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*THE FIRST INDIANS AT THE FEET OF OUR LADY*

# THE STORY OF THE MAGI

By the

REV. H. HERAS, S.J.

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
SIMLA**

**STUDIES IN INDIAN HISTORY**  
**OF THE**  
**INDIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**  
**ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE**  
**Bombay**  
**No. 21**

**THE STORY OF THE MAGI**

DATA ENTERED

**CATALOGUED**



The Rsis of India at the Feet of Our Lady and the Child  
By J. P. GONSALVES

*The First Indians at the Feet of Our Lady*

# THE STORY OF THE MAGI

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SOCIETY OF ST. PAUL

Bombay—Allahabad

1954



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*Imprimi potest*

ALOYSIUS M. COYNE, S.J.

Praepositus Vice-Provinciae

Bombayensis

Bombay, 8 Septembris, 1954



*Imprimatur*

✠ VALERIANUS CARDINALIS GRACIAS

Archiepiscopus Bombayensis

Bombay, 7 Octobris 1954

232-91

H4135

## PREFACE

The devotion of Indians of all denominations, Hindus, Muhammadans, Parsis and Jews, towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, is a fact recorded by eye-witnesses all over the country.

Hundreds of Hindus go to honour her at her Church of Milagres in Mapuça, Goa, making offerings of oil throughout the year. In the village of Sioni, Lalapur District, Diocese of Jhansi, the chapel in honour of Our Lady was built on a plot of land donated for this purpose by a Hindu. During the annual feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary most of the Hindus of the locality gather round the Chapel to take part in the procession. They are very eager to see the statue of Our Lady taken out in procession. In Gharria Phatak, in the same Diocese, people of all creeds also take part in the celebrations in honour of Christ's Mother at the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, on May the 13th. The grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at Irudayakulam, Madurai Archdiocese, is likewise visited by peoples of all religions, morning and evening throughout the year, offering flowers, candles, salt and at times other things. The same scenes are reported from the shrine of Our Lady of Blackpully, a suburb of Bangalore, where hundreds of Hindus and Muslims from Bangalore, Kolar Gold Fields and the surrounding villages flock the whole year, but especially during the novena before the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady (8th September). Many Hindus venerate the image of Our Lady in the small chapel at Bhatkal, North Kanara, especially on the 12th of January, when the annual feast is celebrated. They come with their little children, making offerings out of their poverty. Again at Halga in North Kanara, the non-Christians, both Hindus and Muslims, are as fervent as the Christians in their devotion to Our Lady of Piety in her little Chapel. They go to her in their needs and afflictions and whenever they leave the place and on their return. The new shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Yercaud, Salem Diocese, is also visited by the Hindus of the place eager to venerate Our Lady. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims flock likewise to the Little Mount at Madras to honour Our Lady of Health on the Fourth Sunday after Easter every year. The Hindus



visit the Shrine throughout the year. Many Hindus and Parsis are among those who every Wednesday evening go to the Church of St. Michael, Mahim, in Bombay to make the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Once more in Greater Bombay the Church of Mount Mary, Bandra, witnesses large crowds of all denominations coming to honour Our Lady throughout the year, but especially during the novena following on the feast of her Nativity (8th September). They go there to implore graces, to thank her for favours received, to praise her as the powerful Queen of Heaven. The same instances of fervent Marian devotion on the part of the Hindus are witnessed throughout the year at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Snows, Tuticorin, on the Fishery Coast, one of the oldest churches of South India.

The Church of Our Lady of Ransom of Vallarpadam, in the Archdioceses of Verapoly, was originally erected through the permission and facilities granted by the Hindu Diwan of Cochin Paliath Achan, who had himself saved the picture of Our Lady from a devastating flood. From those old days the Church receives a subsidy from the descendants of the old Diwan for having a perpetual light in the Church. Hindus as well as Christians honour Our Lady of Ransom throughout the year. In fact one of the Hindu devotees of Our Lady received an extraordinary favour from her in about the year 1800. It is narrated that a Nair woman of the very high family of the Palliyil's was betaking herself with a child to Cochin in a vessel through the backwaters. A storm took place and the boat capsized. All managed to escape, but the woman and her child disappeared and were accounted as drowned. But suddenly after a night and a day they reappeared, and she narrated that at the moment of danger she had placed herself and her child under the protection of the *Vallarpadam Amma* (the Lady of Vallarpadam) and when they were under water they were sheltered by that loving Mother. In due acknowledgement she did not want to return home but remained with her child by the side of the Church, rendering some little services to her protectress, just as sweeping the church, etc., as is done even now by many votaries of the Blessed Virgin. From that day the portrait of the Nair woman and her child

is painted in one of the lower corners of the ancient painting of Our Lady of Vallarpadam.

When the statue of Our Lady of Fatima visited many Indian cities and towns a few years ago (1950) she again attracted many Indians, without distinction of caste and creed, round her. She was recognized by all as the purest Virgin, the glory of the Jewish race, the saintly mother of Christ.

All these wonderful manifestations of devotion towards Our Lady on the part of our non-Christian brethren are not new in India. When the Jesuits opened their first house in northern India at the court of Akbar, Fathpur (now Fathepur-Sikri), they dedicated their chapel to Our Lady, installing a replica of the picture venerated in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, upon the altar. The Emperor visited the Fathers, as soon as he heard that they had taken possession of their new quarters. He came alone. When entering the chapel, he removed his turban and prostrated himself on the ground in adoration of Christ and his Mother. A week later he brought his three sons with him with a few noblemen of his court. They removed their shoes before entering the chapel. One of the Fathers who witnessed the visit writes : "He told his sons to do reverence to the pictures of Christ and His Virgin Mother. One of the nobles exclaimed with emotion that she who was sitting on her throne in such beautiful garments and ornaments was in truth the Queen of Heaven." (Hoyland-Banerji, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J., on his Journey to the Court of Akbar*, pp. 48-49, Oxford, 1922).

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The following pages will disclose the story of the first Indians who bowed down their heads at the lotus feet of Mary Immaculate nearly two thousand years ago.

H. HERAS, S.J.

*Bombay, 8th September 1954*

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THE GOSPEL ACCOUNT—ST. MATHEW, II, 1-12  
(Trans. by Mgr. KNOX)

Jesus was born at Bethlehem, in Juda, in the days of king Herod. And thereupon certain wise men came out of the east to Jerusalem, who asked: "Where is he that has been born, the king of the Jews? We have seen his star out in the east, and we have come to worship him." King Herod was troubled when he heard it, and all Jerusalem with him: so that he assembled all the chief priests and learned men among the people, and enquired of them where it was that Christ would be born. And they told him: "At Bethlehem in Juda: so it has been written by the prophet: 'And thou, Bethlehem, of the land of Juda, art far from the least among the princes of Juda, for out of thee will arise a leader who is to be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then, summoning the wise men in secret, Herod questioned them closely upon the time of the star's appearing. And he sent them on their way to Bethlehem, saying to them: "Go and enquire carefully for the child, and when you have found him, bring me back word, so that I too may come and worship him." They obeyed the king and went on their journey; and all at once the star which they had seen in the east was there going before them, till at last it stood still over the place where the child was. They, when they saw the star, were glad beyond measure: and so, going into the dwelling, they found the child there, with his mother Mary, and fell down to worship him: and, opening their store of treasures, they offered him gifts, of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Afterwards, because they had received a warning in a dream forbidding them to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by a different way.

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## INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Magi to adore Jesus is of the scenes of His childhood the one that has most appealed to the Christian imagination throughout the history of the Church. Christian iconography has constantly reproduced it, in painting, sculpture and stained glass ; legend has adorned it with a wealth of detail ; the novel has introduced it into the world of literature with a beauty without parallel;<sup>1</sup> popular tradition in Spain has made a most fitting use of it to reward children's good behaviour, thus placing them on the supernatural level;<sup>2</sup> the Church Herself commemorates the event in her liturgy as a first class feast, with a privileged octave, as very few feasts have it in the ecclesiastical year. For the Christian people, mostly drawing, as they do, their origin from the pagan world, have seen in the Magi the very first of the Gentiles opening their eyes to the light of the Gospel. That star was indeed the first divine missionary to the heathen world, and the Magi were the first to acknowledge the divinity of the newborn Child. And so we who come after them rejoice at their commemoration.

But, we may ask, who were these Magi and whence did they come ? Much has been written on the matter ; yet these notes, written from an independent standpoint, might bring some new light to a fascinating problem.

### 1. WHAT THE MAGI WERE NOT

It is very common to style the Magi "Holy Kings," and in almost every picture or piece of sculpture they are re-

1. The well-known American novel by Lewis Wallace *Ben Hur* is an instance. In this the Magi appear in the first chapters following the star in search of the Child Jesus. According to Lewis, the Magi are three, one from Egypt representing Africa, another from India representing Asia, and the third, an Athenian, representing Europe. This fancy of three continents blinds the author to forget the only certain detail we have about the Magi's origin, namely, that they come from the east.

2. Children in Spain believe that the Magi visit all houses during the night from the 5th to the 6th of January, leaving their gifts, sweets and toys for those whose conduct has been exemplary, and pieces of charcoal or nothing for those who do not obey their parent and teachers.

presented as such, wearing a crown and a royal mantle, and attended by a royal retinue. And yet St. Matthew, who is the only evangelist that speaks of them, says not a word about their royal status.

In the paintings of the Catacombs and the reliefs of the Christian sarcophagi of the first centuries the Magi are never presented as kings. No Father of the Church ever mentions their royal dignity. Tertullian only remarks that they were *fere reges*,<sup>3</sup> nearly kings, but he does not say on what authority his assertion is based. It is only from the sixth century that the belief that the Wise Men of St. Matthew's account were kings spread among the Christian people. This opinion seems to be based on verse 10 of Psalm 71: "The kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents : the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts," which is symbolically repeated in the liturgy of the feast of the Epiphany, but has no historical value. The ensigns of royalty, the crown and the mantle, make their appearance at the end of the tenth century.<sup>4</sup> In an ivory reliquary in the Museum of Cluny (1140 A.D.), the Magi are garbed as kings, though the third, Melchior, wears no crown. In a miniature of the *Roman Sacramentary* in the National Library of Paris the three wear crowns. As for their retinue and mode of travel, camels are to be found already in Roman sarcophagi of the first century, but this is simply because the camel is the most common beast used in the east for travelling across the desert ; it implies nothing as to the status of the Wise Men.<sup>5</sup> In mediaeval and modern iconography the regal train fills all the background of the picture or carving. In the mosaic of San Apollinario Nuovo at Ravenna, the Magi, though still dressed in the Persian fashion, appear for the first time each with his individual characteristics, as they are depicted in modern times ; thus one is shown wearing a white beard, the second a black one, while the third appears

3. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, III, 13 : *ML*, II, col. 367 ; *Adversus Judaeos*, IX ; *ibid.*, cols. 658-659.

4. Fabre, *Pages d'Art Chrétien*, p. 384.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 377, fig. 202 ; Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi Christiani Antichi*, II, pl. CCII, 4 ; pl. CCIV, 1 ; pl. CCXIX, 2 and 3 ; pl. CCXXII, 4 and 6 ; Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, VII, cols. 549-550.

as a beardless youth.<sup>6</sup> Later on Bede the Venerable gives a detailed description of the person and attire of the *Magi*, much as if he had actually witnessed the scene : "It is said that the first was Melchior, old and white-haired, having a long beard and long hair, wearing a hyacinthine tunic with cloak closely woven and shoes purple bluish and white in a variegated style ; his mitre was of an unusual shape ; he offered gold to the Lord, acknowledging Him as king. The second, named Gaspar, was a beardless youth, rubicund, dressed in a mylenian tunic, red mantle and hyacinthine shoes ; he offered frankincense to the Lord, adoring Him as God, for such a gift is offered to divinity. The third one, of olive complexion and with a goodish beard, was called Balthasar ; he displayed a purple tunic with white ornaments, and mylenic shoes ; offering myrrh to the son of man, he made a profession of faith in his death".<sup>7</sup> Never did monastic piety rove so far in the realm of fancy ! In the time of the great maritime discoveries, when the several races of mankind became better known, the "beardless king" was painted as a negro, the three races of mankind being thus imagined at the feet of our Lord. Perhaps Dürer, in 1504, was the first to introduce the negro king in the picture of the Adoration.<sup>8</sup> Other artists have portrayed contemporary monarchs who were their protectors in these kings. In a painting in the Museum of Florence by Leonardo da Vinci, the Medici princes Cosmo, Lorenzo and Giuliano appear as the Magi. Similarly in a sculpture by Jean Van Eyck one of the Magi is Philip the Handsome, Duke of Burgundy, and another is Charles the Bold.<sup>9</sup> Dürer's types have since become the traditional model of all Epiphanies. "Now," says a French critic, with more assurance than accuracy, "the Magi are no more an enigma to us. We know all about them, how they came with great pomp, clad in royal dresses, to worship the Child Jesus".<sup>10</sup> These types so distinct, made somebody imagine that the three Magi represented the three

6. Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 378, fig. 264.

7. Saint Bede, *Excerptiones Patrum* ; *ML*, XCIV, col. 541.

8. See a painting of his in Florence. Cf. Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 391, fig. 275.

9. Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as represented in the Fine Arts*, p. 218 (London, 1857).

10. Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 394.



families of Noah's race, Semites, Chamites and Japhetians. Such is the tale of the Wise Men. Indian philosophers, with a marvellous intuition and an incomparable appreciation of the gift of wisdom, would say : If they were kings, they could not be wise men ; if they were wise, they could not be kings ; for he who acquires true wisdom renounces all early possessions. As Fray Luis de Leon observes :

"What a quiet life,  
is his, who escapes the wordly noise,  
and follows the hidden  
path, through which do run  
the few wise men who have existed."

The number of the Magi is absolutely unknown to us. Saint Matthew merely uses the plural, without specifying their number. A fresco of the third century in the cemetery of Saint Peter and Marcellinus at Rome shows only two Wise Men worshipping the newly-born Child, one on either side of Our Lady.<sup>11</sup> Another painting, in the cemetery of Domitilla, dating from the first half of the fourth century, represents four Magi, two on either side of Our Lady.<sup>12</sup> A vase in the Kircherian Museum at Rome has eight Magi.<sup>13</sup> The symmetry of the painting was evidently the reason for the even number. This variety is evidence of the ignorance of the first Christians as to the number. The tradition of the Oriental Church seems to incline to the number twelve.<sup>14</sup> Yet several Fathers speak of three Magi already. Some authors suppose that this number has been influenced by the number of the holy young men in the furnace of Babylon.<sup>15</sup> Most probably the Fathers and the sculptors of the Roman sarcophagi were influenced by the number of the gifts that the Magi presented to the Child : in these carvings each

11. Wilpert, *Le Pitture delle Catacombe Romane*, II, pl. 60; Marucchi, *Elements d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, I, p. 197. (Paris, 1899). Thirteen Epiphanies are extant among the paintings of the Catacombs. Cf. Fabre, *Pages d'Art Chrétien*, p. 378.

12. Wilpert, *op. cit.*, pl. 110 ; Marucchi, *op. et. loc. cit.*

13. Marucchi, *op. et. loc. cit.*

14. Mâle, *L'art religieux au XIII siècle*, p. 251.

15. Cf. Drum, word "Magi" in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, IX, p. 528.

of the Wise Men offers the Child a different gift.<sup>16</sup> The iconography of the Epiphany in mediaeval and modern times follows this tripartite tradition of gifts in the hands of the Magi.<sup>17</sup>

We know nothing of the names of these personages. In some manuscripts of the seventh and eight centuries they are given as Bithisarca, Melchior and Gathaspa.<sup>18</sup> Agnellus, in the beginning of the ninth century, gives the names as we know them now : Gaspar, Balthasar and Melchior<sup>19</sup>; so they appear in the fresco of St. Urban, in Rome (1011), and in the casket at Cluny (1140) : Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar<sup>20</sup>. In the Syriac Church they are called Larvandad or Zarvandad, Hormisdas, Gushnasaph and Arsach.<sup>21</sup> Among the Armenians the names are altogether different : Kagha, Badadilma and Badadakharida.<sup>22</sup> By the old Greek writers they are called : Appellius, Amerus and Damascus.<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew writers call them : Malagath, Galgalath and Sarachim.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. THE WISDOM OF THE MAGI

The word *magoi*, as it is used by St. Matthew, does not mean that they were Magi in the dubious meaning of the word, namely, that they were devoted to witchcraft, or that they were diviners, or interpreters of the occult, but rather that they were learned men.

16. We find that even in Spain in the sarcophagus of the Church of Castilliscar—completely different from those of the Romans—each of the Magi brings a different gift. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi Christiani Antichi*, II, pl. CCXIX, 3.

17. We shall speak later on the value of this tradition.

18. Cf. Knabenbauer, *In Matheum*, I, pp. 70-81.

19. Fabre, *Pages d'Art Chrétien*, p. 384. According to the Martyrology the Feast of the three Magi is celebrated on different days : That of St. Gaspar on the 1st January ; that of St. Melchior on the 6th, and that of St. Balthasar on the 11th of the same month. Cf. *Acta Sanctorum*, I, pp. 8, 323, 664.

20. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, II, p. 114. Cf. *ML*, CVI, col. 620.

21. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III, p. 340, a.

22. *Acta Sanctorum*, May I, p. 1780; *Journal Asiatique*, 1807, février, p. 160.

23. Zacharias Chrisopolitanus, *De Concordia Evangelistarum* : *MG*, CXXXIV, col. 83.

24. *Ibid.*, Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica In Evangelia*, VIII, *ML*, CXCVIII, col. 1542.

We must first notice that the union of the word "Magi" and "from the Orient," together with the constant tradition of the Church, clearly reveal that these men were not of the Jewish race. They were Gentiles, from the hated *gojim*; which becomes much more interesting if we bear in mind that this fact is mentioned by St. Matthew only, who addressed his Gospel to the Jews and consequently wrote in Aramaic. The fact that it is St. Matthew who mentions it is a proof of its authenticity: even if it was against the liking of the Jews they had to know that some *gojim* had come from heathen lands to worship the Lord.

The word *māgoi* at first sight seems to point to their origin in Persia. Herdotus tells us that this was the name of an old Persian tribe, which was not precisely a social tribe, but rather a religious one;<sup>25</sup> it was the tribe of the followers of Zarathustra, the monotheistic reformer of old Iran. Etymologically *māgoi* is derived from the Avestic word *maga* which means "gift"; hence *magu* in the old Avestic and *mogu* in the most recent books of the *Avesta* had to have the same meaning as the substantive *maga* converted into an adjective, which means "partaker of the gift".<sup>26</sup> What could this gift be? *Maga* is the gift of Vohu Mano, the "Good Spirit," that is, God; defining more precisely, we may call it "the gift of wisdom." Hence Zarathustra who, as he himself writes, had received this gift by revelation, had made his followers its partakers.<sup>27</sup> The Magian followers of Zarathustra were not astrologers at all, as were the Chaldaeans, for we know that astrology is condemned in the *Avesta*.<sup>28</sup>

But in the Gospel the word *Māgoi* is not used with reference to Zarathustra's revelation, for if that were so, all the patristic tradition would have acknowledged Persia as the country of the Magi, which is not the case, as we shall see presently. St. Matthew uses this name with reference to the gift of wisdom in general, that is to say, partakers of the gift of wisdom, sages. The English translation of this passage

25. Herodotus, I, 101.

26. Messina, *Ursprung der Magier und die Zarathustrische Religion*, pp. 70-80. (Rome, 1930).

27. Messina, *I Magi a Betlemme e una predizione di Zoroastro*, pp. 14-15.

28. Cf. Ricciotti, *Vita di Gesù Cristo*, p. 280.

in the Douai version, "Wise Men," seems to give precisely the meaning intended by the author. But from what country did the Wise Men hail ?

### 3. THE COUNTRY OF THE MAGI IN THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

The oriental regions whence these Wise Men came may be many. When they spoke of the star to King Herod they said that they saw it *en te anatolici*, according to the Gospel text.<sup>29</sup> This phrase, although it may be understood to mean that they saw the star on the eastern side of the sky or in the east, seems much more naturally to signify that they saw it when they were in the east ; so these words confirm their oriental origin. Which was, therefore, this "east" where they came from? What were these oriental regions? Of all the data in the evangelic narrative this is, according to Ricciotti, *il più vago*, the most uncertain.<sup>30</sup>

Geographically the "east" is all the land to the east of the river Jordan. But when they come to define the particular region from where the Magi came, the same authors who mention "all" the oriental region of the Jordan, suggest only the Syro-Arabic desert, Mesopotamia and Persia, excluding practically every other region the east of that river.<sup>31</sup> It is true that in the Bible the sound "east" refers generally to Arabia<sup>32</sup> and Persia,<sup>33</sup> which are the lands nearest to Palestine, what we might call "the geographical east." But it does not follow that St. Matthew cannot refer to farther oriental lands, especially since the Greek word *anatolici* signifies precisely "the rising of the sun," that is, "the astronomical east." Therefore "the east" of St. Matthew does not exclude any region of the east of the Jordan, either near or far.

Some have thought that these oriental regions would be the lands of Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea, where

<sup>29</sup>. *Matthew*, II, 1 and 9.

<sup>30</sup>. Ricciotti, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>31</sup>. Thus, for instance, Ricciotti, *op. et loc. cit.*

<sup>32</sup>. *Num.*, XXIII, 7 ; *Jerem*, XLIX, 28 ; *Ezech.* XXV, 10.

<sup>33</sup>. *Is.*, XLI, 2.

Balaam had prophesied that "a star of Jacob would be born",<sup>34</sup> a prophecy that would indicate to the Wise Men the supernatural meaning of the star. In reality Balaam had not in his mind a physical phenomenon in the sky or atmosphere ; but a "star" which was symbolically the Messiah, born of the descendants of Jacob<sup>35</sup>. Therefore the words of the prophet of Ammon do not refer to the star seen by the Magi, nor could the latter have understood that the luminous body that appeared to them was the star of Balaam's prophecy.

The opinion of the Fathers of the Church on this point is much divided. Theodotus of Ancyra and St. Maximus Taurinensis incline to Chaldaea, in Mesopotamia, as the land of the Magi. Theodotus affirms that it was Chaldaea, because the Chaldaeans were proficient in the study of nature and the movements of the stars;<sup>36</sup> while St. Maximus declares that the Magi saw the star "in Chaldaea",<sup>37</sup> that they were "from Chaldaea", and he calls them "Chaldaeans",<sup>38</sup> giving no reason for his affirmations.<sup>39</sup> St. Peter Chrysologus is sometimes cited as favouring the same country, but that is not the case. He denies it emphatically<sup>40</sup> and even finally asserts that the Magi were descendants of Noah from among the children of Abraham.<sup>41</sup>

Others believe that Arabia was the home of the Magi, St. Justinus Martyr saying it several times.<sup>42</sup> Tertullian mentions Damascus as the place of origin of two of their presents, gold and incense, because of the prophecy of Isaias : *Prius quam cognoscat vocare patrem et matrem accipiet virtutem*

<sup>34</sup>. Num., XXIV, 17.

<sup>35</sup>. Nevertheless Origen says that the apparition of the star at the time of the birth of Jesus had been already foretold by Balaam (*Contra Celsum*, I, 59 ; *MG*, XI, col. 769).

<sup>36</sup>. Theodotus Ancyranus, *Homilia I in Nativitate*, 10 ; *MG*, LXXVII, col. 1364.

<sup>37</sup>. St. Maximus Taurinensis, *Homiliae Hiemales*, XIX : *ML*, LVII, col. 264.

<sup>38</sup>. *Ibid.*, XVIII, col. 261, XX, col. 265.

<sup>39</sup>. *Ibid.*, XVIII, col. 262 ; XX, cols. 265-266 ; XXIII, cols. 275-276 ; XXV, cols. 279-280 ; XXVI, col. 282.

<sup>40</sup>. St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo CLVI* : *ML*, col. 612.

<sup>41</sup>. St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo CLVII* : *op. cit.*, col. 616.

<sup>42</sup>. St. Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 77 : *MG*, VI, col. 637 ; 78, cols. 657-660 ; 88, col. 685 ; 102, col. 713 ; 102, col. 716 ; 100, col. 724.

*Damasci* (VII, 4), which, according to him, was fulfilled when the Magi offered their gifts to the Child.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly many authors of a later period have seen fulfilled on the same occasion the two prophecies of the Psalms : *Reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent*<sup>44</sup> and *dabitur ei de auro Arabiae*,<sup>45</sup> and consequently have seen in the Wise Men natives of Arabia.<sup>46</sup> In relation to this Fr. Bover suggests very pointedly: "If the royal dignity of the Magi is rightly rejected, for instance, as originating from a too literal interpretation of these biblical passages, with the same reason the opinion of Arabia can be logically rejected as equally inspired by an inadequate interpretation of the seventy-first Psalm".<sup>47</sup>

St. Epiphanius of Cyprus is usually cited among those who believe in the Arabian origin,<sup>48</sup> but his opinion seems to fluctuate between Arabia and Persia. At times he speaks of the Magi merely as "from the east" and "from the countries of the east"; he explains also that they were "Abraham's and Chettura's descendants, who dwelt in the parts of Arabia and region of Magodia"<sup>49</sup>, and therefore he too applies to them and to their gifts the verse of Isaias mentioned above.<sup>50</sup> But in another place he says that "the Magusei were among the Persians"<sup>51</sup>.

The opinion that Persia, was the homeland of the Wise Men is certainly the one that has had most supporters, on account, no doubt, of their name. Clement Alexandrine calls "Magi of Persia"<sup>52</sup> those who came to adore the Infant. Origen, speaking of the Magi of Bethlehem, says that "the

43. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, III, 13 : *ML*, II, cols. 366-367 ; *Adversus Judaeos*, IX, cols. 658-659.

44. *Ps.* LXXI, 10.

45. *Ibid.*, 15.

46. Thus, for instance, Fr. Prat, *Jesus Christ*, I, p. 100.

47. Bover, *El Evangelio de San Mateo*, p. 51.

48. For instance, Bover, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

49. St. Epiphanius, *De Laudibus Beatae Virginis Mariae*, ad calcem : *Op. ra Ombia*, II, p. 299 (Paris, 1622).

50. St. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 2, p. 483 (Basilea). (In the copy in the Gregorian University, Rome, that we used, the date of the edition is effaced and illegible).

51. *Ibid.*, p. 487. The Magi of Persia were called *Magusei* in other lands. Cf. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum religionum*, 5 : *MG.* I, col. 1410.

52. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 15 : *MG.* VIII, col. 777.

Magi are the wisest men among the Persians",<sup>53</sup> who have intercourse with evil spirits to find out obscure things ; but when the star appeared the birth of Jesus prevented the evil spirits from operating. So they examined Balaam's prophecy and deduced that the Man announced in this prophecy had a greater power than the devils ; therefore they adored Him as God.<sup>54</sup> Singular reasoning to show how the Persian Magi—familiar with the devil, according to him—were converted to the knowledge of the Messiah ! St. Cyril of Alexandria also supposes that our Magi came from Persia "because the country of the Persians lies towards the east" ; but as he understands that the prophecy of the psalm, *Dabitur ei de auro Arabiae*, was fulfilled on the occasion, he very easily resolves the difficulty that arises, by the words : "In this place (the Psalmist) calls the region of the Persians by the name of Arabia."<sup>55</sup> This is an extraordinary explanation indeed, St. Cyril making his personal opinion concerning the country of the Wise Men agree with the Davidic prophecy which he interprets so literally.

St. John Chrysostom, too, believes that the Wise Men came from Persia, and his reason seems to be that "the Magi dwelt in Persia,"<sup>56</sup> although he confesses that Palestine is towards the south of Persia, and not towards the west, according to the obvious meaning of St. Matthew's narrative.<sup>57</sup> Anyway he asseverates that the star taught the Jews "in the Persian language" what they did not want to learn from their prophets.<sup>58</sup> Finally he assures us that when the Child with His Mother had to flee to Egypt, the Magi made their way to Persia.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup>. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 24 : *MG*, XI, col. 704.

<sup>54</sup>. *Ibid.*, I, 60, col. 704

<sup>55</sup>. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *In Isaiam*, IV, 4(V, 49, 12) : *MG*, LXX, col. 1061. The Hebrew text nevertheless does not mention Arabia, but only an individual city of Arabia, i.e., Sceba (Saba). Cf. Vaccari, *Libri poetici della Bibbia*, p. 135 (Roma, 1925).

<sup>56</sup>. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matheum*, hom. VII, 4: *MG*, LVII, col. 78.

<sup>57</sup>. *Ibid.*, VI, 2, cols. 64-65. He emphasizes this southern situation of Bethlehem in relation to Persia, for he wants to prove that the star of the Magi could not be an ordinary star, as all stars move from east to west. We shall speak of this opinion of St. Chrysostom below.

<sup>58</sup>. *Ibid.*, VI, 3, col. 65.

<sup>59</sup>. *Ibid.*, VIII, I, col. 83. Cf. the same author, *De Beato Philogonio*, VI : *MG*, XLVIII, col. 753.

This seems likewise the opinion of St. Ephrem Syrus when he speaks of "the Magi of Persia".<sup>60</sup> He seems, however, not to be very decided, since he applies the prophecy of the psalm to the Epiphany.<sup>61</sup>

The Spanish poets Juvencus and Prudentius share this opinion. The former depicts the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem in these classical hexameters :

*Gens est ulterior, surgenti conscia soli,  
Astrorum solers ortusque abitusque notare,  
Hujus primores nomen tenuere Magorum,  
Hinc lecti procures Solymas per longa viarum  
Deveniunt, regemque adeunt, orantque doceri  
Quae regio imperio puerum Judaea teneret  
Progenitum.*<sup>62</sup>

And a few lines later he adds :—

*Tunc jubet Herodes Persas pertendere gressum.*<sup>63</sup>

Therefore these grandees who were acquainted with the stars were Persians.<sup>64</sup>

Prudentius is more simple and equally explicit :

*En Persia ex orbis sinu  
Sol unde sumit januam  
Cernunt periti interpretes  
Regale vexillum Magi.*<sup>65</sup>

It is evident from the above that the Persian origin is the view that is most prevalent among the ancient writers of the Church, so much so that it may be said that it is the most common. Besides we must note that to the majority of these writers the reason for identifying them as Persians

<sup>60</sup>. St. Ephrem Syrus, *Diversi Sermones*, sermo III : *Opera Omnia*, III, p. 605 (Romae, 1740).

<sup>61</sup>. St. Ephrem Syrus, *In Natalem Domini*, sermo X, p. 428.

<sup>62</sup>. Juvencus, *Evangelicae Historiae*, I, vv. 259-265 : *ML*, XIX, col. 65.

<sup>63</sup>. *Ibid.*, V, 276, col. 96.

<sup>64</sup>. But the author of the notes on Juvencus' poem does not seem to attach great value to the opinion of the poet, for to his comment on the word "Persian" he adds : *Quo nomine omnes orientales extra Romanum Imperium nationes, Juveni tempore, censebantur.* *Ibid.*, col. 95. We shall have an opportunity, a little later, to repeat this idea.

<sup>65</sup>. Prudentius, *Cathemerinon*, Hymnus I, vv. 25-28 : *ML*, LIX, col. 902. The commentator on the *Cathemerinon* says that *Jeremias Felbingerus pugnât, vel somnariat (Magos) fuisse Sinenses.*



is the fact that St. Matthew calls them "Magi", a name which did not in any way disturb those others who thought they came from Chaldaea or Arabia.<sup>66</sup> We may therefore conclude that there is no real patristic tradition about the country of origin of the Magi.

#### 4. THE ICONOGRAPHIC TRADITION

More constant and general than the patristic tradition is the iconographic tradition of Rome. The thirteen paintings in the Catacombs which represent this mystery, although they vary as regards the number of the Wise Men, are always in perfect agreement as regards their Persian attire, the characteristic Phrygian cap, the short tunic and tucked trousers, flying cape and leggings. This is the Persian type so well known to students of Roman archaeology.<sup>67</sup> Such is the appearance of the two Persian Saints Abdon and Senen in the painting of the Cemetery of Pontianus.<sup>68</sup>

At a somewhat later period, in the sculptures of the Christian sarcophagi, the Magi worshipping the Child are represented in the same manner. From a scene of the sarcophagus of Ancona, depicting them speaking with Herod, they are dressed as Persians.<sup>69</sup> They appear similarly clad before our Lady and Jesus in a panel of the door of St. Sabina's, dating from the middle of the fifth century.<sup>70</sup> The mosaic

<sup>66</sup>. Similarly, this is the reason why the majority of modern authors hold that Persia was the country of the Magi. See, for instance, Fr. Drum: "East of Palestine only ancient Media, Persia, Assyria, and Babylonia had a Magian priesthood at the time of the birth of Christ. From some such part of the Persian Empire the Magi came." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, word "Magi", IX, p.

<sup>67</sup>. Wilpert, *Le Pitture delle Catacombe Romane*, pp. 176-186 (1923). Cf. Lagrange, *Evangelie selon Saint Mathieu*, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup>. Fabre, *Pages d'Art Chrétien*, p. 378.

<sup>69</sup>. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi Christiani Antichi*, I, pl. XIV, 2 and 3. We know only two paintings in which this iconographic tradition is not followed. One of them, under the Vigna Magna, belongs to the mid-fourth century. The Magi do not wear any cap, and their legs are bare. In the second painting the dress is not so visible, but it does not seem to be the traditional Persian dress. *Ibid.*, pl. 147. The painting in St. Calixtus' cemetery (dating from the middle of the fourth century), is not clear either. *Ibid.*, pl. 144.

<sup>70</sup>. Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 377, fig. 263.

of San Apollinario Nuovo of Ravenna, of the sixth century, introduces a new element in the Magian figures—two of them are bearded—but continues the tradition as regards their dress<sup>71</sup>.

This Roman iconographic tradition reached the East. The Fathers of the Synod of Jerusalem (836 A.D.) say that, when the Persians were destroying all the Christian churches of Palestine (614 A.D.), they spared the Basilica of the Nativity of Our Lord because they found therein a painting of the Adoration in which the Magi appeared wearing the national Persian dress.<sup>72</sup> Now, is this constant iconographic tradition maintaining that Persia is the country of the Magi of any moment?

We have already seen what the commentator of Juvenecus says, namely, that in the poet's time all Orientals were called Persians. Likewise it has been remarked that this style of depicting the Magi of the Catacombs (which is the very source of the tradition) was influenced by the images of Mithra. This Persian god, so popular among the aristocratic circles of Rome in the beginning of the Christian era, was an Oriental god, and offered an example of Oriental dress to the primitive Christian painters.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the Persians were almost the only Orientals that were in contact with Rome. For a Roman an Oriental was a Persian, since to him little more of the East was known. The reliefs of the Triumphal Arch of Constantine, not far from the Colosseum, demonstrate this. In these reliefs the soldiers of Maxentius are represented as vanquished prisoners led in a triumphal procession along the Via Sacra. Now Maxentius was the Emperor of the east; his soldiers ought to be Orientals, and as such, all of them wear the traditional Persian garments. The Magi of the Catacombs and of the Christian sarcophagi appear as Persians only to signify that they came from the east. There was no further significance in the representation. In an Algerian sarcophagus in the Louvre Museum even the three young Jews thrown by order of Nabuchodonosor into the burning furnace of Babylon appear in Persian

<sup>71</sup> Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 378, fig. 264.

<sup>72</sup> Messina, *De Vetere Religione Persarum eiusque relatione cum religione V. et N. Testamenti*, p. 60 (Romae, 1936).

<sup>73</sup> Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

garb.<sup>74</sup> All these circumstances considered, it may fairly be concluded that the iconographic tradition has no historic value whatsoever.

## 5. THE COUNTRY OF THE WISE MEN OF THE EAST

When St. Matthew tells us that "Wise Men from the east" came to adore the Child Jesus, he evidently meant that they came from a country where wisdom was cultivated. We must remember that the wisdom of the Oriental races was proverbial among the Jews. Exalting the wisdom of Solomon, the sacred author says that the wisdom of this King "surpassed the wisdom of all the Orientals, and of the Egyptians".<sup>75</sup> Where in the Orient shall we find this privileged country of wisdom ?

We know nothing of the wisdom of the ancient Arabs, who were nomadic tribes. Arabia, therefore, can be totally set aside in this inquiry.

Wise were the ancient Chaldaeans, but by the time of our Lord's birth Chaldaea had been agitated first by the Medo-Persian invasion, then by the Greek invasion of Alexander the Great and the wars of his successors, and the wisdom of Chaldaea passed away.

Not so in ancient Persia. Wisdom was there cultivated by the disciples of Zarathustra. But the Persians did not consider themselves excelling in wisdom. For them "the country of wisdom" was one of the neighbouring nations. Which was this country ?

Jalālū'd-din Rumi, the Persian poet,<sup>76</sup> narrates that "a learned man (once) said, for the sake of (telling) a story : 'In India there is a certain tree ; who so takes and eats of its fruit, he grows not old, nor ever dies.' A king heard this (tale) from a veracious person, and became a lover of the tree and its fruit. From the Divan of Culture he sent an intelligent envoy to India in search (of it). For many years his envoy wandered about India in quest (of the tree)," but

<sup>74</sup>. Wilpert, *op. cit.*, II, pl. CLIX, 1.

<sup>75</sup>. *III Regum*, IV, 30.

<sup>76</sup>. *Mathnavi*, II, versos 3641-3680.

all his efforts were in vain : the tree was nowhere to be found. Finally he consulted a wise Shaykh, saying : "The Emperor chose me out to seek a certain branching tree. For there is a tree unique in (all) the quarters (of the world) ; its fruit is (of) the substance of the Water of Life. I have sought (it) for years and seen no sign (of it), except the gibes and ridicule of these merry men." The Shaykh laughed, and said to him : "O simpleton, this is the Tree of Knowledge in the sage, very high and very grand and very far-spreading ; it is a Water of Life from the all-encompassing Sea (of God)" Hence India was for the ancient Persians the country where the Tree of wisdom grew, and thither they went to quench their thirst for knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

The Persian poet's story seems to have a historical foundation. The Sassānian king of Irān, Khusru I Noshirvan (531-579 A.D.), having heard that there existed in India a book of wisdom, commanded his vazir Buzurj-mihir to find a man acquainted with the languages both of Irān and of India, so that he might fare to the latter country in quest of the book. The man chosen was Burzūyeh. He travelled to India, obtained possession of the book, translated it into Pahlavi and brought it back to the court of Khusru. The book in question seems to have been the *Pancatantra*.

But there is still further evidence concerning the high estimation of Indian wisdom among the Persians. The Arabian historian el-Mas'udi states that all historians who combine maturity of thinking with a profound scientific investigation and possess a clear discernment of mankind unanimously believe that the Hindus were that portion of the human race which in the most ancient times most enjoyed the fruits of peace and wisdom.<sup>78</sup> Induced by high considerations of preeminency, they were the first to elect a

<sup>77</sup>. Mathnavi, II, 3641-3680. This episode of the quest of the Tree of Wisdom in India, is narrated likewise by Abulfada in his *Geographia*. Cf. Gildemaister, *Scriptorum Arabum de Rebus Indicis loci et opuscula inedita*, pp. 222-223. It is also narrated with little variations in the Spanish version of Calila and Dimna. See edition of the Spanish Academy (1915), pp. 17-19.

<sup>78</sup>. Lewis Wallace in the novel referred to at the beginning of this essay says that one of the Magi hailing from India said : "My people were the first to walk in the fields of knowledge, first to divide them, first to make them beautiful" (Cap. III).

king. He was, says el-Mas'udi, the first Brahman, the king most powerful, and the supreme Imam.<sup>70</sup> "In his time Philosophy flourished, and the wise men were kept at the head of the Nation. They extracted iron from the mines, and forged swords, daggers, and similar weapons. They built temples, ornamenting them with precious stones of the most pure brightness ; they represented in these temples the spheres of the heavens, the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and the stars. By means of a representation of images, they gave an idea of the system of the Universe, and also they demonstrated by these means the influence of the stars upon this world ; and the manner in which they are the cause of producing different animals, rational or irrational. So they could study the position of the principal regulator, the Sun.

"The Brahman wrote a book which contained the proofs of all these matters, and conveyed a clear idea of them to the minds of the esoterical people, a knowledge of what is above all that, pointing out Who is the first cause, and Who gave their existence to all beings, and who embraces all things with his liberality. The Hindus obeyed this king. His country was well cultivated, and he made them reach the greatest human possible prosperity.

"He gathered wise men ; and these wrote the book *El Sind-Hind* which means "the last end of all ends." Based upon this, there have been written other books, such as the *Arjabbar* and the *Almagest* ; the *Arkand* has its origin in the *Arjabbar*, while the book of Ptolemy comes from the *Almagest*, and the "Astronomic Tables" are based upon these books.

"They invented the nine signs, that form the numerical system of the Hindus. It was the Brahman who first explained the orbit of the sun, and its zenith ; he asserted that its zenith will be reached after the sun has gone round 3·000 years for every sign of the Zodiac. Now, that is, in 332 A.M., it is in the constellation "Geminis," when it will arrive at to the signs of the South hemisphere, the law of the earth will change ; and what now is habitable all will be made inhabitable, and vice versa because the North will become South, and the South North. He inscribed the dates of the planetary system in a gilt house. These form the most ancient

<sup>70</sup>. This king seems to be Prithvi.

chronology (astronomical) ; and are the ground upon which Hindus built their calendar of the Moon (with two changes) ; and they count the time of the full Moon, in relation to India, not in relation to other countries. This Calendar especially concerns the Moon. But we cannot transcribe them here, since this is a work of history, not of inquisitions and philosophical speculations ; besides there is a summary of this matter in our *Kitab el-Ausat*".<sup>80</sup>

According to this historian, therefore, India was the classical country in which wisdom was cultivated from very ancient times. In fact, the wise men of India, always called *R̥ṣis*, formed from remote antiquity, and form to this day, a social rank superior to all others in the country, and as such they have been venerated through the ages. In ancient India wisdom was not so much knowledge of the universe and its physical laws : *vidya* or *gnāna* was reduced almost exclusively to the knowledge of God and all that concerns Him. Therefore it can rightly be said that Indian philosophy is rather theology. Naturally such wisdom, cultivated, with this spirit of inquiry into the divine nature and perfections, had to be the best disposition to understand the call which the Magi so faithfully followed. Could India then, be the country of the Wise Men of the east ?

## 6. THE COUNTRY OF ASTRONOMY

As some commentators have pointed out, this eastern country in which wisdom was ensued had to be as well a country in which astronomic knowledge existed. In fact, several writers, as we saw above, surmise that the Magi hailed from Chaldaea, since that ancient nation was renowned for its astronomical studies. As it was the appearance of the star in the sky that prompted the Wise Men to travel and they moved by its movements, they had beyond doubt to be familiar with the study of the sky as well as with the movements of the stars. Can we say of India, the classical country of wisdom, that astronomy also was cultivated here ?

<sup>80</sup>. el-Mas'udi, *Meadows of Gold, and Mines of Gems* (Sprenger's transl). I, pp. 152-160, (London, 1841).

Let the great modern astronomer Shri Swamikannu Pillai, whose name we shall mention again in the course of this study, answer the question.

"It's ascertained," he says, "that the course of the Sun and Moon have been taken down in that country from the most remote ages, as a matter of fact from the Vedic period (1.300—1.000 B.C.), to state the length of months and days ; and there is no doubt about it that the Hindus and Babylonians as well, studied the courses of the stars to set forth their planetarian writings and horoscopes".<sup>81</sup> It must also be borne in mind what the Mas'udi says about the beginnings of astronomical studies in India.<sup>82</sup> In fact, it is known nowadays that if Babylon and Assyria (the old Chaldaea) are known for their astronomic knowledge, this is the bequest of the Sumerian nation, which in its turn received the first principles of the astral science from an Indian who had landed on those shores in very early times. Among the Proto-Dravidic inscriptions of the Indus Valley there are several astronomical observations which clearly show how much astronomical science had progressed among the Proto-Indians in the fourth millennium before Christ. They fancied a Zodiac of eight constellations, of which the Sumeric and Babylonian Zodiac is merely the development.<sup>83</sup> It was, indeed, a Proto-Indian, Andubar by name, who went to Mesopotamia and taught astronomy to those peoples.<sup>84</sup>

From such immemorial times do astronomical studies form a branch of knowledge which Brahmanical institutions cultivated so diligently. The Sanskrit treatises on the subject are clear evidence of their interest. Apart from the astronomical passages in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, there is an astronomical treatise of the Jainas of Northern India, entitled *Sūriyapannati* (small treatise on the sun), which is prior to the Christian era.<sup>85</sup> From about the same period seems to date another treatise entitled *Iyotiṣa-Vedānta*.<sup>86</sup> The

81. Swamikannu Pillai, *An Indian Ephemeris*, I, Part I, p. 99.

82. Cf. above, p. 16

83. Cf. Heras, "El Primer Zodiaco descubierto en el Norte de la India" *Las Ciencias*, (Madrid), IV, No. 4, pp. 555-558.

84. Cf. Heras, *Studies in Proto-Indo-Mediterranean Culture*, I, pp. 189-190.

85. Macdonell, *India's Past*, p. 182.

86. Thibaut, *Astronomie Astrologie und Mathematik*, p. 42 (Strassburg, 1899).

great astronomers Āryabhata, Laṭadeva and Varāhamihira with the famous *Siddhantas* (the first among them the *Sūrya Siddhanta*) flourished five centuries after Christ, but their mastery of so difficult a science presupposes a background and history that go much further back.

As regards the old calendar of the Tamilians, who undoubtedly are the most genuine representatives of Dravidian culture, one who has deeply studied that culture says : "It is unique and it aims at a degree of astronomical accuracy and consistency beyond that of any other calendar in use, even at the sacrifice of some practical convenience. It proves the independence and continuous activity of Dravidian science in the part of India least exposed to non-Dravidian influences".<sup>87</sup>

Therefore it is not strange that Apollonius of Tyana, whosever this traveller might have been, avers that he was initiated into the mysteries of astrology by an Indian king on whom he called in one of his tours through this land.<sup>88</sup>

The Indians, therefore, could see fully well that the star which appeared in the east was not a star like other stars. Something remarkable there must have been about it to draw the Wise Men's attention so irresistibly.

## 7. THE STAR OF THE MAGI

It has been said that the Magi were probably from the land of Madian, for it was there that the Prophet Balaam had uttered in presence of King Balac and his grandees the prophecy concerning the people of Israel :

"A star shall rise out of Jacob

And a sceptre shall spring up from Israel".<sup>89</sup>

Therefore, it is asserted, when the descendants of those who had heard these words saw the mysterious star they recalled the prophecy and went to adore the Messiah of Israel.

Yet Balaam's words do not refer to a material star that rose on the firmament. The "star" spoken of in the pro-

<sup>87</sup>. Slater, *The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture*, p. 72.

<sup>88</sup>. *The Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyana*, p. 50 (ed. de Beauvoir Priaulx, London, 1873).

<sup>89</sup>. *Num.*, XXIV, 17.



phency is only a symbol of the future Messiah himself, in no way differing from the "sceptre" of the second verse. The star of Balaam was not therefore the star of the Magi. The latter was a material phenomenon seen in the sky after the Nativity of Our Lord, who is the true star of Jacob.

Much has been discussed about this star. In early times already Origen had thought that it was very likely a comet.<sup>90</sup> The same idea has been revived in recent times by some, who imagine that it could very well have been the comet Halley.<sup>91</sup> But, in fact, this comet was seen in the year 11 B.C., not at the time of the birth of our Lord.

St. John Chrysostom seems to believe that the star was created by God for the specific purpose of bringing these first fruits of Christianity to the feet of His newly-born Son. The saint says: "It seems to me that not only was it not one of many stars, but that it was not a star at all; it was rather, in my belief, a certain invisible power that looked like a star"; and he attempts to prove his view by four arguments. "First, because there is not star following such a route; for every Moon and the stars go from east to west, but this star was going from north to south, since such is the position of Palestine in relation to Persia.<sup>92</sup> Secondly, this star appeared not only by night but also during the day when the Sun shone over the skies.<sup>93</sup> Thirdly, on account of the guise in which it shone; for at times it shone and at other times it went out,<sup>94</sup> nor did it follow a natural course, but when the Magi had to go the star went ahead; and when they had to stop, it stopped. Finally this is proved by its brilliancy. For had it been in the high sky, it could hardly guide the travellers; settled lower, it could well serve as their guide. For it is impossible that a star can show the place in which a cottage stands; much less still, the place in which the Babe lay down".<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup>. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 58: *MG*, XI, col. 708.

<sup>91</sup>. Cf. "Mystery of the Magi" in *Newsweek*, December 27, 1948, pp. 28-29.

<sup>92</sup>. Cf. ante, p. 10

<sup>93</sup>. This is only a deduction on the part of the Saint. It is not said so in the Gospel.

<sup>94</sup>. We shall explain the intermitencies of light and obscurity later.

<sup>95</sup>. St. John Chrysostom, *In Mattheum*, hom. VI, 2: *MG*, LVII, col. 64-65.

Saint Efrem's opinion on this point could not be far different, for he says that such a star was *praeter rerum ordinem*, out of the natural course.<sup>96</sup> The same seems to be hinted at by Saint Maxim when he calls the star "recent," apparently created for this purpose.<sup>97</sup> So too thinks Peter Comestor, who even quotes the pleasant legend that having accomplished its task of showing forth the house of the boy Jesus in Bethlehem to the Magi, the star plunged into a well of the village, where some maidens of the monastery of Saint Paula and Eustochio could still see it in the fourth century.<sup>98</sup>

Such were the personal opinions of these Fathers, not always based on knowledge, as that of St. Chrysostom that the Magi came from Persia and that this country was to the south of Palestine. Were it so, how could the Wise Men assert that they saw the star in the east? Similar to this opinion is that of the professors of the Biblical Institute of Rome, for they gloss the translation of the passage as follows: "The star seen by the Magi, according to the most probable opinion deduced from its characteristics, was an extraordinary meteor, formed by God expressly for the purpose of making the happy announcement of the Nativity of the expected Saviour".<sup>99</sup>

The great astronomer Kepler, after a conscientious study of the movements of the celestial bodies in the light of the tradition assigned by Abrabanel, came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was born in the seventh year of the Christian Era. Precisely during this year, in the months of May, October and December occurred the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, to which in the beginning of the following year Mars was also joined. According to Kepler, this conjunction could well have been the star of the Magi. Fillion recognises

<sup>96</sup>. St. Ephrem Syrus, *In Natalem Domini*, Sermo IV : *Opera Omnia*, II, p. 416 (Romae, 1740).

<sup>97</sup>. St. Maxim Taurinensis, *Homiliae Hismales*, XVIII : *Opera*, col. 51, (Romae, 1784).

<sup>98</sup>. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, *In Evangelia*, VII: ML, CXCVIII col. 1542.

<sup>99</sup>. *La Sacra Bibbia tradotta dai testi originali con note a cura del Pontificio Istituto Biblico di Roma*, VIII, p. 29, n. 2. What is most extraordinary is that after the words quoted above this reference is added "*Num.*, 24, 17," which contains the passage of Balaam that does not concern the star of the Magi in the least.

that Kepler's opinion was at first adopted by many Biblical scholars, and it does not lack followers even today.<sup>100</sup> One of them is Karl Adam who thus places the birth of Christ during the autumn of the seventh year A.D.<sup>101</sup> Let us examine the foundations of the double opinion of this famous astronomer.

Concerning the year of the birth of the Lord, it is well known today that the calculations of the monk Dionysius the Lesser, in the sixth century, for determining the date of the birth of Christ, were totally wrong. Because if this event occurred in the first year of the Christian Era, that is the 753rd year of the foundation of Rome, King Herod could not well have received the Magi in Jerusalem, because he died in the month of March or April in the year 750. We know that in the year 748 or 749 Herod was in Jerusalem and that he went to Jericho only in November and December 749, where he died a little later.<sup>102</sup> Consequently he could well have received the Magi in Jerusalem about the year 747 of the foundation of Rome, when the conjunction of those planets took place.

But could the Evangelist call the star *astér*, that which was not a star but an *ástron*, a luminous celestial body? This term could also be applied to a group of stars, if the conjunction of Kepler's planets could be adopted.<sup>103</sup> We should note first that a conjunction is not the same thing as an occultation. When a conjunction of planets takes place, these planets approach one another, remaining always visible, otherwise the phenomenon would be an eclipse, not a conjunction. But the planets in conjunction do not appear to the naked eye individually and separate, but as joined, united, conjoined, we might almost say, forming a single star, bigger and brighter than the others. Now, when the Wise Men said in Jerusalem that they had seen the "Star of the Lord" in the east, they evidently did not speak with scientific precision. Consequently they could very well call a star what in reality was not a star, but what appeared

100. Fillion, *The Life of Christ*, I, p. 344.

101. Adam, *The Son of God*, p. 89.

102. Cf. Ricciotti, *The Life of Christ*, p. 150

103. Cf. Boll, "Der Stern der Weisen," *Zeitschrift fuer die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1917, pp. 40-48.

as one.<sup>104</sup> Thus do people ordinarily speak of the planet Venus as the Morning Star. It may also be remembered that Origen opined that the star was a comet and so did not see any difficulty in the Evangelist's narrative.

Therefore the star of the Magi could very well have been the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn with which conjoined Mars, some months later thus becoming still a bigger and brighter star. The Catholic astronomer of India Swamikannu Pillai studied the movements of this conjunction and he found them entirely in accord with the narrative of St. Matthew. Further on, we shall narrate the journey of the Magi following the movements of the star.

#### 8. THE ROMAN TRADITION OF THE ASTRONOMICAL CONJUNCTION

Of the varied collection of reliefs representing the Epiphany among the sarcophagi of Roman Museums some are of particular interest for our purpose. The majority show three Magi making haste to offer their gifts to the divine Child, who generally appears seated in the lap of His Mother and sometimes holding out His hands with a child-like gesture to the gift offered by the foremost of the three Magi, who are represented as standing behind one another. But some of these reliefs place the star above the head of the Virgin, or on the right of the stable when this is represented.<sup>105</sup> The star generally appears as a little circle, within which is a body stellated by various points. In a sarcophagus in the neighbourhood of Syracuse, in Sicily, the star has 9 points; <sup>106</sup> in one in the Lateran Museum, it has 8 points; <sup>107</sup> in two other sarcophagi of the same Museum, it has 7 points; <sup>108</sup> in another of the same and in one in the Berlin Museum, it has 6 points; <sup>109</sup> in one in the Teutonic Cemetery of Rome, it has 5 points. <sup>110</sup>

<sup>104</sup>. We shall explain what they meant when they mentioned "the star of the Lord."

<sup>105</sup>. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi Cristiani Antichi*, II, pl. CCXXI, 6.

<sup>106</sup>. *Ibid.*, I, pl. LXXXXII, 2.

<sup>107</sup>. *Ibid.*, II, pl. CCXXIV, 8.

<sup>108</sup>. *Ibid.*, I, pl. CLI, 1, II, pl. CCXIX, 1.

<sup>109</sup>. *Ibid.*, II, pl. CCXXI, V.

<sup>110</sup>. *Ibid.*, II, pl. CCI, 5.

The star sometimes assumes capricious forms : in one case, it is enclosed within two circles.<sup>111</sup> In another the circle takes the form of the petals of a flower with a point within each petal.<sup>112</sup> In another there is no stellated body in the circle, but a little central circle and several little circles around.<sup>113</sup> Finally, in another there is no circle surrounding the whole, but only a little circle to which are joined three small isosceles triangles by one of the vertices.<sup>114</sup> Great variety indeed of execution, which already appears in a painting of the Cemetery of St. Ciriacus, of the second half of the fourth century.<sup>115</sup>

In all these representations the first of the Wise Men, who is nearest to the Virgin, with the Infant Jesus in her lap, points with his right hand to the star, and with this characteristic gesture turns his head to his companions as though saying : "Behold the star !".<sup>116</sup> This attitude came to be traditional so that in a painting of the Cemetery of St. Cyriacus in which the star is not represented, the first Wise Men is nevertheless depicted in the attitude of one indicating something.<sup>117</sup> In another at Pedersburgh near Cahors, in place of the star there is the legend SITVS, which appears to signify the place where the Infant was (*supra ubi erat puer*), and the first of the Magi also points to this mysterious word.<sup>118</sup>

This attitude is already found in a famous painting of the first half of the second century in the cemetery of Priscilla, in which a personage stands in front of Our Lady and points out the star which is above the head of the Infant Jesus.<sup>119</sup> So too in the sarcophagi. And this continued well up to the Middle Ages, with this occasional variation that when the first Wise Man is on his knees before the Infant, the second, always standing, is pointing to the star. This is seen, for

111. *Ibid.*, I, pl. CXXXXVIII, 1.

112. *Ibid.*, II, pl. CCXXIV, p. 284.

113. *Ibid.*, I, pl. XXXIX, 2.

114. *Ibid.*, II, pl. CLXXXVIII, 3.

115. Wilpert, *Le Pitture*, III, p. 241.

116. Cf. Fabre, *Pages d'Art Chrétien*, p. 377, fig. 202.

117. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi*, II, pl. CCXXV.

118. *Ibid.*, I, pl. CXV, 1.

119. Wilpert, *Le Pitture*, I, pl. 22. This personage has often been described as the Prophet Isaiah ; but in recent times scholars seem inclined to identify him with Balaam. Cf. Hertling-Kirschbaum, *Le Catacombe Romane e loro Martiri*, pp. 251-252.

example, in a bas-relief of the choir of the Cathedral of Paris (1320),<sup>120</sup> and in a German marble diptych in the Louvre Museum (1350).<sup>121</sup>

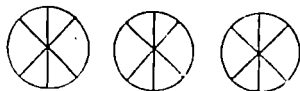
But we know three reliefs depicting this mystery in which the first Wise Man with lifted hand shows the luminous phenomenon to the other two, although no star is seen above, but three circles, united to one another, with some lines in the interior. The best of these reliefs is that on a sarcophagus in the Lateran Museum which is reproduced in plate 2. In this instance, two of the circles are represented without any line in the interior, thus :—



In the sarcophagus named Albani, in the Cemetery of San Sebastian, the three circles have lines drawn in the interior, though not uniformly, thus :—



Only in a fragment of a sarcophagus from Die, Valence in France, do we again meet with the stellar form reproduced also in the interior of the three circles, thus :—



What do these three circles signify ?

<sup>120</sup>. Fabre, *op. cit.*, p. 383, fig. 208.

<sup>121</sup>. *Ibid.*, fig. 260.

<sup>122</sup>. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi*, I, pl. LXXXXVI.

<sup>123</sup>. *Ibid.*, I, pl. XL.

<sup>124</sup>. *Ibid.*, pl. CXXXVII. 6.

There is no doubt that they refer to the luminous phenomenon which attracted the Magi to Bethlehem, for they are in the place which in other representations is occupied by the star, and the first Wise Man even in these three instances points out the three circles with his finger to his associates. The fact that in two of these sarcophagi the three figures are circles, as shown above, seems to suggest that, in the carver's intention, the three bodies which attracted the attention of the Magi were not stars, while in the last case the sculptor wished to represent them as stars, at least apparently. However, stars or not, these three figures clearly demonstrate that the Magi were attracted by three luminous bodies similar to stars which, joined together, suggested the appearance of a great star. I do not know how another interpretation can be given to the three circles in these iconographical instances. Consequently these reliefs strongly support the opinion of Kepler that the star of the Magi was the result of the conjunction of the two planets, Jupiter and Saturn, to which Mars was joined at a later date. Accordingly these three sarcophagi seem to testify to the existence of a tradition amongst the Christians in Rome in the fourth century—the date of these carvings—that the Wise Men of the east were attracted to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem by the brilliance of the planetary conjunction which appeared in the east and which they called a “star.”

But why did the brilliance of the star attract these Wise Men? Why did they interpret it as a sign of the birth of the Messiah? Were they perhaps awaiting the Messiah in the same way as did the Jews?

## 9. “THE EXPECTATION OF THE NATIONS”

When the Patriarch Jacob pronounced his last prophetic words shortly before his death, he called the Messiah “the Expectation of the Nations.”<sup>125</sup> This was neither a poetic exaggeration nor an emphatic denomination rooted in the pride of race. It was only the affirmation of a historical fact that the future Messiah would be “the Expectation of the Nations,” that the nations would be waiting the joyous

<sup>125</sup>. *Gen.*, XIXL, 10.

day of his appearance. Jacob himself may have known the hopes and desires of the Egyptians amongst whom he had lived some years, hopes and desires which are recorded in a notable document written before his days by the savant Ipuwer.<sup>126</sup> Yet Egypt is not to the east of Palestine and the Wise Men of the east could not have come from the land of the Nile. Was the Messiah also expected by the peoples of the Orient?

Regarding Persia, it is well known to those versed in Oriental scholarship that, according to the tradition of the *Avesta*, the Persians "were expecting a Saviour."<sup>127</sup> Actually three Saviours are mentioned in the *Gathas*, but of the three the third is the true one, because by His intervention the final and decisive victory of good over evil will be obtained. Who would this Saviour be?

In the *Avesta* He is called by the generic name of *Saoshyant*, which etymologically signifies "the Helper"<sup>128</sup> or, better still, "He who will help" or "He who will change the world with a celestial fire"; and consequently translated as "the Saviour" by Avestic scholars.<sup>129</sup> He would therefore be the One who would lead humanity to its pristine state of happiness which ended in the temporal triumph of the forces of evil. But what would be the nature of this *Saoshyant*?

First, beyond all doubt, He would be greater and more powerful than the two that preceded Him because their victory is only temporary, whereas His is final and decisive. Probably these two *Saoshyants* were introduced in the *Avesta* at a late date.<sup>130</sup> The third will fulfil the work of His two predecessors. Why? Probably because of His nature. The first two are men. Has the third perhaps a nature that is superior to humanity?

In the first place, it cannot be doubted that He is also a real man, because, at least according to later Persian tradition, like the other two, He will be descended from Zara-

126. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, p. 198 (New York, 1946).

127. Ricciotti, *Vita di Gesù Cristo*, p. 287.

128. Cf. Kanga, *Pahlavi Version of Yashts*, p. 11, n. 1.

129. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras*, p. 208 (Tübingen, 1930).

130. Cf. Messina, "Il Saoshyant nella tradizione iranica," *Orientalia*, I, p. 168. The doctrine of the Saoshyant is clearly formulated in the 4th century B.C. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 171.



thustra.<sup>131</sup> But the third *Saoshyant* is called, besides, *Astvat Ereta*. This name has been variously translated: "He who will resuscitate dead bodies", "the fulfilment of Rectitude", and "Rectitude Personified", or "Truth Incarnate".<sup>132</sup> Now *Ereta*, called also *Asha*, is always associated with the very *Ahūra Mazda* and with *Vohū Manah*, "the word of the Mind", so much so that the three appear as a triad: "They are not, in reality, separable from *Ahūra Mazda*, but they are his effective attributes, rather similar to the Divine Wisdom of the Old Testament".<sup>133</sup>

*Asha - Ereta*, consequently, is at least intimately related with the divinity, if it be not God Himself, and since it is *Astvat*, it is incorporated or incarnated, with two natures, one divine, the other human. These two natures are clearly specified in the following passage which also gives the reason for the incarnation. Thus we read in the *Avesta*: "Whose name will be the victorious *Saoshyant* and whose name will be *Astvat Ereta*: He will be *Saoshyant* because as a living, corporeal creature He will oppose the destruction of corporeal creatures, attacking the *Druj*, he of duplicity of mind, attacking the evil works of the faithful".<sup>134</sup> This text declares that the mission that has been assigned to the great Saviour for the benefit of the whole human race is the destruction of the *Druj* and the evil wrought by men when they obey the suggestions of the *Druj*. To carry out this great enterprise he has two personal elements, to wit, two natures, a "corporeal" or human nature and a "living" nature, *i.e.* His spiritual and divine nature. Consequently the Persians have maintained the original tradition according to which God become man would come to the world for the salvation of men. For this reason even the mother of the *Saoshyant* was venerated by the ancient Persians. Thus we read in one of the books: "We venerate the guardian angel of the holy lady *Eretat-fedhri*, of whom it is said that she obtains

131. *Bu da'hesh*, XXXII, 8. Cf. Messina, *I Magi a Bethlehem*, pp. 43-45.

132. *Ereta* is the same as the Sanskrit word *ṛta*, which is only applied to God, as it means His Eternal Law. Cf. Messina, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

133. Gore, *The Philosophy of the Good Life*, p. 43.

134. *Yast*, XIII, 28, 120 (*S.B.E.*), XXIII, p. 226.

every thing because she will bring to light him who will destroy the malice of the demons and of men".<sup>135</sup>

It was undoubtedly because of this belief that Clement of Alexandria said that "the Magi of the Persians announced the birth of our Saviour".<sup>136</sup> This *Saoshyant* is still awaited by the Mazdaeans.

As regards India, it is narrated in the *Mahābhārata* that the first age of the world was one of peace and perfect happiness. During that era man lived in unison with God and mundane matters were not the motive of his actions. But this period ended with the sin of man, "the original sin", after which troubles began for man, which went on increasing for the three subsequent periods. To bring out this transformation more vividly, the *Mahābhārata* compares the *Krita Yuga* to a bull with four legs, content and happy because it can leave the stable to seek its food. In the beginning of the second period, the *Treta Yuga*, the bull loses a leg, and things do not go too well with the poor bull ; it goes limping to pasture. Things became worse in the third period, the *Dvāpara Yuga*, when the bull, as it were, has lost a second leg. At the beginning of the fourth period, the *Kali Yuga*, the black period, the great physical and moral disasters that now afflict humanity begin to set in. The bull has lost a third leg.<sup>137</sup>

The poem describes in detail how in each of these periods truth suffered a great setback.<sup>138</sup> Naturally, the powers whereby men could communicate with Heaven were withdrawn, "and consequently they could not lift themselves up from the earth. They were made slaves to their sensuality and anger ; they became addicted to duplicity and lying in their mode of life, they were subjected to indolence and ignorance".<sup>139</sup> In another passage the poem describes at length the diabolical powers that afflicted the earth in increasing vigour during the three successive periods, and the oppression that all men suffered from them ; until God,

<sup>135.</sup> *Yāst*, 18, 142.

<sup>136.</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 15 : *MG*, VIII, col. 777.

<sup>137.</sup> *Āraṇyaka Parva*, 13019 ff.

<sup>138.</sup> *Ibid.*, 11249-11260.

<sup>139.</sup> *Ibid.*, 12025-12026.

moved by the groans of pain that rose from the earth and reached the foot of His throne, addressed the heavenly courtiers, saying to them "Go to the earth and be born in it, to free it from that slavery".<sup>140</sup>

This is a clear confession that, according to the old Indians, men by their natural powers alone were powerless to regain their former happiness. This admission of human weakness in an affair so transcendental crystallized in an extraordinary myth which is found primarily in the epic, but is afterwards repeated and amplified in various *Purāṇas*. All men, says this legend, yearned to recover the immortality they had lost in a very ancient period, and which had sunk to the bottom of the sea. They churned the waters of the sea for a long time, but got nothing. Then they went to the throne of God and laid their complaint before His presence ; and God, moved to compassion, ordered Nārāyaṇa: "Communicate power to men so that they may continue churning the water of the sea." And thus, with Nārāyaṇa's help, they finally obtained their desire.<sup>141</sup> Divine power was therefore necessary to restore the age of perfection on the earth. Without God on earth man could not rise to God in heaven.

After describing all the calamities that distinguish the *Kali Yuga*, the poem finally announces the coming of the divine Redeemer to free mankind from its endless evils and calamities. This prediction is of the highest interest in the religious history of India and of the world. At the end of the *Kali Yuga* "and at the consummation of the appointed time, a Brāhmaṇa called Kalki Viṣṇuśaśas will be born on the earth."<sup>142</sup> He will have great prowess, intelligence and vitality. He will be born in a village named Sambhla, in a fortunate Brāhmaṇ family. He will be an imperial sovereign always victorious by the power of his own virtue. He will restore order and harmony in this world of abounding popu-

140. Ādi Parva, 2504.

141. *Ibid.*, ch. XVIII.

142. *Brāhmaṇa* originally signifies one similar to Brahma and consequently to God.

lation and teeming contradiction. That glorious Brāhmaṇa of great intelligence will destroy all evil and create a new era".<sup>143</sup>

This prediction is repeated in Purāṇic literature, where more details are given. Viṣṇu (God) will appear like Kalki at the end of the Kali Yuga and bring sinners back to the path of sanctity.<sup>144</sup> "He will be adorned with the eight supernatural qualities, with his irresistible power he will destroy the sons of evil and thieves and all those whose mind is given to the service of iniquity. Then he will restore the reign of justice on earth, and the mind of those who live at the end of the *Kali Yuga* will be vivified and transformed into something clean and bright as crystal. The men who are thus transformed by the power of that privileged age will be the seeds of a new humanity, and will bring to birth a race which will be ruled by the laws of the *Kṛta Yuga*. For in this way the *Kṛta Yuga* will flourish once more".<sup>145</sup>

Another Purāṇa tells us that "when Kalki who possesses supernatural power and is the protector of virtue appears, the *Satya Yuga* will flourish again".<sup>146</sup> During this period "the people will possess the quality of goodness in a most elevated degree." Then Kalki, "who is holiness itself, will live in their souls, and they will increase to a number without measure."<sup>147</sup>

It must be noted that Kalki is considered as the god Viṣṇu incarnate.

The same tradition appears in Buddhist literature. In one of the last sermons to the brethren of his monastic congregation (*saṅgha*) the Buddha speaks to them of the coming age of justice and happiness, and in the course of the allocution he says : "Then, brothers, there will rise up in the world a lofty one named Metteya, the ascetic (*arhant*), of searching eye, full of wisdom and goodness, happy, who will know all

143. *Mahābhārata*, Āraṇyaka Parva, 13097-13106. The importance of this Messianic prophecy was already noted by the French Jesuit Fr. Calmette, missionary of South India, in a letter to the Marquis de Coetlogon, dated Pallavaram, 28th September, 1730. *Letters Edifiantes et Curieuses*, VII, pp. 494-503

144. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, III, 2.

145. *Ibid.*, IV, 24 (Cf. preceding note).

146. It may be remembered that this is another name for the *Kṛta Yuga*.

147. *Bhāvagata Purāṇa*, XII, 2, 18-24.

the worlds, hardly equalled as a guide to the mortals who desire to be directed, master of the heavenly beings and of men, the noble one, a Buddha,<sup>148</sup> just like myself. He will by himself see and know perfectly, as it were face to face, this world and that of the spirits, with his chosen ones (*Brahmas*) and his devils, and the world of monks and Brāhmaṇas, of princes and peoples just as I see and know them now. The sublime truth of his origin, sublime in its progress, sublime in its consummation, will be proclaimed by him, in spirit and in word ; He will make the sublime life known in all its grandeur and purity, just as I have predicted it. He will be surrounded by thousands of brethren, just as I am encircled by hundreds of brethren".<sup>149</sup>

In this way, therefore, in Persia and in India "the Expectation of the Nations"<sup>150</sup> has been awaited. But when will his apparition occur ? Was he hoped for at a fixed date ? In the *Bundahish* of Persia it is only said that the *Saoshyant* will come in the last age of the world. In India the annunciation is more definite.

## 10. THE ANNOUNCING STAR

It can well be admitted, and so different authors have interpreted it, that when the eyes of the body had seen the star, those of the soul received a special illumination from God to understand its mystical significance. "Since they were versed in astronomical studies, the mysteries of Christ were taught them by the stars themselves".<sup>151</sup> "To those astronomers the star was like a visible language, capable of

<sup>148</sup>. The word *buddha* is not a proper noun, but a participle which means 'enlightened'.

<sup>149</sup>. "Cakkavatti-Sihanada Suttanta," *Dighā Nikāya*, III, 76. The difference that the Buddha establishes between himself and the future Buddha ought to be noted. The latter's followers will be counted by the thousand, whereas his own followers by the hundred only. Moreover the future Buddha will know "by himself" whatever he, Gautama, knows by experience.

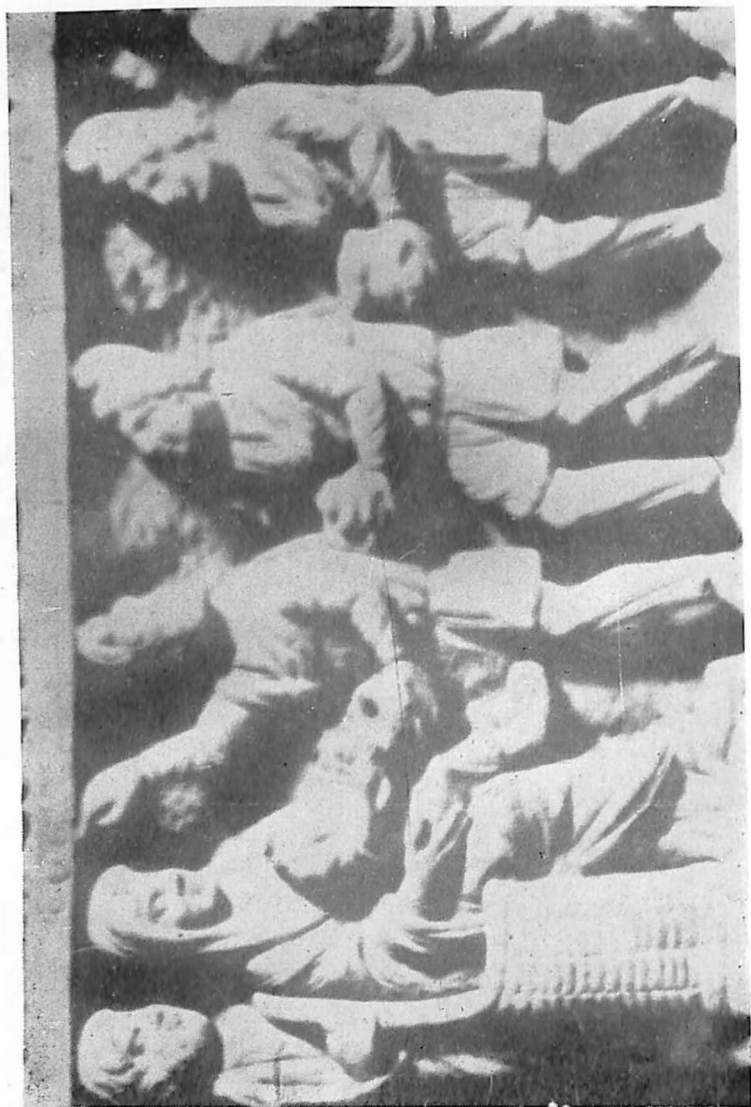
<sup>150</sup>. The Messianic parallellisms of India and Persia have already been remarkably well studied by Abegg, *Messiasglaube in Indien und Iran*, pp. 203-240. (Berlin, 1929).

<sup>151</sup>. Theodotus of Ancyra, *Hom. I in Nativitatem*, 10 : MG, LXXVII, col. 1304.



Plate I

time that two of the Magi appeared crowned  
Ivory Reliquary of Cluny (1140 A.D.)



attracting their attention and exciting their faith."<sup>152</sup> But it is always more prudent not to attribute a supernatural interpretation to a fact, if that can be explained naturally. Could there have been any prediction or prophecy in the east, in which a star would appear in the heavens at the time of the birth of the Son of God made man?

There seems to have existed among the Jews themselves a tradition about the announcing star. The *Midrash*, commenting on the words of Balaam: "A star will rise out from Jacob,"<sup>153</sup> says: "And the star will shine from the east and this is the *star of the Messias*. And it will shine from the east for fifteen days, and if its splendour is prolonged, it will be for the good of Israel".<sup>154</sup>

The learned mediaeval commentator Rabbi Isaac Abrabanel, basing himself on this old Jewish tradition, commenting on the prophecy of Daniel, writes that the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of the Fish would have consequences of great importance, specially for the people of Israel. And just as this phenomenon occurred three years before the birth of Moses, in the same way the same phenomenon would precede the birth of the Messias.<sup>155</sup>

It seems therefore that there existed among the Jews a tradition according to which a star would announce the birth of the Messias of Israel.

Similar traditions existed among other races. Don José María Millás Vallicrosa, Professor of the University of Barcelona, after expressing his opinion that the Magi were either Persians or came from the territory between the Transjordan and Persia, adds: "According to their belief, the hope for a Saviour would be announced by the apparition of a star".<sup>156</sup>

<sup>152</sup>. St. Augustin, Sermo XCVII, found in the Breviary.

<sup>153</sup>. *Num.*, XXIV, 17.

<sup>154</sup>. *Haggadoth Mashiah* quoted by Mills, *Prehistoric Religion*, p. 285.

<sup>155</sup>. Quoted by Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 280. This was the passage that induced Kepler to study the question and influenced him to form his opinion about the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn at the time of the birth of the Messias. What Abrabanel says of the conjunction at the time of the birth of Moses is based on an error in his calculation, for the conjunction did not actually occur.

<sup>156</sup>. Millas Vallicrosa, *Jesucristo segun los Evangelios*, p. 72.



Certain apocryphal books of the New Testament and several Christian authors from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries refer to a prophecy of Zarathustra, according to which the religious reformer of Persia announced that "the Virgin will conceive without the co-operation of a man and will deliver without detriment to his virginity. The Jews will crucify Him in the Holy City, which Melchisedech founded. He will rise from among the dead and will ascend into heaven. As a sign of His birth you will see a star in the Orient more brilliant than the sun and the stars of heaven, because it will not really be a star, but an angel from God. When you see it, get ready to go to Bethlehem. Adore Him truly born, and offer Him gifts. The star will be the guide and will lead you to Him".<sup>157</sup> Other texts are similar. The late Fr. Guiseppe Messina, S.J., of the Biblical Institute, who is otherwise the stoutest champion of Persia as the motherland of the Wise Men, has studied the different texts of this supposed prophecy and concluded that it has no basis in fact and is influenced by Christian ideas and literature of a later period.<sup>158</sup> Consequently one cannot attach any value to this prediction of the star by Zarathustra. Notwithstanding this adverse criticism, we know that Diodorus of Tarsus, in the fourth century, in his book *Against Fate* avers that the Magi had received from the Chaldaeans through Balaam the prediction that there would appear a star announcing the coming of the Saviour of the world.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, Fr. Messina speaks of an universal belief from ancient times concerning the synchronism of the apparition of a star and the birth of a great personality.<sup>160</sup>

## 11. AN INDIAN PROPHECY

The *Mahābhārata*, after narrating the apparition of the *avatāra* Kalki, the restorer of the primitive age of perfection,

157. Peeters, *Evangelies apocryphes*, II, "L'Évangile de l'Enfance," pp. IX-X (Paris, 1914).

158. Messina, "Una presunta profezia de Zoroastro sulla venuta del Messia," *Biblica*, (Roma), XIV (1933), pp. 170-198; Messina, *I Magi a Betlemme e una predizione di Zoroastro*, pp. 58-85.

159. Photius, *Bibliotheca*, CCXXIV : *MG*, col. 877.

160. Messina, *I Magi a Betlemme*, p. 6.

as quoted above, adds : "When the Sun and Moon and Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) enter into the constellation of Puṣya, a Brāhmaṇa called Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will be born".<sup>101</sup> While the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, after the annunciation of the coming of the last *avatāra* Kalki, says ; "Some verses are usually recited with reference to this, that is to say : When the Sun and the Moon and the (lunar constellation of) Tīṣya and the planet Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) are in the same house, the *Kṛita Yuga* will be restored."<sup>102</sup>

If we compare the two texts, we see that the first refers to the birth of the *avatāra*, while the second speaks of the restoration of the primitive age of happiness. But as we now know that both things will coincide, no doubt can arise that both the texts refer to the same time. This time is clearly fixed, *i.e.* when the Sun and the Moon and Bṛhaspati, that is, Jupiter, meet in the constellation of Tīṣya, called by others Puṣya. The circumstances of this celestial phenomenon are therefore well worth studying.

The constellation Tīṣya is properly speaking that of Karkātaka or Cancer. Tīṣya is the star ṛ of Cancer;<sup>103</sup> as it is the most prominent of the stars therein, this constellation is sometimes called by the name of Tīṣya. Bṛhaspati is considered to be the divinity that presides over the constellation of Tīṣya.<sup>104</sup> But being, as said above, the constellation of Karkātaka (Cancer), it is also the "house of exaltation" of the Moon in Indian astrology.<sup>105</sup> The importance of this constellation is manifest in the whole history of India. The usurper Duryodhana was wont continually to ask the chiefs of his army to go to the field of Kurukshetra to offer battle to his enemies, because, as he told them, "the constellation of Puṣya is now rising".<sup>106</sup> Many centuries after, when Gautama Siddharta, the future Buddha, was born, it was observed

101. *Mahābhārata*, Āraṇyaka Parva, 13099-13104.

102. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV, 24 (Wilson, IV, pp. 228-229). Cf. *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, XII, 2, 8-41.

103. Cf. Swamikannu Pillai, *An Indian Ephemeris*, I, Part 1, p. 35.

104. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, IV, 4, 10, 1 ; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, I, 5, 1, 2 ; III, 1, 1, 5.

105. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 108. It is well known that in old days the constellations were called 'houses,' which were allotted to the Sun, the Moon and the sundry planets.

106. *Mahābhārata*, Udyoga Parva, 5073.

that "the constellation of Puṣya appeared over the horizon."<sup>167</sup> As regards the planet Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) as well as Sani (Saturn), they are called in India "burning".<sup>168</sup> The horoscope of Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyana*, places five planets, among them Bṛhaspati, in the constellation of Karkātaka at the time of the birth of the hero.<sup>169</sup> The phenomenon announced by the epic and the Purāṇa concerning the apparition of the *avatāra* takes place only in the house of the Moon. The entrance of Bṛhaspati into the house of the Moon, Bṛhaspati being the divinity that presides over Karkātaka is therefore an astronomical event of great importance. When Bṛhaspati enters into the constellation of Karkātaka, the great feast called Puskara is celebrated in the river Jamuna for twelve days.<sup>170</sup>

Hence the phenomenon which is announced in these texts is a true conjunction, a *samīyoga*, as it is called in India. This conjunction in the constellation of Cancer cannot be frequent. Jupiter, one of the planets outside the earth, takes 11'8618 years to complete a sidereal revolution;<sup>171</sup> but, as the relative position of the Sun, the Moon, and the earth itself changes in the meanwhile, many more sidereal revolutions are necessary for the four celestial bodies to find themselves in a straight line. Consequently the phenomenon mentioned in this prediction ought to be very rare in the ages.

This prediction therefore is of great importance as an announcement of the birth of a person universally awaited and one whose beneficent work is to be great and of universal influence. It is well known that in the east from very ancient times the stars are believed to preside over the birth of every person ; and according to the main star that presides at the birth, the horoscope of each person is prepared even to this day in India. No stellar phenomenon presiding over the birth of a person is deemed more important than the conjunction announced : the Sun, the Moon and Jupiter (the

167. *Lalita Viṣṭara*, VII, 18.

168. *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma Parva, ch. III, v. 27.

169. There is no doubt concerning the faked nature of this horoscope, fabricated at a much later period ; but even so, it shows the ideas current in India about this constellation and the planet Bṛhaspati.

170. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

171. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

greatest planet) in conjunction in the constellation of Cancer.<sup>172</sup> The prediction then, is much according to the spirit of the east, particularly India. Saint John Chrysostom had already said in Constantinople : "The stars help the astrologers to prepare horoscopes of babies recently born; but do not announce their birth".<sup>173</sup> Yet God could very well have made known to the pagan world the position of certain heavenly bodies at the time of the birth of His Messiah, since we know, precisely from the historical fact of the Magi going to Bethlehem, that the message of the star was addressed especially to the non-Jewish nations. And if this be the case, then it can be a true prophecy of the time of the coming of the Saviour. Saint Leo the Great seems to be acquainted with this text of the Indian scriptures when he writes : "There ought to have existed a special divine revelation, thanks to which they knew that "His star" signified the birth of a King, that this King, newly born was God Himself, and that they would be led by their star to the place of the birth of this God-King".<sup>174</sup> This was not the conjunction of Abraham and Kepler ; it was a star (according to the ordinary way of calling it), Brhaspati, announcing the great event when the Sun and Moon would be in conjunction with it. It is possible that St. Ignatius, Martyr, knew the significance of this star when he wrote to the Ephesians : "The star shone upon the sky with a brightness more intense than all the other stars, and its light was indescribable, and its newness inspired a certain awe ; because all the other stars together with the Sun and the Moon accompanied it, while the star shed its light over all things".<sup>175</sup>

## 12. PROPHETS AND PROPHECIES IN THE PAGAN WORLD

It cannot be doubted that God communicates Himself to souls in a thousand ways, sometimes illumining the mind internally, sometimes by external signs. The Holy Church, studying these divine communications, has never restricted

<sup>172</sup>. *Harivamśa*, 3019.

<sup>173</sup>. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matheum*, hom. VI, 1 ; *MG*, LVII, cols. 62-63.

<sup>174</sup>. St. Leo, *Sermo XXXIV*, "*In Epiphaniam*," IV, 3 : *ML*, LIV, col. 247.

<sup>175</sup>. St. Ignatius, *Ad Ephesios*, XIX : *MG*, V, col. 753.

the circle of their influence to the bosom of the Church. God makes the sun rise and the rain fall, both for the just and the sinner,<sup>176</sup> since all are His sons. Would it not be to ignore His infinite goodness and curtail his benevolence towards those of His sons who do not know Him, if we refused to admit the existence of such revelations to the pagan world, which requires this supernatural guidance to the Truth more than we do?<sup>177</sup> "It is part of Catholic teaching", says Mgr. de Broglie, "that God gives graces and therefore hears the prayers which are directed to him outside the exterior communion of the true Church".<sup>178</sup>

In this manner St. Augustine tells us that in ancient times there were prophets among the Jews, as also among the Gentiles, and to prove the second assertion he adduces the testimony of Saint Paul, who in his epistle to Titus speaks of a prophet of the ancient people of Crete (1,12).<sup>179</sup> St. Thomas holds the same opinion: "Since eminent men adorned with the spirit of prophecy lived before the Jewish law, we ought to believe that they were moved by a divine spirit, as if it was an order given to them personally, to follow certain external rituals of adoring God which corresponded to the internal motions of their piety, and that they were adapted to the significance of the mysteries of Christ that their acts expressed".<sup>180</sup> These movements were true revelations whereby God communicated Himself to the whole nation. For "the Church", says Fr. Dandoy, "admits not only the possibility, but even the probability of private revelations, either internal or external, given individually to the Gentiles and particularly to the most enlightened among them".<sup>181</sup>

St. Thomas therefore holds that many Gentiles have received revelations about Jesus Christ.<sup>182</sup> One of the Gentiles so favoured was Job, the Edomite patriarch, when he said :

<sup>176</sup>. *Matth.*, V, 45.

<sup>177</sup>. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 2, a 7, at 3 um.

<sup>178</sup>. de Broglie, *Religion et Critique*, p. 69.

<sup>179</sup>. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XIX, 2 : *ML*, XLII, col. 348.

<sup>180</sup>. St. Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, Ia IIae, q. 103, a 1, *in corp.*

<sup>181</sup>. Dandoy, *Catholicism and National Cultures*, p. 31.

<sup>182</sup>. St. Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, IIa IIae, q. 2, a 7, ad 3 um. Cf. St. Thomas, *In Sententiarum*, d. XXV, q. 2, a 2, 2 and 3.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I will rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God".<sup>183</sup> Consequently, says the Angelic Doctor : "It is probable that the mystery of the Redemption was revealed to the Gentiles many generations before the coming of Christ".<sup>184</sup> It seems particularly certain that "the coming of Christ was revealed to many Gentiles";<sup>185</sup> one of these revelations was made to Balaam.<sup>186</sup> Such is the case with the Indian prophecy also.

By making the time of the birth of the Saviour known, when Jupiter would enter the constellation of Cancer, God was preparing to bring the people of India to the feet of the newly born Child, recognizing Him as God and Saviour of the world.

But were the Magi who went to Bethlehem to adore the Divine Babe really Indians ?

### 13. THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

Knowing the Magi to be Wise Men of the east, we have investigated which was the classical land of wisdom in the east, and have found that it was India, a land in which astronomy was particularly cultivated, the knowledge of which prepared the people to comprehend the significance of the star. We have found similarly that the Restorer and Redeemer was hoped for both in Persia and India, in Persia with special eschatological powers, in India with the special mission of restoring the pristine era of the world ; a tradition so firmly established in this country that it passes on to the Buddhist scriptures. Moreover in India there existed the ancient prediction of an announcing star, clearly fixed and well defined. Everything seems to indicate that the Wise Men were Indians, certain *ṛsis* of this country who from immemorial times made the quest of Truth—the eternal breath of this most ancient nation which seems to have crystallized in the motto which now surrounds its national crest, *Satyameva Jayate*, "truth verily triumphs." The Gospel gives

<sup>183.</sup> *Job*, XIX, 25-26.

<sup>184.</sup> St. Thomas, *De Veritate*, q. XIV, a. 11, ad 5 um.

<sup>185.</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 2, a. 8, ad 3 um.

<sup>186.</sup> *Num.*, XXIV, 17.

us a last detail which seems in the same way to confirm this view : the detail of the gifts which the Magi offered to the Babe of Bethlehem.

From early ages a complicated circle of legends grew around these magian gifts, specially in the authors of the apochryphal books of the Bible. According to these books, after our first parents commit the sin and are expelled from Paradise, when Adam and Eve dwell in the so-called "Cave of the Treasures," God tells them that the angels in obedience to His orders will bring them gold, frankincense and myrrh, after dipping them in the water that springs near the Tree of Life, and that they will be offered to Adam as memorials of the garden of Paradise. These are the sacred "treasures" of the cave, where they are deposited, one on each side, the gold to light up the cave by day and night, the incense to perfume it, and the myrrh to comfort them.<sup>187</sup> After Adam's death and burial, his son Seth guards his testament along with the treasures and writes at the end of the testament : "We have sealed this testament and we have placed it in the Cave of the Treasures, where it will be until this day with the treasures that Adam brought from Paradise, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And the sons of the Magi will come and remove them and take them to the Son of God in the Grotto of Bethlehem of Juda".<sup>188</sup> The journey of the Magi to the cave is then related in imaginary detail, from which cave they remove the treasures to offer them to the Babe born King of the Jews.<sup>189</sup>

According to the narrative of St. Matthew, when the Wise Men of the east reached Bethlehem, after having found "the Babe with Mary His Mother, falling down they adored Him, and opening their treasures they offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh". Many symbolic explanations of the three gifts have been given by the Fathers of the Church, by ancient ecclesiastical writers, even by ascetical books, and by Biblical notes of modern times ; though the explanation is not always the same. The most general one

187. Dillmann, *Das christliche Adambuch d. Orients*, pp. 65-70.

188. "Apocalypse of Adam," *Journal Asiatique* (5eme serie) II (1853) p. 457.

189. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

is that they offered Him gold as to a king, frankincense as to God, and myrrh as to a mortal destined to die (since myrrh was used in the ceremony of anointing corpses).<sup>100</sup> But St. Maximus Taurinensis in the fourth century says that gold signifies power, myrrh symbolizes incorruptibility, and frankincense presignifies his pontifical authority.<sup>101</sup> The *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* explains that gold symbolizes rational faith, frankincense pure prayer, and myrrh good works.<sup>102</sup> According to a Persian legend, gold signifies royalty; incense, divinity; and myrrh, the power of the Child to give salvation.<sup>103</sup> In modern times it is said that gold signifies royalty, incense divinity, and myrrh humanity.<sup>104</sup>

Having considered all this, we may affirm that it is not likely that this symbolism was in the minds of the Magi when they offered their gifts to the Infant Jesus. Fr. Drum says this clearly.<sup>105</sup> It seems more probable that they offered these gifts following a custom of their nation or people. "The offer of these gifts," says Fr. Drum, "is an Oriental custom".<sup>106</sup> "The gifts," says Ricciotti, "were presents which were presented to kings according to Oriental etiquette; in such a way, that in offering them, they recognized him as a king".<sup>107</sup>

Once again the three gifts seem to point to India as the home of this custom. Gold exists in India, and the mines of gold of Mysore and Hyderabad were exploited from remotest times.<sup>108</sup> Herodotus mentions the gold of India and the methods employed in the country to exploit it. Gold jewels have been found at Mohenjo Daro (3,500 B.C.).

<sup>100</sup>. Cfr. for example, Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 80: *MG*, II, col. 772. St. Ephiphanius Cipriot, *De laudibus Beatae Virginis Mariae, ad calcem: Opera Omnia*, II, p. 300 (Paris, 1622); St. Ambrose, *De Fide*, I, 4: *ML*, XVI, col. 535.

<sup>101</sup>. St. Maximus Taurinensis, *Homilia XXI*: *ML*, LVII, col. 270.

<sup>102</sup>. *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum*, I, 1: *MG*, LVI, col. 642.

<sup>103</sup>. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, p. 123.

<sup>104</sup>. *La Sacra Bibbia tradotta dai testi originali a cura del Pontificio Istituto Biblico*, VIII, p. 30, n. 11.

<sup>105</sup>. Drum, "Magi" in the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, IX, p. 530. Drum says that they offered Him gold because the Child was poor, but he candidly admits that he cannot say why they offered Him the other gifts.

<sup>106</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup>. Ricciotti, *Vita di Gesù Christo*, p. 290.

<sup>108</sup>. Marshall, *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization*, II, pp. 519, 521-523.



The *Periplus of the Eritrean Sea* mentions mines of gold in Bengal.<sup>199</sup> Frankincense and myrrh are originally from Arabia Felix. Herodotus speaks of and describes the plantations;<sup>200</sup> but these odoriferous products were imported to India and were used there for religious and social rites from immemorial times. Indian merchants imported these products from the commercial city of Eudaimon (Aden), as they are to this day.<sup>201</sup> Marco Polo, at the end of the thirteenth century, tells us that black incense, not the white sort, grows in India also.<sup>202</sup>

Now one of the customs of the country is, after the birth of a male child, to feed him "with gold, honey, and butter", according to the laws of Manu.<sup>203</sup> Naturally gold was not given to the newly born child, but, as the commentators explain, honey and butter were given him after they had been touched to a gold coin or ingot. This already shows the importance of gold in the ceremonies following the birth of a son.

The fact is that even today in many parts of India, when a child is born to a family, the relations and acquaintances who wish to share in the happiness of the event present three gifts to the parents of the infant : first, some small coins to help in the maintenance and education of the baby ; some grains of frankincense to aromatize the room in which the mother lies ; and some grains of myrrh, which, when mixed with the mother's food, promotes lactation. The small coins are equivalent to the gold of the Gospel.

It is many years since this ancient Indian custom was for the first time drawn to my attention by the most Reverend Monsignor Dr. Henry Döring, S.J., the late Archbishop-Bishop of Poona. He had found this custom among the Mahars of the district of Sangamner, in Mahārashtra, among whom he was a missionary before his elevation to the episcopal dignity. I have since found the same custom in many parts of South India. If therefore the Magi were *ṛṣis*

199. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, p. 32.

200. *Ibid.*, 107-114.

201. Cf. Heras, *Studies in Proto-Indo-Mediterranean Culture*, I, pp. 339-360.

202. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, II, p. 330.

203. *Mānavadharmasāstra*, II, 29. This rite is still practised by many Hindus all over India.

of India, the traditional land of wisdom, it is not to be wondered at that they offered gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Infant and His Mother, since these were precisely the gifts that from the most ancient times were offered in India to the parents of the newly born. And if it is so, then it is not likely that one offered gold, another frankincense, and the third myrrh, as the iconographical tradition seems to suppose, but each of them offered all three gifts, as is even today the custom in the country. Peter Comestor is the only ecclesiastical writer in whom I find a similar idea. "They offered to the Babe," he says, "each of them, gold, incense and myrrh".<sup>204</sup>

The custom of offering these three gifts to the parents of the recently born does not now exist in Persia ; nor do scholars know that any such custom ever existed in that country.

#### 14. UNIVERSAL EXPECTATION OF THE MESSIAS

The fact that the Messiah was "the Expectation of the Nations," according to the prophecy of Jacob,<sup>205</sup> proves the special Providence of God in exciting this desire among the Gentile nations to prepare them to the knowledge of His Son made man at the time of His appearance on the earth. "Christ," we read in the *Clementine Recognitions*, "who exists in the beginning and always, continually offered help during all the generations, though invisibly, to those just men who were awaiting Him".<sup>206</sup> If this be the truth, as it certainly is, we cannot doubt that in the course of the ages and increasingly so as the time drew nearer when in the stillness of a dark night the almighty Word of God would leap down from heaven from His royal throne<sup>207</sup> to dwell among us,<sup>208</sup> God would intensify this salutary influence and assist the pagan world to expect the arrival of the Desired One, preparing them instantly to recognise and follow Him.

<sup>204</sup>. Peter Comestor. *Historie Scholastica, in Evangelia*. VIII : *ML*, CXCVIII, col. 1542.

<sup>205</sup>. Cf. above, p.

<sup>206</sup>. *Recognitions Clementinae*, I, 52 : *MG*, I, col. 1236.

<sup>207</sup>. Cf. *Wisdom*, XVIII, 14-15.

<sup>208</sup>. *John*, I, 14.

This incontrovertible fact in the spiritual sphere, along with the increasing calamities that were shaking the earth and creating the hope of a prompt cure of the evils, explain the universal expectation of a Saviour, that prevailed in the pagan world.

#### 15. PREPARATION OF THE JOURNEY OF THE INDIAN RSIS

The expectation of a Messiah could not be less in India. Those who were acquainted with the prophecy of the star, according to the ancient scriptures, would constantly search the heavens, and when on a day at the time of the setting of the sun they could see that the latter along with the Moon and Jupiter were entering the constellation of Cancer, they would understand that the hoped-for moment had come. God descending from the heavens (*avatāra*) had been born among men to cure their ills. The wonderful star *Brhaspati*, in conjunction with the Sun and the Moon entering into the constellation of *Tisya*, announced it clearly. "For those astronomers", says St. Augustine, "the star was a visible language, very apt for exciting their attention and for renewing their faith".<sup>200</sup>

But how did they come to the knowledge that the Messiah was born out of India, that he was born precisely in the land of Israel among the Jewish people? St. Leo the Great tells us that "God who made the star appear, gave the knowledge to those who contemplated it; and since he made them understand the significance of the star he also made them inquire about the same".<sup>210</sup> The Wise Men of India, the Magi of Bethlehem as we now know them, intrepidly decided to go in search of the *avatāra*, and began to ask all whom they met where He would be born. Perhaps the idea to follow the movements of the star did not at first occur to them.

The Roman historian Suetonius says that "an old and constant tradition had prevailed in the whole world, according to which the people of Judea would overpower the whole earth".<sup>211</sup> This tradition may possibly have spread

200. St. Augustine, *sermo* XCVII.

210. St. Leo the Great, *sermo* XXXI, 1 : *ML*, LIV, col. 235.

211. Suetonius, *Vita Vespasiani*, IV, 3.

through India which had commercial relations with Rome. Our Wise Men, knowing it, consulted with those who were well acquainted with the tradition, to discover whether there existed any relation between this and that which the wonderful star signified.

In their fervent search they would meet the Jews who dwelt in the western parts of India. These were remnants of the ten tribes of the *Diasporā*, who, when the Jews of Babylon were permitted to return to Jerusalem at the time of Cyrus, had already been dispersed among the people of the Orient. We know of those of Persia from the book of Esther. The Afghans, subsequently converted to Islam, are of Hebrew origin. In India we know of the Jews of Taxila, today Pakistan, in the ruins of which city there has been found an inscription of Aśoka (4th century B.C.) written in Aramaic evidently addressed to that monarch's Jewish subjects.<sup>212</sup> To these Jews we owe the system of writing called *Kārosthī* of Hebrew formation, of which we possess many examples in inscriptions and coins.<sup>213</sup> throughout the North-Western Frontier Province. To the south of the modern city of Bombay, in Chaul and its vicinity, there existed then, as it exists to this day, another Jewish centre, the *Beni Israel*, "the sons of Israel." Another focus of Judaism was in Malabar, the so-called "Black Jews of Cochin," who have dwelt in this city and its surroundings from very ancient times. All these scattered Jewish colonists had their home in India before the beginning of the Christian era.

Sticking closely to the historical data, let us attempt a reconstruction of the Magi's journey to Bethlehem. The patient seekers of the significance of the star, we may take it, met some of these Jews, who instructed them in their ancient prophecies regarding the hoped-for Messiah, whom the Wise Men would identify with the *avatāra* Kalki Viṣṇu-yaśas, and this would spur them on in their quest of Him. In their contact with the Indian Jews, probably those that lived around Taxila, the devout *ṛṣis* acquired a few Aramaic words which they could use when they had reached the lands of Israel.

<sup>212</sup>. Marshall, *Guide to Taxila*, pp. 75-76 and pl. XIII, (a).

<sup>213</sup>. There exist three volumes of *Kārosthī* inscriptions, edited by Rapson and Noble.

For their travelling effects, they would take little with them. Mediaeval and modern iconography of the Epiphany, on the unsupported assumption that the Magi were kings, has furnished them with a numerous train of courtiers, servants, and beasts of burden, the artists giving the fullest play to their imagination. Nothing farther removed from the reality!

An Indian *ṛṣi*, precisely because he is one, knows how transitory are the things of the world, and so he rarely surrounds himself with pomp. A piece of cotton cloth wrapped round the waist, their large mass of hair (because the *ṛṣi* who has renounced the world does not crop it) tied up in a conic shape over the head,<sup>214</sup> a scrip on the shoulder containing a change of clothing, some dry food and fruits, some small coins<sup>215</sup> and a staff in their hand, and barefoot (the use of sandals is modern in India)—such would be their appearance and such their simple provision for the journey.

At the bottom of their bags would lie a small packet consisting of a leaf secured with a thorn of the babul tree (*acacia arabica*), a natural way of fastening still used in India. The packet contained some gold dust,<sup>216</sup> some grains of incense and a small quantity of myrrh. Each of the Wise Men would guard the packet as a precious treasure, for it contained the gifts that, according to traditional custom, they would offer to the Child.

## 16. THE JOURNEY FROM INDIA TO JERUSALEM

According to our calculations, the Indian sages beheld the entering of Bṛhaspati in conjunction with the Sun and

<sup>214</sup>. The author of these lines has seen a *sannyāsi* with his hair loosed in order to make his morning prayer, in the village of Rathaipadukondakulotungacholanagarathumalai, in South India, and the hair reached down to the ankle.

<sup>215</sup>. In this period there existed in India rough pieces of silver-plate or copper-plate without any conventional form whatever, with signs inscribed without order, which were used as coins. They were called *Karṣapaṇas*. In the provinces around Taxila the coins of the Indo-Greek kings were similarly current.

<sup>216</sup>. Gold coins are not known in India before the Christian era; certain old documents speak of gold dust as payment for a certain sale deal.

Moon in the constellation of Puṣya during the first days of February in the seventh year before the Christian era, the 747th year of the foundation of the city of Rome, the 3109th of the Kali Yuga in Indian calculation.<sup>217</sup> Because of its scanty light the star Puṣya was invisible, except at 21 degrees of the equator, whilst the others could be distinguished at 17 degrees.<sup>218</sup>

Their inquiries concluded, the *ṛsis* were not long in starting on their journey, since their preparations were few and simple. Bṛhaspati cannot be seen during the day. So they set forth on an evening of March, the beginning of the Indian year, which was the 14th of the month, while Bṛhaspati illumined them with its splendour. The coincidence of their journey with the opening of the year would seem to forecast a happy issue of their enterprise. In ancient India the nights were called by the name of the star that was in conjunction with the Moon. We read in the *Mahābhārata* of a traveller who says : "I started up with the Moon in Puṣya and have returned with the Moon in Śravaṇā."<sup>219</sup> The pilgrims travelled during the night and rested by day. It was the usual custom in their country ; the nights are not so dark and blind in India as they are in Europe ; a soft tropical light is shed over the whole atmosphere. They did not know that Bṛhaspati would lead them to the place where the Child was ; they discovered this in the course of their journey. They knew that they had to travel westwards, crossing Persia and Syria. The modern territory of Afghanistan was then considered a part of the Indian sub-continent.

From the kingdom of Gandhāra onwards, where they had spoken to the Jews who lived round Taxila, the travellers took their way to the west, to enter into what is today known as Afghanistan through the pass of Khyber, to the west of the ancient city of Puskalāvati (the Peshawar of today). The Khyber Pass has been the traditional gateway of India. The Āryas entered the country through this pass. Most probably Alexander the Great himself had dashed with his army over the plains of the Punjab from the heights

<sup>217</sup>. Swāmikannu Pillai, *An Indian Ephemeris*, part 1, p. 22.

<sup>218</sup>. *Sūrya Siddhānta*, IX, 13 (edited by Burgess, p. 259).

<sup>219</sup>. *Mahābhārata*, Śalya Parva, ch. 34, V. 3.

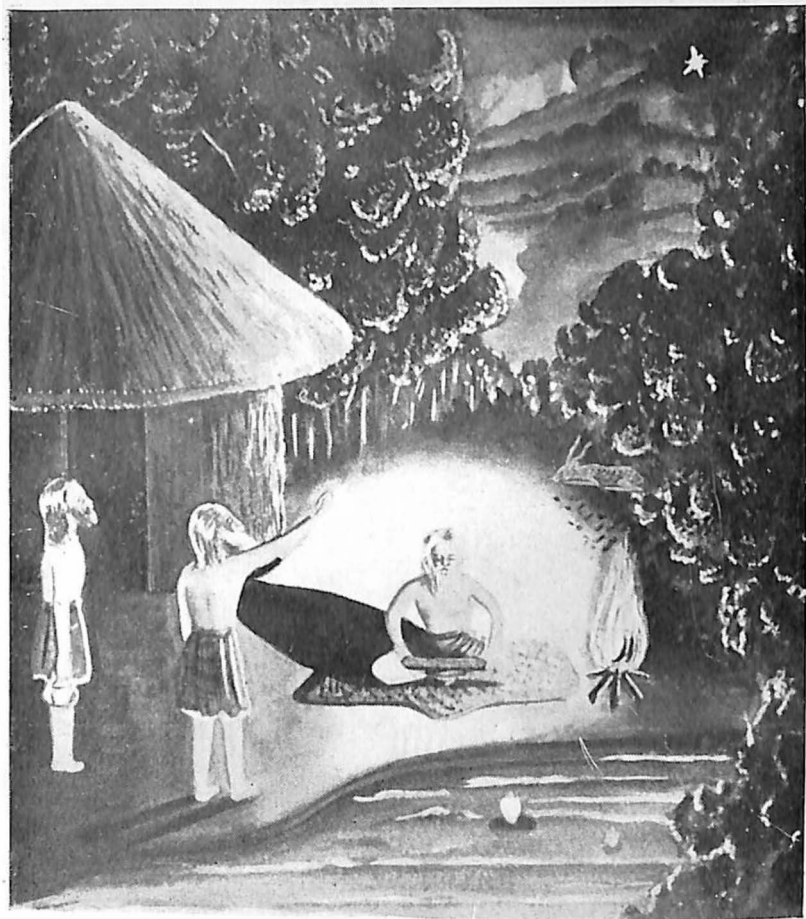
of Khyber. During their journey westwards the zealous travellers noted with surprise that Bṛhaspati was every night moving further to the west. Did they would lose sight of it any day? Its light, though intermitent, seemed to inspire them with courage and decision.

Once within the Afghan territory, instead of crossing the northern mountains to Kābul, they took an entirely westerly direction, crossing the desert of Arachosia after passing through the thickly populated city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great four centuries before, called subsequently Sikandar Shahr, the modern Kandahar. In this city they met many Jews with whom they spoke again of their quest and from whom they received hospitality and food. It is probable that they contemplated with astonishment and even with fervent enthusiasm a new celestial phenomenon in the desert of Arachosia. The Planet Sani (Saturn) was each day approaching Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) more closely, and on the 13th of May Jupiter and Saturn were a little more than a degree of distance between themselves to the east of the sky, eight hours after the setting of the Sun, that is, in the early hours of the morning of the 14th.<sup>220</sup> Sani is called in the *Mahābhārata* "the active planet of great splendour".<sup>221</sup> Its conjunction with Jupiter, which they could easily foresee, could not but excite feelings of devotion among the *ṛsis*. The conjunction of the two "burning" planets must signify a great event. The luminous activity of Saturn, together with the star of Bṛhaspati, was a certain sign of prosperity.

The journey continued each night by light of the stars. In this way, ten days afterwards, on the 23rd of May, the pilgrims reached Alexandria Arcion, the modern Herat, not far from the frontiers of Persia. This Alexandria was a populous city, under the rule of the Parthian kings of Persia, and it was already influenced by the culture of this nation, as this nation had been influenced by the civilization of Babylon and Assyria from the times that the Persian kings Kushru (Cyrus) and Daraiavush (Darius) conquered these two countries. In Alexandria all the world was talking

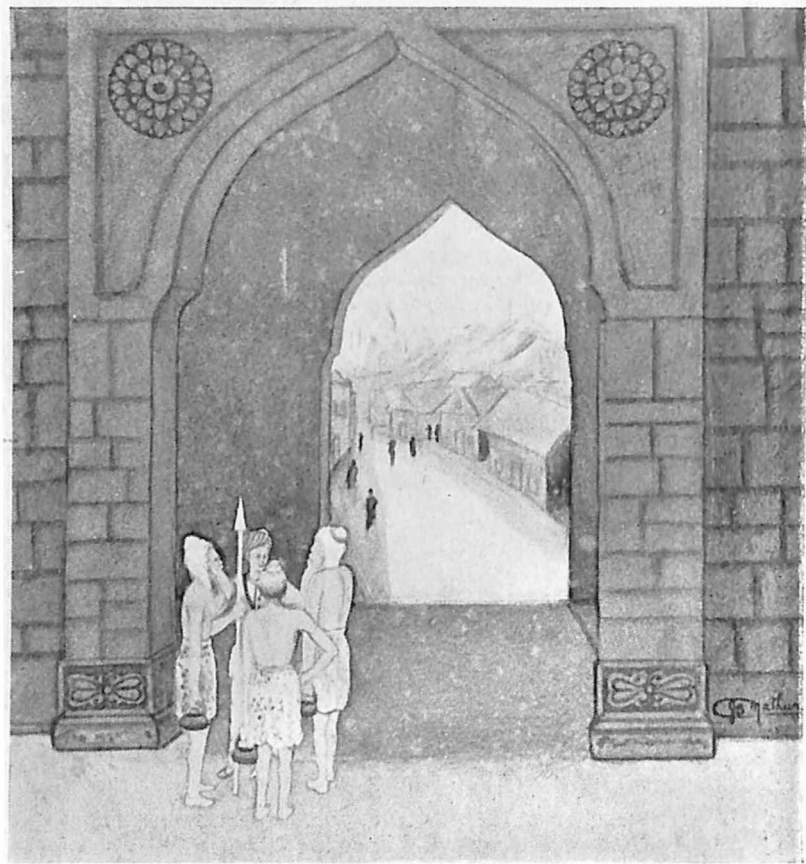
<sup>220</sup>. Swamikannu Pillai, *An Indian Ephemeris*, I, Part 1, p. 125.

<sup>221</sup>. *Mahābhārata*, Udyoga Parva. ch. 143, V, 8.



The Ṛṣis of India seeing the Star for the first time  
By J. S. MATHUR





The R̥ṣis of India making inquiries at the Gate of Jerusalem  
By J. S. MATHUR

of the future juncture of the two planets. On the 24th of May they were seen at dawn rising together in the east, seven hours after the setting of the Sun, with one degree of distance between themselves, in the last degrees of the constellation of 'Pisces'.<sup>222</sup> "Astronomically considered," says Edersheim, "and without relation to any controversy, it cannot be doubted that a most extraordinary junction of planets took place not less than three times in the year 747 A.U.C., that is to say, in May, October and December, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of 'Pisces,' which occurs only once in 800 years. All the astronomers speak of this conjunction. It was not only an extraordinary phenomenon ; it was besides a most luminous spectacle in the middle of the dark night, such as could not but be noted by all who busied themselves with astrology".<sup>223</sup>

According to Babylonian ideas, the planet Jupiter (there styled Marduk), signified "peace upon earth".<sup>224</sup> He is "the Lord of Heaven and earth".<sup>225</sup> The most ancient writings of Mesopotamia say that if Jupiter shines with unusual splendour, the king of Akkad will triumph, the land prosper and the nation be blessed. On the other hand, Saturn was a sign of "good will to men, and the triumph of justice". If Saturn appears near the orbit of the Sun, justice will reign on earth, the son will be obedient to the father, salvation will come from the hands of One who will rule the entire world.<sup>226</sup> Naturally the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn will announce "peace and justice".<sup>227</sup> Such was the talk the Indian sages heard among the innumerable Jews that dwelt in that city. This would quicken their steps to the goal. For the end was not yet near.

With unremitted courage they entered the lands of Persia. From Herat they passed to Artacoana, a little to the north-west, but within the Persian limits. Meanwhile from day to day they beheld the planets appear in the east,

<sup>222</sup>. Swamikannu Pillai, *op cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>223</sup>. Edersheim, *The Life and times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, p. 219. (New York, 1903).

<sup>224</sup>. Virolleaud, *L'Astrologie Chaldeenne*, p. 63. (Paris, 1905).

<sup>225</sup>. Thierens, *Astrology in Mesopotamian Culture*, p. 41 (Leiden, 1935).

<sup>226</sup>. Jastrow, "Sun and Saturn," *Revue d'Assyriologie*, 1910, pp. 163 sqq.

<sup>227</sup>. *Ibid.*

each day earlier than the day before, after the setting of the Sun; until the 10th of September, when Jupiter and Saturn appeared in the east at the same time that the Sun hid in the west. The planets were now very near: the longitude of Jupiter was  $357.4$ , and that of Saturn  $356.7$ .<sup>228</sup> They continued stationary in the days following, until on the 30th of September they approached so near as almost to touch each other, Jupiter at  $355.4$  and Saturn  $355.2$ . At a simple glance they seemed to touch, two points distant from each other.<sup>229</sup> The intrepid pilgrims then travelled towards the north, to reach a valley among high mountains, at the foot of which ran a river. Following the river, they arrived at Susia, one of the chief Iranian cities.

The planets had slowly separated, but always keeping at a small distance, really speaking always together, since on the 20th of October they were at a degree of distance (Jupiter at  $352.8$  and Saturn at  $353.8$ ), rising from the horizon at 9 in the night. From Susia the Magi could follow an entirely westerly route, first along the course of the same river to make their way to the city of Zadracarta, capital of the province of Hyrcania. When they were in the vicinity of this city, on the 9th of December, the two planets were at 90 degrees of distance from the Sun, and remained in this position during the whole month of December.<sup>230</sup> When the brilliant light of the two planets appeared on the zenith, it gave those interested in the movements of heavenly bodies much to talk about. It was universally believed in these Eastern lands that when Jupiter and Saturn appeared over the zenith, their position was indicative of salvation, and that all hardship and travail would cease as by magic.<sup>231</sup>

These conversations would no doubt increase the fervour of our pilgrims. They would impart the purpose of their journey to the people they encountered, to adore Him "who was born king of the Jews".<sup>232</sup> And if their interlocutors were Jews themselves, they would inquire of the Indians their mission and their travelling experiences. At the time the

<sup>228</sup>. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. cit. et loc. cit.*

<sup>229</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup>. Jastrow, *op. et loc. cit.*

<sup>232</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 2.

Persian king was a Parthian, Phraates IV. This monarch had been warlike in his youth, but had been subjugated by the Roman power, and humiliated by one of his subjects named Tiridates, who obliged him to seek asylum among the nomad tribes of Central Asia. When he recovered his throne he became mild and peace-loving, and returned to the Emperor Augustus the Roman standards which had been captured by the Persians 33 years before, in the time of Mark Anthony.<sup>233</sup> The affairs of the west interested him no longer. The strangers' query would cause him no sudden fear as it afterwards did Herod.

A few days afterwards, about the middle of December, they resumed their travel, going in the direction of Thara. Zadracarta must have been the northern most point of the whole journey. To reach Thara, they went forward southwards and then turned gently towards the west. Following the same south-westerly direction, they reached a famous pass in the mountains called the "Gates of the Caspian", at the south of this sea. Descending the mountains, they arrived at Rages, the modern Teheran. When they reached this city, the new year had already begun, the 6th before the Christian era. At the end of December the two planets had already begun to fall towards the west. These movements started fresh rumours among people. It was said that if Jupiter and Saturn moved towards the west, this was a certain sign of an unchanging peace, and a merciful salvation for all nations.

Our wayfarers had by now passed the city of Ecbatana, and leaving behind them the mountainous regions of Media, they could without great difficulty cross to the River Tigris and the plain of Mesopotamia. They probably crossed the stream at the city of Opis, north of Babylon, and a few days after forded the Euphrates. It is likely enough that when they were between these two rivers another new celestial phenomenon attracted their attention. On the 17th of February, on the 340th day of the Indian solar year, the planet Mars, the one of the reddish light, was in conjunction with Saturn, the first at  $359^{\circ}40'$  and the second at  $359^{\circ}20'$ .

<sup>233</sup>. Cf. Horace, *Odes*, IV, 15.

Jupiter had moved away a little, since it was at 5·40.<sup>234</sup> This is the complete conjunction mentioned by Abrabanel and admitted by Kepler. "In the month of March of that year (6 B.C.)," says Ramsay, "there occurred a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars which presented a most brilliant spectacle in the firmament and naturally attracted the attention of whatever observers were interested in celestial phenomena, as were the Wise Men of the east".<sup>235</sup>

When they crossed the plains of Mesopotamia, the travellers would hear from their hosts other marvellous interpretations of the astrological import of that conjunction, according to the sages of the land of the two Rivers. For the conjunction observed by the *ṛṣis* had occurred in the constellation of Karkātaka, *i.e.* Cancer, which is called *Allul* in Sumerian and *Titu* in Akkadian. Now the sign by which this constellation is represented reads *Nanguru*, a word which in Akkadian means "a little cut" or "a cradle", the place where a newly born child is laid. But the word *Nanguru* also means "carpenter," and this word, they very likely told the Indian sages, seemed to denote the social condition of the child born in that constellation ; because the tenth house of the upper meridian, according to the astrological ideas of Mesopotamia, pointed to the rank of the family of the child born in that constellation.<sup>236</sup> This would open new vistas to the devout *ṛṣis* ; for if the child was a carpenter, they must not expect to find royal pomp and material greatness about him : the *avatāra* was going to be a spiritual king, the king of truth, *Vidyarāja*, a personage much in accordance with Indian conceptions.

The end of the journey was not far off. They would naturally go first to Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of the Jews, to inquire there where "the King of the Jews" was born, perhaps they believed that he was born in Jerusalem itself. What more natural than that a king should be born in the capital of his kingdom !

The road from the Euphrates to Jerusalem did not present great difficulties. Crossing the steppes of the modern state

<sup>234</sup>. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. et loc. cit.*

<sup>235</sup>. Ramsay, *Was Christ born at Bethlehem ?*, p. 215 (London, 1898).

<sup>236</sup>. Thierens, *Astrology in Mesopotamian Culture*, p. 52.

of Transjordan, which was then called Arabia Petrea, they probably passed by the city of Amman, crossed the river Jordan to the north of the Dead Sea, near Jericho, where there was a good ford, entered Jericho, passed a little afterwards through Anathoth, and from there to Jerusalem was a matter of a few hours. Brhaspati had continually shone before them from the west, as if showing the way, and that light they had followed all through their journey.

## 17. THE WISE MEN IN JERUSALEM

The pilgrims reached the outskirts of the great city of Jerusalem on the morning of the 15th of March. Asking the walkers, who always stir out in the morning from great cities, on their way to Bethany, they learnt that Jerusalem was close at hand, and so they fared all day to reach it as early as possible. Late in the morning they crossed the torrent Cedron, and climbing up the sloping rock where the Holy City stands, they reached the south-eastern gate of Jerusalem at mid-day. Before them rose the walls of the Temple.

What must have been the emotions of devotion and joy that filled their breasts ! They had been on foot a full year. They had traversed deserts, scaled mountains, forded rivers, visited numberless cities, encountered unknown peoples, undergone the discomfort of varying climates, eaten strange food, not seldom suffered hunger and thirst, sometimes were in peril of their lives. But the ardour to meet the *avatāra*, God made Man, the newly born king of the Jews, made all hardships easy. Now they had reached the end of their journey. Now there was no more to do save to inquire where the looked-for Infant lay. This they did the moment they reached Jerusalem ; the whole of Jerusalem ought to know it.

There were guards keeping watch at the gates of the city. People were indoors at their mid-day repast, and very few were abroad. According the guards, one of the Wise Men, who had made most progress in Aramaic, inquired : "Where is he that is born king of the Jews ?"<sup>237</sup>

This artless question disconcerted the guards. They exchanged looks of surprise, muttered some words among themselves, and asked these suspicious looking strangers where they had come from. Idlers collected around.

"From Bhārata, from India," they replied. "We have journeyed for a year. We left our country on the first day of the year, and today is the 360th day. We have passed through Arachosia, Ariana, Iran, Sennaar, and Arabia, to find this Infant. For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to adore Him".<sup>238</sup>

The *ṛsis* could well say that they had seen "His star," the star of the Lord, because Brhaspati, the same as Brahmanaspati, were names of God in their own country.<sup>239</sup> Therefore the star that bore this name was in reality the star of God. With these words they made a profession of faith in the divinity of the newly born One.

But these words aroused far different ideas in the minds of those who heard them. The simple question clearly showed that the strangers knew naught of the local circumstances. The king of the Jews was Herod, a cruel and evil-minded man, who had murdered his own sons for fear they might seize the throne.<sup>240</sup> He was aged seventy, and had been ruler since he was young.<sup>241</sup> Such an inquiry as where "the king of the Jews" had been born was bound to excite the worst suspicions of the monarch. He was not a Jew, but an Idumean, who had come to the throne of the Jews by the favour of Rome. Any "born king of the Jews" would be a descendent of the family of David, with a legitimate right to the national throne. And so the guards, when they heard the question, looked astonished, not daring to reply directly. Meanwhile the arrival of these men from a distant country, with their strange guise and extraordinary question was noised about the city, and no other thing was spoken of. St. Matthew means this when he says that "all Jerusalem was troubled by the news".<sup>242</sup> Some feared for the life of the newcomers ; in others there leapt up the hope that the day was

<sup>238</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup>. *Rgveda*, II, 23. Cf. *J.B.A.S.B.*, XXVIII (1923), No. 1. pp. 50-52.

<sup>240</sup>. Josephus. *De Bell. J. daic.*, I, 48.

<sup>241</sup>. Jones, *The Herods of Judaea*, p. III (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>242</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 3.

nigh when they would be freed from the yoke of the foreigner that sat on the throne of Israel, and all foresaw new excesses of violence from a ruler adulated by a few, hated by many, loved by none.

About a twelve month since an incident had occurred that had given rise to strange rumours in places surrounding the Temple and among people who were wont to pray in the sacred precincts. It appears that a poor couple had come to the Temple for the legal ceremony of the purification of the mother and the circumcision of the first born, with the offering of the two turtles prescribed by the law of Moses. When the ceremonies were performed, an aged devotee named Simeon, who came to the Temple regularly, approached the mother of the Child, looked at Him fixedly, and asking leave of the mother, took Him in his arms and began to utter strange words, while his countenance shone as the faces of the prophets of old used to shine when they foretold future events. Some remembered that one of the phrases that the aged Simeon had uttered was that the Child "was a light to the revelation of the Gentiles".<sup>243</sup> And now there had come from the east these Gentiles declaring that they had seen the light of His star! Were the two events related? Would it not be better if old Simeon were asked to explain all this? But he was already dead, and in the beginning of his prophecy it seems that he had asked of the Lord God to permit him to depart from the world in peace, because his eyes had seen that which he had so ardently longed for.

Others more accustomed to the letter and interpretation of the ancient Scriptures remembered some words that the Lord God had said to His Son, according to the prophecy of Isaias: "Behold, I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayst be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth".<sup>244</sup> Ought not these words of Isaias be connected with the words of Simeon and with the mysterious arrival of these Gentiles from the last land then known as the east, from which they said they had set out because they had seen the light of the star? Did not the whole thing refer to the apparition of the star of Jacob pre-

<sup>243</sup>. *Luke*, II, 32.

<sup>244</sup>. *Isaias*, XLIX, 6.



dicted by Balaam, words that undoubtedly referred to the future Messiah? Could the time of the Messiah have come? Was He not "the Expectation of nations", according to the prophecy of Jacob? <sup>245</sup> These strangers had come from a remote country in search of Him whom they called "the King of the Jews".

It had grown dark. The Wise Men came out from the house where one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem had offered them board according to Oriental custom, and they repaired to the square before the Temple in order to scan the immensity of the heavens. Since the day they had seen the star of the "Lord of Magical Power," for this seemed to be the meaning of *Bṛhaspati*, they had every night for a whole year lifted up their gaze to the sky and had seen there shining that wonderful star that had guided them through four countries. They wished to contemplate it again, that star which inspired and fed their enthusiasm and devotion. The night before, from the outskirts of Bethany, they had seen it in the east immediately after sunset. Diligently they looked for it again. They did not see it, they searched the skies without any result, and had to return to their lodging disappointed. St. Matthew signifies that the star had disappeared on their arrival in Jerusalem when he says that when the Magi left the city, "it appeared to them anew".<sup>246</sup> What had happened?

The poor pilgrims well remembered that on the evening of the 14th of March, the previous day, which was the first day of the Indian year, they had not seen Saturn, which was very near Jupiter in former days from the time when they were in conjunction. But Saturn did not matter much; for them Jupiter was the star of the Lord, the one that had guided them to their destination. How could they continue their journey without the light of the star? What had happened was a simple celestial phenomenon which has enabled us as to know the day of the arrival of the Magi at Jerusalem. According to astronomical calculations, from the day 0 to the 15th of the new Indian year, that is, from the 14th of

<sup>245</sup>. *Exodus*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>246</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 9. St. Augustine agrees, *Sermo 2 de Epiphania*. Cf. *Roman Breviary*, 8 Jan., *lectio VI.*

March of the 29th of the same month, first Saturn and on the following day Jupiter came into conjunction with the sun, and they were therefore hidden with it under the horizon at the time of sunset,<sup>247</sup> and during these fifteen days Jupiter was invisible to our sages, who nevertheless every evening went to the square to see if the star had appeared again, and always in vain.

The next day Herod summoned the strangers to his palace. The noise of their arrival had reached his ears, and he wished to question them for himself. He sought from them the circumstances of their journey and its cause. The one who spoke for the rest told of the apparition of the star their inquiries from the Jews of Taxila and their eventful journey. Herod asked what this star could have to do with the Infant born king of the Jews, for this was the matter of moment to him. The Indians said that according to their most ancient Scriptures the star Brhaspati on entering the constellation of Tisya in conjunction with the Sun and the Moon would mark the time of the birth of the Child. This created great fear in the mind of the king. He recalled that at the time of the birth of Mithridates VI, the founder of the greatness of the kingdom of the Parthians, a comet had been seen, as the historians relate.<sup>248</sup> The same he had heard tell of Augustus, his great friend, the Roman Emperor.<sup>249</sup> This star appearing in the Orient signified the birth of the founder of a new dynasty among the Jews, as the comets had signified those of the others. Herod felt that his throne was tottering. His first fear was that one of the descendents of Hyrcanus or of Aristobulus, (the last kings of the dynasty of the Maccabees who were his contemporaries) would be proclaimed monarch, and himself treated as a usurper.<sup>250</sup> It might also be that this Babe "born king of the Jews" was of the line of David, which was the only royal family truly lawful, from whom it was said that the Messias hoped-for by the Jews would be born. Much caution was needed ; and astute as he was, he gave no sign of his alarm and fear. The information the

247. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

248. Justin, *Historia*, XXXVIII, 2.

249. Servius, *In Aeneidem*, X, 272.

250. Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, *In Evangelia*, VIII: ML, CXVIII col. 1542.

strangers had given him would do for the moment. He dismissed them, telling them that, after looking into the matter, he would give them a reply to their question.

And while Herod summons the learned scribes and discusses the case with them ; and while the latter study the prophecies and form the opinion which they will communicate to the king, our readers will permit us to answer an objection that has no doubt grown in their minds.

It is generally supposed that the adoration of the Magi occurred a few days after the birth of the Infant Saviour ; they are even often represented in painting and sculpture, already from the time of the Christian sarcophagi, as offering their gifts in the stable where He was born.<sup>251</sup> Perhaps the celebration of the feast of the Epiphany twelve days after the Nativity has helped to generalize this error. In actual fact, until the year 354 the Church of Rome used to celebrate but one feast, on the 6th January, of the birth of our Lord and the Epiphany. In this year the feast of the Nativity was transferred to the 25th December. St. Augustine in some of his homilies speaks of the need for instituting the feast of the Epiphany independently of the Nativity.<sup>252</sup> In point of fact the adoration of the Magi could on no account have preceded the Purification and the Presentation of the Infant in the Temple, since St. Joseph would not have ventured to go to Jerusalem after the promulgation of Herod's decree against all the male infants of Bethlehem and its surroundings. Now the Purification of Our Lady took place forty days after the Nativity. Therefore the Magi could not have reached Bethlehem until after the Holy Family had returned from Jerusalem, when already 50 days at least had passed after the Nativity. But this period seems too short. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus believes that when the Magi arrived the Infant Jesus was already two years old, and he

<sup>251</sup>. Some of the sarcophagi exist, in which the Infant appear wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, when He is adored by the Magi. Cf. Fabre, *Pages d'art Chrétien* p. 377, fig. 282 ; Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, VII, 550.

<sup>252</sup>. St. Augustine, *Sermo CCIII: ML, XXVIII*, col. 1035; *Sermo CCIV: Ibid.*, col. 1038.

gives as a reason that the pilgrims "did not find Mary in the cave where she had given birth ; but in a house".<sup>253</sup>

Fr. Drum, in modern times, is of the opinion that the adoration of the Magi did not take place for "a year, or a little more than a year after the birth of Christ".<sup>254</sup> Which is exactly what our calculations in studying the geography of the nations crossed and the stellar phenomena have given us, in the light of the Gospel narrative.

It must be noted that the crafty Herod, after ascertaining from the pilgrims the time of the appearance of the star, when he proclaimed the order to destroy the children of Bethlehem and its borders, put "two years" as the limit of the age of the children to be butchered.<sup>255</sup> Thus he was sure that the "pretended" king of the Jews would perish in the slaughter.

The study of the Scriptures and the discussion of the texts took many days. The doctors of the law feared for their person when the monarch would hear for certainty the birth place of the Messias. Finally on the 3rd of April they gave their reply. Then Herod sent for the Indians in secret. He had already formed his plans. He told them that Bethlehem of Juda was the place announced by the prophets, for from there, according to the prophecies, would rise the one who would rule the destinies of the people of Israel.<sup>256</sup> He advised them to note well the place where the Child dwelt because then he could go there himself "to adore Him,"<sup>257</sup> as he assured them with unexampled duplicity. The Indian sages ; who did not know deceit, believed him ; and a message from heaven was necessary to save the life of the Child.

## 18. JOURNEY'S END

The devout *isis* had every moment awaited the king's reply, and on the evening of the same day they left Jerusalem for their final destination. All these days they had hoped

<sup>253</sup>. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, *Contra Hæreses*, II, 1, p. 103 (Basilea, date obliterated). Cf. *Opera*, p. 555.

<sup>254</sup>. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, IX, article "Magi", p. 528.

<sup>255</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 16.

<sup>256</sup>. *Mich.*, V, 2, Cf. *Matth.*, II, 6.

<sup>257</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 8.

to see the star, but in vain. It did not appear anywhere. They inquired where Bethlehem was, and when they were told that it was a six miles' walk towards the south, and being shown the way, they started with ineffable bliss and devotion. Th desire of their hearts was to be satisfied. It was the 4th of April.

Leaving Jerusalem by the same gate by which they had entered, and taking their way to the south of the city along the wall, they descended the valley of Hinnom, crossed a plain which thirty years later was to be called *Haceldama*, "the plain of blood," passed by the foot of the Hill of Evil Council and soon found the road to Bethlehem which had been pointed out to them. It was already night, and one of them, suddenly directing his gaze to the west, even then hoping to espy again the star of the Lord, saw it clearly shining above the horizon ; because on this date both planets Jupiter and Saturn, after having been hidden by the Sun for some 33 days, appeared again to the west of the Sun, immediately after its setting.<sup>258</sup>

The happiness of the Magi can well be imagined. The Gospel only tells us that "the star which they had seen in the east went before them".<sup>259</sup> And seeing it, they "rejoiced with exceeding great joy".<sup>260</sup> To make this clear St. Matthew puts together several words indicative of happiness : a verb *ehāresan* ; a noun *harān* ; an adjective, *megālen*, and an adverb *sfōdra*. Bethlehem is to the south-east of Jerusalem, the road winding east and west, so that it can well be said that the star preceeded them. It was soon hidden below the horizon, but the next night it appeared again, this time already towards the zenith, shining more brilliantly than the day before. On the morning of the third day after they had left Jerusalem they seemed to see the star stationary over the western horizon of the village of Bethlehem, as if to indicate the place where the Infant King was. "And entering the house, *eis ten oikian*, they found the Infant in the arms of Mary his Mother, and throwing themselves on the ground they

258. Swamikannu Pillai, *op. et loc. cit.*, By reason of this apparition of the star we can be sure of the day on which the Magi left Jerusalem.

259. *Matth.*, II, 9.

260. *Ibid.*, II, 10.

adored Him".<sup>201</sup> The Greek text does not say that they knelt down, as they are generally represented, but *pesóntes*. This participle really signifies "throwing themselves on the ground". This is clearly an Oriental posture, particularly Indian. The humble followers of the star had already forgotten all about it, for they had come to Him whom the star pointed to and which they had sought so diligently ; and in this way, first of all prostrating themselves at the feet of the Infant in the arms of His Mother, joined their hands in front of their heads in the *añjali mudrā* (gesture of devotion and offering), as is done in India, and then throwing themselves on the floor rubbed their foreheads in the dust, exclaiming with sighs of devotion and joy :—

*Íśvarāya namaḥ,*  
*Íśvarāya namaḥ,*  
*Íśvarāya namaḥ,*

repeated three times ; which in Sanskrit, the sacred language of India, means "Adoration to the Lord." It is a true act of religion by which one recognizes the Godhead and adores It. And after they had prostrated themselves for some time, they rose, still remaining on their knees ; and putting their hands into their tattered satchels took out the small packets tied up in a vegetable leaf, now dried up after a year, and opening them, laid them on the ground at the foot of the Child and His Mother. They were the traditional gifts of their land : gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Divine Infant regarded them steadily with the eyes of a Child. But His Providence had long designed and long awaited this visit : from ages everlasting he had ordained that the star should be announced to that multitudinous and spiritual-minded nation, and He had moved the hearts of those *γῆς* to be led by His light. He knew well the purity of those hearts, and their detachment from earthly things. He had observed the privations they had so cheerfully endured in the fervent desire to see and adore Him. How would He fill those hearts with graces, of high sanctity, a sanctity that has been venerated by the Church from the very earliest centuries.

<sup>201</sup>. *Ibid.*, 11.

Years later, the Child, grown to man's estate, extolled the devotion and fervor of the poor sages from far Ind. When, praising the faith of the Roman centurion and contrasting it with the unbelief of Israel, he mentioned the coming of the Gentiles of the east and west into the communion and faith of the sons of Abraham. He said : "I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven".<sup>262</sup> Though he praised the faith of a Roman he named the east before he did the west. He remembered the Magi who had been the first of all Gentiledom who accepted Him as the Lord and Saviour of all.

Meanwhile Our Lady, struck by these events and "pondering over them in her heart",<sup>263</sup> inquired of the pilgrims whence they had come and how they had known of the birth of the Child, and of the movements of the star which had guided them, and the other happenings of the journey : for she was the one who later told all that to the Apostles, and one of them set it down in his Gospel.

The Indian sages were not repelled by the poverty of the dwelling of the King of Heavens. They knew well how the fashion of this world passes away, according to the doctrines of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and that poverty was an adornment to Him who was to take upon Himself a spiritual mission of such consequence as the restoration of the age of perfection. He who has stars in the sky to illuminate the obscurity of the human intelligence to His will needs no array to encumber His greatness. "Their eyes," says an ancient text, "could not behold the Infant as an insignificant being, because the faith of their hearts manifested Him to them with a greatness that had not been ever paralleled".<sup>264</sup>

The Gospel does not tell us how long the Magi remained in Bethlehem. Probably they left the following day or the day after. Their quest had been fulfilled. They had taken the *darśana* of the *avatāra* announced in their scriptures, and that was all they wished. The Indian feels the highest joy in seeing the *darśana*, the presence of a great personage, and

<sup>262</sup>. *Matth.*, VIII, 11.

<sup>263</sup>. *Luke*, 11, 51.

<sup>264</sup>. *Opus imperfectum in Matthæum*, 1,1 : *MG*, LVI, col. 642.

considers it a blessing. No doubt they were the guests of Mary and Joseph, as the law of hospitality demands it in the east. And for their way back to their country they took a road that leads to the south of the Red Sea to Kir Moab, and from there to Arabia, in order not to meet with Herod, according to the warning which the Lord had communicated them in sleep.<sup>205</sup> Peter Comestor affirms that they returned to their country by sea.<sup>206</sup>

#### 19. THE ACCOUNT OF THE APPARITION OF THE STAR IN THE "OPUS IMPERFECTUM IN MATTHAEUM."

When our task of investigation into the land of the Magi was finished we came across a work published in the *Patrologia Graeca* of Migne, which relates at length the expectation of the star in the land of the Magi and its apparition and effects. The study of this text, in the light of what we have said, will serve to confirm the Indian identity of the Magi. It runs as follows :<sup>207</sup>

"I have heard from some who spoke of a certain text, which though not certain is not contrary to faith, and is interesting besides. (It is said in it) that there existed a certain nation situated at the very beginning of the Orient next to the Ocean, whose inhabitants pride themselves in (possessing) an (ancient) Scripture called after Seth (which spoke) of the future apparition of this star and of the gifts that ought to be offered to it. This (scripture) had been transmitted from father to son for (many) generations of a cultured people. To fulfil (this prediction) the wisest of them chose from among themselves twelve who were given to (the contemplation) of celestial phenomena ; and deposed that they should look out for the apparition of the star. And if one of them would die, his son, or a near relation who was ready for it, took the place of the dead men. They were called Magi, in their own language, because they glorified

<sup>205</sup> *Matth.*, II, 12.

<sup>206</sup> Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica*, In *Evangelia*, VIII : ML, CXCVIII, col. 1542.

<sup>207</sup> In the translation of the text some words have been introduced for its better understanding. These words have been put into brackets.



God in silence and in words not heard. In this way, then, every year after the termination of the harvest, these men went up a certain mountain situated there, which in their language was called the "Mountain of Victory," which high up had a cave in the rock, (a place) most pleasant where springs (spouted) and a delicious copse existed. (Then) they went up, and after taking bath (*lavantes se*) they prayed and venerated God in silence for (the space of) three days. And they did this for many generations with the hope that the star of happiness would appear in their time (*en ratione sua*). Until (one day) it appeared to them, and descended on that Mountain of Victory in the shape of a Babe, who (showed) above Himself the sign of the Cross. And the star (*sic*) spoke to them and taught them (*docuit eos*) and ordered them to take the road to Judaea. And in doing this the star guided them for a space of two years, and food and drink were never lacking to them in their bags (*in peris eorum*). And the other things that they did are briefly noted in the Gospel. After this when they returned (to the country), they continued to adore and glorify God with greater fervour than before and preached to all those of their descent and instructed many (*multos erudierunt*)".<sup>268</sup>

The text from which we have translated was for the most part attributed to St. John Chrysostom,<sup>269</sup> so much so that certain ancient critics, such as Fray Juan Mahusio and Sixtus Senensis, even believed it to be substantially written by the Saint, though interpolated and corrupted with many heretical doctrines of a succeeding period.<sup>270</sup> Today it is generally believed to be one of the spurious works of the saintly Bishop of Constantinople. Its author seems to be an Arian bishop, probably Bishop Maximus, of the Goths, during the first half of the fifth century.<sup>271</sup>

Nevertheless we cannot reject its authority, apart from the heretical passages it contains. The Church herself accepted it when she prescribed passages from this book as lessons in certain offices during the liturgical year, as Sixtus

268. *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, I, 1 : MG, LVI, col. 637-638.

269. Cf. Migne, P.G., LVI, col. 611, note 1.

270. Cf. *Ibid.*, col. 602-603.

271. Cf. Paos, *Das Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum*, (Tübingen, 1907).

Senensis notes.<sup>272</sup> Fray Juan Mahusio, a Franciscan, professor of theology, after saying that it was written by an uncertain author, calls it "a golden work".<sup>273</sup> And Erasmus confesses that its author is a man erudite and versatile and so well versed in the Sacred Scriptures that in his judgement it is from this point of view not inferior to the works of Chrysostom.<sup>274</sup>

The passage we are studying begins by saying that the narrative is taken from a certain scripture, which "though not certain, is no contrary to the faith." This scripture is the *Book of Seth*, one of the apochryphal books of the Old Testament. Precisely because of this it is said to be uncertain, that is to say, not true with the certainty of an inspired book, but this does not mean that what is related therein is false. In ancient times there existed seven *Books of Seth*, since lost, which were much read in the east, specially among the Gnostics.<sup>275</sup> Often such apochryphal books contain historical data of importance, whose authenticity cannot be denied. The historicity of the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle to the north of India is based specially on an apochryphal book.<sup>276</sup> St. Jude mentions facts taken from an apochryphum in his Catholic Epistle.<sup>277</sup> As regards the work in question, what is said to be contained in it is confirmed in part by the documents we have so far studied.

It speaks, then, of "a certain nation situated at the very beginnings of the Orient, close to the Ocean." In this description the eastern boundaries of the world were meant, "close to the Ocean" that is, where the continents ended, where no more land existed. This was the India in the world known to the ancients. When Alexander the Great came to the East, he marched to India for this reason, namely, to conquer the whole world up to its eastern limits ; so that "the limits of our empire (as he himself said to his soldiers

<sup>272</sup>. Cf. Migne, *op cit.*, col. 602. These lessons have expunged from the reformed Breviary.

<sup>273</sup>. *Ibid.*, col. 601.

<sup>274</sup>. *Ibid.*, col. 601-602.

<sup>275</sup>. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, 1, p. 771.

<sup>276</sup>. *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, Cfr. Heras, *The Two Apostles of India*, pp. 4-16.

<sup>277</sup>. *St. Judas*, 9.

when they mutinied, objecting to going up the Ganges) may coincide with those that God Himself has put to the earth".<sup>278</sup>

Geographical knowledge of the east had not progressed far among the western people from the time of the great Alexander down to the beginning of the Christian era. India continued for centuries to be the eastern limit of the world "close to the Ocean." St. Isidore of Seville, when describing the geographical situation of India, says that it sprads "from the southern seas up to the rise of the sun," *usque ad ortum solis*,<sup>279</sup> i.e. the easternmost country. The apochryphal text seems therefore to speak of India, which is confirmed by what is said about this country.

For it proceeds to say that there existed a certain scripture which spoke of the future appearance of the star, and of the gifts which were to be offered to the newly born.<sup>280</sup> This scripture had been transmitted from father to son "in the course of many generations of a very cultured nation." Who does not see signified in this description the narratives of the *Māhabhārata* or of the *Purāna* mentioned above, announcing the apparition of the star at the time of the birth of the *avatāra*? And we have seen that there does not exist another country that is blessed with such a prediction. With reason "its inhabitants pride themselves on possessing this scripture."

The custom of keeping a look-out for this star seems very reasonable, though it lacks confirmation. One circumstance is highly interesting: This night watching began after the end of the harvest, which happens in India in the month of January. But the second half of January and the first half of February correspond to the India month *maghā*, and whatever pertains to this month is called *maghā*. Is the word *Magi*, used in the text we are commenting upon, even after it had lost its -h-, a relic of this Indian word referring to the month? The text affirms precisely that "they were called *Magi* in their own language."

278. Arrianus, *Anabasis*, ch. 28.

279. St. Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, XIV, 3, 5 : *ML*, LXXXII, col. 497.

280. The statement in the text that this scripture was called after Seth is an evident error of the copyist. This clause must be placed while speaking of the other scripture at the beginning of the passage, not here. Evidently the author of the *Book of Seth* had a knowledge of the Indian prophecy and included it in his work.

As regards the "Mountain of Victory," we have not so far been able to discover any Indian mountain called *Vijaya Parvata*. But Fray Juan de Marignoli, a Franciscan friar who visited India in the fourteenth century as a pontifical legate, and who was later made Bishop of Bisignano, in the description of his voyage speaks of a very high mountain in the kingdom of the queen of Saba which seems to be no other than the Mountain of Victory. It has not been possible to determine the situation of this kingdom, but it cannot be doubted that it ought not to be far from the south-western coast of India. Because the friar tells us that he could not climb the top of the mountain because of a certain poison they had given him in Columbum (Quilon, Malabar); and a little later says that the presents that the queen of Saba gave him were snatched off in Scillan (Ceylon).<sup>281</sup> The existence of this queen in these regions, as well as that of a woman doctor who cured him of his sickness, also seems to indicate matriarchal customs which have prevailed for hundreds of years, specially on the south-west coast of India.

Marignoli then says that in this kingdom there exists a mountain, very high, called "Gybert," which, according to him, means holy (*beatus*). "In this mountain likewise they say that the Magi were praying on the night of the birth of Christ, when they saw the star."<sup>282</sup> At its foot there was a spring from which Marignoli drank. The inhabitants of the kingdom of Saba assured him that the prophet Elias was hidden within the mountain, and that he appeared every now and then. This circumstance also seems to indicate Malabar as the locality of the mountain, since in the days of Marignoli there were Christians only in Malabar, and only Christians could have spoken about the prophet. This mountain seems to be the one called Schir, of which Dionysius of Telmahar speaks in the 8th century. Schir is situated at the limit of the east, before the great ocean that surrounds the world and the east of the country of Nud where Adam settled after his expulsion from Paradise. In this mountain

<sup>281</sup>. Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, II, p. 392 (1866).

<sup>282</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

was "the cave of Treasures" of which the apochryphal writings speak, as we have mentioned above.<sup>283</sup>

Herzfeld, who translates the word *Mons Victorialis* not as "the Mountain of Victory," but as "the Mountain of the Victorious (Chief)," identifies it with the large table land *Kuh-i-khwāja*, "the mountain of the Lord," or "of the Holy one," which rises more than 400 feet above the marshes of Hāmūn in the middle of Sistān, south-west of the modern kingdom of Afghanistan.<sup>284</sup>

The custom of praying in silence on this high mountain in expectation of the apparition of the star, as is said in this account, is entirely Indian, as is also the rite of bathing before beginning one's prayers.

Finally, the text tells us of the wallets carried by the Magi on their journey, which we have spoken of above; and that it took two years, *i.e.* a year and some more days of the following year, according to our calculations. But if the Magi were from Malabar, and had to go by way of the Punjab to enter the lands of Afgānistan, it would not be too much to posit two full years for the whole journey.

## 20. THE TRADITION OF INDIA

The decisive argument that the author of the *Opus Imperfectum* in relating this story refers to India is that he locates the preaching of St. Thomas the Apostle in the land of the Magi. Ancient Oriental writers know very well that India was the field of the ministry of this Apostle.<sup>285</sup> St. Jerome writes that St. Thomas preached the Gospel to the Magi and finally slept, that is, died in India.<sup>286</sup>

Now the author of the *Opus Imperfectum*, at the close of the narrative of the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem, adds: "Finally, as after the Resurrection of the Lord, the

283. Dionysii Telmaharansis, *Chronici liber primus*, pp. 79-83. (1850). Consult *Journal Asiatique*, II, 1853, p. 468.

284. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran*, pp. 62-64 (London 1935); Stein, *Innermost Asia*, II, p. 909.

285. Cf. Heras, *The Two Apostles of India*, pp. 1-2. Cf. Perumalil, "The India of the Early Greeks and Romans," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, XXVIII (1942), pp. 341-383.

286. St. Jerome, *De Vitis Apostolorum*, V : ML, XXIII, col. 721.

Apostle Thomas went to that province they (the Magi) joined him, and were baptized by him, and came to be the companions of his preaching".<sup>287</sup> We have here, then, the first link in a chain of tradition which speaks of the Magi as setting forth from this country to see and adore the Saviour.

Sophronius is certain of the same, and St. Jerome agrees with him that the Magi were baptized by St. Thomas when he came to India to preach the Gospel. This tradition has been commemorated in art down to modern times.<sup>288</sup> In the Baroncelli Chapel in Florence, for example, there exists a series of episodes in the life of the Virgin Mary, painted by Tadeo Gaddi. One of the episodes is the "Baptism of the Magi by St. Thomas."

In the XVIth century a Christian of Malabar gave the Portuguese writer João de Barros the information that a king of Ceylon called Pirimal (Perumal) went to Mascate and thence with others to Bethlehem to adore the Infant Jesus.<sup>289</sup> Perumal is a Tamil and not a Singhalese name, so this personage must have been king of Jaffna, in the north of Ceylon, dominated by the Tamilians of India.<sup>290</sup>

On the other hand, an almost contemporaneous Singalese tradition makes this Magus a king of Calicut in Malabar. It says that in the annals of this kingdom it is narrated that Chery Perimale (Chera Perumal), emperor of Malabar and founder of the city of Calicut, was a Brahman of great wisdom, "one of the three (*sic*) Magi who went to Bethlehem to adore the Son of God made man, and who on his return built a temple with chapel and altar".<sup>291</sup>

## 21. CONCLUSION

In our work of inquiry into the country of origin of the Magi or Wise Men of the east who went to adore the Babe of Bethlehem, an impartial study of the facts and circum-

<sup>287</sup>. *MG*, LVI, col. 638.

<sup>288</sup>. Cf. Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna as represented in the Fine Arts*, p. 213 (London, 1857).

<sup>289</sup>. Barros, *Da Ásia*, Decada VIII, libro 7, cap. 9. Cf. Gnana Prakasar, *A History of the Catholic Church in Ceylon*, p. 2. n. 4.

<sup>290</sup>. Cf. Hosten, *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore*, p. 410.

<sup>291</sup>. Queiroz, *Conquista Espiritual de Ceilão*, p. 1125 (Colombo, 1912).

stances has revealed that the traditional country of wisdom, even among the ancient nations of the east, was India ; that in India there existed a prophecy that the Messias, or Redeemer, would come at the time when a star appeared in conjunction with the sun and the moon in the constellation of Cancer ; which phenomenon coincided with the conjunction of planets studied by Abrabanel and Kepler, and which seems to be recorded in the archaeological monuments of Christian Rome of the IVth century. Finally the fact that the Magi offered to the Child, the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, points to an ancient Indian custom, current even today in different parts of the country.

Following these clues, we have accompanied the Wise Men from their own land to Bethlehem, led by the movements of the star of which St. Matthew speaks. The identification of the Magi who adored the Divine Child of Bethlehem with the Wise Men of India explains better than any other the various points raised by the Biblical account :—

1. We understand fully the sense, the reverse of depreciatory, in which the word *Magus* is used ; the Indian *ṛṣi* is a wise man honoured by all the world, because all are aware that he is the only one who knows to distinguish between the eternal value of the spiritual world and the fleeting nature of earthly things.

2. We understand, too, the profound spirituality of the Magi of the Gospel, who apprehend the sign of God in the star and adore the Divine Will which is manifested to them in a dream.

3. On our explanation the Magi had an obscure knowledge of the coming of the Messias, which could be explained more completely and immediately to them by the Jews who lived in their land, after the apparition of the star.

4. The significance of this star as marking the birth of an illustrious person, is an entirely Indian datum, one, indeed, of a nation that even today is governed by horoscopes in the individual life of men, and by other celestial phenomena in what concerns social customs.

5. The gifts offered by the Magi of the Gospel have hardly received any historico-social explanation until now. On our hypothesis they have a real meaning, a remnant of

most ancient customs which reveal social charity, local custom and practical wisdom.

6. The Magi betray an entire innocence of the political situation in Judaea when they speak of a new king in the ears of the suspicious Herod. In Arabia, and even in Persia, the cruelties of this ruler were well known, not so in distant India. Had they been Arabians or Persians, they would have been more politic in their mode of introducing themselves.

7. Herod's dissembling of his purposes is explained. Herod took them for simpletons, since they had to appear so in the eyes of the great and wise of this world. After he had heard the reply of the priests and scribes, he called the strangers to him *occulte*,<sup>292</sup> clandestinely, on the sly, because his fiction that they should bring him word again so that he also might go and adore the Child would have deceived none about the palace or in Jerusalem. But these men from a far country, he calculated, would believe it readily. Their looks, too, revealed them as people who could easily be duped. He could not have acted thus with real Persian Magi, persons of great standing, or with Arabs of his own race, among whom he was well known.

8. The limit of two years fixed by Herod in the age of children to be slain has now an incontrovertible historical explanation.

9. Finally, the apparition and disappearance of the star is now naturally explained from the time of its appearance in the east till the day when it stood over the house in Bethlehem, the time coinciding with the conjunction of Abrabanel and Kepler, which also seems to be suggested by the Roman sarcophagi.

It must be noted that according to the prophecy of the Indian scriptures the desired *avatāra* which the star was to announce would restore the happiness of the Kṛta Yuga, after ending the iniquities of the Kali Yuga. It is certainly known that even in modern times Christianity is acknowledged in India as totally outside the pale and spirit of the Kali Yuga. The country of the Magi admits the effects of the advent of the *avatāra* Our Lord Jesus Christ among the Christians. A Christian missionary relates that a group

<sup>292</sup>. *Matth.*, II, 7.



of Erukulas of the district of Guntur gave the reason for their desire to become Christians in these words : "We have seen that in this Kali Yuga, when the whole world is egotistic and perverted, only the Christians busy themselves in doing good to all".<sup>203</sup> This was a practical admission that the Kali Yuga was already at an end so far as the Christians were concerned, and as the last *avatāra* was to be the One who would end it, this fact proved to them that the *avatāra* had already come and that only the Christians knew Him. The old prophecy of India still points out Jesus Christ to the Indians of today. For, as St. Bonaventure says, "the star did not shine for the Magi alone ; the whole world has been illumined by the mystery of the star".<sup>204</sup> For, "from this point of view Jehovah is now no longer exclusively the God of Israel ; he draws the Jews and the Gentiles, the shepherds of Bethlehem and the Wise Men of the east, to the feet of His Son".<sup>205</sup>

203. Picket, *Christ's Way*, p. 25.

204. St. Bonaventure, *Sermo I in Ephphaniam*.

205. Berthe, *Jesus Christ, His Life, His Passion, His Triumph*, p. 34.

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