

# The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

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## STATION 48:

### THE THREE GREAT UNCIAL CODICES:

The "*Sinaiticus*,"  
"*Alexandrinus*"  
"*Vaticanus*"

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Though discovered at different times and places, the three oldest and largest manuscripts of the Bible extant share many similarities. First, they are all written in a style of calligraphy called **Uncial**, featuring **CAPITAL** letters. There are few if any divisions between words, and the text shows certain lines which indicate that a common word or phrase has been abbreviated. Words do not necessarily end on the same line on which they start. If this were an English text, imagine the confusion possible; consider a string of letters such as "mothermineillbetterseeverysoon..." which could be read as "Mother mine ill; better see very soon..." or "Moth? Ermine? I'll bet terse every so on..."

Though in this display each of these great Codices is described individually, keep in mind that all three were made at great expense of material and labor, and were probably based on the most accurate texts in their time. Their language, Greek, was the actual language of the original texts of the New Testament, while the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament (which pre-dated the Christian Era) had been scrupulously composed to reflect the Hebrew original, and was the version of the Old Testament circulating at the time of Christ.

There is strong support for the theory that two of these "Uncials" (the **Sinaiticus** and the **Vaticanus**) were part of a project ordered by Emperor Constantine the Great to have the **scriptorium** at Caesarea produce 50 complete copies of the Bible for distribution throughout the Empire. Evidence which suggests this includes the fact that the actual handwriting of the pages indicates that, though several different scribes worked on each manuscript, at least two of these scribes worked on more than one of the manuscripts. The differences in size of the lettering, of the use of columns (or the lack of columns), the clear divisions into sections or not, all can be explained by the personal style of the lead scribe. Scholars who have collated the manuscripts have noted far more similarity than discrepancy among them.

Manuscripts throughout the period prior to the introduction of printing from movable type were sometimes "mass produced," in the sense that one monk stood at the head of a room and slowly read to a group of scribes. Mis-hearings or omissions were constant dangers. Indeed, all three manuscripts show corrections added on by other hands over the centuries since their creation.

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## **CODEX ALEXANDRINUS**

The manuscript known as the **Alexandrinus** first reached the western world when the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucar, sent it to King James I of England, but it did not actually arrive until after the succession of Charles I in 1627. Originally written at the end of the Fourth or beginning of the Fifth Century, probably in Egypt according to the best scholarship (in fact, its name perpetuates the history that came with it, that it came to Byzantium from Alexandria), it gives the text in double columns of 50 or 51 lines. Some students have speculated that the principal scribe who prepared it could not read Greek, because spaces sometimes interrupt the middle of a word!



The Old Testament text is substantially complete (missing only ten leaves) including all the books commonly associated with the Septuagint (thus, the Apocrypha); in addition, it has Psalm 151, 3 & 4 Maccabees and, after the Psalms, the 14 'Odes' or 'Liturgical Canticles.' The New Testament in contrast is missing from 19 to 25 leaves, including most of Matthew's Gospel, but has added the two Epistles of Clement. According to the "Table of Contents," it once contained the 'Psalms of Solomon.'

Though it didn't surface until after the King James Version was complete, it came like a God-send to the Biblical scholars of Europe in its time of presentation. "Junius" (Patrick Young), who had been involved in creating the "Geneva" version in English, was one of the first to examine it critically. Other scholars devoted their lives to its study; the scholarly edition of this Bible produced by Professor Breitinger and published in Geneva in 1730 by Heidegger compared the **Alexandrinus** with variant readings from the **Vaticanus** and other manuscripts. In its day, it was considered to be the best edition of the Septuagint ever published.

A facsimile of parts of the Old Testament, published in London in 1816-28, is shown at [Station 34](#). The loose-leaf **complete** facsimile shown here, however, was produced by the British Museum (custodian of the original since 1757) in 1879-83 by Sir E. Maunde Thompson, the Principal Librarian. Some 200 were printed, and today this facsimile is among the rarest of rare books, as most are forever locked away in the great libraries and institutions of the world. This edition is the only way that a scholar can see every line of every page of this precious manuscript; no further facsimile has ever been authorized, partly in fear of damage to the original. For this reason alone, the **Alexandrinus** presented here is priceless as a book, priceless as a research tool, priceless as a record of how God's Word was preserved through the centuries - including the books included (mentioned above) that did not appear in the King James Version.

If you consider that this display of the **Alexandrinus** has only recently been presented at the Cathedral, though rarity upon rarity has preceded it, you may get a regard for just how difficult it can be to search out and acquire a major item for a collection such as this. Given that there are likely no more than three or four such sets in private hands, given that Dr. Scott spent years searching the world for it, and you may begin to appreciate some of the degree of difficulty and years of effort spent in assembling the Dr. Gene Scott Collection, freely displayed to you every Sunday.

## **CODEX SINAITICUS**

Shown with more background material at [Station 33](#), the

**Sinaiticus** was the last of the great uncial manuscripts discovered; the famous tale of Tischendorf saving it from being used as kindling at the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai in 1844 (with further finds of pages as late as 1855) needs little repeating here. The main body of the Codex is housed at the British Museum, and consists of 346« leaves, of which 199 give the Old Testament; another 43 leaves are at the University Library at Leipzig, while fragments of 3 leaves remain at Leningrad. Other leaves have been found and still remain at St. Catherine's Monastery. As many as eight different scribes can be traced in its preparation, and scholars estimate that it originally comprised 730 leaves, and would have required the skins of approximately 360 goats or sheep for its preparation.

The **Sinaiticus** comprises the Old and New Testaments plus the 'Epistle of Barnabas' and the 'Shepherd of Hermas' - two books not in the King James Version. Though it was most probably written at Caesarea, some scholars think that it was a close copy of an Alexandrian original. Some lean to other places for its creation, but there is strong support for its being one of Constantine's order of 50 (which must have taken many decades to execute). Though its readings tend to support the version given by the **Vaticanus**, it also shares readings with the **Alexandrinus**.

Presented here is Tischendorf's own definitive publication of the manuscript, in four volumes, sponsored by Czar Alexander II of Russia but printed in Leipzig, Germany from 1862 through 1865. This followed his publication of portions of his original find - 44 leaves of the Old Testament - in 1846, as the "**Codex Friderico-Augustanus**" (Frederick Augustus of Saxony was his first patron; the Czar, with his immensely deeper pockets, would soon follow), and publication of another portion followed in 1855. Shown here is the definitive, final, edition.

It would have indeed taken an imperial purse to prepare a set of books such as these; the printer created special type to set the text (it was also used for publication of the **Vaticanus** also shown at this Station). This massive undertaking utilized the services of the finest craftsmen in the world, and these books were printed in extremely limited numbers - and cost, at



the time, the equivalent of a year's pay for a middle-class merchant! Today, nearly all the extant copies are preserved in "Rare Book" rooms of libraries throughout the world - those that survived the ravages of time and wars in the many decades since its publication.

Tischendorf presented the actual manuscript to the "Czar of All the Russias" in 1859, and until the Russian Revolution it rested in Imperial splendor in St. Petersburg. Then, as Stalin's government scrambled for hard currency, it was sold to the British Museum (the repository of the **Codex Alexandrinus** as well).

If one were to attempt a modern translation of the Bible into English, this would be one of the "foundations" upon which to build a text. When the King James Version was prepared, it still lay undiscovered on Mt. Sinai. It is an eternal tribute to the persistence of God's Word - and the skill of James' scholars - that the Bible in English would change very little, and in minor detail only, if every variation included in the **Sinaiticus** (or the other "Great Uncials") was to be incorporated.

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## **CODEX VATICANUS**

Considered to be from the middle of the Fourth Century, a contemporary of the **Sinaiticus**, and, if the theory is correct, one of Constantine's order of 50 manuscripts. The date of its acquisition by the Vatican is unknown. Some scholars think it may have predated the division of the Roman Empire by Valens and Valentinian; others think it reached Rome after the sack of Constantinople by Mahomet II in 1453 (which is more likely). It was first catalogued in 1475, and it was already on hand when the great Complutensian Polyglot was prepared under the direction of Cardinal Ximenes.

Consisting of 759 leaves, it uses uncial lettering in three columns of 42 lines to a page. Missing are the first 46 chapters of Genesis, Hebrews after Chapter 9:15, the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, and Revelation. Originally the work of two scribes, the manuscript is faded in places; scholars think it was overwritten letter by letter in the 10th or 11th century, with accents and breathing added along with corrections from the 8th, 10th and 15th centuries. All this activity makes precise paleographic analysis impossible. Missing portions were supplied in the 15th century by copying other Greek manuscripts.

The difference between the **Vaticanus** and the

**Alexandrinus** is sometimes given with reference to Origen's works. The **Alexandrinus** Old Testament follows Origen's Hexapla - and thus is based on older Hebrew texts, while the **Vaticanus** is closer to the Septuagint (Greek) version, uncorrected by Origen (and presented as the 5th column of his `Hexapla'), and thus is truer to the Bible actually used by the New Testament writers than that "corrected" - no matter how diligently - by Origen. Like the other "Great Uncials," the **Vaticanus** contains books not included in the King James Version.

**Two different facsimile editions are presented here.** The **First Edition** of the **Vaticanus**, shown here in five volumes, was produced from Cardinal Mai's edited transcription, set in type which in no way resembled the uncial original, and which included modern stops, breathings and accents. It was printed in Leipzig in 1857 by Joseph Spithover, and includes some facsimile material from the original manuscript for comparison.

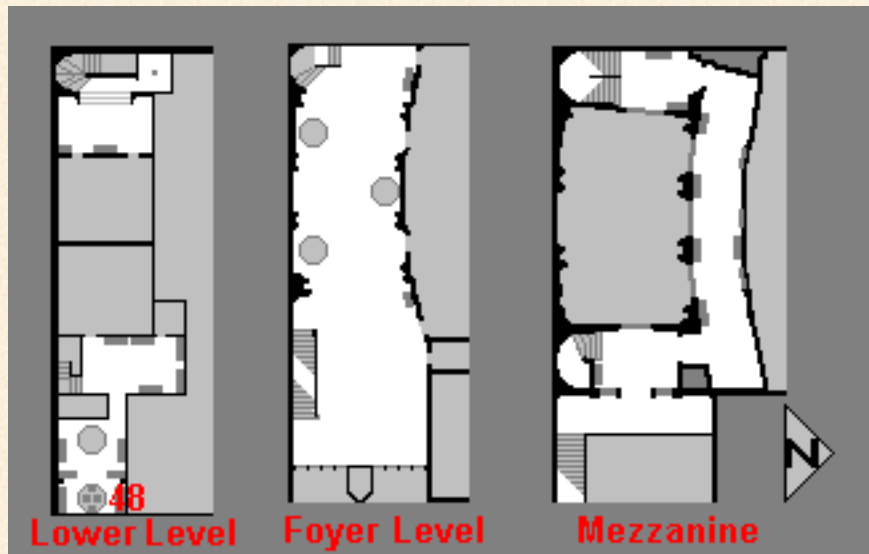
The **second, definitive edition** was produced under the auspices of Pope Pius IX in five volumes from 1868-1872 (a final volume of scholarly comments followed in 1881, and is not shown here). The second edition was a **true facsimile**, using the same castings of type as were used for Tischendorf's edition of the **Sinaiticus** (though in reality the **Vaticanus** used smaller letters). Both of these sets are so rare as to be practically unobtainable!

The **Vaticanus** was regularly consulted by scholars from the 16th through the 19th centuries, usually for its rendering of the Septuagint, as one scholar after another tried to be "definitive." It was cited for its variant readings in Bretinger's 1730 edition of the **Alexandrinus** Septuagint, and made guest appearances in excerpt form in many scholarly presentations throughout Europe, including those of Field in England.

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## STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is located in the "Room of the Book" on the Lower Level at the red #48.



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