This chapter focuses on the relationship between places and physical objects, and so it is only fitting that I dedicate it to Bianca Kühnel, whose research in recent years involves the myriad affinities between Jerusalem and European landscapes as they are reflected and reconstructed in architectural copies and topographical translations of the holy sites to Europe. Among the fundamental issues at the heart of this topic are the relationship between material objects and geographical landscapes and the affinities among remote geographical places as they are reconstructed in visual media. This theme has been addressed by Kühnel who argues that architectural complexes of Jerusalem that were copied in Europe can be regarded as ‘icons’ of Jerusalem; they differ from one another in scale, style, and material but are committed to a prototype that is ‘oblivious of geographical borders’.1 Kühnel considers the ‘mediatory’ aspects of Jerusalem sites in Europe, indicating their mnemonic role in combining space and time to create ‘an optimal framework for believers to grasp the dimensions of past, present and future, while positioning and repositioning themselves and their own humanity in relation to the humanity of Christ’.2

In what follows, I focus on the relationship between ‘objects’ and ‘places’ as manifested in a medieval legend, appearing in Latin pilgrims’ accounts, that reports the miraculous transfer of one or two stones from Mount Sinai to

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Mount Zion. According to the later version of the legend, the stones were transferred by angels for the Virgin Mary, who wished to go on a pilgrimage to Sinai; instead, Mary could venerate Sinai in these stones without leaving her home on Mount Zion. I attempt to explain what the stones stand for and what role they assume when they are examined in the context of Christian image theory, arguing that Sinai stones on Mount Zion (re)present actual sites as well as a record of devotional practice. The narrative of the transfer of the stones for the Virgin can be contextualized within the framework of European devotional practices that concentrate on Mary’s figure in order to evoke the memory of the holy places. It is within these contexts that the meaning of the stones ought to be read.

The Legend

Philip of Savona, whose account is dated to the 1280s, tells of a stone that was shown to pilgrims in one of the chapels of the church on Mount Zion. In it, he says,

St John the Evangelist celebrated Mass in the presence of the Virgin Mary for as long as she lived in this world. And there is still there a red stone that was used as an altar and was transported from Mount Sinai by the hands of angels at the request of the Blessed apostle Thomas on his return from India.³

³ ‘Et ibi prope est alia cella in qua ipsa benedicta virgo migravit de hoc seculo nequam. Est eciam ibi ecclesia beati Iohannis evangeli qui fuit ut dicitur prima ecclesia in hoc mundo. In qua idem beatus Johannes in conspectu beate virginis Marie missam celebrabat quamdiu ipsa beata virgo vixit in hoc seculo. Et edhuc est ibi lapis quidam rubeus qui erat pro altari qui quidem lapis transportatus fuit de monte Synay per manus angelorum ad preces beati Thome apostoli de India revertentis’. Sabino de Sandoli, Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucisignatorum (saec. xi–xiii): Textus Latinum cum versione Italica, 4 vols (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1978), iv, pp. 226, 228. English translation in Denys Pringle, Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187–1291 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 329. Philip of Savona is also known as Philip Bussierius. The Sinai stone on Mount Zion was already mentioned at the beginning of the twelfth century in the account of the Russian pilgrim Daniel; it was mentioned again in a Greek source dated after 1187, but neither explains the reason for the stone’s transfer. This chapter discusses only the later versions of the legend as they appear mainly in Latin accounts beginning in the 1280s.