

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SINAITIC MANUSCRIPT

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As the Conference of the Evangelical Church of Germany, held at Altenburg, in the month of September, 1864, turned its attention to certain recent works on the Life of Jesus, I was requested by my friends to put together a few thoughts on this important subject, and read them before the Congress. This I consented to do, and pointed out that M. Renan has taken strange liberties with the Holy Land; and that the history of the early Church, as well as that of the sacred text, contains abundant arguments in reply to those who deny the credibility of the Gospel witness. My address was so favourably received by the Congress, that the Editor of the *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*, on June 3, 1863, made use of the following language: "I venture to say that no address has ever stirred our hearts like that short one of M. Tischendorf. As a critic he is here on ground on which he has no rival. When history speaks, it is the duty of philosophy to be silent."

Familiar as I am through my long studies with those facts which are best calculated to throw light on that great question which now agitates Christendom, I have thought it right to publish the sketch of the subject, hasty as it was, which I had prepared at Altenburg. My work, printed in the month of March, 1864, has been so favourably received, that in three weeks an edition of 2,000 copies has been exhausted: a second edition was brought out in May, and translations in French and English were also prepared.

At the same time, the Committee of the Religious Tract Society at Zwickau expressed a desire to circulate this pamphlet, provided it was recast and adapted for popular use. Although I had many other occupations, I could not but comply with their request, and without delay applied myself to the task of revising the pamphlet. I was glad of the opportunity of addressing in this way a class of readers whom my former writings had not reached; for, as the real results of my researches are destined to benefit the Church at large, it is right that the whole community should participate in those benefits.

This popular tract, in the shape in which I now publish it, lacks, I admit, the simple and familiar style of the usual publications of the Zwickau Society; but, in spite of this fault, which the very nature of the subject renders inevitable, I venture to hope that it will be generally understood. Its chief aim is to show that our inspired Gospels most certainly take their rise from apostolic times, and so to enable the reader to take a short but clear view of one of the most instructive and important epochs of the Christian Church.

In sitting down to write a popular version of my pamphlet, the Zwickau Society also expressed a wish that I should preface it with a short account of my researches, and especially of the discovery of the Sinaitic Codex, which naturally takes an important place in my list of documentary proofs. The account of these discoveries is already before the public, but a, it is possibly new to many of those who read the Zwickau publications, I yielded to the wish of the Committee, having no other desire in this attempt than to build up my readers in their most holy faith.

As several literary and historical essays, written by me when a very young man, and in particular two theological prize essays, were favourably received by the public, I resolved, in 1839, to devote myself to the textual study of the New Testament, and attempted, by making use of all the acquisitions of the last three centuries, to reconstruct, if possible, the exact text, as it came from the pen of the sacred writers. My first critical edition of the New Testament appeared in the autumn of 1840. But after giving this edition a final revision, I came to the conviction that to make use even of our existing materials would call for a more attentive study than they had hitherto received, and I resolved to give my leisure and abilities to a fresh examination of the original documents. For the accomplishment of this protracted and difficult enterprise, it was needful not only to undertake distant journeys, to devote much time, and to bring to the task both ability and zeal, but also to provide a large sum of money, and this--the sinews of war--was altogether wanting. The Theological Faculty of Leipzig gave me a letter of recommendation to the Saxon Government; but at first without any result. Doctor Von Falkenstein, however, on being made Minister of Public Worship, obtained a grant for me of 100 thalers (about £15) to defray my travelling expenses, and a promise of another hundred for the following year. What was such a sum as this with which to undertake a long journey? Full of faith, however, in the proverb that "God helps those who help themselves," and that what is right must prosper, I resolved, in 1840, to set out for Paris (on the very day of the Feast of the Reformation), though I had not sufficient means to pay even for my travelling suit; and when I reached Paris I had only fifty thalers left. The other fifty had been spent on my journey.

However, I soon found men in Paris who were interested in my undertaking. I managed for some time to support myself by my pen, keeping, however, the object which had brought me to Paris steadily in view. After having explored for two years the rich libraries of this great city, not to speak of several journeys made into Holland and England, I set out in 1843 for Switzerland, and spent some time at Basle. Then passing through the south of France I made my way into Italy, where I searched the libraries of Florence, Venice, Modena, Milan, Verona, and Turin. In April, 1844, I pushed on to the East. Egypt and the Coptic convents of the Libyan desert, Mount Sinai in Arabia, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Convent of St. Saba on the shores of the Dead Sea, Nazareth and its neighbourhood, Smyrna and the island of Patmos, Beyrout, Constantinople, Athens; these were the principal points of my route, and of my researches in the East. Lastly, having looked in on my way home on the libraries of Vienna and Munich. I returned to Leipzig in January, 1845.

This journey cost me 5,000 thalers (£750). You are ready to ask me, how the poor traveller, who set out from Leipzig with only a few uncashed bills, could procure such sums as these. I have already partly given you a clue to explain this, and will more fully account for it as we go on with the narrative. Such help as I was able to offer to fellow-travellers, a great deal of kindness in return, and, above all, that enthusiasm which does not start back from privations and sacrifices, will explain how I got on. But you are naturally more anxious to hear what those labours were to which I devoted five years of my life.

With this view I return to that edition of the New Testament of which I have spoken above. Soon after the Apostles had composed their writings, they began to be copied; and the incessant multiplication of copy upon copy went on down to the sixteenth century, when printing happily came to replace the labour of the copyist. One can easily see how many errors must have inevitably crept into writings which were so often reproduced; but it is more difficult still to understand how writers could allow themselves to bring in here and there changes, not verbal only, but such as materially affect the meaning, and, what is worse still, did not shrink from cutting out a passage or inserting one.

The first editions of the Greek text, which appeared in the sixteenth century, were based upon manuscripts which happened to be the first to come to hand. For a long time men were satisfied to reproduce and reprint these early editions. In this way there arose a disposition to claim for this text, so often reprinted, a peculiar value, without ever caring to ask whether it was an exact reproduction or not of the actual text as it was written in the first century. But in the course of time manuscripts were discovered in the public libraries of Europe which were a thousand years old, and on comparing them with the printed text, critics could not help seeing how widely the received text departed in many places from the text of the manuscripts. We should also here add that from the very earliest age of the Christian era the Greek text had been translated into different languages--into Latin, Syriac, Egyptian, etc. Ancient manuscripts of these versions were also brought to light, and it was impossible not to see what variation of readings there had been in the sacred text. The quotations made by the Fathers, from as early as the second century, also confirmed in another way the fact of these variations. It has thus been placed beyond doubt that the original text of the Apostles' writings, copied, recopied, and multiplied during fifteen centuries, whether in Greek or Latin, or in other languages, had in many passages undergone such serious modifications of meaning as to leave us in painful uncertainty as to what the Apostles had actually written.

Learned men have again and again attempted to clear the sacred text from these extraneous elements. But we have at last hit upon a better plan even than this, which is to set aside this *textus receptus* altogether, and to construct a fresh text, derived immediately from the most ancient and authoritative sources. This is undoubtedly the right course to take, for in this way only can we secure a text approximating as closely as possible to that which came from the Apostles.

Now to obtain this we must first make sure of our ground by thoroughly studying the documents which we possess. Well, in completing my first critical edition of the New Testament, in 1840, I became convinced that the task, so far from completed, was little more than begun, although so many and such celebrated names are found on the list of critical editors; to mention only a few out of many: Erasmus, Robert Stephens, Beza, Mill, Wetstein, Bengel, Griesbach, Matthæi, and Scholz. This conviction led me to begin my travels. I formed the design of revising and examining, with the utmost possible care, the most ancient manuscripts of the New Testament which were to be found in the libraries of Europe; and nothing seemed to me more suitable, with this end in view, than to publish with the greatest exactness the most important of these documents. I should thus secure the documents as the common property of Christendom, and ensure their safe keeping by men of learning, should the originals themselves ever happen to perish.

I extended, for this reason, my investigations to the most ancient Latin manuscripts, on account of their great importance, without passing by the Greek text of the Old Testament, which was referred to by the Apostles in preference to the original Hebrew, and which, notwithstanding its high authority, had during the lapse of two thousand years become more corrupt than that of the New Testament. I extended my researches also to the Apocryphal books of the New Testament,

as the present treatise will readily show. These works bear upon the canonical books in more respects than one, and throw a considerable light on Christian antiquity. The greater number of them were buried in our great libraries, and it is doubtful if any one of them had received the attention which it deserved. In the next place, I proposed to collect together all the Greek manuscripts which we possess, which are of a thousand years' antiquity, including in the list even those which do not bear on the Bible, so as to exhibit in a way never before done, when and how the different manuscripts had been written. In this way we should be better able to understand why one manuscript is to be referred to the fourth century, another to the fifth, and a third to the eighth, although they had no dates attached to determine when they were written.

Such then have been the various objects which I hoped to accomplish by my travels. To some, all this may seem mere learned labour: but permit me to add that the science touches on life in two important respects; to mention only two,--to dear up in this way the history of the sacred text, and to recover if possible the genuine apostolic text which is the foundation of our faith,--these cannot be matters of small importance. The whole of Christendom is, in fact, deeply interested in these results. Of this there can be no doubt; and the extraordinary proofs of interest that the Christian world has given me are alone a sufficient attestation.

The literary treasures which I have sought to explore have been drawn in most cases from the convents of the East, where, for ages, the pens of industrious monks have copied the sacred writings, and collected manuscripts of all kinds. It therefore occurred to me whether it was not probable that in some recess of Greek or Coptic, Syrian or Armenian monasteries, there might be some precious manuscripts slumbering for ages in dust and darkness? And would not every sheet of parchment so found, covered with writings of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, be a kind of literary treasure, and a valuable addition to our Christian literature?

These considerations have, ever since the year 1842, fired me with a strong desire to visit the East. I had just completed at the time a work which had been very favourably received in Europe, and for which I had received marks of approval from several learned bodies, and even from crowned heads.

The work I advert to was this. There lay in one of the libraries of Paris one of the most important manuscripts then known of the Greek text. This parchment manuscript, the writing of which, of the date of the fifth century, had been retouched and renewed in the seventh, and again in the ninth century, had, in the twelfth century, been submitted to a twofold process. It had been washed and pumiced, to write on it the treatises of an old father of the Church of the name of Ephrem. Five centuries later, a Swiss theologian of the name of Wetstein had attempted to decipher a few traces of the original manuscript; and, later still, another theologian, Griesbach of Jena, came to try his skill on it, although the librarian assured him that it was impossible for mortal eye to decipher a writing which had disappeared for six centuries. In spite of these unsuccessful attempts, the French Government had recourse to powerful chemical reagents, to bring out the effaced characters. But a Leipzig theologian, who was then at Paris, was so unsuccessful in this new attempt, that he asserted that it was impossible to produce an edition of this text, as the manuscript was quite illegible. It was after all these attempts that I began, in 1841-2, to try my skill at the manuscript, and had the good fortune to decipher it completely, and even to distinguish between the dates of the different writers who had been engaged on the manuscript.

This success, which procured for me several marks of recognition and support, encouraged me to proceed. I conceived it to be my duty to complete an undertaking which had hitherto been treated as chimerical. The Saxon Government came forward to support me. The king, Frederick Augustus II, and his distinguished brother, John, sent me marks of their approval; and several eminent patrons of learning at Frankfort, Geneva, Rome, and Breslau generously offered to interest themselves in my attempt.

I here pass over in silence the interesting details of my travels--my audience with the Pope, Gregory XVI, in May, 1843--my intercourse with Cardinal Mezzofanti, that surprising and celebrated linguist--and I come to the result of my journey to the East. It was in April, 1844, that I embarked at Leghorn for Egypt. The desire which I felt to discover some precious remains of any manuscripts, more especially Biblical, of a date which would carry us back to the early times of Christianity, was realized beyond my expectations. It was at the foot of Mount Sinai, in the Convent of St. Catherine, that I discovered the pearl of all my researches. In visiting the library of the monastery, in the month of May, 1844, I perceived in the middle of the great hall a large and wide basket full of old parchments; and the librarian, who was a man of information, told me that two heaps of papers like these, mouldered by time, had been already committed to the flames. What was my surprise to find amid this heap of papers a considerable number of sheets of a copy of the Old Testament in Greek, which seemed to me to be one of the most ancient that I had ever seen. The authorities of the convent allowed me to possess myself of a third of these parchments, or about forty-three sheets, all the more readily as they were destined for the fire. But I could not get them to yield up possession of the remainder. The too lively satisfaction which I had displayed had aroused their suspicions as to the value of this manuscript. I transcribed a page of

the text of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and enjoined on the monks to take religious care of all such remains which might fall in their way.

On my return to Saxony there were men of learning who at once appreciated the value of the treasure which I brought back with me. I did not divulge the name of the place where I had found it, in the hopes of returning and recovering the rest of the manuscript. I handed over to the Saxon Government my rich collection of Oriental manuscripts in return for the payment of all my travelling expenses. I deposited in the library of the University of Leipzig, in shape of a collection, which bears my name, fifty manuscripts, some of which are very rare and interesting. I did the same with the Sinaitic fragments, to which I gave the name of Codex Frederick Augustus, in acknowledgment of the patronage given to me by the King of Saxony; and I published them in Saxony in a sumptuous edition, in which each letter and stroke was exactly reproduced by the aid of lithography.

But these home labours upon the manuscripts which I had already safely garnered did not allow me to forget the distant treasure which I had discovered. I made use of an influential friend, who then resided at the Court of the Viceroy of Egypt, to carry on negotiations for procuring the rest of the manuscripts; but his attempts were, unfortunately, not successful. "The monks of the convent," he wrote to me to say, "have, since your departure, learned the value of these sheets of parchment, and will not part with them at any price."

I resolved, therefore, to return to the East to copy this priceless manuscript. Having set out from Leipzig in January, 1853, I embarked at Trieste for Egypt, and in the month of February I stood for the second time in the Convent of Sinai. This second journey was more successful even than the first, from the discoveries that I made of rare Biblical manuscripts; but I was not able to discover any further traces of the treasure of 1844. I forget: I found in a roll of papers a little fragment which, written over on both sides, contained eleven short lines of Genesis, which convince me that the manuscript originally contained the entire Old Testament, but that the greater part had been long since destroyed.

On my return, I reproduced in the first volume of a collection of ancient Christian documents the page of the Sinaitic manuscript which I had transcribed in 1844, without divulging the secret of where I had found it. I confined myself to the statement that I claimed the distinction of having discovered other documents--no matter whether published in Berlin or Oxford--as I assumed that some learned travellers, who had visited the convent after me, had managed to carry them off.

The question now arose how to turn to use these discoveries. Not to mention a second journey which I made to Paris in 1849, I went through Germany, Switzerland, and England, devoting several years of unceasing labour to a seventh edition of my New Testament. But I felt myself more and more urged to recommence my researches in the East. Several motives, and more especially the deep reverence of all Eastern monasteries for the Emperor of Russia, led me, in the autumn of 1856, to submit to the Russian Government a plan of a journey for making systematic researches in the East. This proposal only aroused a jealous and fanatical opposition in St. Petersburg. People were astonished that a foreigner and a Protestant should presume to ask the support of the Emperor of the Greek and Orthodox Church for a mission to the East. But the good cause triumphed. The interest which my proposal excited, even within the imperial circle, inclined the Emperor in my favour. It obtained his approval in the month of September, 1858, and the funds which I asked for were placed at my disposal. Three months subsequently my seventh edition of the New Testament, which had cost me three years of incessant labour, appeared; and in the commencement of January, 1859, I again set sail for the East.

I cannot here refrain from mentioning the peculiar satisfaction I had experienced a little before this. A learned Englishman, one of my friends, had been sent into the East by his Government to discover and purchase old Greek manuscripts, and spared no cost in obtaining them. I had cause to fear, especially for my pearl of the Convent of St. Catherine; but I heard that he had not succeeded in acquiring anything, and had not even gone as far as Sinai--"for," as he said in his official report, "after the visit of such an antiquarian and critic as Dr. Tischendorf, I could not expect any success." I saw by this how well advised I had been to reveal to no one my secret of 1844.

By the end of the month of January I had reached the Convent of Mount Sinai. The mission with which I was entrusted entitled me to expect every consideration and attention. The prior, on saluting me, expressed a wish that I might succeed in discovering fresh supports for the truth. His kind expression of goodwill was verified even beyond his expectations.

After having devoted a few days in turning over the manuscripts of the convent, not without alighting here and there on some precious parchment or other, I told my Bedouins, on the 4th February, to hold themselves in readiness to set out with their dromedaries for Cairo on the 7th, when an entirely fortuitous circumstance carried me at once to the goal of all my desires. On the afternoon of this day I was taking a walk with the steward of the convent in the neighbourhood, and as we returned, towards sunset, he begged me to take some refreshment with him in his cell. Scarcely had he entered the

room, when, resuming our former subject of conversation, he said: "And I, too, have read a Septuagint"--*i.e.* a copy of the Greek translation made by the Seventy. And so saying, he took down from the corner of the room a bulky kind of volume, wrapped up in a red cloth, and laid it before me. I unrolled the cover, and discovered, to my great surprise, not only those very fragments which, fifteen years before, I had taken out of the basket, but also other parts of the Old Testament, the New Testament complete, and, in addition, the Epistle of Barnabas and a part of the Pastor of Hermas. Full of joy, which this time I had the self-command to conceal from the steward and the rest of the community, I asked, as if in a careless way, for permission to take the manuscript into my sleeping chamber to look over it more at leisure. There by myself I could give way to the transport of joy which I felt. I knew that I held in my hand the most precious Biblical treasure in existence--a document whose age and importance exceeded that of all the manuscripts which I had ever examined during twenty years' study of the subject. I cannot now, I confess, recall all the emotions which I felt in that exciting moment with such a diamond in my possession. Though my lamp was dim, and the night cold, I sat down at once to transcribe the Epistle of Barnabas. For two centuries search has been made in vain for the original Greek of the first part of this Epistle, which has only been known through a very faulty Latin translation. And yet this letter, from the end of the second down to the beginning of the fourth century, had an extensive authority, since many Christians assigned to it and to the Pastor of Hermas a place side by side with the inspired writings of the New Testament. This was the very reason why these two writings were both thus bound up with the Sinaitic Bible, the transcription of which is to be referred to the first half of the fourth century, and about the time of the first Christian emperor.

Early on the 5th of February I called upon the steward. I asked permission to take the manuscript with me to Cairo, to have it there transcribed completely from beginning to end; but the prior had set out only two days before also for Cairo, on his way for Constantinople, to attend at the election of a new archbishop, and one of the monks would not give his consent to my request. What was then to be done? My plans were quickly decided. On the 7th, at sunrise, I took a hasty farewell of the monks, in hopes of reaching Cairo in time to get the prior's consent. Every mark of attention was shown me on setting out. The Russian flag was hoisted from the convent walls, while the hillsides rang with the echoes of a parting salute, and the most distinguished members of the order escorted me on my way as far as the plain.

The following Sunday I reached Cairo, where I was received with the same marks of goodwill. The prior, who had not yet set out, at once gave his consent to my request, and also gave instructions to a Bedouin to go and fetch the manuscript with all speed. Mounted on his camel, in nine days he went from Cairo to Sinai and back, and on the 24th February the priceless treasure was again in my hands. The time was now come at once boldly and without delay to set to work to a task of transcribing no less than a hundred and ten thousand lines--of which a great number were difficult to read, either on account of later corrections, or through the ink having faded--and that in a climate where the thermometer during March, April, and May is never below 77° of Fahrenheit in the shade. No one can say what this cost me in fatigue and exhaustion.

The relation in which I stood to the monastery gave me the opportunity of suggesting to the monks the thought of presenting the original to the Emperor of Russia as the natural protector of the Greek Orthodox faith. The proposal was favourably entertained, but an unexpected obstacle arose to prevent its being acted upon. The new archbishop, unanimously elected during Easter week, and whose right it was to give a final decision in such matters, was not yet consecrated, or his nomination even accepted by the Sublime Porte. And while they were waiting for this double solemnity, the Patriarch of Jerusalem protested so vigorously against the election, that a three months' delay must intervene before the election could be ratified and the new archbishop installed. Seeing this, I resolved to set out for Jaffa and Jerusalem.

Just at this time the Grand-Duke Constantine of Russia, who had taken the deepest interest in my labours, arrived at Jaffa. I accompanied him to Jerusalem. I visited the ancient libraries of the holy city, that of the monastery of Saint Saba on the shores of the Dead Sea, and then those of Beyrout, Ladikia, Smyrna, and Patmos. These fresh researches were attended with the most happy results. At the time desired I returned to Cairo; but here, instead of success, only met with a fresh disappointment. The Patriarch of Jerusalem still kept up his opposition, and as he carried it to the most extreme lengths, the five representatives of the convent had to remain at Constantinople; where they sought in vain for an interview with the Sultan to press their rights. Under these circumstances the monks of Mount Sinai, although willing to do so, were unable to carry out my suggestion.

In this embarrassing state of affairs the archbishop and his friends entreated me to use my influence on behalf of the convent. I therefore set out at once for Constantinople, with a view of there supporting the case of the five representatives. The Prince Lobanow, Russian ambassador to Turkey, received me with the greatest goodwill, and as he offered me hospitality in his country house on the shores of the Bosphorus, I was able the better to attend to the negotiations which had brought me there. But our irreconcilable enemy, the influential and obstinate Patriarch of Jerusalem, still had the upper hand. The archbishop was then advised to appeal himself in person to the patriarchs,

archbishops, and bishops; and this plan succeeded--for before the end of the year the right of the convent was recognized, and we gained our cause. I myself brought back the news of our success to Cairo, and with it I also brought my own special request, backed with the support of Prince Lobanow.

On the 24th of September I returned to Cairo. The monks and archbishop then warmly expressed their thanks for my zealous efforts in their cause, and the following day I received from them, under the form of a loan, the Sinaitic Bible, to carry it to St. Petersburg, and there to have it copied as accurately as possible.

I set out for Russia early in October, and on the 19th of November I presented to their Imperial Majesties, in the Winter Palace at Tsarkoe-Selo, my rich collection of old Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, and other manuscripts, in the middle of which the Sinaitic Bible shone like a crown. I then took the opportunity of submitting to the Emperor Alexander II a proposal of making an edition of this Bible worthy of the work and of the Emperor himself, and which should be regarded as one of the greatest undertakings in critical and Biblical study.

I did not feel free to accept the brilliant offers that were made to me to settle finally, or even for a few years, in the Russian capital. It was at Leipzig, therefore, at the end of three years, and after three journeys to St. Petersburg, that I was able to carry to completion the laborious task of producing a *facsimile* copy of this codex in four folio volumes.

In the month of October, 1862, I repaired to St. Petersburg to present this edition to their majesties. The Emperor, who had liberally provided for the cost, and who approved the proposal of this superb manuscript appearing on the celebration of the Millenary Jubilee of the Russian empire, has distributed impressions of it throughout the Christian world, which, without distinction of creed, have expressed their recognition of its value. Even the Pope, in an autograph letter, has sent to the editor his congratulations and admiration. The two most celebrated universities of England, Cambridge and Oxford, desired to show me honour by conferring on me their highest academic degree. "I would rather," said an old man--himself of the highest distinction for learning--"I would rather have discovered this Sinaitic manuscript than the Koh-i-noor of the Queen of England."

But that which I think more highly of than all these flattering distinctions is the fact that Providence has given to our age, in which attacks on Christianity are so common, the Sinaitic Bible, to be to us a full and clear light as to what is the real text of God's Word written, and to assist us in defending the truth by establishing its authentic form.