WHERE THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM STOOD.

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CHICAGO

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ROME AND THE ORIENT.*

BY FRANZ CUMONT.

We are fond of regarding ourselves as the heirs of Rome and we like to think that the Latin genius, after having absorbed the genius of Greece, held an intellectual and moral supremacy in the ancient world similar to the one Europe now maintains, and that the culture of the peoples that lived under the authority of the Cesars was stamped forever by their strong touch. It is difficult to forget the present entirely and to renounce aristocratic pretensions. We find it hard to believe that the Orient has not always lived, to some extent, in the state of humiliation from which it is now slowly emerging, and we are inclined to ascribe to the ancient inhabitants of Smyrna, Beirut or Alexandria the faults with which the Levantines of to-day are being reproached. The growing influence of the Orientals that accompanied the decline of the empire has frequently been considered a morbid phenomenon and a symptom of the slow decomposition of the ancient world. Even Renan does not seem to have been sufficiently free from an old prejudice when he wrote on this subject:1 “That the oldest and most worn out civilization should by its corruption subjugate the younger was inevitable.”

But if we calmly consider the real facts, avoiding the optical illusion that makes things in our immediate vicinity look larger, we shall form a quite different opinion. It is beyond all dispute that Rome found the point of support of its military power in the Occident. The legions from the Danube and the Rhine were always braver, stronger and better disciplined than those from the Euphrates and the Nile. But it is in the Orient, especially in these countries of “old civilization,” that we must look for industry and riches, for technical ability and artistic productions, as well as for

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1 Renan, L'Antéchrist, p. 130.

intelligence and science, even before Constantine made it the center of political power.

While Greece merely vegetated in a state of poverty, humiliation and exhaustion: while Italy suffered depopulation and became unable to provide for her own support; while the other countries of Europe were hardly out of barbarism; Asia Minor, Egypt and Syria gathered the rich harvests Roman peace made possible. Their industrial centers cultivated and renewed all the traditions that had caused their former celebrity. A more intense intellectual life corresponded with the economic activity of these great manufacturing and exporting countries. They excelled in every profession except that of arms, and even the prejudiced Romans admitted their superiority. The menace of an Oriental empire haunted the imaginations of the first masters of the world. Such an empire seems to have been the main thought of the dictator Caesar, and the triumvir Antony almost realized it. Even Nero thought of making Alexandria his capital. Although Rome, supported by her army and the right of might, retained the political authority for a long time, she bowed to the fatal moral ascendancy of more advanced peoples. Viewed from this standpoint the history of the empire during the first three centuries may be summarized as a "peaceful infiltration" of the Orient into the Occident. This truth has become evident since the various aspects of Roman civilization are being studied in greater detail; and before broaching the special subject of these studies we wish to review a few phases of the slow metamorphosis of which the propagation of the Oriental religions was one phenomenon.

In the first place the imitation of the Orient showed itself plainly in political institutions. To be convinced of this fact it is sufficient to compare the government of the empire in the time of Augustus with what it had become under Diocletian. At the beginning of the imperial regime Rome ruled the world but did not govern it. She kept the number of her functionaries down to a minimum, her provinces were mere unorganized aggregates of cities where she only exercised police power, protectorates rather than annexed countries. As long as law and order were maintained and her citizens, functionaries and merchants could transact their business, Rome was satisfied. She saved herself the trouble of looking after

4 Cicero, De Officiis, II, 8.
the public service by leaving a broad authority to the cities that had
existed before her domination, or had been modeled after her. The
taxes were levied by syndicates of bankers and the public lands
rented out. Before the reforms instituted by Augustus, even the
army was not an organic and permanent force, but consisted theo-
retically of troops levied before a war and discharged after victory.
Rome's institutions remained those of a city. It was difficult
to apply them to the vast territory she attempted to govern with
their aid. They were a clumsy apparatus that worked only by sud-
den starts, a rudimentary system that could and did not last.

What do we find three centuries later? A strongly centralized
state in which an absolute ruler, worshiped like a god and sur-
rounded by a large court, commanded a whole hierarchy of func-
tionaries; cities divested of their local liberties and ruled by an om-
nipotent bureaucracy, the old capital herself the first to be dispos-
sessed of her autonomy and subjected to prefects. Outside of the
cities the monarch, whose private fortune was identical with the
state-finances, possessed immense domains managed by intendants
and supporting a population of serf-colonists. The army was com-
posed largely of foreign mercenaries, professional soldiers whose pay
or bounty consisted of lands on which they settled. All these fea-
tures and many others caused the Roman empire to assume the like-
ness of ancient Oriental monarchies.

It would be impossible to admit that like causes produce like
results, and then maintain that a similarity is not sufficient proof of
an influence in history. Wherever we can closely follow the succes-
sive transformations of a particular institution, we notice the action
of the Orient and especially of Egypt. When Rome had become a
great cosmopolitan metropolis like Alexandria, Augustus reorganized
it in imitation of the capital of the Ptolemies. The fiscal reforms of
the Cæsars like the taxes on sales and inheritances, the register of
land surveys and the direct collection of taxes, were suggested by
the very perfect financial system of the Lagides, and it can be main-
tained that their government was the first source from which those
of modern Europe were derived, through the medium of the Romans.
The imperial saltus, superintended by a procurator and cultivated
by metayers reduced to the state of serfs, was an imitation of the ones
that the Asiatic potentates formerly cultivated through their agents.

8 O. Hischfeld, op. cit., pp. 53, 91, 93 etc. Cf. Mitteis, Reichsrecht und
Volksrecht, p. 9, n. 2 etc.

9 Rostovtzev, "Der Ursprung des Kolonats" in Beiträge zur alten Ge-
schichte, I, 1901, p. 295; and Haussoullier, Histoire de Milet et du Didymeion,
1902, p. 106.
It would be easy to increase this list of examples. The absolute monarchy, theocratic and bureaucratic at the same time, that was the form of government of Egypt, Syria and even Asia-Minor during the Alexandrine period was the ideal on which the deified Caesars gradually fashioned the Roman empire.

One cannot however deny Rome the glory of having elaborated a system of private law that was logically deduced from clearly formulated principles and was destined to become the fundamental law of all civilized communities. But even in connection with this private law, where the originality of Rome is uncontested and her preeminence absolute, recent researches have shown with how much tenacity the Hellenized Orient maintained its old legal codes, and how much resistance local customs, the woof of the life of nations, offered to unification. In truth, unification never was realized except in theory. More than that, these researches have proved that the fertile principles of that provincial law, which was sometimes on a higher moral plane than the Roman law, reacted on the progressive transformation of the old *ius civile*. And how could it be otherwise? Were not a great number of famous jurists like Ulpian of Tyre and Papinius of Hemesa natives of Syria? And did not the law-school of Beirut constantly grow in importance after the third century, until during the fifth century it became the most brilliant center of legal education? Thus Levantines cultivated even the patrimonial field cleared by Scevola and Labeo.

In the austere temple of law the Orient held as yet only a minor position; everywhere else its authority was predominant. The practical mind of the Romans, which made them excellent lawyers, prevented them from becoming great scholars. They esteemed pure science but little, having small talent for it, and one notices that it ceased to be earnestly cultivated wherever their direct domination was established. The great astronomers, mathematicians, and physicians, like the originators or defenders of the great metaphysical systems, were mostly Orientals. Ptolemy and Plotinus were Egyptians, Porphyrius and Iamblichus, Syrians, Dioscorides and Galen, Asiatics. All branches of learning were affected by the spirit of the Orient. The clearest minds accepted the chimeras of astrology and magic. Philosophy claimed more and more to derive its inspiration from the fabulous wisdom of Chaldea and Egypt. Tired of seeking truth, reason abdicated and hoped to find it in a revelation preserved

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in the mysteries of the barbarians. Greek logic strove to coordinate into an harmonious whole the confused traditions of the Asiatic religions.

Letters, as well as science, were cultivated chiefly by the Orientals. Attention has often been called to the fact that those men of letters that were considered the purest representatives of the Greek spirit under the empire belonged almost without exception to Asia Minor, Syria or Egypt. The rhetorician Dion Chrysostom came from Prusa in Bithynia, the satirist Lucian from Samosata in Commagene on the borders of the Euphrates. A number of other names could be cited. From Tacitus and Suetonius down to Ammianus, there was not one author of talent to preserve in Latin the memory of the events that stirred the world of that period, but it was a Bithynian again, Dion Cassins of Nicca, who, under the Severi, narrated the history of the Roman people.

It is a characteristic fact that, besides this literature whose language was Greek, others were born, revived and developed. The Syriac, derived from the Aramaic which was the international language of earlier Asia, became again the language of a cultured race with Bardeanes of Edessa. The Copts remembered that they had spoken several dialects derived from the ancient Egyptian and endeavored to revive them. North of the Taurus even the Armenians began to write and polish their barbarian speech. Christian preaching, addressed to the people, took hold of the popular idioms and roused them from their long lethargy. Along the Nile as well as on the plains of Mesopotamia or in the valleys of Anatolia it proclaimed its new ideas in dialects that had been despised hitherto, and wherever the old Orient had not been entirely denationalized by Hellenism, it successfully reclaimed its intellectual autonony.

A revival of native art went hand in hand with this linguistic awakening. In no field of intellect has the illusion mentioned above been so complete and lasting as in this one. Until a few years ago the opinion prevailed that an "imperial" art had come into existence in the Rome of Augustus and that thence its predominance had slowly spread to the periphery of the ancient world. If it had undergone some special modifications in Asia these were due to exotic influences, undoubtedly Assyrian or Persian. Not even the important discoveries of M. de Vogüé in Hauran⁹ were sufficient to prove the emptiness of a theory that was supported by our lofty conviction of European leadership.

To-day it is fully proven not only that Rome has given nothing or almost nothing to the Orientals but also that she has received quite a little from them. Impregnated with Hellenism, Asia produced an astonishing number of original works of art in the kingdoms of the Diadochs. The old processes, the discovery of which dates back to the Chaldeans, the Hittites or the subjects of the Pharaohs, were first utilized by the conquerors of Alexander's empire who conceived a rich variety of new types, and created an original style. But if during the three centuries preceding our era, sovereign Greece played the part of the demiurge who creates living beings out of preexisting matter, during the three following centuries her productive power became exhausted, her faculty of invention weakened, the ancient local traditions revolted against her empire and with the help of Christianity overcame it. Transferred to Byzantium they expanded in a new efflorescence and spread over Europe where they paved the way for the formation of the Romanesque art of the early Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{10}

Rome, then, far from having established her suzerainty, was tributary to the Orient in this respect. The Orient was her superior in the extent and precision of its technical knowledge as well as in the inventive genius and the ability of its workmen. The Caesars were great builders but frequently employed foreign help. Trajan's principal architect, a magnificent builder, was a Syrian, Apollodorus of Damascus.\textsuperscript{11}

Her Levantine subjects not only taught Italy the artistic solution of architectonic problems like the erection of a cupola on a rectangular or octagonal edifice, but also compelled her to accept their taste, and they saturated her with their genius. They imparted to her their love of luxuriant decoration and of violent polychromy, and they gave religious sculpture and painting the complicated symbolism that pleased their abstruse and subtle minds.

In those times art was closely connected with industry, which was entirely manual and individual. They learned from each other, they improved and declined together, in short they were inseparable. Shall we call the painters that decorated the architecturally fantastic and airy walls of Pompeii in Alexandrian or perhaps Syrian taste artisans or artists? And how shall we classify the goldsmiths, Alexandrians also, who carved those delicate leaves, those picturesque animals, those harmoniously elegant or cunningly animated groups that cover the phials and goblets of Bosco Reale? And

\textsuperscript{10}This fact has been established by the researches of M. Strzygowski.

\textsuperscript{11}Cf. also Pliny, \textit{Epist. Traian.}, 40.
descending from the productions of the industrial arts to those of industry itself, one might also trace the growing influence of the Orient; one might show how the action of the great manufacturing centers of the East gradually transformed the material civilization of Europe; one might point out how the introduction into Gaul\textsuperscript{12} of exotic patterns and processes changed the old native industry and gave its products a perfection and a popularity hitherto unknown. But I dislike to insist overmuch on a point apparently so foreign to the one now before us. It was important however to mention this subject at the beginning because in whatever direction scholars of to-day pursue their investigations they always notice Asiatic culture slowly supplanting that of Italy. The latter developed only by absorbing elements taken from the inexhaustible reserves of the "old civilizations" of which we spoke at the beginning. The Hellenized Orient imposed itself everywhere through its men and its works; it subjected its Latin conquerors to its ascendancy in the same manner as it dominated its Arabian conquerors later when it became the civilizer of Islam. But in no field of thought was its influence, under the empire, so decisive as in religion, because it finally brought about the complete destruction of the Greco-Latin paganism.\textsuperscript{13}

The invasion of the barbarian religions was so open, so noisy and so triumphant that it could not remain unnoticed. It attracted the anxious or sympathetic attention of the ancient authors, and since the Renaissance modern scholars have frequently taken interest in it. Possibly however they did not sufficiently understand that this religious evolution was not an isolated and extraordinary phenomenon, but that it accompanied and aided a more general evolution, just as that aided it in turn. The transformation of beliefs was intimately connected with the establishment of the monarchy by divine right, the development of art, the prevailing philosophic tendencies, in fact with all manifestations of thought, sentiment and taste.

We shall attempt to sketch this religious movement with its numerous and far-reaching ramifications. First we shall try to show what caused the diffusion of the Oriental religions. In the second place we shall examine those in particular that originated in Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and Persia, and we shall endeavor to distinguish their individual characteristics and estimate their value. We shall see, finally, how the ancient idolatry was transformed


\textsuperscript{13} Harnack, \textit{Mission und Ausbreitung}, II, p. 283, n. 1.
and what form it assumed in its last struggle against Christianity, whose victory was furthered by the Asiatic mysteries, although they opposed its doctrine.

* * *

But before broaching this subject a preliminary question must be answered. Is the study which we have just outlined possible? What items will be of assistance to us in this undertaking? From what sources are we to derive our knowledge of the Oriental religions in the Roman empire?

It must be admitted that the sources are inadequate and have not as yet been sufficiently investigated.

Perhaps no loss caused by the general wreck of ancient literature has been more disastrous than that of the liturgic books of paganism. A few mystic formulas quoted incidentally by pagan or Christian authors and a few fragments of hymns in honor of the gods\(^{14}\) are practically all that escaped destruction. In order to obtain an idea of what those lost rituals may have been one must turn to their imitations contained in the chorus of tragedies, and to the parodies comic authors sometimes made; or look up in books of magic the plagiarisms that writers of incantations may have committed.\(^{15}\) But all this gives us only a dim reflection of the religious ceremonies. Shut out from the sanctuary like profane outsiders, we hear only the indistinct echo of the sacred songs and not even in imagination can we attend the celebration of the mysteries.

We do not know how the ancients prayed, we cannot penetrate into the intimacy of their religious life, and certain depths of the soul of antiquity we must leave unsounded. If a fortunate windfall could give us possession of some sacred book of the later paganism its revelations would surprise the world. We could witness the performance of those mysterious dramas whose symbolic acts commemorated the passion of the gods; in company with the believers we could sympathize with their sufferings, lament their death and share in the joy of their return to life. In those vast collections of archaic rites that hazily perpetuated the memory of abolished creeds we would find traditional formulas couched in obsolete language that was scarcely understood, naive prayers conceived by the faith of the earliest ages, sanctified by the devotion of past centuries, and almost ennobled by the joys and sufferings


\(^{15}\) Cf. Adami, *De poëtis secv. Graccis hymnorum sacrorum imitatoribus*, 1901.
of past generations. We would also read those hymns in which philosophic thought found expression in sumptuous allegories or humbled itself before the omnipotence of the infinite, poems of which only a few stoic effusions celebrating the creative or destructive fire, or expressing a complete surrender to divine fate can give us some idea.

But everything is gone, and thus we lose the possibility of studying from the original documents the internal development of the pagan religions.

We would feel this loss less keenly if we possessed at least the works of Greek and Latin mythographers on the subject of foreign divinities like the voluminous books published during the second century by Eusebius and Pallas on the Mysteries of Mithra. But those works were thought devoid of interest or even dangerous by the devout Middle Ages, and they are not likely to have survived the fall of paganism. The treatises on mythology that have been preserved deal almost entirely with the ancient Hellenic fables made famous by the classic writers, to the neglect of the Oriental religions.

As a rule, all we find in literature on this subject are a few incidental remarks and passing allusions. History is incredibly poor in that respect. This poverty of information was caused in the first place by a narrowness of view characteristic of the rhetoric cultivated by historians of the classical period and especially of the empire. Politics and the wars of the rulers, the dramas, the intrigues and even the gossip of the courts and of the official world were of much higher interest to them than the great economic or religious transformations. Moreover, there is no period of the Roman empire concerning which we are so little informed as the third century, precisely the one during which the Oriental religions reached the apogee of their power. From Herodianus and Dion Cassius to the Byzantines, and from Suetonius to Ammianus Marcellinus, all narratives of any importance have been lost, and this deplorable blank in historic tradition is particularly fatal to the study of paganism.

It is a strange fact that light literature concerned itself more with these grave questions. The rites of the exotic religions stimulated the imagination of the satirists, and the pomp of the festivities

18 Cf. Cumont, Monuments relatifs aux mystères de Mithra.
furnished the novelists with brilliant descriptive matter. Juvenal
laughs at the mortifications of the devotees of Isis; in his Necyo-
mancy Lucian parodies the interminable purifications of the magi,
and in the Metamorphoses Apuleius relates the various scenes of
an initiation into the mysteries of Isis with the fervor of a neophyte
and the studied refinement of a rhetorician. But as a rule we find
only incidental remarks and superficial observations in the authors.
Not even the precious treatise On the Syrian Goddess, in which
Lucian tells of a visit to the temple of Hierapolis and repeats his
conversation with the priests, has any depth. What he relates is
the impression of an intelligent, curious and above all an ironical
traveler. 19

In order to obtain a more perfect initiation and a less frag-
mentary insight into the doctrines taught by the Oriental religions,
we are compelled to turn to two kinds of testimony, inspired by
contrary tendencies, but equally suspicious: the testimony of the
philosophers, and that of the fathers of the church. The Stoics
and the Platonists frequently took an interest in the religious beliefs
of the barbarians, and it is to them that we are indebted for the
possession of highly valuable data on this subject. Plutarch's treat-
ise Isis and Osiris is a source whose importance is appreciated even
by Egyptologists, whom it aids in reconstructing the legends of those
divinities. 20 But the philosophers very seldom expounded foreign
doctrines objectively and for their own sake. They embodied them
in their systems as a means of proof or illustration; they surrounded
them with personal exegesis or drowned them in transcendental
commentaries; in short, they claimed to discover their own ideas
in them. It is always difficult and sometimes impossible to dis-
tinguish the dogmas from the self-confident interpretations which
are usually as incorrect as possible.

The writings of the ecclesiastical authors, although prejudiced,
are very fertile sources of information, but in perusing them one
must guard against another kind of error. By a peculiar irony of
fate those controversialists are to-day in many instances our only
aid in reviving the idolatry they attempted to destroy. Although
the Oriental religions were the most dangerous and most persistent
adversaries of Christianity, the works of the Christian writers do
not supply as abundant information as one might suppose. The
reason for this is that the fathers of the church often show a certain
reserve in speaking of idolatry, and affect to recall its monstrosities

19 On its authenticity cf. Croiset, Essay sur Lucien, 1882, pp. 63 and 204.
only in guarded terms. Moreover, as we shall see later on, the apologists of the fourth century were frequently behind the times as to the evolution of doctrines, and drawing on literary tradition, from epicureans and skeptics, they fought especially the beliefs of the ancient Grecian and Italian religions that had been abolished or were dying out, while they neglected the living beliefs of the contemporary world.

Some of these polemicians nevertheless directed their attacks against the divinities of the Orient and their Latin votaries. Either they derived their information from converts or they had been pagans themselves during their youth. This was the case with Firmicus Maternus who has written a bad treatise on astrology and finally fought the Error of the Profane Religions. However, the question always arises as to how much they can have known of the esoteric doctrines and the ritual ceremonies, the secret of which was jealously guarded. They boast so loudly of their power to disclose these abominations, that they incur the suspicion that the discretion of the initiates baffled their curiosity. In addition they were too ready to believe all the calumnies that were circulated against the pagan mysteries, calumnies directed against occult sects of all times and against the Christians themselves.

In short, the literary tradition is not very rich and frequently little worthy of belief. While it is comparatively considerable for the Egyptian religions because they were received by the Greek world as early as the period of the Ptolemies, and because letters and science were always cultivated at Alexandria, it is even less important for Phrygia, although Cybele was Hellenized and Latinized very early, and excepting the tract by Lucian on the goddess of Hierapolis it is almost nothing for the Syrian, Cappadocian and Persian religions.

The insufficiency of the data supplied by writers increases the value of information furnished by epigraphic and archeological documents, whose number is steadily growing. The inscriptions possess a certainty and precision that is frequently absent in the phrases of the writers. They enable one to draw important conclusions as to the dates of propagation and disappearance of the various religions, their extent, the quality and social rank of their votaries, the sacred hierarchy and sacerdotal personnel, the constitution of the religious communities, the offerings made to the gods, and the ceremonies performed in their honor; in short, conclusions

as to the secular and profane history of these religions, and in a

certain measure their ritual. But the conciseness of the lapidary
style and the constant repetition of stereotyped formulas naturally
render that kind of text hardly explicit and sometimes enigmatical.
There are dedications like the Nama Sebesio engraved upon the
great Mithra bas-relief preserved in the Louvre, that caused a num-
ber of dissertations to be written without any one’s explaining it.
And besides, in a general way, epigraphy gives us but little informa-
tion about the liturgy and almost nothing regarding the doctrines.

Archeology must endeavor to fill the enormous blanks left by
the written tradition; the monuments, especially the artistic ones,
have not as yet been collected with sufficient care nor interpreted
with sufficient method. By studying the arrangement of the temples
and the religious furniture that adorned them, one can at the same
time determine part of the liturgic ceremonies which took place there.
On the other hand, the critical interpretation of statuary relics en-
ables us to reconstruct with sufficient correctness certain sacred
legends and to recover part of the theology of the mysteries. Unlike
Greek art, the religious art at the close of paganism did not seek, or
sought only incidentally, to elevate the soul through the contempla-
tion of an ideal of divine beauty. True to the traditions of the
ancient Orient, it tried to edify and to instruct at the same time.\(^\text{22}\)
It told the history of gods and the world in cycles of pictures, or it
expressed through symbols the subtle conceptions of theology and
even certain doctrines of profane science, like the struggle of the
four elements; just as during the Middle Ages, so the artist of the
empire interpreted the ideas of the clergy, teaching the believers
by means of pictures and rendering the highest religious concep-
tions intelligible to the humblest minds. But to read this mystic
book whose pages are scattered in our museums we must laboriously
look for its key, and we cannot take for a guide and exegetist some
Vincent de Beauvais of Diocletian’s period\(^\text{23}\) as when looking over
the marvelous sculptured encyclopedias in our Gothic cathedrals.
Our position is frequently similar to that of a scholar of the year
4000 who would undertake to write the history of the Passion from
the pictures of the fourteen stations, or to study the veneration of
the saints from the statues found in the ruins of our churches.

But, as far as the Oriental religions are concerned, the results
of all the laborious investigations now being made in the classical

\(^{22}\) Cf. Cumont, *Monuments relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, I, pp. 75 and
\(^{219}\).

countries can be indirectly controlled, and this is a great advantage. To-day we are tolerably well acquainted with the old religions of Egypt, Babylonia and Persia. We read and translate correctly the hieroglyphics of the Nile, the cuneiform tablets of Mesopotamia and the sacred books, Zend or Pahlavi, of Parseeism. Religious history has profited more by their deciphering than the history of politics or of civilization. In Syria also, the discovery of Aramaic and Phoenician inscriptions and the excavations made in temples have in a certain measure covered the deficiency of information in the Bible or in the Greek writers on Semitic paganism. Even Asia Minor, that is to say the uplands of Anatolia, is beginning to reveal itself to explorers although almost all the great sanctuaries, Pessinus, the two Comanas, Castabala, are as yet buried underground. We can, therefore, even now form a fairly exact idea of the beliefs of some of the countries that sent the Oriental mysteries to Rome. To tell the truth, these researches have not been pushed far enough to enable us to state precisely what form religion had assumed in those regions at the time they came into contact with Italy, and we would be likely to commit very strange errors, if we brought together practices that may have been separated by thousands of years. It is a task reserved for the future to establish a rigorous chronology in this matter to determine the ultimate phase that the evolution of creeds in all regions of the Levant had reached at the beginning of our era, and to connect them without interruption of continuity to the mysteries practiced in the Latin world, the secrets of which archæological researches are slowly bringing to light.

We are still far from welding all the links of this long chain firmly together: the orientalists and the classical philologists cannot, as yet, shake hands across the Mediterranean. We raise only one corner of Isis’s veil, and scarcely guess a part of the revelations that were, even formerly, reserved for a pious and chosen few. Nevertheless we have reached, on the road of certainty, a summit from which we can overlook the field that our successors will clear. In the course of these lectures I shall attempt to give a summary of the essential results achieved by the erudition of the nineteenth century and to draw from them a few conclusions that will, possibly, be provisional. The invasion of the Oriental religions that destroyed the ancient religions and national ideals of the Romans also radically transformed the society and government of the empire, and in view of this fact it would deserve the historian’s attention even if it had not foreshadowed and prepared the final victory of Christianity.