

THE TRADITIONAL BURIAL OF MOSES ON MOUNT SINAI.

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IN the January number of the BULLETIN a suggestion was thrown out that the traditional burial of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai was an attempted coincidence between the post-mortem fortunes of the Saint and those of the great Hebrew legislator, Catherine having in her last moments prayed that her body might never be found, while of Moses it is recorded that, 'no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day,' although in general terms the place of sepulchre is said to be on Mount Nebo. On the foregoing supposition the discovery of Catherine's body on the summit of Mount Sinai, and its ultimate deposition in the chapel of the Burning Bush are due to a misunderstanding of the terms upon which the angels were sent to remove her from Alexandria.

The parallel that was here drawn between Catherine and Moses received an accession of interest from the discovery that at some period in the history of the Convent on Mount Sinai the monks held the belief that Moses was actually buried in their neighbourhood, and not, as the book of Deuteronomy suggests, in the land of Moab. Such a local tradition would make parallelism at once between the two obscure funerals, and would on the page of history, as well as on the map of geography, place Jebel Mousa and Jebel Katherin in close contiguity.

It becomes interesting, then, to trace the new tradition for the Mosaic burial.

The matter came to light in an article in the *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher* for Sept., 1923, written by Mr. F. H. Marshall of the Birkbeck College, London, to whom I am indebted for the transcripts and interpretations that follow. The subject of the article is a MS. in modern Greek of Georgios Chumnos, recently acquired by the British Museum, and containing a metrical paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus. From an inscription in the MS. it is clear

that it was formerly in the Library of Mount Sinai, and there is a good round curse on the unknown person who removed it from thence. The passage referring to the death and burial of Moses runs as follows :

‘Ορίζη, κάτω σκάφτουσι πρὸς τὸ σινὰ τὸ ὄρει,
 εἰς ὅσον ἦτονε σόστου, καὶ ὁ μωϋσῆς ἐχώρη·
 Ἐμπένη μέσα ὁ μωϋσῆς σᾶντον νὰ δικήμασι,
 καὶ ὁ κύριος πέμπει νέφαλον νὰ σκεπάσι.
 Λοιπὸν αὐτὸν ἐσκέπασεν καὶ ὁ μωϋσῆς ἐχάθη,
 καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν φόβον ὁ λαὸς ὅλος ἐπαραπάρθη.

which is, being interpreted :

“ He gives command, and they dig down into Mount Sinai to the proper depth, and Moses went and entered it to test it. And the Lord sends a cloud to cover him. So He covered him and Moses was lost, and all the people was agitated with fear.”

There can be no doubt that we are dealing with a genuine Sinaitic tradition.

Mr. Marshall tells me further that there are three illustrations to this episode of the burial of Moses : they show (1) Moses directing a man who is wielding an adze within an open sarcophagus on the mountain ; (2) Moses lying within the open sepulchre (inscribed *ἐθάφη ὁ μωϋσῆς* ; (3) the sarcophagus closed (inscribed *κιβώρι τοῦ μωϋσῆ*).

How old may we assume this tradition to be ? For Chumnos himself is not earlier than about A.D. 1500. He incorporates in his poem a good deal of legendary matter, which is evidently Midrash of a much earlier period.

Mr. Marshall points out concurrences in such legends with the *Ἱστορία παλαιοῦ* published by Vassiliev in *Anecdota Græco-Byzantina* for 1893, and suggests that in some cases this concurrence may mean dependence upon Andreas of Crete († ca. 730). It will be sufficient, for the present, to remark that there is not the least reason for depressing the new Sinaitic tradition of the time of Chumnos or to the modern Greek literature. It must belong to a much earlier time. How much earlier ? That is what we should like some further information about ; perhaps the closer study of the Chumnos MS. may tell the tale.