

The Sociology of MMT and the Conversions of King Agbarus and Queen Helen of Adiabene

Robert Eisenman, California State University Long Beach

In a related paper to this one in another section of SBL, I present a paper entitled "MMT as 'Jamesian' Letter to 'the Great King of the Peoples beyond the Euphrates' (or Izates)." Anyone conversant with early Christian history will immediately recognize the title "Great King of the Peoples beyond the Euphrates" as part of the conversion story of "Agbarus" or "Abgarus," translated from the Syriac into Greek by none other than Eusebius himself, which he claims to have found in the actual chancellory records of the Edessene kings. The pronunciation of "Agbarus"/"Abgarus" depends on which source one is drawing from, Greek, or Syriac -- the Armenian historian, Moses of Chorene, already having observed how Western authors tended to confuse such Semitic pronunciations.

Since Eusebius hardly ranks as a creative writer, one should probably take him at his word about where he found this story. I am also treating aspects of these conversions stories in a paper being given to the "Study of Islam" section of A.A.R.: "'Ad,' 'Thamud,' 'Hud,' and 'Salih' as Reflecting Edessene/Northern Syrian Conversion Stories about 'Thomas', 'Addai'/'Thaddaeus', 'Yehudah' ('Judas Thomas'/'Judas the Zealot'/'Judas Barsabas') and James." These names, which come down to us primarily through Eusebius' work and other Syriac sources, appear in the Koran as "'Ad and Thamud", "Hud and Salih" -- "'Ad" relating to Addai (Thaddaeus), "Thamud" to Thomas (Judas Thomas), "Hud" to Yehudah (Judas Thomas or Judas Barsabbas or Judas the Brother of James again), and "Salih" to James,

The name "Abgarus", to my knowledge, has never been fully delineated, whether a proper noun or a title meaning "Great King". In any event, in first-second century Syria, before the Romans suppressed this Kingdom (and with it that of Adiabene), during Trajan's campaigns in the East ending in 117 CE, the name occurs so regularly among rulers, that it appears to take on something of the sense of a royal title in the manner of "Caesar" or "Herod", or even "Aretas" further West. The same can be said for "Monobazus" or "Bazeus" in Josephus' version of similar events.

According to Eusebius, the "Agbar" or "Abgar" in question (I prefer to use the former, because of its clear connection with the garbled "Agabus" in Acts and the matter of the Famine or Famine-relief) was actually called "Agbar Uchama", which would be Abgar V (d. c. 50 CE) or "Abgar the Black". Why he was called "black" in Edessene chronicles (unless he was black) has again, to my knowledge, never been adequately explained; but it is important, especially when linked up with Acts' version of these events in the story about "the Ethiopian Queen's eunuch" -- "Ethiopian eunuch", as I will show, being the operative words here. It should be noted that the "Agabus" story occurs in proximity in Acts with the story about the "Famine-relief" activities Paul undertakes, from a place it is choosing to call "Antioch", where it thinks the first real "Christian" community was set down by Paul and Barnabas (11:26-30).

To return to "MMT" and its "sociology". It should be appreciated that "MMT" is a rather arcane manner of referring to a document, the real meaning of which is "Some Works of the Torah" (I think the present writer was one of the first to point out that this word "Ma'asei" did not mean "acts," "words" (phraseology actually used in the first part of the "Letter"), but actually meant "works" -- a word used across the breadth of the Qumran corpus to express

the ethos of its approach and integrally associated with James' name in the matter of Paul-James debates. The "Letter" or "Letter(s)", popularly referred to under this heading, as in all such Hebrew documents, did not carry a title.

It is not, however, a bad one, as long as the general public knows to what it refers. It is a word used throughout the Letter(s) and the specific reference is to "the works that will be reckoned to you as Righteousness" or as Paul would put it "reckoned as justifying you" (MMT 1.1-2 and 2.30-33).

The reference to "reckoned to you as Righteousness" is, of course, from Gen 15:6, evoking the manner in which both James and Paul consider Abraham to have been "justified". As we shall see, the allusion to Abraham's salvatory state is not without moment, because these Northern Syrian locales around Haran -- Abraham's homeland or place of origin -- such as Edessa or even Adiabene further East (it is not clear if the two terminologies are not linguistically connected, and this as well with "'Ad" or "Addai"), held the name of Abraham in specific reverence. For them the name of "Abraham" and his salvatory state, loomed large, especially where their own salvatory state was at issue as, for instance, in Acts 15:1, triggering "the Jerusalem Council".

So we can assume that in these admonishments or encouragements to the "King" at the end of the second Part of the "Letter(s)" -- the climax -- the allusion is to Abraham (MMT 2.29-33).

The next thing to be appreciated is that the "Letter"(s) does seem to be addressed to a "King." This is what makes it so important. In addition, as I attempt to show in my paper on "MMT as 'Jamesian' Letter to 'the Great King of the Peoples beyond the Euphrates'", the "King" in question does not appear to know a lot about Judaism. Terms like "the Book of the Torah" and "the words of the Prophets", used in instructing him (2.6-2.24), terms otherwise seemingly not in such common use in Qumran documents aimed at a more Palestinian milieu, stand out.

In addition, it is the salvatory state of Abraham -- as in the Letters of James and Paul -- which is being evoked in the above lines to encourage this King and "his People" to follow the series of positions or "works of the Torah" being outlined in the letter. Here, the allusion to "People" or "Peoples" outside of Palestine or as Paul would express it, "Gentiles," is not something that would be particularly expected in a letter to a Palestinian King, whomever such a Palestinian king in such a context might be.

To repeat, the very idea of writing to this "King" would appear to imply that he is at some distance from the locale in question, which would not normally be the case for small distances and locales in Palestine. The idea of the document being a Letter or Letters, as the titles to the several papers referred to above imply, relates to a series of notices about "Letter(s)" in the literature of this period -- most notably, the "letter to Agbarus" or "the Agbarus correspondence" which forms the backbone of the conversion of King Agbarus and the Edesenes or the Osrhoenes (i. e., the "Assyrians"), "the Letter" Judas Barsabas and Silas are pictured as taking down to "Antioch" containing James' "rulings" or his so-called "instructions to overseas communities" (Acts 15:22-32). In the Damascus Document from Qumran, it is "the Mebakker" / Overseer / or Bishop who makes such "rulings", as he does in the history of early Christianity.

What I am attempting to show in these papers and James the Brother of Jesus (New York, 1997) is that despite the varying names of the messengers -- in Syriac, it is the same "Ananias", whom Paul supposedly meets in Acts 9:12-19 in "Damascus"; in Josephus, a merchant called "Ananias" follows the Future King Izates everywhere and gets in among his mother, Queen Helen of Adiabene's women seeing to convert them -- and varying ways of referring to these letters or

correspondence, which simply reflect the point-of-view of a given narrator in redacting the tradition he is heir to; all these Letter(s) are basically the same.

Take, for instance, the allusion to the word "People" or "Peoples". As I have attempted to show in my work, this is a very important usage -- as it is in Paul's version of things, "Gentiles." In the title Eusebius quotes, allegedly from the Edessene Chancellory records, "Peoples" is a parallel expression of that to "the Kings of the Peoples", mentioned in the Qumran Damascus Document (8.11), which in that context, according to my interpretations, is clearly meant as an allusion to Herodians (not Maccabeans). It is also, as I have shown, a term used in Roman administrative parlance to refer to petty kings of the East, such as the Herodians -- but also individuals like Antiochus of Commagene and his son, Epiphanes (the leader of the Roman "Macedonian Legion" in the Jewish War), Azizus of Emesa (presentday Homs in Syria), one or another of the Tigranes' (Maccabean Herodians) in Armenia, Polemo of Cilicia, etc., to whom Rome farmed out its administrative responsibilities and the right to collect taxes.

There is also an allusion in the Habakkuk Pesher, which relates to this, having to do with Hab 1:14-16 and "catching them (like fishes) in his dragnet and his eating being plenteous" (5.12-6.7), relating to just such Roman administrative tax-farming, where the enemies known as "the Kittim" are concerned ("who worship their weapons and sacrifice to their standards of war"), and incorporating an allusion to "Peoples" -- here the "Peoples" which the Romans or Kittim "eat year by year."

For Roman juridical and administrative usage, as I have just exemplified, these same "Peoples" made up the Eastern part of the Empire. This is the same word in Greek (Ethne), as "the Peoples" to whom Paul dedicates his new mission and on whose behalf he is most often called "the Apostle to the Gentiles". For Josephus, too, Helen's son, "Izates" or "Izas" is at one point also described as a King of just such a "people beyond the Euphrates" and one of the groups, interestingly enough, to whom Josephus originally seems to have addressed his first version of the War.

Also the encouragement to "remember David. He was a man of Pious works and he, also, was saved from many sufferings and forgiven", one finds in these key passages in "MMT" (2.28-29), in this context, is important. It is almost impossible that such an admonition would be directed towards Herodians, whom few Palestinian purists would have thought to address in this way, not even the single Herodian making efforts at such Piety -- Agrippa I. One would probably have to rule out Maccabeans as possible recipients of such a Letter, both because of its tone and the condescending way in which it discusses Jewish national and legal manners. It 'talks down'. Presumably the Maccabeans knew Jewish Law better than this.

In the context of Izates' life, too, the allusion to David's "sufferings" and "being forgiven" are important, clearly part of the encouragement to "works Righteousness", since in Josephus' story of both Queen Helen's conversion, backed up in Rabbinic sources, and her son Izates', this theme plays an important role. I can think of no similar situation among Maccabeans or Herodians -- the other possibilities -- that can be readily cited.

To stretch the point a little, David also interested the author(s) of the Damascus Document. There, in the same context in which the Messianic "Star Prophecy" from Num 24:17 is quoted, David evoked, again in a Northern Syrian locale -- thus, once again linking the Damascus Document and "MMT", if the two can be thought of as comprising a contemporaneous or homogeneous ideological framework. Though "MMT" is considered "late" -- whatever this means, usually.

palaeography -- the Damascus Document is considered "early", again on the basis of one or two "older" exemplars diverging from a later cluster of scripts. The present writer would consider all documents alluding to similar phraseology, ideology, or dramatis personae to be written more or less contemporaneously, and this on the basis of "internal" data not the "external".

In these passages alluding to "going out from the Land of Judah to dwell in the Land of Damascus", so important to the ethos of the Damascus Document (6.5), where "the well is dug" and "the Poor", "the New Covenant," and "the Royal Law according to the Scripture" are referred to; the hope is expressed that the "the Tabernacle of David which is fallen" (Amos 9:11) will "be exiled...from My Tent of Damascus" (Amos 5:26-27). This, in turn, is tied to an allusion to "escaping to the Land of the North" (7.13-21). All of this, of course, with just the slightest intuitive leap, would mesh very well to the flowering of a new Hebrew/Israelite dynasty (that is after a proper conversion and circumcision) in "the lands of the Osrhoens" in Northern Syria and their King, "Agbarus" or "Abgarus", or further still "beyond the Euphrates" in Adiabene, a neighboring or possibly autonomous province of these lands -- it is not clear. What is clear is that all of these "lands" come under the heading of "the Peoples beyond the Euphrates."

The question, too, of which "Antioch" we are talking about, "Antioch on the Orontes", the one usually referred to by most people, scholars or lay, or the little known "Antioch by Callirhoe" or "Antioch Orrhoe" (Antioch of the Assyrians), a.k.a. called Edessa, a town neighboring the famous "Haran" of Abraham legend. Though superficially, this might appear a pointless question to ask, actually it is not, as it is the final step in linking all our traditions together and achieving a kind of convergence.

In fact, there were upwards of four "Antioch"s at the time, founded by one of the progenitors of the Seleucid regime to honor his father, "Antiochus". A third of these is mentioned in Acts 13:14, "Antioch of Psidia", not far from Cilicia in Asia Minor. A fourth was located at the mouth of the Tigris/Euphrates Delta -- presentday Basra -- then called Charax Spasini or Antiochia Charax -- later called Messene. Interestingly enough, this last was also associated with the story of the conversion of Helen's son Izates in Josephus. The writer contends that little or nothing was going on in Antioch on the Orontes at this time where early Christian history was concerned, as opposed to "Antioch Orrhoe" or "by Callirhoe" on the Upper Euphrates in Northern Syria -- indistinguishable and concurrent with that Haran associated with Abraham -- and that it was not here that Christians "were first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). In fact, at one point in Josephus' story of Queen Helen's son Izates, it is said that his father gave him the Kingdom of "Carron", probably meant to signify Carrhae or Haran.

Where the sociology of "MMT" itself is concerned, the first part of the Letter easily divides up into two sections, the first and greater part has to do with "things sacrificed to idols" or unclean gifts, including those from Gentiles, brought into the Temple. That this is also the concern of the "Three Nets of Belial" section of the Damascus Document should also be clear, since the "pollution of the Temple" charge evoked there (a second, "fornication" we shall presently encounter as the second concern of the first part of "MMT") is specifically related to not "separating as prescribed by Torah' (4.18-5.7), that is, not "separating the Holy Things according to their precise specifications, to love each man his brother as himself" (6.20-21 -- "the Royal Law according to the Scripture" according to the Letter of James 2:8) and not "separating between polluted and pure and distinguishing the Holy from profane" (6.17-18 -- compare this with Peter learning in Acts not to make distinctions

between Holy and profane, nor call any man profane in Acts 10:15 and 10:28 -- the exact opposite).

That the point about "things sacrificed to idols" relates to gifts from Gentiles or their sacrifices in the Temple, an odd thing to be reciting to one or another of the Maccabees, is made clear in MMT 1.8-9. This is also made clear in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 10:16-25, where Paul is obviously wrestling with James' directives to overseas communities, concluding in a massive display of sophisticated thought and criticizing those "puffed up" with their own knowledge -- meaning the Leadership -- "an idol is nothing in the world" (8:4) and "food does not commend us to God" (8:8) and -- in the same breadth that he announces "Communion with the blood of Christ" -- "all things are Lawful...eat anything sold in the marketplace, not raising questions of conscience" (a euphemism for the Law -- 10:16-25).

One can find this same allusion to "puffed up" in the Habakkuk Pesher's analysis of "the Delay of the Parousia" (Hab 2:3) and "the Righteous shall live by his Faith" (Hab 2:4, which the allusion to "puffed up" introduces). That the reference to "things sacrificed to idols" relates to "pollution of the Temple" in CD 4.17-18 is also confirmed in Rev 2:14's version of the "nets" which Belial cast before Israel (there portrayed as the "stumbling block"/"snare which Balaam taught Balak to cast before Israel"). There the allusion is to the more specific, "things sacrificed to idols", which these references in MMT (and by extension Paul) make clear relate to gifts and sacrifices from Gentiles in the Temple.

This, of course, is a theme perfectly suited to overseas Kings (or Queens) newly come into Judaism or Christianity. That Helen of Adiabene and her sons, Izates and Monobazus, were extremely interested in gifts or sacrifices in the Temple is documented in Talmudic materials as well. These dwell on the golden lampstand she and her sons were said to have contributed to the Temple. Helen, it should be observed, was also interested in the matter of "fornication", as she was also said to have donated a plaque with "the suspected adultress" passages from Num 5:13-31 inscribed on it in gold for display in the Temple. It should not be overlooked, that following this in Num 6:1-21, as well, are the strictures relating to Naziritism and, from Rabbinic sources too, we hear that this was one of her consuming passions too. In fact, because of a vow she took regarding Izates' safe-keeping in war (additional materials having to do with her and her sons' "sufferings"), we hear she took three consecutive, seven-year Nazirite vows of abstinence.

Finally, there is the matter of "Famine-relief" connected with her and Izates' names in all sources, Josephus telling us that she sent her "Treasury agents" to Egypt and Cyprus to buy grain for distribution in Jerusalem. The Famine in question is, of course, the one evoked in Acts, where it is connected to the an unknown "prophet called Agabus" (11:28). We have already remarked, that at this point, too, in Acts, Paul and "Barnabas" are sent up to Jerusalem with Famine relief, collected from the nascent "Christian" community in a place called "Antioch", in a trip unrecorded in Galatians.

This is at the beginning of Chapter 12, which appears to be telling us about these relief activities, but in the end does no such thing -- instead telling us about the beheading of James "the son of Zebedee", "the brother of John," a beheading coinciding at this point in Josephus' narrative with that of one "Theudas" (Thaddaeus?), also connected in some manner with Josephus' account of the Famine and Queen Helen's Famine relief activities. Instead, the rest of Chapter 12 introduces us to James, the Leader of the early Church at that time who seems to have been referred to earlier, but no such description is extant in Acts as it presently stands. Rather Chapter 12 ends with Paul and

Barnabas "returning from Jerusalem, having successfully completed their Mission" (12:25).

There is another individual in Talmudic sources credited with "Famine relief" activity, "Ben Kalba Sabu'a." For various reasons (covered in James the Brother of Jesus, Viking, 1997), this is probably another pseudonym for members of the royal family of Adiabene, now resident in Jerusalem and their Famine relief activities. "Kalba" in Aramaic means "dog"; in Hebrew, "female dog" or "bitch". "Sabu'a", as we shall see, probably has something to do with ritual immersion or bathing -- even "Sabaeen" -- in Syriac. We shall treat this below, when it comes to dealing with "the Subba of the marshes" in Southern Iraq and the Koran.

The second matter treated in some detail in these passages in MMT is "fornication" (1.83-89), a matter we have already shown to be of interest to the "Three Nets of Belial" section of the Damascus Document and certainly one of Helen of Adiabene's more pronounced concerns -- why, it is difficult to say. This is also of concern, as we have shown, in Rev 2:14's picture of similar "snares" or "stumbling blocks", as well as James' directives to overseas communities in Acts -- not to mention the Letter redacted in his name.

If we now turn to Acts' version of like-minded events, it will be observed that the matter of James' rulings to overseas communities at the conclusion of "the Jerusalem Council" in Acts 15, is triggered at the beginning of that chapter, as already noted, by the reference to "certain ones -- normally "from James" (at least this is how this genre of persons is referred to in Gal 2:12, where "the Peoples" are also referred to) -- coming down from Jerusalem (to Antioch, as "Agabus" is pictured as doing in Acts 11:27-28), taught the brothers that unless you are circumcized according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved".

Not only should one note the parallel with the expression "the Book of Moses" and the "saved" applied to David in MMT above (2.6-2.29), the passage basically parallels Paul in Galatians above, calling the "some from James", triggering the "Antioch" confrontation, "those of the circumcision". The vocabulary parallels are almost precise. The Chapter ends with James' famous directive to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols ("pollutions of the idols" in 15:20), fornication, strangled things, and from blood". The last would certainly seem to rule out the interpretation Paul is putting on these things in 1 Cor 10-11 above, "partaking of the blood of Christ" -- even if only symbolically.

Where the Pseudoclementines and the Koran pick up these issues -- the former straightforwardly acknowledging this was James teaching and that Peter also taught it -- "strangled things" is certainly "carrion", the reference being to the manner in which beasts of prey "strangle" their prey. But interestingly, this "carrion" theme can also be detected in the extant passages of the first part of "MMT" in the stricture "barring dogs from the Holy camp ("Jerusalem being the Holy Camp"), because they may eat some of the bones with the flesh still on them in the Temple (1.34-36 and 66-69).

This definitely has to do with the theme of "carrion" and makes the link-up of themes in "MMT" with James' directives to overseas communities that much tighter -- not to mention the total ethos of the Letter(s) of "works that will be reckoned for you as Righteousness", again recapitulating another basic theme found in the Letter attributed to James' name. Where the "letter" containing James' directives to overseas communities is concerned, Acts observes that it was sent to "those in that Antioch and Syria and Cilicia ("Antioch" now being reckoned as a place distinct from "Syria"), brothers from among the Peoples". Here, once again, one should note the allusion to "Peoples".

It is sent via the hand of someone Acts identifies as "Judas surnamed Barsabas" and another individual mentioned for the first time, "Silas".

Aside from the ideological similarities of the orientations surrounding James and the Letter(s) known as "MMT", a final conjunction of themes -- in addition to that relating to "things sacrificed to idols" -- has to do with "circumcision". One should recall that for Paul this is a practice that is either "nothing" or legally neutral (1 Cor 7:19 and Gal 5:19). On the other hand, James is normally seen as the Leader of 'the Party of the circumcision' and these same "some from Jerusalem" (hardly to be distinguished from the "some from James" in Gal 2:12) teach that without "circumcision you cannot be save". The Damascus Document from Qumran, a text that we have already seen to be packed with "Jamesian" themes, also couples another of these crucial references to "circumcision" with allusion to Abraham's paradigmatic actions. The passage, CD 16.6, relates to "returning to the Torah of Moses" and escaping the Angel of Satan, asserting as the substantiation that "Abraham circumcized himself on the day of his knowledge".

The reference is, of course, to Gen 17 and Abraham circumcizing all the males of his household, including Ishmael, after receiving the promises and instructions. But this brings us to the episode involving the circumcision of Helen's sons, Izates and Monobazus, as retold in both Josephus and the Talmud. This definitely takes place in an 'Abrahamic' milieu (Haran or Adiabene) and the soteriological state of Abraham -- as by implication here in MMT and, of course, the whole presentation of the Letter of James -- is definitely the determining factor. The episode in question follows their conversion to another form of Judaism (or "Christianity") that did not require it, taught by one "Ananias" and another colleague who goes unnamed (Paul?), both of whom consider circumcision to be unimportant or at least religiously where conversion is concerned.

As Josephus retells it, Helen has a horror of circumcision, fearing it will put her son Izates in bad odor among her subjects. What follows is retold in both Josephus and Talmudic versions. As both would have it, Izates and Monobazus are reading Scripture, when a more Zealous teacher comes (Josephus names him "Eleazar"), and asks the two young men if they understand the significance of the passage they are reading. The Talmud knows the very passage, Gen 17:10-17, in which Abraham is commanded to circumcize. Once again, the emphasis on Abraham's salvatory status would have, as in the Letter attributed to James and Paul's Galatians, impressed those in a Northern Syrian framework holding the memory of Abraham dear and comparing themselves to his salvatory state before circumcizing themselves. This is the force of Paul's argument centering about Gen 15:6, to which James only rather meekly cites the situation of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (gen 22). The argument here is, of course, much more powerful.

We are now in a position to join all our themes and draw some conclusions. For Josephus, as we saw, Izates' father, who seems to have been the brother or half-brother of his mother (again, as in the case of Abraham in the Bible), gave him a Kingdom around Haran to administer. In the Syriac version of parallel events, as translated and perhaps edited by Eusebius, the conversion in question is occurring in "the Land of the Osrhoenians" around Edessa or Antioch Osrhoene and the name of the King is now "Agbarus, the Great King of the Peoples beyond the euphrates". The intermediary in the correspondence between this "Antioch" and Jerusalem is, once again, Ananias, but the individual sent to evangelize the Edessenes are, first of all, "Thaddaeus", and, thereafter, the individual who originally sent him, now called "Judas Thomas."

But in Gospel Apostle lists and elsewhere, "Thaddaeus surnamed Lebbaeus"

takes the place of or is interchangeable with "Judas (the brother) of James". In Syriac tradition, too, Helen is King Agbar's wife, as well as being his sister. Our conclusion is that, since these kinds of Kings had very large harems, among "Agbar"'s (again, possibly a title) numerous wives, one was perhaps Helen, who was also his sister or half-sister. She was given the Kingdom of Adiabene, contiguous to Edessa or "the Land of the Edessenes" further east, and probably one of the provinces of this "Great King of the Peoples beyond the Euphrates." In fact, in Syriac tradition of the next century, one of the Abgars is actually called "Abgar bar Ezad" (Abgar VII, 109-16 CE), i. e., "Abgar son of Izates." It not possible to link names like "Monobazus", "Bazeus", and "Abgar" further than this, though they are clearly names remounting to differing.

Again, the conclusion seems to be that we, basically, have same or similar events seen through the prisms of differing perspectives, linguistic and otherwise, as persons at this time often had differing names depending on which tradition was doing the recording. The main characters and events remain the same and they all relate to contemporaneous occurrences. In one tradition, the conversion is to Judaism; in the other, 'Christianity'. This would also seem to be related to Christians "first being called Christians" at Antioch in the Lukan tradition of Acts. Other than this, they are all but indistinguishable.

The key points, all of which seem to overlap, are the link to James' instructions to overseas communities, the matter of "things sacrificed to idols" in the Jamesian correspondence, Acts, and MMT -- not to mention Paul in 1 Corinthians, Peter and James in the Pseudoclementines, and Hippolytus' picture of extreme Essenes, we shall consider below. The next is the way the figure of Abraham is used in almost all sources -- this goes on into Islam, including the ruberic of "Friend", which is found both at Qumran and in the Letter of James -- in particular as regards his circumcision, but also his "Faith" or "Salvation." Thirdly, there is the proper identification of "Antioch" -- in this instance Edessa and/or Adiabene, all related to the Arabic root "'Ad" or, as Syriac tradition would have it, "Addai", itself related to "Thaddaeus" or "Judas (the brother) of James" -- in other traditions "Judas Thomas" and even "Judas the Zealot" (cf. variant manuscripts of the Apostolic Constitutions).

Another theme that runs through most of these traditions, including those in "MMT", Acts, and "the Agbarus correspondence," is that of the "Letter" theme. The letter, known popularly as "MMT" was found in multiple copies at Qumran -- the only letter found there. It is clearly important and probably one of the few documents, found at Qumran, aimed at an external consumption of an overseas audience recently converted -- therefore the emphasis on the status of "gifts and sacrifices from Gentiles in the Temple" (MMT 1.2-24) and the fact that the "King", who is to assume Davidic proportions, is said to "possess discernment and Knowledge of the Torah" (2.31).

Preceding this, "the works of the Torah" (n.b., our 'Jamesian' emphasis on "works Righteousness") being recommended for his salvation are characterized as for "his own Good and that of His People" (2.30). Once again, the allusion to "People", possibly implying one different than that of the authors of the Epistle(s), i. e., one of "the Peoples beyond the Euphrates," should be seen as significant. Weighing all of these notices and factors, it is not a long stretch to discern that instead of "Judas Thomas sending down Thaddaeus" -- hardly distinguishable from one another -- it is James, in his role as "Mebakker" or "Bishop", sending his "brother", "Judas of James" or "Jude the brother of James" (also being referred to under the confusing ruberic "Judas Barsabas" in Acts) with the letter containing his instructions -- an epitome or compressed version of MMT. Again, the determining factor is the matter of the

"brother" or the "twin".

This brings us to the last subject of concern in these various, interesting and sometimes overlapping traditions, which also throws light on the curious nature of Acts' working method. This is the conversion of the Ethiopian Queen's eunuch -- the Treasurer over all her property -- by Philip (Acts 8:26-37). In turn, an elaboration of this will throw light on the meaning of these various allusions to Saba/Sabaeen/Sabu'a and Sheba.

There are many aspects to this episode, but the most important is to realize that it is a parody of the conversion of Queen Helen's son Izates. Instead of the "Zealot" teacher "of the Party of the circumcision" asking Izates and his brother if they understand the significance of what they are reading, in this instance the teacher -- one "Philip" who is on his way from Samaria to Caesarea but somehow ends up on the road to Gaza, the traditional gateway to Egypt -- jumps up (a la another individual dubbed a "Zealot" in Old Testament history, Jonadab son of Rechab, on the back of the Jehu's chariot -- 2 Kings 10:16) on the back of the chariot of someone called "the Ethiopian Queen's eunuch", "one in power over all her treasure" (8:27).

Conveniently this "eunuch" is reading Isaiah rather than Gen 17 on Abraham's circumcision. In fact, it is Is 53, "the Suffering Servant," one of the most basic of all early Christian prooftexts. But the parody on circumcision from the Izates/Monobazus conversion episode in Josephus and Talmudic literature should be clear -- though this with rather malevolent intent -- circumcision being for the Romans a form of bodily mutilation in the manner of castration (cf. Origen castrating himself in the manner of a "Sicarios" and the Roman Lex Cornelia de Sicarius, fairly extensively expounded in James the Brother of Jesus). The Queen's eunuch immediately steps down from his chariot and requests baptism -- an important element in the story in linking it to other "baptist" groups further east, whereupon Philip immediately dematerializes and disappears to another place.

Not only is the conversion episode involving Queen Helen's sons being parodied, but so are her Famine relief operations, she having sent her Treasury agents to buy grain as far as Egypt and Cyprus. Of course, the Book of Acts is showing knowledge of these episodes and transforming them in a consistent, if somewhat tendentious manner. In every instance, the point is to get away from the "zeal" of those insisting on circumcision -- whom in the sense of the Roman Lex Cornelia de Sicarius of the First and Second Centuries CE can also be called "Sicarii" after the circumcizer's knife -- into the area of simple baptism or ritual immersion. In this instance, too, the "Ethiopian" Queen's name, "Kandakes," probably can be seen as another parody of one of Queen Helen's martyred descendants in the next generation, "Kenedaeos," one of the leaders of the first successful military operation against the Romans at the Pass at Beit Horon.

Of course, there was no "Ethiopian Queen" at this time, who sent her "eunuch"s to Jerusalem, for whatever the reason, and no one called "Kandakes" either. Ethiopia was hardly in touch with this part of the world in this epoch, but Adiabene was! What there was, was the conversion of Queen Helen's two sons to a more "Zealot"- minded form of Judaism -- one that insisted on circumcision and did not abjure it as religiously neutral as Paul.

As alluded to above, Hippolytus, in his version of Josephus' famous testimony to Essenes, describes four kinds of "Essenes", the last two being "Zealot Essenes" and "Sicarii Essenes". Whether one agrees with him or not, this is certainly a very original testimony. The point is that it helps us relate to the documents at Qumran in a way that the normative testimony attributed to Josephus does not.

The last are distinguished in two ways: 1) they will kill anyone they here discussing the Law who is not circumcized and 2) having participated in the recent War against Rome, they did not mind undergoing any torture or form of death, in order to avoid "eating things sacrificed to idols". In Josephus, this is simply "forbidden things". This should be repeated, because it is so important, that is, unlike Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-11, they were willing to martyr themselves rather than eat "things sacrificed to idols." Both, of course, simply are early "Jamesian Christians" or rather "Sicarii Essenes" -- the wordplay continues on even into the "Judas Iscariot" episodes in the New Testament, as the "betrayer" of Christ par excellence. This mindset, as just noted above, goes a long way towards describing the ethos of Qumran, which for a long time has puzzled commentators, because it exhibits what can be considered both "Essene" and "Zealot" characteristics.

Of course, the reference to "Ethiopian" here probably incorporates three or even four parodies. The knowledge of some of these New Testament artificers is so precise that it outstrips almost anything previously accorded them by scholars. First, there is the idea that these Eastern Arab "Queen"s like Helen of Adiabene were "black" -- of course, "Agbar Uchama," the hero of Eusebius Syriac narrative was perhaps "Black". As already noted, the "Agabus" episode in Acts, connected as it is to the matter of the Famine and, therefore, Famine relief, makes it clear that the New Testament authors knew quite a lot about and were already parodying this conversion a good deal earlier than Eusebius' "Uchama" episode or even what latterday scholars give them credit for.

Additionally, there is the whole mix-up between "Saba" and "Sheba", as signifying either "Ethiopian" (Southern Arabian) or "Daily Bather". This has continued into the Koran up to the presentday. Daily bathing was extremely prevalent in the lands in the upper part of the Euphrates, i. e., among "the Peoples beyond the Euphrates", meant as inclusive of "Adiabene" not exclusive of it. In Syriac, such individuals were known, according to Eusebius, as "Masbuthaeans" -- based on the root indicating immersion or daily bathing, S-B-'. For the Epiphanius and the Pseudoclementines, in their wisdom, all early Christians, including Peter, were Daily Bathers.

Peter, in particular, rose daily before dawn to pray and bathe. He also wore threadbare clothes, just as Josephus says "the Essenes" -- clearly another daily bathing group -- did, and taught a version of James' directives to overseas communities -- also, not surprisingly, going directly into Islam -- more detailed and more precise even than Acts'. In other work, I have suggested, that if "MMT" is, in fact, directed to a foreign King recently converted, interested in the Law and "Justification" by its works, such as either "Agbarus" or Helen's son Izates (if the two can in reality be distinguished from each other, except in name); then in some sense the bathing installations at Qumran -- at least in their later stages which are by no means insignificant -- can also be seen as financed by her legendary munificence, or that of her sons, as clearly the War against Rome was. In Talmudic tradition, this would include even later generations, down to Rabbi Akiba, who supported Bar Kochba and grew rich in marrying the legendary "Ben Kalba Sabu'a's daughter", individual we shall consider also to be representatives of this family.

If the bathing installations at Qumran are, in fact, bathing installations and not something else and the literature at Qumran does support this general concentration on bathing -- whatever else may be indicated -- so do both Josephus' and Hippolytus' "Essenes"; then they owed their construction to someone's munificence. Not only were "Essenes", as already observed, "Daily Bathers" -- and Josephus devotes much space to his description of this -- so

seemingly were the "Ebionites", followers of James par excellence and descending, according to early Church literature, from "the Essenes".

In the late First or early Second Centuries, in Northern Syria, these groups gave way to one called "Elkasaites" who, if nothing else, were clearly Daily Bathers. In Syriac, these are certainly Eusebius' mysterious "Masbuthaeans", based on the root "to immerse". In Arabic, they are clearly what are intended by "Sabaeans"/ "Bathers", regardless of confusions with "Saba" (or "Sheba" -- Southern Arabia), a slightly different homophonic root, and in Southern Iraq or "Messene" -- all locations connected with Josephus' narrative of Izates' conversion and travels -- these turn into the "Nazoraioi" or "Mandaeans", again "Daily Bathers". In Arabic, also, they are known as "the Subba of the Marshes" down to the present day, if they have not all been obliterated by Saddam Hussein's recent draining of these same "Marshes".

Mani came from one of these Elkasaites families in Southern Iraq, but the real difference between Manichaeism and these other "bathing" groups in Northern Syria and Iraq is that Manichaeism discarded bathing. Still, all these groups appear to prize the "True Prophet" ideology or prophecy, strong at Qumran and in the proof texts found there, which went on through such "Sabaeans" or "Subba" and the Manichaeans into Islam.

Finally, because of all these connections, in other work too, I have suggested that Helen's family, coming from Northern Mesopotamia, were also Daily Bathers. If she supported the bathing installations at Qumran, this would prove it, not to mention this mix-up -- purposeful or otherwise -- in Acts' passage about the "Ethiopian Queen's eunuch Treasurer's" conversion and baptism, between "Saba"/"Sabaeans" and "Saba"/"Sheba" ("Ethiopian"). It has also been observed that even the name, Judas Barsabas, relates to this, but I am unable to prove this in any way. It is only a suggestion.

Helen, certainly, according to the sources, displayed a consuming interest in Naziritism, a procedure, as Acts 21:23-27 demonstrates, also of interest to Jamesian Christianity -- James being a life-long Nazirite according to all sources. It is also in evidence at Qumran, where the notion of "Holiness from the womb" (cf., for instance, the Qumran Hymns) -- as in testimonies to James' "Naziritism" and "Rechabitisim", is widespread, as are other "Nazirite" usages and vocabulary. I have, also, pointed these out in recent work, so much so that Qumran might be considered a Community of priestly Naziritism. Not only would these facets of Helen's character and presumably that of her son, Izates', explain all these mix-ups we have been witnessing and the interest of this family in the bathing installations at Qumran, but also the Revolution against Rome.

Acts' portrait of "the Ethiopian Queen's Treasurer" or "eunuch" shows intimate knowledge of all these matters -- "eunuch" being a malevolent aspersion on Izates' circumcision. Recently a book was published (The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia, Holt, 1997), showing how photographs in the Stalinist Era were retouched over time, to excise non-presons and/or those eliminated by execution or suicide, promoting an officially sanitized version of history.

The same process can be said to be occurring vis-a-vis these ancient conversion stories. For instance, the reason why "the Ethiopian Queen's eunuch" or "Treasury agent" is on his way to Gaza and Egypt is that this is the direction Queen Helen (or Izates) treasury agents would have taken to buy grain; but a "eunuch" -- as euphemistically described in Acts -- would not even have been allowed into the Jerusalem Sanctuary, so why undertake a pilgrimage of this kind to Jerusalem in the first place? One can also conclude, because of the "Agabus" allusion in Acts and its connection to the issue of the

all-important "Famine" (45--48 CE), in some manner "King Agbarus" is involved in these "Famine relief" activities, ascribed to Helen, as is the early Christian Community in "Antioch" -- wherever this was. Acts appears to know the truth behind these evasions, but for various reasons is unwilling to describe or divulge it, many of these character ending up as non-persons or mere fictionalized glosses.

If "MMT" is a letter to one of another of these newly converted "Kings" "beyond the Euphrates", sympathetic to Judaism (or "Christianity" as the case may be); then the fact of its importance to the Qumran corpus is of extreme significance and relatively easily explained -- as are the multiple copies of it in the Qumran chancellory records, not to mention its "Jamesian" aspects. This is just another peg in the many parallels between James and the Righteous Teacher from Qumran, perhaps a final one.

The "Letter" would then be -- to conflate the notices about "Letter" or "Letters" in all our sources -- a variation on the one James sent down via "Judas Barsabas" (a.k.a. Judas the brother of James, a.k.a. Judas the Zealot, a.k.a. Judas Thomas, a.k.a. Thaddaeus, a.k.a. Lebbaeus -- and a.k.a., possibly, "Judas Iscariot") to "Antioch" with his rulings appertaining to overseas communities, even according to Acts' somewhat tendentious presentation. In other words, what we have in this Qumran archive, are copies of the actual letter, brought down by Judas, James' brother, to the "King" of the Edessenes or Adiabene -- which is unimportant.

What led us to this conclusion, was the emphasis on the banning of Gentile gifts in the Temple, "things sacrificed to idols" according to Jamesian description, the very matter Josephus describes as leading up to and triggering the War against Rome; the ethos of "bathing" among "Essenes", at Qumran, and among Ebionites, Elkasaites, and Sabaeans further afield; and, finally, the evocation of Abraham's "Justification by works", in particular, the importance of his circumcision for all those living "in the Land of the North" or Northern Mesopotamia as paradigmatic and a sine qua non for conversion.