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See also → Amulet; → Bibliolatry; → Kabbalah; → Magic, Magician; → Mezuzah; → Numbers and Numerology; → Phylacteries; → Sortes Biblicae; → Superstition

Magnificat

- I. New Testament
- II. Christianity
- III. Literature
- IV. Music

I. New Testament

The designation "Magnificat" is used for the first of three poetic texts in the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel which are related to the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. The other two are the "Benedictus" (Luke 1:68–79) and the "Nunc dimittis" (2:29–32). All three of these texts are named after their opening words in the Latin Vulgate translation. In the liturgical tradition of the Christian churches they were included as *cantica* (hymns) in the *Liturgia horarum* (liturgy of the hours): The Benedictus belongs to the *Laudes* (morning prayer), the *Magnificat* to the *Vesper* (evening prayer), the *Nunc dimittis* to the *Complet* (night prayer). The three Lukan texts therefore have an outstanding reception history within the liturgy of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches.

All three of these texts rely on traditions from the OT and are focused on the salvation for God's people Israel. The *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* probably already existed before Luke's Gospel. (In the case of the *Nunc dimittis* this is less certain.) Luke has integrated them into his birth narratives as hymns that interpret the births of John the Baptist and Jesus in a similar way as the psalm of Hannah of old in 1 Sam 2:1–10 interprets the birth of Samuel. The *Benedictus* is put in the mouth of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, the *Magnificat* is spoken by Mary, the mother of Jesus. The *Nunc dimittis* has a somewhat different place within the narrative: It is attributed to Simeon of old, an otherwise unknown pious Jew, who meets the new-born Jesus and his parents in the Jerusalem temple. Above that, the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* show several similarities in style and content. Against this background, scholarship has discussed at length the provenance and original meaning of these texts. Whatever the religious provenance and former usage of these psalms (or hymns) may have been (they were regarded as Jewish compositions; as compositions about John the Baptist; or as Christian texts about Jesus), in their Lukan context they serve as the interpretation of John as the prophet and forerunner of Jesus and of Jesus as the one through whom God turns his mercy to Israel.

Unlike the *Benedictus* which directly follows the account of John the Baptist's birth, the *Magnificat* is

spoken by Mary as a reaction to Gabriel's announcement of her forthcoming pregnancy through the Holy Spirit and the birth of a son who will be great and will be called Son of the Most High (1:30–35) as well as to Elisabeth's praising of Mary (1:41–45). Given this place within the narrative, it is particularly striking that in the *Magnificat* Mary praises God who has turned his salvation to Israel even before Jesus was born. The aorist forms which occur throughout the *Magnificat* in vv. 48–55 therefore emphasize that already the announcement of Jesus' birth has to be perceived as God's salvation for Israel, whereas Jesus' birth itself will happen only at a later stage within the narrative and is therefore separated from the time at which Mary speaks the *Magnificat*.

In the *Magnificat* the social consequences of God's salvific acting are particularly highlighted. Already the first sentence states that God, the savior (σωτήρ), has "looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant," i.e., of Mary. In what follows God's strength is described as directed against the powerful and the rich: He has "scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones" (vv. 51–52) and "sent the rich away" (v. 53). In correspondence, God has "lifted up the lowly" and "filled the hungry with good things" (vv. 52–53). By way of conclusion this acting of God is interpreted as help for his "servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (vv. 54–55).

The *Magnificat* relies to a considerable degree on traditions from the OT and Jewish writings which describe God's mercy for the poor and his degrading of the haughty and powerful (see Brown: 358–60; Kennel: 155–59). This prepares for Jesus' way according to Luke's Gospel. Already at his first public encounter in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus interprets his own way by quoting from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18–19). At a later place, Jesus summarizes the content of his activity again with references to several passages from Isaiah: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (7:22). The salvific consequences of Jesus' activity for the poor and the disadvantaged are therefore particularly highlighted in Luke's Gospel. The *Magnificat* as an early Christian text thus fits Luke's portrayal of Jesus in a particular way. Its place at the very beginning of the Gospel summarizes beforehand what will be outlined in more detail in the narrative that follows: With the coming of Jesus God has turned his mercy to his

people Israel, especially to the poor, the oppressed and the needy.

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Jens Schröter

II. Christianity

■ Patristics and Early Medieval Times ■ Orthodox Christianity ■ Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America ■ World Christianity

A. Patristics and Early Medieval Times

The hymn that Mary sings in the Gospel of Luke (1:46–55) is a response to Elizabeth's joyful greeting that pronounced Mary as "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42). In the western Christian tradition, the hymn is called the *Magnificat*, based upon the words in the first verse of the prayer as it appears in the Vulgate: *et ait Maria magnificat anima mea Dominum* (Luke 1:46). In the Greek tradition, the *Magnificat* is called the *Ode of the Theotokos* and in the Syriac tradition *mwrb*. From this hymn patristic exegetes formulated theological instruction and moral lessons for their audiences. Commentators recognized that Mary's words celebrated God's paradoxical way of interacting with humanity in salvation history. They held up as a model Mary's response of gratitude to the activity of the Holy Spirit and, thus, in the words of the *Magnificat*, patristic exegetes found a scriptural justification to honor Mary as the Mother of God and grant to her a position that elevated her above other saints. Moreover, because the canticle uses the language of lineage and generations, it invited exegetes to ponder and identify the "heirs" or true "Israel" that Mary invokes who would receive God's promises (Luke 1:50). They also saw a chance in their exegesis of the hymn to elevate their own communities as the true Israel, the "orthodox" in a line of generations who called Mary "blessed."

Origen (d. 253 CE) comments upon the *Magnificat* in *Homily 8* of his *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke*. Focusing upon a typology that sees Mary as the new Eve, Origen extols Mary as a model of virtue for all believers, especially women: "Sin began from the woman and then spread to the man. In the same way, salvation had its first beginnings from women. Thus the rest of women can also lay aside the weakness of their sex and imitate as closely as possible the lives and conduct of these holy women" (*Hom. Luc.* 8.1). For Origen, Mary's words "*My soul magnifies the Lord*" (Luke 1:46) mean that Mary magnifies the image of the Lord within her, the Lord who

himself is “the image of the invisible God” (*Hom. Luc.* 8.2–3). Origen notes that Mary’s humility or ταπεινότης should be understood as “moderation” or μετριοτής. She exemplifies gentleness and submission to God (*Hom. Luc.* 8.5). Mary’s proclamation that God’s mercy was extended to all who fear Him (Luke 1:50) is meant to be for those who have come to believe in Christ.

Athanasius of Alexandria, in a homily delivered on Christmas of 346, first focuses on the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary. Mary’s perfect and joyful response to the incarnation of the Word of God within her womb demonstrates Mary’s sanctity: “And Mary, in hearing these words ... understood them and was persuaded that God was dwelling in her; her heart palpitated following an abundance of joy” (Lefort: 216). Athanasius uses the *Magnificat* to praise Mary: “Truly your soul exults in the Lord, and your spirit shakes with joy from God your savior; henceforth, every generation [will bless you], from age unto age. Listen to all the saints from the beginning, blessing you among all the generations of the earth” (Lefort: 218). Mary’s purity made her worthy to carry and nurse the mouth of the incarnate God. Then, Athanasius presents a symbolic interpretation of the *Magnificat* to refute the Christology of the Arians. The proud whom God lays low (Luke 1:51) are those who claim that Christ is a creature. The heirs of God’s blessings are the Nicene Christians: “He exercised the power of his arm and sent away those who are proud in the thoughts of their hearts,’ namely, you, Arius, and those who with you say that Christ is a creature” (Lefort: 219). Quoting the canticle again, Athanasius claims that Christians, moreover, are the true Israel: “‘He gave his hand to Israel his servant,’ that is to say to us the Christian people who believed in him” (Lefort: 219).

The Syriac tradition contains allusions and citations of the *Magnificat*. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), for example, throughout his cycle entitled the *Hymns on the Nativity*, explored God’s paradoxical way of interacting with humanity, and this is epitomized in how God chose a young and poor girl, not the daughter of a king, to be mother of God. The incarnation of Jesus in Mary led to what Ephrem calls an “overturning of orders” – perhaps an allusion to Luke 1:52 – that began in Mary’s womb (*Hymn* 11, str. 7, 132 in McVey).

In an early anonymous Syriac dialogue hymn, a poet imagines a conversation between the angel Gabriel and the newly pregnant Mary. Here, the words of the *Magnificat* provide a response to the angel’s greeting. The believing congregation who sung this hymn joined Mary as they sang out her words in liturgical drama:

MARY: Holy and glorious and blessed is His name,
For He has looked upon His handmaid’s low estate;
Henceforth all generations in the world
Shall proclaim me blessed. (Str. 48 in Brock 2012: 143)

In an anonymous Syriac hymn on Mary, the poet explores how all should call Mary “Blessed” (*Bride of Light, Hymn on Mary* 8, str. 1), since God chose her to be the mother of his Son, whose birth gives rebirth to all (*Bride of Light, Hymn on Mary* 8, str. 3). Also, the anonymous *Hymn on Mary* 12 presents a theological argument to honor Mary and to defend her virginal conception, using the words of the *Magnificat*:

Let all generations call me blessed
Said Mary as she exulted in joy,
For I have become, through grace, a mother to God;
I have given birth, without intercourse
To the Lamb of God, to the Lord of the angels.
(Brock 1994: *Hymn on Mary* 12, str. 5)

The sixth-century Syriac poet, Jacob of Serug, reworks the words of the *Magnificat* in a series of *Homilies on the Mother of God*. In *Homily* 3, Jacob imagines a conversation between the Mother of God and the angel Gabriel, considering the words of the *Magnificat* to be a response to Gabriel, rather than Elizabeth: “The maiden said: ‘I magnify the Lord who has done a great miracle for me; by his grace He has filled me with wonder; For henceforth all nations of the world at all times, will speak great things of me.’” (*Homily* 3.81) Jacob considers the *Magnificat* as a song of praise in which all women can participate. Mary has lifted the stigma on women that they inherited from Eve: “From this time forward woman-kind will be blessed in me, for through me the reproach of Eve is removed from womanhood” (*Homily* 3.84).

In the Latin patristic tradition, the most extensive commentary on the *Magnificat* is Ambrose of Milan’s *Commentary on St. Luke*. Ambrose calls the Canticle of Mary the most perfect that was ever composed, and he notes its similarities to the prayer of Anna, Samuel’s mother (1 Kgs 2:1). He also presents the canticle as Mary’s offering of thanksgiving to God, the source “from whom all she had was received” (ch. 1.46), thus establishing that Mary is a model of gratitude for all Christians. Indeed, he notes that Mary uses the term *my soul – anima mea* to communicate that her “ardent expression of gratitude, proceeded from her inmost soul, and all its faculties” (ch. 1.46). In addition, Mary calls “her Lord” “savior” because he bestowed salvation on Mary (ch. 1.47). It was a “work of sanctity to prepare the Virgin for so great an event” as the Incarnation, (ch. 1.49) and she is pronounced *Blessed* “both on account of the conception of the Son of God, and her own sanctity.” Ambrose emphasizes that all who have come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, Jew or Gentile, shall call Mary “blessed,” since she received the dignity of being the Mother of God. He imagines that Mary promises to generations of believers that they will have recourse to her patronage, the patronage of one who is worthy of more honor and veneration than other saints, for only heretics “gloried in decrying the Mother of God”

(ch. 1.48). Finally, Ambrose clarifies that it is the Christian people, “the Spiritual Israel,” who are the beneficiaries of God’s promise: “The virgin extols the mercy and goodness of God in bringing about the great mystery of the Incarnation, in the accomplishment of which the chief instruments were from the Jewish nation, and the chief blessings were primarily intended for the carnal descendants of Abraham, to be afterwards extended to all His spiritual children called from among the Gentiles” (ch. 1.54).

Ambrose’s commentary provided the main literary basis for one of the more important commentaries of the early medieval period (Bonney: 60). The Venerable Bede wrote a *Commentary on Luke – In Lucae Evangelium Exposition* with an analysis of the *Magnificat*, and this text paved the way for the more extensive commentaries to come in the high Middle Ages by authors like Bernard of Clairvaux (*Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary*) and Thomas Aquinas (*Catena Aurea in quatuor Evangelia*). For Bede, Mary is “blessed” or “beata” because she did not doubt God’s promises to Israel (Bonney: 61) and is a model believer whom Christians should imitate. The words of the *Magnificat* indicate that Mary is the first person whom Christ’s grace sanctifies: “It is hardly surprising that the Lord who was about to redeem the world began his action with his mother so that she, by means of whom salvation was being prepared for all humanity, would be the first to draw to the full from the fruit of that salvation and likewise from her own child,” (Bede, *Homilia* I, 3; CCLS 122, pp. 15–16, trans. Bonney: 62). Bede’s interpretation of the *Magnificat* begins with the mystery of the figure of Mary and becomes a meditation on the Church (Bonney: 73).

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Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent

B. Orthodox Christianity

The churches of the Christian East, diverse traditions originating in Eastern and Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent, afford the Bearer of God, or *Theotokos*, deep reverence and devotion as a divine protector, intercessor, and miracle worker. Eastern theology of

the *Theotokos* is expressed in its liturgy, where the *Magnificat* is most commonly found in the morning services.

In the Chalcedonian (Byzantine) churches, the *Magnificat* is sung in verses during Matins (*Orthros*). After each verse is a refrain: “More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without defilement thou gave birth to God the Word. True *Theotokos*, we magnify thee.” This is followed by the *Benedictus*.

The *Magnificat* has similar use in the non-Chalcedonian (Oriental) churches. One example is the Armenian Apostolic Church, which devotes a canon of the Morning Hour (*Aravodyan Zham*) to the Bearer of God (*Asdvadzadzin*). The *Magnificat* (*Medzatsustse*), the *Benedictus*, and the *Nunc dimittis* are read antiphonally. Then is sung a *Medzatsustse* hymn appropriate to the liturgical mode of the day, which emphasizes the intercessory role of the *Asdvadzadzin*.

The use of the *Magnificat* in both Eastern and Western Christendom belies their shared roots in the early church, but too exemplifies their doctrinal divergences over time. Western conceptions of Mariology are generally less developed in the East. Notably, the teaching of the Immaculate Conception is rejected. Eastern Christians believe that the virgin *Theotokos* was a human chosen to bear Christ, a woman of great purity and piety for whom Christ was her savior, and who died a human death. In this way, the *Theotokos* is understood only in a Christological context.

Eastern Christians interpret the *Magnificat* to explain the *Theotokos* as a woman of faith who chose to accept the Lord. This is illuminated in hymns sung in the Byzantine churches on the Feast of the Annunciation. Written as dialogues between Mary and the Angel Gabriel, Mary expresses fear, embarrassment, and uncertainty over what she is asked to do. “Thou dost announce to me that I shall bring forth child, yet I have no experience of man,” she says. “Lead me not astray, O man, with crafty words, as the crafty serpent once led astray Eve our mother (Mother Mary/Ware: 338). Mary held human agency to reject God, as Eve did. Rather, she said yes, accepting her role in Christ’s salvific mission (Luke 1:38).

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Aram Sarkisian

C. Medieval Times and Reformation Era

The Magnificat was revered consistently through the centuries as a text central to the understanding and celebration of the incarnation of Jesus. Set in the first person in its opening verses (Luke 1:46–49), Mary's song allowed the faithful to experience her joy at the incarnation in an intimate way. In the Middle Ages and through the 16th century, the Magnificat was most widely and uniformly experienced in daily practice in the form of musical recitation.

While the monastic rule of Aurelian of Arles (d. 551) assigned Mary's canticle to morning recitation, the first reference to the Magnificat in its enduring position as the climax of the evening service of Vespers occurred in the sixth-century Rule of Benedict. Within Vespers, the canticle followed the recitation of four or five psalms, a chapter, a hymn, a versicle, and short response. In the office of Lauds, the canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68–79) occupied the same position as the Magnificat in Vespers. In Vespers, the Magnificat and preceding psalms were each framed by antiphons proper to the feast. The antiphon surrounding Mary's song usually featured a text drawn from the gospel pericope of the day, thereby heightening the liturgical moment. Other musical enhancements were made to mark the solemnity of the Magnificat in Vespers. Mary's text was chanted to a slightly more elaborate formula for intonation than one would sing for a psalm tone, although the canticle was treated like a psalm tone on account of its bipartite unfolding of verses and the inclusion of the doxology ("Gloria patri") at its conclusion. The singing of the Magnificat was often amplified ceremonially by a censing of the altar or the ringing of bells on particularly high feasts.

Musical splendor was extended further in choral compositions on the text of Luke 1:46–55. Renaissance composers set Mary's song in choral polyphony more than any other biblical passage. It was customary in Magnificat settings to arrange every other verse in polyphony, while the alternating verses of the canticle were retained as chant in the designated musical mode. Orlando de Lassus wrote more than one hundred settings of the Magnificat, far more than any 16th-century composer.

The outpouring of luxurious musical settings of the Magnificat was not echoed in visual art. Although the scene of the Visitation was a topic for artists to take up, not more than a handful of paintings survive on Mary's song itself. Commentators through the centuries, however, do provide a rich exegetical tradition on the canticle. In his homily on the Magnificat, Bede considers Mary a special beneficiary of extraordinary spiritual gifts that allowed her to return praise to God and to obey faithfully God's commands. Jean Gerson's *Collectiorum super Magnificat* (ca. 1427–28), which survives in thirty-four manuscripts and two prints from the

1470s, stands out among the later medieval tracts on the canticle of Mary. Each of twelve treatises in his unparalleled and extensive compendium explicates a phrase from the Magnificat and is cast in a dialogue between master and disciple. Other writers such as Guillaume Durand and the anonymous author of the 12th-century *Liber quare* addressed the placement and function of the Magnificat in the office of Vespers.

More controversial readings of Mary's canticle emerged in the early 16th century. In the 1518 *Colloques*, the Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus suggested revisions to the Magnificat in three places, changing the Vulgate *salutari* to *servatore* (Luke 1:47) and *magna* to *magnifica* (1:49), while inserting the preposition *ad* before *humilitatem* (1:48) to avoid literal translation as "humility" and rather as *parvitas* ("humble condition"). Whereas Mary's humility was considered a praiseworthy virtue by medieval exegetes, Erasmus placed emphasis on the Virgin's lowliness as a circumstance. This particular gloss drew criticism, which Erasmus defended in extensive commentary.

Martin Luther's *Commentary on the Magnificat* (1521, LW 21) was dedicated to Johann Frederick, future Elector of Saxony and an early supporter of the Reformer. Compiled for the prince's edification, the tract urged the young man to keep in mind Mary's canticle as a ruler. Luther echoed Erasmus' concern for the word *humilitatem*, translating it as "Nichtigkeit" in the Magnificat commentary and "Niedrigkeit" ("low estate") in his 1522 NT. Luther drew attention to the verb *respexit* ("regarded"), believing it an injustice to think that Mary would glory in her humility rather than her virginity. Others were even more rigorous with the interpretation of *humilitatem*. In a 1557 sermon on the Visitation, Protestant theologian Johannes Brenz wrote: "Mary is not glorying in her virtue or justice, or her merits before God. But *humilitas* in this passage means misery, affliction, scorn, and abjectness." (Brenz: 1200) For reformers, humility was not a state that God should reward. Well after Luther's excommunication from the Roman church, he still promoted Mary's canticle as an appropriate window into an honorable society under God's watch, one that would never be swayed either by the wealthy or the powerful on earth. Above all, Luther used the Magnificat to develop Mary's role as a teacher and a unique example rather than an object of praise: "In proportion as we ascribe merit and worthiness to her, we lower the grace of God and diminish the truth of Magnificat" (Pelikan: 322). Reformer Caspar Huberinus wrote that the Magnificat affirmed that we should call Mary "blessed," but he warned not to pray to Mary, so as not to add a fourth person to the Godhead (Huberinus: 240r–v). The canticle for reformers was nonetheless a prime text explaining the relationship between God and

man, even in the absence of any specific language about Jesus.

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Michael Anderson

D. Modern Europe and America

Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, culminating in her articulation of the Magnificat, is a celebratory moment in Luke's account of Jesus' conception and nativity. The movement of the unborn John the Baptist within Elizabeth's womb indicates that the child Mary is carrying will be the Messiah. The Magnificat is Mary's response as she praises God for her election (Luke 1:46–55), celebrating how “my soul magnifies the Lord.” This song has remained a significant element in the Christian Church's liturgy. It is the second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary and is a fixed part of the service of Vespers. Its Feast is celebrated on May 31 in the Catholic Church (except in Germany, where an older date of July 2 is retained, as it is in the Lutheran Church). In Anglicanism, it is sung at Evensong. It is the liturgical text most frequently set by early modern composers, including Monteverdi and Bach, a tradition continued in recent centuries by, among others, Bruckner, Vaughan Williams, and Rutter (cf. “IV. Music”).

The modern scholarly consensus that Luke 1 and 2 were late additions to what became the canonical text was not raised until the 19th century. Nor was the attribution of the Magnificat to Mary widely questioned until then: some early manuscripts include an opening phrase, “And Elizabeth said,” so the canticle may have been originally assigned to her. For 1500 years the stories in Luke 1–2 were interpreted as God's intervention in history. In the post-Enlightenment cultural shift – what Max Weber referred to as “disenchantment” – the place of the Annunciation-Visitation-Magnificat sequence became caught up in that transition.

Early modern Europe inherited two exegetical emphases that can be distinguished from each other: 1) Mary is seen to affirm her worthlessness before God, providing a model of humility to Christians; 2) Mary is exalted as the instrument that

brings forth the power of the Lord, elevated – or, as many Catholic commentators affirmed, created from all eternity – as Queen of Heaven. Catholic exegetes continued the medieval emphasis that Mary's humility was not just praiseworthy but evidence of her own merit; Lutheran and Reformed traditions emphasized that Mary acknowledged her election as entirely due to divine grace, not to any inherent worthiness. The emphasis on her humility remains dominant among Protestants. In discussions of ideal female behavior, reticence is universally praised, with Mary as the model of obedience and humility. Catholic commentators stress God's grace, manifest in Mary's own graciousness and mediated through her to humankind. Indeed, for some Catholic exegetes, divine grace comes to humans only through Mary and in the Magnificat she gave voice to that exalted place. Within Baroque theology, the writings of Pierre Berulle, Jean Eudes, and other members of what are loosely termed the “mystics” of the French School in the 17th century celebrated the uniqueness of the Virgin such that a female principle is firmly, even gloriously, at the center of salvation and its articulation. Hailed by Elizabeth, Mary's role as Mother of God signifies the presence of divinity within the very fiber of the material creation: “being in her is like being in heaven” (Berulle: 161). Eudes' word-by-word commentary on the Magnificat similarly combines humility and exaltation. Mary exemplifies perfect feminine reticence in not revealing the “tremendous mystery which exalted her to the highest pinnacle,” but her humility is combined with triumphant affirmations of her power and inherent grace: “She considered herself as being the last [of all creatures], even though she was in fact the first” (Eudes: 62).

Many artists, such as Ghirlandaio or Pontormo, lovingly recreated the Visitation scene as a whole. The Magnificat, however, inspired few visual representations, possibly an indication of patriarchal reluctance to portray female authorship of such powerful prophetic utterance. One popular cultural form in which the Magnificat features frequently is the semi-fictional biography, the retelling and elaborating of incidents from Mary's life, using material from the Gospels and the *Protevangelium* or the medieval *Legenda aurea*. Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653) has Joseph and a few women servants who are “noble and venerable” accompany Mary in a courtly visit to her cousin. Chiara Matricani (1515–1604?) writes of both Mary's “divinity” and her profound “humility” in the scene which is described with sentimental hyperbole, contributing to a tradition that continues to the present day in a multiplicity of sermons, tracts, holy cards, children's stories, and pious devotions (cf. Haskins).

A crux for the reception of the canticle is its emphasis on the overturning of the mighty and powerful and the promotion of the lowly and humble. In

accord with the apocalypticism of some of Jesus' sayings later in Luke and in the apocryphical "sayings"-Gospel of Thomas, the Magnificat praises God that those of lower estate or in poverty will be elevated. In rising rhetoric, using intensifying parallelisms, the poor ones, the *anawim*, among some of whom the song probably originated, are extolled as downtrodden by the proud, the rich, and the mighty. Most pre-modern commentators filtered out the note of apocalyptic proclamation and defiance, and read the prophecy metaphorically. But some more radical voices in Protestantism, like the English Leveller Gerard Winstanley or the Ranter Abider Coppe picked up on the revolutionary implications of Mary's song as "magnifying" not only God, but celebrating God's choosing the poor and underprivileged over the rich (Paulson: 134–35). Some early modern women writers turned to Mary's prophetic role in the Magnificat as an empowering precedent, bringing into language what Julia Kristeva describes as the "semiotic within the symbolic" through the "rhythms, the alliterations, the primary processes" (Kristeva: 252) of women's prophetic voices. The poet Eleanor Davies, for example, looks towards the coming of a new age when the Lord will "put his word in [women's] Mouth. He powreth his spirit upon his hand-maidens" and "the rich" will be "sent emptie away" (Davies: 2).

Like much of the NT narrative, the Magnificat was caught up in the gradual scholarly scepticism regarding the textual integrity and historicity of the NT narratives initiated by Enlightenment figures like Spinoza, Richard Simon, or John Toland. Writing in the early 19th century, David Friedrich Strauß commented that the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and her ecstatic outburst bears the "indubitable marks of an unhistorical character" (Strauß: 150). Notwithstanding a modern scholarly consensus that the Magnificat draws heavily on Hebrew songs and that it is a theologemnon, a literary rather than a historical event, it has retained its liturgical role and to an extent its apparently historical character in mainstream Christian belief and devotion.

In the late 20th century, there was increased interest in the Magnificat as it became central to Christian liberation theologies, especially in Latin America, that looked towards social change, even revolution. Many modern readings stress God's out-reaching to the economically poor and, more broadly, any who are oppressed or marginalized by a dominant culture. For many modern feminist theologians, crucially, the Magnificat is spoken or sung by a woman. It is a woman, the English Catholic theologian Tina Beattie argues, who is "the first to know, and in the Magnificat the first to articulate, the fullness of God's reconciling love" (Beattie 1999: 446); the Magnificat is "a narrative for and about women, in which women speak for them-

selves and proclaim their own salvation" (Beattie 2002: 168). And so whether for pious believers continuing to believe in and celebrate the historicity of the scene or for scholars, artists, and cultural theorists intrigued by its power, the Magnificat retains its fascination.

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Gary Waller

E. World Christianity

Mary's exuberant response following the angelic visitation has continued to challenge and inspire devotion for generations of African Christians. The Magnificat as it is commonly referred to, conveys Mary's prophetic utterance of the great reversals that would characterize the kingdom of her son (Luke 1:46–55). Following Elizabeth's affirmation of her reflexive acceptance of the divine nomination to bear the God-child (v. 45), Mary begins by proclaiming the greatness of God her savior and affirming his love towards her as the singular reason for which generations henceforth would recognize and honor her as the woman favored above all women (v. 48). This she rightly regards as a great thing done to her.

Within her prophetic interpretation of the incarnational deed, the powerful are brought down from the thrones that empower them for injustice while the weak are uplifted and empowered; the hungry and empty are filled with good things while those who are full and rich are emptied and sent away with nothing (vv. 51–53). In the upside-down and inside-out kingdom of Mary's messiah-son it would all be played out; the first would be last while the last become first; losses would translate into gain while greatness would be measured by service without borders. The magnificat foretells the consequential realities of God becoming man; of the favor it represents, the mercy it invokes and the reciprocity of its status inversions. The magnificat also highlights the role of righteous heritage as a stimulant for God's redemptive mercy which remains unde-

tered by the passage of time: That God is able to remember mercy on account of his faithful servants onto their descendent kin (vv. 54–55).

In the African context, the *magnificat* continues to inspire men and women alike. Mary's spontaneous applause of confident praise is congruent with many African situations where reflection on God's goodness has inspired many a song and dance in celebration of God's unmerited kindness. On such occasions words are not enough to articulate the astonished gratitude with which African Christians respond to God's saving grace and mercy: Theirs is unfettered grace without entitlement; theirs is the reversal of status that translates the materially poor into spiritual endowment; theirs is the uplifting enthronement with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6–7) for which a jubilant dance is a fitting response.

As in the *Magnificat*, material poverty presents no impediment to the river of God's mercy and justice. In this way, the *Magnificat* challenges every form of injustice and inspires Christians to work for justice and mercy. The *Magnificat* thus emboldens anticipatory Christian hope and longing for the coming of a day when God's redemptive and retributive justice will be fully realized and when – in his name – all oppression and injustice will cease. So whether it be in situations of war and conflict, famine, corruption, economic injustice or drought, African Christians have continued to position themselves as co-laborers with God to see his kingdom come. Their daily experience of God in his protection and his provision serves to confirm that there can only be one way in the advance of the Kingdom of God and of his messiah – forward, until it is fully realized on earth as it is in heaven. Injustice in any sphere, economic, social, political, or spiritual, is perceived as a legal target for their transformational engagement. They do this in Africa – where to have an heir is to continue living, motivation enough to apprentice their children in the things of God in the expectation of his trans-generational mercies on account of a righteous heritage. As with Mary in the *Magnificat*, African Christians see themselves as called to proclaim God's unabated advance irrespective of any prevailing exigencies, fully cognizant of the fact that even in the worst of their circumstances God is not defeated.

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Joshua K. Rutere

III. Literature

The *Magnificat*, the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46–55), has long been part of the churches' liturgy – part of the morning office in the East, and part of vespers/evensong in the West. The 15th-century *Myroure of Oure Ladye*, associated with the Brigittine nuns at Syon Abbey, offers an extended semi-allegorical explanation for the inclusion of this canticle in the evening office.

The *Magnificat* is included in most Middle English plays of the Visitation, as in the Wakefield plays (performed into the late 16th century) and the *Ludus Coventriae* (late 15th century), in the latter of which Mary speaks the lines in Latin, and has Elizabeth follow each line with an English translation or paraphrase. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (late 14th century) twice quotes snippets of the *Magnificat*, including the reference to God's promise to Abraham and his descendants (Luke 1:55), placed in the mouth of Abraham himself in Passus 16. There are possible allusions to the *Magnificat* in *Paradise Lost* (1667/74), as in 12.346, where a reference to God's covenant with David is couched in the language of Luke 1:54 in the *Book of Common Prayer* translation. The writer and poet Chiara Matraini (1515–1604?), influenced by Counter-Reformation ideology, wrote a *Breve discorso sopra la Vita e laude della Beatiss. Verg. E Madre del Figliuol di Dio* (*Discourse on the life of the most blessed Virgin and Mother of the Son of God*, 1590) in which she builds on the infancy account of Luke, with allusions to, and quotation of, the *Magnificat*, to set out the life of the blessed Virgin in a kind of long, personal prayer (Haskins 2008: 69–70). Matraini's junior contemporary Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), a physician and author, likewise composed a work on the life of the Virgin featuring a long paraphrase of the *Magnificat*, the *La Vita di Maria Vergine Imperatrice dell'Universo* (1602, *Life of the Virgin Mary, empress of the universe*).

These premodern works are almost entirely devotional in tone and content, and while devotional literature incorporating the *Magnificat* continued and continues to be produced as Marian devotion has never slackened, modern literature and poetry has tended to make other uses of the canticle than strictly devotional. It has been, for instance, a source of inspiration for a large number of poets, including important modern American poets such as Carol Muske, Toi Derricotte (both of whom wrote poems entitled "*Magnificat*," in 2000 and 2012 respectively) and Patricia Goedicke ("*Love Song and Magnificat* [O Short Prince]," 2001). The tone in these sort of poems is more searching and pensive, rather than simply laudatory or catechetical. Authors like the German Christian feminist Dorothee Sölle (1929–2003), seek to draw out feminist and egalitarian themes:

It is written that Mary said
"he has shown strength with his arm

he has scattered the proud,
 he has put down the mighty from their thrones
 and exalted them of low degree.”
 Today we express that differently.
 We shall dispossess our owners, and we shall
 laugh at
 those who claim to understand feminine nature.
 The rule of males over females will end.
 Objects will become subject.
 They will achieve their own best rights.
 (“Meditation on the magnificat,” 1977)

In other settings, it has been used to great emotional effect. Sigrid Undset’s *Kristin Lavrandatter* trilogy (*Kransen*, 1920 [Wreath]; *Husfrue*, 1921 [The wife]; *Korset*, 1922 [The cross]), a set of three historical novels set in 14th-century rural Norway, revolves around the life of Kristin, a young woman who comes from a devout family, but ends up falling in love with Erlend, an adulterous excommunicate. Kristin becomes pregnant with Erlend’s son before the two are wed, and in a scene of great pathos not long after the child’s birth, Kristin goes to a church in spiritual and emotional distress, weighed down by her sins. In an intense inner monologue, she recites the opening lines of the *Magnificat* while comparing her own son’s sinful conception to the virginal conception of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.

At other times, an allusion to the canticle is meant to provoke a reaction, as when Chelsea Quinn Yabro’s speculative fiction ebook *Magnificat*, which uses the canticle as an epigraph. The story is set in an alternate universe closely resembling our own, and takes as its premise the election of a non-Christian, Chinese woman as pope, and explores the consequences of this election. The reader is clearly meant to read the election as analogous to the Annunciation, and to consider what it would mean for the Roman Catholic Church to have the Holy Spirit work in such an unusual manner.

In Charlotte Hastings’ play *High Ground* (originally staged as *Bonaventure* in London in 1949), the main character, Sister Mary Bonaventure, sets about trying to prove the innocence of a woman accused of murder, whose innocence she intuitively feels, but cannot initially prove. The ongoing dialogue between Sister Mary and her Mother Superior implicitly pits Mary’s intuition against Mother Superior’s authority, and so it is in a curiously triumphant vein that Sister Mary exultantly recites the opening of the *Magnificat* in the closing lines of the play when she has been able to prove the innocence of the accused murderer.

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Sean Otto

IV. Music

The canticle of the Virgin, Mary’s praise of the Lord in response to Elizabeth’s exuberant greeting when Mary comes to visit her after the Annunciation (Luke 1:39–45), is known as the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55) – taking its name from the opening word in the Vulgate. The Magnificat has been sung independently of the narrative context during Vespers (at least) since the early Middle Ages (see also “Magnificat II. Christianity” above). The sixth-century Rule of Benedict (ch. 17:8) specifies that a canticle of the NT is to be sung toward the end of Vespers (Venarde: 83; see also “canticle”). Amalar of Metz (in book 4:7 of his *Liber officialis* from ca. 822) makes it clear that the Magnificat was sung daily for Vespers, quoting also Beda from the early eighth century at length (Amalar 2:364–65 and 370–73). Manuscripts for the Divine Office over the following centuries show this as a stable tradition in the Latin West all through the Middle Ages and beyond in the Catholic Church (Steiner et al.). In this place and for centuries, it was chanted with an introductory antiphon and the customary doxology, *Gloria patri* (see “Gloria”) to a canticle tone, which was often more elaborate than most tones for psalm recitations, although manuscripts differ in this respect. The antiphons would either quote or paraphrase a short part of the Magnificat or from the gospel for the mass of the day in question (Steiner et al.).

The Magnificat was not only sung in the Roman Church. In the medieval Byzantine Church, it was sung (in Greek) during the *Orthros*, a daybreak service before the daily celebration of the Eucharist (Constantelos). The Lutheran churches continued the medieval Latin practice of singing the Magnificat for evening services. In his *Deutsche Messe* (1526, *German Mass*) Luther expressed his wish to have services also in Latin (Luther: 63). In connection with the vesper service, he wrote “we want to keep the youth well versed in the Latin Bible,” and he continues to describe daily morning and evening services with both German and Latin texts and songs, specifying along the way for vespers, “the Magnificat follows in Latin with an antiphon or hymn” (Luther: 69). However, the Magnificat in German was also included in many Lutheran hymnbooks among other German canticles. While other German canticles disappeared from most hymnals in the 18th century, the German Magnificat was still regularly sung (Leaver: 242–74). Similarly, in the Church of England, the Magnificat was also sung in English for Evensong (Harper: 173–74).

According to Winfried Kirsch, the Magnificat (including the doxology) was first set in polyphony in the 14th century and became the most common liturgical text to be set in polyphony between the mid-15th and the early 17th century, except for the ordinary of the mass (Steiner et al.; see also “Mass II. Music”). Polyphonic settings were sung for festive vespers in the Roman Church as well as in Lutheran churches and the Church of England. There are numerous settings by Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican composers in the 16th–18th centuries, in the vernacular (for the two latter categories) as well as in Latin (see above, Steiner et al., and Bertoglio: 377–81). Some composers even wrote large numbers of Magnificat settings; Palestrina wrote more than thirty, Orlando de Lassus around 100 (Steiner et al.). This also had to do with the need for Magnificats in various modes in order to fit the (proper) antiphons (changing with the day).

Composers setting the Magnificat include, beside the already mentioned, Gilles Binchoys, Guillaume Dufay, Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Nicolas Gombert, Thomas Tallis, all belonging to the 15th and 16th centuries, when almost all composers set the Magnificat. Sometimes settings were in simple polyphony, at other times the Magnificat was set in complex artistry (Steiner et al.; see also Perkins 1999: 336–41, 550–55 and Perkins *Grove Music Online*). In the 16th and 17th centuries, William Byrd, Tomás Luis de Victoria, Claudio Monteverdi, Michael Praetorius, Heinrich Schütz, Heinrich Biber, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, and François Couperin among many others, famously set the Magnificat (Steiner et al.; Perkins: 918; Dann/Sehnal; Hitchcock; Higginbottom). In some cases, a Magnificat was set as part of a full setting of all the choral items of a vesper service, as in Monteverdi’s *Vespro della beata Vergine* (1610). Similarly, Pietro Francesco Cavalli, maestro di cappella at the San Marco basilica in Venice, as had been also Monteverdi, published three vesper settings in 1675, the *Vespro della B.V. Maria*, the *Vespro delle domeniche*, and the *Vespro delli cinque Laudate*, which, naturally, also included the Magnificat (Walker/Alm). The settings in the 17th century, as seen in, e.g., Monteverdi’s, Schütz’s, and Cavalli’s Magnificats, were characterized by the new musical style, developed from the end of the 16th century, where accompanied solo singing alternated with choral singing in so-called concerted settings.

In the first decades of the 18th century, Antonio Caldara made several settings (Pritchard), inspiring also J. S. Bach’s setting (in Latin) from 1723 which he later reworked in 1733 (Wolf/Emery). As pointed out by Christoph Wolf, Latin liturgical settings were still used in Lutheran worship on Sundays, and “the concerted Magnificat continued to hold its place in Vespers” (Wolf/Emery). Bach also set parts of the German Magnificat text (Luke 1:46–48, 54) in his cantata *Meine Seel erhebt den Herren* in 1724 (My soul

doth magnify the Lord) for the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, interspersed with recitatives and arias, concluding in a choral setting of the German *Gloria patri* (Stokes: 16–18).

Telemann and C. P. E. Bach set the Magnificat, as did Vivaldi in the Catholic world, and, later in the century, W. A. Mozart set the Magnificat three times in vesper compositions. As Roger Bullivant notes, Mozart’s settings are “symphonic” in the sense that the whole Magnificat (including the *Gloria patri* ending) is shaped in one overall form, as opposed to, for instance, J. S. Bach and Telemann, where each verse was set in a separate movement (Steiner et al.). In Mozart’s last setting, from the *Vesperae solennes de Confessore* (Solemn vespers for a confessor; Salzburg 1780) for soloists, chorus and orchestra, performed at a solemn vesper at one of the highest holidays of the church year in the Salzburg Cathedral, the Magnificat setting is almost in a sonata form (Schick: 221). Even so, Mozart’s setting respects the semantic variations within the text. Within a brief setting, certain words and sentences stand out from the overall atmosphere of jubilant praise as, for instance, the sentence *esurientes implevit bonis: et divites dimisit inanes* (“he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” Luke 1:53). The first part is a solo for the soprano, whereas the full chorus sings the second part first forcefully (on *et divites*, “and the rich”), but suddenly continues softly, almost mysteriously, on *dimisit inanes* (sent away empty).

In the 19th century, Schubert set a Magnificat for soloists, chorus, and orchestra (with organ) as a young man in 1815 (Brown et al.). Felix Mendelssohn set the Magnificat twice, as a boy of thirteen in 1822, inspired by J. S. Bach’s and C. P. E. Bach’s settings (Todd: 92–93), and again toward the end of his life, in 1847, as one of his *Drei Motetten* (Three English church pieces) op. 69, published only after his death with German-English texts. This collection includes precisely the canticles in use for the Anglican Evensong, among which the last of the three, the Magnificat, is the most ambitious (Todd: 558–59). Anton Bruckner set the Magnificat for soloists, chorus and orchestra (including organ) in 1852 (Hawkshaw/Jackson).

Franz Liszt composed a setting for chorus and orchestra in 1874, but already in his *Dante Symphony* (1856), he decided, partly after Richard Wagner’s advice, not to compose a purely orchestral paradise movement after the first two movements of the symphony (Inferno and Purgatory). Instead, he chose to include a Magnificat setting (for either women’s or boys’ voices) as the third movement. In this third movement, he set only the first couple of sentences from the Magnificat followed by hosannas and hallelujahs, constituting in this way a vision of paradise accompanied by ascending series of triads with a descending diatonic bass line, i.e., descend-

Slowly, drawn out The structure of the upper voices is superimposed through.

SOPRANO
ALTO
TENOR
BASS
PIANO
For Practice Only

My soul doth mag-ni-fy, doth mag-ni-fy,
My soul doth mag-ni-fy, doth mag-ni-fy,
My soul doth mag-ni-fy the Lord, and my Spir-it hath re-
joiced in the melody of the bass
the Lord, O high-er than the Che-ra-bim, more
fy the Lord, O high-er than the Che-ra-bim, more
fy the Lord, O high-er than the Che-ra-bim, more
joi-iced in God my Sa-viour.

In the same tempo (♩ = ♩)
Very lightly and tenderly

Fig. 9 S. Rachmaninoff, *Magnificat* [Beginning]; op. 37, No. 11

ing in whole tone steps (Watson, Dufetel). The ethereal sound of the setting seems not to be designed to convey the actual words of the Magnificat, evoking rather “one of the ladders described by [the patriarch] Jacob or Dante, ascending toward paradise as a luminous, glorious and ecstatic apparition” (Dufetel: 392).

Among his liturgical music for the Russian Orthodox Church, Tchaikovsky set a vesper service, op. 52 (1881–82), for unaccompanied chorus (Wiley), which includes a (Russian) setting of the Magnificat. In the 20th century, Rachmaninoff’s *Vsenoshchnoye bdeniye* (1915, All-night vigil) includes a setting of the Magnificat in Russian (Norris; cf. fig. 9).

Settings of the Magnificat in the 20th century further include Penderecki’s *Magnificat* (1974) for seven male voices, boys’ chorus, two choruses and orchestra. It combines his earlier serial avant-garde compositional style with diatonic triads, including also “a triple fugue (in ‘Quia respexit’) and poly-rhythmic textures” (Thomas). Arvo Pärt’s *Magnificat* (1989) for unaccompanied mixed choir is a short setting in Pärt’s well-known mature *tintinnabuli* style (Steiner et al.).

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See also → Ambrose of Milan; → Bach, Johann Sebastian; → Benedictus; → Gloria; → Luther, Martin; → Mary (Mother of Jesus); → Mercy; → Nunc Dimittis; → Telemann, Georg Philipp

Magog (Person)

According to genealogies in Gen 10:2 and 1 Chr 1:5, Magog (MT *Māgōg*; LXX Μαγωγ) is one of the seven sons of Japheth, son of Noah, whose subsequent descendants are not mentioned. While certainly belonging to the group of eponyms related to the mostly Indo-European nations in northern Israel, Magog's location is nonetheless not known. Throughout the history of biblical interpretation, a number of places have been suggested, such as the Scythians (Josephus) or the Goths (Jerome). Other scholars have identified it with *Gagā(ya)* mentioned in the Amarna correspondence, and some refer to the Assyrian *māt Gūgi* and, thus, find in Gyges a reason to locate Magog in Lydia (however, others point to Alyattes or to a Lydian as general designation for a ruler). Magog is also mentioned in the apocalyptic prophecies of Ezek 38–39, where it as an ethnic and geographical term (38:2; 39:6) related to Gog. This is why the word “Magog” is sometimes considered to be an artificial derivation of “Gog,” with the prefix *ma-* to mark the place of origin. However, “the land of Magog” in Ezek 38:2 remains from the text-critical point of view uncertain, and some scholars see it as a gloss. In 39:6 of the LXX, Gog appears instead of Magog, and the occurrence can, thus, not be confirmed. Nevertheless, Magog, together with Gog, has found its way into Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic literature (cf. Rev 20:8).

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See also → Gog and Magog

Magog (Place)

→ Gog and Magog

Magpiash

Magpiash (MT *Magpī'āš*; LXX Μαγαφης; Vg. *Mecphia*) is mentioned in Neh 10:21 (ET 10:20) as a member of the Judean community who signed the covenant. Magpiash, which may be a variant of Magbish (found in Ezra 2:30), is among a group of

names that are probably more closely related to place names, most notably Anathoth and Nebai (variant of Nebo; Neh 10:20, Eng 10:19). In the example of Nebai, Meyer and later Williamson (324) have argued that families may have adopted the names of the villages and towns they were from (see also Noth). This may be the case with Magpiash, which was a town in the list of settlers in Ezra 2:30, following the town of Nebo (Ezra 2:29).

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Magus, Simon

→ Simon Magus

Mahalab

Mahalab (MT *Mēheḥel*) is one of the Canaanite cities located south of the Litani river, regarded as a part of the tribal territory of Asher (Josh 19:29). In LXX^B of Josh 19:29 the phrase “from Leb and Achzib” (ἀπὸ Λεβ καὶ Ἀχοζοβ) is found, and therefore *mḥbl* in MT is probably a corruption of *mḥbl*. This hypothesis is confirmed by Judg 1:31, which places “Ahlab” before “Achzib” as a settlement that Asher was not able to conquer. This location is also found in Sennacherib's annals which record the settlements located between Sidon and Acco: i.e. Great Sidon, Little Sidon, Beth-Zaith, and Mahalab (Mahalliba, ANET: 287), among others.

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Mahalalel

1. Son of Cainan

Mahalalel (MT *Mahalaḥēl*; Sam. Pentateuch *Māllēlāl*; LXX Μαλελελ), son of Cainan and father of Jared, belongs to the lineage of Seth (Gen 5:12–16; 1 Chr 1:2). His name is composed of two elements, the first either a participle or a noun of the root *h-l-l* (to praise), the second clearly the noun *'ēl* (God, or the deity *El*), resulting in the meaning “praising God” or “praise of God.” Mahalalel is, like the Cainite Mehujael with a similar sounding name, member of the fifth generation of humankind (so explicitly 4Q369 f1 i:1), and lived 895 years (so MT, Sam. Pentateuch, and LXX). According to the original Pentateuchal chronology as preserved in the MT, one year has to be calculated between procreation and birth (cf. Gen 11:10 as well as Gen 17:1,