

## **RAITHOU (*al-Rayah*)**

Ancient town, which has disappeared, 5 miles (8 km) south of al-Tur, a small town on the west coast of the southern Sinai Peninsula. The information collected there by Porphyry Ouspensky in 1850 places al-Rayah, or at least its ruins, on the edge of the sea, two hours' march south of al-Tur (see also Maspero and Wiet, 1919, pp. 98-99).

In the [neighborhood](#) of this town several sites were inhabited by anchorites or cenobites. It cannot be stated with any precision at what date the first ascetics established themselves there. The APOPTHEGMATA PATRUM mentions Raithou several times, but this collection brings together pieces of very diverse origin and period, which therefore are difficult to date. Similarly, there are no certain documents for fixing the date of the martyrdom of the forty monks at Raithou, perhaps fourth or fifth century, massacred by Blemmyes or Agarenes (Devresse, 1940, pp. 216-21). Although it is very probable that Sinai was inhabited by monks from the fourth century on, the sources do not confirm their presence at Raithou before the beginning of the fifth century.

Amun of Raithou paid a visit to Sisoës at Clysmā (*Apophthegmata patrum*, Sisoës 26); Sisoës did not install himself there before 429 (Chitty, 1966, p. 79, n. 83). Three anchorites from Raithou came before 428 to join Euthymius in his laura near Jerusalem (Festugière, 1962, p. 79). A solitary from Raithou named Zosimus became the disciple of Peter the Iberian (c. 409-489) toward the middle of the fifth century. Generally dated to the sixth century, the report of Ammonius, who was a monk of Canopus near Alexandria, and also a pilgrim to Jerusalem and then to Sinai, where he gathered up the history of the martyrs of Raithou and of Sinai, describes a semi-anchoritism at Raithou very similar to that of Egypt.

Ammonius notes that at Raithou only one of the hermits “who lived

separately in caves” was a Roman, which, Tillemont (1732) remarks, leads one to think that the others were autochthonous. We know that at the Council of CONSTANTINOPLE in 536 a monk-priest named Theonas represented not only the mountain of Sinai but also the “laura” (some manuscripts say the desert) of Raithou (Schwartz, Vol. 3, pp. 37, 51, 130; see the index); Eutychius (Sa’id ibn Batriq) states that a delegation of monks from Sinai asked Emperor JUSTINIAN (527- 565) to build monasteries to protect them against the raids of the Blemmyes and the Arabs. The text states that a monastery was built at Rayah (Vol. 2, pp. 202-03). It is known that the monastery of the Virgin in Sinai was completed in 556 (Stein, Vol. 2, p. 300).

The [Nestorian](#) traveler known as COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES, whose report was written between 547 and 549, speaks of the monastery of Raithou, where Menas, one of his traveling companions, became a monk. He identifies Raithou with the biblical Elim, where twelve springs flowed.

John Climacus (c. 570-649) wrote his famous *Ladder of Divine Ascent* at the request of John, [HEGUMENOS](#) of Raithou, with whom he exchanged letters. This was perhaps the same man who is called John the Cilician in the *Pratum spirituale* of John Moschus (c. 550-619). The last source mentions three anchorites at Raithou. It was also a monk of Raithou, named Daniel, who wrote the life of John Climacus.

Apart from two rather vague references to the monk Epiphanius (perhaps in the ninth century) and to Daniel of Ephesus (in the fifteenth century), we find no further reference to monks at Raithou until the travelers of the sixteenth century.

The first sixteenth-century mention of a monastery in this part of the Sinai Peninsula is by [Jean](#) Thénau in 1512 (p. 81). He notes that there is no potable water at al-Tur; one must seek it “half a French [league](#) from there, near the sumptuous ruined monastery which Justinian once had built, the abbot of which was Saint John, to whom John [Climacus](#)

addressed his book on the spiritual life (The Ladder of Paradise).” He, too, associates Raithou with the twelve springs of Elim.

In 1588, the Russian [merchant](#) Basil Posniakoff wrote of the “[monastery of Saint John](#) of Raithou, ruined from top to bottom by the accursed Turks,” at “three versts [a little more than 2 miles/3 km] from al-Tur” (Volkoff, p. 28).

Claude SICARD visited the site in 1720, but says very little about it; the monastery is that of John of Raithou, friend of John Climacus, and there are still gardens and caves in good condition. On his map of 1722 he places the monastery a little to the north of the well of sweet water and of Elim.

The archimandrite Ouspensky noted in 1850 that the monastery dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and founded by Justinian had been destroyed by al-Hakim at the beginning of the eleventh century and had become the cemetery for the Christians of al-Tur. It is remarkable that all the Russian travelers designate the town of al-Tur by the name of Raithou. Ouspensky notes that the ancient Raithou was at the place today called Rayah, and that ruins are still visible: a fortress and a well of sweet water. He adds that near the Jabal Hammam Sidna Musa, three and a half hours’ march northwest of al-Tur, there are hermitages and a church fitted up in caves. He thus clearly distinguishes the cenobium of Justinian to the northeast and the hermitages near the sea to the northwest. The latter, of a type common in Egypt, are well described by Wellsted (1838, Vol. 2, pp. 15-19), at a place called al-Wadi.

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Wadi Gharandal, more than 62.5 miles/100 km north of al-Tur.)

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**RENÉ-GEORGES COQUIN**

**MAURICE MARTIN, S.J**

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