

**GEBIR:
SUPPLEMENT**

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

Gebir

Digital Supplement

Including Source Texts for *Gebir*,
“Crysaor”, and “The Phocæans”;
and “The Story of *Gebir*”
by Stanley T. Williams



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**LANDOR'S INSPIRATION
FOR *GEBIR*:

CLARA REEVE'S
"CHAROBA, THE QUEEN
OF ÆGYPT" (1785)¹**

1. The full title is "The History of Charoba, Queen of Ægypt. Taken From a History of Ancient Ægypt, According to the Traditions of the Arabians." It is in fact a translation of Pierre Vattier's translation of a manuscript by the medieval Arabian writer Murtadá Ibn al-'Afif (1154-June 5, 1237). We reprint Reeve's version here, sourced from the 1930 facsimile edition of *The Progress of Romance* (1785) [[Google Books](#)].

Charoba was the only daughter and heir of *Totis* King of *Ægypt*; who was likewise called *Pharaon*, and *Pheron*, by other nations.

In the reign of *Totis*, *Abraham* the beloved of God came into *Ægypt*; and it is written, that he would have corrupted *Sarah* the wife of *Abraham*, but GOD punished the king, and delivered his servants. Afterwards *Totis* shewed them great respect, and offered them gold and treasures, but they refused them. Then he recommended *Sarah* to his daughter *Charoba*, and desired her to shew her some tokens of respect. *Charoba* was a young and blooming Virgin, handsome, ingenious, and of a generous spirit, she took *Sarah* into her friendship, shewed her all kinds of honour, and sent her many rich presents. — *Sarah* brought them all to *Abraham*, and asked his advice concerning them; he ordered her to restore them, and to say that they had no need of them. — *Sarah* therefore returned them all to *Charoba*, who was surprised, and acquainted her father with all that had passed, which increased his admiration of them; seeing they refused all those things, which others the most eagerly sought, and used every means to obtain. And he said unto his daughter, — “These are persons of high estimation, who are full of holiness and sincerity, and are not covetous of perishable goods; — *Charoba* do whatever you can to shew them honour, that they may leave their blessing with us when they depart our country.”

After this, *Charoba* gave *Hagar* unto *Sarah*, who was in

due time the mother of our father *Ishmael* (God's peace be with him!)—*Hagar* was a beautiful young maiden, a Coptess by nation. When she was presented to *Sarah*, *Charoba* said—"Behold thy recompence," therefore *Sarah* called her *Agar*.

When *Abraham* had resolved to return out of *Ægypt* into *Syria*, *Charoba* provided many baskets of provision of all kinds, with preserved fruits and many excellent things to eat by the way; saying "these things are only for your accommodation by the way, and not to enrich you."

Sarah told *Abraham* of this, and he permitted her to accept this present, saying, "there was no harm in receiving it from the generous princess." *Totis* requested of *Abraham* that he would pray to God for his benediction of his country.—*Abraham* therefore prayed to God for *Ægypt* and its inhabitants.—He also gave his benediction to the Nile, and told *Totis* that his family should reign there for many ages.—Likewise he gave his benediction to *Charoba*, and *Sarah* gave her the hand of friendship, and they departed out of *Ægypt*.

Charoba caused mules to be loaden with her provisions, and sent her own people to conduct them till they were gotten quite out of *Ægypt*.

Being got a good way on their journey, *Abraham* said unto *Sarah*, "Give us to eat some of those provisions which the princess of *Ægypt* gave unto you." Then *Sarah* ordered the baskets to be set before them, and they, and their

companions also, eat of the provisions.—And they did so many days.—But when they came to the last basket, they found it full of precious jewels, and curious things, and changes of garments.—Whereupon *Abraham* said, “this princess hath deceived us, and obliged us to accept of her treasures.—Great GOD give her subtilty to deceive her enemies, and to vanquish all those who shall arise to do her harm, and to strive with her for her land!—Bless her in her country, and in her river, and make that country a place of plenty, safety, and prosperity!”

When the beloved of GOD was come into the land of *Syria*, he spent those gifts in pious works,—in lodging and feeding pilgrims, and in making many wells, which he ordered to be common. He also bought flocks and herds, which he set apart for all travellers,—for the poor and needy,—for the lame and the blind: and GOD gave him his benediction, and caused his riches to increase and multiply. Also GOD gave him children after a long time, and in his old age:—first *Hagar* bore him a son which was our father *Ishmael*; and after some years *Sarah* likewise bare a son.—And *Hagar* and her son left *Syria* and went into *Arabia*.—And *Hagar* sent a messenger to *Charoba*, to acquaint her that she had borne a son,—whereat *Charoba* rejoiced, and sent her abundance of gold, and jewels, and fine *Ægyptian* linen, to dress her son withal. Out of these treasures *Hagar* provided ornaments for the square temple at *Mecca*, and she also established a porter in the same temple.

Totis king of *Ægypt*, lived till after that time, and *Hagar* sent him word that she had a strong and valiant son; but that they lived in a barren land, and prayed him to supply them with provisions.

To this end, *Totis* caused a channel to be made on the Eastern side of *Ægypt*, and brought into it the water of the Nile, so that it carried vessels into the salt sea, which is the channel of the red Sea.—By this way he caused Wheat to be sent to *Hagar* and her son, and many other presents.—They went by water as far as *Gedde*, and from thence were carried to *Mecca* on the backs of beasts.—By these means GOD preserved the inhabitants of *Mecca*, and relieved their wants;—therefore the *Arabians* spoke well of *Totis*, and called him the just, as having performed the promises he made them, and given proofs of his good will to them.—Nevertheless, *Totis* was more feared than beloved in his own Country, for he did many unjust and cruel actions. Moreover he put many people to death, and particularly those of his own family, even his nearest relations; and this he did out of jealousy of them, lest they should deprive his daughter of the crown after his death: but *Charoba* was of a mild and gentle disposition, always endeavouring to prevent the shedding of blood. She was also of a great capacity and ingenuity:—she concealed a near kinsman from the King's cruelty, and preserved him and his family; one of which she afterwards appointed to succeed her on the throne, as we shall shew hereafter.

Totis in his old age, was hated and feared by all the nobility; and even *Charoba* dreaded his cruelty. She also suspected that they would take away the Crown from his posterity; therefore, it was surmised, that she connived at the conspiracy against his life; for he was poisoned, but no man knew by what means, or by what persons.

After *Totis* was dead, the people could not, at first, agree about a successor:—Some said they would have the race of *Abribus*, one of their ancient princes—others would have a new family called to the throne:—most of them objected to the government of a woman.—While they were thus undetermined, one of the Viziers rose up, and spoke thus to them.

“My friends,—*Charoba* is a woman of great understanding, she is likewise of a mild and merciful disposition;—there is no reason why she should be excluded from the succession:—moreover the good man that came from *Syria* and his wife have given her their benedictions:—she is beloved by all that are acquainted with her noble qualities, and if you take the crown from her and give it to another, you will certainly have cause to repent of your precipitation.”

The people on better consideration, inclined to this good advice, and the grandees of the kingdom by degrees came into it: so they deputed this Vizier to go to *Charoba*, and in their name, intreat her to fill the vacant throne. So that Vizier placed *Charoba*, in the royal seat.—The first

time she sate on the royal throne, she gave great sums away to the people; shewing great liberality, and promising much happiness to all her subjects,—she doubled the pay of the soldiers,—she honoured the priests and sages, and the chiefs of the nobility.—She likewise countenanced the magicians and their fraternity,—she caused the temples to be repaired and enlarged, and built many public edifices. She reigned many years wisely and happily; and she remembered the benediction of *Abraham*, and believed that by the protection of his God, she subdued all her enemies, and was respected by her people.

After a long time, it happened that *Gebirus* the *Metaphequian* heard of her fame; and he was minded to pay her a visit, and oblige her to marry him.—*Gebirus* was of a gigantic stature, and descended from the race of the *Gadites*,—and when he sat on the ground seemed as high as the tallest men,—he was strong of body, and fierce of disposition,—he had a distemper in his body that gave him constant pain;—his physicians advised him to seek out another country, the soil of which, with the air and water were more suitable to his temperament.

They gave him such an account of the land of *Ægypt*, that he resolved to go and take up his abode there.—He called together all his people,—he distributed money and arms among them, and then declared to them his design of taking possession of the land of *Ægypt*; and flattered them with the hopes of victory, reward, and a settlement,

in a country that was the garden of the world.—Soon after he began his march, and took with him five thousand *Gadites*, men of great stature and strength; every one of which carried a large stone upon his head, and was completely armed. He travelled till he came to the borders of *Ægypt*, and then sent a message to the Queen, desiring to know in what place she chose he should enter *Ægypt*; for he was unwilling to oppose her in any thing, but would appear to be obedient to all her commands.—His design was to marry her, and make himself King of *Ægypt*; or, in case she refused him, to dam up the course of the *Nile*, with the stones his people brought upon their heads,—to turn the channel into another country and so make the *Ægyptians* die of famine, and to ruin their country. He sent a splendid Embassy to *Charoba*, bragging of his strength and riches, and offering himself to be her husband.

Charoba had a woman servant, who had been her nurse,—an artful, subtle, contriving woman, and a great Enchantress.—*Charoba* consulted her in all affairs, and advised with her on this emergency.—She gave her advice to this effect.—“It seems to me that there is no probability of defeating these huge bodies by fighting, we must rather subdue them by stratagem; And to this end, we must manage our business so, that they may neither do harm to you, nor your subjects.—I will therefore, with your permission, go myself to him and give an answer to his embassy in your name.”

The Queen bade her do what seemed best to her. She ordered many of her servants to wait upon the nurse, to do her honour in the sight of the Prince, and to shew that she was highly esteemed by her mistress.

The nurse took with her, presents of the most valuable things in *Ægypt*,—precious stones, carved works, preserved fruits, costly garments, perfumes, arms, fine tempered swords, etc.—She presented all these rarities to *Gebirus*, which he willingly received, and afterwards enquired what answer she brought to his suit.—“Great King,” said she, “My mistress is sensible of your valour and merit, and is far from refusing so advantageous an offer; but she must wait for a proper time, before she can reward your love according to your deserts.—The nobility are jealous of a foreign prince; and she must manage with them so as to bring them to agree, and to receive you as their sovereign lord; in the mean time you must shew readiness to obey all her commands;—to reside where she shall appoint, and to do what she shall require, and she will take care to provide for you and your servants.” He returned for answer.—“If she will receive me for her husband, I am ready to obey her commands in all things; and if the nobility refuse to accept me for a King, let her call upon me, and I will compel them to her will:—and tell her for a marriage gift, I will bring her whatever she pleases to ask of me.”—“My Queen,” replied this cunning ambassadress, “needs not any thing of yours, seeing, that all the riches on both sides, will

henceforward be in common between you: but while she is employed in promoting your interest and happiness, she desires that instead of a marriage present, you will cause a city to be built on that side next the great sea, that it may be an honorable mark of your affection to her even to the end of the world.—And that it may be a discovery of your great power, and strength, she would have you employ in this work, those great stones and pillars, which she is informed you brought to dam up the channel of the *Nile*;—by this you will give proof of your good intentions towards the inhabitants of *Ægypt*, and you will gain their love and duty towards you.—Moreover when this work is finished, she will over-rule all other difficulties, and make you her husband before all the world.”

The King was exceeding glad at this proposal, and granted her request.—And so it was agreed between them that he should enter *Ægypt* on the west side, and that he should found a city there; which was in the same place where *Alexandria* now standeth. So he encamped his army on the sea-side, and *Charoba* sent provisions for him and his people.

Now there were the ruins of a city in that place, which city was founded by *Sedad*, the son of *Gad*, who was a great King, and purposed to bring thither whatever was rare and precious in all parts of the world. But the destroyer of castles prevented him, even Death, which none can escape or avoid.—There were many remains of this ancient city, and

Gebirus caused to be brought thither, all the stones and the pillars he had brought into *Ægypt*. And he assembled the engineers and the artists from all those parts, and they made a model for the new city; and *Charoba* sent him a thousand workmen. Now the nurse who was *Charoba's* confident, by her orders consulted the magicians; and they by their arts, employed certain demons of the sea, to obstruct the buildings; so that *Gebirus* spent a long time in building, and yet the city advanced very little: for whenever the buildings were nearly finished; while the workmen took their rest by night, the demons of the sea came and pulled down the buildings, and destroyed them; at which *Gebirus* was greatly troubled and afflicted, until he understood the reason, by means of a strange adventure that befel him.

Charoba had sent a thousand goats and sheep, which were milked every day for the King's kitchen. They were kept by a young shepherd to whom *Gebirus* gave the charge of them,—he had other shepherds under him, and they led their flocks out to graze every day by the sea-side.

Now the chief shepherd was a beautiful person and of a good stature and aspect. One day when he had committed his flocks to the other shepherds, and wandered far away from them, he saw a fair young lady rising out of the sea, who walked towards him and saluted him graciously.—He returned her salutation and she began to converse with him.—“Young man,”—said she, “will you wrestle

with me for a wager that I shall lay against you?" — "What will you lay, fair lady," said the shepherd, "and what can I take against you?" — "If you give me a fall," said the lady, "I will be yours and at your disposal, — and if I give you a fall, you shall give me a beast, out of your flock." — "I am content," — said the shepherd, — so he went towards her, and she met him, and wrestled with him, and presently gave him a fall. She then took a beast out of the flock, and carried it away with her into the sea.

She came every evening afterwards, and did the same, until the shepherd was desperately in love with her: — so the flock was diminished, and the shepherd was pining away with love and grief.

One day King *Gebirus*, passing by the shepherd, found him sitting very pensively by the flocks: so he came near and spoke to him. — "What misfortune hath befallen thee, shepherd? — why are thou so altered and dejected? — thy flock also diminishes, and gives less milk every day." — Upon this the shepherd took courage, and told the King all that had befallen him with the lady of the sea. — Which when *Gebirus* heard he was astonished, and in doubt whether to believe him. — "At what time," said he, "does this lady visit thee?" — "Every evening," reply'd the shepherd, "when the sun is just ready to set." — "Take off thy upper garment," said the King, "and thy bonnet also, — give them to me, and retire thyself a little way out of sight." — And the shepherd did so. So the King put on the

shepherd's upper garment and his bonnet, and sat down in his place.

At the accustomed time, the young lady came out of the sea, and saluted the King, who returned her salutation. — “Wilt thou wrestle any more with me upon the same terms?” said she. — “Yes with all my heart,” said the King. So he came towards her, and gave her a fall presently, and crush'd her very much. — She cried out to him to spare her, saying, “you are not my ordinary match.” — “No,” said the King, “I am his master.” — “Then,” said she, “put me into his hands, since I am taken; for he has treated me courteously, and I have tormented his heart with love and grief:—mean time he hath captivated me, as I have him, and I will at last reward his love. — If thou wilt resign me to thy shepherd, I will in requital, teach thee how to compleat thy buildings, and the city which thou hast begun.” He then promised to give her to the shepherd, upon condition, that she would tell him from whence came the misfortunes that happened to his buildings, and the means whereby he might finish them. — “Know then, Oh King!” said she, “that this land of *Ægypt*, is full of magicians and enchanters; and that the sea is full of demons and spirits, which assist them to carry on their affairs,—to build, and to destroy. These are they who pull down thy buildings, and obstruct thy city.” — “And what must I do to prevent them?”—said the King.

So she taught him to make certain statues of copper,

and stone, and earth, and wood, and set them along by the seaside, and she taught him to set spells upon them; so that when the demons of the sea came up to destroy the buildings, they saw the statues and returned back into the sea.

So she went and abode with the shepherd every day, but every night she returned into the sea.

From this time, the buildings of *Gebirus* advanced, and he completed many structures as he had desired. Then *Gebirus* had another conference with the lady of the sea, and he spoke thus to her.

“Behold I have expended all the money that I brought hither, and the city is not yet finished; and I have no more money. Canst not thou discover to me any hidden treasures in this land, whereby I may finish my city, and not leave off my work to my disgrace and sorrow.” —The lady replied— “There is much treasure in this ruined city, and I will instruct thee how to find it. — On the north side of your buildings there is a round place, — on the outside are seven pillars, with a brazen statue on the top of each of them. — Thou shalt sacrifice a fat bull to every one of those statues, and cause the pillar under it to be rubb’d with the blood of the bull; then perfume it with the hair of his tail, and shavings of his horns and hoofs. Then thou shalt say unto it, — “Behold the offering I make to thee, — let me have that which is under thee, and about thee.” — Having said and done thus to every one of them, measure from every pillar, on that side the face of the statue is turned towards,

fifty cubits.—Then let thy people dig there.—You shall do all this when the moon is at the full.—After you have digged thirty cubits, you will find a great door; cause it to rubb'd with the gall of the bulls, and then take it away.—You shall then descend into a cave, fifty cubits in length. In it you will find a storehouse made fast with a lock, and the Key will be under the threshold of the door; take it and rub the door with the remainder of the bulls galls, and perfume it with shavings of the horns and hoofs, and the hair of the tails, and then the door shall open.—You shall then wait a while, till the winds that are enclosed within get vent; and when they are calmed, you may enter. At the entrance, you will meet with a statue of brass, having about its neck, a plate of the same metal; on which is written a catalogue of all the treasures in these storehouses, of which you may take what you please. You shall make no stay before a dead person, whom you shall see there, laid upon a bed with regal ornaments. Let not what is about him, of jewels and precious things, excite your envy or covetousness; but, having taken away what is sufficient for your occasions, depart immediately; making fast the doors, and covering the place with earth as you found it.—Know also that there are storehouses under every pillar and its statue; for they are the tombs of seven Kings, who are buried there with all their treasures.”

Gebirus was extremely satisfied with this account which the nymph gave him; he thanked her much, and

went immediately, and did all things that she had ordered; and he found immense wealth and treasures, and many rare and admirable things.—By these means he completed the buildings of his city.

When *Charoba* heard that the city was almost finished, she was afflicted, and fell into great perturbation of mind: for she meant only to weary out the King, and to reduce him to an impossibility.

After the city was finished, *Gebirus* sent some of his chief men, with the tidings to *Charoba*; and invited her to come and see it.—She was almost overwhelmed with grief and apprehension, that she should now be compelled to marry:—but her nurse comforted her with these words.—“Do not yet despair, my royal mistress!—give not yourself further trouble concerning this audacious man.—Leave him to me, and I will shortly put it out of his power to give you any further concern, or to do you mischief.”

She returned with the messengers to *Gebirus*, and carried with her fine tapestry of great value, as a present from her mistress.—“Let this be put over the seat on which the King sitteth,” said she, “then let him divide his people into three parties, and send them forward to meet the Queen, who will give them such treatment as they deserve. When the first party shall be about a third part of the way, you shall send away the second; and when the second are got to their station, you shall send away the third:—thus they shall be dispersed about the country for the Queen’s safety,

and she shall have no cause to fear the designs of her enemies, — she will be attended by the King's servants only, and when they return she will come with them."

So *Gebirus* sent away his servants, according to her instructions, and she continued sending him rich presents every day, till such time as she knew that the first party were arrived at their station.

Then by her orders there were tables set before them covered with refreshments of all kinds; but they were all poisoned meats. — And while they sat down to eat, the Queen's men and maid-servants stood all around them, with umbrellas and fans to keep them cool; — also their liquors were cooled. So while they sat at the tables they all died from the first to the last. — Then the Queen's servants went forwards to meet the second party, which they treated in the same manner. — Then they removed to the third party, and served them as they had done the others. — So the Queen's servants went forward; and a part of the Queen's army followed them, and they buried all the dead bodies.

Then the Queen sent a message to the King, that she had left his army in and about her own city of *Masar*, and that she was coming to meet him speedily. — So she set forward with many attendants, and her nurse met her, and accompanied her to the city of the King.

When she drew near the palace, the King rose up, and went forward to meet her. Then the nurse threw over his shoulders a regal garment, which was poisoned, and which

she had prepared for that purpose; afterwards she blew a fume into his face, which almost deprived him of his senses; — then she sprinkled him with a water that loosened all his joints, and deprived him of his strength; so that he fell down in a swoon at the feet of *Charoba*. — The attendants raised him up and seated him in a chair of state, and the nurse said unto him — “Is the King well to night?” — He replied, — “A mischief on your coming hither! — may you be treated by others as you have treated me! — this only grieves me, that a man of strength and valour should be overcome by the subtilty of a woman.” — “Is there any thing you would ask of me before you taste of death?” said the Queen — “I would only intreat,” said he, “that the words I shall utter may be engraven on one of the pillars of this palace which I have builded.”

Then said *Charoba*, “I give thee my promise that it shall be done; and I also will cause to be engraven on another pillar — this is the fate of such men as would compel Queens to marry them, and kingdoms to receive them for their Kings.” — Tell us now thy last words.

Then the King said — “I, *Gebirus*, the *Metaphequian*, the son of *Gevirus*, that have caused marbles to be polished, — both the red and the green stone to be wrought curiously; who was possessed of gold, and jewels, and various treasures; who have raised armies; built cities; erected palaces; — who have cut my way through mountains; have stopped rivers; and done many great and wonderful actions; —

with all this my power, and my strength, and my valour, and my riches: I have been circumvented by the wiles of a woman; weak, impotent, and deceitful; who hath deprived me of my strength and understanding; and finally hath taken away my life:—Wherefore, whoever is desirous to be great and to prosper; (though there is no certainty of long success in this world,)—yet, let him put no trust in a woman; but let him, at all times, beware of the craft and subtilty of a woman.”

After saying these words, he fainted away, and they supposed him dead; but after some time he revived again.—*Charoba* comforted him, and renewed her promise to him.—Being at the point of death, he said,—“Oh *Charoba!*—triumph not in my death!—for there shall come upon thee a day like unto this, and the time is not very far distant.—Then shalt thou reflect on the vicissitudes of fortune, and the certainty of death.”—

Soon after this he expired.—*Charoba* ordered his body to be honorably interred in the city which he had budded:—Afterwards, she built an high tower in the same city; and caused to be engraven upon it her own name, and that of *Gebirus*: and an history of all that she had done unto him; and also those his last words.—So her fame went forth, and came to the ears of many Kings, and they feared and respected her. And she received many offers of friendship and alliance; but *Charoba* remained a virgin to the end of her life.

Now it happened about three years after the death of *Gebirus*, that *Charoba* having embarked on board a small vessel, in which she was wont to take her pleasure upon the Nile by moon-light, went on shore with some of her attendants.

As they were returning to the ship, with great mirth and jollity, it so happened that the Queen trod upon a serpent; which turned again, and stung her in the heel; the pain whereof, took away her sight. — Her women comforted her, — saying, it would be nothing. — “You are deceived,” said she. — “The day is come with which *Gebirus* threatened me: — a day which all the great ones of the earth must meet and submit to. — Carry me home immediately, that I may die there.”

The day following *Charoba* died; — having first appointed *Dalica*, her kinswoman to succeed her. — She was the daughter of that kinsman, whom *Charoba* preserved from the cruelty of her father *Totis*.

So died *Charoba*, Queen of *Ægypt*; but her name died not with her, for it remaineth, and is honoured unto this day.

Queen *Dalica*, was endowed with beauty and wisdom. — She followed the example of her predecessor, and governed her kingdom with great prudence. — She did many great works in *Ægypt*, — and caused many castles to be erected on the frontiers of the kingdom, to repel her enemies on whatever side they should be attacked. She caused

the body of *Charoba*, to be embalmed with camphire and spices; and it was carried into the city of *Gebirus*: for *Charoba* had caused her tomb to be prepared there in her lifetime, and embellished it with regal ornaments, and appointed priests to attend on it.

Queen *Dalica* solemnized the funeral of *Charoba* with great magnificence. She made her subjects rich and happy by her wise government; and, after reigning seventy years in *Ægypt*, died also a virgin, and was succeeded by her sister's son, *Ablinos*, whose posterity wore the crown of *Ægypt* for many generations.

**CLASSICAL SOURCES
FOR "CRYSAOR"**

Pseudo-Apollodorus

Having received from Hermes an adamantine sickle, Perseus flew to the ocean and caught the Gorgons asleep. They were Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa. Now Medusa alone was mortal; for that reason Perseus was sent to fetch her head. But the Gorgons had heads twined about with the scales of dragons, and great tusks like swine's, and brazen hands, and golden wings, by which they flew; and they turned to stone such as beheld them. So Perseus stood over them as they slept, and while Athena guided his hand and he looked with averted gaze on a brazen shield, in which he beheld the image of the Gorgon, he beheaded her. When her head was cut off, there sprang from the Gorgon the winged horse Pegasus and Chrysaor, the father of Geryon; these she had by Poseidon. So Perseus put the head of Medusa in the wallet and went back again; but the Gorgons started up from their slumber and pursued Perseus: but they could not see him on account of the cap, for he was hidden by it."

THE LIBRARY, BOOK 2.4, TRANS. JAMES GEORGE FRAZER

Hesiod

Hesiod was a Greek epic poet who flourished in Bœotia in the eighth century B.C. He was alongside Homer the most respected of the old Greek poets.

And again, Ceto bore to Phorcys the fair-cheeked Graiae, sisters grey from their birth: and both deathless gods and men who walk on earth call them Graiae, Pemphredo well-clad, and saffron-robed Enyo, and the Gorgons who dwell beyond glorious Ocean in the frontier land towards Night where are the clear-voiced Hesperides, Sthenno, and Euryale, and Medusa who suffered a woeful fate: she was mortal, but the two were undying and grew not old. With her lay the Dark-haired One in a soft meadow amid spring flowers. And when Perseus cut off her head, there sprang forth great Chrysaor and the horse Pegasus who is so called because he was born near the springs of Ocean; and that other, because he held a golden blade in his hands. Now Pegasus flew away and left the earth, the mother of flocks, and came to the deathless gods: and he dwells in the house of Zeus and brings to wise Zeus the thunder and lightning. But Chrysaor was joined in love to Callirrhoe, the daughter of glorious Ocean, and begot three-headed Geryones. Him mighty Heracles slew in sea-girt Erythea by his shambling oxen on that day when he drove the wide-browed

oxen to holy Tiryns, and had crossed the ford of Ocean and killed Orthus and Eurytion the herdsman in the dim stead out beyond glorious Ocean. And in a hollow cave she bore another monster, irresistible, in no wise like either to mortal men or to the undying gods, even the goddess fierce Echidna who is half a nymph with glancing eyes and fair cheeks, and half again a huge snake, great and awful, with speckled skin, eating raw flesh beneath the secret parts of the holy earth. And there she has a cave deep down under a hollow rock far from the deathless gods and mortal men. There, then, did the gods appoint her a glorious house to dwell in: and she keeps guard in Arima beneath the earth, grim Echidna, a nymph who dies not nor grows old all her days.

HESIOD, *THEOGONY*, 270-305

TRANS. HUGH G. EVELYN-WHITE

**CLASSICAL SOURCES OF
“THE PHOCÆANS”**

Justin

“In the time of King Tarquinius, a company of Phocaeans from Asia, sailing up the Tiber, formed an alliance with the Romans, and proceeding from thence to the inmost part of the gulf of Gaul, built the city of Massilia amidst the Ligurians and the savage Gallic tribes, and performed great exploits there, both in defending themselves against the fierce Gauls, and in attacking, of themselves, those by whom they had previously been molested.

The Phocaeans, compelled by the smallness and infertility of their territory, had applied themselves more to the sea than to the culture of the ground, supporting themselves by fishing, merchandise, and above all by piracy, which in those days was thought an honourable occupation. Venturing accordingly to visit the remotest shores of the ocean, they came into the gulf of Gaul and to the mouth of the river Rhone; and, charmed with the pleasantness of the country, and relating, on their return home, what they had seen, they tempted others to go to the same parts. Of the fleet Simos and Protis were the captains, who applied to the king of the Segobrigii, named Nannus, in whose territory they were anxious to build a city, desiring his friendship. On that day, as it happened, the king was engaged in preparing for the nuptials of his daughter Gyptis, whom, after the custom of that people, he intended to give in marriage to a son-in-law to be chosen at the feast.

The suitors having been all invited to the wedding, the Greek visitors were also requested to join the festival. The maiden was then introduced, and being desired by her father to give water to him whom she chose for her husband, she overlooked all the rest, and turning to the Greeks, held out water to Protis, who, from the king's guest becoming his son-in-law, was presented by his father-in-law with the ground for building a city. Massilia was accordingly built near the mouth of the river Rhone, in a remote bay, and as it were in a corner of the sea. The Ligurians, jealous of the growing greatness of the city, harassed the Greeks with continual war; but they, repelling their attacks, rose to such a degree of strength, that they conquered their enemies and planted several colonies in the lands which they captured.

From the people of Massilia, therefore, the Gauls learned a more civilized way of life, their former barbarity being laid aside or softened; and by them they were taught to cultivate their lands and to enclose their towns with walls. Then too, they grew accustomed to live according to laws, and not by violence; then they learned to prune the vine and plant the olive; and such a radiance was shed over both men and things, that it was not Greece which seemed to have immigrated into Gaul, but Gaul that seemed to have been transplanted into Greece."

JUSTIN, *EPITOME OF POMPEIUS TROGUS*, 43.3-4

TRANS. JOHN SELBY WATSON

Herodotus

162. Harpagus was now made general by Cyrus. When he came to Ionia, he took the cities by means of earthworks; he would drive the men within their walls and then build earthworks against the walls and so take the cities.

163. Phocaea was the first Ionian town that he attacked. These Phocaeans were the earliest of the Greeks to make long sea-voyages, and it was they who discovered the Adriatic Sea, and Tyrrhenia, and Iberia, and Tartessus, not sailing in round freightships but in fifty-oared vessels. When they came to Tartessus they made friends with the king of the Tartessians, whose name was Arganthonius; he ruled Tartessus for eighty years and lived a hundred and twenty. The Phocaeans won this man's friendship to such a degree that he invited them to leave Ionia and settle in his country wherever they liked; and then, when he could not persuade them to, and learned from them how the Median power was increasing, he gave them money to build a wall around their city. He gave it generously: for the circuit of the wall is of not a few stades, and all this is made of great stones well fitted together.

164. In such a manner the Phocaeans' wall was built. Harpagus marched against the city and besieged it, but he made overtures, and said that it would suffice him if the Phocaeans would demolish one rampart of the wall and dedicate one house. But the Phocaeans, very indignant at

the thought of slavery, said they wanted to deliberate for a day, and then they would answer; but while they were deliberating, Harpagus must withdraw his army from the walls, they said. Harpagus said that he well knew what they intended to do, but that nevertheless he would allow them to deliberate. So when Harpagus withdrew his army from the walls, the Phocaeans launched their fifty-oared ships, embarked their children and women and all their movable goods, besides the statues from the temples and everything dedicated in them except bronze or stonework or painting, and then embarked themselves and set sail for Chios; and the Persians took Phocaea, left thus uninhabited.

165. The Phocaeans would have bought the islands called Oenussae from the Chians; but the Chians would not sell them, because they feared that the islands would become a market and so their own island be cut off from trade: so the Phocaeans prepared to sail to Cyrnus, where at the command of an oracle they had built a city called Alalia twenty years before. Arganthonius was by this time dead. While getting ready for their voyage, they first sailed to Phocaea, where they destroyed the Persian guard to whom Harpagus had entrusted the defense of the city; and when this was done, they called down mighty curses on any one of them who should stay behind when the rest sailed. Not only this, but they sank a mass of iron in the sea, and swore never to return to Phocaea before the iron

should appear again. But while they prepared to sail to Cynrus, more than half of the citizens were overcome with longing and pitiful sorrow for the city and the life of their land, and they broke their oath and sailed back to Phocaea. Those of them who kept the oath put out to sea from the Oenussae.

166. And when they came to Cynrus they lived there for five years as one community with those who had come first, and they founded temples there. But they harassed and plundered all their neighbors, as a result of which the Tyrrhenians and Carthaginians made common cause against them, and sailed to attack them with sixty ships each. The Phocaeans also manned their ships, sixty in number, and met the enemy in the sea called Sardonian. They engaged and the Phocaeans won, yet it was only a kind of Cadmean victory; for they lost forty of their ships, and the twenty that remained were useless, their rams twisted awry. Then sailing to Alalia they took their children and women and all of their possessions that their ships could hold on board, and leaving Cynrus they sailed to Rhegium.

167. As for the crews of the disabled ships, the Carthaginians and Tyrrhenians drew lots for them, and of the Tyrrhenians the Agyllaioi were allotted by far the majority and these they led out and stoned to death. But afterwards, everything from Agylla that passed the place where the stoned Phocaeans lay, whether sheep or beasts of burden or

men, became distorted and crippled and palsied. The Agylaeans sent to Delphi, wanting to mend their offense; and the Pythian priestess told them to do what the people of Agylla do to this day: for they pay great honors to the Phocaeans, with religious rites and games and horse-races. Such was the end of this part of the Phocaeans. Those of them who fled to Rhegium set out from there and gained possession of that city in the Oenotrian country which is now called Hyle; they founded this because they learned from a man of Posidonia that the Cyrenus whose establishment the Pythian priestess ordained was the hero, and not the island.

168. Thus, then, it went with the Ionian Phocaea. The Teians did the same things as the Phocaeans: when Harpagus had taken their walled city by building an earthwork, they all embarked aboard ship and sailed away for Thrace. There they founded a city, Abdera, which before this had been founded by Timesius of Clazomenae; yet he got no profit of it, but was driven out by the Thracians. This Timesius is now honored as a hero by the Teians of Abdera.

169. These were the only Ionians who left their native lands, unable to endure slavery. The rest of the Ionians, except the Milesians, though they faced Harpagus in battle as did the exiles, and conducted themselves well, each fighting for his own country, yet, when they were defeated and their cities taken, they remained where they were and did as they were told. The Milesians, as I have already said,

made a treaty with Cyrus himself and struck no blow. Thus Ionia was enslaved for the second time: and when Harpagus had conquered the Ionians of the mainland, the Ionians of the islands, fearing the same fate, surrendered to Cyrus.

HERODOTUS, *HISTORIES*, BOOK I, 162-169

TRANS. A. D. GODLEY

“THE STORY OF GEBIR”

BY STANLEY T. WILLIAMS¹

1. Williams, Stanley T. “The Story of *Gebir*.” *PMLA*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec. 1921), pp. 615-631. Via JSTOR.

While the following article by Stanley A. Williams contains some erroneous information, it might also prove of some use to a reader seeking to situate Gebir with respect to figures of English Romanticism, including Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Having taken the time to prepare it for republication in the print edition of Gebir before realizing the extent of its flaws (most pronounced with respect to the Arabian legend of Jubair and other inaccuracies), we nevertheless offer it here for perusal.

—Jacob Siefring

Walter Savage Landor's professions, found everywhere in his letters, that he is writing for the few, and his rather studied contempt of the *aura popularis*¹ are best illustrated by his epic poem, *Gebir*, first published in 1798. For this extraordinary poem the guests are, indeed, few and select. Southey's admiration for the epic was unbounded; Lamb refers to its creator as "*Gebir* Landor";² and Shelley read and re-read the poem.³ Yet so unknown was *Gebir* to the general reader that De Quincey remarked that *Gebir* had "the sublime distinction, for some time, of having enjoyed only two readers, Southey and myself."⁴ And Miss Seward wrote Todd, the editor of Spenser and Milton, that *Gebir* was "the most unintelligible fustian that ever bore the name of an epic poem."⁵

This unpopularity was due primarily to Landor's

1. Besides Landor's lines "On His Seventy-fifth Birthday" and frequent allusions to his own unpopularity, another passage has interest: "He who is within two paces of his ninetieth year may sit down and make no excuses; he must be unpopular; he never tried to be much otherwise; he never contended with a contemporary, but walked alone on the far eastern uplands, meditating and remembering." See *Heroic Idylls with Additional Poems*, Preface.

2. *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, Vol. VIII, p. 924.

3. Thomas Hogg, *An Anecdote Biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 64.

4. *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, Vol. VIII, p. 289.

5. *The Letters of Anna Seward*, vol. VI, p. 29. Miss Seward to the Rev. J. H. Todd, June 11, 1802.

obscure manner, but partly also to the story of *Gebir*, which was not familiar through popular legend, and which sprang from hidden sources. Landor was a man of great and capricious learning. The sources of his narrative poetry are often from the minor—very minor—writers of antiquity, or from forgotten dictionaries of erudition. The legend of the king, Gebir, or Gebirus, the invader of Egypt, became through Landor the theme of a nineteenth century epic.⁶ What is the history of this story?

Gebir was from Iberia; the legend is concerned with adventures in Egypt; and the most ancient version of the tale is from Arabia. But records of Iberia, of Egypt, or of Arabia offer no evidence of the historicity of Gebir. The name, as far as I can discover, does not exist in such histories except in the case of Arabia, and in this record the Gebir mentioned is clearly not the warrior in question. Thus *La Grande Encyclopédie*, for example, speaks of: “Geber [sic] (Abou-Mousa-Djaber ben Hayyan Ec Coufy) célèbre chimiste arabe, qui a vécu vers le 8^e ou 9^e siècle de notre ère.” And, again: “Geber. Nom sous lequel on désignait, au moyen âge (en le considérant à tort comme ayant donné son nom à l’algèbre), le mathématicien arabe Abou-Mohammed Djabir ibn Aflah, de Séville, qui vivait dans la

6. Forster says that the name, Gibraltar, was derived from the word, Gebir. See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 49.

seconde moitié du XI^e siècle.”⁷ Nor does the literature of these countries indicate that King Gebir was a character either of legend or of fiction.

In fact the story of Gebir is connected not with literature of the Christian era, but is linked in a shadowy fashion with stories of Biblical antiquity. Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe in her *History of Joseph* refers to the legend as antecedent to Joseph’s adventures in Egypt. The nurse of Sabrina, to comfort her mistress in her passion for Joseph, tells her the story of the “rich Gebirus”, who wooed Charoba.⁸

Likewise the first part of William Sotheby’s *Saul* is reminiscent, at least in manner and incident, of the story of Gebir.

This story, however, is not found in the Bible. It is probably of little significance, but it is interesting that the name or word, Gebir, rare, if found at all elsewhere, does occur in the Bible, both alone and in compound. Thus the Israelites encamp in Eziongeber:⁹ “And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom.”¹⁰ “Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at

7. *La Grande Encyclopédie*, Vol. XVIII, 682, 683.

8. Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe, *The History of Joseph*, Book VI, p. 47.

9. *Numbers* 33:35-36.

10. *1 Kings* 9:26.

Ezion-geber.”¹¹ Later: “Went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea-side in the land of Edom.”¹² But besides the place the person is mentioned: “The son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars.”¹³ It should be noted that the word Geber means “a valiant man.” He was one of Solomon’s purveyors and had sole jurisdiction over Gilead.¹⁴ Yet there is no evidence to connect this Geber and the Gebir (or Gebirus) who was the invader of Egypt and the lover of Charoba.

Apparently the first version of the story of Gebir in its entirety was that found by M. Pierre Vattier, Arabic Professor to King Louis XIV. This was a manuscript, written in Arabic, in the Mazarin Library. Its full title was: *The History of Ancient Egypt, according to the Traditions of the Arabians.—Written in Arabic, by the Reverend Doctor Murtadi, the Son of Gapiphus, the Son of Chatem, the Son of Molsen the Macdesian.*¹⁵ This manuscript M. Vattier translated into French

11. 1 Kings 22:48.

12. II Chronicles 8:17.

13. 1 Kings 4:13.

14. *Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, & Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. III, 760.

15. See *The Egyptian History of the Pyramids, The Inundation of the Nile*, etc. Faithfully done into English by J. Davies of Kidwelly, 1672; and see Clara

as *L’Egypte où il est traité des Pyramides, etc.* In his preface M. Vattier praises the legend, and notes resemblances in certain points to classical literature: “Were there nothing in this story worthy of our notice but the Fable of Gebirus and Charoba, with the Adventures of the Shepherd, and the Sea-nymph, I should not repent of my trouble in this Translation. — I little thought to find in an Arabian writer, a story so nearly resembling the fables of the Greek and Latin poets. — While I was writing, it frequently reminded me of the Fourth Book of the *Odyssey*, and of several parts of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.”¹⁶

The *Bibliotheca Britannica* records the translation into English of M. Vattier’s version by John Davies in 1672. Miss Reeve says nothing of this translation, but it has always seemed possible that she may have consulted it. I have been able to compare Davies’s translation with Miss Reeve’s version. It is evident that Miss Reeve depended in no way upon Davies’s translation. Her tale is clearly a very free rendering of the French, with noticeable omissions. In Davies’s book Gebir has a brother Gebirim; there is no such person in Miss Reeve’s story. In addition, there are numerous differences of detail such as the number of the

Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, Preface, pp. xni-xiv; and *Poems, Dialogues in Verse, and Epigrams* by Landor, ed. Charles G. Crump, Vol. II, 369-70.

16. Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, Preface, p. xiv. Mr. Crump doubts the fidelity of M. Vattier as a translator of this manuscript. See *Poems, Dialogues in Verse, and Epigrams* by Landor, Vol. II, 370.

Gaddites, the effect of the nurse's message upon Gebir, and the name of the nymph. But, more than this, long episodes occurring in the French and in the English translation are left out. A digression¹⁷ dealing with charms employed by Gebir is unused; the account of the seven tombs visited by Gebir is much compressed; and the method of murdering Gebir is altered. There is never a chance echo of the phraseology of Davies. In all likelihood Miss Reeve has translated the French, and has used the story to suit her fancy.¹⁸

17. One of the several episodes found in Davies but omitted by Miss Reeve is the following: "Know, great Prince, that the Land of Egypt is a Land of Enchanters, and that the Sea there is full of Spirits and Demons, which assist them to carry on their affairs, and that they are those who take away your Buildings. But what means is there to prevent it? said the King. To do that (said she) you shall make great Vessels of Transparent glass, with covers thereto, which may keep the water from entering in; and you shall put into them Men skill'd in Painting, and with them Meat and Drink, for a week and Cloths and Pencils, and whatever is necessary for Painting. Then you shall stop the Vessels well, after you have fastened them at the top with strong Cords, and ty'd them to the Ships, and then you shall let them go into the Sea like anchors, and you shall put at the top of the cords little Bells, which the Painters shall ring; and then I will tell you what it is requisite that you should do." In the story Gebir obeys directions. The painters ring the bells, and are taken out the water with the "Draughts" they have made. Then comes the extraordinary climax: Statues are made like the draughts, and the beasts of the sea, imagining that these are other demons, flee! See John Davies, *The Egyptian History of the Pyramids, etc.*, pp. 126-128.

18. Miss Reeve was acquainted with the passage on Gebir in Mrs. Rowe's *History of Joseph*, quoting it in her Preface, p. xv. This passage runs in part:

"When Totis by his death, the sole command

Such is the history of the story of Gebir up to the time that it was read and utilized by Landor. It is highly improbable that Landor was familiar with or had, indeed, heard of any version of the legend except Clara Reeve's. Forster says that Landor often related to him the incident which led to the composition of Gebir. While staying at Swansea, one of the ladies of the family of Lord Aylmer lent him a book from the Swansea Circulating Library. This book was *The Progress of Romance, Through Times, Countries, and Manners; with Remarks on the Good and Bad Effects of It, On Them Respectively; In a Course of Evening Conversations*. The author of the book was Clara Reeve. Landor, says Forster, "found it to be a history of romance, having no kind of interest for him until he came at its close to the description of an Arabian tale. This arrested his fancy, and yielded him the germ of Gebir." The story was called by Miss Reeve "The History of Charoba, Queen of Ægypt. Taken from a History of Ancient Ægypt, According to the Traditions of the Arabians."

Landor's great indebtedness to this story has been understated both by the biographer, Forster, and by the poet

Of Misraim left to fair Charoba's hand;
The rich Gebirus from Chaldea came
With foreign pomp to seek the royal dame.
Chemis adorn'd his train, whose beauteous face
Allur'd a goddess of the watery race;
On Nilus's banks the young Chaldean stood,
When lo, Marina rising from the flood,—"

himself. Landor was led into exaggerated statements about his own originality in the poem by the following remark which appeared in the *Monthly Review*: “The poem is nothing more than the version of an Arabic tale.”¹⁹ This was grossly untrue, but Landor is hardly more truthful in his reply in his *Postscript to Gebir*, suppressed, but partially available in Forster’s *Life of Landor*. In this Forster quotes Landor as saying in effect: “There is not a single sentence in the poem nor a single sentiment in common with the Arabian tale. Some characters were drawn more at large, some were brought out more prominently, and several were added. He has not changed the scene, which would have distorted the piece; but every line of appropriate description, and every shade of peculiar manners, were originally and entirely his own.”²⁰ I shall compare first the general outlines of the two stories of Gebir, Clara Reeve’s and Landor’s; secondly, in some detail, the parallelisms and divergences in the two stories, point by point, endeavoring to demonstrate two facts: First, that the statement of the *Monthly Review* was unjust. Landor’s *Gebir* is certainly much more than “the version of an Arabic tale”; he has altered and created, and the essence and spirit of the nineteenth century poem is his. Secondly, that Landor, too, is unjust when he says that “there is not a single sentiment in

19. The *Monthly Review*, February, 1800.

20. This is the legend’s name for Pharaoh.

common with the Arabic tale"; in some respects Landor has followed his source closely.

The first eight pages of Miss Reeve's romance describe the visit of Abraham and Sara to Egypt. There Charoba, the daughter of Totis, the King of Egypt, receives Sara in friendship, bestowing many gifts upon her, among them Hagar, later the mother of Ishmael. When Abraham leaves Egypt, Charoba causes her people to guide him, and Abraham prays for Egypt, and blesses the Nile. Later Abraham and Sara find among their possessions treasures which Charoba has secretly placed there. They bless Charoba, and use the money for sacred purposes. When Hagar is delivered of a son, she sends word to Charoba. Totis conveys provisions to her through a channel made from the Nile in the eastern part of Egypt. Thus friendship is established between the Arabians and the Egyptians. Totis becomes unjust, is poisoned, possibly with the connivance of Charoba, and, after some dissension, Charoba is selected in his place.

Gebir, a giant and king of a giant race, resolves to marry Charoba, and invades Egypt. If Charoba refuses his request, he means to dam up the Nile with stones which he has brought with him for this purpose, and so starve the Egyptians. In alarm Charoba asks counsel of her nurse, who, flattering Gebir, begs him, with his stones, to build a city. Gebir consents, but demons tear down the city as he builds.

In the midst of Gebir's distress one of his shepherds

meets the “young lady of the sea”. Accepting a challenge to wrestle, the shepherd is worsted and loses, besides the best beast of his flock on the wager, his heart to the nymph. The shepherd confides in Gebir who conceives the idea of changing garments with his servant. He meets and subdues the nymph and learns from her how to make statues which will frighten away the demons. Yet Gebir’s city is still unfinished from want of money. The nymph again counsels him, this time to offer various sacrifices of bulls’ galls. Her orders are followed implicitly by Gebir, and his city is miraculously completed. Charoba now fears that she must marry Gebir, but the nurse plots against him. She induces Gebir to send his friends to her in three parties, successively, and she poisons in turn each group. The nurse then kills Gebir with a poisoned robe. Gebir dies, cursing Charoba, and ordering it to be inscribed upon his tombstone that he has met death through the guile of a woman. He prophesies Charoba’s death which, three years later, is accomplished. Dalica, a kinswoman of Charoba, becomes queen.

Landor’s story begins with the invasion of Egypt by Gebir and his race of giants. Charoba confides in her nurse, called by Landor Dalica. Dalica persuades Charoba to seek out Gebir, and to urge him to build a city in Egypt. At the first meeting Gebir falls in love with Charoba, but, unwilling to indulge in the softness of love, he leaves her, and goes to Tamar, his younger brother, who is in charge of the

royal flocks. Gebir means to divulge his passion to Tamar, but Tamar anticipates him by confession of love for a nymph, whom he met near the sea, and who challenged him at wrestling. The nymph had defeated him, and had won his love. Gebir reveals his love for Charoba.

As Gebir begins to build his city, it is continually destroyed by an unknown force. Gebir disguises himself as Tamar, meets the nymph and overcomes her. She, to win Tamar whom she now loves, reveals to Gebir certain rites. Having sacrificed before the city, Gebir sees an abyss open beneath him. He enters and visits the regions of the dead, beholding his own ancestors, and various great figures of the past.

When Gebir returns, fear and love contend for mastery in Charoba. Meanwhile, her people have learned to respect Gebir, and desire a marriage between him and Charoba. But Dalica, to whom Charoba has not confessed her love, plans treachery against Gebir. She visits her enchantress sister Merythyr, at Masar, and receives from her a poisoned robe which she means to throw about Gebir.

Landor then digresses to relate the happiness of Tamar with the nymph, who shows to her lover the glories of the ocean. There follow pictures of the warriors at their games, and of Charoba at her bath. Yet amid all the exultation Gebir is inexplicably uneasy. He plans, however, to make his declaration to Charoba. At this dramatic moment Dalica wraps the poisoned robe about Gebir. The king's death

anguish is great, and Charoba's grief is hardly less. Dalica, with wild invocation, exonerates Charoba of complicity. Gebir rouses to take leave of Charoba, and then dies.

Landor omits all the ancient story prior to the invasion of Gebir. His poem commences with Gebir's coming, because of "meditating on primeval wrongs," and not merely, as in the source, because he hears of Charoba's fame. Both stories dwell on the fact of Gebir's giant race. The phrases are very like: in the first "men of great stature and strength"; in the second "men of gigantic force, gigantic arms". The detail of the stones on the heads is used by Landor, with fidelity to the original, though he turns it into vivid verse. Miss Reeve says: "Every one carried a large stone upon his head, and was completely armed." Landor writes:

" . . . nor sword sufficed,
Nor shield immense nor coat of massive mail,
But, that upon their tow'ring heads they bore
Each a huge stone, refulgent as the stars."

In Miss Reeve's story Gebir asks Charoba where he may enter Egypt, threatening, if she refuses, to dam the Nile and starve the Egyptians. Charoba confides in her woman servant, "an artful, subtle, contriving woman, and a great Enchantress," who counsels strategy. Most of this Landor omits. Charoba asks advice of the nurse, who urges Charoba herself to persuade Gebir to build a city. Landor

makes much of the meeting of Charoba and Gebir. At this point in both stories occurs the shepherd episode. Each version is substantially the same, but Landor has expanded the incident into a closely packed narrative concerned with the beauty of the nymph and the passion of Tamar, who is here also the brother of Gebir. Now occurs the most famous passage in *Gebir*, the description of the sea-shell:

“But I have sinuous shells, of pearly hue
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed
In the sun’s palace-porch; where, when unyoked
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave.
Shake one, and it awakens; then apply
Its polished lips to your attentive ear,
And it remembers its august abodes,
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there.”²¹

21. This passage, like others in *Gebir*, was first composed in Latin. It read:

At mihi cæruleæ sinuosa foramina conchæ
Obvolvunt, lucemque intus de sole biberunt:
Nam crevere locis ubi porticus ipsa palatī,
Et quæ purpureâ medius stat currus in undâ.
Tu quate, somnus abit: [...]”

Wordsworth imitated the passage on the shell in *The Excursion*, Book IV:

“I have seen
A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract
Of inland ground, applying to his ear,
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell;
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul

Landor's story ends differently, for Tamar is in love with the lady, and Gebir confesses to him his passion for Charoba. Landor drops the incident for a time, but Miss Reeve adds the sequel at once. Gebir changes garments with the shepherd, defeats her, and learns from her charms with which to frighten away the demons. With her help Gebir finishes his city. Some of these details Landor uses, but not until later. Yet, though Landor's treatment of the source is often free, his account of the first conversation

Listened intently, and his countenance soon
Brightened with joy; for murmuring from within
Were heard,—sonorous cadences!"

Byron also uses the figure in *The Island*, Canto II, Stanza 17:

"The Ocean scarce spoke louder with his swell,
Than breathes his mimic murmurer in the shell,
As, far divided from his parent deep,
The sea-born infant cries, and will not sleep,
Raising his little plaint in vain, to rave
For the broad bosom of his nursing wave."

A critic once rebuked Byron for taking these lines from Wordsworth, though Byron, unlike Wordsworth, had acknowledged the source. Landor knew of this plagiarism, and commented on it in the *Imaginary Conversations*. In the dialogue called "Southey and Landor", Landor says: "I do not look very sharply after the poachers on my property. One of your neighbors has broken down a shell in my grotto." In "Archdeacon Hare and Walter Landor", Landor remarks: "My *Sea-Shell* which Wordsworth clapped into his pouch. There it became incrustated with a compost of mucus and shingle; there it lost its 'pearly hue within', and its memory of where it had abided." An interesting modern version of Landor's idea may be found in Eugene Lee-Hamilton's *Sea-Shell Murmurs*.

between the lady and the shepherd is almost paraphrase.

Landor next describes in great detail the building of the city, and its destruction by unknown forces. The people attempt to propitiate the gods, but in vain. It is then that Landor introduces the sequel of the shepherd episode, following the source closely. In Clara Reeve's tale we read: "Thou shalt sacrifice a fat bull to every one of those statues, and cause the pillar under it to be rubb'd with the blood of the bull; then perfume it with the hair of his tail, and shavings of his horns and hoofs." And later: "Rub the door with remainder of the bulls' galls, and perfume it with the shavings of the horns and hoofs, and the hair of the tails, and then the door shall open." Landor writes:

"And at each pillar sacrifice thou one.
Around each base rub thrice the black'ning blood,
And burn the curling shavings of the hoof; [...]
The yellow galls, with equal care preserv'd
Pour at the seventh statue from the north."

From this point Landor's story departs far from the original. Gebir descends into subterranean regions of pure Landoresque invention. The third book of the poem opens with an apostrophe to Shakespeare. Gebir beholds the spirit of Aröar, who fought under his forefathers, and witnesses the torment of the lost souls that live by the "weary river". Beyond, separated by a flaming arch, he sees the abodes of the blest. Before him pass the spirits of famous Kings,

among them George III, Louis XVI, and William the Deliverer.²² Gebir meets also the spirit of his own father.

Similarly, the fourth book owes nothing to the source. The story proceeds as related up to the time of the plot to kill Gebir. Here, as noted, Dalica, the nurse, secretly secures charms from her sister. Landor describes the horror of Dalica as she watches her sister prepare the poison.²³ But in Miss Reeve's story there is a detailed account of the joint plans of the nurse and Charoba to get rid of the King's party before he himself is attacked. All this Landor omits, and besides these omissions and changes in the fifth book of his poem, his sixth book bears no relation to the source. It describes the love affair of Tamar and the nymph. This part of the poem is enlarged by some one hundred fifty lines of political allusion, among them the striking reference to Napoleon. The picture of the games is Landor's invention. But the great difference between the poem and the source at the end is in the denouement. In Miss Reeve's poem Charoba hates Gebir; in Landor's poem she

22. In reprinting *Gebir* Landor condensed the poem by reducing it nearly one-half. In the last edition about one hundred and fifty lines were eliminated from Books III and VI, most of these allusive to contemporary events. The line in the original, describing Napoleon as "a mortal man above all mortal praise," was qualified by a note.

23. Landor stated that he took these lines from a passage in the pages of the traveler, Bruce. It is very possible that the precise origin was the chapter on *Cerastes, or Horned Viper*. See James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Vol. VII, 292ff.

loves him. In the source she has achieved her end and is happy; in the poem she is bereaved. Landor depends upon the tragic death scene at the end. Miss Reeve, however, goes on to relate briefly further fortunes of Charoba, together with her death, and the succession to the throne of Dalica. Yet in both Gebir rouses, seemingly dead, to address Charoba; in both the poisoned garment is the means of Gebir's death; and in both is the employment of the servant or nurse as the instrument of Gebir's death.

Such a comparison indicates the untruthfulness of the reviews in saying that the poem *Gebir* was merely a version of an Arabian tale. It is evident that Books III, IV, and VI, and most of Book V are Landor's invention. He omits the first episode of the old story, and the last episode in the history of Charoba. The story is basically altered for the poet's own purposes. He develops and relates to the main story the love affair of the shepherd. The poem is filled with contemporary allusions. Above all Landor has enriched and expanded the legend into an epic poem of seven books and two thousand lines. *Gebir* is remarkable for compact thought, luminous image, and dignified emotion.²⁴ The passage on the sea-shell is itself remarkable.

24. Much of the lofty mood of *Gebir* is traceable to Landor's reading during the year 1797. He was under the spell of Pindar. "When I began to write *Gebir*," he wrote Forster in 1850, "I had just read Pindar a second time and understood him. What I admired was what nobody else had noticed,— his proud complacency and scornful strength. If I could resemble him in

On the other hand, Landor's indebtedness to Miss Reeve cannot be gainsaid. He has clung to fundamental facts and incidents: the character of Gebir; the building of the city; and the aid of the nymph; the poisoning of Gebir. It is perfectly possible to prove that a number of passages in *Gebir* are taken almost verbatim from the source. *Gebir* is neither a "version" nor is it "originally and entirely his own".

Landor's poem has not made the legend of Gebir immortal. *Gebir* is not a great epic. It was written before Landor was twenty-one years old; it exhibits many of the faults of youth, and some which belong to pedantry. Perhaps the *Quarterly Review* was right when it said that *Gebir* was a poem it did any man credit to understand. But it should be recalled that Landor did not write for the *Quarterly Review*, or for its readers; of such he was frankly contemptuous. Landor was unique in being honest when he declared he wished only the approval of his peers. With respect to *Gebir* he said he would be satisfied, if he secured ten thoughtful readers. In this he succeeded. *Gebir* is important for the student because it made a profound impression upon a few great men of letters. These were, chiefly: Coleridge, De Quincey, Southey, Lamb, Scott, and Shelley,²⁵

nothing else, I was resolved to be as compendious and exclusive."
See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 46.

25. In April 1808, Southey wrote a friend of Landor: "I have often said before we met that I would walk forty miles to see him; and, having seen

though there might be numbered among the admirers of *Gebir* the lesser names of the Hebers, Charles Wynne, Frere, Canning, Humphrey Davy, and Bobus Smith. William Sotheby was appreciably influenced by *Gebir* in his poem *Saul*, and Sergeant Rough became the author of a tragedy, *The Conspiracy of Gowrie*, in direct imitation of *Gebir*.

Coleridge was fond of quoting from *Gebir*,²⁶ and, though De Quincey alludes whimsically to himself as “a Mono-Gebirist”, asserting that only he and Southey had read the poem, his admiration for the epic was profound. Southey declared that *Gebir* possessed “some of the most exquisite poetry in the language,” and just before going to Lisbon he wrote Coleridge: “I take with me for the voyage your poems, the Lyrics, the Lyrical Ballads, and *Gebir*, — these make all my library.” In the *Critical Review* for September 1799 may be found Southey’s sincere but apparently extravagant tribute to *Gebir*. Though Southey was most eloquent on the subject, the poet most deeply influenced by *Gebir* was Shelley. James Hogg writes: “I often found Shelley reading *Gebir*. There was something in that poem

him, I would gladly walk four-score to see him again.” It was Southey’s praise in the *Critical Review* for September 1799, which first drew thoughtful attention to *Gebir*. Lamb, too, who, tipsy or sober, was always quoting *Rose Aylmer*, praises *Gebir*, admiring especially the passage describing the ocean in Book V. Sir Walter Scott also thought highly of *Gebir*. See John Forster, *Walter Savage Landor*, p. 50, note.

26. Coleridge found *Gebir* like a piece of dark ground filled with bright eminences.

which caught his fancy. He would read it aloud, or to himself sometimes, with a tiresome pertinacity. One morning I went to his rooms to tell him something of importance, but he would attend to nothing but *Gebir*.²⁷ Hogg threw the book out of the window, yet Shelley returned to it again. Browning was wont to declare that he owed more to Landor than to any living poet, and there is ample evidence to prove that this youthful epic of Landor's affected definitely the poetry of the period.

27. *Anecdote Biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 64. Shelley's favourite passages were the description of the ocean and that of Merthyr preparing her charms, both in Book V.

