

**Sinai Scenes.**  
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I

Wilderness and not desert.  
Sandstone, cliffs, oases, wells.  
Not Sahara's sweeping sandy dunes.

A water-hole with palm trees,  
Deep in a crevasse,  
tall fronds scarce reach ground level.

It is silent, still,  
Daytime's heat  
A palpable presence.  
Quiet to rest in rock's shade.  
Night's still chill,  
clarity and brilliance.

Virginal sandy flats,  
Perhaps never trodden,  
For footprints last millennia,  
And worn paths seven thousand years.

Rain's softness never washes,  
erases human tracks.  
A mark made on the desert's face  
remains until a blind fool  
drives over it in a jeep,  
crushes it under tank-tracks,  
or covers it with tar.

II

Wind-shaped round sandstone marbles on a rocky shelf,  
Wind-carved monstrous rocks,  
pitted, rounded, irregular crevices,  
Drawings, writing, and  
low down — Beduin signs.

A black-patinaed rock-face drawing board;  
men and women, a horse, ibex herds,  
an ostrich hunt, a snake, a scorpion,  
a gracious she-camel and her foal  
cut white into black nigh two millennia ago,  
but still bright.

How long to form a patina?

Ancient sanctuaries with standing stones,  
A temple on a mountain top,  
Cells, monasteries and holy sites;  
Black, chipped flint knives,  
Cairns, crenellations, roads and paths  
Round postbox tombs,  
Beehives built of dry rock,  
Dotting the sand.

They are all still there,  
Romans, Greeks, Nabateans,  
Armenians, Jews, Arabs,  
Beduin, Sabeans, Egyptians.  
Layered human traffic of the wasteland.

### III

In Serabit's turquoise mines  
I bought two blue-green stones  
wrapped in an olive oily cloth,  
to make ear-rings for my love.  
The masters' hieroglyphs on stelae  
and in the mines  
ancient slaves' Semitic.

### IV

Always the quiet,  
Where the voice can be heard,  
If the ear is open.

The quiet is affirmation,  
not sound's cessation,  
to touch, to feel;  
The soul responds to silence's solidity..  
Not touched, untouchable.

### V

"God have mercy on my camel and guide,"  
wrote a pilgrim  
on the peak of Jebel Musa.  
It is there  
with a Greek chapel,  
a Georgian inscription,  
the soot of Beduin sacrifices.

The holy mountain,

Moses', so they say.  
Anyway, it could have been.

Elijah hid on Horeb's height,  
Catherine's body niche,  
And Jethro's tomb on a hill.

Rephidim, Amalek,  
The thorny bush and Miriam's well,  
The monastery and a solitary's cave,  
A Byzantine paving,

## VI

The land's layered love,  
God's wilderness where he is found,  
Our wilderness where he is sought.

Israel, Elijah and Paul the Monk,  
meeting God in desert,  
God stomps from Sinai,  
with his myriad hosts.  
Did Israel's God ever like  
the wet, green, sappy land?