

MYSTERIES UNEARTHED & The Amazing Discoveries In Bible Lands Seminars

The Codex Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus

1. CODEX ALEXANDRINUS, (A).

One of the chief treasures of the BM

Brief history.

Its history, at least in later years, is much less obscure than that of the Sinaiticus. It belonged to the Patriarchal Chamber at Alexandria and in 1624 it was offered by Cyrik Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople (formerly of Alexandria,) to Sir Thomas Roe, the British Ambassador in Turkey, for presentation to King James I. King James died before the MS started for England and the offer was transferred to Charles I. In 1627 the gift was received, and the MS remained in the possession of the sovereigns until the Royal Library—was presented to the nation by George II. Since then it has remained here in the BM.

SIGNIFICANCE.

Like the Codex Sinaiticus (aleph), it originally contained the whole Greek Bible, with the addition of the two Epistles of Clement of Rome and the Psalms of Solomon (shown in the table of contents). The OT has suffered slight mutilations but the NT even more seriously as the whole of St Matthew's gospel, as far as chapter 25vs6 is lost, together with leaves containing John 6vs50 to 8vs52 (where the number of pages missing shows that the doubtful passage 7vs53 to 8vs2, cannot have been present when the MS was perfect), 2 Corinthians 4vs13 to 12vs6, one leaf of the first Epistle of Clement, and the greater part of the second.

As regards the quality of the text preserved, it does not stand quite as high as its two predecessors in age, aleph and B [B stands for Codex Vaticanus]. Different parts of the NT have evidently been copied from different originals, but in the Gospels, A is the oldest and most pre-eminent example of that revised "Syrian" text which had become predominant as early as the fourth century.

In the Acts and Epistles, it ranks definitely with B and aleph, and is perhaps a better example of that class. In the Apocalypse it belongs to the Neutral Type (Westcott & Hort regard aleph & B as the two main representatives of the Neutral Text), and is probably the best extant MS of that book, with a possible exception of p47.

The Epistles of Clement, which are very valuable for the history of the early church, the first having been written about the end of the first century and the other before the middle of the second, were until quite recently not known to exist in any other MS.

The Eusebian sections and canons are indicated in the margins of the Gospels, which also exhibit the earliest example of a division into chapters. A similar division of the Acts and Epistles, ascribed to Euthalius of Alexandria, who wrote c. AD 458 is not found in this MS; and this is an additional reason for believing it not to have been written later than the middle of the fifth century.

The Codex Alexandrinus was the first of the greater MSS to be made accessible to scholars.

2. CODEX SINAITICUS. (aleph)

Brief history.

The discovery of this MS was the supreme triumph of the great Bible scholar Constantine Tischendorf. In the spring of 1844, he was travelling in the East in search of MSS and in the course of his travels he visited the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. While working in the library he noticed a basket containing a large number of stray pages of MSS, among which he was astonished to behold several leaves of the oldest Greek writing he had ever set eyes on. A short inspection proved that it contained part of the Greek Bible. No less than 43 such leaves did he extract, and the librarian casually observed that two baskets loads of similar 'waste' paper had already been consumed in the furnace of the monastery. He obtained permission to keep the 43 leaves and also learned that about 86 leaves of the same MS were also in existence, but he had difficulties in seeing them.

He returned to Europe, and having presented his treasure to his sovereign King Frederick Augustus of Saxony, he published its contents under the name of Codex Friderico—Augustanus.

On the last day of his third journey, after the second unsuccessful attempt to buy the other 86 leaves, a young monk of the monastery showed him a stack of 346 parchment leaves wrapped in a red cloth which after much persuasion and dilatory negotiations Tischendorf was allowed to take to Russia for presentation to the Tsar in 1859.

It was purchased in 1931 for the sum of £100,000 from the atheist Soviet Government.

SIGNIFICANCE.

The first 43 leaves belonged to the OT, containing portions of 1st Chronicles, 2nd Esdras, Tobit, and Jeremiah, with Esther complete; they are now at Leipzig, separated from the rest of the volume to which they once belonged.

The other 346 parchment leaves contained not only the 86 leaves for which he had been searching, but also the complete NT, parts of several OT books, and two early Christian works: - the Shepherd of Hermas, and a copy of the non-canonical Epistle of Barnabas. In fact, the discovery of the latter was of great importance to church historians, since it was known only from very imperfect copies.

Tischendorf gave to this famous Bible MS the initial letter of the Hebrew alphabet and called it Codex Sinaiticus, the symbol aleph (a). It was dated to the middle of the fourth century AD 340,

The study of the Codex Sinaiticus, a Bible MS a hundred years older than the earliest Bible MS [Alexandrinus 458 AD] available at that time, showed that its text in all essentials was practically identical with the standard Greek text of the Bible, i.e., the Septuagint (LXX).

Besides being one of the most ancient, the Codex Sinaiticus is also one of the most valuable texts of the NT. In many passages (e.g., the omission of the last 12 verses of St. Mark, in which aleph and B stand alone against all the other extant MSS) it is found in agreement with the Codex Vaticanus, B, preserving obviously superior readings where the great mass of later MSS is in error. According to the analysis of Westcott and Hort its text is almost entirely pre-Syrian. Agreement between aleph and B are so frequent that it is evident that they belong to the same family of text.

The publication of this early fourth century manuscript, Codex Sinaiticus, made an impact also on Vatican authorities. First it established Tischendorf as the unrivalled authority on the Greek NT, and second it also assuaged any fear that the publication of early Bible MSS would be detrimental to the church or to its teachings.

Consequently, Tischendorf finally received the coveted permission to publish the Vatican's most famous Bible MS, the Codex Vaticanus. His New Testament edition of this codex was published in 1867 under the title of *Novum Testamentum Vaticanum*. A year later it was followed by an official edition issued by the papal authorities.