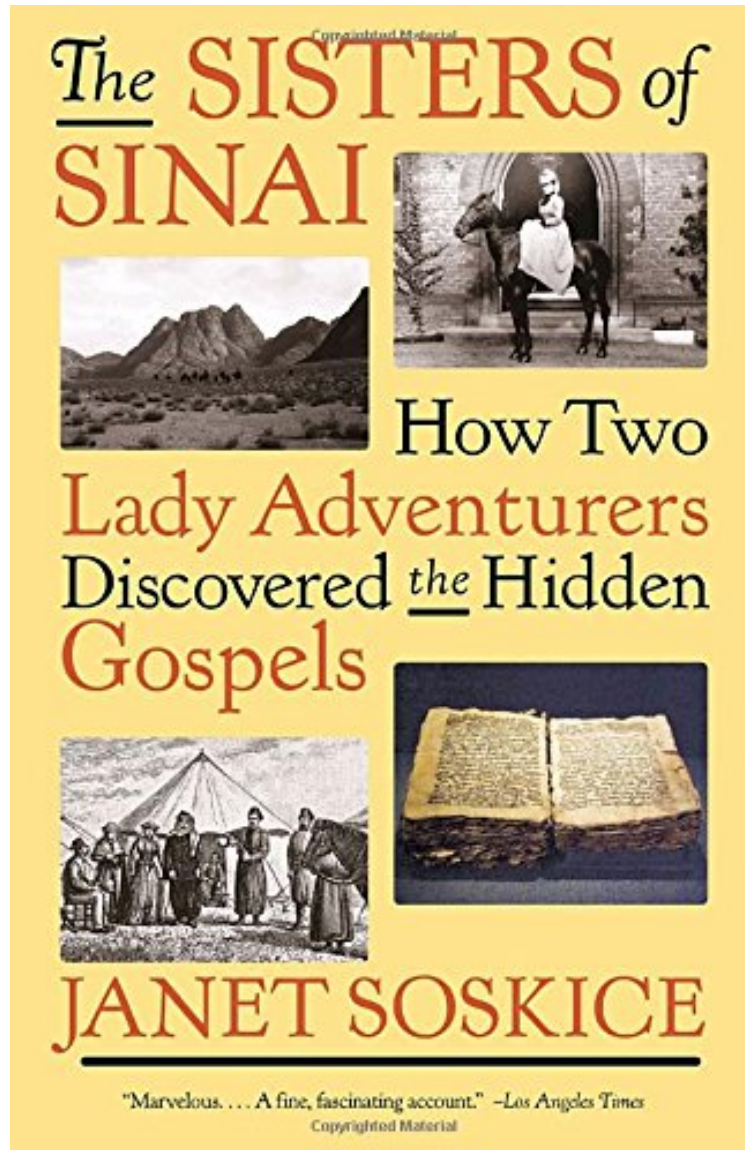


The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels

Janet Soskice

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#218468 in Books Janet Soskice 2010-08-24 2010-08-24Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.99 x .66 x 5.17l, .68 #File Name: 1400034744336 pagesThe Sisters of Sinai How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels | File size: 31.Mb

Janet Soskice : The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels:

36 of 36 people found the following review helpful. Amazing Book on Many Levels By J. Hollerbach My grandmother always used to say that "truth is stranger than fiction." It took me many years to appreciate that statement. And Janet Soskice has certainly provided strong evidence for that with this well-written biography. She has written a multi-layered book that becomes more and more fascinating as each section unfolds. This is not only a book about how an ancient manuscript of the Gospels was discovered, although that would have been interesting alone. Janet Soskice manages to intertwine the story of two sisters, twins whose circumstances were so unusual that their Presbyterian belief in Providence would be difficult to dispute, with attitudes toward women in the 19th Century, the excitement of the Academy during the Victorian era, and a travelogue of the Middle East. The book is rich, complex, exciting and sometimes extremely frustrating, as various characters render their judgments about gender, religion and values. It is very real and very genuine. The author treats her subjects with the respect they clearly deserve, while not glossing over their bigotry and eccentricities. She is, likewise, very clear in revealing the bigotry that the sisters received at the hands of the Academy, especially Cambridge. As the sisters launch on their search for manuscripts, the book can read as well as any good detective story. And the conflicts between the sisters and the more established members of academia bring some high drama and tension to the book. So the story itself is well written and quite fascinating. What I found so incredible about the book, however, was the sisters themselves. This is a story of overcoming incredible obstacles, of digging in and getting things done when, objectively, one's goals seem daunting at best and impossible at worst. In short, Janet Soskice has written the story of two absolutely amazing women who traveled through the Sinai desert without husbands when that was unheard of; befriended some wonderful Greek Orthodox monks even though they were staunch Presbyterians; discovered obscure documents written in Syriac (not exactly the *lingua franca* of the day); and became two of the top Orientalists in their era - and in middle age yet! It is the story of relationships developed (I just loved their relationship with Solomon Schechter!) with others who were as excited about religion, God and scholarship as they were. All in all, it was a pleasure reading of how their lives so beautifully and brilliantly unfolded, and how scholarship, religion, and their own natures grew and expanded as a result of their adventures. I would highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the history of religion, the Victorian era, women's studies, archeology, or anyone who just enjoys settling down to a great read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Two Wealthy Scottish Sisters Take Us Closer To The Original Gospels By Rev. D. Thomas Ford, Jr. This is the great, well-told story of two very wealthy Scottish Presbyterian sisters who are extremely gifted in foreign languages and adventurism who discover a third century copy of the Gospels in Syria at The Saint Catherine Monastery on the top of Mt. Sinai in the Arabian Peninsula in the late 19th century. It revolutionized biblical scholarship. This book is a must read for all serious Bible scholars and lay students of the Bible.

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Surprising and Exciting By Anglo-American Reader Each morning on my way to work I drive past the gates of Westminster College, Cambridge, England, founded in 1899 as the Presbyterian (now United Reformed Church) seminary in this great center of British learning. These days when I go by I find myself thinking of the twin sisters whose generosity paid for the theological college, and who are the subject of this delightful book by Janet Soskice, Canadian-born Professor of Philosophical Theology at Cambridge. These two ladies, Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson, were formidable both as travellers and as intellects. From a small town in western Scotland where their shrewd father was a lawyer, they eventually as middle-aged widows established themselves in Cambridge and became self-taught scholars, collecting, collating, and translating early Christian manuscripts -- biblical scholars of the highest order. Re-reading my words I realize I have made them sound incredibly boring, but they were not, and neither did they sit at home by a warm fire doing needlepoint. At a time when women from their background were likely to be cosseted, they thought nothing of criss-crossing the Middle East looking for lost manuscripts -- a passion that was ignited when they turned up a very early manuscript of the gospels in the chaotically organized library at St. Catherine's Convent in the Sinai Peninsula. After it was confirmed that this was a winner they were hooked. Not only did St. Catherine's become a regular stopping-off point, but they even went scampering around the oldest monasteries in Egypt that had been established by the Desert Fathers in search of texts -- often being welcomed with open arms by monks whose attitudes until that point had certainly not been female friendly. I can promise a reader that this fabulously written book will neither certainly bore you or nor send you off to sleep. Page-turners are seldom written by Cambridge academics and about those fascinated by ancient Syriac manuscripts -- but this book shatters forever such stereotypes! Agnes and Margaret were obviously both brilliant and memorable characters, to be both admired and of whom to be just a teeny bit frightened. It helped that they inherited from their father the substantial fortune that he had amassed through careful business dealing, but they used their wealth wisely and well -- paying for the building the Presbyterian seminary in Cambridge was just one small part of their generosity. I am the father of two grown daughters, but if we were out to start our family over again and I had known about this dynamic little pair I would have been very tempted to try to persuade my wife that we should call them Agnes and Margaret after these two fascinating beings. Read this book: it will be good for your heart and good for your soul.

Agnes and Margaret Smith were not your typical Victorian scholars or adventurers. Female, middle-aged, and without university degrees or formal language training, the twin sisters nevertheless made one of the most important scriptural

discoveries of their time: the earliest known copy of the Gospels in ancient Syriac, the language that Jesus spoke. In an era when most Westerners male or female feared to tread in the Middle East, they slept in tents and endured temperamental camels, unscrupulous dragomen, and suspicious monks to become unsung heroines in the continuing effort to discover the Bible as originally written.

From Bookmarks Magazine To critics' delight, Soskice has resurrected the long-forgotten story of two daring women who bucked the conventions of their day and prevailed. Critics were quick to point out that this rollicking adventure tale will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers despite its religious overtones. Soskice's scholarship is impeccable, and she engages readers in the controversies surrounding the Bible in the late 19th century while skillfully evoking the prejudices of the Victorian era and placing her charming subjects squarely within it. The spirited sisters struggled for recognition and control of the "Lewis Codex" amid academic suspicion, resentment, and treachery, and Soskice has penned a worthy tribute to their perseverance. A Christian Science Monitor Best Book of the Year A Washington Post Best Book of the Year A Library Journal Best Book of the Year Marvelous. . . . [A] fine, fascinating account. Los Angeles Times The Sisters of Sinai is a bracing and moving book . . . a reminder of the ardor, hardship and energy invested in the pursuit of knowledge in that endlessly inquiring and industrious Victorian age. The New York Times Book Luminous. . . . By turns a rattling adventure yarn . . . and a testament to the power of perseverance. The Washington Post Book World Sets the extraordinary life of two plucky women . . . against a backdrop of swashbuckling Bible hunters, racing each other around the world to find the latest clue in the mystery of how the Bible was first written. Denver Post You don't need to follow a particular religion to become engrossed in this enthralling narrative. The Sisters of Sinai is a tale of grand adventure and far-flung travels, and it proves appealing even on that level. Soskice is so adept at making a rarefied subject accessible and vivid that the narrative seems almost cinematic. If the heroines hadn't been identical twins, in a film adaptation Dames Judi Dench and Maggie Smith would be brilliantly cast in the lead roles. The Christian Science Monitor A combination travelogue, mystery story, adventure narrative, and accounting of the rivalries which beset scholars of major universities in Britain toward the end of the 19th century. . . . [Soskice] catches the feel of the era and brings these forgotten scholars to life. Charleston Gazette We compliment some non-fiction books by saying they read like novels, but The Sisters of Sinai reads better than a novel. Filled with tales of derring-do, arcane knowledge, persistence in the face of extraordinary odds, and the acquiring of and preservation of priceless knowledge, The Sisters of Sinai does what the best books do: makes you want to know much more. The Daily Herald (Utah) Lively and inspiring. . . . Thrilling. . . . Soskice describes those days of urgent outdoor transcription with the understandable yearning of a 21st-century theologian for whom such pioneering triumphs can only be a dream. Her deft handling of a travel yarn and her feel for the culture-bucking momentum of the twins' lives makes the dream a compelling one. The Times (London) This rattling tale appears to come straight from an Indiana Jones adventure. . . . Yet this real-life expedition was not led by a whip-cracking archaeologist, but by two God-fearing Ayrshire twins. . . . Janet Soskice has done an excellent job in piecing together the lives of two remarkable, and largely forgotten women who, like Moses, made a discovery at Mount Sinai that would transform their lives forever. The Scotsman An absorbing and delightful chronicle, both of two fascinating women and of a crucial moment in the history of modern faith and modern disenchantment. First Things In Sisters of Sinai Janet Soskice has achieved the impossible: she has brought biblical scholarship to life. A gripping story of two spirited women determined to pursue the truth whatever the cost, with camels to boot. Wonderful. Sara Wheeler, author of Cherry: A Life of Apsley Cherry-Garard This meticulously researched effort takes what for decades has been an intriguing footnote in the history of textual serendipity and gives it the full examination it so richly deserves. . . . Exciting. Fine Book Magazine An extraordinary and compelling book, combining vivid travel adventures, wonderful characters, and absorbing journeys of the mind and heart. Janet Soskice brilliantly and accessibly unfolds one of the most gripping sagas of Biblical detection, while telling the story of two magnificent women who trespassed intrepidly in worlds that sought to exclude them. John Cornwell, author of Hitler's Pope About the Author Janet Soskice grew up in western Canada and has lived for some years in England, where she is Professor in Philosophical Theology at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Jesus College. She lectures around the world and is a frequent contributor to radio and television programs.