

Codex Sinaiticus—a Fourth-Century Manuscript with the Complete Text of the Synoptic Gospels

1 Codex Sinaiticus¹

In 1844 Constantin von Tischendorf found numerous leaves of a massive manuscript of the Bible in the library of the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.² This manuscript would come to be known as Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ, 01)

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- 1 Constantin von Tischendorf, *Codex Frederico-Augustanus: sive fragmenta Veteris Testamenti e codice Graeco omnium qui in Europa supersunt facile antiquissimo in oriente detexit in patriam attulit ad modum codices edidit C. Tischendorf* (Leipzig, 1846); Profiri Upenski, *Vostok khristianskii: Egipet i Sinai; bidy, ocherki, plany i nadpisi* (2 vols.; St. Petersburg, 1857); Constantin von Tischendorf, *Bibliorum codex Sinaiticus Petropolitani: Ex tenebris proiraxit in Europam tanstulit adjuvandas atque illustrandas sacras litteras edidit C. Tischendorf* (4 vols.; St. Petersburg, 1862); Idem., *Novum Testamentum Sinaiticum: sive Novum Testamentum cum epistula Barnabae et Fragmentis Pastoris ex codice Sinaitico* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1863); Idem., *Novum Testamentum Graece: Ex Sinaitico codice annuum antiquissimo Vaticana itemque Elzeviriana lectione notate edidit A. F. C. Tischendorf* (Leipzig, 1865; Reprinted Olms: Hildesheim, 1969); V.N. Beneshevich, *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Graecorum qui in Monasterio Sanctae Catherinae in Monte Sina Asservantur* (St. Petersburg, 1911; Reprinted Olms: Hildesheim, 1965); and Idem., *Les Manuscrits Grecs du Mount Sinai et le Monde Savant de l'Europe depuis le XVIIe Siècle jusqu'à 1927* (Athens: Verlag der 'Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Jahrbücher,' 1937).
 - 2 The story of Sinaiticus and evaluations of its importance have been presented by many. Of especial importance are Tischendorf's editions of 1862 and 1863; Frederick Scrivener, *A Full Collation of the Codex Sinaiticus with the Received Text of the New Testament: To Which Is Prefaced a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1864); Constantin von Tischendorf, *Where Were Our Gospels Written? With a Narrative of the Discovery of the Sinaitic Manuscript* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1896); Helen Lake and Kirsopp Lake, *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitani: The New Testament, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, Preserved in the Imperial Library of St. Petersburg* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911) [facsimile]; Constantin von Tischendorf, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Ancient Biblical Manuscript Now in the British Museum, Tischendorf's Story and Argument Related by Himself*, 8th ed. (London: Lutterworth, 1934); Lagrange, *Critique rationelle*, 90–107; Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*; Hatch, *Principal Uncial Manuscripts*, Plate XV–XVI; Ihor Ševčenko, "New Documents on Constantine Tischendorf and the Codex Sinaiticus," *Scriptorium* 18 (1964): 55–80; T.C. Skeat, "The Last Chapter in the History of the Codex Sinaiticus," in *Writings of T. C. Skeat*, 238–240, originally published in *NT* 42 (2000): 313–315; Dirk Jongkind, *Scribal Habits of Codex Sinaiticus*, Text and Studies 3:5 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007); D.C. Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of*

and is the oldest complete manuscript of the Christian Bible. Tischendorf was permitted to take some of the leaves when he returned to Germany in 1845, and they are housed today in Leipzig University Library (these leaves were formerly called Codex Friderico-Augustanus). In 1859 Tischendorf returned to the monastery to find that many more leaves had been recovered by the monks, who had attempted to re-bind the pages. These leaves were presented to Tsar Alexander II in 1869, at which time they were moved to the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg. In 1933, the leaves of the manuscript in Russia were purchased by the British Museum and transferred to the British Library, where the volume was rebound in 1935 by Douglas Cockerell.³ A few pages remained in St. Petersburg. In 1975, a new cache of manuscripts was found in the monastery, among which were discovered twelve additional leaves of Codex Sinaiticus. This new find remains on Mount Sinai. Although the manuscript is dispersed across four different countries and four different libraries, today the entire manuscript is easily accessible and marvelously presented online by the Codex Sinaiticus Project.⁴

Codex Sinaiticus is a mid fourth-century parchment manuscript containing the complete Greek Bible, with some lacunae, and a few extra-canonical texts (Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas).⁵ It has been suggested over the years that Codex Sinaiticus, along with Codex Vaticanus, is the product of Constantine's imperial commission of fifty Bibles. In Chapter Five it was seen that this is not likely to be the case. Nevertheless, Sinaiticus *is* the result of the state of affairs brought about by Constantine in which Christians were permitted and encouraged to build churches and copy their scriptures, many copies of

the World's Oldest Bible (London: The British Library/Hendrickson, 2010); and most recently Christfried Böttrich, "One Story—Different Perspectives: The Discovery of Codex Sinaiticus," in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript*, ed. Scot McKendrick et al. (London: The British Museum/Hendrickson, 2015), 173–187.

- 3 T.C. Skeat, "Four Years' Work on the Codex Sinaiticus: Significant Discoveries in Reconditioned MS," in *Writings of T. C. Skeat*, 109–118. Originally published in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1938.
- 4 www.codexsinaiticus.org. See also Peter Robinson, "The Making of the Codex Sinaiticus Electronic Book," in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript*, 261–277; and D.C. Parker, "The Transcription and Reconstruction of Codex Sinaiticus," in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript*, 279–293.
- 5 See Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*, 60–65. The Eusebian enumeration in the text of the Gospels provides a *terminus post quem* of about 300–340 CE. On the basis of paleographical evidence, it is apparent that the manuscript was composed before the fifth-century majuscules. Two of the scribes, A and B, even write in a more archaic script characteristic of the third century. Milne and Skeat date the manuscript to the middle of the fourth century, not later than about 360 CE. Cavallo, *Ricerche*, 56–60, similarly suggests 360 CE.