



**Messianic Ideas:
Historical Sources, and some
Contemporary Expectations of Fulfilment**

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Acknowledgements

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The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star at: <<http://www.ooo.org/>>.

The Maitreya Project at: <<http://www.maitreyaproject.org/>>.

The Omega Point at: <<http://www.omegapoint.org/>>.

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Abbreviations

Chron. – Chronicles

Do./ Dos. – Doha/ Dohas, i.e., part(s) of Rāmacharitamānasa text describing an episode. It might contain extra verses known as Caupais, which are chanted with a different kind of rhythm.

G-d – In Judaism, the reverent way God's name is written in English. G-d is usually synonymous with the Jewish God Jehovah (YHWH - יהוה).

Gen. – Genesis

Exo. – Exodus

Haba. – Habakkuk

Isa. – Isaiah

Matt. – Matthew

Ps. – Psalm

Rev. – Revelation

Sam. – Samuel

Zeph. – Zephaniah

Introduction

The aim of this work is to provide basic historical insights into the origins of the messianic myth and its future developments within various world religions (see our Table of contents). Issues of millenarian ideas in connection to the world saviour theme are also part of the study. We intend to provide an enlarged picture upon the subject of the world saviours including some current trends. All major characters we present herein are messianic *per se*; some will prove to have eschatological features as well.

Our construct will firstly examine the two main archetypes of the messianic myth, the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin*. Then, we focus on the Lord Rāma, the Buddhist Maitreya, the Jewish Messiah, the Christian Messiah and the Islamic al-Mahdī as world saviour characters relevant to Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, respectively. Although most of the messianic characters are more or less known as such, it is our intention to fill a gap in study of religions by arguing that the Hindu Lord Rāma is also a messianic figure. To our knowledge no scholarly construct that is based on historical scriptural material has been produced so far, which unveils seven messianic characters of various religions in one single thesis.¹ We attempt also to present the current growth of

¹ See two works by S. G. F. Brandon, *The Judgement of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of a Post-Mortem Judgement in the Major World Religions* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) and *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions: An Historical and Comparative Study containing the Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion delivered in the University of Oxford, 1954-1957* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) for historical accounts on eschatological themes. However, Brandon's historical and comparative focus is on the judgement of the dead, and the interpretation of eschatological ideas, whereas our approach is less comparative-interpretative, and more oriented towards the messianic themes as they appear within historical scriptural contexts. As we shall see, resurrection and judgement of the dead, and

messianic expectations of the arrival of one or another of the world saviours. The exposition of some worldwide projects in connection to various world saviour figures is also part of the study.

Currently, the messianic and the millenarian ideas are vibrant subjects of religious debates. New trends have developed in connection with the identification of a unique world saviour figure for all main creeds. Our study takes the challenge of a cross-cultural historical presentation of major world saviour characters, so that we hope to answer to some of the questions relevant to an expected world saviour by one or another religion. The present thesis aims (in its last chapter) to be useful to the understanding of a worldwide growing trend to connect politics and religious ideas dealing with messianic expectations.

Our work is divided into four chapters. In Chapter One we attempt to uncover the origins of the messianic myth. Two archetypes will be identified as the most relevant root-figures for the messianic eschatology, i.e., the Iranian *saoshyant* and the Indian *cakravartin*. Although we do not engage in a deconstructive critique of these archetypes, the reader will easily recognise a number of parallels as we go further identifying the legacies of the original messianic myth.

In Chapter Two we make the portrayals of two leading India-based messianic figures, the Lord Rāma and the Buddhist Maitreya. We use relevant scriptural material to identify their major characteristics and missionary outlines.

Chapter Three is dedicated to the world saviour characters relevant to the three major Abrahamic traditions. The Jewish Messiah, the Christian Messiah and the Islamic Mahdî are key elements of messianism in Judaism, Christianity

salvation of humankind are only parts of the mission of a world saviour figure of eschatological features.

and Islam, respectively. We argue that Islam and Christianity have inherited their saviour figures from Judaism, and that Islam is also indebted to Christianity. The Jewish Messiah is the forerunner who provided inspiration for the other two messianic characters that were reshaped to fit new religious tenets.

This construct uses mainly primary sources, although scholarly reliable secondary literature is also employed. Our treatment of the subject is largely descriptive. We seek to uncover the historical sources of messianic ideas, some of them we identify in their original context. We have been able to linguistically identify such original references that are included in the text.²

And finally, Chapter Four contains some current developments in relation to the messianic myth, namely the existence of celestial events interpreted as portents that suggest the arrival of the divine incarnate to fulfil an earthly mission, and a trend of the syncretic interpretation of all messianic figures. Examples are given for the Iranian *saoshyant* and the Indian *cakravartin*. We also name some current projects in relation to the expected arrivals of the Lord Rāma and the Buddhist Maitreya in India. Some syntheses of groups of people

² Notes on style and text. We use the Oxford style of referencing. Our various transcripts of primary scriptural material follow the most common modalities of transliteration into the Roman script. For the Greek original text we used, J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), for Torah text, Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003), and for Avestan texts we used and consulted, C. Kossowicz, *Ahunavaiti* (Petropoli: Impensis Caesareae Universitatis, 1867), and Hans Reichelt, *Avesta Reader: Texts, Notes, Glossary and Index* (Berlin: Photomechanischer Nachdruck Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1968 [1911]). Some Avestan Web resources were found at: <http://www.avesta.org/yasna/yasna_jamaspa.htm>. Accessed 26 July 2004. We did not elaborate on various versions of translations from the original texts. If there is any version of translation we have used that alters notably the meaning we have indicated so.

or individuals connected to Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions awaiting the Abrahamic saviour are identified in Chapter Four as well.

Our methodological acumen is oriented towards the historical (with a hint of anthropological) conduct of inquiry. We emphasise on the origins and development of the messianic themes, and the apocalyptic changes expected to come upon humanity. The historical developments will be discussed concurrently with the anthropological themes concerned. We have tried to trace the origins of saviour characters, herein presented, from the earliest known sources. Succinct scriptural references relevant to this enquiry are presented. We have also to mention that our study attempt does not aim to create a detailed comparative study but rather to be a collection of data, which are relevant to all the seven messianic characters presented. We provide raw material for a more of a cross-cultural analysis.

We also refrain from summarising the messianic characters into a uniquely reconstructed figure, or uncovering the common denominator of messianic prophecies. The entire corpus of prophecies will be treated separately taking into consideration different conceptual attitudes, and the religious backgrounds in which they arose. It is our hope that the pivotal problems in relation to the appearance and missionary work of various messianic figures will be addressed. We admit being selective in our material for the purpose of emphasising mainly the apocalyptic portrayal of messianic characters.

The results and implications of our study is that the basic ideas of major religious prophecies, in connection with world saviours, could be found in one compound work that makes available to the reader the pertinent historical sources and some relevant scholarly research. This thesis might also contribute (especially by the information we provide in Chapter Four) to the understanding of current developments in the areas of messianism, millenarism, and the

influence of the two on the world politics. A few words could be said about messianic ideas overall.

A time of personal and world salvation led by a divinely inspired charismatic figure is a recurring motif in eschatology, as societies developed messianic ideas of a perfected world (in contrast to the real world) since the dawn of humankind. Such ideas are revived from time to time, their motifs of reappearance could be analysed from multiple angles, i.e., the biological, the social, the historical, and even the political. There is overall a case of desire for inner and outer perfection that might answer to the question why societies develop messiah figures. Renewal and salvation are expected at personal and societal levels although the methods of achieving might go against rational thinking. Overall it can be said that messianic ideas are products of communities of people, but as we shall see further in our study, the presence of prophetic imprints aims to give absolute validity to future forecasts at mega-societal level. Significant parallels between various messianic ideas will be noticed in relation to an utopian idea of ‘future realisation of some perfect place and time’,³ the regaining of a lost paradise,³ and an end of an era (or End of Time) and the beginning of a new one. They are all millenarian hopes and dreams of ‘the establishment of an ideal society divinely or otherwise sanctioned to replace the glaring ills of the day.’⁴ However, we are not concerned here with an analysis of messianic ideas, but their presentation in an historic and some contemporary contexts. The messianic myth will prove to be an early deposit of messianic ideas. To this we turn in the first chapter.

³ Garry W. Trompf, “Utopia,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, edited by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 15, p. 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*

1

The messianic myth

Introduction

The extent to which Zoroastrianism or Zurvanism (largely regarded as an intellectual interpretation of Zoroastrianism) have influenced the messianic and eschatological themes of other religions is a matter of continuous scholarly debate.¹ It is not our intention here to make an argument in relation to the issue of Zoroastrian strands of influence upon various creeds, but to identify the *saoshyant* of Iranian Zoroastrianism and the *cakravartin* of India as archetypal characters (if not eschatological as well) of the messianic myth. The *saoshyant*

¹ Garry Trompf arises pertinent questions about Zarathushtrâ's place in the history of consciousness, in "An Agenda for Persian Studies," in *Mehregan in Sydney: Proceedings of the Seminar in Persian Studies during the Mehregan Persian Cultural Festival Sydney, Australia, 28 October – 6 November 1994*, edited by Garry W. Trompf, *et al.* (Sydney: School of Studies in Religion, 1998), pp. 2f thus: 1. Was Zarathushtrâ the first known monotheist? 2. Do we have in Zarathushtrâ the earliest "called" prophet, directed to convey to his followers the first major revealed religion? 3. Was Zarathushtrâ the first to teach a last judgement (*cf. Yasna 44*)? Trompf concludes that these questions have become pertinent afresh with the publication of Norman Cohn's *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*, which controversially argues that 'the Bible owes its monotheism, its Satan and its eschatology more to Zarathushtrâ than to any other sources' (p. 3). See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), especially Chapter 13 'Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians', pp. 220-226 describing Jewish and Christian messianic and eschatological ideas supposed to be of Zoroastrian origin. See also L. Paterson, *Mithraism and Christianity: A Study in Comparative Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921) cautiously comparing Mithraic ideas with those of similar themes existent in Christianity, especially Chapter six 'Eschatology – the Soul and the Future Life'. Mithraism (the cult of the solar deity Mithra) is regarded as a mystery cult founded by Zarathushtrâ who incorporated Mithraic mysteries into Zoroastrianism (in John Bowker, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 647f).

and the *cakravartin* are regarded as prominent figures in relation to the ideas of the coming of a cosmic ruler, universal king and saviour of the world.²

Thus we intend in this chapter to discover the historical sources relevant to the two above-mentioned figures, as character-models for the messianic myth, and construct their exploits as messianic saviours. The resemblance between the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* suggests a common pool of ideas. But, as we shall see, the two messianic archetypes developed in culturally different milieux.

The importance of the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* characters is indeed paramount. We shall see later on in our study how the two archetypes appear to be sources of inspiration for relevant messianic ideologies pertinent to major world religions. We define a religion as being major by its big number of followers, or by a significant influence exercised upon religious ideas. Thus, we regard Zoroastrianism and Judaism major religions. In our exposition we use traditional scriptural data in order to portray the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* as being significant character-archetypes for future development of messianic and millenarian ideas. We turn now to the construct of the mythical figure of the Iranian *saoshyant*.

The Iranian *saoshyant*

The Zoroastrian messianism relevant to a world saviour character, known as *saoshyant* (Avestan: 𐬰𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀), is connected with the Iranian priest and

² Joseph M. Kitagawa, “The Many Faces of Maitreya: A Historian of Religions Reflections,” in *Maitreya and the future Buddha*, edited by Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 8.

and the *Vendîdâd* (*vid. inf.*). Avestan literature is associated with the time of pre-Achaemenian time history (before, during and after Zarathushtrâ's life period, until the Achaemenian period), and later on with Achaemenian empire era (558-323 BCE). Beside a few archaic texts of *Yasna*, there are the *Gâthâs* ('hymns, psalms'), most probably being the very words of Zarathushtrâ, the Prophet. The *Gâthâs* consists of seventeen hymns only, but are regarded as foundation of the entire *Yasna*. The later *Avesta* contains the three other parts of early Zoroastrian literature, the *Yashts* ('worship by laudation'), the *Vispered/ Visprad/ Visprat/* ('invocations and offerings') and the *Vendîdâd / Vidêvdât* ('law against the demons'). The canonical literature in Pahlavi language belongs mainly to the Sassanian period (226 BCE-651 CE), but some scriptural work was completed during Parthian times (250 BCE-226 BCE). The *Bundahishn* ('creation'), *Dênkart/ Dînkard* ('acts of the religion'), the *Dâdistân-î Dînik* ('religious ordinances and opinions') and the *Dînâ-î Maînôg-î Khirad* ('ordinances of the holy spirit') are regarded as the most relevant works in Pahlavi. Other literature relevant to Zoroastrianism is most recent, dating after the eleventh century CE. The most significant works that were written in Parsi-Persian, are the *Sad Dar* ('a hundred subjects'), the *Dar Bundahishn* ('creation of a hundred chapters'), and the *Rivâyats* ('collections of religious traditions').⁵ Zoroastrianism, in its beliefs, articulated a key element of what is known today as the concept of modern eschatology, the doctrine about 'the last things' (Greek: τὰ ἔσχατα).

The central component of Zoroastrian messianism is the faith in future world saviours (Sg. *saoshyant/ sôshyâns/ sôshâns*) who appear at crucial points in human history to revivify the entire world creation. The term *saoshyant*

⁵ Cursetji Pavry and Dastur Jal, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-8.

(‘future benefactor’) is a title, which in time has become the name of a particular person, the Saoshyant.⁶ About the *sôshyâns* we learn that ‘one of them comes separately at the end of each millennium, who arranges again all the affairs of the world’.⁷ Although there are a few Zoroastrian saviour figures, we shall see that the last *saoshyant* is of paramount importance. Zoroastrian scriptures make references to three saviour figures, apart from Zarathushtrâ himself being a *saoshyant*.⁸

Yasht XIII.128 refers to *Uxshyat-ereta* as the first *saoshyant* who is followed by *Uxshyat-nemah* the second, while *Yasht* XIII.129 (*vid. inf.*) names the last *saoshyant* as *Astvat-ereta* (Avestan: 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀).⁹ The identification of the *saoshyants* is made by the description of their missions ahead, rather than by proper names. The *Uxshyat-ereta* is ‘the one who makes righteousness grow’, *Uxshyat-nemah* ‘the one who makes devotion/ reverence grow’, while *Astvat-ereta*, is ‘the one who embodies righteousness’. It is significant to note that the arrival of a *saoshyant* is made known by distinctive celestial events, which are

⁶ We shall refer from now on to the Saoshyant/ Sôshyâns/ Sôshhâns (first letter capital, regular font) as being the last *saoshyant* saviour figure, who, as we shall see, is known as *Astvat-ereta*.

⁷ *Dînâ-î Maînôg-î Khirad* II.93, in E. W. West, trans., *Pahlavi Texts*, Part 3, The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 24, F. Max Müller, ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 15.

⁸ *Yasna* LIII. 2 in L. H. Mills trans. *The Zend-Avesta*, Part 3 The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 31, F. Max Müller, ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1887), pp. 190f.

⁹ James Darmesteter, trans., *The Zend-Avesta*, Part 2, The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 23, F. Max Müller, ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1883), p. 220. The later Pahlavi literature identifies the forerunners to the Sôshyâns (i.e. the last Zoroastrian saviour) as *Aûshêdar/ Hushêdar* (‘developer of righteousness’) and *Aûshêdar-mâh/ Hushêdarmâh* (‘developer of worship’) as being identical with *Uxshyat-ereta* and *Uxshyat-nemah* messianic figures, respectively; see *Dînkard* Book VII Chap. I.42, in L. H. Mills (1887), *op. cit.*, p. 15, n.1. *Dînkard* Book VII, Chaps. IX, X and XI in Mills (1887), *op. cit.*, pp. 107-118, predicts various events to happen during the interval of 3000 years after Zaratûst, including the arrival and the mission of the Sôshyâns.

interpreted as portents indicating the birth of a ruler and renovator of the pure religion. A great light given by primeval luminaries heralds a *saoshyant*.¹⁰

The world saviour's birth, according to Zoroastrianism, is parthenogenetic. The *Astvat-ereta* is to rise up from the Lake Kāsava, as a messenger of Ahura Mazdâh (Avestan: *𐬀𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬎𐬀*).¹¹ The *Vendîdâd* locates the lake in the region of the dawn,¹² that is somewhere to the east of Iran or beyond. The saviour's father will be Zarathushtrâ, whose seed is preserved in that lake and guarded by 99,999 guardian spirits,¹³ while his mother is the holy maid Eredat-fedhri/Vîspa-taurvairi.¹⁴ Pavry and Jal asserts the births of future *saoshyants* from Zarathushtrâ's seeds are to be regarded as spiritual events.¹⁵ A vital consideration needs the mentioning here. As Zoroastrianism is based on the worship of the fire in order to obtain the desired results, the appearance of *saoshyants* are outcomes from practices of *yasnas*, those fire ceremonies used to propitiate auspicious events. We shall see in the following chapter how the Hindu Lord Rāma, as world saviour, is born out of a fire ceremony (*yajñā*) that is said to attract the higher power to descend on earth. We shall see also later on in our study that the Jewish Messiah is initially a *tzaddik*, a virtuous Jew who is worthy to be empowered by the heavenly realm to become the Messiah of Israel. The belief is that the spirit of God is attracted, by means of prayers, communal worship and conformity to religious observances, to descend and manifest into

¹⁰ *Dâdistân-î Dînîk* II.13-15, in E. W. West, trans., *Pahlavi Texts*, Part 2, The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 18, F. Max Müller, ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p. 15.

¹¹ *Yasht* XIX.92, in Darmesteter (1883), *op. cit.*, p. 307.

¹² *Vendîdâd*, *Fargard* XIX.5, in Darmesteter (1880), *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

¹³ *Yasht* XIII.62, in Darmesteter (1883), *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁴ *Yasht* XIII.142, *ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁵ Pavry and Jal, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

a *tzaddik*. The case of the Saoshyant as a virtuous person worthy to receive the divine empowerment is similar.

The Saoshyant as messenger and representative of the good god Ahura Mazda (in contrast with Angra Mainyu, the maleficent spirit) is the paragon of virtue, by defeating the forces of evil, and creating a human paradise on earth (*vid. inf.*). Such mythical themes are human universals for being so pervasive and recurrent. As Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it, myth, as the central concern of anthropology, is the reflexion of the mind ‘in its purest form, working to resolve the contradictions or “opposites” within a society, through a logic within narrative that was more telling than prosaic argument.’¹⁶ Zoroastrian mythical themes in relation to the most important messianic character, the Saoshyant, were gradually constructed by scriptural literature since the early time of the *Avesta*. The *Gâthâs* (parts of *Yasnas*), those writings attributed to Zarathushtrâ, do make references to the *saoshyant* five times.¹⁷ The *Gâthâs*, *Yasna XXXIV.13* is translated by Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb thus:

The path, O Ahurâh, which you have shown me, is the path of Vohuman, the path based on the teachings of *saoshyants*, the saviours. The teaching, which recommends that the work performed with the view of performing one's duty honestly shall bring forth happiness. The teaching, which leads mankind to real knowledge and wisdom, and reaching You O Mazda, is its rewards.

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit* (Paris, 1964), p. 18, as cited by Garry Trompf, *In Search of Origins* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1990), p. 93.

¹⁷ See Mills (1887), *op. cit.*, *Yasna XXXIV.13*, p. 89; *Yasna XLV.11*, pp. 129f; *Yasna XLVIII.9*, pp. 157f; *Yasna XLVIII.12*, p. 159; *Yasna LIII. 2*.

saviour's mission on earth. The Amesha Spentas²⁴, seven in number, represent the personified attributes of Ahura Mazdâh who is their father. The Amesha Spentas are instrumental upon the restoration of the world, the coming of immortality, the rise of the dead, and the defeat of Drug/ Druj, the personification of the evil spirit²⁵ of Angra Mainyu/ Ahriman.²⁶ Overall it can be said that the idea of renewal of the world by divine intervention is a key element of Zoroastrian messianism.

The emergence of a divinely ordained world saviour possessing exceptional personal qualities, who is helped by gifted people placed in important positions of power, are the essential elements of Zoroastrian messianism. As we shall see further in our study, Zoroastrian messianism proved to be a great source of inspiration for other messianic themes in the main religions. The scriptural construct of the *cakravartin*²⁷ saviour figure of India is based on common Indo-European messianic ideas, thus having a substantial resemblance to the Saoshyant.

²⁴ *Yasht* II.1-8, in Darmesteter (1883), *op. cit.*, p. 35-37. See Darmesteter (1880), *op. cit.*, p. LX naming the meaning of the Amesha Spentas, thus: *Vohu Manô* ('good thought'), *Asha Vahista* ('excellent holiness'), *Xshathra Vairya* ('perfect sovereignty'), *Spenta Ârmaiti* ('divine piety'), *Haurvatât* ('health'), *Ameretât* ('immortality') A comparison is made with Vedic deities that are similar in attributes (footnote 1). The seventh 'immortal' is *Spenta Mainyu* ('holy spirit') that is largely identified with Ahura Mazdâh. Our italics and diacritics were added; 'kh' is largely written as 'x', Avestan: .

²⁵ *Yasht* XIX.16-20, in Darmesteter (1883), *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291. The Saoshyant will accomplish the destruction of the evil spirit by performing *yasnas* (*vid. sup.*).

²⁶ *Vendîdâd*, *Fargard* XIX.1-10, in Darmesteter (1880), *op. cit.*, pp. 204-207.

²⁷ See in Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), p. 381, *cakravartin* literally means 'rolling everywhere without obstruction'. The definition pertains to the *cakra* ('wheel') as symbol of power in motion. The significant meanings are: ruler of the wheels; emperor and sovereign of the world.

The *cakravartin* of India

Over many centuries in India developed a messianism centred on a human charismatic figure that is divinely ordained and destined to be the final unifier of the earthly realm. The basis was the Indian ancient mythical idea of a just and virtuous monarch known as the *cakravartin* (Sanskrit: चक्रवर्तिन्).²⁸ As we shall see, the concept shares major common attributes with the Zoroastrian final saviour, the *saoshyant*, as above expounded. The assumption is that the Indo-Iranian tribes, prior to their eastwards expansion to the Iranian plateau and the northwest of India, did have some messianic ideas that were later developed, being conducive to the creation of the saviour archetypes.²⁹ Some similar themes that were prevalent among the Dravidian people of India may have also contributed to the *cakravartin* construct as hero archetype.³⁰ Configured to suit their philosophies accordingly, the divinely ordained secular ruler is identified in Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist literatures.

The *cakravartin* mythical figure as world saviour appears to be very ancient. It has a clear connection with Lord Viṣṇu's epiphanies, those incarnations of the supreme deity manifesting in every cosmic age (*yuga*). Book III, chap. II of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, does mention the four ages (as *Kṛta*, *Treta*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali*) in

²⁸ Joseph M. Kitagawa, *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁹ Our assumption of the existence of similar eschatological themes, which are relevant to both ancient Vedic tribes and ancient Iranians, is based on the common ancestry of the two groups. See Kitagawa, *loc. cit.*, p. 10 mentioning the idea that the Buddhist credence in Maitreya was motivated by the Iranian idea of the existence of a cosmically ordained saviour.

³⁰ See for example the presence of the Divine Elephant among the seven treasures of a *cakravartin* (*vid. inf.*). Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 130 writes: 'The white elephant was the ancient sacred mount of the pre-Aryan kings'.

which Lord Viṣṇu, as the universal spirit, appears in various forms in order to impart wisdom, restrain the wicked, and preserve and rectify creation.³¹ Thus, Lord Viṣṇu is indeed the divine archetype of the earthly great-man (*mahāpuruṣa*) character that has two aspects. When Lord Viṣṇu, becomes the earthly incarnation of the universal spirit, he either acts as a remarkable man of wisdom on a spiritual plane (like Buddha for example, *vid. inf.*), or a ruler as *cakravartin* of the world (that being the case of Śrī Rāma, *vid. inf.*). Thus, Lord Viṣṇu ‘turns the wheel’ (*cakra vartayati*) of world events in order to reinforce *dharma* (Sanskrit: धर्म) and bring wisdom, justice and prosperity to humankind. There are remarkable characteristics pertinent to a *cakravartin*. He is a divine messenger, having a mandate from heaven to accomplish a mission on earth. The *cakravartin* possesses divine powers, one being the *sudarśana cakra*, that is Lord Viṣṇu’s discus, which is a sun’s symbol and an invincible weapon if used. There is relevant literature elaborating on the idea and attributes of a *cakravartin*. The oldest recorded reference known so far, of the term *cakravartin*, appears in relation to a list of world rulers, in *Maitrī Upaniṣad* I.4 (late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE).³² Elaborating upon the *cakravartin* figure, the *Viṣṇu*

³¹ H. H. Wilson, *The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961), pp. 218-219. Lord Rāma as the seventh incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu came during *Treta Yuga* (*vid. inf.*). It is a well-known fact that Hinduism sees Gautama Buddha, who acted within the Hindu framework of his time, as the ninth incarnation of the Lord Viṣṇu.

³² William K. Mahoney, “Cakravartin,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, edited by Mircea Eliade, Vol 3 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 6. See also in S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India Pvt Ltd., 1994), p. 797 in *Maitrī Upaniṣad* I.4 the Sanskrit word *cakra-vartinaḥ* ‘world-rulers’; but, Radhakrishnan believes *Maitrī Upaniṣad* to be later in date than the classical *Upaniṣads* (ca. 600-400 BCE) although mentioning Max Müller who ascribes this *Upaniṣad* ‘to an early rather than to a late period.’ p. 793.

Purāṇa Book I, chap. XIII, does mention that ‘the mark of Viṣṇu’s discus is visible in the hand of the one who is born to be a universal emperor, one whose power is invincible even by the gods.’³³ Commenting on this issue, Wilson asserts that the universal emperor is,

a *chakra-vartti*, or, according to the text, one in whom the *chakra*, the discus of Viṣṇu abides (*varttate*); such a figure being delineated by the lines of the hand. The grammatical etymology is, ‘he who abides in, or rules over, an extensive territory called a *cakra*.’³⁴

The possession of the *cakra* mark on a *cakravartin*’s hand is just one of the 32 great marks of a great-man’s (*mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas*) body. Such marks are to be seen as symbols of power. We compiled a table of the 32 significant body marks of a great-man/ superman (*mahāpuruṣa*) as world-monarch (*cakravartin*), and their significances based on the information found in *Dīgha Nikāya* XXX.1.1 - XXX.2.31, i.e., the entire *Lakkhaṇa Suttanta – The Marks of the Superman –*, as translated by Rhys Davids.³⁵

³³ Translation from the original Sanskrit by H. H. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Wilson. Diacritics and italics added.

³⁵ See *Dīgha Nikāya* XXX.2.29, *Lakkhaṇa Suttanta* as translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F., trans., *Dialogues of the Buddha: Translated from Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Part 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1921). Corrections were done to the old English using words like “doth”, “hath”, etc., and to the outdated style of expression. The body mark numbers from 1 to 32, as they appear in the text of *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Lakkhaṇa Suttanta*, are indicated in square brackets. *Cakravartin*’s entourage, consisting of Brahmin householders and others, appears everywhere when is about those people surrounding the world-monarch. This entourage we have mentioned at position two only; the entire formula is replaced thereafter everywhere in column three by the word ‘people’.

Pos.	Body marks.	What a great-man (<i>mahāpuruṣa</i>) as <i>cakravartin</i> gets from it.
1.	Feet with level tread, evenly placing his foot upon earth, evenly drawing it up, evenly touching earth with the entire surface of the foot. [1]	Conquering not by the scourge, not by the sword, but by righteousness, he does preside over this earth to its ocean-bounds, an earth void of barrenness, pitfalls or jungle, mighty, prosperous, secure and fortunate and without blemish.
2.	Beneath on the soles of his feet wheels appear, thousand-spoked, with tyre and hub, in every way complete and well divided. [2]	He has a great retinue; many are they that surrender him:- Brahmin householders, townsmen and country folk, treasury officials, bodyguards, warders, ministers, courtiers, tributary kings, feudatories in chief, youths of high degree.
3.	He has projected heels [3], has long fingers and toes [4], and as to his limbs is divinely straight. [15]	His has a long life. Long does he last, for many years does he preserve his life; no enemy whatever born of man is able in that interval to take his life away.
4.	He has the seven convexes: on both hands, on both feet, on both shoulders and on the trunk. [16]	Choice well-flavoured food, tasty dainty drinks.
5.	Soft and tender hands and feet, and the hands and feet [5] (reticulated) like a net. [6]	All his people attendants are valuable and precious.
6.	Ankles like rounded shells [7] and the down on his body turns upward, every hair of it. [14]	He becomes Chief, Best, Foremost, Supreme, Paramount among those who have worldly possessions.
7.	Legs like an antelope's. [8]	Whatever things are worthy of a Monarch, the appanage, the treasures, the belongings of a Monarch, these does he quickly acquire.
8.	His skin is so delicately smooth that no dust cleaves	Great wisdom will be his, nor is anyone therein equal to him, nor superior to him

	his body. [12]	amongst those who have worldly wealth.
9.	His complexion is like bronze, and his skin like gold. [11]	Receiver is he of fine and soft coverlets and cloaks and fine linen, fine cotton, fine silken, fine woollen stuffs.
10.	His male organs were concealed in a sheath. [10]	Abundant children will be his, more than a thousand sons, heroes, victors vigorous of frame, crushers of the host of the enemy.
11.	His proportions have the symmetry of the banyan-tree [19]; and standing without bending, he can touch and rub his knees with both hands. [9]	Rich is he, of great fortune, of great wealth, full is the treasure house of much gold and silver, of many goods, of coin and corn.
12.	The front half of his body is like a lion's [17]; there is no furrow between his shoulders [18]; his bust is equally rounded. [20]	He is incapable of failure and loss, he suffers no loss in money or corn, in fields or fallow, in two or four-footed beasts, in wife or children, in servants or slaves, in kinsfolk, friends or connections, he forfeits nothing wherein he succeeds.
13.	His taste is supremely acute; of anything on the tip (of the tongue) sensations of taste are produced in the throat and are diffused everywhere. [21]	He experiences little of illness or suffering, he is possessed of a good digestion, of an equable temperature, neither too hot nor too cold.
14.	His eyes are intensely blue [29] and he has eyelashes like a cow's. [30]	The people love to see him; he is popular among people and beloved by everyone.
15.	He has a head like a turban. [32]	He obtains the loyalty of the multitude of people.
16.	On the skin in each pore there is a single hair only; [13]; and between the eyebrows appears a hairy mole, white and like soft cotton. [31]	The people conform to his wishes

17.	He has forty teeth [23]; his teeth are regular. [24]	People around him are not divided against themselves.
18.	His tongue is very long [27], and he has a divine voice like that of the <i>karavīka</i> bird. [28]	His voice commands attention; all people take his words to heart.
19.	His jaws are as a lion's. [22]	Any human foe or adversary whatever cannot overthrow him.
20.	He has continuous teeth [25]; his teeth are very lustrous. [26]	Pure in heart are his attendants, and all people around him.

Power related are also the seven precious things/ treasures (*ratnas*) that come to a *cakravartin* at the beginning of his earthly mission as the followings: the Sacred Wheel (*cakra*) denoting universality, the Divine Elephant (*hastiratna*, 'elephant-treasure') that is monarch's carrier for the purpose of domain administration, the Milk-white Horse (*aṣvaratna*, 'horse-treasure') that is a carrier pertaining to monarch's conquest, the Magic Jewel (*cintāmaṇi* 'though-jewel') the wish-stone fulfilling every desire, the Perfect Queen-Consort (*strīratna*, 'treasure of a wife') that is the ideal woman of faultless beauty and virtue, the Perfect Minister of Finance (*gehapati/ gṛhapati*, 'householder') who looks after administration and funds necessary for dispensing charity, and the Perfect General-in-Chief (*pariṇāyaka*, 'leader').³⁶ The Pali literature identifies the above-mentioned seven treasures as: *cakka-ratanaṃ hatthi-ratanaṃ assa-ratanaṃ mani-ratanaṃ itthi-ratanaṃ gahapati-ratanaṃ pariṇāyaka-ratanaṃ*, i.e.,

³⁶ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 130-131 uses the Sanskrit terminology. See also *Dīgha Nikāya* XXX.2.29, *Lakkhaṇa Suttanta* as translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F., *op. cit.*, p. 165 mentioning the seven treasures.

wheel-treasure, elephant-treasure, horse-treasure, gem-treasure, woman-treasure, householder/ administrator-treasure, advisor/ leader-treasure.³⁷

Thus, reconstructing the *cakravartin* saviour figure from scriptural material is to remark that he is the representative of the heavenly realm, and as a great-man (*mahāpuruṣa*) comes to the earthly realm to fulfil a divinely sponsored mission of renewal of humankind. Other divinely ordained messengers, who assist the *cakravartin*'s mission, accompany him. The Hindu tradition links *cakravartin*'s assignment to Lord Viṣṇu's epiphanies, in which the supreme deity intervenes to correct anomalous developments within humankind. The *cakravartin* is according to Hindu tenets a human being of great personal qualities destined to play a leading role in 'turning on the *cakra*', i.e. going unobstructed to reinvigorate *dharma* that is the right conduct pertinent to human existence. Similar themes in connection with the world renewal we have encountered already in the case of the Iranian *saoshyant* as above expounded.

But contrary to the *saoshyant* saviour figure, the *cakravartin*, as depicted in historical sources, appears to be a non-eschatological character. As we shall see in our Chap. Two, in the case of Śrī Rāma as incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, a *cakravartin* can be an eschatological character as well as messianic.

So far, in our brief exploration we examined the historical sources of the two major archetypes of the world saviour figures, the Iranian *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* of India. These two archetypes will be later on identified in our subsequent constructs of other world saviour figures to be the two forerunners of Indo-European and Semitic messianic and eschatological themes, and most relevant to the messianic myth of world renewal by divine intervention.

³⁷ See Estlin J. Carpenter, ed., *The Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. 3 (London: The Pali Text Society, 1976), p. 177 for the Pali text in Roman transliteration.

Conclusion

One of our aims in this chapter was to identify the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* as archetypes of the messianic myth. We have constructed the two historical saviour characters primarily from their relevant scriptural traditions. We have identified a consistent Zoroastrian scriptural literature articulating the concept of a final saviour image that later on will be a central idea in modern Indo-European and Semitic messianism and eschatology. Further down the track of our study, we shall see how these two raw models of world saviours have influenced other subsequent messianic characters and millenarian ideas. The *saoshyant* is an eschatological character *per se*, while originally the *cakravartin* has no eschatological features.

We found the *cakravartin* saviour image scripturally prominent and connected to Lord Viṣṇu's epiphanies. We shall see further on in our next chapter, how Śrī Rāma and the Maitreya Buddha characters of future saviours were inspired by the *cakravartin* archetype. Later on in our Chapter Three we examine the three Abrahamic messianic characters and their constructs resembling the *saoshyant* archetype. As we shall see, the messianic myth proved to be perennial. We have already specified that the *cakravartin* archetype influenced two prominent messianic characters that of Śrī Rāma and the Maitreya Buddha. To this we shall now turn.

2

The World Saviour characters in Hinduism and Buddhism

Introduction

So far we have argued that the mythical figures of the *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* are at the origins of the messianic myth. Our aim in this chapter is to depict Lord/ Śrī Rāma and Maitreya Buddha, as two divinely ordained world rulers closely related to the *cakravartin* archetype. We shall see how the two distinct messianic characters relevant to Hinduism and Buddhism respectively are depicted as earthly initiators and maintainers of the Indian kind of ethics known as *dharma*. Above all, the Indian-style world-monarch accomplishes a divine mission by virtue of his moral supremacy (*vid. inf.*).

The notion of Śrī Rāma being messianic character is not well known among scholars of studies in religion. The focus of our endeavour is to identify the relevant scriptural references, particularly in the *Rāmacharitamānasa*, in order to justify Śrī Rāma's character as closely related to the *cakravartin* world saviour archetype. We argue that Śrī Rāma is part of the cyclical divine interventions in human affairs, pertinent to Hindu deity Lord Viṣṇu.¹ This is a classical soteriological theme in the Hindu tradition in which the heavenly realm intercedes with humanity at its historical crossroads (see our Chap. One about

¹ One of our foci in the present chapter is to depict Śrī Rāma as messianic and eschatological character. We did not find necessary to elaborate on the tenth Avatāra of Viṣṇu that is Kalki, a remote messianic figure who is said to appear at the end of Kali Yuga, an age of the world (*yuga*) that lasts 432,000 years. The Kali Yuga is largely believed starting in 3102 BCE. Kalki Avatāra, as messianic figure, does not present any interest for the contemporary messianic movements in India.

Viṣṇu's epiphanies under 'The *cakravartin* of India', also *vid. inf.*).

On the other hand, the Maitreya Buddha as messianic character has a large portrayal in literature, history and art². We hope our endeavour to identify Śrī Rāma and Maitreya Buddha as world saviour characters adds more to a growing panorama on the subject of messianism. We have constructed the Maitreya Buddha's portrayal, as the awaited Buddhist world saviour, based on the relevant Pali and Sanskrit literature of India and the surroundings. Consequently the later developments of the multidimensional cult of Maitreya in those areas where Buddhism spread over centuries like Indochina, China, Korea, Japan, Śrī Lanka, although the messianic element may be stronger in some of these areas, are not part of our study. The Maitreya myth takes multiple forms. Jan Nattier distinguishes four possible versions of the Maitreya myth: *Here/now* – the believer expects to meet Maitreya on earth, during his or her present lifetime; *Here/later* – the believer expects the meeting to take place on earth, but at some time after the believer's death (i.e. in a future rebirth); *There/now* – the believer expects an immediate encounter with Maitreya in the Tuṣita Heaven; *There/later* – the believer aspires to a rebirth in Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven.³ Our construct will emphasise on the historical sources relevant to the *Here/now* version of the Maitreya myth that is apocalyptic *per se*. The identification of such material that is significant to Buddhist messianic ideas will help to understand current expectation we unveil in Chapter Four about the *Here/now* version of the

² E.g. Inchang Kim, *The Future Buddha Maitreya: An Iconological Study*, Emerging perceptions in Buddhist studies, no. 7. (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1997), Asha Das, *Maitreya Buddha in literature, history and art* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2003), Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, eds., *Maitreya and the future Buddha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³ Jan Nattier, "The Meaning of the Maitreya Myth: A Typological Analysis," in *Maitreya and the future Buddha*, edited by Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 25.

Maitreya myth. We shall now turn to the construct of the Śrī Rāma as world saviour, and further on elaborate on the Maitreya Buddha.

The Hindu Lord Rāma

The Hindu Śrī Rāma (Sanskrit: राम), known also as Ramācandra, is held as the seventh incarnation (*avatāra*) of Lord Viṣṇu, one of the Hindu trinity consisting of Brahmā ('the Creator'), Viṣṇu ('the Preserver') and Śiva/ Rudra ('the Destroyer') as personifications of the dynamics of macro- and micro-universes in relation to cyclical developments in time. The story of Rāma's birth, and his exploits are subjects to many versions of the story of *Rāmāyāna*. Apart from vernacular works there is collateral literature, the most important being *Vasiṣṭha Rāmāyāna* known also as *Yoga Vasiṣṭha / Vasiṣṭha's Yoga*, a collection of teachings given by Guru Vasiṣṭha, to his pupil Rāma, the future king and saviour of humanity.

Amid continuous speculation in relation to what could be the contents of the original *Rāmāyāna* of Vālmīki,⁴ our option is to use the text of *Rāmācharitamānasa* ('the Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma') as primary research material. Its author, the devotional poet Tulsidas/ Tulasidas/ Tulsidasa, started

⁴ See P. L. Bhargava, *Retrieval of History from Purāṇic Myths: Exposure of Late Purāṇic Myths about some Great Characters of the Earliest Indian History* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1998), contesting Vālmīki's *Rāmāyāna* currently available, especially in Chaps. One, Two, Three and Ten; references are made to other authors supporting interpolations in regard to the controversial issues of Sītā's banishment to the forest, and the killing of Bālin/ Vāli, and so on.

the composition of this version of *Rāmāyāna* in 1574 CE.⁵

The Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmāyāna*, currently the most popular version of Rāma's story in India, contains all the relevant material in order for us to construct the character of Śrī Rāma as earthly incarnation of the divine, and key eschatological figure in Hinduism. By comparison with the currently available *Rāmāyāna* of Vālmīki, the text of *Rāmācharitamānasa* gives more details about Śrī Rāma as messianic figure.

The *Rāmācharitamānasa* work is structured into seven chapters (*kāṇḍas*) namely, *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, *Kiṣkindākāṇḍa*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, *Laṅkākāṇḍa*, and *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The work describes various stages of the story of Śrī Rāma, the actions relevant to his birth and the mission that followed, all part of a divinely masterminded plan in heaven. Together with Śrī Rāma as main player, there are multiple other characters that participate in the parable. Rāma's story is not ordinary. It re-enacts the allegory of the incarnated Sun God descending on earth with a mission to fulfil.⁶ We learn about the cause of Lord Viṣṇu's descent as Śrī Rāma thus:

Whenever righteousness declines and demons, vile and arrogant, multiply, and work lawless deeds beyond the telling, and whenever Brahmans and cows, and gods and earth are in trouble, the gracious Lord assumes various bodily forms and relieves the distress of the faithful.

⁵ Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa, *Śrī Rāmācharitamānasa*, trans. not indicated. (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1997), p. 43.

⁶ E. Krishnamacharya, *Book of Rituals* (Visakhapatnam: The World Teacher Trust, 1990), p. 95.

Hindi – Avadi

जब जब होइ धरम कै हानी | बाढ़हिं असुर अधम अभिमानी ॥३॥
करहिं अनीकि जाइ नाही बरनी | सीदहिं बिप्र धेनु सुर धरनी ॥
तब तब प्रभु धरि बिबिध सरीरा | हरहिं कृपानिधि सज्जन पीरा ॥४॥

Transliteration

Jaba jaba hoi dharma kai hānī, bāRhahī asura adhama abhimānī. 3.
Karahī anīti jāi nahī baranī, sīdahī bipra dhenu sura dharanī.
Taba taba prabhu dhari bibidha sarīrā, harahī kṛipānidi sajjana pīrā. 4.⁷

As the world can be in such a distressed condition at any time in its history, the assumption is that the divine descend can happen when such conditions are met. Thus, Śrī Rāma's exploits are both a story of the past and a prediction. We find in 'The Story of Bhuṣuṇḍa' (i.e. *Vasiṣṭha's Yoga* VI.1:22) the idea that 'Lord Viṣṇu takes birth again and again as Rāma: he will be born in this age for the eleventh time.'⁸ Rāma's narrative is clearly a myth in which an individual biography is located in a story of India's past. According to Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Śrī Rāma was born in a previous incarnation in the year 7039 BCE as a result of specific astrological configuration.⁹ The arrival of the Hindu world saviour is heralded by specific preparations on the earth to receive the divine descend. Thus, we learn that:

⁷ *Bālakāṇḍa* Do.120, in R. C. Prasad, trans., *Tulasidasa's Shriramacharitamānasa: The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), p. 74. Avadi is a dialect of the Hindi language.

⁸ In Swami Venkatesananda, *Vasiṣṭha's Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 353.

⁹ Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Bhakti Yoga Sagar: Satsangs with Swami Satyananda Saraswati*, Vol. 4 (Munger: Sivananda Math, 1999), p. 83.

in the city of Ayodhya there ruled a king who was a jewel of Raghu's race; he was called Daśaratha, a name which is familiar in the Vedas. He was a champion of virtue, a repository of good qualities and a man of wisdom; he was a sincere devotee of God Viṣṇu and his mind was also set on Him.¹⁰

Along with the virtuous king Daśaratha there is Kausalya, one of his wives, who is 'of chaste behaviour, faithful to their lord and full of humble and steadfast devotion to Hari's lotus feet'.¹¹

Most pertinent about Rāma's descent is that his birth is the result of an important fire ceremony, a *yājñā*. King Daśaratha has asked the holy guru Vasiṣṭha, his family Brahmin priest, to organise a *yājñā* event to propitiate the birth of progeny for the king. Consequently, the wise Vasiṣṭha summoned the sage Śṛṅgī and have a noble fire sacrifice performed. The rice boiled with milk by that *yājñā* is allegorically offered by fire-god Agni himself, to queen Kausalya first, then to the other two queens of king Daśaratha.¹² The entire event happens in conjunction with cosmic portents pertaining to the descent of Śrī Rāma:

The position of the sun and the moon, the zodiacal sign into which the sun had entered, the position of the seven other planets, the day of the week and of the lunar month, all these were auspicious. Above all, the creation rejoiced for the birth of Rama is seen as the source of all delights.¹³

¹⁰ R. C. Prasad, *op. cit.*, *Bālakāṇḍa* Do.187, p. 109.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Do.188, p. 109. Hari is one of Lord Viṣṇu's names.

¹² *Ibid.* Do.188-189, pp. 109f.

¹³ *Ibid.* Do.190, p. 110.

In such a way, Rāma is born. As son of king Daśaratha, Rāma belongs to the sun dynasty. His parthenogenetic birth happens in the holy city of Avadh (Ayodhya), alongside his three brothers, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrugna, who are personifications of Lord Viṣṇu's attributes. When Rāma first manifested he symbolically held Visnu's, emblems of power, the conch-shell, discus (*cakra*), club and lotus.¹⁴ A host of other heavenly beings descend as partial incarnations to participate into the *līlā* ('divine play') of Lord Visnu's and his consort Lakṣmī. Thus, Sitā descends as Rāma's future wife and *śakti* ('power'). The turning point of the story, that triggers Rāma's mission in motion, is his marriage to Sitā. Once Rāma becomes fully aware about his divine assignment those attributes relevant to a *cakravartin* become activated (*vid. inf.*).

The *Rāmācharitamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa (like the *Rāmāyāna* of Vālmīki as well) is an allegory structured in such a way to allow natural developments of the events. Śrī Rāma has to go to the woods in the mountains accompanied by his wife Sitā, and brother Lakṣmaṇa, who is the incarnation of Śeṣanāga, the support of the entire universe as Viṣṇu's couch.¹⁵ It turns out that the chief demon Rāvana kidnaps Sitā. Preparations for a conflict of gigantic proportions are under way. Alliances are forged, the entire world appears to be polarised in two gigantic alliances, the forces of light (headed by Śrī Rāma) and the forces of darkness (headed by the demon monster Rāvana), who in his allegoric representation is a ten-head human being. A sustained battle follows in which

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Do.191, p. 111. The holding the discus/ wheel (*cakra*) is a mark of a *cakravartin* (see 'The *cakravartin* of India' in our Chap. 1).

¹⁵ The Lakṣmaṇa character, as incarnation of the allegorical Śeṣanāga, the support of the earth, is to play a key role during the battles in which cataclysmic earth structure changes happen.

Hanūman, the monkey-face general, plays a key role.¹⁶ The forces of darkness are defeated, and Sitā is rescued.

Specific fire ceremonies *yājñas* will be performed to ensure the purification of the world at the start of a new cycle. The eschaton follows; Indra, the heavenly king of gods, will resurrect the dead at Rāma's request.¹⁷ After accomplishing his mission of annihilation of the evil Śrī Rāma will return to Ayodhya where his devoted brother Bharata is in waiting for him. Then, fair judgements will follow as Rāma rewards people as per their deeds in accordance with *dharma*, the virtue. There will be jubilation, as people are happy to know that 'Rama's coronation will bring gladness to the whole world'.¹⁸

The divine coronation follows, in which guru Vasiṣṭha and other Brahmins apply the sacred mark on Śrī Rāma's forehead so that he becomes king and sits on a throne along with his devoted wife Sitā.¹⁹ The entire world will be at peace as Śrī Rāma is the 'undisputed sovereign of the entire globe'. The kingdom of God will be established as prosperity follows, people become generous, they pledge the vow of monogamy, the entire nature rejoices, the earth is now rich in crops.²⁰ This beautiful allegorical story has all the major theme of the *cakravartin* saviour archetype (*vid. sup.* in our Chapter One) plus the eschatological element (*vid. sup.* Indra resurrecting the dead).

Śrī Rāma is divinely ordained, and his appearance happens in conjunction with celestial portents. Sitā, Rāma's devoted wife, can be equated with the

¹⁶ The heroic deeds of Hanūman are particularly depicted in the *Sundarakāṇḍa* chapter of the *Rāmacharitamānasa* text.

¹⁷ *Laiṅkāṇḍa* Do.113, in Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 564.

¹⁸ *Uttarakāṇḍa* Do.9, in Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 579.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Do.11, in Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

²⁰ *Ibid* Dos.21 and 22, in Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 588f.

Perfect Queen-Consort (*strīratna*, ‘treasure of a wife’) of a *cakravartin*. Rāma owns the sacred Wheel (*cakra*) of great power, the mark of Lord Viṣṇu, and his wishes are fulfilled thus pertaining to the possession of the Magic Jewel (*cintāmaṇi* ‘though-jewel’). Other precious things/ treasures (*ratnas*) relevant to a *cakravartin* are more pertinent to his future position as enlightened king that requires a good administration, military power, charity, and so on. Although Śrī Rāma character is clearly that of a world saviour nature, the *Rāmācharitamānasa* work construct is not what is expected from ordinary scriptural material.

Śrī Rāma, as world saviour, is part of a story in which his future messianic mission is depicted as an allegory. In contrast to Śrī Rāma’s story, other messianic characters are different. They are the results of religious prophecies, in which a prophet exists in the background. But, in the case of *Rāmācharitamānasa* there is no prophet *per se*, for Vālmīki, the original expounder of *Rāmāyāna*, is just a writer though inspired by the divine realm. The unique form of presentation of a messianic theme that is found in the *Rāmācharitamānasa* work is one of the reasons Śrī Rāma is not much known as messianic character, but a protagonist of a story. But, as we have seen already, the exposition of circumstances of Rāma’s birth, his actions and the outcomes that follow, is a clear historical scriptural proof that Śrī Rāma is in a divinely sponsored mission similar to any other messianic character. Above all, Śrī Rāma’s mission ends in the same way as of other messianic characters, i.e., there is a defeat of the forces of evil, judgement of the world, resurrection of the dead, and renewal of the entire creation. Rāma’s story has greatly inspired the Indian ethos.

The Indian culture is deeply rooted in the story of Śrī Rāma and Sitā that for thousands of years has continues to influence the domestic and personal life of

Indians as well as country's political arena. The story of Śrī Rāma is also at the core of Indian royal ideology; the national dream of the establishment of *Rāmarājya*,²¹ the kingdom of Rāma as personal, social and political fulfilment of happy lives for humans, and the transposition of the heavenly paradise to the earthly realm. Certainly, such expectations are more conducive to regard the story of *Rāmacharitamānasa* as a prediction, although for the cyclical occurrence is both a prediction and a story of the past (*vid. sup.*). We shall examine now another messianic character, the Maitreya Buddha, who is constructed similarly based on the *cakravartin* archetype.

The Buddhist Maitreya

Buddhist thought based its world saviour character on the archetype of the mythical great-man (*mahāpuruṣa*). The great-man is an incarnation of the universal principle that descends on earth for the purpose of the accomplishment of *dharma* (Sanskrit: धर्म). It equally applies to a *buddha* as embodiment of renunciation (*sannyāsa*), as well as to a virtuous world-monarch, the *cakravartin*. However, those who qualify for either of the above-two characters have their missions of salvation of the world differently oriented. The historical Buddha of the sixth century BCE for instance, had to accomplish his mission as spiritual leader, whereas a *cakravartin* has a secular mandate. The future Maitreya Buddha (Sanskrit: मैत्रेय बुद्ध) 'symbolises the consummation of the rich legacy of Buddhist religious experience derived from the enlightenment of Gautama

²¹ Swami Siddhinathananda, *Rama the Ideal Man* (Calicut: Ramakrishna Sevashrama, 1988), p. 168.

Buddha',²²

As we shall see further on, the Maitreya Buddha (मैत्रेय बुद्ध) character resembles more closely the *cakravartin*, than the Buddha, the renouncer. In relation to Maitreya's body should exist the 32 major marks (*vid. sup.* in our Chap. One), 80 (minor) physical attributes, and 108 marks under his foot, relevant for a great-man (*mahāpuruṣa*).²³ As the fifth Buddha according to *Mahāvastu* 240,²⁴ Maitreya descends on earth in order to turn the wheel of time (*kālacakra*) that 'is the wheel of destruction'²⁵ and subsequently of renewal. This implies messianic themes; some troublesome events for humanity, followed by a future age of bliss (*vid. inf.*).

We find references relevant to Maitreya Buddha as messianic figure in the canonical text of *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Suttanta* that is *Dīgha Nikāya* XXVI. The *Dīgha Nikāya* is one of the fivefold division of the *Sutta piṭaka*, part of the classical Buddhist canon that according to the tradition was instituted by the Council of the 500 arhats just after the cremation of the Buddha Gautama/Gotama²⁶ (ca. 486 BCE). According to *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Suttanta*, there will

²² Kitagawa, *loc. cit.*, p. 7.

²³ Asha Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-57. See the table in Chap. One for the 32 significant body marks of a great-man/ superman (*mahāpuruṣa*).

²⁴ See *Mahāvastu* 240 mentioning the succession of the Buddhas. The last five being described as Krakucchanda, Konākamuni, Kāśyapa, Śākyamuni and Maitreya, in J. J. Jones, trans., *The Mahāvastu*, Vol 3 London: (Luzac & Company Ltd., 1956), p. 230. Cf. Shashi Bhusha Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974), p. 87 on the table containing the names of the five human Buddhas: Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kāyapaś, Gautama, and Maitreya. (NB. there is an error in Shashi Bhusha Dasgupta's text, Kāyapaś should be Kāśyapa, but Śākyamuni and Gautama represent the same Buddha).

²⁵ Dasgupta, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

²⁶ John Bowker, *op. cit.*, p. 991.

be a continuous decline of *dharma* prior to Maitreya's arrival. 'The world will fall into promiscuity'²⁷ and there will arise a sword-period,²⁸ that is a time of tribulations when people fall into the behaviour of wild beasts and with their swords deprive each other of life.²⁹ In the royal city of Ketumatī, will arise the righteous Sankhā as Wheel-turning king (i.e. *cakkavatti/ cakravartin*) and possessor of the seven precious things.³⁰ This *Suttanta* gives Buddha Gautama's own words about the future Buddha thus:

At that period, brethren, there will arise in the world as Exalted One named Metteyya, Arahant, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now. He, by himself, will thoroughly know and see, as it were face to face, this universe, with its worlds of the spirits, its Brahmās and its Māras, and its worlds of recluses and brahmins, of princes and people, even as I know now, by myself, thoroughly know and see them.

²⁷ See *Dīgha Nikāya, Cakkavatti-sihanāda Suttanta* XXVI.20 in T. W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F., op. cit., p. 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Dīgha Nikāya* XXVI.21, p. 71. The relevant Pali word in Estlin J. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 73 is '*satthantarakappa*' that is better to be translated as 'time of disaster by war'. ('*kappa*' means 'period of time', '*satthantara*' means 'disaster of war'). *Satthantara kappa* is one of the three major disasters mentioned by the Buddhist tradition as: *dubbhikkhantra kappa* (time of disaster by famine), *satthantara kappa* (time of disaster by war), and *rogantara kappa* (time of disaster by pestilence/ diseases).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Dīgha Nikāya*. There is the lamentation: 'This is a wild beast, this is the wild beast' (Pali: *esa migo esa migo ti*). People with their swords will deprive each other of life (Pali: *aññamaññaṃ jīvītā voropessanti*). The theme of people's beastly behaviour at the time of tribulations will reappear in a form or another in all those traditions we herein present.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, *Dīgha Nikāya* XXVI.24, p. 73. *Vid. sup.* in our Chap. One for the seven precious things.

Pali text (Roman script)

Asīti - vassa - saḥassāyukesu bhikkhave manussesu Metteyyo nama Bhagavā loke uppajjissati araham Sammā - Sambuddho vijjā - caraṇa - sampanno sugato loka-vidū anuttaro purusa - damma - sārathi satthā deva- manussānaṃ Bhudho Bhagavā, seyyathā pi' Eham etarahi loke uppanno araham Sammā- Sambuddho vijjā - caraṇa - sampanno sugato loka - vidū anuttaro purisa - damma - sārathi satthā deva - manussānaṃ Buddho Bhagavā. So imaṃ lokam sadevakaṃ samāraṃ sabrahmakaṃ sassamaṇa - brāhmaṇiṃ pajam sadeva - manussaṃ sayam abhiñña sacchikatvā pavedessati, seyyathā pi' ham etarahi imaṃ lokam sadevakaṃ samāraṃ sabrahmakaṃ sassamaṇa - brāhmaṇiṃ pajam sadeva - manussaṃ sayam abhiñña sacchikatvā pavedemi.³¹

We learn also that Metteyya will be preoccupied with the truth (*dhamma*) in association with a holy entourage:

The truth [the Norm] lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation, will be proclaimed, both in the spirit and in the letter, the higher life will he make known, in all its fullness and in all its purity, even as I do now. He will be accompanied by a congregation of some thousands of brethren, even as I am now accompanied by a congregation of some hundreds of brethren.

Pali text (Roman script)

So dhammam desissati ādi - kalyāṇam majjhe - kalyāṇam pariyosāna - kalyāṇam sāttham savyañjanaṃ kevala - pari - punnam parisuddham brahmācariyaṃ pakāsessati, seyyathā pi' ham etarahi dhammam desemi ādi - kalyāṇam majjhe - kalyāṇam pariyosāna - kalyāṇam sāttham savyañjanaṃ

³¹ *Ibid.*, *Dīgha Nikāya* XXVI.25, pp. 73-74. In *Dīgha Nikāya, Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Suttanta* XXVI.25 Part 1. Diacritics and italics added.

kevala - paripuṇṇaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmacariyaṃ pakāsemi. So aneka - sahaṣṣaṃ bhikkhu - saṃghaṃ pariharissati, seyyathā pi'haṃ etarahi aneka - satamaṃ bhikkhu - saṃghaṃ pariharāmi.³²

The canonical sources like *Dīgha Nikāya*, depicts the Maitreya Buddha character in general features only. On the other hand, the non-canonical literature gives more details about the Buddhist world saviour. Recent scholarly research adds more reference material, written both in Pali and Sanskrit, about the Maitreya character. Das mentions the most relevant titles relevant to the Maitreya/ Metteyya as the followings: *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Jātaka*, *Milindapañha*, *Attasālinī*, *Mahāvaṃsa*, *Tikā*, *Cūlavaṃsa*, *Thūpavaṃsa*, *Mahāsampiṇḍa Nidāna*, *Jinakālamālipakaraṇa*, *Rasavāhīnī*, *Satattakī*, *Saddhammattharatnā Valiya*, *Dvādasaparitta*, *Dasabodhisattuppatti Kathā*, *Samanta Bhaddhikā*, *Anāgatavaṃsa Dasanā*, *Bodhipakkhīya Dīpanī*, *Lalitavistara*, *Dīvyavadana*, *Aśokāvadāna*, *Avadāna Śataka*, *Saddharma Puṇḍarika Sūtra*, *Vajracchedikā Sūtra*, and *Gaṇḍavyūha*.³³ But, the Maitreya Buddha as saviour character is better articulated in two relevant non-canonical texts, the *Mahāvastu* and the *Anāgatavaṃsa*.³⁴

From the *Mahāvastu* text, that is a collection of stories in relation to Gautama Buddha and his entourage, we learn that ‘in a prosperous household and one well adorned with wisdom, Maitreya will appear in the world in a future

³² *Ibid.*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, p. 74, In *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Suttanta* XXVI.25 Part 2. Diacritics and italics added.

³³ Our list was compiled from Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-46.

³⁴ Alan Sponberg, “Epilogue: A prospectus for the Study of Maitreya,” in *Maitreya and the future Buddha*, edited by Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 286-287.

age.³⁵ We learn also that ‘when Maitreya will be the Tathāgata,³⁶ the royal capital will be named Ketumatī.’³⁷ About the future saviour we find out that ‘Maitreya will he be called who, free of passion, liberated, emancipated of heart’³⁸ with a great retinue will pervade the world of men and gods. But one work stands apart, the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, which gives detailed information about the Buddhist saviour figure.

The *Anāgatavaṃsa*, that is a non-canonical Pali composition of a later date estimated at the tenth century CE,³⁹ concisely describes the holy life of Maitreya (Pali: Metteyya) as saviour of mankind. The text consists of a discussion between the venerable Sāriputta Upatissa and Buddha himself. The former makes the following query about the future Buddha: ‘How will the Buddha, the composed conqueror is born after your demise?’⁴⁰ The Buddha answered thus:

In a *crore* of years in this Bhaddkappa there will be born, the greatest among men, greatly virtuous, greatly prudent and wise, of great fame and strength, endowed with great career and prowess, possessor of great memory and patient, intently devoted to virtues, Metteyya by name. He will have eyes that

³⁵ *Mahāvastu*. 246, in J. J. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

³⁶ In Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 433 ‘Tathāgata’ word, as related to Gautama Buddha, means literally ‘he who comes and goes in the same way [as the Buddhas who preceded him]’. Maitreya as Tathāgata is a *mahāpuruṣa* character similar to Buddha, but his mission will followed a royal ideology instead of renunciation and spiritual dissemination as Buddha’s.

³⁷ *Mahāvastu* 240, in Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

³⁸ *Mahāvastu* 247, *ibid.*, Jones, p. 237.

³⁹ Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28 estimates the tenth century CE as the date for Kassapa, the author of *Anāgatavaṃsa*. But, the eighteenth century CE is more likely the time of composition of the available text. The *Anāgatavaṃsa* text of 142 verses is fully translated by Das, *op. cit.*, using an early manuscript in Roman edition by professor Minayeff of St. Petersburg since 1886, p. 81.

⁴⁰ *Anāgatavaṃsa stanzas* marked 1, 2 in Das, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

see into the observed theme of all reckoned *dhammas*, he will be prudent and Seer and penetrated into great pleasure, that greatest spiritual being, the conqueror will be born.

Pali text (Roman script)

imasmim bhaddake kappe asaṃjāte vassakoṭiye |
metteyyo nāma nāmena sambuddho dvipaduttamo |
mahāpuñño mahāpañño mahāñānī mahāyaso |
mahabbalo mahāthāmo uppajjissati cakkhumā |
mahāgati sati c'eva dhītimā bāhusaccavā |
saṃkhāto sabbadhammānaṃ nāto diṭṭho suphassito |
pariyogāḷho parāmaṭṭho uppajjissati so jino ⁴¹

Moreover, the *Anāgatavaṃsa* is full of relevant information about the future Buddhist saviour of humanity. Based on this text we have extracted the most important data in relation to Maitreya, from various *stanzas* indicating their numbers in square brackets. The Buddhist saviour has multiple appellatives; he is seldom-named *Ajita* ('victorious'), *Jina* ('conqueror') or *Muni* ('sage, wise'). The major ideas about Maitreya and other facts in relation to his mission are as the followings. There will be a holy capital city named Ketumatī [8], a beautiful palace bedecked with gems [12]. The powerful king Sankhā, the king of kings is the master of this city [9-10]. Maitreya's mother is Brahmavati, his father

⁴¹ *Anāgatavaṃsa stanzas* marked 5-7 in Das *op. cit.*, p. 86. The word 'crore' denotes a long period of time rather than the number 100,000. *Bhaddkappa* refers to the actual *kalpa*, i.e., epoch/ age. *Dhamma* is the Pali word equivalent to the Sanskrit *dharma*, i.e. virtue/ truth/ good deed. Our italics were added in the Pali Roman transliteration and the English translation. Also the bars at the end of *stanzas* ('verses') are our additions.

Subrahma [96]. There is a wish fulfilling tree (*kapparukkhesu*)⁴² of magical powers to materialise things. [19-20, 22, 23, 24, 25]. Maitreya's wife is Chandramukhi, and he will have a son Brahmavardhana by name [48]. Maitreya will retire to the Himalayan region [81] together with his attendants, the renouncers (*bhikṣus*) [83, 84, 85]. The compassionate Maitreya emerges in the world to teach the truth, thus liberating numerous beings by turning the Wheel of Truth [87, 88, 89, 90]. He will attain supreme liberation and dies [133]. The law ordained by him will persist [134].⁴³

From the above data it is clear that distinctive characteristics exist between the Buddhist Maitreya and other messianic characters. The Buddhist saviour is peaceful, he does not come to judge humanity or to punish the wicked in front of a divine army, but his primary mission is to validate human aspiration for Buddhahood.⁴⁴ But, Maitreya, as *cakravartin* appears to act to establish a revolutionary imprint conducive to the transformation of humanity at a societal level. A world cycle end and a new one begins. Christine M. E. Guth writes:

As the Buddha who will appear at the end of this world cycle to re-establish a just order over the entire world, Maitreya was linked with the *cakravartin*, the ideal universal monarch who conquers with the Buddhist Dharma rather than with the sword. Maitreya's earthly name of *Ajita*, meaning "victorious," undoubtedly contributed a militant element to this image.⁴⁵

⁴² The word *kapparukkhesu* is the Pali equivalent of the better-known Sanskrit word *kalpavṛkṣa*, the wish-fulfilling tree.

⁴³ See Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-97 for the entire translation of *Anāgatavaṃsa* text.

⁴⁴ Alan Sponberg, *loc. cit.*, p. 295.

⁴⁵ Christine M. E. Guth, "The Pensive Prince of Chūgūji: Maitreya Cult and Image in Seventh-Century Japan," in *Maitreya and the future Buddha*, edited by Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 209.

But, the new world imposed by a *cakravartin* primarily through his moral superiority implies some kind of enforcement, that is an element subservient to the main method that of preaching *dharma*, the right way of living. It can be surely envisaged that the major villain on earth is internal rather than external. The enemy to defeat is the *adharma*, (Pali, *adhamma*), the unrighteousness, untruth, which takes multiple forms in order to deceive the human.

That lack to follow the right path to successfully fulfil the full potential of a human life, to attain Buddhahood and become an arhat (the one who has reached the state of *nirvāṇa*) is seen as the real enemy to be defeated by the future Buddhist saviour. Thus, Maitreya's 'turning of the wheel of doctrine' (*dharmacakra*) is rather peaceful by preaching *dharma*, instead of imposition. Maitreya Buddha's images are peaceful and full of generosity.

Thus, we have seen how Gautama Buddha himself prophesised about the coming in the future of the Maitreya Buddha, a clear-cut messianic character with no eschatological features. The *Anāgatavaṃsa*, a later addition to non-canonical scriptural works, gives relevant data about the future Buddhist saviour, about his entourage, and the *modus operandi* for the purpose of the salvation of the world.

Conclusion

We have seen so far, how the two messianic characters relevant to Hinduism and Buddhism, the Lord Rāma and the Maitreya Buddha respectively, are based on the idyllic figure of the *cakravartin*, a divinely ordained world-monarch who is destined to perform a world renewal by 'turning the wheel' of radical changes that leads to a fresh start for the entire humanity. Both Lord Rāma and Maitreya

Buddha are gifted with remarkable personal qualities. Since the beginning of their missions, Lord Rāma and Maitreya Buddha receive help from the divine realm, and their great entourages are also part of the divine intervention.

What we find relevant about the two messianic characters herein described is that they play a key role in the millennia-old messianic expectation in the Hindu and Buddhist religions. Our constructs of the two messianic figures are mainly based on primary reference material of historical accounts. We will see later on in Chap. Four how vibrant at the present time is the expectation of the arrivals of Hindu and Buddhist world saviours.

Now in the next chapter we attempt to explore the Abrahamic traditions in relation to the messianic ideas. These religious traditions have distinct forms of messianic characters although their saviours' missions contain significant parallels vis-à-vis the radical transformation of the world by divine intervention. This theme we have seen already being prevalent across cross-cultural boundaries. To the Abrahamic traditions we shall turn now.

3

The World Saviour characters in Abrahamic traditions

Introduction

We have seen so far, that the two relevant messianic characters of Hinduism and Buddhism, Śrī Rāma and the Maitreya Buddha respectively, were inspired by the *cakravartin*, a mythical archetypal saviour figure who originally has no eschatological features. The Maitreya Buddha character appears to be messianic only, while Śrī Rāma is eschatological as well. Our aim in this chapter is to further expound three more messianic characters relevant to the religions they serve. Belief in the Jewish Messiah, the Christian Messiah and the Islamic Mahdî are key messianic elements in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,¹ respectively.

A significant feature of the three creeds is their claim to be the legitimate holders of the Abrahamic lineage, thus the beneficiaries of G-d Jehovah's (YHWH - Hebrew: יהוה) blessings given to the biblical patriarch Abraham (ref. Gen. 12:1-3). Judaism, as a religious forerunner, was the first to articulate an Abrahamic saviour character. The three messiahs, we locate in their historical sources, are the Jewish Messiah,² the Christian Messiah, and the Islamic

¹ Although the Abrahamic religions are messianic and eschatological *per se*, we shall see that in Islam there is no clear scriptural reference to who will do the judgement of the world after the resurrection of the dead, for the Mahdî as Islamic saviour is more of a strong political leader character. Even without a judge of the dead, Islam is still eschatological in nature, as is proved by some texts in the *Qur'an* (*vid. inf.*).

² The Jewish saviour, who is to come at the End of Time, used to be known simply as Messiah, but since the advent of Christianity a distinction has been made between the Messiah

al-Mahdî, have decisively marked the historical development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

We argue based on scriptural evidence and scholarly research that the above three religious traditions share basic messianic and eschatological features. By observation and comparison it will be seen that some eschatological elements of the above three religions, are also present in Zoroastrian tradition. The issues if the Zoroastrian archetypal character of the Saoshyant (Avestan: *𐬰𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬀*) is the origin of inspiration for other later messianic characters, or if key Zoroastrian eschatological elements were borrowed by the three Abrahamic religions, are still a matter of the current scholarly debate (see our Note 1 in Chapter One). The Abrahamic traditions articulated three major messianic characters, the Jewish Messiah, the Christian Messiah, and the Islamic al-Mahdî.

The Jewish Messiah

There is a wide consensus among scholars of religion that the key messianic ideas in Judaism were likely to be inherited from the Zoroastrians. But the Jewish Messiah has more complex features. The issue of the coming of a future Jewish saviour is tightly connected with the Israelite royal ideology, which started with the anointing of king Saul by the prophet Samuel (see 1 Samuel Chap. 10). The divinely ordained king is the protector and guarantor at social and political levels of the fulfilment of the covenant between G-d and Jewish

of Christianity and the Messiah of Israel, i.e., the Jewish Messiah, who is now more often named Moshiach/ Mashiach.

people. As Laato Antti puts it, Judaic messianism was a result of ‘the Israelite royal ideology and the rise of the messianic expectations and their transformation into eschatological messianism in the postexilic period.’³ i.e., after the Zoroastrian Persian king Cyrus freed the Jews from Babylonian captivity (see Ezra Chap. One).

During the Babylonian captivity (ca. 586-538 BCE) and beyond, Zoroastrianism decisively marked Judaism. Kitagawa explains:

Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism most heavily in its eschatology, including the notions of the messianic era of national restoration, the coming of the new eon of God’s kingdom, and the celestial hereafter for the deceased, as well as in the understanding of the sacred history.⁴

³ Antti Laato, *A Star is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), p. 394.

⁴ Kitagawa, *loc. cit.*, p. 9. Some scholars of Jewish messianism, for example Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel from its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 14, supports the idea that the concept of a saviour of humanity is inherited from the Jewish tradition, and it has no inspiration from Zoroastrianism. In relation to it should be noted that around the year 1000 BCE when king David lived, the Prophet Zarathushtrâ probably lived. At that time, Zoroastrian messianism had already some themes developed, whereas Judaism was in its formative stage (see our Chap. One in relation to the presence of the *saoshyant*, the Zoroastrian saviour, in the *Gâthâs*). As we shall see further down the track in our study, the lineage of king David is to play a significant role for the future Jewish saviour. The Jewish royal ideology started from the time of king Saul, and later on the entire Jewish messianic ideas were entangled with the royal ideology. Thus, we believe that there are no good reasons to dismiss Zoroastrian influence upon the construct of the future Jewish saviour that was better articulated by the *Talmud of Babylonia*, during the Babylonian captivity that lasted approximately between ca. 586-538 BCE (*vid. inf.*). Even if the date when Prophet Zarathushtrâ lived is placed between ca. 660-583 BCE (see note 4 in our Chapter One), still at that time the *Talmud of Babylonia* was not articulated. This is just a simple remark in relation to the disputed issue, without claiming to solve the current scholarly debate on Zoroastrian influence upon Judaism.

The Persians, as new conquerors of Babylon, helped the Jews to return to their homeland (as per the *Book of Ezra*) to start the constructions on the second temple. Thus, under the influence of Zoroastrianism, new ideas appeared to mix with the old ones. Consequently, the Jewish eschatology largely matured. The authors of the Old Testament developed already some eschatological ideas relevant to the individual and the nation of Israel, but the synthesis of indigenous and Persian strands occurred only in the fourth century BCE, after the return from captivity.⁵ Gradually, Jewish messianism developed the idea of the coming of a final redeemer who has the divine mandate to fulfil all redemptive expectations of the Jewish people. Joseph Klausner writes:

The ancient traditions about the exile in Egypt and the deliverance from this exile were the initial stimulus to the formation of the entire Messianic idea, which is fundamentally the idea of redemption from exile.⁶

The Jewish saviour is known as the Messiah (Moshiach/ Mashiach, Hebrew: *mâshîah* מָשִׁיחַ) meaning ‘he who is anointed’. His basic personal quality is of being a person of righteousness, a *tzadik/ tzaddik*,⁷ who although a redeemer for Israel, will perfect the entire world as well. The Moshiach as future saviour is to be of the lineage of Judah, one of Jacob’s sons.

⁵ R. H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life In Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity or Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian Eschatology from Pre-prophetic Times till the Close of the New Testament Canon* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), p. 19.

⁶ Joseph Klausner, *op. cit.*, pp. 48f.

⁷ Jacob Immanuel Schochet, *Chassidic Dimensions: Themes in Chassidic Thought and Practice* (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1990), p. 85 explains ‘The term *tzadik* derives from *tzedek* – righteousness; justice. *Tzadik* thus means a righteous person. The general definition is that of a person who obeys and fulfils G-d’s will which is expressed in the precepts of Torah.’ The word *tzadik/ tzadikim* is related to the name of the priest Zadok (“righteous”), the one who anointed Solomon, David’s son, king of Israel.

There is a large consensus among scholars that the earliest reference to a saviour of Israel is in Gen. 49:10 in which the patriarch Jacob before dying, foretells the future of his sons who are to be the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob blessed his virtuous son Judah thus: ‘The sceptre will not depart from the house of Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendents, until Shiloh comes, the one whom all nations will obey’ (Hebrew:

:לא-יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקק מבין רגליועד כ-יבא שילה ולו יקחת עמים).⁸

We learn thus that any future king (Hebrew: *mēlēkh* מֶלֶךְ) of Israel will be from the lineage of Judah/ David/ Solomon. The unconditional promise of the eternal dynasty of David is found in 2 Sam. 7. The idea that ‘a new king will arise from David’s descendents’ is found in Isa. 11:1, and further clarified in 1 Chron. 22:10, which says that Solomon’s (David’s son) dynasty will rule Israel forever. A significant verse urging patience in waiting for the future king of Israel is present in Haba. 2:3 thus: ‘The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie. Though he tarries - wait for him, for it will surely come. It will not be late!’

Multiple references to a redeemer of Israel appear in the Judaic authoritative scriptural material. We have used data from reliable scholarly research across the canon of rabbinical writings done by Jacob Neusner on a large textual material in relation to the issue of the redeemer of Israel. Neusner used five essentially distinct categories in order to analyse the Messiah myth: 1. *Mishnah* and its close associates, *Abot*, the *Tosefta*, and *Abot de Rabbi Nathan*; 2. *Talmud of the Land of Israel* and *Talmud of Babylonia* adjoined by *Pesiqta de Rabbi*

⁸ There is debate on how to translate Gen. 49:10. Instead of ‘until Shiloh comes’ it writes ‘until the coming of the one to whom it belongs’. Gen. 49:10 is largely regarded as messianic.

Kahana; 3. *Exegetic compilations serving the Pentateuch* i.e. *Mekhilta*, *Sifra*, *Sifre Numbers* and *Sifre Deuteronomy*; 4. *Rabbah* collection writings (*Genesis Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, *Lamentations Rabbah*, *Esther Rabbah*, *Song of Solomon Rabbah*, *Ruth Rabbah*); 5. The synagogue based writings, *Siddur* and *Targum*.⁹ *Talmud of Babylonia* is being identified as principal and single most comprehensive document that covers all the important themes found in all other documents.¹⁰ Key elements about the Messiah are identified as per the following paragraph.¹¹

The Messiah is coming for the lineage of King David; the age of the Messiah is different from the current age; there will be tribulations before Messiah's arrival and sages suffer;¹² Messiah's coming is linked to the resurrection of the dead; Messiah will gather exiles of the Israel;¹³ Messiah records peoples' good deeds; Messiah comes to worst generation;¹⁴ God restores

⁹ Jacob Neusner, *Messiah in Context: Israel's History and Destiny in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 215-220.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹¹ Jacob Neusner, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-218, ref. table.

¹² *Cf.*, e.g. Zeph. 3:8 thus:

Therefore wait for Me, says G-d, for the day that I rise to the prey; for My judgment is to gather nations, that I assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them My indignation, all My fierce anger. For all the earth shall be consumed by the fire of My jealousy.

Klausner, *op. cit.*, pp. 444f basing himself on the Jewish scriptures, describes the last seven years prior to the coming of the Jewish Messiah (named here 'the son of David'); in the first year will be scarcity of rain, in the second the arrows of hunger are sent forth, in the third a great famine causes the death of many, in the fourth is partial famine, in the fifth people start to repent, in the sixth are rumours wars, and in the seventh are wars. Worthy to note is the mentioning in Dan. 9:27 of the seven year period before the end time.

¹³ *Cf.*, e.g. Isa. 11:12 'The Lord will raise a signal flag to show the nations that he is gathering together again the scattered people of Israel and Judah and bringing them back from the four corners of the earth'.

¹⁴ Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 238 writes:

At the time of redemption there will remain, according to most of the prophets, only "the remnant of Israel". This remnant is described particularly in Isaiah and Zephaniah as a small group of the upright, the blameless, and the humble among the son of Israel.

Jerusalem, Zion, and Temple cult, through the Messiah; Messiah's name was Shiloh; Messiah punishes sinners; Messiah comes when souls are all born;

More detail about the character of the future king of Israel is found in Isa. 11:1-5 thus:

The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down; but just as new branches sprout from its stump, so a new king will arise from among David's descendents. (2) The spirit of the LORD will give him wisdom, and the knowledge and skill to rule his people. He will know the LORD's will and honour him, (3) and find pleasure in obeying him. He will not judge by appearance or hearsay; (4) he will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless. At his command the people will be punished, and evil persons will die. (5) He will rule his people with justice and integrity.

We learn that 'the Jewish Messiah is truly human in origin, of flesh and blood like all mortals.'¹⁵ Multiple references are to be found in the Jewish scriptures, but, the personality and work of the Jewish Messiah are described specifically in two works of vision: 1. *The Vision of the Eagle ascending out of the Sea*; 2. *The Vision of the Son of Man ascending out of the Sea*. Both these works are parts of the *Pseudepigraphic (Fourth) Book of Ezra* that is attributed to Ezra (fifth century BCE). We find out that the Jewish Messiah 'existed before the creation of the world and is being kept with God until the time for him to be revealed.'¹⁶ During his time innumerable men of Gog and Magog make war against the Messiah (named here 'the Man') standing upon the summit of Mount Zion (the heavenly Jerusalem), but they are defeated by his flaming breath. There is also

¹⁵ Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 520.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 358f.

the mentioning of the Messiah descending from Mount Zion, then he meets a multitude of peaceful people that come under his protection.¹⁷ As for the personality of the Messiah we learn that his personal qualities surpass the ordinary standard of human abilities. As a mighty ruler and unequalled personality, the Messiah would be superior to all the rest of the saints and prophets of Israel. He would possess a very deep feeling for what is just and right, and in his judgement he should reach the truth by instinct not by sight or hearing.¹⁸ Thus we have a clear picture of the time of the arrival of the Jewish saviour, a description of his main deeds and of his personal qualities.

In brief, the Jewish Messiah concept is a long lasting continuing scriptural construct that from the time of the start of Jewish royal ideology (with the anointing of Saul as the first Jewish king), the future hopes developed more and more. But, later on, the ideal king became David, from whose lineage the future Jewish Messiah is expected to come. The awaited saviour of Israel is a charismatic human being of impeccable ethical conduct. He is well acquainted with the scriptures, and is a good observant of religious injunctions. It is expected that the Jewish Messiah will fulfil all the redemptive aspirations of the people of Israel, and perfect the entire world during his mission. Moshiach has remarkable personal abilities and a keen intuition. The portrayal of the Jewish Messiah is more realistic (in political terms) in comparison with the Christian Messiah in his second coming.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 360ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 465-468. Cf. Jacob Immanuel Schochet, *Mashiach: Principle of Mashiach and Messianic Era in Jewish Law* (S.I.E., 1992), *passim*, for Moshiach's great personal qualities.

The Christian Messiah

Christianity emerged within Judaism as a messianic movement resulting from a three-year ministry of Jesus (Hebrew: Y'shua (ישוע), the Christ (the Greek: Χριστός, that is the translation of the word *mâshîaḥ* Hebrew: מָשִׁיחַ) who preached within the settings of Judaic messianic expectations. During Jesus' lifetime and immediately thereafter, there were dissensions within the Judaic religious establishment, but gradually the final conclusion was that Jesus was not the awaited Messiah of Israel.

There was not enough evidence based on the Judaic messianic literature to portray Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. In spite of the hard work done by the Jewish Christian followers (particularly by apostle Peter during the lifetime of Jesus and after his death, and by apostle Paul after Jesus' death) to promote Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the conclusion was eventually final. As *The New Testament* testifies, Jesus promoted himself to be the awaited Messiah, but the stringent conditions of Jewish hopes (prevalent at that time) for the mission and works of the Messiah of Israel were not met. The Jewish Messiah was supposed to be announced by a messenger of good news (i.e. a herald) before the redemption, while Elijah, who comes before the Day of Judgement,¹⁹ will anoint the Messiah. Jesus was not announced by any herald,²⁰ neither anointed. In spite

¹⁹ Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

²⁰ If we consider the story of the three *μάγοι* (i.e. Zoroastrian priests) as heralds of good news following a bright star in order to find the baby Jesus (see Matt. 2:1-13), whom they name 'king of the Jews', the issue takes an entirely different dimension. In this case Jesus appears to be regarded as *Uxshyat-ereta*, the first *saoshyant* after Zarathushtrâ, instead of being the Jewish Messiah (see our Chap. One for Zoroastrian *saoshyants*). See also, Garry W. Trompf "An Agenda for Persian Studies," *loc. cit.*, commenting on the idea that 'Christ manifested himself first to the Persians (i.e., to the *Magoi*), p. 5.

of Paul's great efforts (reflected by his scriptural letters part of the new canon) to demonstrate that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, his arguments did not address the main issues in relation to the coming of the expected saviour of Israel.

Jesus Christ's life was a clear proof that he did not accomplish the mainstream demands and expectations Judaism had upon **a final redeemer**, like the gathering of the exile to the Holy Land, the ushering in of a new era of prosperity, personal salvation, freedom and the accomplishment of Jewish royal ideology, just to name a few (*vid. sup.*). Being rejected not only by the elders of Israel, particularly the priests at the temple, but also by the mass of people, Jesus Christ's teachings were gradually embraced by the gentiles mainly through the missionary work of Paul (sometimes called apostle Paul). Christianity emerged on a Judaic foundation, but went towards a new direction being gradually embraced by the Greek and Roman worlds. Thus, the Jewish inheritance was significantly reshaped (*vid. inf.*).

The New Testament (βιβλία - book or καίνη διαθήκη - new covenant) made of the Gospels (Greek singular noun - εὐαγγέλιον), of the various scriptural letters, and the *Book of Revelation* give significant information about the finished and unfinished works of Jesus Christ who anticipated his death in order to fulfil some of the scriptures, particularly Isa. 53, if its interpretation is correct that refers to a suffering person rather than the parable of suffering Israel. Jesus, the future Greek Christ, was part of Jewish milieu exclusively. He did not contemplate being the Messiah to other people but to the Jews only. But, after his death, things evolved in a different direction. A vivid expectation of his return among the Jewish followers triggered the gentiles to follow and embrace the idea of an imminent salvation related to Jesus' second coming.

The key element that kept the belief in Jesus alive was his promise to come again soon (Rev. 22:12 and 22:20 'I am coming soon' ἔρχομαι ταχύ) to make

all things new (Rev. 21:5 ‘I make all things new’ *καινὰ ποιῶ παντὰ*). But, to the disappointment of many Christians along almost two millennia, the promised imminent second arrival (*παροῦσία*) did not happen as expected in spite of imperative (‘Come!’ *ἔρχου*) requested by disciples (see Rev. 22:17 and 22:20).

The second coming of Jesus appears to have a twofold meaning, a spiritual and an historical. The Christ assures his people of support by a spiritual communion with them, but also of his coming as an historical event to happen in the future.²¹ The second coming of Jesus is portrayed full of miracles transgressing the natural order especially in *The Book of Revelation* (the *Apocalypse*) attributed to John.²² This unique account of scriptural material, written ca. 95 CE, is the most authoritative part of Christian canon in relation to the second advent of The Christ Messiah.

John, while being on the island of Patmos, received the divine message. In the basic outline of *The Book of Revelation*, John describes the opening of his vision (Rev. 1:1-20), followed by greetings to the seven churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22), and then he had the vision of God and the Lamb (Rev. 4:1-5:14). The preamble to the divine judgement starts with the seven seals of judgement (Rev. 6:1-8:5) followed by the seven trumpets of judgement (Rev. 8:6-11:19). Then the heavenly and earthly conflicts begin (Rev. 12:1-14:20); there are catastrophic natural disasters as a consequence of the seven bowls of judgements (Rev. 15:1-16:21). The most significant judgement is that of the Babylon (Rev. 17:1-19:21), then all the troubles end. There is the end of the old age and the advent of the new one. The dead are resurrected for the final judgement and God

²¹ Charles, *op. cit.*, p. 420.

²² The attribution of *The Book of Revelation* to apostle John, the author of the fourth gospel, is increasingly questioned, in Bowker, *op. cit.*, p. 506.

lives now among people. All things are entirely renewed (Rev. 20:1-22:21). Among such multiple themes there are other significant ideas worthy of discussion.

There is in Rev. 8:1-5 for instance a description of fire sacrifice performed by angels before the throne of God. Seven of them have seven trumpets ready to be used. After the successful completion of the fire ceremony, another angel took a censor and filled it 'with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth'. There follows an earthquake that appears to be the beginning of many natural disasters (described from Rev 12: 6 onwards) at the commands of the same seven angels who participated in the fire ceremony. Thus we learn that God and his people as described in *The Book of Revelation* use fire ritual to produce what they want, a great point of comparative interest. Our previous chapters present similar themes in relation to other messianic characters; there is use of sacrosanct fire rituals in relation to birth, or missions of various messianic characters. Thus purification of the world is done by fire as formerly by water as it is in *The Old Testament*, in the story of the world flood.²³ Here we have the ideas of Stoic metaphysics (of Heraclitan origin) in which the fire is seen as the fundamental principle in things²⁴ (see 2 Peter 3:6-7).

An interesting episode is in Rev. 12:1-5 describing a pregnant woman in danger from an enormous red dragon. She and her child appear to be very important. After giving birth, the male child is taken to God's throne. The Lamb according to Rev. 14.1 is now on a mountaintop with his 144,000 followers. The woman flees to a desert area to be protected there for 1,260 days equivalent to

²³ Charles, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

²⁴ William S. Sahakian, *History of Philosophy* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1968), p. 40.

three years and a half, that is the most difficult part of the tribulations (Note that a similar theme of the 1260 days of troubles appears also in *The Book of Daniel* in *The Old Testament*). Worth mentioning is the coming of the Christ Messiah as a supernatural phenomenon; Christ's portrayal in his second coming is of a superhuman being who comes 'with the clouds' (Rev. 14: 14) to perform the judgement of the world with a sickle in his hand (Rev. 14: 16) because the earth and people were 'fully ripe for judgement' (Rev. 14: 18). There is a detailed description of the City of God (the New Jerusalem) in Rev. 21 as the holy city of God's dwelling.²⁵ *The Book of Revelation*, ends with the description of paradise in a holy place where God will stay with his people as per Rev. 22:1-4 thus:

(1) Then the angel showed me the river of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (2) through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (3) Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; (4) they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Greek text

1. καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον, ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου. 2. ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς

²⁵ As a comparison see our previous chapters in relation to holy places of various world saviours. The Saoshyant is linked to a place near a lake, the Lord Rāma to Ayodhya, the Maitreya Buddha to Ketumatī, the Jewish Messiah to Jerusalem, and the Christ Messiah to the New Jerusalem. As will see, it is not quite clear if and where the Mahdī character, as future saviour of Islam, will do the judgement or if Jesus in his second coming will be the judge from the Muslim perspective.

ποιοῦν καρποῦς δώδεκα κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδιδούν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν. 3. καὶ πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι. καὶ ὁ θρόνος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀρνίου ἐν αὐτῇ ἔσται, καὶ οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ λατρεύσουσιν αὐτῷ 4. καὶ ὄψονται τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.²⁶

Thus we learn, according to *The Book of Revelation*, about the future existence of a wish-fulfilling tree, which will contribute to the healing of humanity. The throne of God will be on earth in a divine city, and people will see the face of divine incarnate.

In conclusion, the Christian Messiah character is basically a future development of the Jewish Messiah. Jesus' attempt to be recognised as the Jewish Messiah failed. Following his death, various scriptural works aim to justify Jesus' deeds as relevant to the Messiah of Israel. Thus, *The New Testament* was produce, so that it triggered the emergence of Christianity. The Christian Messiah figure has undoubtedly influenced another major messianic character of the current Middle East, that of the al-Mahdî of Islam.

The Islamic al-Mahdî

Islam emerged in seventh-century Arabia, based on Muhammad's teachings, a new interpretation of main ideas found both in Judaism and Christianity, and pagan beliefs of people of Arabia at that time. Muhammad/ Mohammed, the Prophet, reshaped many Jewish and Christian themes in a new credo portrayed by the Islamic literature to be the most authoritative and legitimate. It claims the inheritance to the lineage of patriarch Abraham through his first-born son

²⁶ J. D., Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 911.

Ishmael, by Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. Islamic messianism was built upon similar themes found in the scriptural literature of the 'people of the book', i.e. Jews and Christians. But, in time such themes were absorbed and reframed into new structures particularly after Mohammed's death that happened in 632 CE.

A sequence of orthodox caliphs (sg. *khalifah*, pl. *khulafâ*) followed until Hussein, the last caliph descending from the Prophet's lineage (through his daughter Fatima), was assassinated at Karbala, in Iraq in 680 CE. This marks 'the end of Islam as prophetic experience',²⁷ and the beginning of political Islam that made the credo more of a political ideology rather than a religion *per se*. Hussein's killing, and of his father Alî bin Abî Tâlib in 661 CE, had important implications for the Islamic messianism. It was the starting point of the schism between the Sunni and Shi'ite traditions (*vid. inf.*). As we shall see, the idea of a future Islamic saviour evolved separately in two major directions pertinent to these traditions. Gradually the belief in a future Islamic saviour was constructed.

The idea of a redeemer for Muslim people was not a feature of the early Islam. The messianic figure that was later known, as Mahdî/ al-Mahdî is not directly present in the *Qur'ân*, Islam's most authoritative book. But, there are claims of implied references in *sûrahs* 3.46 and 19.29 for example, which contain the word 'mahd', i.e. 'cradle' 'childhood'.²⁸ Although these *sûrahs*

²⁷ Fatima Mernissi, *Le harem politique: Le Prophète et les femmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987), p. 241: 'la disparition de l'Islam comme expérience prophétique'.

²⁸ D. B. Macdonald, "Al-Madhî," in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers (New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 313 comments on *Sûrahs* 3.46 and 19.29 containing the word 'mahd', i.e. 'cradle' 'childhood', that might be taken as an early reference to the Mahdî as being Jesus/ Îsâ, the saviour of Christianity. Cf. D. S. Margoliouth, "Mahdî," in *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, Vol. 8 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 336. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Brentwood: Amana Corporation, 1991), p. 139 translates *Sûrah* 3.46 thus: 'He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous'. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble*

could be interpreted as giving a messianic message, we shall see further how Islam constructed a saviour figure having politico-military characteristics.

The presence of a large-scale divine intervention can be also envisaged by inference from the eschatological references present in the text of *Qur'ân*, especially in relation to the divine judgement done on the Day Resurrection (see *sûrah 75, Al-Qiyâmah* - The Resurrection). This important day starts by the blowing of a trumpet (see *sûrah 20.102*), a theme previously found in the Christian *Book of Revelation* (*vid. sup.*). The coming in the future of such a day aroused an important theological problem. Who is going to do the final resurrection and judgement since, *sûrah 75 (Al-Qiyâmah)* does not mention the judge? Islam holds God (Allah) too high in status to descend into the realm of matter; images, statues, and so on that might portray God are prohibited.

On such constraints an earthly saviour of Islam, as Allah's messenger, gradually emerged. The Muslim demands from their future saviour became pertinent to the culture of Islam; the emphasis was particularly on social and political issues, like the accomplishment of justice and equity, and the islamisation of the entire world. Consequently, the awaited saviour was named accordingly, such relevant names appearing in Islamic literature as: al-Mahdî ('The Guide One'), the Hidden Imâm, Imâm of the Age, Master of the Command, and the Rabb ('Giver of Security'), just to name a few. The appellations suggest significant characteristics of the future saviour. Both Sunni and Shi'ite traditions constructed a saviour figure having substantial differences.

Qur'an (Madinah: King Fahd Complex For The Printing Of The Holy Qur'an, 1999), p. 74 translates: 'He shall speak to the people in the cradle and in manhood, and he will be one of the righteous'.

To the Sunnis, the saviour Mahdî is an ordinary man destined to be a reformer and conqueror; to the Shi'ites he is alive and hiding in waiting for a proper time to appear to perform his mission.²⁹ The Shi'ite tradition offers more details about the Mahdî who has to come from the lineage of Ali, Prophet's cousin who married Fâtima one of Prophet's daughters by Khadîja, his first wife. The Mahdî, who is to appear at the End of Time to make radical changes to humanity, will be part of Ali's lineage according to the Shi'ites.

The first time the term *mahdî*, was used appears to be in connection to a title given to Muhammad bin al-Hanafîya, a son of Alî bin Abî Tâlib by another wife than Fâtima. Alî, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet married Muhammad's daughter Fâtima, and became later on the fourth caliph in Islam. After the violent deaths of Alî and his two sons (by Fâtima), Hassan and Hussein, Muhammad bin al-Hanafîya who was blood related to the Prophet and his tribe (the Quraishi) became a claimant to the caliphate. He was called the *madhî*, a name of honorific significance. In later developments, there was the belief that Muhammad bin al-Hanafîya, as well as his father Alî, continue to be alive. While the Sunni tradition has an ambiguous Mahdî character, the Shi'ite articulated it better.³⁰ Although only about ten percent of the Muslim world, the Shi'ite faction of Islam has presently significant number of followers in Iran, Iraq, and the Indian subcontinent.

The Shi'ite tradition usually identifies the Mahdî with the last of the 12 hidden Imâms. According to this doctrine of the Twelvers, there were in the past twelve Imâms who directed the destiny of humanity. The last Imâm Muhammad al-Mahdî (son of the previous Imâm al-Hasan al-Askarî), who disappeared when

²⁹ D. S. Margoliouth, *loc. cit.*, p. 337.

³⁰ D. B. Macdonald, *loc. cit.*, p. 310.

a young child, is believed to be the Hidden Imâm Mahdî. He at the End of Time comes back to herald the Day of Judgement and bring justice to mankind.³¹ A more detailed account of the awaited Islamic saviour is given by Ibn Khaldûn (circa 1406 CE) in his work *Muqaddima*; the awaited al-Mahdî will appear at the End of Time as descendent of the Prophet through his daughter Fâtima. The Mahdî will make justice triumph and reign over the Muslim kingdoms, Jesus (Îsâ) descends along with him and together they defeat the evil spirit personified by a personage known as al-Dadjdjâl/ Dajjâl,³² (al Masîh ad Dajjâl, ‘liar’, ‘deceiver’), a pseudo Islamic Messiah who is also known as Anti-Christ.

Relevant literature has been produced to describe the Islamic saviour, the conditions of his advent, his deeds, and the outcomes. Al-Sadr and Mutahhery compiled a list of twenty authors and titles containing ‘affirmative references to the Mahdî by Muslim authorities from the old to the modern times’: Ibn Taimiyyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*; Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Tazkirah*; Al-Hafiz, Abul Hasan al-Abiri, *Manaqib al-Imam al-Shafi’i*; Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar, *Fat-h al-Bari*; Al-Hafiz al-Sakhawi, *Fat-h al-Mugheeth*; Al-Suyuti, *Al-‘Urf al-Wardi* and *Al-Kashf’an Mujawizat Hazihi al-Ummah al-Alf*; Al-Zarqani, *Sharh al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyyah*; Abul ‘Ala al-‘Iraqi al Husayni, *Al-Mahdi*; Al-Shaukani, *Al-Tawzih fi tawatur me jaa fi’l Mahdi al-Muntazar wa’l Dajjal Masih*; Saddiq Hasan Khan, *Al-Izh’ah lima kana wa ma yakunu baina yadai al-Sa’ah*; Abu Abdillah Muhammad Jassis, *Sharb Risalah ibn Abi Zaid*; Muhammad al-Arabi al-Fasi, *al-Marasid*; Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman al-Fasi, *Mubhij al-Maqasid*; Al-Safarini, *Al-Durrah al-Mudi’ah fi ‘Aqidah al-Firqah al-*

³¹ Bowker, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

³² Macdonald, *loc. cit.*, p. 311.

Murdiyah; Qutbuddin Muhammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kitabi, *Nazm al-Mutanathir min al-Hadith al-Mutawatir*; Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn al-Saddiq, *Al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*; Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ghimari, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun min Kalam Ibn Khalladun*; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Manar*; Al-Hafiz al-Zahabi, *Al-Muntaqa*; Abu al-Tayyib ibn Ali al-Hasan al-Hasani, *Al-Iza‘ah lima kana wa ma yakunu baina yadai al-Sa‘ah*.³³

The collections of writings second in importance to the *Qur‘ân*, the *Hadīths*, contain references to the subject of the awaited Mahdī. The *Hadīth* is a large corpus of writings containing the alleged sayings of the Prophet and his companions, of the early caliphs, and of various Muslim scholars. Its scriptural authority is often contested; certain *Hadīths* might be seen more reliable than others. About the *Hadīths* as authoritative scriptural literature, Mernissi argues that they were born out of a crisis that followed after Mohammed’s death; the *Hadīths* were fabricated to suit political agendas, thus becoming powerful political weapons.³⁴ Worthy to mention is that the most relevant *Hadīths*, the *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari*, have no mention of the Mahdī.³⁵ Al-Sadr and Mutahhery (1986) argue that there are many other writings dealing with the subject of Mahdī, the Prophet Muhammad or his companions.³⁶ A collection of *Hadīths*, dealing with the signs of the Last Day is found in Zafrulla Khan, from where we learn that Allah will raise the Messiah (son of Mary) in the East of Damascus, and Jesus will slaughter the Anti-Christ. The people of Gog and

³³ Ayatullah Baqir Al-Sadr and Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhery, *The Awaited Saviour* (Accra: Islamic Seminary Publications, 1986), p. 111.

³⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *loc. cit.*, pp. 47-49.

³⁵ Macdonald, *loc. cit.*, p. 311.

³⁶ Ayatullah Baqir Al-Sadr and Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhery, *op. cit.*, p. 110, mentions the existence of ‘almost 50 traditions of the Prophet, which clearly foretell the emergence of the Mahdī before the Day of Resurrection’ Many of these traditions were ‘directly narrated on the authority of the Prophet by 33 well-known companions’.

Magog will die (*Hadīth* 1814), and the Anti-Christ will appear among the Muslim people as Satan in the garb of a man. Some themes were borrowed from the Christian scriptures; with the blowing of the first trumpet, many people die, the blowing of the second trumpet heralds the resurrection (*Hadīth* 1816). In the areas of Euphrates river people will be killed in large number (*Hadīth* 1828); there will be scarcity of men and an excess of women (*Hadīth* 1831). As for the time when the judgement is held, the Prophet is quoted saying: ‘When authority is committed to those not fit to administer it, then expect the Judgement’ (*Hadīth* 1843).³⁷ Thus, pertinent to Mahdī’s arrival and mission a world revolution is expected. According to Al-Sadr and Mutahhery the world revolution’s salient features are as per the following paragraph.

There will be a final victory of righteousness, virtue, peace, justice, freedom and truth over the forces of egoism, subjugation, tyranny, deceit and fraud. The establishment of a world government is to follow. There will be reclamation and rehabilitation of the whole earth so that no areas remain wasted. The attainment of full sagacity by mankind, adherence to ideology and emancipation from animal impulses and undue social restrictions is expected to happen. There will be a maximum utilisation of the gift of the earth. Societies will benefit from equal distribution of wealth and property among all human beings. A complete eradication of all vices like adultery, fornication, usury, use of intoxicants, treachery, theft and homicide, and the total disappearance of abnormal complexes, malice and ill-will are expected to occur. War will be eradicated,

³⁷ Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *Gardens of the Righteous: Riyadh as-Salihin of Imam Nawawi* (London: Curzon Press, 1975), pp. 304-310.

and the restoration of peace, friendship, co-operation and benevolence follow.³⁸ This ambitious Islamic agenda demands a strong charismatic leader able to enforce a world revolution in accordance with the Qur'ânic scriptural urge to holy fighting *jihâd* (see *surah* 2.193 urging the Muslims to fight until there are no other religious belief but in Allah). The Mahdî resembles quite well the expected strong Jewish Messiah.

To conclude the ideas pertinent to the Mahdî saviour character is to say that no account may be regarded as reliable due to the lack of clarification in the *Qur'ân* and ambiguity of the *Hadîths*, and other subsequent messianic or eschatological literature. One thing could safely be said: the Mahdî's missionary aim is primarily of socio-political nature. Mahdî's case as messianic character is behind Islam's "political messianism", which as political ideology just pretends to be a religion. And, Jesus (in now Islamic connotation) is supposed to perform tasks in relation to personal salvation for Muslim believers.

Conclusion

We have seen how the three Middle East-based messianic characters share in common the idea of redemption relevant to followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in their specificity. But, the Jewish Messiah is a forerunner. The Hebrew canon is rich in information about the awaited saviour, a strong earthly leader whose main messianic and eschatological features were contained within the *Talmud of Babylonia*.

On the other hand, the Christian Messiah is expected in his second coming to finalised what was left unfinished during his first appearance, so that he

³⁸ Al-Sadr and Mutahhery, *op. cit.*, pp. 102f.

becomes more closely identified with his Jewish “ancestor”. A feeling of soteriological work ahead for Christian Messiah is prevalent in the *New Testament*, the credo on which was based the new messianic movement that later became Christianity. Both the Jewish and the Christian Messiahs characters proved to have eschatological features.

The last Abrahamic saviour, the Islamic Mahdî messianic figure, resembles quite well the Jewish Messiah for his strong leadership features. Mahdî’s characteristics are much in tune with the hope of the Islamic conquest of the world, while fixing the domestic problems as well. The endemic violence, inequality and lack of social justice prevalent in the Islamic societies create a demand that Imâm Mahdî, as the Islamic saviour, will correct all such societal problems. There are no clear eschatological features for the Mahdî messianic figure.

We turn now to the exposition of some contemporary expectations of fulfilment of messianic ideas. There are recent developments of messianic hopes in relation to some celestial events, and a new syncretism of prophetic exegesis.

4

Some contemporary expectations of fulfilment of messianic ideas

Introduction

This part of our work intends to unveil the vibrant messianic hopes happening all over the world. The chapter is entirely dedicated to the presentation of some contemporary cosmic phenomena (claimed or assumed to have implications on earthly events), and various projects in relation to the fulfilment of messianic ideas particularly connected to the imminent arrivals of world saviour figures.¹

First, we elaborate upon some current messianic hopes of messianic myth fulfilment, based on celestial portents, and the syncretic trend of portrayal of a world saviour figure. Then, we expound upon some happenings in connection to the expected arrivals of the last *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin*. Other relevant projects related to the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Muslim expectations are also part of this chapter.

There appear to be a revival of the messianic myth interpretation that currently is gaining momentum. A current exegesis based on celestial omens claims the year 2012 CE as the new eschaton year. We have identified some relevant worldwide events connected with the expected fulfilment of the messianic myth, though we are far from covering the wider panorama that is still in the making.

¹ The pulse of messianic expectations we discovered to be on the Internet, from where most of our data is collected.

Some current developments in relation to the messianic myth

The cosmic portents have always been subjects for speculative ideas in relation to significant earthly events they might generate, like for example, birth or death of a charismatic secular or religious leader, winning or loosing a significant battle, or the coming of devastating epidemics, and so on. There are currently some cosmic events worthy to mention.

First, a relevant celestial portent is the appearance of the bright planet Mars at dawn time shining many times brighter than usual. Although we did not find any current specific reference to planet Mars to suggest the expected result out of this celestial appearance, it is our assumption that the event has a great potential of a messianic interpretation later on, especially for those spiritual traditions linking the arrival of the world saviour to ‘signs in the sky’ (see our Chap. One for Zoroastrian expectations for example). The bright planet Mars can be seen at dawn rising from the East until disappears before the sunrise.

Secondly, in the last decade or so, the position of our solar system relative to the Milky Way on 21 Dec. 2012 is claimed by the commentators on this cosmic event to be the most significant portent for heralding a new terrestrial era. The 21 Dec. 2012 date is suggested as the new eschaton (*vid. inf.*). Religious followers and spiritually minded people alike do expect unusual events to happen around 21 December 2012. This idea was triggered initially by the knowledge that the famous Mayan calendar ends on that date (*vid. inf.*). Although the entire issue of 21 December 2012 being the doomsday is entirely baseless from scientific point of view,² a massive amount of information is

² See University of Alabama Professor Enrique Gomez from Astronomy and Physics Department dismissing the ‘end of the world in 2012’. As for the Mayan calendar and the end

available on the Internet to support a religious speculation (*vid. inf.*).

As John Major Jenkins reported in 1993, the Milky Way crosses the Solar system ecliptic through the constellation of Sagittarius on 21 December 2012 that is the date when the Mayan calendar ends its long count known as *baktun* 13.0.0.0.0.³ Jenkins asserts that this event will accelerate the pace of civilisation.⁴ Commenting upon Jenkins' ideas in relation to the celestial event, the issue became the basis for further speculation in relation to prophetic interpretations. In the light of specific celestial events, the social fabric of civilization is seen as disintegrating into an apocalyptic funeral pyre that is followed by regeneration as the culmination of humanity's great efforts to manifest the utopian dreams.⁵ But science does entirely dismiss the speculative ideas that astronomical cycles or the appearance of the visible planets in particular constellations, alignments of the planets, solar eclipses, periodic appearances of comets are correlated with cycles of terrestrial events.⁶

of the world he asserts that 'no one knows for sure if the Mayans intended to portend the end of the world on that particular day', at: <<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/815326/posts>>. Accessed 22 Sept. 2004.

³ See José Argüelles, *Time and the Technosphere: The Law of Time in Human Affairs*. (Rochester: Bear and Company, 2002), p. 245, glossary; one *baktun* is equivalent to 394.52 years, and the Mayan calendar started in 3113 BCE and will end in 2012 CE after the completion of 13 *baktun* years, written as 13.0.0.0.0.

⁴ <<http://www.levity.com/eschaton/Why2012.html>>. *The How and Why of the Mayan End Date in 2012 AD* by John Major Jenkins. Accessed 31 July 2004. Cf. Adrian Gilbert, *Signs in the Sky: The Astrological & Archaeological Evidence for the Birth of a New Age* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), p. 298: 'According to the Mayan prophecies, the age will close with a cataclysm'.

⁵ <<http://www.omegapoint.org/paradigmatic3.htm>>. *Paradigmatic Parallels - pt 3 2012 & The Great 26,000 Year Cycle* by Jonathan McGregor Bethel & Michael Scott McDaniel. Accessed 31 July 2004. Similar themes in relation to the year 2012 have been reported over 300 Internet sites at: <<http://www.diagnosis2012.co.uk/>>. Accessed 7 July 2004.

⁶ Ernest Jr. Zebrowski, *Perils of a Restless Planet: Scientific Perspective of Natural Disasters*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 30.

However, this imprint of celestial events interpretation appears to be supported by a syncretic and composite picture of religious prophecies that is emerging. There are views in relation to the expectation of a unique world saviour figure, and the emergence of a common age of resolution.

One Muslim vision in relation to the awaited saviour of humanity acknowledges that it 'is common not only to all the Muslim sects, but also shared by all the great religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Zoroastrians.'⁷ A more comprehensive view in relation to the syncretic messianic figure is found in a dialogue between two Muslim scholars. The world saviours are identified to materialise in one and the same person, although differently envisaged by Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus. The two Muslim scholars argue that:

each group believes that this divinely ordained saviour will be among them. The Zoroastrians believe he is Persian and among the followers of Zoroaster. The Jews maintain that he will be among the Children of Israel, and the follower of Moses. The Christians think he will be one among them. Muslims believe that he will be among the Hashimites and among the direct descendants of the Prophet.⁸

Furthermore, the world mission of the syncretic messianic figure is presented thus:

It is not appropriate to confine the deliverer of the world, the Mahdi, to one particular nation. He will actually come to fight against all discriminatory claims of racial, creedal and national distinction. Consequently, he should be

⁷ Al-Sadr and Mutahhery, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Their work is dedicated 'to those who believe in the raising of the Mahdī the Saviour of the deprived people'.

⁸ Online at <<http://al-islam.org/mahdi/nontl/Chap-3.htm>>. Accessed 21 June 2004.

regarded as the Mahdi of the whole of humanity. He is the saviour and deliverer of the people who worship God. His victory is the victory of all the prophets and all the righteous ones on earth. He will be restoring the religion of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all of the heavenly revelations, namely, Islam; he will revive the pure religion of Moses and Jesus, which had foretold the prophethood of Muhammad.⁹

The outcome of such syncretic views is hard to envisage, but it appears to contribute to a better dialogue between religions. Still, in relation to practical expectations for the world salvation, there are some notable events currently happening in India.

There at Udvada in Gujarat state is kept the Iranshah Atash, the fire said to be rescued by Zoroastrians from Iran at the time of their migration to India, the currently accepted date being 937 CE.¹⁰ The holy fire that has the statue of a monarch behind it is preserved till the advent of the future Iranian monarch Shah Behram Varzavand, who is no other than the awaited last *saoshyant*. The Iranshah Atash will then be enthroned in the motherland Iran.¹¹ The Zoroastrian communities are already in waiting. A special prayer known as “Saoshyanto Manthra” is chanted to speed up the Saoshyant’s coming. It is predicted that the saviour is born already, between 1940 and 1950 when auspicious planetary configurations were identified. The Saoshyant will commence important work after the age of 52 when planet Jupiter is exalted in anyone’s horoscope. Other planetary positions indicate years 2002 to 2032 the time when Shah Behram

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ John R. Hinnells, “Parsis,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, edited by John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). p. 735.

¹¹ Hanoz M. Mistry, at: <<http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com/iranshah33.html>>. Accessed 27 August 2004.

Varzavand acts to the accomplishment of his divine mission.¹² Still in India, there is another relevant messianic expectation underway.

There at Rikhia, Deoghar district, Jharkhand state, a significant development in relation to the *cakravartin* archetype is in progress. The year 2001 was the revival of the ancient old ceremony of Rāja Sūya Yajña, a ritualistic worship that will be performed for twelve consecutive years. This ceremony is depicted as the ritualistic divine consecration of the king who, beforehand, has to qualify as *cakravartin*.¹³ Swami Satyananda Saraswati asserts himself being a *cakravartin*, a conqueror possessing the spiritual kingdom of yoga.¹⁴ As *cakravartin* Swami Satyananda dispenses charity as *prasād* to everyone attending the event, irrespective of religion and other backgrounds.¹⁵ The idea of the ritualistic worship is to activate the divine ordering (*ṛta*) and the starting in motion of the wheel (*cakra*) pertinent to a *cakravartin*. The revival of Rāja Sūya Yajña ceremony on 15 Dec. 2001 is an invocation for the divine grace¹⁶ and a ‘pray to God for the peace, plenty and prosperity of everyone’,¹⁷ The 2001 ceremony lasted only five days until 19 Dec., culminating with the re-enactment of the marriage of Śrī Rāma to Sitā. Thus, we have briefly expounded some recent developments in connection to the messianic myth and the vibrant expectations for its fulfilment. The Rāja Sūya Yajña ceremony is only part of a

¹² Cursetji M. Patel, at: <<http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com/raenidar33a.html>>. Accessed 27 August 2004.

¹³ Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Bhakti Yoga Sagar: Satsangs with Swami Satyananda Saraswati*, Vol. 7 (Munger: Yoga Publications Trust, 2002), pp. 1f in Introduction.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 173f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

sequence of other spiritual events happening at the same place at Rikhia, where many other kinds of worship were being performed. To this we shall turn.

Hindu and Buddhist recent relevant projects

Since 1995 at Rikhia, Deoghar district, Jharkhand, India, elaborated fire ceremony (*yajnas*) operations are conducted every year to propitiate future significant events. There at Rikhia, there is worship of the Mother Goddess Caṇḍī, a popular name for the goddess Durga¹⁸. There is also a ceremonial worship based on the *Rāmacharitamānasa*¹⁹ in conjunction with the Rāja Sūya Yajña since 2001 (*vid. sup.*). Every year, people from all over the world could participate in the ritualistic worship of Śrī Rāma by chanting of *Rāmacharitamānasa*, the sacred text narrating the exploits of Rāma who descended on earth to fulfil a mission that was masterminded in heaven. The role of king Daśaratha from the story of *Rāmacharitamānasa*, is presently filled by Swami Satyananda Saraswati who performs charity in the name of Śrī Rāma. The worship culminates with Sitā Kalyanam, that is the marriage of Sitā to Rāma, which takes place on the fifth day of the raising moon, that happens in the second part of the month of November or in December. The purpose of the worship is to seek God in human form.²⁰ However, Swami Satyananda Saraswati gives no hints about the God incarnate, mentioning only that ‘when the Lord incarnates nobody knows it at the time.’²¹ The vitalistic events at Rikhia appear to be a new development of messianic expectation in India.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁰ Saraswati (1999), p. 84.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

On the other hand, the impending arrival of Maitreya Buddha is also a vivid expectation. Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984) was one of the most important Buddhist leaders of our times, and well known for his remarks about the arrival of the future Buddhist saviour. This is what he says about the event:

Eventually the time will come for Maitreya to appear as the fifth universal Buddha of this world age and turn the Wheel of Dharma for the benefit of all. ... Maitreya will manifest in the form of a great spiritual leader and demonstrate the path of virtue. He will particularly spread the teachings on loving-kindness and, as a result, the fortune of the beings in this world will begin to change. ... According to the prophesies of all the Buddhas and his own promise, this will be the time when Maitreya Buddha will appear in this world as a universal teacher.²²

In 1974 Lama Thubten Yeshe and his main disciple, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche founded the organisation known as Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). It was Lama Thubten Yeshe's desire to build a large Maitreya statue. The current Spiritual Director of the FPMT is Lama Zopa Rinpoche who 'carried forward Lama Yeshe's activities and projects.'²³ But, the young Lama Osel Rinpoche who was born in 1985 to Spanish parents is 'recognized as the re-incarnation of Lama Thubten Yeshe.'²⁴ Lama Osel is closely following the Maitreya Project's progress at Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, in Northern India.²⁵

²² Taken from Lama Thubten Yeshe *Maitreya: A commentary on the Kriyatantra of Maitreya* by (Wisdom Publications, 1985). Source: <<http://www.fpmt-osel.org/teachings/maitreya.htm>>. Accessed 30 July 2004.

²³ <http://www.maitreyaproject.org/en/about_founders.html>. Accessed 30 July 2004.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See the entire website at: <<http://www.maitreyaproject.org/>>. Accessed 30 July 2004.

The 152-metre-high statue, when completed, will be the biggest in the world. The statue will be installed on a 270-hectare site at Kushinagar where Buddha died 2500 years ago.²⁶ Although there is no overt declaration that the project is built in anticipation of Maitreya Buddha's arrival, it might be assumed by the grandeur of the endeavour that a major event is expected to happen soon.

Thus, the Hindu and Buddhist projects, we have above-mentioned in connection to the Lord Rāma and the Maitreya Buddha respectively, are two examples of vivid expectations of the arrival of the saviour figures pertaining to Hinduism and Buddhism.

Awaiting the Abrahamic saviour

One of the most significant movements marking Judaism today is known as Chassidism.²⁷ One faction of it still struggles with the promotion of the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson to be the Jewish Messiah (Moshiach). Although Rabbi Schneerson (better known as the Rebbe), the head of Lubavitch Chassidic movement, is regarded as the most charismatic figure of Judaism during the twentieth century, he died in 1994 without clear evidence that he fulfilled all the requirements to be the Jewish Messiah. Abundant literature has been written about the Rebbe, but the mainstream Judaism has rejected the claim that the Rebbe is the Jewish Messiah. David Berger writes:

Judaism absolutely rejects the belief that God will send the real Messiah to

²⁶ See article "Buddha will be biggest in the world," in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (July 16, 2004), p. 9.

²⁷ The term *chassid* derives from *chessed*, kindness; love. 'Chassidic' is often written 'Hasidic'.

preach that the redemption is arriving 'right away' (as the Rebbe certainly did), let alone to identify himself unequivocally as the redeemer (as the messianists believe he did), and then have him die before the fulfilment.²⁸

By large, the Rebbe is acknowledged to be a *tzaddik* only, although a connection is made between him as forerunner and the awaited saviour of Israel, the Mashiach.²⁹ The Rebbe is famous for two well-known utterances: 'Moshiach is ready to come now. It is only for us to do a little extra goodness and kindness', and 'The time of our Redemption has arrived.'³⁰ Rabbi Schneerson never declared himself to be the awaited Jewish Messiah. The above two utterances imply that he asserted himself as a forerunner who brings the good news. In his views, the Messiah will be a 'Veltlicher (i.e. worldly, non-Chassidic) Jew'.³¹

But, the most significant issue to mention here is Rebbe's prophecy of the year 7552 (1992 CE) in which he announces that the redemption of the Jewish people has arrived, and the Moshiach's arrival is imminent. The starting of the redemption is seen as the time of the appearance of the Jewish saviour, the days of the Moshiach being forty years (as per *Sanhendrin* 99a). Thus, we have a clear picture of what the Rebbe wanted to say in relation to the Moshiach; Moshiach's time starts in 1992. It will last forty years, exactly the same number

²⁸ David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2001), p. 61.

²⁹ Jacob Immanuel Schochet (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 81-124 describes the Rebbe as *tzaddik*. Schochet's work is:

dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe whose personification of all the ideals discussed in these pages inspired their writing and motivates their emulation. Marking the 40th anniversary of his blessed leadership we beseech the Almighty to grant him the strength to continue guiding people of Israel toward their destiny and to lead all of us toward Mashiach very speedily in his and our days.

³⁰ <<http://www.moshiachnow.org/articles/articles/16.html>>. Accessed 26 August 2004.

³¹ <<http://chassidusunlimited.tripod.com/teaching.html>>. Accessed 26 August 2004.

of years when the people of Israel were in wilderness after their exodus from Egypt that is mentioned in Ps.95:10.³² However, although king Moshiach has arrived according to Rebbe's prophecy, the Jewish people have to open their eyes to perceive it.³³ Moshiach coming into the open cannot happen until the consummation of the time of tribulations (see our Chap. Three for the conditions of Moshiach's arrival and his deeds).

While the debate still continues if the redeemer of Israel has arrived or not, there are other projects within the Jewish communities that are preoccupied with the speeding up the coming and manifestation of Moshiach, and subsequently the hastening of the End by various methods. The base is found in different stories of the Jewish tradition that emphasises upon the belief that it is possible for people of high degree of sanctification to take in their hands the coming of the Jewish Messiah thus letting God no other option.³⁴

There is for instance a project on the Internet 'WE WANT MOSHIACH NOW PETITION TO HEAVEN!' where people can sign online.³⁵ The purpose of it is to bring the redemption one step closer.³⁶ A specific prayer promoted by The Rebbe is used to speed up the coming of king Moshiach: Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu V'Rabbeinu Melech HaMoshiach L'Olam Va'ed!³⁷ While Judaism is

³² See "Countdown to Moshiach" by Rabbi Shmuel Butman at: <<http://www.torah4blind.org/count.htm>>. Accessed 21 September 2004. See also <<http://www.moshiachnow.org/articles/articles/13.html>>. Accessed 21 September 2004. Cf., Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 421, mentioning the forty years as the Days of the Messiah corresponding to the forty years in the wilderness of people of Israel during the time of Moses.

³³ <<http://www.moshiachnow.org/articles/articles/25.html>>. Accessed 21 September 2004.

³⁴ See Patai (1979), Chap. 7 recounting various stories about 'hastening the end'.

³⁵ <<http://books.dreambook.com/moshes/moshiach.html>>. Accessed 26 August 2004.

³⁶ <<http://moshiach.ilovetorah.com/>>. Accessed 26 August 2004.

³⁷ <<http://www.moshiach.net/blind/majeski.htm>>. Accessed 26 August 2004.

ever preoccupied with the coming of the Jewish Messiah, a Christian movement in Africa asserts the arrival of God the Father in human form.

A relevant messianic movement is present in Calabar, Nigeria. There, the Leader Olumba Olumba Obu (born in December 1918), known also as The Father, is the head of the Christian church known as The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. The organisation is on a missionary campaign to reveal to the world that the Leader Obu is the awaited saviour of humanity, and that the Kingdom of God has arrived on earth already. Following various utterances from the Christian scripture, the Leader's existence is defined as being 'before the world was formed' as the Christ was portrayed in the *New Testament*. The Leader is the 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' who is 'perfect, omnipotent and omniscient, originator and ruler of the Universe.'³⁸ Astral projections were discovered and a multitude of people testify about The Leader as being the awaited one.³⁹ Although the Leader Obu did not proclaim himself to be the awaited Messiah, his entourage of followers hails him as such. Above all, Olumba Olumba Obu was crowned as King of Kings on 14 April 2001,⁴⁰ thus in a way agreeing with the messianic expectations of his followers. The Nigerian exegetic development pertinent to the fulfilment of Jesus Christ's promises appears to be significant. The messianic movement of The Leader is rapidly spreading all over the world. It is still unclear if there is any apocalyptic expectation. Other Christians are still waiting for the final battle to start.

³⁸ <<http://freespace.virgin.net/dolly.daniels/ARTICLES/WHOISOOO.HTML>>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

³⁹ <<http://freespace.virgin.net/dolly.daniels/BOOKS/iamthat.htm>>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

⁴⁰ <<http://freespace.virgin.net/dolly.daniels/crowning/coronatn.htm>>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

Due to the significant developments of world political events, a new exegesis of the Bible's *Book of Revelation* becomes apparent. Following the worldwide raise of Islamic fundamentalism, the beastly allegoric figure of ten horns and seven heads spoken in Rev. chap. 13 (the last main interpretation was to represent the Soviet Union), is now described as 'the formation of a tenation Islamic republic'.⁴¹ Two Christian groups of supporters of End Time prophecies having active campaigns are The Jesus Christians (mainly Australian) and The Family (spread worldwide in twelve tribe formation). They advocate a similar theme that of the imminent end of the world we know. *Survivors*, the book by Zion Ben-Jonas, is entirely dedicated to how The Jesus Christians group will manage to survive to the end of events when Jesus Christ comes the second time to fulfil his promises. The count down begins, according to Zion Ben-Jonas' interpretation of the Bible's Book of Revelation and Jesus' foretelling of the future in Luke. 21:5-36, but the twelve tribes mentioned in Rev. 7:5-8 are emerging as survivors.⁴² Contemporary Islam is also actively waiting for an End Time saviour.

The Islamic Mahdî, according to Shi'ite expectations, comes after two major deaths for humanity, one red (i.e. by war) and one white (i.e. by plague and disease). Other disasters by fire are expected to happen. A very bright star in the East heralds the appearance of the Mahdî. A mighty military leader, the

⁴¹ Joseph A. Pearson at: <<http://members.aol.com/allahislam/part5.html>>. Accessed 8 July 2004.

⁴² See Zion Ben-Jonah, *Survivors* (Chennai: Printshop Private Limited, 2003), particularly in Book Two, Chap. 9 "The Countdown Begins", pp. 93-108, and "Twelve Tribes", pp. 109-114; Ben-Jonah does portray his narrative as 'total conjecture' (p. 2), and there is no mentioning of any specific date of the countdown.

Mahdî starts destroying the non-believers, and the conversion of the entire world to Islam.⁴³ As for the specific time of Mahdî's arrival we learn this:

Certainly only Allah knows the specific date and time of Mahdi's (atfs) Rise but we do know that as the signs are revealed his return will be confirmed, exponentially increasing confirmation will be given as to the immanence of his return from occultation. ... There is no Hadith that says we will NEVER know when he will return. For the sign could be a sign that his return IS ALREADY HAPPENING. He might already be among us.⁴⁴

A case of active Islamic messianism is in *The Day of Wrath* book written by Safar Ibn Abd Al-Rahman Al-Hawali in which he attempts to demonstrate the legitimacy of the existence of Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock, on the ancient site of the Jewish temple by using scriptural data from *Old* and *New Testaments*. Compiling additional information from the Islamic canon, Al-Hawali predicts 'the end – or the beginning of the end' to be the year 2012.⁴⁵

Hawali's work has generated interesting political commentaries, as the world political events appear to be reshaped accordingly to reflect a hidden religious background. Old historical wounds are reopening thus enforcing a strong vitalist approach for those waiting for the fulfilment of religious prophecies. Thus the parallel between the Jewish Moshiach and the Hindu Rāma generates a natural political connection. The Israel-India strategic alliance, that

⁴³ < <http://www.revelation13.net/Muslim.html> >. Accessed 26 August 2004.

⁴⁴ <[http://www.khomeini.com/GatewayToHeaven/Articles/Imam%20Mahdi%20\(AF\).htm](http://www.khomeini.com/GatewayToHeaven/Articles/Imam%20Mahdi%20(AF).htm)> by Isa Adam Naziri - for the Shi'ite tradition. Accessed 31 July 2004.

⁴⁵ Ref. Al-Hawali's, p. 77 online book *The Day of Wrath* available in pdf format at: <<http://www.religioscope.com/pdf/The%20Day%20of%20Wrath.pdf>>. Accessed 5 July 2004.

was unthinkable before, is made possible now by drawing parallels of patterns of present and historical events. For Israel, the sacred site, the activist alliance and the treat are Jerusalem, Kahane, and Islamic militancy, respectively; while for India they are Ayodhya, Hindutva, and Islamic militancy. The common treat of Islamic militancy makes Israel and India strategic partners.⁴⁶

Noteworthy to mention about the expected appearance of the Islamic Mahdî is the 2003-year emergence in Iraq of the Imâm Mahdî Army, which was founded by the Iraqi preacher Moqtada al-Sâdr. This is a case of religious violence in which a military formation of guerrilla war is being connected to Imâm Alî's shrine in Najaf, one of Shi'ite Islam's holist sites. The Shi'ite faction of Islam is messianic *per se*. Thus we have presented a brief summery of some contemporary messianic hopes of the imminent arrival of a world saviour as per the expectations of certain groups of people connected to the three Abrahamic religious creeds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are currently some new developments in relation to the fulfilment of the ancient messianic myth. Some cosmic events are interpreted as portents towards prophecy fulfilment, and the year 2012 is suggested as the new eschaton. Although the entire fabric of the new eschaton year 2012 is faulty, the apparition of planet Mars shining brightly to the East at dawn time is a real cosmic event that has a great potential for further development of messianic

⁴⁶ See <<http://home.earthlink.net/~hipbone/Analytic/AnalysisHawali.html>>. Accessed 5 July 2004.

ideas in relation to the advent of the world saviour heralded by celestial portents. We have already expounded on such ideas in the previous chapters. There is also a syncretic trend to equate all messianic figures with one unique world saviour.

Furthermore, in India, we have briefly mentioned two relevant events in connection to the arrivals of the last *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin*. We have also reported two current vibrant expectations of the fulfilment of prophecies associated with the arrivals of the Hindu and the Buddhist world saviours currently happening in India too.

The expectation of the Abrahamic saviour is also vibrant. We have expounded on the most relevant event of our time in relation to Judaism: the Jewish Messiah is held to be already here, since the starting of the time of redemption in 1991 CE according to the Rebbe's prophecy. There are also relevant happenings in connection with the arrival of, or the awaiting for, the Christian Messiah. As for the awaited Islamic saviour, the Mahdî, his arrival is connected with the political and military happening in the Middle East. A note should be taken about the significant roles messianic prophecies might play in today's social and political issues. We have seen how a vibrant expectation of saviours' arrivals is on the rise. We are now ready to draw a final conclusion.

Conclusions

The beginning of this study attempted to locate of the origins of the messianic myth as represented by two major figures, the Iranian *saoshyant* and the *cakravartin* of India. The messianic myth proved to be a creative osmotic theme. Over millennia the five main world saviour figures emerged: the Hindu Lord Rāma, the Buddhist Maitreya, the Jewish Messiah, the Christian Messiah and the Islamic al-Mahdî. Relevant historical scriptural source information associated with the messianic characters we made available to the reader. The contribution we claim is the portrayal of the Hindu Lord Rāma as messianic and eschatological figure. The characters we presented are messianic *per se*, some proved to be eschatological also.

Amid of growing expectation for redemption mainly in relation to the year 2012, we have attempted to unveil some current developments in relation to the messianic myth and the awaiting of world saviours. Most such data were collected on the Internet where the messianic expectation is the most active.

Our study intended to be a non-biased reading; we refrained largely from making assessments in regard to the tenability of religious prophecies. We aimed at creating of a larger panorama by putting together seven religious traditions in their authoritative exposure on the subject of the world saviour. Along with the exposition of scriptural constructs of the world saviour figures the most relevant commonalities were unveiled, or made available for reader's observation of similarities.

The implications of our study are that those main ideas pertaining the historical sources of messianic beliefs that are relevant to major saviour characters, and the related millenarian themes, to be available in one

monograph. Our research, although not complete by far, could be used to add more to the development of comparative messianic and eschatological themes or discover more of their historical sources in relation to the subject of expected world saviours.

The world saviour constructs, we have attempted to expound, might also contribute to understand of current messianic trends. We have unveiled new syncretic exegetic developments of religious prophecies that attempt to focus on a wider cross-cultural panorama in relation to the millennia old religious expectations of redemption. Although this issue might suggest a convergence of world religions, it is premature at the present time to draw a conclusion pertinent to a post-modern era. The studies in religion may also benefit from our findings. Garry W. Trompf writes:

Historians of religion need reminding, then, that the cross-cultural study of time, and of mythical as distinct from ordinary historical thinking, has its special place in the study of millenarism.¹

As we approach the year 2012 the expectation of significant world changes based on celestial events is growing. Our study uncovered some pertinent issues in connection to the new eschaton year 2012 that is claimed to be the End of Time. The messianic and eschatological themes, as core religious beliefs, are proved to be more and more important on today's world political arena, in order to explain certain political developments. Thus, we hope our argument might contribute to a better understanding of messianic, millenarian and eschatological ideas.

¹ Garry W. Trompf, "Millenarism: History, Sociology, and Cross-Cultural Analysis," in *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2000), p. 116.

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