

**Review of Bill Cooper's
“The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus”**

Dr Trevor R Allin

www.livingwater-spain.com

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

First published 26th February 2021

© Trevor R Allin 2021

This revision dated 12th February 2022

About the Author

Dr Trevor R Allin graduated from the University of Leeds with a 1st Class Honours degree in Phonetics, French, Spanish and Philosophy and History of Religion. Following studies in linguistics, he undertook original research on a South American indigenous language, for which purpose he lived within the indigenous community and studied the language with native speakers over a period of more than a year. The University of St Andrews subsequently awarded him a Ph.D. for his thesis “A Grammar of Resígaro”.

For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in Spain and England on the important early Greek manuscript of the Bible, Codex Sinaiticus.

¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Introduction

The Greek text of the New Testament

The New Testament was written in Greek and from the earliest days, copies of it were made. At a very early stage, at least in the second century, translations of it were made into some other languages, including Syriac. By the fourth century there were various translations into Latin and some church leaders considered some of these translations to be defective.

While in Rome, the priest, subsequently Bishop, Jerome of Stridon was commissioned to produce a revised Latin translation of the New Testament, based on the Greek texts. Between 382 and 405 A.D., according to reports, he produced a revised translation of the whole of the Bible into Latin. This became known as the Vulgate, and eventually became for many centuries the only authoritative text used by the Roman Catholic church.³

Meanwhile, the eastern church continued to use the Greek New Testament and indeed also the translation into Greek of the Old Testament, which is generally known as the Septuagint, and continued to make copies of the oldest Greek Biblical manuscripts available to them.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

More than a thousand years later, a priest of the Roman Catholic church, Erasmus of Rotterdam, was unhappy with the lack of accuracy of the Vulgate text and decided to produce a revised Latin text, which was to be printed, using the printing technology developed in Germany about 60 years earlier by Johannes Gutenberg and others. Late on in the project, he decided to add a Greek text, in order to justify his Latin translation.

In order to produce the Greek text, he consulted eleven Greek manuscripts, none of them of the whole New Testament. It is widely reported that these manuscripts had been produced in the 11th to 14th centuries, and in fact none of them included the final six verses of the book of Revelation, so he translated these back into Greek from the Latin texts that he had.

Learning that the Complutensian University of Madrid was about to publish a New Testament in various languages, including Greek, Erasmus rushed out the printing of his edition, which was published in 1516. The speed of production resulted in the Greek containing numerous typographical errors, which were corrected in subsequent editions. For more information on this, see

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novum_Instrumentum_omne⁴ The New Testament of the Complutensian Polyglot had in fact been printed in 1514, but was not published until 1520 or 1522, so that the New Testament prepared by Erasmus contained the first *published* printed Greek text of the New Testament.

The “*Textus Receptus*” – the “Received Text”

More than one hundred years later, in 1633, the Greek text produced by Erasmus was described by two printers in Holland with the Latin phrase “Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum” – “therefore

³ See the Wikipedia article on Jerome, here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome> Accessed on 25.2.21.

⁴ Accessed on 25.2.21.

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

you now have a text received by all”. Changing two words here from the accusative case (object of the verb) to the nominative case (subject of the verb) gives us the words “textus” and “receptus”. See, for instance, here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textus_Receptus⁵, and this name has been adopted by the King James Only proponents as the name for the Erasmus text of the New Testament.

Luther’s German translation of the New Testament, published in 1522, was reportedly based on the second, corrected edition of Erasmus’s Greek Text, which of course, was at that time not yet known as the “Textus Receptus.” The Erasmus text was reportedly also used for various vernacular translations of the Bible over the subsequent one hundred years or more, including the English Authorised (or “King James”) Version of 1611 (which however also was greatly influenced by earlier translations into English, some of them from the Latin Vulgate).

The King James Version only

Over recent decades, various people brought up on the text of the King James Bible have objected to newer translations of the Bible into modern English. Proponents of the “King James Version Only” have been particularly active in the USA, and have developed a whole series of arguments that ignore undisputed historical evidence. On this subject, the book “The King James Only Controversy” by James R White is recommended.⁶

“King James Only” proponents also claim that “the Textus Receptus” is the divinely-inspired and inerrant Greek text of the New Testament. They therefore reject Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that diverge from the Erasmus text. As his text was derived from various manuscripts, there is, worldwide, not a single Greek manuscript of the New Testament that agrees 100% with the Erasmus text.

Codex Sinaiticus

The Greek manuscript of the Bible known as Codex Sinaiticus was discovered by the 19th century German academic Constantin Tischendorf in St Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai in 1844. For more than a century prior to then, pages from it had been cannibalised by monks in the monastery in order to use the parchment for other purposes, such as for gluing the spine of other manuscripts. Tischendorf was permitted to take 43 sheets (86 pages) back to Germany, and he presented these to his university (Leipzig).

Two years later, Tischendorf published a facsimile of these pages, dedicated to the King of Saxony, Frederick Augustus II, who had funded his journey. He named the pages “Codex Friderico-Augustanus Lipsiensis”, using a Latinised version of the names of King and of the city, in accord with the academic publishing norms of the time.

The pages contained sections of the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures (our “Old Testament”) which had been translated by Jews in Alexandria, starting in approximately 250 B.C.

In 1859, Tischendorf returned to St Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai and this time he was shown many more pages of the same manuscript, including the whole of the New Testament. He obtained the permission of the Monastery to borrow these pages, in order to copy them, but subsequently the

⁵ Accessed on 25.2.21.

⁶ White, James R., “The King James Only Controversy”, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2nd edition 2009.

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

Monastery decided to donate these pages to the Czar of Russia, Alexander II, who had funded Tischendorf’s journey and was a patron of the Monastery.

Some of these facts are now disputed by the Monastery, but the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg still has the letters from the Monastery in which they donate the manuscript to the Czar, and it has published these letters on its website. See here: http://nlr.ru/eng_old/exib/CodexSinaiticus/ and here: http://nlr.ru/eng_old/exib/CodexSinaiticus/zah/, and links from these pages.⁷

For more information on Tischendorf, see “Constantine (sic) Tischendorf” by Stanley E Porter.⁸

The pages of original manuscript recovered in 1859, along with copies of a printed facsimile, were presented to the Czar in 1862 by Tischendorf on behalf of the Monastery. Tischendorf named the facsimile “Bibliorum Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus”, using the Latin for “St Petersburg”. The pages received by Tischendorf in 1844 remain to this day in Leipzig University and so were not incorporated in the “Bibliorum Codex Sinaiticus Petropolitanus”.

In 1933 the Soviet government sold the original manuscript pages that it had to the British Museum, although a few pages were inadvertently left in St Petersburg, where they remain to the present day.

Codex Sinaiticus is one of the most important Biblical Manuscripts. It has been dated at approximately 320-340 AD. Although we have older manuscripts of individual New Testament books and groups of New Testament books, such as the gospels or the letters of the Apostle Paul, Codex Sinaiticus is

- by 500 years the oldest complete New Testament that we have,
- the oldest complete copy of Hebrews, the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon and Revelation.
- It is one of the two oldest *complete* copies of the gospels, the book of Acts and the General Epistles,
- one of the two oldest copies of the Old Testament.

For more information on Codex Sinaiticus, see “Codex Sinaiticus” by D C Parker.⁹

Review of Bill Cooper’s Book “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus (self-published by him in 2016)

Cooper’s aims are:

1. to defend the King James Version of the Bible as the only valid English translation of the Bible;
2. to defend the “*Textus Receptus*” as the only valid Greek text of the New Testament.

He therefore claims that the Codex Sinaiticus is a forgery. His book consists of a vast number of unsubstantiated claims, such as “Tischendorf invented the tale.” (p. 10) In this review, I will mostly let Cooper speak for himself, and allow the reader to judge.

Cooper claims that:

- The Textus Receptus is the original text of the New Testament and on this Received Text “all the Reformation Bibles of Europe were based” (p. 10) and that “The Word [of God] has been preserved pure and entire in the Textus Receptus – the Received Text.” (p. 106)

⁷ Accessed on 25.2.21.

⁸ Porter, Stanley E., “Constantine Tischendorf The Life and Work of a 19th Century Bible Hunter”, London: Bloomsbury, 2015

⁹ Parker, D.C., “Codex Sinaiticus The Story of the World’s Oldest Bible”, London: The British Library and Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2010

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

- “The Received Text, translated into English in the King James Bible, [which] was merely the latest improvement.” (p. 106)

These are standard claims of the “King James Version Only” proponents.

A Vatican/Jesuit/Roman Catholic Plot

Cooper claims that:

- Tischendorf was “the Lutheran heretic.” (p. 21) and that the Vatican summoned him to a private audience with the pope in order to destroy the Textus Receptus. (p. 11)
- “[T]he Vatican, through the Jesuits, funded [Tischendorf’s] journeys.” (p. 13)
- Tischendorf “had long hoped to overturn [the Reformation].” (p. 12)
- The Jesuits were working secretly in the Greek Orthodox monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, organizing the production of fake manuscripts to “destroy” the Textus Receptus: “to provide those working behind the scenes with a fraudulent basis with which to attack and discredit the Received Text of the Bible.” (p. 35).

Cooper does not explain how it was possible for Jesuit agents of the Vatican to spend years in the Greek Orthodox St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai in the 19th century. From the “Great Schism” of 1054 until 1965, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches had excommunicated all members of the other church, so there was no co-operation or official contact between them.

In fact the first time since 1054 that a face-to-face meeting took place between a Roman Catholic Pope and the leader of the largest of the Orthodox churches, the Russian Orthodox Church, was in February 2016, when Pope Francis met Patriarch Kirill.¹⁰ We note that it was this same Russian Orthodox Church that had a close relationship with the Greek Orthodox St Catherine’s monastery throughout the centuries, including in the 19th century, when Cooper claims that Jesuits were actually living in this Orthodox monastery and forging and doctoring manuscripts there. His claims are simply preposterous and can be given no credit. If he had researched the background adequately, he would have been aware that this was not possible.

Cooper states:

- “Codex Vaticanus, ... Like Codex Sinaiticus, ... was a mutilated and horrendously distorted ‘version’ of the Bible of Alexandrian provenance which it was hoped would eventually topple the Received Text from its Reformation pedestal, a long cherished ambition of the papacy and its Jesuits ...” (p. 11)
- The Jesuits recruited a known forger, Constantine Simonides, to produce a forged manuscript that subsequently became known as Codex Sinaiticus.
- They removed a biblical passage, Mark 16:9-20, from Codex Vaticanus, a manuscript which had been stored in the Vatican for more than 300 years.
- They then removed the same passage from Codex Sinaiticus (although, as Cooper claims that they had organised the production of Codex Sinaiticus, why they had bothered to put this passage in, before removing it, is not explained by Cooper).

¹⁰ There are numerous sources of information to confirm this. See, for example, the Wikipedia article “Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill”, here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Declaration_of_Pope_Francis_and_Patriarch_Kirill and the numerous sources that it gives. (Accessed on 12th February 2022)

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

- “The plan that [Tischendorf] had ‘hit upon’ with his Jesuit friends had been to produce a wholly corrupted version of the Bible that could be made out to date all the way back to the 3rd or 4th century.” (p. 43)

Papyrus P75: “forged by the Jesuits”

Cooper claims that more than a century later, the Jesuits forged another important Biblical manuscript, P75, which came to light in 1952, in order to provide further support to Codex Vaticanus (pp. 95-102).

Cooper states, “[T]he critics were trying to convince the public ... that Codex Sinaiticus contained the genuine and original New Testament. If accepted, the Authority of Scripture upon which the Protestant Reformation was firmly based, would be left hanging in tatters, and the Vatican would have seen centuries of hard work, subterfuge and forgery bearing fruit.” (p. 39)

Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*: “generating cash for the Vatican”

Cooper states, “Dan Brown’s blasphemous novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, ... was still bringing in much-wanted public interest and cash to the Vatican.” (p. 102) How or why the Vatican was receiving money from Dan Brown’s novel is not explained.

“The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife”: another “Vatican Forgery”

Cooper also claims that the fragment sometimes called “the Gospel of Jesus’ Wife” was “merely the latest in a very long line of Vatican forgeries.” (p. 103) Not only does this make no sort of sense, it was Vatican scholars who were the first to demonstrate that this fragment was fake. (For details, see “Veritas”, by Ariel Sabar¹¹ and news reports of the time.)

Vaticanus and Sinaiticus: “both written in the West”, in the 19th Century

Elsewhere (p. 25) Cooper states that “we are inclined to surmise that B [Vaticanus] and A [Sinaiticus] were both written in the West, probably at Rome.” (p. 25, words in square brackets in Cooper’s text) This contradicts his claim elsewhere that Sinaiticus was written in a Greek monastery by Constantine Simonides as part of the Jesuit plot. Cooper also mislabels Sinaiticus as “A”, which is in fact the designation of Codex Alexandrinus. The designation for Sinaiticus is א (pronounced “Alef”), the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Elsewhere, Cooper states as though an undisputed fact, “[Vaticanus] was actually written out in Rome itself prior to its ‘discovery’.” (p. 25) There is no evidence to support this claim and in fact a vast amount of evidence that contradicts it.

Cooper states, “It would even be wrongfully alleged to the public [by the Jesuits] that Vaticanus predated the Greek Textus Receptus, thus making the Received Text a corruption of it, instead of the other way about.” (p. 23).

However, the facts are these:

¹¹ Sabar, Ariel: “Veritas A Harvard Professor, A Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife”, New York: Doubleday, 2020.

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

1. It is a matter of undisputed historical fact that the Greek text that (a hundred years later) was given the name “Textus Receptus” was published and printed in 1516. (Strangely, Cooper does not accuse its author, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was a Roman Catholic priest, of being part of any Vatican plot.)
2. According to the Wikipedia article on Codex Vaticanus, this manuscript appears to be referred to in the Vatican Library’s catalogue of 1475 and “definitely” in the 1481 catalogue. (Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Vaticanus consulted on 22 February 2021). In the catalogue from 1475, the manuscript was given the shelf number 1209, which Codex Vaticanus still bears, making the reference in that year a clear reference to the manuscript that we now know as Codex Vaticanus (1209, B).

Contrary to Cooper’s claims, Codex Vaticanus does therefore clearly predate the Textus Receptus.

Simonides, the Convicted Fraudster

The 19th century convicted Greek fraudster Simonides is Cooper’s principal witness, and indeed Cooper puts a drawing of Simonides on the front cover of this book. As regards Sinaiticus, Cooper states, “The codex was indeed written out by Simonides in the 19th century.” (p. 28)

Simonides was a convicted forger of ancient documents who had spent time in prison in Germany for fraud after selling fake documents there. One of the chief expert witnesses against him was Constantin Tischendorf, and when, a few years later, Tischendorf announced the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, Simonides, now safely out of Germany and living in England, saw a chance to “get even” by claiming that he had himself written it. This aroused some interest in sections of the English press in 1862-63, but there were so many inconsistencies in Simonides’ claims that he found himself repeatedly having to change key statements, generally blaming English people who, he said, had mistranslated from the Greek what he had “actually” said.

Simonides made other claims, producing (after delays of several weeks) letters purportedly from a monk in Egypt named Kallinikos, supporting his claims. However, local research by the British Chaplain in Alexandria and the British Consul in Salonica demonstrated that no monk named Kallinikos was known in the places claimed by Simonides, and when the letters from “Kallinikos” were demonstrated to be in Simonides’ own handwriting, this and other, overwhelming evidence led to Simonides’ claims losing all credibility. However, Cooper ignores such facts and takes at face value the allegations of the convicted fraudster. (pp. 36-38 and elsewhere)

Cooper makes much of the fact that in the 1860s in England Simonides produced as supporting evidence a page that he claimed was from a Greek newspaper published in 1843. (pp 52-55) However, McGrane has demonstrated (<http://protestanttruth.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Forging-of-Codex-Sinaiticus.pdf> accessed on 24.2.21) that the Greek newspaper page in question had in fact been printed in England in the 1860s, using fonts available to printers in England at the time, which were quite different from the fonts used by the real newspaper in question in Greece 20 years earlier. Other errors on the page produced by Simonides, such as the page numbers given, the date, and the use by Simonides of Greek numerals, when in fact the newspaper used Arabic numerals, also demonstrate that it is not genuine. (McGrane, pp. 90-94) Cooper realises (p. 136) that Simonides arranged the private printing in England of other Greek documents, so it is clear that he was in regular contact with a printer in England who was able to print in Greek.

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

For more information on Simonides, “Codex Sinaiticus and the Simonides Affair” by J K Elliott is recommended.¹²

A collection of Conspiracy theories

Cooper sees conspiracies everywhere (for instance, on pages 70, 71, 73, 89 and 92 – five different conspiracies). He ignores factual statements that don’t suit him, and puts conspiracies in their place.

Are the Sinaiticus pages in Leipzig lighter than the pages in London?

Cooper claims that the pages of Codex Sinaiticus that were taken to Leipzig in 1844 are lighter than those that were retrieved in 1859, as when Tischendorf took these pages away in 1844, the Jesuits in the monastery had not had time to “age” them artificially (pp. 77-79). He recognises that in the Hendrickson print of Sinaiticus¹³ the pages are all of the same colour (p. 79), as are the pages on the British Library website¹⁴. However, for him, this just “proves” that the Roman Catholic Church/the Vatican/the Jesuits have destroyed the evidence that he needs. He doesn’t explain how the North American Evangelical publishers Hendrickson are controlled by the Roman Catholic Church/the Vatican/the Jesuits, nor how the British Library is controlled by them.

Cooper’s Lack of Familiarity with ancient Parchment Manuscripts

Cooper reveals his unfamiliarity with parchment manuscripts at various points. However, his lack of awareness provides him with opportunities for further conspiracy theories. We will here mention just three.

The nature of Parchment/Vellum

Parchment/vellum is made from animal skins, but Cooper is apparently unaware of the characteristics of such skins. Many skins have imperfections, for instance, where an injury sustained by the animal had healed, or because of other defects and irregularities. The page size of Sinaiticus is so large that the largest-available skins were required, and in a book as long as the Bible, hundreds of skins were needed. Skins could not be rejected because of imperfections that were minor or even of moderate size (perhaps up to the size of a small coin). In consequence, the scribe had to accommodate the text to defects in the surface, for instance, by writing round holes or other defects.

For Cooper, all such holes are “worm holes”, and the fact that the text goes round them “proves” to him that the text was written in the 19th century, after the holes had been caused by worms over the centuries.

He also has a variant to this theory: some “wormholes” were added to the Codex Sinaiticus by Jesuits working in St Catherine’s monastery in the 19th century, in order to make the manuscript appear older than it really was.

¹² Elliott, J. K., “Codex Sinaiticus and the Simonides Affair”, Θεσσαλονικη: Πατριαρχικον Ιδρυμα Πατερικων Μελετων (Thessaloniki: Patriarchikon Hidryma Paterikōn Meletōn), 1982

¹³ “Codex Sinaiticus A facsimile”, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc. and London: The British Library 2011

¹⁴ <https://codexsinaiticus.org/en/> Accessed on 25.2.21.

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

Lines of Text and Letter Sizes

Cooper states that in ancient manuscripts “had these lines [of text] been written when the vellum was new, all three lines would have remained parallel, the letters of a uniform size” (p. 32). This reveals his lack of familiarity with ancient manuscripts, in two areas:

- *firstly*, although manuscripts were prepared for writing on with indentations for the lines and pin pricks for the start and end points of columns, in fact lines of text are sometimes not as parallel as intended;
- *secondly*, the letters were routinely not of a uniform size, and various abbreviations were used, as well as letters of various sizes, in some cases even tiny letters, in order to fit text as nearly as possible to the column width.

However, Cooper uses such deviations from perfectly parallel lines and such variations in the size of letters as “proofs” that Codex Sinaiticus is a “forgery”. See especially pp 32-34.

Ink absorption of Parchment

Another feature of writing on parchment is that the surface on the hair side absorbs the ink differently from the surface on the flesh side. The consequence of this is that the text on the hair side (from which the hair had been removed during preparation) tends to be slightly darker. That side also absorbs ink better, giving a result with higher contrast and greater sharpness of the lettering. The text on the flesh side is slightly fainter than the text on the hair side. With some manuscripts, centuries later, the text on the flesh side is a lot fainter.

Cooper appears to be unaware of this well-known fact (or perhaps he chooses not to report it). Instead, he speaks of “the unnatural fading of the ink in certain parts of the manuscripts” (p. 34) and he claims that the variation between pages with darker text and other pages with lighter text “proves” that the manuscript has been “artificially aged”, to deceive people into buying the “Vatican lie” that this is an ancient manuscript. (See also pp. 90, 105.)

Styles of Greek: Classical, Koiné, Mediaeval, Modern

Cooper’s understanding of developments in the Greek language also appears to be incomplete. Greek has been spoken and written for over 3,000 years, and like all languages, it has evolved over that time. However, for Cooper, there are only two types of Greek: “ancient Greek” and “modern Greek” (p. 46), and he claims (p. 105 and elsewhere) that parts of Codex Sinaiticus are written in “modern Greek”, a “proof” that it was composed in the 19th century. Many of his readers may assume the accuracy of his claims. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

The great period of Classical Greek writing covers the period of approximately the 11th century B.C. to the 8th century B.C. The New Testament was written 800-1,000 years after this. The Greek used in the New Testament lacks certain characteristics of Classical Greek. The type of Greek written in the Biblical manuscripts is known as Koiné Greek. However, for Cooper, anything not written in Classical Greek is “modern Greek”, thus “proving” that Sinaiticus was composed in the 19th century. (See his chapters 4 and 5 and also p. 93.)

Cooper states, “The late origin of the Greek is indicated by the occurrence of a great number of words unknown to the classical period, but common in later or modern Greek.” (p. 46) He seems to be unaware

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

that neither the New Testament nor the Jewish Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, were written in the “classical” Greek of up to 1,000 years earlier.

To support his claims, he lists (p. 49) Greek words that he states were “unknown to the classical period” (pp. 48-49). Not only is this irrelevant, many of the words were in fact used in the New Testament, for instance *λέντιον* ([lention], “towel”) in John 13:4.

The influence of Latin

After the end of the New Testament, Sinaiticus includes a copy of two early non-biblical texts that were popular among some Christians in the 2nd – 4th centuries, Shepherd of Hermas and Barnabas. Cooper claims these were in fact translated from the Latin, “proving” that they were not written at the time claimed. (p. 51) Unfortunately for him, the New Testament (in any Greek manuscript, including Textus Receptus) contains some Latin words. For instance, Mark transliterates the Latin word for centurion, writing *κεντυρίων* ([kenturiōn]) in 15:44 and again in 15:45, instead of using the Greek equivalent, *ἑκατοντάρχης* ([hekatonarchēs], “centurion”), which is used in Matthew 27:54 and elsewhere.

Other examples could be given, but it is clear that Latin words were used in even the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. In fact, we know that the sign that was put on the cross of Christ “was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek” (John 19:20, NIV). Thus, Cooper’s claim about supposed translation from Latin words does not demonstrate that the manuscript was “modern”.

The Vatican Plot and Charles Darwin

Cooper claims that the recovery of Codex Sinaiticus from St Catharine’s monastery in 1859 “bears all the hallmarks of careful preparation, planning and timing.” (p. 35) He claims that this planning and timing was carried out by the Jesuits/the Vatican, to coincide with the publication of Darwin’s “Origin of the Species” in the same year, to be “destructive of the Bible.” (p. 35)

In fact, the more claims Cooper makes, the more unbelievable are his allegations. No wonder that most experts in ancient manuscripts don’t waste their time trying to refute his conspiracy theories.

Hiding the Lack of evidence

On page 58, Cooper writes, “Without a doubt, this forged insertion into the text of both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus was instigated by Cardinal Mai.” However, I must point out that writers who use phrases such as “Without a doubt” do so to hide the fact that they have no evidence to support their claim.

Elsewhere (p. 62) he uses the word “Doubtless” to support a further unsubstantiated claim, and on p. 64 he writes, “The draft for MS 2427 was clearly copied verbatim out of Vaticanus before the verses Mark 16:9-20 were removed from Vaticanus by Cardinal Mai in 1857.” Again, the word “clearly” is used to mask the lack of evidence to support this claim.

Furthermore, he also seems to be unaware that Cardenal Angelo Mai had in fact died three years earlier, on 8th September 1854, and so cannot have removed anything from Vaticanus in 1857!

On page 90 he claims that Tischendorf cut out parts of the text of Codex Sinaiticus. He writes, “this excision ... was undoubtedly performed by Tischendorf himself”, using the word “undoubtedly” as a substitute for evidence.

The Resurrection of Christ

Cooper claims that by “removing” Mark 16:9-20 the Vatican is eliminating the evidence for the resurrection of Christ (p. 64). He doesn’t explain why the Vatican would want to deny the resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, he fails to mention that in Mark 16:6, the news is given that Jesus has been raised from the dead. So why didn’t the Vatican remove that verse, too? He also ignores the fact that throughout Mark’s gospel, Christ repeatedly taught his disciples about his crucifixion and resurrection. He also ignores the fact that the other three gospels and the book of Acts have repeated accounts of appearances by Christ after his resurrection, and indeed this is one of the principal themes of the whole New Testament.

On page 59, Cooper claims that for this “insertion”, “the space for accommodation had to be precise and not approximate”. He claims that the same changes were made (in the 19th century) in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, and on the next two pages he reproduces parts of a page from each manuscript. However, by missing out the rest of each manuscript page, he hides the fact that the space available in each manuscript is totally different, thus destroying his whole argument at this point. This is misleading and Cooper must have been aware of what he was doing.

This does of course raise serious questions as to his integrity and as to the reliability of other claims that he makes.

Codex Alexandrinus

Cooper states, “It is significant that Codex Alexandrinus ... is said to be of comparable age to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.” (p. 62) However, he does not say by whom it “is said”. In fact, Alexandrinus, which is an extremely important manuscript of the Bible, is normally dated at about 420 A.D., approximately 100 years after Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, and a simple study of the handwriting and layout easily confirms this.

The British Library

Cooper states, “the British Library leaves [of Codex Sinaiticus] ... were purchased ... in 1935.” (p. 85) In fact this happened in 1933 (see D. C. Parker, “Codex Sinaiticus”, p. 159, among many other sources). Cooper goes on to state, “[the leaves] have remained in the British Library ever since.” (p. 85). In fact, the British Library was not founded until 40 years later, on 1st July 1973, and its current building was not opened to the public until November 1997. In reality, for its first decades in England, Codex Sinaiticus was housed in the British Museum, most of the time in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

It is thus demonstrated that Cooper is not a reliable source of accurate information.

Other claims made by Cooper are also demonstrably false, but this review is already too long, so we shall not refute them here.

Cooper’s use of emotive language

Cooper’s book uses emotive language as a substitute for facts. To give just a few examples: “Codex Vaticanus, for all its faults, was the bait on the Vatican’s hook, and Tischendorf swallowed it whole – hook, line and sinker.” (p. 24);

Review of “The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus” by Bill Cooper

“the grip that modernism in the guise of Bible criticism was putting around the throat of the nation – and its press” (p. 38)

“disgraceful” (p. 38)

“hideous” (p. 90)

“Horrible” (p. 91)

“prize-winning ugliness” (p. 91)

“out came the knives of assassination in the public press.” (p. 44)

“it was one of the most audacious acts of dishonesty and sleight of hand ever perpetrated on the academic world.” (p. 46)

“Tischendorf ... resorted to a colossal lie” (p. 47)

“What is involved here is a massive and concerted deception.” (p. 54)

“It is a lie, a colossal lie.” (p. 55)

“one of the greatest and most serious scandals in the depressingly long history of Vatican forgery” (p. 57)

“such a level of hellish, not to say foolish duplicity” (p. 63)

“hideous scrawl that defaces the codex” (p. 83)

“The whole episode stinks.” (p. 101)

As may be imagined, reading this book was a most unpleasant experience. Cooper certainly appears to be “full of bitterness”. His claims are not supported by evidence and on the contrary, they go against undisputed evidence at every significant point.

A Personal Reflection on Codex Sinaiticus

I have read the whole of the New Testament in Codex Sinaiticus, and substantial sections of the Old Testament in it, and I have not found that it “contradicts” the teachings of the Bibles that I have read in the past, and still read, in English, Spanish, Greek and various other languages.

Cooper claims that there are major “differences” between the Codex Sinaiticus and the text produced by Erasmus, but most of the differences consist of spelling variations that do not prevent the reader from recognising the word, and minor differences of word order that are generally untranslatable into English.

For me, reading the Codex Sinaiticus has definitely not “left the Authority of Scripture ... hanging in tatters”, as claimed by Cooper, nor does it change the message of the Bible, so in fact all of Cooper’s claims seem to have been a waste of effort, an attempt to undermine a major Bible manuscript in which the text is not significantly different from the text in modern translations of the Bible.