

FIDES ET HUMILITAS:
THE JOURNAL OF THE CENTER FOR ANCIENT
CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Fall 2014 ※ Issue 1

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*Figural Reading in the Book of the Cave of Treasures:
Recovering an Interpretive Tradition*

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Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to recover the interpretive tradition of figural reading depicted in the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (c. late 6th–early 7th century). Throughout his extended fifty four chapter narrative that recounts the story of biblical history from creation to Pentecost, the author uses the interpretive approach of figural reading as a means to unite the biblical story and provide cohesion. This essay will be divided into two sections. First, the textual history, literary character, and theological message of The Cave of Treasures (CT) will be introduced. Second, a taxonomy representative of the author’s figural interpretations will be presented under five headings: 1) Adam-Christ Readings; 2) Soteriological Readings; 3) Christological Readings; 4) Ecclesiological Readings; and, 5) Cessation-Replacement Readings.

Introduction

In recent decades a number of biblical scholars have proposed that pre-critical approaches of reading the Bible ought to be recovered as hermeneutically beneficial for present day interpreters. This post-

critical movement, broadly categorized as *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, suggests that pre-Enlightenment interpretative traditions (especially the traditions of the church fathers) ought not only to be considered for their historical significance in the history of interpretation, but also integrated into the wheelhouse of interpretive practices of contemporary scholars.¹ In light of this biblical studies milieu, I propose that the interpretive approach of figural readings depicted in the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (CT)—c. late 6th–early 7th century—serves as an instructive example of one such pre-critical interpretive tradition that ought to be recovered by present day readers of biblical literature.

Basic Terminology

For the purpose of this essay, I define *figural reading* as an interpretive attitude toward the biblical story that seeks to establish an

¹For an introduction to this diverse movement see the series of essays edited by Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Particularly influential is an essay from the same volume by David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” 26–38 (reprint, *Theology Today* 37:1 [1980], 27–38). See also the article by Daniel J. Treier, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? Sic et Non,” *Trinity Journal* 24 (2003): 77–103, who interacts with Steinmetz’s proposal. Treier has also written a helpful introduction, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). Other works could be cited in this growing and diverse movement, but I have found the following works to be of particular interest: Richard A. Mueller and John L. Thompson, “The Significance of Pre-Critical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the End of the Modern Era: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Richard A. Mueller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 335–45; Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); John J. O’Keefe and R.R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2005; David Paul Parris, *Reading the Bible with the Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Atlanta: Paternoster, 2006).

interdependent connection between two distinct historical events so that the latter is understood as a fulfillment of the former.² Figural reading has a long history in the Christian tradition and is one of the primary reading strategies of all pre-Enlightenment interpreters.³

This particular interpretive tendency occurs repeatedly in CT, yet up to this point in time no effort has been made to classify the various figural moves contained in this document. Hence, the goal of this paper is to present a taxonomy of the various figural readings that the author himself makes, and to suggest that although the validity of any (or perhaps even all) of these readings may be considered suspect by some, it is nevertheless the case that this general posture toward the biblical story ought to be regarded as hermeneutically commendable—even to

²This definition loosely follows the definition provided by Eric Aurebach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Task (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 73, 555, as well as the description of figural interpretation articulated by Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale, 1974), 18–37. John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 83–113, has demonstrated that although different at certain points, both Aurebach and Frei articulate a similar understanding of figural interpretation that is representative of the pre-critical Christian tradition.

³Eric Aurebach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 11–76. I am intentionally using the term *figural* as opposed to *allegorical* or *typological* as a way to describe the interpretive disposition of CT. The term *figural* is more comprehensive since it can include various components of exegesis that include both allegory and typology. Interpreters may debate whether this or that interpretation is typological or allegorical, but for the purpose of this paper I avoid this distinction for the sake of developing a taxonomy that accounts for both types of readings. Hence, the umbrella term *figural* is preferred. One should also note that pre-critical interpreters, especially the Fathers, did not draw a sharp distinction between typology and allegory in their exegesis. For more on this see the discussion by O’Keeffe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 19–21, 90–93. CT does not distinguish between typological and allegorical readings; the taxonomy developed here does not either.

such an extent that this posture is one that ought to be recovered by present day biblical scholars.⁴ To accomplish this purpose I will first briefly introduce CT and then proceed to a presentation of the taxonomy of the author's figural readings.

Introducing the Cave of Treasures

As a part of the OT Pseudepigrapha, the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (CT) belongs to the genre of the rewritten Bible texts, with the majority of scholars dating its final composition to the late sixth or early seventh century.⁵ It was originally composed in Syriac and is extant in Arabic, Ethiopian, Coptic, and Georgian versions.⁶ Su-Mi Ri has argued that the Syriac text is extant in two recensions, West-Syriac and East-Syriac, derived from a single source.⁷ Most scholars find this theory persuasive, yet there is debate regarding how to account for the sources in view.⁸ A solution is offered by Leonard, who suggests that

⁴It is regrettable that CT maintains an anti-Jewish polemic. However, this shortcoming need not detract modern readers from attempting to glean interpretive insights from this creative document.

⁵The translation adopted for this study is the recently published work by Alexander Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Non-Canonical Scriptures*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 531–84. All Scriptural quotations are from Toepel. Toepel's work replaces the first English translation of CT offered by Ernest Alfred W. Budge in 1927. See Ernest Alfred W. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927; reprint, New York: Cosimo, 2005).

⁶Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 532–34. As Toepel notes in *Die Adam- Und Seth-Legenden In Syrischen Buch Der Schatzhöhle: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.*, vol. 581, Subsidia 103 (Louvian: Peeters, 2006), 1, CT was one of the most influential works in all of Syrian literature.

⁷Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 532.

⁸For a summary of various proposals see the concise presentations of Toepel,

even though CT appeals to traditions found in Judaism and Christianity, both the literary elements of the text and the presence of key motifs, indicate that CT should be regarded as a composition of one author rather than a compilation of older sources.⁹ Despite this dispute concerning the document's textual history, one is nevertheless on sure footing to follow the recommendation of Davila, who argues that in instances where the textual history of a particular Pseudepigraphical document is in question, it is appropriate to "concentrate on general themes and repeated ideas" as a means of investigation.¹⁰ In light of this consideration, my own approach will be to explore the broad themes and patterns resident in CT to understand one example of the theological content and hermeneutical trajectories present within early Syriac Christianity.

CT is a Christian retelling of the story of redemption from Creation to Pentecost, with particular focus on the relationship between Adam and Christ. The title of the work comes from the supposed "Cave of Treasures"—a cave located on the fringes of

"The Cave of Treasures," 535–36, and Su-Min Ri, "La Caverne Des Trésors: Problèmes D'Analyse Littéraire," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. Hans J.W. Drijvers, René Lavenant, Corrie Molenberg, and Gerrit Reinik (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Studium Orientalium, 1987), 183–84.

⁹Clemens Leonhard, "Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures," in *The World of the Arameans III: Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugene Dion*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 326, ed. P.M. Michele Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 2001), 255–293.

Following Leonhard, Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 535–36, concludes that the final form was written in an Eastern Syriac setting during the Sasanin empire of Xurso II Parvez, whose reign dates from 590–628 C.E.

¹⁰James R. Davila, "The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha as Background to the New Testament," *Expository Times* 117:2 (2005), 57.

paradise where Adam and Eve deposited gold, myrrh, and incense, shortly after their expulsion from Eden (5:14–20). These “treasures” are later presented to Christ by the magi when Jesus is born in Bethlehem (45:12–15). Thus, the “treasures” are used by the author to develop the narrative by serving as a theme that ties the biblical story together.¹¹ The story follows the Genesis creation account by retelling the seven days of creation (1:1–25), the creation of Adam and Eve (2:1–25), as well as his subsequent fall and expulsion from Eden (3:1–5:17). In stark contrast to the Genesis account, the brunt of their expulsion is quickly relieved by God, who permits the couple to dwell on a mountain just outside paradise (5:17). It is here in this second paradise that the couple deposits gold, myrrh, and incense into the supposed “Cave of Treasures,” and also the place where Adam establishes the perpetuation of priestly activity that results in salvific efficacy for all his progeny who dwell near the Cave (5:17–18, 25 6:11; 7:1–14).¹²

Cain is expelled from the holy mountain after murdering Abel and forced to live in the plain below, while Seth and his progeny continue for several generations to live in close proximity to the Cave of Treasures (6:19–7:14). The cave continues to play an important role in the early chapters of the narrative, serving as the burial place of Adam and his immediate descendants (6:11, 20; 7:22; 8:17; 9:10; 10:10; 13:8–10;

¹¹Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” 531, 536–38. The cave also plays an important role in the early chapters of the narrative, serving as the burial place of Adam and his immediate descendants (6:11, 20; 7:22; 8:17; 9:10; 10:10; 13:8–10; 14:16–17), as well as the locale where the priestly vocation of Adam’s seed is exercised (7:13–14, 19–22; 9:7; 10:1, 12; 13:11).

¹²See Serge Ruzer, “The Cave of Treasures on Swearing by Abel’s Blood and Expulsion from Paradise: Two Exegetical Motifs in Context,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:2 (2001): 251–71, who argues that the priestly ministry performed by Adam and his seed prior to their expulsion from the holy mountain was salvific.

14:16–17), as well as the locale where the priestly vocation of Adam’s seed continues to be exercised (7:13–14, 19–22; 9:7; 10:1, 12; 13:11). Ultimately, the descendants of Seth are expelled from the holy mountain as a result of committing fornication with the daughters of Cain (12:1–20), while only Noah and his children remain behind (16:1–5). Noah leaves the mountain to build the Ark in preparation for the flood, but not before retrieving Adam’s body, as well as the gold, myrrh, and incense, and taking them with him for safe keeping (16:6–27). For the author of CT, this bitter departure from this second paradise elicits the need for Christ, who will come in the line of Adam and return humanity to paradise once again (17:1–20).¹³

After Noah’s death, Shem takes the body of Adam and buries it “in the middle of the earth,” in anticipation for the coming redemption of Christ (22:1–23:25). It is here, “in the middle of the earth,” that salvation is finally accomplished for Adam’s seed (22:7–9).¹⁴ The narrative advances steadily through the main events of the OT, including the building of the Tower of Babel (24:1–27), the Patriarchal era (28:1–32:18), and the history of Israel (33:1–43:25). Finally, the author concludes his work by detailing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (44:1–54:10), as well as the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost (54:11–15).

As for the theological purpose of the work, the author’s intention is to demonstrate the direct link between Adam and Christ in order to

¹³Ruzer, “The Cave of Treasures on Swearing by Abel’s Blood and Expulsion from Paradise,” 257–60.

¹⁴The motif of salvation being accomplished for Adam’s offspring “in the middle of the earth” is repeated throughout the narrative (2:15; 5:10–13; 6:12; 16:22–27; 22:7–9; 23:15; 29:6; 49:3–7). Leonard, “Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures,” 262, suggests that the phrase functions as a framing device.

prove that Adam's expulsion from Eden is resolved only by the work of Christ. This is verified in the transmission of the treasures and Adam's body from the Ark to the middle of the earth—the very place where Christ is later crucified and atones for the sins of the world (5:17–18; 23:15–18; 49:1–10).¹⁵ This also demonstrates the purpose of the extensive and dogmatically asserted genealogies that occur repeatedly throughout (33:1–15; 43:13–25; 44:1–57; 52:1–19).¹⁶ In fact, the author concludes his work by designating it as the “book concerning the sequence of the generations' descent from Adam to Christ, which is called *The Cave of Treasures*” (54:16). The author understood his work to be a presentation of the genealogical history of Christ that serves as the necessary apologetic for his theological agenda.

Figural Reading in the Cave of Treasures

Having briefly introduced the literary character, content, and theological message of CT, we are now in a position to examine the author's figural interpretations. To accomplish this task I will present a taxonomy representative of the author's figural readings under five headings: 1) Adam-Christ Readings; 2) Soteriological Readings; 3) Christological Readings; 4) Ecclesiological Readings; and, 5) Cessation-Replacement Readings. Although the umbrella categories presented here are not exhaustive and are open to modification, they do reflect the broad interpretive tendencies that characterize the author's hermeneutical approach to the biblical story, thereby serving as a basis

¹⁵Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” 536–37.

¹⁶Leonard, “Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures,” 268, 272–73, argues that the *rison d'être* of the whole book is to present an apology for Christ's genealogy, but he does not mention that the function of establishing Christ's direct link with Adam is to prove that Christ is the savior of humanity.

for interpretive reflection.¹⁷

Adam-Christ Readings

As previously mentioned the primary purpose of CT is to demonstrate a direct link between Adam and Christ to prove that salvation will be accomplished for Adam and his seed only through the work of Christ. This overarching agenda leads the author to propose a variety of creative interpretations aimed at accomplishing this goal. At one point the author is so explicit regarding the certainty of this correspondence that he states: “Know that Christ resembled Adam in everything, as it is written” (49:1). This statement does not mean that Christ resembled Adam in every way possible, but that the death and resurrection of

¹⁷Before presenting these categories it is helpful to point out that the author’s interpretive method is justified (at least in his eyes) in large part due to the fact that the information made available to OT characters by God, at least in a number of cases, goes well beyond the information that was made available to them in the biblical account. In other words, at various points the author reads interpretive significance into OT persons, events, and institutions, because God had already revealed to them what Christ would come and accomplish in the future. Since specific knowledge of how God would accomplish his redemptive purpose in Christ was available, it is not difficult to see how the author justifies his highly charged Christian readings of the OT. For example, according to CT God revealed to Adam that he would send his son, dwell within a virgin, put on a body, and suffer to accomplish salvation on his behalf (5:6–13). God also revealed to Moses that Christ would drink bitter wine while hanging on the cross at the hands of Caiaphas (51:9–13). During the sacrifice of Isaac, it was revealed to Abraham that Christ would die on a cross and suffer in Adam’s behalf (29:8–14). By expanding upon the content of the biblical material in this way the author allowed himself a great measure of interpretive flexibility. In other words, because the author was willing to expand upon the biblical material, it created a culture of interpretive creativity that allowed him to read redemptive historical significance into persons, institutions, and events that may not seem apparent to contemporary readers. Within the creative framework of the author such moves are entirely logical. Understanding this interpretive tendency to expand upon the biblical material allows present day interpreters the ability to more readily comprehend the hermeneutical worldview of the author and appreciate the interpretive moves he makes on his own terms.

Jesus correspond to events in Adam's life.¹⁸ This Adam-Christ correspondence is generated to demonstrate that the return to paradise is accomplished only through Christ.

One of the starkest attempts at establishing this correspondence between the Passion of Christ and Adam is portrayed in 48:12–30 (Cf. 6:18). In this passage the author draws a number parallels between Christ and Adam by appealing to supposed correspondences between the Friday of Christ's crucifixion and the Friday of the first week of creation. See below:

Temporal Correspondence	Adam	Christ
In the first hour on Friday	God made Adam from the dust	Christ received spittle from Adam's children (48:12)
In the second hour on Friday	Adam named the creatures and they bowed before him	The Jews encircled Christ as David was encircled by bulls (48:13–14) Cf. Ps 22:12
In the third hour on Friday	The crown of honor was placed on Adams head	The crown of thorns was placed on the head of Christ (48:15)
For three hours	Adam remained in paradise shining with glory	Christ stayed in the law court being scourged by those born of dust (48:16)
In the sixth hour on Friday	Eve climbed the tree transgressing the commandment	Christ climbed the cross, the tree of life (48:17)

¹⁸Andreas Su-Min Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors: Étude Sur L'Histoire Du Texte Et De Ses Sources*, CSCO 581, Subsidia 103 (Louvian: Peeters, 200), 467–87, correctly limits the correspondence between Christ and Adam to the Passion.

In the sixth hour on Friday	Eve gave Adam the bitter fruit of death	The accursed synagogue gave vinegar and gall to Christ (48:18)
For three hours	Adam was stripped bare under the tree	Christ stayed naked on the cross of wood (48:19)
On a Friday	Adam and Eve sinned	Their sin was removed (48:21)
On a Friday	Adam and Eve died	They were made alive (48:22)
On a Friday	Death began to rule over them	They were freed from its rule (48:23)
On a Friday	Adam and Eve left paradise	Our Lord went into a tomb (48:24)
On a Friday	Adam and Eve were stripped naked	Christ bared himself in order to clothe them (48:25)
On a Friday	Satan stripped them bare	Christ stripped bare Satan and all his hosts and openly put them to shame (48:26)
On a Friday	Adam left paradise and its door was closed	It was opened for a multitude to go in (48:27)
On a Friday	The sharp sword was given to the Cherub	Christ was struck and broke the sword's blade (48:28)
On a Friday	Priesthood, prophesy, and kingship were given to Adam	Kingship, Priesthood, and prophesy were taken away from the Jews (48:29)

In the ninth hour on Friday	Adam went down from paradise to the lower earth	Christ went down from the height of the cross to the lower parts of the earth, to those who sleep in the dust (48:30)
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Another example of the type of correspondence between Adam and Christ is established on the basis of shared geographical location. This similarity is employed as early as 2:15–24, where the details of Adam’s creation and installation as God’s vice-regent are linked to the cross of Christ. According to the author, Adam’s creation took place at the same location in Jerusalem where the cross of the savior was to be erected (2:15–16).¹⁹ It was here that Adam wore the gown of kingship and was made prophet, priest, and king (2:17–18). In Jerusalem Adam was given dominion over creation (2:19–25). That the author refers to the geographical similarity between Adam and Christ in his retelling of the creation story signals how important the concept is for his theological argument. Indeed, the author goes so far as to assert that at creation God made Golgotha the center of the earth, the very place where the four corners of the world converge (49:3). This also explains why the body of Adam had to be buried in Jerusalem in the middle of the earth. When the sons of Seth were exiled from the holy mountain, Shem and Melchizedek took the body of Adam, along with the gold, myrrh, and incense, and buried them in the center of the earth. When they did so, the four corners of the earth opened in the shape of the cross (23:16). Later, when Christ is crucified at the same locale, the four

¹⁹“When he stretched himself and rose in the middle of the earth he put his feet on that place where the cross of our savior would be erected, because Adam was created in Jerusalem” (2:15–16).

corners of the earth opened again, allowing the blood and water from Christ's side to flow down into Adam's mouth, thereby providing salvation (49:3-10; 51:22).²⁰ Thus, the shared geography of Adam and Christ serves as a significant interpretive foil for tying these two key persons together.

This figural reading based on the geographical correspondence of Adam and Christ motivates the author to place other key events as though having occurred at the same location. Since Golgotha is the center of the earth, the very place where redemption will be achieved for Adam's race, it is only logical to identify this as the site where other significant redemptive historical happenings transpired. For example, Shem commands Melchizedek to serve as a priest at the very place where Adam's body was buried. It is here, in the middle of the earth, at the place of the skull, that the head of the cruel snake will be broken and the head of all mankind will be redeemed (23:13-23). Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was also performed at the very place where Christ was sacrificed (29:4-4). In fact, the author states that when Abraham ascended the altar he saw the cross of the Lord (29:8). This was the same location where David saw the Lord standing with a sword of fire (29:7; Cf. 1 Chron 21:16). By postulating an unbroken geographical chain of key historical events the author is able to further emphasize the close link between Adam and Christ.²¹

²⁰This also accounts for the repeated frame that salvation will be wrought for Adam's offspring in a specific location (22:19; 29:8, 14; 31:19; 49:9). For the author of CT, the geographical location is loaded with theological significance.

²¹Sebastian Brock, "Genesis 22 in the Syriac Tradition," in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Étude Bibliques Offertes A L'Occasion De Son 60^e Anniversaire*, Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis 38, ed. Pierre Casetti, Othmar Keel, et Adrian Schenker (Suisse: L'Institut Biblique de l'Université de Fribourg, 1981), 7-8, indicates that CT is the only

Soteriological Readings

Another key area of figural reading within CT concerns instances where OT persons, events, and institutions either foreshadow or explicitly point ahead to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As is the case with other early Christian interpreters of the OT, the author is neither subtle nor lacking in creativity in his treatment of this theme, but liberally rewrites the OT at key points to suit his interpretive intention. For example, the author rewrites the creation story in such a way as to incorporate this motif. At his creation, Adam plants his foot at the location of the cross, indicating that God designed the world with a soteriological intention in mind (2:15). When God created the earth, the four directions of the earth converged together, pointing ahead to the four corners of the cross (43:4-5; Cf. 23:16). Furthermore, at creation God planted the tree of life in the middle of paradise, signifying the savior's cross, fastened to the middle of the earth (4:3).²² By integrating the cross explicitly into the creation story, the author indicates its importance in the history of redemption.

CT also indicates that key events in the life of Noah, Abraham, and Jacob point ahead to the cross. According to the author, during the flood the ark was carried on the wings of the wind and traveled north, south, east, and west, tracing the cross upon the water (19:5). Interpreting Ps 78:65 as textual proof, CT argues that Noah's

document in Syriac literature that has each of these events occurring at the same location.

²²Cf. Just. *Dial.* 86,1, who makes a similar connection between the tree in the garden and the tree of the cross: "Understand now how he whom the Scriptures announce as about to return in glory after his crucifixion was symbolized both by the tree of life (which is said to have been planted in Paradise) and by what was about to happen to all the just."

intoxicated state typified the cross of Christ. He rose and cursed Cain in the same manner that Christ rose from the dead and cursed the Jews, scattering them among the nations (21:18–28).²³ Likewise Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac pointed ahead to the cross. Isaac’s ascent toward the altar signified Christ’s ascent toward the crucifixion (29:12).²⁴ Jacob’s ladder also depicts the cross of salvation (31:18). The angels ascending and descending are the ministers of the gospel toward Zechariah, Mary, the Magi, and the shepherds, while the Lord standing at the upper end is to be understood as Christ, who stood at the upper end of the cross before descending to Sheol to save us (31:18). Each of these stimulating readings demonstrates the importance of the cross in the author’s narrative.

Christological Readings

The early church was regularly engaged in controversy concerning how to account for the deity and humanity of Christ. Written near the conclusion of such early church discussions—c. late 6th–early 7th century, CT provides its own contribution to this contentious issue by proposing a number of creative figural interpretations as a way to explain Christ’s nature. For example, following other East Syriac writers on Gen 22, CT argues that the ram caught in the branches signifies the undivided human nature of the Word (29:9).²⁵ Immediately

²³“The Lord has risen from sleep like a man overwhelmed by wine” (Ps 78:65).

²⁴CT asserts that when Isaac ascended the altar Abraham saw a cross (29:12). John 8:56 is quoted as evidence: “your Father Abraham wished to see my days, he saw (them) and rejoiced.”

²⁵Although Brock, “Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition,” 18–19, identifies the association of the ram with the human nature of the Word as an East Syriac interpretation, he does observe that CT strays from the tradition by not associating Isaac with Christ’s divinity.

after this reading the author asserts a polemic against the Monophysites by arguing that it was Christ's human nature, rather than his divine nature, that suffered on the cross (29:10–11).²⁶ Appealing to the gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark, CT asserts that the purple and red garments used to clothe Christ at the crucifixion are instructive concerning his two natures (Cf. Matt 27:28; Mk 15:17). The scarlet signifies blood, symbolizing Christ's immortal nature, while the purple signifies water, symbolizing Christ's mortal nature (49:16–20).

CT also interprets the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side as possessing Christological significance. Appealing to John 19:34, the author states that when the blood and water both flowed from Christ's side, neither mingled with the other (51:18–19). Why did the blood flow before the water? For CT the answer is clear: through the blood he shows that he is immortal and through the water he shows that he is mortal and capable of suffering (51:21).²⁷ Each of these figural readings demonstrates that CT was not averse to using creative hermeneutical methods to advocate its unique approach to Christology.

Ecclesiological Readings

An important category of figural interpretation in CT can be observed in the author's ecclesiological readings. The first ecclesiological reading concerns the authors' interpretation of Gen 2:8 and 2:15, both key verses that describe Adam and his function in the garden at the

²⁶Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors*, 364, considers 29:10–11 to be a late insertion. Leonard, "Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures," 263–64, in convincing manner, considers 29:10–11 to be an abbreviation of the eastern text, rather than an expansion of a common source with the western text.

²⁷Here the Nestorian influence in CT is pronounced.

time of creation (3:16–21). As for Gen 2:8, CT states that Eden is to be identified as the holy Church (3:17a), the Church is God’s mercy that will be given to all mankind (3:17b), and paradise within Eden signifies the place of rest and inheritance for God’s people (3:21). The author defends his interpretation by appealing Ps 90:1 and Ps 74:2—both of which are taken to prefigure the Church.²⁸ The author interprets the concept of *rest* found in Psalm 90:1 to refer to resting in the Church, while Ps 74:2 speaks of the promise of God to make this rest a reality.²⁹ The author extends this reading to Adam and his responsibility for tending and keeping the garden by offering his interpretation of Gen 2:15. In the same way a priest is brought in to minister in the Church, so was Adam brought in to tend and keep the Garden of Eden (4:1). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve more deeply into this particular interpretation, it is clear that the author understands the Garden of Eden, as well as Adam’s function within it, in an ecclesiological fashion.

A second ecclesiological reading concerns the ark as a symbol of the Church. CT 18:3 states the general principle: “Adam’s body was put down in the middle of the ark, for all the mysteries of the Church are foreshadowed in it.” His depiction of the church is symbolized by the positioning of four elements in the ark, each of which corresponds to four elements found in the primitive church: 1) women were on the eastern side of the ark and men were on the western side,

²⁸“Lord, you are a place of rest for us from generation to generation” (Ps 90:1); “Remember your Church which you ransomed from old” (Ps 74:2).

²⁹Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors*, 161, suggests that these interpretations of Psalm 90:1 and 74:2 are analogous to the type of exegesis found in the NT or in rabbinic literature. Unfortunately Ri does not list any examples. He does note that the Eden/Church typology is very similar to the exegesis of Mar Éphrem.

corresponding to the separation of men and women during worship; 2) Adam's body was placed in the middle, corresponding to the central placement of the lectern; 3) Various types of animals were at peace, corresponding to the peace shared between God's people; 4) Strong animals dwelt with weak animals, symbolizing the equality shared between God's people. CT follows a consistent stream of early Christian tradition that viewed the ark symbolically, but adapts and modifies this tradition to create its own unique interpretation.³⁰

One final ecclesiological example concerns the patriarch Jacob and his first encounter with Rachel as a symbol of Christian baptism. CT points out that when Jacob saw Rachel he did not embrace and kiss her until the stone was first rolled away and the sheep were allowed to drink. This corresponds to the requirement of the church that those who have not been baptized are not able to receive an embrace and a kiss from God's people (31:25). Early Christians would often practice a liturgical kiss as a part of Eucharistic celebrations, baptisms, and at funerals. The baptismal liturgy followed a standard procedure that consisted first of baptism, and then was followed by the first kiss of fellowship initiated by the bishop. This first kiss was the initial symbol of welcome into God's people and was subsequently followed by similar expressions of welcome from other fellow saints.³¹ The author, noticing the order of events that occurred in the episode with Jacob and Rachel, seizes upon this feature and corroborates it with his own baptismal practice. Indeed, the author has created his own ecclesiological interpretation as a result of a flexible hermeneutic.

³⁰It was common for both the Greek and Latin Fathers to interpret the ark in figural manner. See Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors*, 242, for examples.

³¹As described by Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors*, 377.

Cessation-Replacement Readings

CT is unique in a number of respects, especially considering that it does not discuss the giving of the law at Sinai in its recitation of biblical history. However, it does offer several figural interpretations pertaining to the ministry and words of Moses to indicate how the Jewish ordinances and Israel's place in redemptive history have been eclipsed as a result of the cross of Christ.³² For example, the author repeatedly points out that the wood used to crucify Christ was taken from the same wood used to carry the Ark of the Covenant (50:20–21; 53:6, 11, 13). This is entirely fitting, for the same wood that was used to carry one covenant was used to carry the covenant of the Lord (50:21). In his next statement, the author suggests that the Apostle Paul makes a direct reference to the cross when he describes the height, depth, length, and breadth of the love of Christ (50:22–23). This shift from the wood of the old covenant to the wood of the new covenant indicates how the later has surpassed the former.³³

CT affords another figural interpretation related to Moses by arguing that the prophecy of Deut 32:32–33 is fulfilled in how the Jews treated Christ on the cross, ultimately signaling the end of Jewish ordinances and the end of Israel as God's chosen people (51:9–17).³⁴ The

³²Toepel, "The Cave of Treasures," 537, argues that this sets CT apart from Jewish writings such as *Jubilees* that make much of the giving of the law at Sinai and the sacrificial service. In CT the act of Christ to restore Adam to paradise completely supersedes the role of the Mosaic Law.

³³See Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne de Trésors*, 476–77 for other examples in early Christian literature where wood in the OT was interpreted as typological of the cross.

³⁴"Their grapes are bitter grapes, and their clusters vinegar for them, their venom is the venom of dragons and their chief mover is the evil asp. This you are giving back to the Lord" (Deut 32:33–34).

bitter grapes and the sour clusters refer to the sons and daughters of the synagogue who crucified Christ, while the chief asp is Caiaphas and the venom belongs to the evil snakes of Israel (51:9–13).³⁵ The author also understands the vinegar of verse 32 to be the bitter wine that Christ was forced to drink with a sponge (51:14–15). In the same way that a sponge is used to clean out an empty cup, Christ drank from a sponge to indicate the ancestors' blessings no longer belong to Israel (51:16). Kingship, priesthood, prophecy, and anointing were taken away from Israel and given back to Christ (51:17; Cf. 50:13–17). By reading Deut 32:32–33 in this highly figural way, the author attempts to demonstrate how the details of Christ's suffering on the cross prove that the Jewish ordinances, as well as Israel's unique place in redemptive history, have been eclipsed due to prophetic fulfillment. Indeed, by linking themes and ideas connected with Moses to Christ's redemptive work, CT endeavors to prove that both the ministry and the words of Moses are fulfilled in the cross.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to categorize the various types of figural readings in CT in hopes of proposing them as interpretive possibilities for present day scholars. After introducing the literary character, content, and theological message of CT, a taxonomy representative of the various types of figural interpretations was presented under five headings: 1) Adam-Christ Readings; 2) Soteriological Readings; 3) Christological Readings; 4) Ecclesiological Readings; and 5) Cessation-Replacement Readings. Although the

³⁵For other examples of how Caiaphas was negatively perceived by early Christians see Helen Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 10–11.

veracity of any number of these interpretations may be questioned, the author nevertheless presents modern day scholars with a commendable interpretive approach to the biblical story that might be integrated into their current arsenal of hermeneutical strategies. At the very least one finds a rich storehouse of interpretive possibilities that may serve as gateways for further investigation.