

I AM THERE

Here's a story.

In 1945 two men were in the desert in Egypt digging for fertilizer. One man was named Muhammed and the other was Khalifah. They uncovered a red clay jar. At first the men decided not to break the jar for fear there were dark spirits inside, but then they considered that there might be gold inside, so in the eternal way of men considering that there might be some cash to be gleaned from violence, Muhammed smashed the jar with his shovel.

Inside the jar were thirteen books made of papyrus. Muhammed wrapped the books in his cloak and took them home to his village, al-Qasr. At first Muhammed left the books in a pile of straw by the oven, from which pile his mother, in the eternal way of women considering that there might be some use to be milled from manish muck, used some of the pages for kindling the fire and gave some others of the pages away to neighbors, among them a one-eyed outlaw named Bahij'Ali.

After a while Muhammed gave the rest of the books he had left to a local priest named Basiliyus' Abd al-Masih, who showed them to his brother-in-law, a teacher named Raghil Andrawus, who in the eternal way of men smelling major cash, went into the city, taking the books to Cairo, where he showed the books to a doctor named George Sobhi, who thought they might be valuable, and George Sobhi showed them to the government, which concluded that they *were* valuable, and in the eternal way of greedy governments everywhere, seized the books from the doctor, and put them in the national museum, and eventually the government obtained all the rest of the unburned pages and books that had traveled from neighbors to dealers to collectors all over the world, all the pages except those toasted forever by Muhammed's mama in the kitchen, and now the pages are in the national museum of Cairo, where you could, if you were of a mind to, see them today.

All the pages are from the fourth century, and the stories they contain were originally written in Greek, and they tell of a mysterious man at the dawn of the first century, who said, among many other things in those books found by Muhammed and Khalifah one day in the desert, these riveting sentences:

*The Kingdom is within you.*

*What is hidden from thee shall be revealed unto thee.*

*Love thy brother as thy soul.*

*Blessed is the man who has suffered; he has found life.*

*I am the light that is over them all.*

*I am the All; the All has come forth from me, and the All has attained unto me.*

*Cleave a piece of wood: I am there.*

*Raise up the stone, and ye shall find me there.*

*Seek, and ye shall find; he who seeks shall find, and he who knocks, to him it shall be opened.*

*The kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.*

And many other things.

But this morning, as I ponder the light that is over all, and contemplate the vast universe of that which is hidden from me, and slowly cleave the wood of my days looking for the same voice that said to Moses *I am Who Am*, I remember one other haunting line from that pile of paper:

*You that hath ears, let him hear this.*

To which I say amen and then amen and then again amen.

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*Brian Doyle, Editor*

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