

David Williams:

What do transmitted, borrowed, gifted or re-configured objects, styles, cultural forms or texts reveal about processes of cultural dialectic in the Mediterranean? To what extent are these dynamics particularly Mediterranean?

One hundred and fifteen years after the Great Schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches we find the first textual witness to the presence of the relics of Saint Catherine of Alexandria at Mt Sinai. Surprisingly the source is Western, Philippe de Milly, Grand Master of the Templars (1169-70), visited, venerated the relics and received a portion of them.¹ Further distribution of the relics throughout Western Europe led to an increase in interest in the already popular saint. The Cult of St Catherine was until then minor in the Byzantine East with only a few iconographic depictions, the best known being the mosaic in the apse of Hosios Loukas. More importantly, there is no recorded locus of her cult nor bodily relics, something that is made clear in the *Passio*, which states Catherine's explicit wish that her body be hidden, so it could not be divided up as relics. The cult continued to be primarily West-facing and gave the Monastery at Sinai (Soon to be called St Catherine's) a unique status of protection and patronage by the Papacy. This unique status, driven by the monastery's ownership of the relics paradoxically allowed it to retain its Orthodox identity and largely ignore the schism between the Orthodox and Catholics until at least the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439) 385 years later. In my position paper I will explore the development of a Western Christian cultic centre run by the Orthodox brotherhood and consider the parallel efforts to appease or gain patronage from Islamic rulers.

¹ B. de Broussillon, *La maison de Craon 1050-1480: etude historique accompagnee du Cartulaire de Craon*, 2 vols (Paris, 1893), i, p. 101: "... in montem Synay ascendi et a monachis loci illius sepulcrum beatae virginis Catherinae mihi aperire obtinui et, cum ingenti timore pariter et amore, de sacratissimo corpore praefatae virginis, praesentum thesaurum veraciter assumpsi.