

The world's oldest bible reunited online

Posted on Monday 6th July 2009

A remarkable collaboration between institutions in the UK, Germany, Egypt, and Russia has succeeded in reuniting virtually more than 800 pages and fragments from the world's oldest surviving Christian bible, Codex Sinaiticus.

For the first time, people around the world will be able to explore high resolution digital images of all the extant pages of the fourth-century book, which was written in Greek on parchment leaves by several scribes and had its text revised and corrected over the course of the following centuries.

See: www.codexsinaiticus.org (<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/>)

To mark the online launch of the reunited Codex, the British Library is staging an exhibition, From Parchment to Pixel: The Virtual reunification of Codex Sinaiticus, which runs from Monday 6 July until Monday 7 September, 2009 in the Folio Society Gallery at the Library's St Pancras site. Visitors will be able to view a range of historic items and artefacts that tell the story of the Codex and its virtual reunification, along with spectacular interactive representations of the manuscript and a digital reconstruction of the changes to a specific page over the centuries. In addition, they will see on display in the Treasures Gallery, for the very first time, both volumes of Codex Sinaiticus held at the British Library.

The virtual reunification of Codex Sinaiticus is the culmination of a four-year collaboration between the British Library, Leipzig University Library, the Monastery of St Catherine (Mount Sinai, Egypt), and the National Library of Russia (St Petersburg), each of which hold different parts of the physical manuscript.

By bringing together the digitised pages online, the project will enable scholars worldwide to research in depth the Greek text, which is fully transcribed and cross-referenced, including the transcription of numerous revisions and corrections. It will also allow researchers into the history of the book as a physical object to examine in detail aspects of its fabric and manufacture: pages can be viewed either with standard light or with raking light which, by illuminating each page at an angle, highlights the physical texture and features of the parchment.

"The Codex Sinaiticus is one of the world's greatest written treasures," said Dr Scot McKendrick, Head of Western Manuscripts at the British Library. "This 1600-year-old manuscript offers a window into the development of early Christianity and first-hand evidence of how the text of the bible was transmitted from generation to generation. The project has uncovered evidence that a fourth scribe – along with the three already recognised – worked on the text; the availability of the virtual manuscript for study by scholars around the world creates opportunities for collaborative research that would not have been possible just a few years ago."

The Codex Sinaiticus Project was launched in 2005, when a partnership agreement was signed by the four partner organisations that hold extant pages and fragments. A central objective of the project is the publication of new research into the history of the Codex. Other key aims of the project were to undertake the preservation, digitisation and transcription of the Codex and thereby reunite the pages, which have been kept in separate locations for over 150 years.

Professor David Parker from the University of Birmingham's Department of Theology, who directed the team funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which made the electronic transcription of the manuscript said: "The process of deciphering and transcribing the fragile pages of an ancient text containing over 650,000 words is a huge challenge, which has taken nearly four years.

"The transcription includes pages of the Codex which were found in a blocked-off room at the Monastery of St Catherine in 1975, some of which were in poor condition," added Professor Parker. "This is the first time that they have been published. The digital images of the virtual manuscript show the beauty of the original and readers are even able to see the difference in handwriting between the different scribes who copied the text. We have even devised a unique alignment system which allows users to link the images with the transcription. This project has made a wonderful book accessible to a global audience."

To mark the successful completion of the project, the British Library is hosting an academic conference on 6-7 July 2009 entitled 'Codex Sinaiticus: text, Bible, book'. A number of leading experts will give presentations on the history, text, conservation, palaeography and codicology of the manuscript. See the [website](http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/project/conference.aspx) (<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/project/conference.aspx>) .

Dr McKendrick added: "The Codex Sinaiticus is also a landmark in the history of the book, as it is arguably the oldest large bound book to have survived. For one volume to contain all the Christian scriptures book manufacture had to make a great technological leap forward – an advance comparable to the introduction of movable type or the availability of word processing. The Codex was huge in length – originally over 1460 pages – and large in page size, with each page measuring 16 inches tall by 14 inches wide. Critically, it marks the definite triumph of bound codices over scrolls – a key watershed in how the Christian bible was regarded as a sacred text."

The Codex Sinaiticus Project is generously supported by a number of funders, including:

- The Arts and Humanities Research Council
- The Stavros Niarchos Foundation
- The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
- The Leventis Foundation

For further information:

Notes to Editors:

1. **Codex Sinaiticus** is the world's oldest Bible and the most important Biblical manuscript. It was written by hand in the mid-fourth century around the time of Constantine the Great. Though it originally contained the whole of the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha in Greek, half of the Old Testament has since been lost. The surviving manuscript concludes with two early Christian texts, an epistle ascribed to the Apostle Barnabas and 'The Shepherd' by Hermas.

Codex Sinaiticus is named after the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, Egypt. St Catherine's is one of the oldest, continuously active, Christian monastic communities in the world and traces its origins back to the fourth century.

2. **The British Library** is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The Library's collection has developed over 250 years and exceeds 150 million separate items representing every age of written civilisation. It includes: books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, patents, newspapers and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages www.bl.uk.

St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai. Built at the foot of Mount Moses, Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery was constructed by order of the Emperor Justinian between 527 and 565. It is built on the traditional site of Moses' Burning Bush. The Monastery was built to house the bones of the Christian martyr St Catherine. It is one of the oldest continually-working monasteries in the world, a Greek Orthodox holy place connected with the Prophet Moses and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt.

Leipzig University Library. The University Library of Leipzig was established in 1543 and is one of the oldest German University libraries. It serves as a literature and information supplier for the University of Leipzig as well as for the general public of Leipzig and the region. The precious and extensive historical and special collections give the University Library a high national and international reputation. The collections range from important medieval and modern manuscripts to incunabula, papyri,

autographs, ostraka and coins. The current stock comprises 5 million volumes and about 7,700 periodicals.

National Library of Russia, in St Petersburg, is one of the world's largest libraries, holding nearly 33 million items, of which 6 million are in foreign languages. It possesses the most complete collection of publications in Russian. Its staff perform intensive research, mount exhibitions and conduct conferences as well as serving visitors in the reading rooms. It also operates an electronic document supply service, allowing users around the world to receive electronic copies of material from its collections.

The Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing at the University of Birmingham is at the cutting edge of research developing digital tools and editions. Its staff are involved in editions of many of the world's great works, including the New Testament, The Canterbury Tales, Dante's Divine Comedy and Darwin's On the Origin of Species. See www.itsee.bham.ac.uk

Arts & Humanities Research Council: Each year the AHRC provides approximately £102 million from the Government to support research and postgraduate study in the arts and humanities, from languages and law, archaeology and English literature to design and creative and performing arts. In any one year, the AHRC makes approximately 700 research awards and around 1,350 postgraduate awards. The quality and range of research supported by this investment of public funds not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. www.ahrc.ac.uk (<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk>)

ENDS

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

