The Romans, so far from looking with the Jews to the Tigris, looked to the Jews themselves. Or at least they looked to that whole Syria, of which the Jews were a section. Consequently, there is a solution of two points:

1. The wise men of the East were delegates from the trans-Tigridian people.

2. The great man who should arise from the East to govern the world was, in the sense of that prophecy, _i.e._, in the terms of that prophecy interpreted according to the sense of all who circulated and partook in--or were parties to--the belief of that prophecy, was to come from Syria: _i.e._, from Judea.

Now take it either way, observe the sublimity and the portentous significance of this expectation. Every man of imaginative feeling has been struck with that secret whisper that stirred through France in 1814-15--that a man was to come with the violets. The violets were symbolically Napoleonic, as being the colour of his livery: it was also his cognizance: and the time for his return was _March_, from which commence the ever memorable Hundred days. And the sublimity lies in the circumstances of:

1. A whisper running through Christendom: people in remotest quarters bound together by a tie so aerial.

2. Of the dread augury enveloped in this little humble but beautiful flower.

3. Of the awful revolution at hand: the great earthquake that was mining and quarrying in the dark chambers beneath the thrones of Europe.

These and other circumstances throw a memorable sublimity upon this whisper of conspiracy. But what was this to the awful whisper that circled round the earth ((Greek: he oikoumene)) as to the being that was coming from Judea? There was no precedent, no antagonist whisper with which it could enter into any terms of comparison, unless there had by possibility been heard that mysterious and ineffable sigh which Milton ascribes to the planet when man accomplished his mysterious rebellion. The idea of such a sigh, of a whisper circling through the planet, of the light growing thick with the unimaginable charge, and the purple eclipse of Death throwing a penumbra; that may, but nothing else ever can, equal the unutterable sublimity of that buzz--that rumour, that susurrus passing from mouth to mouth--nobody knew whence coming or whither tending, and about a being of whom nobody could tell what he should be--what he should resemble--what he should do, but that all peoples and languages should have an interest in his appearance.

Now, on the one hand, suppose this--I mean, suppose the Roman whisper to be an authorized rumour utterly without root; in that case you would have a clear intervention of Heaven. But, on the other hand, suppose, which is to me the more probable idea, that it was not without a root; that in fact it was the Judaean conception of a Messiah, translated into Roman and worldly ideas; into ideas which a Roman could understand, or with which the world could sympathize, viz., that _rerum potiretur_. (The plural here indicates only the awful nature, its indeterminateness.)

I have, in fact, little doubt that it _was_ a Romanized appropriation or translation of the Judaean Messiah. One thing
only I must warn you against. You will naturally say: 'Since two writers among the very few surviving have both refuted this prophecy, and Josephus besides, this implies that many thousands did so. For if out of a bundle of newspapers two only had survived quite disconnected, both talking of the same man, we should argue a great popularity for that man.' And you will say: 'All these Roman people, did they interpret?' You know already--by Vespasian. Now whilst, on the one hand, I am far from believing that chance only was the parent of the ancient (Greek: eustochia), their felicitous guessing (for it was a higher science), yet, in this new matter, what coincidence of Pagan prophecy, as doubtless a horrid mistrust in the oracles, etc., made them 'sagacious from a fear' of the coming peril, and, as often happens in Jewish prophecies--God when He puts forth His hand the purposes attained roll one under the other sometimes three deep even to our eyes.

(The end)

Thomas De Quincey's essay: Messianic Idea Romanized

By Thomas De Quincey