

*Religion and Money in the Middle Ages*

# **THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER**

**COIN RELICS IN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN EUROPE**

Lucia Travaini





# The Thirty Pieces of Silver

*The Thirty Pieces of Silver: Coin Relics in Medieval and Modern Europe* discusses many interconnected topics relating to the most perfidious monetary transaction in history: the betrayal of Jesus by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. According to medieval legend, these coins had existed since the time of Abraham's father and had been used in many transactions recorded in the Bible. This book documents fifty specimens of coins which were venerated as holy relics in medieval and modern churches and monasteries of Europe, from Valencia to Uppsala. Most of these relics are ancient Greek silver coins in origin mounted in precious reliquaries or used for the distribution of their wax imprints believed to have healing powers.

Drawing from a wide range of historical sources, from hagiography to numismatics, this book will appeal to students and academics researching Late Antique, Medieval, and Early Modern History, Theology, as well as all those interested in the function of relics throughout Christendom. *The Thirty Pieces of Silver* is a study that invites meditation on the highly symbolic and powerful role of money through coins, which were the price, value, and measure of Christ and which, despite being the most abject objects, managed to become relics.

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Religion and Money in the Middle Ages explores the connections between two of the most dominant aspects of medieval society and culture: religion and money. Recognising the importance of both multi- and single-disciplinary perspectives on the issues and questions connected to religion and money, the series accepts joint as well as individual authorship and editorship. All disciplinary perspectives are welcome, particularly from history, archaeology, anthropology and numismatics. The series operates with a broad chronological range: in western European terms from late Antiquity to the Reformation. While the geographical and cultural focus lies in western Christendom, the series will be open to cross-cultural comparative studies, and to treatments of money and religion in all religious communities within the period, within Christendom and without.

Of especial interest are studies which explore issues on the theory and practice of money within religious contexts, and those that further reveal the interconnections and contrasts, overlaps and distinctions, between these attitudes and practices are particularly encouraged. How differences between theory and practice emerge, how they are reconciled, or how they remain unresolved, are further questions the series is keen to explore. The range of source material available, and the centrality of both subjects to medieval life, culture, belief and activity, allow for breadth and depth of investigation and insight into the medieval past at its most intimate and in its largest institutions and social structures.

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### **The Thirty Pieces of Silver: Coin Relics in Medieval and Modern Europe**

*By Lucia Travaini*

# **The Thirty Pieces of Silver**

Coin Relics in Medieval  
and Modern Europe

**Lucia Travaini**

Original Italian edition:  
Lucia Travaini, *I Trenta denari di Giuda. Storia di reliquie impreviste nell'Europa medievale e moderna*, Viella, Rome, 2020.

Translated by Andrew D.R. Colvin

First English edition published 2022  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN  
and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,  
an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-68802-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-68804-2 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-13911-9 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9781003139119](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003139119)

Typeset in Times  
by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

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# Appendix 2

## Collection of sources on the Thirty Pieces of Silver

*Edited by Francesco D'Angelo*

This section collects some of the most important medieval sources on the legend of the Thirty Pieces of Silver, representatives both of the western and eastern traditions. The texts are ordered according to a chronological criterion and presented in the original language followed by an English translation, with the exception of the *Book of the Bee*, which is given only in English translation.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Godfrey of Viterbo

Godfrey of Viterbo (c. 1125–c. 1195) was imperial chaplain and notary under the German emperors Conrad III (1138–1152), Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–1190) and Henry VI (1190–1197). He is the first to mention the legend of the Thirty Pieces by including it in his best-known work, the *Pantheon*, a universal history (in prose and in verse) from the creation of the world to the year 1186. Three redactions of this work are known: a first from around 1187, a second not datable with precision and a third dated to 1190 (Varanini 2001).

From Godefridus Viterbiensis, *Pantheon*: 241–244; see also the text published in Du Ménil 1847:321–324.

Part. XIV. Quod triginta denarii, quibus venditus est Christus, fabricati sunt tempore Nini regis Assyriorum, et de manu in manum usque ad Christi tempora pervenerunt.

Denariis triginta Deum vendit Galilaeus,  
quos et apostolicus describit Bartholomaeus,  
unde prius veniant, quis fabricavit eos.  
Fecerat hos nummos Ninus, rex Assyriorum,  
et fuit ex auro Thares fabricator eorum;<sup>2</sup> cum quibus instituit rex  
nini vita forum.  
Regia denariis fuit his impressa figura,  
rebus ut aeternis exempla daret valitura,  
formaque sic fieret perpetuata sua.  
Filius illius Thares, qui dicitur Abram,  
sustulit hos nummos post hoc cum conjuge Sara,



quando, jubente Deo, transiit in Chanaan.  
 His nummis tunc emit agros a Jherichonitis;  
 his etiam Joseph est emptus ab Ismahelitis;  
 hos tenuit Pharaon dives in aere suo.  
 Hosque, sibylla potens, habuit regina Nicaula,  
 Austri regina<sup>3</sup>, qui post Salamonis ab aula,  
 in templum nummos dat reverenter eos.  
 Quos Nabuchodonosor, templo prius exspoliato,  
 detulit in Babylon, ubi, militis in solidatum (I. solidato),  
 regibus in Saba dicimus esse datos.  
 Hos reges Saba, quos post nova stella vocavit,  
 ferre Deo nummos Veterum scriptura notavit,  
 cum tria tres socii dona tulere magi<sup>4</sup>  
 Angelicis monitis his regibus inde regressis,  
 mittitur e coelis puero dignissima vestis;  
 haec inconsutilis, mira colore fuit.  
 Hanc pater a coelis misit, non femina nevit;  
 longa fit atque brevis, puero crescente recrevit,  
 temporis aequivi stamine texta levi.  
 Dum jubet Herodes puerum pro morte requiri,  
 mater eum timuit fugiens ad climata Nili;  
 ducta metu mortis, virgo latebat ibi.  
 Tunc in ea crypta tria sunt haec dona relictas,  
 aurum, thus, myrrha, vestisque Dei benedicta;  
 pastores veniunt, ipsaque dona vehunt.  
 Vir fuit astrolog[ol]us qui dona relictas removit,  
 omneque portentum Christi per sidera novit;  
 Armenus patria, justus, honestus erat.  
 Tempore quo Christus docuit, tunc angelus isti  
 dixit: Dona Dei redde quaecunque tulisti;  
 munera sacra Dei restituantur ei!  
 Redditur haec tunica brevis in forma puerili;  
 Jhesus ut induitur, modulo fit longa virili;  
 vidit et obstupuit mens tremefacta viri.  
 Denarios triginta Deo quos inde tulerunt,  
 in gazam templi, Jhesu mandante, dederunt;  
 quos Judam pretio post habuisse ferunt.  
 Detulit hos Judas Scarioth; facta nece Christi,  
 quos reicit, quia poenituit pro morte magistri,  
 seque necans laqueo ventre crepat medio.  
 Tunc in agrum figuli nummos ter quinque dederunt,  
 militibusque suis totidem pro parte tulerunt,  
 quos vigiles tumuli nocte fuisse ferunt.  
 Forte putas, Lector, contraria me posuisse,  
 dum nummos illos ex auro scribo fuisse,  
 nam Liber argenti nomine gesta dedit.

Marcus ob argentum Dominum descripserat emptum,  
 non auri dixit nummismata sive talentum;  
 sed licet hoc taceat, non minus illud erat.  
 Mos fuit antiquis auri nomen variare  
 atque per argentum diversa metalla votare;  
 hoc usu nunquam regula prisca caret.  
 Nosce quod hoc sanctus sic scripsit Bartholomaeus,  
 ejus ad Armenos sermo narratur hebraeus,  
 qualiter est auro venditus ipse Deus.  
 Ergo, patente nota, solus negat hoc idiota,  
 cuius habent vota non discere fatta remota  
 lectores dociles pagina nostra vocat.

### ***English translation***

Part XIV. That the thirty coins, for which Christ was sold, were created in the time of Nino, king of the Assyrians, and passing from hand to hand they came to the time of Christ.

The Galilean sells God for thirty denarii, of which the apostle Bartholomew tells where they originally came from and who created them. Nino, king of the Assyrians, had these coins made, and it was Terach who made them from gold; with them the Ninivite king established the market. The face of the king was imprinted on these coins, so that he would provide valid examples in every age and his image would be immortalized. Terach's son, whose name was Abraham, later took these coins away with his wife Sarah when, on God's command, he went to Canaan. With these coins he purchased land from the inhabitants of Jericho; always with them Joseph was bought by the Ishmaelites; the wealthy Pharaoh kept them in his treasure.

They were also owned by the powerful sibyl, Queen Nicaula, queen of the Austro, who later, from Solomon's court, reverently gave the coins to the Temple. When Nebuchadnezzar robbed the Temple he took them to Babylon, where they were given to the kings of Saba as payment for the soldiers.

When the three Magi brought their three gifts together, the Scripture of the Ancients recalls that these kings of Saba, after the new star had summoned them, brought the coins to God. But when, warned by an angel, these kings had turned back, from heaven a very worthy robe was sent for the Child; it was seamless and of a wonderful colour. The Father had sent her from heaven, no woman had woven her; it lengthened and shortened, grew as the Child grew in stature, woven with the light warp of contemporary time.

The thirty denarii, which they had brought to God, on Jesus' instructions were given to the treasure of the Temple, those money which, it is said, Judas later obtained as payment. Judas Iscariot took them; after the death of Christ, he threw them away, repentant for the Master's death, killed himself by hanging himself and quartering his belly in half. And it is said that they gave fifteen coins for the potter's field, and as many they gave to the soldiers who watched the tomb at night. Perhaps, reader, you think that

my words are contradictory, since I write that those coins were of gold; in fact the Book refers to the facts with the name of silver. Mark had written that the Lord was bought in exchange for silver, he did not mention golden coins or talents. But although he is silent about this, none the less it was so. It was the custom of the ancients to use more than one name for gold and to call several metals by the name of silver; this ancient rule never failed in use. Know thou that St. Bartholomew thus wrote on this subject; his sermon in Hebrew to the Armenians tells how God himself was sold in exchange for gold. Therefore, being an obvious thing, only an ignorant person would deny it, whose desires do not include knowledge of remote facts, while our work is aimed at readers ready to learn.

## 2. Solomon of Basra

Solomon was a Syro-Nestorian bishop of Basra (or Bassora, in present-day Iraq) from about 1222. Around or shortly after this date he wrote in Syriac the *Book of the Bee* (*Kthāwā d-dévrithā*), the history of salvation from the creation of the world until the end of time, which contains numerous biblical legends beyond that of the Thirty Coins. Solomon's version, the oldest testimony of the Eastern redaction, shares with Godfrey's the beginning and the end, as well as the association with the sacred tunic; the role of the Armenian astrologer in the *Pantheon*, who delivers the coins to Jesus, is instead played here by another Armenian character, King Abgar.

### *From Solomon of Al-Basra, The Book of the Bee:95–97*

Chap. XLIV. The thirty pieces of silver which Judas received, and for which he sold his Lord, were thirty pieces according to the weight of the sanctuary and were equal to six hundred pieces according to the weight of our country. Terah made these pieces for Abraham his son; Abraham gave them to Isaac; Isaac bought a village with them; the owner of the village carried them to Pharaoh; Pharaoh sent them to Solomon the son of David for the building of his temple; and Solomon took them and placed them round about the door of the altar. When Nebuchadnezzar came and took captive the children of Israel and went into Solomon's temple and saw that these pieces were beautiful, he took them, and brought them to Babylon with the captives of the children of Israel. There were some Persian youths there as hostages, and when Nebuchadnezzar came from Jerusalem, they sent to him everything that was meet for kings and rulers. And since gifts and presents had been sent by the Persians, he released their sons and gave them gifts and presents, among which were those pieces of silver about which we have spoken; and they carried them to their parents. When Christ was born and they saw the star, they arose and took those pieces of silver and gold and myrrh and frankincense and set out on the journey; and they came to the neighbourhood of Edessa, and these kings fell asleep by the roadside. And they arose and left the pieces behind them, and did not remember them, but

forgot that anything of theirs remained behind. And certain merchants came and found them, and took these pieces, and came to the neighbourhood of Edessa, and sat down by a well of water. On that very day an angel came to the shepherds, and gave them the garment without seam at the upper end, woven throughout. And he said to them, 'Take this garment, in which is the life of mankind.' And the shepherds took the garment and came to the well of water by the side of which were those merchants. They said to them, 'We have a garment without seam at the upper end; will ye buy it?' The merchants said to them, 'Bring it here.' When they saw the garment, they marvelled and said to the shepherds: 'We have thirty pieces of silver which are meet for kings; take them and give us this garment.' When the merchants had taken the garment, and had gone into the city of Edessa, Abgar the king sent to them and said, 'Have ye anything meet for kings, that I may buy it from you?' The merchants said to him, 'We have a garment without seam at the upper end.' When the king saw the garment, he said to them, 'Whence have ye this garment?' They said to him, 'We came to a well by the gate of thy city, and we saw it in the hands of some shepherds, and we bought it from them for thirty pieces of stamped silver, which were also meet for kings like thyself.' The king sent for the shepherds, and took the pieces from them, and sent them together with the garment to Christ for the good that He had done him in healing his sickness<sup>5</sup>. When Christ saw the garment and the pieces, He kept the garment by Him, but He sent the pieces to the Jewish treasury. When Judas Iscariot came to the chief priests and said to them, 'What will ye give me that I may deliver Him to you?' the priests arose and brought those pieces and gave them to Judas Iscariot; and when he repented, he returned them to the Jews, and went and hanged himself. And the priests took them and bought with them a field for a burial-place for strangers.

### 3. Ludolf von Sudheim

Ludolf von Sudheim (Suchem) was a German priest in the diocese of Paderborn (Westphalia). After his pilgrimage to the Holy Land (1336–1341), around the years 1350/1361 he wrote a report, *De itinere Terrae Sanctae*, which was dedicated to Baldwin of Steinfurt, bishop of Paderborn (Schnath 1987; Gadrat-Ouerfelli 2017). Ludolf claims to have read the account of the Thirty Pieces in a *Historia regum orientalium*, that is a story of the Three Wise Men (or Three Kings); he is also the first author to mention the King of Godolia, a character whose identification, however, is difficult: perhaps his name could derive from Godolia, governor of Judah on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar (Hill 1920:97).

#### *From Ludolf von Sudheim, De itinere Terrae Sanctae Liber: 84–85*

Cap. XXXIX: De Triginta denariis. Legitur in quadam historia regum orientalium, qui domino munera obtulerunt, quod Thare pater Abrahae



fecisset monetam seu denarios, iussu cuiusdam regis Mesopotamiae nomine Ninus, et recepisset triginta argenteos pro suo salario. Hos argenteos dedit Abrahae, qui ipsos in peregrinatione, in exilio consumpsit, et per diversas manus transeuntes iidem denarii ad manus Ismaelitarum devenerunt, et cum ipsis a fratribus emptus fuit Ioseph. Postea dum Ioseph dominaretur in Aegypto, iidem argentei a fratribus pro frumento ad manus Ioseph sunt reversi, et ipsis fratribus restitutis, fratres ipsos argenteos dispensatori Ioseph dederunt, qui ipsos misit in Saba pro mercimoniis ex parte Pharaonis; temporibus Salomonis, dum ab oriente venit regina Saba, audiens eius sapientiam, ipsos triginta argenteos obtulit in templo. Temporibus Roboam, dum Nabuchodonozor templum spoliavit et thesauros abstulit, ipsos triginta denarios cum aliis thesauris tradidit regi Godoliae, qui secum erat in exercitu, et sic cum aliis in thesauris regum Godoliae usque ad nativitatem Christi permanserunt. Tunc regnum Godoliae in regnum Nubiae est translatum. Nato itaque domino, Melchior rex Nubiae videns in stella, Christum de virgine natum, ipsos triginta denarios, quia antiquius et nobilius aurum in thesauris suis non reperit, secundum dei nutum Christo obtulit; postea vero beata virgo Maria in Aegyptum fugiens, metu Herodis, in loco quo nunc est hortus balsami,<sup>6</sup> cum aliis magorum muneribus ipsos triginta denarios amisit, quos quidam pastor reperit et penes se triginta annis servavit. Et tunc cum fama crevit de Iesu, idem pastor in Ierusalem se transtulit et Iesus eundem a suis infirmitatibus liberavit, qui Christo in templo praedicanti et docente ipsos triginta denarios, et alia magorum munera, obtulit, quos Iesus recipere renuens, ut denarios in templo offerret, et alia munera super altare poneret, praecepit, quod et pastor fecit, et Iudaei triginta denarios in carbonam<sup>7</sup> proiecerunt, et postea ipsos Iudae pro traditione Iesu dederunt, et ipsis per Iudam reportatis agrum figuli pro quindecim denariis emerunt, et reliquos quindecim militibus sepulcrum Christi custodientibus tradiderunt, et sic cum factum erat cum denariis, quod erat praedestinatum, statim fuerunt divisi et hinc inde dispersi. Sed antequam hoc non erat factum, quod de ipsi fieri debuit, semper insimul permanserunt, ut audivistis. Sed scriptura ipsos denarios argenteos appellat, quia antiquitas omne metallum argentum appellaverunt; sed nulli dubium quin fuerint aurei. Ipse ager sanguinis non est magnus, ut dixi, sed profundissime effossus et desuper testudinatus et foraminibus rotundis perforatus, et per illa foramina corpora mortuorum intus proiciuntur, et post triduum nil aliud nisi sola ossa reperiuntur. Aliter locus tam parvus ad tot mortuorum corpora sufficere non posset. Iuxta hunc agrum est locus valde delectabilis et arboribus pulcherrimus, quem fratres praedicatores in recessu meo emerunt, sed nescio, si ipsum obtinuerunt. Sunt etiam prope plurima sanctorum eremitoria, habitacula et oratoria gratiosa, quae nunc sunt deserta. Ita prope est caverna, in qua Petrus negato Christo permansit et latitavit et amare flevit. Non longe ab hac caverna est locus, quo Iudas desperatus se suspendit.

***English translation from Ludolph von Suchem,  
Description of the Holy Land:110–112***

Chap. XXXIX. Of the Thirty Pieces of Silver. We read in a history of those kings of the East who offered gifts to our Lord, that Terah, Abraham's father, made money, or pennies, at the bidding of a King of Mesopotamia named Ninus, and that he received thirty pieces of silver for his pay. These pieces of silver he gave to Abraham, who spent them during his wanderings in exile, and these same pieces of silver passed through divers hands until they came into the hands of the Ishmaelites, and with them Joseph was bought from his brethren. Afterwards, when Joseph bore rule in Egypt, these same pieces of silver came back into Joseph's hands from his brethren as the price of corn, and when they were restored to his brethren, his brethren gave them to Joseph's steward, who sent them to Sheba to buy merchandise for Pharaoh. Now, in Solomon's time, when the Queen of Sheba came from the East to hear his wisdom, she offered these thirty pieces of silver in the temple. In the time of Rehoboam, when Nebuchadnezzar despoiled the temple and took away its treasure, he gave the thirty pieces of silver with other treasure to the King of Godolia, who was with him in his army, and so they remained with other treasures in the treasury of the Kings of Godolia until Christ's birth. At that time the kingdom of Godolia was removed to Nubia. Now, when our Lord was born, Melchior, the King of Nubia, saw in the star that Christ was born of a virgin. He therefore took the thirty pennies, because he could find no more noble or ancient gold in his treasury, and by God's will offered them to Christ. Afterwards the Blessed Virgin Mary, when fleeing into Egypt through fear of Herod, lost the thirty pennies, together with the rest of the presents of the Magi, at the place where the Garden of Balsam now is. A shepherd found them and kept them for thirty years. Then the fame of Jesus being noised abroad, this same shepherd came to Jerusalem, where Jesus healed his sickness. When Christ was preaching and teaching in the temple the shepherd offered Him the thirty pennies and the other presents of the Magi, but Jesus refused them, and bade him offer the pennies in the temple, and lay the other gifts upon the altar. The shepherd did so, and the Jews cast the thirty pennies into *corban*, and afterwards gave them to Judas for betraying Jesus. Then when Judas brought them back again, they bought the potter's field for fifteen pennies, and gave the other fifteen to the soldiers who were guarding Christ's sepulchre; and when that had been done with the pennies which had been predestined, they straightway were divided and scattered hither and thither. But until that was done which it was fated should be done by them, they always kept together, as you have heard. The Scripture calls them silver pennies, because in old times they called all metal silver; but there is no doubt but what they were of gold. The field of blood is not large, as I have told you, but has an exceeding deep pit dug in it, with a vaulted roof above it. This vault is pierced with round holes, through which holes

dead bodies are cast into it, and after three days nothing of them is found save bones. Were it not so, such a little place would not be sufficient to contain so many dead bodies. Near this field there is an exceeding pleasant place with beauteous trees, which the preaching friars (Dominicans) were trying to buy when I was leaving; but I know not whether they got it. Near it also there are very many hermitages of saints, cells, and oratories full of grace, which now are deserted. Likewise, near it is the cave wherein Peter hid himself after he had denied Christ and wept bitterly. Not far from this cave is the place where Judas hanged himself in despair.

#### 4. John of Hildesheim

Between 1364 and 1375 another German, the Carmelite Friar John of Hildesheim, wrote the *Historia trium regum*, a story of the Three Kings destined to have great fortune: it was in fact translated into High German as early as 1389 and into Middle English and Middle French in the fifteenth century (Cardini 2017:111–123; Burke, Čéplö 2016b:38–39; Jan 1974). As a source, John cites some unidentified *Libri Indorum* ('Books of the Indians'), which would also contain the legend of the Thirty Pieces given to Jesus by Melchior, one of the Magi. Compared to the other authors, John attributes the sacking of Jerusalem not to the Babylonians of Nebuchadnezzar but to the Arabs, allies of the Egyptians. Despite some verbal similarities with Ludolf's version his story shares many details with those of Godfrey and Solomon. We may consider, for example, the shepherd who gives the Thirty Pieces to Jesus after being healed by him: in the stories of Ludolf and John, this character plays the same role of King Abgar in the version of Solomon of Basra; see Cerulli 1968: 127–128), The friar, therefore, may have had access to the legend in a version very similar to that known to the other two authors (Hook 1997:208; Hill 1920:97–99).

#### *From Johannes de Hildesheim, the Three Kings of Cologne: 248–252*

Cap. XXVIII: Denarios illos XXX quos Malchiar optulit domino, prout in libris Indorum legitur, Abraham egrediens de Ur Caldeorum in peregrinatione sua secum sumpsit et in Ebron portauit, et cum ipsis agrum in sepulturam suam et uxoris et filiorum comparauit. Et horum denariorum monetam dicitur fecisse Thare, pater Abrahe, ex parte regis Mesopotamie. Et postea pro eisdem denariis Joseph a fratribus Hysmahelitis est venditus, et eidem Joseph in Egiptum a fratribus idem denarii pro frumento sunt portati, et deinde post obitum Jacob ad regnum Saba pro aromatibus ad sepulturam Jacob et Joseph fuerunt missi et in thesauros regios repositi. Et postea tempore Salomonis a regina Saba in templo in Jherusalem inter cetera predicti denarii sunt oblati. Et deinde tempore Roboam in capcione Jherusalem et ternpli domini depredacione ad manum regis Arabum, qui tunc temporis fuit in adiutorio Egipciorum, pervenerunt et cum aliis ornamentis aureis

spoliatis in thesauros regies reponebantur, unde postmodum per Malchiar regem<sup>8</sup> sumpti et domino sunt oblatis et fuerunt ex auro Arabie purissirno, quia antiqui nobilius aurum in thesauris suis ponere consueverunt.

Cap. XXIX. Cum autem beata Maria metu Herodis fugit in Egiptum, tunc hos XXX denarios cum aliis muneribus oblatis in panno lineo ligata in deserto amisit. Que pastor, unus ex hiis qui baduini vocantur, invenit et usque in modicum tempus ante passionem Domini apud se retinuit. Qui tunc in incurabilem cecidit infirmitatem: et audita fama Jhesu Jherusalem venit et a Jhesu mox curatus est et conversus, et sic denarios cum ceteris Christo a magis oblatis in sua infancia, que ipse in deserto reperit, iterum Domino optulit: que iussit Dominus ut in templo super altare poneret; unde sacerdos qui tunc sorte exiit, thus super altare in incensum accendit et hos XXX denarios cum mirra in gasophilacium misit.<sup>9</sup> Et post modicum tempus, tertia die ante passionem Domini, principes sacerdotum hos XXX denarios ex communi bursa de gasophilacio templi sumpserunt et cum ipsis Judam ad tradendum Dominum ad[d]uxerunt. Et partem mirre vino quod ori Domini optulerunt, miscuerunt, et reliquam partem Nichodemus addidit cum aliis aromatibus ad Domini sepulturam. Horum denariorum XV dati sunt militibus ad custodiendum sepulchrum Domini, et reliquis XV emptus est ager in sepulturam peregrinorum, qui est prope Jherusalem, vix ad semiiactum lapidis longus. De isto agro profundissima facta est fovea, terra effossa, et a fundo circummurata et desuper testudinata, et desuper testudi[n]es sunt foramina per que corpora mortuorum in profundum mittuntur. Nec moveat aliquem quod hii denarii in evangelio vocantur argentei: quia omnis moneta communi nomine argentei vocabantur. Et similitudo horum denariorum in nomine et moneta a temporibus Abrahe in partibus illis usque ad destruxionem Jherusalem per Tytum et Vespasianum permanserunt, quia in partibus Orientis monete non mutantur in pondere vel valore. Similitudo horum denariorum, et tunica Domini inconsutilis, apud quamplurimos nobiles usque in presentem diem hereditarie permanserunt. Et unus illorum denariorum circa tres florenos habet in pondere et valore, et in una parte talis denarii stat capud regis et in alia sunt littere caldaice, que ab hominibus modernis non possunt legi vel discerni.

### *English translation*

Chap. XXVIII. As for those thirty denarii that Melchior offered the Lord, according to the Books of the Indians, they are the same that Abraham, coming out of Ur in Chaldea, kept with him in his wanderings and brought them to Hebron, and with them bought a burial ground for himself, his wife and children. And it is said that Thare, Abraham's father, minted these thirty denarii for the king of Mesopotamia.

And for the same denarii Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites. And they were taken by the brothers to Egypt, to Joseph himself, to buy



wheat. After the death of Jacob, they were sent to the kingdom of Sheba to buy herbs for the burial of Jacob and Joseph and were stored there in the royal treasure.

Then, in the time of Solomon, they were offered, along with other things, by the Queen of Sheba at the temple of Jerusalem. Then, in the time of Rehoboam, when Jerusalem was taken and the temple of the Lord robbed, they came into the hands of the king of the Arabs, who was then an ally of the Egyptians, and were placed, with other things taken as spoils, in the king's treasures. From there they were, after a long time, taken from King Melchior and offered to the Lord.

And they were of the purest gold of Arabia, because the ancients used to keep in their treasures only the most precious gold.

Chap. XXIX. The Blessed Mary, when she fled to Egypt for fear of Herod, lost these thirty denarii in the desert, with other gifts which had been offered her by the Magi and which she had bound in a linen cloth.

Now, one of those shepherds called Bedouins found them and kept them with him until shortly before the Lord's passion. He then fell into an incurable disease and, having heard of Jesus by reputation, came to Jerusalem and was immediately cured and converted by Jesus. Thus, again, he offered the Lord the money with the other things which had been presented to Christ by the Magi in his infancy. And the Lord commanded that everything should be placed in the temple, above the altar: so the priest, who had come out then, lit the incense above the altar for incensing, and sent this thirty denarii, with myrrh, into the gazophilias. But shortly afterwards, on the third day before the Lord's passion, the princes of the priests took these thirty denarii from the common casket of the gazophilias in the Temple and, through them, incited Judas to betray the Lord.

And of myrrh, one part mixed with the wine that was presented to the mouth of the Lord, and the other part was added by Nicodemus to other aromas for the burying of the Lord. Of this money fifteen were given to the soldiers to keep the Lord's tomb, and with the other fifteen were bought the field for the burial of the strangers, which is near Jerusalem, about half a stone's throw in length.

In this field, excavating the earth, a very deep pit was made, surrounded by walls in its foundations, above covered with a roof, and on the roof there are holes, through which the bodies of the dead are thrown down.

Nor is it any wonder that these thirty denarii, in the gospel, are called "silver", because, in the current parlance, the coins of every species were called silver. And coins similar in minting and value to those thirty denarii remained in those regions from the time of Abraham until the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian, because in the eastern lands the coins of weight and value do not change.

Copies of this thirty denarii and the Lord's seamless robe have remained hereditary to this day in many noble families. And each of those denarii is, in weight and value, about three florins. On one side is the king's head,

and on the other side there are Chaldaic letters that modern people can no longer read and interpret.

### 5. The vulgarizations of the legend: the *Historia trium regum* in High German

The great popularity of the *Historia trium regum* is demonstrated by the many translations into vernacular German, English, Dutch and French dating back to the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries (Harris 1955:xxii–xxxv). Among them, the oldest seems to be the one reported below, made in 1389 in High German and handed down by numerous fifteenth-century manuscripts (On the dates and manuscripts of the German translations see Harris 1958; Harris 1959).

#### *From the Book of the Three Holy Kings (Buch von den heyligen drin konigen) (from Harris 1955:28a–31a)*

*Von den driszig phengen, die konig Mèlchior  
opperte. Idese gar fremde ding*

*Daz XXX capittel*

Von den driszen pengem, die konig Melchior unserm Cristo opperte, findit man frymme ding geschriben an manchen enden. Die phenigen warn guldin. Unde liz die penige slahen eyn kony von Mesopatamen Nynusz genant daz der regnerte, daz ist gar eyn lange zijt. Und slug sie Thare Abrahamsz vadersz. Die driszig penige wurden Abraham. Von wasz sachen sie an ene qwemen unde wie sie an ene qwamen, daz ist kuntlich nit. Da Abraham usz sime heymede zogte, alsz eme got geboit, da drug er die penige mit eme. Unde qwam en Ebron unde kauffte eynen acker zu eyner begrebde sin und frauwe Saren synen wybe unde eren kynden. Mit den selben phenigen kauffte Putryphar, pharaonisz kemmerer, Joseph Jacobsz sone umbe die brüder Josephsz, die auch sone warn Jacobsz. Die selben driszig pennige furten die selben brüder widder in Egypten. Dem wurden die pennige widder, dar umb... vorkaufft wart. Unde da Jacobi der XII sone vater starp, da sant sie Joseph gein Sabba umb edel krut und salben unde salbete damidde den doden lycham sinsz vadersz unde begrop ene da mydde. Dar nach nam die koniginne von Saba die driszig pennige mit andir vil kostlicher zirheide unde fore gen Jherusalem unde gap sie konig Salman. Darnach, da konig Salmon gestarp und Jherusalem gestort wart, da wurden sie zu deile dem konig von Arabien, der helffer waz desz konigisz von Egypten. Der lede sie behalden. Nu wasz konig Melchior, der unserm herren golt opperte, erbe desz konigisz von Arabien und wurden eynen also bysz uff den andem und zu leste wurden sie konig Melchior, da der wulde suchen den nühlen gebom konig. Da man er die driszig pennig mit ander vil kostlicher gabe und opperte sie unserm herren, alsz vorgeschriben stet. Wie daz er so sere ylde,

daz er nit andersz dan den gulden appel und die driszig phenge erwuschte und opperte die... der gochmüdekeit, alsz auch die andern zwene konige daden, die nit andersz opperten dan daz ene zu erste in die hende qwam.

*Die dryszig pennige vorlosz unser frauwe, da sie floch in Egipten*

*Daz XXXI capittel*

Da unser frauwe — in Egipten fliehen sulde, da strickete sie die driszig phennige mit dem wyrach und mit dem mirren in eyn düchelin unde verlore die in der wuste eynesz mit dem andern. Eyn hirte, der in der wüste desz vehesz hütte, fant den rat by ein andir in dem lynen düchelin gewickelt. Der hirte behylt daz allisz wol bysz uff die zijt, daz unser herre bredigen begunde in den landen zu Judea, da er auch manch wunder zeychen det. Also qwam ez, daz der hirte zu eynem geziden siech wart. Der suchte wart eme gar kume rat. Da hurte er sagen, daz ein man were in der Juden lande, der heilte die sichen ane alle arzedie, die die natüer geleisten mag. Da machte sich der vorgeante hirte uff und gedacht an sinen rad, den er vor lang en zijden funden hatte, unde nam den mit eme und machte sich in daz lant Judeam und suchte und fant unsern Cristum und bat ene umb gnade, daz er eme hulffe. Cristusz unser herre, der nie mentschen beide vorsede, halff dem armen manne und macht ene gesunt. Da er besub, daz er gesunt wurden wasz, da zoch er die driszig pennege mit dem wyrauch und mit dem mirren her vore. Und bot sie unserm herren zu dancke siner gnaden. Unser herre wiste wol, wo der rad here komen wasz, und hiesz den, waz er in den henden hette, daz er daz opperte.... die driszig phenge mit dem wyrauch und mirren in den tempel uff den altar. Der prister, der desz altarisz hüte und plag, der nam die driszig pennege und warff sij in den stagk, alsz nach stacke stent in manchin kirchin, da man gelt in wirffet. Den wyrauch brantte er zu den zijden, alsz man sin dorffte. Den mirren behylt er auch. Von dem myrren wart auch gemacht ein bytter drang, den man Cristo bot unserm herren an.... daz orütze nelit, e man ene uffhing, da man en uff hub und also an dem orütze stunt, bysz daz er sprach: «Mich durstet». Da boden sie eme abir dryncken. Von dissem zweyerley dryncken sagent die ewangelia, der erste were win und mirra. Der ander eszig und gallen. Auch meynent etliche, der myrre qweme zu unsers herren begrebde, wande der wart eme geoppert von konig Jaspar zu eyme zeychen daz er sterben sulde, alsz vor undir scheiden ist. Dye selben dryszig pennige wurden Judasz gegeben umb sin vorrederye. Judasz der nam die pennige darnach, alsz ene der düfel in den zwyfel brachte. Und warff sie in den tempel. Die penige wurden uff gehalten und daz halbe deyl wart gegeben den blutzappen. die desz grabesz hütten. Myt den andern deyl wart gekaufft ein acker zu eyner begrebbede der elenden bylgerin. Der acker ligt nahe by Jherusalem und ist nyt lengir adir breyder dan eyn steinwurff. Und da jherusalem an der cristen hant stunt, da wart gar eyn dyff lach in gemacht und gegraben. Daz wart von grunde uff gemüert und aben zu gewelwit. (...) daz gewelbe lysz man machen locher.

Durch die lochir warff man die doden yn und waz vil grebir machinsz abe. Nyemant sal sich dar an stoszen, daz wir sprechin, die pennige wem gulden und daz ewangelium sagit sie wem sylbem. Daz ist der schriff alde gewonheit, daz sie alle montze silbern nement an vil steden. Die phenge wurden nie gescheiden bisz uff daz leste, da myt ene gescheen waz, wasz mit ene geschehen sulde. Da wurden sie da gescheiden und gestrauwet und meinet man, ir eyner were alsz swere von gulde alsz dry gulden. Und uff der eynen syten stet eynaz konigesz heubt. Daz habe uff eynsz lorbersz baum schappel. Uff der andir syten stent Caldeische buchstabe, die ytzunt nyemant gelesen kan, wasz sie bedüden.

## 6. The vulgarizations of the legend: The *Historia trium regum* in Middle English

Around 1400 the work of John of Hildesheim was shortened and translated into English. It also enjoyed a certain popularity in this version, as indicated by the various fifteenth century manuscripts that still exist today in addition to the various printed texts of the sixteenth century (See the introduction of Horstman in Johannes de Hildesheim 1886:v–xxi; Harris 1954:xxxiv).

### *From þe þree holy and worshipfull kyngis of Coleyn (text from Johannes de Hildesheim, the Three Kings of Cologne:94–100)*

(Capitulum XXVI). Fferthermore 3e schul vndirstonde, as hit is aforseyde, þat Melchior, kyng of Nubye and of Arabie, offrid to Godd a rounde appil of gold and XXX gilt penyes. Of þes XXX gilt penyes 3e schul here þe first bygynnyng and þe last ende. Thara, þat was fadir to Abraham, did make þes XXX gilt penyes in þe name of þe kyng of Mesopotamye þe wich was cleped Nynus. And þus abraham, whan he 3ede a pilgrimage oute of þe londe of Chaldee in to Ebron, þat in þat tyme was cleped Arabie, he bare þes XXX gilt penyes with hym and bouzte with hem a place for his sepulture [and for his wyf] and for his childryn, Ysaac and Iacob.<sup>10</sup> Aftirward Joseph was solde of his breþerin in to Egipt to Marchauntys þat were of hismahely for þes same XXX gilt penyes. [Aftirward whanne Iacob was dede, thanne were thes XXX gilt penyes] sent to þe londe of Saba for diuers spyys and oynementys for þe sepulture of Iacob: and so þei were putte in to þe kyngis tresory. Þan by processe of tyme in kyng Salemons tyme þe quene of Saba offrid þes XXX gilt penyes, with many oþir riche iewels, in þe tempil of Godd in Jerusalem, so aftirward, in þe tyme of Roboam, þat was kyng Salemons soone, whan Ierusalem was destroyed and þe tempil of Godd despoiled, þan þes XXX gilt penyes were brougt to þe kyng of Arabie: and so þei were put in to his tresory, with many oþer riche ornamentys þat were brougt oute of þe tempil of God.

Than aftirward, whan Crist was bore in Bethleem, þan Melchior, þat was kyng of Nubye and of Arabie, toke þes XXX gilt penyes, and many oþir



riche ornamentys and iewels, with hym, bycause hit was þe fynest gold and þe best þat he had in his tresory; þerfore he toke þes same with hym and offrid hem to Godd in Bethleem þer as he was bore. Than aftirward, whan oure lady seynt Marye ȝede oute of Bethleem in to Egipte for drede of kyng Herodes, þan sche lost all þes ȝiftes þat were offrid in þe weye, and þei were all bounde in a clothe togedir.

So aftirward hit happed, þer was a scheperde in þat contrey þat kept schepe; þe wiche had so grete infirmite and so grete dissese þat þer myȝt no leche hele hym, and all þe goode þat he hadde he ȝaf to diners lechys to be hole and hit myȝt noȝt be. Than, on a tyme as he ȝede in þe felde with his schepe now in o place now in an opir, he fonde þes XXX gilt penyes, with encense and Mirre, bounde alle in a clowte togedir. And whan he had founde þes ȝiftes, he kept hem priuelich to hym-self, til a litil afore aȝens þe tyme þat God ȝede to his passyoun. And whan þis scheperde herde speke of swich a holy prophete þat helid all men of her infirmities with a worde, þan he com to god and preide hym of grace and of help: and þan God allmyȝty anoon helid hym, and enfourmed hym of þe feiþ.

Þan þe scheperde offerid to God with goode deuocioun þes XXX penyes, with encense and Mirre, as þei were all bounde togedir in a clowte. And whan God sayȝe þes XXX gilt penyes, with encense and Mirre, he knewe hem wel, and bad þe scheperde þat he scholde go in to þe tempil and offre all þes thynges vppon þe autere. And so þe scheperde did, aftir þe commandement of God, and offryd vppon þe autere in þe tempil þes XXX gilt penyes, with encense and mirre, with grete deuocioun. And whan þe preest þat in þat tyme kept þe tempil sayȝe swich oblacions offrid on þe autere, in þe worschep of þis oblaciouns he was reuested and ensensed þe autere; and bycause þat oblaciouns were scelde seye in þe tempil, þe preest of þe tempil tok all þes III þingis and deposited and put hem in to her comune tresory. And a litil while aftir, þat is to seye þe thrid daye tofore Cristes passyoun, Iudas Skariot com in to þe temple to þe princys of þe lawe and to þe Iwys and made couenaunt with hem to betraye his maister God allmyȝty: & for his trauayle þe princys of þe Iwys toke oute of her tresory þes XXX gilt penyes and ȝaf hem to Iudas Skariot, and so þis Iudas sold Godd almyȝty his maister for þes .xxx. gilt penyes. Than, whan all þis was do and Crist, Goddis sone of heuen, was betrayed þorwe his discipil and scholde be dede for all mankynde, as his will was: þan þis Iudas repent hym and was sory for his mysdede, and ȝede in to þe tempil aȝene to þe princys of þe Iwys and cast downe to hem þese XXX gilt penys. Than, whan all þes was done, as þe gospell seiþ, he ȝede & henge hym-self. So þan þe Iwys bouȝte with XV of þes gilt penyes a feelde for sepulture of pilgrymes, as þe gospell telleþ, and þe opir XV penyes þe Iwys ȝaf to þe knyȝtys þat kept þe sepulcre of Crist.

Also, ȝe schulle vnderstonde þat þe liknesse of þes XXX gilt penyes were vsed in all þat contrey boþe in name and in money from Abrahams tyme in to [þe] destruccionn of Ierusalem, þe wiche was do by Tytus and Vaspasianus. But from þe tyme of Abraham in to Cristys passyon þes XXX gilt penyes

were neuer desseueryd ne departed, but euermore þei were bore hoole togedir; and whan Crist was solde for hem, þan anoon þei were disseueryd and departed aboute in diuers placys. Fferthermore þe cause why þes XXX gilt penyes were cleped syluer in gospels, noȝtwithstondyng þei were fyne gold, is þis: ffor hit is þe comune name and þe comune vsage in all þat contrey so for to clepe hem, as men clepe in þis contrey gold of bizende þe see Scutys, Motouns or floryns. And ȝit in þe eest þe same preent is made, boþe in gold and in siluer and in copir, and kept among grete lordys of þe contrey. And þe preent of one of þes XXX gilt penyes is þis: on þat o side is a kyngis hed corouned, and in þat oþer side be write lettres of Chaldee, þe wiche men kunne noȝt rede now. And one of hem is a[s] moche worþ in weight and in valwe as III floreyns. And many merueiles be tolde of þes XXX gilt penyes, þe wiche were longe to telle.

## **7. The vulgarizations of the legend: Catalan anonymous from the fifteenth century**

The following text is taken from the so-called *Biblia pequeña*, a Catalan prose work made around the middle of the fifteenth century, during the reign of Alfonso V of Aragon known as the Magnanimous (1416–1458) (On the *Biblia pequeña* and other Iberian versions of the legend of the Thirty Pieces see Cerulli 1968:117–121; Hook 1997:209–218). Despite some differences – first of all the omission of all the holders of the coins between their minting and Joseph’s episode and the addition of a new legendary theme, that of the Queen of Sheba and the Wood of the Cross (on this legend and its possible source, see Hook 1997:215; Cerulli 1968:132–134) – the Catalan legend is largely dependent on the *Pantheon* or on a tradition that was in any case part of it.

*From the Bíblia pequeña (text edited in Cerulli 1968:118–119; see also the variant text edited in Hook 1997:213–214)*

Titol dels XXX diners qui foren donats a Judes: don vingueren ne en que finaren.

Demanda: Aquells XXX diners qui foren donats a Judes per les quals fou venut Messias e apres fou mort: don vingueren e en que finaren.

Responch: Devets saber que en lo temps de Thare, pare d’Abraam, feu Thare moneda d’aure molt gran; e aço per manament de Liuro, Rey de Babilonia<sup>11</sup>. E devets saber que per XXX diners de aquella moneda fou venut Josep, fill de Jacob, en Egipte. E per temps annant foren aportats en les parts de Saba e vingueren en poder de la Regina Nichola Sibilia la qual era de Saba). E sapiats que en aquell temps de Salamo vench aquesta Regina en Jerusalem ojint la saviesa de Salamo. E ella volch entrar en lo Temple a orar. E vee I gran fust qui stava a ras del Temple e maravellas; e dix prophe-  
tizant: «O rays de fust, beneyta sies tu. A questa part es romasa sobre la

terra per donar salut en lo mon. Grans maravellas mostres que han esse en tu. Car del cel sera envijat aquell que naxera de la Verge e morra sobre tu per salvar les gentes de lurs peccats. E meravellame molt de tu Rey que es tan entes, per que tens axi tan honrat fust». E dites aquestes paraules oferi los XXX diners dessor nomenats. E aquetes XXX diners fores mesos en l'Archa que s'apella Corbanam, hon se metien tots los diners los quals per los Gentils e per lo altres strangers eren ofers e donats.

Estingueren aqui entro que Nabugadenosor roba lo Temple que los sen porta en Babilonia. E per temps annant Nabugadenosor guerreja ab aquells de Ethiopia. E dells hi hat I de aquells tres Reys de Saba lo qual pres aquestes XXX diners de soldada, pero com aquella moneda corria en aquella terra de Saba. E aquell Rey, pero com ell los avja guanyats a gran honor, stoja los molt be. E en aquell temps que nasque Jhesu Christ aparech a aquest tres Rey I stela la qual los avia prophetat Balam. E movents de lurs terres anant vers Jerusalem seguits la stela. E la un d'aquest tres Reys aporta aquesta moneda, ço est aquesto XXX diners sobredits e oferils al Infant Jhesus.

E la Verge ans partint ab l'Infant de Betlem anassen en Egipto. E, axi com Deu volch, per lo cami, perde aquestes XXX diners. E trovals un pastor, gran strolech; e conech lo misteri dels diners. E venchsen al Temple; e veche I infant petit lo qual disputava ab los grans maestres de la Ley. E acostas al Infant e dix li: «Jo tinch diners que son teus». E l'Infant Jhesus li respos: «Dona los als sacerdots del Temple». E los sacerdots per tal com era moneda sospitosa, tornaren los en la Archa sobredita de Corbanam. E estingueren aqui fins a la venda de Jhesu Christus; los quals foren donats a Judes, fals venedor, axi com dehia la profecia: «Sera venut per argent e lo pobre per calçament». E a la fin finaren que sen compra un camp a sepultura als pelegrins. E açi se compli la profecia que diu: «Lo preu qu'els fils de Israel m'an preat sera donat per I camp del oller en sepultura de pelegrins».

## **8. The vulgarizations of the legend: Italian anonymous from the fifteenth century**

The fifteenth-century manuscript XII F 13, from the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli (for a description of the codex, see Miola 1882:167–172), contains a translation into Neapolitan vernacular of the above mentioned Catalan legend, probably written under Alfonso the Magnanimous – who was also king of Naples as Alfonso I (1442–1458) – or his immediate Aragonese successors (Cerulli 1968:121–122).

*From the codex XII F 13, Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale  
(text edited in Cerulli 1968:122–123)*

De li XXX denari quali foro dati a Juda da onde vennero et a chi affinaro.

Domandanomi alcuni de quelli XXX denari chi foro dati a Juda per li quali fo venduto Messias Jhesu Christo e dopo fo morto[:] da onde

vennero et in chi affinaro[.] Respondo[.] doveti sapire che negly tempi de Thare padre de Abraham fe facer moneta de oro multo grande e questo per comandamento de Olifer [.,] Re de Babilo (see note 11). Et devete sapire che per trenta denari de quella moneta fo venduto Joseph figlyol de Jacob in Egypto. E certo tempo nanci furono portati nelle parti de Sabba. Et vennero nel tempo de la Reyna Nicola Sibia la qual era de Sabba. Et sapiate che in quel tempo de Salomone venne la ditta Reyna in Jerusalem per udire la sapiencia de Salomone. Ley volendo entrare nel Tempio per orare vidi un gran peço de legno chi stava in uno loco depositato del Tempio et maraviglyosse et prophetiçando dixit: «O radice del legno benedicto sei tu. Questa parte e restata sopra la terra per dare salute al mundo. Grande miracli mostri che hano ad esse de te[.] ca dal cielo sera mandato quello che nascera da la Virgine e morira sopra di te per salvar la gente del suo peccato. Maraviglyome assay de te[.] Re[.] che se tanto savio che tene aqui un tanto honorato legno». E ditte queste parole offerse li predicti XXX denari. E questi XXX denari foron posti ne l'archa chi se chiamava [...] dove se poniano li denari quali per li Gentili e per li altri erano offerti e dati. E stettero aqui finche Nabuchodonosor arobo il Tempio e robandolo se li porto in Babilonia. E per tempo nante Nabuchodonosor guerava con quelli de Etyopia[.] et hebi uno de quelli Rey de Sabba il quale prese quelli XXX denari per suo salario perche quella moneta correa in quella terra de Sabba. E quel Re sapendo che loro haviano guandato tal moneta lui la guardo molto bene e con multa cerimonia. E nel tempo che nacque Yhesu Christo apparve a questi tre Rey una stella la quale loro haviano prophetiçato Balaam e parterose da le terre soe et andaro la via de Jherusalem sequendo la dicta stella. Et un di quelli tre Rey porto quelli XXX denari supradicti et offersili al infante Yhesu. E la Virgine Maria partendo da Bethleem con lo infante Yhesu sin ando in Egypto. E come Iddio volse la Virgine Maria perdetti per lo camino quelli XXX denari. E trovalli un pastore grande astrologo e conobi il misterio de gli predicti denari. E venne nel Tempio e vidi un garçone picculino il quale disputava con li grandi maystri de la lege. Et accostosse al garçone Yhesu e dixeli[.] «yo tengo denari che son tuoi». E lo garçone Yhesu respoxe[.] «Donali al sacerdote del Tempio». E perche era moneta sospettusa la tornaro nel l[.] archa sopradicta la quale se chiamava[.] Corbona. E stettero lli fin la venditione de Yhesu Christo i quali fuoron dati a Juda falso venditore. Cossi come dicea el propheta[.] «Sara venduto per argento e lo populo per calciamiento». Et alla fine affinaro quelli XXX denari che se ne compro un campo per sepoltura de pelegriini.

***English translation of both the Catalan and the Italian text***

Of the thirty denarii that were given to Judas, where they came from and where they ended up.

Some ask me about the thirty denarii which were given to Judas, and for which the Messiah Jesus Christ was sold and later was dead: where they came from and where they ended up. I answer: you should know that in the time of Thare, Abraham's father, he had very large gold coins made by command of Olifer, king of Babylon. And you should know that Joseph, son of Jacob, was sold in Egypt for thirty denarii of that money. And some time later they were brought to Sheba. And they came at the time of Queen Nicola Sibilia, who was from Sheba. And you should know that at the time of Solomon the aforementioned queen came to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Wanting to enter the Temple to pray, she saw a large piece of wood which was deposited in a place of the Temple, and marveling and prophesying she said: "Oh root of the blessed wood, thou art. This part remained on earth to give salvation to the world. Great miracles you show, which will come from you, because from heaven will be sent the one who will be born from the Virgin and will die upon you to save people from their sin. I marvel so much about you, king, who are so wise to keep here a wood so much honored". And after saying these words, she offered the aforementioned thirty denarii. And such thirty denarii were placed in the ark which was called [...] where were placed the denarii which were offered and given by the Pagans and the others. And they remained there until Nebuchadnezzar plundered the Temple and stole them and took them to Babylon. And some time later, Nebuchadnezzar waged war with the people of Ethiopia; and there was one of the kings of Sheba who took those thirty denarii as his pay because this was the current money in the land of Sheba. And that king, knowing to have gained such a worth money, kept it so carefully and with great respect. And when Jesus Christ was born, a star appeared to these three kings, which Balaam had prophesied to them, and they left their land and went on the way to Jerusalem following the aforementioned star. And one of those three kings took those aforementioned thirty denarii and offered them to the infant Jesus. And the Virgin Mary, leaving from Bethlehem with the infant Jesus went to Egypt. And as God wanted, the Virgin Mary lost those thirty denarii on her way. And a shepherd, who was a great astrologus, found it and knew the mystery of the aforementioned denarii. And he came to the Temple and saw a little boy who was disputing with the great masters of the law. And he approached the boy Jesus and said to him: "I have the denarii which are yours". And the boy Jesus answered: "Donate them to the priest of the Temple". And because it was a mysterious money, they put it in the aforementioned ark, which was called *Corbona*. And these coins remained there until Jesus Christ was sold, when they were given to Judas, treacherous merchant. As said the prophet: "He will be sold for silver and the people for footwear". And at the end, with those thirty denarii a field was bought for the burial of pilgrims. And thus was fulfilled the prophecy which said: "The price which the sons of Israel have set for me will be given for the field of the potter for the burial of pilgrims".



## 9. Felix Fabri

The Swiss Dominican friar and theologian Felix Fabri (c. 1441–1502) visited the Holy Land in 1480 and then in 1483–1484, leaving a detailed description entitled *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabia et Egypti peregrinationem* ('Book of the Peregrination in the Holy Land, Arabia and Egypt'). The work also contains a brief excursus on the legend of the Thirty Pieces, which the author claims to have read in a story "long and verbose": this is a synthesis that compared to other versions doesn't add anything particularly original, but it's worth mentioning anyway for the presence of the King of Godolia, a character already mentioned by Ludolf from Sudheim (On the relations between Felix Fabri and the other Latin authors see Hill 1920:100; Burke, Čéplö 2016a:296).

### *From Fabri, Evagatorium, I:426*

Porro de triginta denariis legi quandam longam et verbosam historiam, quae dicit, quod Thare, pater Abrahae, eos ad imperium Nini regis cuderit, cum aliis eiusdem percussurae, et Abraham eos accipiens in terram hanc detulit, a quo per successum Ismaeli sunt traditi, numquam ab invicem divisi. Hos Ismaelitae dederunt filiis Jacob pro Joseph fratre suo, quem vendiderant eis, frates autem eos in Aegyptum portaverunt, pro frumento exponentes eos. Et de Aegypto transmissi sunt in Saba regionem pro mercimoniis. Hos regina Saba obtulit Salomoni inter alia munera, qui eos in gazophylacium templi Domini iniecit; hos Nabuchodonosor cum aliis templi thesauris tulit, et Godoliae eos pro munere tradidit, a quo in regnum Nubiae sunt transmissi. Nato autem Domino in Bethlehem Melchior rex Nubiae obtulit eos Domino, quos beata Virgo et Joseph cum puero fugientes in deserto perdiderunt, et quidam pastor eos reperiens triginta anni servavit. Hic pastor audiens fama miraculorum Domini Jesu venit infirmus in Jerusalem, et sanitate ab eo recepta obtulit XXX Domini Jesu. Qui dum eo accipere nollet, dedit eos templi sacerdotibus, qui eos in corbanam miserunt. Vendito autem Domino Judae eos tradiderunt, qui poenitentia ductus projecit eos in templum, quos accipientes sacerdotes hunc agrum pro eis emerunt, et hoc pacto dispersi sunt ab invicem per mundum; de quibus in Rhodo unum vidi, cuius figuram Johannes Tucher de Nüremberga accepit, et modulo facto plumbo fudit aequales argenteo, et suis amicit tradidit. Nam dum anno 1485 essemus congregati in Nüremberga ad capitulum provinciale celebrandum, dedit praedictus vir cuilibet fratri unum de suis denariis. Quantitas est sicut blaphordorum crucis, in una parte est facies humana, in alia est lilium.<sup>12</sup> Superscriptio vero fuit quidem, sed videri non potest. Et tantum de monte Acheldama.

### *English translation from Fabri, The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri: 537–538*

Now, as for the thirty pieces of money, I have read a long rambling story which says that Terah, the father of Abraham, struck them at the bidding of

King Ninus, with others of the same mintage; and that Abraham received them and brought them into this land, and that from him they were handed down to Ishmael by inheritance, all together, and that they never were divided from one another. They were paid by the Ishmaelites to the children of Jacob for their brother Joseph, whom they sold to them, and the brethren carried them down into Egypt to buy corn with. From Egypt they were carried into Sheba, as the price of merchandise. The Queen of Sheba gave them to Solomon among other presents, and he cast them into the treasury of the Lord's temple. Nebuchadnezzar carried them off together with the other treasures of the temple and made a present of them to Godolia (*sic*), by whom they were sent to the kingdom of Nubia. When the Lord was born in Bethlehem, Melchior, the King of Nubia, offered them to the Lord, and the blessed Virgin and Joseph lost them in the desert when they were fleeing with the child. A shepherd found them and kept them for thirty years. This shepherd, hearing the fame of the miracles of the Lord Jesus came to Jerusalem sick; and, having received health from Him, offered the thirty pieces to Jesus, Since He would not receive them, he gave them to the priests of the temple, who set them aside as *corban*. When the Lord had been betrayed, they handed them over to Judas, who, moved by remorse, flung them down in the temple. The priests picked them up, and bought this field for them, and thus they became scattered separately throughout the world. I have seen one of them in Rhodes, and Johannes Tucher, of Nuremberg, [b] took a cast of it, had a leaden mould made, and cast silver coins in its likeness, which he distributed among his friends; indeed, when we were all gathered together in Nuremberg in the year 1485, to celebrate the meeting of the chapter of the province, the aforesaid man gave one of his pieces of silver to a certain brother of our order. It is about as large as those of the coins called *blaffardi*, which are marked with a cross; on one side there is a human face, on the other a lily. There once was an inscription, but it cannot now be seen. So much for Mount Aceldama.

## Notes

- 1 English translations are by Francesco D'Angelo, unless otherwise specified. For references to the texts cited here, see the comments by Lucia Travaini and other bibliography in the previous chapters.
- 2 On the tradition about Terach as minter, see Cerulli 1968:128–129.
- 3 *Queen of the Austro* is the name for the Queen of Sheba in Matthew 12:25 and Luke 11:31; she is mentioned in the Old Testament (cf. 1Kings 10:1-10) and, starting from Flavius Josephus (first century AD), was often associated with Ethiopia. Another tradition, which attributes to her the name Nikaule (Nicaula according to Godfrey) dates back to the same Roman historian, while her identification with the Sibyl is from a later date (Cerulli 1968:129–132).
- 4 Christian exegesis often identified the Magi (or sometimes only one of them) with the kings of Sheba who, according to the Scriptures (*Ps* 72 (71), 10-11, 15; *Is* 60, 6), would visit the Messiah and bring him gifts (Cardini 2017:29–30; Cerulli 1968:134).

- 5 This part of the text refers to the legend according to which King Abgar V of Osroene (†50), suffering from an incurable disease, wrote to Jesus asking him to be healed and offering him hospitality in his own palace. Jesus replied to his letter promising to send one of his disciples, who would heal him. This legend was mentioned for the first time in the *Ecclesiastical history* of Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century) (Cerulli 1968:126; Camplani 2009:251–257).
- 6 According to a legend from the thirteenth century, during the flight into Egypt Joseph and Mary came to the oasis of Matarea (present-day Matarieh), where Jesus caused a spring to flow, in whose waters Mary washed the child's tunic. From the drops of Jesus' sweat, which fell there from the clothes, was therefore produced the balsam. The legend is cited, among the others, by the apocryphal *Arabic-Syriac Infancy Gospel* (Craveri 1990:127).
- 7 The term 'carbonam' is the Latin transliteration from the Hebrew *corbàn* ("offering" or "presentation of an offering to God"), *corban* and *corbona* in the *Vulgata*. By extension it came to indicate also the place or casket where the money offered to the Temple was kept (therefore the Temple treasure) (Penna 1950:529). Cf. the words of the high priests in *Mt* 27:6, when Judas brought them back the Thirty Pieces, throwing them into the Temple: "The chief priests picked up the coins and said: "It is against the law to put this into the treasury [*Vulg: in corbonam*], since it is blood money".
- 8 According to this text, Melchior ruled over the "First India", which included the kingdom of Nubia and extended over Arabia, Sinai and the Red Sea. It mentions also a kingdom of Godolia (the "Second India") whose ruler, as in Ludolf's version, was Balthasar. In John's story, however, this last kingdom has no relation with the legend of the Thirty Pieces (Cardini 2017:117). It is likely that John of Hildesheim knew Ludolf's text (Monneret de Villard 1952:214–215).
- 9 The term *gasophilacium* (Greek transcription of the Hebrew *ganzak*) indicated the room where the treasure of the Temple was kept and, by extension, the treasure itself (Johannes de Hildesheim, *The Three Kings of Cologne*:265, note 122).
- 10 This is obviously a mistake, since Jacob was the son of Isaac and therefore Abraham's nephew and not his son.
- 11 Livero (Holofernes) as king of Babylon at the time of Abraham is an obvious anachronism. He appears in the Book of Judith as captain of Nebuchadnezzar, therefore several centuries after the time of Terach and Abraham (Cerulli 1968:128). He is mentioned below as Olifer in the Naples version.
- 12 For the coin named *blaffardus* see above [Appendix 1](#), no. 30.