

# The Antiquaries Journal

Being the Journal of the Society of Antiquaries of London

Vol. XIV

April 1934

No. 2

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PUBLISHED BY HUMPHREY MILFORD  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW LEIPZIG NEW YORK

TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPETOWN

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS SHANGHAI

*Quarterly: Price Five Shillings net*  
*Annual Subscription, 18s. 6d. post free*

All communications on Editorial matters and books for review should be addressed to  
the Assistant Secretary, Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London, W. 1

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## AN EARLY MANUSCRIPT OF THE BIBLE.

# NATIONAL APPEAL FOR THE PURCHASE OF THE SINAI MANUSCRIPT OF THE BIBLE FOR THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

The support of all those who are interested in the establishment of the correct text of the Bible is invoked by the Trustees of the British Museum, who have the opportunity of purchasing for the National Collections the famous manuscript of the Bible known as the Codex Sinaiticus.

The earliest evidence for the Greek text of the Bible is found in papyrus manuscripts, some of which date as early as the second century after Christ ; but these represent only fragments of some of the books. The earliest substantial texts are vellum manuscripts of the fourth century, and of these there are only two ; the Vatican manuscript, nearly complete, and the manuscript which it is now possible for this nation to acquire from the Soviet Government. It may be mentioned in passing that these are some five centuries earlier than any of **the manuscripts of the Hebrew text of the Bible.**

The date of the Sinaiticus is placed by scholars about the middle of the fourth century ; indeed it has been suggested that it may be one of the manuscripts of the Bible which were written to the order of St. Athanasius and sent by him in 340 A.D. to the Emperor Constans. It is known to have been at Caesarea in Palestine at some time between the fifth and seventh centuries, and it is probable that after the taking of Caesarea by the Arabs in 638 A.D. it was removed to the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. There, in 1844, the German scholar Tischendorf found it—or so much of it as remained, for a great part of the Old Testament had been destroyed by the neglect of the monks. He first rescued from a receptacle for rubbish 43 leaves which he presented to the King of Saxony ; they are still at Leipzig. What remained, and what he only found on a later visit, were some 350 leaves, containing about two-fifths of the Old Testament, the whole of the New Testament (thus supplementing the Vaticanus, which lacks part of the New Testament) and two non-canonical but very popular books, the Epistle of Barnabas and the “ Shepherd ” of Hermas. In 1859, Tischendorf persuaded the monks to cede the manuscript to the Tsar of Russia, as Head of the Orthodox Church, and it has since then been one of the greatest treasures of the Imperial Library.

It is now offered by the Soviet Government to the British Museum for the sum of £100,000. In making a statement to this effect in the House of Commons

on December 20th last, the Prime Minister said that the Government would make a special contribution towards the purchase price of one pound for every pound collected from other sources. **It is therefore necessary to raise at least the sum of £50,000.** It would be excellent if the whole £100,000 could be raised by voluntary contributions.

The King has made a personal donation of £100, and The Queen one of £25, these gifts being accompanied by an expression of Their Majesties' keen interest in the steps which the Trustees are taking in the matter. At the moment of the printing of this appeal, a sum of approximately £11,000 has been received from all sources, for the most part in quite small amounts. But special mention must be made of Lord Wakefield's contribution of £1,000, and of the efforts of the "Friends of the National Libraries" which have so far brought in £1,400. Much can be done by helpers who are willing to organize collections of small sums from those who are unable to give largely, and to forward them in bulk.

**The Vendors have given an undertaking that the money paid will be spent in this country. In other words the £100,000 will be treated as a credit to be used in Great Britain.**

It is unnecessary to dwell at length on the desirability of the acquisition. But it may be observed that it is not merely for sentimental reasons that it is necessary that the original of so precious a document should be in a place of security, and accessible to students. Scrutiny of the manuscript has already confirmed the opinion that no facsimile, however photographically accurate, can take the place of an original when it comes to deciding finally the exact significance of a correction of the text; and this manuscript contains many corrections by students of the time immediately following the date of its production, students who had earlier authorities at their disposal. The text which it preserves is in many places different from that of the Vatican manuscript or other later authorities, such as the Alexandrine Codex of the fifth century, which is already in the British Museum, or the Codex Bezae at Cambridge. If it is secured for the British Museum, England, so long the chief centre of the study of the text of the Bible, will possess three out of the four chief sources for the establishment of that text.

Nor is it necessary to point out that the price, high as it may seem, is not exorbitant. It is less than half the sum which was asked for the manuscript but recently. It is less than has been paid by the nation for a single Renaissance picture.

The book is now on view at the British Museum. Pictorial cards (2*d.* each), full size collotype facsimiles of an opening (1*s.* each), and a descriptive pamphlet (with three illustrations, price 6*d.*) can be obtained from the Museum. On orders of one hundred or more a discount of 32½ per cent. is allowed.

The Trustees appeal with complete confidence to the generosity of the public, and will welcome and duly acknowledge any contribution, however small. Such contributions should be sent as soon as possible to

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