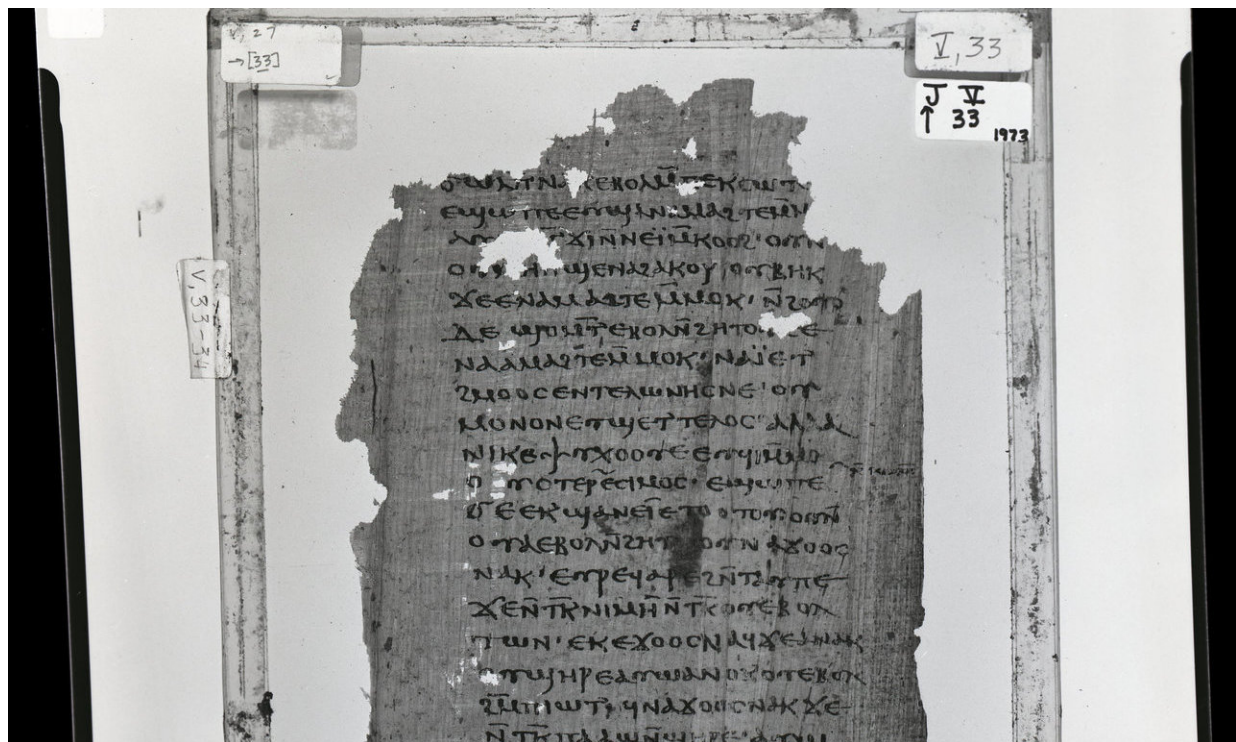


# Professors discover copy of Jesus' secret revelations to his brother

November 30 2017



A piece of the Coptic translation of the First Apocalypse of James from the Nag Hammadi Codex V. Credit: Nag Hammadi Library, Oxford University.

The first-known original Greek copy of a heretical Christian writing describing Jesus' secret teachings to his brother James has been discovered at Oxford University by biblical scholars at The University of Texas at Austin.

To date, only a small number of texts from the Nag Hammadi library—a collection of 13 Coptic Gnostic books discovered in 1945 in Upper Egypt—have been found in Greek, their original language of composition. But earlier this year, UT Austin religious studies scholars Geoffrey Smith and Brent Landau added to the list with their discovery of several fifth- or sixth-century Greek fragments of the First Apocalypse of James, which was thought to have been preserved only in its Coptic translations until now.

"To say that we were excited once we realized what we'd found is an understatement," said Smith, an assistant professor of [religious studies](#). "We never suspected that Greek fragments of the First Apocalypse of James survived from antiquity. But there they were, right in front of us."

The ancient narrative describes the secret teachings of Jesus to his brother James, in which Jesus reveals information about the heavenly realm and future events, including James' inevitable death.

"The [text](#) supplements the biblical account of Jesus' life and ministry by allowing us access to conversations that purportedly took place between Jesus and his brother, James—secret teachings that allowed James to be a good teacher after Jesus' death," Smith said.



Geoffrey Smith (left) and Brent Landau take a closer look at the Greek fragment identified as the First Apocalypse of James. The fragments--and rights to published images of them--are owned by the Egypt Exploration Society. Credit: Geoffrey Smith, UT Austin.

Such apocryphal writings, Smith said, would have fallen outside the canonical boundaries set by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his "Easter letter of 367" that defined the 27-book New Testament: "No one may add to them, and nothing may be taken away from them."

With its neat, uniform handwriting and words separated into syllables, the original manuscript was probably a teacher's model used to help

students learn to read and write, Smith and Landau said.

"The scribe has divided most of the text into syllables by using mid-dots. Such divisions are very uncommon in ancient manuscripts, but they do show up frequently in manuscripts that were used in educational contexts," said Landau, a lecturer in the UT Austin Department of Religious Studies.

The teacher who produced this manuscript must have "had a particular affinity for the text," Landau said. It does not appear to be a brief excerpt from the text, as was common in school exercises, but rather a complete copy of this forbidden ancient writing.

Smith and Landau announced the discovery at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Boston in November and are working to publish their preliminary findings in the Greco Roman Memoirs series of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

Citation: Professors discover copy of Jesus' secret revelations to his brother (2017, November 30) retrieved 9 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2017-11-professors-jesus-secret-revelations-brother.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--