



THE THREE MAGI AND THE CHRIST CHILD

EXCERPT FROM THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO (AN ACCOUNT OF ROUGHLY 25 YEARS' TRAVEL, AS DICTATED IN GENOA PRISON IN 1298 TO A WRITER AND FELLOW PRISONER, RUSTICELLO OF PISA):

"Persia is an enormous territory which in antiquity was a noble country of great importance, but now it has been ruined and ravaged by the Tartars. Saveh, the city from which the three kings set out to worship the infant Christ, is in Persia and the three fine, great tombs of the kings are still to be seen there. Over each of these tombs has been constructed a square building surmounted by a very finely carved dome. The tombs are close to one another and Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior, the three embalmed kings, can be seen entirely with their hair and their beards. Messer Marco Polo asked many questions of the people of that city as to those three Magi but no one knew anything about them except that they were three kings who had been buried there for a long time. Eventually he was able to discover more.

Three days' walk from Saveh he came to a town called Kala Atashparastan which means castle of fire-worshippers. The name was rightly applied since the inhabitants of this place did indeed worship fire. They related that in old times three kings from the district had gone to visit a newly-born prophet, taking with them gold, frankincense and myrrh in order to ascertain if the prophet were God, an earthly King or a Physician [sage]. They thought that if he accepted the gold he would then be an earthly King, if he took the incense he would be God, and if he took the myrrh he would be a Physician.

When they reached the place where the baby had only recently been born, the youngest of the three kings went in to see him alone. He found that the baby looked like himself, appearing to be the same age and to have the same features. He came out amazed. The second youngest king then went to see the baby and he also had the impression that he was seeing someone of his own age

with his own physical appearance. He, too was astounded. Then the third and oldest king went in and the same thing happened to him as to the other two. He came out deep in thought. Finding themselves together again, the three kings told each other what they had seen and were greatly surprised. They decided to go back to the baby together. When they were all in front of the child they found that he had the appearance of a thirteen-day-old baby. They worshipped him and offered him the gold, frankincense and myrrh. He accepted the three gifts and then gave them a small closed casket. The three kings left to return to their own country.

When they had been riding for several days the kings decided that they wanted to see what the child had given them. They opened the little casket and found a stone inside it. They were very surprised by this gift and discussed it for a long time because they could not understand its significance. When the baby had accepted all three offerings, the wise men had said within themselves that the child was at once the True God, True King and True Physician. The child, knowing that faith had been born in the Magi, had given them the stone as a sign that they should be as firm as a rock in the faith which they had glimpsed, for he well knew what was in their thoughts. But the kings were unable to understand why they had been given the stone so they threw it in a well. But as soon as they had done so a burning flame from heaven struck the well.

And when the three men beheld this marvel they were sore amazed by this omen and regretted having flung away the stone for they then perceived that it held a great and Holy meaning. So they took some of the fire which had been kindled and put it in a rich and beautiful church where the people keep it constantly burning, and where it is worshipped as a god, and all the sacrifices they offer are kindled with that fire. Should the flame ever go out it is relit from fires belonging to people of the same religion. It can never be relit in any other way, although a journey of ten days may be needed to find the same fire. So this was how the cult of the fire-worshippers originated - and it has no small number of followers. This story was told directly to Marco Polo by the

inhabitants of Kala Atashparastan and is the absolute truth. As for the three kings, one came from Saveh, one from Hawah [Ava], and the third from Kashan, of that very castle where they still worship fire with the people of all the country round about...."

EXCERPTS FROM "IN XANADU" BY WILLIAM DALRYMPLE ON THE SAME SUBJECT AND OF POLO'S ACCOUNT OF IT:

"According to Yule, the word 'Magi' used by St Matthew in his gospel does not actually mean wise men, as we have always assumed. The word is Persian, and so stands out in the Greek of the Gospel as a solitary foreign word. Its meaning is specific. It is the name of the ancient Zoroastrian priestly class. In all the elaboration that has grown up around the story in the Gospel, St Matthew's original meaning has been obscured. In the text the men who follow the star from the east are not kings. Nor are they numbered or given names: this is all medieval legend. The Gospel text simply reads 'Some Magi came to Bethlehem from the East'. St Matthew's original audience would have understood that this meant a visit to Bethlehem of fire-worshipping priests from Persia."

"As I read Yule's footnotes I remembered depictions of the Magi that I had seen on sarcophagi in the Vatican Museum and in the mosaics of St Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. The Magi are shown wearing trousers, tunics and pointed felt caps - the distinctive dress of the ancient Persians. This in turn reminded me of the story I had read the previous year in Runciman's *The First Crusade*. In the seventh century, the Persians had defeated the Byzantines and had swept through Palestine burning and pillaging every important building they had come across. Only one structure was spared: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. According to Runciman, they made this single exception because over the doorway of the church was placed a huge mosaic showing the three Magi worshipping the Christ child. All three were shown in Persian dress. If the

specifically Persian origin of the Magi is perhaps obscured today it was clearly understood into the Middle Ages."

Note: William Dalrymple failed to find the tombs of the three Magi, but did discover upon his return to Cambridge that, until it was burned down by Ghengis Khan, the town of Saveh was the site of one of the most important astronomical observatories in Asia. "It is first referred to by the chronicler al-Muqaddasi, but the fullest account appears in the writings of his successor al-Khazwini. Khazwini says he saw rooms full of astronomical instruments, globes and telescopes as well as a vast specialist library. In other words, if the Magi had been watching out for a new star anywhere, it would have been in Saveh. The Zoroastrian Magi were astronomers and did interpret dreams. Like the Jews, they believed in the coming of a Messiah. This was Shaoshyant, the son of Zoroaster, whose virgin birth, announced by a bright star, would herald the beginning of the reign of justice. It was thus quite reasonable for St Matthew to send some Magi to Palestine to look for a Messiah. More telling still is the fact that there is no precedent for gold, frankincense and myrrh being grouped together in the Old Testament. The three gifts are, however, often recorded together as Persian temple offerings. In the Gospel, St Matthew's Magi do in fact present genuine pagan offerings at the crib."

"But is the significance of the gifts in Polo's Magi story that is one of the strangest aspects of the whole legend. In the West, the gift of myrrh has long been interpreted as a symbol of Jesus' mortality. This does not derive from any explanation in the Gospel, but because in the Old Testament myrrh is mentioned as an embalming herb. In Polo's story, however, myrrh is not presented in homage, as a symbol of Christ's humanity, but as a test. If the child accepted it, he would not be a king or a god but a physician. This idea makes perfect sense in a Zoroastrian context, for Zoroaster was seen as the Divine Healer. His earthly representatives, the Magi, developed this idea into a system of supernatural alchemy, practising medicine alongside their priestly functions. What is interesting is that the early Christian East

also understood myrrh as a symbol of healing. While the Western Church went on to develop the concepts of Christus Rex, Christ the King, the Eastern Churches retained the old idea of Christus Medicus, Christ the True Physician. Polo's story appears to have retained the original, authentic symbolism of the three gifts, a symbolism which was very early rejected in the West - but miraculously retained by the fire worshippers near Saveh. Is it possible that Polo's story may thus preserve elements of an early Christian tradition of which St Matthew has given only an abbreviated version?"

"The [above] passage of 'The Travels', above all others, cries out for proper scholarly investigation. What was the building that was described by Polo? Its significance was not understood by the local population, which suggests that it was not a Muslim building. Zoroastrians do not bury their dead (they leave them on Towers of Silence to be consumed by vultures), so it cannot have been any normal Zoroastrian monument. Was it once a Christian shrine? This, like many aspects of the story, raises far more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, the remarkable story told by Polo must at least open the possibility that the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem was an historical event, that these Magi came from Saveh and that an independent tradition of their visit to Palestine was maintained in the observatory town from which they set off, and in which there were eventually laid to rest."

* See Chapters 5, 38, 39, + 40 of Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ.



Don't forget!!!!

Some of your Christmas holidays could be spent camping on Shri Mataji's property at Wamuran, participating in the building of Shri Mataji's house. There are lots of areas in which you could become involved:

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Mud brick making
Woodworking and joinery
Varnishing window frames
Chainsaw milling
Chainsaw fence posts

GENERAL

Slashing grass (it grows profusely after rain)
Clean up timber
Plant trees
We would like to plant some auspicious trees like Akosha Neem, Cedar (any suggestions for others?) fruit trees etc.

We've found that working early in the morning is best for three to four hours and then a siesta in the midday.

There are lots of interesting activities on the Sunshine Coast. Bushwalking in adjoining state forest, swimming at Bribie Island and Mooloolaba is only 40 minutes away. Arts and crafts are in the hinterland at Maleny and Montville.

We would like to participate in the Maleny Earth Festival at Christmas which lasts approximately one week but need more Yogis.

We recently had a stand at the Natural Living Festival at Nambour which was very successful. The follow up programs at the Nambour Meeting Place have been enthusiastically attended.

Busy, Interesting and Rewarding time to be had!! Arrange a car load of Yogis to come up. Please let us know if you want to spend some time on Mother's property. Ring Kim or Debbie on 074 966-716.

