

THE MONASTERY OF
ST CATHERINE

ATIYA

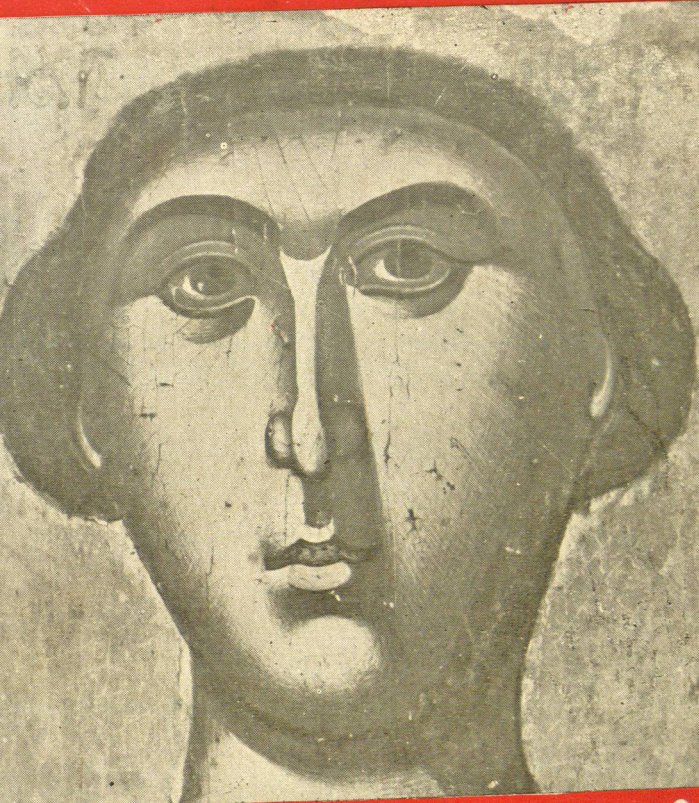


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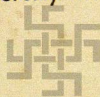


the Monastery of
S^T CATHERINE
in Mount Sinai

by A. S. Atiya

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

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*Porphyrios III.
Present Archbishop of Mount Sinai.*



9/7/1954

Sumit Kumar Bhatnagar

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THE MONASTERY OF St. CATHERINE IN MOUNT SINAI

by

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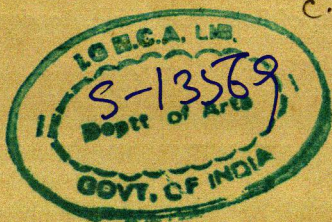
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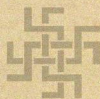


PREFACE

The present essay is one of a series to be written by way of introduction to the Christian monuments of Egypt. We begin with the Monastery of St. Catherine in Mount Sinai which has earned a great reputation as a place of pilgrimage through the Middle Ages and modern times. Though it is not the oldest establishment of its kind in this country, it is definitely the best preserved among all the Monasteries of Egypt; and its treasures have been accumulating during the last sixteen centuries of our era. Here, we have aimed at giving the reader a mere bird's eyeview of this ancient foundation and its contents. Some of the illustrations are reproduced for the first time. Mr. Wallace Wade of the Photoduplication Service of the Library of Congress (Washington) has taken a number of photographs specially for this study, and we have borrowed others from Mgr. Cardinale who visited the monastery in recent years. To both of them we offer our thanks and appreciation. In conclusion, it is our duty to record here that this study has seen the light through the good offices of Maître Salah-el-Din Fadel, Minister Plenipotentiary and Director General of the Press Department in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Cairo, February 1950.

A.S.A.



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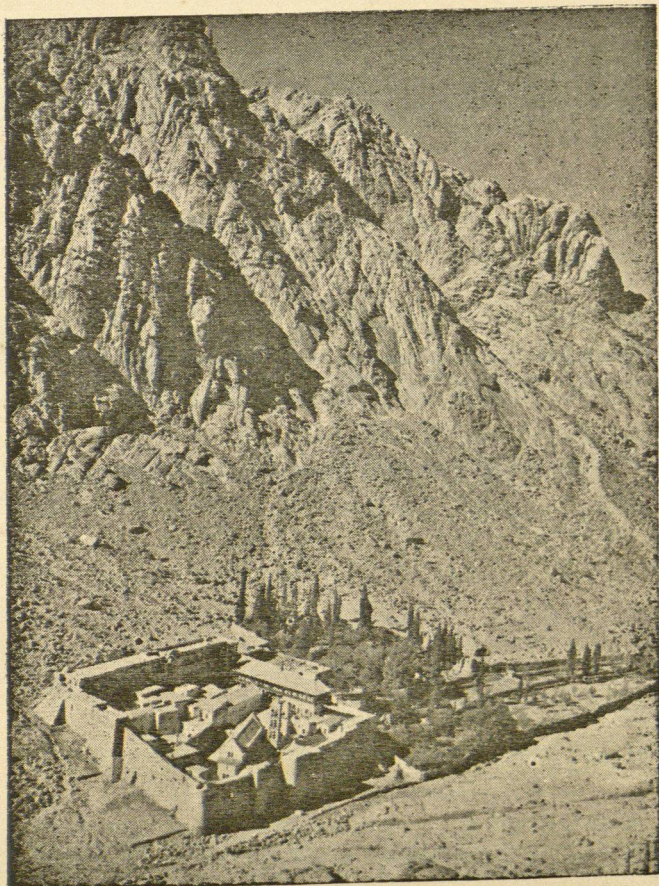


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*The Monastery.
General View with Jebel Musa in the Background.*

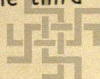


INTRODUCTION

The Monastery of St. Catherine stands at the foot of the mountain of Moses in the heart of the Sinai Peninsula. Far into the vast and inhospitable wilderness of Biblical renown, it dawns upon the weary traveller and adventurer as a haven of peace and a hospitable refuge. Here, the three great monotheistic religions of Moses, Christ and Mohammad meet in complete harmony. Like a rock, this time-honoured foundation has stood out in the sands of Sinai for more than fourteen centuries with its dignity undiminished and untarnished. The Monastery of St. Catherine is reputed to be one of Egypt's great and ancient monastic institutions. In the western desert, the monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun, and in the eastern desert, the monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul are monuments of early Christianity in this country. In Mount Sinai, the Byzantine rule has left its most enduring monument in St. Catherine's Monastery. All these venerable establishments to the east or to the west of the valley of the Nile are gems which cannot be overlooked by the devout traveller and pilgrim.

HISTORY

Egypt was one of the first countries in the world to espouse the cause of Christianity and to bear the brunt of the fiercest Roman persecutions for the new faith. It was during that period of primitive Christianity in this country that men's minds turned to ascetic and monastic ideas. At the close of the second century, and during the third

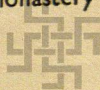




Emperor Constantine the Great and St. Helena.
An Old Russian Icon.



in particular, people began to flee from the face of the merciless persecutors to the deserts which bordered the green valley of the Nile and went even further into the wilderness of Mount Sinai. Thus, before the Monastery of Mount Sinai came into existence, Sinai teemed with hermits from Egypt and other territories of the Roman Empire. Many of them preferred to stay on the holy Mountain of Moses; and St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great is said to have visited this region in 337 A.D. and ordered the construction of the Chapel of the Burning Bush on the spot where God addressed Moses. The Chapel which commemorates her visit was incorporated in the monastery more than two centuries later, and it still exists on the same spot to the present day. But St. Helena's visit to the Holy mountain and the Burning Bush was not unique even in those early days before the foundation of the monastery. St. Silvia — sometimes known as St. Etheria — travelled to Sinai in 460 and left an attractive description of her ascent of the mountain where she found a small church surrounded by a number of cells of Christian recluses; and on her descent down to the valley, she shared a simple meal with holy men near the Burning Bush. On the other hand, life was not always easy and eventless in those parts. From time to time, heathen Bedouin tribes harassed these monastic settlements even after Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. Thus, the monks of Mount Sinai decided some time in the first half of the sixth century to send a delegation to Emperor Justinian (527-565) in Constantinople and explain to him their precarious life and ask him to build a monastery





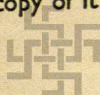
*Holy Mother and Child between Justinian and Theodora.
An Old Painting.*



to house their scattered brotherhood. Justinian, who was one of the greatest builders of Christian antiquity, acceded to their request, and the Monastery came into existence on its present site around the Chapel of the Burning Bush before the middle of the century—some say it was completed in 545. Again, during the Emperor's lifetime, a notable addition was made to the monastery. Justinian founded the Basilica "to the memory and rest of our late Empress Theodora" as the contemporary inscription runs. It may, therefore, be deduced from these terms that the monastery cathedral was built between 561, the year of Theodora's death, and 565 when Justinian's life came to an end.

At its foundation, the Monastery of Mount Sinai did not bear the name of St. Catherine, and its cathedral was called the Cathedral of the Transfiguration. It was not until the ninth century that the legend of St. Catherine and its associations with the monastery were widely spread. Later, the remains of that beloved Saint were transferred to the monastery and were enshrined within the Basilica which was consecrated to her. Since then, the monastery has been known as the Monastery of St. Catherine.

After the Arab Conquest of Egypt in 640 A.D., it is said that the Prophet Mohammad granted the monks of Mount Sinai a covenant whereby their lives and property became secure under Moslem rule. The existing tradition is that the original charter was taken from the monastery by Sultan Selim I after the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt in 1517. The Sultan, however, gave the monks a copy of it





St. Catherine and the Wheel of Torture.
Painting on the Iconostasis.

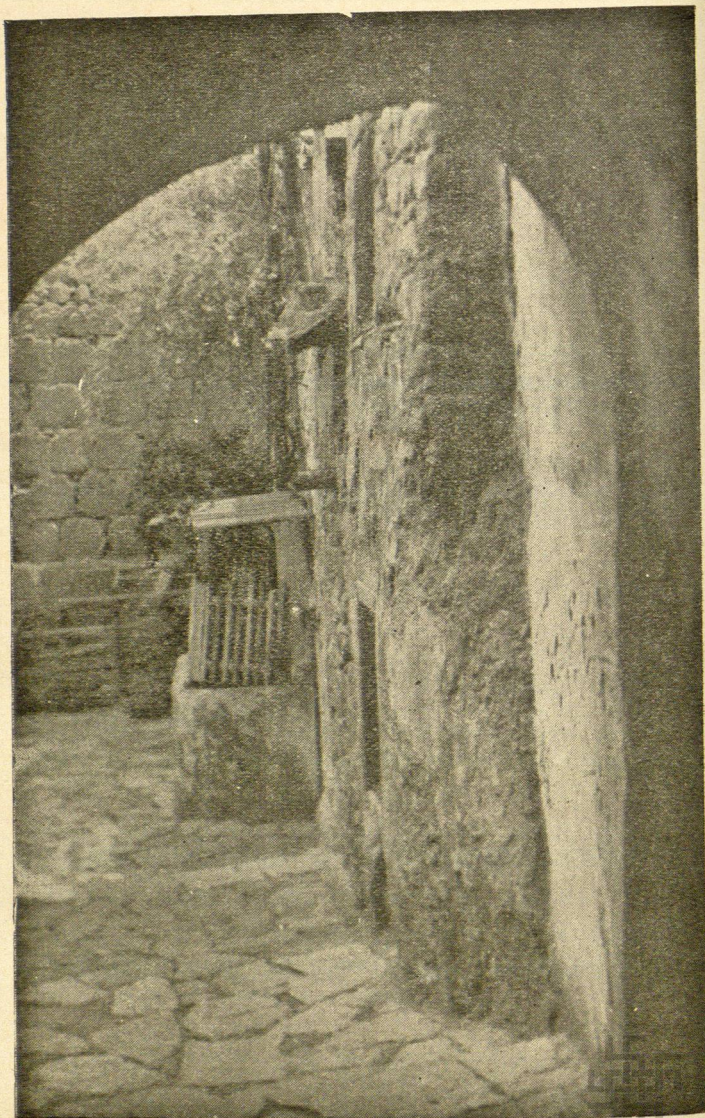


and sanctioned its terms. On the other hand, it is clear from the monumental collection of ancient and modern rolls preserved in the monastery library, that the Covenant of the Prophet, whether authentic or forged, was in some way or other renewed, and the privileges of protection and safe-conduct for the monks of St. Catherine were upheld.

It is not easy to construe the consecutive story of the monastery in medieval and modern times. Even if this were possible, it would be of little interest to the lay reader. Nevertheless, the multitude of inscriptions, portraits, archeological objects, and historical documents extant furnish us with a series of interesting episodes connected with both the internal and the external history of the Convent. They form, on the whole, a story of its relations with its patrons and with the pilgrims to Sinai.

The benefactors of the monastery included Popes, Emperors and Kings from the early middle age. In reality, all the Patriarchs and Bishops of Christendom regarded with veneration and affection the Monastery of Mt. Sinai. It is an established fact that Pope Gregory I the Great (592-604) was one of its early supporters in Rome. His anniversary was celebrated by the monks of St. Catherine during the medieval period. Moreover the Photian Schism of Constantinople from Rome in the fifteenth century apparently did not suppress the friendly relations between the monks and Western Europe. Their envoys went regularly every year to collect donations and the customary annuities to the monastery from the



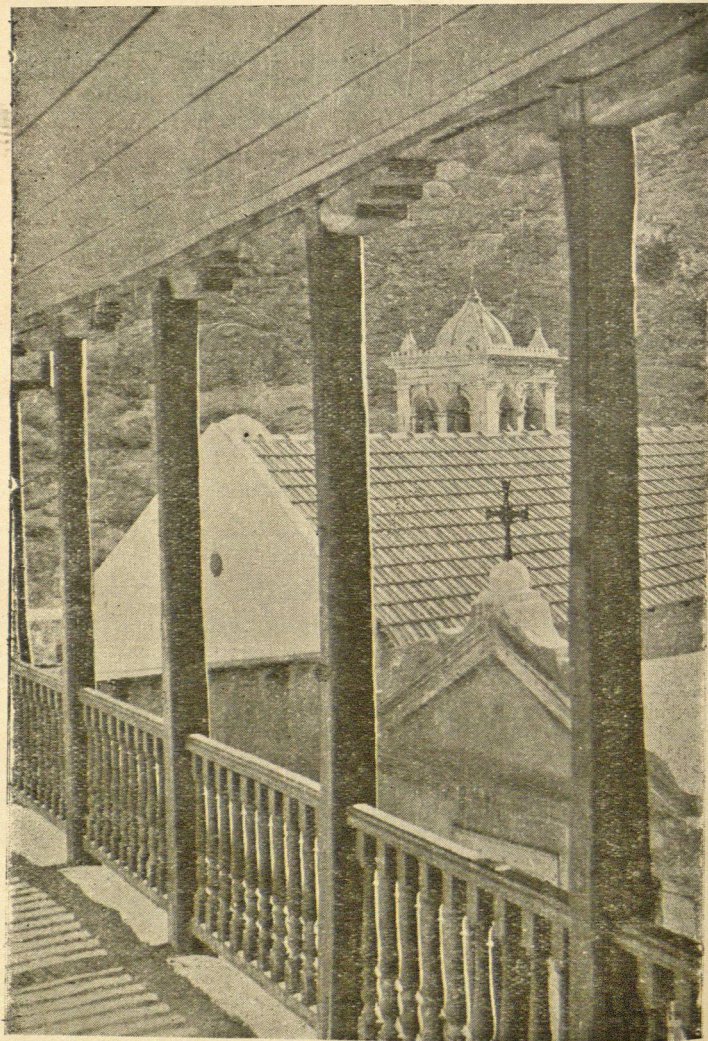


The Burning Bush.

Catholic states, regardless of the Schism. Numerous monarchs continued to communicate with the monks and sent presents to the monastery. Charles VI of France sent a chalice to the Church of St. Catherine in Mt. Sinai in 1411. Records dated 1480-83 in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris) reveal that the famous King of France Louis XI had promised the monastery the sum of 2000 ducats in fulfilment of a vow. Another document of 1535 registers the receipt of donations from Queen Isabel of Spain (1481-1504) and Emperor Maximilian of Germany (1493-1517). Louis XIV (1643-1715) also contributed to the monastery, and his portrait hangs on the walls of the old library to the present day side by side with the painting of another patron of the monks, namely Constantine Brancovan Prince of Wallachia in 1696. Above all, the Tzars of Russia were the most loyal and unwavering supporters of the monastery. However, it would be idle to enumerate all their valuable gifts which the monks closely guard in their treasure inside the Cathedral, as will be partly shown at a later stage in this essay. The French Expedition to Egypt in 1798 has also left its mark on the monastery in the famous Kléber round tower built by order of Napoleon who confirmed the monks' privileges and ordered the repairing of the walls.

As to the pilgrims, we can judge their great numbers and their origin by the innumerable inscriptions which they left on the monastery walls and buildings. These inscriptions are mainly in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Russian. Together with a multitude of crusaders' arms and blasons engraved on



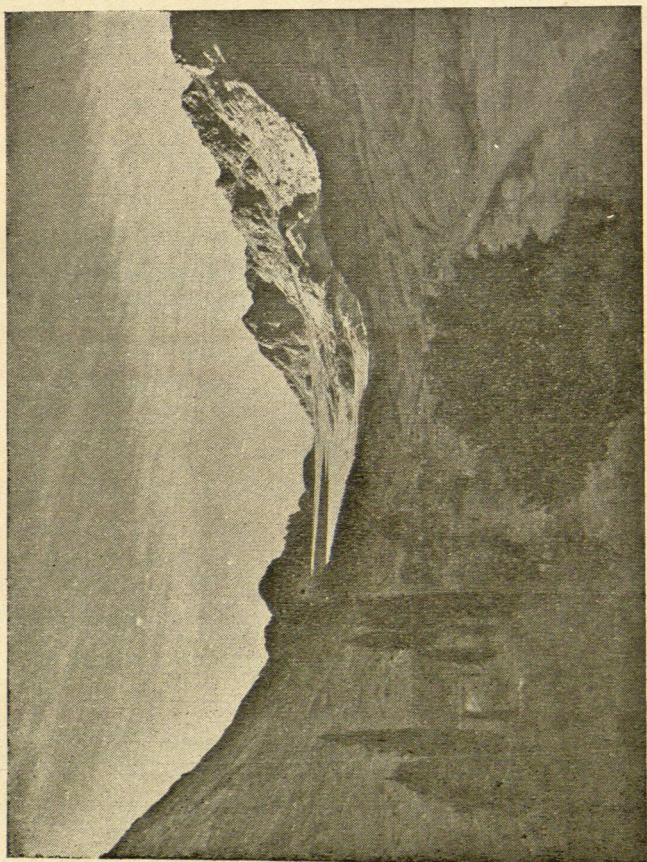


View from the Balcony of a Cloister,— now used as Guest Rooms.

the stone masonry, these inscriptions leave no room for doubt as to the importance of St. Catherine's Monastery as one of the chief centres of Christian pilgrimage. On the other hand, written literary accounts of the monastery have been left by a number of pilgrims and travelers from the West. Amongst these are Peter-Rudolf von Suchem (1336), John Tucher (1479), and Felix Faber (1484), three Germans ; Niccolò di Frescobaldi (1384) and Niccolò di Martoni (1395), two Italians; and Pero Tafur (1435) a Catalan.

The modern writers are too numerous to be treated here at length, for every year has its special harvest of pilgrims to Sinai. These include men and women of all denominations and all ranks, as one can see from the "Visitors' Book" which contains the august signature of His Majesty King Farouk I, followed by those of high court officials, as well as that of eminent exegetes like Father Lagrange, the founder of the "*Ecole Biblique*" of Jerusalem and the famous American clergyman and writer, the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick. In 1945 Monseigneur Cardinale and D. Enrici of the Papal Internunciature in Egypt visited the Monastery, and the former published a fair account of his visit in the "*Euntes*", the official paper of the *Pontifical Missionary Organisation* attached to the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*.

It may be of interest, in conclusion, to quote the number of eighteenth century pilgrims to Sinai as given by the famous Swiss traveller Burckhardt who visited the monastery in 1816. He says that a caravan of eight hundred



The Landscape Seen from the Heights of the West Wall.



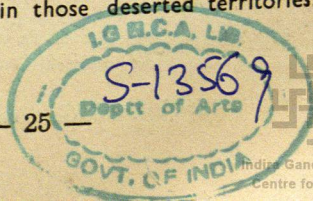
Armenians arrived from Jerusalem on one day, while five hundred Copts came from Cairo on another occasion. Burckhardt, however, adds that pilgrims in his own day amounted to about eighty every year together with some Moslems. This number increased again very considerably in the nineteenth century when floods of Russian pilgrims took to the Convent of St. Catherine.

THE ROUTE

The route to the Convent of St. Catherine is long and uneasy. In olden times, caravans took eight days to reach the monastery from Suez and six from Akaba. Now with the motor traffic and the improvement of the old caravan road, the whole distance from Cairo to the monastery totalling 392 kilometers or 239 miles may be covered with some discomfort in a single day. If taken in two or three stages extending over a couple of days, it will be much easier. The road begins very well for the first 130 kil., then it becomes a typical country road for a similar distance to Abu Zenima on the Gulf of Suez, and afterwards it is reduced to a track between gigantic mountains of varied colour and rugged beauty. In the end, the road deteriorates to an almost imperceptible path in a vast sea of sand and stones, and the driver will have to be continually on his guard lest the tyres should be caught in the sand. As a rule, no single car should undertake the journey by itself for fear of accidents or mishaps in those deserted territories.

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Confessional Gate on Jebel Musa.

There is a number of important landmarks which should not escape the traveller's attention. Within 28 kil. of the Suez Canal ferry, one will find Moses' Springs, twelve in number, some palatable and some unpalatable, where Moses and the Israelites had their first halt during their flight from Egypt after crossing the Red Sea. Some 104 kil. further bring us to Abu Zenima, the manganese mining centre with a frontier rest-house open to travellers against a small charge by special arrangement with the authorities. If you chose to linger here for a while, your guide may take you into the neighbouring mountains to inspect the historic mining stations which the Ancient Egyptians used about fifty centuries ago. The next stop is at the Faran oasis within 76 kil. taking no less than three hours by car owing to the state of the road. Note the widening valley before Faran where the Israelites are supposed to have defeated the Amalekites.

Faran was once a flourishing city with a worthy history. It had already been in existence for two centuries when, at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth, it became the seat of a Christian Bishop. Then it began to decline under Arab rule from the seventh century with a short period of revival in the twelfth during the Crusades. Rock-cut tombs and early Christian hermits' caves are witnessed on the mountain side, while the remains and relics of at least one cathedral and two churches lay scattered on the plain below. In fact, Faran is even older than the Monastery of Mount Sinai as a





The North Wall and the Kléber Tower.



Christian centre. Now it is a tributary to the monastery with one monk in residence.

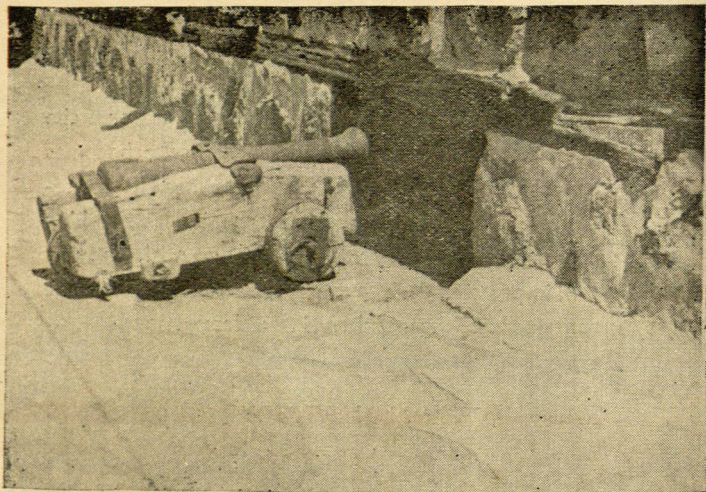
From Faran to St. Catherine's, we have to traverse the worst fifty kil. of the whole journey. The route becomes dreary and the sand quite treacherous at times. Its monotony is only broken at the last left turn by the sudden emergence of the monastery with its strong and lofty walls and its tall, impressive dark green cypress trees, against the grey mountainous background as if in a dream.

THE MONASTERY

A General Description.

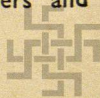
Like all the great monastic foundations of Egypt in the early centuries of the Christian Era, the Monastery of St. Catherine has the form and appearance of a Roman or Byzantine fortress. Its old, big gate was blocked later for reasons of defence, and a substitute was provided by a small rectangular entrance just wide enough for the passage of one person or hardly two. This again is fortified by a triple gate lined with thick iron plates, and studded with mighty nails. Above this entrance is the famous dual inscription in Greek and in Arabic often quoted by writers and stating that the Monastery of Mount Sinai was founded by the Roman Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora in the year 6021 after Adam or 527 A.D. The inscription is not contemporary with the foundation, and the date is of course incorrect.





Ancient Gun from the Mamluk Period.

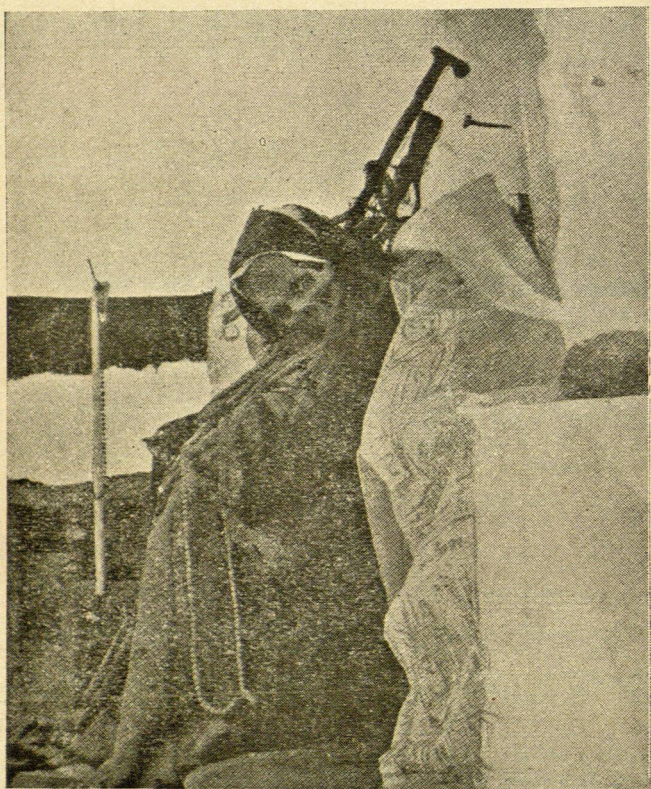
From within, the monastery has all the characteristics of a typical medieval establishment. With its circuitous passages, vaulted corridors and flights of half-worn stone stairways, — with its basilica and numerous chapels, its chapter-house, refectory, *scriptorium* or library, its monastic cells, guest-house, mills, store-rooms, oil press, distillery, water wells, and several other features, — this monastery constitutes a real labyrinth where every inch of the interior is or has been utilised to sit full capacity. It is a quaint cluster of buildings, sometimes rising to two or three stately storeys high, sometimes sinking into a mere subterranean cave-like structure, and sometimes its diminutive chambers and



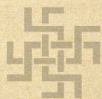


The Late Father Basil (dead in 1947) and a Skull.





St. Stephanos dead in 580 A.D.

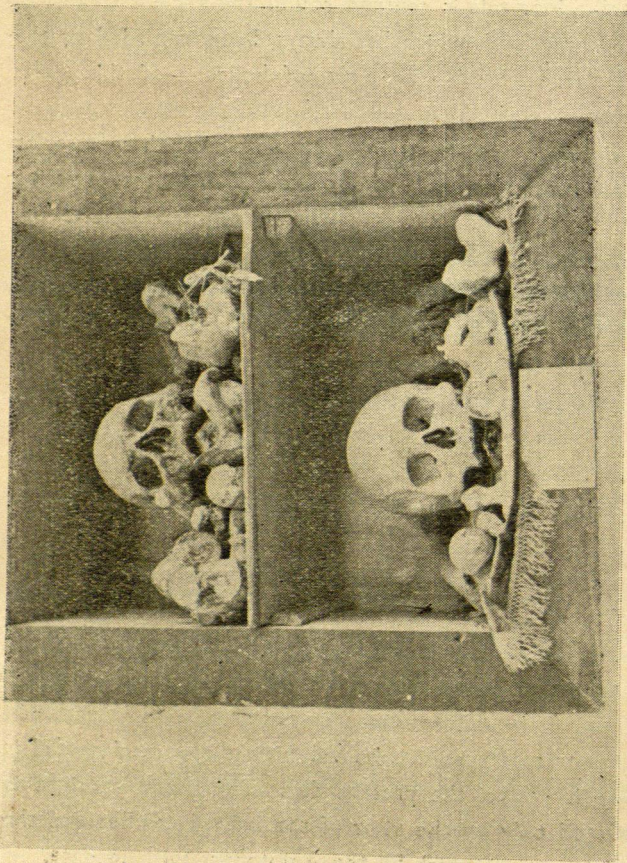


chapels are built or inserted inside the outer walls. This irregular conglomeration of structures where every stone can tell a long tale is centred round the ancient Chapel of the Burning Bush which has always been regarded as the *sanctum sanctorum* — the holy of holies — of this great convent.

Outside the gate, there is an orchard with spectacular cypress trees. — small when compared with the towering mountains around, but tall when regarded against the monastery walls. And here in a walled corner, we find “God’s Acre”, a limited plot of land devoted to the burial of the newly deceased monks. On the death of a member of the fraternity, the brothers dig out the bones of the oldest dead to make room for the new. Then they carry the old bones to the bone-room where they stack the limbs on one side and the skulls on another. The bones of the archbishops, however, are kept separately in special niches or wooden caskets. The skeleton of St. Stephanos, dead in 580 A.D., is made to sit in full priestly vestments as if on guard at the entrance of this house of the dead. During his lifetime, he kept watch on the way up the mountain and often said he wished he could guard it forever. The monks remembered his words, and, in deference to his will, collected his skeleton and seated it where it sits to the present day. The gruesome sight is mitigated only by the view of the lighted candles and the burning censers which fill the atmosphere with incense.

The number of the monks of St. Catherine varied from century to century. The highest number on record in the four-





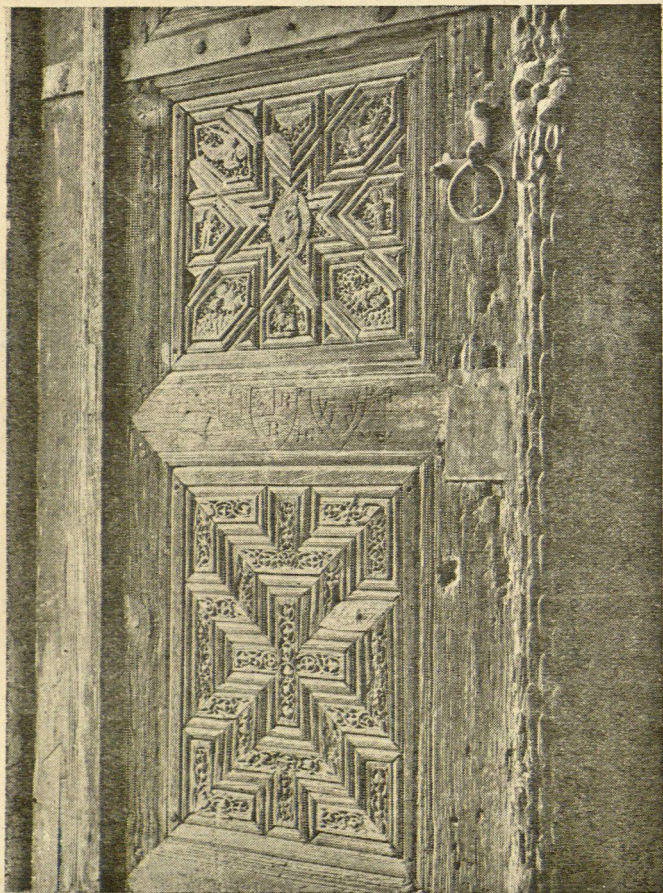
Bones of Ancient Archbishops.



teenth century is just over 400 monks. But it is possible that, in the early middle age, the monks of Mount Sinai were much more numerous; for, in addition to the many leading a cenobitic life inside the monastery, the mountains around teemed with solitary ascetics and anchorites. In recent years, the declining numbers have oscillated between thirty and fifty.

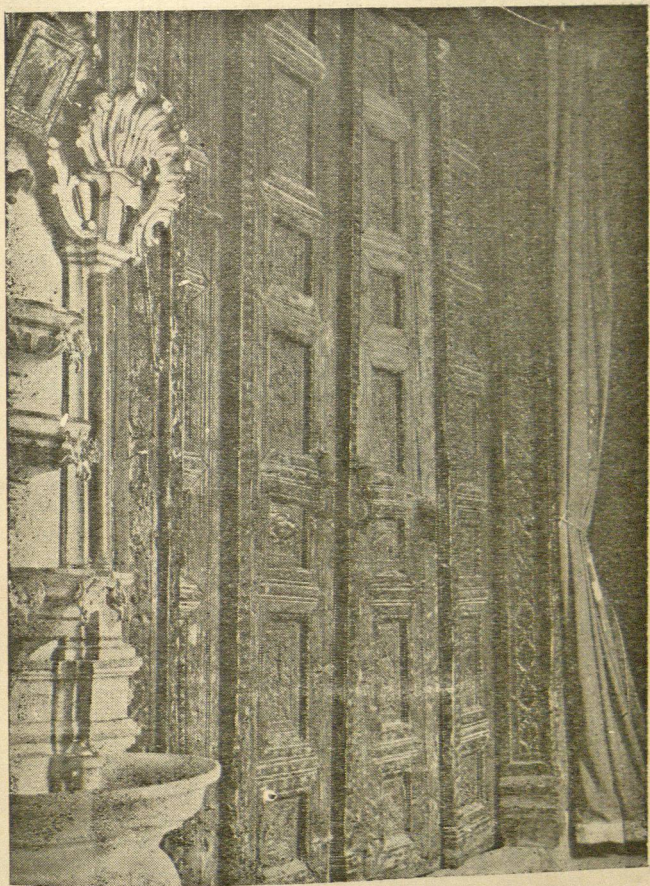
The rule of the monastery is the Rule of St. Basil the Great (329-79), a disciple of St. Pachomius the Great (290-348) of the Thebaid in Upper Egypt. They lead a life of poverty and austerity; but, like the Pachomian brothers, they observe the rule of labour side by side with the principle of prayer. Nowadays the hours of prayer have changed from those of the days of yore as a result of the dearth of monks at St. Catherine's. At 3.30 a.m. small bells may be dimly heard in the midst of the monks' sleeping quarters to prepare for prayer. A quarter of an hour later, the big bell beats thirty-three times — the age of Christ in years — calling the brothers for communal prayer in one of the fifteen churches within the monastery. On Sundays and Saints' days, this is followed by the traditional drum-like beating of the ancient wooden board in the big tower as well as the striking of a big iron bar and of all the bells of the monastery, announcing the beginning of Mass in the Cathedral, which lasts generally five hours. The morning air is thus filled with sweet incense, the chiming of ancient bells and the chanting of the bearded fathers.





*Eleventh Century Outer Gate of Cathedral.
Fatimid Woodwork and Crusader Blasons.*





*Fifth Century Inner Gate of Cathedral.
Byzantine Woodwork.*



After this brief and general survey, it behoves us to examine more closely some of the main features of this great and august convent.

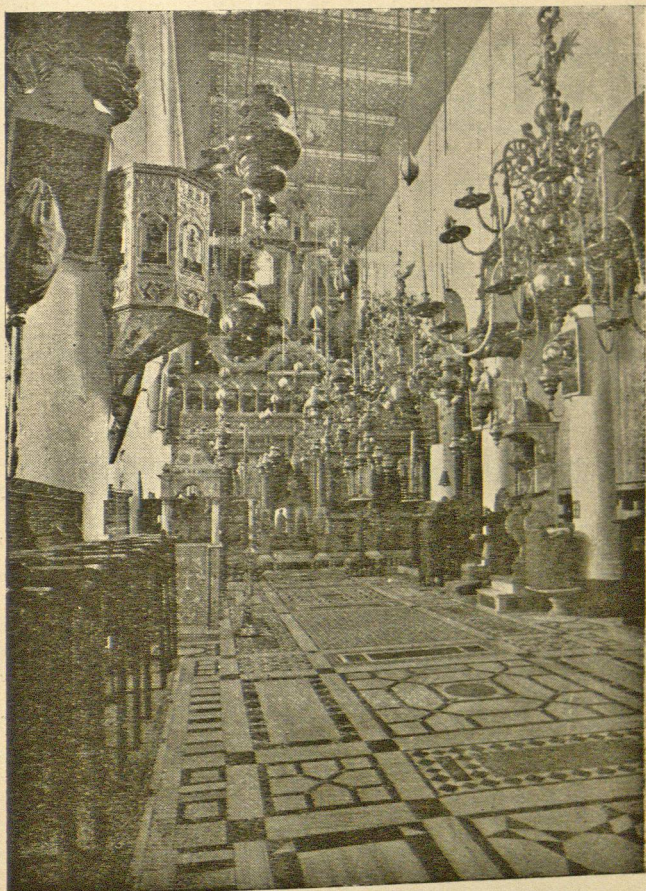
THE BASILICA

As shown above, the Basilica was founded by Justinian between 561 and 565 in commemoration of Theodora his wife. It was built in such a way as to incorporate the Chapel of the Burning Bush and was called the Church of the Transfiguration until the relics of St. Catherine were laid to rest in it; and henceforward it was named after that beloved fourth century Alexandrine martyr.

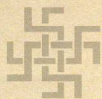
This basilica is a fine example of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture. It consists of a narthex leading to a great nave which is separated from the aisles by two rows of six granite columns with lotus-headed capitals, unfortunately painted white and green. It has nine chapels — four on each side, and the Chapel of the Burning Bush behind the altar and below ground level. The altar stands as usual towards the east underneath a great dome with magnificent mosaics from the time of Justinian. The iconostasis is fitted in between the two top columns.

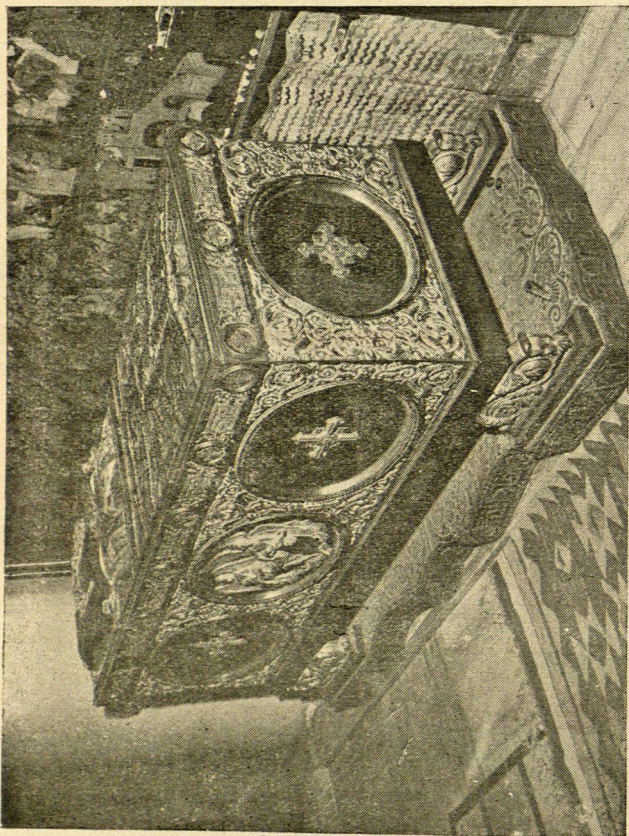
This Cathedral is a veritable museum of the fine arts of Christian antiquity. Wood-carving here is at its best.





Interior of Cathedral.

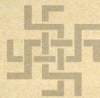


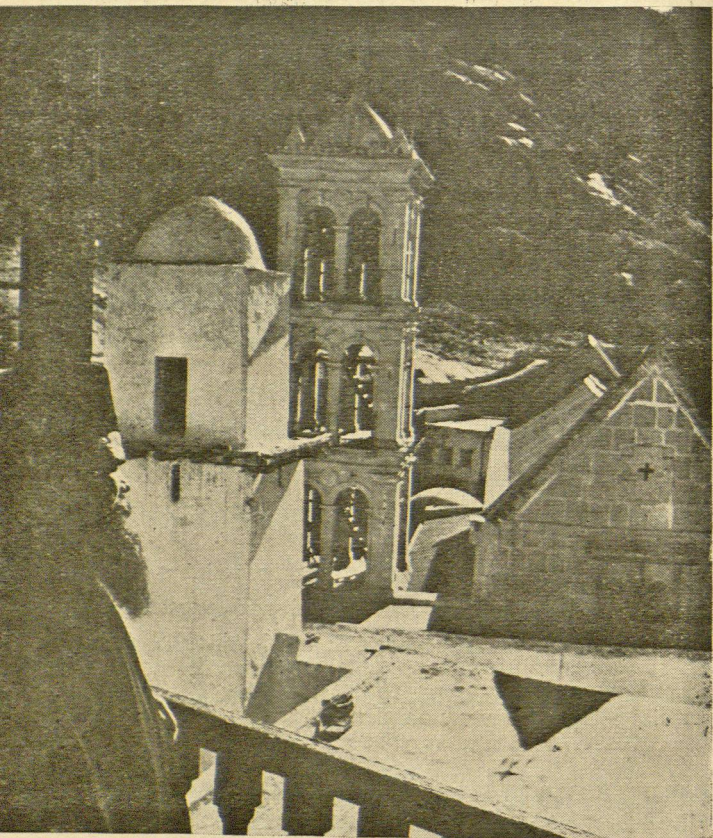


*Silver Sarcophagus with Image of St. Catherine in Gold Studded
with Precious Stones. (Note Icons on wall Behind).*



The gate of the narthex, which is not very ancient, being only of eleventh century Fatimid workmanship, offers considerable interest with the crusader arms engraved on it by medieval pilgrims. But this is incomparable to the next fourth century Byzantine gate of the nave. With its wonderful animal, bird and floral engravings, it has only one peer in St. Barbara's Church door of the fourth century treasured in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo. The interior of the Cathedral staggers the visitor with its grand display of the richest collection of icons in the world. In the sanctuary, behind the iconostasis, there are two large silver chests with the images of St. Catherine worked in gold and studded with precious stones. Both are gifts of the Tzars of Russia — Peter the Great (1688) and Alexander II (1860). They are used for storing some of the invaluable donations received from Kings and Queens across the centuries. Still more precious than these articles is the sarcophagus under a domed canopy to the right of the altar. It holds two smaller chiselled silver cases, the one containing St. Catherine's skull wearing a crown of gold and precious stones, and the other contains her left hand which is decorated with rings of gold and precious stones as well. These relics are put on view on the Saint's day (November 5th), which is a memorable occasion for annual celebrations among the monks and the pilgrims. The Chapel of the Burning Bush with its only inlet from the Cathedral interior is a continuation of this treasure-trove with its mighty accumulation of ancient and modern vestments embroidered in gold and silver threads, of wonderful mitres, chalices





Side by Side.

Cathedral Belfry and Minaret of Mosque in the Monastery.

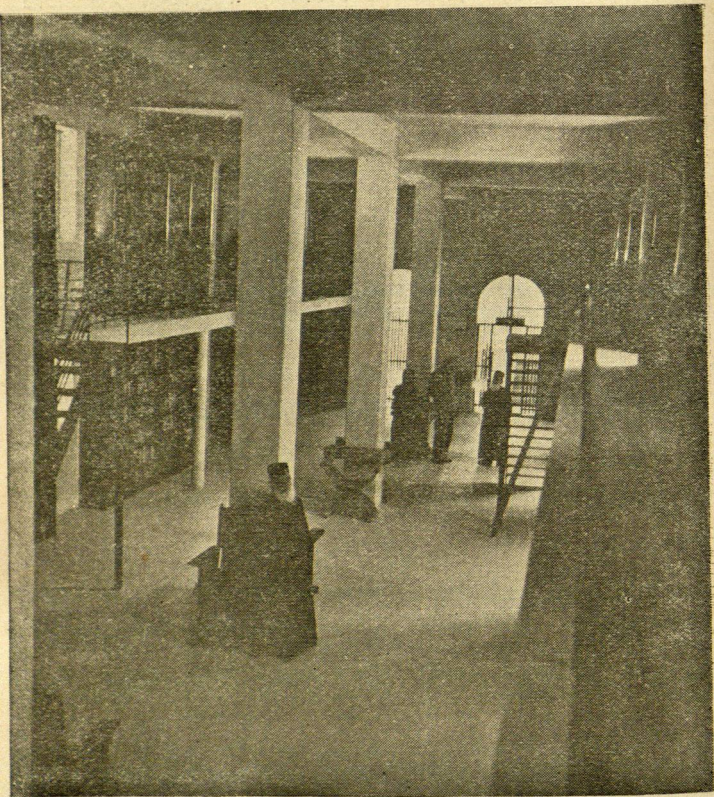


and trays of the finest workmanship, gold and silver crosses of varying sizes and shapes, gospels with heavy gold and silver covers, and, what is probably regarded as more precious than all these, — the relics of other Saints besides St. Catherine's, such as the skull of St. John Chrysostom, the arm of St. Basil and the lower jaw of St. Gregory of Nyssa.

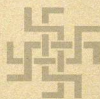
THE MOSQUE

Next to the Cathedral lies the mosque, which is one of the most significant features of the monastery. The mosque is a Fatimid foundation built in fulfilment of a wish of the vizir Abul-Mansur Anushtakin in 1106 A.D., during the Caliphate of the famous Al-Ámir 1103-3 A.D. as is recorded in the text of the Kufic inscription on the pulpit (*minbar*). The minaret, situated to the east facing the church belfry, is a detached tower nearly ten metres high. The mosque is a small simple building measuring 10 by 7 metres, rectangular in form, but solidly enforced with two pillars on which the arches carrying the roof rest. The chief articles of high archeological interest in the mosque comprise a small low lectern (*kursi*) and a pulpit of carved wood. They date exactly from the year 1106 A.D. The pulpit is almost unique. There are only two others like it in the Islamic world : one at the town of Qūṣ in Upper Egypt and another at Hebron in Palestine, both preserved from the same Fatimid period. The style of the carvings and panels





The New Library.



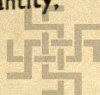
is typical of that age. Both pulpit and lectern bear Kufic inscriptions which are dated 500 A.H./1106 A.D. The engraved decorations are in the traditional form of geometrical foliage.

The mosque is cited in several medieval accounts of western pilgrims. James of Verona in 1335 and Leonardo Frescobaldi in 1384 recorded its existence with an air of wonder at the mutual tolerance between the priests of Christianity and the priests of Islam. After all, we have to admit the fact that they could not have been used to such broad outlook on matters of faith in their own homeland. Egypt was undoubtedly more tolerant than Europe in those days.

A local Jebeliya family is entrusted with the keys of the mosque as a hereditary privilege, and its members look after this Moslem place of worship. The late king Fouad I presented it with green velvet tapestry embroidered in gold thread and bearing his name on the occasion of a projected visit to Sinai.

THE LIBRARY

The monastery library is still more remarkable than most of the treasures aforementioned. Much has been said and written about this extraordinary library ; but, after a recent inspection of its contents, we feel unable to accept the authority of past writers without reserve. In quantity,



its manuscripts certainly exceed all the estimates put forward in the catalogues and hand-lists extant which register about 2000 tomes in all. Now it is established according to the most recent inventory that the Greek manuscripts alone reach 2250 codices. The Arabic manuscripts are reckoned to be in the neighbourhood of 600. The Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Ethiopic and Slavonic manuscripts, reaching several hundred volumes, have still to be examined and defined. The total collection undoubtedly surpasses 3000 tomes. Again the right evaluation of the nature and quality of the manuscripts is still a comparatively closed secret, and it is the task of a special committee or expedition to reveal this aspect of the library to the world of scholarship. This expedition has just been formed by the Farouk I University in Alexandria and the American Foundation for the Study of Man in Washington. Its purpose is to examine every volume separately and microfilm conjointly the whole set for the Library of Congress in Washington and for the Farouk I University. It is hoped that this gigantic task will be completed before the summer of 1950, thanks to the collaboration of a team of scholars and technicians from the Farouk University, the Library of Congress, the American Foundation and several American Universities.

It would be sufficient at the present juncture to give the reader a few preliminary notes for general enlightenment as to the importance of the library. The monks of Mount Sinai made acquisitions from various parts of the Empire,



١٩
 فضل الكسر اساعترسل مملوا وكانوا الذين
 اكلوا نحو خمسة الاف رجلا سوا النساء والصبان
 وكان
 خلف تلاميذه ان يدخلوا الى السفينة ويمسكوه الى
 العبر حتى تفر الجماعات فلما اكلوا الجماعات
 صعد الى الجبل فجلس ليصل فلما كان هناك وحده
 فاما السفينة فكانت تفر وسكن البحر تغدب من الرياح
 لان الريح كانت لهم صدم ١٠ و ١٢ الساعة الرابعة
 من الليل انا اليهم يسوع ما تسيا على البحر فلما راوه
 التلاميذ بمتى على البحر تنجسوا وقالوا هو خيال ومن
 الفزع صاحوا و ان يسوع مكانه كلهم قايلا
 لهم بقوة انا هو لا تخافوا واحياه بكرو وقال له
 يارب ان كنت انت هو فاصر ان اتيك على الماء
 وانه قال له اقبل فاحذر بكرو من السفينة ومسا
 على الماء لياث الى يسوع فلما ابصر الريح تتبدده
 فزع وبها يعرق فصاح وقال يارب سلم ومكانه
 مد يسوع يده كفاوله وقال له يا قليل الايمان فيملا
 ذا شكك فلما صعد الى السفينة اتوا وسجدوا
 له وقالوا احفظا انك انت بن الله فلما عبروا جوه
 لا اذصر حساركم فغرقوه رجالا اهل ذلك الوضع
 وبعثوا الى كل تلك الكوره وهموا اليه كل من
 كان به باسا وكانوا يكلبوا اليه ان يمسوا اليه
 فثوبه فقط وكان كل من معه خلع
 حفيد ابوا الى يسوع
 من ارمصين انا من الكتاب والفريسيين وقالوا له لماذا

٢٨٠ كُتِبَ الْغَاثِ الْمُسْكِرُ الضَّعِيفُ الْأَيْمَرُ الصَّكَاظُ
 بِرَأْسِ الْبَلَدِ الْأَمْتِ قَرَأَتْ بِأَنِي أَمْ كَرِيهَ ذُكُودِ
 الْوَقْدِ وَأَقَامَكَ عَنْ بَيْتِهِ وَاسْتَعْبَكَ الصَّوْتِ الْبَدِي
 بِحَيِّ الْمَحْبُوبِ الْقَائِلِ تَعَالَوْا يَا مُبَارِكِي أَيْ دَنُودِ
 تَمْلِكُ الْمَعْدَ لَكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْتَا الْعَالَمُ مَعَ مَا يَتَّبِعُ
 مِنْ قُوَّةِ الْغَنِيِّ لَا يَخْلَفُ مَوَدَّةَ الْحَقِّ لَا تَنْشَأُ بِنْدِ
 بِأَنِي لَا تَنْشَأُ لَا تَنْشَأُ الْوَدَّ وَكُتِبَ الْمُسْكِرُ
 فِي أَتَمِّ الْهَيْمِ فِي أَوَّلِ تَقْصِيرِ أَدَارِهِ يَكُونُ مِنْ
 حِسَابِ سَمِ الْعَالَمِ عَلَى مَا لَا تَسْبِيحُ كُنَيْسَهُ بِنْدِ
 الْمَقْدُوسِ الْبَلَدِ الْهَيْمِيَّةِ مِنْ سَنَةِ سِتِّ الْأَوَّلِ
 فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَتَمَّ بِسَنَةِ ٢٨٤ هـ
 فِي مَسْجِدِ الْقُودِ فِي تَقْصِيرِ الْهَيْمِ مِنْ سَنَةِ أَرْبَعِ
 وَتَمَّ بِسَنَةِ سِتِّ هـ رَحِمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ قَرَأَ
 وَكُتِبَ وَوَضَعَ الْمَقْنَنُ الْفَهْمُ وَالْحَقُّ لِلْوَصَايَا

Colophon of Kufic Gospel Dated Moharram 284 A.H.

and these included works written in the fourth century. The most outstanding example, now of international fame, is the Codex Sinaiticus, which was taken first to old St. Petersburg in the nineteenth century by the German scholar Tischendorf, and then recently purchased during the time of the Soviet Revolution by the British Museum in London for the enormous sum of 100,000 pounds sterling in gold. The Codex Syriacus, however, still remains in





Book Cover in Pure Gold.

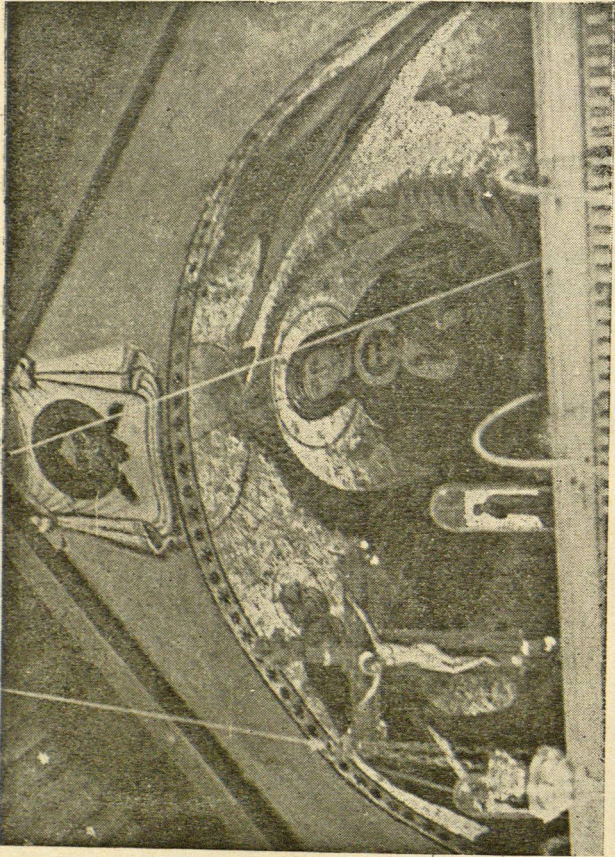


the monastery library. This is the fifth century Syriac translation of the Bible based on a second century Greek text and is thus believed to be the most ancient recension of the Holy Scripture.

The manuscripts are quite varied in character and content. Though mostly in Greek, they also include Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, Armenian, Slavonic and Arabic manuscripts. They are not entirely Biblical or theological in bearing. They also contain a fair number of historical, geographical and philosophical sources of great value.

In addition to these monumental works, the library or rather the monastery archives contain a unique set of official documents in the form of rolls of varying length, sometimes reaching several metres. These are the charters of liberties or "firmans" issued by the Caliphs and Sultans of Islam in favour of the monks of St. Catherine amounting to more than 2000 pieces. They represent several Mohamadan dynasties from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. A preliminary investigation shows that the oldest document is dated 524 A.H./1130 A.D. and is contemporary with the foundation of the mosque under Fatimid rule. In our opinion, this set is the fullest known official source on the evolution of Arabic court-hand and Muslim diplomatics. The very existence of these documents is an outstanding demonstration of the spirit of tolerance which marked the relations between the Sultans and their Christian subjects.





A Painting from the Refectory Niche



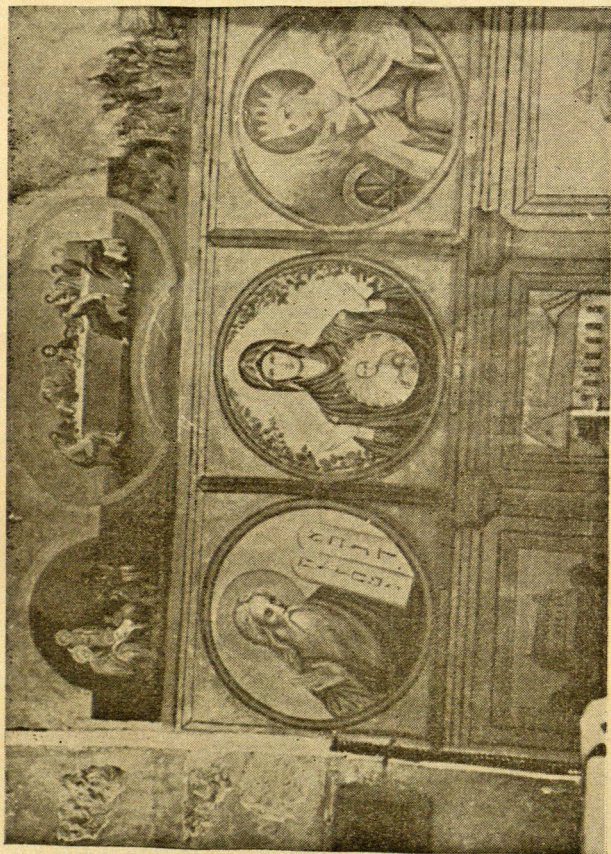
THE REFECTORY

The refectory, situated south-east of the Basilica, is a long vaulted chamber 17 metres long, 5 metres wide and 7 high, with four thick arcades. It is difficult to know with precision whether this was originally built in the Byzantine period as a refectory or as a chapel. It still has an altar in an eastern niche. Whatever its origin may have been, this chamber was transformed into a dormitory for Latin pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages. Its walls are adorned with frescoes of which "The Last Judgment" is dated 1573 and "The apparition of the Trinity to Abraham" is dated 1577. On the whole, the refectory is particularly famous for the numerous heraldic engravings and names of European pilgrims ranging from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. The two old tables placed along the wall cannot escape the vigilance of the visitor. They are not dated, but one of them is of special artistic interest in view of its ornamental carvings. These include fine cuttings representing angels, a fruit basket, floral and animal decorations.

CONCLUSION

It is not easy to give the reader an exact evaluation of the Monastery of St. Catherine from the historical and the archeological points of view. The little that has been written on it is insufficient and inadequate. No intensive

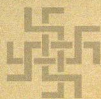


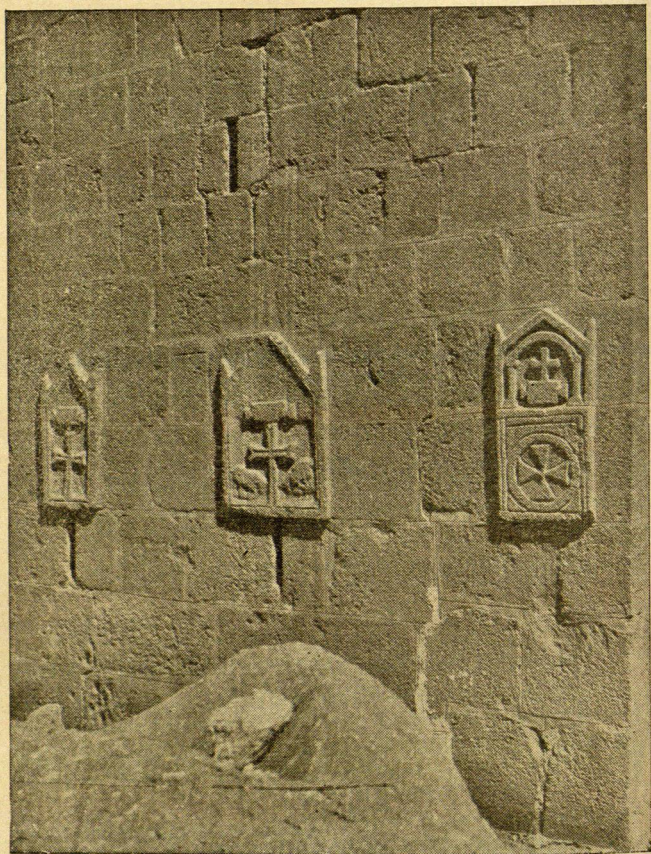


The Work of a Modern Artist : Father Pachomius, Moses, the Virgin Mary and St. Catherine.



and comprehensive studies of its various aspects have been carried out by serious scholars. Opportunities for work here are interminable. It is hoped, indeed, that the work of the joint Expedition of Farouk I University and the American Foundation for the Study of Man will put some of this accumulated wealth of material at the disposal of scholars throughout the world. The monastery is a living medieval museum and an art gallery of many ages. Wherever you turn, the eye will fall on some object of capital interest. Each stone can tell a story. Nevertheless, the monastery must be regarded in its ensemble as a unit; and as such, it staggers the imagination with its accumulated artistic and archeological wealth. It represents more than one chapter in the history of Egypt, and its survival intact is a credit to the monks of Mount Sinai and to Egypt and the Egyptians.





Medieval Wall Engravings.



MEDITERRANEAN SEA





