



Mount Sinai

Joseph J. Hobbs

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Amid the high mountains of Egypt's southern Sinai Peninsula stands Jebel Musa, "Mount Moses," revered by most Christians and Muslims as Mount Sinai. (Jewish tradition holds that Mount Sinai should remain terra incognita, unlocated, and does not associate it with this mountain.) In this fascinating study, Joseph Hobbs draws on geography and archaeology, Biblical and Quranic accounts, and the experiences of people ranging from Christian monks to Bedouin shepherds to casual tourists to explore why this mountain came to be revered as a sacred place and how that very perception now threatens its fragile ecology and its sense of holy solitude.

After discussing the physical characteristics of Jebel Musa and the debate that selected it as the most probable Mount Sinai, Hobbs fully describes all Christian and Muslim sacred sites around the mountain. He views Mount Sinai from the perspectives of the centuries-long inhabitants of the region—the monks of the Monastery of St. Katherine and the Jabaliya Bedouins—and of tourists and pilgrims, from medieval Europeans to modern travelers dispirited by Western industrialization.

Hobbs concludes his account with the recent international debate over whether to build a cable car on Mount Sinai and with an unflinching description of the negative impact of tourism on the delicate desert environment. His book raises important, troubling questions for everyone concerned about the fate of the earth's wild and sacred places.

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