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**Article**

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## The Magi in Ethiopic Tradition\*

WITOLD WITAKOWSKI

Ethiopia and Ethiopic literature may not be the primary area of interest for scholars in patristics,\*\* yet we should bear in mind its importance for preserving in translation many early Christian or Christianised texts the originals of which are lost. This is especially true of the apocryphal or pseudepigraphical literature, as for instance the *Book of Enoch* or *Jubilees*. As far as the New Testament apocrypha are concerned, the situation is less clear due to the state of the publication of and research on the relevant texts. It seems however that there is considerable room for future discoveries, even though these may not be as spectacular as in the case of the two pseudepigrapha named above. Moreover, once apocryphal materials and traditions had reached Ethiopia they never ceased to stimulate the creativity of the Ethiopian *gens de lettres*, and thus we may find

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\*\* An earlier version of this paper was read at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies in Oxford in 1995. Abbreviations used:

BL – British Library (formerly: British Museum);

Cat. Coll. – GETATCHEW HAILE & W.F. MACOMBER, *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa, and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library*, Collegeville, vol. I–X, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1975–93.

CSCO SAe – Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Aethiopici;

CSCO SS – Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Syri;

EMML – Ethiopic Microfilm Manuscript Library, Collegeville, Minnesota;

PO – Patrologia Orientalis;

PG – Patrologie Graecae cursus completus, ed. J.P. MIGNE;

ROCh – Revue de l'Orient chrétien;

SChr – Sources chrétiennes;

SeT – Studi e Testi.

WRIGHT, *Cat. BM* – W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since the year 1847*, London 1877.

relatively late compositions of apocryphal character which are based on material from the early Christian epoch.

One of the themes which seldom failed to resurface whenever a new composition in Ethiopic gave it an opportunity was the visit of the Magi in Bethlehem. The pericope *Matthew 2,1–12*, the only text among the canonical gospels to report it, is very brief and as such it left many questions about the Magi open. These concerned the land of their origin, their number, their names, the time of their arrival in Bethlehem, the form of the star, and perhaps the most intriguing question: How did the Magi know about the birth of Christ?

Here we intend to present the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) compositions<sup>1</sup> known to develop the topic, and to provide some explanations concerning the origin of these traditions. In many cases it will not be possible to determine the date of the texts reviewed. Some of them may even come from what in European conditions would be the modern, or at least the post-mediaeval, period.

In the Ethiopian Church the Magi are celebrated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Tahšas (which is the 25<sup>th</sup> of December according to the Julian calendar, but the 4<sup>th</sup> of January in the Gregorian reckoning<sup>2</sup>), i.e. on the day of the Nativity, as the Ethiopian *Synaxarion* testifies<sup>3</sup>.

We may start from the Ethiopic translation of the Gospels, most probably made soon after the Christianisation of the country, which took place at the beginning of the fourth century. This causes no particular surprise; one thing may however be worth noting: the word μάγοι (Mt 2,1) is translated as *mäsäggälan* (መሳጸጋላን ፣) i.e. 'magicians, sorcerers', which shows that of the two possible renderings of the Greek word μάγοι the translators opted for the popular interpretation, perhaps unaware of the other, more positive, meaning of the word as 'wise men'.<sup>4</sup> The rendering *mäsäggälan* has established itself in Ethiopic

<sup>1</sup> Amharic material from the so-called *Andämta* commentaries was studied by R.W. COWLEY, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: a study in exegetical tradition and hermeneutics* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 38), Cambridge 1988, pp. 46–54.

<sup>2</sup> So for the years of Matthew, Mark and Luke; for that of John – the 26<sup>th</sup> of December and the 5<sup>th</sup> of January respectively; M. CHAINE, *La chronologie des temps chrétiens de l'Égypte et de l'Éthiopie*, Paris 1925, pp. 84f and 88f.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Synaxaire éthiopien: les mois de Tahšchasch, Ter et Yakâtit, IV: Le mois de Tahšas (fin)*, publ. et trad. par S. GRÉBAUT (PO 26:1), Paris 1945, p. 89; an English transl.: *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, a translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium ... by E.A.W. BUDGE, II, Cambridge 1928 (= Hildesheim 1976), p. 421.

<sup>4</sup> This does not imply that the terms *mäsäggälan* and *säb'a sägäl* have pejorative meanings. Such would contradict both the role of the Magi in Matthew and in the literature under

literature and it (or its variant *säb'a sägäl*; ሰብአ ሰገል ፡ with the same meaning) occurs in all the texts to be reviewed.

In apocryphal literature we meet the Magi, oddly enough, in the *Life of Adam and Eve* (ገድለ ፡ አዳም ፡ ወሐዋን ፡)<sup>5</sup>. To judge by the title this would be an Old Testament pseudepigraphon, but without losing this quality it is clearly a Christian or Christianised<sup>6</sup> composition belonging to a special class of apocrypha which attempted to overbridge the separateness of the Old and the New Testaments, as the presence of an account of the Magi shows. We read here that the star the Magi saw was like the face of a young virgin carrying a little child. To understand the significance of the star the Magi had to consult their books. Then they climbed a high mountain in the east, from which they took the gifts that had been with Adam in the Cave of Treasures: “gold namely as unto a king; frankincense, as unto God; and myrrh, as for His death”, and set out to Palestine. They are presented as the kings of Persia, Saba and the East respectively. Also their names, otherwise unknown, are given<sup>7</sup>.

We meet the Magi again in the *Miracles of Jesus* (ተአምረ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡)<sup>8</sup>, the Ethiopic version of the Arabic *Apocryphal Gospel of John*, perhaps of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which was translated into Ethiopic in the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the episodes tells the story of the Magi (ሰብአ ሰገል ፡)<sup>9</sup>, also termed “kings and magicians” (ኅገሥት ፡ ወመሰግላን ፡). The light of the guiding star, we learn, was like a column from heaven down to earth, and “in the middle of the star there

review here, and their being venerated by the Church. (I wish to thank Prof. Bairu Tafla for clarifying this point).

<sup>5</sup> Ethiopic text: *Der Kampf Adams (gegen die Versuchungen des Satans), oder: das christliche Adambuch des Morgenlandes*, hrsg. v. E. TRUMPP (Abh. der Philos.-philol. Classe der Kgl. Bayerischen Akad. der Wissenschaften 15:3), München 1881, p. 167f; a German transl.: *Das christliche Adambuch des Morgenlandes*, aus dem Äthiopischen mit Bemerkungen übers. v. A. DILLMANN, *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft* 5 (1852–53), p. 135f; an English transl.: *The Book of Adam and Eve, also called the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, transl. by S.C. MALAN, London 1882, p. 204f.

<sup>6</sup> If it be admitted that there was a Jewish nucleus at the centre of the Christian literature on Adam and Eve. By classifying it within the group of “secondary Adam literature” M.E. STONE (*A history of the literature of Adam and Eve* (Early Judaism and its Literature, 3), Atlanta, Georgia 1992, pp. 98–100) practically denies this.

<sup>7</sup> See table 1 of the names of the Magi given below.

<sup>8</sup> So far only a part has been published: *Les Miracles de Jésus: texte éthiopien publié et traduit par S. GREBAUT*, I–III, PO 12:4 (1916), pp. 551–652; 14:5 (1920), pp. 771–844; 17:4 (1924), pp. 783–857. For general information on this text see W. WITAKOWSKI, *The Miracles of Jesus: an Ethiopian apocryphal gospel*, *Apocrypha* 6 (1995), pp. 225–244.

<sup>9</sup> PO 12:4 (1916), pp. 609–618.

was the image of a virgin girl carrying a shining child”. The Magi, unable to find a star similar to it in their astrological books, consulted *The Books of the Commandments of the Fathers* (መጻሕፍተ ጥንታዊ ስርዓተ ስብከት), also called *The Commandments of Adam to Seth* (ጥንታዊ ስርዓተ ስብከት ለሳድ), and there they found the description of a star which matched what they had seen in the sky. In accordance with what the consulted books related, they travelled to Bethlehem carrying the gifts which their ancestors had brought out from the ‘Mountain of Treasures’ (ደብረ መዛግብት) on which Adam had once lived<sup>10</sup>. The three kings took with them 3000 men, which apparently frightened the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Herod himself. The journey to Bethlehem took two years. We are also told the significance of the gifts: gold for Christ as a king; incense on account of his divine priesthood; and myrrh on account of his death in the flesh, i.e. as the symbol of his human nature. When the Magi were leaving they received from Mary pieces of barley bread for the journey, since, as we are told, she had nothing else to give.

*The Book of the Birth of Our Lady Mary* (መጻሕፍት ለደታ ለማርያም ጳጳሳዊ) is a reworking of the *Protevangelium of James*<sup>11</sup>, translated into Ethiopic some time before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the date of the earliest manuscripts. Here we learn again of the significance of the gifts, differing from the one just mentioned only in the meaning of the myrrh being given on account of Christ’s incarnation (ጥንታዊ ስርዓተ ስብከት), not his death, which confirms the underlying symbolism of myrrh as referring to Christ’s human nature. Then the story goes as in Matthew’s pericope, except that back in their country the Magi told their king that they had got from Jesus a bit of blessed bread, which they had hidden

<sup>10</sup> *Qalēmentos*, a pseudo-apostolic composition attributed to Clement of Rome, the disciple of Peter, says nothing about the Magi, only revealing the origin of the gifts: these were a sort of conjugal gift which Adam gave Eve, to be preserved until the Lord’s Son should come to the world. Adam also determined their significance, identical with what is usually stated; a French transl. by F. NAU, *Littérature éthiopienne pseudo-clémentine*, III: Traduction du Qalēmentos, ROCh 16 (1911), p. 170; a critical edition and an Italian translation is being prepared by ALESSANDRO BAUSI, whose preliminary facsimile edition has already been published: *Il Qalēmentos etiopico: la rivelazione di Pietro a Clemente, i libri 3–7* (Studi Africanistici: Serie Etiopica 2), Napoli 1992.

<sup>11</sup> The Ethiopic text in: *Apocrypha de B. Maria Virgine*, ed. /interpr. M. CHAINE (CSCO SAe I:7 [= 22, 23]), Romae 1909 p. 15,19–16,33 / Latin transl. p. 13f. An English translation in: *Legends of Our Lady Mary, the Perpetual Virgin & Her Mother Hanna*, transl. by E.A.W. BUDGE, London 1922, pp. 122–142. The differences between the Greek text and the Ethiopic are listed by H. ZOTENBERG, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens (gheez et amharique) de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1877, p. 57f.

in the earth. When asked to bring it they started to dig, but then fire blew out from the hole, and therefore, we are told, the magi worship fire<sup>12</sup>.

The *Miracles of Mary* (ተአምረ ፡ ግርዖም ፡) is a collection of stories about the Holy Virgin of mediaeval European origin which reached Ethiopia around the year 1400 via an Arabic translation, in which it was enriched with new episodes<sup>13</sup>. Here it became very popular and was developed by the addition of many new episodes, bringing the total to over 600, many times more than the number in the original collection<sup>14</sup>. Five of them involve the Magi, only one of these having been published.

This published episode contains only a passing mention of the Magi in a passage which belongs to the cycle of the stories about the miraculous icon of Ṣaydnāyā (north of Damascus), representing the Virgin Mary. It effused oil which had the power of healing. We are told that one of the greatest miracles of the icon was its appearance “in the flesh” (ትመስል ፡ ልብስተ ፡ ሥጋ ፡) to the Magi in the cave of Bethlehem<sup>15</sup>.

Episodes no. 305 & 306, according to W. MACOMBER’s list<sup>16</sup>, keep quite close to the Matthaean narrative. Episode 305<sup>17</sup> mentions only the question the Magi asked upon their arrival in Jerusalem, concerning the place where Jesus had been born, on hearing which all Israel, including young and old, men and women, was perturbed. In episode 306<sup>18</sup> the only non-canonical detail is the assertion that it was the archangel Gabriel who told the Magi about the Child’s birth.

In another episode of the *Miracles of Mary*, no. 446<sup>19</sup>, the Magi are called “great kings”. They arrived in Jerusalem together with many soldiers, causing much fear to Herod and the Jews. In Bethlehem they found the Holy Family and

<sup>12</sup> The fragment on the Magi was translated by M. CHAINE also into French: *Le cycle de la Vierge dans les apocryphes éthiopiens, Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale de l’Université de Saint-Joseph* 1 (1906), p. 192f.

<sup>13</sup> E. CERULLI, *La letteratura etiopica*, 3. ed. (Le letterature del mondo), Firenze 1968, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> The “standard” Arabic collection has 74 episodes, G. GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, 1: Die Übersetzungen* (SeT 118), Città del Vaticano 1944, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> E. CERULLI, *Il libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del Medio Evo Latino*, Roma 1943, p. 260f (Ethiopic text) & 263 (Italian transl.).

<sup>16</sup> I wish to thank Professor WILLIAM MACOMBER for the opportunity, during my visit to Collegeville, Minnesota, in June 1995, to consult the manuscript of his work *Miracles of Mary*, soon to be published.

<sup>17</sup> In ms. EMMML 2058 of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., VI, 1982, p. 70), f. 10rb–10rc; EMMML 3031 of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., VIII, 1985, p. 27), f. 20rb–20va.

<sup>18</sup> In ms. EMMML 2058, f. 10va–11va; EMMML 3031, f. 21ra–21vb.

<sup>19</sup> In EMMML 2952, of ca. 1720 (Cat. Coll., VII, 1983, p. 258), f. 25v–26r.

the midwife Salome<sup>20</sup>. The gifts are given the usual significances, known from the *Life of Adam and Eve* or the *Miracles of Jesus*, i.e. as attributes of Jesus as king, God and (mortal) man.

The fourth episode, no. 486<sup>21</sup>, involves the soothsayer Balaam (Num. 22–24). By the power of his divination he had seen a virgin, a child and a star, we are told, 1520 years before Mary was born. Then he summoned all the diviners (መሰግላን ፣) including Zārädäšt, who was his assistant (ረድኡ ፣), showed them the picture of his vision, apparently painted by himself, and told them to follow the star when it should appear, be it in their days or in the days of their descendants. Balaam's picture was subsequently kept in a treasury and shown to every new generation of the Magi, and when an unusual star appeared two years before Jesus's birth, it was compared to the one in Balaam's picture and recognised to be the same. The descendants of Zārädäšt, now also called "kings", took the picture and the gifts and, accompanied by troops, arrived after a two-year journey in Jerusalem. After meeting Herod they moved on, but Herod sent with them a spy. Nevertheless they arrived safely in Bethlehem and handed over the gifts. The star is said to have really been the archangel Gabriel, who also later spoke to them in a dream and diverted them from seeing Herod again.

An angel coming to the Magi to tell them about the Bethlehem event also figures in the *Story of Mary* (ነገረ ፣ ማርያም ፣), another collection of legends concerning Mary, and of unknown age<sup>22</sup> (the text has never been studied and remains unpublished<sup>23</sup>). However the Magi are guided here not by an angel but by a star, which is said to have stopped not over a house but over a cave. Four

<sup>20</sup> This figure, introduced into the apocryphal tradition by the *Protevangelium of James*, is of course known in Ethiopia through the *Book of the Birth of Mary*, and also through the *Miracles of Jesus*.

<sup>21</sup> Known from four manuscripts: EMMML 642, of the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., II, by W.F. MACOMBER, 1976, p. 390), 682, of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. (ibid., p. 440), 3378, of the 19<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., VIII, by GETATCHEW HAILE, 1985, p. 229), 3805, of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., IX, by GETATCHEW HAILE, 1987, p. 161).

<sup>22</sup> The age of the known manuscripts does not go beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> C., but the composition may very well be older. In the introduction to the *Story* it is stated that "in the language of the Egyptians it is called the Little Gospel (... ዘይሰመዶ ፣ በነገረ ፣ ግብጻውያን ፣ ንኡስ ፣ ወንጌል ፣, ...; Brit. Libr. Orient. 603, f. 2ra) and in that of the Ethiopians 'The Story of Mary' ...", which may be an indication of its being translated from Arabic. However, none of the texts on Mary known in Arabic (GRAF, GCAL (above n. 14), pp. 246–257) can be regarded as the *Vorlage* of the *Story*.

<sup>23</sup> The ms. consulted: EMMML 748, from the period 1865–1913 (W.F. MACOMBER, Cat. Coll., III, 1978, p. 56), f.13v–14v.



gifts brought by the Magi are named: gold (ወርቅ ፣), myrrh (ከርቤ ፣), incense (ሰሐን ፣) and frankincense (ዕግን ፣)<sup>24</sup>, but no symbolical explanation is given.

The *Homiliary for the feasts of Mary* (ድርሳነ ፣ ማርያም ፣), a composite collection of a rather late date, based partly on the *Story of Mary*<sup>25</sup>, contains *inter alia* an anonymous homily on the Magi<sup>26</sup>. It introduces Satan as him who spurred Herod to kill the innocents, but does not bring much new material to the episode of the Magi: we learn only that Herod waited two years for the Magi to come to visit him on their way back.

The Magi occur too in the *Homiliary for the feasts of the Archangel Raguel* (ድርሳነ ፣ ራጉኤል ፣), also a composite collection and also of a late date (19<sup>th</sup> century?), but comprising material from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>. The *Homiliary* is made up of an introductory homily in honour of the archangel, and of several short stories connected with both the Old and the New Testaments, called ‘miracles’<sup>28</sup>, in which Raguel plays the main part. One of them states that it was this archangel who appeared to Balaam’s she-ass and then to the soothsayer (መሰግል ፣) himself, forbidding him to curse Israel (Num 22, 21–35). The following episode tells that “by Raguel’s hand” the star of Balaam appeared to the “kings of the magi” (ነገሥተ ፣ ሰብአ ፣ ሰገል ፣), whereupon they set off to Palestine. It was also Raguel who appeared to them in a dream to prevent their return to Herod.

The Ethiopian *Synaxarion*, translated into Ethiopic in the 14<sup>th</sup> century from Arabic, contains an account of the coming of the Magi (both ሰብአ ፣ ሰገል ፣ and መሰግል ፣ are used) on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Tahśās<sup>29</sup>. They were, we learn, of the family of Balaam. They were diviners (ጠንቋልያን ፣) who used to observe stars and draw conclusions from their appearances. God himself taught them this art. In the ‘books of Balaam’ they possessed it was written that “a great king was to be born in Judea” (Num 24,17). The star which appeared to them had the form of a

<sup>24</sup> The Ethiopic Matthew (2, 11) knows only gold (ወርቅ ፣), myrrh (ከርቤ ፣) and incense (ሰሐን ፣).

<sup>25</sup> Cat. Coll., VI, 1982, pp. 504–513; IX (by GETATCHEW HAILE only), 1987, p. 284f.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished; the ms. consulted: EMMML 2461, of 1842 (Cat. Coll., VI, 1982, p. 504), f. 52r.

<sup>27</sup> A. CAQUOT, L’Homélie en l’honneur de l’archange Raguel (Dersāna Rāgu’ēl), *Annales d’Éthiopie* 2 (1957), pp. 91–122.

<sup>28</sup> S. GRÉBAUT (Les miracles de l’archange Ragou’ēl, ROCh 18 (1913), pp. 277–282) published the text from a private collection in Paris. Another ms. consulted: EMMML 41 (of the Church of St. Ragu’el at ጠጥጣጣ, near Addis Ababa) of the late 19<sup>th</sup> C. (Cat. Coll., I, 1982, p. 44), f. 48ra–va.

<sup>29</sup> See above n. 2.



virgin embracing a child in her bosom<sup>30</sup>. They were three kings with a retinue of 30,000 cavalry. By the will of God the Holy Family was in the cave in Bethlehem on that day in order that the Magi should find them. But it was in Nazareth that the Child, now two years old, had been living all the time. The Magi adored the Child and presented the gifts, for which the usual significance is given. After the Magi's return to their country they became preachers and announcers of the appearance of God in the flesh.

The *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* (መጽሐፈ ፡ ምስጢረ ፡ ሰማይ ፡ ወምድር ፡), a composition of the 17<sup>th</sup> century of partly apocalyptic character, provides only a marginal mention of the Magi, stating that it was the archangel Michael, in the form of the star, who guided them<sup>31</sup>.

Traditions about the Magi may even be found in less probable places, as for instance some of the *Säwasəw* (ሰዋሰው ፡). The texts thus titled are usually grammars of Ge'ez, or Ge'ez–Amharic vocabularies, but some of them contain “difficult” words which need some sort of explanation (not necessarily a simple rendering in Amharic), and other pieces of information of typically apocryphal character, like the measure of the arms of the Cross, or the names of the nails with which Jesus was nailed to the Cross. In one *Säwasəw* (Ms. EMMML 2849, f. 69ra) also names of the Magi, in addition to those of the shepherds (anonymous in Lk 2, 8–20), can be found. These are listed below in table 1 of the names of the Magi<sup>32</sup>.

Finally we have to consider *Tərgwame Wängel* (ትርጓሜ ፡ ወንጌል ፡), i.e. *The Commentary on the Gospel*. In fact two different works are so titled, both unpublished.

A fuller title of one of them is *The Commentary on the Holy Gospel from the words of many teachers, who by their teaching have enlightened the Church* (ትርጓሜ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ዘእምቃተ ፡ ብዙ-ኃን ፡ መምህራን ፡ እለ ፡ አብርሃም ፡ በትምህርቶሙ ፡ ለቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ henceforth: *The Catena Gospel Commentary*). R.W. COWLEY identified this *Commentary* as “the Geez recension of the Coptic–Arabic gospel catena”<sup>33</sup>. It is not later than the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as the date

<sup>30</sup> Ethiopic text with a French transl. *Le Synaxaire éthiopien...* ed. S. GRÉBAUT, (see above n. 3) p. 89; E.A.W. BUDGE's transl., (ibid.), p. 421.

<sup>31</sup> *Le livre des mystères du ciel et de la terre*, texte éthiopien publ. et trad. par J. PERRUCHON (PO 1:1), Paris 1903, p. 28; an English transl.: *The Book of the Mysteries of Heavens and Earth and other works of Bakhayla Mika'el (Zosimas)*, ed. E.A.W. BUDGE, Oxford 1935, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> No information on the significance of the gifts is provided.

<sup>33</sup> COWLEY, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation...* (see above n. 1), p. 47.

of the earliest manuscript indicates<sup>34</sup>. It is said to be compiled from various commentators, and John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus and other Fathers appear as authorities. In the scholion on the pericope of *Matthew 2* we find that the Magi, having travelled for two years, came to Bethlehem on the day Jesus was born. The star which led them “from the cities of Persia” contained an image of a woman and her child, on whose face (sic!: በገጽ ፡ ውላቱ ፡ ሕፃን ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ ...) it was written: “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” The father of the Magi was Zärädäš<sup>35</sup>, a descendant of Balaam, whose prophecy on “the star from Jacob” (Num 24,17) is quoted.

The significance of the gifts is the usual one. New is the story of the way the Magi obtained them. Originally these were God’s gifts to Adam presented to him when he was expelled from the paradise. Together with Adam’s body Noah brought them into the ark, and after the flood they were kept in Jerusalem, from which they were taken into exile after the city’s fall. In Babylon they were given as gifts to idols, and finally the Magi acquired them.

The other *Tərgwame Wängel* has been identified, also by R.W. COWLEY, as the Ge‘ez version of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s *Commentary on the Gospel*<sup>36</sup>. Abu’l Faraj ‘Abdallāh Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib († 1043) was an East Syrian (“Nestorian”) philosopher and physician, and secretary to two successive *katholikoi* of his Church. His multiple interests included biblical studies, and he is known *inter alia* for his voluminous commentaries, including one on the Four Gospels<sup>37</sup>. Finished in 1018, it soon found its way into the hands of West-Syrian (Monophysite)

<sup>34</sup> EMMML 2088 (16<sup>th</sup> C., Cat. Coll., VI, 1982, p. 159); three other manuscripts are known: EMMML 2797 (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> C., Cat. Coll., VII, 1983, p. 140), EMMML 2068 (18<sup>th</sup> C., Cat. Coll., VI, 1982, p. 138), and British Library Add. 16220 from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> C., A. DILLMANN, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum orientalium qui in Museo Britannico asservantur, Pars tertia codices Æthiopicos amplectens*, Londini 1847, p. 10f, ms. XI.

<sup>35</sup> So EMMML 2068, f. 7vb; a variant in EMMML 2088, f. 9ra and EMMML 2797, f. 8vb: Zärädäš, i.e. written with the Amharic character ገ።.

<sup>36</sup> COWLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 48; he used Ms. BL Orient. 732 of the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> C. (WRIGHT, Cat. BM, p. 200f).

<sup>37</sup> The Arabic original was published in an uncritical edition by YŪSUF MANQURIŪS, *Tafsīr al-Mašriqī*, 2 vols., Cairo 1908–10, (non vidi). R.W. COWLEY (*op. cit.*, p. 53, the stemma) suggests, probably on the basis of the colophon in the Ms. BL Orient. 732 (WRIGHT, Cat. BM, p. 201a), that the original was Syriac. Nothing however is known of the Syriac text, nor, in fact, of any other composition of this author written in Syriac. In his literary activities Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib seems to have used only Arabic. It is quite certain however that he used material in Syriac, which he must have translated in order to introduce it into his *Tafsīr* in large excerpts. The matter requires further investigation.

redactors<sup>38</sup>, and in this version it eventually reached Ethiopia. According to a colophon in Ms. BL Orient. 732 it was translated into Ethiopic in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl, i.e. in 1522/23<sup>39</sup>. The manuscripts do not seem to contain the name of the author, and since Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib begins his comments on successive Gospel verses<sup>40</sup> by quoting John Chrysostom, in the catalogues the commentary is sometimes attributed to this Church Father<sup>41</sup>. However, it is also possible that in Ethiopic tradition the author was called “John Chrysostom the Eastern” (Yoḥannəs Afä Wärq Məśraqawi), as the colophon in BL Or. 732<sup>42</sup> may suggest.

Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib collected in his *Commentary* several opinions on the number of the Magi, on their origin and on other circumstances concerning their coming to Bethlehem: Yoḥannəs Afä Wärq (John Chrysostom or Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib) asks the question from which people they were, and collects some answers: Awsanyos (i.e. Eusebius<sup>43</sup> of Caesarea) and Gregory of Nusia<sup>44</sup> say that they were from the progeny of Balaam, Jacob of Roha<sup>45</sup> – from the tribe of Elam, the son of Shem. Others say that they were from the progeny of the kings of Sheba and Seba<sup>46</sup> (Ps. 72,10), but the correct opinion is that they were from Persia. As to their number, some say there were three of them as they brought three gifts, and that they had 1000 followers. Jacob of Roha says however that they were twelve, with more than 1200 followers. According to others they were eight, because of the prophet Micah’s saying (5, 5): “... seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men”. Still others say that they comprised three of royal descent and nine grandees of their kingdom<sup>47</sup>. The king who sent them was called Fəršabur

<sup>38</sup> G. GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, 2: Die Schriftsteller bis zur Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts* (SeT 133), Città del Vaticano 1947, pp. 166–168.

<sup>39</sup> WRIGHT, *Cat. BM*, p. 201a.

<sup>40</sup> As the part concerning the *Gospel of Matthew* is the largest, it is sometimes transmitted separately, e.g. that in the ms. BL Add. 16248, DILLMANN’s *Catalogus ...* (above n. 34), ms. no. XII.

<sup>41</sup> E.g.: W.F. MACOMBER, *Cat. Coll.*, II, 1976, nr. 368, p. 81.

<sup>42</sup> His full name in Ethiopic is Gäbrä ʿĒgziʾabəḥer (transl. of ʿAbdallāh) Ab Yoḥannəs Afä Wärq Məśraqawi, Ms. BL Orient. 732, f. 206, WRIGHT, *Cat. BM*, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> The letter N (in Awsanyos) must be a mistake for B (in Eusebius), easily made in Arabic script.

<sup>44</sup> Nyssa.

<sup>45</sup> See below.

<sup>46</sup> Ms. EMMML 368 (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> C., W.F. MACOMBER, *Cat. Coll.*, II, 1976, p. 81), f. 14va:

አሰባ : ወሳባ :

<sup>47</sup> Their names are listed below in table 2.

(ፍርሻቡር ፣)<sup>48</sup>. They had 4000 carriers for their travelling equipment, but having heard that there was hunger in Jerusalem they left their troops at the Euphrates in Raqqa, and only the twelve chiefs with 1000 troops came to Bethlehem.

We may now ask what are the sources of the traditions we meet in the Ethiopic texts just reviewed. Some of the apocryphal narremes found in the texts are known from Christian literatures in other languages, as for instance the significance of the gifts (in *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Miracles of Jesus*, *The Book of the Birth of Mary*, *The Miracles of Mary*, *The Synaxarion*, *The Catena Gospel Commentary*) which is attested already in the second century in Irenaeus's (c. 130–c. 200) *Against the Heresies* (III,9:2)<sup>49</sup> and Origen's (c. 185–c. 254) *Contra Celsum* (I,60)<sup>50</sup> and is quite common in patristic literature.

Also the connection between the prophecy of Balaam and the Magi (in *The Miracles of Mary*, *The Homiliary for the feasts of Raguel*, *The Synaxarion*, Ibn at-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Gospel*) is known from many other sources, both Western and Oriental. The earliest witnesses to this tradition are Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165) in *Dialogues with Trypho* (106,4)<sup>51</sup> and again Irenaeus (*ibid.*) and Origen (*ibid.*, and in *Homilies on Numbers* 13,7; 18,4<sup>52</sup>).

Another tradition, that of the Magi being kings (in *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Miracles of Jesus*, *The Miracles of Mary*, *The Homiliary for the feasts of Raguel*, *The Synaxarion*, Ibn at-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Gospel*, and on a miniature in Ms. Paris d'Abbadie 105<sup>53</sup>), based originally on Ps. 72,10 and Isaiah 60,3, is in fact one of the most popular non-gospel motifs, found practically throughout the Christian world: earliest in the West in Tertullian's (c.

<sup>48</sup> EMMI 368, f. 14vb.

<sup>49</sup> IRENEE DE LYON, *Contre les hérésies: Livre III*, ed. A. ROUSSEAU & L. DOUTRELEAU, t. II (SChr 211), Paris 1974, p. 106f.

<sup>50</sup> ORIGENES, *Werke*, Bd. 1, hrsg. v. P. KOETSCHAU (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte), Leipzig 1899, p. 111; ORIGEN, *Contra Celsum*, transl. by H. CHADWICK, Cambridge 1965, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> IUSTINI MARTYRIS *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, ed. M. MARCOVICH (Patristische Texte und Studien 47), Berlin 1997, p. 253; an Engl. transl. in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. by A. ROBERTS & J. DONALDSON, vol. 1, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987, p. 252; a German tr.: Des heiligen Philosophen und Martyrers Justinus *Dialog mit dem Juden Tryphon*, übers. v. PH. HAEUSSER (Bibliothek der Kirchenväter), Kempten 1917, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup> ORIGENE, *Homélie sur les Nombres*, ed. A. MÉHAT (SChr 29), Paris 1951, pp. 277f & 370. See too: E. KIRSCHBAUM, *Der Prophet Balaam und die Anbetung der Weisen*, *Römische Quartalschrift* 49 (1954), pp. 129–171.

<sup>53</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Psalter of Bølen Sägäd, from 1465, fol. 5v; see fig. 2.

160–c. 225) *Adversus Iudaeos* (9,12)<sup>54</sup> and Caesarius of Arles's (c. 470–542) *Homily 134*<sup>55</sup>, and in the Orient in the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (45,18f) of the fourth/sixth century<sup>56</sup>.

When we read that the star stopped over a cave, not a house, as in the case of the *Story of Mary*, we may assume the influence of the *Protevangelium of James* (cap. 21), although, oddly enough, the cave does not occur in *The Book of the Birth of Mary*, which is the Ethiopic reworking of that apocryphon.

The two-year journey of the Magi to Bethlehem, as in *The Homiliary on the feasts of Mary*, is most probably an inference based on Matthew's report that Herod killed innocents up to two years old. The author of *The Story of Mary* says however that Herod waited two years for the Magi to come back to him, which means that according to him they arrived in Bethlehem directly after the Child's birth. Other authors however transfer these two years to the period before Jesus's birth, as is the case in *The Catena Gospel Commentary*. This is met with in many non-Ethiopic sources for instance in the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (45,2)<sup>57</sup>.

There are also elements of tradition which are peculiar to Ethiopia. To this category belongs the name of the archangel who guided the Magi, given as Gabriel, Michael or Raguel.

Mainly Ethiopic and very various are also the names of the Magi which can be found in some of the texts reviewed, as well as in short notices in various manuscripts, and even as inscriptions in miniatures. Nine sets of the names of the Magi are known, which we list in table 1 below.

<sup>54</sup> Q.S.F. TERTULLIANI, *Adversus Iudaeos*, hrsg. v. H. TRÄNKLE, Wiesbaden 1964, p. 22; an Engl. transl. in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, Edinburgh & Grand Rapids, 1989, p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> J.-P. MIGNE, *Patrologia Latina* 39 (1845), col. 2018, among the writings of Augustine (*sermo* 139). It was discovered that this and many other *sermones* had been falsely attributed to Augustine, having in fact been composed by Caesarius of Arles. However this homily (139, *De Epiphania Domini IX: Dies ista est festivitas*) has not been published in the new edition of his writings: Sancti CAESARII ARELATENSIS *Sermones*, ed. G. MORIN (*Corpus Christianorum: series latina* 103–104), Turnholti 1953.

<sup>56</sup> The Syriac text & a French transl.: *La caverne des trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, éd. (& trad.) par SU-MIN RI (CSCO 486–487, Scr Syri 207–208), Lovanii 1987, p. 368f; transl. p. 142f.; an Engl. transl.: *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, transl. by E.A.W. BUDGE, London 1927, p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> SU-MIN RI's ed., p. 360, tr. p. 140; BUDGE's tr. p. 203.

Table 1: Names of the three Magi:

Ethiopic texts	1 <sup>st</sup> name	2 <sup>nd</sup> name	3 <sup>rd</sup> name
<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i> <sup>58</sup>	Ḥor (king of Persia) ሐር ፡	Bāsānaṭər (king of Saba) በሰናጥር ፡	Qārsudan (king of the East) ቀርሱዳን ፡
<i>Book of the Birth of Mary</i> <sup>59</sup>	Tānisuram ተነሱራም ፡	Mālikä መሊክ ፡	Şisəs(ə)ba ጸሴስባ ፡
Miniature in Ms. Of Dābrä ሁጵፍኑስ, Hayq (Gospel book) <sup>60</sup>	Natisuram (incense) ናቲሱራም ፡	Milkun (gold) ማሊክን ፡	Şisəsəba (frankincense <sup>61</sup> ) ጸሴስባ ፡
Miniature in Ms. d'Abbadie 105 (Psalter) <sup>62</sup>	Mənsuram ምንሱራም ፡	Likon ሊክን ፡	Bädsiba በድሲባ ፡
Homiliary for the feasts of Mary ( <i>Darsañä Maryam</i> ) <sup>63</sup>	Awsən (gold) አውሰን ፡	Albətar (frank-incense) አልባታር ፡	Kasəd (myrrh) ካሰድ ፡
<i>Sāwasəw</i> <sup>64</sup>	Qādasər (gold) ቀዳሰር ፡	Māliḥo (incense) መሊካ ፡	Niləs (myrrh) ኒሊስ ፡
<i>Catena Gospel Commentary</i> <sup>65</sup> , “Coptic” names	Bäʾanti-Suram <sup>66</sup> በአንቲ ፡ ሱራም ፡	Mālikun መሊክን ፡	Bädisəs(ə)ba በዲስባ ፡
<i>Catena Gospel Commentary</i> , “Greek” names <sup>67</sup>	Gäspär ገሰጳር ፡	Bälṭasir <sup>68</sup> በልታሲር ፡	Malkəyos ማልክዮስ ፡
<i>Commentary on Matthew 2,1–23</i> <sup>69</sup> , according to the “Franks” (አፍርንጋውያን ፡)	Gäspär ገሰጳር ፡	Beltäzar ቤልተዳር ፡	Beləstor ቤልስቶር ፡

<sup>58</sup> TRUMPP's ed. (above n. 5), p. 168, 20–22, MALAN's tr. p. 205.

<sup>59</sup> CHAINE's ed. (above n. 11), p. 15, 20f / tr. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Gospel Book of Krəstos Täsfanä, fol. 18v, from ca. 1280–90; see fig. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Oddly enough none of the Magi is said to bring myrrh.

<sup>62</sup> See above n. 53, and fig. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ms. EMMML 3998, (19<sup>th</sup> C., GETATCHEW HAILE, *Cat. Coll.*, IX, 1987, p. 284), f. 48vb–49ra; cf. the names reported by HIOB LUDOLF, *Lexicon Aethiopicum–Latinum*, London 1661, Appendix, col. 339 (inaccessible to me): Aunoson, Albytar, and Kyssäd; B.M. METZGER, *Names for the nameless in the New Testament: a study in growth of Christian tradition*, in: *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, ed. by P. GRANFIELD & J.A. JUNGSMANN, Bd. I, Münster, 1970, p. 82.

<sup>64</sup> Ms. EMMML 2849, (18<sup>th</sup> C., *Cat. Coll.*, VII, 1983, p. 197), f. 69ra.

<sup>65</sup> Ms. EMMML 2797, (17/18<sup>th</sup> C., *Cat. Coll.*, VII, 1983, p. 140), fol. 8va–b; the *Commentary* also specifies the age of the Magi: they were 60, 40 and 20 years old, respectively.

<sup>66</sup> Variants: EMMML 2068, (see above n. 34), fol. 7vb: Bäʾatti Suram; EMMML 2088 (n. 34), fol. 9ra: Bäʾantisuram.

<sup>67</sup> Ms. EMMML 2797, fol. 8va–b.

<sup>68</sup> Variants: EMMML 2068, *ibid.*, and 2088, *ibid.*: Bälṭäser.



The set of the *Life of Adam and Eve* seems to depend (indirectly) on the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, where they are called “Hormo of Ramhodri, the king of Persia, Azdayr, the king of Saba, and Porzdan<sup>70</sup>, the king of Sheba of the East”<sup>71</sup>. The two sets of names in the *Catena Gospel Commentary* and in the manuscript from the Lake Tana (Rema) show a knowledge of the European names of the Three Kings. The rest of the names are Ethiopic, but it does not seem probable that they derive from one archetype only<sup>72</sup>.

There are still other elements of tradition which are neither local Ethiopian nor common Christian. Here we shall concentrate on five of them:

1. the form of the star: a column of light and a virgin girl with a child in the middle of it occur in: *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Miracles of Jesus*, *The Synaxarion* and *The Catena Gospel Commentary*.
2. the origin of the gifts, namely from the Cave of Treasures where Adam lived, in: *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Miracles of Jesus*<sup>73</sup>;
3. the Magi’s consultation of ancient books in their possession: *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Miracles of Jesus*, and *The Synaxarion*;
4. Zārādāšt as the ancestor of the Magi: *The Miracles of Mary* (no. 486), *The Catena Gospel Commentary*;
5. many thousand men forming the retinue of the Magi: *The Miracles of Jesus*, *The Miracles of Mary* (no. 446), *The Synaxarion*.

The Virgin with the Child visible in the star comes from the *Cave of Treasures*, a sixth century Syriac apocryphon, with the roots in the fourth century, to both the Old and the New Testaments (of the category mentioned above in connection with *The Life of Adam and Eve*), where we read in practically identical words that in the star which appeared to the Magi there was “a maiden carrying a child, and a crown was set upon his head”<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Ms. Tānāsee 91 = Rēmā 2, f. 203va; E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, *Äthiopische Handschriften vom Tānāsee 2: Die Handschriften von Dabra Māryām und von Rēmā* (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, 20:2), Wiesbaden 1977, p. 119.

<sup>70</sup> From which the name Qārsudan comes. The difference in the initial letters can be explained by a very close similarity between “F” (used in Arabic to render Syriac “P”) and “Q” in Arabic writing.

<sup>71</sup> SU-MIN RI, *Caverne* (see above, n. 56), p. 369 (Syr. text), 143 (tr.); these are the names as transmitted in the West Syriac manuscripts, those of the East Syriac ones show somewhat less similarity with the Ethiopic forms, being closer to a supposed original.

<sup>72</sup> For the names provided by aṭ-Ṭayyib, see below.

<sup>73</sup> Cp. too above n. 10 on *Qālemāñtos*.

<sup>74</sup> E.A.W. BUDGE’s transl. (above, n. 56), p. 203f; SU-MIN RI, *Caverne*, p. 362,1f / 140 (ch. 45, 3).



The idea of the gifts originally coming from the Cave of Treasures is of course also taken from the same apocryphon (5,17)<sup>75</sup>.

The ancient books which the Magi consulted are in *The Miracles of Jesus* said to contain the *Commandments of Adam to his son Seth*. The closest parallel to this can be found in another Syriac apocryphon, *The Story of the Magi*, which is known only from a copy contained in the *Chronicle* of Pseudo–Dionysius of Tel–Maḥrē (also known as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*), of the eighth century<sup>76</sup>. The *Story* itself is older however, and must have existed in some form already three centuries earlier, since there exists a Latin resumé of its contents, called *Liber apocryphum nomine Seth*, preserved in the commentary on the *Gospel of Matthew*, the so–called *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, a work of an anonymous Arian author writing in the first half of the fifth century<sup>77</sup>. The Syriac *Story of the Magi* tells *inter alia* of the *Books of Commandments* received by Seth from Adam which then were transmitted through the generations of Seth’s descendants down to the Magi of the epoch of Christ<sup>78</sup>.

Zārādāšt, or Zardošt, as he is called in Syriac sources, is none other than Zarathustra or Zoroaster. An apocryphal *Prophecy of Zardosht* on the coming of Christ to the world is present in two East Syrian<sup>79</sup> works: in the *Scholion* (7,21), a commentary on the Bible by Theodore BarKōnī (eighth century)<sup>80</sup>, and in

<sup>75</sup> SU–MIN RI, *Caverne*, p. 42f / 18f; BUDGE, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo–Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, t. I, ed. (& interpr.) J.–B. CHABOT (CSCO SS III:1 = [CSCO 91, 121, SS 43, 66]), Parisii 1927 (text), Lovanii 1949 (Latin transl.), pp. 57,1–91,3 / 45–70; an Italian transl. by G. LEVI DELLA VIDA in: U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, *Le leggende orientali sui Magi evangelici* (SeT 163), Città del Vaticano 1952, pp. 27–49.

<sup>77</sup> Falsely attributed to John Chrysostom and published thus in *Patrologia Graeca* in a volume of his writings, PG 56, col. 636f; cp. J. VAN BANNING’s introduction to his planned edition of the work: *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum: Praefatio* (Corpus Christianorum: series latina, 87B), Turnhout 1988, p. Vf; and his article on *Opus* in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 25 (1995), pp. 304–307.

<sup>78</sup> *Ktābē d–puqdānē*, also called the *Books of Hidden Mysteries* (*Ktābē d–(°)rāzē ksayyā*), *Chronicle* of Ps.–DIONYSIUS (above n. 76), p. 58,23 and 59,8, respectively.

<sup>79</sup> This is the more interesting as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is Monophysite, and as such more likely to have preserved compositions coming from the Monophysite circle of Oriental traditions.

<sup>80</sup> THEODORUS BAR KONI, *Liber scholiorum*, ed. A. SCHER, I–II (CSCO SS 2:65–66 [= CSCO 55, 69, SS 19, 26]), Parisii 1910–1912; THÉODORE BAR KONI, *Livre des scolies* (*recension de Séert*), trad. par R. HESPEL & R. DRAGUET, I–II (CSCO 431–2, SS 187–188), Lovanii 1981–82, vol. II, pp. 74,3–75,19 /tr. 52f.

Solomon of Basra's (13<sup>th</sup> century) *Book of the Bee* (ch. 37)<sup>81</sup>, but in an abridged form it is present also in the *Bible commentary* of Isho'dad of Merv (ninth century)<sup>82</sup>, as well as in West Syrian exegetical works, e.g. in Dionysius BarṢlibhī's († 1171) *Commentary on the Gospels*<sup>83</sup>. Zardosht as the prophet of Christ's birth figures also in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*<sup>84</sup>.

Numerous troops accompanying the Magi-kings are also known from Syriac literature. This information can be found in the *Commentary on the Gospels* by Dionysius BarṢlibhī<sup>85</sup>, and is repeated by Michael the Elder (twelfth century) in his *Chronicle*<sup>86</sup>. These two authors also write about most of the troops being left in Raqqa because of the news about the hunger in Palestine.

As far as the origin of the traditions contained in the *Gospel Commentary* of Yoḥannəs Afä Wārḳ Məsraqawi, the East Syrian Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, is concerned, the matter is clear: he had of course drawn upon Syriac commentary tradition, a connection made clear by R.W. COWLEY. More research however is needed on Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib's sources, and here only a few points, directly referring to Syriac sources, can be specified.

Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib provides twelve names of the Magi, and COWLEY (after B.M. METZGER<sup>87</sup>) drew attention to the parallel set of twelve names in Solomon of Basra's *Book of the Bee*. The latter lived however two centuries later than Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, and although *The Bee* is a very valuable witness to the tradition the actual source in this case, though indirect, is the apocryphal *Story of the Magi* preserved in the previously mentioned *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-

<sup>81</sup> [SOLOMON OF BASRA], *The Book of the Bee*, the Syriac text edited ... with an English translation by E.A.W. BUDGE, Oxford 1886, pp. PṬ-Ṣ [= 89-90] (Syr.), 81f (Engl.).

<sup>82</sup> *The Commentaries of ISHO'DAD OF MERV*, Bishop of Ḥadatha (c. 850) in Syriac and English, ed. and transl. by M. D. GIBSON (*Horae Semiticae* 6 & 5), Cambridge 1911, vol. II (Syr.), pp. LB [= 32], 14 – LG [= 33], 2; vol. I (Engl.), p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> DIONYSII BAR ṢALĪBĪ, *Commentarii in Evangelia*, [part I] ed. (& tr.) I. SEDLÁČEK & I.-B. CHABOT (CSCO SS 2:98 [= 15]), Paris 1906 (Syriac text), & (CSCO SS 2:98 [= 16]), Romae 1906 (Latin tr.), I, 94,4-11 / 71.

<sup>84</sup> Arabic text together with an Italian tr.: M.E. PROVERA, *Il Vangelo arabo dell'Infanzia secondo il ms. Laurenziano Orientale (n. 387)* (Quaderni de "La Terra Santa"), Gerusalemme 1973; p. 70 (Arabic), 71 (Italian); French tr. in *Évangiles apocryphes, II: L'Évangile de l'enfance: rédactions syriaques, arabe et arméniennes*, trad. et annotées par P. PEETERS (Textes et documents pour l'étude historique du christianisme), Paris 1914, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> DIONYSII BAR ṢALĪBĪ, *Commentarii* (see above n. 83), I, p. 90,2f / 68.

<sup>86</sup> *Chronique de MICHEL LE SYRIEN, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, éd. et trad. en français par J.-B. CHABOT, t. I-IV, Paris 1899-1924 (repr. Bruxelles 1963), p. 89b, 31-33 / tr. I, 141.

<sup>87</sup> METZGER, Names for the nameless... (above n. 63), pp. 73-99.

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Maḥrē<sup>88</sup>. In table 2 below the Ethiopic names (from two manuscripts) and the Syriac names from the *Story* in Pseudo–Dionysius’s *Chronicle*, and *The Bee* of Solomon of Basra (where they are vocalised) are juxtaposed<sup>89</sup>. Due to some early error in Ethiopic tradition, or perhaps in the Arabic manuscript from which the *Commentary* was translated, there are only 11 names provided.

Table 2: The names of the twelve Magi

	Ethiopic version of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s <i>Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew</i>	Syriac tradition <sup>90</sup>	
N <sup>o</sup>	Ms. BL Orient 731 <sup>91</sup>	Ms. EMMI 378	<i>Story of the Magi</i> Solomon of Basra <sup>92</sup>
1.	Hədwänäd s. <sup>95</sup> Erṭabän	Hədwänd s. Arṭabän	ZHRWNDD s. ʿ <sup>9</sup> RṬBN
2.	Šädäf s. Käd fär	Šädäf s. Käd fär	ʿWŠTZP s. GWDPR
3.	Aršak s. Mähädäs	Aršak s. Mähädäs	ʿRŠK s. MHRWQ
4.	Zurwänäd s. Wər wänd	Zurwänd s. Wər wänd	ZRWND s. WDWD
			Zarwandād (ZRWND) s. ʿArṭbän (ʿRṬBN) Gušnäsāph (GWŠNSP) / GWŠYSP s. Gundpr (GWNDPR) / GWNPR ʿĀrēšākh (ʿRŠK) s. Miḥāroq (MYHRWQ) Zarwändād (ZRWND) s. Warzwād (WRZWD) / Warzwād (WR(W)ZWD) / WRWZD

<sup>88</sup> *Chronicon Pseudo–Dionysianum...* (above n. 76), pp. 57, 23–58,2.

<sup>89</sup> For the full list of the names of the Twelve Magi in Syriac tradition, containing also those from Moshe BarKēphā, Theodore BarKōnī, Dionysius BarŠlibhī and Michael the Elder (the Syrian), see W. WITAKOWSKI, *The Magi in Syriac Tradition*, *Vox Patrum*, 1999, forthcoming.

<sup>90</sup> According to COWLEY (*op. cit.*, p. 48, n. 11) a similar list is contained in the exegetical homilies of the West Syrian author Moshe BarKēphā, J.F. COAKLEY, *The Homilies of Moše bar Kēpha on the early chapters of the Gospels*, Cambridge 1977 (unpublished dissertation). The names of the twelve kings are however published by W. WRIGHT, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, vol. II, Cambridge 1901, p. 801.

<sup>91</sup> COWLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>92</sup> *The Bee*, (above n. 81), p. ŠG [= 93], 5–10, with unvocalised variants.

<sup>93</sup> The abbreviation “s.” = “son of”.

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5.	Arʾayahum s. Kāsri	Arʾayahu s. Kāsri	ʾRYHW s. KSRW	ʾIryāho (ʾYRYHW) s. Kesro (KSRW) / KWSRW
6.	Arṭaḥašt s. Ḥulit	Arṭaḥašat s. Ḥulit	ʾRṬḤŠYŠṬ s. ḤWYLT	ʾArṭaḥšišṭ (ʾRṬḤŠYŠṬ) s. Ḥolity (ḤWLYTY)
7.	Ašnän Buzən s. Šäsrun	Ašnän Buzən s. Šäsrun	ʾŠṬNBWZN s. ŠYŠRWN	ʾŠṬWN <sup>c</sup> BWDN / ʾ Ēšto/unā <sup>c</sup> bo (ʾŠṬWN <sup>c</sup> BW) / ʾŠṬ <sup>c</sup> BDWN s. Šišron (ŠYŠRWN)
8.	Aduq s. Ḥahum	Aduq s. Ḥahum	MHRWQ s. HWMM	Mēhāroq (MHRWQ) s. Ḥuhām (HWHM)
9.	Aḥširəs s. Säniban	Aḥšəras s. Sanibän	ʾḤŠRŠ s. ŠḤBN	ʾAḥširēš (ʾḤŠYRŠ) s. Ḥašbn (ḤŠBN)
10.	Särduḥ s. Bəldan	Särduḥ s. Bəldan	NŠRDYḤ s. BLDN	Šardälāḥ (ŠRDLḤ) s. BLDN / B <sup>c</sup> LZN / <sup>c</sup> LWN
11.	Märduḥ s. Nil	Märduḥ s. Nil	MRWDK s. BYL	Mrodākh (MRWDK) s. BLDRN / BYL / BYLDRN
12.			HWRMZD s. SNṬRWQ <sup>94</sup>	Hormizdād (HWRMYZDD) / HWRMYZD s. Siṭḥro/uq (SYṬRWQ) / Sanṭroq (SNṬRWQ) / SYṬRWG

Some of the names are clearly based on those of the Persian kings (Artaban: 1; Arsaces: 3; Artaxerxes: 6; Xerxes: 9) with Babylonian additions (Marduk son of Bel: 11). The forms of the names in Ethiopic, garbled as compared to the Syriac forms, can be explained by the imperfection of the Arabic chain of transmission, through manuscripts in which apparently many diacritical points were lost (e.g. Bel > Nil).

The name of the king who sent the Magi is stated by Ibn at-Ṭayyib to be Fəršabur. This too comes from Syriac exegetical tradition, where it is spelled

<sup>94</sup> Hormizdad son of Sanatruq has been lost in Ethiopic tradition. In Syriac he was named in third place.

Pir-Šabur<sup>95</sup>. The earliest attestation can be found in the *Commentary on the Four Gospels* by the East Syrian Ishoʿdad of Merv (ninth century)<sup>96</sup>, but it occurs also in the *Commentary* of Dionysius BarŠlibhī<sup>97</sup>.

Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib referred to Jacob of Roha, whose opinion on the Magi being twelve and coming from the tribe of Elam he reported. Jacob of Roha is better known as Jacob of Edessa († 708), ‘Roha’ being the Ethiopic form of the name of this city, the main centre of Syriac Christianity (Syr. ʾUrhāy > Ar. ar-Ruhā > Eth. Roha). Jacob wrote on the Magi in one of his letters to John the Stylite<sup>98</sup>.

We may conclude that the Ethiopian tradition on the Magi, of great variety in itself, drew, in addition to its own imaginative impetus, upon a number of external sources with roots in early Christian literature from the second century on. Although many intermediate stages remain unknown and further research is needed in order to establish them, there is little doubt that for a large number of the elements of the Ethiopic tradition on the Magi the ultimate source is Syriac apocryphal and exegetical literature, both Eastern and Western.

#### Summary

The paper traces various extra-biblical strains of tradition concerning the Magi (*MT* 2,1–12) in Geʿez literature. The Magi (*mäsäggalan, säbʿa sägäl*) are present in various Ethiopic compositions, both translated from other languages and original. The compositions discussed include *inter alia* apocryphal literature (*The life of Adam and Eve, The Miracles of Jesus, The Book of the Birth of Mary, The Miracles of Mary*), homilies (that for *the feasts of Mary*, and that for *the feasts of the Archangel Raguel*), and two commentaries on the Gospel.

The tradition, as seen in the texts reviewed, is not consistent, and various stories, sometimes contradicting each other, are told about the Magi. Those strains of tradition which are not of local origin (as are the names of the Magi), come from a number of external sources with roots in early Christian literature. Some elements of this tradition (the Virgin with the Child visible in the star, the origin of the gifts from the Cave of Treasures, Zārädāšt as the ancestor of the Magi, and many thousand men forming their retinue) can be traced back to Syriac apocryphal and exegetical literature.

<sup>95</sup> I.e. PYRŠBWR. The name is of Iranian origin too, and means ‘Old Shapur’, cf. PH. GIGNOUX, *Noms propres sassanides en moyen-persé épigraphique* (Iranisches Personennamenbuch, II: Mitteliranische Personennamen, 2), Wien 1986, p. 148f.

<sup>96</sup> ISHOʿDAD OF MERV, *Commentaries*, (above n. 82), p. KW [= 26], transl. p. 16.

<sup>97</sup> DIONYSII BAR ŠALIBĪ, *Commentarii*, (above n. 83), p. 89,24, tr. p. 68.

<sup>98</sup> Add. 12172; W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since the year 1838*, vol. II, London 1871, p. 604a; the relevant fragment was published by E. NESTLE, *Brevis linguae Syriacae grammatica, litteratura, chrestomathia cum glossario* (Porta linguarum orientalium, 5), Carlsruhe 1881, p. PG–PD [= 83f].





Fig. 1: The Magi, Gospel Book of Krastos Täsfanä, Däbrä Ḥṣṭifanos, Hayq, fol. 18v.

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Fig. 2: The Magi, Psalter of Bølen Sägäd, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. d'Abbadie 105, fol. 5v.