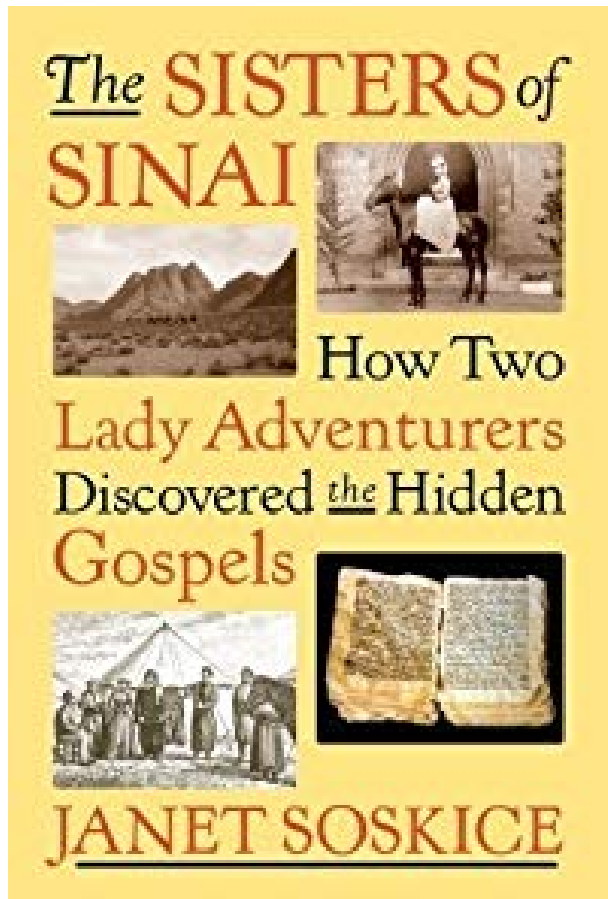


The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels



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In 1892, two sisters, identical twins from Scotland, made one of the most important scriptural discoveries of modern times. Combing the library of St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, they found a neglected palimpsest: beneath an unprepossessing life of female saints, they detected what remains to this day among the earliest known copies of the Gospels, a version in ancient Syriac, the language spoken by Jesus. The Sisters of Sinai is the enthralling account of how two ladies in middle age and without university degrees uncovered and translated this text, bringing a great biblical treasure to world attention. Janet Soskice takes us, via the lives of Agnes and Margaret Smith, on a quintessentially Victorian adventure. It is partly a physical journey: when Westerners generally feared to tread in the region, the sisters Smith traversed the Middle East, sleeping in tents, enduring temperamental camels and unscrupulous dragomen, and facing uncertain welcome from monks deceived by earlier travellers. It is also a journey of the mind: in an era when religious faith was under attack, when new discoveries in science and archaeology were rewriting the accepted understanding of the Bible's origins as well as those of humankind, a great contribution to knowledge was made by two whose only natural advantage was an astonishing gift for languages, modern as well as classical. Finally, and most movingly, it is a progress of the human spirit. Unwilling to let their lack of formal training or the disdain and jealousy of male scholars stand in their way, Agnes and Margaret became renowned scriptural authorities, in joyful pursuit of

their lifelong passions for adventure and learning. Here, rousinglly recounted, is the story of two unlikely and unsung heroines of the continuing effort to discover the Bible as originally written.