



The Star of Bethlehem: A Symbolic Challenge to the Ancient Determinism of the Stars and Planets



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A New Symbolic and Cultural (Non-Astral) Perspective
on the Star of Bethlehem and Its Role in Announcing
the Birth of the Savior



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A NEW SYMBOLIC AND CULTURAL (NON-ASTRAL) PERSPECTIVE ON THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM AND ITS ROLE IN ANNOUNCING THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR

As we will see in this short essay, the mystical phenomenon of starlight had nothing to do with astronomical and cosmic reality; nothing to do with the matter of the world, in short. Rather, it presented itself as an image of the semantics of the mystical symbolism practiced by different mystical currents of Hellenism. This image, derived from the observation of the night sky, paradoxically expressed a profound and radical challenge to the cultural meaning attributed at that time to the stars and planets: the determinism of celestial objects on the lives of men.

I have always heard the most outlandish arguments about everything related to early Christian literature. Therefore, regarding our topic, I will begin by explaining what the Star of the East, the Star of Bethlehem, or the Star of the Magi—whatever we may call this singular phenomenon recounted in the Gospel¹ of Matthew—was not (under any circumstances). In other words, I will discard what the symbolism of this Christmas light does not refer to, and which is erroneously and ignorantly associated with the stars, in order to finally explain the true meaning of the cultural and historical symbolism of its divine light. This symbolism, curiously and surprisingly, presents itself as a radical antithesis to cosmology, astrology, and astronomy, and was nothing less than a central sign and manifestation of the timeless and eternal soteriology of certain groups within early Christian Gnosticism. As we shall see, the Star of Bethlehem presents itself today as precisely the antithesis of what is generally attributed to it; for what it expresses is nothing other than

¹ Mateo. 2. 2-11.

the negation and overcoming of the harmony and power of the fatalistic determinism of the stars and planets, dominated by archons and demons. And this is despite the use of the cosmic imagery it combated.

Thus, I have often heard it said, as most readers will have heard it, that the Star of Bethlehem could have been a nova or a supernova; that it could have been a comet and not a star (Halley's Comet? some wonder), or that it could even have been an asteroid that fell from the sky. I even know those within that group of purveyors of falsehoods who associate the word "science" with their own whims, who dismiss the previous hypotheses and come to talk to us about the planet Uranus: they come to remind us of the special configuration it adopted with Saturn in the ninth year of the previous era, of which, contrary to what they claim, no records remain for an obvious and simple reason: because Uranus was an unknown planet until the eighteenth century. Even today, the dominant discourse of the pontifical universities, which speaks of the conjunctions of Jupiter and Venus in the years three and two before the *anno domini*, is gaining ground on social media. Without forgetting, of course, as we shall see below, the most important celestial phenomenon of the triple astral conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the year seven before our era.

In other words, we are faced with a very narrow-minded rationalism that, completely ignorant of the paths traveled by the symbols and archetypes of myths and mythology, seeks recognition through anachronistic, ideologized, and erroneous interpretations, always derived from a strictly literal and clumsy reading of ancient texts, not only the Gospels.

The truth is that much of modern historiography, formed within a strictly positivist framework, has tended to displace symbolic and mythological analysis in favor of causal and literal explanations. Therefore, from this perspective, the Gospel account of the Star of Bethlehem had to be explained by a verifiable astronomical phenomenon, relegating mythical language to the realm of the incidental, the superficial, and the naive. However, this approach, which ignores the methodological richness of the emic and etic planes of anthropology, consequently ignores the symbolic codes of late Hellenism and disregards the profoundly spiritual and polemical character of Matthew's text, which did not aspire to describe a physical fact, but to subvert the dominant cosmological order.

I am pointing the finger at all those professors who, educated in anachronism and the worst kind of positivism, are incapable of understanding the true emic perspective that emerges from the murky depths of human action in different cultures. They all constitute the vanguard of that "historical science" (as they

call their strange occupation) that turns the mysterious and obscure origins of Christianity into the obviousness of a story for old people and children. Curiously, they know everything about Jesus of Nazareth and nothing about Christ or Sophia; nor about the incarnate Word; nor about the mediating Logos; nor about the *Logoi Spermatikoi*. They all have a second- or third-hand grasp of the Jewish history of the Second Temple, which, from their vague and confused evocations, they call “science,” as I have already said. And they do so with the same perspicacity and skill with which magicians handle the top hat, the rabbit, and the staff. And all of them, completely ignorant of what the phenomena of Sophia-Wisdom, Jesus-Christ, the Son of Man, Philo’s Logos, and, in short, the very first Christianity actually were, end up turning the offspring of Mary and Joseph into a large family and putting glasses, white socks, and sandals on the Gnostic figure of Jesus.

The truth, and without going on a tangent of unnecessary satire, is that many of these self-proclaimed “researchers” and popularizers of worn-out ideas discovered back in the last century that, since their natural environment was “historical science” and not myths, faith, or theology, the explanation of the literal meaning of the Star of Bethlehem in the Gospel of Matthew had to rest on a principle of astronomical rationality and never on the dark and pathetic fabrications of mythological allegory. Because something important -according to them-, from “a scientific point of view,” must have occurred at the time of the improbable birth of Jesus of Nazareth; a material phenomenon associated, even, for many, with the benevolent providence of the Almighty. Something known at the time, which could have been recorded in forgotten written records, and which Johannes Kepler himself rediscovered and communicated to the world in the early days of scientific development, well into the 17th century. I am referring to the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which occurred in the year 7 BCE, according to which Jupiter would have moved through the constellation of Pisces to approach the planet Saturn. A key, decisive, and magnificent astronomical phenomenon (crucial, from my point of view, but on a different plane and in a very different order of things than the Star of Bethlehem) when it comes to interpreting and understanding the Christian culture that has shaped the mental map of the world and the concerns, likes, and dislikes of the entire West for eighteen centuries. So important, from my point of view, that it invalidates any reductionism of the type we are referring to in these pages: the reduction, ultimately, as our occasional rationalists do, of the triple planetary conjunction of the year 7 BCE to the Star of Bethlehem, or the Star of the Magi, however we want to call it. These are two completely different phenomena in every sense.

And here lies the real entanglement and the reason for confusion between two different perspectives on the way of understanding symbols and the material ontology of the world, allegory and the very materiality of the cosmos: that point where two equally true perspectives intersect, but with radically different premises: the one that derived its own meanings from astronomical reality (as we will see with the triple astral conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn) and those that, from the mysticism of their meanings, challenged astronomy and the cosmos to explain their symbols (as we will see with the Star of the East).

The arrival of the Savior, foretold by the stars.

It so happens that, from my point of view² (and from Carl G. Jung's point of view),³ the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the year 7 BCE should not be understood as an isolated phenomenon or a mere retrospective astronomical curiosity, but rather as a symbolic element integrated into a long-standing tradition related to messianic hope.⁴ However, it is worth emphasizing that Jung did not provide direct historical evidence from first-century Judaism, but instead reconstructed an astral semantics based on medieval Jewish sources and the persistence of symbolic motifs that, due to their internal coherence and continuity, allow us to infer the existence of an earlier tradition. In this sense, the triple astral conjunction would function as a cosmological backdrop laden with meaning for certain sectors of Hellenized Judaism.

Thus, the messianic significance of this cosmic phenomenon would be presented as a hidden foundation, an ideological cornerstone, a leitmotif and ultimate rationale for all subsequent New Testament construction. For, according to Jung, there existed a tradition and belief in certain sectors of Judaism that the arrival of the Messiah would occur at the time when the planets Jupiter and Saturn came into conjunction. However, and as I do not wish to stray from my main point, I will refer all those readers interested in this fascinating subject of the triple astral conjunction of the year 7 BCE to the chapter "Astrology and Cosmology in Early Christianity: On the Stars, the Celestial Calendar, the Time of the Messiah, and the World Sponsored by the Bishops of the Church,"⁵ in my book *Sacrifice and Drama of the Sacred King*; in particular, to the section entitled "The Time of the Messiah." "The Fish, the

² Cf. Eliseo Ferrer. *Sacrificio y drama del Rey Sagrado. Genealogía, antropología e historia del mito de Cristo*. Madrid, 2021.

³ Cf. Carl G. Jung. *Aion. Contribución al simbolismo del sí mismo*. Barcelona, 2011.

⁴ Op. Cit. 170-202.

⁵ E. Ferrer. Op. Cit. 597-626.

Prophecy of Daniel, and the Triple Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn.”⁶ In these pages, I connect, through an almost perfect fit, three culturally distinct phenomena that nevertheless form part of the same structural mechanism: the theories of Carl G. Jung and certain Christian Gnosticism regarding the role of the triple astral conjunction of the year 7 BCE in determining the birth of the Messiah, the child-god, or the savior king; the prophecies concerning the timing of the Messiah’s arrival established in the *Book of Daniel*,⁷ and the creation of the *anno domini* by Dionysius Exiguus⁸ during the pontificate of John I, at the beginning of the sixth century. All of these, as can be observed, constitute matters seemingly far removed from the literal interpretation of the Gospels, seemingly unrelated to the narrative discourse of the improbable story of Jesus of Nazareth, and seemingly foreign to the texts of the shepherds, the Nativity scene, the Star of Bethlehem, and the supposed visit of the Magi to Judea. But the truth is that these three crucial matters—the astral conjunction of the year 7 BCE, the prophecy of Daniel’s seventy weeks, and the retrospective creation of Dionysius Exiguus—all appear buried and encased in concrete and steel within the very foundations that generated the motives, stimuli, and midrash pesher of the Gospel narrative. The triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn formed part of the essential cosmology in early Christianity, as a sign heralding the arrival of the Messiah, according to the interpretation of certain Hellenized Hebrew sects and as Jung notes, as I mentioned. But it was something quite different from the meaning of the Star of Bethlehem, which appeared only as a symbolic representation and banner of a mysticism that defied the materiality of the cosmos and the planetary movement dominated by the archons and demons.

I must emphasize that the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces was generally associated, within certain Hebrew sects, with the sign heralding the arrival of the Messiah, according to the cited references. Furthermore, I should add that the Jewish Kabbalists, for whom the figure of Jesus Christ was of no interest or significance due to ignorance, continued to announce the arrival of the Messiah of Israel throughout the Middle Ages, precisely coinciding with a new conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. The most evident and well-known case was that of the Portuguese Jew Isaac Abravanel, who, disregarding the Christianity of the Church, continued to explain in the fifteenth century that the Messiah would come when the planets Jupiter and Saturn were in

⁶ Op. Cit. 614-618.

⁷ Daniel. 9.24-27.

⁸ E. Ferrer. Op. Cit. 615, 616.

conjunction in the sign of Pisces. “Abravanel,” according to Jung, “awaited the coming of the Messiah under the sign of Pisces; that is, at the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in that sign.” And he was not the only one to express such hope. We find the same interpretations four centuries earlier, through Rabbi Abraham ben Jiyya (died 1136) and Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1020-1070).⁹ For Jung, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn signified the union of extreme opposites: “In the year seven BCE,” the Swiss psychoanalyst concluded, “this famous conjunction occurred no fewer than three times in the sign of Pisces. The closest approach took place on May 29 of that year, at a distance of only 0.21 degrees; that is, less than half the width of the full moon.”¹⁰

I must emphasize, however, that references to medieval Jewish Kabbalists—Abraham ben Jiyya, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, or Isaac Abravanel—should not be interpreted as direct testimonies of first-century Judaism, but rather as indications of the long-lasting persistence of a Hebrew astral semantics. The interest of these sources lies not in their immediate chronological value, but in showing how certain symbolic schemes relating to messianic time and the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn remained active and operative in Jewish thought for centuries, completely independent of Christianity and the figure of Jesus Christ.

In other words, judging by what we are seeing, and if it were not a genuine mockery of Satan and a complete hermeneutical sarcasm, we would have to agree with those who, whether or not they are dressed in pseudoscientific garb, tell us that Jesus of Nazareth was born (or should have been born; or probably “they gave birth to him”) in the year seven before our era, when the murderous king who persecuted children was still alive; and that, moreover, he was born (or should have been born or “they gave birth to him”) in spring (in May, according to Jung’s astro-mythology), since the shepherds slept in the open air in their sheepfolds, caressed by the cool night breeze and under the twinkling lights of the stars. But, unfortunately, none of what I’ve just described has anything to do with the Star of Bethlehem... It does, however, relate to the Hellenistic cosmic-temporal mythology of the incarnation of the Christ Child, to the mythology of the arrival of the Cosmocrator King, to the Hellenistic cosmic-temporal mythology of the arrival of the Savior, and to the Jewish mythology of the arrival of the Messiah foretold by Nathan. But not to the Star of the East.

⁹ C. Jung, Op. Cit. 139.

¹⁰ Op. Cit. 143.

There is no astronomical evidence of the Star of Bethlehem.

Furthermore, we are quite familiar today with the astronomical phenomena that occurred between 744 AUC (10 BCE) and 754 AUC (*anno domini*), which, in an emic sense, is how we must approach the actual calendar of that time (Ab Urbe Condita), and not through the anachronisms and later interpretations of the Church. Clearly, none of these phenomena coincide with the stellar event described in the Gospel of Matthew; and only the triple conjunction of the planets in 747 AUC, supposedly interpreted by Hellenized Hebrews, fits within the semantics and communicative power of the stars and planets. Here are the facts:

–745 AUC (9 BCE). Conjunction of Uranus and Saturn. This phenomenon is irrelevant to any ancient astronomical or astrological system, since Uranus was not identified as a planet until the eighteenth century and was not part of any documented ancient symbolic, cosmological, or predictive corpus. Therefore, any attempt to link this configuration to the Star of Bethlehem necessarily involves an insurmountable anachronism.

–Year 747 AUC (7 BCE). Three Jupiter-Saturn Conjunctions in Pisces. From Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, Jupiter and Saturn appeared as two “very close stars” in the night sky. This triple conjunction was later interpreted as the change of the Age of Aries to Pisces, according to the precession of the equinoxes. This change would bring with it, among other subsequent interpretations, the death of the lamb and the birth of the fish, meanings that were adopted by the sects that formed early Christianity. Another meaning of that astral conjunction in certain Hebrew and early Christian-Gnostic sects was the birth of the Messiah: the birth of the Savior or Cosmocrator King of Hellenism.

–Year 749 AUC (5 BCE). A comet was recorded in Chinese chronicles.

–Year 750 AUC (4 BCE). A lunar eclipse and minor planetary phenomena.

–Year 751 AUC (3 BCE). Jupiter-Venus conjunction in Pisces.

–Year 752 AUC (2 BCE). Another Jupiter-Venus conjunction. Along with the conjunction of the previous year, this is one of the events used by traditional Church interpretations to provide an astronomical meaning to the Star of Bethlehem. But beyond these self-serving ideological interpretations, it is entirely meaningless from the perspective of Hebrew interpretations of Babylonian astral semantics. While the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BCE was associated with the arrival of the Messiah, conjunctions of Jupiter

and Venus were long associated with the symbolism of prosperity and abundance of material goods.

—**Year 754 AUC (1 anno domini).** Dionysius Exiguus, during the pontificate of John I, established the anno domini in 525. He did not consider a year zero.

—**Year 844 AUC (90 CE).** The first texts of the Gospel of Matthew were probably written.

—**Year 884 AUC (130 CE).** The definitive text of Matthew, reissued by the Church authorities, appeared.

—**Years 904-1004 AUC (150-250 CE).** Vague allusions to the Star of Bethlehem appear in the earliest Christian writers (second and third centuries CE).

—**Justin Martyr (100-165 CE).** In his “Dialogue with Trypho,” he referred to prophecies about the birth of Christ, mentioning celestial phenomena that foretold it, though not necessarily with details about the star.

—**Tertullian (155-240 CE).** He spoke of the celestial signs and wonders that accompanied the birth of Jesus, referring to the tradition of the star, but without further details.

—**Origen (184-253 CE).** In his commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew, he analyzed the star, interpreting it essentially symbolically and only secondarily in a literal sense. He was referring to the fact that Matthew’s text spoke of an observable event, but Origen did not claim to know what kind of astronomical phenomenon it was; he simply accepted without question that the evangelist described it as an event in the sky. However, and much more importantly, Origen saw in the Star a symbolic and spiritual meaning, as in many other elements of the Gospels: it represented, according to him, the light of Christ that guided the Gentiles toward salvation.

I repeat that everything related above has nothing to do with the Star of Bethlehem... For behold, on that night when the Virgin Mary was in labor and a large and luminous star arrived from the East, it absorbed within its light every possible celestial luminary, according to the symbolic logic of the story, and settled on the rooftops of Bethlehem: the city that the prophet Micah had chosen for the birth of the messiah of Israel: “For you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”¹¹

¹¹ *Miqueas.* 5.2.

Thus, in the internal logic of the text, the star that came from the East did not compete with the other celestial bodies nor was it integrated into the known astronomical order; rather, it surpassed and eclipsed it. It was a light that, on the narrative and symbolic level, nullified the efficacy of the rest of the firmament and behaved as an autonomous manifestation, independent of all cosmic regularity, thereby reinforcing its spiritual rather than astronomical character.

Moreover, it should not surprise us that the birth of the promised Messiah was announced in the Gospel of Matthew¹² through the Magi—astrologers—and the Star of the East that marked the way to Bethlehem: a star completely unrelated to the astral conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and also completely unrelated to any astral or planetary consideration of a physical, cosmic, material, and mathematically quantifiable nature. It was, in reality, an astral symbolism which, contrary to the rationalist interpretation, expressed the negation of the archontic power of the stars and planets, while simultaneously announcing a superior power descended from heaven (the incarnation of the Word or Logos of God). That is to say, it was an astral symbolism (only in its formal representation) intended to legitimize and validate the descent and arrival in the world of the true Savior; which indicated, at first glance, that most of the message's recipients, likely overwhelmed by the power of the celestial signs, should accept the text's message, be familiar with its language, and correctly interpret the expressive force of its symbolism.

A universal tradition within Hellenistic culture.

As I have already stated and reiterated, the mystical phenomenon of starlight had nothing to do with astronomical and cosmic reality. Rather, it was presented as an image within the semantics and symbolism of various mystical currents of Hellenism. In all cultures of the period, and particularly in the Zoroastrian tradition, the manifestation of the nativity of the cosmocrator-redeemer was dominated by the images of the star, the light, and the grotto; influences that were also evident within certain Hellenistic Samaritan and Jewish sects. According to Persian traditions, the *xvarna* that shone above the sacred mountain was the sign heralding the coming of Saoshyant, the redeemer miraculously born from the seed of Zoroaster and a virgin.¹³ “The Persians

¹² Mt. 2. 1,2.

¹³ Mircea Eliade. *Mefistófeles y el andrógino*. Barcelona, 2001. p. 54. Dentro de la tradición iranía, Eliade señalaba también el simbolismo de la ascensión periódica al «monte de las Victorias», el «centro del mundo» donde la luz escatológica se dejaba ver por primera vez.

considered epiphanies of light, and, above all, the appearance of a supernatural star, as the quintessential sign announcing the birth of the cosmocrator and savior. And since the birth of the future king and redeemer of the world was to take place in a grotto,” Eliade stated, “the star or column of light had to shine above that grotto. Therefore, it was very likely that the Christians adopted the imagery of the nativity of the cosmocrator-redeemer from the Parthians and applied it to the birth of Christ.”¹⁴ In this sense, “Monneret de Villard and Widengren also expressed this view, for whom this motif was undoubtedly of Persian origin. The *Protoevangelium* spoke of a blinding light that flooded the grotto of Bethlehem; and when it began to recede, the Child appeared. This indicated that light was inherent to Jesus, or else it was one of his epiphanies.”¹⁵

However, according to Eliade, it was the anonymous author of the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* (Patr. Gr. LVII. 637-638) who introduced new elements of this Persian symbolism into the Christian legend. “According to this text, the twelve Magi lived in the vicinity of Mount of Victories. They knew of Seth’s secret revelation concerning the coming of the Savior and every year they climbed the mountain, where there was a grotto among springs and trees. There, they worshipped God in hushed tones for three days, awaiting the appearance of the star. And it finally appeared in the form of a child, who told them to go to Judea... Thus, guided by the star, the Magi traveled for two years. And, upon their return, they recounted the miracle they had witnessed.”¹⁶

Anders Hultgård held similar views, arguing that the idea that the Star of Bethlehem was the result of an astronomical phenomenon at the beginning of our era, as is commonly believed, should be discarded. For him, an interpretation based on Persian traditions about the Magi would be more fitting and would better align with the Gospel account. “The Greek text of Matthew did not speak of astrologers in general, but of Magi (Gr. *magoi*) from the East, that is, Zoroastrian priests of the time. These figures,” Hultgård pointed out, “had observed the appearance of a star that foretold the birth of the Christian savior. And this was the result of the adaptation of an Iranian legend related to the birth of the savior king who represented the god Mithras. This legend was preserved in a slightly reworked form in some early Christian texts, especially in the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum* and the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius*.”¹⁷ For

¹⁴ Op. Cit. 51. Eliade cita a G. Widengren. *Fenomenología religión*. Madrid, 1976. p. 313.

¹⁵ Op. Cit. 51, 52.

¹⁶ Op. Cit. 52.

¹⁷ Anders Hultgård. «La religión iranía en la antigüedad. Su impacto en las religiones de su entorno: judaísmo, cristianismo, gnosis». En *Biblia y helenismo. El pensamiento griego y la*

Hultgård, as for Eliade and Widengren, both texts clearly linked the Magi to Persian mythology, and described the annual meeting of the Mazdean priests on the summit of a mountain where there was a cave, trees and a spring: the sacred mountain... There, they awaited the appearance of a star and the descent of the figure of the celestial savior, who was to descend through the column of light formed by the star itself.

It is worth recalling that wisdom and holiness were represented in Persian tradition, as in the tradition of ancient India, by the blinding light emanating from the sacred fire.¹⁸ Therefore, there is no doubt that, in terms of narrative discourse, the luminous element of Matthew's star could be framed, beyond ecclesiastical scriptural references, within the Iranian cultural tradition. The Star of Bethlehem informed the Chaldean Magi of the miraculous birth of a savior king, who, from distant lands, undertook a long pilgrimage to glorify the newborn child. The transformation of these Chaldean Magi into kings of the East would form part, according to some interpretations, of the popular storytelling developed later under the influence of Greco-Egyptian fantasy.

Coincidentally, the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated throughout Christendom on January 6th, and which in the East marked the date of Christ's birth, was also the date on which the festival of the birth of the new aeon (a syncretic personification of Osiris and the Sun) was celebrated in Alexandria at the temple of Kore, "the Maiden," who there was identified with Isis, for whom the appearance of the star Sirius (Sothis) had been the most eagerly awaited sign for millennia. "The rising of the star heralded the flooding of the Nile, through which the world-renewing grace of the dead and resurrected Lord Osiris would be poured out upon the earth."¹⁹

The Star, Messianic Hope, and Gnostic Visions.

Moreover, since ancient times, Israel's messianic hope had been linked to the appearance of a star. Indeed, from the most distant antiquity, not only in Judaism and the Iranian tradition, but also throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, the birth of the cosmocrator king, the savior, had been identified with the appearance of a star in the sky. This was certainly present in the Jewish Scriptures, as evidenced by Balaam's prophecy when he declared: "I

formación del cristianismo. (A. Piñero Ed.). Córdoba, 2006. p. 583.

¹⁸ De la misma forma que las *Upanishads* identificaban el *ātman* con la luz interior del individuo, el *Gran Bundahishn* identificaba el alma con el *xvarna*, la «luz de la gloria».

¹⁹ Joseph Campbell. *Las máscaras de Dios.* Vol. III. «Mitología Occidental». Madrid, 1999. pp. 368,369.

will see him, but not now; I will behold him, but not near: A star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the temples of Moab and the skulls of all the sons of Seth.”²⁰ According to Justin Martyr, “another prophet, Isaiah, announced the same thing in other terms. A star was to rise out of Jacob, and a flower was to grow on the staff of Jesse.” And this bright star that rose, this flower that grew on the rod of Jesse, was Christ the Savior.”²¹ Another reference from Justin also provides us with further evidence: “And that He was to arise like a star through the lineage of Abraham, Moses made clear when he said: ‘A star will arise from Jacob, and a leader from Israel.’ And another Scripture said: ‘Behold, a man. His name is East.’ Thus, a star rose in the sky as soon as Christ was born, as is written in the accounts of His Apostles, and the Magi from Arabia, recognizing Him by it, came and worshipped Him.”²²

On the other hand, we must not underestimate the fact that the *Book of Revelation* contains two highly significant and profound references to the “morning star.” The first²³ was preceded by a text from the Psalms: “I will give him authority over the nations, and he will rule them with an iron scepter.”²⁴ The second, much more eloquent and expressive, identified the revealer of Wisdom with the morning star: “I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”²⁵ That is to say, it identified Jesus Christ with the rising sun or with the morning star; that is, the planet Venus or the star of the goddess Ishtar.

It seems possible, therefore, that (beyond the solar Logos) the narrative of the *Apocalypse* included a distinctive sign of the narrative of the ancestral and archetypal myth that, coming from the Mesopotamian world, I label as “Sacrifice and drama of the Sacred King”: that which would belong to the mythology of the goddess Inanna-Ishtar and her son-lover Dumuzi-Tammuz, tens of centuries before the legends of the childhood of Matthew and Luke. It is not unreasonable to think, given the text of *Revelation*, that the star that appeared over Bethlehem in Matthew’s Gospel narrative could have been a cultural projection of the luminous planet that, three thousand years earlier, was presented as the star of

²⁰ *Números*. 24.17.

²¹ Justino. *Primera Apología*. 32.12,13. Op. Cit. 217. Hay que hacer notar que *Números* 24.17 e *Isaías* 11.1 se funden en una sola cita atribuida a Isaías.

²² Justino Mártir. *Diálogo con Trifón*. 106.4. En Daniel Ruiz Bueno. *Padres apologetas griegos*. Madrid, 1954. p. 489.

²³ *Ap.* 2.28.

²⁴ *Sal.* 2.8-9

²⁵ *Ap.* 22.16.

Ishtar, Inanna, sacred shepherdess and guardian of the cowshed, who gave birth to a son called “shepherd,” “lord of the sheepfold,” “lord of the net,” and “lord of life.”²⁶ We must not forget that in the symbolism of early Christianity, Jesus was also a shepherd, *Poimén*, like Dumuzi, Tammuz, Attis, and Osiris (*Poimén leukón astrón*),²⁷ and at the same time a lamb: representations that perfectly aligned with the end of the Age of Aries and his symbolic death, which also coincided with the zodiacal sign of the Passover celebration.

However, the matter of associating Christ’s birth with the Persian symbolism of the bright star (which, in my view, takes precedence over other cultural influences) is explained with philosophical depth in a passage by the Gnostic Christian Theodotus;²⁸ a passage recorded by Clement of Alexandria, where the luminescent phenomenon is presented as an allegory of the presence of the revealer of Wisdom in the world. The text first describes the nature of human destiny, which is caused by the fatal movement of celestial bodies in the purest deterministic style: “Thus, through the action of the fixed stars and planets, the invisible powers, guided by these celestial bodies, govern and preside over the generations.”²⁹ But “from this dispute and struggle of the powers, the Lord delivers us and grants us peace, far from the combat of the powers and the angels.”³⁰ “That is why the Lord descended,” explained the Gnostic Theodotus, “to bring peace to those who came from heaven and those who came from earth. [...] That is why a strange and new star rose on high, annihilating the ancient arrangement of the stars, shining with a new light not of this world, which traced new paths of salvation, just as the Lord himself, Guide of men, descended to earth to change from fate to his Providence those who believe in Christ.”³¹

Darkness, the counterpoint to starlight.

Of course, the counterpoint, at the opposite extreme, to this interpretation of the Star of Bethlehem (as a rupture of necessity, of fate, and of the mathematical harmony of the cosmic materiality of the archons), is found in the Gospels in the solar eclipse and the consequent darkening of the earth,³² impossible at the time of Easter and which foretold the death of Jesus Christ. A manifestation of the

²⁶ Anne Baring y Jules Cashford. *El mito de la diosa*. Madrid, 2005. p. 211.

²⁷ «Pastor de las blancas estrellas».

²⁸ Clemente de Alejandría. *Extractos de Teódoto*. IV. 69-75.

²⁹ Op. Cit. IV. 70.1.

³⁰ Op. Cit. IV.72.1.

³¹ Op. Cit. IV.74.1,2.

³² *Mc.* 15.33. *Mt.* 27.45. *Lc.* 23.44,45.

heavens that we now know transcends the merely mournful dimension of a literal reading of the texts, to transport us to a symbolic depth that only finds its place in the context of the cosmic Christ and in his liberating action (in the luminous and Gnostic manner) upon the fatalism of the ancient determinism of the stars and planets.

There are many other examples of the symbolism of darkness. “In Pliny [for example] we find a similar episode, which he claimed to have observed in Rome in his time. We are faced with the transposition of a supposed miracle, originally conceived to glorify the new Greco-Roman Golden Age that constituted the reign of the deified Augustus; a figure to whom the miraculous abolition of astral fate was also attributed.³³ All of which was evident in the New Testament, in the liberating announcement of the arrival from heaven of the apocalyptic Savior Judge at the end of time, and in the birth of a new age: “For immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear, and at that time all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”³⁴

Let’s say that the liberation and disruption of the archontic (material) order of the stars and planets presupposed, within the literature of Gnosticism and certain Jewish and Samaritan mystical and apocalyptic sects, a challenge to the mathematical order of the movement of celestial bodies. This challenge could only be associated with the figure of the Judge-Savior in apocalyptic literature (darkness) and the revealer of God’s Wisdom in Christian Gnosticism (brightness and luminosity).

The theme of Fate vanquished by light or darkness, ultimately vanquished by a divine intervention that would suppress the power and force of the harmonious movement of the planets, which until then had held sway over the destiny of humankind, already appeared in much of pre-Christian and Christian literature. It appeared in the Book of Enoch, was alluded to in other texts of apocalyptic literature, was the basis of Gnostic soteriology, and was also a very important part of certain ideologies of the Greco-Roman world.

The destruction of the power of the planets and liberation from the bonds of destiny through a Savior associated with light and sacred fire (Persian, Jewish, Greco-Roman, or Samaritan) constituted both the basis of the Gnostic myth of the return of the enlightened to the light of the Father, and the basis of the

³³ Jean Doresse. «Gnosticismo». *En Historia Religionum*. Madrid, 1973. Vol. I. p. 531.

³⁴ *Mc.* 13.24-26. *Mt.* 24.29,30.

apocalyptic myth that, from darkness and chaos, pointed to the establishment of a new cycle of relations between earth and heaven, liberating the collective of the righteous and the blessed from the tyranny of the archons.

...A Hellenistic interpretation of the coming of the Savior also appeared in the different variants of early Gnosticism: "Pre-Christian Gnosticism adopted this same theme, mentioned with the same significance in *The Sacred Book of Eugnostus*. Gnosticism, in turn, inherited it, but only after transforming or repeating it, in order to relate it to the strange event [the descent of the Son] that it claimed had taken place at the beginning of our era."³⁵

The Star of Bethlehem that announced the birth of Jesus; the darkening of the sun that, at Passover, announced the death of Christ; the birth of the Savior to a virgin mother;³⁶ the adoration of the Magi; the birth in the manger; the Massacre of the Innocents; The flight to Egypt, etc., etc., were just some of the many fabulous elements that, in their cultural context, expressed a symbolic "truth" that the Gospels and some Gnostic literature shared with the set of archetypal features of the myth, of Greek and Persian origin, of the descended savior.³⁷ And, within this framework, the star, as a symbol of his birth and as a sign that defied the cosmic fatalism of the archons and demons, appeared as an irreplaceable element in the narrative of the Nativity of the God Child in many ancient cultures.

³⁵ J. Doresse. Op. Cit. 531.

³⁶ Mt. 1.22,23. Lc. 1.27. Las primitivas imágenes de la Virgen María la representaban con dos espigas de trigo en la mano, lo mismo que aparecen representadas Perséfone y la Virgen zodiacal. (H.P. Blavatsky. Op. Cit. Vol. IV. 163).

³⁷ J. Campbell. Op. Cit. 366-371.