

Babylon and Rome

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[p.241]

I

It cannot seriously be denied that most of the features of advanced Catholic¹ ritual have little or no direct warrant in the New Testament. It is frequently urged in support of such ritual that it can be traced in unbroken sequence back to the fourth century. "No sooner did the primitive Church emerge from the centuries of persecution, and acquire freedom from external repression, than it gave full and wonderful expression to its devotional spirit in elaborate and beautiful Symbolic ways."² Antiquity, however, is no guarantee of apostolic authority, especially as there is a gap of nearly three centuries between apostolic days and the introduction of the greater part of these ritual practices into the Church. Indeed, far from our being able to find Scriptural authority for these practices, all the available evidence on their provenance goes to show that they were taken over into the Church from the various Mystery cults which were so popular throughout the Roman Empire in the early centuries of our era. The appeal to the Fathers cannot take the place of an appeal to the Apostles. "The most honoured of the Fathers were men whose minds were impregnated by the superstitions of Pagan religion, or the subtleties of Pagan philosophy.... They were 'near the fountain' of Christianity, forsooth; yes, but they were nearer still to the cesspool of Paganism. And inquiry will show that it is to the cesspool that we should attribute every perversion of the truth which to-day defaces what is called the Christian religion."³

The proof of the descent of Catholic ritual from the Mysteries is not the object of this paper; for such proof, the reader may consult such works as R. Reitzenstein's *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, or S. Angus's *The Mystery Religions and Christianity*. One of the most striking examinations of the

[p.242]

subject was made in 1901 by G. H. Pember in *The Church, the Churches and the Mysteries*, the third section of which, "The Mysteries and Catholicism", was a detailed and convincing demonstration of the Mystery origin of many of the most characteristic features of Romanism in particular.⁴ It is a matter for much satisfaction that this section has been reprinted this year

¹ Throughout this paper the adjective "Catholic" is used, not altogether accurately, to denote those sections of Christendom which most insist upon the term (such as the Roman, Greek, and Anglo-Catholic communions), and which cultivate the advanced ritual here referred to.

² W. J. Sparrow Simpson, *The History of the Anglo-Catholic Revival*, p. 70.

³ Sir R. Anderson, *The Bible or the Church*, pp. 42 f. Though not the whole truth about the Fathers, thank God, this statement is certainly true, and it is the relevant portion of the truth about them for the purpose of our present study.

⁴ It will be said in reply that, even if such an origin can be proved, these pagan practices, when taken over by the Church, were baptised and invested with a new spirit, being redeemed and purged from their pristine associations: "by their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots!" Our present study is frankly an inquiry into the roots, and we are ready to appraise the fruits independently as we find them. If, however, these fruits involve a greater attention to outward forms and ceremonies than to inward and spiritual realities, the interposition between God and man of mediators other than the One of God's appointing, the obscuring of the simplicity that is in Christ, and the worship of the creature instead of, or as well as, the Creator (by whatever technical term that worship may be designated), then we shall conclude that the fruits partake of the nature of the roots—which is what we should have expected in the natural course of things.

(1941) in a volume of Pember's writings entitled *Mystery Babylon the Great*, edited by his literary executor, Mr. G. H. Lang, and published by Oliphants Ltd.

Not only did Pember trace Catholic ritual back to the Mystery religions, but through these to the ancient ritual of the Babylonians. He was by no means the first to argue for such a connection between Babylon and Rome. The early Protestant identification of the Apocalyptic "Babylon the Great" (Rev. xvii. 5) with the Church of Rome suggested a connection that was more than verbal and metaphorical. About the middle of last century a series of works appeared in Britain which sought to prove that the worship of the Roman Church could be traced back through pagan Rome to the religion of ancient Babylon. The stimulus to this research was probably afforded in large measure by Catholic Emancipation and the development of the Tractarian movement.

One of the earliest of these works was *Lares and Penates* in Cilicia, by William Burckhardt Barker (died 1850). The eighth chapter of this work, entitled "Magi and Monks", described certain relics of Anatolian religion, from which the author deduced that after the Persian conquest of Babylon, the headquarters of the Babylonian hierarchy were transferred to Pergamum, whence they passed to Rome in 133 B.C. when Attalus III, the last Pergamene king, bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman state.⁵

The thesis was taken up and developed in 1852 by H. J. Jones, who contributed to the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* a series of four papers, sadly deficient in historical accuracy, entitled "Is Rome Babylon, and Why?"⁶ But neither Barker nor Jones treated the subject with anything like the thoroughness of the Rev. Alexander Hislop, Free Church Minister at Arbroath, whose book, *The Two Babylons*, appeared in 1857, and speedily ran into several editions. This monument of study and erudition aimed at proving that the Papal system was identical with the worship of Nimrod (or Ninus) and his wife Semiramis.⁷

[p.243]

In defence of his thesis Hislop ranged the whole world from ancient days down, to his own, finding everywhere marks of the Babylonian origin of all pagan and Papal worship. To his wide reading he added an etymological inventiveness which traced words all over the globe to

⁵ I am acquainted with this work of Barker in a posthumous edition of 1853. The argument referred to is on pp. 432 ff. of this edition. The transference of the Babylonian worship to Pergamum is unknown to classical history, which first mentions Pergamum in connection with the Anabasis of the Ten Thousand (401 B.C.). The "palladium of Babylon, the cubic stone" which Barker says the Babylonian priests took with them to Pergamum must be intended to be identified with the black meteorite image of Cybele, taken to Rome in 204 B.C. from Pessinus, according to most historians, but from Pergamum, according to Varro (see below). I am aware of no suggestion in classical literature that this image came from Babylon. The only argument I have seen for a connection between Babylon and Pergamum is in Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, ch. vii. He refers to an oracle of Apollo quoted by Pausanias, x. 15, which addresses Attalus I as *ταυροκέρως*, "bull-horned", an epithet belonging properly to Bacchus. As Hislop elsewhere identifies Bacchus with Nimrod (ch. ii), he concludes that the Attalids sat in the seat of the priest-kings of Babylon, and "were hailed as the representatives of the old Babylonian god".

⁶ These papers were reprinted at Torquay in 1900 as "Prophetic Papers" 31 to 34 "issued by the World-wide Prayer Union for the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ". It is in this later form that I have made their acquaintance, through the kindness of Mr. G. H. Lang. Their dependence on Barker's work is clear.

⁷ For Nimrod see Gen. x. 8 ff. Ninus appears as the eponymous founder of Nineveh in Diodorus ii. 1-20. Diodorus borrowed his account from Ctesias. The historical Semiramis (cf. Herodotus i. 184) was Sammuramat, regent-mother of Adad-nirari IV of Assyria (810-782 B.C.), but most of the romantic tradition of Semiramis handed down by Diodorus and others belongs in origin to the Syrian goddess Atargatis (the same as Ishtar), whose daughter she was fabled to be.

"Chaldee"⁸ roots. For him "cannibal" (actually a variation from "Carib") was Aramaic *kahnā Ba'al*, "priest of Baal"; the old North European deity Zernebogus, whose name is pure Slavonic and means "black god", the prototype of the horned and hooped devil of popular tradition, was Zer-nebo-Gus, which bears some likeness to the Aramaic equivalent of "Seed of the prophet Cush" (in other words, Nimrod, the son of Cush). This kind of argument, of course, has been invalid for something like three-quarters of a century. The science of philology no longer depends on fortuitous similarities. The laws of development and change in language have been observed and recorded, and etymologies must conform to these. Great tracts of Babylonian life and history that were unknown in Hislop's day have since been brought to light. We now know that the original language of Babylonian religion, far from being what he and his contemporaries called "Chaldee" (which was really Aramaic), was not a Semitic language at all, not even the Semitic tongue now called Akkadian, anciently spoken in the Euphrates and Tigris valleys, but Sumerian, a language with no certain affinity to any other known language, unless to some dialects of the Caucasus region.⁸

Obviously, therefore, Hislop's argument stands in need of radical revision in order to be brought up to date. In place of his reliance on the classical authors' accounts of Babylonian history and worship, eked out by the then very recent discoveries of Layard, we should have to base our arguments on the firsthand information on these subjects which we possess as the result of a century's archaeological research. It may well be asked how far Hislop's conclusions would stand the test of such a revision. It is the object of this paper to select, out of the mass of available evidence, a few points which, when joined, seem to form a line connecting Babylonian religion with the ritual carried out to-day throughout great sections of Christendom. These and related facts must be taken into consideration by any writer who would do for readers of the twentieth century what Hislop did for those of the nineteenth.

[p.244]

II

The connection between the Mysteries and the paganised Christianity of later Roman times is clear enough when the evidence is examined; their connection with early Babylonian religion is less clear, but it is part of our present purpose to indicate some evidence for such a connection. Babylonia had its Mysteries dating back to very early times. According to A. Jeremias (*The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East*, Eng. trans., p. 83), these Mysteries (*nisirtu*) were revealed to Enmeduranki,⁹ one of the antediluvian kings, and jealously guarded by succeeding generations of initiates. That these Mysteries were believed to secure fellowship with the divine, Jeremias inferred from the fact that the ascent of the planet-towers was considered to be well-pleasing to God, and from certain features of the celebration of the death and resurrection of Tammuz.¹⁰ The worship of Tammuz is a most fruitful field for research in connection with our present study, although Jeremias himself is an unsafe guide in these matters. He belonged to the now discredited Pan-Babylonian school of comparative religion, which made the mistake of regarding the astral stage in Babylonian religion as the original one, and endeavoured to trace back to this stage practically all the

⁸ The Georgian scholar M. Tseretheli shows evidence for a relation between Sumerian and the South Caucasian language-group. F. Hommel held that it was related to Turkish, comparing; e.g., Old Turkish *tengere*, "god", with Sum. *dingir*. See M. Ebert's *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* vi. 261 f., xiii. 125.

⁹ Enmeduranki, the seventh of the ten Sumerian antediluvian kings, corresponds to the Euedorachos of Berossus and to the Enoch of Scripture. The tradition of his receiving these mysteries lies behind the copious Enoch literature shortly before and after the time of Christ.

¹⁰ See Ezek. viii. 14.

religions of mankind, not excepting the Biblical revelation.¹¹ The astral stage in Babylonian religion certainly goes back to very early times, but it was in fact superimposed upon a still earlier nature-cult in which the more elemental deities of the earth and the corn were the objects of worship.

The earliest settlers in Babylonia were the Sumerians. They seem to have come from the east (cf. Gen. xi. 2), and to have had cultural contacts with the civilisation uncovered by recent excavation at Mohenjo-daro in the Indus valley. The culture and religion of the Sumerians were taken over by the Semites who entered Babylonia from Arabia. Sumerian religion was originally monotheistic, consisting in the worship of the Skygod An (see the late Professor Langdon's article, "Monotheism as the Predecessor of Polytheism in Sumerian Religion", in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for April, 1937). Later it developed a complicated and bewildering multiplicity of deities, ultimately numbering about 5,000. The first step in the direction of

[p.245]

polytheism was the worship of the Earth-goddess as the Skygod's consort. Early pictographs from Erech associate with him the goddess of that city, Innini, the Queen of heaven,¹² *i.e.*, the planet Venus. But her worship goes back to the preastral period, when the great Earth Mother was worshipped as the consort of the Sky Father.¹³ Earlier than her astral name Innini is Mami ("Mother") or *dingir*-Mah ("Great Goddess"), the latter being her title in the Assyrian theogony. At a very early stage she was associated with Tammuz, whose name represents Sumerian *Duynu-zi*, "faithful son".¹⁴ Dumuzi comes fifth in the list of the ten antediluvian kings, his name being preceded by the determinative ideogram *dingir*, "god". The analogy of the Attis and Adonis myths suggests that the original form of the Tammuz story told how a young king, beloved by the Earth-goddess, died for her sake.¹⁵ Tammuz appears also as the son and brother of the goddess. The Sumerians told how the goddess went to Arallu, the abode of the dead, to seek Dumuzi, and how the earth languished and lay desolate while she was absent there, as it did in the myths of Demeter and Isis.

When the Semites arrived in Babylonia, they came as the heirs of an astral religion differing in several respects from that of the Sumerians. In Sumerian religion the Sun was masculine and the Moon feminine; among the early Semites the Moon was masculine and the Sun feminine. So, too, the planet Venus was originally regarded as a male deity by the Semites;

¹¹ The Pan-Babylonians (the name was of their own choosing) set out to explain all religions in terms of astral mythology. Apart from Jeremias, the most famous members of the school were the archaeologist H. Winckler, who founded it, and E. Stucken, who in his three volumes, *Astralmythen* (Leipzig, 1901-7), extended the system to cover all the peoples of the earth. The school received its death-blow from F. Kugler in *Im Bannkreis Babels* (Münster, 1910). English readers will find brief criticisms in W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 91 ff.; E. A. W. Budge, *Rise and Progress of Assyriology*, pp. 280 ff.; A. S. Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible*, 226.

¹² See Jer. vii. 18; xliv. 17ff., 25. The primitive pictograph of Innini in her original role of Earth Mother was a serpent coiling round a staff, which appears later as the symbol of Aesculapius, and is well-known to-day as the badge of the R.A.M.C. Others may decide what connection, if any, this has with the brazen serpent of Numbers xxi. 8 f.

¹³ "Sky Father" is also the literal translation of Sanskrit *Dyauspitṛ*, Gk. *Ζεὺς πατήρ*, Lat. *Iuppiter*, *Diespiter*, etc., forms which indicate a primitive Indo-European monotheism similar to the Sumerian.

¹⁴ According to S. H. Langdon, *Semitic Mythology (Mythology of All Races, v.)*, p. 346. To this important work by Langdon, I am indebted for most of the information about Sumerian and Semitic mythology in this paper. Dumuzi appears as *Daozos* in the king-list of Berossus.

¹⁵ For the many widespread forms of this myth see J. G. Frazer, "Adonis, Attis, Osiris" (*The Golden Bough*, Part iv).

but the Semites of Babylonia (the Akkadians), in adopting the Sumerian theology, retained their own name for the planet (Ishtar),¹⁶ but changed the sex, so that Ishtar became a female deity, and took over all the functions of the Sumerian Innini, both as Earth Mother and as the planet Venus, the Queen of heaven. The Sumerian influence was so powerful over the territory of the northern and western Semites that the change of sex was imposed on the deities of the Sun, Moon, and Venus in all these parts. In South Arabia, however, the primitive Semitic cult was preserved, with the female Sun, the male Moon, and the male Venus as principal deities.

The Sumerian myth of Dumuzi and Innini appears in an Akkadian form as the story of Tammuz and Ishtar. Like Innini, Ishtar goes to the underworld in search of Tammuz, in order to effect his resurrection, and all love forsakes the earth until her return. In the city of Babylon the priesthood devised

[p.246]

a mystery-play, or ἱερὸς λόγος, as the Greeks would have called it, dealing with the death and resurrection of the local god Bel-Marduk, and drawn from the analogy of the Tammuz myth. In Syria Tammuz was known as Adoni ("my lord"), Graecised as Adonis, and the chief seat of his worship was Gebal (Byblos). It is significant that, according to Plutarch, it was to Byblos that Isis went in search of the body of Osiris.¹⁷ This argues a connection between the Osiris and Tammuz myths, and such a connection is definitely asserted by Wallis Budge, who assures us that "the myth of Bel-Marduk and the myth of Osiris are, *mutatis mutandis*, identical.... The substantial identity of the two myths is proved by their contents, but there is evidence, of a philological character, which suggests that Bel-Marduk and Osiris are one and the same god" (*Babylonian Life and History*, p. xv).

It is worth noting that Hislop's identification of Tammuz with Nimrod rests on a more secure basis than he knew. Nimrod the founder of cities is, according to Langdon, identical with the Sumerian god Ninurta (whose name also appears in the form Nimurta); and "like all gods who were 'sons', Ninurta was originally also Tammuz, son of the Earth-mother, and died each year with the perishing vegetation.... The cult of Ninurta spread to the West in early times, and a temple of Ninurta at Gebal is mentioned in the fifteenth century [B.C.]... it is obvious that not only the Adonis cult of Gebal was borrowed from the Tammuz cult of Sumer, but that Ninurta... has a direct connection with the Sumerian and Phoenician cults of the dying god" (*Semitic Mythology*, pp. 131 ff.).

Langdon shows reason to believe that the Ninurta myth influenced Indo-Iranian mythology. And the widespread cult of the Mother-goddess in modern India, which excavations in the Indus valley enable us to trace back to Chalcolithic times, may also have a Sumerian origin.¹⁸ But it is in the West that we find clearest traces of Sumerian influence: "there is no doubt but

¹⁶ Ishtar is the Babylonian form of the goddess's name. It corresponds to S. Arabian 'Athtar and Phoenician 'Ashtart (Graecised Astarte). In the O.T. form 'Ashtoreth the vowels of *bosheth*, "shame", have replaced the original ones of the last two syllables. The Greek forms Atargatis and Derketo found as names of the Syrian goddess represent 'Athtar-'Ate, in which the S. Arabian form is coupled with 'Ate, the Aramaic name of the Mother-goddess. The word Asherah, so frequent in the O.T., is shown by the Ras Shamra documents to have been the name of another goddess, distinct from 'Ashtart.

¹⁷ *De Iside et Osiride*, 15 ff.

¹⁸ See *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilisation*, by Sir John Marshall (reviewed by W. Fulton in *The Expository Times*, xlv. pp. 102 ff.). At a much later date we find the Earth Mother (Prthivi) addressed in the Veda as the consort of the Sky Father.

that this entire cult of a dying god who descends yearly to the shades of the nether world, mourned with annual wailings by women, and in imitation of whose supreme sacrifice his priests emasculated themselves in the cults of Phoenicia, Phrygia, and Rome, is either wholly of Sumerian and Babylonian origin, or profoundly influenced by the Tammuz cult" (Langdon, *op. cit.*, p. 76).

[p.247]

III

Throughout Asia Minor we find from early times abundant evidence of the cult of a great Mother-goddess. Her most primitive name was Ma, by which she was known in historical times in Cappadocia: "Ma, the Mother of the gods", as she is called in an inscription.¹⁹ With this name we may compare Mami and Mah, which we have already mentioned. Elsewhere in Asia Minor she received names from various centres of her worship—Cybele, Agdistis, Pessinuntica, the Idaean Mother. At Ephesus we find her later worshipped as the many-breasted Artemis,²⁰ an altogether different deity from the virgin huntress who bore the same name among the Greeks. The Greek Demeter ("Earth Mother"), celebrated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, was Anatolian in origin according to Sir William Ramsay (*Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilisation*, p. 81). The Anatolian goddess was also identified at an early date with the Cretan Rhea.²¹

In Phrygia Attis plays to Cybele the part that Tammuz plays to Innini in the Sumerian myth. The Attis worship presents so many features in common with the Tammuz and Adonis cults that a common origin is almost certain. Thus Ed. Meyer speaks of "the close relation, indeed identity, of the cult and saga of the Adonis of Byblos with the Attis cult".²² Meyer ascribes this identity to Anatolian influence on Syria. That there was Anatolian influence on Syria and even Babylonia at an early date is true: the Hittite king Hattusilis I conquered Aleppo and raided Babylon about 1800 B.C., and about two centuries later we find another Hittite king, Telepinus, reigning as far south as Damascus. But long before our earliest evidence for Anatolian influence in Syria and Babylonia, we find clear traces of Sumero-Akkadian influence not only in Syria, but in Anatolia as well.

The invasion of Asia Minor by the Indo-European Hittites about 2000 B.C. seems to have put an end for the time being to a long-standing occupation of the eastern part of that peninsula by Babylonians and Assyrians.²³ Long before the reign of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2650 B.C.) there was established at Kanesh in Cappadocia (modern Kül-tepe) a Babylonian commercial settlement. When this settlement was threatened by

[p.248]

¹⁹ The votive inscription Μητρί Θεῶν Μᾶ is quoted by A. Rapp in W. H. Roscher's *Lexikon der griechischen and römischen Mythologie*, ii, col. 1652.

²⁰ See Acts xix. 24 ff.

²¹ E.g., Euripides *Bacchae* 58 f., Lucretius ii. 600 ff., Lucian *de dea Syria* 15, Strabo x, 3. 15.

²² "die enge Verwandtschaft, ja Identität des Kults and der Sage des Adonis von Byblos mit dem Attiskult" (*Geschichte des Altertums*, Vol. i, Part ii, p. 735).

²³ See the article "The Coming of the Hittites into Asia" by B. Hrozný in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for April, 1930.

the surrounding peoples, Sargon marched to its aid. A number of cuneiform tablets found in this part of Asia Minor and dated *c.* 2200-2000 B.C. witness to the continuance of such settlements several centuries after Sargon.

So far-reaching was the Sumero-Akkadian influence in Anatolia in the third millennium B.C. that the cuneiform script, which developed out of the picture-writing devised originally by the Sumerians for their own language, and which was adopted by their Semitic neighbours for a language for which it was by no means so well suited, was also adopted for the languages of Asia Minor. When the Indo-European Hittites arrived, they took it over for their language also, and in the archives of the Hittite Empire discovered at Boghaz-koi no fewer than eight languages have been deciphered, all written in cuneiform, with complete Sumerian and Akkadian words and syllables interspersed among the native words. The magic, astrology, and ritual of Asia Minor, as revealed by cuneiform texts, were thoroughly Babylonian in origin. The Hittites took over names of deities from Babylonia and applied them to their own deities. Thus Hattusilis III (*c.* 1295-1260 B.C.) worshipped as his patroness a goddess of the Hittite city Samuhas, whose name is given as Ishtar. Hittite religion also had its dying god Telepinus, and its sacred marriage between the thunder-god Teshup and the Mother-goddess. Garstang has pointed out the resemblance between the Hittite sacred marriage and that depicted for us by Lucian at Syrian Hierapolis, between the Syrian goddess Atargatis (the same as Ishtar) and her consort Kombabos.²⁴ We may also compare the description of the Phrygian Mysteries given by Ramsay in *Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilisation*, pp. 294 ff., and the part played by the sacred marriage (ἱερός γάμος) in Old Attic Comedy.

We do not, of course, exclude the possibility of the cult of a Mother-goddess having existed in Anatolia before the beginning of Babylonian influence in that land, but whether it did or not, Anatolia had come so thoroughly under Babylonian influence by the time that we first have any certain acquaintance with its history and religion that we may safely follow Langdon in tracing back to a Sumerian source the Mother-goddess and dying god cults as we find them in Anatolia in historical times.

Babylonian and Assyrian influence in Anatolia, only temporarily and not entirely checked by the Hittite Empire, was

[p.249]

resumed after the weakening of that Empire, and lasted until the sixth century B.C. When the Persian Empire succeeded the Babylonian, and organised into an administrative unity all the territory between the Aegean and Libya on the west and India on the east, there was ample opportunity for intercourse between far-distant peoples, and a religious fusion resulted. This fusion was fostered by the impartial attitude of the Great King himself, who, though personally a Zoroastrian, was solemnly invested with the sovereignty at Babylon as the chosen of Bet-Marduk, and by the Hebrew prophet was acclaimed as the anointed of Jehovah (Isa. xlv. i). With the extension of the Persian Empire the cult of Mithras was introduced to the west. This deity, of Indo-Iranian origin, first appears as worshipped by the king of Mitanni on a Boghaz-koi tablet of *c.* 1500 B.C. In the Veda he is celebrated in his Sanskrit name Mitra as one of the great gods; in the Zend-Avesta he appears as the spirit of light on the side of Ahura-mazda. Later, as the god of fertilising warmth, he came to be regarded as the consort of

²⁴ Lucian *de dea Syria*, 19 ff. Kombabos is probably the same in origin as Humbaba of the Gilgamesh epic. For the comparison of the Hittite and Syrian rites cf. J. Garstang in Hammerton's *Encyclopaedia of Modern Knowledge*, iii. p. 1561 (in an article, "Hittite History revealed by the Spade"), and elsewhere.

the Indo-Iranian Mother-goddess Anahita, who was identified in Anatolia with the Cappadocian Ma. The persistence of the Mithras cult in Anatolia may be seen in the first century B.C. in the name Mithradates, borne by so many of the kings of Pontus. In Anatolia there took place some degree of fusion between the Mithras and Cybele cults. From the latter the former took over the rite of the *taurobolium*,²⁵ to which regenerating efficacy was ascribed in the later Roman Empire.

"In this fusion of religions" under the Persian Empire, says W. R. Halliday, "the dominant influence was naturally exercised by Babylon, which had for long been the leader of civilisation in the Middle East. It was from the Chaldaeans no doubt that the worship of Mithras first acquired its elaborate astral features" (*The Pagan Background of Early Christianity*, p. 285).

IV

A primitive connection with Asia Minor was rooted in Roman tradition. The legend that the ancestors of the Romans were Aeneas and his companions who escaped from Troy appears in Naevius (235 B.C.), and is immortalised in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas, according to the legend, brought to Italy the Lares and Penates of Troy (*Aen.* ii. 293), including, according

[p.250]

to other accounts, the Palladium, which was kept in the temple of Vesta (Ovid, *Tristia*, iii. 1. 29).

The truth underlying this legend is to be found in the Anatolian origin of the Etruscans. Herodotus says that they came from Lydia (i. 94), and his account is supported by recent research. Their Greek name Τυρρηνοί, earlier Τυρσανοί points to their identity with the Tursha, who formed part of the coalition of sea-peoples which in 1221 B.C. attacked Egypt and was repulsed by Merneptah. The Etruscan settlement in Italy was an incident in, the general dispersal of peoples from the Eastern Mediterranean around that time. That it is to be connected with the Aeneas legend is evident from the fact that the Fall of Troy (dated by the Parian Marble 1209 B.C.) was another incident in the same movement. Philology lends its support to archaeology in pointing to Anatolia as the home of the Etruscans. Little enough is known about the Etruscan language, but we know enough to trace a resemblance to Lydian and other Anatolian languages and to a language found on inscriptions in Lemnos.²⁶

Rome fell for a time under Etruscan domination. The very name Rome is Etruscan, and Ramsay traces it back to an Anatolian root (*Asiatic Elements in Greek Civilisation*, p. 89). Etruscan religion exerted a deep influence on Roman religion. Among the Etruscan deities, a prominent place was taken by the Mother-goddess Thufitha (also the goddess of night and of the dead), who doubtless was identical originally with the Anatolian Mother-goddess.²⁷ Among other Oriental features of Etruscan worship must be mentioned divination, especially by the inspection of the liver. This inspection was carried out by *haruspices*, who persisted

²⁵ The word originally referred to the sports of the bullring so characteristic of the Minoan civilisation in Crete. The Mithraic rite, however, consisted of bathing in the blood of a sacrificed bull; the devotee thus became in *aeternum renatus* and received the title *tauroboliatus*.

²⁶ In the light of these Lemnian contacts the statement in Thucydides iv. 109 is interesting, that Tyrrenians (Etruscans) settled in Lemnos at one time. Thucydides identifies them with the Pelasgians.

²⁷ See Hammerton's *Universal History of the World*, Vol. ii, p. 1159.

well into imperial times. The famous bronze liver of Piacenza, divided into zones for the guidance of *haruspices*, is the chief monument of this form of Etruscan divination, and it reminds us of similar models found in Anatolia and Babylonia, where divination by liver-inspection, was also practised (cf. Ezek. xxi. 21). That the terminology of the Anatolian liver-models is Babylonian points clearly to the source of this method of divination.²⁸

The first direct contact between the Roman state and Asia Minor known to Roman historians took place in 204 B.C. At that time Hannibal was still in Italy, and a Sibylline oracle advised the Romans that he could be driven out if they fetched

[p.251]

from Pessinus in Asia Minor the Great Mother of the gods. An embassy was sent to Attalus I of Pergamum, who facilitated their quest, and the "Great Idaean Mother of the gods" was brought home to Italy in the form of a black stone, no doubt one of the many meteorites which had divine honours paid to them in the ancient world, such as the Trojan Palladium and the image of Ephesian Artemis (Acts xix. 35). In Rome the image was installed in the temple of Victory until a suitable shrine of its own could be provided. An annual festival, the Megalesia, was instituted to commemorate her arrival and celebrated from the 4th to 10th April.²⁹ Under the Empire we find another festival celebrated in her honour, from 15th to 27th March. This festival is first mentioned by Lucan (i. 599), and therefore was probably instituted in the reign of Claudius, who appears to have patronised the worship of Cybele.³⁰ The high spot of the March festival was the Hilaria, a carnival (*feriae stativae*) in honour of the goddess, celebrated on the 25th. The coincidence with Lady Day is significant.

The Cybele cult in Phrygia was wild and orgiastic. The Phrygian immigrants found it in Anatolia when they arrived there from Thrace, and into it they introduced elements from the even wilder worship of their own deity Sabazios. In Rome the wildness of the cult was considerably modified, but its character could not but be offensive to the staid Roman mind. Cybele, however, or the *Magna Mater*, as she came to be called in Rome, did justify her presence there, for shortly after her arrival Hannibal was driven from Italy and conquered. Her cult, therefore, with its train of Galli, the effeminate priests who had made themselves eunuchs in imitation of Attis, had to be tolerated, but until the reign of Claudius no Roman citizen might become her priest. Yet the wild sensuousness of the cult appealed to those emotions which were but little catered for in the dull state religion, of Rome. That there was a craving for something more enthusiastic than the state religion is shown by the popularity of the worship of Bacchus, which was rigorously suppressed in 186 B.C. Bacchus or Dionysus was also a deity of Anatolian origin, who under the name Iacchus was associated with Demeter in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

²⁸ D. Randall-MacIver (*The Etruscans*, p. 125) says straight out that this Etruscan divination "is certainly derived from Chaldea". For the Anatolian liver-models see p. 140 of the section "Kleinasien" contributed by A. Gotze to *Kulturgeschichte des alten Orients* (Munich, 1933; one of the many volumes in Iwan von Müller's *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft*). This section by Götze is one of the best accounts available of the early history of Asia Minor, including the Babylonian influence on that land.

²⁹ The earliest account of the coming of Cybele to Rome is in Livy xxix. 11, 14. Cf. also Ovid, *Fasti* iv. 179 ff., with Sir J. G. Frazer's notes. Varro (*de lingua Latina* vi. 15) brings the image, not from Pessinus, but from the Megalesion, a shrine outside the wall of Pergamum.

³⁰ The authority for the statement about Claudius is the sixth century writer Joannes Lydus. Reasons for believing it are given by F. Cumont in *Les Religions Orientales dans le Paganisme Romain* (3rd edition, Paris, 1929), pp. 87 ff. This book is a most valuable contribution to our subject. There is an, English translation from an earlier edition, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Kegan Paul, 1911).

The Anatolian Mother-goddess was introduced to Rome in another form in 82 B.C., when Sulla on his return from the East brought with him the cult of the Cappadocian Ma. This

[p.252]

cult, however, never attained great vogue in Rome, and was soon incorporated in the Cybele cult. With the rise of the Empire the Cybele cult became more reputable. Augustus tells us that he built Cybele a temple on the Palatine (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti* iv. 8), and after Caligula's patronage of Isis worship,³¹ Claudius could do no less for one who was by now a naturalised Roman goddess of two and a half centuries' standing, and so he removed all the restrictions which had hitherto been placed on the worship of Cybele.

V

When the Roman dominion began to extend to Asia, Asiatic influence was bound to increase in Rome. The first Asiatic province was formed from the kingdom of Pergamum, when Attalus III died in 133 B.C. and made the Roman state his legatee. In Asia kings were revered as divine. An exactly similar veneration of the Roman Republic was difficult, in the absence of one man in whom the divinity might be focused, although thirty-three years earlier the Bithynian king Prusias II addressed the Roman senate as θεοὶ σωτῆρες (Polybius xxx. 16). When an Emperor arose, however, here was something which the Orient could understand.

In Julius Caesar for the first time since the founding of the Republic (traditionally dated 509 B.C.) the Romans had a man who was for all practical purposes a priest-king, though he refused the title *rex*. In 63 B.C., as Pontifex Maximus, he became head of the state religion, and his title of perpetual Imperator, granted in 45 B.C., marked him out as the supreme ruler. But Oriental kings were accorded divine honours; so must it be with Caesar. His statue was erected in the temple of Quirinus (the deified Romulus, founder of Rome), bearing the inscription DEO INVICTO.³² But the most significant of his religious innovations was the inauguration of the worship of Venus Genetrix.³³ This was not the old Roman Venus, but a new creation. Aphrodite or Venus was the legendary mother of Aeneas, and to Iulus, the son of Aeneas, Caesar's family, the *gens Iulia*, traced its origin. In the original form of the story the mother of Aeneas was probably the Mother-goddess of Asia Minor.³⁴ Caesar's introduction of her worship emphasised her rank as the divine Mother, with the corollary that he himself was the divine Son.

[p.253]

Caesar went too far, and offended Roman sentiment, with fatal results to himself. Augustus discovered how to secure even greater power without infringing the letter of the Roman constitution. He was not accorded divine honours at Rome until his death. But in the East he was venerated as a god during his lifetime, and it is significant that it was in Pergamum, the

³¹ Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 132, ascribed to Caligula the construction of the temple of Isis in the Campus Martius.

³² The Latin represented by Θεῶ ἀνικτήτῳ in Dio Cassius xliii. 45.

³³ Suetonius, *Life of Julius*, 26; Appian, *Civil War*, ii. 102.

³⁴ In the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite her meeting with Anchises, the father of Aeneas, takes place on Mount Ida. There are hints in ancient writers that Anchises came to grief through his connection, with her (*Hy. Aph.*) 286 ff. ; Theocritus i. 106; Plutarch, *quaest. nat.* 36). This reminds us of Attis, though the actual manner of his misfortune was different.

old capital of Attalus, that the first temple and priesthood of the cult of "Rome and the Emperor" were instituted, from 29 B.C. onwards (Tac. *Ann.* iv. 37).

Until the reign of Gratian (A.D. 375-383) the Roman Emperors continued to bear the title Pontifex Maximus, even after the Christianisation of the Empire. Gratian renounced it, considering it unfitting for a Christian Emperor. In view of the pre-eminence of the Roman see, it is not surprising that the Bishops of Rome were given or assumed the ancient title which the Emperor had vacated, especially as pontifex was by this time in current use for a Christian priest or bishop. The fact that the Papal title "Supreme Pontiff" is pagan in origin proves little in itself; but we shall see that the kinship of the Papal system with the religion of pagan Rome is more than merely titular.

VI

We have already traced the progress of Mithraism from Persia to Anatolia. According to Plutarch (*Pompey*, 24), it was introduced to the Roman Empire by the pirates whom Pompey settled in Cilicia in 67 B.C. after clearing them from the Mediterranean. Mithraism, with its offer of eternal regeneration by the shedding of blood in the *taurobolium*, became very popular throughout the Empire, and of all the cults current in the early centuries of our era was the most formidable rival to Christianity. Mithraism had its Mysteries, with seven stages of initiation (evidently connected with the seven planets, and of Babylonian origin), its love-feasts, its supreme pontiff, its celibate priests and consecrated virgins. A detailed study of the debt of Catholic ritual to Mithraism yields some remarkable results. Another of its legacies was the date of Christmas, for the 25th December was observed as the birthday of Mithras (*Dies Natalis Inuicti Solis*) long before it was adopted as the conventional date of our Saviour's birth. It was essentially a man's religion, and was carried by soldiers to the farthest bounds of the Empire. The

[p.254]

military element in its technical vocabulary is striking; the initiates were the *militia dei*, their initiatory oath the *sacramentum* (the word originally indicated a soldier's oath of obedience). Such military terms are also found in the vocabulary of Bacchus and Isis worship, and even in the New Testament the Christian is compared to a good soldier of Christ Jesus who fights against spiritual foes with heavenly armour; but in later times much of the language of the Mystery Religions made its way into the terminology of the Church. Clement of Alexandria, as a counterblast to these religions, used many of their technical terms in a Christian sense. Such an adaptation of a pagan vocabulary had obvious dangers. "Even in a writer like Clement one is continually struck with how dim, at points, becomes the dividing line between Christian Platonism and pagan religious philosophy" (Halliday, *op. cit.*, p. 251). The language of Neoplatonism was indebted to that of the Mysteries, and to Neoplatonic language much of the scholastic vocabulary of the Middle Ages can be traced, through Victorinus Afer, the translator of Plotinus into Latin.³⁵

Further contributions to the religious melange of the Empire were made by Isis worship, which survived successive attempts to expel it from Rome; by the cult of the Syrian goddess Atargatis, which Nero cultivated for a time (Suetonius, *Nero*, 86); by the followers of Mani,

³⁵ Cf. E. Benz, *Marius Victorinus and die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik* (Stuttgart, 1932); P. Henry, *Plotin et l'Occident* (Louvain, 1934).

who devoted twelve years to the traditions of the wise men of Babylon, according to the legend, after he received the divine command to separate himself from his surroundings;³⁶ by the Emperor Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222), priest of the Baal of Emesa in Syria, who tried to elevate his deity to the supreme place in the Roman pantheon, and by Aurelian, who after his conquest of Palmyra in A.D. 273 brought to Rome the worship of the Palmyrene Baal.

All these rituals—Anatolian, Egyptian, Syrian, Persian—took the form of Mysteries, in which the great events of their respective mythologies, the ἱεροὶ λόγοι, were presented dramatically to the worshippers. Their close contact with each other produced a considerable degree of syncretism, the more readily because there was a basic similarity between them all, which is not surprising if they can all be traced back to a common origin. The primal Mother-goddess who came to be worshipped under so many differing forms and names resumed in this syncretism her pristine unity. The words are famous

[p.255]

in which Isis reveals herself to her devotee Lucius (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* xi. 4):—

I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in hell, the principal of them that dwell in heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all the gods and goddesses. At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the lamentable silences of hell are disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world, in divers manners, in variable customs, and by many names. For by the Phrygians, the first of all men, I am called Pessinuntica, the mother of the gods; by the autochthonous Athenians, Cecropian Minerva; by the sea-girt Cyprians, Paphian Venus; by the arrow-bearing Cretans, Dictynnian, Diana; by the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; by the Eleusinians, their ancient goddess Ceres; by some Juno, by others Bellona; by some Hecate, by others Rhamnusia; and principally both sort of the Ethiopians which dwell in the east and are lightened by the sun's morning rays, and the Egyptians, who excel in, all manner of ancient doctrine and worship me in their proper ceremonies, call me by my true name, Queen Isis.

This composite Mother-goddess took a powerful hold on the imagination of the peoples of the Empire. With the Christianisation of the Roman state, she ceased gradually to be worshipped as Cybele or Isis, but her worship continued to flourish none the less. In *The Evangelical Quarterly* for October, 1934, Professor C. B. Lewis in an article, "Survivals of a Pagan Cult", argues convincingly that the Cybele cult survived in the poetry of the troubadours in the veneration for "the loved one far away". Nor can it be seriously disputed that the worship (hyperdulia, to use the technical term) of the Virgin Mary in many of its features is but the continuation of the Mother-goddess cult under another name. We have already noted the coincidence of her festival on Lady Day with the *Hilaria Matris Deum*. "It is interesting to note in passing," says Dr. T. R. Glover, "that the land which introduced the Mother of the Gods to the Roman world, also gave the name Θεοτόκος (Mother of God) to the Church",³⁷ and again, "There is evidence to

[p.256]

³⁶ A. Jeremias, *The O.T. in the Light of the Ancient East*, p. 84, n. 2.

³⁷ The title Theotokos received official ecclesiastical sanction at the council of Ephesus, A.D. 431, but it had been used incidentally before that, especially by the Alexandrian Fathers, from Origen onwards.

show that the Madonna in Southern Italy is really Isis renamed"³⁸ (*The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, pp. 21, 23). The title "Star of the Sea" by which the Virgin is addressed in many hymns was given to Isis by her sailor devotees in the Roman Empire.³⁹ And other parallels will occur to those who read the following account of Isis worship by Dr. W. R. Inge: "her worship... was organised upon a plan very like that of the Catholic Church. There was a kind of pope, with white-robed shaven priests. The toilet of the 'Madonna' was attended to every day. Daily matins and evensong were sung in her temples. There was a great festival in the autumn, at which the death of Osiris-Serapis was lamented, while there was rejoicing over his resurrection".⁴⁰ The one discrepancy between this ritual and that of the Catholic Church is the date of the death and resurrection of the god. This fell in the autumn in Egypt, because the chronological framework of the Osiris myth in that land was based on the rise and fall of the Nile. Elsewhere, however, the death and resurrection ceremonies took place at the spring equinox. In Rome, for example, the death of Attis was celebrated on the 24th March, the *dies sanguinis*. Many elements in the Mass and in the Easter celebrations belong not to the Christian worship of apostolic days, but to the Mystery representations of the death and resurrection of the Dying God.

It is no part of our present purpose to give an account of the details of the Mystery ritual, or to examine its relation to Catholic ritual, but rather to provide an outline of Prolegomena to such a study.

"The truth that catholicism arose from a transformation of primitive Christianity in the atmosphere of the pagan mysteries is often denied", says the Bishop of Birmingham, "but the known facts are decisive. It is to be regretted that detailed evidence is not as full as we could wish, inasmuch as documents describing the mystery-beliefs have largely perished. Their destruction was probably deliberate. Yet enough remains to show that the beliefs of Catholicism repudiated by a sound instinct at the Reformation were precisely those mystery-religion accretions which were alien from the moral and spiritual simplicity of Christ's teaching."⁴¹

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³⁸ Similarly Frazer: "Ancient Egypt may have contributed its share to the gorgeous symbolism of the Catholic Church as well as to the pale abstractions of her theology. Certainly in art the figure of Isis suckling the infant Horus is so like that of the Madonna and child that it has sometimes received the adoration of ignorant Christians" (*The Golden Bough*, one vol. ed., p. 383).

³⁹ Cf. Frazer, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ In *Hammerton's Universal History of the World*, Vol. iv, pp. 2087 f.; in *Hammerton's Encyclopaedia of Modern Knowledge*, Vol. iii, p. 1517. The whole article, on "Oriental Rivals of Christianity", is worth consulting.

⁴¹ E. W. Barnes, *Scientific Theory and Religion*, p. 631. That which guided the Reformers in rejecting these accretions was more than a "sound instinct"; it was the settled principle of admitting nothing that was contrary to "God's Word written." See also Harnack's *History of Dogma*, Vol. iv, pp. 268 ff., the chapter entitled "The Mysteries and Kindred Subjects"; E. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (Hibbert Lectures, 1888), Lecture X, "The Influence of the Mysteries upon Christian Usages".