

## SYRIA.\*

BY FRANZ CUMONT.

THE religions of Syria never had the same solidarity in the Occident as those from Egypt or Asia Minor. From the coasts of Phœnicia and the valleys of Lebanon, from the borders of the Euphrates and the oases of the desert, they came at various periods, like the successive waves of the incoming tide, and existed side by side in the Roman world without uniting, in spite of their similarities. The isolation in which they remained and the persistent adherence of their believers to their particular rites were a consequence and reflection of the disunited condition of Syria herself, where the different tribes and districts remained more distinct than anywhere else, even after they had been brought together under the domination of Rome. They doggedly preserved their local gods and Semitic dialects.

It would be impossible to outline each one of these religions in detail at this time and to reconstruct their history, because our meager information would not permit it, but we can indicate, in a general way how they penetrated into the Occidental countries at various periods, and we can try to define their common characteristics by showing what new elements the Syrian paganism brought to the Romans.

The first Semitic divinity to enter Italy was *Atargatis*, frequently mistaken for the Phœnician Astarte, who had a famous temple at Bambyce or Hierapolis, not far from the Euphrates, and was worshiped with her husband, Hadad, in a considerable part of Syria besides. The Greeks considered her as the principal Syrian goddess (*Συρία θεά*), and in the Latin countries she was commonly known as *dea Syria*, a name corrupted into *Iasura* by popular use.

We all remember the unedifying descriptions of her itinerant priests that Lucian and Apuleius<sup>1</sup> have left. Led by an old eunuch

\* Translated by A. M. Thielen.

<sup>1</sup> Lucian, *Lucius*, 33 f., and Apuleius, *Metam.*, VIII, 24 f.

of dubious habits, a crowd of painted young men marched along the highways with an ass that bore an elaborately adorned image of the goddess. Whenever they passed through a village or by some rich villa, they went through their sacred exercises. To the shrill accompaniment of their Syrian flutes they turned round and round, and with their heads thrown back fluttered about and gave vent to hoarse clamors until vertigo seized them and insensibility was complete. Then they flagellated themselves wildly, struck themselves with swords and shed their blood in front of a rustic crowd which pressed closely about them, and finally they took up a profitable collection from their wondering spectators. They received jars of milk and wine, cheeses, flour, bronze coins of small denominations and even some silver pieces, all of which disappeared in the folds of their capacious robes. If opportunity presented they knew how to increase their profits by means of clever thefts or by making commonplace predictions for a moderate consideration.

This picturesque description, based on a novel by Lucius of Patras, is undoubtedly extreme. It is difficult to believe that the sacerdotal corps of the goddess of Hierapolis should have consisted only of charlatans and thieves. But how can the presence in the Occident of that begging and low nomadic clergy be explained?

It is certain that the first worshipers of the Syrian goddess in the Latin world were slaves. During the wars against Antiochus the Great a number of prisoners were sent to Italy to be sold at public auction, as was the custom, and the first appearance in Italy of the *Chaldaei*<sup>2</sup> has been connected with that event. The *Chaldaei* were Oriental fortune-tellers who asserted that their predictions were based on the Chaldean astrology. They found credulous clients among the farm laborers, and Cato gravely exhorts the good landlord to oust them from his estate.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with the second century before Christ, merchants began to import Syrian slaves. At that time Delos was the great trade center in this human commodity, and in that island especially, Atargatis was worshiped by citizens of Athens and Rome.<sup>4</sup> Trade spread her worship in the Occident.<sup>5</sup> We know that the great slave revolution that devastated Sicily in 134 B. C. was started by a slave from Apamea, a votary of the Syrian goddess. Simulating divine madness, he called his companions to arms, pretending to act in accord-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Riess in *Pauly-Wissowa*, s. v., "Astrologie," col. 1816.

<sup>3</sup> Cato, *De agric.*, V, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Bull. corr. hell.*, VI, 1882, p. 497, No. 15; p. 498, No. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Livy, XXXIX, 6.

ance with orders from heaven.<sup>6</sup> This detail, which we know by chance, shows how considerable a proportion of Semites there was in the gangs working the fields, and how much authority Atargatis enjoyed in the rural centers. Being too poor to build temples for their national goddess, those agricultural laborers waited with their devotions until a band of itinerant galli passed through the distant hamlet where the lot of the auction had sent them. The existence of those wandering priests depended, therefore, on the number of fellow-countrymen they met in the rural districts, who supported them by sacrificing a part of their poor savings.

Towards the end of the republic those diviners appear to have enjoyed rather serious consideration at Rome. It was a pythoness from Syria that advised Marius on the sacrifices he was to perform.<sup>7</sup>

Under the empire the importation of slaves increased. Depopulated Italy needed more and more foreign hands, and Syria furnished a large quota of the forced immigration of cultivators. But those Syrians, quick and intelligent as they were strong and industrious, performed many other functions. They filled the countless domestic positions in the palaces of the aristocracy and were especially appreciated as litter-bearers.<sup>8</sup> The imperial and municipal administrations, as well as the big contractors to whom customs and the mines were farmed out, hired or bought them in large numbers, and even in the remotest border provinces the *Syrus* was found serving princes, cities or private individuals. The worship of the Syrian goddess profited considerably by the economic current that continually brought new worshipers. We find her mentioned in the first century of our era in a Roman inscription referring in precise terms to the slave market, and we know that Nero took a devout fancy to the stranger that did not, however, last very long.<sup>9</sup> In the popular Trastevere quarter she had a temple until the end of paganism.<sup>10</sup>

During the imperial period, however, the slaves were no longer the only missionaries that came from Syria, and Atargatis was no longer the only divinity from that country to be worshiped in the Occident. The propagation of the Semitic worships progressed for the most part in a different manner under the empire.

At the beginning of our era the Syrian merchants, *Syri negotiatores*, undertook a veritable colonization of the Latin provinces.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Florus, II, 7 (III, 9).

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Vita Marii*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Juvenal, VI, 351.

<sup>9</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Gauckler, *Bolletino comunale di Roma*, XXII, 1907, pp. 225 f.

<sup>11</sup> Courajod, *Leçons du Louvre*, I, 1899, pp. 115; 327 f.

During the second century before Christ the traders of that nation had established settlements along the coast of Asia Minor, on the Piraeus, and in the Archipelago. At Delos, a small island but a large commercial center, they maintained several associations that worshiped their national gods, in particular Hadad and Atargatis. But the wars that shook the Orient at the end of the republic, and above all the growth of piracy, ruined maritime commerce and stopped emigration. This began again with renewed vigor when the establishment of the empire guaranteed the safety of the seas and when the Levantine traffic attained a development previously unknown. We can trace the history of the Syrian establishments in the Latin provinces from the first to the seventh century, and recently we have begun to appreciate their economic, social and religious importance at the true value.

The Syrians' love of lucre was proverbial. Active, compliant and able, frequently little scrupulous, they knew how to conclude first small deals, then larger ones, everywhere. Using the special talents of their race to advantage, they succeeded in establishing themselves on all coasts of the Mediterranean, even in Spain.<sup>12</sup> At Malaga an inscription mentions a corporation formed by them. The Italian ports where business was especially active, Pozzuoli, Ostia, later Naples, attracted them in great numbers. But they did not confine themselves to the seashore; they penetrated far into the interior of the countries, wherever they hoped to find profitable trade. They followed the commercial highways and traveled up the big rivers. By way of the Danube they went as far as Pannonia, by way of the Rhone they reached Lyons. In Gaul they were especially numerous. In this new country that had just been opened to commerce fortunes could be made rapidly. A rescript discovered on the range of the Lebanon is addressed to sailors from Arles, who had charge of the transportation of grain, and in the department of Ain a bilingual epitaph has been found mentioning a merchant of the third century, Thaïm or Julian, son of Saad, decurion of the city of Canatha in Syria, who owned two factories in the Rhone basin, where he handled goods from Aquitania.<sup>13</sup> Thus the Syrians spread over the entire province as far as Treves, where they had a strong colony. Not even the barbarian invasions of the fifth century stopped their immigration. Saint Jerome describes them traversing the entire Roman world amidst the troubles of the invasion, prompted by the lust of gain to defy all dangers. In the barbarian society the

<sup>12</sup> Kaibel, *Inscr. gr.*, XIV, 2540.

<sup>13</sup> CIL, III, S., 14165<sup>a</sup>.

part played by this civilized and city-bred element was even more considerable. Under the Merovingians in about 591 they had sufficient influence at Paris to have one of their number elected bishop and to gain possession of all ecclesiastic offices. Gregory of Tours tells how King Gontrand, on entering the city of Orleans in 585, was received by a crowd praising him "in the language of the Latins, the Jews and the Syrians."<sup>14</sup> The merchant colonies existed until the Saracen corsairs destroyed the commerce of the Mediterranean.

Those establishments exercised a strong influence upon the economic and material life of the Latin provinces, especially in Gaul. As bankers the Syrians concentrated a large share of the money business in their hands and monopolized the importing of the valuable Levantine commodities as well as of the articles of luxury; they sold wines, spices, glassware, silks and purple fabrics, also objects wrought by goldsmiths, to be used as patterns by the native artisans. Their moral and religious influence was not less considerable: for instance, it has been shown that they furthered the development of monastic life during the Christian period, and that the devotion to the crucifix<sup>15</sup> that grew up in opposition to the monophysites, was introduced into the Occident by them. During the first five centuries Christians felt an unconquerable repugnance to the representation of the Saviour of the world nailed to an instrument of punishment more infamous than the guillotine of to-day. The Syrians were the first to substitute reality in all its pathetic horror for a vague symbolism.

In pagan times the religious ascendancy of that immigrant population was no less remarkable. The merchants always took an interest in the affairs of heaven as well as in those of earth. At all times Syria was a land of ardent devotion, and in the first century its children were as fervid in propagating their barbarian gods in the Occident as after their conversion they were enthusiastic in spreading Christianity as far as Turkestan and China. As soon as the merchants had established their places of business in the islands of the Archipelago during the Alexandrian period, and in the Latin period under the empire, they founded chapels in which they practised their exotic rites.

It was easy for the divinities of the Phœnician coast to cross the seas. Among them were Adonis, whom the women of Byblus mourned; Balmarcodes, "the Lord of the dances," who came from

<sup>14</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Hist. Fr.*, VIII, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Bréhier, *Les origines du crucifix dans l'art religieux*, Paris, 1904.

Beirut; Marna, the master of rain, worshiped at Gaza; and Maiuma,<sup>16</sup> whose nautical holiday was celebrated every spring on the coast near Ostia as well as in the Orient.

Besides these half Hellenized religions, others of a more purely Semitic nature came from the interior of the country, because the merchants frequently were natives of the cities of the *Hinterland*, as for instance, Apamea or Epiphanea in Coele-Syria, or even of villages in the flat country. As Rome incorporated the small kingdoms beyond the Lebanon and the Orontes that had preserved a precarious independence, the current of emigration increased. In 71 Commagene, which lies between the Taurus and the Euphrates, was annexed by Vespasian, a little later the dynasties of Chalcis and Emesa were also deprived of their power. Nero, it appears, took possession of Damascus; half a century later Trajan established the new province of Arabia in the south (106 A. D.), and the oasis of Palmyra, a great mercantile center, lost its autonomy at the same time. In this manner Rome extended her direct authority as far as the desert, over countries that were only superficially Hellenized, and where the native devotions had preserved all their savage fervor. From that time constant communication was established between Italy and those regions which had heretofore been almost inaccessible. As roads were built commerce developed, and together with the interests of trade the needs of administration created an incessant exchange of men, of products and of beliefs between those out-of-the-way countries and the Latin provinces.

These annexations, therefore, were followed by a renewed influx of Syrian divinities into the Occident. At Pozzuoli, the last port of call of the Levantine vessels, there was a temple to the Baal of Damascus (*Jupiter Damascenus*) in which leading citizens officiated, and there were altars on which two golden camels<sup>17</sup> were offered to Dusares, a divinity who had come from the interior of Arabia. They kept company with a divinity of more ancient repute, the Hadad of Baabek-Heliopolis (*Jupiter Heliopolitanus*), whose immense temple, considered one of the world's wonders<sup>18</sup> had been restored by Antoninus Pius, and may still be seen facing Lebanon in majestic elegance. Heliopolis and Beirut had been the most ancient colonies founded by Augustus in Syria. The god of Heliopolis participated in the privileged position granted to the inhabitants of

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Clermont-Ganneau, *Rec. d'archéol. or.*, IV, p. 339.

<sup>17</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *s. v.* "Damascenus, Dusares."

<sup>18</sup> Malalas, XI, p. 280, 12 (Bonn).

those two cities, who worshiped him in a common devotion,<sup>19</sup> and he was naturalized as a Roman with greater ease than the others.

The conquest of all Syria as far as Euphrates and the subjection of even a part of Mesopotamia aided the diffusion of the Semitic religions in still another manner. From these regions, that were partly inhabited by fighting races, the Cæsars drew recruits for the imperial army. They levied a great number of legionaries, but especially auxiliary troops, who were transferred to the frontiers. Troopers and foot-soldiers from those provinces furnished important contingents to the garrisons of Europe and Africa. For instance, a cohort of one thousand archers from Emesa was established in Pannonia, another of archers from Damascus in upper Germany; Mauretania received irregulars from Palmyra, and bodies of troops levied in Ituraea, on the outskirts of the Arabian desert, were encamped in Dacia, Germany, Egypt and Cappadocia at the same time. Commagene alone furnished no less than six cohorts of five hundred men each that were sent to the Danube and into Numidia.<sup>20</sup>

The number of inscriptions consecrated by soldiers proves both the ardor of their faith and the diversity of their beliefs. Like the sailors of to-day who are transferred to strange climes and exposed to incessant danger, they were constantly inclined to invoke the protection of heaven, and remained attached to the gods who seemed to remind them in their exile of the distant home country. Therefore it is not surprising that the Syrians who served in the army should have practised the religion of their Baals in the neighborhood of their camps. In the north of England, near the wall of Hadrian, an inscription in verse in honor of the goddess of Hierapolis has been found; its author was a prefect, probably of a cohort of Hamites stationed at that distant post.<sup>21</sup>

Not all the soldiers, however, went to swell the ranks of believers worshiping divinities that had long been adopted by the Latin world, as did that officer. They also brought along new ones that had come from a still greater distance than their predecessors, in fact from the outskirts of the barbarian world, because from those regions in particular trained men could be obtained. There were, for instance, *Baltis*, an "Our Lady" from Osroene beyond the Euphrates;<sup>22</sup> *Aziz*, the "strong god" of Edessa, who was identified with

<sup>19</sup> CIL, X, 1634.

<sup>20</sup> Cichorius in *Pauly-Wissowa*, s. v. "Ala" and "Cohors."

<sup>21</sup> CIL, VII, 759.

<sup>22</sup> *Baltis* in *Pauly-Wissowa, Realenc.*, s. v.

the star Lucifer;<sup>23</sup> *Malakbel*, the "Lord's messenger," patron of the soldiers from Palmyra, who appeared with several companions at Rome, in Numidia and in Dacia.<sup>24</sup> The most celebrated of those gods then was the Jupiter of Doliche, a small city of Commagene, that owed its fame to him. Because of the troops coming from that region, this obscure Baal, whose name is mentioned by no author, found worshipers in every Roman province as far as Africa, Germany and Brittany. The number of known inscriptions consecrated to him exceeds a hundred, and it is still growing. Being originally nothing but a god of lightning, represented as brandishing an ax, this local genius of the tempest was elevated to the rank of tutelary divinity of the imperial armies.<sup>25</sup>

The diffusion of the Semitic religions in Italy that commenced imperceptibly under the republic became more marked after the first century of our era. Their expansion and multiplication were rapid, and they attained the apogee of their power during the third century. Their influence became almost predominant when the accession of the Severi lent them the support of a court that was half Syrian. Functionaries of all kinds, senators and officers, vied with each other in devotion to the patron gods of their sovereigns, gods which the sovereigns patronized in turn. Intelligent and ambitious princesses like Julia Domna, Julia Maesa, Julia Mamea, whose ascendancy was very considerable, became propagators of their national religion. We all know the audacious pronouncement of the year 218 that placed upon the throne the fourteen year-old emperor Heliogabalus, a worshiper of the Baal of Emesa. His intention was to give supremacy over all other gods to his barbarian divinity, who had heretofore been almost unknown. The ancient authors narrate with indignation, how this crowned priest attempted to elevate his black stone, the coarse idol brought from Emesa, to the rank of supreme divinity of the empire by subordinating the whole ancient pantheon to it; they never tire of giving revolting details about the dissoluteness of the debaucheries, for which the festivities of the new *Sol invictus Elagabal* furnished a pretext.<sup>26</sup> However, the question arises whether the Roman historians, being very hostile to that foreigner who haughtily favored the customs of his own country, did not misrepresent or partly misunderstand the facts. Heliogabalus's attempt to have his god recognized as supreme, and to establish a

<sup>23</sup> *Pauly-Wissowa, Realenc.*, s. v. "Aziz."

<sup>24</sup> Dussaud, *Notes*, 24 f.

<sup>25</sup> Kan, *De Jovis Dolicheno cultu*, Groningen, 1901.

<sup>26</sup> Réville, *Religions sous les Sévères*, pp. 237 f.



kind of monotheism in heaven as there was monarchy on earth, was undoubtedly too violent, awkward and premature, but it was in keeping with the aspirations of the time, and it must be remembered that the imperial policy could find the support of powerful Syrian colonies not only at Rome but all over the empire.

Half a century later Aurelian<sup>27</sup> was inspired by the same idea when he created a new worship, that of the "Invincible Sun." Worshiped in a splendid temple, by pontiffs equal in rank to those of ancient Rome, having magnificent plays held in his honor every fourth year, *Sol invictus* was also elevated to the supreme rank in the divine hierarchy, and became the special protector of the emperors and the empire. The country where Aurelian found the pattern he sought to reproduce, was again Syria. Into the new sanctuary he transferred the images of Bel and Helios, taken from Palmyra, after it had fallen before his arms.

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The sovereigns, then, twice attempted to replace the Capitoline Jupiter by a Semitic god and to make a Semitic religion the principal and official religion of the Romans. They proclaimed the fall of the old Latin idolatry and the accession of a new paganism taken from Syria. What was the superiority attributed to the creeds of that country? Why did even an Illyrian general like Aurelian look for the most perfect type of pagan religion in that country? That is the problem to be solved, but it must remain unsolved unless an exact account is given of the fate of the Syrian beliefs under the empire.

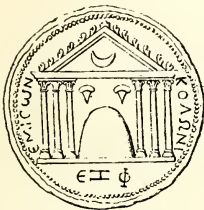
That question has not as yet been very completely elucidated. Besides the superficial opusculum of Lucian on the *deca Syria*, we find scarcely any reliable information in the Greek or Latin writers. The work by Philo of Byblus is a euhemeristic interpretation of an alleged Phœnician cosmogony, and a composition of little merit. Neither have we the original texts of the Semitic liturgies, as we have for Egypt. Whatever we have learned we owe especially to the inscriptions, and while these furnish highly valuable indications as to the date and the area of expansion of these religions, they tell us hardly anything about their doctrines. Light on this subject may be expected from the excavations that are being made in the great sanctuaries of Syria, and also from a more exact interpretation of the sculptured monuments that we now possess in great numbers, especially those of Jupiter Dolichenus.

Some characteristics of the Semitic paganism, however, are

<sup>27</sup> Zosimus, I, 61.

known at present, and it must be admitted that it would appear at a disadvantage if judged by the features that first attract our attention.

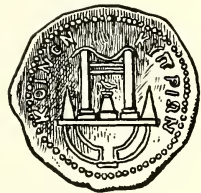
It had retained a stock of very primitive ideas and some aboriginal nature worship that had lasted through many centuries and was to persist, in part, under Christianity and Islam until the present day.<sup>28</sup> Such were the worship of high elevations on which a rustic enclosure sometimes marked the limits of the consecrated territory; the worship of the waters that flow to the sea, the streams that arise in the mountains, the springs that gush out of the soil, the ponds, the lakes and the wells, into all of which offerings were thrown with the idea either of venerating in them the thirst-quenching liquid or else the fecund nature of the earth; the worship of the trees that shaded the altars and that nobody dared to fell or mutilate; the worship of stones, especially of the rough stones called bethels



COIN OF EMESA



COINS OF PAPHOS



Showing conical representations of the deity.

that were regarded, as their name (*beth-El*) indicates, as the residence of the god, or rather, as the matter in which the god was embodied.<sup>29</sup> Aphrodite Astarte was worshiped in the shape of a conical stone at Paphos, and a black aerolite covered with projections and depressions to which a symbolic meaning was attributed represented Elagabal, and was transferred from Emesa to Rome, as we have said.

The animals, as well as inanimate things, received their share of homage. Remnants of the old Semitic zoolatry perpetuated themselves until the end of paganism and even later. Frequently the gods were represented standing erect on animals. Thus the Dolichean Baal stood on a steer, and his spouse on a lion. Around certain temples there were sacred parks, in which savage beasts roamed

<sup>28</sup> Janssen, *Coutumes des Arabes du pays de Moab*, Paris, 1908, pp. 297 f.

<sup>29</sup> Titus of Bostra, II, 60, pp. 60, 25, ed. de Lagarde.

at liberty,<sup>30</sup> a reminder of the time when they were considered divine. Two animals especially were the objects of universal veneration, the pigeon and the fish. Vagrant multitudes of pigeons received the traveler landing at Ascalon,<sup>31</sup> and they played about the enclosures of all the temples of Astarte<sup>32</sup> in flocks resembling white whirlwinds. The pigeon belonged, properly speaking, to the goddess of love, whose symbol it has remained above all to the people worshipping that goddess.

"Quid referam ut volitet crebras intacta per urbes  
Alba Palaestino sancta columba Syro?"<sup>33</sup>



GODDESS ON A LIONESS  
From a rock-carving at Boghaz-Koi.



COIN OF TARSSUS  
Showing goddess on an  
animal, the conical stone  
and dove.



BETHEL ON COIN OF TARSSUS

The fish was sacred to Atargatis, who undoubtedly had been represented in that shape at first, as Dagon always was.<sup>34</sup> The fish were kept in ponds in the proximity of the temples.<sup>35</sup> A superstitious fear prevented people from touching them, because the goddess punished the sacrilegious by covering their bodies with ulcers and tumors.<sup>36</sup> At certain mystic repasts, however, the priests and initiates consumed the forbidden food in the belief that they were ab-

<sup>30</sup> Lucian, *De dea Syria*, c. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Philo Alex., *De provid.*, II, c. 107 (II, 646 M).

<sup>32</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *Realenc.*, s. v. "Dea Syria," col. 2242.

<sup>33</sup> Tibullus, I, 7, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 46; V, 331.

<sup>35</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *Realenc.*, col. 2241.

<sup>36</sup> Selden, *De dis Syris*, II, c. 3, pp. 268 f., ed. 1672.

sorbing the flesh of the divinity herself. That worship and its practices, which were spread over Syria, probably suggested the ichthys symbolism in the Christian period.<sup>37</sup>

However, over this lower and primordial stratum that still cropped out here and there, other less rudimentary beliefs had formed. Besides inanimate objects and animals, the Syrian pagan-



ASTARTE AND THE DOVE



ASTARTE'S DOVE (DETAIL)

ism worshiped personal divinities especially. The character of the gods that were originally adored by the Semitic tribes has been ingeniously reconstructed.<sup>38</sup> Each tribe had its Baal and Baalat who protected it and whom only its members were permitted to worship. The name of *Ba'al*, "master," summarizes the conception people had

<sup>37</sup> Usener, *Sinthflutsagen*, 1899, pp. 223 f.

<sup>38</sup> Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, pp. 292 f.

of him. In the first place he was regarded as the sovereign of his votaries, and his position in regard to them was that of an Oriental potentate towards his subjects; they were his servants, or rather his slaves.<sup>39</sup> The Baal was at the same time the "master" or proprietor of the country in which he resided and which he made fertile by causing springs to gush from its soil. Or his domain was the firmament and he was the *dominus caeli*, whence he made the waters fall to the roar of tempests. He was always united with a celestial or earthly "queen" and, in the third place, he was the "lord" or husband of the "lady" associated with him. The one represented the male, the other the female principle; they were the authors of all fecundity, and as a consequence the worship of the divine couple often assumed a sensual and voluptuous character.

As a matter of fact, immorality was nowhere so flagrant as in the temples of Astarte, whose female servants honored the goddess with untiring ardor. In no country was sacred prostitution so developed as in Syria, and in the Occident it was to be found practically only where the Phœnicians had imported it, as on Mount Eryx. Those aberrations, that were kept up until the end of paganism,<sup>40</sup> probably have their explanation in the primitive constitution of the Semitic tribe, and the religious custom must have been originally one of the forms of exogamy, which compelled the woman to unite herself first with a stranger.<sup>41</sup>

As a second blemish, the Semitic religions practised human immolations longer than any other religion, sacrificing children and grown men in order to please sanguinary gods. In spite of Hadrian's prohibition of those murderous offerings,<sup>42</sup> they were maintained in certain clandestine rites and in the lowest practices of magic, up to the fall of the idols, and even later. They corresponded to the ideas of a period during which the life of a captive or slave had no greater value than that of an animal.

These sacred practices and many others, on which Lucian complacently enlarges in his opusculum on the goddess of Hierapolis, daily revived the habits of a barbarous past in the temples of Syria. Of all the conceptions that had successively dominated the country, none had completely disappeared. As in Egypt, beliefs of very different date and origin coexisted, without any attempt to make them agree, or without success when the task was undertaken. In

<sup>39</sup> Fossey, *Bull. corr. hell.*, 1907, p. 60.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *Vita Constant.*, III, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Strabo, XII, 3, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Porphyry, *De abst.*, II, 56.

these beliefs zoolatry, litholatry and all the other nature worships outlived the savagery that had created them. More than anywhere else the gods had remained the chieftains of clans<sup>43</sup> because the tribal organizations of Syria were longer lived and more developed than those of any other region. Under the empire many districts were still subjected to the tribal regime and commanded by "ethnarchs" or "phylarchs."<sup>44</sup> Religion, which sacrificed the lives of the men and the honor of the women to the divinity, had in many regards remained on the moral level of unsocial and sanguinary tribes. Its obscene and atrocious rites called forth exasperated indignation on the part of the Roman conscience when Heliogabalus attempted to introduce them into Italy with his Baal of Emesa.

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How, then, can one explain the fact that in spite of all, the Syrian gods imposed themselves upon the Occident and made even the Cæsars accept them? The reason is that the Semitic paganism can no more be judged by certain revolting practices, that perpetuated in the heart of civilization the barbarity and puerilities of an uncultivated society, than the religion of the Nile can be so judged. As in the case of Egypt we must distinguish between the sacerdotal religion and the infinitely varied popular religion that was embodied in local customs. Syria possessed a number of great sanctuaries in which an educated clergy meditated and expatiated upon the nature of the divine beings and on the meaning of traditions inherited from remote ancestors. As their own interests demanded, that clergy constantly amended the sacred traditions and modified their spirit when the letter was immutable in order to make them agree with the new aspirations of a more advanced period. They had their mysteries and their initiates to whom they revealed a wisdom that was above the vulgar beliefs of the masses.<sup>45</sup>

Frequently we can draw diametrically opposite conclusions from the same principle. In that manner the old idea of *tabu*, that seems to have transformed the temples of Astarte into houses of debauchery, also became the source of a severe code of morals. The Semitic tribes were haunted with the fear of the *tabu*. A multitude of things were either impure or sacred because, in the original confusion, those two notions had not been clearly differentiated. Man's ability to use the products of nature to satisfy his needs, was thus limited

<sup>43</sup> This was the case even where cities had arisen.

<sup>44</sup> Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, I, pp. 405; 409.

<sup>45</sup> Hippolytus, *Adv. hæres.*, V, 11, § 7.

by a number of prohibitions, restrictions and conditions. He who touched a forbidden object was soiled and corrupted, his fellows did not associate with him and he could no longer participate in the sacrifices. In order to wipe out the blemish, he had recourse to ablutions and other ceremonies known to the priests. Purity, that had originally been considered simply physical, soon became ritualistic and finally spiritual. Life was surrounded by a network of circumstances subject to certain conditions, every violation of which meant a fall and demanded penance. The anxiety to remain constantly in a state of holiness or regain that state when it had been lost, filled one's entire existence. It was not peculiar to the Semitic tribes, but they ascribed a prime importance to it.<sup>46</sup> And the gods, who necessarily possessed this quality in an eminent degree, were holy beings (*ἅγιοι*)<sup>47</sup> *par excellence*.

In this way principles of conduct and dogmas of faith have frequently been derived from instinctive and absurd old beliefs. All theological doctrines that were accepted in Syria modified the prevailing ancient conception of the Baals. But in our present state of knowledge it is very difficult indeed to determine the shares that the various influences contributed, from the conquests of Alexander to the Roman domination, to make the Syrian paganism what it became under the Cæsars. The civilization of the Seleucid empire is little known, and we cannot determine what caused the alliance of Greek thought with the Semitic traditions.<sup>48</sup> The religions of the neighboring nations also had an undeniable influence. Phœnicia and Lebanon remained moral tributaries of Egypt long after they had liberated themselves from the suzerainty of the Pharaohs. The theogony of Philo of Biblus took gods and myths from that country, and at Heliopolis Hadad was honored "according to Egyptian rather than Syrian rite."<sup>49</sup> The rigorous monotheism of the Jews, who were dispersed over the entire country, must also have acted as an active ferment of transformation.<sup>50</sup> But it was Babylon that retained the intellectual supremacy, even after its political ruin. The powerful sacerdotal caste ruling it did not fall with the independence of the country, and it survived the conquests of Alexander as it had previously lived through the Persian domination. The researches of Assyriologists have shown that its ancient worship persisted

<sup>46</sup> Robertson Smith, *loc. cit.*, pp. 446 f.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Clermont-Ganneau, *Études d'archéologie orientale*, II, 1896, p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Dussaud, *Notes*, pp. 89 f.

<sup>49</sup> Macrobius, I, 23, § 11.

<sup>50</sup> Enting, *Sitzb. Berl. Akad.*, 1885, p. 669.

under the Seleucides, and at the time of Strabo the "Chaldeans" still discussed cosmology and first principles in the rival schools of Borsippa and Orchoë.<sup>51</sup> The ascendancy of that erudite clergy affected all surrounding regions; it was felt by Persia in the east, Cappadocia in the north, but more than anywhere else by the Syrians, who were connected with the Oriental Semites by bonds of language and blood. Even after the Parthians had wrested the valley of the Euphrates from the Seleucides, relations with the great temples of that region remained uninterrupted. The plains of Mesopotamia, inhabited by races of like origin, extended on both sides of an artificial borderline; great commercial roads followed the course of the two rivers flowing into the Persian Gulf or cut across the desert. and the pilgrims came to Babylon, as Lucian tells us, to perform their devotions to the Lady of Bambyce.<sup>52</sup>

Ever since the Captivity, constant spiritual relations had existed between Judaism and the great religious metropolis. At the birth of Christianity they manifested themselves in the rise of gnostic sects in which the Semitic mythology formed strange combinations with Jewish and Greek ideas and furnished the foundation for extravagant superstructures.<sup>53</sup> Finally, during the decline of the empire, it was Babylon again from which emanated Manicheism, the last form of idolatry received in the Latin world. We can imagine how powerful the religious influence of that country on the Syrian paganism must have been.

That influence manifested itself in various ways. First, it introduced new gods. In this way Bel passed from the Babylonian pantheon into that of Palmyra and was honored throughout northern Syria.<sup>54</sup> It also caused ancient divinities to be arranged in new groups. To the primitive couple of the Baal and the Baalat a third member was added in order to form one of those triads dear to Chaldean theology. This took place at Hierapolis as well as at Heliopolis, and the three gods of the latter city, Hadad, Atargatis and Simios, became Jupiter, Venus and Mercury in Latin inscriptions.<sup>55</sup> Finally, and most important, astrolatry wrought radical changes in the characters of the celestial powers, and, as a further consequence, in the entire Roman paganism. In the first place it gave them a second personality in addition to their own nature.

<sup>51</sup> Strabo, XVI, 1, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Lucian, *De dea Syria*, c. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, I, pp. 233 f.

<sup>54</sup> *Comptes Rendus Acad. Inscr.*, 1907, pp. 447 f.

<sup>55</sup> Dussaud, *Notes*, p. 24.



The sidereal myths superimposed themselves upon the agrarian myths, and gradually obliterated them. Astrology, born on the banks of the Euphrates, imposed itself in Egypt upon the haughty and unapproachable clergy of the most conservative of all nations.<sup>56</sup> Syria received it without reserve and surrendered unconditionally;<sup>57</sup> numismatics and archeology as well as literature prove this. King Antiochus of Commagene, for instance, who died 34 B. C., built himself a monumental tomb on a spur of the Taurus, in which he placed his horoscope, designed on a large bas-relief, beside the images of his ancestral divinities.<sup>58</sup>

The importance which the introduction of the Syrian religions into the Occident has for us consists therefore in the fact that indirectly they brought certain theological doctrines of the Chaldeans with them, just as Isis and Serapis carried beliefs of old Egypt from Alexandria to the Occident. The Roman empire received successively the religious tribute of the two great nations that had formerly ruled the Oriental world. It is characteristic that the god Bel whom Aurelian brought from Asia to set up as the protector of his states, was in reality a Babylonian who had emigrated to Palmyra,<sup>59</sup> a cosmopolitan center apparently predestined by virtue of its location to become the intermediary between the civilizations of the Euphrates and the Mediterranean.

The influence exercised by the speculations of the Chaldeans upon Greco-Roman thought can be asserted positively, but cannot as yet be strictly defined. It was at once philosophic and religious, literary and popular. The entire neo-Platonist school used the names of those venerable masters, but it cannot be determined how much it really owes to them. A selection of poems that has often been quoted since the third century, under the title of "Chaldaic Oracles" (*Λόγια Χαλδαϊκά*) combines the ancient Hellenic theories with a fantastic mysticism that was certainly imported from the Orient. It is to Babylonia what the literature of Hermes Trismegistus is to Egypt, and it is equally difficult to determine the nature of the ingredients that the author put into his sacred compositions. But at an earlier date the Syrian religions had spread far and wide in the Occident ideas conceived on the distant banks of the Euphrates. I shall try to indicate briefly what their share in the pagan syncretism was.

<sup>56</sup> Boll, *Sphacra*, p. 372.

<sup>57</sup> Diodorus, II, 31, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Cumont, *Mon. myst. Mithra*, I, p. 188, fig. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Sobernheim, "Palmyrenische Inschriften," *Mitt. der vorderasiat. Gesellschaft*, X, 1905, pp. 319 f.

We have seen that the gods from Alexandria gained souls especially by the promise of blessed immortality. Those from Syria must also have satisfied doubts tormenting all the minds of that time. As a matter of fact the old Semitic ideas on man's fate in after-life were little comforting. We know how sad, dull and hopeless their conception of life after death was. The dead descended into a subterranean realm where they led a miserable existence, a weak reflection of the one they had lost; since they were subject to wants and suffering, they had to be supported by funeral offerings placed on their sepulchers by their descendants. Those ancient beliefs and customs were found also in primitive Greece and Italy.

This rudimentary eschatology, however, gave way to quite a different conception, one that was closely related to the Chaldean astrology, and which spread over the Occident towards the end of the republic. According to this doctrine the soul returned to heaven after death, to live there among the divine stars. While it remained on earth it was subject to all the bitter necessities of a destiny determined by the revolutions of the stars; but when it ascended into the upper regions, it escaped that fate and even the limits of time; it shared equally in the immortality of the sidereal gods that surrounded it.<sup>60</sup> In the opinion of some, the soul was attracted by the rays of the sun, and after passing through the moon, where it was purified, it lost itself in the shining star of day.<sup>61</sup> Another more purely astrological theory, that was undoubtedly a development of the former, taught that the soul descended to earth from the heights of heaven by passing through the spheres of the seven planets. During its passage it acquired the dispositions and qualities proper to each planet. After death it returned to its original abode by the same route. To get from one sphere to another, it had to pass a door guarded by a commandant (*ἄρχων*).<sup>62</sup> Only the souls of initiates knew the password that made those incorruptible guardians yield, and under the conduct of a psychopompus<sup>63</sup> they ascended safely from zone to zone. As the soul rose it divested itself of the passions and qualities it had acquired on its descent to the earth as though they were garments, and, free from sensuality, it penetrated into the eighth heaven to enjoy everlasting happiness as a subtle essence.

<sup>60</sup> See below.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorschung*, Berlin, 1892, pp. 68, n. 1; 70, n. 2.

<sup>62</sup> A belief still held by present-day Nosairis in Syria.

<sup>63</sup> A divinity believed to conduct souls to their proper abodes.

Perhaps this doctrine, undoubtedly of Babylonian origin, was not generally accepted by the Syrian religions, as it was by the mysteries of Mithra, but these religions, impregnated with astrology, certainly propagated the belief that the souls of those worshipers that had led pious lives were elevated to the heights of heaven, where an apotheosis made them the equals of the luminous gods.<sup>64</sup> Under the empire this doctrine slowly supplanted all others; the Elysian fields, which the votaries of Isis and Serapis still located in the depths of the earth, were transferred into the ether bathing the fixed stars,<sup>65</sup> and the underworld was thereafter reserved for the wicked who had not been allowed to pass through the celestial gates.

The sublime regions occupied by the purified souls were also the abode of the supreme god.<sup>66</sup> When it transformed the ideas on the destiny of man, astrology also modified those relating to the nature of the divinity. In this matter the Syrian religions were especially original; for even if the Alexandrian mysteries offered man just as comforting prospects of immortality as the eschatology of their rivals, they were backward in building up a commensurate theology. To the Semitic races belongs the honor of having reformed the ancient fetichism most thoroughly. Their base and narrow conceptions of early times to which we can trace their existence, broaden and rise until they form a kind of monotheism.

As we have seen, the Syrian tribes worshiped a god of lightning,<sup>67</sup> like all primitive races. That god opened the reservoirs of the firmament to let the rain fall and split the giant trees of the woods with the double ax that always remained his emblem.<sup>68</sup> When the progress of astronomy removed the constellations to incommensurable distances, the "Baal of the Heavens" (*Ba'al šamîn*) had to grow in majesty. Undoubtedly at the time of the Achæmenides, he was connected with the Ahura-Mazda of the Persians, the ancient god of the vault of heaven, who had become the highest physical and moral power, and this connection helped to transform the old genius of thunder.<sup>69</sup> People continued to worship the material heaven in him; under the Romans he was still simply called *Caelus*, as well as "Celestial Jupiter" (*Jupiter Caelestis*, Ζεὺς Οὐρά-

<sup>64</sup> Anz, *Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung des Gnosticismus*, 1897.

<sup>65</sup> Macrobius, *Comm. somn. Scip.*, I, II, § 8.

<sup>66</sup> Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Originally he was the god of thunder.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Usener, *loc. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Pognon, *Inscr. sémit.*, 1907, pp. 165 f.

νός),<sup>70</sup> but it was a heaven studied by a sacred science that venerated its harmonious mechanism. The Seleucides represented him on their coins with a crescent over his forehead and carrying a sun with seven rays, to symbolize the fact that he presided over the course of the stars;<sup>71</sup> or else he was shown with the two Dioscuri at his side, heroes who enjoyed life and suffered death in turn, according to the Greek myth, and who had become the symbols of the two celestial hemispheres. Religious uranography placed the residence of the supreme divinity in the most elevated region of the world, fixing its abode in the zone most distant from the earth, above the planets and the fixed stars. This fact was intended to be expressed by the term Most-High ("Υψιστος) applied to the Syrian Baals as well as to Jehovah.<sup>72</sup> According to this cosmic religion, the Most High resided in the immense orb that contained the spheres of all the stars and embraced the entire universe which was subject to his domination. The Latins translated the name of this "Hypsistos" by *Jupiter summus exsuperantissimus*<sup>73</sup> to indicate his pre-eminence over all divine beings.

As a matter of fact, his power was infinite. The primary postulate of the Chaldean astrology was that all phenomena and events of this world were necessarily determined by sidereal influence. The changes of nature, as well as the dispositions of men, were controlled according to fate, by the divine energies that resided in the heavens. In other words, the gods were almighty; they were the masters of destiny that governed the universe absolutely. The notion of their omnipotence resulted from the development of the ancient autocracy with which the Baals were credited. As we have stated, they were conceived after the image of an Asiatic monarch, and the religious terminology was evidently intended to display the humility of their priests toward them. In Syria we find nothing analogous to what existed in Egypt, where the priest thought he could compel the gods to act, and even dared to threaten them.<sup>74</sup> The distance separating the human and the divine always was much greater with the Semitic tribes, and all that astrology did was to emphasize the distance more strongly by giving it a doctrinal foundation and a scientific appearance. In the Latin world the Asiatic religions propa-

<sup>70</sup> Renan, *Mission de Phénicie*, p. 103.

<sup>71</sup> Babelon, *Rois de Syrie, d'Arménie*, 1890, pp. clix; 178 f.

<sup>72</sup> According to the Alexandrian Judaism these were all qualities of Jehovah.

<sup>73</sup> "Jupiter summus exsuperantissimus," *Archiv f. Religionsw.*, IX, 1906, pp. 326 f.

<sup>74</sup> Ps.-Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VI, 7.

gated the conception of the absolute and illimitable sovereignty of God over the earth. Apuleius calls the Syrian goddess *omnipotens et omniparens*, "mistress and mother of all things."<sup>75</sup>

The observation of the starry skies, moreover, had led the Chaldeans to the notion of a divine eternity. The constancy of the sidereal revolutions inspired the conclusion as to their perpetuity. The stars follow their ever uncompleted courses unceasingly; as soon as the end of their journey is reached, they resume without stopping the road already covered, and the cycles of years in which their movements take place, extend from the indefinite past into the indefinite future.<sup>76</sup> Thus a clergy of astronomers necessarily conceived Baal, "Lord of the heavens," as the "Master of eternity" or "He whose name is praised through all eternity"<sup>77</sup>—titles which constantly recur in Semitic inscriptions. The divine stars did not die, like Osiris or Attis; whenever they seemed to weaken, they were born to a new life and always remained invincible (*invicti*).

Together with the mysteries of the Syrian Baals, this theological notion penetrated into Occidental paganism.<sup>78</sup> Whenever an inscription to a *deus aeternus* is found in the Latin provinces it refers to a Syrian sidereal god, and it is a remarkable fact that this epithet did not enter the ritual before the second century, at the time the worship of the god Heaven (*Caelus*)<sup>79</sup> was propagated. That the philosophers had long before placed the first cause beyond the limits of time was of no consequence, for their theories had not penetrated into the popular consciousness nor modified the traditional formulæ of the liturgies. To the people the divinities were beings more beautiful, more vigorous, and more powerful than man, but born like him, and exempt only from old age and death, the immortals of old Homer. The Syrian priests diffused the idea of a god without beginning and without end through the Roman world, and thus contributed, along lines parallel with the Jewish proselytism, to lend the authority of dogma to what had previously been only a metaphysical theory.

The Baals were universal as well as eternal, and their power became limitless in regard to space as it had been in regard to time. These two principles were correlative. The title of "*mar 'olam*" which the Baals bore occasionally may be translated by "Lord of

<sup>75</sup> Apuleius, *Metam.*, VIII, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Diodorus, II, 30.

<sup>77</sup> De Vogüé, *Inscr. sémit.*, pp. 53 f.

<sup>78</sup> CIL, VI, 406 = 20758.

<sup>79</sup> *Rev. archéol.*, 1888, I, pp. 184 f.

the universe," or by "Lord of eternity," and efforts certainly have been made to claim the twofold quality for them.<sup>80</sup> Peopled with divine constellations and traversed by planets assimilated to the inhabitants of Olympus, the heavens determined the destinies of the entire human race by their movements, and the whole earth was subject to the changes produced by their revolutions.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, the old *Ba'al šamīn* was necessarily transformed into a universal power. Of course, even under the Cæsars there existed in Syria traces of a period when the local god was the fetich of a clan and could be worshiped by the members of that clan only, a period when strangers were admitted to his altars only after a ceremony of initiation, as brothers, or at least as guests and clients.<sup>82</sup> But from the period when our knowledge of the history of the great divinities of Heliopolis or Hierapolis begins, these divinities were regarded as common to all Syrians, and crowds of pilgrims came from distant countries to obtain grace in the holy cities. As protectors of the entire human race the Baals gained proselytes in the Occident, and their temples witnessed gatherings of devotees of every race and nationality. In this respect the Baals were distinctly different from Jehovah.

The essence of paganism implies that the nature of a divinity broadens as the number of its votaries increases. Everybody credits it with some new quality, and its character becomes more complex. As it gains in power it also has a tendency to dominate its companion gods and to concentrate their functions in itself. To escape this threatening absorption, these gods must be of a very sharply defined personality and of a very original character. The vague Semitic deities, however, were devoid of a well defined individuality. We fail to find among them a well organized society of immortals, like that of the Greek Olympus where each divinity had its own features and its own particular life full of adventures and experiences; and each followed its special calling to the exclusion of all the others. One was a physician, another a poet, a third a shepherd, hunter or blacksmith. The Greek inscriptions found in Syria are, in this regard, eloquently concise.<sup>83</sup> Usually they have the name of Zeus accompanied by some simple epithet: *κύριος* (Lord), *ἀνίκητος* (invincible), *μέγιστος* (greatest). All these Baals

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, I, 258; II, 297.

<sup>81</sup> CIL, III, 1090 = Dessau, *Inscr.*, 2998.

<sup>82</sup> Robertson Smith, *loc. cit.*, pp. 75 f.

<sup>83</sup> Renan, *Apôtres*, p. 297.

seem to have been brothers. They were personalities of indeterminate outline and interchangeable powers and were readily confused.

At the time the Romans came into contact with Syria, it had already passed through a period of syncretism similar to the one we can study with greater precision in the Latin world. The ancient exclusiveness and the national particularism had been overcome. The Baals of the great sanctuaries had enriched themselves with the virtues<sup>84</sup> of their neighbors; then, always following the same process, they had taken certain features from foreign divinities brought over by the Greek conquerors. In that manner their characters had become indefinable, they performed incompatible functions and possessed irreconcilable attributes. An inscription found in Brittany<sup>85</sup> assimilates the Syrian goddess to Peace, Virtue, Ceres, Cybele, and even to the sign of the Virgin.

In conformity with the law governing the development of paganism, the Semitic gods tended to become pantheistic because they comprehended all nature and were identified with it. The various deities were nothing but different aspects under which the supreme and infinite being manifested itself. Although Syria remained deeply and even coarsely idolatrous in practice, in theory it approached monotheism or, better perhaps, henotheism. By an absurd but curious etymology the name Hadad has been explained as "one, one" (*'ad 'ad*).<sup>86</sup>

Everywhere the narrow and divided polytheism showed a confused tendency to elevate itself into a superior synthesis, but in Syria astrology lent the firmness of intelligent conviction to notions that were vague elsewhere. The Chaldean cosmology, that deified all elements but ascribed a predominant influence to the stars, ruled the entire Syrian syncretism. It considered the world as a great organism kept intact by an intimate solidarity, and whose parts continually influenced each other.

The ancient Semites believed therefore that the divinity could be regarded as embodied in the waters, in the fire of the lightning, in stones or plants. But the most powerful gods were the constellations and the planets that governed the course of time and of all things.

The sun was supreme because it led the starry choir, because it was the king and guide of all the other luminaries and therefore the

<sup>84</sup> *Rev. de Philologie*, 1902, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> CIL, VII, 759.

<sup>86</sup> Macrobius, *Sat.*, I, 23, § 17.

master of the whole world.<sup>87</sup> The astronomical doctrines of the "Chaldeans" taught that this incandescent globe alternately attracted and repelled the other sidereal bodies, and from this principle the Oriental theologians had concluded that it must determine the entire life of the universe, inasmuch as it regulated the movements of the heavens. As the "intelligent light" it was especially the creator of human reason, and just as it repelled and attracted the planets in turn, it was believed to send out souls, at the time of birth, into the bodies they animated and to cause them to return to its bosom after death by means of a series of emissions and absorptions.

Later on, when the seat of the Most-High was placed beyond the limits of the universe, the radiant star that gives us light became the visible image of the supreme power, the source of all life and all intelligence, the intermediary between an inaccessible god and mankind, and the one object of special homage from the multitude.<sup>88</sup>

Solar pantheism, which grew up among the Syrians of the Hellenistic period, as a result of the influence of Chaldean astrology, imposed itself upon the whole Roman world under the empire. Our very rapid sketch of the constitution of that theological system shows incidentally the last form assumed by the pagan idea of god. In this matter Syria was Rome's teacher and predecessor. The last formula reached by the religion of the pagan Semites and in consequence by that of the Romans, was a divinity unique, almighty, eternal, universal and ineffable, that revealed itself throughout nature, but whose most splendid and most energetic manifestation was the sun. To arrive at the Christian monotheism<sup>89</sup> only one final tie had to be broken, that is to say, this supreme being residing in a distant heaven had to be removed beyond the world. So we see once more in this instance, how the propagation of the Oriental cults levelled the roads for Christianity and heralded its triumph. Although astrology was always fought by the Church, it had nevertheless prepared the minds for the dogmas the Church was to proclaim.

<sup>87</sup> Cicero, *Somnium Scip.*, c. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Cumont, "La théologie solaire du paganisme romain," in *Mémoires des savants étrangers*, XII, Pt. 2, pp. 447 f.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Synesius, II, 10 f.; IV, 120 f.