Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria wrote in the fourth century C.E. that the Christian apocrypha—texts that refer to the life of Jesus and his followers that are not included in the New Testament—“are used to deceive the simple-minded.” It was once believed that after the Church had determined the contents of the canon, all of these additional (noncanonical) texts were abandoned, hidden or destroyed. In “‘Lost Gospels’—Lost No More” in the September/October 2016 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review, Biblical scholar Tony Burke challenges this assertion.

“Today scholars of the Christian apocrypha are challenging this view of the loss and rediscovery of apocryphal texts,” explains Burke. “It has become increasingly clear that the Christian apocrypha were composed and transmitted throughout Christian history, not just in antiquity.”

Burke explains that after the invention of the printing press, scholars began to travel the world in search of ancient manuscripts that they could bring to light again with the use of this new invention.

Another modern “invention” has also aided in the scholarly understanding of the history of Christian apocrypha: archaeology. At Egyptian sites such as Oxyrhynchus and Akhmim, archaeologists have unearthed texts or works that were previously known only from their mention by other ancient authors.

Other texts, such as the Nag Hammadi Codices—13 codices that include complete copies of the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip—have come from the antiquities market.

“It has become increasingly clear that Christianity began as a multitude of voices, each one declaring itself right and others wrong,” states Burke, who rejects the idea that these gospels were “lost” through intentional suppression by the “winning” tradition, the Roman Church.

All this leads Burke to conclude that the Christian apocrypha “were valued not only by ‘heretics’ who held views about Christ that differed from normative (or ‘orthodox’) Christianity, but also by writers within the church who did not hesitate to promote and even create apocryphal texts to serve their own interests.”

The Tchacos Codex, which contains the apocryphal *Gospel of Judas*, came from the antiquities market.