CHAPTER FOUR

THE CAVE OF TREASURES:
CALVARY VERSUS EARTHY PARADISE

In late antiquity the story of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from paradise drew the attention of both Jewish and Christian writers, among them early Syriac authors such as Ephrem and the anonymous writer of Liber Graduum discussed earlier in Chapters 2 and 3. Closely connected to it was interest in the biblical account of Cain’s crime and punishment, which might itself have functioned as a reiteration of sorts both of Adam’s original sin and of his expulsion from paradise. No wonder then that according to some early Jewish traditions the primordial disaster to the human race had to do not so much with the expulsion from paradise but with Cain’s crime (or, alternatively, his hideous nature). Traditions of this kind were further developed in a number of Gnostic sources from late antiquity. Related motifs and themes attested in Greek and Syriac texts have been studied in detail by J. B. Glenthoj, whose work has provided very useful data for further comparative study. On the Syriac side we have, in addition to a number of relevant passages in biblical commentaries and homilies by such authors as Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh, a Syriac Life of Abel published by S. Brock and an untitled composition published by A. Levene.

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1 See, for example, G. Anderson, The Genesis of Perfection; B. L. Visotsky, Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures (Tübingen, 1995).
3 E.g., attested in Philo (Questions on Genesis 60; On the Posterity and Exile of Cain 2–4) and Aramaic Targums (e.g., Tg. Ps.-J. to Gen 6:4).
4 See B. A. Pearson, “Cain and Cainites,” in idem, Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity (Minneapolis, 1990), pp. 95–107, esp. 103.
This chapter deals with *The Cave of Treasures (CT)*, another original Syriac work that in its opening sections extensively addresses both the story of the proplasts and that of Cain and Abel. There seems to be a scholarly consensus that *CT* was originally composed in Syriac; the text has been presented by Ri as extant in two—West-Syriac and East-Syriac—recensions (R. Oc. and R. Or. respectively). The fourth century has often been seen as the time of compilation of an earlier version of the text; Ri in his edition of *CT* proposes the first half of the third century, but in any case it is plausible that earlier traditions found their way into the text. A final redaction at the beginning of the sixth century by an East-Syrian scholar is usually assumed.

As a whole, *CT* narrates the history of salvation from the days of the creation and Adam’s fall all the way to Jesus’ death and resurrection and the Pentecost. Our investigation focuses on the salient narrative strategies of *CT*, employing a number of unique motifs, such as playing down the negative effects of Adam’s sin and the expulsion from paradise, presenting the ritual swearing by Abel’s innocent blood as a self-sufficient salvific act, and highlighting the remoteness of Jerusalem and Golgotha—the traditional arena of Christian redemption discourse—from the initial *locus* of earthly bliss in the East. Some of these peculiar motifs are backed in *CT* by references to certain oddities in the Old Testament text itself. *CT* seems to be aware of both the exegetical problems posed by the biblical source and a spectrum of existing exegetical solutions. The unique trends attested in *CT* will be outlined vis-à-vis relevant traditions in both Christian and Jewish exegesis of late antiquity; this analysis will make possible a better appreciation of the polemical stance of the cult-oriented community behind *CT*.

**Expulsion or Orderly Exodus?**

The notion that having been expelled from paradise Adam continued to dwell in its vicinity is strongly present in the Greek *Life of Adam*

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