Chapter 1. Introduction: East and West in Hellenism

Any portrayal of the Hellenistic era must begin with Alexander the Great. His conquest of the East (334-323 B.C.) marks a turning point in the history of the ancient world. Out of the conditions it created grew a cultural unity larger than any that had existed before, a unity which was to last for almost a thousand years until destroyed in its turn by the conquests of Islam. The new historical fact made possible, and indeed intended, by Alexander was the union of West and East. "West" means here the Greek world centered around the Aegean; "East," the area of the old oriental civilizations, stretching from Egypt to the borders of India. Although Alexander's political creation fell apart with his death, the merging of cultures proceeded undisturbed through the succeeding centuries, both as regional processes of fusion within the several kingdoms of the Diadochi and as the rise of an essentially supra-national, Hellenistic, culture common to them all. When finally Rome dissolved the separate political entities in the area and transformed them into provinces of the Empire, she simply gave form to that homogeneity which in fact had long prevailed irrespective of dynastic boundaries.

In the larger geographical framework of the Roman Empire, the terms "East" and "West" assume new meanings, "East" being the Greek and "West" the Latin half of the Roman world. The Greek half, however, comprised the whole Hellenistic world, in which Greece proper had become a minor part; that is, it comprised all that part of Alexander's heritage which had not slipped back into "barbarian" control. Thus in the enlarged perspective of the Empire the East is constituted by a synthesis of what we first distinguished as the Hellenic West and the Asiatic East. In the permanent division of Rome from the time of Theodosius into an Eastern and a Western Empire, the cultural situation finds final political expression: under Byzantium the unified eastern half of the world came at last to form that Greek empire which Alexander
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When Alexander appeared, Hellas had, both in point of fact and in its own consciousness, reached this stage of cosmopolitan maturity, and this was the positive precondition of his success, which was matched by a negative one on the oriental side. For more than a century the whole evolution of Greek culture had been leading in this direction. The ideals of a Pindar could hardly have been grafted onto the court of a Nebuchadnezzar or an Artaxerxes and the bureaucracies of their realms. Since Herodotus, "the father of history" (fifth century B.C.), Greek curiosity had interested itself in the customs and opinions of the "barbarians"; but the Hellenic way was conceived for and suited to Hellenes alone, and of them only those who were freeborn and full citizens. Moral and political ideals, and even the idea of knowledge, were bound up with very definite social conditions and did not claim to apply to men in general—indeed, the concept of "man in general" had for practical purposes not yet come into its own. However, philosophical reflection and the development of urban civilization in the century preceding Alexander led gradually to its emergence and explicit formulation. The sophist enlightenment of the fifth century had set the individual over against the state and its norms and in conceiving the opposition of nature and law had divested the latter, as resting on convention alone, of its ancient sanctity: moral and political norms are relative. Against their skeptical challenge, the Socratic-Platonic answer appealed, not indeed to tradition, but to conceptual knowledge of the intelligible, i.e., to rational theory; and rationalism carries in itself the germ of universalism. The Cynics preached a revaluation of existing norms of conduct, self-sufficiency of the private individual, indifference to the traditional values of society, such as patriotism, and freedom from all prejudice. The internal decline of the old city-states together with the loss of their external independence weakened the particularistic aspect of their culture while it strengthened the consciousness of what in it was of general spiritual validity.

In short, at the time of Alexander the Hellenic idea of culture had evolved to a point where it was possible to say that one was a Hellene not by birth but by education, so that one born a barbarian
could become a true Hellene. The enthroning of reason as the highest part in man had led to the discovery of man as such, and at the same time to the conception of the Hellenic way as a general humanistic culture. The last step on this road was taken when the Stoics later advanced the proposition that freedom, that highest good of Hellenic ethics, is a purely inner quality not dependent on external conditions, so that true freedom may well be found in a slave if only he is wise. So much does all that is Greek become a matter of mental attitude and quality that participation in it is open to every rational subject, i.e., to every man. Prevailing theory placed man no longer primarily in the context of the polis, as did Plato and still Aristotle, but in that of the cosmos, which we sometimes find called "the true and great polis for all." To be a good citizen of the cosmos, a *cosmopolites*, is the moral end of man; and his title to this citizenship is his possession of *logos*, or reason, and nothing else—that is, the principle that distinguishes him as man and puts him into immediate relationship to the same principle governing the universe. The full growth of this cosmopolitan ideology was reached under the Roman Empire; but in all essential features the universalistic stage of Greek thought was present by Alexander's time. This turn of the collective mind inspired his venture and was itself powerfully reinforced by his success.

*Cosmopolitanism and the New Greek Colonization*

Such was the inner breadth of the spirit which Alexander carried into the outward expanses of the world. From now on, Hellenas was everywhere that urban life with its institutions and organization flourished after the Greek pattern. Into this life the native populations could enter with equal rights by way of cultural and linguistic assimilation. This marks an important difference from the older Greek colonization of the Mediterranean coastline, which established purely Greek colonies on the fringes of the great "barbarian" hinterland and envisaged no amalgamation of colonists and natives. The colonization following in the footsteps of Alexander intended from the outset, and indeed as part of his own political program, a symbiosis of an entirely new kind, one which though most obviously a Hellenization of the East required for its success a certain reciprocity. In the new geopolitical area the Greek element no longer clung to geographic continuity with the mother country, and generally with what had hitherto been the Greek world, but spread far into the continental expanses of the Hellenistic Empire. Unlike the earlier colonies, the cities thus founded were not daughter cities of individual metropoles but were fed from the reservoir of the cosmopolitan Greek nation. Their main relations were not to one another and to the distant mother city but each acted as a center of crystallization in its own environment, that is, in relation to its indigenous neighbors. Above all, these cities were no longer sovereign states but parts of centrally administered kingdoms. This changed the relation of the inhabitants to the political whole. The classical city-state engaged the citizen in its concerns, and these he could identify with his own, as through the laws of his city he governed himself. The large Hellenistic monarchies neither called for nor permitted such close personal identification; and just as they made no moral demands on their subjects, so the individual detached himself in regard to them and as a *private* person (a status hardly admitted in the Hellenic world before) found satisfaction of his social needs in voluntarily organized associations based on community of ideas, religion, and occupation.

The nuclei of the newly founded cities were as a rule constituted by Greek nationals; but from the outset the inclusion of compact native populations was part of the plan and of the charter by which each city came into being. In many cases such groups of natives were thus transformed into city populations for the first time, and into the populations of cities organized and self-administering in the Greek manner. How thoroughly Alexander himself understood his policy of fusion in racial terms as well is shown by the famous marriage celebration at Susa when in compliance with his wishes ten thousand of his Macedonian officers and men took Persian wives.

*The Hellenization of the East*

The assimilating power of such an entity as the Hellenistic city must have been overwhelming. Participating in its institutions and ways of life, the non-Hellenic citizens underwent rapid Hellenization, shown most plainly in their adoption of the Greek language: and this in spite of the fact that probably from the beginning the
non-Hellenes outnumbered the born Greeks or Macedonians. The tremendous subsequent growth of some of these cities, like Alexandria or Antioch, can be explained only by the continual influx of native oriental populations, which yet did not change the Hellenistic character of the communities. Finally, in the Seleucid kingdom, in Syria and Asia Minor, even originally oriental cities transformed themselves through the adoption of Hellenic corporate constitutions and the introduction of gymnasia and other typical institutions into cities of the Greek type and received from the central government the charter granting the rights and duties of such cities. This was a kind of refounding, evidence of the progress of Hellenization and at the same time a factor adding momentum to it. Besides the cities, the Greek-speaking administration of the monarchies was of course also a Hellenizing agent.

The invitation suggested in the formula that one is a Hellen not by birth but by education was eagerly taken up by the more responsive among the sons of the conquered East. Already in the generation after Aristotle we find them active in the very sanctuaries of Greek wisdom. Zeno, son of Mnaseas (i.e., Manasseh), founder of the Stoic school, was of Phoenician-Cypriote origin: he learned Greek as an adopted language, and throughout his long teaching career at Athens his accent always remained noticeable. From then until the end of antiquity the Hellenistic East produced a continual stream of men, often of Semitic origin, who under Greek names and in the Greek language and spirit contributed to the dominant civilization. The old centers of the Aegean area remained in existence, but the center of gravity of Greek culture, now the universal culture, had shifted to the new regions. The Hellenistic cities of the Near East were its fertile seedbeds: among them Alexandria in Egypt was pre-eminent. With names generally Hellenized, we can mostly no longer determine whether an author from Apameia or Byblos in Syria, or from Gadara in Trans-Jordan, is of Greek or Semitic race; but in these melting-pots of Hellenism the question finally becomes irrelevant—a third entity had come into being.

In the newly founded Greek cities the result of the fusion was Greek from the outset. In other places the process was gradual, and continued into the period of late antiquity: people became converted to Hellenism as one might change one's party or creed, and this was still going on at a time when movements of renascence of national languages and literatures were already under way. The earliest, indeed anachronistic, example of such a situation is provided by the familiar events of the Maccabaean period in Palestine in the second century B.C. Even as late as the third century A.D., after five hundred years of Hellenistic civilization, we observe a native of the ancient city of Tyre, Malchus son of Malchus, becoming a prominent Greek philosophic writer and at the instance of his Hellenic friends changing (or suffering them to change) his Semitic name first to the Greek Basileus, then to Porphyrius, thereby symbolically declaring his adherence to the Hellenic cause together with his Phoenician extraction. The interesting point in this case is that at the same time the counter-movement was gathering momentum in his native country—the creation of a Syrian vernacular literature associated with the names of Bardesanes, Mani, and Ephraem. This movement and its parallels everywhere were part of the rise of the new popular religions against which Hellenism was forced to defend itself.

**Later Hellenism: The Change from Secular to Religious Culture**

With the situation just indicated the concept of Hellenism underwent a significant change. In late antiquity the unchallenged universalism of the first Hellenistic centuries was succeeded by an age of new differentiation, based primarily on spiritual issues and only secondarily also of a national, regional, and linguistic character. The common secular culture was increasingly affected by a mental polarization in religious terms, leading finally to a breaking up of the former unity into exclusive camps. Under these new circumstances, "Hellenic," used as a watchword within a world already thoroughly Hellenized, distinguishes an embattled cause from its Christian or gnostic opponents, who yet, in language and literary form, are themselves no less part of the Greek milieu. On this common ground Hellenism became almost equivalent to conservatism and crystallized into a definable doctrine in which the whole

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1 "King"—the literal translation of Malchus.

2 "The purple-clad"—an allusion to his original name as well as to the major industry of his native city, purple-dyeing.
tradition of pagan antiquity, religious as well as philosophical, was for the last time systematized. Its adherents as well as its opponents lived everywhere, so that the battlefield extended over the whole civilized world. But the rising tide of religion had engulfed "Greek" thought itself and transformed its own character: Hellenistic secular culture changed into a pronouncedly religious pagan culture, both in self-defense against Christianity and from an inner necessity. This means that in the age of the rising world-religion, Hellenism itself became a denominational creed. This is how Plotinus and still more Julian the Apostate conceived their Hellenic, i.e., pagan, cause, which in Neoplatonism founded a kind of church with its own dogma and apologetic. Doomed Hellenism had come to be a particular cause on its own native ground. In this hour of its twilight the concept of Hellenism was at the same time broadened and narrowed. It was broadened in so far as, in the final entrenchment, even purely oriental creations like the religions of Mithras or of Attis were counted in with the Hellenistic tradition that was to be defended; it was narrowed in that the whole cause became a party cause, and more and more that of a minority party. Yet, as we have said, the whole struggle was enacted within a Greek framework, that is, within the frame of the one universal Hellenic culture and language. So much is this the case that the victor and heir in this struggle, the Christian Church of the East, was to be predominantly a Greek church: the work of Alexander the Great triumphed even in this defeat of the classical spirit.

The Four Stages of Greek Culture

We can accordingly distinguish four historical phases of Greek culture: (1) before Alexander, the classical phase as a national culture; (2) after Alexander, Hellenism as a cosmopolitan secular culture; (3) later Hellenism as a pagan religious culture; and (4) Byzantinism as a Greek Christian culture. The transition from the first to the second phase is for the most part to be explained as an autonomous Greek development. In the second phase (300 B.C.—first century B.C.) the Greek spirit was represented by the great rival schools of philosophy, the Academy, the Epicureans, and above all the Stoics, while at the same time the Greek-oriental synthesis was progressing. The transition from this to the third phase, the turning to religion of ancient civilization as a whole and of the Greek mind with it, was the work of profoundly un-Greek forces which, originating in the East, entered history as new factors. Between the rule of Hellenistic secular culture and the final defensive position of a late Hellenism turned religious lie three centuries of revolutionary spiritual movements which effected this transformation, among which the gnostic movement occupies a prominent place. With these we have to deal later.

(b) THE PART OF THE EAST

So far we have considered the role of the Greek side in the combination of West and East, and in doing so started from the internal preconditions that enabled Hellenic culture to become a world civilization following upon Alexander's conquests. These preconditions had of course to be matched by preconditions on the oriental side which explain the role of the East in the combination —its apparent or real passivity, docility, and readiness for assimilation. Military and political subjection alone is not sufficient to explain the course of events, as the comparison with other conquests of areas of high culture shows throughout history, where often enough the victor culturally succumbs to the vanquished. We may even raise the question whether in a deeper sense, or at least partially, something of the kind did not also happen in the case of Hellenism; but what is certainly manifest at first is the unequivocal ascendancy of the Greek side, and this determined at least the form of all future cultural expression. What, then, was the condition of the oriental world on the eve of Alexander's conquest to explain its succumbing to the expansion of Greek culture? And in what shape did native oriental forces survive and express themselves under the new conditions of Hellenism? For naturally this great East with its ancient and proud civilizations was not simply so much dead matter for the Greek form. Both questions, that concerning the antecedent conditions and that concerning the manner of survival, are incomparably harder to answer for the oriental side than the parallel ones were for the Greek side. The reasons for this are as follows.
In the first place, for the time before Alexander, in contrast with the wealth of Greek sources we are faced with an utter paucity of oriental ones, except for the Jewish literature. Yet this negative fact, if we may take it as a sign of literary sterility, is itself a historical testimony which confirms what we can infer from Greek sources about the contemporary state of the Eastern nations.

Moreover, this vast East, unified in the Persian Empire by sheer force, was far from being a cultural unity like the Greek world. Hellas was the same everywhere; the East, different from region to region. Thus an answer to the question regarding cultural preconditions would have to fall into as many parts as there were cultural entities involved. This fact also complicates the problem of Hellenism itself as regards its oriental component. Indeed, Gustav Droysen, the originator of the term "Hellenism" for the post-Alexandrian Greek-oriental synthesis, has himself qualified the term by stating that in effect as many different kinds of Hellenism evolved as there were different national individualities concerned. In many cases, however, these local factors are little known to us in their original form. Nevertheless, the overall homogeneity of the ensuing Hellenistic development suggests some overall similarity of conditions. In fact, if we except Egypt, we can discern in the pre-Hellenistic Orient certain universalistic tendencies, beginnings of a spiritual syncretism, which may be taken as a counterpart to the cosmopolitan turn of the Greek mind. Of this we shall have more to say.

Finally, in the period after Alexander the supremacy of pan-Hellenic civilization meant precisely that the East itself, if it aspired to literary expression at all, had to express itself in the Greek language and manner. Consequently the recognition of such instances of self-expression as voices of the East within the totality of Hellenistic literature is for us frequently a matter of subtle and not unequivocally demonstrable distinction: that is to say, the situation created by Hellenism is itself an ambiguous one. With the interesting methodological problem this presents we shall have to deal later.

These are some of the difficulties encountered in any attempt to clarify the picture of the Eastern half of the dual fact which we call Hellenism. We can nonetheless obtain a general though partly conjectural idea, and we shall briefly indicate as much of it as necessary for our purpose. First a few words about the state of the Eastern world on the eve of the Greek conquest that accounts for its lethargy at first and the slowness of its reawakening afterwards.

The East on the Eve of Alexander's Conquests

Political Apathy and Cultural Stagnation. Politically, this was determined by the sequence of despotic empires that had taken over the East in the preceding centuries. Their methods of conquest and rule had broken the political backbone of the local peoples and accustomed them passively to accept each new master's change of empires. The destinies of the central power were predestined fate for the subject peoples, who were simply thrown into the spoils. At a much later time, Daniel's vision of the four beasts symbolized this passive relation of the oriental peoples to the succession of political powers. So it came about that three of which broke the military might of the Persian monarchy delivered to the victor an enormous empire of innumerable peoples which became estranged from the idea of self-determination and did not even feel the urge to take a hand in the decision. The only serious local resistance of a popular nature was encountered by Alexander in Tyre and Gaza, which had to be reduced in long-drawn sieges. This exception was no accident; the Phoenician city of Gaza's case was probably similar—was in spite of its vassal relation to the Great King a sovereign polity, and its citizens fought their own cause in the long-standing Phoenician-Greek rivalry for sea power.

The political apathy was matched by a cultural stagnation arising in part from different causes. In the old centers of oriental civilization, on the Euphrates and on the Nile, which prior to the Persian epoch were also the centers of political power, after some thousand years of existence all intellectual movement had come to a standstill, and only the inertia of formidable traditions was felt. We cannot go here into explanations which would lead us far from our path; we simply note the fact, which especially in the case of Egypt is very obvious indeed. We may, however, remark that immobility that our dynamic predilections are inclined to der
as petrifaction could also be regarded as a mark of the perfection which a system of life has attained—this consideration may well apply in the case of Egypt.

In addition, the Assyrian and Babylonian practice of expatriating and transplanting whole conquered peoples, or more accurately their socially and culturally leading strata, had destroyed the forces of cultural growth in many of the regions outside the old centers. This fate had in many cases overtaken peoples of a more youthful cultural age who were still to unfold their potentialities. For the imperial manageability thus gained, the central power paid with the drying up of the potential sources of its own regeneration. Here we have doubtless one of the reasons for the torpor of the old centers we mentioned before: by breaking the national and regional vital forces throughout the kingdom, they had as it were surrounded themselves with a desert, and under these conditions the isolated summit of power was denied the benefit of whatever rejuvenating influences might have come from below. This may in part explain the state of paralysis in which the East seems to have been sunk prior to Alexander and from which it was delivered by the revivifying influence of the Hellenic spirit.

*Beginnings of Religious Syncretism.* Yet this same state of affairs contained also some positive conditions for the role which the East was to play in the Hellenistic age. It is not just that the prevailing passivity, the absence of consciously resisting forces, facilitated assimilation. The very weakening of the strictly local aspects of indigenous cultures meant the removal of so many obstacles to a merging in a wider synthesis and thus made possible the entry of these elements into the common stock. In particular, the uprooting and transplantation of whole populations had two significant effects. On the one hand, it favored the disengagement of cultural contents from their native soil, their abstraction into the transmissible form of teachings, and their consequently becoming available as elements in a cosmopolitan interchange of ideas—just as Hellenism could use them. On the other hand, it favored already a pre-Hellenistic syncretism, a merging of gods and cults of different and sometimes widely distant origins, which again anticipates an important feature of the ensuing Hellenistic development. Biblical history offers examples of both these processes.

The earliest description of the genesis of an intentional religious syncretism is found in the narrative in II Kings 17:24-41 concerning the new inhabitants settled by the Assyrian king in evacuated Samaria, that well-known story of the origin of the Samaritan sect which closes with the words:

> So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

On a world-wide scale religious syncretism was later to become a decisive characteristic of Hellenism: we see here its inception in the East itself.

*Beginnings of Theological Abstraction in Jewish, Babylonian, and Persian Religion.* Even more important is the other development we mentioned, the transformation of the substance of local cultures into ideologies. To take another classic example from the Bible, the Babylonian exile forced the Jews to develop that aspect of their religion whose validity transcended the particular Palestinian conditions and to oppose the creed thus extracted in its purity to the other religious principles of the world into which they had been cast. This meant a confrontation of ideas with ideas. We find the position fully realized in Second Isaiah, who enunciated the pure principle of monotheism as a world cause, freed from the specifically Palestinian limitations of the cult of Jahweh. Thus the very uprooting brought to fulfillment a process which had started, it is true, with the older prophets.

The uniqueness of the Jewish case notwithstanding, certain parallels to these developments can be discerned elsewhere in the political disintegration of the East or can be inferred from the later course of events. Thus, after the overthrow of Babylon by the Persians the Old-Babylonian religion ceased to be a state cult attached to the political center and bound up with its functions of rule. As one of the institutions of the monarchy it had enjoyed a defined official status, and this connection with a local system of secular power had supported and at the same time limited its role. Both support and restriction fell away with the loss of statehood. The release of the religion from a political function was an uprooting comparable to the territorial uprooting of Israel. The fate of
subjection and political impotence in the Persian Empire forced the Babylonian religion to stand henceforth on its spiritual content alone. No longer connected with the institutions of a local powersystem and enjoying the prestige of its authority, it was thrown back upon its inherent theological qualities, which had to be formulated as such if they were to hold their own against other religious systems which had similarly been set afloat and were now competing for the minds of men. Political uprooting thus led to a liberation of spiritual substance. As a subject for speculation, the generalized principle acquired a life of its own and unfolded its abstract implications. We may discern here the working of a historical law which helps us to understand many mental developments of later antiquity. In the case of the Babylonian religion, the success of this movement toward abstraction is apparent in its later form as it emerged into the full light of Hellenism. In a one-sided development of its original astral features, the older cult was transformed into an abstract doctrine, the reasoned system of astrology, which simply by the appeal of its thought-content, presented in Greek form, became a powerful force in the Hellenistic world of ideas.

In a comparable manner, to take a final example, the Old Persian religion of Mazdaism detached itself from its native Iranian soil. Carried over all the countries from Syria to India by the numerically small ruling nation, it had in the midst of the religious plurality of the Persian Empire already found itself in something like a cosmopolitan situation. Through the fall of the Empire it lost with the support also the odium of a foreign rule and henceforth shared in the countries outside Persia proper with other creeds the burdens and advantages of diaspora. Here again, out of the less-defined national tradition there was extracted an unequivocal metaphysical principle which evolved into a system of general intellectual significance: the system of theological dualism. This dualistic doctrine in its generalized content was to be one of the great forces in the Hellenistic syncretism of ideas. In Persia itself the national reaction which led in succession to the founding of the Parthian and neo-Persian kingdoms was prepared for and accompanied by a religious restoration which in its turn was forced to systematize and dogmatize the content of the old folk-religion, a process in some ways analogous to the contemporary creation of the Talmud. Thus in the homeland and in the diaspora alike, the changing conditions produced a similar result: the transformation of traditional religion into a theological system whose characteristics approach those of a rational doctrine.

We may suppose comparable processes to have taken place throughout the East, processes by which originally national and local beliefs were fitted to become elements of an international exchange of ideas. The general direction of these processes was toward dogmatization, in the sense that a principle was abstracted from the body of tradition and unfolded into a coherent doctrine. Greek influence, furnishing both incentive and logical tools, everywhere brought this process to maturity; but as we have just tried to show, the East itself had on the eve of Hellenism already initiated it in significant instances. The three we have mentioned were chosen with particular intent: Jewish monothelism, Babylonian astrology, and Iranian dualism were probably the three main spiritual forces that the East contributed to the configuration of Hellenism, and they increasingly influenced its later course.

So much for what we called "preconditions." We may just pause to note the fact that the first cosmopolitan civilization known to history, for so we may regard the Hellenistic, was made possible by catastrophes overtaking the original units of regional culture. Without the fall of states and nations, this process of abstraction and interchange might never have occurred on such a scale. This is true, though less obviously, even for the Greek side, where the political decline of the polis, this most intensive of particularistic formations, provided a comparable negative precondition. Only in the case of Egypt, which we omitted in our survey, were conditions entirely different. In the main, however, it was from Asia, whether Semitic or Iranian, that the forces issued that were actively operative in the Hellenistic synthesis together with the Greek heritage: thus we can confine our sketch to the Asiatic conditions.

The East Under Hellenism

Having dealt with the preconditions, we must briefly consider the destiny of the East under the new dispensation of Hellenism. The first thing we note is that the East became silent for several
centuries and was all but invisible in the overpowering light of the Hellenic day. With regard to what followed from the first century A.D. onward, we may call this opening stage the period of latency of the oriental mind and derive from this observation a division of the Hellenistic age into two distinct periods: the period of manifest Greek dominance and oriental submersion, and the period of reaction of a renascent East, which in its turn advanced victoriously in a kind of spiritual counterattack into the West and reshaped the universal culture. We are speaking of course in terms of intellectual and not of political events. In this sense, Hellenization of the East prevails in the first period, orientalization of the West in the second, the latter process coming to an end by about 300 A.D. The result of both is a synthesis which carried over into the Middle Ages.

*The Submersion of the East.* About the first period we can be brief. It was the age of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms, particularly characterized by the efflorescence of Alexandria. Hellenism triumphed throughout the East and constituted the general culture whose canons of thought and expression were adopted by everyone who wished to participate in the intellectual life of the age. Only the Greek voice was heard: all public literary utterance was in its idiom. In view of what we said about the entering of orientals into the stream of Greek intellectual life, the muteness of the East cannot be construed as a lack of intellectual vitality on the part of its individuals: it consists rather in its not speaking for itself, in its own name. Anyone who had something to say had no choice but to say it in Greek, not only in terms of language but also in terms of concept, ideas, and literary form, that is, as ostensibly part of the Greek tradition.

To be sure, the Hellenistic civilization, wide open and hospitable, had room for creations of the oriental mind once they had assumed the Greek form. Thus the formal unity of this culture covered in fact a plurality, yet always as it were under the official Greek stamp. For the East, this situation engendered a kind of mimicry which had far-reaching consequences for its whole future. The Greek mind on its part could not remain unaffected: it was the recognition of the difference in what was called "Greek" before and after Alexander that prompted Droysen to introduce the term "Hellenistic" in distinction to the classical "Hellenic." "Hellenistic" was intended to denote not just the enlargement of the polis culture to a cosmopolitan culture and the transformations inherent in this process alone but also the change of character following from the reception of oriental influences into this enlarged whole.

However, the anonymity of the Eastern contributions makes these influences in the first period hard to identify. Men like Zeno, whom we mentioned before, wished to be nothing but Hellenes, and their assimilation was as complete as any such can be. Philosophy generally ran on very much in the tracks laid down by the native Greek schools; but toward the end of the period, about two centuries after Zeno, it too began to show significant signs of change in its hitherto autonomous development. The signs are at first by no means unambiguous. The continuing controversy about Poseidonius of Apameia (about 135-50 B.C.) well illustrates the difficulty of any confident attribution of influences and in general the uncertainty as to what in this period is genuinely Greek and what tinged with orientalism. Is the fervent astral piety that pervades his philosophy an expression of the Eastern mind or not? Both sides can be argued, and probably will continue to be, though there can be no doubt that, whether or not he was Greek by birth, to his own mind his thought was truly Greek. In this case, so in the general picture: we cannot demand a greater certainty than the complex nature of the situation admits. Faced with the peculiar anonymity, we might even say pseudonymity, that cloaks the oriental element, we must be content with the general impression that oriental influences in the broadest sense were at work throughout this period in the domain of Greek thought.

A clearer case is presented by the growing literature on "the wisdom of the barbarians" that made its appearance in Greek letters: in the long run it did not remain a matter of merely anti-quaarian interest but gradually assumed a propagandist character. The initiative of Greek authors in this field was taken up in the old centers of the East, Babylon and Egypt, by native priests, who turned to composing accounts of their national histories and cultures in the Greek language. The very ancient could always count on a respectful curiosity on the part of the Greek public, but as this was increasingly accompanied by a receptivity toward the spiritual con-
tents themselves, the antiquarians were encouraged imperceptibly to turn into teachers and preachers.

The most important form, however, in which the East contributed at this time to the Hellenistic culture was in the field not of literature but of cult: the religious *syncretism* which was to become the most decisive fact in the later phase begins to take shape in this first period of the Hellenistic era. The meaning of the term "syncretism" may be extended, and usually is, to cover secular phenomena as well; and in this case the whole Hellenistic civilization may be called syncretistic, in that it increasingly became a mixed culture. Strictly speaking, however, syncretism denotes a religious phenomenon which the ancient term "theocracy," i.e., mixing of gods, expresses more adequately. This is a central phenomenon of the period and one to which we, otherwise familiar with the intermingling of ideas and cultural values, have no exact parallel in our contemporary experience. It was the ever-growing range and depth of just this process that eventually led over from the first to the second, the religious-oriental, period of Hellenism. The theocracy expressed itself in myth as well as in cult, and one of its most important logical tools was allegory, of which philosophy had already been making use in its relation to religion and myth. Of all the phenomena noted in this survey of the first period of Hellenism, it is in this religious one that the East is most active and most itself. The growing prestige of Eastern gods and cults within the Western world heralded the role which the East was to play in the second period, when the leadership passed into its hands. It was a religious role, whereas the Greek contribution to the Hellenistic whole was that of a secular culture.

In sum, we may state of the first half of Hellenism, which lasts roughly until the time of Christ, that it is in the main characterized by this Greek secular culture. For the East, it is a time of preparation for its re-emergence, comparable to a period of incubation. We can only guess from its subsequent eruption at the profound transformations that must have occurred there at this time under the Hellenistic surface. With the one great exception of the Maccabaean revolt, there is hardly any sign of oriental self-assertion within the Hellenistic orbit in the whole period from Alexander to Caesar. Beyond the borders, the founding of the Parthian kingdom and the revival of Mazdaism parallel the Jewish case. These events do little to disturb the general picture of Hellas as the assimilating and the East as the assimilated part during this period.

*Greek Conceptualization of Eastern Thought.* Nevertheless, this period of latency was of profound significance in the life history of the East itself. The Greek monopoly of all forms of intellectual expression had for the oriental spirit simultaneously the aspects of suppression and of liberation: suppression because this monopoly deprived it of its native medium and forced a dissimulation upon the expression of its own contents; liberation because the Greek conceptual form offered to the oriental mind an entirely new possibility of bringing to light the meaning of its own heritage. We have seen that the lifting of generally communicable spiritual principles out of the mass of popular tradition was under way on the eve of Hellenism; but it was with the logical means provided by the Greek spirit that this process came to fruition. For Greece had invented the *logos*, the abstract concept, the method of theoretical exposition, the reasoned system—one of the greatest discoveries in the history of the human mind. This formal instrument, applicable to any content whatsoever, Hellenism made available to the East, whose self-expression could now benefit from it. The effect, delayed in its manifestation, was immeasurable. Oriental thought had been non-conceptual, conveyed in images and symbols, rather disguising its ultimate objects in myths and rites than expounding them logically. In the rigidity of its ancient symbols it lay bound; from this imprisonment it was liberated by the vivifying breath of Greek thought, which gave new momentum and at the same time adequate tools to whatever tendencies of abstraction had been at work before. At bottom, oriental thought remained mythological, as became clear when it presented itself anew to the world; but it had learned in the meantime to bring its ideas into the form of *theories* and to employ rational concepts, instead of sensuous imagery alone, in expounding them. In this way, the definite formulation of the systems of dualism, astrological fatalism, and transcendent monotheism came about with the help of Greek conceptualization. With the status of metaphysical doctrines they gained general currency, and their message could address itself to all. Thus the Greek spirit delivered Eastern thought from the bondage of its own symbolism.
and enabled it in the reflection of the logos to discover itself. And it was with the arms acquired from the Greek arsenal that the East, when its time came, launched its counteroffensive.

The Eastern "Underground." Inevitably the blessings of a development of this kind are no unmixed, and the dangers inherent in it for the genuine substance of oriental thought are obvious. For one thing, every generation or rationalization is paid for with the loss of specificity. In particular, the Greek ascendancy naturally tempted oriental thinkers to profit from the prestige of everything Greek by expressing their cause not directly but in the disguise of analogues gleaned from the Greek tradition of thought. Thus, for instance, astrological fatalism and magic could be clothed in the garments of the Stoic cosmology with its doctrines of sympathy and cosmic law, religious dualism in the garment of Plato-nism. To the mentality of assimilation this was certainly a rise in the world; but the mimicry thus initiated reacted upon the further growth of the Eastern mind and presents peculiar problems of interpretation to the historian. The phenomenon which Oswald Spengler called, with a term borrowed from mineralogy, "pseudomorphosis" will engage our attention as we go on (see below, Ch. 2, d).

There was another, perhaps still profounder, effect which Greek ascendancy had upon the inner life of the East, an effect which was to become manifest only much later: the division of the oriental spirit into a surface and a sub-surface stream, a public and a secret tradition. For the force of the Greek exemplar had not only a stimulating but also a repressive effect. Its selective standards acted like a filter: what was capable of Hellenization was passed and gained a place in the light, that is, became part of the articulate upper stratum of the cosmopolitan culture; the remainder, the radically different and unassimilated was excluded and went underground. This "other" could not feel itself represented by the conventional creations of the literary world, could not in the general message recognize its own. To oppose its message to the dominant one it had to find its own language; and to find it became a process of long toil. In the nature of things it was the most genuine and original tendencies of the spirit of the East, those of the future rather than of the past, that were subjected to this condition of subterranean existence. Thus the spiritual monopoly of Greece caused the growth of an invisible East whose secret life formed an antagonistic undercurrent beneath the surface of the public Hellenistic civilization.

Processes of profound transformation, far-reaching new departures must have been under way in this period of submergence. We do not know them, of course; and our whole description, conjectural as it is, would be without foundation were it not for the sudden eruption of a new East which we witness at the turn of the era from whose force and scale we can draw inferences as to its inception.

The Re-emergence of the East

What we do witness at the period roughly coinciding with the beginnings of Christianity is an explosion of the East. Like lent-up waters its forces broke through the Hellenistic crust and flooded the ancient world, flowing into the established Greek folds and filling them with their content, besides creating their own new beds. The metamorphosis of Hellenism into a religious oriental culture was set on foot. The time of the breakthrough was probably determined by the coinciding of two complementary conditions: the maturing of the subterranean growth in the East, which enabled it to emerge into the light of day, and the readiness of the West for a religious renewal, even its deeply felt need of it, which was grounded in the whole spiritual state of that world and disposed it to respond eagerly to the message of the East. This complementary relation of activity and receptivity is not unlike the conversion one which obtained three centuries earlier when Greece advanced into the East.

The Novelty of Revived Eastern Thought. Now it is important to recognize that in these events we are dealing, not with a reaction of the old East, but with a novel phenomenon which at that crucial hour entered the stage of history. The "Old East" was dead. The new awakening did not mean a classicist resuscitation of its time-honored heritage. Not even the more recent conceptualization of earlier oriental thought were the real substance of the movement. Traditional dualism, traditional astrological fatalism, traditional monotheism were all drawn into it, yet with such a peculiar twist to them, that in the present setting they subserved the representation of a novel spiritual principle; and the same is true of the
use of Greek philosophical terms. It is necessary to emphasize this fact from the outset because of the strong suggestion to the contrary created by the outer appearances, which have long misled historians into regarding the fabric of thought they were confronted with, except for its Christian part, as simply made up of the remnants of older traditions. They all do in fact appear in the new stream: symbols of old oriental thought, indeed its whole mythological heritage; ideas and figures from Biblical lore; doctrinal and terminological elements from Greek philosophy, particularly Platonism. It is in the nature of the syncretistic situation that all these different elements were available and could be combined at will. But syncretism itself provides only the outer aspect and not the essence of the phenomenon. The outer aspect is confusing by its compositeness, and even more so by the associations of the old names. However, though these associations are by no means irrelevant, we can discern a new spiritual center around which the elements of tradition now crystallize, the unity behind their multiplicity; and this rather than the syncretistic means of expression is the true entity with which we are confronted. If we acknowledge this center as an autonomous force, then we must say that it makes use of those elements rather than that it is constituted by their confluence; and the whole which thus originated will in spite of its manifestly synthetic character have to be understood not as the product of an uncommitted eclecticism but as an original and determinate system of ideas.

Yet this system has to be elicited as such from the mass of disparate materials, which yield it only under proper questioning, that is, to an interpretation already guided by an anticipatory knowledge of the underlying unity. A certain circularity in the proof thus obtained cannot be denied, nor can the subjective element involved in the intuitive anticipation of the goal toward which the interpretation is to move. Such, however, is the nature and risk of historical interpretation, which has to take its cues from an initial impression of the material and is vindicated only by the result, its intrinsic convincingness or plausibility, and above all by the progressively confirmatory experience of things falling into their place when brought into contact with the hypothetical pattern.

Major Manifestations of the Oriental Wave in the Hellenistic World. We have now to give a brief enumeration of the phenomena in which the oriental wave manifests itself in the Hellenistic world from about the beginning of the Christian era onward. They are in the main as follows: the spread of Hellenistic Judaism, and especially the rise of Alexandrian Jewish philosophy; the spread of Babylonian astrology and of magic, coinciding with a general growth of fatalism in the Western world; the spread of diverse Eastern mystery-cults over the Hellenistic-Roman world, and their evolution into spiritual mystery-religions; the rise of Christianity; the efflorescence of the gnostic movements with their great system-formations inside and outside the Christian framework; and the transcendental philosophies of late antiquity, beginning with Neoplatonism and culminating in the Neoplatonic school.

All these phenomena, different as they are, are in a broad sense interrelated. Their teachings have important points in common and even in their divergences share in a common climate of thought: the literature of each can supplement our understanding of the others. More obvious than kinship of spiritual substance is the recurrence of typical patterns of expression, specific images and formulas, throughout the literature of the whole group. In Philo of Alexandria we encounter, besides the Platonic and Stoic elements with which the Jewish core is overlaid, also the language of the mystery-cults and the incipient terminology of a new mysticism. The mystery-religions on their part have strong relations to the astral complex of ideas. Neoplatonism is wide open to all pagan, and especially Eastern, religious lore having a pretense to antiquity and a halo of spirituality. Christianity, even in its "orthodox" utterances, had from the outset (certainly as early as St. Paul) syncretistic aspects, far exceeded however in this respect by its heretical offshoots: the gnostic systems compounded everything—oriental mythologies, astrological doctrines, Iranian theology, elements of Jewish tradition, whether Biblical, rabbinical, or occult, Christian salvation-eschatology, Platonic terms and concepts. Syncretism attained in this period its greatest efficacy. It was no longer confined to specific cults and the concern of their priests but pervaded the whole thought of the age and showed itself in all provinces of literary expression. Thus, none of the phenomena we have enumerated can be considered apart from the rest.

Yet the syncretism, the intermingling of given ideas and
images, i.e., of the coined currencies of the several traditions, is of course a formal fact only which leaves open the question of the mental content whose external appearance it thus determines. Is there a one in the many, and what is it? we ask in the face of such a compound phenomenon. What is the organizing force in the syncretistic matter? We said before by way of preliminary assertion that in spite of its "synthetic" exterior the new spirit was not a directionless eclecticism. What then was the directing principle, and what the direction?

The Underlying Unity: Representativeness of Gnostic Thought. In order to reach an answer to this question, one has to fix one's attention upon certain characteristic mental attitudes which are more or less distinctly exhibited throughout the whole group, irrespective of otherwise greatly differing content and intellectual level. If in these common features we find at work a spiritual principle which was not present in the given elements of the mixture, we may identify this as the true agent of it. Now such a novel principle can in fact be discerned, though in many shadings of determinateness, throughout the literature we mentioned. It appears everywhere in the movements coming from the East, and most conspicuously in that group of spiritual movements which are comprised under the name "gnostic." We can therefore take the latter as the most radical and uncompromising representatives of a new spirit, and may consequently call the general principle, which in less unequivocal representations extends beyond the area of gnostic literature proper, by way of analogy the "gnostic principle." Whatever the usefulness of such an extension of the meaning of the name, it is certain that the study of this particular group not only is highly interesting in itself but also can furnish, if not the key to the whole epoch, at least a vital contribution toward its understanding. I personally am strongly inclined to regard the whole series of phenomena in which the oriental wave manifests itself as different refractions of, and reactions to, this hypothetical gnostic principle, and I have elsewhere argued my reasons for this view. However far such a view may be granted, it carries in its own meaning the qualification that what can be thus identified as a common denomi-

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8H. Jonas, Gnosis und spatantiker Geist, I and II, I, passim; see especially the introduction to vol. I, and Ch. 4 of vol. II, 1.
PART I

Gnostic Literature—Main Tenets, Symbolic Language