The History of the Thirty Pieces of Silver

The Legend of the Thirty Pieces of Silver (LTPS) is a medieval apocryphon which traces the transmission of the coins paid to betray Jesus from Terah’s gift of the coins to Abraham to Judas’ purchase of the Field of Blood in Acts 1:18-19. The text is extant in a variety of forms and languages including Latin, Syriac, Arabic and Armenian, and several European languages including German, English, Italian, Spanish and Catalan. The following translation is based on the Western recension of the Syriac text.

The story of the origin of the thirty silver pieces which Iscariot received as the price of the Messiah. These pieces which Judas received from the Jewish priests, where are they from and what is their story?

These pieces were made by Terah, the father of Abraham. Abraham gave them to his son Isaac. And Isaac bought a village with them. The master of it brought them to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh sent them to Solomon, the son of David, for the temple he was building. And Solomon took the pieces and placed them round the door of the altar.

When Nebuchadnezzar came and took captive the children of Israel, he entered the temple of Solomon and saw that these pieces were beautiful, and he took and brought them to Babylon with the captive children of Israel.

And there were some Persians there as hostages. When Nebuchadnezzar came from Jerusalem, they sent him everything fit for kings. And when king Nebuchadnezzar saw that all they had sent him was beautiful, he released
their sons and gave them many presents. He gave them also those pieces. And the Persians brought them to their fathers.

When Christ was born and they saw the star, they rose and took those pieces and gold and myrrh and frankincense. They took those pieces and set forth on a journey until they reached the vicinity of Edessa. The day grew dark and they fell asleep on the side of the road. And in the morning they arose to continue their journey. They left those pieces where they slept and did not know it. Some merchants came and found the pieces.

And they came to the vicinity of Edessa by a well of water. And on that very day an angel came to the shepherds of that land and he gave them a garment without a seam on the upper end. And he said to them, “Take the garment in which is life to humanity.” The shepherds took the garment and came to a well of water. And they found the merchants who had found the pieces near the well of water. They said to the merchants, “Will you buy this beautiful garment without seam at the upper end?” The merchants said to them, “Bring it here.” And when the merchants saw this garment, they marveled at it very much. The merchants said to the shepherds, “We have beautiful pieces worthy of a kings. Take them and give us this garment.”

When the merchants had taken the garment, they arrived in the city and stopped at an inn. Abgar the king sent for the merchants and said to them, “Have you anything worthy of a king that I could buy from you?” The merchants said to him, “Yes, we have a garment without a seam at the upper end.” When king Abgar saw that garment of which there was no equal, he said to them, “Where did you get this garment?” They said to him, “We came
to a certain well by the gate of your city. And some shepherds said to us, ‘We have a garment without a seam at the upper end. Will you buy it?’ And we looked at the garment and saw that there was no other like it in the world. We had with us thirty pieces with images of kings which we gave to the shepherds and received the garment. And these pieces are worthy of kings such as yourself.”

When Abgar heard this, he sent for the shepherds and took the pieces from them. And Abgar sent the pieces and the garment to Christ for the good that he had done him with regard to Abgar’s disease from which he had cured him. When Christ saw the garment and the pieces, he took the garment and sent the pieces to the Jewish treasury. Our Lord knew their secrets. That is why he sent these pieces with which he would be bought.

And when the Jews came to Judas Iscariot they said to him, “Deliver to us Jesus, son of Joseph!” He said to them: “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” And they rose and got those thirty pieces and gave them to Judas Iscariot. And Iscariot returned them to the Jews. They bought with them a burial-place for strangers. And then they brought the pieces to Solomon’s temple and threw them into a fountain inside the temple—the pieces and the staff of Moses the prophet—and thus hid them.