

A New Gospel Ascribed to Mark

Copy of Greek Letter Says Saint Kept 'Mysteries' Out

By SANKA KNOX

A copy of an ancient letter in Greek that ascribes a secret gospel to Mark and that narrates a miracle absent from the present Gospel of Mark was made public last night.

Dr. Morton Smith, Associate Professor of History at Columbia University, found the copy of the letter two years ago while studying ancient manuscripts at the Monastery of Mar Saba, about twelve miles southeast of Jerusalem.

The letter incorporates the story of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead and attributes the story to Mark.

Dr. Smith's visit to Mar Saba, in the hope of finding material on ancient religion, a field in which he is an authority, was rewarded when he found the letter, presumably a seventeenth-century or eighteenth-century copy, written on the back of the leaves of a Dutch book printed in 1646.

Translated and transcribed, the letter was presented last night with evidence that attributes its authorship to Clement of Alexandria. The paper was read at the ninety-sixth meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at Union Theological Seminary.

Clement was a prolific author who wrote in Alexandria between about 180 and 202 A. D. With Origen, he is generally



Monastery of Mar Saba, where the document was found

considered either to have created or laid the foundation for Christian theology and exegesis.

Dr. Smith's find was not examined on historical or theological grounds. But the professor foresaw that if the letter received scholarly acceptance as having been written by Clement, opinions about the teachings of Jesus, the origin and character of the Gospels and the character and early history of the Christian church would have to be reconsidered.

Six paleographical experts

have agreed with Dr. Smith that the handwriting he found could be dated to the eighteenth century; two favored the seventeenth century.

It was probably written by a monk for the sign of the cross appears at the top of the text, which is two and one-half pages. It was written with correctness and facility; Dr. Smith said it was most likely the work of a scholar.

The heading, "From the let-

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A SECRET GOSPEL ASCRIBED TO MARK

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ters of the most holy Clement the author of the Stromateis to Theodore," suggests that the letter was once part of a collection. The body of the letter, which has been minutely compared to known writings of Clement for content and style, appears to support attribution to Clement.

Words that were favored by Clement or that were peculiar to him were found in the letter, as well as favorite constructions of grammar.

Clement's writings, which have contributed materially to knowledge of Christianity in Egypt—said to have been founded by Mark—once included works that were considered scandalous. These have disappeared.

The questions scholars will have to deal with in judging the document are: Could it be an imitation of Clement's work, and then, if the letter is proved genuine, could the gospel mentioned be an imitation of Mark? Clement might have been quoting from what he honestly considered to be a gospel of Mark but about 130 years intervened between Mark and Clement.

Letter Was a Reply

Clement's letter, to an unknown "Theodore," was obviously a reply. Theodore had apparently written to the theologian, setting forth certain teachings of the Carpocratians, a heretical sect, and his opposition to them, and telling of their knowledge of the secret gospel.

In Clement's letter the Lazarus story, which Clement calls part of a "secret gospel," is fully related.

However, Clement apparently made an unusual concession in revealing the "secret gospel." Clement emphatically lectured Theodore on the necessity of keeping knowledge of the gospel secret—he "should even deny it on oath," Clement wrote.

What the falsifications were in the Carpocratian version,



REPORTS DISCOVERY: Dr. Morton Smith, who told of finding ancient letter involving Jesus' teaching.

Clement did not outline, but he charged that even "true" elements had not been "reported truly."

Further, Clement said that when Mark had written "an account of the Lord's doings" while with Peter in Rome, he had not written about all of them, nor had he even hinted "at the ones pertaining to the mysteries."

According to the letter, Mark had made a selection, choosing those "doings" that would be "most useful" in instruction in the faith.

After Peter's death, Mark went to Alexandria, taking, ac-

ording to Clement's letter, the notes of Peter. From these, Clement wrote, Mark "transferred to his former book the things suitable to progress towards knowledge."

Still, Clement wrote, Mark kept secret "the things which are not to be uttered." Clement said that Mark did not set down "the hierophantic [priestly] teaching of the Lord," but added to his gospel other stories and sayings that, when interpreted, "would lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth which is hidden behind seven veils."

The composition was left to the Church of Alexandria, and kept carefully guarded, Clement wrote, "being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries."

The Gospel According to John is the only one of the traditional four Gospels to include the story of Lazarus. The new material also introduces a new witness to the miracle—Salome, the personality who once played an important part in Egyptian pseudepigrapha—Biblical material that was judged spurious.

In the Gospel of Mark in the New Testament, Salome watches the Crucifixion "afar off" with other women and shares the task of anointing Jesus after His death.

Mark, the companion of Apostles, is generally considered the first in point of date. He is known not to have been a witness to the New Testament events, but his gospel presented the tradition of eye-witnesses at second hand. Biblical scholars date Mark in the Sixties of the first century; Matthew and Luke, who used or whose compilers used Mark as an important source, are dated 75 and 85 A. D.