In view of questions about the date of the Zoroastrian materials, the differences between Jewish and Persian concepts, and the probability of independent developments, not a few scholars have concluded that the earlier claims for the decisive influence of Persian beliefs upon Judaism have been overvalued.[429]

429. Barr, "Question," p. 225; B. Reicke, "Iranische Religion, Judentum und Urchristentum," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. H. von Campenhausen et al. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), vol. 3, col. 883; J. Maier, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1972), p. 42.

13
The Magi

The Original Magi

According to Herodotus (1.101), the magi (Greek *magos*, plural *magoi*) were originally one of the tribes of the Medes who functioned as priests and diviners under the Achaemenian Persians (sixth–fourth centuries B.C.).[1] Herodotus (1.132) wrote that "no sacrifice can be offered without a Magian." The magi also interpreted dreams (Herodotus 1.107, 120, 128). Other classical writers knew that the magi served before fire altars (Strabo 15.3.15; Xenophon, *Cyropedia* 4.5.14; 7.5.57) and offered libations (Strabo 15.3.14).[2]

Herodotus reports that a magos named Bardiya/Smerdis seized power

1. According to M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism II* (hereafter *History II*) (Leiden: Brill, 1982), p. 19: "The original meaning of the term, it has been suggested, was perhaps 'member of the tribe' (as in Av. *moghu*), given a special sense among the Medes as 'member of the priestly tribe.' " Herodotus's view that the magi were originally a Median tribe is supported by E. Benveniste, *Les mages dans l'ancien Iran* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1938), p. 11, but is questioned by G. Messina, *Der Ursprung der Magier und die zarathuštrische Religion* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1930), p. 77.

2. See E. Benveniste, *The Persian Religion According to the Chief Greek Texts* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929). For a list of studies on the Greek word *magos*, see E. D. Francis, "Greeks and

for seven months, posing as the brother of Cambyses, before Darius gained power in the fall of 522 B.C.[3] The Old Persian version of Darius's Behistun inscription calls this imposter, also known as Gaumata, a *maguš*.[4] The corresponding Elamite version calls him a *ma-ku-iš*, but the Akkadian version uses the term *LU KUR ma-da-[a-a]*, that is, "Median man"[5] (see chapter 4).

The Persians continued to use derivations from the word *maguš* as a word for "priest" down to the end of the Sasanian era around A.D. 650. An ordinary priest was called *mog*, and the chief priest *magupat*, "master of the magi,"[6] or even *magupat magupatan*, "chief priest of chief priests."[7]

The relationship of the magi to Zoroaster and his teachings is a complex and controversial issue. The magi are strikingly absent from the Avesta with one possible exception.[8] The Zoroastrians and magi were probably initially in conflict for two reasons: the magi appear to have been polytheistic (Xenophon, *Cyropedia* 3.3.22; 8.3.11–12), whereas Zoroaster's own teachings about Ahuramazda were either monotheistic or dualistic; and Zoroaster was from the northeast and the magi were established in northwestern Iran. According to Mary Boyce: "It is reasonable, however, to suppose that the existence of this hereditary priesthood [i.e. the magi], with its own traditions and forms of worship, was a major factor in western Iranian resistance to Zoroastrian proselytizing."[9]

The religion of the magi under the Achaemenian kings is another

Persians: The Art of Hazard and Triumph," in *Ancient Persia: The Art of an Empire*, ed. D. Schmandt-Besserat (Malibu: Undena, 1980), p. 58, n. 27.

3. See chapter 4; J. Wiesehöfer, *Der Aufstand Gaumatas und die Anfänge Dareios I* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1978).

4. The etymology of the Old Persian word is uncertain. Pokorny suggests a relation to the Proto-Indo-European root *magh-*, "to be able." J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 8th ed. (Bern: A. Francke, 1954), p. 695.

5. On the role of the magi under the Achaemenians, see M. A. Dandamayev, *Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden*, trans. H.-D. Pohl (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1976), pp. 238–40; J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York: Schocken, 1983), pp. 154–55; R. N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (München: C. H. Beck'sche, 1984), pp. 120–24; M. Schwartz, "The Religion of Achaemenian Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran II: The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. I. Gershevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 696–97.

6. M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 102.

7. V. G. Lukonin, "Political, Social and Administrative Institutions: Taxes and Trade," *CHI* III.2 (1983), p. 689.

8. See F. Altheim and R. Stiehl, *Geschichte Mittelasiens im Altertum* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1970), p. 54. This makes untenable G. Messina's thesis that the magi were priests of purely Zoroastrian origin.

9. M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism I: The Early Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 21.

area of controversy. Arthur Darby Nock's judgment on this matter is cautiously stated:

> The balance of probability seems to me to indicate that Zoroaster's *Gathas* had been accepted by *some* of the Magi as inspired and that their phraseology and ideas had exercised *some* influence on them and through them on the language of Xerxes at least.[10]

A recent reconstruction of the history of the magi by Papatheophanes, which is admittedly inferential in nature, suggests that the Median magi defected to Cyrus, who presumably worshiped Mithras. When the Median magi supported the revolt of Gaumata the magos, Darius punished them and replaced them with Persian magi who accepted Zoroastrianism.[11] Some magi are mentioned in association with the cult of Ahuramazda in the Elamite tablets from Darius's reign.[12] Papatheophanes speculates that some of the Median magi may have fled to Ephesus, where they were observed by Heraclitus.[13] The earliest preserved occurrence of the Greek word *magos* is found in a passage of Heraclitus.[14]

With the conquest of Asia Minor by the Persian army under Cyrus in 546 B.C. came the settlement of many Medes and Persians accompanied by their magi.[15] A famous relief from the satrapal capital of Dascylion in northwest Asia Minor depicts a pair of magi with the barsom twigs and sacrificial animals.[16] Their mouths and noses are covered to keep them from contaminating the sacred fire.[17]

In any case the classical writers Plato, Pliny the Elder, and Plutarch maintained that Zoroaster himself was a magos and that the magi were his followers.[18] For example, Plutarch (*Moralia* 5.369 E–F) relates: "The Magian Zoroaster . . . called the one (god) Oromazes and the other

10. A. D. Nock, "The Problem of Zoroaster," *AJA* 53 (1949): 277, reprinted in his *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 690.

11. M. Papatheophanes, "Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Magi, and the Achaemenids," *IA* 20 (1985): 153.

12. H. Koch, *Die religiösen Verhältnisse der Dariuszeit* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1977), p. 158.

13. Papatheophanes, "Heraclitus," p. 155.

14. Ibid., p. 102.

15. J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés* (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1938), pp. 90–92; F. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover, 1956 reprint of the 1911 edition), pp. 139–41.

16. T. Macridy, "Reliefs gréco-perses de la région de Dascylion," *BCH* 37 (1913): 340–58; E. Akurgal, "Griechisch-persische Reliefs aus Daskyleion," *IA* 6 (1966): 147–56; P. Bernard, "Les bas-reliefs gréco-perses de Dascylion à la lumière de nouvelles découvertes," *RA* 125 (1969): 17–28.

17. See our discussion under "Fire" in chapter 12.

18. Boyce, *History II*, p. 261; J. H. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism: The Origins, the Prophet, the Magi* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1972 reprint of the 1913 edition), p. 197.

A relief of two Persian magi from Dascylium in northwest Anatolia. (Courtesy of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Turkey)

Areimanius." When Apuleius was on trial for magic, he argued that *magus* meant "priest" in Persia and cited Plato to indicate that the Persian princes studied the "*mageia* of Zoroaster, son of Oromazos."

The Magi and Magic

Although the Medo-Persian magi were rarely associated with spells (except at Herodotus 7.191), by the fifth century B.C. the word in some cases seems to have become synonymous with the Greek word *goēs* ("wizard, sorcerer"[19]). In Sophocles' play, *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus berates the blind seer Teiresias:

> The trusty Creon, my familiar friend,
> Hath lain in wait to oust me and suborned
> This mountebank (*magon*), this juggling charlatan,
> This tricksy beggar-priest, for gain alone.[20]

By the Roman era (for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 2.27; 12.22, 59) the magi and their arts were associated with sorcery. We derive our word *magic* from the Latin *magicus*, which in turn is a loan from the Greek *magikos*.[21] Because of the association of the magi with Zoroaster, Pliny the Elder (30.2) asserted: "Without doubt magic arose in Persia with Zoroaster."

It is in the sense of *magos* as "magician" that we read of the activities of Simon from Samaria, who "practiced sorcery" (*mageuōn* [Acts 8:9]) and amazed the people with his "magic" (*mageiais* [Acts 8:11]).[22] The Apocryphal Acts of Peter describes how Simon astounded the crowds at Rome by his "magical" flights until Peter prayed that he might crash to the ground.[23] While the Book of Acts describes Simon simply as a magician, the early church fathers came to regard Simon as the fountainhead of all the Gnostic heresies.[24]

19. See G. Delling, "*goēs*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1: 737–38; also idem, "*magos*," in *Theological Dictionary* (1967), 4: 356–59.

20. *Sophocles*, trans. F. Storr (London: Heinemann, 1928), pp. 38–39, lines 385–88.

21. On the definition of magic and its diffusion in the ancient world, see E. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1967), pp. 12–61; idem, "Magic in the Biblical World," *TB* 34 (1983): 169–200.

22. C. S. Mann, "Epiphany—Wise Men or Charlatans?" *Theology* 61 (1958): 459–500. Mann makes the improbable suggestion that even the Christmas Magi belonged to this class of charlatans.

23. W. Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 2: 289–316.

24. R. P. Casey, "Simon Magus," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, eds. F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966 reprint), 5: 151–63; W. Meeks, "Simon Magus in Recent Re-

Elsewhere in Acts (13:6, 8) we read of a Jewish sorcerer, a *magos* named Elymas Bar-Jesus, who was influential at the court of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus. From Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.142) we learn of another Jewish *magos* from Cyprus named Atomus, through whose arts Felix, the governor of Judea, gained the hand of Drusilla (compare Acts 24:24–25).

By the New Testament era most of the occurrences of the word *magos* were in the pejorative sense of "magic."[25] According to John Hull: "The apostolic fathers always used the word *mágos* in a bad sense. The apologists used *mágos* and its cognates about sixteen times and always in the bad sense."[26] Harold Remus likewise concludes, "in the second century use of *mágos*, *mageía*, and derivative or related words is almost uniformly negative in the extant Christian sources."[27]

The Magi and Astrology

Among the functions of the Persian magi was their work as diviners. In the Hellenistic age magi in the West continued to have a reputation for foretelling the future. Cicero (*De divinatione* 1.47; followed by Plutarch, *Alexander* 3.2) records that when Alexander was born the magi interpreted a spontaneous fire in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus as a sign that a great calamity for Asia had been born.[28]

From the fourth century B.C. on the magi were increasingly associated with the Chaldeans as astrologers.[29] The name *Chaldean* assumed different meanings at different periods. In the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods it meant an inhabitant of lower Mesopotamia.[30] In

search," *Religious Studies Review* 3 (1977): 137–42; E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 58–65, 201–3; J. D. M. Derrett, "Simon Magus (Acts: 8:9–24)," *ZAW* 33 (1982): 52–68.

25. See A. F. Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, Gilles Quispel Festschrift, eds. R. Van Den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 349–75.

26. J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1974), p. 124.

27. H. Remus, " 'Magic or Miracle'? Some Second Century Instances," *Second Century* 2 (1982): 130; E. Yamauchi, "Magic or Miracle?" in *Gospel Perspectives VI: The Miracles of Jesus*, eds. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), pp. 89–91.

28. J. R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander, A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 8.

29. Bidez and Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 1: 33–36.

30. E. Yamauchi, "Chaldea, Chaldeans," in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, eds. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 123–25. The use of "Chaldean" in Dan. 2:10; 4:7; 5:7, 11, in the sense of "astrologer" has been regarded as a clear case of anachronism. A. R. Millard, "Daniel 1–6 and History," *EvQ* 49 (1977): 70, however, points out that there is as yet no known example of "Chaldean" as either an ethnic or professional term from Neo-Babylonian texts.

the Hellenistic age it could mean a Babylonian priest or scholar versed in astrology, or a Greek who had studied such lore. In the Roman and early Christian eras it came to signify an astrologer. According to Strabo (16.1.6), "in Babylon a settlement is set apart for the local philosophers, the Chaldeans, as they are called, who are concerned mostly with astronomy." Strabo was also aware of a tribe of Chaldeans.

The development of "Chaldeans" in a professional as well as an ethnic sense derived from the interest in astronomy/astrology developed by priestly scholars among the Chaldeans of Mesopotamia. An interesting Greek text of Pseudo-Berossus asserts:

> From the time of Nabonassar (747–734 B.C.), the Chaldeans accurately recorded the times of the motion of the stars. The polymaths among the Greeks learned from the Chaldeans that—as Alexander (Polyhistor) and Berossus, men versed in Chaldean antiquities, say—Nabonassar gathered together (the accounts of) the deeds of the kings before him and did away with them so that the reckoning of the Chaldean kings would begin with him.[31]

Although there were considerable contacts between the Aegean and the Near East before Alexander as we have noted (chapter 11), it was after his capture of the area that a flood of Greeks visited, and in some cases settled in, Mesopotamia.[32] There some of them acquired a knowledge of Chaldean astrology.[33] According to Wilhelm Eilers:

> It is not for nothing that astrologers were called "Chaldeans," for their true home was in Aramaean southern Babylon, in Uruk which, especially in the Seleucid-Parthian period, was the center of ancient astronomy and interpretation of the stars. The latest dated cuneiform texts include clay tablets from this place containing astronomical observations; these texts come from the first century A.D.[34]

In the Hellenistic age Chaldeans also traveled west, where they practiced their divinatory arts. The most famous example of a Chaldean priest who left Babylon to teach astrology to the Greeks on the island of Cos some time after 281 B.C. was Berossus. His famous

31. Cited by J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia 1158–722 B.C.* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1968), p. 227.

32. E. Yamauchi, *Greece and Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967); and chapter 11.

33. See J. Bidez, "Les écoles chaldéennes sous Alexandre et les Séleucides," *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales* 3 (1935): 41–89.

34. W. Eilers, "Iran and Mesopotamia," in *CHI* III.1, p. 501.

Babyloniaca, written in Greek, contains invaluable traditions on astrological matters.[35]

A factor that may have contributed to the identification of the magi with the Chaldeans and astrologers is their association with Zoroaster. The Greek spelling of Zoroaster's name, *Zoroástres*, was first recorded by Xanthos of Lydia.[36] The Greeks saw in this name the word *astēr* ("star"). Hermodorus, a pupil of Plato, explained Zoroaster's name as *astrothútes* ("star worshiper"[37]). Because of these associations a mass of astrological matter circulated under the name of Zoroaster.[38]

Zodiacal Astrology

The development of astrology as we know it today was made possible by the discovery of the Zodiac, that is, the realization that the sun in passing through its path, the ecliptic, goes through twelve constellations, each "ruling" a thirty-degree section of the circle.[39] This made possible the casting of horoscopes based on the position of the planets and stars at the moment of one's birth. Otto Neugebauer points out the differences between the earlier astral omens and the later astrology:

> The (Assyrian) predictions concern the king and the country as a whole and are based on observed astronomical appearances, not on computation and not on the moment of birth. . . . Hellenistic horoscopes, however, concern a specific person and depend upon the computed position of the seven celestial bodies and of the zodiacal signs in their relation to the given horizon, for a given moment, the moment of birth.[40]

The Zodiacal constellations are first mentioned about 700 B.C. according to Bartel Van der Waerden,[41] but not until around 400 B.C.

35. S. M. Burstein, *The BABYLONIACA of Berossus* (Malibu: Undena, 1978), pp. 31–32.
36. Boyce, *History II*, p. 183.
37. Ibid., p. 260.
38. W. and H. G. Gundel, *Astrologumena: Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte* (Wiesbaden: Sudhoffs Archiv, 1966), pp. 40–51, 60–66. Astrological lore is found in the ninth-century-A.D. Zoroastrian text, the Bundahišn. See D. N. MacKenzie, "Zoroastrian Astrology in the Bundahišn," *BSOAS* 27 (1964): 511–29.
39. For the early history of astronomy-astrology, see Bartel L. Van der Waerden, *Science Awakening II: The Birth of Astronomy* (Leyden: Noordhoff; New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).
40. O. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 170.
41. Van der Waerden, *Science*, p. 92; B. L. Van der Waerden, "History of the Zodiac," *AfO* 16 (1953): 216–18; B. O. Long, "Astrology," in *Supplementary Volume, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. V. Furnish et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 76.

according to Neugebauer.[42] In any case the earliest known cuneiform horoscope comes from the latter date.[43] Four examples are known from the third century B.C.[44]

The Diffusion of Astrology to the West

The first depiction of the Zodiac in Egypt comes from a temple at Esna from the third or second century B.C.[45] The famous circular Zodiac from the Dendera temple dates from 30 B.C.[46] Its Mesopotamian origin is betrayed by the design of each sign. While acknowledging key contributions of the Babylonians, such as their sexagesimal reckoning and carefully recorded ephemeridae,[47] Neugebauer stresses the independent Hellenistic (Ptolemaic) contributions:

> The roots of astrology are undoubtedly to be found in Mesopotamia, emerging from the general omen literature. Yet, we know much less about the history of Babylonian astrology than is generally assumed. Only that much seems clear that it was a far less developed doctrine than we find in Greek astrological literature. The real center of ancient astrology, from which it spread over the whole world, is undoubtedly Hellenistic Alexandria.[48]

With their victories over the Greeks in the second century B.C., the Romans were inundated with Greek influence in many fields, including

42. Neugebauer, *Exact Sciences*, pp. 102, 140, prefers to speak of such constellations as "ecliptical constellations" until we have evidence of their use in casting horoscopes. See D. R. Dicks, *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 172; R. R. Newton, "Astronomy in Ancient Literate Societies," in *The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World*, eds. D. G. Kendall et al. (London: British Academy, 1974), p. 13.
43. See A. Sachs, "Babylonian Horoscopes," *JCS* 6 (1952): 49–75. For other examples, see P. Hilaire de Wynghene, *Les présages astrologiques* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1932).
44. Van der Waerden, *Science*, p. 181. Compare O. Neugebauer and H. B. Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1959). The six known Greek horoscopes are from the reign of Augustus.
45. R. A. Parker, "Ancient Egyptian Astronomy," in Kendall, *Place of Astronomy*, p. 61.
46. J. N. Lockyer, *The Dawn of Astronomy* (Cambridge: MIT, 1964 reprint of 1894 edition), pp. 134, 146.
47. O. Neugebauer, ed., *Astronomical Cuneiform Texts: Babylonian Ephemeridae of the Seleucid Period*, 3 vols. (London: Lund Humphries, 1955).
48. O. Neugebauer, *A History of Mathematical Astronomy* (New York: Springer, 1975), 1: 5; idem, "On Some Aspects of Early Greek Astronomy," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116 (1972): 251. M. P. Nilsson, *The Rise of Astrology in the Hellenistic Age* (Lund: Observatory, 1943), p. 5, also declares: "Because of this naive character of Babylonian astrology, it is permitted to doubt the correctness of the common opinion that the Babylonians created the great astrological system. . . . It can be proved that this is an achievement of the Greeks." F. Rochberg-Halton, "New Evidence for the History of Astrology," *JNES* 43 (1984): 115–40, while conceding the Greek innovations, points out new evidence for Babylonian antecedents of the later astrology.

philosophy and astrology. Astrology was given great prestige among the Romans by its support by Stoic philosophers. In the last century of the Roman Republic astrology was widely accepted by the elite as *the* scientific method of divination with the exception of a few sceptics like Cicero. Cicero's two learned friends, Nigidius Figulus and Terentius Varro, were believers in astrology.[49]

But the growing influence of astrologers was considered dangerous to the state. In 139 B.C. Cornelius Scipio Hispalus expelled astrologers from Rome. In the early Roman Empire such expulsions were ordered repeatedly:

> Accordingly, first in 33 B.C. by action of the aedile Agrippa, later by senatorial decree, and after 52 by imperial edict, the city or all Italy was repeatedly cleared of *mathematici, Chaldaei, astrologi, magi, góetes,* or however they were called, perhaps ten times over the period 33 B.C. to A.D. 93, and possibly once more under Marcus Aurelius.[50]

Although a satirist like Juvenal might poke fun at astrologers (*Satire* 6.585–86), historians like Suetonius and Dio Cassius were persuaded by the efficacy of astrology. Almost all the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors of the first century believed in the potency of astrology. Samuel Dill observes:

> It is not hard to see why the emperors at once believed in these black arts and profoundly distrusted their professors. They wished to keep a monopoly of that awful lore, lest it might excite dangerous hopes in possible pretenders. To consult a Chaldaean seer on the fate of the prince, or to possess his horoscope, was always suspicious, and might often be fatal.[51]

On the day of Augustus's birth, Nigidius Figulus allegedly prophesied a notable destiny for the future ruler from a knowledge of the hour of his birth (Suetonius, *Augustus* 94.5; Dio Cassius 45.1.3–5). At Apollonia the astrologer Theogenes cast a horoscope for Augustus (Suetonius, *Augustus* 94.12): "From that time on Augustus had such faith in his destiny, that he made his horoscope public and issued a silver coin stamped with the sign of the constellation Capricornus, under which he was born." Manilius, a poet who lived during Augustus's reign,

49. F. H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954), pp. 58–74.

50. R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 132–33. See also F. H. Cramer, "Expulsion of Astrologers from Ancient Rome," *Classica et Mediaevalai* 12 (1951): 9–50.

51. S. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Meridian, 1956 reprint of 1904 edition), p. 447.

wrote an extant work on the stars,[52] which is cited in the great *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus (fourth century A.D.).[53] In A.D. 11 Augustus passed a law making it a crime to consult astrologers about the fate of the emperor.[54]

Suetonius's life of Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) is filled with references to astrologers. Because he feared their potential for his enemies, "he banished the astrologers as well, but pardoned such as begged for indulgence and promised to give up their art" (*Tibierius* 36). Juvenal made fun of the emperor's "herd of Chaldean astrologers" surrounding him in his retirement at Capri (*Satire* 10.94).[55]

Claudius (A.D. 41–54) tried to revive the ancient order of augurs, but banished astrologers (Tacitus, *Annals* 12.52). His wife, Agrippina the Younger, and her son Nero were devotees of astrology.[56] Nero (A.D. 54–68) delayed his coronation on the advice of his Chaldeans.[57] To avert the dangers portended by a comet, Nero determined to put to death some distinguished men (Suetonius, *Nero* 36).

Although Vespasian (A.D. 69–79) banished astrologers, he retained the most skillful for his own guidance (Dio Cassius 66.10.9). Titus (A.D. 79–81), according to Suetonius (*Titus* 9), inquired into horoscopes. Domitian (A.D. 81–96) put Mettius Pompusianus to death because he had an imperial horoscope (Suetonius, *Domitian* 10). Just before his assassination Domitian put to death the astrologer Ascletarion, who correctly predicted that dogs would attack his own corpse after his death (*Domitian* 15).

Astrology among the Jews

While Jewish interest in astrology during the Middle Ages has never been doubted, as evidenced in the Kabbalah,[58] there has been some question as to how wide and early this interest was. Both in the Sasanian and Parthian eras rabbis in Mesopotamia did not question the

52. *M. Manilii Astronomicon*, ed. A. E. Housman, 2d ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937). See W. Hübner, "Manilius als Astrologe und Dichter," *ANRW* II.32.1 (1986): 126–320.

53. Firmicus Maternus, *Ancient Astrology, Theory and Practice*, trans. J. R. Bram (Park Ridge: Noyes, 1975).

54. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, p. 132.

55. There are a number of demotic horoscopes on ostraca from Egypt from the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. See O. Neugebauer, "Demotic Horoscopes," *JAOS* 63 (1943): 115–26.

56. M. Grant, *Nero: Emperor in Revolt* (New York: American Heritage, 1970), p. 148.

57. Astral influence was admitted by Seneca, Nero's Stoic tutor. See Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law*, pp. 118–21.

58. S. Gandz, *Studies in Hebrew Astronomy and Mathematics*, ed. S. Sternberg (New York: KTAV, 1970); A. Altman, "Astrology," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971), 3: cols. 788–95; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library, 1974), pp. 186–87.

validity of astrology but only whether it applied to Israel.[59] There are numerous references to astrology in the Talmud (for example, *b. Sabb.* 156a–b), reporting the teaching of R. Hanina Bar Hama (early third century A.D.), who thought that the constellation at the hour of one's birth determined one's character. Many rabbis held that "Israel is not subject to planetary influences" (literally "Israel has no star"), but R. Hanina disagreed.

The recently published Jewish magical text, the *Sepher ha-Razim*, holds that Noah learned "to master the investigation of the strata of the heavens, to go about in all that is in their seven abodes, to observe all the astrological signs, to examine the course of the sun, to explain the observations of the moon, and to know the paths of the Great Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades. . . ."[60] This work dates from after the third century A.D.[61]

Jewish knowledge of the Zodiac is attested during the first century A.D., for example, by Josephus (*War* 5.217–18) when he makes the following comparison of the sacred elements in the temple: "The seven lamps . . . represented the planets; the loaves on the table, twelve in number, the circle of the Zodiac and the year." Furthermore, a clay tablet with zodiacal signs was found in a Hellenistic stratum at Gezer.[62]

Indisputable early evidence of Jewish interest in astrology has now been provided by the publication of important documents from the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran.[63] The first of these documents (4Q Cryptic; formerly 4Q 186) was written in a strange amalgam of proto-Hebrew, Greek, and cryptic signs. It was first published by John Allegro in 1964.[64] In Allegro's translation it reads:

> His thighs are long and thin, and his toes
> are thin and long, and he is of the Second Vault.
> He has six (parts) spirit, and three in the Pit
> of Darkness. And this is the time of birth on which he is
> brought forth—on the festival of Taurus. He will be poor;
> and this is his beast: Taurus. (Col. II.5–9)

The text reflects the idea that the body and spirit are determined by the zodiacal sign at birth; the ratio of the man's spirit in light or darkness depends on the relative length of the days.

Another Aramaic text from cave 4, originally published by Jean Starcky in 1964,[65] seems to be the horoscope of a new Solomon, whose hair would be red. During his youth he would be like a lion.[66] Both of these texts have provoked considerable discussion.[67]

Also from cave 4 are fragments from an unpublished brontologion, which gives the signs of the Zodiac and then makes predictions on the basis of thunder:[68] "If it thunders in the sign of the Twins, terror and distress caused by foreigners. . . ." The closest parallel is a brontologion ascribed to Zoroaster in the *Geoponica* 1.1.[69]

Attitudes toward astrology are not uniformly represented in the

59. J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia II: The Early Sasanian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), pp. 84–85; idem, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia I: The Parthian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), p. 171; L. Wächter, "Astrologie und Schicksalsglaube im rabbinischen Judentums," *Kairo* 11 (1969): 181–200; R. A. Rosenberg, "The 'Star of the Messiah' Reconsidered," *Bib* 53 (1972): 105–9; J. H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues, *HTR* 70 (1977): 183–200.

60. M. Morgan, trans., *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries* (Chico: Scholars, 1983), p. 17.

61. M. Margalioth, *Sepher Ha-Razim* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966). Margalioth dated the work to the third century. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim*, p. 8, also suggests the third or fourth century. I. Gruenwald, "Knowledge and Vision," *Israel Oriental Studies* 3 (1973): 71, prefers a fifth- to sixth-century date.

62. M. Delcor, "Recherches sur un horoscope en langue hébraïque provenant de Qumran," *RevQ* 6 (1966): 536. Byzantine synagogues in Galilee had mosaics decorated with the Zodiac motif. See I. Sonne, "The Zodiac Theme in Ancient Synagogues and in Hebrew Printed Books," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 1 (1953): 3–13; R. Wischnitzer, "The Beth Alpha Mosaic: A New Interpretation," *Jewish Social Studies* 17 (1955): 133–44; G. Stemberger, "Die Bedeutung des Tierkreises auf Mosaikfussböden Spätantiker Synagogen," *Kairos* 17 (1975): 11–56; R. Hachlili, "The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Art: Representation and Significance," *BASOR* 228 (1977): 61–77. For Christian adaptations of the Zodiac motif, see W. Huebner, *Zodiacus Christianus* (Königstein: Hain, 1983). I owe many of the above references to my doctoral student, Lester Ness, who is writing his dissertation on the subject of the Zodiac synagogue mosaics.

63. Balaam's famous prophecy of the star (Num. 24:17) is frequently cited in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See P. Prigent, "Quelques testimonia messianiques," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 15 (1959): 419–30.

64. J. M. Allegro, "An Astrological Cryptic Document from Qumran," *JSS* 9 (1964): 291–94; J. M. Allegro, *Qumrân Cave IV.1*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert V (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), pp. 88–91.

65. J. Starcky, "Un texte messianique araméen de la grotte 4 de Qumrân," in *Memorial du cinquantenaire de l'Ecole des Langues Orientales Anciennes de l'Institut Catholique de Paris* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1964), pp. 51–66.

66. J. Carmignac, "Les Horoscopes de Qumran," *RQ* 5 (1965): 216.

67. Delcor, "Recherches sur un horoscope"; A. Dupont-Sommer, "Deux documents horoscopiques esséniens découverts à Qoumrân près de la Mer Morte," *CRAIBL* (1965): 239–53; idem, "La secte des Esséniens et les horoscopes de Qumran," *Archaeologia* 15 (1967): 24–31; F. Sen, "Los horóscopos de Qumrán," *Cultura Biblica* 23 (1966): 366–67; J. Fitzmyer, "A Bibliographical Aid to the Study of the Qumran Cave IV Texts," *CBQ* 31 (1969): 70–71; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1: 236–37; 2: 158–59; M. R. Lehmann, "New Light on Astrology in Qumran and the Talmud," *RQ* 14 (1975): 599–602.

68. Divination by thunder and lightning was especially practiced by the Etruscans and Romans. See O.-W. Von Vacano, *The Etruscans in the Ancient World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 19–23; R. Bloch, "La divination en Etrurie et à Rome," in *La Divination*, eds. A. Caquot and M. Leibovici (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 1: 197–232.

69. J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1959), p. 42; Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology," 192, n. 28: "Unfortunately the two fragmentary columns of another scroll are unpublished, although J. T. Milik mentioned them twenty years ago."

Pseudepigrapha (200 B.C.–A.D. 200).[70] Astrology is condemned in a number of works, as James Charlesworth notes:

> According to the author of *1 Enoch* 8.3 (probably early second century B.C.), astrology is an evil and demonic idea since it was taught to men by one of the fallen angels, Baraqiyal. The third book of the *Sibylline Oracles* (second century B.C.) in lines 220–36 praises righteous men who neither search the mystical meaning of the movements of the heavenly bodies nor are deceived by the predictions of Chaldean astrology.[71]

In a similar fashion, Jubilees (12:17) has Abraham coming to himself after observing the stars at night: "And a word came into his heart, saying: 'All of the signs of the stars, and the signs of the sun and the moon are all in the hand of the Lord. Why am I seeking?' "[72]

On the other hand, parts of 1 Enoch such as 72:1–37 incorporate numerous zodiacal ideas. First Enoch (80:2–8) attributes the disorders of the planets to the sons of men.[73] Second Enoch, which dates to the late first century A.D., has Enoch declaring: "And I saw the eighth heaven, which is called in the Hebrew language Muzaloth, the changer of the season, of dry and of wet, and the 12 zodiacs, which are above the seventh heaven. And I saw the ninth heaven, which in the Hebrew language is called Kukhavim, where the heavenly houses of the 12 zodiacs are."[74]

Charlesworth has recently published a Syriac manuscript called the Treatise of Shem, which is the only Jewish pseudepigraphon that consistently advocates astrology.[75] It is a calendologion, that is, it seeks to determine the character of a year according to the zodiacal sign in which it begins. According to Charlesworth's analysis, the document was composed by an Alexandrian Jew shortly after the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Charlesworth concludes: "The recovery of the Treatise of Shem, coupled with the indisputable fact of a 'most unusual celestial display' near the time of Jesus' birth, by no means prove that Matthew ii preserves reliable historical information; but it is now more difficult to claim that Matthew's star was created purely out of a myth."[76]

70. J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).

71. Charlesworth, "Astrology," p. 188. See also J. H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Interest in Astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman Period," *ANRW* (1987): II.20.2, pp. 926–50.

72. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2: 81.

73. No fewer than eleven manuscripts of Enoch were found at Qumran. See J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

74. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I: 136.

75. Ibid., pp. 473–80.

76. J. H. Charlesworth, "Rylands Syriac MS 44 and a New Addition to the Pseudepigrapha: The Treatise of Shem," *BJRL* 60 (1977–1978): 394. On the attempts to explain away the Magi story as a

The Christmas Magi

Gherardo Gnoli asserts: "The Zoroastrian doctrine of the Savior of the Future (Saoshyant) was the basis for the story of the coming of the Magi of Bethlehem in the *Gospel of Matthew* (2:1–12)."[77] The argument for this unlikely thesis has been developed by Giuseppe Messina.[78] Messina first denies that the magi were a Median priestly caste. He views them as adherents of Zoroaster, who came into conflict with Darius for this reason! To suggest that the Christmas Magi were Zoroastrians who were responding to Zoroastrian apocalyptic prophecy, Messina cites such sources as the Oracle of Hystaspes, the Arabic infancy gospel,[79] Theodore Bar Konai (eighth century), and Bar Hebraeus (thirteenth century).[80] He is assuming that the Zoroastrian doctrine of the Saoshyant inspired Matthew.[81] This overlooks the profound differences in the concepts of savior and salvation in Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Despite the fact that some of the church fathers (for example, Clement of Alexandria) believed the Christmas Magi were Zoroastrians, it is clear from the history of the Magi and the biblical context that they were astrologers[82] who were probably from Mesopotamia.[83]

midrash based on either Tiridates' trip to meet Nero, on Balaam's prophecy of the star, or on the Lucan shepherd story, see my "The Episode of the Magi," *Chronos, Kairos, and Christos*, eds. J. Vardaman and E. Yamauchi, Jack Finegan Festschrift (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989), pp. 15–39.

77. G. Gnoli, "The Magi," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 9: 81.

78. G. Messina, *Der Ursprung der Magier* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1930); idem, "Una profezia di Zoroastro sulla venuta del Messia," *Biblica* 14 (1933): 170–98; idem, *I. Magi a Betlemme e una Profezia di Zoroastro* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1933); idem, "Ecce *Magi* ab Oriente venerunt," *Verbum Domini* 14 (1934): 7–19.

79. This late work asserts that "some magi came to Jerusalem according to the prediction of Zoroaster."

80. Bar Hebraeus declared: "In those days (of Cyrus) came Zardosht, chief of the Magian sect. It is reported that he was one of Elijah's disciples, and he informed the Persians of the sign of the birth of Christ and that they should bring him gifts."

81. Compare J. R. Hinnells, "Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament," *Numen* 16 (1969): 161–85.

82. David Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem* (New York: Walker, 1979), p. 193. Hughes tries to maintain that the Magi were both Zoroastrian priests and astrologers, but this is untenable. D. Pingree, "Astronomy and Astrology in India and Iran," *Isis* 54 (1963): 240–41, points out: "In fact, virtually nothing is known of the astronomy and astrology of pre-Sasanian Iran. There was indeed a Greek astrological text of the second century B.C. ascribed to Zoroaster of which fragments are preserved by Proclus and the Geoponica; the material with which it deals is overwhelmingly Babylonian. . . . However, trustworthy knowledge of Iranian astronomy and astrology is non-existent before the reign of Shâpûr I (240–270)."

83. E. Bishop, "Some Reflections on Justin Martyr and the Nativity Narratives," *EQ* 39 (1967): 33. Bishop observes: "Origen, who knew the Palestine of his day, and Jerome, who lived in Bethlehem, considered favourably the claims of Babylonian astrologers, as did St. Augustine of Hippo; and it must be admitted that the consensus of three such scholars is formidable."

The Christmas Star

There are over five hundred books, articles, and reviews on the subject of the "star," offering a variety of explanations of the celestial light that guided the Magi.[84] Some have suggested the idea of a nova—a star that suddenly increases in brightness.[85] Chinese records indicate that a nova was visible near the star Alpha Aquilae for seventy days in 5 B.C.[86] Others have suggested the possibility of a comet. Some have focused on Halley's Comet, which appeared in 12 B.C.[87] On the basis of Chinese records, Jack Finegan suggested that the comets (or novae) of 5 or 4 B.C. could have started the Magi on their journey, and that the comet of April 4 B.C., could have been shining when they reached Judea.[88] Comets, however, were usually–though not always—believed to be unfavorable portents.[89]

Johannes Kepler, the great astronomer of the seventeenth century, calculated that the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which took place before the supernova of 1604, must have also taken place in 7 B.C. in the constellation Pisces.[90] David Hughes argued this triple conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter was the Christmas star.[91] Some have interpreted Pisces as the constellation of the Jews, Saturn as associated with

84. For a nearly comprehensive bibliography, see R. S. Freitag, *The Star of Bethlehem: A List of References* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1979). See also A. Strobel, "Weltenjahr, grosse Konjunktion und Mesiasstern," *ANRW* II.20.2 (1987): 988–1187.

85. C. P. Richards, "The Star of Bethlehem," *Sky and Telescope* 16 (Dec. 1956): 66–67; P. and L. Murdin, *The New Astronomy* (New York: Crowell, 1978), pp. 21–24.

86. D. H. Clark, J. H. Parkinson, and F. R. Stephenson, "An Astronomical Re-Appraisal of the Star of Bethlehem—A Nova in 5 B.C.," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* 18 (1977): 443; compare A. J. Morehouse, "The Christmas Star as a Supernova in Aquila," *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* 72 (1978): 65.

87. A. C. Stentzel, *Jesus Christus und sein Stern*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: H. Christian, 1928); J. E. Bruns, "The Magi Episode in Matthew 2," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 51–54; Ho Peng Yoke, "Ancient and Medieval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources," *Vistas in Astronomy* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1962), 5: 127–226. For an advocacy of Halley's Comet, see J. Vardaman, *The Year of the Nativity* (Mississippi State: Cobb Institute of Archaeology, 1983); idem, "Jesus' Life: A New Chronology," in Vardaman and Yamauchi, *Chronos*, pp. 66, 78. Nikos, Kokkinos, "Crucifixion in A.D. 36: The Keystone for Dating the Birth of Jesus," in Vardaman and Yamauchi, *Chronos*, pp. 159–62.

88. J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 248. Compare J. and M. W. Seymour, "The Historicity of the Gospels and Astronomical Events Concerning the Birth of Christ," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* 19 (1978): 194–97.

89. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, p. 78: "The traditional interpretation of the significance of comets was overwhelmingly unfavorable." Augustus, however, persuaded the people that the comet of 44 B.C. represented the deification of Julius Caesar in the heavens. For a critique of the nova and comet hypotheses, see Hughes, *Star*, pp. 145–57.

90. Johannes Kepler, *De Stella Nova in Pede Serpentarii* (Prague: Pauli Sessi, 1606).

91. Hughes, *Star*, p. xii.

Saturday (the Sabbath), and Jupiter as the planet of royalty (called in Hebrew *Tsedeq*).[92] But this interpretation of Pisces seems to be based on late interpretations such as Abarbanel's commentary on Daniel (fourteenth century). Ptolemy (second century A.D.), the astrologer, associated Aries with the Jews.[93]

Contrary to the view of many interpreters, Kepler did not interpret the conjunction of planets as analogous to the Christmas star, but rather the nova that appeared at the time as the triple conjunction.[94] Jupiter and Saturn passed each other at a distance equal to twice the moon's diameter so they could not have been mistaken as a single object. The Greek word *astēr* is used for an individual star or planet.[95] While the extant Babylonian almanac for 7/6 B.C. covers the period of such a conjunction, it takes no special note of it.[96]

Ernest Martin has favored identifying Jupiter with the Bethlehem star.[97] The identification with Jupiter has been advocated by Konradin Ferrari d'Ochieppo, the former chair of the Department of Theoretical Astronomy at the University of Vienna.[98] He is, however, critical of other aspects of Martin's theory.[99] Still other planets such as Saturn,[100] Mars,[101] and even Uranus[102] have been suggested.

Finally, the difficulty of explaining the guidance of the Magi to the place where the Christ child lay has persuaded others that the passage

92. F. L. Filas, "The Star of the Magi," *IER* 85 (1956): 432–33; H. W. van der Vaart Smit, *Born in Bethlehem* (Bethlehem: Helicon, 1963), pp. 79–113; Adler Planetarium and Astronomical Museum, Chicago, "What Was the Star of Bethlehem?" *Christianity Today* 9 (Dec. 18, 1964): 277–80; R. A. Rosenberg, "Star of Bethlehem," in *IDBS*, p. 842; J. F. Farquharson, "The Star of Bethlehem," *Journal of the British Astronomical Association* 89 (Dec. 1978): 8–20.

93. O. Gingerich, "More on the Star of Bethlehem," *Harvard Magazine* (Sept. 1975): 4–5.

94. A. J. Sachs and C. B. F. Walker, "Kepler's View of the Star of Bethlehem and the Babylonian Almanac for 7/6 B.C.," *Iraq* 46 (1984): 44.

95. W. Foerster, "*astēr*," and "*astron*," in *TDNT* I, p. 501. See F. Boll, "Der Stern des Weisen," *ZNW* 18 (1917–1918): 40–43.

96. Sachs and Walker, "Kepler's View," p. 45.

97. E. L. Martin, "The Celestial Pageantry Dating Christ's Birth," *Christianity Today* 21 (Dec. 3, 1976): 16–18, 21–22; idem, *New Star over Bethlehem* (Pasadena: Foundation for Biblical Research, 1980), pp. 9–11.

98. K. Ferrari-d'Occhieppo, *Der Stern der Weisen—Geschichte oder Legende*, 2d ed. (Vienna: Herold, 1977); idem, "The Star of Bethlehem," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* 19 (1978): 517; idem, "The Star of the Magi and Babylonian Astronomy," chapter 3 in Vardaman and Yamauchi, *Chronos*, pp. 41–53.

99. K. Ferrari-d'Occhieppo, "Weitere Erwägungen zum Stern von Bethlehem," *Sterne und Weltraum* 20 (June–July 1981): 209–10.

100. F. Zinniker, *Probleme der sogenannten Kindheitsgeschichte bei Mattäus* (Freiburg: Paulus, 1972), p. 115.

101. J. K. Fotheringham, "The Star of Bethlehem," *JTS* 10 (1908): 116–19.

102. J. E. Ciotti, "The Magi's Star: Misconceptions and New Suggestions," *Griffith Observer* 42 (Dec. 1978): 2–11.

in Matthew was intended to describe a supernatural and not a natural phenomenon.[103]

Our current system of dating was devised by a monk, Dionysus Exiguus, in the sixth century A.D. He miscalculated the date of Augustus—an error that was discovered only in the seventeenth century. Those scholars who would identify the Christmas star with Halley's Comet, which appeared in 12 B.C., date Jesus' birth accordingly.[104] At the other extreme, Martin has suggested a lowering of the date of Herod's death to 1 B.C. and consequently of Jesus' birth to 2 B.C.[105] Hughes follows Timothy Barnes in dating Herod's death to 5 B.C., and because he identifies the star with the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, he arrives at the date of 7 B.C.[106] Most scholars have dated Herod's death in the spring of 4 B.C., because an eclipse that is mentioned by Josephus is believed to have occurred at that time. This would place the birth of Jesus in 5 or possibly 6 B.C.[107]

The Magi in the Church Fathers

The Magi's gifts of gold, myrrh, and frankincense recall Psalm 72:10: "The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts." This association helped to facilitate the metamorphosis of the Magi into kings. According to Tertullian (*Adversus Marcion* 3.13): "The East considers the Magi almost as kings."

103. P. Iohannes Schaumberger, "Textus cuneiformis de stella Magorum?" *Biblica* 6 (1925): 448–49; B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 163–167; B. Davidheiser, *Science and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), pp. 103–5; W. White, "Star of the Magi," in *The Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. M. G. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 5: 512–14; K. Boa and W. Proctor, *The Return of the Star of Bethlehem* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980); J. A. Moore, *Astronomy in the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), pp. 146–54.

104. See n. 87 above.

105. E. L. Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, 2d ed. (Pasadena: Foundation for Biblical Research, 1980), pp. 4–25; idem, "The Nativity and Herod's Death," in Vardaman and Yamauchi, *Chronos*, pp. 85–92. See also P. Gaecherter, "Die Magierperikope," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 90 (1968): 257–95; J. Mosely, "When Was That Christmas Star?" *Griffith Observer* 44 (Dec. 1980): 2–9; J. Thorley, "When Was Jesus Born?" *Greece and Rome* 28 (1981): 81–89.

106. Hughes, *Star*, p. 200; T. D. Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," *JTS* 19 (1968): 204–9.

107. See Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, pp. 231–33; D. Johnson, "The Star of Bethlehem Reconsidered," *Planetarian* 10 (1981): 14–16; idem, "When the Star of Bethlehem Appeared," *Planetarian* 10 (1981): 20–23; idem, " 'They Went Eight Stades toward Herodeion,' " pp. 93–99; H. W. Hoehner, "The Date of the Death of Herod the Great," pp. 101–11 and P. L. Maier, "The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus' Life," pp. 113–30, in Vardaman and Yamauchi, *Chronos*. H. W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 11–25.

Myrrh and frankincense were precious aromatic spices obtained from the exudation of short trees that grew only in two parts of the world, Somaliland in east Africa and Yemen in southwest Arabia (biblical Sheba).[108] Knowledge that these substances came from Arabia may have influenced Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (78) to assert that the Magi came from Arabia.[109] He was followed in this view by Tertullian and Epiphanius. The vast majority of church fathers, however, believed that the Magi came from Persia (for example, Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Origen, Ephraem Syrus).[110]

The notion that God apparently used astrology to guide the Magi troubled the church fathers. Tertullian (*On Idolatry* 9) declared: "What then? Shall therefore the religion of those Magi act as patron now also to astrologers? . . . But, however, that science has been allowed until the Gospel, in order that after Christ's birth no one should thenceforward interpret any one's nativity by the heavens."

Ignatius (*Ephesians* 19.3) declared that when the star shone, "thence was destroyed all magic, and every bond vanished."[111] Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (78) declared: "For the Magi, who were held in bondage for the commission of all evil deeds through the power of that demon, by coming to worship Christ, show that they have revolted from the dominion which held them captive." Other church fathers maintained that the Magi were not mere astrologers like the Chaldeans but were learned followers of Zoroaster. Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.58–60) took Celsus to task for failing to distinguish between the Chaldeans and the Magi. He believed the Magi knew the prophecy of Balaam, and were inspired on their quest when they found their magic declining in power.

108. Gus W. Van Beek, "Frankincense and Myrrh," *BA* 23 (1960): 70–95; Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh* (London: Longman, 1981); G. Ryckmans, "De l'or(?), de l'encens et de la myrrhe," *RB* 58 (1951): 372–76. Ryckmans makes the unlikely suggestion that the Gospel writer misunderstood the Semitic word for gold, which was really a third type of aromatic substance.

109. The few modern scholars to follow this orientation include H. J. Richards, "The Three Kings," *Scripture* 8 (1956): 23–28; R. North, *Guide to Biblical Iran* (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Biblical Archaeology, 1956), p. 56; F. Salvoni, "La visita dei Magi e la fuga in Egitto," *Ricerche bibliche e religiose* 14 (1979): 22.

110. Messina, "Ecce," p. 11; Hughes, *Star*, p. 36.

111. W. R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 88. Schoedel comments: "It is presumably the heavenly bodies that are here said to lose their grip on humankind."

Monument to Severa depicting the three Magi.

The Magi in the Apocryphal Gospels

The episode of the Magi was expanded in the infancy gospels from the second century on.[112] In the earliest of these, *The Protevangelium of James* (circa A.D. 150), we read:

> And the wise men said: "We saw a very great star shining among those stars and dimming them so that the stars appeared not: and thereby knew we that a king was born unto Israel, and we came to worship him." . . . And lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them until they entered the cave: and it stood over the head of the cave.[113]

The sixth-century Syriac *Cave of Treasures* gives the names of the Magi as Hormizdah, king of Persia; Yazdegerd, king of Saba; and Perozadh, king of Sheba (compare Ps. 72:10).[114] The first references to the traditional names of the Magi—Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar[115]—occur in the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*, a Latin translation of a sixth-century Greek chronicle. *The Armenian Infancy Gospel*, which was based on an early Syriac composition, specifies that Melqon (Melchior) came from Persia, Balthasar from Arabia, and Gaspar from India.[116]

112. See my article, "Apocryphal Gospels," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1: 181–88.

113. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960 reprint), p. 47. Compare W. Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 1: 386. See also Alois Kehl, "Der Stern der Magier," *JBAChr* 18 (1975): 115–26.

114. B. M. Metzger, "Names for the Nameless in the New Testament," in *Kyriakon*, J. Quasten Festschrift, eds. P. Granfield and J. Jungmann (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), 1: 82.

115. The name *Melchior* means "my king is light"; *Balthasar* was probably derived from "Belteshazzar," the Babylonian name given to Daniel; and *Gaspar* may come from the Indian name *Gundaphorus*. See Metzger, "Names for the Nameless," p. 85; M. V. Scheil, "Melchior, Gaspar, Balthasar," in *Melchior de Vogüé, Florilegium ou receuil de travaux d'érudition* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909), pp. 551–54.

116. James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 83.

Mosaic of the three Magi from the Church of S. Vitale in Ravenna (6th cent.). (Alinari/Editorial Photocolor Archives)

The *Excerpta et Collectanea* gives us further details:

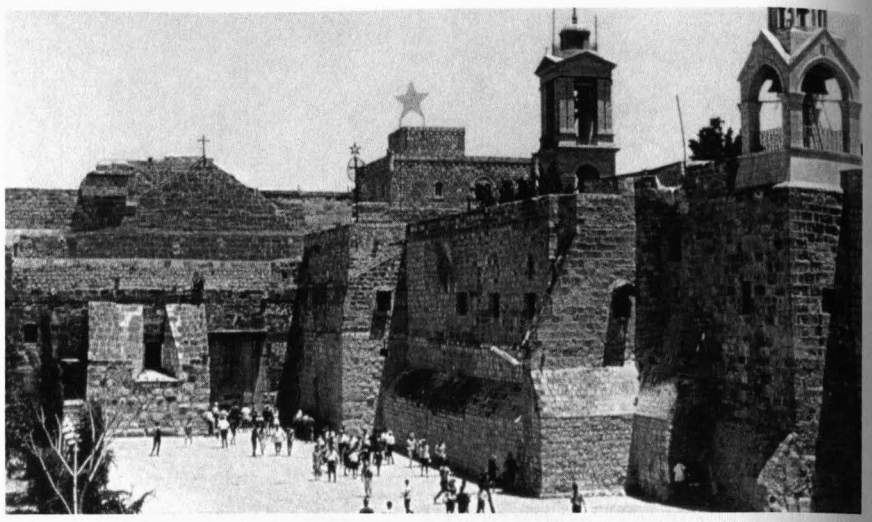
> Melchior, an old man with white hair and a long beard . . . who offered gold to the Lord as to a king. The second, Gaspar by name, young and beardless and ruddy complexioned . . . honored him as God by his gift of incense, an oblation worthy of divinity. The third, black-skinned and heavily bearded, named Balthasar . . . by his gift of myrrh testified to the Son of Man who was to die.[117]

The Magi in Art

The adoration of the Magi was one of the most popular motifs in early Christian art,[118] appearing already in the catacomb of Santa Pris-

117. Cited by R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), p. 199. R. E. McNally, "The Three Kings in Early Irish Latin Writing," in *Kyriakon*, 2: 669, comments on this work as follows: "This curious compilation, if not actually of Irish provenance, certainly reflects and parallels early Irish thinking. Largely a collection of disparate pieces of different character and origin, it was probably put together about the middle of the eighth century, possibly somewhat later."

118. See H. Kehrer, *Die heiligen drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Seemann, 1908–1909); J. C. Marsh-Edwards, "The Magi in Tradition and Art," *Irish Ecclesiastical Review* 85 (1956): 1–9.



The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. (Courtesy of Palphot)

cilla two centuries before the representation of shepherds adoring the Christ child.[119] The number of Magi varied from two to four but eventually stabilized at three.[120] The three Magi, dressed in Persian garb, were usually depicted presenting gifts to the infant Jesus resting on the lap of his mother, as in the famous epitaph of Severa.[121]

The three Magi appear in the famous sixth-century mosaic from the church of St. Apollinaris Nuovo in Ravenna. Above their figures are inscribed the names: SCS. (= *Sanctus* "Saint") Balthassar, SCS. Melchior, and SCS. Gaspar. The purple mantle of the empress Theodora on the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna is embroidered with the figures of the Magi.[122]

The Magi were customarily portrayed in Persian dress with belted tunics, full sleeves, trousers, and peaked hats. Franz Cumont suggests that Christian artists adopted the Roman representation of Persians presenting tributes to the emperors.[123] When the Persian army under Chosroes invaded Palestine in 614, his soldiers destroyed the churches

119. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, p. 197.

120. C. R. Morey, *Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 68; André Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), fig. 26; Pierre du Bourguet, *Early Christian Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1971), p. 46.

121. In the illustrated epitaph of Severa (dated to 330), a star looms above the Magi and the Madonna. The figure behind her pointing to the star has been interpreted as Balaam or as a personification of the Holy Spirit. See J. P. O'Neill et al., eds., *The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), p. 221, no. 136.

122. Morey, *Early Christian Art*, p. 167; Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, fig. 252.

123. F. Cumont, "L'adoration des mages et l'art triomphal de Rome," *Atti di Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia*, ser. 11A, Memorie 111 (1932): 82–105.

The adoration of the Magi on a clay torta. (Courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Art)

of Jerusalem but spared the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem when they saw that a mosaic of the church depicted Magi in Persian dress.[124]

This mosaic of the Magi may have been reproduced in some of the *eulogiae*, souvenirs brought back from the Holy Land by pilgrims. These were of two types. The first were *ampullae*, small bottles of lead in which the pilgrims brought back from the Holy Land water or holy oil from the lamps that burned at the shrines. Among the famous Monza ampullae given by Pope Gregory the Great to the Lombard queen (circa 600) are examples that depict the Virgin in a frontal pose, flanked by Magi on one side and shepherds on the other.[125]

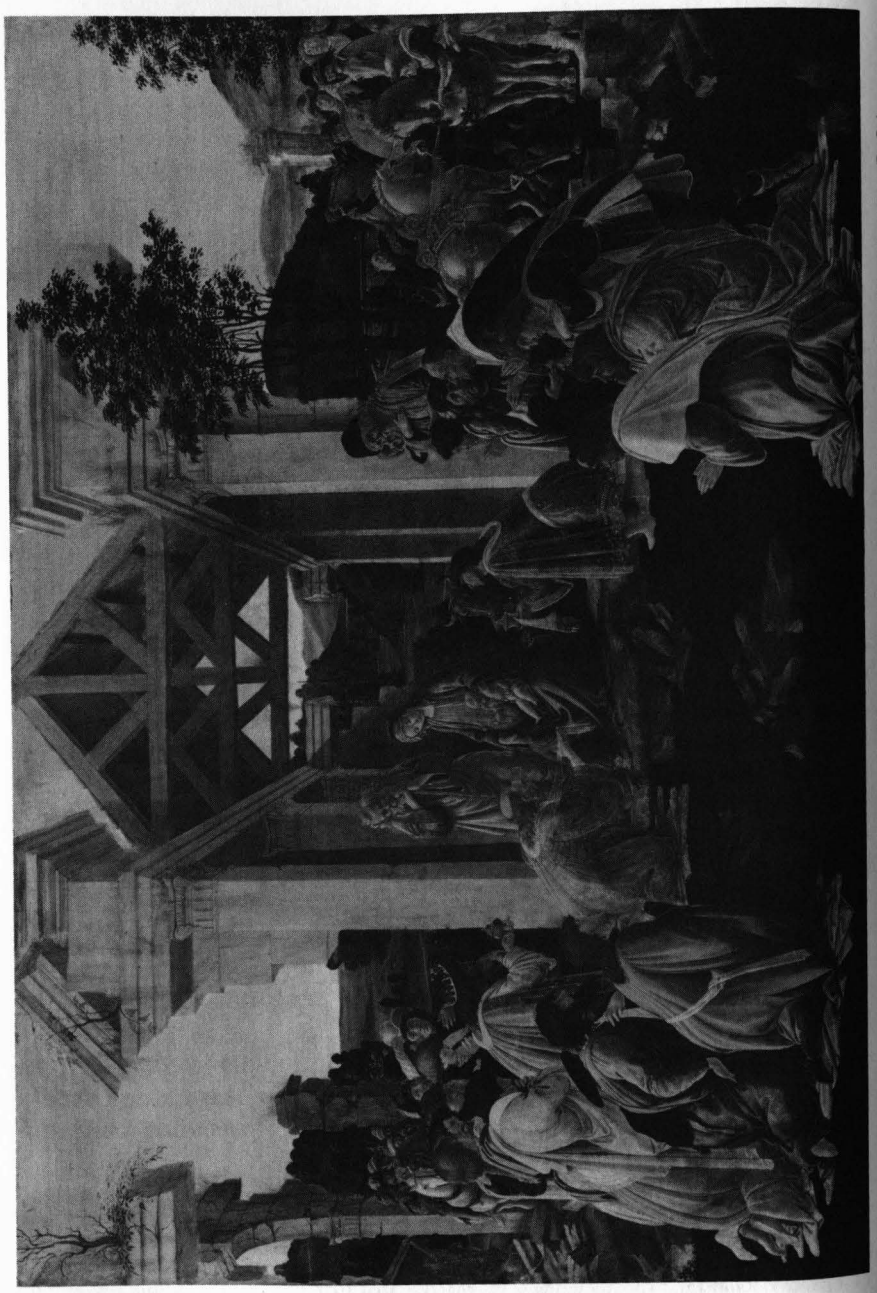
The other rare type of souvenirs were *tortae*, tokens made of clay or earth stamped with images of the shrines. As these were intended to be ground into powder, then dissolved in water and drunk for their curative powers, very few have survived. Recently two sixth-century examples, now in Istanbul, were published. These depict three bearded Magi wearing peaked hats and bearing gifts as they advance toward the Christ child held by the seated Virgin. A later example is owned by the Detroit Institute of Art.[126]

From the sixth century on, the Magi were often depicted as being of different ages: a youth, an adult, and an older man. Leonardo Olschki suggested this trimorphism was inspired by the threefold manifesta-

124. This story was reported at the Synod of Jerusalem in 836. See Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 26; Messina, "Ecce," p. 7.

125. Morey, *Early Christian Art*, p. 123; Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, fig. 209; J. Daoust, "Les ampoules de Monza," *BTS* 170 (Apr. 1975): 1–8.

126. L. Y. Rahmani, "The Adoration of the Magi on Two Sixth-Century C.E. *Eulogia* Tokens," *IEJ* 29 (1979): 34–36.



The adoration of the Magi by Botticelli (15th cent.). (Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

tion of the god Zurvan.[127] In a series of studies Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin suggested this differentiation stemmed from the Hellenistic cult of Aion.[128]

Artists began depicting the "wise men" from the east as kings first during the twelfth century. Between the years 1360 and 1420 one of the three kings was first represented as a black.[129]

The Relics of the Magi

When Marco Polo traveled in Persia in the late thirteenth century, he was shown the tombs of the Magi fifty miles southwest of Tehran:

> In Persia is the city called Saveh, from which the three Magi set out when they came to worship Jesus Christ. Here, too, they lie buried in three sepulchres of great size and beauty. . . . Their bodies are still whole, and they have hair and beards. One was named Beltasar, the second Gaspar, and the third Melchior. . . . The inhabitants declare that in days gone by three kings of this country went to worship a new-born prophet and took with them three offerings—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—so as to discover whether this prophet was a god, or an earthly king or a healer.[130]

In competition with the Persian claim that the relics of the Magi were preserved in their homeland, the West came to believe the relics of the Magi were recovered from Hadramaut in South Arabia by the Emperor Zeno in 490. From Constantinople they were then taken to Milan.

When Frederick Barbarossa, the German Holy Roman emperor, vanquished the city of Milan, Reinald von Dassel, the emperor's chancellor, obtained the precious relics for his native city of Cologne. The relics were received with great jubilation in 1164 and became the prized treasure of the great Gothic cathedral built at Cologne.[131]

127. L. Olschki, "The Wise Men of the East," in *Oriental Traditions . . . Presented to William Popper*, ed. W. J. Fischel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 375–95.

128. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Die drei Weisen aus dem Morgenlande," *Antaios* (1965): 234–53; idem, "Jesus' Trimorphism and the Differentiation of the Magi," in *Man and His Salvation*, S. G. F. Brandon Festschrift, eds. E. Sharpe and J. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), pp. 91–98; idem, "The Wise Men from the East in the Western Tradition," in *Papers in Honour of Mary Boyce*, eds. A. D. H. Bivar and J. Hinnells (Leiden: Brill, 1985), pp. 149–57.

129. J. Vercoutter, J. Leclant, F. M. Snowden, and J. Desanges, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 1: 24.

130. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. R. Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp. 58–59. See A. V. W. Jackson, "The Magi in Marco Polo and the Cities in Persia from which They Came to Worship the Infant Christ," *JAOS* 26 (1905): 79–83.

131. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Wise Men from the East," p. 157.