1 *The Bible Hunters*

Two Bible Hunters

In the 1840s and 1850s, Constantin Tischendorf, a dashing and worldly expert on the Bible and ancient manuscripts, traveled from his home in Leipzig to the Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine of Sinai, in Ottoman-controlled Egypt. His goal was to find ancient editions of the Bible to uphold his biblical Christian faith. Over three separate visits to this monastery, Tischendorf came across a complete version of the New Testament in Greek along with significant portions of the Christian Old Testament in a manuscript dating to the early fourth century. This manuscript was, to date, the oldest complete Greek New Testament ever uncovered; it allowed generations of scholars to affirm, correct, and amend the received text of the New Testament. Despite attempts by a noted Greek forger to claim credit for what became known as *Codex Sinaiticus*, Tischendorf's "discovery" remained a watershed moment in European biblical criticism.[1]

In the 1930s, a pious and thoroughly learned archaeologist named Sir William Braceridge arrived from London at the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba in Jerusalem, a territory under British control but subject to continuing strife from native Arab populations. Sir William was, like Tischendorf, on the hunt for ancient biblical manuscripts that would support his Christian faith. At Mar Saba he discovered, to his chagrin, a fragmentary text purportedly written by Nicodemus – to whom Christ had conveyed the need to be born again and who had assisted at Christ's burial (John 3 and John 19) – revealing that Christ had in fact not risen from the dead; the resurrection never happened and the lynchpin of Christian faith was a deceit and a lie. Fortunately, the local British constabulary in concert with a visiting American millionaire proved that the "Shred of

[1] Stanley E. Porter, *Constantine Tischendorf: The Life and Work of a 19th Century Bible Hunter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

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Nicodemus" was a forgery, perpetrated by a Greek expert under duress from Nazi plotters.

Tischendorf is historical; Braceridge is fictional, a secondary but crucial character in the 1940 novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba*. Together these two Bible Hunters highlight some of the key ideas about biblical discovery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the decades before the emergence of the conspiratorially minded Gospel Thrillers. Both Tischendorf and Sir William brave strange lands, wield European expertise, confront the possibility of forgery, and defend the biblical truth of their evangelical faiths. They bracket the age of the Bible Hunters.

In this chapter, I enter into the worlds of Tischendorf and Braceridge, a Bible Hunting era of Bible-based theology, textual criticism, colonial administration, and imperial adventure. These worlds offer key background and contrast to the conspiratorial era of the Gospel Thrillers. After tracing the rise of the narrative of the Bible Hunter in the period through World War I and some early fictional portrayals from this period, I turn to *The Mystery of Mar Saba*, which serves as an important prototype and transition to the narratives and themes of Gospel Thrillers. (*The Mystery of Mar Saba* will also undergo its own surprising resurrection in the twenty-first century as we shall see in Chapter 6.)

Major geopolitical shifts following World War II in the Middle East meant the establishment of new nation-states (ostensibly) free from European control. Two new major manuscript discoveries occur during this momentous political transition: the Nag Hammadi codices and the Dead Sea Scrolls. These new discoveries take up and transform the key themes of the Bible Hunter narrative, themes that will also be central to the Gospel Thrillers: imperialist uncertainties, academic pretensions, theological anxieties, and the West's desire for and fear of the biblical remains to be found in the dangerous and exotic East.

The Model of the Modern Bible Hunter

The nineteenth-century era of European imperialism was also the golden age of Euro-American Bible Hunters, who sought out biblical manuscripts along with other ancient testimonies from the apostolic age to bolster their faith. Their particular aims, methods, and political and cultural circumstances set them apart from earlier Christians who

had sought out and incorporated new manuscript witnesses into their Bibles in hopes of improving the received text.

Origen, for instance, was a third-century theologian based first in Alexandria (Egypt) and later in Caesarea Maritima (Palestine). A devoted interpreter of the Christian Bible, Origen was dissatisfied with the received text of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. He created a novel textual tool comprising six columns. In one column sat the Septuagint. The other columns contained the text in Hebrew; a transliterated version of the text, that is, the Hebrew words rendered in Greek letters; and three additional Greek translations executed in recent centuries. (Later Origen added two more recent Greek translations.) Origen's multivolume feat, known as the Hexapla (sixfold Bible) was encyclopedic and antiquarian, based on the work of those serious textual critics of his day who sought the best versions of classical texts like Plato and Homer. Medieval scriptoria and early modern scholars continued in Origen's antiquarian vein; the Renaissance saw a renewed burst of interest in producing improved versions of the Bible, now translated into vernacular languages like French, English, and Spanish.[2]

But if Bible Hunters like Tischendorf were not the first to attempt to improve the received text of the Bible, their ambitions took flight on a far grander scale. European powers in this second age of imperial expansion engaged vigorously with the vulnerable Islamic empires to their East and South. European colonial interests were not merely predatory but also grounded in the belief that deep wells of western patrimony lay waiting to be discovered in the "ruins" of the East. Early administrators of the British Raj in India encountered Sanskrit texts that they interpreted as key to understanding their (white) "Indo-European" roots. When Napoleon brought his army into Egypt in 1798, he was accompanied by historical, literary, and archaeological experts intent on finding the primitive roots of their own European (Christian) history. Napoleon's adventures in Egypt were short-lived,

[2] Anthony Grafton and Megan H. Williams, *Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Wim François and August den Hollander (eds.), *Vernacular Bible and Religious Reform in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Lovaniensium 287(Leuven: Peeters, 2017); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–25.

but the next Ottoman governor of Egypt sent as an offering to the imperial powers of England and France ancient Egyptian obelisks – "Cleopatra's needles," as they were dubbed – to be erected in European capitals as monuments to a masculinized Roman (that is, white) history extracted from the feminized sands of the Middle East.[3]

As antiquities flowed from the corners of the Ottoman Empire into European hands, so too Protestant missionaries went forth in their belief that all the peoples of the world would soon submit to Christian truth under the banner of empire. Encounters with these objects of Christian missionary zeal produced new ways of understanding "religion" that nonetheless reaffirmed the natural superiority of western (white) Christianity. Drawing on the reports of missionaries, academics began producing complex taxonomies and genealogies of world religions, creating yet more hierarchical connective tissue between the "primitive" East and the "civilized" West.[4]

Into this matrix of colonial-missionary fervor stepped the Bible Hunters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These hunters were armed not only with philological expertise – that is, knowledge of the languages of the ancient world – but also with paleographic expertise – that is, knowledge of how to find, read, and translate ancient and medieval manuscripts out of their cloistered contexts. They began their searches in the libraries and repositories of European capitals, where earlier Renaissance scholars had collected medieval manuscripts. But very soon their targets were the monastic libraries of the lands to the East of Europe, where Christian treasures awaited. Among the most ambitious of these new Bible Hunters was Constantin Tischendorf.

[3] Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Bob Brier, *Cleopatra's Needles: The Lost Obelisks of Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 93–155; Donald M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

[4] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Two Constantines

Tischendorf had reason to think precious finds awaited him in the East. Already in the eighteenth century, European adventurers had brought back Christian manuscripts among their various exotic souvenirs. In the 1760s, a wealthy and ambitious Scot named James Bruce headed to Africa to find the source of the Nile River. In addition to returning home with elaborate accounts of his exploratory successes, Bruce returned with early Christian manuscripts in Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopic Ge'ez, a tantalizing hint of the textual resources available outside the bounds of Europe. In the 1830s, a minor noble named Robert Curzon extended his Grand Tour from Europe to the Levant and Egypt; his collection of antiquities included manuscripts painstakingly acquired from eastern monasteries where, Curzon claimed, monks were either greedy in their unwillingness to part with ancient texts or so ignorant of their value that they could not imagine what he might use the pages for.[5]

No wonder, then, that young Tischendorf, having already done his best to examine the most reliable biblical manuscripts in the libraries of Europe, turned his sights eastward. Like Origen centuries earlier, Tischendorf was impelled by the desire to improve and correct the received versions of the Christian Bible in Greek. Unlike Origen, Tischendorf was also responding to a school of thought among some German theologians that questioned the historical reliability of the Bible. This new "Higher Criticism," as it was called, was pioneered in the first half of the nineteenth century by German scholars like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm de Wette. Its approach to the Bible called for more rigorous attention to the ways that biblical texts came to be compiled, edited, and transmitted over time, ultimately questioning their historical (and theological) reliability. This rationalist stance to the biblical text allowed liberal theologian David Friedrich

[5] James Bruce recorded his explorations in five volumes: *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790); see Rebekah Mitsein, "'Come and Triumph with Your Don Quixote': or, How James Bruce Travelled to Discover the Nile but Found Scotland Instead," *Studies in Travel Writing* 18 (2014): 1–17. Curzon also published accounts of his travels: *Visits to the Monasteries of the Levant* (London: John Murray, 1849); see Ian Fraser, *The Heir of Parham: Robert Curzon, 14th Baron Zouche* (Norfolk: Paradigm Press, 1986).

Strauss, in 1833, to publish his blockbuster *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (The Life of Jesus Critically Treated), in which he argued that the gospel accounts were largely mythological and self-evidently contradictory, an extreme argument that cost him a prestigious academic post.[6]

Against this rising tide of Higher Critical skepticism, Tischendorf sought refuge in the text, properly and rationally restored by recourse to more ancient and reliable textual witnesses. Tischendorf's approach was "scientific" (in German *wissenschaftliche*, a broader term than the English word), grounded in clear principles of textual criticism that would become the academic discipline of paleography. In his own account of his most famous discovery, *Codex Sinaiticus*, Tischendorf's scientific endeavor naturally leads him to the East. Here's how Tischendorf puts it in a popular account entitled *When Were Our Gospels Written?*, delivered in the 1860s and immediately translated and circulated widely:

> 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.[7]

The passage is redolent with the Orientalist fantasies that would long animate Euro-American knowledge-making. The "treasures" that would add value to "our Christian literature" – and by "our" Tischendorf surely means his fellow Protestant European Christians, not their eastern Orthodox cousins – are merely "slumbering for ages

[6] Porter, *Constantine Tischendorf*, 81–89; Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*; John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984).

[7] Constantine [*sic*] Tischendorf, *When Were Our Gospels Written? An Argument by Constantine Tischendorf with a Narrative of the Discovery of the Sinaitic Manuscript*, 2nd ed. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1867), 20. Porter includes this translation with commentary in *Constantine Tischendorf*.

in dust and darkness," unappreciated by their faceless monastic caretakers. Tischendorf recounts how he discovered and rescued the Greek Bible from the monastery of St. Catherine's over three separate trips, literally saving the dismembered codex from being used for kindling by the ignorant monks. (This trope of rescuing manuscripts from ignorant eastern destruction persists throughout the modern period.)[8]

At some point during Tischendorf's attempts to find and copy this precious manuscript, the monks of St. Catherine's become wise to the value of their holdings. Delicate negotiations, eventually brokered by the court of Czar Alexander II of Russia ("the natural protector of the Greek Orthodox faith," Tischendorf reasons), allow Tischendorf to borrow the remains of the fourth-century codex and transcribe and reproduce it in his hometown of Leipzig. This Greek Bible he called *Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus*, a Latin nomenclature that evoked the scientific labeling current in the biological sciences. *Codex* refers to the form of the manuscript: a set of leaves bound into a book (like our modern book), as opposed to a scroll; *Sinaiticus* refers to its site of "discovery," the monastery of St. Catherine's in Ottoman Egypt; and *Petropolitanus* refers to St. Petersburg, the capital of Russia, from which the Czar financed Tischendorf's work and where soon after the codex was housed as the Czar's property. (After the Russian Revolution, *Petropolitanus* was sold to the British Museum; other portions of the full codex remain scattered across Europe.)[9]

[8] On Tischendorf's western disdain for the backward conditions of the "convents" to which he traveled, see his *Travels in the East by a Pilgrim*. Trans. W. E. Schukard (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), 95–99, for his description of St. Catherine's monastery. On the trope of peril – especially burning – faced by manuscripts before their "rescue" by westerners, see Brent Nongbri, *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 313, n.1.

[9] Tischendorf, *When Were Our Gospels Written*, 25 on the monks who have "learned the value of these sheets of parchment." Porter, *Constantine Tischendorf*, 23–47, gives a lucid account of Tischendorf's travels and codicological and paleographic work on *Sinaiticus*. On the scientizing influence of Linnaeus and Darwin on biblical criticism – which, as she argues, is also colonializing, racializing, and sexualizing – see Yii-Jan Lin, *The Erotic Life of Manuscripts: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Biological Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). An earlier portion of the codex retrieved by Tischendorf and published as *Codex Friderico-Augustanus*, in honor of the King of Saxony who sponsored Tischendorf's first trip east, remains in Leipzig; other pieces remain in the possession of the Russian National Library and St. Catherine's Monastery. The disparate sections have been virtually reunited on

This extraction and publication of a biblical treasure slumbering temporarily in the East affirmed the Bible as a piece of western, European patrimony, whose natural home was the scientifically (*wissenschaftliche*) rigorous library of the trained – and pious – text critic. This biblical witness upheld at once western imperial authority and true Christian piety. Theology and politics intertwined. In concluding his account of the Sinaitic discovery in *When Were Our Gospels Written?*, Tischendorf relays the following exchange on the occasion of his receiving honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford:

> "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."

Koh-i-noor, like *Codex Sinaiticus*, was a "treasure" extracted from the East, a massive diamond handed over to Queen Victoria upon her formal annexation of Punjab; it remains today part of the British royal family's Crown Jewels. So too, Tischendorf notes, is *Codex Sinaiticus* a crown jewel of pious Christian faith retrieved from the East:

> 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.[10]

Tischendorf's crown jewel was not without its skeptics. Skepticism of new manuscript discoveries was perhaps to be expected: the prices paid by governments, universities, and museums to acquire rare ancient texts could be steep and created an atmosphere rife for exploitation by honest brokers and forgers alike. Tischendorf worked assiduously to demonstrate the authenticity and antiquity of *Sinaiticus*. It is a telling irony, then, that the most spectacular challenge to Tischendorf's textual triumph came from a notorious forger of manuscripts: Konstantinos Simonides.[11]

www.codexsinaiticus.org. See also David Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World's Oldest Bible* (London: British Library, 2010).

[10] Tischendorf, *When Were the Gospels Written*, 36.

[11] On forgery and its relationship to early modern historical criticism, see Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, new ed. Foreword by Ann Bair (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019). On Simonides, see Andreas Müller, Lilia Diamantopoulou, Christian Gastgeber, and Athanasia Katsiakiori-Rankl (eds.), *Die getäuschte*

By the early 1860s, Simonides had already been involved in several scandalous manuscript forgeries across western Europe, even tangling with Tischendorf in Leipzig earlier in the 1850s. Indeed, it was the highly skilled forgeries passed off by people like Simonides that cast *all* such discoveries, including *Codex Sinaiticus*, under suspicion. How shocked Tischendorf must have been, then, when Simonides published a letter in the London *Guardian* claiming that, as a young man, *he* had written out the Greek biblical codex now erroneously called Sinaiticus.[12]

According to Simonides, the volume was produced as a gift for Czar Nicholas I by the monks of Mount Athos; young Simonides, whose uncle Benedict was the head of one of the monasteries on Athos, had taken over the task from the overworked calligrapher of the monastery, learning to form the ancient letters and consulting the best biblical texts. He was astounded, years later, to find his beautifully bound gift in "much altered" condition, artificially aged, its dedication to the Czar cut away along with his own signature. His attempts to warn learned colleagues – including, he hints, Tischendorf himself – went unheeded, so he thought it best to publicly proclaim that *Codex Sinaiticus* was, in reality, *Codex Simonideios*. (In addition to mocking the pseudoscientific Latin name devised by Tischendorf, Simonides also subtly dewesternized it by using a Greek adjective, *Simonideios*, in place of the Latin one, *Sinaiticus*.)[13]

Scholars now agree that Simonides was lying, but the controversy raged in the English press for almost a full year, with a back-and-forth between Simonides's opponents and supporters. Simonides went to a great deal of trouble to insist on his authorship of this Greek Bible from Sinai; at one point he even produced letters from a certain "Hieromonk Kallinikos" of Alexandria to support his story, letters almost certainly

Wissenschaft: Ein Genie betrügt Europa – Konstantinos Simonides (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2017).

[12] On Simonides's career as a biblical forger, see Tommy Wasserman, "Simonides' New Testament Papyri: Their Production and Purported Provenance," *Marginalia: LA Review of Books* (July 6, 2018).

[13] Simonides's letter appeared in the September 13, 1862, issue of the *Guardian*; the voluminous press clippings following Simonides's charge are handily collected and commented upon by J. K. Elliott, *Codex Sinaiticus and the Simonides Affair*, Analecta Vlatadon 33 (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1982). See also Pasquale Massimo Pinto, "Simonides in England: A Forger's Progress," in *Getäuschte Wissenschaft*, eds., Müller et al., 109–26.

forged by Simonides. His opponents, in turn, solicited British agents abroad to hunt down Kallinikos to prove Simonides's ongoing malfeasance. When the dust finally settled Simonides left England, perhaps for Egypt, and was little heard from again. (In an 1864 book he did, however, include *Codex Sinaiticus-Petropolitanus* as being among his previous publications.) His disruptive intervention into Tischendorf's biblical triumph was short-lived but brings vividly to life many of the underlying political, personal, and theological anxieties that accompanied the endeavors of the Bible Hunters.[14]

Tischendorf framed his "discovery" of *Codex Sinaiticus* as an expert extraction of Christian biblical wisdom from the East; Simonides's bold claim to be *Codex Sinaiticus*'s composer dismantled Tischendorf's triumph on two levels. At the individual level, it suggested the German paleographer's lack of expertise, unable to tell the difference between ancient and modern writing. This little piece of revenge against Tischendorf, whose expertise had been used against Simonides, was no doubt one of Simonides's principal aims.

In a larger sense, however, Simonides called into question the entire enterprise of European Bible Hunting. Bible Hunters relied on the East being a relatively passive and stable treasury of riches available for scholarly examination. While it is true that they might be subject to benign neglect or the occasional ignorant fire, ancient texts were slumbering until awakened by the European paleographer's kiss. Simonides painted a very different picture: active monks, composing new texts in ancient handwriting, reusing premodern codices, masters of their own libraries. Out of these industrious and creative locales, how could any European be certain what he was looking at?

Simonides positioned himself and other native brokers of newly found antiquities as the only safeguards against the kind of whopper of which he accused Tischendorf. Simonides overturned the intellectual

[14] Simonides lists Tischendorf's finds as his own compositions, in the front matter of *The Periplus of Hannon, King of the Karchedonians* (London: Trübner & Co., 1864). Lilia Diamantopoulou, "Konstantinos Simonides: Leben und Werk. Ein tabellarischer Überblick," in *Getäuschte Wissenschaft*, eds. Müller et al., 305–25, notes reports of Simonides's death in 1867, 1868, and 1890. The 1867 notice records Simonides dying of leprosy in Alexandria; Anna Mykoniati, "Biographische Bemerkungen zu Konstantinos Simonides," in *Getäuschte Wissenschaft*, eds. Müller et al., 87–106, remarks with skepticism that this was a "somewhat Romantic cause of death (*eine etwas romanhafte Todesursache*)" and that forgeries by him continued to circulate through the 1870s (105, n.55).

and economic system within which Bible Hunters like Tischendorf operated. If they wanted to find ancient authorities to support their biblical text, they would have to rely on eastern expertise *and* pay a sufficient price. Of course, they could never *really* know what they were getting: an ancient manuscript and a clever forgery looked identical. Simonides revealed the East to be an inherently unreliable site for western biblical discovery and recovery, a claim that would land with pointed irony coming from a notorious foreign forger.

In the end, of course, Simonides's gambit failed: Constantin Tischendorf is remembered as the Bible Hunter *extraordinaire* and Konstantinos Simonides as the disgraced forger. Bible Hunters from Europe would continue their hunts throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, taking advantage of the rising might of industrialized Europe and the slow dissolution of Ottoman control over the Middle East. But the subtle anxieties represented by Simonides persisted throughout this Bible Hunting age: that discovery could be revealed as forgery, that western knowledge and power could meet resistance, that the treasure chest of the East could prove an unstable mirage.

Forgers, Converts, and Women among the Bible Hunters

The confrontation between Simonides and Tischendorf also revealed the necessary link between the institutional imperatives of the Bible Hunter and his personal character. Tightly connected institutional sites of knowledge and power made the Bible Hunt possible: empire, university, and church. Imperial money supported the growing prestige of academic expertise which, for these Bible Hunters, was always in service of upholding correct biblical theology. The discovery of biblical antiquities in the East was a boon to all three institutions, enriching and ennobling academics (Tischendorf gained the aristocratic "von" before his surname), enhancing the piety of Europe's rulers, and securing the faith of believers.

The character of individuals was as important as the power of institutions in this enterprise. Biblical knowledge had to be sought and verified through perilous adventure in the East, requiring the upstanding personal character of the Bible Hunter to embody the values of empire, university, and church. Part of Tischendorf's triumph over Simonides, then, was an assertion of personal superiority by the

western scholar over the eastern "native": he was the better (whiter) man. Simonides's marked foreignness in many ways made the outcome a foregone conclusion. Yet other more marginal and less straightforward characters from Bible Hunting narratives in the later nineteenth century served as limit cases, testing the image of the pious, noble, learned Bible Hunter.

Moses Wilhelm Shapira was a Christian convert from Judaism who found success as an antiquities dealer in Jerusalem, specializing in biblical antiquities. In 1883, he brought to London what he claimed were almost 3000-year-old fragments of Deuteronomy discovered by Arabs in a cave in the desert. Shapira offered the strips of ancient text to the British Museum (later press accounts said he asked for the staggering amount of £1 million; 50 years later the Museum would purchase *Codex Sinaiticus* for £100,000). Shapira had a decades-long relationship with the British Museum as a supplier of antiquities; he had also been involved ten years earlier in the sale of fraudulent Moabite artifacts to the Old Museum in Berlin. Christian David Ginsburg, a Semiticist consulting with the British Museum, spent a month studying the Deuteronomy fragments; he even published a series of articles on them. At the end of the month, however, Ginsburg proclaimed the fragments forgeries; Shapira fled to the Continent and committed suicide in Amsterdam the following summer, purportedly in shame at his exposure.[15]

The story as told is shot through with the familiar tensions of the Bible Hunting plot: the desire for new ancient texts, the mistrust of the eastern sources of western biblical knowledge, the sure hand of the upright scholar aligned with the institutions responsible for producing knowledge. For decades after Shapira presented his leathery manuscripts for inspection, the story as told continued to pit the shifty easterner against the stalwart European expert, a kind of replay of

[15] Fred N. Reiner, "C. D. Ginsburg and the Shapira Affair: A Nineteenth-Century Dead Sea Scroll Controversy," *The British Library Journal* 21 (1995): 109–27; Michael Press, "The Career of Moses Shapira, Bookseller and Antiquarian," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2023); Chanan Tigay, *The Lost Book of Moses: The Hunt for the World's Oldest Bible* (New York: Harper, 2016). On the role of the British Museum in gatekeeping the white, Christian, imperial framework of the Bible through collection and curation, see Gregory Lee Cuéllar, *Empire, the British Museum, and the Making of the Biblical Scholar in the Nineteenth Century: Archival Fever* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Tischendorf and Simonides (including the tragic death of the thwarted forger).

As more recent studies show, the details of the case may not necessarily be so straightforward. Ginsburg, for instance, seemed poised during his month of study to endorse the finds as authentic. He would then have been claiming the mantle of successful Bible Hunter ably assisted by the "native" informant with whom he had worked in the past. Under pressure from various outside experts, however, particularly the French scholar Charles Clermont-Ganneau, Ginsburg chose another narrative path; he preserved his own institutional credentials, as well as his personal bona fides, by portraying Shapira as a foreign fraud.[16]

Yet even this framing of the story obscures important nuance. It is easy, in the imaginary world of the Bible Hunters, to posit Ginsburg as the western authority and Shapira as the eastern informant (or fraud). In fact, both men were Christian converts from Judaism who had emigrated from different areas of Russia-controlled Poland. Both had converted to Christianity before relocating to new territories to pursue careers as experts in the world of biblical antiquities. (Shapira had even published studies of his antiquities in the same literary journal, *The Athenaeum*, in which Ginsburg published his first tentative pieces on Shapira's Deuteronomy fragments.) To portray Ginsburg and Shapira as similar doesn't fit the Bible Hunter story, in which western expertise grapples with eastern chicanery and ignorance. A nakedly anti-Semitic *Punch* cartoon of the time casually portrayed Ginsburg as the white, bespectacled British manuscript detective apprehending the swarthy, hook-nosed "Sharp-*eye*-ra." Only by recasting Shapira as ethnically distinct – non-white – can he become the foreign villain who upholds the familiar image of the Bible Hunter.[17]

Shapira threatened to disrupt the ethnic ideal of the European Bible Hunter. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, two Scottish

[16] See Reiner, "C.D. Ginsburg"; Clermont-Ganneau had tangled with Shapira a decade earlier over the faked Moabite statues.

[17] The *Punch* cartoon appeared in the September 8, 1883, issue as *Punch's Fancy Portraits. – No. 152.* (p. 118). Recently scholars have argued for the authenticity of Shapira's scrolls: Shlomo Guil, "The Shapira Scroll Was an Authentic Dead Sea Scroll," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 149 (2017): 6–27; Idan Dershowitz, *The Valediction of Moses: A Proto-Biblical Book* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2021).

widows briefly challenged the Bible Hunter's manliness. Twin sisters Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson (nées Agnes and Margaret Smith), after decades of intense language study and foreign travels, followed Tischendorf's footsteps to Sinai. There they "discovered" more ancient texts, most spectacularly palimpsests, or reused, overwritten manuscripts, which contained very early version of the canonical gospels written in Syriac (a late form of Aramaic, the language of Jesus). The sisters hunted for the Bible outside of the intertwined institutions of empire, university, and church. Independently wealthy, Lewis and Gibson required no royal patrons to finance their journey. Although highly educated, as women the sisters were excluded from the academic halls of Cambridge, where they had made their home. And while certainly driven by Presbyterian piety to seek out the oldest biblical texts, the sisters, perhaps due to their own socially marginal status, were great friends and supporters of intellectuals well outside their religious circles.[18]

Lewis and Gibson, due primarily to their enormous wealth, were ultimately successful in "discovering" gospel texts, along with other ancient sources, and publishing them back in Great Britain. But they tangled constantly with the institutional forces, primarily at Cambridge, who often sought to transmit the sisters' discoveries through more official (that is, male) university channels. Newspaper accounts of their discovery of the Syriac gospels emphasized their male manuscript "instructor," Cambridge paleographer J. Rendel Harris, and almost always included the picturesque detail that the "lady Orientalists" steamed open the dried pages of the Syriac codex "with their tea-kettle." It is unclear whether their texts would even have been published without the (sometimes reluctant) support of

[18] Janet Soskice, *The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009). Among their close friends were the Semiticist William Robertson Smith, who narrowly escaped charges of heresy in the 1870s before moving to Cambridge, and Solomon Schechter, a specialist in rabbinics at Cambridge who later became President of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York: see Stefan C. Reif, "Giblews, Jews and Genizah Views," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 55 (2004): 332–46 and Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, *The Cairo Genizah and the Age of Discovery in Egypt* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2022), 103: "The Schechters also gained friends outside of the university, like Agnes Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, who, thanks to their gender or religion or both, were excluded from mainstream university life."

University-affiliated colleagues such as Harris, Robert Lubbock Bensly, and Francis Crawford Burkitt.[19]

It is beyond question that Lewis and Gibson had the necessary experience, means, and expertise to engage in the adventures of Bible Hunting. Run-of-the-mill sexism certainly played a role in their snubbing by Cambridge dons and their marginalization in press accounts. But this particular instance of sexism highlights the stubborn image of the Bible Hunting enterprise: it took the institutional surety of men and kings to secure the perilous finds from the East into safe, western hands. This was *adventuring*, after all. Lewis and Gibson, with their independent means, knowledge of modern Greek and Arabic, and their handy tea-kettle, became an exception that proved the rule. Just as Shapira's moral and literal darkening affirmed the upright white character of the Bible Hunter, so Lewis and Gibson's marginalization affirmed his rigorous manliness. These limit cases reinforced the personal character of the Bible Hunter, who must be pious, learned, brave, white, Christian, and male, embodying in his person the virtues of church, university, and empire.[20]

Bible Hunters reproduced certain "truths" about the personal, political, and religious relationship between the West and the East. While it is certainly true that these Bible Hunters enjoyed warm and collaborative relationships with their eastern hosts and assistants, their work was first and foremost the deployment of material and social capital in the service of extracting Christian knowledge from East to West, from the "slumbering" cells of monks to the "scientific" collections of university libraries and museums.

The Bible Hunters enjoyed forms of privilege, indicated by institutional and personal superiority, to transfer these precious textual resources (back) to their supposed proper home, in the West. At the same time, the machinations of a tricky operator like Simonides demonstrated that those precious texts could never shake their foreign roots; they would always bear some remainder of their time in the East

[19] Soskice, *Sisters of Sinai*, 143–213. On the subordination of the women to Harris and the "tea-kettle" see the anonymous early account (printed in multiple venues): "A Syrian Text of the Gospels," *London Echo* (April 13, 1893): 2.

[20] On the very different, multireligious trajectories of the so-called Cairo Genizah in the nineteenth century, see Rebecca J. W. Jefferson, "Deconstructing the 'Cairo Genizah': A Fresh Look at Manuscript Discoveries in Cairo before 1897," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 108 (2018): 422–48 and *Cairo Genizah*.

(as, quite literally, the palimpsests "discovered" by Smith and Gibson retained traces of their overwritten secondary texts). Pious knowledge "recovered" from the shifting sands of the East could never be totally trustworthy; behind every *Codex Sinaiticus* loomed the threat of a *Codex Simonideios*.

Tales of Adventure

The hope for and fear of a biblical text that appears out of the mists of time moved easily from the accounts of public lectures and magazines into the pages of US and British fiction. In a late Sherlock Holmes story, the great detective encounters a sad-sack old professor in a country house; the professor's young assistant has been killed in a failed robbery, and the professor laments the interruption of his work:

> "Yes, sir, it is a crushing blow," said the old man. "That is my *magnum opus* – the pile of papers on the side table yonder. It is my analysis of the documents found in the Coptic monasteries of Syria and Egypt, a work which will cut deep at the very foundation of revealed religion."[21]

The unsympathetic professor is a comical and sinister foil to the academic adventurers of previous centuries like Tischendorf or Lewis and Gibson. He is a sickly invalid, unable to adventure on his own to the East. He is also theologically suspect: he doesn't want to uphold biblical truth but rather subvert "revealed religion," probably due to his Russian, Bolshevik roots. Little surprise that Holmes will deduce his complicity in his assistant's death.

In 1924, a US attorney and writer named Arthur Cheney Train, known primarily for his courtroom dramas, published a story in *The Saturday Evening Post* called "The Lost Gospel." While the Holmes story conjures the dark shadow of the nineteenth-century Bible Hunter, Train's "Lost Gospel" updates him for a new age. Here readers encounter the intrepid, upper-class archaeologist digging up secrets in Near Eastern sands now fully liberated from Ottoman rule. After World War I, the aristocratic archaeologist and collector of antiquities became a favorite of mystery writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. The dashing, rich, and well-educated Briton or American with

[21] Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez," in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: McClure, Philips, and Co., 1905), 260–90, at 277–78.

his glass of sherry and his lucky spade embodied a new set of imperial fantasies. Having survived the fires and gas of a tragic war, what might this adventurer with his wit, wisdom, and will to recover and rebuild the world discover of himself in the exotic sands of the East? Further: What secrets had the sands of the East been concealing for untold centuries?[22]

Train's novella begins among a smart set of British, US, and European travelers, along with an Oxford-educated Egyptian nobleman, on a pleasure cruise down the Nile in 1924. (The echoes of other boats playing recent popular hits on their phonographs create a dissonant sonic backdrop.) A mysteriously recovered letter sends the most intrepid of the group, a stalwart and apparently very wealthy young American man named Calthrop, on the trail of a vanished archaeological expedition from 1914, before the War. That expedition had been led by a pair of archaeologists, one from the United States and one from Germany. Calthrop finds that they had, in fact, discovered not only an Egyptian pyramid (named by the German after their imperial German sponsor, "Wilhelm der Zweite") and a bejeweled Roman sword but the lost gospel itself: a journal written by a traveling Roman aristocrat to the Emperor Tiberius, containing firsthand accounts of Christ's last words and deeds. The German and American fall out over the gospel's apparently pacifist message: the German, enraged, kills his US comrade with the Roman sword and is in turn killed by their fearful Arab guides. The gospel is lost to fire; only the blood-stained sword and a tantalizing Latin fragment remain.

We can recognize key elements from the nonfictional accounts of an earlier era of Bible Hunters: religious discovery intersects with personal character and political interests, all against the dangerous yet alluringly exotic backdrop of the East. What is new, of course, is the fictional gospel, inspired by but very different from the biblical manuscripts brought West by Tischendorf and Gibson and Lewis. Here it's not a

[22] Arthur Cheney Train, "The Lost Gospel," *The Saturday Evening Post* 196.49 (June 7, 1924): 3–5, 216–18, 220–22; published the next year by Scribner's. Robert Price, *Secret Scrolls: Revelations from the Lost Gospel Novels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 14–18 credits Train with creating "a new sub-genre of mystery-adventure." The figure of the swashbuckling archaeologist in the post-War period also appears in early film and endures, of course, in figures like Indiana Jones in the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* franchise: see Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 51.

question of restoring verses or securing a new translation. Train's "Lost Gospel," readers are told, "might have changed the whole history of civilization!" Imagining a new gospel ramps up the personal, theological, and political stakes of the "discoveries" emanating from the East. The atmosphere in these new fictions is still one of adventure, however; characters in these Bible Adventure tales inhabit a world burnt and scarred by World War I, but a world whose order is being restored. "The Lost Gospel" is still a story about western privilege and theological and political triumph over danger.

The Mystery of Mar Saba and the End of Bible Hunting

An evangelical adventure novel published in Canada in 1940 sits at the cusp of the Bible adventures inspired by the Bible Hunters and the new genre of Gospel Thriller that will arise during the Cold War. As we have already seen, James Hunter's *The Mystery of Mar Saba* featured Sir William Bracedridge, a character who evoked the Bible Hunters of the previous century. Sir William is a secondary character, however; the main protagonists are adventuresome imperial agents figuring out how to manage the wily and disruptive East in the wake of the first World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

James Hunter, the author, was an émigré from Scotland who edited the Toronto-based *Evangelical Christian*, a magazine founded to support missionary endeavors abroad. *The Mystery of Mar Saba* was his first novel, followed in 1947 by its sequel *Banners of Blood*; both were published by the same evangelical press that printed his magazine. Hunter wrote other adventure novels, winning awards for his writing from evangelical Zondervan Publishers in the United States. All of Hunter's fiction is rooted in a Bible-focused, global missionary zeal.[23]

The Mystery of Mar Saba's themes and structure replicate Hunter's white, missionary, evangelical, Protestant worldview, mapped onto the military and political divisions of the 1930s. The story revolves around a Nazi plot to cripple the British Empire through acts of terrorism and

[23] On Hunter's life and career see my fuller account in "'This Piece of Parchment Will Shake the World': *The Mystery of Mar Saba* and the Evangelical Prototype of a Secular Fiction Genre," *Christianity & Literature* 69 (2020): 91–106 at 91–92; for more analysis of his first two novels, see Reeva S. Simon, *The Middle East in Crime Fiction: Mysteries, Spies, Novels, and Thrillers From 1916 to the 1980s* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1989), 116–17.

espionage in British-controlled Palestine. The villain of the novel almost cartoonishly captures the intersection of political, theological, and personal dispositions:

> He had the square head that is associated with the typical German, thick lips, a heavy chin and a high forehead. The eyes were small, blue and piercing. In his face there was no pity, humor or kindness. It was that of a man in whom the soul had died, and from whom the spirit had departed leaving only a fleshly automaton to carry out the evil devices of the heart. Such was Professor Heimworth, noted German Higher Critic and archaeologist. (p. 11)[24]

Within a few pages of his sinister entrance Professor Heine Heimworth proclaims the triumph of the unconquerable Fuehrer and the imminent demise of the British Empire. His unwitting archaeologist colleague, Peter Yphantis, piously resists Heimworth's nefarious plans. Yphantis links Heimworth's Nazism, impiety, and biblical criticism explicitly:

> "No truer word was ever spoken than that of Queen Victoria when she said that the secret of British greatness was in the Word of God. That faith has been weakened as you, Herr Professor, know, through the permeation of her colleges with the destructive teaching of Higher Criticism, and the use of your text-books in particular. But so many of your 'assured results' are being overthrown today, that you will never succeed that way." (p. 15)[25]

We have already seen how opposition to Higher Criticism's skeptical attitude toward biblical truth animated Tischendorf and the other Bible Hunters of the nineteenth century. In Hunter's novel, Higher Criticism has metastasized into the insidious tool of German academic atheists, disseminated through British universities to weaken faith and empire with its "assured results."[26]

[24] On links between German "barbarism," militarism, and Higher Criticism in US evangelical thinking beginning during World War I, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141–83.

[25] Victoria's apocryphal bon mot is repeated later in the novel (p. 317), and was immortalized in Thomas Jones Barker's 1863 painting *The Secret of England's Greatness*: see Lynda Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19 (2014): 161–82; Jan Marsh, "Icon of the Age: Victoria and *The Secret of England's Greatness*," in *Black Victorians: Black People and British Art*, ed. Jan Marsh (Manchester Art Gallery: Manchester, 2005), 57–67.

[26] Opponents of Higher Criticism referred scornfully to its "assured results" (see Harriet Harris, "Fundamentalist Readings of the Bible," in *The New Cambridge*

Heimworth's Higher Criticism has, however, proved insufficient for Germany's attempts to undermine the British Empire. Heimworth has devised a new plan, only hinted at in this opening chapter but unveiled in the course of the novel: the forgery of a first-century testimony that will prove the resurrection of Christ never happened. One of Heimworth's co-conspirators acknowledges with awe, "'You will not only destroy the British Empire. You will change the history of the world'" (p. 19), a claim repeated throughout the novel. Heimworth blackmails Yphantis, "the greatest living authority on ancient manuscripts," the Protestant child of a Greek father and a German Jewess, into executing the forgery, holding Peter's sister Natalie hostage. Heimworth later attempts to force Natalie to marry him by threatening Peter's life.

Heimworth plants the forgery in the titular monastery of Mar Saba, outside of Jerusalem "in the heart of the Wilderness of Judea" (p. 181). As I described at the beginning of this chapter, it is discovered there by Sir William Braceridge, "one of the greatest living authorities on ancient manuscripts" (after Yphantis, one presumes), on a tour of "several monasteries in search for more Biblical documents" (p. 166). Sir William makes the discovery, which he calls the "Shred of Nicodemus"; the pious Bible Hunter is devastated to be the potential instrument of Christianity's demise. Far from being a destructive critic, Sir William seeks to bolster the biblical text through new discoveries, modeled explicitly on the example of Tischendorf (pp. 166–67, 281, 293).

Sir William presents his findings to the Governors of the British Museum back home and, after the Prime Minister ("a Unitarian" [p. 298]) refuses to intervene, the "Shred of Nicodemus" is published: "the bomb burst on an unsuspecting world" (p. 299). "THE DOWNFALL OF CHRISTIANITY," screams one headline (p. 301). The godless defenders of "rational Christianity" rejoice while more faithful heads strive to prove the document a forgery. Riots devastate US cities, Indian nationalists call for the expulsion of "all Christian missionaries," and "Communism was increasing" (pp. 306–8, 314).

History of the Bible. Vol. 4: From 1750 to the Present, ed. John Riches [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], 328–43, at 331); protagonist Colonel Alderson also ponders how "the Tel Amarna tablets . . . had sadly damaged some of the 'assured results' of Higher Criticism" (p. 22).

Eventually the plot is uncovered and overthrown by the heroes of the tale – Colonel Alderson, the evangelical British head of the Palestine Police, and square-jawed, blue-eyed, US millionaire George Anthony "Tony" Medhurst, whose description contrasts notably with Heimworth's:

> Life seemed to have cast all her gifts in his lap. Wealth, a fair measure of good looks and health and strength were his. He stood six feet one in his socks and weighed 195 pounds. His eye was blue and his jaw was square, a little too set perhaps. (p. 31)

Medhurst, a well-educated religious skeptic at the novel's outset, falls in love with Natalie Yphantis and undergoes a dramatic conversion experience in Jerusalem. Working with Alderson and with Dennis, his faithful Methodist retainer, Medhurst saves Natalie, proves the Shred a forgery, and defeats the local band of Arab terrorists – "the Hooded Ones" – who have been organized by Heimworth and his Nazi compatriots. "CHRIST IS RISEN," rejoices the headline in the *Times* of London; biblical faith is restored and Hitler's sinister machinations are delayed, if only for a few years (pp. 407, 410). Tony and Natalie, united in their faith, plan a wedding in the Garden of the Resurrection in Jerusalem.[27]

Much of the novel follows Medhurst's dashing heroics in Palestine, interspersed with strong doses of evangelical Zionism. Britain's imperialist interests and her Christian commitments are intertwined in Palestine. At one point Colonel Alderson notes: "'I believe it is of divine ordination that Britain has the mandate for the Holy Land'" (p. 68). The Jews settling the holy land are praised as a sign of God's providence; Jewish settler displacement of the local Arabs is even at one point compared positively to the displacement of North American "Indians" by European settlers (p. 123). The defeat of the Higher Critic is also the defeat of the Nazi threat and the beating back of the anticolonial resistance of the native Arabs of Palestine. (By the time of his second novel, in 1947, Hunter had grown leery of Jewish settlers,

[27] The Garden Tomb was established by the evangelical Palestine Exploration Fund in the late nineteenth century as the authentic site of the Resurrection, far removed from the gaudy inauthenticity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (noted by Hunter, *Mystery of Mar Saba*, 266–67): see Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 197–206.

whose quest for an independent Jewish state no longer jibed with his apocalyptic Zionism.)[28]

Hunter further maps this intertwining of the political and theological onto ethnicity and gender through his conflict between the handsome, Christian American and the grotesque, faithless Nazi. The contested love interest of both, Natalie Yphantis, the beautiful evangelical daughter of a Greek father and a Jewess, is an unsubtle metaphor for the Christian Bible itself, the merging of Jew and Greek, beloved by the faithful and despoiled by the wicked. It's no wonder her brother Peter can so convincingly forge a false gospel. The triumph of the United States and Britain over Nazi Germany is also the triumph of (evangelical) piety over (higher critical) impiety as well as the triumph of pious manhood – "muscular Christianity" (p. 151) – over impious weakness.

The novel presents us with the same worldview that shaped the Bible Hunters of the previous century: the political, the theological, and the personal united to defend the vulnerable Bible in the dangerous territory of the East. But as the world drifts away from the false sense of hope that followed the first World War into the global conflict of World War II, *danger* looms larger and the hope for triumph feels less secure. Hunter's imperial, missionary, masculinist biblical triumphalism teeters precariously, as Heimworth's careful forgery very nearly *did* bring down the British Empire and pave the way for Nazi victory. The Bible, it seems, is more vulnerable than before.

The "wilderness" of the Middle East had, since before Tischendorf, been an unsettling and unsettled site for the recovery of pious biblical truth, a danger zone only lightly controlled by a secure western hand. *The Mystery of Mar Saba* asks us to imagine that danger coming not only from the hot zone of the East, but from political, theological, and personal divisions in the West. The "native" resistance of Konstantinos Simonides is one thing; what if the pious Bible Hunters also had to contend with shadowy forces in the West colluding to obscure the

[28] On evangelical Zionism, see Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: NYU Press, 2013) and Robert O. Smith, *More Desired Than Our Owne Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). On *The Mystery of Mar Saba* as "an 'apocalyptic' spy novel," see Reeva S. Simon, *Spies and Holy Wars: The Middle East in 20th-Century Crime Fiction* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), 119; at one point Colonel Alderson proclaims: "I think we are living at the climax of history" (p. 67).

biblical truth? Hunter's novel came out while the Second World War was still raging; Heimworth's defeat was not the final blow against this global enemy of truth and faith. Readers are left to imagine the next round of conflict, as perhaps another new forgery or – perhaps even worse – an authentic *new gospel* comes to light, threatening to change the history of the world.

The political climate in the West and Middle East following World War II, as one age of empires came to a close and a neocolonial age of eastern and western blocs took hold, transformed the imaginary world of biblical discovery. The post-War political reality shaped how two new astounding manuscript finds unfolded in the 1940s and 1950s, and how the story of Bible Hunting adventurers would give way to the conspiracy-minded Gospel Thrillers.

New Discoveries, New Dangers, New Stories

In November of 1953, the *New York Times* on its front page (below the fold) reported an announcement by the Jung Institute for Analytical Psychology in Zurich, Switzerland, of the "preservation of a book of early Christian writings, some of which date from about 150 A.D." The book, the article explains, was one of "thirteen volumes of Gnostic manuscripts containing forty-eight texts or Gospels found in 1945 by Egyptian peasants at a place called Nag Hammadi on the Upper Nile." The other twelve volumes had been, over time, recovered and were held in the "Coptic library in Cairo" where they were "not being made readily available to Western scholars." How this "Jung Codex" (so-called because it was presented as a gift to famous psychoanalyst Carl Jung) had reached Switzerland "the institute . . . either does not know or will not reveal."[29]

This is the first major headline in a US newspaper about the finding of various gnostic codices in Egypt in 1945, books which provided new, seemingly first-hand evidence for varieties of gnostic or heretical Christianity from its early centuries, now commonly referred to as the Nag Hammadi codices. That this headline appears a half-decade after the discovery and is about the single volume held outside of Egypt in a

[29] Michael L. Hoffman, "Gnostic Gospels of 150 A.D. Found: Throw Light on Early Christianity," *New York Times* (November 16, 1953): 1; see James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Story*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 351–485.

European collection hints at some of the new political realities surrounding eastern biblical "discoveries" in the period following World War II. First, we note the lack of any western Bible Hunter: the books were "found ... by Egyptian peasants." The texts emerge, unbidden, from the desert. (I return to the particular Orientalist fantasies contained in this discovery account in Chapter 4.) We also note the reticence to claim western patrimony over these ancient Christian books, a reticence notably lacking among the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bible Hunters. The one volume held by Europeans had arrived in the West by means unknown (or untold). The remaining books were being maintained as patrimony of the new Republic of Egypt, not "readily available to Western scholars."

The post-World War II reconfiguration of the Middle East made Bible Hunting practically and politically difficult. While the British and French had held direct or indirect control over large swaths of the Middle East in the decades between World War I and World War II, their grip loosened dramatically following 1945. In 1952, the year before the announcement of a gnostic book in Switzerland, a military coup had toppled the King of Egypt and driven the last British troops from Suez; in the same year the Egyptian Antiquities Service passed from French to local control. In 1948, the State of Israel was founded, which also signaled the formal end of British control of Palestine. Suddenly the hunting grounds of biblical antiquities were no longer the sleepy, exotic sands of colonial holdings, but independent nation-states with volatile and shifting relationships with the West. Instead of precious texts retrieved by western adventurers we encounter native finds, like the Nag Hammadi books, haltingly and sporadically made available to Western scholars.[30]

In his enormously detailed chronicle of the history of scholarship on the Nag Hammadi books, James Robinson outlines the prolonged diplomatic efforts undertaken by European and US scholars who wanted to study, translate, and disseminate the texts found in the

[30] On the rise and fall of European control over Egyptian antiquities, see Reid, *Whose Pharaohs* and *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015), esp. 329–54 on the decolonization of the 1940s and 1950s. The Nag Hammadi find lies outside Reid's chronological parameters, but he includes a brief discussion of the find on pp. 223–25 in the larger context of the Coptic Museum's history.

1940s. (Eventually the return of the Jung Codex, henceforth "Codex I," to Egypt became a precondition for full international access to the remaining volumes.) From 1952 the books were kept in the Coptic Museum (not, as the *New York Times* reported, the "Coptic library in Cairo") as part of Egypt's national patrimony.[31]

Reading through the voluminous correspondence collected by Robinson from the 1950s and 1960s one can sense the impatience of western scholars engaged with the Egyptian authorities and the tussles between rival European academics for access to the ancient texts: "I hope," wrote one French scholar to another while waiting for word about such access, "to have by then some further information that will permit me to see a bit more clearly into a situation that seems to me singularly complicated and difficult."[32]

From the perspective of these European scholars, as long as the texts remained unseen by western eyes they remained in a sort of stasis, reminiscent of Tischendorf's manuscripts "slumbering" in monasteries or – even worse – subject to "mutilation" at the hands of purportedly inexpert Egyptian conservators working without western "consultants." The colonial sense of privilege enjoyed by earlier Bible Hunters diminished, but by no means disappeared. Scholars were eager to participate in an international committee dedicated to the study and publication of the Nag Hammadi texts, but at the same time bristled at the perceived lack of rigor or fairness under Egyptian leadership. Eventually, European scholars managed to form a team under the international auspices of UNESCO, a neocolonial concession that allowed the West to act as partners with the East rather than outright dominators.[33]

The other major discovery of the 1940s, the Dead Sea Scrolls, reveals even more starkly the post- and neocolonial shifts in biblical "discoveries" following World War II. In 1946 or 1947, within a year or so of the appearance of the Nag Hammadi texts, a cache of ancient documents in Hebrew and Aramaic began filtering into the antiquities market. Early documents included the oldest Hebrew versions of biblical books; soon biblical interpretations and sectarian literature

[31] Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 123, 487–88.
[32] From a letter from C.-H. Puech to Jean Doresse in 1956, translated and cited by Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 697.
[33] Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Story*, 342–43 on "mutilation" of the codices; pp. 948–1038 on the orchestrated takeover by UNESCO.

emerged, as well. The first English-language press announcements from 1948 reported that the Scrolls were found "in the library of the Syrian Orthodox monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem." These echoes of that familiar Bible Hunting era narrative – including at one point accusations of forgery – soon gave way to a story a lot like the one surrounding the Nag Hammadi books: a serendipitous discovery by unsuspecting locals, the true magnitude of which could only be affirmed by some exertion of western expertise. (I return to the particular Orientalist fantasies of *this* discovery account in Chapter 3.)[34]

In 1955, US writer and literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote an extended piece for the *New Yorker* magazine, laying out the contexts, debates, and ramifications of the discovery of millennia-old Hebrew and Aramaic scrolls recovered from caves near the Dead Sea. Much of the standard popular and scholarly narratives surrounding the Scrolls takes shape in Wilson's account: the find by Muhammed "the Wolf"; the attempts by the Syrian Orthodox bishop of St. Mark's, Metropolitan Samuel, to raise money from the Scrolls; parallel attempts by scholars from multiple faiths and national backgrounds to secure the Scrolls; the Scrolls' relation to an ancient "monastic" Jewish sect and to the origins of Jesus's movement. All of these strands continue to be unspooled in historical and historiographic accounts of the Dead Sea Scrolls today. What remains more vivid in Wilson's 1955 account are the post-World War II politics that shaped the early life of the Scrolls, politics which have receded in more recent accounts.[35]

[34] The announcement came from the public relations office of Yale University, where Millar Burrows, director of the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, was on faculty. The announcement is reproduced in John J. Collins, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography*, Lives of Great Religious Books (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1–2 and 146. When Burrows published photographs of the scrolls found by Metropolitan Samuel, he titled the two-volume set *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1950–1951), acknowledging the monastery's ownership of the Scrolls but still evoking earlier Bible Hunting narratives. Accusations of forgery were lodged by historian Solomon Zeitlin: see my discussion in Chapter 3.

[35] Edmund Wilson, "A Reporter at Large: The Scrolls from the Dead Sea," *New Yorker* (May 14, 1955): 45–131, lightly expanded as *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) and expanded further as *The Dead Sea Scrolls: 1947–1969* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1969). On the persistent narratives in Dead Sea Scrolls studies, see Edna Ullmann-Margalit, *Out of the Cave: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Dead Sea Scrolls Research* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Geza Vermes, *The Story of*

The early months after the first Scrolls appeared on the antiquities market were busy ones. Metropolitan Samuel was trying to verify the worth of the Scrolls; Eleazar Sukenik, the lead archaeologist from the Zionist Hebrew University, was seeking to acquire his own scrolls directly from the Bedouin; and scholars from the Palestine Archaeological Museum and the École Biblique, led by French Dominican priest Roland de Vaux, were exploring the caves where the first Scrolls were found, eventually uncovering thousands more fragments and remains. These first years of Dead Sea Scrolls exploration and recovery were also embedded in political turmoil, as the British prepared to withdraw from Palestine in spring of 1948 and the United Nations announced a partition of the territory between Zionist Jews and the surrounding Arab states.

Wilson paints a picture of constant violence and danger. On the first page he describes the Jewish "terrorist groups which had been murdering British soldiers." When Sukenik successfully returned from Bedouin territory with his own scrolls and called an exhilarated press conference, Wilson describes him as "quite unperturbed by the flashing and banging" of bombs around him. (By contrast, a US journalist who tried to attend the press conference "fainted in the street on the way, and had to be carried in by his colleagues.") When the British formally withdrew in 1948, "leaving the Jews and the Arabs already at one another's throats," the Monastery of St. Mark from which Metropolitan Samuel hailed was nearly destroyed in the shelling of the Old City of Jerusalem.

While the Egyptian Revolution of the early 1950s established total control over the sovereign nation and its antiquities, including the Nag Hammadi codices, the Dead Sea Scrolls were split by the international lines established in the wake of the wars following the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. The armistice of 1949 left the Scrolls divided: Metropolitan Samuel had fled with his Scrolls to the United States, where he hoped to sell them and rebuild his monastery; Sukenik and Hebrew University's Scrolls were in the new State of Israel; the Dead Sea caves and the Scrolls recovered from them by the École

the Scrolls (New York: Penguin, 2010), 22–23, briefly acknowledges the fraught political context. Weston W. Fields, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Full History. Vol. 1: 1947–1960* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) is the most detailed account of the first decade of Scrolls scholarship.

Biblique and the Palestine Archaeological Museum were now subject to Jordan's Department of Antiquities.

By the time he wrote his extended piece in the early 1950s, Wilson was observing an academic landscape of Dead Sea Scrolls studies shaped by and reproducing the violent geopolitical and religious contexts of their discovery. Israeli Jews did not cross into Jordan, nor did the international team of predominantly Christian scholars under Father de Vaux attend lectures at Hebrew University. The religious and political boundary functioned as a scholarly barricade:

> The people at [Hebrew] University know nothing of de Vaux's discoveries, except what they learn at long intervals from the reports in the *Revue Biblique* (a quarterly journal published in Paris but edited by de Vaux from Jerusalem) . . . At the same time, till the very recent publication of the Hebrew University texts, the Christian scholars had no access to them . . . Thus the enmity between Jew and Arab is contributing to the obstacles and touchiness of this curious situation, which has also been a little affected by the rivalry between Jews and Christians.[36]

Until 1967, when the Israeli military reunited Jerusalem, the Scrolls remained divided between two scholarly centers with nebulous connections to the West. The international scholars under de Vaux's leadership were obviously linked to western scholarship but also remained under non-western control: Wilson notes that de Vaux's *Revue Biblique* emerges simultaneously from Paris and Jerusalem. The pale aura of Vatican authority behind the Catholic scholars of the École Biblique would, over time, engender even more suspicion and confusion.[37]

Meanwhile the first generation of Jewish scholars at the Hebrew University had one foot in the European university, after which their own institution was modeled and from which most of them had received their training; at the same time, their academic project was grounded in a "return" to Zion predicated on their native "middle easternness." Sukenik's son, Yigael, followed in his father's footsteps after serving in the new Israeli Defense Force in the first years of the new nation; he wrote a dissertation on Hebrew University's Dead Sea

[36] Wilson, "Scrolls from the Dead Sea," 106.
[37] On the École Biblique and De Vaux, see Collins, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 10, 16–20 and Vermes, *Story of the Scrolls*, 24–51, 66–67 and my further discussion in Chapter 3.

Scrolls and managed to purchase the Scrolls Metropolitan Samuel had put up for sale in the United States. By the time Yigael Sukenik was established as the premier archaeologist of Dead Sea antiquities he had begun to go by a Hebrew surname acquired during his time in the military: *Yigael Yadin*. The one-generation path from immigrant Eleazar Sukenik to native Yigael Yadin conveys the similar transformation of Zionist European Jewry into something more ambiguously non-European: the "native" Israeli, the *Sabra*.[38]

The discovery and dissemination of the Dead Sea Scrolls caught public imagination more quickly and flamboyantly than the study of the Nag Hammadi texts taking place at the same time. There are several reasons for this difference. The biblical and parabiblical contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls made them more familiar to western audiences, akin to the manuscript "discoveries" of the earlier, Bible Hunting era. Their context, too, was more evocative: near in space and time to the life of Jesus, always carrying the hope and promise of illuminating something from Christ's life. Finally, the complex networks in which the Scrolls were embedded immediately and continuously generated controversy across multiple political and religious lines. The new State of Israel embodied in a new way the ambiguous role of the Middle East as a site of western discovery, founded primarily by European and US immigrants, but quickly calling into question the rather recent whiteness acquired by Jews in the West.[39]

Both archives, however, represent critical transformations in the imaginary world from which new fictional gospels would emerge beginning in the 1960s. To be sure, key elements of the "discovery" narrative from the earlier Bible Hunting era remained: religious discovery intersected with personal character and political interests, all

[38] On Yadin, see Neil Asher Silberman, *A Prophet from Amongst You: The Life of Yigael Yadin: Soldier, Scholar, and Mythmaker of Modern Israel* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1993); on the complications of European/white identity in Israel, see Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 31–47 and my further discussion in Chapter 3.

[39] On the precarious and recent whiteness of (especially US) Jews see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Cynthia Levine-Rasky, *Whiteness Fractured* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133–41.

against the dangerous yet alluringly exotic backdrop of the East. But the depth and proportion of these themes changed. The East could no longer be imagined as a site of western privilege, the locale from which knowledgeable European and US hunters could extract new biblical truths, unstable but timeless, like the pyramids. These were now sovereign states, requiring negotiation and asserting their own rights to control and produce biblical knowledge. They sat at a crossroads of new geopolitical rivalries, able to ally themselves with political blocs. As if to reinforce this independent East, the texts were no longer "discovered" by western adventurers but were brought forth and brokered directly by the inhabitants. Any sense of control that men like Tischendorf might have asserted a century earlier was now even more tenuous.

The unsettling contents of the Nag Hammadi books and the Dead Sea Scrolls only reinforced this sense of loss of control. Tischendorf and Lewis and Gibson found in the East biblical manuscripts that might obligingly shore up their theologically sound Bibles; these new texts were more apt to disrupt than affirm the Protestant, Christian Bible. The earliest Dead Sea Scrolls to be made public were reassuringly biblical; early headlines usually trumpeted the discovery of the "Oldest Copy of the Book of Isaiah." Later Scrolls were more florid and esoteric, remains of a Jewish sectarian group whose strange rules and customs could paint a very different picture of Jesus's milieu. While the Nag Hammadi texts were later, they were also evidence of decidedly unorthodox forms of earliest Christianity.

As I explain in the Chapter 2, US anxieties about the Bible as well as the new, Cold War genre of *thriller* quickly incorporated these new, disruptive possibilities of biblical discoveries. When the first authors of Gospel Thrillers in the 1960s sat down to imagine what might emerge from the sands of history, and how the West would deal with them, their stories were transformed and mutated versions of Cheney's and Hunter's tales of Bible Hunting adventure and triumph. Gospel Thrillers would imagine a vulnerable Bible in a world disturbed and overturned by new discoveries, new politics, and new possibilities.