

RYLANDS SYRIAC MS. 44 AND A NEW ADDITION TO  
THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA : THE TREATISE OF SHEM,  
DISCUSSED AND TRANSLATED

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AMONG the oriental manuscripts in the John Rylands University Library is a Syriac manuscript numbered 44 which dates from the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Its 134 paper folios, still unbound, preserve the labours of two Nestorian scribes (fos. 1-96 and 97-134). The volume is a collection of astrological texts, of which many describe the characteristics of the year according to the zodiac sign in which it begins. Within the collection, on folios 81b-83b, is the only extant copy of a document attributed to Shem, the son of Noah.

While preparing a catalogue of the Rylands Syriac manuscripts I came across this document. My first impression was that it must be an insignificant medieval fabrication modelled on earlier pseudepigrapha. Upon closer examination my evaluation altered considerably and I became more favourably attracted to it. My initial assumption was that the document was unexamined. I knew it was not mentioned in recent articles and books on the Pseudepigrapha and my colleagues in the field had never

<sup>1</sup> I am pleased to express my appreciation to Dr. Frank Taylor, the former Deputy Director and Principal Keeper of the Rylands, and the Editor of this BULLETIN. He assisted and encouraged me from 1967 until 1973 as I prepared a new edition of Rylands Syriac MS. 9, the Odes of Solomon (*The Odes of Solomon*, Oxford, 1973). During the past seven years he has also given generously of his time as he has assisted me in the preparation of a catalogue of the Rylands Syriac manuscripts.

Uncommon abbreviations used : DJD = Discoveries in the Judaean Desert ; GNMM = Good News for Modern Man ; HTR = *Harvard Theological Review* ; ICC = International Critical Commentary ; JB = Jerusalem Bible ; JSS = *Journal of Semitic Studies* ; PW = Wissowa, G. et al., eds. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* ; RQ = *Revue de Qumran* ; SBT = Studies in Biblical Theology ; SCS = Septuagint and Cognate Studies ; TDNT = *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittel) ; and TED = Translations of Early Documents.

heard of it. Later I was surprised to discover that none of the introductions to or bibliographies on the Pseudepigrapha contained the information that there existed a pseudepigraphon attributed to Shem, yet the Syriac scholar Alphonse Mingana had introduced, translated, and edited it in 1917.<sup>1</sup>

Mingana regarded the Treatise solely as "a kind of agricultural horoscopy", written "somewhere in Egypt for people who had great interest in Palestine, or somewhere in Palestine for people who had great interest in Egypt". Somewhat contradictorily, he continued by suggesting that it "was written in a time of national distress in Palestine", which indicated to him "a time not very remote from the catastrophe which befell the Jewish nation under Vespasian and Hadrian". He vitiated the force of this suggestion by claiming "that the outer form of the work actually postulates a much later date". Because the work is not clearly Christian, Mingana supposed that it is Jewish. The question of the original language is unanswerable and it is "prudent to suspend our judgement". He concludes his report "with a great margin of uncertainty".

Mingana's opinion of the manuscript itself was rather low. He felt that the copyist "was an extremely bad Syriac scholar" and even expressed the judgement that Cod. Syr. 44 is "the most unsatisfactory Syriac manuscript which I have ever seen". His translation frequently veered from the extant manuscript; he customarily understood ambiguous Syriac words and meanings in the light of Arabic. He omitted words and even a sentence which appeared unsatisfactory; he altered the text. But he usually refused to restore the frequent gaps.

My own perception of the document is appreciably different from that of Mingana. To no small degree this is due to the different views of early Judaism with which we work. Mingana wrote when intertestamental Judaism was conceived as monolithic with a normative centre and when Palestinian Judaism was portrayed as insular, conservative, and paradigmatically different from Hellenistic Judaism. Today all this reconstruction has

<sup>1</sup> *Some Early Judaeo-Christian Documents in the John Rylands University Library: Syriac Texts* (Manchester, 1917), pp. 20-29, 52-59; repr. from BULLETIN, iv (1917-18), 59-118.

collapsed. Intertestamental Judaism is perceived as a richly variegated phenomenon, which even included astrological images *and* ideas, with no defined normative centre. Palestinian Judaism was not isolated from the Hellenistic world; even in the most conservative centres there were Jewish groups thoroughly influenced by norms and ideas not indigenous to Judaism. Palestinian Judaism is not easily differentiated from Hellenistic Judaism. Likewise, our understanding of early Syriac language and literature has developed considerably, as has our approach to the editing of texts, at least in the field of biblical research.

It is timely, therefore, to reintroduce the Treatise of Shem, to attempt to discern its origin and assess its importance, and to present a new translation with notes. It will become evident that apart from disagreeing with Mingana on most points mentioned above, it appears to me that he missed the real significance of this document.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Treatise of Shem describes the characteristics of the year according to the house of the zodiac in which it begins. Documents like this, which are called calendologion, are also attributed to other biblical personalities; another one is the *Revelatio Esdrae de qualitatibus anni*.<sup>1</sup> The Treatise of Shem contains twelve chapters, following the twelve signs of the zodiac running counter-clockwise from Aries to Capricorn, but reversing the order of the last two so that Pisces precedes Aquarius. This inverted order was caused by a scribe who skipped a chapter in his haste to finish but eventually added the missing chapter at the end. The scribe who copied the only extant manuscript, or an earlier scribe, warns the reader that a

<sup>1</sup> See M. R. James, *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (TED) (London, 1920), pp. 80 f.; and J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (SCS 7) (Missoula, Mont., 1976), pp. 182-4. Reliable books are F. Cumont's *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, trans. J. B. Baker (New York, 1912; repr. 1960), O. Neugebauer's *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (New York, 1957<sup>2</sup>), F. Cumont's *L'Égypte des astrologues* (Brussels, 1937), and F. Boll's *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, ed. Gundel (Leipzig, Berlin, 1931<sup>4</sup>).

copyist's mistake places Aquarius after Pisces. Originally the twelve chapters were in an ascending order of desirable features, beginning with Aries, in which apparently the worst year begins, and culminating with Pisces, in which clearly the best year originates: "there will be peace and prosperity among men, and love and harmony among all the kings who are on the entire earth" (TrShem, 11:18).

#### ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

The four Greek loan words found in the Syriac text are not indicative that the original language is Greek. Each of them (see notes a to chap. 3, c to chap. 5, d and k to chap. 7, d and g to chap. 11), with the possible exception of *harmonia* (but cf. Brockelmann's lexicon, p. 50), early passed into and became customary in Syriac. The original language seems to be Semitic since there are abundant Semitisms that appear to be original and personal names are defined according to the Semitic alphabet (chaps. 2, 6-12). Because of the gaps and corrupt Syriac text,<sup>1</sup> it is impossible to discern whether the original language is Hebrew or Aramaic (Syriac). If the provenance is Alexandrian, then Aramaic becomes a little more probable.

#### DATE

The laconic nature of the Treatise of Shem precludes dating it precisely and certainly; but I think that the frequent references to the Romans and Egyptians are not fictitious but historically based. Proceeding with this assumption it is clear that the document was composed in the Roman period, because of the references to the Romans (1:5, 3:6 f., 11:12). The one most notable feature regarding a date of composition is the pervasive references to wars, usually against the Romans (3:6 f.; 1:9; 2:2; 3:3, 7:8 and 18, 10:10 f.; cf. 5:7, 6:13, 12:8). This concern coincides with the terror of war that characterized the eastern portion of the Empire from c. 100-31 B.C., when Octavian

<sup>1</sup> See notes f to chap. 2, e, g and i to chap. 5, e to chap. 6, e, j and o to chap. 7, d and g to chap. 8.

defeated Anthony at Actium.<sup>1</sup> Inscriptions, Octavian's own, and Virgil's writings demonstrate that Octavian was popularly conceived as the one who put an end to war.<sup>2</sup> The fear of war between Rome and Egypt ("And the king of the Romans will not remain in one place . . . a great war and misery (will occur) on all the earth, and especially in the land of Egypt," 1:5-9) adequately fits the period when Anthony was associated with Alexandria and "married according to Egyptian law" to Cleopatra (37-30). This passage also might refer obliquely to the suicides of Anthony and Cleopatra and the merciless acts by Octavian in Alexandria in 30 B.C. The claim that the Romans will defeat the Parthians (3:6 f.), if our restoration of the text is accurate, indicates a date shortly after Anthony's victory over the Armenians, Medes, and Parthians, and the celebration of this triumph in Alexandria (not in Rome as tradition demanded) in the fall of 34 B.C.

The second most notable feature regarding the date of composition is the reference to and fear of "robbers", "thieves", or "marauders" (cf. 7:20, 10:7, 11:11, 12:1; cf. 6:1, 10:1, 11:1). This concern best fits the period before Octavian strengthened the Empire, built impressive and extensive high-ways, and established a military police, which secured relatively speedy and safe travel within it. These observations cumulatively

<sup>1</sup> Conspicuously absent are references to the internal struggles among the Roman Empire during the first century A.D., Claudius' charge to the Alexandrians to be "tolerant and friendly to the Jews" (London Papyrus 1912), the *Nero-redivivus* myth, and the two great Jewish wars (A.D. 66-73, 132-5), both of which exacted great costs in Alexandria—50,000 Jewish lives were lost there in the first war and the synagogue was burned in the second. No significant historical event after 30 B.C. seems to be portrayed in the TrShem.

<sup>2</sup> An inscription at Priene, which is just south of Ephesus in Asia Minor, dated to 9 B.C., refers to Octavian as the "saviour, who . . . put an end to war and . . . set everything in order". In his *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* Octavian himself spoke of Actium as "the crowning victory", and pointed with justifiable pride at the peace he had established in the Empire: "I restored peace to all the provinces of Gaul and Spain and to Germany, to all . . ." With phrases reminiscent of the dream of a blessed future described in Isa. xi, Virgil in his fourth Eclogue (19-22) spoke of the age Octavian had inaugurated: "He shall receive the life of gods and use/Heroes with gods commingling, and himself/Be seen of them, and with his father's worth/Reign o'er a world at peace." A reliable student edition of the last two texts is contained in C. K. Barrett's *The New Testament Background. Selected Documents* (London, 1956; New York, 1961).

suggest that the Treatise of Shem was probably composed in the last third of the first century B.C.

Let me attempt to speculate further regarding the date of composition. Anthony or Cleopatra may be the subject of 2:3, "And a wind will go out from Egypt and will fill the entire earth".<sup>1</sup> A reference to the battle at Actium between Anthony and Octavian may be couched in 2:10: "two kings will oppose one another". Anthony's defeat by Octavian in the sea battle at Actium and his subsequent suicide in Alexandria may be mentioned in 6:13-17: "And the king [= the Roman Emperor Octavian] will strive with a king [= Anthony] and will slay him. And Alexandria will be lost . . . And many ships will be wrecked." Another reference to the results of this battle may be found in the next chapter, 7:16 f.: "And the king [= Octavian] will stay in one place [Octavian ends the intermittent wars and resides in Rome]. And power will leave the land [Egypt will become the personal possession of Octavian]. And the nobles will flee to the sea, and there will be between (them) [in the sea] a severe war." If these conjectures are sound, then an Alexandrian Jew, thinking about the vicissitudes of life evoked by the defeat of the seemingly invincible Anthony and Cleopatra—who had nearly twice as many men and ships as Octavian, yet both deserted Actium before the battle was decided—composed this astrological document shortly after 31 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An informed, engagingly popular (but at times perhaps too subjective) biography of Anthony is A. Weigall's *The Life and Times of Marc Anthony* (Garden City, 1931). Another popular and different interpretation of the events, and especially of the motivation behind Cleopatra's actions at Actium, may be found in E. Stauffer's "Augustus and Cleopatra", *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches*, trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (London, 1955), pp. 54-80. An attractive account of Alexandria, with maps, and with a portrayal of Cleopatra different from that of either Weigall or Stauffer, is by E. M. Forster, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (Garden City, New York, 1961). Scholarly discussions of Jewish life in Alexandria may be found in V. Tcherikover's *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, trans. S. Applebaum (New York, 1959; repr. 1970); in M. Stern's "The Jewish Diaspora", *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern (Assen, 1974), i. 117-83, see also 184-215; and in P. M. Fraser's, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols. Oxford, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Some critics may claim that the obvious has not been stated and affirm the date suggested by pointing to the voluminous astrological treatises pseudonymously attributed to King Nechepso and his Priest Petosiris which were

## PROVENANCE

The two most likely places in which this text may have been composed are Egypt (mentioned in chaps. 1, 2, 7-9, 12) and Palestine (found in chaps. 4, 6). The latter is improbable, since there is a reference to robbers who come *from* Palestine ("And robbers will come from Palestine", 11:11). The numerous references to the Nile (chaps. 1-5, [6], 7, 8, 12) suggest that the provenance is probably Egyptian. The references to irrigation (1:4, 10:18) and illnesses caused by winds bearing desert sands (4:7) increase this probability. References to the city of Alexandria (4:3 and 6:14) imply that the provenance is Alexandrian. The description of the beneficial effects of the north wind (3:1, 5:1, 8:1), the harmful characteristics of the east wind (7:3, 10:2), and the continuous references to the sea (1:10, 2:12 [*bis*], 3:7, 4:5, 7:18 [*bis*, once restored], 11:5; cf. 10:5), the sea-coast (10:15), fishing (11:5), and ships (1:10, 2:12, 3:7, 4:5, 6:16, 11:6) also suggest that the Treatise of Shem was composed in Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

A few decades ago historians had no clear evidence that Jews composed astrological tracts about the time of Jesus; many good scholars thought Jewish interest in the zodiac surfaced only late in medieval Jewish mysticism. Even quite recently the erudite and informed editors of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* reported that composed in Alexandria some time in the second century B.C. (Boll, *Sterngläube*, p. 24; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, i. 436 f., ii. 632 f.; M. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.2, 2 vols. Munich, 1955-61<sup>2</sup>), ii. 269; earlier scholars dated this pseudepigraphon to the second third of the first century B.C., e.g. W. Kroll, "Nechepso", PW 16.2, cols. 2160-7; and E. Riess, "Astrologie", PW 2.2, cols. 1802-28, esp. cols. 1816 f.). Dating the TrShem in the last third of the first century B.C. fits nicely with the observation that astrology began to be popular about the time of Jesus' birth (Nilsson, *Geschichte*, ii. 276).

<sup>1</sup> Alexandria during the hellenistic period was characterized by an interest in astrological ideas (cf. esp. Cumont, *L'Égypte des astrologues*; Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, ii. 268-81; Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, i. 434 f.). For examples of zodiacal papyri in late Ptolemaic and early Roman Egypt see O. Neugebauer and R. A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts* (4 vols. London, 1960-9) esp. see iii. 203-12 and iv. plates 46, 47 and 48).

the zodiac is " first mentioned in the *Sefer Yezirah* ", a document dated somewhere between the third and sixth centuries (*EncyJud.* vol. xvi, col. 1191).

Jewish interest in astrology and the zodiac is at least as early as Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup> This new insight is demonstrated by the early date of the Jewish Sibylline Oracles, especially v. 512-31,<sup>2</sup> and the discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls of at least two Jewish astrological documents, one called 4Q Cryptic (formerly 4Q 186)<sup>3</sup> and the other still unnamed and unpublished.<sup>4</sup>

The clearest and fullest evidence for an early Jewish interest in astrology has been unknown to scholars, although it has been shelved for most of this century in the Rylands. The document concerned is, of course, the Treatise of Shem, and, as in 4Q Cryptic, the concern is not with daily manipulation of nature and man by the stars but with the determination of the year or of one's destiny (cf. TrShem, 8: 12) according to the zodiacal sign in which it originates or in which one is born.

If the historical reconstruction attempted above is accurate, we have a significant and unparalleled Jewish response to one of the most significant and epoch-making sea-battles in the history of our culture. Jewish soldiers from King Herod of Judaea together with troops from throughout the Eastern Empire united under Anthony. Octavian won the battle, nevertheless, and his success at Actium enabled him to unite the " civilized " world and to lay the foundations for the greatness of the Roman Empire. He received the title that had been reserved for the gods, and ever today he is known as Augustus (" the exalted one "). Significant for an understanding of many passages in the Treatise of Shem is the recognition that Augustus Caesar took Egypt as his own personal possession and began to export Egyptian grain to Rome.

<sup>1</sup> See my " Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha and Dead Sea Scrolls ", *HTR* (in press).

<sup>2</sup> Book 5 was composed early in the second century A.D. The TrShem is therefore at least a century older.

<sup>3</sup> Published by J. M. Allegro in " An Astrological Cryptic Document from Qumran ", *JSS*, ix (1964), 291-4; repr. *DJD*, v. 88-91, plate xxxi. See J. Carmignac, " Les horoscopes de Qumran ", *RQ*, v. 199-217.

<sup>4</sup> See J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea*, trans. J. Strugnell (SBT, 26; London, 1959), p. 42.

## THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

The contention that if the year begins in Virgo then a Jew whose name contains a *Y*, *S*, *B* and *N* will be robbed and forced to flee his home contradicts the ancient tradition that the Jewish home is protected by God (e.g. cf. Ex. xii. 13, 22) and each member in it is protected by the solidarity of the family (cf. Lev. xxv. 25, 47-49; Gen. iv. 23 f.). The pervasive idea that fortune, the rise of the Nile, the movement of the stars and the moon, health, and a good harvest depend upon the power of the zodiac flagrantly compromises the ancient tradition that God is lord of the universe (cf. Ps. xxiv, 29) and actively involved in the processes of history (cf. e.g. the cultic confession of faith in Deut. xxvi. 5-9; cf. Ps. 8). The claim that ample rain depends upon the house of the zodiac in which the year begins compromises the belief that God controls the rain (cf. e.g. Amos iv. 7, Zech. x. 1), which is a central Jewish belief popularized by the colourful account of Elijah's successful prayer for rain on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs. xviii. 1, 41-46).<sup>1</sup>

In the Pseudepigrapha this biblical perspective is reaffirmed in an anti-astrological context. The author of Jubilees explicitly rejected<sup>2</sup> ideas characteristic of the Treatise of Shem :

<sup>1</sup> The only scholar who has read and commented on the TrShem besides Mingana, E. R. Goodenough, claims correctly that the thin veneer of Judaism in it discloses that the author did not relate his astrological beliefs to his Jewish faith. He writes: "a Jew would seem to have believed in both Judaism and astrology but to have been content to join the two together thus loosely rather than try really to fuse them" (*Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York, 1958), viii. 199).

<sup>2</sup> Other significant arguments against astrology are as follows: According to the author of the early chapters of 1 En. astrology is an evil and demonic idea since it was taught to men by one of the fallen angels Baraqiyal (1 En. viii. 3). The third book of the SibOr (c. second century B.C.) in lines 220-36 praises righteous men who neither search for mystical meaning in the movements of the heavenly bodies nor are deceived by the predictions of Chaldean astrology. Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 B.C.-A.D. 45) attempted to refute the ideas of the astrologers and argued that Moses, although he apparently had a concept of the universe similar to that of the astrologers, taught that God alone is in control of creation, but he never suggested that the "stars or their motions" effected the fate of men (Migr. 32). Josephus mentions that the veil of the Temple, which was composed of Babylonian tapestry, "typified the universe" and possessed "mystic meaning", but although it "portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the

And in the sixth week, in its fifth year, Abram sat up during the night on the new moon of the seventh month [= Tishri, the beginning of the Jewish year],<sup>1</sup> so that he might observe the stars from evening until daybreak so that he might see what events of the year would come to pass with respect to rain. And he was sitting alone and making observations; And a voice came into his head, saying:

“All of the signs of the stars and the signs of the sun and moon are in the hand of the Lord. Why am I seeking?

If he desires, he will make rain morning and evening,  
And if he desires he will not send (it) down;  
And everything is in his hand.” (Jub. xii. 16-18)

While Jubilees xii, of course, was not written against the Treatise of Shem, it was directed against the astrological claims that the zodiac determined yearly rain fall, an idea expressed, for example, in the Treatise at 5:1: “*And if the year begins in Leo: there will be Spring rains, then the soil will be deprived of the north winds.*”

It is not wise to attempt ways to deny that the author of the Treatise of Shem was a Jew, rather it is important to perceive the degree to which some hellenistic Jews compromised ancient traditions as they became accommodated to foreign lands and customs. Diasporic Judaism and even Palestinian Judaism was not guided by an established orthodoxy; Judaism became more

signs of the zodiac” were not represented (*Wars*, v. 212-14; cf. *Wars*, vi. 228-92). Later, R. Johanan argued against Jewish interest in astrology by teaching that Israel is immune from planetary influence (b. Shab 156a). The entire fourth book of Hippolytus’ *Refutation of All Heresies* is directed against astrology and speculations regarding the influence of the zodiac; his attention is directed against the belief that one’s fate is determined by the house of the zodiac that is rising over the horizon at the moment of birth, an idea different from the thoughts in the TrShem but similar to those in 4QCryptic. For an informative account of the attempts by Octavian and others to control the volatile speculations of the astrologers see R. MacMullen, “Astrologers, Diviners, and Prophets”, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 128-62. For further discussion see my “Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha and Dead Sea Scrolls”, *HTR* (in press).

The translation of Jubilees is by O. Wintermute and will appear in the new edition of the Pseudepigrapha, which is to be published by Doubleday under my editorship and a team of assistants and advisors.

<sup>1</sup> “There are four ‘New Year’ days: on the 1st of Nisan . . . on the 1st of Elul . . . on the 1st of Tishri is the New Year for [the reckoning of] the years [of foreign kings], of the Years of Release and Jubilee years, for the planting [of trees] and for vegetables; and the 1st of Shebat . . .” (Rosh ha-Shanah 1.1) (H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, 1933), p. 188). Danby notes that Tishri “is alone spoken of throughout the rest of the tractate as ‘the New Year’”.

and more syncretistic. The Treatise of Shem is a significant addition to our perception of the variegated nature of inter-testamental Judaism; and mere possession of it should dismiss the recent claim that astrology in Judaism was never more than a Qumranite or sectarian aberration.<sup>1</sup>

Noticeably absent in this document are references to angels, a belief in immortality or a resurrection from the dead, and the various levels of heaven. No Jewish festivals are noted except Passover (1:8, 6:12) and the references to this may simply be another indication of Egyptian provenance.

The author believes that God is efficacious, since petitions and prayers for rain are effective (8:3, 11:17; cf. 12:9). It is significant that he refers to God only three times (8:3, 11:17, 12:9) and that twice he uses the phrase "the living God".

#### RELATION TO THE CANONICAL BOOKS

Intermittently throughout the preceding discussion the Treatise of Shem has been compared with the Old Testament. The few parallels emphasize a difference in perspective. For example, the Old Testament prophets prophesy about what is soon to happen because of God's involvement in history; the author of the Treatise of Shem predicts events potentially far distant in the future because of the effect of the zodiac upon earthly cycles. The Old Testament writers saw the stars as obeying God's commands and displaying his glory<sup>2</sup>; the author

<sup>1</sup> M. R. Lehman, using the outmoded paradigm of "normative Judaism", claims solely on the basis of 4QCryptic and an enigmatic passage in the Talmud that "astrology never got a permanent foothold in Judaism, since it was, from the beginning, fraught with sectarian overtones". See his "New Light on Astrology in Qumran and the Talmud", *RQ*, xxxii (1975), 599-602. Astrology did obtain a "foothold in Judaism", as demonstrated by R. P. Hanina b. Hama: "The stars make one wise, the stars make one rich, and there are stars for Israel" (b. Shab. 156a). For an excellent survey of astrology in Judaism see A. Altman, "Astrology", *EncyJud*, iii. cols. 788-95. Also see my article on the subject in *HTR*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. esp. Ise. xl. 26; xlv. 12; Pss. xix. 1, 5 f.; cxlviii. 3. The concept reappears in the Pseudepigrapha: ApBar iii. 34 f.; 1 En. xviii. 13-16; xxi. 1-6; xli. 5; lxxxvi. 1-6; 4Ez vi. 3. I am indebted here to W. Foerster, "astēr, astron", *TDNT*, i. (1964), 503-5. King Josiah deposed the priests "who offered sacrifice to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations and the whole array of heaven" (2 Kgs. xxiii. 5, JB).

of the Treatise of Shem claimed the heavenly bodies caused events to happen on the earth.

One<sup>1</sup> specific passage in the New Testament receives some illumination because of the discovery of Jewish interest in astrology prior to Jesus and his followers. Matthew ii. 2 mentions that the wise men (*magoi*) come to Judea to see a newly-born King of the Jews because "we have seen his star in the East . . ." (RSV). An alternative and better translation is "we saw his star as it rose . . ." (JB) or "we saw his star when it came up in the east . . ." (GNMM).<sup>2</sup> With either translation, and especially with the latter, it is probable that the author of this tradition—either Matthew himself or more probably<sup>3</sup> another Jewish Christian before him—was influenced by astrological predictions. So strong are the astrological overtones in this verse (and Matt. ii. 9) that early Christians claimed it proved "that astrology may be depended on".<sup>4</sup> Eventually St. Chrysostom in the fourth and St. Augustine in the fifth century were forced to direct one or more sermons against an astrological interpretation of Matthew ii. 1-12. St. Augustine became embroiled in a heated controversy and the influence of his opponents can be surmised by the words he used: "This star

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iv. 6-8, which describes the four living creatures that surround the heavenly throne, and Rev. xii. 1, which describes a woman crowned with "twelve stars", are usually interpreted in terms of the zodiac. The first passage represents the four main zodiacal constellations (Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius), the second portrays the twelve signs of the zodiac. See R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (ICC; Edinburgh, 1920, repr. 1963 and 1966), i. 122 f., 315 f.

<sup>2</sup> The Good News for Modern Man Version is the text exegeted by the brilliant German scholar E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. D. E. Green (Atlanta, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Schweizer correctly sees two traditions behind Matt. ii. 1-12, one which emphasized the struggle between Herod and the newborn king, and another which had as its motif "the homage offered by the astrologers". These were of different origin, and "Matthew was probably the first to link the two traditions" (*Good News According to Matthew*, pp. 36 f.). Another careful argument for the independent prior character of the tradition about the wise men has been published recently by Zinniker, *Probleme der sogenannten Kindheitsgeschichte bei Mattäus*, Freiburg, 1972; cf. esp. p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted by St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, trans. G. Prevost, Rev. M. B. Riddle (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 10; New York, 1894), Homily vi. 36. Greek: *hoper esti sēmeion tou tēn astrologian einai bebaian.*

confounded the meaningless reckonings and prognostications of the astrologers when it showed these worshippers of stars that the Creator of heaven and earth was worthier of adoration."<sup>1</sup> In an earlier sermon St. Augustine claimed that "the star did not determine the marvels of Christ's birth, but Christ determined the appearance of the star among His other miracles".<sup>2</sup>

The new evidence for astrology among the Jews and the early astrological interpretation of Matthew ii. 1-12 should demonstrate that merely discussing the striking parallels between these verses and the tradition about Balaam as recorded in Numbers xxii. 1-24; xxv<sup>3</sup> does not totally exhaust the rich complexities in Matthew. It is no longer justifiable to approach Matthew ii with the assumption that all Jews believed the stars intervened in man's destiny *only* in line with God's will; and it is unwise to presuppose that Matthew's wise men *must* be pagans because of their astrological beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Astrological speculation could well have been linked with Jesus' birth by Jewish Christians before Matthew wrote.<sup>5</sup> At his birth (or close to it)<sup>6</sup> Jupiter and

<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. M. S. Muldowney (The Fathers of the Church 38; New York, 1959), Sermon for the Epiphany, Sermon 201, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Sermon 199, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> A. Paul correctly argues that this "coincidence is certainly not fortuitous". See his list of six parallels between Matt. and Num., *L'Évangile de l'enfance selon saint Matthieu* (Lire la Bible 17; Paris, 1968), pp. 100-4. See also R. E. Brown's careful and voluminous *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York, 1977 [in press]).

<sup>4</sup> These assumptions are expressed either explicitly or implicitly by A. Paul, who eventually reaffirms the ancient tradition that the wise men were disciples of Zarathustra (*L'Évangile de l'enfance*, pp. 104-12, 116-25). R. A. Oriti incorrectly states, "Since the Jews were not believers in astrology, they would attribute no special significance to the chance grouping of planets" ("The star of Bethlehem", *Griffith Observer*, xxxix (1975), 9-14).

<sup>5</sup> A cuneiform tablet, the Celestial Almanac of Sippar, predicts the triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in 7 B.C. Hence, astrologers and astronomers eagerly anticipated the celestial wonder. See the discussion and bibliographical notes in E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, trans. R. and C. Winston (New York, 1960), esp. pp. 32-34, 217.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus' birth, according to critical research, is usually placed between 8 and 6 B.C.; in 7 B.C. there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn three times (thanks to the optical illusion of retrograde motion) in Pisces: in late May and early June, throughout October, and in early December. See the astronomical tables published by W. D. Stahlman and O. Gingerich, *Solar and Planetary Longitudes for Years -2500 to +2000 by 10-Day Intervals* (Madison, Wisconsin Univ.



Saturn over a period of *eight months* were in conjunction three times in Pisces, the Hebrew zodiacal sign and the sign of the last days.<sup>1</sup> Later Jewish and Jewish-Christian astrologers could well have noted the significance: Jupiter, the "star"<sup>2</sup> that denoted kingship, was linked with Saturn, the "star" that represented Israel (or Palestine). A derived meaning seems clear: in the last days a great king shall be born in Israel.<sup>3</sup> Proof of

Press, 1963), p. 306. Shortly after this threefold conjunction, on 19 February 6 B.C., Mars was in conjunction with Saturn, "but the Magi, though they were expecting it, probably were prevented from observing it because the sun had by now moved into the area and all three planets were almost certainly lost in the glare of sunset" (R. S. Knapp, *A Star of Wonder* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1967), p. 15). I am grateful for assistance in this research to R. S. Knapp and J. P. Charlesworth, both of the Morehead Planetarium.

<sup>1</sup> W. Sinnott claims that Matthew's star was probably the conjunction of Venus with Jupiter on 17 June 2 B.C., which occurred in Leo (a lion according to early Semitic records, and Judah is called a "lion's whelp" in Gen. xlix. 9 f.) with the planets equidistant from the star Regulus (prince), which always remains between Leo's feet (cf. Gen. xlix. 9 f.) ("Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem", *Sky and Telescope* (December 1968), 384-6). See also the reply to Sinnott by the Editor-in-Chief, C. A. Federer, who offers the opinion "that Ensign Sinnott's results make the Star of Bethlehem more plausible astronomically than it has seemed heretofore" ("Rambling Through December Skies", *Sky and Telescope* (December 1968), 390, 396).

<sup>2</sup> Matt. uses the noun *astēr* (star) not *astron* (star, constellation). Ignatius (Eph. xix. 2) also uses the noun *astēr*. R. Rodman argues that *astēr* should not be taken to denote a conjunction of planets because *astron* would more appropriately represent "conjunction and *planēs* "planet" ("A Linguistic Note on the Christmas Star", *Griffith Observer*, xl (1976), 8 f.). *Astron*, however, does not mean "conjunction", and *astēr* does mean "planet" only when combined with *planēs*; as Rodman reports, *planēs astēr* means "wandering star". But Matt., who was a Semite not a Greek, probably did not originate the account, rather he adapted the earlier tradition in line with his pervasive emphasis upon the fulfilment of messianic prophecies. One should remember that *astēr* is generic and can even represent a "comet", since Origen, who obviously wrote in Greek, claimed that the star was "a new star" (*astera en tē anatolē kainon*) like a comet or meteor. He claims that Chaeremon the Stoic's *Treatise on Comets* shows that comets occasionally did portend *good* things (*Contra Celsum*, Bk. 1, 58 f.). It seems unlikely, however, that *astēr* denoted the conjunction of two planets; it is more likely that the author of the tradition, if he used *astēr*, was focusing upon the unique behaviour of Saturn, the star of Israel. It is sane to admit that we are now venturing too far into speculation.

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation has been defended repeatedly and has been reasserted recently by E. Nellesen (*Das Kind und seine Mutter: Struktur und Verkündigung des 2. Kapitels im Matthäusevangelium* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 39; Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 117-19, and Zinniker (*Probleme*, pp. 111-15).

astrological speculations among the Jews prior to the birth of Christianity, as now demonstrated by the recovery of the Treatise of Shem, coupled with the indisputable fact of a “most unusual celestial display”<sup>1</sup> 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. Some historical event may lie beneath the embellished traditions.<sup>2</sup> Early Jewish writings, many of which are collected conveniently into the Pseudepigrapha, demonstrate again how much we can learn from them regarding the origins of Christianity.

#### CULTURAL IMPORTANCE

It is significant that the Treatise of Shem was composed about the time that the vernal equinox (the traditional beginning of the year, the start of Spring) moved from Aries to Pisces, where it has been ever since, although it is about to move into Aquarius. This change, G. de Santillana argued, would have evoked strong “astrological emotion” since one age was succeeding another.<sup>3</sup> The Treatise of Shem appears to be an unparalleled record of this monumental shift (the Precession of the Equinoxes).

The cultural importance of this document is even greater if it reflects the unexpected demise of Anthony and Cleopatra at Actium and their subsequent suicides in Alexandria. It becomes the first link in that literary chain of classics, including the masterpieces by Plutarch, Shakespeare, Dryden and Shaw, that features and exposes the paradigm of Anthony and Cleopatra’s paradoxical lives and love.

<sup>1</sup> For Matthew’s wise men this phenomenon would have been “a powerful and awesome omen (in fact this kind of planet arrangement takes place only every eight centuries)” (Knapp, *A Star of Wonder*, p. 15).

<sup>2</sup> Schweizer appropriately draws attention to the record that in A.D. 66 Persian astrologers came to Nero in order to worship him because of the movements of the stars (*Good News*, p. 37).

<sup>3</sup> *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time* (Boston, Mass., 1969), p. 145.

THE TREATISE COMPOSED BY SHEM, THE SON OF NOAH,  
 CONCERNING THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR AND  
 WHATEVER<sup>a</sup> OCCURS IN IT<sup>b</sup>

1. *If the year begins in Aries<sup>c</sup>*: the year will be lean. (2) Even<sup>d</sup> its fourfooted (animals) will die; and many clouds will neither be visible nor appear.<sup>e</sup> (3) And grain will not reach (the necessary) height,<sup>f</sup> but its<sup>g</sup> corn will (reach good height) and will ripen. (4) And the river Nile will overflow<sup>h</sup> (at) a good rate. (5) And the king of the Romans will not remain in one place. (6) And the stars of heaven will be dispersed as sparks of fire<sup>i</sup>; and the moon will be eclipsed.<sup>j</sup> (7) And the first grain will die, but the last grain will be harvested. (8) And from Passover [until the New Year]<sup>k</sup> produce will have a blight.<sup>l</sup> (9) And the year will be bad, for a great war and misery (will occur) on all the earth, and especially in the land of Egypt. (10) And many ships will be wrecked when the sea billows. (11) And oil will be valued in Africa; but wheat will be reduced in value in Damascus and Hauran; but in Palestine it<sup>m</sup> will be valued. (12) And (in that region there will be) various diseases, and sicknesses, even fighting<sup>n</sup> will occur in it.<sup>o</sup> (13) But it will be allowed to escape from it<sup>p</sup> and be delivered.

2. *And if the year begins in Taurus*: everyone whose name contains a Bēth, or Yūdh, or Kāph will become ill, or be wounded by an iron (weapon). (2) And there will be fighting.<sup>a</sup> (3) And a wind will go out from Egypt and will fill the entire earth. (4) And in that (year)<sup>b</sup> there will be wheat and abundant rains, but the nobles<sup>c</sup> of the land and of the surrounding region will destroy (the crops).<sup>d</sup> (5) And [the rain]<sup>e</sup> of (this) year will be withheld for three months, and afterwards produce will be exceedingly expensive for thirty-six days. (6) And many people will die from diseases of the throat, then leanness will cease.<sup>f</sup> (7) And the first grain will perish in like manner, but the last grain will be harvested.<sup>g</sup> (8) And barley<sup>h</sup> and dried peas<sup>i</sup> will (also) be harvested. (9) And devils will attack men but will not harm them in any way. (10) And two kings will oppose one another. (11) And the large river Nile will rise above its banks.<sup>j</sup>

(12) Those who are on a ship in the midst of the sea or people who are on the sea will be in severe misery. (13) But at the close of the year there will be great blessing.

3. *And if the year begins in Gemini:* the moon will be beautiful and a north wind will blow and rain will come from it. (2) And everyone whose name has a Taw, or Hēth, or Mīm will have on his face<sup>a</sup> leprosy<sup>b</sup> or a mark. (3) And in the beginning of the year there will be a harsh war.<sup>c</sup> (4) And there will be Spring rains and grain [will be good]<sup>d</sup> and beautiful, and especially the grain that has been irrigated. (5) And mice<sup>e</sup> will multiply<sup>f</sup> on the earth. (6) And the Romans [and the Parthian]<sup>g</sup> will make severe wars with each other. (7) And the Romans will proceed by ships on the sea, then they will cause a war and destroy the (Parthians).<sup>h</sup> (8) And evil people will proceed in this world and they will do evil<sup>i</sup>; then there will be anxiety and harsh misery. (9) But at the end of the year there will be that which is good, even the river Nile will overflow exceedingly.

4. *And if the year begins in Cancer:* in the beginning of the year there will be a sufficiency of produce and people will be healthy.<sup>a</sup> (2) And the Nile will overflow half its (usual) rate.<sup>b</sup> (3) And Alexandria will be afflicted, and misery from the plague will be in it. (4) And the stars will shine magnificently for the moon will be eclipsed.<sup>c</sup> (5) And many ships will be wrecked in the sea.<sup>d</sup> (6) And in the beginning of the ye[ar wheat and barley will be expensive.]<sup>e</sup> (7) And winds will increase, then many people will be ill from sties (of the eyes) and from coughing and vomiting.<sup>f</sup> (8) And wine will be abundant, but bulls, and sheep, and small cattle will perish, even dried peas will perish. (9) But oil will compensate (for) them.<sup>g</sup> (10) Then at the end of the year the harvest will be wearisome<sup>h</sup> for nine days, but afterwards there will be rain. (11) And great blessing will be in (this year).<sup>i</sup>

5. *And if the year begins in Leo:* there will be Spring rains, then the soil will be deprived of<sup>a</sup> the north winds. (2) And grain will be enjoyed,<sup>b</sup> for<sup>c</sup> indeed the food of men will be good. (3) And wheat and rice and dried peas will be expensive, and wheat must be irrigated. (4) And oil and dates will be expensive. (5) And there will be disease among men. (6) And pregnant

(females)<sup>d</sup> and small cattle will die. (7) And the king<sup>e</sup> will strive with a king. (8) And the large locust(s)<sup>f</sup> will come and will not subside; but somewhat [gradually]<sup>g</sup> they will swirl in circles<sup>h</sup> and shrink (back) together.<sup>i</sup> (9) And the river Nile will overflow (at) its highest rate.<sup>j</sup> (10) And people will have headache(s). (11) Then at the end of the year there will be much rain.

6. *And if the year begins in Virgo:* everyone whose name contains Yūdh or Semkath, and Bēth, and Nūn will be diseased and robbed, and will flee from his home. (2) And (this misfortune) will occur in the beginning of the year.<sup>a</sup> (3) And shortage of water will be in every circle.<sup>b</sup> (4) And the first grain will not prosper. (5) And people will suffer (many) miseries<sup>c</sup> in winter and summer. (6) But the last grain will be harvested and it will be good. (7) And produce will be expensive in Hauran and Bithynia,<sup>d</sup> but at the end of the year it<sup>e</sup> will be inexpensive.<sup>f</sup> (8) Even wine will be less (expensive) and pleasant. (9) And dates will be abundant. (10) But oil will be expensive. (11) And wheat and barley will be valued, but dried pea(s) will be reduced in value. (12) And rain will be late and will not fall upon the earth until<sup>g</sup> thirty days before the Passover [feast].<sup>h</sup> (13) And the king<sup>i</sup> will strive with a king and will slay him. (14) And Alexandria will be lost.<sup>j</sup> (15) And [the Nil]e<sup>k</sup> will not overflow well. (16) And many ships will be wrecked. (17) But at the end of the year there will be a sufficiency about everything.<sup>l</sup>

7. *And if the year begins in Libra:* there will be Spring rains. (2) And the year will be transformed. (3) And people will be spared<sup>a</sup> from the east wind. (4) And fig trees will not produce fruit.<sup>b</sup> (5) But dates and oil will be plentiful. (6) But wine will be expensive. (7) And wheat will be valued greatly. And the locust<sup>c</sup> will appear. (8) And a severe war will occur in Africa. (9) And people will have severe diseases. (10) And in the middle of the year rain will be held back (for) twenty days. (11) And cultivated<sup>d</sup> wheat will not ripen<sup>e</sup> well. (12) And all lands will be good. (13) And everyone whose name has a Yūdh or Bēth will be sick, and he will have anxiety, and will go into exile<sup>f</sup> from his land. (14) And wine will be damaged. (15) And adultery will increase, and (licentious) desire<sup>g</sup> will increase. (16) And

the king<sup>h</sup> will stay in one place. (17) And power will leave the land.<sup>l</sup> (18) And the nobles will flee to the sea, and there will be between (them) [in] the [sea]<sup>i</sup> a severe war. (19) And there will be in Galilee a severe earthquake. (20) And robbers<sup>k</sup> will gather<sup>l</sup> in Hauran and in Damascus.<sup>m</sup> (21) And the river Nile will overflow (at) its highest rate.<sup>n</sup> (22) And a severe plague will occur in Egypt, and it will be in [Gali]lee<sup>o</sup> as in Beth Bardune (the Place of Mules<sup>p</sup>).<sup>p</sup> (23) People will be troubled because of (the lack of) rain.

8. *And if the year begins in Scorpio:* the north wind will blow in the beginning of the year, and there will be many Spring rains. (2) And at the end of the year everything will be expensive. (3) And rain will diminish<sup>a</sup> until people recite<sup>b</sup> petition(s) and prayer(s), and beseech with alms the living God.<sup>c</sup> (4) And there will be disease among women who are pregnant. (5) And many men on account of affliction will migrate<sup>d</sup> from their countries. (6) And wheat and barley will be harvested very little, but dried peas will be harvested. (7) And there will be (sufficient) wine and oil. (8) And ulcers will develop within the bodies of men but will not injure<sup>e</sup> them. (9) And the Nile will overflow half of its (usual) rate.<sup>f</sup> (10) And (there will be) whispers (of hope) for small cattle.<sup>g</sup> (11) And everyone whose name has a Taw or Yūdh will become sick, but will recover health. (12) And everyone born in Scorpio (will) survive (his birth),<sup>h</sup> but at the end of the year he will be killed.

9. *And if the year begins in Sagittarius:* everyone whose name contains a Bēth of Pē will have misery and a severe disease, and in the beginning of the year it will increase in severity. (2) And men in many places will be troubled. (3) And in the land of Egypt there will be sown only a (very) little.<sup>a</sup> (4) And in the middle of the year there will be much rain. (5) But men will gather produce into granaries because of the (following) drought.<sup>t</sup> (6) And grain will not be pleasing. (7) Even<sup>e</sup> at the end of the year it will not be good. (8) But wine and oil will be considered good. (9) And adultery will increase and small cattle will die.

10. *And if the year begins in Capricorn:* everyone whose name contains a Qōph will become sick and be plundered and wounded

with a sword. (2) And the east<sup>a</sup> wind (will)<sup>b</sup> rule the year. (3) And everyone (should) sow (early) ; the last (to sow) will be unsuccessful. (4) And in the beginning of the year<sup>c</sup> [everything]<sup>d</sup> will be expensive. (5) Waves and storms will increase, (so that) they (who are on the sea)<sup>e</sup> will die. (6) And in the middle of the year produce will be expensive. (7) And thieves will increase. (8) And governmental officials will be cruel. (9) Even wasps and (small)<sup>f</sup> reptiles of the earth will increase, and they will harm many people. (10) And many people (will move)<sup>g</sup> from one place to another because of the existing war. (11) And wars will increase on the earth. (12) Then at the end of the year rain will diminish. (13) And in (some) places grain will be harvested, but in (other) places grain will perish. (14) And there will be a disease in Damascus and in Hauran. (15) And there [will be]<sup>h</sup> a famine along the [se]a-coast. (16) And adultery will increase. (17) And people will recite<sup>i</sup> petition(s) and prayers and (observe) a fast and (give) alm(s) (in hope for) rain. (18) And irrigated grain will be good.

11. *And if the year begins in Pisces:* everyone whose name contains a Kāph or Mīm (will) become sick then (eventually) slain.<sup>a</sup> (2) The year will be good. (3) And the grain (will be) good and healthy. (4) And there will be Spring rains. (5) And fishing in the sea will be [prosper]ous.<sup>b</sup> (6) And when (the sea) billows ships will be wrecked. (7) And (people)<sup>c</sup> will become sick. (8) And wine and oil and wheat, each of them, shall be pleasing. (9) Then<sup>d</sup> grain will be good.<sup>e</sup> (10) There will be wars and much desolation in cities ; and villages will be transferred and displaced from one place to another.<sup>f</sup> (11) And robbers<sup>g</sup> will come from Palestine and [many will wa]ge<sup>h</sup> a great war against three cities. (12) And the Romans (sometimes will be) victorious and (sometimes) easily overcome. (13) And there will be a great disease among men. (14) And there will come forth a black man who seeks the kingdom. (15) And the house of the kingdom will perish. (16) And the king will seek to understand what men are saying, and (will) lay waste many cities. (17) And no one will be able to stop him ; and the fear of God and his mercies (will) be absent from him. (18) Then at the end

of the year there will be peace and prosperity among men, and love and harmony among all the kings who are on the entire earth.

12. [*The section on*]<sup>a</sup> *Aquarius, which (of course) is before Pisces nevertheless because of a mistake, was copied in the (following manner*<sup>b</sup>: when<sup>c</sup> the year begins in Aquarius, everyone whose name contains a Lāmadh or Pē (will) become sick or utterly ruined by marauders.<sup>d</sup> (2) And in the beginning of the year rain will increase. (3) And the Nile will overflow (at) its full rate.<sup>e</sup> (4) And Egypt (will rule)<sup>f</sup> over Palestine. (5) [Barley]<sup>g</sup> will be harvested. (6) And lamb(s) and sheep will prosper. (7) And the west wind (will) govern the year. (8) And the king will fight with a king.<sup>h</sup> (9) And the first grain will prosper; but dried pea(s) will not sprout (very) much although they<sup>i</sup> (will) be harvested. And merchants (will) seek help<sup>j</sup> from the living God.<sup>k</sup>

### Notes

#### Chapter 1

<sup>a</sup> The translation attempts to convey the meaning behind the cryptic language without becoming a subjective paraphrase. It is generally an idiomatic rendering; when necessary the literal meaning is supplied in the notes. Round brackets denote words that must be added to obtain idiomatic English; square brackets circumscribe letters or words that have been restored. I have tried to be consistent, even when a principle results in the loss of an attractive translation. 'NSH' (people) is distinguished from BNYNSH' (men); agricultural terms are translated by the same word, TMRT' (date), BWR' (produce), PRDT' (corn), 'llT' (harvest), ZR' (grain), H'T' (wheat), DQ' (dried-peas), S'R' (barley) DWZ' (rice). Chapters and verses are given here for the first time.

The Treatise begins on fo. 81b. Underlining denotes rubrication in the manuscript. MS.: W'LM' (world, age); ed. corr.: WKLM': (whatever). According to the author of Jubilees, Shem inherited Palestine when the earth was distributed among the sons of Noah. The land given to Ham is hot, that to Japheth cold, but that to Shem is neither hot nor cold (see Jub. viii. 12-30, esp. vs. 18). According to the Book of the Bee (ch. 21), Noah commands Shem "to see the sources of the rivers and the seas and the structure of the earth" (ET: E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Bee* (Anec. Oxon., Sem. Ser. 1.2; Oxford, 1886), p. 35).

<sup>b</sup> Nothing—not even a dot or space—distinguishes the title from the body of the text; both are on the same line and in red ink.

<sup>c</sup> The author obviously is thinking about the Houses (Geoarc) of the zodiac which change approximately every two hours as the earth daily rotates on its axis. He is not referring to the Signs (Heliarc) of the zodiac which divide the year into

twelve parts as the earth revolves around the sun. Each year would begin in a different House ; but years begin in the same Sign for intervals of approximately 2,000 years. Since the beginning of recorded history years have begun in only three Signs : Taurus, Aries, and Pisces.

<sup>d</sup> Waw copula is translated in numerous ways : “ then ”, “ and ”, “ although ”, “ but ”, “ even ”, “ for ”. In a more idiomatic translation the superfluous Waw would be omitted.

<sup>e</sup> Lit. “ come to pass ”.

<sup>f</sup> Lit. “ And grain, height will not be to it ”.

<sup>g</sup> The pronoun refers back to Aries.

<sup>h</sup> Fo. 81b ends. Lit. “ will overflow a good overflow ”.

<sup>i</sup> Perhaps this sentence means that there will be meteoric showers.

<sup>j</sup> In this text NEZ'AR (it will become feeble) means “ it will be eclipsed ”.

See 4.4. In Syriac “ the waning moon ” is sahrâ khadh ḥassîr.

<sup>k</sup> A lacuna of 50 mm., space for approximately 14 letters. Ed. proposes : [DMT LWT RYSh Sh]NT'.

<sup>l</sup> “ Blight ” or “ mildew ”.

<sup>m</sup> Lit. “ they will be valued ” ; but “ wheat ” is literally “ grains of wheat ”.

<sup>n</sup> WZYN' means “ and weapons ” but in some phrases denotes “ war ”.

However, our author in 1:9 uses QRB' to denote war. Mingana suggested emending the text to ZW', “ earthquake ”.

<sup>o</sup> Palestine is the region.

<sup>p</sup> The MS. incorrectly has a dot over the Hē.

## Chapter 2

<sup>a</sup> See note n, chap. 1. Mingana emended the text to ZW'.

<sup>b</sup> Lit. “ it ”.

<sup>c</sup> “ Abundant ” and “ nobles ” are both from rawr<sup>e</sup>bhâ. A Syriac author may have chosen these similar words to link the two thoughts ; or a translator into Syriac may have been conditioned by the word he had just used.

<sup>d</sup> Lit. “ them ”.

<sup>e</sup> A lacuna of 10 mm., which is approximately the size of MṬR' in the preceding line. Parts of the Mīm and 'Ālaph are barely visible. WMṬR', moreover, is written in the margin.

<sup>f</sup> This phrase is unattractive and unsophisticated in Syriac. QṬYNTW', “ leanness ”, is usually a word with good connotations : “ fineness ”. 'BD, “ cease ”, literally means “ perish ” (see the next verb in the text).

<sup>g</sup> Cf. 1:7 in which the verb is imperfect ; here it is an active participle.

<sup>h</sup> A plural noun in Syriac.

<sup>i</sup> *Legumen aridum*, cf. R. Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1, cols. 937 f. Also see R. Köbert's *Vocabularium Syriacum*, p. 45. Mingana, incorrectly : “ the watered cereals ”.

<sup>j</sup> Lit. “ its measure ”.

## Chapter 3

<sup>a</sup> *πρόσωπον*.

<sup>b</sup> There may be a play on words between garb<sup>e</sup>yâ (north) and garbâ (leprosy)

<sup>c</sup> The scribe writes twice “ a harsh war ”.

<sup>d</sup> A lacuna of approximately 12 mm., just space enough for NṬ'B: “ will be good ”. The scribe extends the Ṭ far above the other consonants and here it is visible above the lacuna.

<sup>e</sup> W'QWBR' is an error for W'WQBR'. In Syriac MSS. the consonants Q and W are easily confused; in this manuscript they are distinguishable.

<sup>f</sup> Mingana was surprised by this verb form; it is an Aphel act. part. mas. pl. masgîn.

<sup>g</sup> A lacuna of approximately 13 mm., or enough space for five or six consonants plus the final 'Ālaph, which is barely visible. Mingana restored WPRSY' “ and the Persians ”. This restoration is philologically possible, but the Romans fought the Egyptians and Parthians. “ Egyptians ” is unlikely as a restorator because the bottom of the Ṣ in MṢRY' would have been visible since the lacuna does not extend far enough below the line to absorb the long infralinear tail (see MṢRYN in line nine of the same folio). Restore: [WPRTWY]': “ [and the Parthian]s ”.

<sup>h</sup> Lit. “ them ”.

<sup>i</sup> The verbs and their forms in this sentence are identical with the first two verbs in the preceding sentence.

## Chapter 4

<sup>a</sup> Fo. 82a ends.

<sup>b</sup> Lit. “ And the Nile will ascend half its ascent ”.

<sup>c</sup> See note j, chap. 1.

<sup>d</sup> Mingana forgot to translate this sentence.

<sup>e</sup> A lacuna of approximately 50 mm. Another hand has added these words in the right margin of fo. 82b. This hand appears to have written N'QDN (“ will be burned ”) instead of N'QRN (“ will be expensive ”). See 2:5, “ produce will be exceedingly expensive ”.

<sup>f</sup> The word is not found in the Syriac lexicons by R. Payne Smith and R. Köbert (but cf. C. Brockelmann, p. 737). Emend the Rēsh to a Dālath by simply moving a dot and compare the Arabic das'atun, “ vomiting ” (E. W. Lane bk. 1, pt. 3, p. 879). Mingana (without explanation): “ back aches ”.

<sup>g</sup> Lit. “ will make them equal ”; taking NShW' as an Aphel imperfect Mingana: “ will make up for them ”.

<sup>h</sup> Mingana incorrectly stated that the MS. has T'BD; it has T'QD, which should be emended to T'QR (cf. 2:5). Strictly speaking this restoration is not an emendation since a consonant is not altered; only one diacritical dot is moved

<sup>i</sup> Lit. “ it ”.

## Chapter 5

<sup>a</sup> Mingana: "will be scorched by". Although MN often denotes the agent of an action, MN with 'BD means "to be deprived of". If this document was written in Alexandria, then the loss of the north wind would also mean the loss of rain. Clouds heavy with water would form over the Mediterranean to the north of this city and not over the desert in the south. It is noteworthy that 3:1 refers to rain coming from the north wind.

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "be beloved". Mingana: "corn will not be injured".

<sup>c</sup> δέ.

<sup>d</sup> Apparently, because of the context, only animals are meant. No distinction is drawn between men and women; the Syriac noun (BNYNSh'), translated "men" in 5:2, 5:6 and elsewhere, is generic.

<sup>e</sup> Cf. 6:13 and 12:8. The MS. has the plural "kings", but the verb is clearly singular. If the dots for the plural are not ignored—as they should be since they appeared relatively late in Syriac manuscripts—and if the verb is emended to the plural—by merely affixing WN—then the sentence would mean: "And kings will strive with the king [= the Roman Emperor]."

<sup>f</sup> Here and in 7:7 "locust" is singular. Collective nouns representing animals in Syriac may take singular or plural verbs (cf. T. Nöldeke's *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, pp. 251 f.), but it is odd to have in one sentence both singular ("it will come and it will not subside") and plural verbs ("they will swirl . . . they will shrink [back]").

<sup>g</sup> The lacuna measures 11 mm. or enough space for four or five consonants. The final 'Alaph is visible and is attached to a preceding consonant. The top of a Lāmadh may be discerned. Restore probably [QLYL]' (qallilā), which with the previous qallil means "little by little", or "gradually".

<sup>h</sup> Mingana misread the MS., which has DWR' LDWR' not DWK' LDWK'.

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "And the large locust will come [β mas. sing.], and it [*sic*] will not decrease, but somewhat little [by little] they will turn back from circle to circle and they will shrink one with another." Mingana: "A considerable number of locusts will make their appearance and their number will decrease but slightly . . . [Mingana's desire not to emend] they will turn from one place to another and they will be gathered together." The Syriac is difficult to translate because of the conflicting verbs, idioms, cryptic style, and lacuna.

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "its highest overflow".

## Chapter 6

<sup>a</sup> Mingana claimed that there "are evidently some words missing here", and left the sentence open: "And there will be at the beginning of the year [. . .]." The line in the MS. ends with "in the beginning of the year" and the author refers frequently to the "beginning", "middle", and "end" of the year; it is possible that a line or more has been omitted due to homoeoteleuton. In fact, three lines below this one the last word is "year". Another line could have ended in "year" and the copyist could have inadvertently omitted it as his eye returned to "the year" which ended it, thinking it was the one he had just

copied. This error is one of the most frequently committed by scribes. Nevertheless, there is no evidence in the MS. that words have been omitted; scribes corrected this manuscript (cf. note e, chap. 4; and d, chap. 8), and the phrase can be translated sensibly to refer to what precedes. There is, therefore, no need to assume that some words are missing.

<sup>b</sup> Mingana misread the MS.: "in some places". See note h, chap. 5.

<sup>c</sup> Lit. "will have miseries". Mingana: "will be in distress and sickness".

<sup>d</sup> Linking a plain in Transjordan with a region in Northwest Asia Minor seems odd. Note that in 1:11 Hauran is joined in thought with Damascus. Perhaps "Bithynia" was originally "Batanaea", which is just north of Hauran.

<sup>e</sup> Following the correction of "they" to "it".

<sup>f</sup> Lit. "be valued little".

<sup>g</sup> Lit. "the thirty days to Passover". Mingana: "during thirty days down to the time of Passover".

<sup>h</sup> At this point the MS. has a lacuna of 13 mm., which is space for five or six consonants. Restore [ʿadh ʿidhâ]: [feast]. Cf. John ii. 23.

<sup>i</sup> The MS. has a plural noun; one should ignore the dots for the plural because the following singular pronoun demands a singular antecedent. Cf. 5:7 and 12:8.

<sup>j</sup> Mingana: "Living in Alexandria will be dear".

<sup>k</sup> The lacuna measures 12 mm. and a final Semkath is partly visible. There is room for a Lāmadh. NYLWS (Nile) occupies the required amount of space in line 12 of this folio. If further confirmation for the restoration is needed SLQ ("to overflow") is used above to describe the movement of the Nile in 1:4 2:11, 3:9, 4:2, and 5:9. Restore W[NYLW]S: "and [the Nil]e".

<sup>l</sup> Another possible translation: "worth for everything". Mingana "moderation in everything".

## Chapter 7

<sup>a</sup> Lit. "will spare from the east wind". Perhaps the verb form should be changed to the Ethpa., "They will make supplication to the east wind".

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "they will not have in them fruits".

<sup>c</sup> Fo. 82b ends.

<sup>d</sup> The Syriac noun seems to be a Greek loan word, ἀρμονία, which can mean "well-ordered". Since the Greek word also denotes "means of joining", the expression may denote a hybrid wheat. The Greek noun, however, is not reported to have been used in an agricultural sense. Mingana merely transliterated the word.

<sup>e</sup> Emend the text as Mingana suggested. Although the ʿĒ is clear in this particular word it is easily confused with the Nūn.

<sup>f</sup> Another possible translation: "into captivity". A more expert Syriac translator (or author) perhaps might have used simply one word and not four since gallî, the Pa. of g<sup>e</sup>lâ, means "go into exile (or captivity)". Mingana "and will emigrate from his country".

<sup>g</sup> Yûʿabhâ, "earnest desire", usually has a good connotation.

<sup>h</sup> The Roman Emperor is probably meant, cf. 1:5.

<sup>i</sup> The same word as in 7:13. Possibly "earth" is meant (so Mingana).

<sup>j</sup> Restore [BYM]<sup>o</sup>: “[in] the [sea]”. The last consonant looks like an ’Alaph. The lacuna is 10 mm., the precise size of the preceding BYM<sup>p</sup>. As seen repeatedly (cf. 7:15), the author tends to repeat the same word. Mingana does not attempt a restoration, and gives no indication in the translation that there is a lacuna. Although the space is ideal for BYNT[HWN], “between [them]”, the final ’Alaph resists this restoration.

<sup>k</sup> λησθήσ.

<sup>l</sup> Mingana emended the text to NPQWN, “will appear”.

<sup>m</sup> Compare 1:11 and 10:15, in which the scribe spells Hauran correctly and Damascus without the Waw after Mim.

<sup>n</sup> Lit. “all of it its overflow”. Cf. 1:4.

<sup>o</sup> Restore probably Ḥ[GLY]L<sup>o</sup>, “in [Gali]lee”; the first and last two consonants and the bottom of the Gāmal are visible.

<sup>p</sup> This sentence is problematical. Contrast Mingana: “In Egypt there will be a cruel pest, which will be in . . . that is to say mules.” Further research on this document should clear up some textual problems.

#### Chapter 8

<sup>a</sup> This verb was used in 1:6 and 4:4 to describe the eclipse of the moon.

<sup>b</sup> “People” is a true plural and should take a plural verb. See Nöldeke’s *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, p. 251.

<sup>c</sup> Mingana’s translation is an expanded paraphrase: “and rain will be scarce that people will address prayers and supplications to the living God, for the sake of food.”

<sup>d</sup> This lacuna of 13 mm. can be restored easily because a later hand has written the missing words in the left margin. Restore N[ShNWN MN]: “th[ey will migrate]”.

<sup>e</sup> The verb is singular; it should be plural.

<sup>f</sup> Lit. “overflow half of its overflow”. Cf. 4:2.

<sup>g</sup> Mingana stated concerning 8:10, which he omitted from his translation: “There is here a Syriac sentence for which I cannot find any satisfactory meaning”. Cf. 5:6 and 9:9. R. Payne Smith (col. 672) lists under gawgâ the following: “locutio secreta, . . . prayers, recommendations”. We have reserved “prayer” to represent ṢLWT<sup>h</sup>.

<sup>h</sup> Lit. “he is alive”. According to 8:12 the author believes that the zodiac determines not only the characteristics of each year but also the fate of people according to the time of their birth, an idea featured in 4QCryptic (see the Introduction above).

#### Chapter 9

<sup>a</sup> Lit. “And the land of Egypt they will not sow in it anything except a little of something.”

<sup>b</sup> Lit. “failure of rain”.

<sup>c</sup> Usually the author reserves something good for the end of the year.

## Chapter 10

<sup>a</sup> The original scribe observed that he had omitted the Nūn in this word and restored it above the line.

<sup>b</sup> This verb and the next one are participles.

<sup>c</sup> Fo. 83a ends.

<sup>d</sup> When the scribe turned the folio over and began to copy the text on the back he apparently omitted the noun. Following 8:2 restore [KLMDM]: “[everything]”.

<sup>e</sup> Cf. 2:12, and 1:10. Mingana thought the subject again had been omitted. Perhaps it has; but the text is cryptic and is comprehensible as extant.

<sup>f</sup> Sheršâ denotes vermin, and small creeping things like snakes and mice; large reptiles are represented by raḥshâ.

<sup>g</sup> Mingana claimed that a verb has been omitted. But a verb is not demanded; the cryptic style and the prepositional phrase “from place to place” can justify a non-verbal sentence.

<sup>h</sup> Mingana restored this lacuna with BSPR[YM]', which is impossible. A Yūdh clearly and Mīm partly are visible. A lacuna of 10 mm. remains after which there is a Waw and 'Ālaph; restore BSPR YM['] NH]W': “there [will be] along the [se]a-coast”.

<sup>i</sup> Mingana attempted to emend the text to NSQWN and placed this verb in the text itself. The text should not be altered; cf. 8:3 in which NPQ also means “to recite”.

## Chapter 11

<sup>a</sup> Mingana thought the text contained WMTDBYZ, relegated this reading to the notes with “sic!”, and placed WMTBZZ in his text. The text is not written neatly but seems to contain WMTDBH, “and (will) be slain”.

<sup>b</sup> A lacuna of 5 mm.; restore, with Mingana: N[S]GWN. The top of the Gāmal is visible. Lit. “And sea fishing will [inc]rease”.

<sup>c</sup> Mingana claimed that the “subject has been omitted by the copyist”. But “people” may be presupposed because of the numerous preceding phrases; cf. e.g. 10:10, 17; 9:2, 5; 8:3. Note esp. 7:9: “And people will have severe diseases.” Non-specialists in Syriac should be informed that Syriac verbs contain subjects, although they are indefinite pronouns. The present verb means “they will become sick”.

<sup>d</sup> δέ.

<sup>e</sup> Mingana misread the text; ignore his “[sic]”.

<sup>f</sup> Lit. “from place to place”.

<sup>g</sup> ληστής.

<sup>h</sup> Mingana failed to note in his text that there is here a lacuna of 12 mm. Clearly visible is the following: W[ ]M̄HWN. Mingana placed in his text WNMIHWN. A Nūn, which takes up only 2 mm., will not fill the lacuna, which needs from four to six letters. DYN, “then”, plus Nūn is attractive in terms

of space, but DYN does not begin a sentence. In 3:6 and 3:7 "will make" was is N'BDWN, but this is impossible here because of the extant Mīm and Ḥēth. A key is supplied by the remnant of a S<sup>e</sup>yāmē, and Gāmal or Lāmadh above the space; restore: W[SGY''N]MḤWN. SGY'' fits neatly; see the third line on this folio.

<sup>1</sup>The document originally ended on this very positive note. The ending of the twelve years according to the zodiac is influenced by the author's contemporaries' emphasis that the future age would be one of peace and prosperity upon the entire earth.

## Chapter 12

<sup>a</sup> [NWGR' D] appears to be hidden behind pencilled marks.

<sup>b</sup> This opening was added by a copyist.

<sup>c</sup> The usual introductory formula is broken, probably by the copyist who added the preface.

<sup>d</sup> Lit. "from plundering".

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "overflow its full overflow".

<sup>f</sup> The preposition "over" indicates the meaning suggested above. Mingana claimed a verb had been omitted.

<sup>g</sup> Restore [S'R']: "[barley]". The noun must be feminine because the verb is feminine. Cf. 2:8.

<sup>h</sup> Cf. 5:7 and 6:13.

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "it [will] be harvested".

<sup>j</sup> Change M'DRN' ("helpers") to M'DRNWT' ("helps").

<sup>k</sup> See note i, chap. 11.