

The Revelation of the Magi

A summary and introduction

by Brent Landau

The *Revelation of the Magi* (*Rev. Magi*) is a pseudepigraphical early Christian writing purporting to be the personal testimony of the Magi (better known as the “Wise Men” or the “Three Kings”) on the events surrounding the coming of Christ. It is by far the longest apocryphon devoted to these figures, and contains several unique interpretations of the biblical Magi story (Matt 2:1–12) not seen elsewhere in early Christian biblical interpretation. In *Rev. Magi* there are twelve Magi, or possibly more, in contrast to the traditional enumeration of three. They reside in a semi-mythical land in the Far East called “Shir”; and perhaps most startlingly, the Magi’s star is actually Jesus Christ himself, who transforms from star to human and back again throughout the course of the narrative. Although the only complete version of *Rev. Magi* is preserved in Syriac, a much briefer Latin summary of the same basic narrative exists in an ancient commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

Contents

Rev. Magi is a lengthy text—about 6,500 words in Syriac. The narrative will be summarized briefly here, and a much more detailed summary will follow the introduction. *Rev. Magi* is summarized in this volume instead of translated because it was published recently in English by a trade press in a format designed primarily for a general audience.¹ The chief goals of this entry are twofold. First, it provides a fuller introduction to the text and its interpretative problems than that found in the trade press version. Second, because of the length and complexity of *Rev. Magi*, a detailed summary provides readers with a convenient and accessible overview of the text’s content.

According to *Rev. Magi*, the Magi are an ancient order of mystics residing in a land called “Shir,” located at the extreme eastern edge of the inhabited world (1–2). They are descendants of Adam’s son Seth, who received a prophecy from his father Adam about the coming of a star that would signify the birth of God in human form (2). This prophecy is written down by Seth in the world’s first book, and is transmitted through the generations by his offspring, the Magi (3–4). In expectation of the star’s coming, every month the Magi immerse themselves in a sacred spring, ascend their country’s most sacred mountain (the “Mountain of Victories”), pray to God in silence, and enter a cave (the “Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries”) atop the mountain to read Seth’s prophecies (5). At last, the star appears to the present generation of Magi (who serve as the story’s narrators), descends to the peak of the Magi’s mountain, and transforms into a small, luminous human being (11–13). Then, in star form once more, it guides them on a miraculously brief journey from

1. See Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*. For more detailed discussion of the text, consult the author’s dissertation, “Sages and the Star-Child.”

Shir to Bethlehem, during which it relieves their fatigue and multiplies their food (16). When they reach Bethlehem, the star enters a cave, transforms into a luminous infant, and commissions the Magi to return to their country to spread his gospel with his other disciples (18–21). After meeting Mary and Joseph (22–25), the Magi return to Shir with the star's assistance (26). They tell the inhabitants of their country about their journey, and explain that the people of Shir also can experience the presence of Christ if they partake of the food that the star multiplied (27). The people eat, immediately have visions of the heavenly and earthly Jesus, and convert to the faith proclaimed by the Magi (28). Finally, the apostle Judas Thomas arrives in the land of Shir, meets the Magi, and baptizes them and commissions them to preach throughout the entire world (29–32).

Manuscripts and Versions

The full text of *Rev. Magi* is preserved only in Syriac, in a single eighth-century manuscript housed in the Vatican Library (Biblioteca apostolica, syr. 162). The manuscript contains a world-chronicle known as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (named for the monastery in southeastern Turkey where it was produced, henceforth *Chron. Zuq.*) or, less accurately, as the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell-Mahre*.² In its recounting of the history of the world from Creation to the late eighth century, *Chron. Zuq.* embeds a number of previously independent documents, such as a legend about Alexander the Great, the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, and *Rev. Magi*. Based on the way that the compiler of *Chron. Zuq.* has handled other literary sources that he incorporated, there is no reason to think that he has altered the text in any substantial respect.³ A critical edition of Vat. syr. 162 was produced by the Swedish scholar Otto Tullberg and his pupils in 1851.⁴ In 1927 J.-B. Chabot edited the text again for the CSCO and translated *Chron. Zuq.* into Latin,⁵ though by the time of Chabot's edition the manuscript had become increasingly illegible (the cause of the deterioration remains unclear) and Chabot was forced to rely on Tullberg's readings at several points.⁶ The present author is preparing a new edition of the Syriac as part of his CCSA volume on *Rev. Magi*; the new edition utilizes high-resolution digital photographs of the manuscript taken under ultraviolet light, in addition to direct observation of the manuscript at the Vatican Library.

Although the only witness to the complete text of *Rev. Magi* is Vat. syr. 162, a much shorter summary of the same basic narrative appears in the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum* (henceforth *Op. Imperf.*), a Latin commentary on the Gospel of Matthew that was wrongly attributed to John Chrysostom.⁷ Some scholars have regarded the summary

2. See the comments of Amir Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, parts III and IV: A.D. 488–775* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 3–4.

3. See Witakowski, *Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 124–36.

4. Tullberg, *Dionysii Telmahharensis Chronici liber primus*.

5. Chabot, *Chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum*.

6. See Witakowski, *Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 32 n. 20.

7. In Migne, PG 56:637–38. A critical edition of *Op. Imperf.* is apparently underway, though the prefatory volume appeared more than twenty years ago; see van Banning, *Opus Imperfectum*. The portion related to *Rev. Magi* is translated in Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 103–5; for a detailed comparison of the *Op. Imperf.* version of the legend with the Syriac form of *Rev. Magi*, see Landau, “Sages and the Star-Child,” 137–74. An introduction to and translation of the summary has been published recently by Alexander Toepel, “The Apocryphon of Seth,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 33–39. For a complete translation of *Op. Imperf.*, see James A. Kellerman, trans., *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus Imperfectum)* (2 vols.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2010).

found in *Op. Imperf.* as a witness to a shorter, more succinct version of *Rev. Magi* that was later expanded into the form contained in the extant Syriac text from *Chron. Zuq.*⁸ But there has been no consensus about which portions of the Syriac might be secondary, and the version in *Op. Imperf.* possesses the same basic narrative structure found in the Syriac. Therefore, it seems preferable to regard *Op. Imperf.* as a witness to a form of *Rev. Magi* very similar in content and length to that found in the received Syriac.

Original Language, Date, and Provenance

If we assume, as does the most recent scholarship, that *Op. Imperf.* was written in the fifth century by an Arian theologian who had spent some time in Constantinople, then a Greek version of *Rev. Magi* must have been in existence at this time.⁹ Nevertheless, it is highly likely that *Rev. Magi* originally was written in Syriac. Several plays on words only make sense in Syriac,¹⁰ and Judas Thomas was the apostle *par excellence* for Syriac-speaking Christian communities.

The Syriac form of *Rev. Magi* must have existed by some time in the fourth century in order to account for its translation into Greek. However, there are several reasons to suspect an origin earlier than the fourth century.¹¹ Chief among these is the fact that the concluding episode about Judas Thomas's visit to the Magi's homeland in *Rev. Magi* 29–32 appears to be an interpolation. The narrative abruptly switches from first-person narration by the Magi to third-person narration just prior to Thomas's arrival. The Thomas episode also uses vocabulary not previously seen in the narrative, including Syriac ascetical terminology and the proper name "Jesus Christ," which is steadfastly avoided in the first-person plural narration by the Magi. In addition to these textual markers of interpolation, on a literary level the Judas Thomas episode shows a concern for officially integrating the Magi into the broader Christian church through an apostolic visit and baptism, whereas the earlier part of the text has the Magi receive revelation directly from Jesus Christ despite his never being identified to the Magi by this specific name.

A comparison between the Judas Thomas interpolation and the *Acts of Thomas* helps to determine the date of composition for the interpolation. The Thomas story shows no awareness of the storyline of *Acts Thom.*, particularly its setting in India. Yet the baptismal hymn sung by Thomas in *Rev. Magi* 30:2–9 has strong formal similarities to several of the epictic prayers in *Acts Thom.*¹² These factors suggest that the Judas Thomas interpolation was composed in an environment where liturgical forms similar to those in *Acts Thom.* were in use, but at a time when traditions about the precise places Thomas evangelized were still somewhat in flux. Therefore, a third-century date for the composition and interpolation of the Judas Thomas episode seems appropriate.¹³

The original form of *Rev. Magi*, as a pseudepigraphon with only the Magi as its pur-

8. See the discussion of the relationship between these witnesses in Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 165–73.

9. See van Banning, *Opus Imperfectum*, v–vi.

10. For example, the play on the words "divide/division" and "doubt" (7:2), both of which have the same root in Syriac.

11. For a broader discussion of the evidence see Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 176–90.

12. This was noted independently of my own research by Sebastian P. Brock, "An Archaic Syriac Prayer over Baptismal Oil," in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Congress on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2003* (ed. Francis M. Young, Mark J. Edwards, and Paul M. Parvis; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 3–12.

13. See Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 190–200.

ported authors, likely was composed in the early third or late second century, based on the affinities of this work with other Christian literature of this time period. Other Christian pseudepigraphic compositions attributed to “pagans,” such as the Abgar Correspondence and the earliest forms of the Pilate literature, probably originated in the second or third century as apologetic pieces illustrating the truth of Christianity through the testimony of outsiders.¹⁴ Also, the ability of Christ in *Rev. Magi* both to transform his appearance and to appear in several different forms simultaneously is quite similar to the depictions of the polymorphic Christ found in the *Acts of John* and other second-century texts.¹⁵

There is one other early Christian writing with which *Rev. Magi* has a substantial amount in common, though the literary relationship between the two writings is far from clear. This is the little-studied but potentially quite ancient infancy gospel incorporated in a branch of the manuscript tradition of *Ps.-Mt.* and in several Irish witnesses.¹⁶ First discussed by M. R. James in 1927¹⁷ and recently christened the *Liber de nativitate salvatoris* (“Book about the Birth of the Savior,” abbreviated henceforth as *Birth Sav.*) by Jean-Daniel Kaestli,¹⁸ this work is an expansion and harmonization of Matthew’s and Luke’s infancy narratives. In Kaestli’s opinion, the *Protevangelium of James* may be dependent upon *Birth Sav.*,¹⁹ which would necessitate an origin for *Birth Sav.* sometime in the middle of the second century or earlier. *Birth Sav.*’s account of the Magi’s visit shares a number of striking details with the contents of *Rev. Magi*—for example, in both texts only the Magi can see the star, a tradition found nowhere else in early Christian literature.²⁰ It appears that one text is dependent upon the other, though it is not certain in which direction the relationship goes. We may provisionally say that *Rev. Magi* is more likely to be dependent on *Birth Sav.* than the other way around, because in terms of genre *Birth Sav.* is a harmony and expansion of the canonical infancy narratives, and gospel harmonies appear to be some of the earliest apocryphal compositions that exist,²¹ whereas narratives that focus on one specific biblical character or group of characters seem to be a slightly later development in the tradition. Moreover, given that *Birth Sav.* may date from the mid-second century or

14. See Landau, “Sages and the Star-Child,” 214–18. See also Landau, “The Christian Production of ‘Pagan’ Pseudepigrapha” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Boston, Mass., November 24, 2008).

15. For a comparison of the polymorphic Christ in *Rev. Magi* with that found in the *Acts of John*, see Landau, “Polymorphy, Metamorphosis, or Something Else? The Plasticity of Christ in the Syriac *Revelation of the Magi* and the *Apocryphal Acts of John*” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Chicago, Ill., November 18, 2012).

16. For text and translation of the Irish witnesses and text of the Latin Arundel and Hereford recensions, see Jean-Daniel Kaestli and Martin McNamara, “Latin Infancy Gospels: The J Compilation,” in *Apocrypha Hiberniae 1: Evangelia Infantiae* (ed. Martin McNamara et al.; 2 vols.; CCSA 13–14; Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 2:619–880. See also the translation of the Latin Arundel recension in AG, 115–55.

17. Montague Rhodes James, *Latin Infancy Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927).

18. See the recent study by Kaestli, “Mapping.”

19. See Kaestli, “Recherches nouvelles.”

20. The similarities between *Rev. Magi* and *Birth Sav.* were recognized first by Alois Kehl, “Der Stern der Magier: Zu §94 des lateinischen Kindheitsevangeliums der Arundel-Handschrift,” *JAC* 18 (1975): 69–80. For more detailed comparisons of these two texts, see Landau, “Sages and the Star-Child,” 202–14, and Kaestli, “Mapping,” 528–33.

21. Although they probably contain some traditions independent of the canonical Gospels, the *Gospel of Peter* and at least some of the so-called Jewish-Christian Gospels may profitably be described as gospel harmonies, all of which likely originated in the first half of the second century.

earlier, dependence upon *Rev. Magi* would mean that *Rev. Magi* is earlier than any other Syriac Christian literature we possess, and this seems inherently unlikely.²²

In sum, a date for *Rev. Magi* in the late second or early third century appears warranted. There are no compelling reasons to believe that the Syriac text is a translation of an originally Greek work. As the strongest center of early Syriac Christianity, Edessa would be a very likely candidate for this text's place of birth. At any rate, the popularity of Judas Thomas in Edessa would indicate that at least the redaction of the text took place there. Determining the characteristics of the individual or the community that produced this pseudepigraphic composition is quite speculative. Nevertheless, it is tempting to read some elements of *Rev. Magi*'s narrative—in particular, ingesting a particular food that facilitates visionary experience—as the religious experiences of some early Christians who adopted the personae of the Magi in order to give expression to such experiences.²³

Literary Context

As mentioned above, *Rev. Magi* may have been directly or indirectly dependent on the traditions about the Magi found in *Birth Sav*. Apart from this work, several other definite and potential influences on *Rev. Magi* may be noted. Obviously, it is indebted to the story of the Magi in Matt 2:1–12 above all; yet *Rev. Magi* is not slavish in its devotion to this source text. It shows little interest in the Magi's interaction with the inhabitants of Jerusalem; it never even alludes to King Herod's slaughter of the innocents; and the gifts brought by the Magi to Jesus are neither specified as the familiar gold, frankincense, and myrrh, nor as anything else. As for other NT texts, the Gospel of John is as important as Matt 2:1–12, if not more so. *Rev. Magi* is replete with Johannine terminology, often describing Christ as the "Son" who "was sent" by the "Father," and its depiction of Christ as a star may be influenced by the Fourth Gospel's well-known description of Christ as "the light of the world" (John 8:12; 9:5).

Two geographical locations found in *Rev. Magi* also appear in the Syriac work known as the *Cave of Treasures* (*Cav. Tr.*), dated in its final form to the sixth or seventh century but doubtlessly preserving earlier traditions.²⁴ In *Rev. Magi*, the "Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries" is where Seth's books of revelation are kept, along with (unspecified) gifts that the Magi are to offer to Christ when the star appears; in *Cav. Tr.*, the cave is the burial place of Adam and his offspring, as well as the repository of the Magi's gifts. Additionally, in *Rev. Magi*, the Magi's sacred mountain is named the "Mountain of Victories" and the "Cave of Treasures" is located at its summit; the "Mountain of Victories" is mentioned also in *Cav. Tr.*, as the residence of Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah (14:1). These commonalities are intriguing; however, *Cav. Tr.*'s narrative about the Magi has very little in common with the content of *Rev. Magi*. In *Cav. Tr.*, the Magi live in Persia, are startled by the unexpected appearance of the star, and consult the "revelations of Nimrod"—not Seth—to understand the meaning of the star (45:11). It is often thought that *Cav. Tr.* had

22. The earliest Syriac Christian writings are probably the *Odes of Solomon* (often dated to the early second century) and Tatian's *Diatessaron* gospel harmony (second half of second century).

23. See my "Under the Influence (of the Magi): Did Hallucinogens Play a Role in the Inspired Composition of the Pseudepigraphic *Revelation of the Magi*?" Forthcoming in *Fakes, Forgeries, and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* (Eugene, Ore: Cascade).

24. See the new introduction to and translation of this work by Alexander Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013), 531–84.

access to earlier Christian (and perhaps Jewish) exegetical traditions; in the case of the Magi traditions it is probable that both works had access to similar sources, but that neither work utilized the other. *Rev. Magi* also knows earlier traditions about a revelation or testament of Adam written down by Seth and about the great virtue of Seth and his progeny. It is intriguing that Josephus (*Ant.* 1.70–71) names the land of Seth's descendants as "Seiris," though Josephus apparently envisions this land as being somewhere in Transjordan, whereas *Rev. Magi* is dependent upon a widespread ancient geographical tradition that designated "Shir" or "Seiris" as the land known today as China.²⁵ In its use of the figure of Seth, *Rev. Magi* does not show any resemblance to the speculation about Seth as a salvific figure that appears in some works from the Nag Hammadi library.²⁶

One final alleged antecedent (or group of antecedents) must be mentioned, since it dominated earlier scholarship on *Rev. Magi* and is still cited as authoritative by some recent scholars. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, scholars associated with the "History-of-Religions" School claimed that *Rev. Magi* was a product of indigenous Iranian religious thought.²⁷ Most notably, it was held that the appearance of Christ to the Magi atop the Mountain of Victories was a lightly Christianized version of an Iranian legend about the coming of the Saoshyant (a Zoroastrian savior figure) or the birth of the god Mithras.²⁸ Even scholars who were critical of the most thoroughgoing forms of this "Iranian thesis" have conceded that *Rev. Magi* has some Iranian elements.²⁹ As alluring as it may be to regard *Rev. Magi* as a window into the beginnings of Christianity in Iran and pre-Christian Iranian religion, the alleged parallels between *Rev. Magi* and Iranian religion are indeed quite meager and rely heavily on inference. It is important to note also that the genealogical approach to religious thought espoused by the "History-of-Religions" School, wherein all religions are merely replicating the ideas of earlier, primitive religions in disguised form, has largely fallen out of favor among scholars because it posits a very simplistic view of interaction between religious systems. Finally, it must be kept in mind that the scholars who put forth the most detailed versions of this thesis wrote in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was an obsession with establishing Iran as the cradle of Jewish, Christian, and gnostic thought—a notion few scholars today accept.³⁰ Thus, there is little need to resort to more exotic influences than earlier Christian and Jewish texts and traditions in order to explain the religious worldview found in *Rev. Magi*.

Literary and Theological Importance

Although *Rev. Magi* was virtually unknown and/or ignored by specialists in early Christian apocryphal literature until quite recently, the text contains several distinctive and intriguing elements. First, and most obviously, it is by far the longest and most detailed apocryphon relating to the enigmatic figures of the Magi to have survived from antiq-

25. See Reinink, "Das Land 'Seiris.'"

26. For contextualization of *Rev. Magi* among other traditions about Seth, see Albertus F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 48–60.

27. See the (favorable) overview of this scholarship by Hultgard, "Magi and the Star."

28. The most famous and committed proponent of this viewpoint was the Swedish scholar Geo Widengren. For the fullest exposition of Widengren's thesis, see his *Iranisch-semitische Kulturbegegnung in parthischer Zeit* (Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960), 62–86.

29. See the evaluation of Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule* (vol. 3 of *A History of Zoroastrianism*; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 449–53.

30. See the criticisms of these tendencies of the "History of Religions" School in Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71–109.

uity. The Magi do make appearances in the *Protevangelium of James* and other infancy gospels,³¹ and there are several shorter compositions in which the Magi play a major role.³² Yet *Rev. Magi* tells the story of Christ and, indeed, the entire history of salvation, from the perspective of the Magi themselves with a level of detail found nowhere else.

Second, the text surprisingly places the Magi in the legendary far-eastern land of Shir, ignoring the most popular homelands imagined for the Magi by other early Christian commentators: Persia, Babylon, and Arabia. In a number of ancient sources, the land of Shir seems to be roughly equivalent to China, and its inhabitants are said to possess extraordinary virtues and abilities.³³ No other ancient Christian writing locates the Magi in this land,³⁴ and the author of *Rev. Magi* presumably intended to appropriate for the figures of the Magi the sorts of qualities elsewhere ascribed to the inhabitants of China.

Third, the text is strongly invested in the notion of a polymorphic Christ, which, as mentioned above, demonstrates an affinity with writings of the second and third centuries.³⁵ *Rev. Magi* contains several instances of Christ appearing simultaneously to people in a multiplicity of forms (see chaps. 14 and 28), but the most distinctive instance of Christ's shape-shifting is his transformation from a star into human form and back again during the narrative.³⁶ Although there was a great deal of debate in ancient Christian circles about what the mysterious "Star of Bethlehem" was,³⁷ *Rev. Magi* is the only known writing to claim that this star was Jesus in a celestial, pre-incarnational form. The precise background for the idea of Jesus being a star still remains unclear, though it is certainly possible that the well-known statement of Christ that he is "the light of the world" in John 8:12 and 9:5 has played a role. In any case, *Rev. Magi* suggests in 13:1–2 that it is actually Christ's luminous appearance as a star that is closest to his true form, with his human form merely being an accommodation for the purposes of fragile human beings. Beyond these instances of polymorphy or metamorphosis, it is also notable that *Rev. Magi* depicts Christ as being able to appear in two places simultaneously—both with the Magi in Shir and in Bethlehem (13:9, see also 23:2).

These extraordinary bodily properties of Christ are relevant also for the fourth and

31. See *Prot. Jas.* 21, (*Arm.*) *Gos. Inf.* 10–11 (see n. 39 below), (*Arab.*) *Gos. Inf.* 7, and *Birth Sav.* (see the discussion above).

32. For other substantial (but still significantly shorter than *Rev. Magi*) compositions featuring the Magi, see the *Legend of Aphroditianus* elsewhere in this volume, and Pseudo-Eusebius's *On the Star* in William Wright, "Eusebius of Caesarea on the Star," *Journal of Sacred Literature* 9 (1866): 117–36 (Syriac text); 10 (1866): 150–64 (English translation).

33. See Reinink, "Das Land 'Seiris.'" Attributing such exalted status to peoples on the edges of the civilized world was a common trope in Greek and Roman literature; see James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

34. Though some later Syriac Christian texts, probably under the influence of *Rev. Magi*, place the apostle Thomas's missionary work in China. See Jürgen Tubach, "Der Apostel Thomas in China: Die Herkunft einer Tradition," *ZKG* 108 (1997): 58–74.

35. The best discussion of this phenomenon is Paul Foster, "Polymorphic Christology: Its Origins and Development in Early Christianity," *JTS* 58 (2007): 66–99; see also Landau, "Polymorphy."

36. *Rev. Magi* is also one of the only Christian texts to depict Jesus appearing in nonhuman form (though cf. the strange statement in 1 Cor 10:4 that "the rock was Christ").

37. See the discussions in Dale C. Allison, "The Magi's Angel (2:2, 9–10)," in his *Studies in Matthew: Interpretations Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), 17–41, and Nicola F. Denzey, "A New Star on the Horizon: Astral Christologies and Stellar Debates in Early Christian Discourse," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (ed. Scott B. Noegel, Joel T. Walker, and Brandon M. Wheeler; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 207–21.

final distinctive feature of *Rev. Magi*: the text's surprisingly tolerant attitude toward religious diversity. Since Christ can appear to anyone, in any place, at any time, *Rev. Magi* holds him to be the source of most—if not all—of humanity's religious systems. In an extremely important passage, Christ (who is not named as such until the redactional Judas Thomas ending) tells the Magi:

And I am everywhere, because I am a ray of light whose light has shone in this world from the majesty of my Father, who has sent me to fulfill everything that was spoken about me in the entire world and in every land by unspeakable mysteries, and to accomplish the commandment of my glorious Father, who by the prophets preached about me to the contentious house, in the same way as for you, as befits your faith, it was revealed to you about me. (13:10)

According to this statement, Christ has been spoken of throughout the entire world, not just through Israel's prophets and the Magi's books of revelation (see also the Magi's similar statements at 17:5 and 23:4). This belief is quite unusual in early Christian literature, as most early Christian writers regarded the gods of other peoples as either imaginary or demonic. This more tolerant attitude perhaps has its origins in the fact that Syriac Christians had far more exposure to well-established religious traditions of Central and Southeast Asia—Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, most notably—than did their Christian counterparts within the Roman Empire. As a consequence of this inclusive attitude regarding religious diversity, the Magi in *Rev. Magi* become followers of Christ despite never actually knowing him *by* the name “Jesus Christ”—a situation that the more theologically conservative redactor of the text who added the concluding Judas Thomas episode sought to remedy.³⁸

Later Influence

There are two distinct trajectories for the reception history of *Rev. Magi*: the use of the original Syriac form of the text in Eastern Christian communities, and the use of *Rev. Magi*'s narrative as preserved in *Op. Imperf.* in medieval Europe. The former trajectory is somewhat sparse, while the latter is surprisingly rich. We will examine each trajectory in turn.

The earliest Eastern Christian text to show awareness of the Syriac *Rev. Magi* is not in Syriac; rather, it is the sixth-century *Armenian Infancy Gospel*, which is based upon a lost Syriac original. The gospel references *Rev. Magi*'s notion that the Magi are in possession of an ancient prophetic writing by Seth; in fact, they bring this writing with them to present it to Jesus (*[Arm.] Gos. Inf.* 10–11 and 22–23).³⁹ In the late eighth century, about the same time as *Chron. Zuq.* was written, the Syriac writer Theodore bar Konai mentions that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem “in the month of flowers” (i.e., April), and that they laid their crowns at his feet.⁴⁰ Both of these elements also appear in *Rev. Magi* (at 17:1 and

38. For more detailed analysis of *Rev. Magi*'s understanding of divine revelation, see Landau, “One Drop of Salvation”; and Landau, “Sages and the Star-Child,” 244–66.

39. See the translation by Abraham Terian, *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51–52.

40. Theodore bar Konai, *Book of Scholia*, 7:17. For a French translation of the passage, see Theodore bar Koni, *Livre des Scholies (recension de Séert) II. Mimrè VI-XI* (trans. Robert Hespel and René Draguet; CSCO 432, Syr. 188; Leuven: Peeters, 1982), 51.

18:5, respectively), and the tradition about Jesus being born during the month of April is quite unusual, so it is highly probable that Theodore was familiar with *Rev. Magi*. Because Theodore lived in Ira and *Chron. Zuq.* was compiled in southeastern Turkey, this suggests that *Rev. Magi* had been disseminated rather widely by the end of the eighth century.

In the thirteenth century, Solomon, the bishop of Basra, wrote a compendium of biblical and extrabiblical lore known as the *Book of the Bee*, which demonstrates some knowledge of *Rev. Magi*. Solomon mentions that some Christians say that the gifts brought by the Magi were deposited in the Cave of Treasures by Adam, and that he commanded his son Seth to hand them down through the generations (*Bk. Bee* 39; cf. *Rev. Magi* 4:7). Solomon also states that some say that it was at the time of Seth that writing was invented (*Bk. Bee* 18), and *Rev. Magi* 3:3 claims that Seth wrote the first book in the history of the world. Both of these traditions, Solomon says, are not accepted by the church. This suggests that Solomon viewed *Rev. Magi* as heterodox in some respects, but he does not elaborate further.⁴¹

It is also worth mentioning that the list of the names of the twelve Magi and their fathers in *Rev. Magi* 2:3 is found in works by a number of other Syriac writers. However, the names from this list are never referenced again in the narrative of *Rev. Magi*, and they are so widespread throughout Syriac literature that they are likely not to have originated in *Rev. Magi*, but instead were added to the text at some point after its creation.⁴² Indeed, there are hints scattered throughout *Rev. Magi* that the Magi constituted a group much larger than twelve: the text uses the Syriac term *mashritha* to describe them on several occasions, a word found in the Syriac NT to translate the Greek *parembolē*, used almost exclusively for large assemblies of people (e.g., Acts 21:34; Heb 11:34; 13:11).

Although there are some clear indications that *Rev. Magi* remained known in Syriac Christian communities for several centuries after its inclusion in *Chron. Zuq.*, the references to it are rather meager overall. In contrast, *Op. Imperf.*'s summary of *Rev. Magi*'s narrative was extremely influential for understandings of the Magi in medieval Europe. *Op. Imperf.* was attributed, incorrectly, to John Chrysostom, and thus it was copied along with his other works. Its story about the Magi was incorporated into Jacob of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (the "Golden Legend"), an extremely popular thirteenth-century compendium of saints' lives.⁴³ In the fourteenth century, the German priest John of Hildesheim used *Op. Imperf.*'s narrative (along with other sources) in the composition of his enormously popular *Historia Trium Regum* ("History of the Three Kings"), which stands as the most detailed medieval account of the Magi.⁴⁴ The Magi legend was referenced also by Thomas Aquinas, Peter Abelard, and other medieval theologians.⁴⁵

41. For an English translation of the relevant passages see Solomon of Basra, *The Book of the Bee* (trans. Ernest A. W. Budge; Oxford: Clarendon, 1886), 28 and 85.

42. See the helpful tables of the names of the Magi in Syriac sources in Witakowski, "Magi in Syriac Tradition," 839–43.

43. For an English translation of the material in the *Golden Legend* pertaining to the Magi, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (trans. William G. Ryan; 2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1:40, 78–84.

44. The most accessible version of the *Historia Trium Regum* is a Middle English recension; see Frank Schaer, *The Three Kings of Cologne: Edited from London, Lambeth Palace MS 491* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2000).

45. See Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, Q. 36, Art. 5, ad. 4, and Peter Abelard, *Sermo IV in Epiphania Domini*. For the latter, see Paola de Santis, *I sermoni di Abelardo per monache del Paraclito* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 198–99.

Artistic representations of *Rev. Magi's* narrative exist as well: Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* ("Mirror of the Salvation of Humankind") contains a drawing of the Magi bowing before a star containing a small child, an unmistakable reference to *Rev. Magi's* understanding of the Magi's star as Christ himself.⁴⁶ Moreover, two fifteenth-century paintings by the Flemish artist Rogier van der Weyden and his school show the Magi looking in awe at the star-child hovering over a mountain; one of these shows the Magi bathing in their sacred spring.⁴⁷ It is also remarkable that the *Rev. Magi* traditions were known by some of the early explorers of the Americas: one Spanish Augustinian was so impressed by the similarities between Incan religious practices and Christianity that he surmised that the Incans were the descendants of those evangelized by the Magi and the apostle Thomas.⁴⁸ Thus, the narrative of *Rev. Magi* became a valuable resource during the Age of Exploration for fitting the indigenous cultures of the Americas into the traditional Christian schematization of the world.

About the Summary

Because *Rev. Magi* is easily accessible in English through the present author's HarperCollins translation and his dissertation, it is unnecessary to reproduce that translation here. Instead, what follows is a detailed summary of the text (with explanatory footnotes for difficult passages) that will help readers to become aware of the specific content of *Rev. Magi* without having to read a translation of a Syriac text that is not infrequently verbose, repetitive, and stylistically awkward.

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46. See the plate in Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 40–41; two other versions of this image are found in Hugo Kehrer, *Die heiligen drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Seemann, 1908), 2:211, 213.

47. See the plates in Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, ii, 51. These paintings today reside, respectively, in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin and the Cloisters Museum in New York. For discussion of these artistic witnesses to the Magi narrative of *Op. Imperf.*, see Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "The Wise Men from the East in the Western Tradition," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* (ed. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin and Pierre Lecoq; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 1:149–57.

48. See the discussion of the Spanish search for the Magi and the apostle Thomas in Trexler, *Journey of the Magi*, 135–52.

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The Revelation of the Magi (Summary)

Introduction (chap. 1)

The compiler of *Chron. Zuq.* has provided his own descriptive title for the work that follows: “About the revelation of the Magi, and about their coming to Jerusalem, and about the gifts that they brought to Christ” (1:1). The text presents itself as the personal testimony of the Magi; these Magi are called by that name because they pray in silence.^a In their silent prayer, they glorify the Father of Heavenly Majesty, who is above all human thought. The only way in which the lower and upper worlds can speak about him is if the Father wills to reveal himself to them by means of a gift.

The Magi: their names and lineage (chap. 2)

The connection of the name “magi” to their practice of silent prayer is restated and, once again, the object of their prayer is the Father of Heavenly Majesty. The text supplies the names of the twelve current Magi and the names of their fathers. The Magi are described as wise men and kings who live in the land of Shir, which is on the eastern edge of the inhabited world, at the shore of the great Ocean, east of the land of Nod, in which Adam dwelt. The Magi have handed down from generation to generation books of laws and commandments, which go back to Seth, who received these revelations from his father Adam.

The transmission of the Magi’s mysteries (chap. 3)

Seth listened to the instructions of Adam with a virtuous heart, and he wrote them down in a book, the first book ever written. Seth gave the book to his descendants, and his descendants passed it down to Noah, who took the books (hereafter described in the plural) with him in the Ark during the Flood, and then passed it down to his descendants. The books continued to be handed down by Seth’s progeny until the present generation of Magi—who narrate this writing—receive them from their fathers. In accordance with the teachings of their fathers, the present Magi pray in silence, bowing their knees and stretching their hands forth toward the heavens.

The prophecy of the star (chap. 4)

Seth’s books are placed in a cave, known as the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries, that is atop the Mountain of Victories, located in the eastern part of the land of Shir. Re-

a. Although the text suggests that there is an etymological relationship between the words “magi,” “silence,” and/or “prayer” in the Magi’s language, there is no obvious resemblance between these words in any of the relevant ancient languages. Since the Magi are said to live in a semi-mythical country, this alleged wordplay may simply be an exoticizing device intended to provide realism for the narrative.

citing the prophecy that they received from their own fathers, the fathers of the present generation of Magi instruct them to wait for a star that will appear over the Mountain of Victories, then descend to the mountain, and sit upon a pillar of light in the Cave of Treasures. The Magi are instructed also to tell their own sons about this coming star, whose great light will obscure the sun, moon, and stars. The star is a “mystery” of the Son, a being who is the visible counterpart of the Father of Heavenly Majesty. When the Magi see this star, they are to take the gifts deposited in the Cave of Treasures and follow where the star leads. They will see God appearing in the lowly human form of an infant, and they shall offer their gifts to the child and worship him. The Magi, in turn, will receive salvation from the child. Finally, their fathers exhort the present Magi that if the star does not come during their lifetime, they are to instruct their sons to pass along the prophecy to future generations until the prophecy is fulfilled.

The Magi’s monthly ritual (chap. 5)

The Magi come together at the Mountain of Victories from their own dwelling places every month. On the twenty-fifth day of each month, they purify themselves in a spring on the foothills of the mountain. The “Spring of Purification” has seven diverse trees around it, and the smell of sweet spices effuses from the beautiful mountain. On the first day of the month, the Magi climb to the top of the mountain and stand before the Cave of Treasures, bowing their knees and stretching forth their hands in silent prayer. On the third day of the month, they enter the cave, see the gifts that have been prepared for the star’s coming, and recite from Seth’s books of revelation. Then they descend from the mountain and instruct their families and anyone else who wishes to learn. When any of the Magi die, one of his sons or other relatives is raised up in his place. The Magi present their teachings to the people of Shir, though some do not wish to learn from the Magi because of their practice of silent prayer.^a

An excerpt from Seth’s books of revelation about Adam’s fall (chaps. 6–10)

The narration about the Magi, their prophecy, and their ritual is interrupted by an extended quotation from Seth’s books of revelation, mainly consisting of a speech of Adam to Seth about the circumstances of his fall, a prediction of apostasy in the end times, and an exhortation to Seth to seek after righteousness.^b The speech of Adam is prefaced by the explanation that Adam was able to prophesy about the coming star because the same star hovered over the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, the star disappeared from his sight and he was expelled from Eden. Adam tells Seth that he was deceived by Eve, and that Seth should take care not to let himself be deceived by her as well. Despite Eve’s complicity in his downfall, Adam admits that he did not sufficiently recognize how exalted he was above all of God’s other creations. Adam states that God was

a. The passage from 5:11 that apparently describes the opponents of the Magi is confusing and may be corrupt, since it seems to lack an apodosis: “And those who did not wish to learn and distanced themselves from help because they saw our quiet way of life, that we prayed in silence, and we said our mysteries to them with honor.”

b. Although this “excerpt” probably contains some earlier Jewish traditions, there is no evidence that chapters 6–10 had a prior written existence independent of *Rev. Magi*. That said, its subject matter pertains very little to the narrative of *Rev. Magi*. From a narratological point of view, however, these chapters do serve the function of giving the impression of some passage of time between the first time that the present generation of Magi has performed their monthly ritual (in chap. 5) and the occasion upon which the star appears to them (in chap. 11).

indeed merciful in his punishment, since he did not take away from Adam the authority he possessed over all creation. In contrast, the snake was treated harshly by God, losing both its ability to speak and its feet.

Adam then predicts that the generations that come forth from him will be the venerable possessors of the ritual practices connected with the worship of the Father of Heavenly Majesty. Despite their great honor, however, they will rebel against the Father at the end of time.^a They shall blaspheme the Father, make idols, worship the sun and moon, and desire the pleasures of the world. Adam concludes his instructions to Seth by reiterating his own failure to understand the Father's ways, and encourages Seth and his generations to seek mercy from the Father when they stray. Seth writes down these instructions and other commandments of Adam in the books, which are then placed in the Cave of Treasures, and the reading of these books continues throughout the ages until the present generation of Magi.

The star's appearance to the Magi (chap. 11)

After this "flashback" to the instruction of Seth by Adam, *Rev. Magi* then resumes its narrative, with the present generation of Magi revealing that it was in their time that the star and its wondrous visions finally appeared. As is their custom, the Magi come together to wash in the Spring of Purification, but a pillar of light suddenly appears and hovers over the spring, terrifying the Magi. The star^b that the Magi see is unspeakably bright, far brighter than the sun, which becomes as faint as the daytime moon in the star's presence. Yet, it is only the Magi themselves who are able to see this star, since they alone are deemed worthy by the Father to hand down the prophecy through the generations.

The star descends to the Mountain of Victories (chap. 12)

The Magi finish bathing in their spring, climb the Mountain of Victories, and find the pillar of light standing in front of the Cave of Treasures. In their usual way, they kneel before the cave and pray in silence, praising God for the wonders they are seeing. Then, the heavens are opened, and two glorious men carry the star down from heaven and place it upon the pillar, filling the mountain with ineffable light. A small hand emerges from the pillar and star to comfort the terrified Magi. The star enters the cave, and a friendly voice bids the Magi to enter as well.

Epiphany in the Cave of Treasures (chap. 13)

The star gradually transforms itself into a small, humble human being, and says to the astonished Magi, "Peace to you." The being then begins a lengthy discourse about the form he has taken, what the Magi are to do, and what his mission upon the earth is. The being has taken the form of a humble human because it is impossible for humanity to see the true glory of the Son of the Father. He has humbled himself in this form and will even die upon a cross in order to bring salvation to humanity. The being instructs the Magi to

a. Presumably, Adam refers here to the Magi, but this is never made explicit. The apparent prediction of the Magi's apostasy is found only here in *Rev. Magi*. It may be a coded reference to schisms in the community in which *Rev. Magi* was produced.

b. The Magi begin to describe the star in 11:5, but the star does not actually seem to appear in the narrative until 12:3, when it is carried down from heaven by two glorious men. There is a lacuna of one word in 11:3 before the phrase "in the form of an ineffable pillar of light," but "star" is probably not the missing word, since *Rev. Magi* seems to regard the star and the pillar of light as separate entities.

take the treasures deposited in the cave and to bring them in worship to the place^a where the being will be born in human form. Indeed, even as the being is speaking now with the Magi atop the Mountain of Victories, he is also present in the place where he will be born and in the presence of the Father. The being is actually everywhere in the entire world, because he is a ray of light from the Father of Majesty. The Father has sent him in order to fulfill everything spoken about him throughout the entire world, which includes both the prophets of Israel and the Magi's own books of revelation. The being will be a guide for the Magi on their miraculous journey to Jerusalem, where their prophecies will be fulfilled at last. The humble and frail human form that the being takes will cause the people of the world to do evil to him, but this will lead both to their own destruction and to the salvation that the Father intended.

The Magi realize Christ's polymorphy (chap. 14)

After the being has said these things to the Magi, they exit the cave with the treasures that were set aside for the coming of the star and begin to descend the mountain, rejoicing at all they have seen and heard. As they speak to one another about the revelations of the star, they realize that they each saw something different in the cave. One of the Magi saw a light with many images; another, an infant with indescribable forms; another, a youth with an otherworldly form; another, an ugly and humble human being; another, a cross and a person of light upon it, taking away the sins of the world; another saw the being powerfully descend into Sheol and receive worship from the dead; another, his ascension (from Sheol?) and his opening of the graves; and another, his ascension into heaven, accompanied by throngs of praising angels. The Magi rejoice greatly at the sharing of these numerous visions and the fact that they, among all the righteous people of the earth, were deemed worthy to see them.

The Father speaks to the Magi (chap. 15)

As the Magi rejoice, they suddenly hear a voice from the heavens that reveals itself eventually to be that of the Father himself. In a lengthy speech, the Father describes the manifold attributes of the Son.^b He tells the Magi that everything they have just experienced is merely "one drop of salvation from the house of majesty" (15:1), a tiny fraction of the Son's activities and attributes. The Son is the only being who knows the Father, and it is the Son himself who created everything in the heavenly and earthly worlds. He reveals the Father's secrets to his believers and he becomes a human being in order to destroy death and grant eternal life. He is the "bread of life," the "shepherd of truth," and the "great priest who by his blood absolves the worlds" (15:9). In spite of the Son's multiplicity of forms, he is nevertheless one with the Father.

The miraculous journey (chap. 16)

As the Father speaks to the Magi, the star is present with them also. The entire company^c gathers its provisions for the lengthy journey and the star's gifts, and sets out with the star

a. Two lacunae in 13:8 make it unclear whether or not the being specifically states the location of his birth (which is, of course, Bethlehem).

b. The detailed and extravagant speech of the Father is difficult to summarize succinctly; I have only mentioned some of its most noteworthy elements here.

c. In 16:2 we have the first of several instances of the Syriac term *mashritha* ("encampment") used to describe the Magi. Since this term is used in the Syriac versions of the NT to describe large groups of

as their guide. In the extraordinary journey that follows, the Magi walk day and night in the light of the star, having no need of the sun or the moon. Despite their continuous travel, the Magi miraculously experience no fatigue. The star also provides a sort of dwelling-place for them to rest on the journey.^a Moreover, the Magi's provisions increase whenever the star's light shines upon them. Mountains and other rugged terrain are made level for the Magi by the star, they cross rivers by foot, and trample beasts and snakes underfoot. The star appears to the Magi in a multiplicity of forms throughout the journey, a journey that seems incredibly swift to the Magi despite the great distances.

The Magi in Jerusalem (chap. 17)

After a journey of unspecified duration, the Magi arrive in Jerusalem in the month of April. The star leads them into the city, but its inhabitants apparently cannot see the star and mistakenly regard these Magi as practicing "Magianism."^b The Magi inform the Jerusalemites about their prophecy and what they have seen, and Herod calls the "elders of the city" and asks where the Messiah and savior of the world will be born. As soon as the elders reveal that it will be in Bethlehem, the Magi see their star (again?), rejoice greatly, and set forth to Bethlehem. The Magi remark that the foolish scribes fail to believe what is written in their own sacred writings. They also state that Herod had asked them to return to tell him where the Messiah is found, but that the star told them not to obey him.^c

Arrival in Bethlehem (chap. 18)

When the Magi enter Bethlehem, they see a cave just like the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries in their own country. As with the star's initial epiphany, the pillar of light descends and stands in front of the cave, and the star with its accompanying angels descends upon the pillar. The star, angels, and pillar enter the cave, and a voice bids the Magi to enter. The Magi enter, place their crowns under the child's feet, kneel and worship before him, and offer their treasures to him.

Epiphany in the Bethlehem cave (chap. 19)

As with the epiphany in the Cave of Treasures, here again the luminous infant^d gives a lengthy discourse to the Magi. He declares that their ancient mysteries have now been completely fulfilled with his bringing of them from Shir to Bethlehem. He tells them that

people, it may be that the earliest form of *Rev. Magi* envisioned the Magi as a group much larger than the list of twelve found in 2:3.

a. The author of *Rev. Magi* apparently does not regard the star's removal of the Magi's fatigue and its providing of a resting place for them as being contradictory.

b. The text at 17:2 reads: "On account of what cause have you come here? Perhaps because of the mysteries of your Magianism?" because they saw us looking up at heaven, and worshiping our sign, and praying to our guide, because they did not understand our mysteries, and they reckoned us as Magi." Obviously this is a quite difficult passage, since it implies that the central protagonists of the narrative are somehow *not* Magi. Presumably *Rev. Magi* is attempting to make a distinction between the Magi who are Seth's descendants from the land of Shir and more "common" magi who are simply astrologers and/or magicians.

c. There is no reference here or elsewhere in *Rev. Magi* to the "slaughter of the innocents" (Matt 2:16–18). The text simply states that Herod "was not worthy for the worship of the light that was born, because he was a dwelling of error . . ." (17:9). Whereas Matthew's Gospel is more concerned with the consequences that the arrival of the Magi and their star produce for the inhabitants of Judea, *Rev. Magi* is interested instead in the identity of the Magi and their star; so, its retelling of this part of the Matthean narrative seems almost perfunctory.

d. Unlike in chapter 13, there is no explicit narration here of the star's transformation into human form.

they will be his witnesses in the East, along with his disciples. The being will return to his Father when he has completed everything commanded by the Father, yet he is never actually separated from him. The being tells the Magi that when they see the sun darkened during the daytime, a great earthquake, and the dead rising from their graves, they will know that the end of the ages has come and they will see him ascending into the heavens.^a

Angels praise Christ (chap. 20)

As the star-child speaks with the Magi, the cave shines so much that it becomes like some other world. Suddenly, the voices of many (apparently invisible angelic) beings offer praises to him. They praise his creation of the worlds, his complete unity with the Father, and the salvation that he provides.

The commissioning of the Magi (chap. 21)

At the sound of these angelic praises, the Magi fall to the ground terrified. The star-child puts his hand upon them forcefully and comforts them. He tells them that as powerful as these angelic beings might seem to the Magi due to their human frailty, they are insignificant to him. There are, in fact, other things that even the angels are incapable of hearing or speaking about. Because the Magi's ancient mysteries have been completed, the star-child now dismisses them to return to their own land. They will be witnesses to him along with his disciples, and once he has ascended to heaven, he will send disciples to them. The Father and the Son are completely inseparable.^b The Son has been sent to redeem the world from Adam's sin, and will give eternal life to the Magi through water and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Unseen voices praise the Son once more.

The Magi meet Mary and Joseph (chap. 22)

The Magi go forth from the cave to begin the return journey to their homeland. Joseph and Mary, who were appointed to be the parents of the star-child, go out with the Magi.^c They see the light traveling along with the Magi, the same light that had been born in their house, and so Mary and Joseph are upset by the prospect that the Magi are taking their child away from them.

The Magi's revelation to Mary (chap. 23)

The Magi praise Mary for being chosen to give birth to the Son in human form. They tell her that her child is still inside of her^d and is in her house, even though he is also present with the Magi. This great gift does not belong to Mary alone, but is for the salvation of all the heavenly and earthly realms. The Magi urge her to look up and see that he is present

a. The events predicted by the star-child seem to be the Passion, particularly its Matthean version with the earthquake and the raising of the saints (cf. Matt 27:51–53). It is curious, however, that this prediction never actually comes to pass in the form of *Rev. Magi* that we possess. If the Judas Thomas episode is indeed an interpolation, it is possible that the fulfillment of this prediction did actually take place in the narrative, but was obliterated when the Judas Thomas redactional material was added.

b. Much of the content of this speech is slightly rephrased from the speech of the star-child in chapter 19 (and to some degree, the speeches in chaps. 13 and 15).

c. The appearance of Mary and Joseph is quite abrupt: were they in the cave with the Magi, or were they simply in the general vicinity?

d. It is surprising that the text claims that the child is still inside of Mary, since the birth would seem to have already taken place. But this is best interpreted as another case of *Rev. Magi's* strong insistence on Christ's omnipresence throughout the entire world.

throughout the entire creation, and he appears in every land, since he has been sent for the redemption of all human beings.

Mary speaks to Christ (chap. 24)

After the Magi explain to Mary and Joseph the true nature of their child, the couple returns to their house.^a They find their luminous child laughing and speaking about his great mysteries. Mary and Joseph worship him, and Mary praises the child who has been given to her because of her obedience. She explains to the child that she had supposed that he was going with the Magi because of the gifts that they had offered him.

Christ blesses Mary (chap. 25)

The child praises Mary for being worthy to conceive the one who would bring salvation into the world; her deed will bestow blessing and remembrance upon her in this world, and reward in the world to come. She has redeemed Eve and her offspring, and all the worlds have peace because of her. He is now turning to his believers throughout the world, for whom he will fulfill everything promised by the Father.

The return journey home (chap. 26)

During the journey back to Shir, the star again appears to the Magi, and they worship it. The star tells the Magi that he is everywhere, and that he is even greater than the sun. When the time comes to eat, the Magi see that their provisions are now even more full than when they departed from their homeland, a miracle that causes them fear and awe. As they eat their provisions, the visions and wonders that they see in the presence of their guide do not resemble one another.^b

The Magi address the people of Shir (chap. 27)

The Magi complete their journey back to Shir under the guidance of the star, and when they arrive at the border of their land, their families and many other inhabitants of the land come to greet them and marvel at their health despite the length of their journey. The Magi narrate for the people the journey that they undertook. They mention the visions of the star that accompanied them, their visit to Jerusalem, and the epiphany of the star-child at Bethlehem in the cave that resembled the Cave of Treasures. When they began the journey back to their homeland, the Magi say, they found their provisions to be more full than what they initially had brought, and now these overflowing bags of provisions are sitting before the people of Shir. The Magi invite the people to partake of these provisions, because when they eat them, they too will be able to experience the visions and revelations that the Magi have seen.

a. In chapters 24 and 25, which take place in the house of Mary and Joseph, there is no indication that the Magi are present. If they are not, this would be the only interruption in the first-person narrative perspective of the Magi between the formal commencement of first-person narration in 3:6 (or possibly 2:6) and the clear termination of first-person narration in 28:4, just prior to the beginning of the Judas Thomas material.

b. This statement that the Magi have diverse visions is similar to what was stated about the epiphany in the Cave of Treasures in chapter 14. However, the fact that these visions take place for the Magi in the context of eating their provisions foreshadows the visions of the inhabitants of Shir in chapter 28, which are clearly connected with the people's eating of the same food (though the Magi's visions here are not expressly said to be the result of the eating of the provisions).

The people eat the Magi's food (chap. 28)

Some of the people eat from the Magi's provisions, and as soon as they do, they begin rejoicing because of the visions that they immediately see. One of the people sees a great light unlike anything in the world; another sees God giving birth to himself; another, a star of light that darkens the sun; another, a man uglier than any other human being, saving the world through his blood and his appearance; another, a lamb hanging upon a tree of life, redeeming the world through his blood; and another, a pillar of light diving down inside the earth, with the dead rising and worshipping it. The ones who eat of the provisions see many other things beyond these, and the people of the entire land come to hear the revelations of the Magi.^a Day by day, the revelations increase, all sorts of miracles are performed by the Magi, and the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ grows in the land of Shir.

Judas Thomas arrives in Shir (chap. 29)

The faith increases even more when the apostle Judas Thomas arrives in the land, sent there by the Lord. When the Magi hear of his arrival, which the star-child had promised to them, they go to meet him. Thomas^b rejoices when they come, and after they tell him about the journey that they underwent, he recognizes "that the gift of our Lord had overflowed upon them" (29:4). He tells them, in turn, about his own experiences with Christ during the Lord's earthly ministry, including his ever-changing appearances. When the Magi hear this, they glorify God and ask Thomas to give them "the seal of our Lord," baptism (29:5).

The hymn of Judas Thomas (chap. 30)

Early on Sunday, while still night, Thomas takes the Magi to a spring of water. He takes oil and sings a hymn over it. He praises Christ for the gift of the oil, which gives salvation and takes away darkness, and he praises the oil, which hovers over the water as the Holy Spirit did. Using a number of epithets for Christ, Thomas asks him to be present and come upon the believers for their salvation.

The Magi receive the Eucharist and commission to preach (chap. 31)

After singing this hymn, Thomas baptizes them, and when they come out of the water, a luminous child descends to them from heaven. The Magi fall upon the ground, terrified, and when they stand up, the child has become a glorious young man. He takes a loaf of bread, gives praise, and breaks it, giving it first to Thomas and then to them. The being then ascends into heaven once more. Thomas glorifies the amazing and diverse images in which this being appears, stating that none of the names that he is called is his true name, which only he and the Father know. Thomas thanks the Son for enduring all the suffering on humanity's behalf, despite "being exalted above all sufferings and being a kinsperson of that one who does not suffer" (31:6). The Magi echo Thomas's praise, confessing that the Son's majesty is beyond their ability to describe. As they give thanks and praise, a great

a. At 28:4 the first-person narration definitively ceases, the Magi are spoken about here as if they are new characters not previously introduced into the narrative, and we have the first use of the familiar Christian terminology "our Lord." The text reads: "And there was great joy in the entire land of the East, and the nobles, and the poor, and women, and children from the entire land were gathered together in the love of our Lord before those nobles who were called Magi."

b. The text refers to this individual mostly as "Judas." Because the name "Thomas" is more familiar to many readers, I use that name here instead.

many are added to the faith day by day. Thomas tells the Magi that they must fulfill the commandment of the Lord to preach the gospel throughout the entire world, just as the other apostles have done.

The preaching of the Magi (chap. 32)

The Magi go out from there, preach about the coming of Jesus Christ, and perform miracles and healings through his name. They preach to everyone, urging all to flee from the “fearsome judgment of fire that will come suddenly to purify the entire earth from error” (32:2). By faith in Jesus Christ, all will be delivered from the fire and shall enter the eternal rest prepared for believers in his kingdom. At the end of the Magi’s missionary speech, the compiler of *Chron. Zuq.* adds, “The story about the Magi and their gifts has finished” (32:4).