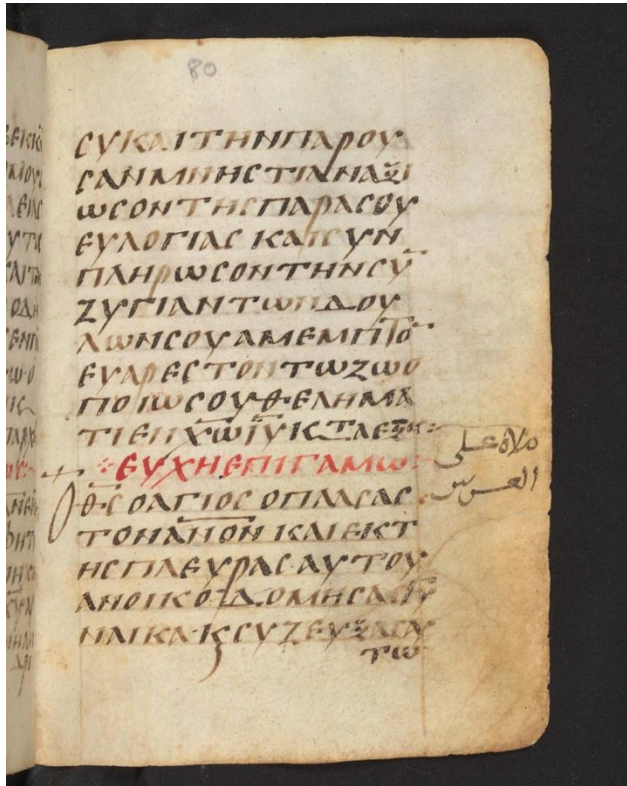


Teaching Sinai Module

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Sinai NF/ MG53: A Case Study of a Byzantine Euchologion



Brief description

Sinai NF/ MG53 was copied in the late eighth or ninth century. Though fragmentary, with only 91 intact folios, it represents one of the oldest extant examples of a Byzantine Euchologion, the prayer book used by a priest for officiating at liturgical offices, sacraments and various blessings.

Teaching exercise

The following two-part teaching exercise is intended to familiarize students (both undergraduate and graduate) with both the Euchologion as a type of Byzantine book, and with the importance of St. Catherine's Library as a repository of important specimens of such books. No prior knowledge of ancient languages is required to complete this teaching module.

Introduction

One of the most distinctive aspects of Sinai's cultural heritage is its vast collection of manuscripts. Consisting of over 3,300 codices and scrolls, most of these manuscripts were originally intended for use within liturgical services at the time they were produced. In addition to the explicit service books of prayer and hymnography (e.g. psalters, lectionaries, menaia, horologia, etc.), there are also manuscript genres that scholars today tend to study for other aspects of religious and social history—such as

homiliaries and hagiographies—which were also often employed within liturgical or paraliturgical use. Each one of these book types represents a subfield of study unto itself.

In this teaching module, we will explore one specific genre of liturgical book manuscript housed at St. Catherine's, namely, the Euchologion (pl: Euchologia). Literally termed “prayer book” in Greek, the Euchologion is equivalent to a medieval Western Missal-Sacramentary, and contains the prayers used by the celebrant bishop or priest for officiating at the sacraments, prayers and blessings. As such, scholars of Byzantine liturgy have long used the Euchologion for reconstructing the history of the main Byzantine rites that characterized religious life in the Eastern Mediterranean, and which unfolded within some of the most famous monuments of East Roman civilization, such as Hagia Sophia or major monastic centers like St Sabbas, Stoudios, Evergetis, or Athos. Such rites include, *inter alia*, the Divine Liturgy (or Eucharist), the daily offices or “hours,” and important blessings for major feasts (e.g. the Theophany water blessing) or life stages (e.g. presentation of a child and mother at church forty days after birth, marriage, funerals, etc.).

Part One: The Euchologion as a Source for Byzantine Religious History

In order to gain initial background in the nature of the Euchologion, read the first few pages of the following chapter (focusing on pages 183–190):

G. Radle, “The Euchologion: Sources and Methods” in *id.*, *Marriage in Byzantium: Christian Liturgical Rites from Betrothal to Consummation* (Cambridge, 2024), 183–210.

This should suffice for giving a brief introduction to the nature of this book and the methods for its study, with supplementary readings included below. In order to gain insight into the typical contents of an Euchologion, I provide here just a small list of some of the liturgical prayers contained within the oldest extant Greek Euchologion, the manuscript BAV, Barberini Gr. 336 from the late eighth century, images of which are available [online](#):

- The Divine Liturgies (the Byzantine Eucharistic rite)
- The liturgy of the hours (Vesper, Matins, etc.)
- The rite of baptism
- A rite for the reconciliation of heretics
- Ordination rites
- Monastic initiation
- A prayer for building a house
- A house blessing
- Prayers before and after Meals
- A prayer for a flock of sheep
- Prayer for the grape harvest
- Prayer for offering new fruits
- Rites of betrothal and marriage

Keeping in mind what an Euchologion is, and observing this sample of prayers for different purposes, attempt to answer the following three questions:

- 1) Where do you suppose an Euchologion was used?
- 2) What strikes you about the contents?
- 3) Given what you have read about an Euchologion, in what ways could the above listed contents be used for learning about Byzantine religious history, and what do you suppose are the limitations of this source (what does it not tell us)?

Part Two: The Case Study of Sinai NF/ MG53

Sinai NF/ MG53, was copied in the late eighth or ninth century and is therefore relatively contemporaneous to the oldest known example of an Euchologion discussed above, Barberini Gr. 336. This Sinai manuscript is small, with dimensions about 150 x 115 mm. This is about the length of a standard pencil and slightly wider than an adult's hand. It was unknown to scholarship until relatively recently. It was discovered as part of the 1975 "New Finds" discovery at Mt Sinai. For insight into this discovery, first read the brief description on the monastery's [webpage](#).

Examine the image of this manuscript carefully. This represents a typical folio within the manuscript. Before proceeding further, examine the folio carefully, and write down any and all observations you have about it. When you are finished, proceed to the following prompt questions:

1. Is the folio highly decorated or relatively simple? What might that reveal about the nature of this book?
2. Compare your observations about this folio to the observations you made about the nature of the Barberini Euchologion above based on its content. Do your observations from the previous question impact how you think about where and how this book was used and what practical role it served for its user?
3. Examining the text more closely, students may have observed the use of more than one color. This is a classic example of "rubrication" (Latin *rubricare*, "color red"), a practice that can be found in manuscripts stretching as far back as ancient Egypt. In this particular context, thinking about your observations regarding the purpose and use of this manuscript, what specific role did red ink serve in this manuscript?
4. Looking carefully at the folio, you might have noticed the presence of more than one script. While most of the text is written in what is known as the majuscule (capital letters) form of Greek, there is also another text copied in the margin, adjacent to the rubricated line. The line is in Arabic and was copied at a later date after the manuscript was already in use for some time. Such marginal texts can be found throughout the manuscript next to the rubricated texts. Given what you have hypothesized regarding the role of rubrication in the previous question, think through the implications of an Arabic marginal note at these spots. What role did they serve and what does that tell us about the priest and the community that was using this manuscript.

Further Reading

Students are encouraged to explore additional examples of the Euchologion or other liturgical books at St. Catherine's through use of the [Sinai Manuscripts Digital Library](#), which is regularly adding more examples. Additionally, for more insight into the Euchologion and methods for its study, see, for example:

- Parenti, Stefano. "Towards a Regional History of the Byzantine Euchology of the Sacraments." *Ecclesia Orans* 27 (2010): 109–21.
- Radle, Gabriel. "The Euchologion: Sources and Methods." In *Marriage in Byzantium: Christian Liturgical Rites from Betrothal to Consummation*, 183–210. Cambridge, 2024.
- Rapp, Claudia, Eirini Afentoulidou, Daniel Galadza, Ilias Nesseris, Giulia Rossetto, and Elisabeth Schiffer. "Byzantine Prayer Books as Sources for Social History and Daily Life." *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 67 (2017): 173–211.