Apocryphal and Esoteric Sources in the Development of Christianity and Judaism

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COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS OF ARMENIA (*MATENADARAN*), YEREVAN

# Apocryphal and Esoteric Sources in the Development of Christianity and Judaism

*The Eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, and Beyond*

*Edited by*

Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev


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# Introduction

> Their impieties [...] required the whole element of water to wash them away, and overwhelmed their memories with themselves; and so shut up the first windows of time, leaving no histories of those longevous generations, when men might have been properly historians, when Adam might have read long lectures unto Methuselah, and Methuselah unto Noah. For had we been happy in just historical accounts of that unparallel'd world, we might have been acquainted with wonders ...
>
> THOMAS BROWNE, *Christian Morals* (1716), III. I

Over recent decades our acquaintance with apocryphal and para-Biblical literature has deepened considerably and this has allowed us to see the Scriptural, exegetical, liturgical and artistic sources of early Christianity in a new light. We are now better able to discern, in numerous elements of Christian traditions, both Eastern and Western, an indebtedness to texts of Jewish or Gnostic origins. Scholars have demonstrated how the literature written during the last centuries of the Second Temple (ca 200 BCE–70 CE) provided inspiration for Christian authors and artists of diverse linguistic, regional and national traditions. Furthermore, this was the case even when the 'explicit meaning' of such documents seemed to contradict New Testament writings. Apocryphal texts have continued to influence Christendom throughout its history.

Apocryphal writings represent a precious historical source, still largely neglected, for the exploration of both the communities from which they arose and those by whom they were adopted during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. A number of such writings were intended to explain the emergence of local Churches, to demonstrate their antiquity, to justify their autonomous structures and to defend the validity of their traditions. However, most of the texts that came to be considered 'apocryphal' were transmitted not out of an institutional need, nor with institutional support, but because they attracted the interest of both clerics and lay people—an interest spontaneous and unregulated. Their proliferation should, therefore, be regarded as a response to those existential and cosmological questions which had been raised by an acquaintance with the Hebrew Bible and by Christianity, yet could not be answered

exhaustively by the texts officially sanctioned by the Churches: the Scripture, Patristic exegesis, liturgy, the official corpus of hagiography, homiletic literature, or the definitions of the Councils. Precisely to such apocryphal and para-Biblical texts is drawn our main attention.

Seldom verified or authorized, and often rejected by ecclesiastical bodies, numerous apocryphal texts had their own process of development, undergoing significant transformations, often to become a medium of literary and artistic elaboration and mythological creativity. Activities involving the transmission of apocryphal texts were a response to a variety of concerns and took place in diverse and often dissimilar settings. Some may be understood as participating in an attempt to investigate the human past and to open 'the first windows of time' (Thomas Browne). Others reflect attempts to predict the future or to peer into the heavenly realm. Both sometimes undertake an etymological quest for a key to particular Biblical words.

Apocryphal texts played a part, often unacknowledged, in religious controversies; they influenced iconography; their presence can be detected not only in liturgies, but also in spells and in magical rites. By means of apocryphal legends Biblical ideas and images also spilt over into man's secular life: such legends underlay the shaping and accreting of narratives, the development of oral traditions and folklore and much else. As for Christian iconography, it was not only governed by texts, but was sometimes directly influenced by traditions transmitted orally, without any mediation of a written source, so that one may even claim, as is done in this volume, the existence of 'visual apocrypha' (Felicity Harley).

Different nuances of retelling, different interpretations and expansions of early sources can lay bare the interests of the narrators and their intended auditors and readers. Through the centuries the elaboration by scribes in copying apocryphal texts can provide a wealth of information, whether about the broader culture or a scribe's specific context. Consequently, apocryphal literature can give us access to the self-understanding of the communities in the midst of which narrators, writers and copyists lived, as well as to their communities' world pictures. This is not provided through their Churches' normative or canonical writings.

In the transmission of apocrypha one aspect should be especially stressed here: the phenomenon of revising Biblical stories and of expanding them in texts, rituals, figurative arts and oral accounts in diverse cultural and ethnic settings. The evidence of apocrypha indicates that copyists, authors, artists and narrators often conceived of themselves living not in a post-Biblical era, but in direct continuity with the Biblical patriarchs and against the background of their vicissitudes. In iconography, the boundaries between the canonical and the apocryphal are so faint that the apocryphal sources even of popular scenes

were forgotten or were left unacknowledged. Even the Protestant Reformers overlooked apocryphal elements, not always perhaps unwittingly.

Certain themes, motifs and images deriving from Second Temple Judaism, which are not present in the canonical Scriptures of Jews and Christians, were inherited by both, and often transmitted without polemical purposes. Each tradition, however, elaborated such themes in its own way, so that the place occupied by them in Christianity is not analogous to their place in Judaism. Nevertheless, the investigation of these two religious worlds may be undertaken as a comparative enterprise, and their divergent voices may sound in polyphony (Hartmut Leppin).

To this scope also contribute the essays that focus not on the dominant traditions within Judaism and Christianity, but on those which developed outside their respective boundaries: the Samaritans, the followers of John the Baptist and the mediæval dualists of Christian origin. In order to achieve a stereoscopic picture of the legacy of apocryphal and para-Biblical literatures, the volume also examines the way in which late antique authors perceived the emerging Christianity against the background of coeval mystery cults and the way Christianity was seen in the Iranian world; it looks at Jewish interactions with Manichæan, Mandæan and Mithraic traditions, as well as at Christian contacts with Mazdeism and the Chaldæan oracles. No synthesis of such complex and divergent phenomena can be attempted in the compass of these introductory pages. Instead, we limit ourselves here to charting some of the avenues explored in the following essays.

The present volume pays special attention to the Christian East and to texts preserved in Coptic, Ethiopian, Syriac, Persian, Armenian and Slavonic. In the East the boundaries of the Biblical canon have never been as clear-cut as in the Latin West; Biblical codices often include texts which in the West were rejected and forgotten. The flexible nature of the Oriental canons of the Scripture, the porosity of their boundaries, allowed numerous apocryphal texts to become integral parts of a living religious culture. This created a complex and unpredictable interplay of diverse and even conflicting elements. The tension between the Church's normative writings and what it deemed apocryphal prevented Christian traditions from being identified with rigid and self-contained systems. The symbiosis between 'canonical' and 'apocryphal', as reflected in literature, liturgy, the figurative arts of Eastern Christianities, and even in their folklore, has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Standard works on the history of the Church have much invested in the maintaining of norms and standards. One of the explanations for the survival of distinctive Oriental Christianities after the Islamic conquests—and up to the present—is to be located within this tension which, following Yurij Lotman, can be defined as the 'dual' character of numerous Christian cultures.

Although *apocrypha* originally meant 'things hidden' or 'concealed', only a limited number of the documents that we now call 'apocryphal' actually claim to contain esoteric knowledge; still fewer can echo secret transmission of religious ideas within distinct and self-delimited groups. Nevertheless, texts which were written between the third century BCE and the second century CE, and which remained outside the canons of either Jewish or Christian Scripture, invited mystical speculation, dramatically or subtly changing the outlook on the Hebrew Bible and on the mysteries and riddles present within the Biblical text. Indeed, they also underlie the New Testament writings. A number of contributions to this volume allow us to catch a glimpse of some of—in Gershom Scholem's terms—the 'religious possibilities' inherent in ancient Judaism and in its Scripture.

During the Christian Middle Ages, the very term 'apocryphal' was sometimes construed as synonymous with the hiddenness of God, of the divine Trinity and of the 'mysteries', i.e. the sacraments celebrated by the Church. The existence of books 'concealed', or 'secret', sprang, as it were, from the very essence of the Christian religion. There are, besides, apocryphal books which inspired distinctly esoteric currents within both Judaism and Christianity and changed the course of the history of each. Such an esoteric element shared by both religions is the focus of Part One.

In recent decades, scholars have paid attention to the role that apocalyptic literature, and in particular the *Revelation of John*, played in mediæval culture and in the mediæval interpretation of the past. Strikingly, the analogous role of the accounts of beginnings, which gave time and history a soteriological value, has seldom been accorded such attention. Yet we may recall that a mere recitation of 'narratives of the beginning', whether in Babylonian antiquity or in the European Middle Ages, could be endowed with performative or magical qualities. One of the central themes that this volume seeks to explore is the perceptions of the origins of the human race—as presented in exegetical, liturgical and iconographic sources.

By defining the nature of the human and the relation between human beings and their Creator, the accounts of the origins in *Genesis* marked an inescapable 'vanishing point' within every interpretation of a vision, every reflection on a heavenly journey, every mystical teaching and every icon. This is already apparent within the Bible itself: 'Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?' (Prov. 30. 4; and henceforth: *Baruch* 3. 26–36; *II Baruch* 48. 2,5,7,8; *passim*). The interpretation of Creation in *Genesis* was one of the main preoccupations of mediæval Jewish mystics. The accounts

of the beginnings in the opening pages of the Bible, whose diverse retellings are often possessed of a pronounced esoteric dimension, are also present as a watermark in all Christian thinking, rituals and arts. Through apocryphal texts, their revisions and interpretations, and through the figurative arts inspired by them, we can disclose the extent to which the first human beings occupied the Christian mind.

Various sources tell of the eschatological expectations which the first human beings transmitted to their posterity. The forestalling of the process of history and the anticipation of the last age are, according to Charles A.A. Bennett (1923), inherent in mystical experience. Mystical knowledge was even regarded as a recovery of that once possessed by Adam. Indeed, some sources speak of a secret knowledge passed on by Adam to his progeny. Transmission of divine revelation through Adam and the patriarchs would add substance to the bond between creatures and the Creator, between earth and heaven. The first chapters of *Genesis* were, therefore, not only perceived as the story of the origins of the Universe—a sequence of single and distinct events that had taken place in a remote past—but were also endowed with timeless and enduring validity for human nature and destiny; they foreshadowed the very structure of the cosmos and, in Michael E. Stone's words, its 'redemptive dynamic'.

Such a conception of the human past asked one to attain a disposition whereby one constantly projects one's life beyond the temporal horizons of the surrounding physical world: backwards, to a time before even one's remotest ancestors, and forwards, to the '*new* heavens' and the '*new* earth' (Is. 65. 17; Rev. 21. 1,5; 2 Pet. 3. 13). Christianisation promised the discovery of a new history: the new religion situated the present between, at one extremity, the origins (including the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the Flood and Noah's ark, which would explain the human condition as it is today) and, at the other, the End Times and the Last Adam. This transcendent horizon of human life conditioned the understanding of time and chronology and played a crucial role in the formation of both biographical and historiographical representations across East and West, imprinting on Christian civilisation a peculiar relation between spirituality and the description of the past.

Marc Bloch (1886–1944) maintained that by placing human destiny between the Fall and the Judgement, the Christian religion presents it as a long adventure. Bloch also suggested that this dimension of European civilisation would only be fully apprehended when historiography adopts comparative approaches which would enable historians to identify common cultural factors active within different societies across political and institutional boundaries. Such factors—notably, the shared apocryphal traditions and, in Bloch's words, 'tales of theological origin'—remain overlooked by a historiographical practice that

focuses exclusively on the development of institutions. The application of comparative methods to the history of Christianity enables us to relativize the role of institutions—secular or religious—as the dominant actors of historical narrative. By bringing together scholars who investigate the apocryphal legacy in diverse linguistic, regional, religious and national traditions, the present volume makes a step in the direction indicated by Bloch.

Narratives of origins also trace a direct line between Adam and the Messiah. Following Victor Aptowitzer, Joachim Jeremias, Benjamin Murmelstein, Sigmund Mowinckel and Gershom Scholem, numerous scholars since the 1920s have stressed the bond uniting the two. The advent of the Saviour is often accompanied by references to the vicissitudes of the first human beings (in particular, Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah and Shem). Adam is shaped in the anticipation and in the likeness of the future Saviour; in a vision he is shown the total course of the history of the world, including the messianic end; Jesus's Nativity is depicted as the fulfilment of the promises received by Adam, Eve and other antediluvian patriarchs; the new-born child is even visited by Eve who, suddenly reappearing in the world, recognises in him her Saviour. The Magi coming from a foreign country to Bethlehem are revealed as inheritors of a secret writing transmitted to their ancestors from the beginnings of the world through a chain of Biblical patriarchs; the visions that they are granted enable them to perceive in the infant Jesus an actor from the days of Creation.

Melchizedek, a mysterious figure who in *Genesis* 14 disappears as suddenly as he had appeared in the text, is identified as either Noah's son or grandson. He is said to bury Adam's body in the middle of the earth, the place where the creation of the earth was completed, where God also created Adam and where Adam's and his children's salvation shall be realised. There Melchizedek remains as a hidden priest ministering at the burial of the first human being until the appearance in the world of the eschatological saviour. By drawing out invisibly until that event the exercise of primæval priesthood, Melchizedek personifies both the expectation and the *typos* of the priestly Messiah. When he enters the cave of the Nativity, he confers on the new-born Jesus the priesthood which he had received at the dawn of the human history.

Chains of patriarchs linking Adam with the Messiah are also known in the Jewish tradition. Thus, from the seventh-century Book of Zerubbabel we hear of a sceptre given to the Messiah's mother by God, which had earlier been given to Adam, Moses, Aaron, Joshua and David. With this sceptre she fights the eschatological foes and later transmits it to her son. The link between protology and eschatology, and between the first human being and the Messiah, is the focus of Part Two.

The recognition of the Messiah by his contemporaries had to rely on ancient revelations and prophecies; that recognition, which only a few could achieve, was the precondition for the beginning of the Messiah's earthly ministry. Part Three is dedicated to the enigmatic signs prefiguring the Messiah's sudden advent and the figures who foretold and anticipated it, such as Elijah who in the Christian tradition was recognised as a type of John the Baptist. Several papers in this volume analyse pictorial representations of those figures to whom is ascribed special knowledge derived from an otherworldly source. These and other essays also explore the figures of the elect to whom, or through whom, were granted the revelations of the heavenly world, of various kinds of secret knowledge, of the end times and of the Son of Man. Foremost of these is the patriarch Enoch, as seen through the literature associated with his name. Visions, revelations of the angelic world and heavenly journeys are considered in Part Four.

Esotericism has been defined in diverse ways by authors who applied the term to phenomena of different periods and divergent religious traditions. Our focus here is not so much on secrecy or the occult as on the claim advanced by certain figures, groups, movements and texts to decipher 'the latent, inner sense of the Scripture' (Ithamar Gruenwald). To a large extent, such claims of esoteric knowledge shaped the religious and cultural history of the post-Biblical era. The definition of esotericism formulated by Antoine Faivre may be adopted to encompass the phenomena analysed in the present volume:

> [L]a *disciplina arcani* signifie surtout ceci: les mystères de la religion, la nature ultime de la réalité, les forces cachées de l'ordre cosmique, les hiéroglyphes du monde visible ne peuvent pas se prêter à une compréhension littérale, ni à une explication didactique ou univoque, mais doivent faire l'objet d'une pénétration progressive, à plusieurs niveaux, par chaque homme en quête de connaissance.[1]

**Part 1.** The volume opens with **Ithamar Gruenwald**'s paper 'The Exoteric Appearances of Jewish Esotericism'. In order to approach the theme of esoteric writings in the world of Biblical religions, the author focuses on the phenomenon of re-writing accounts relating to the Bible, both within the corpus of texts recognised as canonical and outside it. To what extent are the textual variants in the synoptic Gospels, for example, due to different sources? And to what

1 A. Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* vol. 1, Paris, 1996 (revised edition), pp. 31–32; quoted and discussed in M.E. Stone, *Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism*, Oxford, 2018, p. 15.

extent do they result from a competition between the authors of writings that pretended to a normative status in a community and that were intended to shape a new religious identity? Some re-written accounts, Gruenwald explains, pretend to disclose esoteric content of an earlier text. The ambition to propose a new meaning of a known text implies the belief that a hidden, or secret, message is intrinsic to the Biblical text itself. The different content is usually warranted by an angelic revelation; the novel text, allegedly inspired by God, suggests itself as the ultimate version of truth.

This picture, however, is complicated by the fact that the Hebrew Bible itself contains alternate versions of the same story, which, *ipso facto*, opens a door to further re-writings. Consequently, numerous alternate versions of Scriptural texts outside the Bible may also be regarded as an expansion of this inner Biblical phenomenon. Such a re-writing, however, stands in a dialectical tension with the injunction of *Deuteronomy* (itself being a re-written text) 4. 2, which enjoins: 'Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it.'

Gruenwald argues that a new version is not always the result of a hermeneutic enterprise, proposing to distinguish between the re-writing of an account and its interpretation: the latter always remains a note in the margin of a text, existing at its service, whereas re-writing pretends to produce an original document which can be juxtaposed with the former or even supersede it. Such cases are to be found in the Book of Jubilees which in many respects proposes a thorough revision of the stories from *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Although the Book of Jubilees does not present itself as a secret revelation, it wells out of the Scriptural story as its hidden content and in many respects aspires to replace it. According to Gruenwald, it is this ambition, discernible in the Book of Jubilees, which can clearly be regarded as esoteric. The provenance and the role of such esoteric features within the global architecture of this book, however, cannot always be identified.

In the midst of various Christian communities, the spread of writings considered 'hidden' or 'concealed' was dependent on their self-understanding and on the way they conceived of their relations with the outer world. Did Jesus's command 'to go into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk. 16. 15) allow for the existence of secret rites and secret doctrines within Christian communities? An instance of re-writing, or re-narrating, a story in Christian tradition is discussed by **Tobias Nicklas** in his paper 'The *Gospel of Peter* between the Synoptics, Second Century, and Late Antique "Apostolic Memoirs"'. Nicklas focuses on the passages about the Lord's passion and resurrection, which are preserved in a sixth–seventh century codex from Akhmîm in Upper Egypt. The lines speaking of the Lord 'being silent *as if* he felt no

pain' have sometimes provoked a rather unjustified suspicion of the docetic tendency of this text: did Christ's humanity express the Saviour's true identity or did it rather hide it? Since their discovery in 1886–1887, these passages have often been considered to belong to the Gospel of Peter mentioned by ancient Christian authors. Indeed, their storyline resembles the Gospels that would later be recognised as canonical. Nicklas's analysis has led him to posit that the fragments derive from a Jewish Christian circle of second-century Syria and that the original account, which could have been revised during the subsequent centuries, had represented a 're-enactment' of memories about Jesus. In its form, this text had to be a bridge between the genre of gospels and the late antique genre of 'Apostolic Memoirs' which is especially attested in Egypt.

The author of the Akhmîm document treated the text of the New Testament Gospels so freely that one cannot decide whether he used it as a *Vorlage* or only retained in his mind its main storyline (especially, including important and impressive motifs). He sets forth his own story which, whilst relying on texts that were included in the New Testament, does not always remain true to the details of its account. Nicklas explains this feature by the fact that in the second century the texts of the four Gospels were not available in all the Christian communities. Consequently, the author's lack of precision could be overlooked by his auditors or his readers who had memorized the main stories, but had no chance to read the Gospel text in detail.

In order to discuss the ways in which secret doctrines were perceived in Christianity, **Joseph Verheyden**, in his paper 'All Mysteries Revealed? On the Interplay between Hiding and Revealing and the Dangers of Heavenly Journeys according to the Ascension of Isaiah', proposes to focus on the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a Christian apocalyptic book written, admittedly, in the middle of the second century. The book is put together from material of different genres, and the history of its composition still remains a puzzle. It is even unclear whether the author was aware of Jewish authorship of the sources used by him. The *Ascension of Isaiah* tells the story of the brutal execution of the prophet Isaiah at the order of the evil king Manasseh because of Isaiah's reproaches addressed to the king and of the prophet's claim to have been granted a spiritual experience that had led him to travel through heavenly spheres and even to have seen God. In heaven the prophet beholds the story of Jesus's life, from his birth to his violent death. He watches, notably, Christ's passing through the heavenly spheres, which explains how the incarnation and the ascension will occur. One of the points on which different versions of the book disagree is whether or not, in the course of the revelation granted to him, the prophet beheld God's glory.

Verheyden outlines the decisive elements by which the revelation of hidden knowledge is characterised in the *Ascension of Isaiah*: it presupposes that the

divine message may not be disclosed unrestrictedly, yet it is its intrinsic quality that triggers the divulgation of this message; the divine author himself urges his messenger to reveal it. Whilst the message concerns the cosmic battle between God and Satan, its divulgation evinces and even sharpens the conflict between good and evil on earth. Its first victim, or rather martyr, becomes the messenger himself. According to Verheyden, one of the author's primary purposes is to show the dangers with which the disclosure of secret knowledge is fraught. In that sense the *Ascension of Isaiah* is as much a report of a heavenly journey and the revelation of heavenly mysteries, as a call and a warning to those faithful who wished to follow in the steps of the prophet and who claimed to have experienced similar visions.

The claim to keep hidden knowledge, or to have access to the hidden meaning of a text, is related to the stance of various Christian communities on mystery cults. Christian Fathers often used the vocabulary of the mystery religions, which they could have inherited from Philo. **Jan N. Bremmer**, in his paper 'Early Christianity and the Pagan Mysteries: Esoteric Knowledge?', discusses the way in which Christianity articulated its beliefs and its rites between the end of the second and the middle of the third century, precisely during the decades that preceded the important growth of the Christian religion. Celsus was one of the most heedful external observers of emerging Christianity. He was also acquainted with various Mystery cults, and his attitude to them was rather unequal. Whilst he displays an ambiguous attitude towards the Mithraic Mysteries and those of Sabazios, for example, he is much more positive about the Orphic, Samothracian and Eleusinian Mysteries, which he clearly considered as providing a certain kind of wisdom. Moreover, when comparing the Mysteries with Christianity, he takes them all together, without differentiating between them. He clearly regards Christianity as a 'secret doctrine', thus assimilating it to Mystery cults, and he understands Christians' avoidance of making statues and erecting temples as a token of that inner nature of the Christian doctrine. Celsus also mocks the Christians for celebrating their rites not in beautiful sanctuaries but in base places and amidst socially inferior people.

Celsus's opponent Origen seems to have been less informed about the pagan Mysteries, but as an Egyptian he certainly was knowledgeable regarding the Mysteries of Antinoos. Arguing against Celsus, Origen does admit that the Christians kept certain doctrines secret from those who were not baptised, in particular those regarding God, the Logos, the resurrection, the angels and the demons. He indirectly admits the validity of the language of mystery cults for the description of Christianity. Although these examples do not allow us to make global conclusions concerning the nature of Christianity during that period, they show nevertheless that, in some intellectual circles, external and

internal, a similarity between it and mystery cults was admitted. Yet to what extent such views were representative of early Christianity has—Bremmer suggests—to remain a mystery.

**Yuri Stoyanov**'s paper, 'The Medieval Dualist *Nachleben* of Early Jewish and Christian Esoteric Traditions: The Role of the Pseudepigrapha', contextualises some esoteric narratives amongst medieval dualist communities, focusing on Bogomilism and their subsequent reception in Catharism. The corpus of inner doctrines of the Bogomils in Macedonia and Bulgaria was largely indebted to earlier para-Biblical works, and notably *2 Enoch*, *3 Baruch*, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Vision of Isaiah* and *The Life of Adam and Eve*, as well as compilatory compositions such as the *Palæa Historica* and *Palæa Interpretata*. These and other works imparted to Bogomilism a number of foundational notions in diverse spheres such as cosmogony, cosmology, diabology, angelology, Christology, sacred history and eschatology. Mediæval reports and exposés of Bogomil doctrines display fragments of narratives which clearly represent elaborations of the stories of creation and flood from the book of *Genesis*. These narratives find immediate parallels in the miscellaneous pseudepigraphic works translated and circulated during the formative stages of Slavo-Byzantine learning and theology, which were particularly favourable for the reception of heterodox traditions and the emergence of doctrinal deviances. Amongst the central themes were the downfall of the angels and their corruption of humanity, the identity of the ringleader of the angelic apostasy and the fall of Adam and Eve.

The reports describing the initiation of the elite Bogomil class of the *teleoi* ('perfect') maintain that it evolved in stages. The believers were originally instructed in conventional Christian beliefs and ethics, a process which was followed by a progressive introduction to increasingly heretical precepts, until the overall system of the dualist teachings, safeguarded as the inner dualist doctrines, was presented to the neophyte. Those who attained the stage of the 'perfect' were regarded as protectors and repositories of Christ's genuine teaching which was disclosed—in the light of Mk. 4. 11—secretly to his chosen apostles and maintained and passed on in concealment. These doctrines drew especially on the newly translated apocryphal writings from late antiquity, which were largely spread in the medieval Slavic world, both amongst the mainstream Orthodox and the dissenting groups. Some dualist-leaning and Gnostic tendencies in these texts were interpolated and radicalised during their earlier transmission and adoption in sectarian or heterodox milieux. As a result, some of these traditions acquired a more pronounced esoteric dimension in Bogomil and Cathar circles, amongst which the absorbed pseudepigraphic accounts of heavenly rapture also influenced the reported practices of visionary mysticism and heavenly ascent pursued by their theological elites.

**Ezio Albrile** takes us to later times: his paper, 'The Esoteric Cardinal: Giorgios Gemistos, Bessarion and Theurgy', examines the career of the Chaldæan Oracles between Byzantium, Florence and Rome in the first half of the fifteenth century. These Oracles are a Middle Platonic writing datable, admittedly, to the end of the second–beginning of the third century CE, which were, in most cases, identified as god's speeches. According to *Souda*, an eleventh-century Byzantine lexicon, its authors were Julian the Chaldæan (the spiritual master of a Mystery circle) and his son Julian the Theurgist, Marcus Aurelius's contemporaries.

The decisive figure in communicating the wisdom of the Chaldæan oracles to the Renaissance world was the Byzantine erudite Giorgios Gemistos Plethon (ca 1360–1452) for whom it was one of the reference texts in his design of a radical religious reform. He also inspired the Florentine Platonic Academy that was conceived by Cosimo de' Medici (the Elder). Giorgios Gemistos must have learnt of the Chaldæan Oracles from one Elisha, the translator and commentator of Averroes into Hebrew and an expert in Kabbala. From indirect references we learn that Elisha attributed the Chaldæan Oracles to Zoroaster, reconnecting them with the traditions of the Iranian Magi who, according to Herodotus, had been experts in sacred things and in religious rituality. Giorgios Gemistos's disciple was Cardinal Bessarion who aspired to shape a new rituality within the Roman Catholic Church, drawing on both the Neoplatonists and the Chaldæan Oracles rather than on Biblical writings.

**Part 2.** As we have seen, in the *Ascension of Isaiah* the prophet's vision builds a bridge to the messianic times. Some texts discern signs of the future advent of the saviour already in the events of primæval history. Moreover, a number of 'apocryphal' texts speak not only of the expectation by primæval beings and patriarchs of a future redemption: conversely, the eschatological accomplishment can become the moment when the most remote past of the human race is recollected and its principal figures are revived. **Jean-Pierre Mahé**'s paper 'La création d'Adam à Noravanḳ. Théologie et narrativité' examines the enigmatic iconography, datable to the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, in the monastery Noravanḳ in northern Armenia. This iconography is tightly linked to the exegesis of the text from *Genesis* about the creation of the first human being. In the scene to which Mahé draws our attention, the creation of Adam by the Ancient of Days is interlaced with the representation of Christ's crucifixion. The author shows that this scene reflects the *Catechesis of St Gregory* transmitted in Agaṫangełos's *History*, which was edited between 428 and 451. The author of the *Catechesis* supposes that, since in the Scripture man is God's image, the Creator himself, in order to create man, must first have assumed human resemblance. This idea allows the artist of Noravanḳ to repre-

sent the invisible God in a visible form in the act of creation in Genesis, even though Armenian art usually prefers purely symbolic representations to the portrayal of divine persons.

We thus see a mysterious encounter of two figures who, in principle, are separated by an infinite time: on one side is the Creator who in the accompanying inscription is described as the 'Ancient of Days': his age implies his eternal existence and is also indicative of the age of the world at the moment of the Messiah's revelation (cf. *2 Baruch* 56. 3; 85. 10); on the other side is the Son of Man appearing in a given moment in the history of the world. This temporal distance is accentuated by the difference of size between the two. The scene suggests that whilst animating the newly moulded Adam, God envisages making him similar to the Son of Man. The appearance of the Prophet Daniel in the composition accentuates the eschatological dimension of the vision of the Ancient of Days in Noravanǩ. The resemblance of man to God, announced in the first account of creation in Genesis, is only completely realised in the passion of the new Adam whom we behold at the right hand of the Creator.

**Sergey Minov**'s paper, '*Translatio corporis Adæ*: Trajectories of a Para-Biblical Tradition', discusses the traditions relating to Adam's burial in Jerusalem. The author explains that this motif emerged at the intersection of two themes: Jesus's crucifixion on Golgotha and the typological connection between Adam and Christ. Numerous explanations of the arrival of Adam's body at Golgotha, which have been transmitted in diverse linguistic and cultural areas, developed from this motif. According to a Syriac tradition, preserved in an anthology of the eighth or the early ninth century, Noah took the remains of the forefather into the ark and after the flood divided them between his sons. It was Shem who brought them to Jerusalem. This, like analogous traditions transmitted in Armenia, elaborates on the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (third–sixth centuries). Coptic texts claim, on the other hand, that it was the waters of the flood that brought Adam's relics to Jerusalem. A Greek chronicle ascribed to Peter of Alexandria, composed most likely at the end of the ninth–beginning of the tenth century, relates that after his expulsion from Paradise Adam dwelt on an island in front of Eden. After his death angels took his remains thence to Golgotha.

Various versions of this tradition also reached the Slavic world. One explanation claims the appearance of Adam's remains in Jerusalem in the reign of King Solomon. The demons, asked by the king about the appropriate tree for the building of the temple, brought him a tree from Eden where it had been planted by Seth on his father's grave. When the demons pull the tree out, Adam's skull remains entangled in its roots and thus reaches Jerusalem. Examining further parallels to this story Minov hypothesises that the origins of para-Biblical mate-

rial related to Adam's skull should be sought in the multi-confessional milieu of Palestine during the eleventh–twelfth centuries, characterised as it was by exchanges between diverse Christians of East and West, whereas other traditions could have developed already on Slavonic soil. Minov's study demonstrates the importance of Slavonic literature as a repository of lost Greek para-Biblical traditions. Reflecting on the genesis and development of these legends, Minov speaks of a 'chain reaction', whereby a para-Biblical tradition of Adam's body on Golgotha, which had emerged already during the second–third centuries, triggered further the proliferation of para-Biblical material in remote lands of the north.

The link between the first and the second Adam is also explored by **Daniele Tripaldi** in his paper 'Apostles, Long Dead "Heretics", and Monks: Noncanonical Traditions on Angels and Protoplasts in Two Late Antique Coptic Apocalypses (7th–8th Century CE)'. Tripaldi takes into examination two Coptic texts dating, admittedly, to the seventh–eighth centuries, the *Investiture of Abbaton* and the *Mysteries of John*, which elaborate apocryphal Adam traditions. These works were mainly used in a liturgical context and were intended to explain the origin and the meaning of the chief liturgical celebrations. The *Investiture of Abbaton* speaks of the virgin soil, from which Adam would be created. In anticipation of all the crimes that man would commit, the pure clay resists the angels sent by God to fetch it. The Son of God then acts as the warrant for Adam, promising the Father to descend to earth and to restore Adam to his prelapsarian condition of the ruler of the created world. In the *Mysteries of John* Christ fashions his flesh into a grain of wheat. This grain Adam will sow, reap and, finally, eat. Both texts tend in different ways to conceive of the links between protology and eschatology. Thus, the *Investiture of Abbaton* underlines that the Son's incarnation is the *apokatastasis* of the world. The *Mysteries of John*, on the other hand, implicitly identifies the very first grain of wheat given to Adam as Christ's flesh, whilst presenting the Eucharistic bread as the first bread in human history, the same which after the fall saved Adam from starving.

The resemblance between the first and the second Adam was also present in Jewish thought of late antiquity. This idea is explored by **Andrei A. Orlov** who, in his paper 'Face as the Image of God in the Jewish Pseudepigrapha', examines the Jewish text of the middle of the first century CE, which is preserved in Old Slavonic and is known to us as *2 Enoch*. In chapter 44, we hear of the first human being created not merely after God's image, as in *Genesis* 1, but precisely 'in the likeness of God's face'. Nowhere is the Slavonic 'face' used in translating the Biblical account of man's creation. In order to explain the genesis of this motif, Orlov observes the replacement of the term *ṣelem* (image) with that of *panim* (countenance) in a series of Jewish texts regarding the Ladder of Jacob. Another first-century Jewish text only surviving in Slavonic, *The*

*Ladder of Jacob*, speaks of the ladder bridging earth and heaven, which was revealed to Jacob in a dream. According to the Slavonic apocryphon, the ladder had at its top the face of a man, upon which face God himself stood. Orlov observes that when God calls from that last step of the ladder to Jacob, who lies on the earth beneath, the face upon which God stands must appear from earth below as a distinct divine manifestation. Orlov also evokes various Rabbinic sources which, referring to Jacob's vision, speak of the patriarch's heavenly portrait depicted on the throne of glory. Moreover, in some texts this image is even understood as God's anthropomorphic glory.

In *2 Enoch* 22 the protagonist is brought before God's face, where his metamorphosis occurs, whereby the seventh patriarch regains the protoplast's prelapsarian luminosity, thus becoming the 'second Adam'. The new creation of Enoch thus signifies a return of humankind to the initial condition of the first created human being who had been modelled, according to *2 Enoch* 44, after the face of God. This description of Enoch's 'new creation' can explain why the first Adam was created not merely after the image but precisely after the *face* of God: the creation of the first man anticipates Enoch's metamorphosis. Orlov shows that in the author's view the motif of creation after the face of God constitutes a pivotal link between the first Adam, who lost his glorious condition in the Garden of Eden, and Enoch, the 'second Adam'.

**Maria V. Korogodina** and **Basil Lourié**, in their study '*On the Perdition of the Higher Intellect and on the Image of Light*: Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary', examine a rare case of a bridge built between Abel and Christ. They provide a critical edition and a detailed analysis of a textual fragment which is only known in Old Slavonic and which was, in all likelihood, translated from Greek. The surviving text expounds peculiar Christology and refers to an Old Testament typology which is not reflected in the mainstream Byzantine exegesis. The authors detect in it features of Origenist theology, whereas in its Biblical typology they recognise ancient Jewish Christian characteristics, including some liturgical (calendrical) patterns, which are attested in the Jerusalem area until the late fifth century. The lost Greek original of the Slavonic text, however, must have been translated from Syriac.

In an apparent disagreement with *Romans* 5.12—the authors contend—as well as with the prevailing Byzantine exegetical tradition, death enters into the world not with Adam but with Abel; in Abel the text identifies the firstborn of the dead and in Christ the firstborn of the living. This typological pairing represents, apparently, an echo of the great Syriac writer Jacob of Sarug (ca 450–521). The history of the fall and salvation outlined in the fragment is a version of the Origenist myth of destruction and restoration of the divine Henad, which bears resemblances with Evagrius's theology. The text is written in a deliberately

obscure manner, and even the Biblical figures most often remain unnamed but are recognisable thanks to quotations and allusions. The author certainly considered his doctrine as esoteric, probably because he lived in a milieu hostile to Origenism. Most probably, the text was shaped no earlier than the late sixth century, but hardly later than the early eighth century, by Syriac-speaking Origenists.

**Abraham Tal**, in his paper 'Bridging the Gaps in the Samaritan Tradition', explores the interpretation of the figures of Biblical patriarchs amongst the Samaritans. He focuses on the book known as *Asāṭīr*, whose name was once thought to relate to the Hebrew/Aramaic root *sṯr* ('to hide', 'to conceal' or 'to shelter') and, thus, to indicate its esoteric character. The name derives, in fact, from an Arabic term meaning merely 'tales', or 'legends'. *Asāṭīr* represents a chronicle written in the form of a midrash in which many no longer extant traditions are embedded. The small number of the surviving manuscripts can be taken as a proof of its being, during a long period, not secret but rather largely neglected, or forgotten, by the members of the community. It was only during the twentieth century that the book was brought to the attention of the scholarly world.

Unlike other Samaritan chronicles, *Asāṭīr* does not continue the Pentateuch's account in time. Its primary focus is on the four 'pillars' of the world: Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses. Its main concern is to bridge the 'gaps' discovered by its author in the text of the Torah, such as the existence of the wives of Cain and Abel, the reason for God's unequal approach to the brothers' offerings, etc. Some of the traditions transmitted in *Asāṭīr* are very old, because their traces are attested in pre-Christian non-Samaritan sources, whilst other traditions bear traces of Bedouin customs. Since no ancient Samaritan text regarding books other than the Pentateuch has survived centuries of persecution, there is little chance of ascertaining the internal Samaritan sources of this book.

The book attempts to mitigate Adam's responsibility for the fall, hinting that Eve bears the guilt. In spite of the fall, Adam remains the first 'pillar' of the world, whose term shall be closed with the reappearance of Moses, the fourth 'pillar'. *Asāṭīr*, as well as another Samaritan Chronicle, *The Ark of Mårqe*, also speak of the 'Book of Signs', a writing of divine origin, which contained predictions and which was given to Adam who transmitted it to his offspring. Before passing it on further, Enoch thus could learn from it about the future, whereas Noah, in studying it, could perceive in Adam's story anticipatory signs regarding the ark.

According to a consolidated scholarly opinion, in the transmission to the Biblical chroniclers of ancient Mesopotamian accounts relating to the antediluvian world and the Flood an important role was played by an intermediary

from the north. It has also been suggested that this northern intermediary was none other than the Hurrians who, besides, entertained close contacts with the Hebrews. Of Hurrian origin is claimed to be, for example, the name of one of Shem's sons, Arpachshad (Gen. 10. 22; 11. 10; Lk. 3. 36).

Until the early first millennium BCE, Hurrians occupied the area of Harran, Abraham's ancestral land according to *Genesis*, and the highlands rising north of Mesopotamia. Consequently, the topography of *Genesis* can bear traces of the highlands which had once been inhabited by Hurrians and kindred peoples and which would later be known as the Armenian plateau. Departing from Harran and travelling due north, through the defiles of the Gordyæan chain, within a two-days' journey, or even sooner, one could reach a land which from the beginning of the sixth century BCE (or even earlier) had been inhabited by Armenians.

The Armenian plateau is elevated many hundred metres above any other mountainous region surrounding Mesopotamia and Canaan. Consequently, various attempts were made by Jews, Christians and other communities acquainted with the Bible to locate 'the mountains of Ararat' (Gen. 8. 4), upon which Noah's ark had rested, in Armenia. **Nazénie Garibian**'s paper, '"On the Mountains of Ararat": Noah's Ark and the Sacred Topography of Armenia', takes a closer look at the figure of Noah and his particular role in Armenian culture. At least two different traditions regarding Ararat existed in Armenia, one locating it in the Gordyæan chain and the other identifying it with the extinguished volcano which is situated further north and which has borne this name up to the present day. As suggested above, the two localisations may arise from pre-Biblical traditions; however, it may not be excluded that they reflect two successive stages in the gradual integration of the Armenian plateau by late antique readers of the Bible within their sacred topography. At an early date, this tradition would be transmitted to the Armenians.

The perception, infused in the Armenians by the Bible, of inheriting the land upon which postdiluvian humanity had made its first steps, deeply influenced their culture. According to apocryphal texts preserved in Armenian, Noah was the inheritor of a document announcing the future salvation, which God had written with his finger and had given to Adam. Other texts spoke of the bones of Adam and Eve, which Noah transported in the Ark in order to bequeath them to postdiluvian humankind.[2] Adam and his memory of

2 M.E. Stone, 'The bones of Adam and Eve', in R.A. Argall et al. (eds), *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Harrisburg, 2000, p. 244; I. Dorfmann-Lazarev, 'Eve, Melchizedek and the Magi in the Cave of the Nativity According the Armenian Corpus of Homilies Attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis', in J.N. Bremmer et al. (eds), *The Protevangelium of James* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 16), Leuven, 2019, pp. 264–311.

promised redemption were regarded as the foundation stone of the new world, and of the new kingdoms.

Garibian explains that Noah's landing in Armenia even affected popular etymology and modified the toponymy of the country. Thus the city which in the ancient texts is called Ēriwan (deriving its name from the Urartian Erebuni), later became Erewan, i.e. a place 'seen': it was construed in Armenian as the site perceived by Noah and his family from Ararat. The ancient name of another city, Naxčawan, shifted to Naxiǰewan (today Naxçıvan in Azeri), literally 'the place of the first descent' of Noah. A village called Arnoyt also existed where Noah—*Noy* in Armenian—was supposed to have dwelt.

The temporal 'bridges' that various para-Biblical textual and figurative sources built to the origins of humankind exercised a decisive influence on our perception of historical time and even on historical writing. **Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev**'s paper, 'The Historian's Craft and Temporal Bridges in Apocrypha and in Early Christian Art. Para-Biblical Sources in the Light of the Work of Marc Bloch', analyses the perspectives opened up on the study of apocryphal literature by the mediævalist Marc Bloch. Bloch maintained that by placing humankind's destiny between the Fall and the Judgement, the Christian religion depicts it as a long adventure, whilst the figure of the pilgrim stands out as the main paradigm of the individual human life which unfolds between Sin and Redemption.

A series of texts shaped between the second and the sixth centuries, and preserved in Samaritan, Coptic, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Armenian, speak of a written document that the first created human beings passed on to their descendants. That document related a revelation received by Adam regarding his future destiny and that of all his posterity, as well as the history of its transmission. One could never understand from any ecclesiastical document, of what enduring importance across Christendom was the idea of a secret document transmitted to humankind by the first created human being. According to the Armenian 'Script of the Lord's Infancy', that document was written by God himself, eventually reaching the Magi, i.e. the prototypes of the mediæval pilgrims evoked by Bloch. Surprisingly, on the fourth-century 'Dogmatic sarcophagus' from Rome, the Magi's pilgrimage to Bethlehem is depicted as the moment when the first actors of human history are recollected: the narrative sequence of its lower register commences with the scene of the Adoration of the three Wise Men, whereas the opening scene of its upper register, situated exactly above that scene, depicts the Creation of Eve by the Triune God. The postures and gestures of the protagonists suggest that Adam and Eve are in the Magi's minds and form the background of the event that they have come to celebrate. A sarcophagus in Rome and an apocryphal text transmitted in Arme-

nian reveal a kindred semantic structure: both link the Messiah's advent to the beginning of history. The Magi figure in both as the main protagonists of that undertaking, building temporal bridges.

**Part 3.** The symbols and the figures of messianic expectation, the first witnesses of the Messiah's advent, and the ideas concerning his birth, are explored in the following six contributions. **Dieter** and **Sabine Fahl**'s study, 'Quellen der nichtbiblischen Mose-Überlieferung in der *Kratkaja Chronografičeskaja Paleja*', is devoted to Slavonic apocryphal texts regarding Moses who in various traditions was conceived as a messianic figure. No systematic collection of these texts has been prepared to this day. The messianic character of the figure of Moses in Christian exegesis can explain the development in the Slavic world of such a broad tradition, in terms of genre, chronology and geography. The authors focus on the writings pertaining to the *Kratkaja Chronografičeskaja Paleja* (*The Shorter Chronographic Palæa*), a compilation encompassing the time from the Creation of the world to 944, the year of the death of Emperor Romanos Lakapenos.

The sources of the *Palæa* are not always easy to identify, because the compiler, who worked in Northern Russia in the beginning of the fifteenth century, chose only snippets from them—sometimes only a few words—rearranging them according to a chronographic pattern. Links between these snippets are mostly missing, yet in a few cases they do appear at the beginning of a phrase. Although the compiler usually disregarded the exegetic passages present in the main source, the *Tolkovaja Paleja* (*The Interpreted Palæa*), exegetical material is preserved in some contexts, which show Moses as a prefiguration of Christ. The compiler's particular interest lay in precise chronological data because he expected the end of the world in the year 7000, i.e. 1492 AD. Counting time, systematising and interpreting history, served for him as a preparation for its end.

**Abraham Terian**'s paper, 'Whether Lamb or Lion: Overlapping Metaphors in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism', is devoted to two apocalyptic metaphors: the lamb and the lion. It is likely that many of John the Baptist's followers perceived him as the awaited priestly messiah. Consequently, the Gospel of John can attribute to him the words that evoke the Temple sacrifices (1. 29). The evangelist's most direct reference is to *Isaiah* 53. 7, a verse regarded as a prophetic anticipation of the Messiah's redemptive death. One of the evangelist's intentions is to ascribe to Jesus all that in Jewish apocalypticism pertains to the priestly messiah. The *Revelation of John*, by contrast, suggests a metaphoric transition of the lamb into the lion of the tribe of Judah (5. 5). The lamb in the Apocalypse is both a sacrificial Redeemer and 'Lord of lords and King of kings' (17. 14), the sovereign possessing authority over the course of history; he directs

its unfolding and prepares the way for the ushering in of the new age marked by the opening of 'the seventh seal' (8. 1; 22. 1–2).

This progression from one metaphor to another can also be observed in the work of the tenth-century Armenian author Gregory of Narek (the monastery of Narek was situated near Lake Van in southern Armenia, today in Turkey, and was destroyed ca 1916, during the Genocide) who, by juxtaposing the two images, depicts the crucified Jesus as the triumphant lion 'roaring' from the cross and 'calling to the depths of the earth'. The depths 'shake beneath his mighty voice', releasing their 'captives'. This reminds us of the encounter between the redemptive event and the beginnings of human history represented in the first part of the *Questions of Bartholomew*, written towards the end of the second century: Jesus disappears from the cross at the moment when darkness envelops the earth, then becomes visible again and converses with Adam whom he has delivered from the realm of death (1.7–22).

The figure of John the Baptist is even more central to **Albert Baumgarten**'s paper, 'Rescuing John the Baptist'. The author takes us back to those esoteric traditions which did not outlive antiquity and which are the focus of the first part of this volume. Whilst in the New Testament John is depicted as the Precursor of Christ, Baumgarten proposes to look at him from a different standpoint. He suggests that this figure has to be set free from heavy layers of theological superstructures with which he has been loaded over the two millennia and through which we still look at him. He argues that a 'rescued' John can offer an important lesson for the study of the varieties of esoteric and apocryphal sources in the development of both Christian and Jewish traditions under discussion in this volume. According to Baumgarten, John was a full-fledged independent actor who occupied a distinctive place amongst the numerous religious movements of his time and who had an eschatological view of his own. This is testified, for example, by the fact that John's baptism was named not after its purpose but after his name (e.g. Mk. 11. 30; Lk. 7. 29): this means—Baumgarten explains—that the ritual introduced by him, although loosely based on existing Jewish practices, was directly equivalent to none of them. John assigned himself a senior role in the drama of the end of time, and also after his death his disciples continued to believe in his status.

One of the peculiar features of John's movement is a distinct relation between the extreme exigencies addressed towards himself and the lenience shown towards his followers. The call that he addressed to his contemporaries and to his followers did not imply an imitation of his own rigorous ascetism. Baumgarten compares John with the neo-Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana who rejected excessive rigour and severity as vulgarity or pride. Only distant echoes of John's teachings have reached us, some of which probably sur-

vive in the Mandæan tradition. The very paradox perceptible in these echoes attests to the esoteric structure of John's teaching. That forgotten esoteric tradition must have played an important role in the development of both Judaism and Christianity.

Before John the Baptist, the 'Wise Men from the East' were, according to the Gospel of Matthew, the earliest witnesses of the Messiah's advent (Mt. 2. 1–12). To them is devoted **Antonio Panaino**'s paper 'The Esoteric Legacy of the Magi of Bethlehem in the framework of the Iranian Speculations about Jesus, Zoroaster and his three Posthumous Sons'. While the number of the Magi is left unspecified in Matthew, it varies in apocryphal and iconographic sources. Panaino observes that the number three, in particular, has interesting resonances in Iran and in the Iranised lands. Because Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Persia, the Magi who had come to Bethlehem to offer homage to the new-born Christ were regarded as Persian ambassadors: in their persons, the second greatest power in the world recognised Christ's supreme lordship. Some claimed that the absolute primacy of the Magi's witness of Christ's advent accorded them a dignity which was even superior to the Apostle Peter.

The Magi's presence in Bethlehem was associated with the Mazdæan expectation of the last of the three posthumous sons of Zoroaster, the saviour *par excellence*, who shall resurrect all the dead and shall start the final battle against Ahreman. The importance of time speculations in the Zoroastrian tradition, with its special focus on millenarian expectations, finds correspondences in the symbolic interpretation of the group of three Magi. In various apocryphal texts the three Magi see Jesus under different aspects. These aspects evoke not only the different ages of the guest entering the Cave of the Nativity, but also reflect the three ages of the world—past, present and future—and, thus, the power of God as the Lord of the cosmos. If the group of the Magi can be interpreted as a symbol of humankind bowing down before Christ, the new-born child—who appears before them as successively an infant, an adult and an elder—is also the Ancient of Days, the Creator of the world: so he appears before them according to numerous sources. Consequently, in the Iranian world the Magi could be regarded not only as a mirror of the atemporal power of Christ-God, but also as an echo of Zoroaster's three sons who shall announce, with their successive births, one millennium after another, not only three different ages, but also the victory of God against evil.

The Adoration of the Magi is also discussed by **Felicity Harley**, whose paper 'Visual Apocrypha: the case of Mary and the Magi in early Christian Rome' is devoted to the analysis of early Christian representations of this account in Rome. Through this case-study she explores the following question: was the

creation and reception of Biblical imagery in early Christian communities necessarily governed by texts? Harley submits that, from the outset, the relationship between text, contemporary visual culture and nascent Christian iconography was dialogical; while many images created by artists for early Christian viewers can be related to the written word, there are a variety of ways in which they might be thought of as elaborating beyond, and so working independently from, the written word in the expression of theological positions or devotional beliefs in the way that apocryphal textual traditions are seen to do. In this way, she proposes, images might be regarded as 'visual apocrypha', being calculated to provoke different responses from different viewers and to create meanings or interpretations which did not derive directly from a text.

To explore this idea, Harley draws upon various representations of Mary surviving from Rome, which were made before the œcumenical council of Ephesus of 431 (the council that endorsed Mary's title as 'God-bearer') and which express nascent devotion to Mary. The popularity of the scene of the Adoration in early Christian Rome elevated Mary to a position of especial prominence in that city. The author compares two elaborate sarcophagi from the beginning of the fourth century: one from Rome, known as the 'Dogmatic sarcophagus', and a second, very similar sarcophagus from Arles. The identical disposition of the figure of Mary on both, where she is directly juxtaposed with the figure of God the Father, demonstrates a deliberate emphasis on her role in the history of salvation. Mary is thus not merely depicted as a personage from the story of three Wise Men from the East but is celebrated for being the mother of the incarnate God, the role which, according to some scholars, even correlates her with the Creator himself.

**Yishai Kiel**, in his paper 'Gnostic and Mithraic Themes in *Sefer Zerubbabel*', examines the Book of Zerubbabel, a Jewish apocalypse which contains a reaction to the Christian account of Christ's Nativity. Admittedly, it was completed in the aftermath of the Sasanian conquest of Jerusalem in 614. This book reflects some unprecedented ideas in the history of post-Biblical Jewish thought regarding the expectation of the messiah. Unlike other ancient Jewish and Christian sources speaking of a suffering messiah, *Sefer Zerubbabel* uniquely speaks of a messiah imprisoned 'until the time of the end'. Kiel suggests that this account can be illuminated by recourse to the imprisonment of the Living Soul in the Manichæan tradition. He shows that the affinities of *Sefer Zerubbabel* with Sethian, Manichæan and Iranian Mithraic circles are especially perceptible in the birth story and the genealogy of 'Armilos, the Messiah's 'evil twin'. The author argues that the figure of 'Armilos, who is said to have emerged from a union of Beli'al with a rock possessing the shape of a beautiful virgin, can be illuminated by recourse to gnostic, particularly Sethian and

Manichæan, traditions concerning the archons' seduction, or rape, of a virgin and the diabolic offspring which issued therefrom.

**Part 4.** The last six papers draw our attention to the angelic world, to heavenly journeys and to visions of Paradise. **David Hamidović**'s study, '1 Enoch 17 in the Geneva Papyrus 187', is devoted to a damaged Greek papyrus from Egypt deposited in the Library of Geneva. The author shows that the end of the document contains the description of Enoch's heavenly journey from *1 Enoch* 17. The preserved text reveals affinity to both the Greek fragments from Akhmîm and the known Ethiopic recensions of *1 Enoch*. However, the passage also presents many variants departing from these versions. Hamidović finds indices in the papyrus that allow him to hypothesise that the text which has reached us in the form of the Geneva papyrus originally represented another Greek recension of *1 Enoch* 17, different from the known Greek recension of the book in several nuances. The passage also sheds a new light on the process of translation from the Greek version(s) to the Ethiopian version(s) of the *Book of the Watchers*, i.e. the Vigilant Angels (*1 Enoch* 1–36). Finally, the text is embedded in a larger document which remains unidentified. Compared with the Akhmîm fragments, the Geneva papyrus may bring to us a collection of various autonomous texts intended to prove a religious message, most likely the hope of resurrection. It represents, therefore, another witness of a textual relocation of the *Book of the Watchers*.

**Florentina Badalanova Geller**, in her extensive article 'Enochic texts and related traditions in *Slavia Orthodoxa*', examines the relation of *2 Enoch* to *1 Enoch* in the Slavonic world. A lexicographical analysis allows her to conclude that the Slavonic scribes of *2 Enoch* knew *1 Enoch*. While in the *Book of the Watchers* the emphasis is put on the concept of illicit transmission of knowledge, especially associated with magic and divination, from heaven to earth, from angels to humans, in the case of *2 Enoch* the opposite concept predominates. Also, in *2 Enoch* the focal point is the disclosure of esoteric knowledge to a mortal man by angelic agency, but this time the revelation is endorsed by the Lord himself. It is not Enoch's decision to become an eyewitness of the mysteries of the universe; on the contrary, he is chosen by the Most High in order to become a recipient of divine wisdom, and to learn the eternal secrets unknown even to the angelic host. Enoch thus becomes the first visionary and recipient of the mystical experience endorsed by God. In contrast to the Watchers, who challenge God's commands and therefore fall, Enoch, thanks to his obedience, is granted angelic status. While Watchers descend from God's Throne to Earth, Enoch ascends from Earth to God's Throne. Not only are the divine secrets disclosed in his ascent, but he also becomes God's scribe.

Jewish apocalyptic themes, such as those of the books of Enoch or the ascent to heaven from the tradition of the *Merkabah*, i.e. 'the Divine chariot', were

interiorised in various Christian traditions which sometimes 're-enacted' these themes in a different setting. **Emmanouela Grypeou**, in her paper 'Visions of Paradise in the Life of St Andrew the Fool and the Legacy of the Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Byzantium', analyses the influence of para-Biblical writings that bear apocalyptic stamp, of both Jewish and Christian origin, on the later Byzantine visionary literature. The specific narrative frames of hagiographic writings, in particular, set the scenery and serve mainly as cultural indicators, yet they rarely ever significantly modify the major apocalyptic elements that they adopt. Grypeou observes that especially the descriptions of heavenly journeys and eschatological visions were often integrated in hagiographical accounts, such as the *Life of Andrew the Fool* which was composed, most likely, in the tenth century. Significantly, Andrew's ascent through the heavens on his way to the divine throne, the description of Paradise and the transformation of the visionary into an angel-like figure evoke specifically motifs from *2 Enoch*. Although we miss safe evidence regarding the textual transmission of this book, an eclectic use of various texts available in monastic libraries of the Byzantine Empire by respective authors cannot be ruled out.

The phenomenon of interiorization of pseudepigraphical literature is one of the reasons explaining the fact that it continued to be copied, translated and expanded, and especially on the Empire's periphery where the ecclesiastical control of the monastic scriptoria was looser. The interest in apocalyptic prophecies grew in Byzantium especially around the tenth century: that was the time preceding the advent of the middle of the seventh millennium since the creation of the world. The re-writing and expansion of apocalyptic material was part of a wider trend attested in the Byzantine literature around the tenth century. The broad use of apocalyptic traditions and their elaborate variations in hagiographical works nearly develops into a new hybrid genre which can be described as 'apocalyptic fiction'. These texts provided detailed and informative responses to popular anxieties, questions regarding heavenly mysteries and, more importantly, the fate of the soul after death.

Also related to the history of transmission of *1 Enoch* is **Yakir Paz**'s paper, 'Eternal Chains and the Mountain of Darkness. The Fallen Angels in the Incantation Bowls', in which he discusses the myth of the fallen angels. Paz takes into examination the bowls bearing Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Mandaic and Christian Syriac inscriptions as well as magical texts found in Mesopotamia and Khuzestan. He shows that in the Sasanian Empire myths of fallen angels were shared by various religious communities. According to the bowl inscriptions, the sin of these angels consisted in revealing God's mysteries which had a magical character. This idea is close to that reflected in the *Book of the Watchers*, which claims that angels taught incantation to the human beings (*1 Enoch* 7. 1;

9. 6), and in other early accounts of the fallen angels. According to Paz, these magical texts can thus be related to the Aramaic *Vorlage* of the books of Enoch, bringing to us echoes of the mental world in which, in particular, *1 Enoch* was shaped. Yet certain elements encountered, inscribed on the bowls and in kindred magical texts, are not present in the *Book of the Watchers*: thus, for their transgression the angels are punished in the mountain of darkness. The texts analysed by Paz shed light on the way in which ancient traditions concerning the fallen angels were received, re-elaborated and employed by the Aramaic-speaking minorities of the Sasanian Empire: Jews, Manichæans, Mandæans and Christians, supplying us with a missing link between the early Enochic literature and the later mediæval accounts of the fallen angels.

A different view on the angels is offered by **Cecilia Proverbio** whose paper, 'Iconography of Angels: Roots and Origins in the Earliest Christian art', is devoted to the evolution in the representation of angels that occurred in Christian iconography in course of the fourth–beginning of the fifth century. Early Christianity had adopted Jewish angelology, and no specific doctrine of the angels was developed in the Church of the Empire during the earliest centuries, because in Patristic thought the Angel, i.e. God's Messenger *par excellence*, was Christ. The words *mal'ak* in the Hebrew Bible and *angelos* in the Septuagint and the New Testament could simply stress the role of an ambassador or a messenger, which was attributed to various personages, both human and superhuman. The figures of angels, conceived of as God's supernatural emissaries, thus only appear on the margins of the Church Fathers' writings. They are perceived as subsidiary figures, existing only in order to accomplish in human reality the will of God himself.

No distinctive characterisation of the figures of angels can be found in the surviving Christian pictorial representations before the later part of the fourth century, even though the idea of winged angels in Christian thought is much older. Already at the end of the second century this idea was endorsed by Tertullian who suggested that thanks to their wings the angels can be ubiquitous. Nevertheless, in the third-century Christian art a necessity to differentiate the representations of angels and humans was not yet really felt. The appearance of the new iconographic pattern, while dependent on a number of apocryphal texts, has to be linked to the Christological controversies of the late fourth and the fifth century. Most of the surviving depictions of angels pertaining to this period express their alterity with regard to Christ, true God and true human being: their æthereal substance is expressed with the red colour and by means of the wings. According to John Chrysostom, their wings show the sublimity of the angels' nature; it is for this reason that Archangel Gabriel is portrayed winged, and not because angels should possess corporeal wings. The angels'

wings indicate to the beholders that they leave the highest regions in order to draw near the human nature. The wings are, thus, the visible sign of the angels' capacity to provide a bridge between God and the material world.

A classic example of a bridge between protology and eschatology can be found in the visions and representations of the garden of Eden. **Zaruhi Hakobyan**, in her paper 'The Gardens of Eden: Compositional, Iconographic and Semantic Similarities between the 'Birds Mosaic' of the Armenian Chapel in Jerusalem and the Mosaic of the Synagogue at Ma'on (Nirim)', compares two sixth-century mosaics covering the pavements, respectively, of an Armenian chapel in Jerusalem and of the synagogue of Ma'on in Negev. These are but two of the series of twenty comparable mosaics that survive in the Holy Land and the adjacent regions; both are considered to belong to the Gaza school of mosaics. Hakobyan reveals surprising affinities between the two. Each contains a composition of vine scroll inhabited by birds and animals, which reflects the representations of the heavenly garden as depicted by both Jews and Christians. These elements have also been inherited by early Islamic art: we find inhabited vine scrolls in the mosaic of the Dome of the Rock, at the end of the seventh century, and in the Great Mosque of Damascus, at the beginning of the eighth century. According to the author, such representations derive from international artistic workshops active in late antique Palestine, which played an important role in the formation of diverse pictorial traditions, both Jewish and Christian, and which would then be introduced into Armenia and the South Caucasus. This implies that the ideas of Paradise inherited by three monotheistic religions in the Middle Ages owed much to the exchange of ideas that had occurred in the interreligious environment of the late antique land of Israel.

In Armenia, the image of an inhabited vine, informed by the Holy Land's artistic schools, is attested on a number of churches built between the end of the fifth and the middle of the seventh century, as well on other mediæval monuments. The most vivid examples can be found in the church of the Vigilant Heavenly Powers (652) built near the ancient Armenian capital of Vałaršapat (Ēǰmiacin) and in the palatine church of the Holy Cross on the island of Ałtamar (915–921) in Lake Van. These monuments show the enduring character of this iconography. At Ałtamar, the living beings of the vine scroll echo those to whom Adam gives names (Gen. 2. 20). Surrounded by them, Adam represents the thematic centre of the east façade, and probably of the entire church. He holds the memory of the Paradise lost. By turning to the east, whence the Saviour shall come at the end of time (Mal. 3. 20; LXX Zech. 3. 8; 6. 12; Mt. 24. 27; Lk. 1. 78–79), Adam prepares to present him the entire creation which expects his advent.