FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE MIDDLE AGES

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The face of evening and morning

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Introduction

He who was born at the turn of the century witnessed historical events, which, like hurricanes, swept over him and passed him by: if he emerged unscathed, he was nevertheless caught in their lap, shaken and often left as if dazed. One who grew up in that security, which an illusory peace seemed to guarantee in his youthful years, could scarcely catch a glimpse of the uncertain contours of what was to come: and if this was granted him, he could hardly have imagined the historical process in its immediate actuality. Events are still unfolding: what will happen is hidden in his womb by the future, a future at once threatening and suspended. Everyone knows and feels that the cup of suffering has not yet been emptied. Events are followed by the question of their meaning. One stops again before that dark curtain that stands in the way of the free search. As it will later appear, we ourselves are the source of misunderstandings: the current idioms, as mostly happens, they cover the true substance of things. To lend them faith...; but who then really believed them, if, in spite of everything, we sense that they do not, cannot hit the mark. We must confess our impotence: we recognise that we cannot say what really happened. The events are too imposing, they grasp us too deeply, they are still too close to us and still in the flow.

No search holds the solution. Yet an answer would also have a decisive influence on the individual's life: it would represent a direction instead of disorientation, a foundation and certainty where these are lacking, and would at least bring an end to illusions. But how to wrest the darkness from its secret?

We should perhaps ask ourselves Ranke's problem, how things really went. But, as on no other occasion, its insufficiency is revealed here. Not what has been, but what continues to evolve and generate ever new events, even if rooted in the past, does not allow the investigation to reach any fixed point. It should be added that the historical upheaval, such as it has taken place and is still taking place, does not involve individual processes: it penetrates deep and far. Consequently, our research must go beyond the mere event: it must in turn penetrate both in depth and in the distance, it must tend to

that which is essential. Nor is it to be objected that only from the particular can that which is general result: what is essential is not that generality, which can be derived inductively from individual facts. The essential is of its own kind: it can reveal itself in the events, but can never be grasped from the sum of them.

Faced with processes remote in time, the historian can listen to witnesses, collect data, and decide on the true and the false, whereas faced with events in the more recent past and in the present, this would be absurd. Events in fact - no matter which side we were on
- They have all grabbed us and dragged us into their vortex: they have revealed to us our inner weakness and problematic nature, so much so that they have poisoned our every taste in the office of judge. And above all, they have transformed us to such an extent that no one has emerged from the merger process of the past decades as they entered it.

It is now evident that our spiritual and psychic form has also changed. Thus the focus of every single event has changed: there is no place for those who pay attention to it, where it has remained the same before and after the two world wars. One has to go back a long way in time, to completed historical processes, in themselves concluded, if one hopes to achieve the necessary detachment and have a unit of measurement. Expressions such as 'adherence to the present' and the like are among those that time has worn down. Indiscriminate use sometimes seems to take them without question as a measure of value. Let it therefore be said once and for all that considerations such as those that follow are intended not only to be adherent to the present age, but equally distant from it. The historical past is a force. Just as the dead, in the Roman conception, must present themselves before the court of the great dead, so it will be for our age: it will have to justify itself before history. In other words, instead of taking the present as an autonomous unit of measurement, one will have to try to find historical units of measurement and with these measure what is presumed to be a measure in itself.

Dealing with the history of antiquity secures in comparison to any other subject of recent or very recent history that singular advantage, which is distance. The comparison of such remote events with the present makes it possible to separate what is incidental and conditioned by time from what is

permanently valid. Instead of temporal succession, supra-temporal and therefore essential commonalities take their place, in place of the tangle of historical processes the concordance of the historical function manifested in them. A new unit of measurement thus arises.

The completed process, which can only be followed in the history of antiquity, remains in fact autonomous with respect to contemporary events. It allows comparison and, as a completed process that can be mastered in all its parts, acquires pre-eminent value over the process, which has only just begun or is still in progress: it follows that it is precisely the remoteness or, if you like, the extraneousness of antiquity and the its history, often make it more topical than many historical processes, whose topicality is found in their immediate connection with those of today. The comparison of our time with completed historical processes offers the possibility of a diagnosis and perhaps a prognosis. These processes, which present themselves not only in their origin and growth, but also in their completion, flow like many streams and torrents in one swirling current: the end, or if you like, the fall of antiquity in general. This is the largest and most complex object that historical meditation has to date. It has an exemplary value for all those epochs in which a change comparable to it is taking place, and exemplary also in this, that the extinction of one era is accompanied by the rise of another, the sunset by the dawn. With
it is understood that the end of antiquity and the rise of the Middle Ages offer themselves for comparison with an age of upheaval such as our own. As in no other age, it is to be expected that history should mirror the present; that comparison with what once happened should reveal the structure and historical function of what is taking place before us and with us.

The transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages encompasses historical processes spanning centuries. A narrative *excursus* could never embrace the totality of events and forms: even less could it account for the universality of the transformation process. It is better to extract from the whole those parts that most clearly highlight the historical structure and represent, in a certain sense, the crux of the matter.

In order to fulfil this need, the third century AD was chosen, more precisely the century between Commodus and the beginning of the rule of

Diocletian. It presents a unique and absolutely exceptional picture. While the centres of ancient civilisations of high culture still appear to radiate full vitality, while antiquity in general still makes
own demands, already announced from the frontiers of Ecumene
that upheaval, which will lead to the Middle Ages. As if on a scale, everything comes to a halt: for a moment, the great historical 'forms' stand in front of each other as if by magic, before a new movement begins. There are few other epochs of tension in history that contain an equally significant historical constellation, a world-historical constellation in the true sense of the word.

The fortunes of the Roman empire under the 'soldier emperors' (according to the expression used to refer to that century) were for a long time studied from the perspective of the history of the sovereigns. Events, particularly those relating to external and military history, were classified under the governments of each emperor as under the headings of a chapter.
Only after the First World War did historians turn their interest to mass movements: it then seemed that the key to interpretation had to be found in the socio-economic contrast between town and country, between townspeople and peasants. Since the army was no longer recruited among the urban population, but in the countryside, it was considered necessary to take this contrast to its extreme consequences. The new peasant troops and the emperors elected by them would take up the cause of the countryside: this would lead to the degradation of city civilisation and eventually to the disappearance of ancient civilisation.

Michael Rostovtzeff was guided in this conception by personal experiences: the Russian October revolution, in which he had directly participated, seemed to offer him the appropriate framework. Today, no one can agree with this interpretation any longer: the Russian revolution did not lead to a revolt and the supremacy of the countryside over the city (as it may have appeared at first), but to a growing and general industrialisation and consequently an urbanisation of the countryside. Even with regard to the evolution of late antiquity, one may ask whether it was really a class struggle that brought about the change, which ended in Diocletian's new order. There is no doubt that a profound social upheaval took place. But

the impulse was elsewhere: cause was confused with effect. Rarely do the driving forces of history allow themselves to be determined by internal evolution alone. Ranke's doctrine on the primacy of foreign policy is still valid: it will also be confirmed in our case.

Peoples, who were still without a historical physiognomy of their own, were knocking at the gates of the empire from the end of the 2nd century A.D. onwards. But even the neighbours, with whom they had had relations for centuries, proved to be, under the leadership of new and untorn lineages, much more formidable adversaries than in the past.
What gave unsuspected vigour to their assaults was the revolution that took place in the methods of warfare. Everywhere, the cavalry took the lead and became the decisive weapon of battle. If we follow the course of this revolution, we come across a single vast movement that swept across the entire area of the ancient world. It started among the nomadic horsemen of the Eurasian steppes, it simultaneously embraced empires of ancient civilisation such as Siam and China and dragged the East Germans behind it; it invaded the Arabian Peninsula and took its final form in North Africa, eventually reaching the Roman Empire; nor did it stop at its borders, bringing about a decisive change in the structure of the army within.

The starting points of this great movement were the Euro-Asian steppes and the Arabian peninsula, from where it broke into the areas of high civilisation, China, Iran and the Mediterranean basin. Three of the currents, which were to determine the framework of the migration of peoples - Germans, Arabs and Berbers, and finally Turks - announced themselves as early as the 3rd century AD.
C.: only the Slavs still lingered in the shadows. Seen from Europe and Asia Minor, the movement was advancing from east to west: where the comparison with the present is compelling.

It was Goethe in 1815 who saw the vanguards of a nascent movement with a visionary's eye: 'It is true: I no longer see Frenchmen or even Italians. In their place I see Cossacks, Baskirians, Croats, Magyars, Kassubians, Baltics, Brown Hussars and others. For too long we have been accustomed to look only to the west and expect every danger from there. But the land also stretches far to the east'. Rudolf Pannwitz, who rescued these words from oblivion, first mentioned the migration of

peoples, which was to mark the face of our age. Once again, seen from Europe and front Asia, it is advancing from east to west.

This shows that the revolution of the 3rd century can neither be traced back to changes of an economic nature, nor circumscribed to the era of the Roman empire: it is not merely a matter of the decadence of the culture of late antiquity, limited to a small, superficial urban stratum and destined to disappear with it. What happened at that time embraced the entire area of the ancient world: in scope and importance it can only be compared with the events that have characterised and still characterise our time. A common destiny embraced then, as it does now, the whole earth, shattered it, fertilised it and gave birth to the new from the ruins.

An age of history, or rather one of the great spiritual forms of humanity, began with the third century AD to disintegrate: it was at one and the same time a waning of values and social orders and a renunciation of the ability to perceive new possibilities and realise them as historical realities. But this is only the negative aspect: to complete the picture and as a yardstick against which to assess it, it is necessary to bear in mind the other aspect, the one that is fresh with new forces and pregnant with the future. In the face of late antiquity, a new archaic period arises: the avant-garde of the Middle Ages.

Chapter I

Changes in the forms of the spirit

The term 'late Antiquity' (*Spàtantike*), applied to a complex of historical phenomena, although not its own creation, is familiar to art history, which has clarified the concept and emphasised it vigorously. G. Rodenwaldt, who among archaeologists can be considered the art historian, has devoted himself entirely to defining its characteristics and delimiting its extension in time and area of application.

According to Rodenwaldt, the term encompasses the centuries that followed the classical era of ancient art: in particular, after hesitating for a long time to fix its chronological beginnings, he decided to place them under Diocletian. In Italy, he believed that the 'late antique' era was preserved until the invasion of the Lombards,
in the East a little longer, beyond the first invasion of the Slavs, until the victorious campaign of the Arabs: there the era of the Ostrogoths, here the reign of Justinian represented its last flowering.

Rodenwaldt added that the contribution of barbarian influences could not easily be recognised and assessed. He hastened with this generic formula, probably suspecting that a more in-depth examination risked shaking up his whole artificial, overly contrived construction: for him, this was all the more reason to demonstrate that where barbarian influences were observed, the ancient form had ended up prevailing over the foreign element by its own means. Thus, a phenomenon such as frontality - whose Oriental origin is evident - he reconnected it, neglecting older examples, to Sassanid plastic and to a 'Roman folk art' he had discovered.

But can an art that has made the principle of frontality its own still be called ancient in the proper sense? One particularity of 'late antiquity' is, it is said, the disappearance of the relief in the round.
To the objection as to whether an essential character of ancient art did not thereby disappear, it has been thought to answer that plasticity in the round was only imposed on the Romans by virtue of the Greek tradition: its disappearance

would not have meant an essential loss
for Roman antiquity. But it is a fact that not even in the Greek East is relief in the round any more: even there, the plastic sense was eclipsed, and what was still produced in this art became flat, shapeless, sclerotic.

The all-round plasticity in art corresponded in religion to the individual god of the Greeks: two expressions of a circular form, perfectly concluded in itself and modelled in every part. A typical individuality, the individual Greek god was aligned with other individualities of the same nature or opposed to them: together they formed a cosmos of coordinated values and modes of being. Almost at the same time, all-round plasticity and individual Greek god lost importance and value: this is demonstrated by Porphyry's writing on the Sun god.

Porphyry may have believed that he was still on the ground of the traditional representation of the divine: in reality, his system led all the individual gods back to the synthetic essence of the Sun god, who in turn was subordinate to the One and the universal *Nous.* Reduced to pure forces and operative virtues of the One, the various gods lost their sphericity and plasticity, which were proper to each, and had to renounce their individuality in favour of the single, all-encompassing divinity. The Neo-Platonists - Syrians, such as Porphyry, Amelius, Longinus; Arabs, such as Jacobicus; Egyptians, such as Ammonius Sacca, the Hermetics and Plotinus - were, due to their origin and doctrine, the forerunners of the Monophysites, who discredited the 'Logos' and the 'Passion' in favour of the 'Father' and the historical-human manifestation of Jesus in favour of his divine nature. Not only that, they were also the forerunners of Muhammad and his passionate hatred of all faiths, which attributed a 'companion' to God.

It is now recognised that even in art, an East awakened to new life, asserted demands of its own. Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, with its frescoes
- in the synagogue and mithraeum, but also in the temples - added new and surprising features to the picture of Late Antique art. It has been shown that the deserted 'Mschatta' palace and its famous façade in Transjordan, until recently attributed to the period
Umayyad, on the other hand, are creations from the late 3rd and early 4th centuries: declining antiquity is thus joined by the new Arab art, and immediately by a masterpiece. A nationality, which for almost a millennium was to

determine the history of earlier Asia and the Mediterranean countries, he announced himself splendidly by virtue of an art corresponding to his genius.

The 'late antique' therefore, as far as we can now understand, cannot be circumscribed by classical antiquity alone. It is not a unitary phenomenon and at least not a mere expression of a decadent form. On the contrary, it reveals itself to be a complex phenomenon both in its nature and in its origin: alongside what is old and declining, the new makes its way and advances, laying the foundations for future manifestations and in part anticipating them.

Enough said: that conception that, nourished by classical images, thought it could get away with a minimum of concessions (barbarian influences difficult to evaluate...), that everywhere it saw the anchor and never the new is too weak to give us what it claims. He has his eyes fixed on Rome and Italy, on Constantinople and Asia Minor, and does not realise that meanwhile
new centres of gravity were formed; that other worlds arose alongside the old one; that they lived, acted, created independently of it; and that they eventually forced what had hitherto seemed fixed in an immovable destiny into defence.

On the other hand, a historical conception of the centuries on the edge of antiquity and the Middle Ages cannot be based solely on figurative art. Isolated considerations only offer perspectives, which must be confirmed in a total vision. Poetry and historiography, religious documents, the economy and social life cannot be disregarded: all these manifestations must be examined in their unity and in their mutual relations, and art must also be included in this overall picture.

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The novel has never been included by classical stylistics among literary genres: it is found neither in Aristotle's *Poetics* nor in Horace's. This implies that the novel is not subject to any of the laws of literary genres: unity of time and place has never been imposed on the novel, nor has a strict choice of language, comparable to that of epic
or choral opera.

Petronius, next to the elegant, free and unrestrained language of the narrator Encolpius, places the cultured Latin of the poet and scholar Eumolpus: next to the literary language stands that in current use in the cultured environment. Opposite this is Trimalchio and the circle of freedmen: not that they lack
the ambition of a nobler language, but Trimalchio himself, who is their spokesman, wrecks miserably in this attempt. Then there are paratragic and generally parodistic parts, and still others in which the
tragic or rhetorical, sentimental or pathetic colouring intends to be taken seriously. Depending on the subject matter, the language turns to the burlesque, the fantastic or the lurid; nor does it shy away from the insertion of verse. In the mixture of different styles - a conscious, even sought-after mixture - the ancient novel already expressed itself, nor does the modern one
behaves otherwise.

Taine says that Balzac's language is an immense chaos. Everything can be found in it: arts, sciences, professions, the whole arc of history, philosophy and religion... but if the language of the novel has no unity and may even seem chaotic at times, it does not fall into formlessness. Longo's graceful grace and amiable simplicity demonstrate this no less than the pretentious style of
an Apuleius or an Heliodorus. Even the print proofs, thickly covered with corrections, of Balzac's novels are memorable documents of his struggle for a style. There is thus a form in the novel too: as has always been the case for those who have written novels or meditated on them. It only needs to be identified in its specific nature.

There is, we repeat, an epic and a tragic language, but not a language of the novel. This, however, only implies that the language of epic and tragedy is subject to general rules, which severely limit it, whereas the novel, in contrast to the closed form of these literary genres, is suited to the open form (G. Lukàcs).

One could also point to it as a form or attitude proper to research: while epic and tragedy decisively reject whatever does not obey the law of their style, the novel is open to the most varied influences. Cosmopolitan between genres, breaking the barriers of a self-sufficient formation, it offers asylum to all styles and forms of the

language. A late but grateful heir, he accepts all that he can somehow utilise: it sometimes seems to be the rag-picker of literature, not ashamed to boast of the tinsel and expired gold, which more noble and exclusive genres had long since repudiated.

It is a fact that the novel when it first appeared was everywhere considered an inferior genre. It is precisely the lack of a rigorous linguistic form and the aptitude for drawing on its contents everywhere that must have contributed to the formation of this judgement: only ages that had grown deaf in their stylistic laughability were willing to compromise. Antiquity never did: the novel only arises at the moment it declines.

Yet the novel, once it appeared, was to achieve a success in every time and place that other genres would have envied it. The huge print runs of the modern novel are well known: the papyri present a similar picture for the last times of the ancient world. It has been said that a novel that does not 'go' has failed in its purpose. What was the cause of such success?

The novel creates and represents a world of its own. This world engages its creator and enchains readers with such intensity that it temporarily replaces the real world for them. It is able to really give something: the illusion or, better still, the image of a lived reality, to which other genres cannot approach anything comparable.

What is meant is again revealed in the contrast. Just as the language of tragedy only allows for a linguistic choice, so the tragic world, and the dramatic world in general, only represents a section of the real world. In drama, characters are "contrapuntal necessities: the dramatic character is a foreshortening of the real one" (H. v. Hofmannsthal). Characteristic of the novel, in antiquity as in the present day, is instead its tendency to embrace totality: it restores the 'living' in its inexhaustibility, the unlimited, the forces or possibilities operating everywhere.

Drama, particularly tragedy, gathers all the rays into a single fire: it generates a high flame, but gathered in a short space. It gives a section, not an equivalence of the real world. It can illuminate reality as in the light of a flash and reduce it to apodictic form. In any case, the drama never has the possibility of placing its own world alongside the real one. It

one can be disturbed, exalted, purified by a tragedy, but one cannot live in it. Living is only possible in the novel.

The novel has in common with reality precisely the extraordinary richness of its content and possibilities. The great novels draw vast pictures: Petronius gave us no less than a fresco of the society of his time. Apuleius, too, drew a complex picture: in particular he considered the lowest social strata, but also included heaven and Hades. And what shouldn't it have been Giamblicus with the 35 or 39 books he wrote?

The breadth and richness of the novel and the world it depicts allow for the expression of even that which remains impenetrable and anonymously collective in the events, that which is irreconcilable and incomplete, that which appears senseless and of a brutality that is still raw. The novel retains in its nature something ambiguous and of underground. As his language sometimes appears a 'gigantic chaos', but it is not, the same is true of its content: it seems chaotic, or something manifests itself in it, which is at least analogous to a *ratio.* But it, too, remains not always perceptible, elusive to every limitation: it remains in the lap of approximations that always stimulate new questions and new doubts. This iridescent enigmaticity, as well as the penumbra, the indeterminate and the unfinished, are natural features of the novel: its world is demonic. The ancient novel chose by preference the Egyptian milieu as that of a wonderland and enigma, where East and Hellenism met, appearing now to relate to and now to oppose each other: it went in search of the mysterious, of caves and tombs, of hidden caves, of initiates' rituals, of human sacrifices, incantations and necromancy; everything that from the world of the living appeared to lead to Hades.

In this sense, Jacobicus' novel must have been incomparable. What is more, it is not insignificant in the fragments that have remained to us: Chaldeans and priests, sacred hypnosis, the mysteries of Aphrodite, princely processions, soldiers, mercenaries, discharged Great Danes and robbers. And that's not all: tombs, hidden treasures, torture and mutilation, magicians, necromancers and ventriloquists; and all kinds of oddities from the animal world, such as poison flies and poisoned bees, corpse-eating dogs and

dromedaries messengers of love. The setting of this strange, shapeless and teeming world, where hundreds of influences intersected and the new alternated and mingled with the ancient, was Babylon in the age after the birth of Christ. Giamblicus, as he informs us, was a native of Syria: he had learned the Babylonian language and wisdom, customs and history from a prisoner of war. Babylon presented itself to him as a chosen setting: a happy encounter, because this country was, so to speak, predestined to become the setting for a novel.

The novel also proves to be in another respect an open-ended creation. Constituted orders are not ignored: but they are there to be continually called into question, now with a lighter, now a heavier hand. This is why all phenomena of dissolution, pronounced forms of decay and decadence are appropriate to the novel. Long before Stendhal, Petronius discovered the 'province' in the cultural and social sense: Apuleius confirms that criticism of society was already in the blood of the ancient novel. With society, the myth, which it represented, also dissolves: it is parodied in the novel, nor could it not be.
Instead of the wrath of Poseidon of the epic, *the wrath of Priapi* takes over... Once the poetic world coincided with the exemplarity and dignity of myth, which
For a long time he centralised in himself what in life had value and ideality. Having demolished the myth, there remained of life, insofar as one wished to recompose it poetically, nothing but baseness, vulgarity, adventurousness, superstitious mysticism and darkness. The dark and nocturnal aspects of existence took over.

Sometimes the novel delights in reaching atmospheres of anguish, indeed of terror. Ancient novels also offer us considerable material in this field: we should remember Giamblichus again, but Apuleius also counts quite a few successes of this kind. At other times, an attempt is made to achieve an atmosphere bordering on tragic sentiment: whereas in tragedy, however, this tragic feeling is concentrated in specific instants or leads to them with thoughtful progression, in the novel it can permeate the tale uniformly. In tragedy, that of which one has terror and horror comes to expression, in the novel it can remain an ever-present dark background.

The sense of suspension and elusiveness, of impending danger, problematicity and insecurity are manifested in the novel primarily in the realm of the soul. But it is not only the soul that is ready to wander through boundless spaces: where wandering life, homelessness and a sense of abandonment to fate prevail, the journey also becomes legitimate in a purely geographical sense. The experience of travelling transports that state of mind, which dominates the novel, to the plane of space: the heroes are dragged not only from danger to danger, but also from place to place. Travel is change, anxiousness for experience, openness, but it is also a putting oneself at risk and exposing oneself to uncertainty. Travel means a lack of ties: it is, so to speak, the open form of living. In the experience of the journey, the protean element of the novel therefore finds expression.

For the ancient novel, the space, in which it takes place, is never indifferent: it has in some way an emblematic value. Longo, who creates between Daphnis and Chloë amorous relations of a naive and primitive flavour, sets them in the countryside: for the two lovers, the city has no fascination. It is ungodly, whereas nature offers them a purer life, closer to the gods: even after having found their parents, the couple continues to live in the midst of
to nature, revering the gods, the nymphs, Pan and Eros, in the quiet possession of numerous flocks of sheep and goats, knowing no more grateful food than simple fruit and milk. And Longo is not an isolated case: in the novel of Heliodorus' *Ethiopics*, the three places, in which the scene takes place, correspond to three different psychological states. Greece is for the two lovers the pure and luminous land of youth, which they have left behind forever: from there they flee to Egypt, a land that for them means adventures, trials and restless wandering. Ethiopia, beloved of the gods, becomes the symbol of promise and homeland, where the couple finds themselves and witnesses the fulfilment of their destiny. And while the couple ascends to a state of purification, this purifying process also takes place among the
Ethiopians: guided by the will of the celestials, they rise to a nobler and purer form of their religion.

The world of the novel, it has already been said, penetrates the reader's soul to such an extent that it temporarily takes the place of the real one: the novel diverts us from the real world into the fictional one. In times of danger, crisis and general decline, it induces us to escape the oppressive reality, instead of

face it: instead of stimulating us to action, it seduces us by transporting us to a dreamland, far away and so much more beautiful than the real thing.

The historical novel also means escapism: it possibly places the action in the distant past, seeking in remote times a better world, foreign to the present one. The Greek poetry of the period of the empire offered the astonishing example of a literature that had imposed an almost absolute silence on its own time: it turned exclusively to the great past, seeking there the compensation for the miseries of the present. The novel largely followed this attitude: in the novel of Nino, the fabulous past was united with the exotic, while in the novel of Alexander, the great events of Greek history were narrated, to which neither present-day Rome nor the Roman Empire could respond.
the past could, according to what one wanted to believe, oppose anything comparable.

In the novel, it has been said, one can live: even in the historical novel one lives with the heroes, identifying with them... As long as the illusion lasts, nothing prevents the reader from being Nino or Alexander, and making their actions and decisions his own: otherwise the reader, as a subject, would have to suffer the less pleasant aspects of their exploits. But in the novel, he is allowed to be king at will: as if by compensation owed to him, he can make resolutions, lead armies, administer justice and punish, instead of executing, as is usually his turn, grudgingly and grumblingly, what others impose upon him.

The ordinary reader of novels is usually excluded from the *arcana imperii*. Without knowing anything about what goes on in the spheres of the rulers, but animated by an even greater thirst for knowledge, he finds in the historical novel what he desires. There he hears of the origin, divine or otherwise mysterious, of great rulers and heroes, of their dreams and insatiable desires, and above all of the
their love affairs, with which theme the novel flows into the field that is dearest to it. All those characters we have already enumerated are concentrated and exalted in love, which seems to encapsulate the very soul of the novel. Let us remember that sense of uncertainty and arcane, that ambiguity, that intermittence of light, that chaotic and tumultuous, which are inseparable
from the novel: all this forms that dark background from which love is born and flourishes. Love is the refuge of sensitive and timid souls, who suffer

under the weight of the world: it is the force that heals, that soothes wounds, consoles the defeated. The religion of the novel, if we may say so, is faith in love. Love is so natural to the novel that one can hardly imagine it without it: love is a constant theme and often the only one. Few have dared to deviate from this rule. But such omnipotence runs the risk of rendering the soul empty: the limitation to a single object, even if it is susceptible to infinite variations, cannot but impoverish it to the extreme. There is the danger that great and profound thoughts remain forever outside or are only touched upon in relation to the subject of love: moreover, love becomes the only thing, for which it is worth existing, it becomes the whole content and measure of life. Napoleon said of love that it was 'the fate of an idle society'.

Like an over-glossy varnish, it seems to obscure every other object: the tales of the Old Testament, so effective in their simple grandeur, in Josephus' work also end up being heroised. The atmosphere and artifices of the novel begin to prevail over historiography and take its place: they do not stop in the face of events of decisive importance, nor before the sacred and the venerable.

Love is the realm of woman: it permeates her to a degree, which would not be permissible for man. It is love that determines woman's destiny: thus the dominance of love means that woman begins to become the centre of the world, instead of man. A feminine view of the world takes hold. The man turns into a tender lover: a little more and he becomes the woman's plaything. It is as if a Watteau-like world takes shape, and from Longo to Rococo there seems at times to be but a step.

In the romance novel, only a certain aspect of women is emphasised: neither marriage, nor motherhood, nor home, nor family are in the foreground. When dealing with matrimonial matters, marriage is mostly considered the antagonist of love: not duties and worries or the necessary adaptation to one's condition are depicted, but the engagement period, which is also that of seemingly unlimited possibilities. The situation is usually presented as if any danger is encountered before the final reunion of lovers, and after

happiness inevitably begins: on the contrary, difficulties only begin later.

The novel once again proves to be a creation of open form: and by avoiding representing loving necessity, it reveals its lack of commitment. It is characteristic of love that it is fickle, easy and exciting, that it is enjoyed on the surface, that it is gifted and prodigal: in love, the light and whimsical idyll is also part of it. These are all situations that have in common that they escape from harsh reality.

The rise of the romance novel presupposes the progressive decay of traditional customs and order: the novel as an open literary form rightly falls within the framework of the parallel manifestations of social evolution. Considering its action, which it exerts on its readers, the novel distances society from the condition in which it feels sheltered, in the possession of the certain and the absolute: what was considered valid is called into question and all certainty begins to dissolve.

The mundane city represents the conclusion of this evolution of society. Novels thrive on the terrain of the senescent civilisation of large urban centres: this is as true for the lower Roman empire as for more recent centuries. It is to the novel that we owe the expansion but also the flattening of man's cultural formation, the rootless, discentralised city intellectualism no longer sustained by native instincts.

The need for the novel arises where one encounters psychic poverty and an insatiable greed for reading, to the point of wanting to make one's own situations and feelings everywhere at hand with a minimum of effort. The great epic or a true tragedy, or in general anything that demands discipline and form, cannot be brought to life in this way: one no longer even wants to tolerate what more severe ages have produced in these fields. On the ruin of the ancient genres, a construction arises, which neither knows nor wants a determined form any more, and thus becomes the literary equivalent of that formless mass, which congests the metropolis.

The novel of late antiquity, with its open form, survived the closed and strictly circumscribed genres of classical antiquity, becoming at once its heir. The dominance of the novel, which characterised

the literary life of the 3rd century AD, must be understood as an index of formal decadence. But in the face of this decaying world
another arose, which, however diverse its manifestations, found its unity in a new formal coherence. It brought back to life certain traits of the archaic, Greek and Roman ages, long buried and millennia apart. No longer were the inexhaustible fullness and richness of individual forms sought, but closed and rigidly constrained modules, specimens with a geometric and apparently schematic structure. What had seemed extinct for so long, such as chivalry, singular combat, heroic destiny, found a new voice, which soon made itself heard in poetry. Over the dying antiquity sprouted a changed formal sensibility, fresh and adventurous.

But the new did not grow where those who had hitherto been the recognised centres of culture were. What announced itself and pressed for its expression was born on the fringes of the ancient Ecumene. Peoples, of whom there had been no news for centuries, were returning after a long night, to gain weight and face in history.

Among them were the Copts of Egypt and the Syrians, whose national languages and literatures seemed to be entirely overwhelmed by Hellenism: between the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the two peoples came to the fore with literary works of their own. In the forms, which had been created by Hellenism and had run everywhere, the very ancient cultures, in which those works had their roots, found expression.
to which they gave back like a late flowering: Coptic and Syriac literature thus became branches of late Greek and Christian literature. The languages of the two peoples were also part of the same picture: Coptic in comparison to Demotic and Syrian to Aramaic represented that stage of the language that corresponded to the vulgar Latin and Greek of the time. The fall of case inflection, circumlocution by prepositions, the replacement of verb forms by the use of the participle and auxiliaries, the disappearance of desinences and numerous elisions within
of words characterise this linguistic evolution. Alongside these languages and literatures, which grew on soil that had been ploughed and tilled for centuries and now bore fruit again, there are others, which come to light as if suddenly. The Germanic, Arabic and Turkish languages had this in

common which, having sprouted on virgin soil, were now about to bear their first fruits: everything here was young and as if untouched by time. The richly elaborated inflectional system had remained at its original stage: the same could be said of the lexicon. It was for these peoples in its infancy of written literature; the earliest North Arabian graffiti and the oldest inscriptions in Germanic runes belong to the late 2nd and 3rd centuries. With the Huns, the Turkic language appears and its rune alphabet is believed to date back to the 3rd century: epic epithets, handed down through the centuries as an inherited legacy in Finnish epics, take us back to the 4th century.

This new world struggles for a coherent expression. If there is nowhere a pre-constituted form for it, a common attitude already shows itself; and even if what comes to light remains, at its first manifestations, imperfect, the future belongs to it. Everywhere a chivalrous world takes shape, even in an ideal sense, a world where struggle and honour, heroic nature and destiny, greatness and a sense of the tragic had their irreplaceable place. A powerful inspiration towards everything that was severe and sharp in outline, austere in expression and concise in verbal form dominated these young peoples. A constrained language, expressed in alliteration and rhythmic measures, once again determined the external structure of poetry. A closed form returned to replace the open one... In this, the agreement was common: in the heroic song of the Germans, as in the songs of the Garamantian bards of the Sahara, in the runes of the Finns, as in the alliterations of the proverbs of the Huns and the Turks in general, up to the calibrated structure of Attila's funeral song.

The Germanic heroic song, of remote origins, became accessible in literary works beginning in the 4th century: the song of the King of Angles, Offa, and the Gothic battle song of the Huns were born. Hero is the individual who emerges: the cantor narrates his deeds and extols them. War and battle are represented as a singular tussle, where their strength and weight are as if gathered in a single focus: only in this form was it possible for those peoples to represent history, and only a hero was able to give it this character.

This same period saw the beginning of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, which can be likened in its manifestations to Germanic poetry. In the Talmudic inscriptions, a whole hesitant representational world, and as if in bud, seeks its expression, which was later to manifest itself in a more mature, though still strictly constrained, form in the *qasidah.* The first poetic creations, which narrate the struggles between Arabs and Persians, coincide with the advent of the Sassanids. One can get an idea from this attempt at translation:

We faced them, and she was companion to Ilaf
with the hard nail of the steed, the strength of the stallion.
The Persians sensed our vigour and beat
Herbedhan of Shahrazur:
we rushed at the enemy from afar,
...to the empty clearing, in tight
rows, in the heart of the fire.

Or:

Oh do you not grieve,' the voice quickly spreads, 'that
which pierced the marrow of the tribe of Abid,
And how Daizan and his father's house fell,
and how the flock of Tazid's knights disappeared?
He came, all covered by his hosts,
with retinue of heroes, Shapur, prince of armies.
Collapsed is the stone wall of the fortress, had
it also been on hard anvil metal.

Goethe speaks of the sombre, indeed funereal character of ancient Arabic poetry. "The grandeur of the characters, the seriousness, the ferocity confessed by the action imprint their seal on the poetry here".

The conclusion is represented by the Arabic-ancient *qasidah,* which belongs to a later era and brings to completion what had been prepared in earlier poetry. The novel and the love story, which was at its centre, characterised the dying ancient literature: at the bottom

miserly desert, sunburnt, a way of seeing love flourished in radical contrast to this big-city literature. Love
of the Bedouin means renunciation: it is a retrospective gaze on an irrevocable past. Faced with the dreams of a realm of seemingly limitless possibilities, we are shown the resigned gaze of detachment, against the world of woman appears that of man. The novel of late antiquity was something dissolving, non-committal, indicative of cultural decadence. In the *qasidah,* a new era is announced: in its acerbic and severe contours, a reconquered 'closed' form finds expression.

Close to the Arabs are the Camites of North Africa. The song of the *Lute of Gassira* transports us to the world of the nomadic tribes, who resided in the Fezzan. At the beginning of this century, Leo Frobenius picked it up from the mouth of a bard in northern Togo. He recognised the high antiquity of the song, of which he placed the earliest elaboration shortly after three hundred AD. The migration of the Garamantes from the north, their recent settlement in the Niger arc, which constitute the historical background, are found as much as in the work of the geographer Marinos and his younger contemporary Ptolemy. With The *Lute of Gassira,* Frobenius has recovered for world literature a treasure, deeply rooted in chivalrous and warrior sentiment and rising to moments of a superior awareness of heroic grandeur and tragedy.

Gassira is struggling with his destiny. He fights his enemies daily, and his sword is like the sickle in the wheat. Gassira returns covered in glory, but he has no peace among men. He knows he cannot inherit his father's kingdom, he knows he will lose it despite his victories.

Gassira came out onto the field.
A partridge was on a bush, the
young were lying on the grass.
The partridge sang of the struggle with the
snake: all creatures are doomed to die.
Kings and heroes will be buried and reduced to dust.
I too will die, be buried, and be reduced to dust.

But the song of my battles will not die: it will
resound through the ages and live longer than all kings and heroes.
The kingdom will be lost but the song will live.

Gassira recognises that what he is told in the bird's song is right. He orders the blacksmith a lute. But the lute does not sing.

The blacksmith says: - This is a wood: it cannot sing if it does not have a heart. You must give it the heart. The wood must resound to the stroke of the sword. The wood must suck the blood drop by drop, blood of your blood, breath of your breath. Your pain becomes its pain, your glory its glory. The wood can no longer be like the wood of the tree from which it is cut: it must live not only in you, but also in your children. Then the sound that comes from your heart will resound in your son's ear and live on in men, and the blood that flows from your heart will flow over your body and continue in this wood. But the kingdom will be lost. - Gassira says: - And the kingdom will be lost.

Gassira goes into battle with her sons: the eldest son falls. Gassira takes the body on her shoulders and rides home. Blood drips from the eldest son's heart onto the lute, but the lute does not sing. For seven days Gassira goes out to a new battle each time. Every day Gassira brings home the body of one of her sons. Every night the blood of a fallen son drips onto the lute. The women complain, the men grow angry. They order Gassira to leave them. He goes to a foreign land: his youngest son, his women, his friends follow him.

They rode far, day and night. They
arrived in the solitude of the desert.
They stayed in that solitude.
Heroes and women slept:
Gassira's youngest son was sleeping.
Gassira kept watch. Gassira sat by the fire: for a
long time Gassira sat by the fire.
Gassira did not sleep. Gassira was proud and sad.
Gassira strained his ear. Gassira heard a voice near him:
it sounded as if it came from within him.
Gassira remained listening. Gassira began to tremble:

he heard his lute singing. The lute sang the song. As the lute had first sung the song, the king, the father of Gassira, died in the city.
As the lute had sung the song for the first time, Gassira's anguish had vanished.
As the lute had first sung the song, the kingdom was lost.

* * *

The new literary dimension, which announced itself in the 3rd century AD, went hand in hand with a transformation of geographical space. In an enlarged world picture, the centres of gravity began to shift. The gap between young and old peoples, between civilisations that were like wax in the hands of their creators and established, stiffened civilisations, to which a new form could at best be juxtaposed, but under no circumstances become intrinsic, became apparent again.

Iran and China were countries of high civilisation, which could look back on their ancient past. They stood side by side with the ancient world enclosed within the limits of the *imperium Romanum,* the three potentates formed a bloc that contrasted with the peoples, who for the first time appeared in history, Germans, Arabs, Huns, Berbers. Seen as a whole, the three empires formed a continuous belt, stretching across the ancient world in an east-west direction. The Roman and Sassanid empires shared a common frontier; there was no lack of cultural exchange between Iran and China and, consequently, indirectly between China and Rome. The great messianic-inspired and proselytising religions, which from the 3rd century onwards were preparing to overthrow the gods and cults of ancient times, reached the three old empires, spread there and eventually became fatal to them. It was possible to find in the three great empires a common rhythm of historical evolution, typical and, consequently, common forms. It really seemed, at least in this late epoch, that there were all the prerequisites for recognising the commonality of historical destiny, conditioned both by common adversaries and by the affinity of situations and structures peculiar to each empire, and that a coherent attitude should be adopted: none of this, however, happened.

China remained on the sidelines from the beginning. Even with Iran it never had a common border: the 'roof of the world' separated the eastern part of the Ecumene from the central part and the Roman West. The Roman Empire and Iran, these two 'eyes of the world', were not even in a position to organise common action. It was already a great deal that they were united in the defence of the Caucasus passes against the Huns and the Alans: otherwise they were in a state of continuous hostility. Rome and China, separated by land and sea, never attempted to come closer on the political side.

Thus the only link uniting the three old empires and their ancient civilisations was of a commercial nature: the Silk Road. It traversed most of the Asian continent and touched along its route a whole series of centres of ancient civilisation: the Hoang-ho valley and the Lo-Yang, the Tarim basin,
the Bactria, Media and Iraq, Syria and Asia Minor. The Silk Road fulfilled its function entirely, as far as was possible. Natural obstacles, distances, and borders that had to be overcome made the traffic exceedingly difficult. The fact that this connection was never interrupted bears witness to the tenacity of those who practised this route, maintained it and secured access to it.

The Silk Road was primarily for trade. Following the goods for trade and the fruits of different civilisations came the great messianic religions with their missionaries and their books: but this road was never used by soldiers or armies or peoples on the way. The only known exception confirms the rule: extraordinary were the losses suffered by a Chinese expeditionary force, which twice
attempted to seize some 'blood-sweating' celestial steeds
' of the Ferghana area, which were needed to use them in the war against the Huns. Only the second attempt had any success: no such attempts were ever made from the west. From the west
instead penetrated East Turkestan to seek a place there where they could retreat from the rest of the world. Buddhists and Manichaeans faced their oppressors here, the followers of Zarathustra, and later those of Muhammad, who turned to the East.

Trade, redemptive religions, places of retreat have this in common: to escape the great current of history. Salvation and hope in the afterlife,

profit and renunciation move away from those fields, where the decisive forms of history sprout from blood and tears, from hardship and struggle. It is in any case a fact, that that connection with the most distant countries, which was the Silk Road, failed in its function, when it came to shaping a common destiny through common action.

From the 3rd century A.D. onwards, the Silk Road also began to lose importance as a means of direct connection between East and West: and this was not at the initiative of the three ancient empires, which were already in the process of decay. It was to the north, the nomads of Iran and the early Turks, and to the south, the Arabs and the
Berber nomads, who were familiar with the use of the dromedary, to open a new way.

This was the road to the north and, more precisely, the entire belt of the Eurasian steppes, stretching from central Mongolia to Dobruja and the Altföld. Bounded to the north by a belt of forests (taiga), to the south by mountains and deserts, it offered no natural obstacles: the Pamir and Hindukush were missing, as were the political borders, which met along the course of the Silk Road. The riverbed, within which the trade flowed, was wider and freer, so much so that this northern route quickly joined the other, older route for trade purposes, at least from the Christian era onwards.

Only via the northern route could Hellenistic woollen fabrics reach the Hun princes of Noin-Oula in Outer Mongolia from the Black Sea. Even higher up were the first fertile lands of Chwarezm: this state, located on the lower Oxus and south of the Aral Sea, had been concerned from the beginning to place the transit trade to the northernmost regions under its protection.

But the northern route only gained importance when it became a route of great migrations due to the movement of entire peoples. It was mainly the Eurasian nomads who used it: Tocari and Sachi, Sarmatians and Aorsi were the first to follow its course from east to west. The Alans reached as far as the Danube and the Tisza plain, and from there passed into Gaul, Spain and North Africa. But the first who could boast of having travelled this 'great road' in its entirety [1] were the Huns: the arch of the Ordo to the east and the Tisza plain to the west indicate the two extreme points

of the great migration of the Huns. Many Turkic tribes followed in their footsteps, and last of all the Magyars and Mongols.

The northern road skirted all three old empires, sometimes touching their territory, but never crossing it. When the Huns skirted the northern border of Iran, they appropriated quite a few of the country's words and customs: and so did those who came after the Huns. But the influence did not go any further, as the ancient empires never attempted to set foot on the northern road, which remained the exclusive preserve of the nomads. The two historical areas remained separate.

The three empires of antiquity were connected in the south by what was called the 'maritime silk route'. With the discovery of the monsoons, it had been possible to establish a fast and regular connection between the Red Sea ports and India. In the 1st Christian century, there was a flourishing trade between the Roman Empire on the one hand and eastern Iran, India and China on the other. Recent excavations - at Begram near Kabul, at Arikamedu on India's east coast (not far from Pondichéry) and at Oc-Eo in the Mekong delta - have confirmed the importance of the trade, which ran mainly from Egypt to the East.

But the geographical area expanded again by those peoples, who appeared on the horizon of history for the first time in the 3rd century AD. The sea route to the south was supplemented and extended by the southern road: on this road the dromedary arrived from the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula to the country of Blemmi and Noba in Upper Egypt; by means of this road, the great movement of nomads mounted on dromedaries, moving not only from Upper Egypt, but also from Fezzan, reached the southern regions of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

Starting from Yemen, the Arabs of the south had set foot on the opposite shores of Africa and laid the foundations of their rule in Abyssinia: from there they exerted their pressure on the Berber nomads, pushing them back as far as the northern edge of the continent, which was under Roman rule. The dromedary, which originated in Arabia, gave the Berbers a way of life and a new fighting tactic: by allowing them to camp on the edge of the desert, it enabled raids and military expeditions. Nor was it just a movement of the Berber populations: the Arab migration did not

waited for Muhammad's successors to take over. The Nabataeans in the Sinai Peninsula and in Egypt, Hatra and Paimira, the Lacmids of Hira and their adversaries, the Gassanids, the Arab settlement in Cuzistan prove that the movement had been in full swing for centuries. The movement to the west, to the northern edge of Africa and along the Sahara, must also be dated back to the 3rd century A.D.: the foundation of an administrative district of 'Arabia' in Upper Egypt, the appearance in the same area of the northern Arab Tamud, the assignment of Palmyrian and generally Syrian archers on the Numidian *limes* herald the coming conquest.

It is a motion from East to West. Not even this time did the ancient empires (in this case the *imperium Romanum*) make any serious attempt to oppose it. It was Berbers and Arabs, and also nomads, who faced attacks and migrations. Again, this was not an actual road, but a wide area, referred to as the southern road: it was never important as a trade route, but rather as a migration route, not unlike the northern road.

* * *

Among religions, the 'ancient' were distinguished from the 'modern': Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Manichaeism, which has now disappeared, were considered modern. They have as their distinguishing features: an individual founder, the messianic idea, proselytism and a super-national attitude, and they appeal to every man, whatever country, people and class he belongs to.
initially asserted themselves among the lower classes, which in any case were privileged in their message.

In contrast to these are the religions of old: they include those of the Germans, Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Hittites, Babylonians, Indians and Chinese. In comparison, they are primarily defined by the absence of the previous characteristics: they have no founder and do not seek to proselytise; they know neither salvation nor a universal mission. They are for the most part limited to particular peoples, among the
which are intimately connected to state institutions: everywhere, among these peoples, it is the nobility that has the levers of religion. If modern religions tended to grow and propagate - both in the direction of the people

minute than in the space of the universe - the ancient ones were distinguished by their aristocratic exclusivism.

Between the two categories it seems that the mystery religions of late antiquity must be placed. Except for the lack of a founder, these religions have almost every other characteristic in common with modern ones: they proclaim salvation, seek proselytes and tend towards a universal mission. È a fact that they have their origin in the bosom of specific peoples: as Christianity among the Jews, Islam among the Arabs, so the mysteries of Mithras have their home in Iran, those of Isis in Egypt. But one and the other soon cross borders: the involution of national cultures is a necessary precondition for the spread of Buddhism and Christianity, Islam and Manichaeism, no less than for that of the religions of mysteries.

Modern religions and those of the mysteries also have in common the idea of the guilt of all that is human, the appeal to the humblest classes, martyrs and conversion: this last characteristic, beyond any illustrative enumeration, brings us directly to the essential.

For ancient religions, the gods simply existed: their existence was never discussed or questioned. No one was ever 'converted' to Artemis or Aphrodite, the Capitoline Jupiter or the gods of Walhalla. They constituted in their totality natural realities, within which humans moved: the Homeric heroes in all their actions felt the immediate reflection of the work of a god. It never occurred to anyone to doubt or deny the pure existence of such deities: with negligible exceptions, there was no ancient ideism. One could "remain indifferent
"to the gods of Rome, or 'venerate them': in the former case it was the threat of divine punishment, but it was left to the celestials themselves how to force the indifferent to remember them; in the second case, what was normal behaviour, *religio,* was observed.

The faith of the Hellenes was spoken of. In reality one fell into a misunderstanding, because to faith belongs doubt as its shadow. Faith never gives a natural certainty, on the contrary, one must struggle to possess it: one is fought, tempted, one struggles again, and even when one has won, one must always be on one's guard. Faith and the struggle for faith, dissension and conversion are the great theme

of Christianity, Manichaeism and Buddhism. The frescoes in the shrines of Chinese Turkestan show us the Buddha's temptation that keeps repeating itself. And likewise, the mysteries are familiar with this struggle and conversion in the first place. An exception, at most, is Islam.

To be precise, the term 'modern religions' seems untenable. While it may be valid for Christianity and IsIam, it does not apply to Buddhism, which emerged at the turn of the 6th to 5th centuries BC, and even less to Manichaeism and the mystery religions. Instead, the open form is ingrained in all of them: just as they are open to the throngs of the faithful from all over the world, so open are the barriers between peoples, the fate of the soul and that of the faith to be reconquered again and again, day by day.

At the opposite pole are the so-called ancient religions: limited by national borders, consolidated and protected by state authorities and by their remote origin, they presuppose a closed society and an order, which has its foundations in it. Everything is subject to canons, fixed rules and protection, as long as this order exists: they can be defined as religions with a closed form.

Open form is at the same time destruction, the fall of form. Christianity and the mystery religions heralded the end of the ancient world: Gibbon already recognised this. They were the inferior religions, just as the novel was the inferior genre in literature. Messianic religions, which give content to the faith of weaker beings, ultimately depart from the manly religions of Homer and ancient Rome: it is
The link with the crisis, which was affecting the era, is also evident here.

The new world, which now flanked the dying antiquity, bore the characteristic traits of its origins. Germans, Turks and Arabs still had, when they appeared on the scene of history, their ancient gods: the evidence of Germanic runic monuments corresponds to what is known of the Huns and those who followed them. For the pre-Islamic Arabs, a whole series of local gods is documented, one of which, the solar god of Emesa, took the place of the imperial deity of Rome, before he was overthrown by a state church. When a new faith was adopted or, as the Arabs did, one of their own of a new type was created, it was given a combative character. Muhammad's message lives on in the war against

all those professing other faiths and Islam was, like no other, a religion of the sword: similar was the attitude of the Germans.

The person of Jesus or the Pauline teaching did not impress the Germans as much as the powerful personality of Constantine. He was the great emperor, ruler of a vast empire, and thereby the herald of the new message. Not so much the belief in salvation and resurrection, as the weapons, the auspices of victory and prosperity, placed under divine protection, such as the labarum, helmet and shield, were accepted by them and taken as a model. The Germans had a way of seeing, rooted in their nature: for them it was as if the divine origin of rulers was confirmed. Just as their spear was the image of Wotan's weapon, Constantine's helmet was linked to the Germanic royal helmet of the early Middle Ages. No less impressive was the monogram of Christ, which Constantine had reproduced on the shields of his soldiers: they had a similar form of expression in the runes, which were also used as symbols on the shields. In *Heliand,* which elaborates the Christian account of salvation in Germanic guise, this same attitude is perpetuated in a direct line.

Outside these external signs, more than dogmatic instances or those relating to the health of the soul, the myth of Christ had a grip on the new peoples. What was referred to by the Vanadi as historical fact was transformed from a single event into a series of visual representations, in which fundamental and eternal testimonies and maxims about God and man were offered, as if in archetype and in living example. What was bound to time by its origin took on a supratemporal and eternal form. The passage of Christ on earth, an unrepeatable experience of an unrepeatable figure, was transformed into myth, which was to accompany, as an intangible legacy through the centuries, the Middle Ages and modern times.

* * *

The new peoples, when they appeared on the scene of history, knew a form of writing, or at least the first rudiments. The most backward were the Huns and the Germans: the runes, originally pure symbols, were transforming at this time into sound writing. The graphic signs of the Huns, the first stage of the Old Turkic runes (the term is justified only by a formal analogy, as the Germanic runes have nothing in common with

the Turkish ones) are likely to have originated in the 3rd century from a practice of the Aramaic alphabet, which was common in the eastern regions of the Caucasus.
In Arabia, on the contrary, writing had been known for a long time, and not only in the southern part of the peninsula, but also among the northern tribes.

But there is no evidence that poetry was already fixed in writing at that time: it was considered alien to any written form and without any relationship to the book. Ancient Arabic poetry, even though there was no lack of written documents about it, and indeed it often alluded to it, came to explicitly reject any written expression: it aspired to live on the lips of the rhapsodists and at the same time on the lips and in the soul of the community, which welcomed it into its bosom, as a living message, a living and proclaimed fame, as a heroic action, which invested everyone's life and was eternalised in poetry. The song of the Garamanti on the lute of Gassira was only fixed at the beginning of our century.

In Erfurt in 1808 Napoleon remarked to Wieland: 'A good tragedy will always be the best school for the young of the ruling class: even the most effective historical narratives will have but a minor hold. When he is alone, man is always scarcely moved. Several men gathered together, on the contrary, receive impressions, which prove to be
stronger and more durable'.

It is the sentiment proper to an ancient, which is expressed in these words of Napoleon: by contrasting the bookish experience with that lived within the community, he touches on a fundamental point. Attic tragedy and comedy were performed in front of the whole assembled people; epic and choral lyricism presupposed a chivalrous society as a propitious environment for their flourishing; fairy tales found the flow of their tale only before an enraptured audience. Philosophical discourse was also rooted in public discussion; Herodotus in his historical work remained faithful to this attitude; and in the Socratic dialogue the living force of discourse was reflected, and not a dispute between two doctrinal opinions. Increasingly, however, publication in book form replaced living assimilation within the community: since Hellenism, there has been nothing but epic, lyric, and tragedy for books and in books.

Once again, it is worth remembering the novel: with it, more than with any other form, the substitution of the lived experience within the community for the bookish one took place. The novel, which one did not listen to, but had to read, was exactly the product of a bookish age. Although conceived with a wide readership in mind and often produced as a widely consumed article, the novel distracted the reader from the community into his or her own solitude.

For religions, too, books and writing acquired an unprecedented importance. The Vedic hymns and sacred texts of the followers of Zarathustra had been preserved, sometimes for centuries, exclusively in oral tradition. The transmission from master to disciple, from generation to generation, was held in high regard and continued to be cultivated even when written reproduction existed alongside the oral tradition. Homer, who knew writing, as he also lets us glimpse, banned it completely from his world: he considered it improper and unworthy of a hero. It is almost impossible to imagine an Achilles or Hector, Agamemnon or Priam, with writing implements! Gods who write or read may have been familiar to Egyptians and Etruscans, but access to Olympus always remained forbidden to them.

The beginnings and end of antiquity, as shown by the example of Muhammad, remain separated by a profound contrast on the very evaluation of the religious book. The founder of Islam had ingrained the idea that his message was essentially one with the most ancient revealed religions. To him alone, to be sure, had been imparted by the angel of God the word reincarnated in an integral and normative form: but the others, Jews, Christians, and Magi also possessed revelations that authenticated themselves in their purity as written tradition, as a 'book'. They were not *Muslims,* but they were entitled to respect and tolerance as "possessors of the book", that is, of a revealed writing.

Faith in the unity of the revealed religion was not only Muhammad's: the Old and New Covenants, despite their differences and oppositions, were, and still are, bound together with innumerable threads. "That which is written" and "how it is to be interpreted", that "no iota of the law is lost" and that "all things must be fulfilled" are expressions, which return again and again among the

words of the Lord. Muhammad has the greatest points of contact with another revealed religion, Manichaeism, whose features and historical importance have only been highlighted for a generation. chronologically take us right back to the 3rd century AD.

Mani too had his predecessors, whom he often remembers and emphasises: Buddha, Zarathustra and Jesus; but in comparison to them, the founder of the new religion ascribed to himself the particular merit of creating authentic 'books' that were textual for his own doctrine. Such books, he boasted, he had written in his own hand and had personally seen to it that faithful copies were made. In contrast, Buddha, Zarathustra and Jesus had left nothing written down: the writing and composition of the Sacred Books remained a task for their disciples. It is evident that Mani had found, at the beginning of his work, religious "books" of various origins and each already with their own demands.

There were the sacred writings of the followers of Zarathustra, later called the *Avesta:* the Zarathustrians had also taken care to create the 'book' of their religion. But while Mani personally composed the normative writings of his own doctrine, the others had to collect, order and offer in a readable text what had been preserved from ancient times.
With the *Avesta,* Iran was given back its religion and part of its national heritage. It was certainly not a single individual who undertook the harvest: it was the kingdom, in which the renewal was accomplished of Iran, and state and religion rose to new heights, to promote the Avesta codification and grant the enterprise support and protection. There were therefore profound differences between Mani, who codified his own writing while he was still alive, leaving the followers the task of preserving and disseminating it, and the writers of the *Avesta,* who acted on behalf of the king and the clergy.

The holy book of the Zarathustrians and the books of the Manichaeans were not the only ones to face each other in the same place. Also among the Jews, Christians, Gnostics and their contemporaries - and one can say everywhere in late antiquity - there was a reawakening of the need to fix once and for all, with norm value, the original documents of religion and civilisation, which on

they were based on. The codification of the *Avesta* was only one link in a wider chain of initiatives, which also took place throughout the 3rd century. d. C.

Zarathustra for the time and his character fit into a well-defined circle. Confucius and Buddha, Jeremiah and the Deutero Isaiah, the early pre-Socratics and the newly founded cult of Jupiter in Rome were united not only by external circumstances of time but by a spiritual atmosphere common to them: they were united by their opposition to the mythical world of the past and the moralistic yardstick they imposed on everything and not least on the gods themselves.

A unique motion had then united the countries between the eastern Mediterranean basin and northern China. Even now that the message of Zarathustra, brought back to light, was fixed in a "book" and placed as the foundation of a state Church, a spiritual commonality was manifested within the ancient world, which again embraced religions and philosophical doctrines even those that had once been kept apart.
Only that while in the 6th century B.C. a fresh spirit of youth was blowing, giving rise to sprouts and with them the promise of blossoming and maturity, now that which had once blossomed, with the future in its bosom, was now in the throes of fatigue and about to decline. What had once been the living breath of God was imprisoned and enclosed in rigid letters, in the "book".

Many of the languages, in which the sacred books of the ancient world were written, were different from those used in everyday life: they were only preserved within worship. This was true for Avestic, but also for Hebrew. For the Jews, the problem of language touched the foundations of their particular religious and national life. A diaspora, which had become in Egypt and neighbouring countries, such as Cyrenaica and Cyprus, but also in Babylonia more important than Judaism itself, had brought about innovations full of consequences: in the West, the Greek tradition took the place of the one that once flowed from the mouths of the prophets in their native tongue, and which was law, solemn proclamation, thundering word or proud, disdainful invective. Suffice it to say that Philo, an eloquent advocate of his own people and faith, no longer understood Hebrew and had to depend on Greek translations. In the eastern diaspora, indeed even in

Palestine, the ancient language was replaced by Aramaic dialects and the Hebrew redactions of the sacred text replaced by the so-called *targumin.* Only the terrible wars of annihilation, which Rome waged against the Jews, reawakened the national spirit. People went back to reflecting on their own heritage, too long neglected in the face of the foreign element. Greek was put aside: translations were returned to the originals and an attempt was made to restore the language of the fathers to its rightful place. It was the time, in which, as in Iran, a national and religious renaissance was being wished for.

Here too, the establishment of the normative text of the sacred books was a prerequisite. The creation of the Masoretic consonantal text falls precisely in the century following the First Jewish War: before the start of the Second Jewish War, the text of the *Thora* was at least secure, as is proven, among other things, by the latest sensational discoveries of manuscripts in the Dead Sea region. It is not yet possible to determine when the redaction of each of the other books of the Old Testament was completed. By the beginning of the 3rd century the work was complete: the critical edition of the Old Testament, Origen's *Exapla*, was already based on the Masoretic consonantal text.

The Christian Church was not in a hurry to create a canon of sacred writings: those that were available, gospels, letters of the apostles, collections of the Lord's words and apocalypses, were certainly distinguished according to their value and authority, but this distinction was not mandatory. Marcion was the first to concern himself with making a choice between what, in his opinion, was valid and what was not. Since the Church was oriented against Marcion, it necessarily had to counter his own attempt. From the end of the 2nd century, the beginning of the formation of the canon began to become evident. The 'Book' of Christians, the New Testament, slowly took shape in its final form: the complex history of the formation of the canon was only concluded in the 4th and 5th centuries.

The Church also needed a normative text of the Old Testament: on the Jewish side, with the exception of the ***Thora,*** none of the Greek translations had acquired an authority recognised by all. Such a book was yet to be created: what remains to us in the manuscripts of the

Septuagint is a choice from the many current translations established in Church usage during the 2nd century.

The canon of the Manichaeans in Coptic translation was also found in Lower Egypt. A second discovery of papyri, also in Coptic dialect, brought to light a codification of Gnostic writings from the mid 3rd to early 4th century; it is another example of a religious community that felt the need to collect the writings it possessed and present them as a 'book'. Still in Egypt brings us the
corpus of Hermetic writings, the collection of which, this time in Greek, was made towards the end of the 3rd century.

And finally the Neo-Platonists, who placed themselves on the same level as the great religions and drew the consequences of this premise: alongside the 'books' of the others, they lined up their own 'book'. Thirty years after Plotinus' death, Porphyry composed the definitive edition of the Master's works: he appealed to the commission he had received from the deceased. Thus even in comparison with the latter, who was the greatest thinker of his time, the prevailing need of that century was manifested: in this, Plotinus is on the same level as his contemporary Mani, even though otherwise an abyss divides them.

The religions of the ancient world thus became in the 3rd century religions of the
"book'. The considerations of a temporal character, which have been made previously, sometimes lead back to times long before or after this term, but the result does not change. It was a movement that embraced all religions at the same time, and therefore it did not matter what kind they were or how far in the past they had their origin. The "modern" religions stood alongside the "ancient" ones, the missionary and universal religions alongside those that were limited to a single people. Judaism and Zoroastrianism were rooted in the millennium and beyond: they knew then a rebirth, not unlike Plato's doctrine. Christianity, Gnosticism and Manichaeism, on the other hand, had either not yet reached two centuries or even belonged to the present; even the Hermetic movement could only have begun around 100 AD.

It remains to account for this phenomenon. It may be obvious to explain the codification of the original religious documents by the fact that the number and competition of religions necessarily led to a reciprocal delimitation and to emphasise what was essential and particular to each. rigorously specified and fixed the doctrinal content, and the 4th century, of the rest, has beaten this path. But codification was a process of a different nature: it did not aim merely at the necessity of the moment, but sought to incorporate a great past and give it authority. It was concerned with the documents of the origins, which were threatened with disappearance: it did not seek formulas, nor preservation for the sake of preservation, but tended towards the authentic codification and redaction.

A similar movement also took place in Rome. There, there were no sacred writings like those that were collected in the East: in their place were the classics of Roman literature. Then began, according to an expression of Macrobius, the *sacrum studìum litterarum.*

As with the *Avesta* and the Old Testament text, the creation of an edition with authentic value was the basis for a national renewal.
Among the senatorial nobility of the city of Rome, literary activity went hand in hand with the struggle against Christianity, which was at the same time a struggle for Rome's native religion. The *sacrum studium litterarum* thus stood substantially alongside the other codifications. But here it was even more evident that it was precisely to preserve the monuments of a great spiritual past from the threat of decadence. The nobility of the senate succeeded in saving the Roman classics, through the migrations of peoples and the dark centuries of the Middle Ages, until, beginning with the Carolingian era, a succession of revivals began, culminating in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Crisis and decadence of the *imperium Romanum* that began with the 3rd century A.D. loom here against a spiritual background. What corresponds to this on the military terrain - the creation of a fortified zone on the threatened frontiers, in the Roman Empire, but also in Iran and China of the Han emperors
- will be seen later. An old world was felt everywhere

threatened both by the warring forces of the peoples, who had just entered history, and by the new spiritual forces, which they brought to light. The means, which was grasped, was the codification of normative documents. What was still alive from the great past was preserved and fixed in the "book". Even when one grasped the present, as in the case of Mani and Plotinus, one was led to make it immutable, canonical. A chilling breath equally transformed what belonged to the past and what was still of the present. This attitude was imposed by defence and the need for preservation: in the spiritual as in the military field, events ran parallel. What we ultimately glimpse is already and once again the end of one era and the beginning of another: the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

The codification of religious books showed that late antique culture and what the new peoples brought with them were not without reciprocal relations. An old world rushed to fix, and consequently to preserve its traditions against all that pressed and assaulted it from all sides: even on the spiritual terrain it was reduced to defence.
It soon became evident that concessions had to be made to the new, accepted and made room for it within what continued to exist: figurative art offers us documents of this.

Frontality was to become the law that would give art a new face and character. It meant predominance of the surface and therefore renouncing the plastic figure in the round, which had characterised all ancient art. And not only did plasticity recede: in painting, the illusion, whereby bodies were presented as if one could walk around them, was abandoned. Only the vision projected forwards now counts, that is, the immediate view from which the surface is covered in all its extension; it also renders the face in its full contour and produces the most intense impression in the spectator with the looming grandeur of the body and head. It was no coincidence that the sovereign and God were predominantly presented in this aspect: and just as he who is represented is projected entirely, as it were, into the foreground, so is space. From environment and background the space becomes a frame, which on a long continuous plane delimits the figure on the surface by means of contour.

Other changes in taste followed until what had been dear to classical antiquity gradually fell away. As the principle of frontality became decisive for the entire representation, the head and drapery took on a life of their own: the head, once subordinated to the totality of the figure, became independent, concentrating all life, all spiritual content in itself; the drapery became isolated in relation to the body, no longer limiting itself to outlining the forms of the body and letting them shine through, but taking on a life and dignity of its own.

Ancient art favoured colourless or monochrome clothing. Showy fabrics were considered barbaric; floral robes were reserved for the ethereal. In Rome, the toga had begun to be adorned with stripes and borders, but this was limited to the hem: the monochrome character of the robe was essentially respected. On the contrary, frontality, understood in its internal logic, was to dissolve the body envelope, disregarding the function of determining form, which had been fulfilled until then by the robe. Stretched out on the surface and as if made independent, the robe now demanded a new form; which could only be given to it by accentuating the colour and by virtue of a lively ornamentation.

They adorned their garments, making rich use of pearls and precious stones, intricate embroidery and veritable embroidery. Thus, the chest and lap, hems and sleeves were covered with appliqués in squares and roundels. The wool and linen of yesteryear were replaced by Chinese silk; no longer a soft, transparent fabric, so to speak revealing of the forms underneath, but a stiff, sumptuous brocade. The thick and heavy silk was made even thicker with applications of metal threads, while the surface was covered with all sorts of animals, griffins, eagles, sows and lions; and again heroes and sovereigns, high on their steeds, in the act of stretching their bows, all in violent tones, with direct application of purple, gold and silver. A lush and fabulous world, colourful and animated, spread out on the surface: it claimed its right on a par with, or rather with privilege over, the body, to clothe which it also served, but which, in the face of the unfolding of so much exuberance, lost even the last remnant of its meaning.

The weaving masterpieces of the Late Antique and Sassanid courts conquered the world. They are found among the treasures of churches in the North as in the treasury of Nara in faraway Japan. The preciousness of the materials chosen was then of decisive importance. Porphyry, rock crystal, semiprecious stones, amber, the more passionately sought after, the larger and more massive, were worked in wide and continuous surfaces: they exerted a fascination already because of their material. They expressed a new primitiveness in stark contrast to the ancient world, for which only that which had been shaped and had received form from an artist, who in keeping with this formal aspiration had chosen to
own materials marble and bronze.

The mosaic acquired a hitherto unknown importance. Once a simple imitation of paintings on a durable material, it freed itself of this subordinate function and took on a life and laws of its own. Dazzling molten glass like gold, rubies and emeralds, and above all rare and shining stones were applied to the surface, which sparkled, and with which the means of painting could no longer compete. It was then that stylistic element developed in the mosaic, which is considered complementary to the surface, the delimitation of space by means of the outline: marked with straight lines and sharp curves, this framed and traced the boundaries of the individual parts and, at the same time, 'broke' the colouristic effect of the delimited area, with the result that, with its own complementary colour, the lustre became even more brilliant, the preciousness and radiance even more intense.

And finally the enamel, where all that has been mentioned found its crowning glory. A genre was born, which was not only different from the old, but in opposition to the old, a true symbol of the general change in style.

Enamelling has a long history, but it is only in its last phase that it flows into the field that interests us here. The art of enamelling began in China, towards the end of the millennium, under the Chang dynasty and the early Chou dynasty, with the precious sacred bronzes, to which turquoise, ivory, coral and precious impastos were applied by insertion, and continued with similar creations under the Three Kingdoms or the Han dynasty. Around the same time, with the invasion of the Sarmatians, the art of carving took hold in southern Russia. A metal art had developed here,

barbaric and yet refined, with which softness and liveliness was conferred to the outer walls of the vases, to clasps and other trimmings. The 3rd and 4th centuries heralded the arrival of whorlwork, which was the culmination of this art: in the bright red almandine covering, with which the Goths covered the gold leaves of their jewellery, as well as in the united and changing colours of the hollow-cell enamel, which the art of the Celts enjoyed in the late Empire period. With the discovery of honeycomb enamel, this art reached its highest level: in it, surface and frontality, colour and the precious lustre produced by the noble material of the mineral, refined through the smelting process and enhanced by the brilliance of its gold layer, were harmonised.

It remains proven once again that with the 3rd century, the new has gained official recognition. It is now possible to embrace the ongoing transformation within a sufficiently broad horizon and fix its decisive moment.

* * *

Philostratus' descriptions of paintings still aroused Goethe's interest. Since then no one talks about this book any more and only every now and then does the occasional curious person pick it up again, mostly to put it down immediately afterwards, disappointed. Yet Philostratus can give us several indications. Take a look at some of his still life descriptions: what joy he derives from the atmospheric medium and its colouristic effects! His eye has missed very little: he perceives how the neutral tones become warm in their shadows, how they expand into broad patches in the lit parts, or ring out in the full light, how the colours, despite all the peculiarities, accord with the harmony of the whole; how they fit the object. It seems that Philostratus' descriptions and he himself must never be satisfied with the precious rendering of the material, of the transparent crystal, the soft pelage, the skin of the fruit, shiny, wrinkled or even delicate, velvety or dewy.

It is no wonder that he is also familiar with the effects of refracted light, chiaroscuro and the dull lunar night. Alongside still lifes, there is no lack of other themes, such as the large historical painting or visions of countries in aerial perspective, embracing marshes and land, sea and islands. The means, to render, as if by magic, mass and space, are

represented by the stepwise gradualness with which the figures follow one another on the various planes and by the continuity of the representation: there, an attempt is made to create the impression of a tight mass, here to gather, within the limits of a painting, several events that follow one another.

One can, moreover, refer to concrete examples from the same era. Of his successes in the war against the Parthians, Septimius Severus brought testimonies in pictures to the Senate and the people. Battles and sieges were reproduced in large paintings, which were exhibited to the public in Rome. The large reliefs adorning the triumphal arch of the emperor in the Forum date back to this period: in content and style they are preserved within a tradition, which, through the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, recalls a long series of representations of triumphs. Even the large panels of the Arch of Septimius, like the relief bands of those columns, must be looked at from the bottom up. The movement of the composition, the vivid effects of light and shadow, the shapes of the relief rendered more pictorially than plastically confirm those stylistic reasons. In the episodes of the advance, the battle, the flight, the military review, one still observes the mass, in tight rows and skilfully climbed, and, in the uninterrupted succession of events, the manner of continuous representation.

The Arch of Septimius was inaugurated in 203. Almost at the same time another monument was erected in honour of the emperor, not in Rome, but in Africa, in his hometown of Leptis Magna. In this second monument, the element of pure representation is offered in comparison to the dense and tumultuous progression of events on the columns of the Hieronphus and the Arch of Septimius. The suggestion no longer arises from motion, but from stasis. Thus, all of a sudden, the new appears: the frontality of the protagonist figure. The form, in the taste of which the art of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages was to unfold, was already born.

Frontality, moreover, was already encountered earlier, albeit on the borders of the empire. Frescoes and reliefs at Dura-Europos, on the Euphrates and at Paimira indicate that this style originated in Oricnte, as is also confirmed by the primitive-Buddhist art of India. Late monuments show this same representational manner, nor does it take long for frontality to penetrate Sassanid art.

It was the Parthians, in conclusion, who created the new element, or at least introduced it to the West. The frontal style, which was later elaborated with ever greater rigour and also became decisive for the art of the early Middle Ages, was familiar to that people of horsemen who, bursting into northern Iran from the mid-3rd century, took possession of the eastern provinces of what had once been Alexander's empire. With them we enter a new field of investigation. In fact, the greatest influence of the nomadic horsemen, and in general of the new peoples, was in the military field: here, with ever new uses, they completely transformed the framework of war tactics and had a decisive influence on the historical development.

Chapter II

New peoples

History, it has been said, is the history of wars. The statement made with conscious one-sidedness retains its value as such. It is enough to bear in mind that there are indeed epochs in which history is identified with the history of wars, and that these are among the most decisive and full of consequences. China has been averse to war since the earliest times. The art of government was at its peak in preventing insurrection and unrest and the military art in avoiding war: or rather, the army was maintained to ensure peace and not to conduct offensives. And yet China too has experienced crises, which were brought about by the evolution of military art.

Until the middle of the 2nd century BC, an agricultural culture flourished in the valleys of the Wei-ho, Hoang-ho and their tributaries. Rice and millet were cultivated and possibly also wheat: pigs and cattle were domesticated; beside polished stone, horn and bones were used to make tools. The artistic sensibility was expressed in the vases and jugs with the soft clay ready to be moulded into broad curves or strips in strong relief and with refined colouring, from deep violet to warm red and dark brown. The swollen stripes and cord or serpentine ornamentation, the dense and charged colours show a profound affinity with the ceramics of the same era from the Black Lands of Eastern Europe.

A new people, the Changs, penetrated the area. They were hunters and warriors, not peasants, and found themselves in stark contrast to the old native civilisation and its demetrical nature. They created their vases from white, hard, sonorous metal: the individual forms had sharp, broken contours, with an incisive profile, consistent with the metal used, and the richness of the details, which almost furiously covered the outer surfaces, handles, supports and edges, found unity by virtue of a rigorous stylistic will. The ornamentation was marked by the representation of the animal figure, which was here as elsewhere almost the only theme: it was precisely the Changs who were the creators of the first style with animal motifs.

The superiority of the weapons gave victory to the conquerors. They had received the fighting chariot from the regions of Central Asia, and introduced it in turn into China together with metal death masks, helmets and perhaps even bronze armour: from their fast and light chariots they manoeuvred double-bladed bows, long spears and halberds. Their combat tactics and weapons show that the Changs were part of that great movement which, originating from the Eurasian steppes, had its centre of propulsion in the fighting chariots. Their appearance put an end to the economic autonomy that was characteristic of agricultural life: a people of warriors and conquerors, they did not live off the work of their own hands, but off the tribute of their subjects - they did not live in villages but in the great chang city, from where they ruled over the country and the tributary peasants. For the first time they gave China a solid state form with all the positive and negative consequences that were to follow from this grandiose transformation.

Until the year 300 B.C., China held fast to the teachings of the Changs in military art. The main core of the army consisted of fighting chariots, numbering around a thousand, with a crew for each chariot numbering up to a hundred soldiers. What had once been a handful of conquerors launched on adventure had been transformed into the army of a great state: everything had been reduced to a system and organised. This, however, had come at the expense of the former fighting virtue: the indiscriminate increase had brought with it a greater heaviness of movement, nor were the old fighting methods any longer sufficient to cope with the war with the nomads, who bordered to the north. For the second time, China had to undergo a total transformation of its military art.

At the time of the 'fighting kingdoms', the chariot was demoted from the privileged position it had occupied until then: if one wanted to successfully face the agile cavalry troops of the nomads, it was necessary to learn from the adversary. The decisive impetus for the transformation came from the Hiung-nu, who dwelt in the steppes and deserts to the north and north-west of the Ordo arc: the first to recognise the signs of the new times was Emperor Wu-ling of Tchao (325-298). Under his empire, the army received equipment and armament similar to that of the Hiung-nu of the 'forest'. With his innovations Wu-ling

replaced the infantry, transported on chariots, with cavalry, the long, loose-fitting costume of the Chinese with the tight-fitting costume of the nomads, consisting of trousers and jacket, held together by a belt, and the soft Chinese shoe with leather riding boots.

The Hiung-nu, even if everyone still cannot agree to consider them as such, were of Turkish descent: in addition to the horse, as a mount and means of transport, they had received weapons and costumes from the nomadic tribes of northern Iran. Each Hiung-nu was a born warrior: from childhood they were instructed in the craft of arms. If one was strong enough to draw the powerful double-bow, one was qualified as an armoured knight: in hand-to-hand combat, in addition to the bow, they used the spear and sword.

The Hiung-nu's tactics of mounted combat stemmed from their life as shepherds and hunters: but what were raw data of nature had been cultivated and raised to a system. This had happened towards the end of the 3rd century B.C. by the first and greatest ruler of all the Hiung-nu, Mao-tun: as he had conquered power by setting aside all scruples, so he set about increasing it. Even those of his race ended up submitting to his will: from isolated groups of nomadic warriors he transformed them into a disciplined army. The simultaneous firing of arrows, with which the battle was started, was regulated in every detail: instead of flocks, which charged haphazardly, an orderly cavalry divided into compact units took its place. The weaponry was also increased and improved: the Hiung-nu not only used bows, but also halberds and long assault lances. Alongside the light-armed cavalryman was also the heavy-armed cavalryman, clad in armour.

With his completely reorganised army, Mao-tun extended his rule as far as Orchon and Selengà, as far as the Chirghisi of southern Siberia, Zungaria and eastern Turkestan. The claims of the Hiung-nu became more and more immeasurable from then on and did not stop even before the representative of the Son of Heaven.

"Put of Han' was the word in his mouth, 'don't talk too much. Take care rather of the quantity of silk, rice and barley, which Han must deliver to the Hiung-nu. Let everything be exact and of good quality. For what purpose do you still want to talk? If the goods you have to deliver are all right for

quantity and quality, our business is finished. But if not, in autumn, when the harvest ripens at your place, our horsemen will come and trample it underfoot and plunder it'.

Reduced to a system, the nomads' way of fighting had acquired greater striking power, but at the same time it had been diverted from its natural conditions: bound at the beginning to the nomadic existence, which represented almost its natural terrain, and in this respect not susceptible to imitation, it became a tactic that could be learned
and transmit. China did not hesitate to make use of this possibility: just as it had previously made use of horse archers to face the enemy, it now made use of cavalry tactics in general.

The creator of the new cavalry weapon was Emperor Wu-ti (141-87 BC). He introduced the large double-edged sword alongside the bow and replaced the javelin with the long cavalry lance: saddle and stirrup were also taken from the nomads. It got to the point that some of the Chinese auxiliary troops were recruited from the subjugated nomads or even the Hiung-nu. Eventually the armament was so superior to that of the enemy that one Chinese was considered to be worth five opponents. They boasted of the greater power of the bow, the increased penetrating power of the arrows, the greater length of the spears, the better armour and the sharper swords: a pronounced feeling of corps spread through the weaponry of cavalry. "They are all without exception," it was said, "valiant swordsmen, of extraordinary courage, capable of assaulting a tiger, marksmen who hit the target.

The new weapon was successful right from the start: its organiser, 18-year-old Huo-Kiu-Ping, a perfect horseman and archer since his teenage years, inflicted six defeats on the Hiung-nu in succession. With the use of heavy cavalry came a further enhancement: the innovation required on the one hand a breed of horse, capable of carrying the horseman with all his equipment and on the other hand an armour that was both solid and easily accessible.

At that time, only indigenous breeds were used, whose lineage dated back to the primitive Przewalski type horse, characterised by its stocky head, powerful neck, low heel, short legs and taut, muscular back.

was replaced by a Western breed from a herd in Tarpan. The first to hear about the 'blood-sweating' horses of Ferghana on his journey to the West was the famous Chang-Kien: on a subsequent journey (116 B.C.) he brought back some specimens from the Parthian stud farm, which with their heavy complexion proved to be stronger and more suitable for warfare than the previous type. After two harsh and ruinous campaigns, he managed to procure some breeding specimens from the land of the 'heavenly horses from the extreme end of the western world'.
This type of horse also appeared in art from then on: the thin, finely articulated head, the singular gait, which pushes the chest part forward and releases the hind part, the arched back, the muscular thighs give character to its figure.

In the armour, too, an Iranian invention was adopted, as a result of which the rhinoceros-skin collar with leather or steel scales sewn on top of each other, which dated back to ancient times, was abolished. By means of leather links, metal plates were joined to each other to form a warp of a certain thickness: the armour made of sheets or plates, articulated and elastic, and at the same time extremely resistant, covered the fighter's limbs like a suit of clothes. In the same period we also find the covering of the horse.

For the Chinese, the adoption of armour represented a technical advancement: as always, they adapted to their adversary's weapons and tactics in order to defeat him by their own means. Among the Hiung-nu, and nomadic horsemen in general, the invention of the 'metal armoured robe
"was instead linked to deeper roots: technical progress found here their foundation in religious representations, which were their ancient heritage. Both the leather armour with applied metal plates and the other with iron plates recall the shaman's costume, which covered the garment with iron ornaments, images of their own spirits. This covering was sometimes so thick as to hide the cloth: the idea of a kinship between the shaman's robe and the armour comes naturally. The shaman holds his spirits captive in their iron images: he needs them to serve him and defend him against the dangers that threaten him. It is probable that even in the case of the knight's armour, iron originally had this same protective function: but since

the cladding was applied to warfare with its own appropriate form, what was once the shaman's costume was transformed into something new, into the war dress to protect the soldier on horseback.

Transitional forms are long preserved. It is probable that armour was designated as the shamans' cloak, or more precisely that shamans were clad in flake armour; terms such as *lorica plumata* refer to the bird's feathered robe and consequently to bird shamans. The blacksmith, who made the shaman's cloak as well as the iron plates and sheets, has long been regarded as the bearer of extraordinary, partly demonic forces: 'blacksmiths and shamans come from the same nest′ says a proverb of the Iacudi.

Next to the armour appears another instrument of nomadic origin: the drum. The shaman gathers in the cavity of his hand drum the spirits, which he has subjugated to his will: with the kettledrum, which he knows how to use, alternating short vigorous strokes with prolonged rolls, he brings himself into that state of intoxication, which enables him to ascend to the celestial spaces. Wherever magic, intoxication or ecstatic transport meet, one finds this instrument: in this respect, it also belongs to the cults of Cybele and Dionysus. "Deep as bulls' bellow the worshippers of the god in the verses of Aeschylus: 'like the sound of a vigorously shaken drum'.

A people of horsemen from Central Asia, like the Parthians, gave the signal for attack with the kettledrum instead of the trumpet. When the second day of the battle of Carré dawned, in the greyness of the dawn, the dull rumbling of the drums began: and while the Romans, dumbfounded, listened to the unusual sound, they heard the crack of the bows and the whistling of the darts. As they prepared to attack, the mounted troops were as if spellbound, invaded, possessed.... In China, the drum was already familiar to the cult: from that time on, it was introduced into the army, starting the battle with drum and kettledrum blows.

New horizons opened up for art as well: along with the transformation of military art, with the prevalence of chivalry and the importation of forms of shamanic origin, a style of animal representation derived from the steppes of Central Asia became established in China.

The archaic bronze vases of the Chang and their Chou successors were already conditioned by the representation of the animal figure: an inexhaustible wealth of images was enclosed and dominated in highly stylised forms. On a background of meanders and spirals, animal masks detach themselves: immense eyes, surrounded by eyelids and exaggerated in their expressive power, and open immense throats come towards us threateningly; dragons, cicadas, beings in the form of birds face each other; animal femurs support the vases, wild felines
handle. The whole work, at times, takes on the figure of an animal.

After more than a century, this style began to decline: in the 4th century at the latest, a new one emerged. It not only manifested itself in the vases intended for sacred service, but even more profoundly characterised the plastic in the round, the reliefs, the bronzes with incrustations, the metal clasps, the belt buckles, the trimmings of the rider's mounts and the harnesses of the horses: the bodies of the animals began to lose their hieratic rigidity and fixity and began to move and come alive, while the artist in the life he managed to give to the moving forms revealed his new aptitude for capturing the multiple aspects of the animal world.

In the foreground now is the horse: bearer of the new way of fighting, he has also given his stamp to the new animalistic style. With the rider or alone, in the thick of the movement or in quivering anticipation, in the game or in the fight, everywhere the nature of the horse is captured as never before. Fighting between animals also comes to the fore: beings
fabulous, a combination of the wolf or the eagle or the dragon, fight each other or tear apart a horse or a doe; tigers seize a yak and are about to give it the coup de grace; the griffin meets the boar, the bear meets the reindeer and other beasts of prey. There is no representation that does not bring back the motif of the hunt and the chase, the hand-to-hand fight and the annihilation of the prey in blood.

It is not difficult to find in these representations a reference to the Hiung-nu's fighting methods: war and pursuit, fighting and hunting correspond punctually, as for the Parthians, the battle was similar to a hunt: the Hiung-nu struck the enemy to death, circling like a fairground, they threw themselves at the enemy as if possessed and enchanted in a

mystical excitement: in both East and West, nomadic fighting retained traits of shamanic origin.

Under the Han, the history of China took place in the north, in the Hoang-ho valley. The landscape is more uniform in tone than that of the south, where it is characterised by atmospheric changes, their play of light, fog and water. Compared to the lighter-spirited, more imaginative Chinese of the south, the people of the north are of a heavier, but also firmer and more secure character. The robust physical constitution distinguishes the northerner from the finer-built southerner: he is able to be self-sufficient, thanks to his moderation, perseverance and industriousness.
As a farmer, he has to cope with a nature that is rich in gifts, but ruthless in its whims: his security and that of his property depends on his ability to master it. Natural disasters can have frightening effects: only with unity, organisation, hard work and tenacity can one hope to cope with them.

The repeated incursions of the Hiung-nu represented a kind of natural catastrophe: the devastation that followed was similar to floods and the breaking of riverbanks. It was decided to face them with that strength, which comes from cunning and tenacity: nor was one ashamed to learn from the adversary. But the tactics of the cavalry were very different between the Hiung-nu, among whom it had arisen, and on Chinese soil, where they had come into contact with it when it had already reached a high degree of evolution: nevertheless, they went so far as to beat the barbarians with their own weapons. Alongside the new means, indigenous and traditional forms were revived and adapted to the new requirements.

A new ranged weapon successfully entered the competition, the Hiung-nu's double-bow. Until then, archers on horseback had been shooting nimble feathered arrows at targets at great distances: the crossbow now appeared in the hands of Chinese soldiers. With a well-calculated shot, the exploitation of the weapon was increased: the short compression arrows were shot from short distances but with deadly penetrating force. Just as the bow was originally the weapon of the hunter and the pursuer, so the crossbow became the weapon of defence, with which the aim was not so much to reach and strike as to annihilate the enemy: it was therefore like the symbol

of the sedentary man, whether farmer or citizen, who opposed, not as a born warrior, but as a disciplined soldier, the marauders who threatened the fields and settlements of his homeland.

A further expression of this attitude are the large barrage devices, with which people tried to defend themselves against troublesome neighbours: we will find them in Rome and Sassanid Iran.

The emperor Shih-huang-ti (259-210) had taken, linking up with older installations, to fence off the central region all the way to the Yalu with a frontier barricade as a defence against the northern tribes. In the 1st century B.C., the road up to the Lou-lan was added: this outermost part to the west of the *limes* became known following the discoveries of Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein. The road followed the route of a trade route, which mainly, though not exclusively, served the export of silk to the west.

The 'Great Wall' with its forts, warehouses and watchtowers has been preserved for extensive stretches: the constructions were made of unfired clay with *toghrak* log structures and interlocking tamarisk woodwork. The seal-

The region was composed of pardoned convicts, exiled to the desert on the north-western border of the empire, or barbarian mercenaries. Chinese settlers simultaneously subjected the hitherto uninhabited region to the work of the plough. Agricultural colonies were established, which were in turn protected with defence works. The enemy, in the event of aggression, could at most surprise guardhouses or isolated forts: beyond that, they never arrived.
In fact, according to a chronicle of the time: 'The signal fires in the areas along the border burned high and bright, and the surveillance posts were in perfect working order: thus raids on the border villages gave the Hiung-nu little success, and they rarely attacked the fortifications.

Lou-lan was located on the shores of the salt lake: the city was, so to speak, created from nothing. The surroundings were uninhabited and the land bore little fruit: but canals were dug and wheat, millet and hemp were sown on the irrigated land, while other needs had to be sown from within China. Weapons were piled up in storage warehouses,

felt cloths, furs and helmets trimmed with fur to withstand winter, clothing and footwear, saddles and bridles. Camels from Mongolia, donkeys and horses from Tibet were used for transport. Everything was administered by a corps of clerks, who according to Chinese custom entrusted every minute affair to paper: even for a piece of halter a report was required.

With the construction of the *limes,* that series of blows, which the Middle Empire had dealt the Hiung-nu, reached its highest point: not only had the secret of its fighting method been wrested from the adversary, but, by creating this line of barrier, the sedentary colossus had successfully thrown its own native qualities onto the scales.

* * *

The southern group of Japanese islands belonged to the oldest rice-growing regions, which encompassed the monsoon areas and their dependencies, i.e. front and mainland India, the archipelago, southern and eastern China: the Japanese islands represented its eastern offshoots, as Iran its western ones. Home of the rice plant in the wild was Indochina, where it is still found today.
In India and Iran, the immigrant Aryans had learned the cultivation of rice from the natives. The Western Ghati, the southern foothills of the Himalayas, Assam and western Burma, received the
greater amounts of rain and were, in addition to being rice-growing areas, seats of pre-Indo-Germanic civilisations.

A marshy plant, rice requires a hot, humid summer. The growing areas must rest under water for some time before sowing: in the tepid, putrid, fertile moisture, swollen rice grains fall to sprout quickly. The plants must always remain under water, the level of which rises as the rice grows. Submerged in knee-deep water, the farmers and their women provide to daily work.

Man is shaped by rice in the same way as wheat, maize, hunting and herding. The patient care of the soil and

of the plants, the warm and humid atmosphere and the constant confrontation with the process of female fertilisation, which in rice cultivation occurs at every moment, create the preconditions for a feminine view of the world. In southern China, it was the Chou who introduced rice cultivation and the associated breeding of the water buffalo. They belonged to the Tai lineages, whose civilisation, unlike that of northern China, was characterised by a feminine worldview.

From the eastern end of Finland, across the Eurasian steppes and forest regions, to China and North America stretches the area of shamanism. While elsewhere the male representative predominated, in China the female shaman prevailed. The Tai culture also belonged to this world of representations. In official speeches, in the constitution of the Chou state, reference is continually made to these female shamanesses, to their wisdom and gifts as seers, to their ability to ascend to the higher spheres and descend to the underworld.
The graphic sign for the shaman-woman shows her welcoming the divine spirit that takes possession of her. Also the sign for *ling* "
spirit, magic power', contains underneath the raindrops *{ling)* the sign of the shaman woman, as (apart from the phonetic explanation) she begged for celestial moisture during rain sacrifices.

The woman shaman also functioned as a seer and inspirer. Her influence extended beyond dance, music and song, to revelation and prophecy: in this field, her influence has been preserved to the present day, while the artistic and inspirational legacy of the shamaness woman has mostly been taken up by the age. "According to the way of
Chinese feeling, in the world of the body while the man fertilises, the woman begets the child; on the contrary, in the world of the spirit, it is the woman of high senses who fertilises the man and he begets the work. For nature has given women intuition and wisdom, and men reason and the gift of expression.
"(E. Rousselle). The Chinese peach, which ends in a point, has the shape of the drop and the bud, but also of a female breast, suckling: it is the symbol of immortality, as an attraction c spiritual inspiration, leading to becoming immortal.

The quintessential representative of this female-oriented Tai culture was Lao-tse born on the northern border of the Chou state.

The Tao, which his collection of maxims tells us about, is not a male spirit, much less a philosophical abstraction. Lao-tse identifies him as goddess and mother. Tao is the "matrix", she is the "female animal", she is the "mother of heaven and earth" (hence the goddess of earth is in the ideographic sign "earth paste, which is the womb of woman"), she is the "mother of ten thousand beings", the mother of the world and the country. She generates and nurtures, protects and saves her children, when they are in straits: she witnesses "non-violent death"; she has no desires and takes no authoritarian attitudes but, as her name implies, she is a guide: "guide of the whole".

The Tao is defined as "that which cannot be named", as "the secret of secrets", "the womb of secrets": as "the summit of emptiness and the solidity of silence". Alongside these formulas, comparisons arise suggested by water: the guide of everything pours out of the banks; she has the depth of water; she is the goddess of the valley of springs; goodness is the
its nature and highest goodness like water. The masters of the previous age, it is said in another passage, were so deep, that one could not descend into their marine depths; they poured out like ice, which eventually melts; they were peaty and dense like waters of silt. The Tao also conforms to the female image, which is most familiar to a civilisation
of rice farmers: 'Deep as water is It! And it seems to retain the freshness of dew! ".

To the liquid element belongs the water buffalo. Its environment is the marsh, the swamp, the slough. Strong and good-natured animals, they let themselves be guided by women and children by means of a nose ring. Lao-tse himself is represented on a water buffalo. Riding on a buffalo he arrived at the western pass at the edge of the empire. Here the commander of the pass begged him to put his great wisdom in writing, and so the book was born.

On the contrary, the horse was essentially foreign to this civilisation. It came from the north and the nomadic people, and in its wake came chariots of battle, the art of riding and chivalric customs. For Lao-tse, the horse was the symbol of the other side of the world. The fighting horses of the empire lived freely on the meadows of the community instead,

as was their office, to be attacked to work the fields. He knows about the "Lord of the Ten Thousand Chariots", but he also pronounces his own judgement: "hunting and horse-racing insensitise the spirit of man". Lao-tse tries to defend himself against the world pressing in from the north.
He is against the animals "who stand on their toes", who "strut their legs. He is against the boastful ones with the "bite at the mouth" and who are like the "crumbs of the meal" in front of the leader of the whole. Elsewhere he rails against those "who strut at a trot": this expression is written in Chinese with the sign of the "horse" with semantic value, and that of the ;" bridge " with both phonic and semantic value.

Rice cultivation was not the only element that made the Japanese islands part of this area. Female shamanism through the Tai peoples reached the fishermen and sailors of the Jue civilisation all the way to the Tungus reindeer herders, who from northern Shantung reached as far as Siberia: the female shaman could consequently not be absent from the islands in front. But the new world of the horse and the art of riding also eventually reached the rice farmers of Kyushu, Shikoku and southern Hondo. On top of a female-dominated civilisation came a newer, decidedly male one. The farmers became subjects, and the shaman woman was replaced by the ethereal woman. The transition
is unclear in its details, as is so much of Japan's primitive history. But some facts are now certain: corroded horse bones have been found in the oldest coral reefs. The use of the horse in combat, particularly the art of riding, takes us back to Korea as a starting point. Tombs in northern Korea, which on the basis of finds of Chinese lacquerware cups date back to the beginning of the New Era, have unearthed the long cavalry sword of the nomads with a bronze sheath in animal stylisation: stirrups have been found next to Chinese mirrors from the 1st to the 4th century. Further back in time, clay statuettes *(llaniwa)* from the hills of tombs from the 5th to 7th centuries bring us to the site. These include the horse with rider, saddle and stirrup; there is no lack of leather collar, plate and foil armour, nor of long uoses, bows and quivers, two-rimmed helmets and a glove to protect the nose. Relations with Iranian weapons, and consequently with those of Central Asia, have long been noted: in
many depictions, the influence of the art of the

of the Han. From the 3rd century onwards, the new way of life also became established in Japan.

The rise of the Hiung-nu empire and the establishment of relations between it and Han China had wide repercussions, especially in the west. Under pressure from the Asian nomads one wave after another set in motion, and in the end it was the main branch of the Hiung-nu itself that pressed on the borders of Europe.

The Jüe-tschi or Tocari had already been subjugated by Mao-tun, the founder of the empire. The nomadic lineage of Iran had no connection with the language, which is now called 'Tocari'; the Chinese name in its original form indicates that they were Scythians. Under the reign of Mao-tun's son, the Tocars were defeated a second time: their king fell in battle, and the victor made a cup from the skull of the vanquished king. Following this second defeat, the bulk of the tribe, who had hitherto resided beyond the upper reaches of the Hoang-ho, migrated westwards: they attacked their neighbours, the Sachi, who were also Iranian, and after violent struggles with other tribes, arrived, mixed with groups of Sachi, at Fergana on the northern border of Iran, around the middle of the 2nd century BC.

It was the Saks who attempted the first invasion: beaten by Mithridates I, the founder of the Parthian power, they settled in about 139 in the region, which was named after them as Sakistan, today Sistan, in eastern Iran. Better luck came to the second wave, led by the Tocarians and also composed of groups of Sachians and other nomadic races. Ten years after the first attempt by the Sachians, they crossed the Amu-darya river and overthrew Greek rule in Sogdiana and Bactria: from there they invaded the entire Parthian state, after having defeated and killed Mithridates' successor in battle.

The movement was now unstoppable. The Sarmatians, who until then had led a nomadic existence between the lower reaches of the Volga and the Don, attacked their neighbours to the west, the Scythians of southern Russia.
Both peoples were of Iranian stock, close relatives, in origin and language, of the Tocars and Sachians. Scythian domination thus came to an end from the beginning of the 2nd century BC: the Sarmatians spread throughout southern Russia and

pushed back the ancient rulers in the Crimea, across the Danube, in Dobruja.

We are dealing with a wide-ranging movement, which began in the 2nd century and extended from the northern borders of China to the Danube. Its unitary character is confirmed by archaeological finds. Chinese mirrors from the Han period and jade sword handles, all objects from China, were found in Sarmatian tombs of the Kuban and Volga regions: conversely, the stirrup of Sarmatian origin was used in Han China, but also in India from the 2nd to the 1st century.

The similarities between this movement and the great emigration of peoples about half a millennium later are obvious. The latter also started in the Far East, by the Hiung-nu or, as they were then called, the Huns. Only the impetus did not come this time, as in the 2nd century BC, from the foundation of their empire, but on the contrary from its fall. The victories of the great Han emperors and the organisation of the powerful defence system on the southern borders of the empire pushed the mass of the population westwards.

The struggle waged by China against the Hiung-nu bears remarkable similarities to what was happening in the Mediterranean area at the same time. The beginning of that great upheaval, which was to last for centuries, coincided with the years in which Rome had for the first time the revelation of the strength of the barbarians surrounding it. This was the period following the crucial year of 168 B.C., in which wars in Spain and North Africa, in southern Gaul and in the Balkans were putting the fledgling empire to the test. At the turn of the century and in the following years, the first clashes with the Germans and the awakening East were added.

At the same time the struggle against the Hiung-nu had entered its decisive phase. The first emperors of the Han dynasty had not been allowed to achieve decisive success: but under the rule of the greatest of them, Wu-ti (141-87) it was possible to deal serious blows to the adversary. Chinese cavalry formations, after lucky and bloody expeditions, managed to penetrate enemy territory. Under adversary pressure the Hiung-nu moved their centre of resistance north into the Orcon and Selengà basin. Their resistance capacity was gradually exhausted.

An Asian war took on Asian proportions. "The armies of China had penetrated deep into the interior of the country of the Hiung-nu; they had crushed the enemy and driven them from everywhere. An incalculable number of Hiung-nu were killed, wounded; others hastened with their cattle to go far away, to die or disappear. Or again:
"tens of thousands of men and horses, oxen and rams were destroyed. And this number was doubled by a famine that dragged two-thirds of the population and about half the livestock with it. An agonising desolation spread over the Hiung-nu people and caused a general decay. Countries that had hitherto been subject to it fell away like bricks fly off the roof in a storm". "The people starved, and to feed themselves they cooked and roasted each other.

Eventually, the inevitable happened: in the year 54 BC, the Hiung-nu chief officially recognised himself as a vassal of the emperor of China. The tribes living north and north-west of the Hoang-ho came under Chinese rule. Twenty years later, the western part of the Hiung-nu kingdom similarly collapsed. Across the Issikkul, the chief himself fell in battle and his head was sent to the capital.

During this period, the cultural influence of China extended widely: this is confirmed by the area of the excavated finds, which stretches as far as the Altai and Outer Mongolia, towards Minussinsk and Perm, and as far as the Volga and Kuban regions. The Danish finds in the marsh regions brought to light imitations of sword handles, which, originally made of jade, had been imitated in bone.

This was the time of a new expansion of the Roman Empire in the West. The East and Gaul fell under the rule of Rome: under the rule of Augustus the borders were moved to the Rhine, the Danube and the Euphrates.

Unrest, which arose as a result of the rule of a usurper, gave the Hiung-nu the opportunity to again attack the borders of China. But after the rise of the younger Han (from 22 BC onwards) the policies of the old dynasty were resumed. The reconstituted power of the Hiung-nu was

broken again: and, from the year 100 A.D. onwards, at the same time as the beginnings of Trajan's policy of conquest in the West, China's power in Central Asia reached its apogee.

Under the pressure of foreign preponderance, the northern and western tribes of the Hiung-nu abandoned their former locations and headed west. The Sien-bi, first neighbouring and subject tribes (Siberia was named after them), added to the pressure, snatching ever larger parts of their national territory from the Hiung-nu. Many tribes submitted to the new conquerors: but the most vigorous ones rose up again and escaped the Sien-bi and the Chinese. From 170 A.D. they disappeared from the horizon of the Far East.

In 376 A.D. the commanders of the Roman fortresses on the Danube heard that signs of a lively movement had appeared among the northern barbarians. All the peoples between the Tisza and the Black Sea were showing signs of restlessness. A savage and violent people, it was reported, was pushing the mass of neighbouring peoples forward. It soon became clear what had happened: the Gothic reign of Hermannic had collapsed under the impact of the Huns.

From ancient times, Hiung-nu and Huns have been considered to be one and the same people. There has never been a shortage of objections to this identification: linguistically, the two names, since the external analogy has lost all value, cannot be traced back to a single denominator. The question, however, can only be answered in the affirmative: in recent times, the form corresponding to *Hunni, Chunni, Chunoi* has appeared in Oriental documents to designate precisely the Hiung-nu (*xwn*). This is confirmed by the fact that both the Hiung-nu and the Huns spoke Turkish: for the Hiung-nu, this has always been known on the basis of remastic documents, for the Huns the proof is provided by the inscriptions of their descendants, the proto-Bulgarians.

Added to this are the archaeological vestiges of westward migration. In the Middle Jenissei, Hunnic and Iranian artefacts are intermingled to such an extent that it is often difficult to distinguish them; but the plaster death masks found in the tombs reflect the slow penetration of the Mongoloid type and together with the other finds confirm that the migration took place in

east-west direction. The hills of graves on the Altai, through finds of skulls, show the same picture, providing further confirmation of the movement of the Huns westwards. In the Chirghisi area (Alatau), the presence of arrows of Chinese and Mongoloid type among the skulls found there indicates an earlier stage of the migration. At the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. a second wave brought the advancing Huns westwards into the region between Barkul and Lake Balkhash. Ceremonial bows covered in gold leaf, found on the last stretch of the route between Dniestr and Hungary, take us back to the cultures of the Altai and Jenissei areas, where the same use of gold leaf on utensils and clothing appears.

Ptolemy, who composed his geographical work around the sixth decade of the 2nd century, already had news of the Huns settling between the Don and the Volga; around 290 Hun mercenaries met in the service of the Armenians. It follows that the vanguards of the Huns must have already reached the river, which was then crossed in 375, thus starting the great migration of peoples. This fact has been confirmed in Middle Persian documents, where the Huns living in the Caucasus are mentioned around 260 as mercenaries or auxiliary troops of the Sassanid army.

We can thus follow the route taken by the Huns. From Zungaria and the north-eastern part of Russian Turkestan, where Chinese sources again mention the Huns, it leads us to the northern bank of the Jaxartes. The Huns, however, did not manage to cross the river: the barrage system, once erected by Cyrus along the river's course, again stopped the invasion of the nomads. To the west it joined the lower course of the Oxus in Chwarezm. This country, made powerful by a skilful political leader, did not offer the Huns an easy hold. Having barred all roads to the south, they turned north, bypassing the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea as far as the lower course of the Don and Volga, where they temporarily stopped.

During their westward migration, the Huns received quite a few borrowings from the Iranian civilisation. Among the word borrowings next to 're
" and " sir ", we find " the early morning drink ", with which he seems to want to prove himself to manly strength and which recalls the banquet at Attila's court. A unic poem was born and more

particularly the epic: it would be desirable to know how it relates to the poetry of the Goths and whether Iranian influences were present in it. The adoption of writing (a preliminary stage of the later Turkic runes) already brings us to Caucasian territory and consequently to the final period of the migratory movement.

The linguistic form of the borrowed words and the writing, like the architectural forms adopted, indicate rather the extreme northern part of Iran than the Persian south-west. Already the conqueror Mao-tun had to admit that he knew nothing about *li* or *i,* which are the rules and duties of existence: the Huns had paid no attention to this delicate and precious part of ancient Chinese culture, any more than to the chivalrous life and customs that were in use at the court of the Sassanids. On Jaxarte, in Chwarezm and in the Caucasus, the Huns could hardly have learned such things, even if they had had the taste for them. They were other fields, from which the Huns removed the models that suited them.

Hiung-nu and Sarmati were the representatives of the new animalistic style, which had come from western Siberia to take the place of the old Scythian style. The transformation began simultaneously with the appearance of the Hiung-nu on the borders of China and the penetration of the Sarmati into southern Russia. Animals not only gained importance in art, but also became models for human life: human action was under the sign of animal action. In this sense, the attitude of the Huns towards the religions of Iran became clear from the very beginning.

Zoroastrianism was of great importance to Chwarezm; but there is no evidence that it had any influence on the Huns, who remained true to their beliefs. It was common to assimilate oneself to an animal as the model of one's behaviour. In the greatest of the Huns, Attila, one can see how this mentality was decisive - one could say exclusively so - in decisive actions. Animal nature with its exemplary strength and above all its foreknowledge of the future always had a powerful influence on human events.

A snake had shown the Hun hunters the way through the Mesozoic swamp and opened the way to southern Russia for the people: also the

conquest, the occupation of the country also took place under the guidance of an animal. At Voguli and Ostiachi, the oldest version has been preserved, according to which not the snake, but a mythical six-legged elk showed the way. The hunters, in the Greek narrator's adaptation to a representational world conditioned by man, appear as omnivores in human form, with and without wings. Behind the expurgated tale of the Greek narrator, the original version emerges, primordial, formless, suspended in a fantastic and equivocal realm between human and animal, but charged with expressive power, such that it still moves our imagination. The Eurasian steppe looms into view, or more precisely, that area where it flows into the homeland of the elk and the omnivores, and is lost in the mysterious penumbra of the taiga.

* * *

Beyond the Don, which the Huns were not to cross until 375, stretched a vast region, dominated by Goths and Alans.

The Goths, before the Christian era, had their seat in southern Sweden: the island of Gotland, Wàstergotland and Oster-gotland have preserved their name, as have some archaeological vestiges. They reached the Baltic coast by sea: the centre of their new domain was West Prussia. The region around the mouth of the Vistula was called the 'Gothic coast' (*Gothis-candza*) by them.

From the mouth of the Vistula the Goths resumed their advance, pushing south-east again: their goal was the coastal countries of the Black Sea. They pushed ahead or dragged with them other tribes, who like the Goths came from the Scandinavian peninsula: the Burgundians towards the south-west, the Vandals from Silesia towards the upper reaches of the Danube. A Gothic saga recounted that the Goths led by Philimer, son of Gadarig, had arrived, after crossing a swamp and crossing a river, in the fertile region of Oïum. Half of the warriors had remained on this side of the river, the others had invaded the territory of the Spali and settled on the coast of Meotida.

It is not difficult to recognise the Pripet swamp, from which the spearhead found at Kowel with an inscription in Gothic runes is derived. Oïum, which corresponds to the German '*Auen*' (pastures, fertile plain), represents

Consequently, the plain of southern Russia was later home to the Ostrogoths, designated by the name of Grutungi, the 'inhabitants of the fields', as opposed to the Visigoths or Tervingi, the 'inhabitants of the forests'. The Spali dwelt between the Dniestr and the Don: the river, which the Goths crossed, was therefore the Dniestr.

Already under the Scythians, the vast flat region north of the Black Sea was divided into a territory inhabited by agricultural peoples and a forest territory. The Nestorian chronicle correspondingly distinguished two groups of Slavs: some settled on the Dniestr and were called *Poljanen* (or men of the fields), the others *Drevljanen,* as they lived in the forests. The Goths were also distributed in the same two groups, according to a division that appears to have taken place quite early on. In fact, the Germans found pre-established forms of life there, transcending the permanence of individual peoples.

Agriculture and animal husbandry on the one hand, forestry and timber economy on the other, were natural givens. At first, both activities were considered the occupations of the subjects alone, who provided the means of life for their lords with the work of their hands. The hunter was the free master of the forest, while the owner of land and flocks was forced, to increase their possessions and protect them, to lead a warrior's life. Both of these primordial forms of existence in Eurasian regions cannot be conceived without the horse.

Next to the forest and the field, the steppe gave physiognomy to the region: next to the hunter and the landowner, the nomad on horseback. Forest and field have definite boundaries, which root man to the places and limit his horizons. The law of the steppe is different: it has no boundaries and no measure. There is no measure for the winter with its rigours and the icy breath of the storm; there is no measure for the dry, torrid summer; there is no measure for the spring with its immense expanses of flowers, but also with the thaw, which changes the clayey bottom into a yellow-grey or blackish muddy mass. There is no measure to the loneliness and monotony of the steppe, whether it stretches stiffly under snow or covered, as far as the eye can see, with green or a sea of flowers. Man is forced to submit to the law of the steppe, which takes possession of him and dominates him. His uniformity takes away

sense of the native land, its expanse as far as the eye can see binds him to a wandering life.

It was in this region that the existence of the Goths began to mingle with that of their new neighbours, the Alans. They were a vigorous race and were then the leaders of the Sarmatians: they were, as their name indicates, Aryans, specifically Iranian (Old Persian: *aryanam).*
They spoke an eastern-Iranian dialect: according to the indications provided by the language, today's Ossetians in the Caucasus date back to a common origin with the Alans or the Sarmatians. How these two groups associated with each other and with the Goths has not yet been clarified: it is unlikely that there were no armed clashes. The northern saga, which gives us news of the war of the Goths against the Huns, also knows of Gothic victories, which were achieved on Dylgia in the Don plain, below the Jassar mountains. These indications take us back to the Don and today's Kossa Dolgjana, opposite Mariupol: in the mountains of Jassar we recognise the mountains of the Alans. If the Alans later appear simply as a Gothic tribe, it is due to the fact that in the meantime they had merged with the Goths, at least partially Germanising themselves. The relations between the two
peoples did not, however, go in one direction: the Goths
were indebted to their Iranian neighbours for a decisive transformation of their way of life.

'The Alans,' reports a historian from the late 4th century, 'have no huts, nor do they know the use of the plough. They feed on meat and thick milk, they live on their wagons, which they protect with a vaulted roof of ox-skin, and on which they scamper across the steppe, which stretches out before them into infinity. As they find a pasture, they arrange wagons in a circle and eat like wild animals: when the grass is finished, the community
begins again with the chariots. On the chariot, man and woman are united, their offspring are generated and reared. It is their permanent home and, wherever they go, it is their homeland. They hunt before them the flocks, from which they draw their food.
They devote all their care to breeding horses. The soil always produces fresh grass: from time to time they arrive at places where the trees offer them fruit. Thus they can wander freely everywhere, for there is no lack of food or fodder: the moisture of the soil and the swift streams of water there

provide in abundance'. Horse and chariot thus determined the existence of the Alans: one and the other had a lasting influence on the Goths.

They had moved from the Baltic coast in search of new lands to cultivate, but once they had conquered them, they never stayed there for long. Even after they reached the Black Sea and found new homes there, they did not abandon their chariots. The Goths, like their neighbours, had become a people, whose homeland was the encampment of war and transport chariots, arranged in a circle, always in a warlike manner. This arrangement also influenced military tactics: Rome, which had long been concerned with the art of building encampments, learned from its Gothic adversaries to give due consideration to the barricade.

In southern Russia, the Goths became the great restless ones, whose memory still lives on in history. Their wandering eagerness was the terror of the neighbouring Romans. To celebrate Aurelian's victory over the Goths, Ammianus Marcellinus could find no better expression than to say that for a century the fearsome adversary had stood still: *siluerunt immobiles.*

Next to the migratory chariot, the horse was of equal importance to the Alans. The Goths, when they penetrated southern Russia, were already familiar with the art of riding, but only after contact with the Iranian nomads did it acquire decisive importance.

Sarmatians and Alanians were considered bad soldiers in hand-to-hand combat, but in the assault in close squads they were irresistible. The knights were clad in plate armour of iron or thick leather: they wielded spears and pointed swords with both hands from the top of the saddle and charged against the enemy to the cry of 'Marha*, Marha*'. Representations of the time show us the plate armour or an armoured tunic, which reached down to the feet, the cone-shaped helmet, the long lance, uose and knight's boots. Strangely missing is the stirrup, this invention of the Sarmatians, which in the assault with the spear offered a firm foothold and allowed the archers free shooting in all directions.

In the Germanic armies, horsemen had until then fought in mixed formation with infantrymen: at this time, cavalry, sometimes heavy cavalry, became the core of the army. Fighting was now exclusively

with lance and sword. In the ranks of the Roman army the Alans, later also the Huns, enlisted: it got to the point that the Roman infantry without the special cavalry of the Goths no longer felt safe in combat. The compact mass of horsemen was to decide the battle near Adrianople in 378. "Like a thunderbolt," says a contemporary, "it threw itself among the enemies: everything in front of it was overwhelmed by the charge. "Like a thunderbolt' already, twenty years earlier, the king of the Goths had routed the Roman army. Even then the blow had been struck, with savage fury, by the cavalry.

The horse was already inextricably linked to royal dignity itself. Before the battle of Tagina, King Totila displayed his majesty by appearing on horseback in the tournament with lance, armed and splendidly adorned with the insignia of his dignity. On horseback, with shield and lance, Theodoric was depicted in the bronze statue in Ravenna. An image of him still remains fixed in the Rok runestone:

He stands all locked in

arms on his Gothic

steed the shield on his

shoulders

the prince of the Meringians

The art of riding from then on became a characteristic of the Goths, particularly the East Germans. The situation in the West was different. When the Alamanni before the battle of Strasbourg in 357 prepared for the attack, the challenge of the troopers forced the nobility to dismount from their horses and fight hand-to-hand. Even in the 6th century, the army of the Franks consisted mainly of fighters at feet: only a few mounted elements were arranged around the leader.

The Gothic way of life, however, was not only determined by the horse. Arriving in southern Russia, the Goths had entered the area of a civilisation, where the animal had always been held in honour from the very beginning. Nor had the Germans ever lacked experience of the animal world. With the

their masks, the Germanic warriors took on the appearance of bulls, or boars, bears or wolves: helmets and shields had those same animal figures for ornamental purposes. Even the Nordic *Berserker* could transform into animal forms. The Romans likened the dazzling assaults of their Germanic adversaries to the savage fury of wild beasts gone mad: for they threw themselves at the enemy gesticulating menacingly, gnashing their teeth and with savage cries.

The horseman peoples also always cherished the representation of the animal world, such as wolves, bears, birds of prey and other bloodthirsty beasts of prey: in this tendency they met with the Germans, but at the same time distinguished themselves from them. Whereas for the Germans assault and hand-to-hand combat were necessary to form the heroes, for the nomad the warrior action was all about
in the play of cunning, chance and surprise, simulated flight and long-distance shooting. In the representative world of the nomad, not so much the attacking impulse of the fair, but flight and pursuit, agility and cunning, dominate. The two adversaries continually change their appearance: when the one flees away like the dove, the pursuer seizes him like the eagle; if the one shirks like the fish, the other will catch up with it like the pike.

An expression of the representative world of the nomads is the animal motif style. It dates back to the time of the first appearance of horsemen peoples in the southern Russian area: like the Scythians and their predecessors, the Cimmerians, it originated from the steppes of Asia. The Sarmatians introduced an original variant into this style: a colouristic virtue, full of strength yet extremely refined, that differentiated it from older examples. Weapons and utensils, silver and gold plates were embellished with stones of all colours. Next to shafts and banners with animal-shaped points, there were fretwork fiascos, formed by the interweaving of animal bodies in the heat of battle. This animal symbolism can be found,
in clasps, corrections, felt applications, embroidery and woollen fabrics, from the mouth of the Danube to extreme Mongolia. In southern Russia, the Goths soon came under the influence of this art: filigree and granulation, mounted stones and crystal castings were borrowed from the craftsmen of the Bosporus, the different coloured incrustations from the Sarmatian goldsmiths.
The garnet-coloured almandine, which came from the Hindu-Kush, was used by the Goths over the gold of clasps and buckles. Soon they added the

the first representations with animal motifs: if the Gothic works lacked pathetic fight scenes, where the bird of prey shoots down and knocks down the moose, the tiger or the griffin the mare, animal heads and bodies became increasingly important in the creations of goldsmiths. The predilection of the Germans for the play of interlaced lines was combined with the art of the Iranian nomads for a new creation of great future: the Germanic animal motif ornament.

The evolution inaugurated by chivalric ways of life and tactics, and which had a further spiritual manifestation in the animal motif style, led to a political creation, which encompassed a large part of the territory of southern and central Russia: the Gothic empire of Hermannicus. Around the middle of the 4th century, the formation of this empire could be said to have been completed. Although it shattered again after a short time under the blows of the Huns, it retained incalculable significance for the entire later cultural evolution of that vast territory. Among the peoples who belonged to it were not only Goths and Alanic tribes, but also Slavs, such as the Anti; the predecessors of today's Ossetians, and, last but not least, some Finno-Ugric tribes: such as Merens and Mordens, and even Teremissi and Morvini. The remnants that remain, however scattered, allow us to gain an insight into this short-lived and yet singular political creation.

Contemporaries compared the founder (or, if you like, the last creator) of the Gothic empire to Alexander the Great: yet Hermannicus left an unpopular image of himself among the Germans. In the sagas he is depicted as a grim tyrant, ready to rage against his own. Sources speak of the state of slavery in which he kept the subjugated peoples. It can rightly be observed that the government of such a vast territory and over subjects of such diverse origins demanded a harsher and more imperative conduct than that to which the Goths had been accustomed under previous kings. The symbol of this new sovereignty, its despotism and its almost oriental forms was precisely the pomp with which the Gothic rulers surrounded themselves from then on.

This pomp was of Iranian origin. The long chiton with vertically falling stripes in the middle; the cloak open at the front with trimmings at the hem and at the shoulder junction; the cap with bands covered with precious stones, crossing at right angles and falling over the shoulders and finally the large

round precious stone on the tip all reveal elements of the royal costume of the Arsacids (far more than of the early Sassanids). One cannot refer to the mediation work of the Alans in this case, as nothing similar is observed among them: rather, in places where the Arsacids always prevailed, such as Armenia and the surrounding regions, the
ancient customs had been preserved, when the Sassanids already ruled in Iran. The costumes of the Lazi court in the Caucasus, which we know of, are similar to those of the Goths: and it is worth mentioning the Iberians of the Caucasus, predecessors of today's Gruzins, whose recently found royal inscriptions definitely show the influence of the Arsacid kingdom.

In this environment are to be found those through whom the Iranian splendour was transmitted to the Goths. Hermannic sovereignty, as mentioned, also extended over the Ossetians: Gothic imports were found in Dagestan. The interpenetration of Gothic and Iranian forms, which had begun with the association made with the Alans, had become more intimate and firm. When Ulfila, a young contemporary of Hermannicus, conquered the
his Gothic compatriots to Christianity, he made a change of course, the full significance of which can only now be measured. In the actions of that man, who, apart from his own mother tongue, mastered Greek and Latin, the turn from Iran towards the ancient world, an orientation towards the West and Europe at the same time, took tangible form: a decisive event in the history of the East Germans. The Goths were thus removed from that close union with the East, which precisely under Ermanrich had reached its apogee.

The extent and importance of this Gothic empire results from the subjugated Finno-Ugric tribes. The signs for stallion, cuirass, sword and horse whip are found in a number of dialects, which include, in addition to the Teremissi and Morvinian dialects, the Ossetic dialects: this unambiguously implies that these are Alanian imprests. The 'word' could not have been received by the Ugrofin people without the 'thing' represented. Soil finds, moreover, confirm what the language already suggests. In Perm (an area of Carinthian culture) as well as on the Desna, Oka and in the territory between the Volga and the Kama, a stream of imported objects could be followed, such as armoured tunics, long swords and three-cusp arrowheads, as well as parts of horse harnesses, belt buckles and boots, and even gold jewellery with coloured stone decorations, filigree and granulation, typical

inventory of a people of knights, imported from the Gothic Empire and soon disappeared under the Hun wave.

Imported goods reached the north by two routes: the road through the steppe territory between the Volga and the Ural led to the Kama, while to get to Oka one had to take the road through the mountain belt of central Russia. From the Kama along the reverse route, the highly sought-after furs reached the south in exchange. Fur coats and ceremonial robes were in use among the Goths until later times. Linguistic imprests once again provide us with proof of this. The name of the otter in one of the Finno-Ugric dialects refers in its etymology to Ossetic, an obvious consequence of the continuous demand for the precious skin by the Alans.

The Gothic Empire thus set up economic exchanges within Russia. Economic expansion went hand in hand with political power. Such a vast territory could not be conquered and held with masses of infantry alone, but troops of mobile horsemen capable of quickly crossing distances were needed. The Goths were able to establish their empire in central Russia by virtue of the tactics they had learnt from the Iranian cavalry tribes of southern Russia. As a result of the economic penetration of that vast area, the results of the mixed Gothic-Alanic culture were necessarily passed on to the subjugated populations. Horsemanship, weapons and chivalrous customs also conquered central and northern Russia from then on.

In the background of the picture, everywhere, a dominical and chivalrous lifestyle of the Goth-Alanic type. It is again the linguistic imprests that set us on the path. The Finns received from the Germanic the word meaning 'king', the Perm dialects of the Alano-Osetic those meaning 'lord' and 'sovereign'. Elements of chivalric custom are found
not only at Teremissi and Morvini but also on the shores of the Azov Sea.

Even in the songs, which were later to be collected in the *Kale-vala,* one can follow that grandiose upheaval. The Finnish 'rune' most probably takes its name from the Gothic one. In the sixth rune, Wainamoinen's "steed with a body the colour of ears of corn" is referred to as "

blue elk'. In one of the frequent repetitions of the 'blue elk' is contrasted by the 'pugnacious steed'. These are those fixed epithets that, like the Homeric, Germanic or Indian epics, are not lacking in the Finnish one. The probable explanation for the parallelism between the two animals, which at first seems strange, is that the elk as a mount (a custom documented until the 17th century) was replaced by the horse. The succession of these two forms of riding is not only reflected in runic poetry: the same phenomenon is found in a hill of graves in the Pazyrjk in the eastern Altai. In the tomb of a nomadic prince, who was buried there in the years of the great historical turning point, one of the horses buried with the deceased was harnessed in the likeness of an elk with a mask of leather, felt, gold leaf and fur. There, therefore, a horse referred to as a moose, here another horse harnessed as a moose, almost an emblematic indication of the revolutionary significance of the introduction of the horse as a means of riding and the new way of fighting for the peoples of the Eurasian north.

* * *

"The mountain belt to the west and the plains to the east have always been part of Arabia's most populous and active regions. Syria and Palestine, Higiaz and Yemen in particular have participated from time to time in the history of the European continent. Culturally, these fertile and salubrious lands belonged more to Europe than to Asia, and, moreover, even in their expansion, they always kept their gaze more towards the Mediterranean than towards the Indian Ocean. The problem of migratory currents has always been one of the strongest and most complex in the life of Arabia: it affects the whole country, even though it may present itself differently in its various parts.

In Syria, the cities, as a result of poor hygienic conditions and an unhealthy standard of living, had low birth rates and a high mortality rate. The surplus population from the countryside found a home in the cities and was absorbed by them. In Yemen, the situation was different. The cities were but hamlets, still primitive in character and with a rudimentary village-like economy. The population gradually grew, while the standard of living remained at a very low level: the hardship of overpopulation

was becoming increasingly felt. Emigration by sea was not possible, nor was moving north along the coast, as the way was barred from Mecca and its port of Jeddah. Yemen's overpopulation, having reached a state of necessity, found an outlet to the east: the border people, scattered here and there, were pushed little by little over the mountain slopes, down the Uidian into the semi-desert territory, which ends in the north before the deserts of Neyd. The weaker tribes, forced exchanging rich springs and fertile soils for poorer ones, they ended up in areas where agriculture was almost impossible. They thus began to make up for their lack of livelihoods by herding sheep and camels, until in time their existence became increasingly dependent on the herd. Eventually the frontier peoples, who had become almost all dedicated to herding, under a final push from the population behind them that had come to a state of necessity, were driven out of even the last and smallest oasis in the middle of the desert and became nomads. This process, which can still be followed today with regard to individual families and tribes, must have begun as soon as Yemen was populated beyond the its own possibilities. The Uidian, below Mecca and TaÏf, has numerous place names, reminiscent of some of the fifty tribes that left Yemen and are now found in Neyd, Gebel Shammar, Hamad and even on the borders of Syria and Iraq. There, the migratory movement began, nomadism arose, and the current of desert wayfarers was formed.

The desert tribes were just as unstable as the mountain dwellers. Their economic basis was the possession of dromedaries: the Bedouins lived off their breeding, which on the one hand defined the territory of the individual tribes, but on the other forced them to constantly move from spring pastures to summer and winter pastures, where the flocks found their meagre food from time to time. It sometimes happened that even in the desert the population grew beyond the limits of the possibilities of life: then the innumerable tribes began to agitate and clash with one another, to find a new place in the sun. It was impossible to move southwards towards the inhospitable sands or the sea, or even to turn eastwards, for the steep slopes of Higiaz were firmly held by the mountain dwellers, who took advantage of the defensive position offered to them by nature. Sometimes they pointed towards the central oases, and when the tribes, in search of

new locations, they were strong enough, they were partly able to occupy them. If the desert had not hardened their strength, they were slowly being pushed
north in the territory between Medina in the Higiaz and Kasim in the Neyd, until they found themselves at the fork of two roads: here they could either head east, becoming coastal tribes on the lower Euphrates or they could, leap by leap, climb the terraces of the western oases, until they approached the Gebel Drusus in Syria or find water for their herds around Tadmor in the northern desert, on their way to Aleppo or Assyria.
But even then the tribes did not escape the pressure, which continued inexorably pushing them further north to the edge of the cultivated regions of Syria or Iraq. Favourable circumstances or bitter necessity persuaded them to recognise the advantages of owning goats and even sheep, until they ended up sowing wheat and a little barley for their livestock: thus they were no longer Bedouins and, no less than the other villagers, they were exposed to the raids of the nomads. Gradually they found themselves making common cause with the local agricultural people and discovered that they too were farmers.

This is how the peoples of the high lands of Yemen, driven by stronger tribes in the desert, became nomads against their will to keep alive: how from year to year they migrated a little further north or east, until they were driven out of the desert and forced to settle,
still against their will, in cultivable land, not unlike when they had previously been forced to become nomads. It was this circulatory motion that preserved the Semites to their original strength. There are few peoples, perhaps none in the north, whose forefathers have not, in their obscure beginnings, migrated across the desert at least once: each race, with more or less strength, bears the seal of nomadism, of that which is the harshest and most bitter discipline of all.

E. T. Lawrence drew this picture in view of contemporary events, but it is valid beyond the purpose for which it was given. It gives us the law of Arab life. With non-essential changes, it can be referred to the period we are now interested in. It is still the high lands of Yemen that form the starting point. One can here disregard the complicated and partly obscure history of the South-Arabian tribes and kingdoms; one can roughly speak of a succession of Minei, Sabei and Hiemarites, even if the earliest chronological data are

substantially to be lowered. The Hiemarites reached a position of hegemony by the end of the 2nd century BC. They were related to their predecessors, as is proven by the fact that language and writing remain the same. Not unlike in the past, the king, as priest and large landowner, was the head of a state formation, the economic basis of which was agriculture. Even now, the state derived its livelihood from the harvest and trade in incense. Both the sea route through the Red Sea and the land route from Mareb via Mecca to Syria were used. In sixty days the caravans, which left from Main (Minala), arrived at the Gulf of Akaba, where the Nabataeans ensured the subsequent transport and shared the earnings with the Arabs of the south.

This lucrative trade received a severe blow under the early Ptolemies. The rulers of Egypt did everything in their power to deprive the Nabataeans of participation in the South-Arabian trade and establish a direct link: in fact, the Ptolemies monopolised the sea trade almost entirely. In achieving this, they were aided by a discovery, which had extraordinary consequences. The Alexandrian pilot Hippalus discovered the regular course of the monsoons. He therefore ventured to abandon coastal navigation, and with the help of the south-west monsoon reached India on the open sea. Thus, the monopoly of connections with India was also taken away from South-Arabian shipping.

The Hiemarites were no longer able to regain their former position of privilege in the trade with India. Instead, it was the Romans who followed in the footsteps of the Ptolemies, and in Nero's time a regular maritime trade was established, which dispensed with South-Arabian mediation. Alexandria became the centre of trade, preferred over any other: the Hiemarites rose to the rank of customers of Rome. A Roman garrison was based in today's Aden. With the 2nd century, the Hiemarites also ceased to mint coins.
Recent finds in the vicinity of Pondichéry on the east coast of India and in the Mekong Delta testify to the extent reached by Roman trade.

Under the pressure of the economic depression, the Yemenite tribes began to migrate northwards. Across the steppes and deserts

of central Arabia advanced as far as the borders of Syria and Mesopotamia. An indigenous tradition placed these migrations in connection with the breaking of the protective dam at Mareb, which had been the ancient capital of the Sabaeans. According to inscriptions, the disaster occurred in 449-50 and 542-43: both times the Sabeans took shelter.
damage. The final catastrophe does not seem to have taken place before 570, and consequently the fall of the dam was more a symptom than a reason for the general ruin. The great South-Arabian migration had begun long before this date. Both the tribes that dominated Arabia in Late Antiquity, the Gassanids and the Lacmids traced their origin to the time of the dam break, and indeed the Gassanids began their era with that event. But for the one and the other it has been shown that their immigration dates back to much earlier times.

Syria has always been a transit region, and consequently a constant theatre of struggle. The conquerors fought along the coast and in the valley of the Orontes from north to south or in the opposite direction. To the east, the country was exposed to attacks by nomads. Pressures from the south and the interior
of the Arabian Peninsula pushed the Bedouins of the Hamad towards the 'fertile crescent', i.e. Syria and Mesopotamia.

Success depended then as now on the power of the regime in Syria. If the Bedouins are forbidden to penetrate the region with their raids, they must necessarily be content with what is granted them. When a scorching summer dries up the meagre pastures and water wells of the Hamad, there is nothing to prevent them from allowing their herds to graze in the unharvested fields. When the Bedouins want to settle in the region, they must content themselves with the uncultivated land. But when a government is weak, the Bedouin tribes soon get out of control. These put pressure on the resident settlers, cut them down and eventually force them to abandon their fields and homes. If with the establishment of the nomads the cultivated area gained ground in the
towards the steppe, now on the contrary the steppe invades the country cultivated. Abandoned regions become uncultivated again: irrigation systems fall apart and the desert regains the land torn from it.

With the ruin of the Seleucids' power this state of affairs was now a fact: Arab dynasties were consolidated everywhere. Roman rule initially limited itself to incorporating the subsisting principalities into its clientele, in order to entrust them with the defence of the frontiers.
Only the 1st century A.D. led to the full absorption of local potentates. Indirect domination was replaced by direct domination. The history of the Syrian frontier from then on coincided with that of Rome. An autonomous life only existed beyond the military frontier, visible above all in northern Higiaz.

Medain Saleh was the advanced post of the Nabataeans on the incense road coming up from the south. In the vicinity, the Leanites, together with the Tamudenes, had halted the Nabataeans' penetration southwards. After the kingdom of Petra in 106 A.D. became a Roman province, things changed. Oasis after oasis was lost to them. At the end of this conquest, the Tamudenes became a people dedicated to trade in 250 A.D., as they later appeared. Their inscriptions are scattered over a vast area, from north-western Higiaz to central Arabia, and through ancient Midian, Edom and Moab to the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt. The language is north-Arabic, but many proper names and writing point us towards the south: in fact, Tamudic inscriptions have been found in Nedjran, north of Yemen.

For the Safaite inscriptions, most of which come from the inhospitable mountains south-west of Damascus, we have the same situation: they too are composed in a North-Arabic dialect, but the proper names and other elements indicate a South-Arabian origin. While the Tamudenes were to some extent already sedentary and represented themselves with the plough, in the oil-black desert of Hatra they remained nomads. They grazed herds of dromedaries and horses, sheep and goats as far as the Euphrates. Of their possessions and trades, their water wells and camps, all this is recorded in inscriptions: and there is no lack of typical Bedouin morality, such as pride in a long line of ancestors or sadness at the sight of abandoned camps. These Safaites already shunned the military arm of Rome: deserters from Rome's army found in them an almost inaccessible refuge.

In the second half of the 2nd century, the formation of sovereign and independent states occurred for the first time. Still partly obscure is the early history of the Gassanids. But probably the desert castle Mshatta with its magnificent façade, this first splendid specimen of Arab art, was built by one of them or by the Lacmid Imru-ul-qais. Both dynasties, of South-Arabian origin, were there at that time. As vassals of the Sassanids, the early Lacmids had settled in Hira on the lower Euphrates and had subjugated much of northern and central Arabia.
Gadima 'the king of the Tanuch' appears in an inscription from south-eastern Hauran: his successor Amr is named in the Coptic papyrus of Mani, and Arab tradition preserved long memories of the battles of one and the other with Zenobia queen of Palmyra. For a moment the third in this series
- Imru-ul-qais, who proudly called himself 'king of the Arabs'.
- he could indulge in the dream of creating a third great power, alongside Rome and Iran. Death buried this premature plan in its grave.

Syria was, it was said, a transit region. Its inhabitants are welcoming and skilled in the art of hospitality: a spirit of adaptation and readiness to grasp endless possibilities are natural to them. Syria is both a country of clear and sharp light. All that is chiaroscuro, nuance, reverie is alien to the Syrian: he has the gift of a penetrating intelligence, quick and vivid as light, the equal of which is hardly found among other peoples.

But these agile and mobile spirits are at the same time restless, inconstant: they never cease, no matter how unsuccessful, to be critical and mocking, oblivious of any sense of respect or loyalty. Their intelligence is natively that of the cosmopolitan: they seize the happiness of the moment, hence their unbridled, unstoppable joy of celebration. But what demands will and continuity of action, hard experience and perseverance remains alien to them: their bird-like mobility inevitably consumes the necessary strength. Thus Syriac spirituality is like a flickering flame rather than fire, spreading beneficial warmth: it dazzles rather than enlightens and fertilises. The inhabitant of Syria has never been brought into lasting political formations as a result. Wooed for his readiness, feared for his mocking spirit, he was and remained in a state of

subservience: if he was never a trusted subject, he never ultimately caused Rome serious difficulties.

The situation in Iraq is different. Faced with the colourful variety of the Syriac landscape, the picture is all the more uniform in tone. After a brief, rustling spring, in which the steppe is covered with orchids, tulips and poppies, the vegetation dries up and for the rest of the year the country's appearance does not change. The fertile silt covers plants and huts with its grey-brown dust, darkens the sky, and coats everything in the same monotonous appearance. Nature, on the other hand, has spared the country's inhabitants the dull gift of Syriac intelligence. Iraqis are heavier, closer to the earth, more peasant, coarser and slower in intelligence, yet made of a harder, more consistent dough. The Iraqi has always turned out to be a
Valuable fighter, persevering and independent-minded: it is thanks to him that the autonomous state formations of the first Arab world were created.

The Parthian empire had become, due to the deficiencies of its structure, a breeding ground for a variety of local potentates. Everywhere, dynasties that were de facto independent raised their heads. In Babylonia there was temporarily a Jewish kingdom of Asinaios and Anilaios, and in Upper Iraq the Abgar of Edessa and the kings, also Jewish, of Adiabene are chiefly to be remembered. A picture of the relations that were established is offered to us by Hatra, located west of today's Mossul.

The city was within the territory of an Arab tribe, which, like today's Sfiammar, must have come from central Arabia, crossing the Euphrates. It is not known when this happened: under Trajan, the decadence of the Parthian state having become evident, Hatra took on for the first time, albeit in a modest and discreet form, the physiognomy of an independent city: it was surrounded, like the oasis cities of central Arabia, by a wall of dried brick. But more than this poor fortification, the enemy was kept away from the inhospitable surrounding area. In a skirmish, the Emperor Trajan, who was bravely climbing on his steed, was in mortal danger. Hatra's mounted archers directed their arrows at him, having recognised him, despite the fact that he had put aside his own insignia, by his grey hair and dignified demeanour.

When, almost a century later, Septimius Severus appeared at the gates of the city, he was confronted by a strong and flourishing community. On the former clay walls, stone towers had been built in the form of mighty ramparts. Twice the victor of the Parthian king attempted to take Hatra, and both times he failed. The treasures of the Sun Temple of Hatra, which the emperor is said to have wanted to take possession of, remained outside his grasp. Hail of arrows and scorching asphalt received the assailants, while the projectile machines of the towers reached into the furthest ranks.

Only Shapur, the second of the Sassanids, succeeded where the others had failed. When Julian, more than a hundred years later, passed through the area, the city lay abandoned. 'Have you seen Hatra,' an Arab poet sang at the time, 'whose inhabitants were always in such prosperity of life? But is there anyone in the world who is in prosperity for ever? ". Even today, those ruins are among the most impressive of all that remain in that lonely landscape.

More recent than the foundation of Hatra was that of Hira, located on the lower Euphrates. The population consisted of three classes: the Tanuk, Arabs who dwelt between Hira and Ambar in tents made of cheesecloth; the Ibad, Arameans who had settled there permanently; and finally, the mercenaries assigned to defence. These too were Arabs, but, burdened with guilt, they were banished from their tribes and pursued by blood vengeance. The dividing line between nomadic and agricultural population is even more mobile in this region of the lower Euphrates than elsewhere. The farmers also live in tents and settle now here, now there, wherever they find cultivable land. This moving from one place to another does not end until they are incorporated into the citizen class. Mercenaries and foreigners are also to be found elsewhere: in pre-Islamic Mecca they had a privileged position and in times of war formed the army together with hired Bedouins and Abyssinian slaves.

The fundamental element of the state was the Tanuk: they had entered Iraq animatedly, at a time when the power of the Parthians under the last Arsacids was in decline. We met Gadima of Hira 'the king of the Tanuk': he had been on the verge of daring a conflict

armed with Paimira. The Sassanids recognised the new state and entrusted it with the defence of the frontier on the Euphrates. The interests of the Persians and those of Hira coincided: once in possession of the country, the ancient Bedouins were unwilling to partition it with newcomers, even their desert cousins.

Hatra and Hira, as their names attest, arose as camp-cities. The residence of the Lacmids was built in the form of a military camp, and its description handed down to us by an Arab author shows that the Mshatta castle was based on the model of Hira: the castles of the Abbasids also of Balkuwara and Ucheidir remained faithful to this type-structure. The city-camps soon developed into centres of trade, to which the kings ensured defence against external enemies. At the centre of the fortified city of Hatra stood the caravan court, which was also a resting place and hostel for the traders. Its measures were imposing: it stretched out in front of the royal palace, whose high-vaulted ivanae looked down on the busy market.

Just as the city had grown out of the encampment, so from the custom of the nomads grew the military order. The Bedouins, motivated above all by the hope of prey, formed the core of the army: the majority rode on dromedaries, while the sheiks had the privilege of the horse. The horsemen carried long pointed spears, bows and a small round shield, as is still remembered in the cave figures of the Safaites. At their side was an auxiliary troop, recruited from among the inhabitants of towns and villages. Unlike the Bedouins, its members were instructed in discipline, obeyed commands and adapted to closed formations: they also rode on dromedaries, which then as now horses were a rarity in Arabia, held in great esteem. From time to time the kings resolved to distribute animals from their own herds to their trustees: the Gassanids succeeded in this way in securing supremacy over the Bedouins, who only had dromedaries.

Some of the retinue were also supplied with weapons by the prince: these were delivered only when needed, otherwise they remained in storage in the arsenals. Ambar near Hira was one of the warehouses, where weapons were stored, that the Sassanids had provided to their vassals: so they could

if necessary to raise an armoured troop and get the better of the neighbouring nomads. Even the army of pre-Islamic Mecca, the famous Acabic troops, was only readied and supplied with weapons at critical moments: it was composed entirely of foreigners and would have formed, had it remained in arms, a constant danger to the great traders. The bulk of the Acabian troops was made up of Abyssinian slaves. Of these mercenaries, only the Cargi were related to the Arabs: driven out by Bedouin tribes, in a state of perpetual banishment and dedicated to robbery, they had their own particular concept of honour and were preceded everywhere by the fame of their savage ravaging fury. They also rode common dromedaries and when they were properly equipped and armed by the Kuraisch, they achieved extraordinary successes.

A singularity of the Arab armies was the presence of women. They accompanied the tribe's shrine, consisting of the *bait or Baitylos,* which a dromedary carried on a high saddle, shaped like a pavilion: a Palmyrenean bas-relief shows us the animal with its sacred load, followed by a host of veiled women. Women and animals were
also present at the battle: at the climax of the fight, the women threw off their robes and by their nakedness, their gestures and songs of mockery aroused the fighters. Nothing would have stained the fighters with greater dishonour than for women and shrine to fall into the hands of the enemy: many years later, the Prophet's followers still had the tradition of the tribe's mothers, who in pagan times had been the guardians
of the ancient idol.

Arabia thus enters the picture that until now had only been filled by the Eurasian peoples and, in taking its place there, differs from the other peoples in significant particularities: among these, the dromedaries and the position accorded to women, to which the north can offer no counterpart. Both of these particularities have also decisively determined the life and fighting tactics of the nomads of North Africa.

* * *

Under the rule of Thrasamundus (496-523), the Vandal army suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Maurean tribes of Kabaon. This prince

Clever and cunning, who had his pastures in the vicinity of Tripoli, he waited for the Vandals on the coastal road, which led south from Carthage. For the fight, the Maures had arranged themselves in a circle: in the centre were placed the women and children, as well as all the goods of the tribe. They were therefore protected by a living wall of dromedaries, while at the front twelve rows of animals had been deployed in depth. The warriors, armed with shields and javelins, were scattered among the dromedaries and met the Vandals with their bullets.

This tactic then represented a new fact: never before had an army of horsemen been defeated by dromedaries. All of a sudden, the animal acquired an importance that had hitherto been ignored, and this was reflected in the tribes, who based their economic and military life on it, using it in their raids and movements. The fact that the people of Kabaon led their nomadic existence not far from Tripoli means that the steppe and the Sahara were gaining ground on the civilised area, which was likewise retreating and shrinking. But the coast was never the home of the nomads, dromedary breeders: hundreds of rock drawings scattered in the Fezzan and neighbouring regions indicate that the centre of gravity of these tribes was to the south in the steppe and desert.

The drawings always show the same subjects: warriors on foot or horseback, armed with shield, sword and a long spear, and, next to them, large and small livestock, grazing or in herds. In the foreground, however, is the dromedary, alone, or as a domestic animal or mounted by warriors armed with lances. For the nomads it was everything: goods, producer of meat, milk and wool, mount and beast of burden. Raiding livestock was the surest, often indeed the only, means of increasing the tribe's assets and improving the difficult living conditions.

Steppe and desert impose harsh conditions of existence: only by fighting can possession be secured and maintained, whether it be of domestic animals or game, or even the possession of a woman. It is only conquered by repeated trials and acts of courage: and once obtained, it must be defended against rivals. Woman claims as
a right to give himself to the strongest and most skilful. This obliges man to always be ready to prove himself. The singular combat in the

harsher conditions is the rule: death or mutilation the inexorable outcome for those who are defeated.

By forcing the man into a state of permanent offensive tension, the woman creates a type of man-warrior and, if you like, hero. He can tolerate the harshest trials, but at the same time, committed as he is to the fight for woman and his personal honour, he reveals himself to be of an absolute individualism: he is as far removed from the obedient and disciplined soldier of Roman training as from the Germanic hero, whose greatness stems from his tragic opposition to fate.

This human type is not only individualistic, but has anarchic traits; freed from the bonds of family and group life, he leads an adventurer's and warrior's existence, which is typically and exclusively male. And it is still the woman, because of her place in the environment, who pushes him along that path.

He has only to fight for the woman's possession: for the rest, she is the centre of the household. The dignity and function of the *pater familìas does* not exist here: the woman chooses the man who, as it were, enters the family circle from outside. This is made up of the woman's blood relatives: mother, brothers and cousins are closer relatives to the woman than the husband. Children, who are born of the union, are considered as such not in relation to the father, but to the mother. Even work related to the home is the woman's sole responsibility, primarily the building of the tent or hut, while the man limits himself to war and hunting. He lives his life of courage and violence, of heroic and daring episodes: but only women are allowed to tell about them, by the night fire or on the terrace. Woman and man, in short, have the same independence, but each within the insurmountable limits of their own realm.

Everywhere we are offered the same picture. The woman has ousted the man from the intimate circle of his own existence and made of him both a hero and an adventurer, who lives, in a realm alien to the home, in a constant state of struggle with his fellow men for existence and power. This life of his, full of danger and adventure, is in a strange way free of duty: it remains unconditionally outside the law, directed as it is only to the most naked and immediate needs.

The nomads, breeders of dromedaries, were added to the peoples enumerated so far: their appearance in North Africa corresponded to that evolution, which had been determined by the horse both among the Huns and in Han China, among the Goths and Finns and among the Arabs. The "Animal 'form' assumed symbolic value everywhere; in the mirror of animal life was reflected the warlike and heroic existence that was then unfolding everywhere. Violence and risk, singular combat, the joy of struggle and adventure, a mobile and independent existence imposed itself everywhere, in the most diverse forms.

The dromedary determines the face of the North African landscape to such an extent, that one can hardly now imagine it without that presence. When the Romans set foot in Africa, they had not found it there: in Egypt it had been known since the earliest days of Ptolemaic rule, but it was not until the 4th century A.D. that a North African city reached a breeding centre for thousands of cargo dromedaries. From then on, the dromedary-mounted nomads gained importance in the Roman standing army: two squadrons were set up under Diocletian and a third included in the army's staff during the 4th century. They resided in Upper Egypt and were assigned to defence duty against the desert tribes.

Their adversaries, with whom they were then at war, were the Blemmians and Nobatians on both sides of the Nile. These had long lived as peaceful neighbours of the kingdom of Meroe, in the Atbara and Upper Nile region. In the second half of the 1st century and in the 2nd century, the economic flourishing of Meroe took place, to which the ruins of the capital, but also the cities of Lower Nubia (Kerma, Karanog, Phara): after that time the decline had begun and the fact that a number of these cities were surrounded by fortified walls indicates that the greatest blows came from outside. It was at this time that the Blemmians and their neighbours attacked the Egyptian frontier: from the middle of the 3rd century onwards, there is no end to the wailing against their assaults.

What was the reason for the aggressive fury of the nomadic tribes, who had suddenly become very dangerous neighbours? The fact that the Romans used dromedaries against them proves that the most ferocious and

extensive raids were attributed to the increased fighting power of the desert tribes. It is explained how most of the rock drawings in Upper Egypt and Libya depict dromedaries and horsemen, fighting, with their long spears, from the back of the animal: these Blemmians were in fact typical nomads on dromedaries, such since their first appearance in North Africa.

In the following period, combat using dromedaries was further extended, as a tactical innovation, to the East: in the second half of the 3rd century it is found on the frontier of Upper Egypt, and with the 4th century in Numidia. The starting point had in any case been the Arabian peninsula: from there, the Bedouins had transmitted the breeding and use of the animal across the Red Sea. The Tamudenes, other tribes in the Egyptian district of Arabia, whose inhabitants were known for their breeding and trade in dromedaries, had their headquarters in the vicinity of the Blemmi: to the north, the mediators had been the tribes of the Nabataeans, whose figures cover the rocks all over the Sinai peninsula, and to the south, the Sabeans, who migrated to Ethiopia, where rock figures depicting dromedaries and dromedary fights have also been found. This vast current, starting from Arabia, thus embraced the entire desert area of North Africa, definitively marking its inhabitants.

* * *

The migration of peoples, even if it is commonly represented as a movement of vast proportions, is exhausted for the European scholar in the migratory movements of the Germanic races: at a certain distance is the Arab expansion, a reflex movement and as such of little importance. The overview, which we have attempted to give, aims to rectify this picture.

In the meantime, it remains established that the Arabs did not wait for Muhammad to start moving: in this case, as in the other, the existence of precursor signs must be recognised. The exploits of the Cimbri and their fellow marchers, the war of the Marcomanni in the 2nd century, the battles of the Goths and the Alamanni in the 3rd century, represent sometimes essential premises for the future start of the great migrations. Something similar applies to the Arabs: Hatra, the Lacmids of Hira and their Gassanid rivals, the raids of the Nabataeans and Tamudenes (and one might add later the rise of

Palmyra) must necessarily be considered as prodromes. They were all lineages, also Nabataeans and Palmyrenians (according to the name), of North-Arabian origin.

Both the Germanic and the Arab migration penetrated in extent and depth: but while the East Germans conquered Spain and North Africa, Italy, the Balkans and Southern Russia, in order to plunder them and then disperse into these regions, the Arab nationality with a series of similar undertakings incorporated immense territories. The Arab colonisation of East Jordan, Syria and Egypt, which had already begun some time ago, was completed: Iraq, too, was permanently occupied since it first set foot on the left bank of the Euphrates. The resolution of Qadisija represents only the final stretch, affixed to a movement that, despite occasional pauses, had never ceased.

A third current, which is generally overlooked, is the westward migration of the Turks. When it is even mentioned, it is considered to be part of the Arab migration: it would have been the Seljuks and Osmanli who separated from their predecessors. The great Germanic migration is also made to begin with the invasion of the Huns in the year 375, with the first appearance of a Turkic people on the eastern border of Europe. If both groups, Seljuks and Osmanli there, Huns here, were parts of a single movement, this way of looking at things does not add up.

The Turkish migration has in common with the Arab migration to have beaten the same territory with repeated invasions. Huns and Onogurians, Avars, Cazars and Cumans, and later also the Mongols, pushed westwards, along the edge of the steppe area, or, as mentioned earlier, the northern road. Other Turkic tribes, through Iran and Asia Minor, opened a way further south, to meet up in the north of the Balkans with the primitive direction of travel. A new wave always absorbed the remnants of the previous ones: the fall of a historically recognisable group coincided with the rise of a new one of related or related lineage.
This continuous renewal, whereby the succession of tribes did not stop for a whole century, gave the Turkish migration its special character.

A clash with the Germans, however, is undeniable. In the East, conquest was again matched by loss: where the Turkish tribes had penetrated as conquerors, they soon dispersed into the cauldron of 'colossal China'! Even those regions that had been regions of Turkish greatness, which were considered home and centre of their nationality - Ordo and Tschachar, Orcon and Selengà, the forest of Otiikà - fell into foreign hands. The Iacuti Turks pushed back into the forest area, from horsemen-shepherds, became reindeer nomads.

A fourth migration of peoples was also announced, that of the Slavs. In the empire of Hermannicus, together with a few Finnic tribes, the Anties appeared for the first time: they were the Slavs, the last to knock at the door of historical space. They occupied territories, which had already been or were about to be abandoned by their predecessors: if the beginning of this movement
- penetration into the black land area, occupation of northern Russia - took place in a twilight that has not yet been sufficiently illuminated by events, the outcome with its impressive historical consequences is before everyone's eyes.

In the introductory chapter, mention was made of the widening of the geographical horizon, which occurred with the opening of a road to the north and another to the south, both with a route outside the regions of ancient civilisation. Within the framework of the great migrations, the two roads found themselves facing each other. On the northern one passed the Turks, and Germans and Slavs partly crossed and partly followed them. The road to the south was the route of the Arabs, but also of the nomads mounted on dromedaries, continuers of the first Arab migration. At the centre of the great routes, on which peoples advanced and clashed, lay the two great empires of antiquity: Sassanid Iran in the east, the *imperium Romanum* in the west. A common destiny, however, united these two enemy brothers, eternally rivals and divided by annihilating wars: defence against the young and constantly moving peoples that were breaking in from the north and south. This necessity made the two empires develop new forms, which united them beyond and above all differences.

Chapter III

The Sassanids

After the death of Alexander the 'Roman', 240 kings coexisted side by side in Iran. Their leader was Artavan (Artabanus), king of the Parthians: Persia, Isfahan and the border regions were in his power. He brought Ardashir, the son of Sassan, of the lineage of the ancient Persian kings, the Achaemenids, to his court. Ardashir was brought up there in a chivalrous discipline and environment. One day a young princess, whom Artabanus held in higher esteem than the other court ladies, confided to him a secret she knew. The astrologers, so she said, had revealed to their lord that a new king was to arise. He would kill many lords and unite the world again into one empire. And she added that that servant, who had escaped his master in the coming three days, he would attain power, bringing victory over his ancient lord. The young girl and Ardashir decided to act according to the prophecy. They fled with the king's swiftest steeds, taking with them his Indian sword, a crown and part of the treasure.

Artabanus pursued the fugitives with his men. In three days he would have to arrest them, otherwise, the chief astrologer announced, it would be too late. The people, who met the king, reported that in the morning two horsemen had passed by, stony as the wind, followed by a great ram. Artabanus accelerated the pursuit. The people, whom he met little by little, always reported the same thing to him. The king asked the leader of the Magi what this meant, and he was answered: "The ram is the splendour of kingship: it has not yet reached Ardashir. We must try to seize it before he does".

Artabanus accelerated even more. The following day, he encountered a caravan
"We noticed," reported the people to the king, "that with one of those horsemen was on his horse a large and mighty ram. Again Artabanus asked the chief of the Magi for an explanation, and he received this reply: "You could, Sire, and we wish you so, be immortal. But the splendour of kingship has reached Ardashir: now in no way can you any more

Take possession of it. Do not fatigue yourselves or your horsemen any more, nor strain your horses, which are in extremis: try by other means to oppose Ardashir'.

The king sent an army against him. Ardashir also took the field with his men. For four long months every day was fighting and slaughter. But the splendour of kingship was with Ardashir, and so he won the victory, killed Artabanus and all his possessions fell into his hands.
He then took Artabanus' daughter in marriage.

So, in a way, is the legendary narration handed down to us by a Middle Persian book long after the events that shook the 3rd century AD. It seems to simply state that one dynasty replaced the other: Ardashir took the place of the last Arsacid. With him came the Sassan lineage, which was to remain in power for over 400 years. Yet the change that took place had a much wider significance, which we are given a glimpse of by the legend.

A great revolution was taking place for Iran, bringing it back to the consciousness of its past and its deepest being, and reconnecting it with the Achaemenid empire and the religion of Zarathustra. The values expressed in these mighty creations of Iranian history once again became the norm in the face of the political forms of the Parthians and the composite culture, half Eastern, half Hellenistic, that had formed under their rule.

Ardashir's assumption of the throne constitutes the definitive rejection of what had been Alexander's great work. The historical significance of this event is not limited to Iran: it has its repercussions on Rome and at the same time foreshadows the future. The new empire of the Sassanids, if it represents in a certain respect the fulfilment of the historical destiny of a people and a culture, cannot fail to have a national character: but, like everything that is genuinely national, no matter how much one grasps it at its deepest roots, it overcomes its own limits. As an 'empire' with universal pretensions, it stands alongside the Roman *imperium* and takes us a step further, in that it is the first universal empire with typically medieval characteristics.

All this already appears in the narrative modes of the story referred to at the beginning. The rise of the Sassanids can be described in a far more objective manner, punctuated by reference to temporal conjunctures and first causes, rather than the marvellous element. Nevertheless, posterity must have found something in Ardashir's 'novel' that it felt gripped by and as if fascinated by a reality that spoke to its spirit. Otherwise, it would hardly have been accepted in the Persian 'book of kings', that vast collection of homeland traditions, which was compiled shortly before the fall of the Sassanid empire and has survived as a national testament. Indeed, that account, however little history it contains, is more worthy of meditation than if it had been limited to the chronicle of events: it is the myth of the empire's foundation and its hero.

If history in the strict sense is concerned with events and their temporal succession, myth is timeless and aims at essence. Myth does not give us a tale for the sheer pleasure of narration, nor to guarantee the literal truth of the event, which it relates; but the tale is in this case simply the form chosen at a given moment, the possible expression of what lies behind the appearance and is deemed authentic.

But what is the ultimate meaning of that myth? Much of what is said there is only very loosely connected with the particular event and the unique person of Ardashir: it is found again and again wherever the discourse on fortunate actions and outcomes falls. Women and fortune (also a woman) offer each other to the hero: everything goes well for him when his time has come; the hero seizes the opportune moment without hesitation, and indeed everything depends on this lightning readiness. These and similar motifs tend to return almost invariably in stories of this kind: but, alongside them, there are others in our saga, which prove valid only for Iran and only for the Sassanids. Here a courtly chivalrous style is allied to a rigorously legitimising and at the same time universal attitude, both aspects dominated by a profession of faith in Tsaratustrian orthodoxy in such a singular form that it could only have taken place in that place and time. To attempt to separate this skilfully woven warp would be to destroy it: the attempt could only highlight the connection of the individual parts and their unity.

* * *

As soon as young Ardashir is called by the Parthian king to his court, he lives together with the knights' sons. He goes hunting with Artabanus and his knights. He frequents the royal stables, bangs the drum with his hands, sings and gives himself up to the pleasures of his age: there, among the horses, the king's daughter discovers him, and their youthful friendship is forged. On horseback, the competitions between Artabanus and Ardashir take place, at which the splendour of royal power rests on the horse alongside its favourite.

At the court of the Parthian king, one encounters horses and horsemen at every turn. The young Persian boy, who was one day to overthrow Artabanus, also grows up in this atmosphere, which was familiar to the Parthians from the very beginning; that chivalrous way of life which is the great novelty they brought to the history of Iran.

Iran is not a territory of unitary culture: its evolution takes place between two poles, the first of which is in the south-west, in Mesopotamia, which is in communication with the countries of the Mediterranean, from where decisive influences always arrive, the other in the Turanian countries in the north-east. The two poles also represent the contrast between the fertile zone and the steppe, between agriculture and hunting, between sedentary and nomadic life, between city culture and the wandering life of the robbing hordes. While the Achaemenids, Alexander and his successors, despite their differences, had in common their origin from the south-west, the entry of the Parthians indicates a swing of the pendulum towards the opposite pole.

The Parthians, a Scythian race, had penetrated from the Turanian steppes into Iran proper through the frontier mountains, which formed its natural defence. Having set out from their primitive seat on the Ocos, to the east of Herirud, they had taken possession of the satrapy 'Parthia' and from it they received the name by which they have gone down in history: in their subsequent evolution they bore for a long time the marks of their origin, which it may be said they never denied.

If the farmer rooted to the earth and the believer in the teachings of Zarathustra see the ox as the foundation and symbolic expression of existence, the same applies to the horse among nomads. The nomad is a restless being and

dedicated to robbery; he is a violent and despotic man, who roams vast spaces far and wide, regarding them as his natural possession; he is the hero who has placed his existence in the risk of combat. The horse is the means to lead this proud existence, to make possible his vast raids and at the same time the expression of his life as a ruler. Thus the nomads are the first representatives of a free, sovereign and chivalrous form of life; a conception of life that was defined precisely by the Parthians.

On foot, they were without possible defence. Their long robes, which went down to their ankles, hindered them in marching, in combat, in flight: easily in these conditions, they were taken prisoner or massacred.
Only in the saddle did they find themselves: 'they are always on horseback; on horseback they go to war; on horseback they go to their feasts; on horseback they fulfil their public and private duties. On horseback they move about or stop and trade or converse with each other. Moreover, what distinguishes servants and masters is that the former go on foot, the latter do not show themselves except on horseback'. This description by an ancient historian shows us what the social significance of life with the horse was: and in it is also expressed the consciousness that the man of noble caste has of his vocation as ruler, founded on the possession of the horse.

From the standard of living of the nobleman to that of the ruler is but a step. Darius called Persia 'a land of good horses': in the neighbouring Media lay the plain of Nicaea, home to a famous breed and pastureland for countless herds of horses. According to Herodotus' account, Darius owed his throne to the neighing of his horse. Yet in what little account under the Achaemenids were horse and rider held! On cylindrical seals we see the king, according to Assyro-Babylonian custom, on his chariot: ancient Persian reliefs show him on the throne, under a canopy, fighting with lions and dragons, before the sacred fire altar or standing before Ahura-Mazda, but always on foot, never on horseback. Thus we find him on gold coins: and on foot appears Darius, on the Bisutun rock relief, showing us his triumph over the kings of Liigen. On foot, at the king's side, proceed the ranks of the bodyguards in the friezes of the palaces of Persepolis and Susa.

The rock representations of the Sassanid period attest to the change that took place in this figurative world. On the occasion of the oath of homage or in the procession of the paladins, in the scenes of submission, at the investiture ceremony with the royal ring by Ormuzd, in the chivalric tussle with the rival, wherever the Great Sassanid King appears on horseback, either armed with heavy armour or
in hunting costume: only sporadically is he seen on foot, as the representation of the horse and royalty were closely linked at that time.

Moreover, the Sassanids were neither the only nor the first to break with the previous tradition. In Parthian reliefs one already encounters duels on horseback for the conquest of power, scenes of oaths before the king on horseback. Nor should it be forgotten that the use of the horse in warfare was in the mentality of the ancients inextricably linked to the Parthians.

The Parthians had kept their national Scythian armament on the soil of Iran. The bulk of the army was made up of slaves, but they too had to learn to ride and shoot a bow, like those who had belonged to the free men from birth. A man's wealth was measured by the number of horsemen he could send to the royal army in the event of war. The Parthians did not like close combat, nor
sieges: their strength lay in the sudden charge of cavalry and the simulated flight, by which they threw the enemy into confusion and uncertainty. A long fight was none of their business, and it happened that they interrupted it at the climax: but they soon gathered themselves from the flight for an unexpected resistance, so that their decision surprised an enemy who already thought himself victorious.

Archers on horseback, who disappear in flight and soon reappear by surprise, who now disperse in swarms and now attack suddenly, can only be imagined at first glance as light-armed troops. This is how the party archers appear on terracotta and graffiti: and in this same aspect we find them in literature and poetry. But to stop here, the picture would not be complete.

Among the knightly peoples of Central Asia, one must also look for the homeland of flake and plate armour. Armour of this type was already in use in the time of Alexander the Great. At the Battle of Gaugamela, on the left wing of the Persian armour, battalions of Bactrian and Scythian troops fought. The Battilans were subjects of the Great King, while the Scythians were not
than allies: the people of the Turanian steppe had sent auxiliary troops to the empire's army, who are referred to as horse archers. On this occasion we learn that man and horse were protected by flak armour.

The Parthians retained this heritage, which came to them from Central Asia. The coins of the first Arsacid show an archer in a long armoured robe, which reaches down to his leg: that the armour also covered the horse is expressly mentioned. Various pieces of horse armour have been found in the frontier fortress built by the Parthians at Dura-Europos; they are similar to those in southern Russia, where the Parthians' ancestors, Scythians and Sarmatians, used the same fighting tactics.

As a special weapon of the heavy troops, the Parthians introduced the long assault lance, which enabled them to face the enemy even in close combat. Light cavalry and heavy cavalry complemented each other: as soon as the hail of arrows from the archers, swarming from all sides, had weakened the enemy's strength of resistance, the frontal assault of the cataphracts intervened: the blow delivered by the armoured cavalry would eventually completely rout the ranks of the dismounted enemy. Those who led to the
The most effective of these tactics was the Parthian general of the Suri family, who inflicted the disaster of Carré on the Roman legions. Wealth and nobility of lineage had placed him in a position to maintain a corps of a thousand armoured horsemen and nine thousand horse archers: these, lightly armed, were recruited from among his own slaves and the humblest vassals of the Suri. Accompanying the troops was a line of a thousand camels, which carried the load of arrows, so that when they were needed, they would never fail the archers.

All these forms of combat were taken over by the Sassanids. In their armies appears the archer equipped with light weapons and at his side

the cataphract. A graffito from the Dara area places one of these cataphracts before our eyes: we see it galloping, with the animal also covered in flake armour, with the long spear
and bow, and on his head a tall heavy helmet. In a grandiose appearance, the image is repeated in the equestrian statue of Tag-i-Bostan, the masterpiece of Sassanid art. Man and steed wear chain armour: bow and quiver, heavy helmet with visor, round shield and long pointed lance complete the armament. Representations of the *Shahname,* frescos from Chinese Turkestan repeat this image, showing how long this type of armour has been preserved and has gone far beyond the Iranian national territory.

Everything that has been mentioned so far: the primacy of the cavalry weapon, armour for man and horse, heavy helmet, pointed lance, pre-dates medieval forms. To the Iranian cavalry, as a military institution, corresponds, in the political order, an evolved patrimonial state. The Parthian kingdom was characterised by powerful families with extensive territorial possessions and a large clientele, which obeyed them:
They constituted a strong constraint on royal power, as they asserted their claims to the highest offices of state, which they often exercised in their own hereditary possessions. The possessions of the Suri were located in the Sachi region, those of the Karin and Mihran in the southern and northern Media: in the case of the Suri it is evident that the administration of Mesopotamia remained in their hands for a long time.
Alongside these great families there existed semi-independent states, local dynasties or city-states of Eastern or Greek origin. The subjugated Greek cities were granted extensive autonomy: they were also allowed to maintain their own militia. There were also the kings of Edessa and Hatra, the lords of Batnai, Singar and others. All were in a more or less close relationship o f dependence with the Great King of the Parthians in Ctesiphon.

The new Sassanid kingdom asserted the need to eliminate local kings and bring the whole country under one legitimate dynasty. It is undeniable that there was then a strengthening of central power and at least under able rulers with decidedly positive effects. To the feudal nobility of the Parthians, an attempt was made to counterpose a new one, more closely linked to the Sassanid dynasty. It seems in this regard that an attempt was made to isolate the royal house and to

tried to achieve this with the work of collateral lines. Already this attempt indicates that fundamentally the previous order had been preserved. Much of the ancient nobility retained its prestige: the houses of Suri and Karin were able to keep their power intact even under the Persian dynasty. With the introduction of a state church, a new social caste, the high clergy, was established: it too inevitably tended to strengthen the power of the nobility, and the king's government all too often had to adapt to the demands of the clergy of Zarathustra.

* * *

Ardashir, so the story of his life relates, in another source, made a master shot while hunting. He hit a wild donkey, so that the arrow pierced its body and went out the other side: the animal died on the spot. But the son of Artabanus claimed that he had made that shot and would not in any way recognise the master stroke of his vassal. Thus was born the first quarrel between Ardashir and the king of the Parthians. Why this quarrel and what is the significance of shooting a wild ass? Widespread, in its free and loose ways, in the deserts of Central Asia, it rightfully bears the title 'lord of the steppe'. Sven Hedin dedicated a hymn of praise to it, in which he celebrates the wild donkey's fiery lust for life, its indomitable fierceness, and the boldness and beauty of its movements. The poetry of Hebrews emphasised the solitary dignity of his life free of all constraints: 'Who let the wild ass go free,' says the Lord to Job, 'who loosed the reins on the fugitive, to whom I gave solitude for a home and the desert for a dwelling? ".

In the reliefs of Assyrian palaces, it is presented as a game animal, and, a noteworthy detail, reserved as such for the person of the king. The history of the late Sassanids mentions a king, who was known by the appellation 'wild ass', whether as a sign of his nature or because he had made a master shot like Ardashir while hunting. It seems that with a single arrow he had killed the animal and the lion, which had pounced on it. In short, the wild donkey is the royal animal, and in the hunt against it, the skill and might of the ruler proves itself. Hence the silver plates of the Sassanid era in the chiselling work and the designs of the silk cloth show us the king executing those master shots: next to the

lion and the boar his prey is the wild donkey. When Ardashir decided to execute the shot himself, he did what the future ruler of Iran announced in his person. Not without reason did Artabanus' son try to make the deed appear as his own.

The bow, like the art of handling it, is as old as Iran itself. But Ardashir, Artabanus and their images, created by Sassanid art, are depicted in the action of hunting, always on horseback. The appearance of the horse there also represents a change from the previous era. While the gold coins of the Achaemenids show the king armed with a bow,
on foot, without any sign of the opponent or any other purpose, from the Parthian period those of the archer and the hunter on horseback are the images with which the ruler is constantly depicted. The art of the Scythians of Siberia and the Russian-Southern Sarmatians indicates that they also derive from the Central Asian homeland of the Parthian people: from there they passed into Iran, where the Parthians, here as elsewhere, first introduced the art of horsemanship and the esteem of the steed as an expression of the sovereignty of the lords. They were as inseparable from the horse as they were from the bow, and made constant use of one and the other; both on foot and on horseback they were passionate hunters, and only enjoyed meat if it was game, due to their hunting skills. There are countless hunting scenes in the art of the Parthians, who were attracted to no other subject like this one.

The chivalrous style takes possession of everything it comes into contact with at this time. Arising at first from the craft of war and on the hunting trails, then transported by the Parthians into the private life of the lord, it penetrates even into the sphere reserved for women. The artistic representation lingers on the image of the regal teenager, Ardashir, and the his young sweetheart, as they cross the country on their coursers, swift as the wind. There is like the heralding of the magic of Persian miniatures, which were later to illustrate the heroic poems of Firdusi and other poets. Or our thoughts run to those precious clay figures, which place before our eyes the enchantment of a related and not distant world
from that of the Parthians, the China of the Tang with its chivalrous and courtly culture. There, too, the horse is held in the highest esteem, nor is the woman ashamed to show herself in the saddle.

There is a small masterpiece of the genre, a young polo player, running her pony: airy, free and casual the horse's movements, firm and sure the rider's grip on the saddle. The archetype must be sought there, from where, similarly to what had happened with Iran, the Middle Empire had also taken up, making them its own, the spirit and
chivalrous form. Even today, the traveller celebrates the dexterity with which the Mongolian woman is able to master her horse, nor can he forget the casual pride of her movements in the saddle. Once again, one is inevitably led back to the horseman peoples of Central and North Asia, from whom the Parthians once separated. But as much as all this, in style and in life, has retained its value for
the duration of Parthian rule and even afterwards, in one respect at least the Sassanid era differs from its predecessor: and this difference is deeply rooted in the very essence of the two peoples.

The polarity between the region of Turan and that of Iran has already been emphasised, the former a land of raiders, the latter a land of farmers, one of nomads, the other of sedentary people, villages and towns; a polarity by which the history of the districts between the Tigris and the Pamir was conditioned. The Parthians and their neighbours had broken through the Turanian depression to the north-west and occupied Media and all the territory as far as Mesopotamia: Iran had had to bow to the will of the Turanian conquerors. They had settled in the country according to their typical forms of existence: they left cities and agriculture in the hands of the subjugated peoples, and did not adapt to these new forms of life except with a certain disdain and never completely. Their allies, the Tocarians, had subjected Bactria to their power, but they despised the city way of life and ruled over the subjugated country from their court encamped beyond the Oxus, at the edge of the desert: so did the Parthians. The Arsacid kings had their court at Dara, where the arable land passes into the steppe. Even when they moved it to Mesopotamia, they avoided any fixed location: they set up their camp on the northern bank of the Tigris, thus remaining separated by the wide course of the river from the populous Greek metropolis of Seleucia. Their ranks of horsemen and warriors always kept themselves disdainfully far from that world, urban and sedentary, so alien to them. The Parthians always retained a way of life, at the bottom of which was the memory of the steppe and

of the wandering life that was ingrained in them. The bond between people and soil was as tenuous as one could imagine: an accident, a moment of bad mood was enough to break it. The camp, not the soil, was the true home of this people of knights. When the Parthians were defeated and replaced by the new Persian kingdom, it was the other world, the one whose back had been turned, that re-emerged into the light.

Persia had also made the knightly style its own. But it is noteworthy that in this country Parthian rule, not unlike that of the Seleucids, had never been able to take firm root. Indigenous dynastic lineages, although under the nominal dependence of the Great King, had in fact retained power. Ardashir's ancestors resided in
a locality south of Lake Baktegan: they were vassals, although 'kings' themselves, of another king, who resided on the 'White Mountain' east of Persepolis. Ardashir's mother was of that same lineage: her son was entitled to the position of first citizen and head of the local police of a neighbouring city. Living in that way in castles and fortified cities, closely related to each other, they depended strictly on the customs set down in tradition. The precepts of Zarathustra's religion were scrupulously observed. The centre of worship was the fire temple of Anahit at Istachar: Ardashir's grandfather had been primate of this shrine. The coins of the Persian dynasties bore inscriptions in the native dialect, while the Arsacids had made extensive use of Greek. Certainly all this was of little importance: but Persia, to which such great memories were linked, where the ruins of the palaces of the Achaemenids stood, and the tomb of Cyrus still spoke of the fame of the founder of the ancient empire, still remained a stronghold of tradition. And it was a stronghold in another sense as well.

When the Parthian king Artabanus proposed peace to his vassal Ardashir, he sent him this message: 'You have overstepped the mark and thus attracted your own fate, Kurd, raised in the tents of the Kurds'. Three evils are in the world, says an Arabic proverb: Kurds, field mice and locusts. 'Kurds' means the receptacle of all that is harmful, all that is barbaric. But this word also means that he, to whom it is addressed, lives and lodges in the way of the Kurds, that he has his homeland in the mountains, in high and rugged mountains, where he leads a rugged life

and hard. That is the life, which the Kurds have led since ancient times and which the Persians had also lived, before Cyrus had given them power and wealth, and which they were now leading again, waiting to found the new empire for the second time. In giving Ardashir the appellation Kurd, the intention was to emphasise the contrast with the Great King of the Parthians and the sumptuous tenor of his court, which was based in Susiana and the fertile lands on the banks of the two rivers. Persia certainly did not lack fertile land, nor did it lack vast plains. The plain around Passargadair was most favourable for horses to run around. However, this region never attracted horse-riding populations, as did the steppes of the north-east or the plains of Mesopotamia. Persia is in the direction of the Tigris and the coast as if enclosed by a bulwark of mountains: one after the other there are up to eight or nine mountain ranges in the form of terraces progressing up to the snowy peaks, blocking access to the country. Sometimes this labyrinth opens up into small valleys and plains, but these are surrounded by mountains so high that the villagers see the sun only in the morning and remain in the shade for the rest of the day.
Through these mountains passed 'the high road' from the earliest times, but when the Great Achaemenid King, coming from Susa, wanted to use it to visit his homeland in Persia, he had to pay tribute to the mountain communities. Alexander had once only been able to occupy the passes by resorting to an extensive roundabout: at Gaugamela, in vast and open terrain, where he had just won a great battle with cavalry, he had to adapt to the laws of mountain warfare.

A true stronghold, Persia. Not only did its inhabitants feel bound to their traditions, but to the land - whether mountains or narrow plains or pastures, which gave the cities the space they needed and the men the means of subsistence. It is by no means a coincidence that from this corner of Iran arose the revolt against the successors of those who were once
of the nomads. With the Sassanids, the farmer, the city dweller, the nobleman in his castle and the sedentary man in general reared their heads. Nor is it at all coincidental that Ardashir was a founder of new cities like few others: no fewer than eight cities claimed him as their founder.

Ardashir's escape from the royal court - who can forget another saga where such an escape is mentioned? When Wal-tari and Hilda flee from the

Attila's court, they too flee, like the Persian prince and his beloved, to a 'homeland'. They do not go away to unknown and boundless lands, as might be fitting for a steppe dweller: but they hasten
towards that little piece of land, where they feel at home and in whose brief circle they have sunk the roots of their existence forever. So bound to their land are those beings, who leave the king of the Huns and the court of the Parthians, to find the country of their birth and themselves in it.

It is customary to attribute to the nomadic peoples of Asia a kind of indifference in religious matters. The Parthians at least conform to this view; only in later times did they become followers of Zarathustra and even then they certainly did not shine in zeal. What the religion of the Parthians was originally, we can only conjecture, since no certain information has reached us: it is their origin and their beginnings that show us the way here too. Since the Parthians came from the steppes of the north and north-east, they certainly also practised the forms of that faith, which from the earliest times was connatural to that climate. The situation with the people of the new lords, the Persians, and the royal lineage, through which they gained power, was different. In the story of Ardashir, the 'splendour of royalty' appears as the determining power. This supernatural essence, which in the sacred texts of the Iranians is referred to as 'Kvarna', confers success on the hero. Thus the coins of the Greek-Baptrian kings represent this Kvarna under the aspect of the *Tyche*: and in the Middle Persian script it is rendered by an Aramaic ideogram,
which means 'luck'.

If Kvarna appears in our story in the form of a ram, chasing and catching up with Ardashir, the episode has a parallel in Greek mythology. It is in fact the possession of a ram that ensures the sovereignty of Pelops' successor: Hermes had given Atreus the animal, whose fleece and wool were the colour of gold. Gold and celestial splendour also properly belong to the nature of Kvarna. Its name
is in fact etymologically related to that of the sun: and gold from the splendour of fire, descended from heaven, has in other places that function, which otherwise belongs to Kvarna. Consistent with this view in the Scythian saga, while the two eldest brothers of royal lineage try in vain

approaching the glowing metal, the youngest grasps it without any pain or fear, thus revealing himself to be the ruler desired by the gods.

He who can grasp the celestial splendour of Kvarna or he on whom it rests is called to sovereign dignity: this is the meaning of the Scythian saga and that of Ardashir. But such splendour is only authentically granted to a lord of Iranian blood, and this is the reason why he is called 'Iranian' or - with translation of identical flavour - 'arius': on the contrary, the Turanian hero Frahrasyan tries in vain in the saga to grasp the 'Kvarna of the Iranian peoples'. It is in this exclusive possession that the divine origin of sovereignty is founded for Iran and the Aryan race.
Ardashir, descended from the Achaemenids, goes with the ram. Like no other, this dynasty emphasised the purity of its origins: Darius was keen to call himself an 'Aryan of Aryan seed'. Artabanus, on the contrary, like all the kings of his lineage, was and remained a pure usurper: he could not hope to prevail against the new holder of the Kvarna.

This complex of religious representations had become part of Zarathustra's system from a much older strain of belief, but by the time of Ardashir, it had long been an integral part of it. Kvarna shared with Ormuzd the functions of a tutelary deity of kingship. The first Sassanid was depicted in the act of advancing on horseback
towards Ormuzd; the god hands his earthly parallel the ring of power.

In the 'novel of Ardashir', the hero lays the sacred fire Bahram in many places. It is one of the five forms in which the divine element of fire can manifest itself, conceived as the son of the supreme god Ormuzd: and he is identified by a name that once meant 'exterminator of dragons' or 'exterminator of enemies' and that in Vedic myth was Indra's own, but that later equates to 'victorious
"or simply to 'victory'. The link between this fire and the splendour of royal power is found in the victory, which the "Kvarna" gave to Ardashir: just as it is found in the glowing essence of the Kvarna. Thus victorious Ardashir makes his successors partakers of the sacred flame. When he advanced to the east, to Merid, to Balch, and to the extreme

Korasan regions, killed a large number of enemies and sent their heads to the fire temple of Anahit, which was in Istachar, in the heart of Persia.

For Ardashir, honouring the fire meant recognition of tradition, or even more: legacy and commitment. One of his ancestors had been the head of that temple. On the coins that the princes of Persia had had minted in the Seleucid era, the fire shrine appears with the
sides the royal banner and the sovereign in devout posture. Ardashir and his successors also had the altar of fire impressed on their coins, thus continuing the tradition of their country of origin as Great Kings. The preservation of the traditional cult is complemented by an activity of renewal: the reconstitution of the sacred writings of the Tsaratustrians and the creation of a sacred canon are the great religious initiatives of the first Sassanid.

The fate of these writings, which were known by the Middle Persian name of *Avesta,* was quite adventurous. Originally written in gold ink on cowhide, they were kept in the Achaemenid archives in Persepolis. Alexander, exterminator of ancient Persian power and lordship, ostentatiously had this ancient *Avesta* burnt. A childbirth king had arranged the first collection of the remains that were still available. Ardashir completed this collection so as to constitute "a faithful image of the original light". He had the primitive writings stored in the royal treasure chamber, deposited a complete collection in the archive and then disseminated others throughout the country.

The compilation of the *Avesta* certainly could not have taken place without the close collaboration of the priestly caste. One of its members is remembered as the initiator of the compilation: or, according to what has been said in other sources, Ardashir is said to have summoned 40,000 Magi on his own initiative, from which number he chose first 40, then 7. These Magi or *Mobed* were judges and holders of spiritual power: each presided over his own diocese, and above them all was placed, like the 'King of Kings' a 'Mobed of Mobed'. The lines of a veritable hierarchy, parallel to that of the political order, are evident here. This clergy, greedy for domination and powerful, like few others, was second to none in intolerance.

Ardashir already gave canonical value to the collection compiled under him. All avesthetic writings, which were not accepted there, were banned and outlawed. Under Ardashir's successors, a full-fledged court was created to judge religious disputes. It was the king's wish that, since the light of the true faith had now shone again, everything contrary to the truth should be condemned to annihilation and that no false religion could henceforth be tolerated. The Achaemenids also held to the profession of the one true doctrine to such an extent that they once discussed persecuting foreign gods; but religious tolerance was nevertheless one of the foundations of their policy. In the new
Persian empire, on the contrary, the monarchy together with the clergy elaborated the notion of orthodoxy to the extreme consequences: the state police power felt committed to ensuring its unconditional validity within the country. The new principle was immediately applied against the new religions, and first and foremost against Christianity. The acts of the martyrs of the Syriac Church bear witness to the Zoroastrian clergy's thirst for persecution.

Mesopotamia was the main centre of religions, against which the new Sassanid state policy was directed. Not only Christianity had taken root there, but also that religion, whose founder, Mani, was contemporary with the rise of the Sassanids. Originally from a family of Parthian nobility, he was initially a follower of a southern Babylonian sect of 'baptists' or 'Baptists', until he began preaching his own doctrine. Through the Gnostics he had received the inheritance of Greek and Christian thought: and in general he belongs to the series of great Gnostics, so much so that he can be cited in one context alongside Bardesane of Edessa and Marcion. Mani's spiritual homeland is Babylonian Hellenism: he is the last representative of that culture, which stands alongside the Hellenism of Syria and Egypt.

Mani was at the centre of the hostility of the Zoroastrian clergy. It seems that he preached for the first time on the day of the coronation of Shapur I, "when the sun was in the sign of Aries": the king's brother granted his favours to this religious founder and managed to protect him. Mani was able to give him an exposition of his own doctrine composed especially for Shapur: the king granted him permission to preach in the empire. Nevertheless, under a

of his successors, the Magi had Mani tried and condemned.

* * *

The Parthians adapted only late to evolve within the framework of Iranian civilisation, taking its forms with hesitation and a certain disdain: and this applies not only to religion, but also to language. The Arsacids, although fluent in an Iranian dialect, used Greek in their coins and inscriptions. These Great Kings were keen to appear as pro-Hellenic: they even had Greek tragedies performed at their court. A court letter to the city of Seleucia shows that the citizens of these Greek cities ascended to the highest offices, that the royal chancellery wrote in Greek, and that the Parthian ruler decided internal disputes in the city, invoking the observance of Greek law.

Under the Sassanids, the use of Greek in royal inscriptions is encountered by exception and only at the beginning; at the same time as Greek disappeared as the official language, Hellenism was no longer professed. This attitude that became the official one was consciously linked to the Achaemenids and the national-Iranic tradition. It went back to an older stage, which was the legitimate one, but which in times of general decadence had inevitably led to corruption. After Alexander's arrival, universal and spiritual anarchy, unbelief and ignorance prevailed in the country until the saint Ardapal agreed to submit himself to the judgement of fire, to prove the purity of the restored Avestic writings. This is narrated in the book of theYArda-Virat*, with* a procedure similar to that with which the new political order is presented in Ardashir's novel. As there the purity of Zarathustra's doctrine was referred to, so here to the reign of the Achaemenids.
These relations were already implicit in Ardashir's origin. Persia was his homeland and his father, Sassan, descended from the ancient royal dynasty. In the dark ages even this illustrious lineage had apparently fallen, just as state and religion had plummeted from their former heights. Legend, and not only this, but the common imagination in the bloodline's legitimacy had seen as a visible link to ancient greatness. The rise of Ardashir, his campaigns against

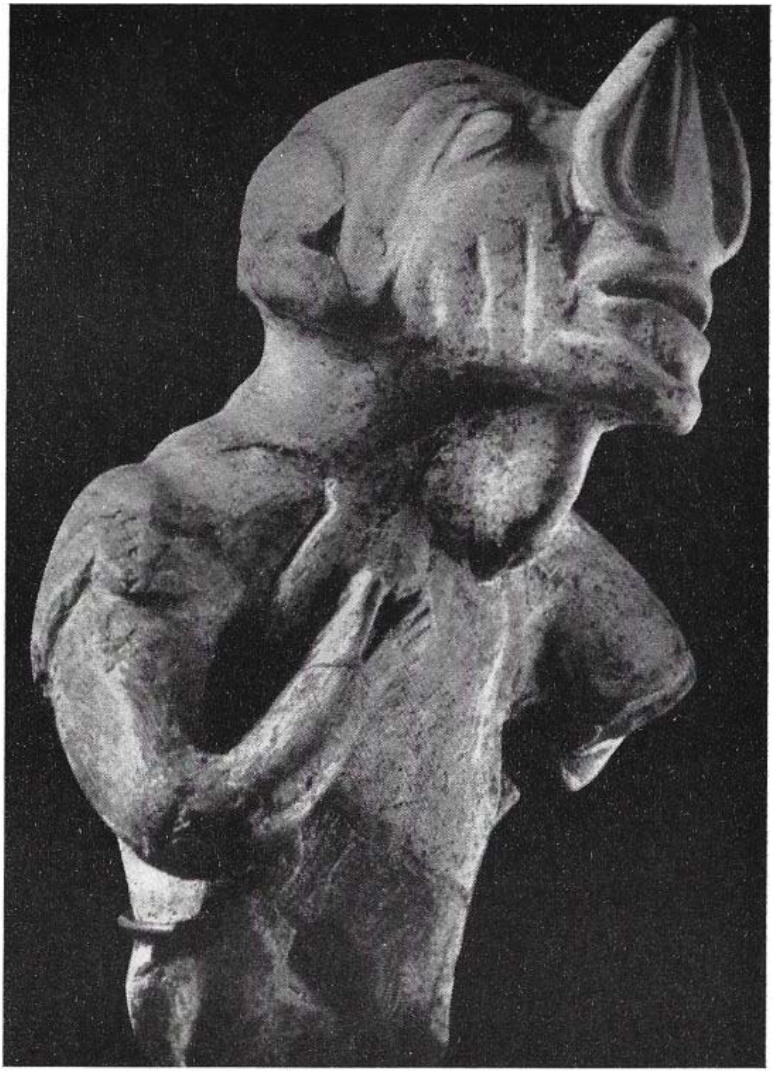
Artabanus and the local kings were to appear as the behaviour of a legitimate heir, who claimed the hereditary empire as his own property. Therefore, the new king, as his first official act, sent peremptory letters to all local kings, in which he asserted his rights and ordered them to obey him. When Artabanus was defeated in battle, Ardashir placed the severed head of the vanquished under his feet: thus, in the rock relief above the Bisutun inscription, the Achaemenid could be seen passing over the body, lying at his feet, of the traitor and rebel Gaumata.

Ardashir's attitude towards Rome was consistent with this. He claimed the whole country up to the Propontid as an ancient Persian inheritance against the current possessors. The country, since Cyrus had conquered it, had remained in the hands of his rightful successors until Alexander had destroyed the Achaemenid empire: it was therefore up to him, to Ardashir, to regain possession of this ancient heritage.

S I it ra s "aci ific'x the bull.

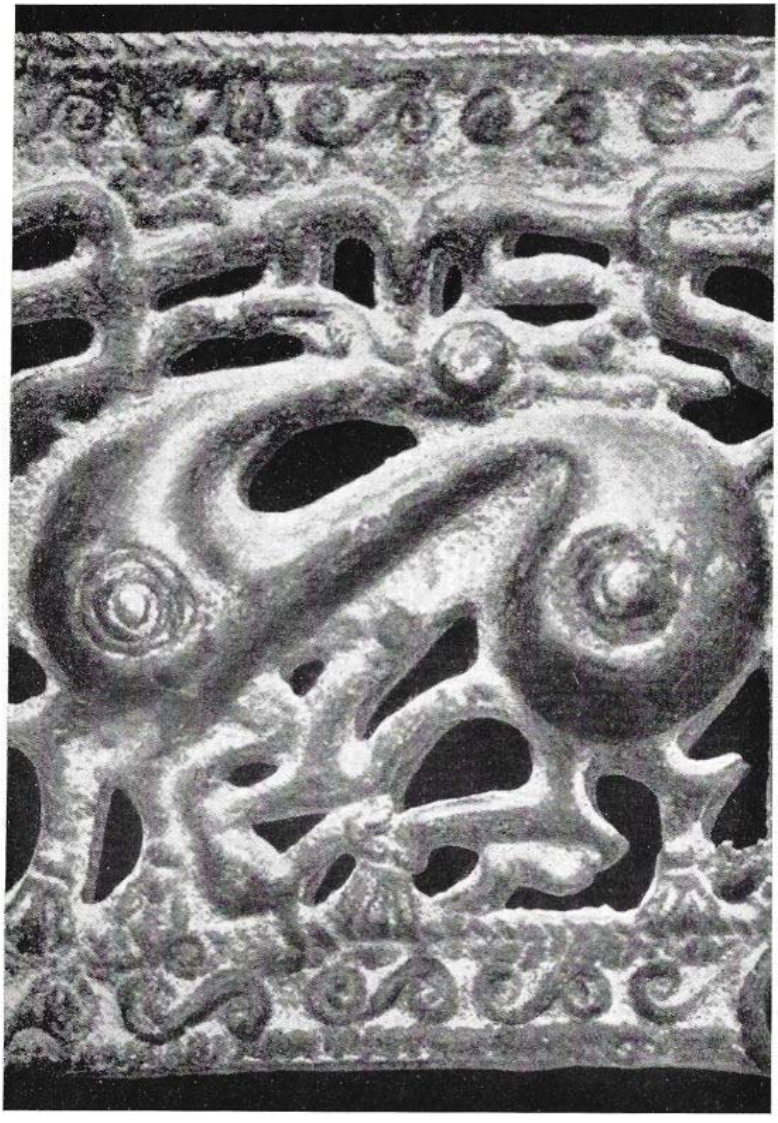
Art also turned out to be an expression of the new regime: its creations were driven by the ruler and the court. It drew on the models of Achaemenid art, which it still had in its sights. The horse, a new and privileged object, had entered the repertoire with the Parthian epoch: but the scenes of homage, the processions of triumph and of the tributary peoples, the propitiatory rites were those same subjects, in which anti-Copsian art had distinguished itself.
Here as there, one finds the taste for symmetry and the decomposition of the total image into longitudinal reliefs, superimposed one on top of the other. Just as the dialect of Persia under the Sassanids conquered Iran and assumed the function of national language and literature, Sassanid art originated from the same soil. For the most part, its monuments can be found where the greatest evidence of the Achaemenid era has also been preserved: there is often an immediate dependency, especially in rock art.

It is natural, however, that even the Sassanid kingdom, however consciously it had taken on national-Iranic physiognomy and had arisen in opposition to an intermediate empire, illegitimate and unwanted by the divinity, could not abstract itself from all that the Parthian dynasty had represented. It thus happened that the cavalry and the new tactics on horseback were received without appreciable changes in its military order. Even the principle of legitimacy happened to be violated, when it was deemed expedient for the security of power, by forging kinship ties with the Arsacid dynasty. In the novel of Ardashir, the hero as a conclusion and a seal to his victory takes Artabanus' daughter in marriage. The late Book of Kings recounts this same event with a wealth of detail: it evidently intends to impress its readers with evidence that the heir to the throne and successor of Ardashir, King Shapur, was the son of that princess of the Arsacids.
The annihilator of the Arsacid dynasty, as Ardashir is portrayed to us, knew, as it were, how to curb himself in time and place. In later times, when the Sassanid house was on its way to its demise, it would suit one of the Arab conquerors not to repudiate the hand of the Persian princess in captivity, who would bring him and his lineage royal prestige.



Grotesque character (Gallo-Roman art)

Animal fighting (Sarmatian art).



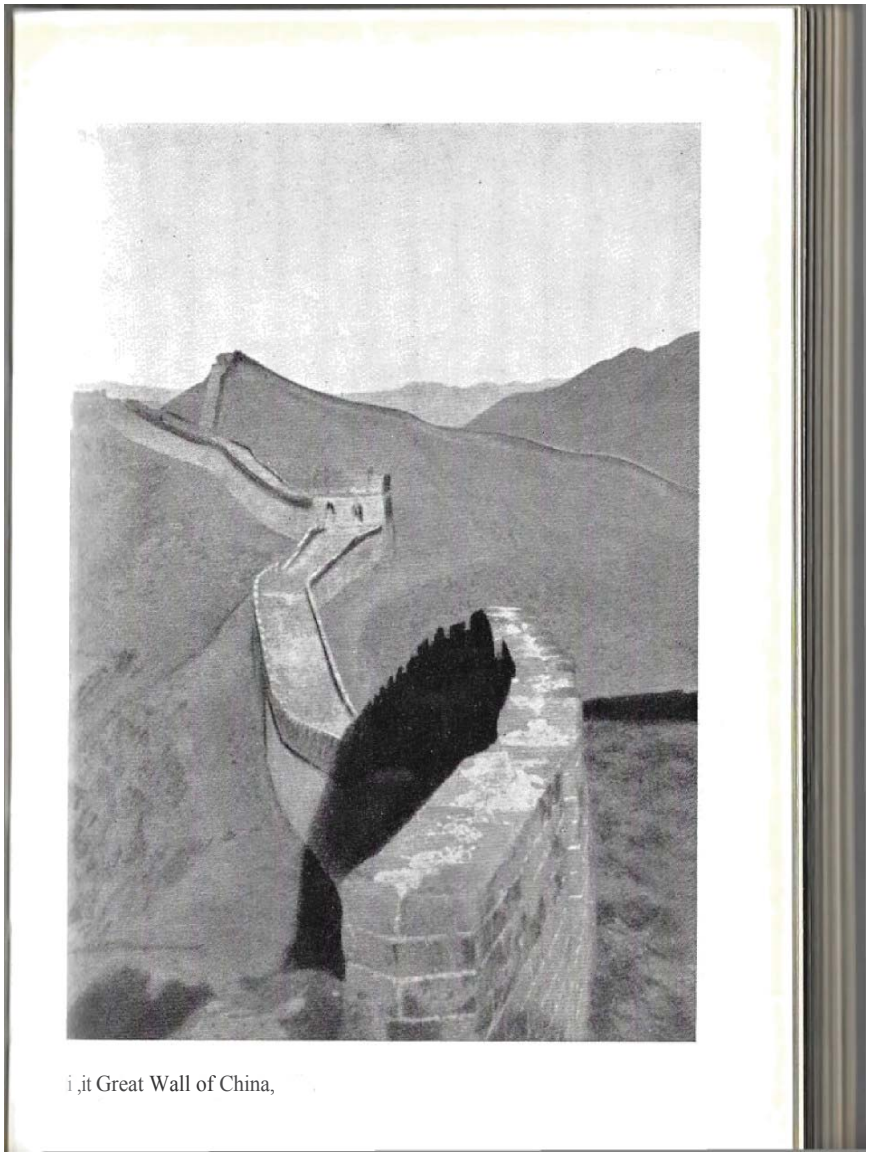


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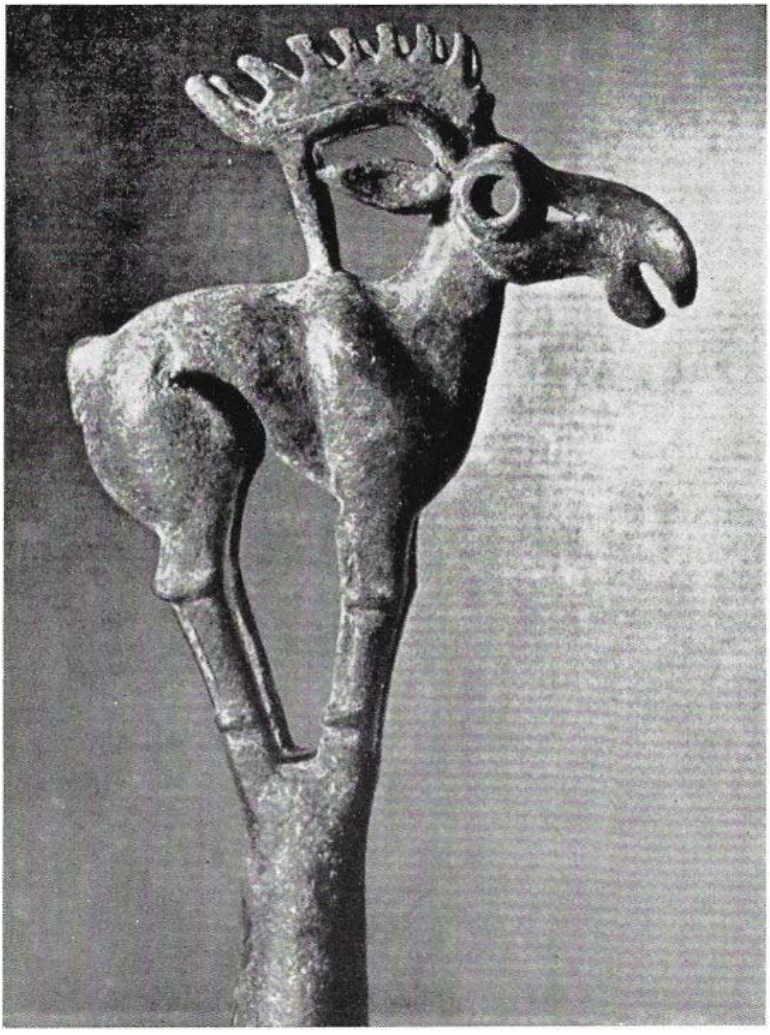
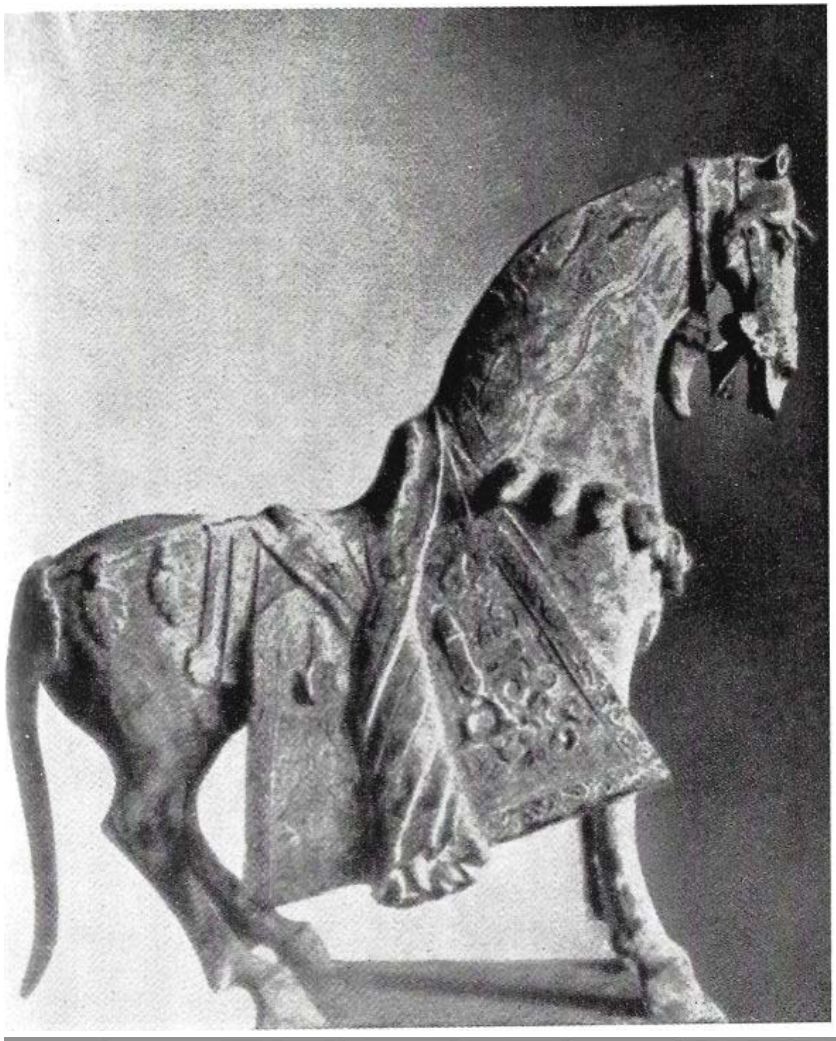
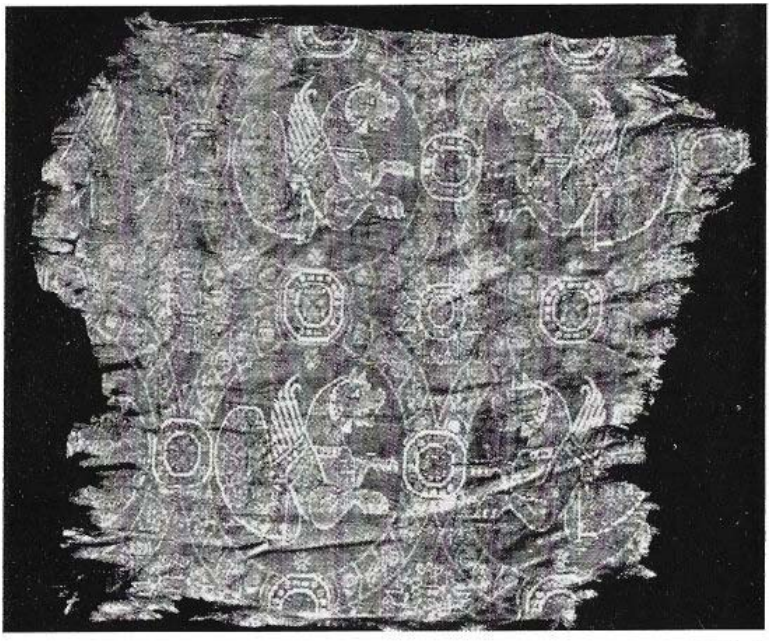
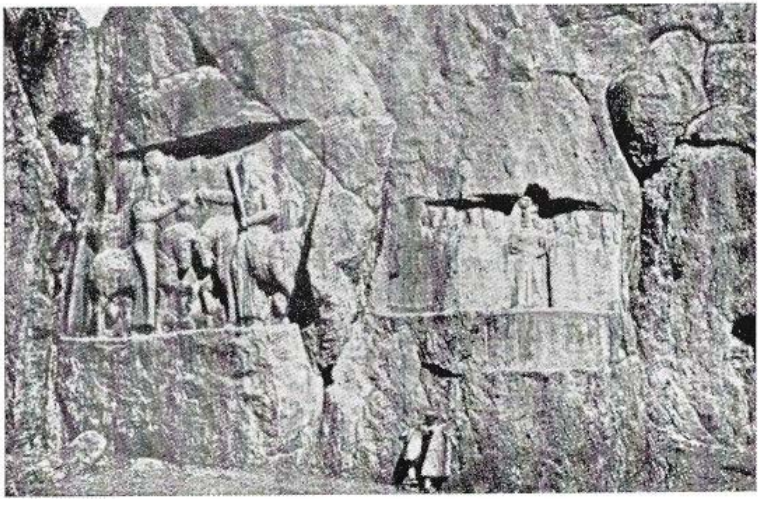
Table VI



End of a Chinese elk rod.







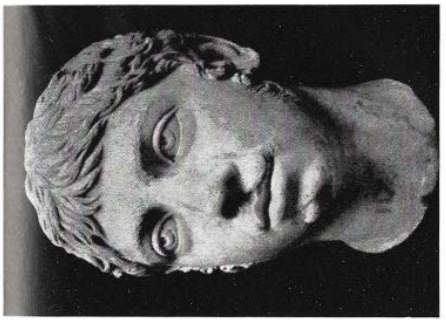
Above: Persian fabric from the 6th century. *Bottom:* Sassanid reliefs at Naksh- i-Rustem with the investiture of King Ardashir I.

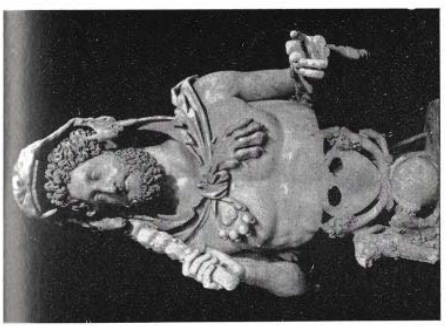
Top: coin of King Shapur I with the fire altar. *Bottom:* Ahura- Mazdah in a Sassanid seal.

Tav. X

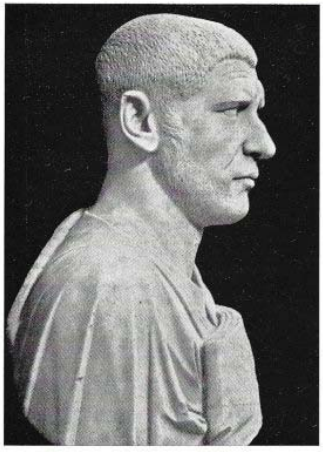
Prigionieri parti (arco di Settimio Severo).

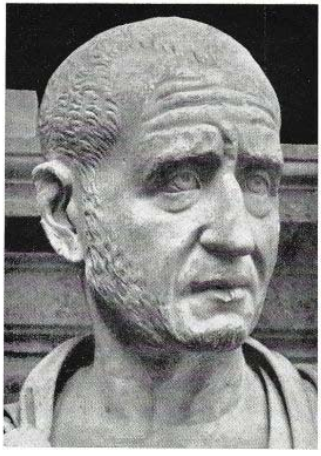
Tav. XI





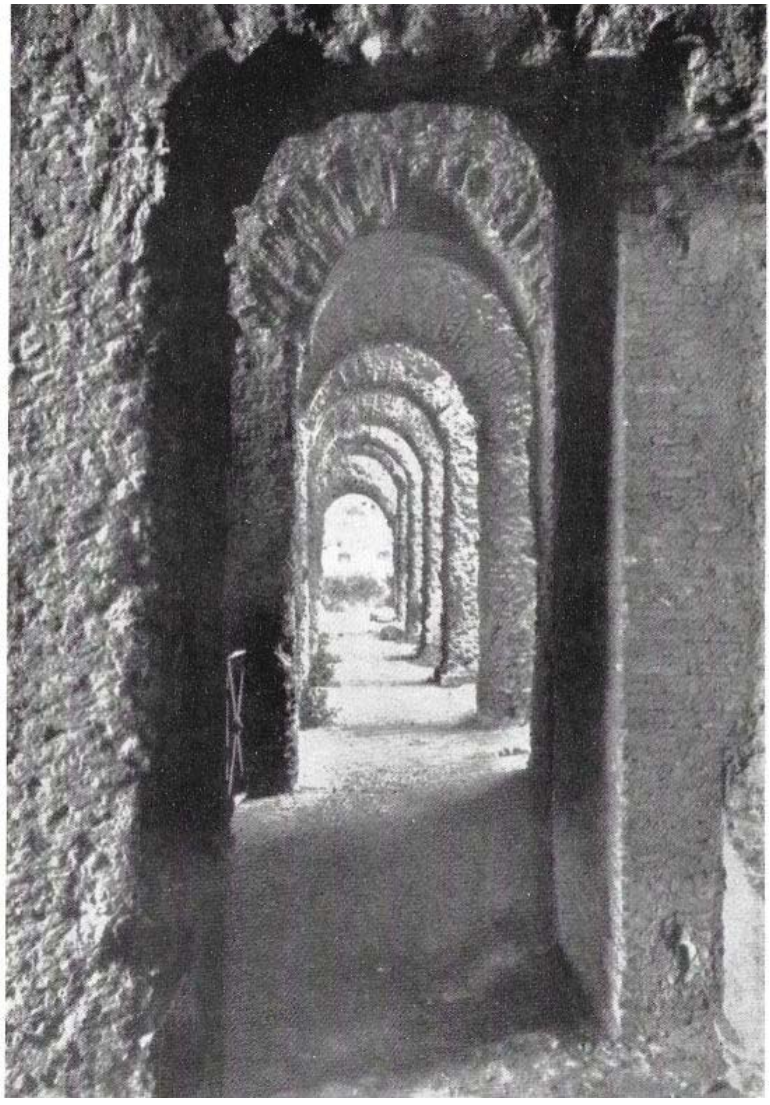
A sinistra: L'imperatore Commodo sotto le sembianze di Ercole. *A destra*: testa dell'imperatore Eliogabalo.





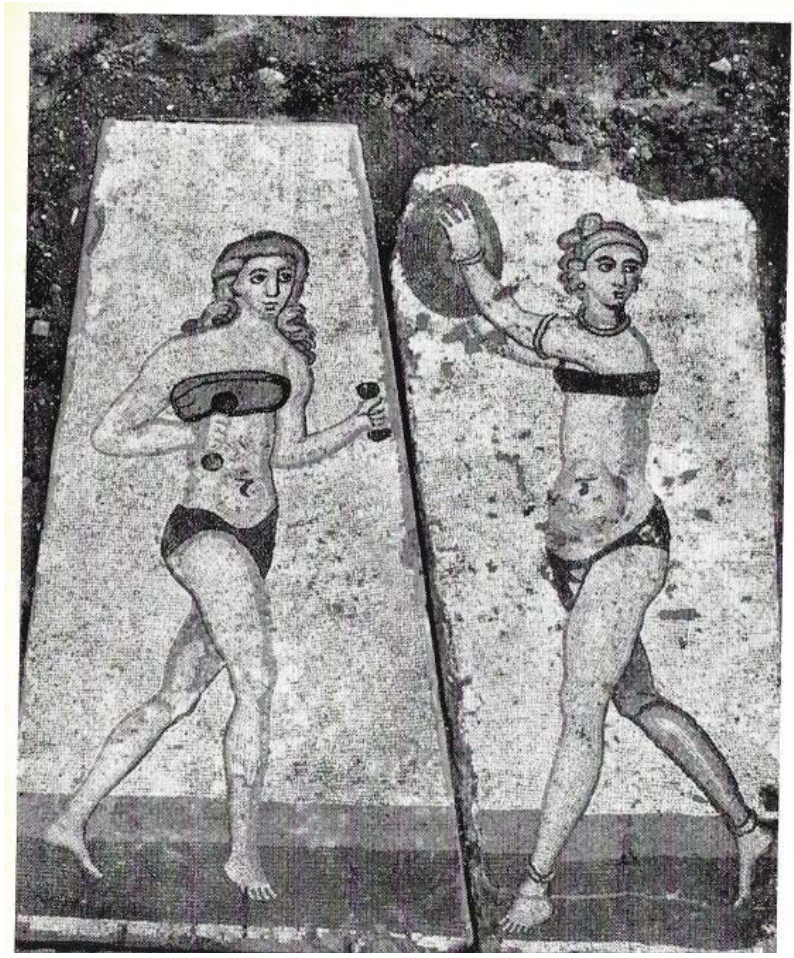
A sinistra: busto dell'imperatore Filippo l'Arabo. *A destra*: l'imperatore Traiano Decio.

Due teste di barbari combattenti.



Portrait of a High Priest of the Magna Mater.

A corridor of the palace of Septimius Severus



Roman villa at Piazza Armerina: detail of the floor mosaic with dancers and gymnasts.

After the fall of Artabanus, Ardashir called himself 'king of the kings of Iran', signifying by this appellation that he intended to place his

power above the local kings or 'little kings', as the sovereigns of other peoples were called in the Germanic Middle Ages with respect to imperial dignity. But already his successor attributed to himself the incomparably more ambitious title of 'king of the kings of Iran and Non-Iran': by which he aimed to transcend national frontiers, he manifested a claim to universality, even in this following in the footsteps of the Achaemenids.

This claim was the consequence of the successes achieved in the East, where the rulers of Turan and the Indus Territory had made an act of subjection to the king of Iran, and was fuelled by the possession of Mesopotamia, as well as by the exaltation of the victories achieved over the Arab princes and the Romans. Unlike the Parthians, they did not recognise the hegemony of Rome even in name only. As an expression of avowed rivalry against Rome, they went so far as to mint their own coinage, a right that the Parthian kings had never given themselves. The awareness of the new Sassanid kingdom's new power became all the stronger when it succeeded where none of its predecessors had succeeded, in taking a Roman emperor prisoner.

Shapur never tired of celebrating the event in his monuments. He appears on horseback, in the brilliant mount of Sassanid kings, while before his majesty a prisoner in Roman costume bends his knees. He drags his chains to his feet and holds up his hands and head in an act of begging for mercy: this is how the captive Emperor Valerian is presented. Behind him, humbly hiding his hands, in the presence of his lord, stands the deserter Ciriades, whom Shapur had set up as an anti-Cesarean. In another relief the king rides at the head of his army and again Valerian bends the knee before his person. The victor is offered the ring, symbol of the sovereignty wrested from the Roman, and in a series
of four compartments, one on top of the other, the spoils of war are brought: the emperor's chariot and fighting horse, an elephant, leopards and lions dragged by chain, the imperial standard and the war treasury. This is followed by prisoners covered with the Roman toga. Whatever significance and importance one may wish to attribute to Sassanid Iran, no impartial judge would not want to grant it, even for a moment, rights equal to those of Rome in terms of intrinsic historical value. However, the fact remains that it was a dangerous and fortunate rival to the *lmperium Romanum*: it was a unique historical conjuncture that gave it such importance. It has often been

observed how much the shape of the Sassanid civilisation influenced not the beginnings of the Arab conquest, but the Caliphs' empire in Baghdad. Perhaps it is worth giving this observation a more general scope. Chivalry and nobility, priestly caste, orthodoxy and heresy, universal empire with a theocratic character, all these prefigure forms, which are characteristic of the historical evolution up to the Middle Ages: and this in an age of crisis, in which Rome had not yet taken this direction with the same decision and success.

Chapter IV

The frontiers of empire

The events, which led to the decline of Rome, belong, like the causes of its greatness, to those problems, which eternally stimulate the historian's meditation. From Polybius, Posidonius, Sallust and Tacitus through Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Gibbon and Niebuhr, the series continues to the present day. The profound reason, which leads one to continually re-examine the problem, is that in it the contingent and the eternal, the accidental and the normative, the particular and the general are inextricably intertwined. Platen stated that the history of Rome was "the only true history, which has meaning and greatness, and where a rigorous evolutionary process can be followed".

Death and life were always for Roman historians linked to each other in a singular way. In the crisis of passing away, the final acts and words of those who died were given a significance of unique value. While in such cases the Greek historian emphasised the ineluctable fulfilment of the law common to all beings, the Romans were repulsed by any reference to what was common to all.
could transcend the individual event and refer to the general case.
At the moment of death, the individuality of the dying man, defining itself for the last time in action and speech, reached its most pregnant and absolute self-expression. That passion, which had made a man alive, making him what he was, gathered in a final manifestation of symbolic strength.

When the assassins sent by Nero presented themselves to his mother, she commanded: '*Ventrem feri*'. She had suffered, acted, lived only for her son: it was she who had put him on the throne. Now her fate had changed: she died by order of the being to whom she had dedicated her life. The sword was to strike the womb, which had begotten the ungrateful one. Claudius' disconcerting word, which gave death the colour of his life; the

famous chapter, in which Tacitus recounts how Seneca and Petronius Trasea prepared for death - all accounts, though each in its own unique way, agree.

"Nascentes morimur finisque ab orìgine pendet', is said in Manilius. For the Romans, in death as in the living process, in annihilation as in the flame of life, that same *quid* of individual and unrepeatable appears. The same law prefixed to man the form of his life impulse, the ways of working and rising, and not differently at the moment when he had to withdraw from the scene. At the very instant in which it appeared a individuality, the individual form of a way of life and death that was consistent with it was already marked in germ. In this vision of life, did not the Romans say something definitive about themselves? And perhaps, insofar as it went beyond the life of the individual, did it not contain this vision an authentic pronouncement on their greatest creation, the universal empire of Rome? Evolution and transition, maturation and decay of *the imperium* had to be subject to the same law.

"Les institutions pérìssent par leurs victoires". These words by Renan were already quoted by Jacob Burckhardt in his *Considerations on World History: it* is no coincidence that he did so in the chapter on crises.

In the evolution of Rome, there are epochs of crisis, which immediately follow those of conquest and expansion. Rise and decline, forms of the life and death of *the imperium,* face each other. Crisis and decadence are by no means synonymous: while decadence has a definitive character, it is in the essence of crisis that it is transitory and can be overcome. This obviously does not mean that Rome's crises remained without consequences. It is necessary to distinguish between high and low empire, between rise and decline, between flowering and decadence. As long as Rome was young, even the harshest crisis had only a relative weight: when the Gauls laid siege to the Capitol, Rome was directly threatened, as it never was again afterwards, yet it rose from the disaster and successfully regained the initiative. In the 3rd century A.D. no enemy ever ventured against the urbe: it was saved from the fate, which the Gauls had reserved for it, but being saved brought it closer to the end than its destruction at the beginning. In this late epoch it manifests itself on the body

of the empire a crisis similar to a serious illness and with each new attack the furrows left by the previous one become deeper. Just as illnesses are images of death, so it is with crises: they are the precursor ghosts of the passing, which must and will happen. Even a crisis overcome is a further step towards the end.

Crisis and decadence are also distinguishable because, while the latter is a unique and fatal occurrence, the former is repeated or at least can always be repeated. In the course of a people's history, it is possible to compare crises with each other, but never with decadence, even if decadence can be related to crises as its premise. By offering the possibility of comparative evaluations, crises open the way for the detection of phenomena, which tend to reproduce themselves, and thus make it possible to separate the typical from the particular, the essential from the accidental, the causes from the consequences. Crisis and decadence of the Roman empire did not have their historian in antiquity. Gibbon was the first to draw before the eyes of posterity a fresco of grandiose proportions: his work captivates today's readers no less than his contemporaries, who snatched the volumes that had just come out from their hands. Certainly no one is willing to undergo the effort of repeating this gigantic undertaking, but no one on the other hand would agree to subscribe to Gibbon's views today.
To the immense problem - the largest to date that history presents us - each time must try to give its own answer.

For who would dare to reduce that mighty process, which takes place over centuries and involves every area of the human, to a definitive formula? One can only sink the probe where one is offered a historically intelligible sense. Two epochs in Roman history are each time compared with each other: both have in common that the apex of conquest and expansion, success and victory were followed by crises of similar proportions.

In the century between 264 and 168 B.C., Rome had extended its rule over the entire Mediterranean. The following period was dominated by internal political repercussions and errors, until Sulla's restoration temporarily restored the disturbed order. This period in the history of Republican Rome is compared with the other,

in some respects similar, of the imperial era, that is to say, that of the last Roman expansion, which reached its apogee with Trajan and, through Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus, culminated in the great crisis of the empire in the 3rd century AD. In the republican period the weight of the scales leaned decisively on the side of the force of expansion, which determined the face of the next century: the shocks, which were the natural were comparatively minor. On the contrary, in the period of late Romanity, the advantages achieved at the borders
were almost negligible in the face of the serious, almost fatal crisis. But alongside these differences, there are surprising concordances. If the differences are in the different potential of the events, the concordances are in the institutional manner and orientation: the contrast in the proportions of the events is matched by homogeneity of form and structure.

In the year 264 B.C. Rome had for the first time gone beyond the peninsula: in the following century it could impose its rule over the Mediterranean space. Polybius regarded 168 B.C., the year of the Battle of Pidna, as decisive: it not only saw the annihilation of the Macedonian dynasty, but at the same time the upward thrust of the Seleucid empire was harnessed. The 'Day of Eleusis' diverted Antiochus IV's expansionist policy from the Mediterranean area.

The two states had previously suffered harsh defeats at the hands of Rome. Carthage had been lying on the ground since the decisive battle of Zama. The power of the Barca dynasty in Spain had fallen into Roman hands. In Italy, too, the northern border had been solidly fortified. The outposts of Roman power now stretched into southern Gaul and to the north-east, on the one hand into the Istrian peninsula, on the other as far as the territory of the Tauerns in present-day Carinthia. Yet that Rome, everywhere victorious, was, from the middle of the 2nd century B.C., engaged in a tough struggle for its existence.

Since the Second Punic War, the conscript lists had never been so decimated as between the 4th and 3rd decade of the century. The Roman army, despite victories over a hostile world, suffered proud blows. The Numids were defeated after long and exhausting fighting, the Cimbri and

of the Teutons after a series of defeats. To subdue the Celto-Iberian Numanthia, a city defended by barely a thousand fighters, required the best Roman generals and all the instruments of warfare at their disposal. What had happened?

The Hellenistic states, as long as they had retained their integrity, had taken on the task of defending civilised territories in the east against the frontier peoples, who were pressing in on all sides. The Macedonian military power held the Thracians, Illyrians and Celto-Balkans in check for a long time. Even further to the east, the Greek Bactrian constituted an embankment against the
nomadic Sachi horsemen, who tried to attack the
civilised lands in the south. The historic civilising mission of the successor states to the empire of Alexander the Great, ensuring the continuity of the centres of civilised life and providing for their defence against external barbarians, was universally recognised. Even in 194, Rome held back from politically annihilating Macedonia, considering that it fulfilled the task of protecting the borders of Greek territory against the Balkan north.

This arrangement began to be subverted with first the weakening and then the definitive collapse of the Hellenistic states. Macedonia, deprived since 168 of its dynasty and reduced twenty years later to a province, was subjected to constant incursions by its Celto-Balkan and Thracian neighbours. The Roman occupation troops stationed in the region had to suffer repeated defeats, especially by the Scordisci of Celtic stock. Antiochus IV, forced by Rome to direct his policy eastwards, wore down his military strength in Elam along with that of Persia. Invasions by nomads from northern Iran and the loss of Greek outposts in Sogdiana and Bactria followed. The weakening of Seleucid and Greco-Battrian military power had already previously had
as a result, the Parthians were annexing more and more territories of Hellenistic states.

A whole movement of resistance from the East against the rulers' people, who were apparently invincible, started from the border area. In religion the subject peoples had always found support: Antiochus III fell during a pillage at an Elamite temple and

Antiochus IV narrowly escaped the same end. In vain he and his successors wore out their strength in the fight against the Maccabees: the
natives rose up everywhere. Apollodorus of Artemita, writing from the point of view of the Parthian dynasty, went so far as to separate 'Greeks' and
"Macedonians' and consider the former as allies of the Orientals. In the Greek elaboration of the Book of Esther, traces of a similar perspective were found.

The settling of the East took place outwardly once again under Greek forms. Die-hard opponents, such as the Arsacids and Mithridates of Pontus, presented themselves as pro-Hellenic. Nevertheless, this was a real upheaval, the force of which was experienced not only by the successor states to Alexander, but by the Romans themselves. The difficulties of the Mithridatic War were the main reason for the terrible defeat at Carre.

The situation in the west was no different. Carthage had once banned the North African desert tribes. The Barca dynasty in Spain had kept the warlike Celto-Iberian tribes away from the fertile and rich regions of the coast: Hamilcar Barca had fallen in an action to repel an invasion attempt. With the decline of Carthage in North Africa, the great Numidian empire established itself, which, after the city's destruction, assumed the role of rival to Rome. Thus in Spain, the Celto-Iberians' hunger for land drove them to repeated incursions into the now Roman coastal area. The interminable guerrilla warfare against these proud, warlike adversaries, led by heroic leaders, undermined Rome's national and military power year after year right down to its roots.

The fiercest attack, however, came from the north. The Cimbri, Teutons and Ambrians, driven in successive waves from their lands, swept southwards: they tried to penetrate through the gaps in the barrier chain, which had been formed by the Celtic-eastern migratory movement. The Germans were repulsed by the Boii and Scordisci; but there, where the Romans, having crossed the Eastern Alps and invaded Noricum, had weakened the Celtic barricade line, they succeeded in crossing. A few years later, still on the frontier, they attempted a new attack on the West, directed against the peoples of southern and south-eastern Gaul, but the ruinous defeats, which

suffered at the hands of the Roman armies, barring their way. For the first time, Rome had a sense of the danger of an invasion by Germanic peoples.

The same conquests thus generated crises in external politics: by weakening or breaking up the pre-existing states at the borders, new adversaries were created in place of the traditional and long-worn ones. Young, battle-hungry barbarians pushed impetuously beyond that defensive rampart, which had hitherto stood in their way, overcoming it and assaulting the borders of the territory occupied by Rome.
Immediate consequence: harsh and ruinous wars. Which makes it clear that crisis and expansion not only followed one another, but conditioned each other, so that one without the other remained incomplete event, that one and the other completed each other as light and shadow, form and content, like the two halves of a sphere.

So far, only external policy has been considered: but as soon as attention is turned to the other aspects of political life, its 'primacy' is confirmed. The crisis within is always provoked from without: foreign policy commands every other manifestation. Rome, with an army of citizens and peasants, had achieved its victories over Hannibal and Antiochus III, over Philip V and Perseus: this army now hesitated in the face of the guerrilla actions it had to undergo in Spain and Africa, in the wars against the Germans and the Parthians. The continuous losses opened unbridgeable gaps in the ranks of the Italic peasantry: the cultivation of the fields was neglected during the absence of the owners, who were left to fight in distant theatres of war for years.
The flooding of the capital market with the influx of plundered treasure, tribute and war damages, imposed on the vanquished, led to a rise in agricultural commodities: the slave markets were filled with prisoners of war, the population of conquered towns and cities. The great mass and minimal cost of unfree labour made it possible for large farms to compete against which small and medium-sized farms were powerless. The peasant class, which had hitherto been the inexhaustible source of Roman national and military power, was facing ruin: it is not surprising that the eldest of the Gracchi had foreseen exactly the consequences of the continuous wars and received the impetus for his reform work from them.

The new war tasks called for new means. The technical element came to the fore. With powerful entrenchments, equipped with large and small siege machines, Scipio the Younger broke through Numancia and forced it to surrender. An army in permanent service and trained for its specific tasks became an ever greater necessity.
Marius arrived at the creation of such an army during the fight against the Cimbri and the Teutons. Most of the recruits were now nobodies, armed at the expense of the state. These, who had nothing to lose in war but everything to gain, bound themselves to the person of the commander, who for his part knew how to hold them dear with rewards and promises. The duty of the individual to the authority of the
state was replacing that personal bond with the victorious general that did not loosen even in the danger of civil war.

Corresponding to this new settlement in the army structure was another of similar magnitude in the citizen class. The Italic federates had borne the burdens of war together with Rome: the Italic troop contingents had gradually grown in number. They now wanted to share in the rights that were granted to Roman citizens: eventually they demanded the same right of citizenship. The vote, however, was only fulfilled when it came to open combat. Romans and Italics now served alongside each other in the legions, and already under Sulla the new citizens were represented in the ranks of the senate. What was to become the picture in the times of Caesar and Augustus, when 'the whole of Italy' was seated in the seats of the Curia, was taking shape.

It is necessary to insist on this point: the Roman army not only had to adapt to the new requirements and take into account what it learned at its own expense from the enemy, but, along with its tactical organisation, its organic composition changed. What had been an army of citizens disappeared: new social strata took over, better able to cope with heavier service. At the same time, the ranks of conscripts were expanding: the Italics were no longer the only ones to serve in the legion, the warlike subjugated races also enrolled for service in the special arms. Numids, Thracians and Galatians fought in the cavalry: we are left with a bronze inscription, from which we can see the solemn granting of the right of citizenship to a Spanish squadron, which had

counter-attacked brilliantly. Caesar's last battle, at Munda, was decided by the charge of Maurian knights. A new course was heralded everywhere: but, however full of consequences it may have been, it never affected the purely 'Roman' character of the state and politics. The Italics, fulfilling their aspirations, never adopted a policy of their own, but conformed entirely to the Roman policy: they did not want to be 'Italics' but 'Romans'. They therefore struggled to become participants in the spiritual and political content of Rome and to contribute to its realisation in time: the constructive and dominating virtue of the idea of Rome was thus manifested, an idea that was not to lose any of its vigour even when faced with similar demands in the 3rd century
d. C.

The primacy of foreign policy, even if the principle has been otherwise justified, implies that every internal change can be traced back to external, political and military events. On the contrary, accepting the views o f authoritative historians, the primary causes of this and subsequent crises of the empire would be to be found in internal relations. A fundamental difference in the modes of historical reflection is evident here. The tendency to see the events of history as essentially rooted in internal processes considers the people and the state as closed units, obedient to their own laws, which condition the upheavals that arise within them. These expand, intersect, transcend their own borders and, clashing with similar processes, determined within neighbouring peoples and states, they pass into external and military complications.

The point of view here proceeds from the inside to the outside, while ours follows the opposite path. The former derives the decisive movements from the primordial foundation of an ethnic or political individuality, solely triggered by the obscure conditions intimate to this individuality, the latter links them to a transcendental order. No people or state ever finds itself in such isolation that it is astonished, even if it is hindered in its growth and expansion, by recognising that neighbours surround it and condition it with impulses and instances similar to its own. Or more precisely, each community is from the very beginning a member of a world, in which other communities participate in the same way. In a fervour of emulation and contrasts, they
expand and collide in space, fight and reconcile: the

External clashes influence the interior when they provoke reactions within each community, the nature and extent of which are initially determined by the external events. It is these movements that, spreading and asserting themselves within, awaken the individuality of each community: thus awakened and as if set free, each individual state, each individual people begins to become conscious of its own particular nature and to take possession of the possibilities latent in it.

The two theories refer to two different conceptions of the state and the people. They not only have cognitive value, but also indicate an orientation in action: they cannot be understood in their essence if they are not experienced in fact and in their actuality. Through action alone, one penetrates moral norms. Peoples and states also have their own ethics, which coincide with that of the individual more than that of the individual. that is not commonly admitted.

Thus, the conception first defined could correspond to an individualistic ethic, all striving for full self-realisation. Free growth is its supreme goal. It comes to a halt, so to speak, against its expectation, clashing with the will of other individualities to assert themselves: a contrast then begins, the outcome of which is ultimately imposed by the right of the stronger. This conclusion reveals the true character of all individualistic ethics: a selfish will to self-assertion, which admits no limits and ultimately recognises only itself.

On the contrary, the other conception corresponds to an ethics, which already initially considers the individual as a member of a totality. Man is forced to come to terms with others and prove himself in the art of the possible. But by virtue of these necessary limits, the impulse to confront and overcome them grows and strengthens. The awareness of the existence of barriers induces one to make greater use of all internal possibilities. Individuality is no longer in this theory a gift, given from the cradle. Only in the inexorability of mutually conditioned relationships is the true character of a people and a state tempered. Not evolution out of all obstacles, but tenacious fidelity to the task at hand: not in unrestrained freedom, but in endurance the 'form, which is proper to each, matures'. "The character

said Goethe, is manifested above all in the capacity to act, react and, even more, to limit oneself, recognise and endure. Actions that affect character from the outside temper it by strengthening it'.

What we are dealing with here are the crises of Rome's power, inevitable consequences of the policy of expansion that had built up that power. It would be convenient for us to know what reflections they aroused in the minds of Roman statesmen. What remains of the declarations and plans of the greatest among them allows us to answer this question.

Caesar had risen to power through his superior handling of the demagogic means of domestic politics: but his greatness lay in the fact that he knew how to look far beyond this horizon. Before his genius was always the whole of the empire's evolution and not just the oligarchy's power struggle. He necessarily had to realise that every expansion on Rome's frontiers came up against stronger, younger, less worn-out peoples and that every breach opened in the belt of states surrounding the Mediterranean and the Roman provinces was answered by a new threat from outside.

It was Caesar's merit to recognise the profound difference between Gauls and Germans. Posidonius had already made this distinction, but he still considered Gauls and Germans to be related to each other, so much so that he likened their two settlements, divided only by the Rhine, to each other. Caesar kept completely away from this confusion.

It was a rule for him that integrity and freshness, and consequently war power, were all the greater in the peoples the further they were from the frontiers of the empire. Hence the superiority, over the other Gauls, of the Belgians, who were further away from the Roman province. Thus in Britain, the populations that lived within sight of the coast were among the most civilised, while the populations of the interior were rougher, simpler, stronger. The Germans kept away from foreign merchants: there were tribes that each surrounded themselves as if with a wide belt of scorched earth, which protected them at once from the enemy and from foreign influences. In this way they had retained their primitive strength and simplicity and had been able to break the ancient superiority of the Gauls: a proof that trade and

proximity to the Roman frontier mitigated the primitive warrior strength of a people.

For Caesar, the threat lay in the immediate future. The Germans could by virtue of their superiority occupy the territory of Gaul, they could also plunder it and from there penetrate the Roman province or even pass into Italy. This is what the Cimbri and Teutons had done, who had previously ravaged the whole of Gaul and only found opposition in the Belgians. The Edui had been defeated by Ariovistus and his Swabians, the Sequani reduced to a third of their territory. It was to be feared that an invasion of Swabians would cross the Rhone and follow the example of the Cimbri and Teutons.

On the Danube, the situation was the same as on the Rhine. The annihilation of an independent Macedonia had removed a barrier line. The Roman proconsuls were forced to fight uninterruptedly against peoples, who broke through from the north. The Dacians mainly proved to be dangerous enemies, and while Caesar was busy in Gaul, Burebista began his ambitious venture of a great empire in Dacia. The plan to eradicate this powerful neighbour dated back to Caesar's consulship in 59, when he had the governorship of Illyria assigned to h i m along with that of Gaul. In his last years the dictator resumed that plan: even before the Parthians, Burebista had to be overthrown.

On the Rhine, on the Danube, on the Euphrates, wars were being prepared. If it was true, as Caesar thought, that the integrity and strength of peoples grew the farther they were from the borders of the empire, there loomed the threat, by pursuing a policy of conquest, of endless war, a war moreover that after every victory would bring with it
increasingly serious difficulties. Perhaps behind the Dacians and Parthians, behind the Germans on the Rhine, lay even more dangerous peoples of even more primitive strength. From this perspective, only a radical solution could remedy this.

The solution has been handed down to us: Plutarch relates it to us in the life of Caesar. According to it, he planned, after having subjugated the Parthians, to penetrate into Irania, and from there via the Caspian Sea (which was thought to be a bay of the outer ocean) and the Caucasus to circumvent the Black Sea to the north. Thence the

conqueror, crossing Scythia and the neighbouring eastern territories of the Germans, intended to enter Germania and, passing through Gaul, return to Italy. Thus the empire, thus embracing the orb in its turn, would be on all sides surrounded by the ocean as its natural frontier.

It was nothing less than the empire of the world. Caesar would be based in the east on the bridgehead between the two bays of the ocean, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf: as for the delimitation of Africa to the south, nothing is said. The plan, as it was conceived, was in another direction. Peoples, behind the Germans, Dacians and to some extent Parthians, were to be incorporated into the empire. The threat from new peoples at the borders was to be eliminated by fixing, as far as possible, the borders of the empire to the outer ocean.

Caesar's plan resumed the idea of a similar feat vague to Alexander in his later years: to make the ocean the frontier of his empire. The connection with this precedent is clear, even though Caesar had indicated the borders to the east. But the model he had received had not only been modified, but reshaped by a new and constructive political thought: that thought, to which Caesar's first declarations inspired by the experience of the campaign in Gaul already concluded, and which now expanded into a plan embracing the entire orb.

Caesar was also able to base his plan on the latest geographical knowledge. As a basis he used a map of the orb by Posidonius. The latter knew nothing about the centre and north of present-day Russia, so Caesar came here to look for a frontier in the ocean, which he assumed was located nearby. Caesar added of his own accord to this geographical picture, as mentioned above, the Germans seen as an immense population extending as far as the Scythians. The law, to which Rome's crises were subject, is now clear: not only were they provoked by the expansion movement, which preceded them, but they were also determined in their specific form.

The validity of this law extends to the crisis of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century AD. It too was introduced by a century of conquests, which had ended with successes, admittedly very laboured and of little importance compared to those that had befallen Rome from the still fresh forces between the

3rd and 2nd century B.C.: but sufficient successes to weaken or destroy what were once the border states of the empire and open up new space to threatening waves of barbarians. Through the gaps produced by the last Roman expansion, the waves burst against the rotten military defences, with which the declining empire was sought to be protected all around.

In the East, the ancient adversary, the Parthian empire, had been severely hit by the military campaigns of Trajan, Lucius Verus and Septimius Severus; this was demonstrated not only by the definitive loss of Mesopotamia but above all by the plans pursued by Rome beyond this immediate objective. It was to establish the fastest possible connection with vast territories in the eastern market, with China and India:
Whereas until then the road had been via the Red Sea and the south-eastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, it was now intended to take the much shorter route via the Persian Gulf. Lucius Verus and Septimius Severus could believe for a moment that they had definitively secured the mouth of the Euphrates: from the stream of Roman-Provincial influences, flowing into the art of Gandhara, from the vibrancy of the silk trade, from the increased interest of contemporary literature in relations with India and China, they notes the importance of the new road that had just been opened to traffic. It is still symptomatic that Septimius Severus, during the Persian campaign of 232, renewed his attempt, even if unsuccessful, to consolidate on the Shatt el-Arab.

Rome, after much effort, had succeeded in crushing the Parthians. Their capital was taken twice and as a direct consequence the Persian Gulf was reached. This opened up new routes for transit trade, already entirely controlled by the Parthians. It seemed a triumph for Rome, and it was also true, but the Romans who had won the victory were not the only ones to profit from the success. In place of the now weakened and challenged Parthian kingdom was to be succeeded by a new dynasty and a new ruling people. The Sassanids burst through the breach, which had been opened by the armies of Rome, and in place of the vanquished adversary a new one arose.
other, which would have given Rome a run for its money to an altogether different extent. The greatest expansion that the Roman Empire had ever achieved corresponded, as an inevitable consequence, to a new crisis.

Marcus Aurelius also planned a further shift of the empire's borders not only to the east, but also to the Danube frontier. Just as on the eastern theatre of war he had responded to past defeats with an attack, which had been carried into the very heart of the enemy power, so he intended to do on the Danube. "He wanted to reduce the land to a province of the Marcomanni; he wanted to do the same with Sarmatia, and would certainly have succeeded in his purpose, had it not been for the defeat of Avidius Cassius', so the emperor's biographer assures us. The Danube was crossed, the wedge to the east extended and the Tatra country reached to the north: at last the Marcomanni, Quadians and Sarmatians were subjugated.

His son and successor Commodus abandoned the conquests: what remained was the political and economic weakening of those Germanic tribes, from which, however, Rome again did not profit the most. Soil finds showed that since the end of the 2nd century Germanic tribes from the East had penetrated through the gaps produced by this last attempt at expansion. Again in place of vanquished neighbours and weakened, fresh and intact lineages sprang up on the borders of the empire, an ominous harbinger of future waves.

A similar enterprise had been conducted in Britain. Reports preserved by the geographer Ptolemy indicate that between 148 and 162 the Romans had penetrated deep into northern Scotland and fortified themselves there permanently. The enterprise must date back more probably to the time of the first successful period of Marcus Aurelius than to that of the peaceful government of Antoninus Pius. The offensive against the Highlands, already forcibly interrupted by Agricola, was resumed: not only was the barricade chain from the Firth of Forth to the Firth of Clyde erected and equipped again, but it penetrated deep into the interior (whereas Agricola had not reached beyond Strathmore). Septimius Severus followed in his footsteps. In his last campaigns, from 208 to 211, he resumed the old plan and reached as far as the northern end of the island. Forts, erected by this emperor, reached as far as the vicinity of Aberdeen:

Caracalla had them cleared after the death of his father. The Roman state - at least ideally - has constantly asserted its claim to dominate the terrestrial orb. Never were reality and idea closer to each other than

under Marcus Aurelius and under Septimius Severus. In an atmosphere of unanimous consensus from the end of the 2nd century, sovereigns were celebrated on coins as the restorers and guardians of the earth's orb, and bestowed with the symbols of the orb's safety and the salvation of mankind. The common sentiment was expressed by the orator Aelius Aristides, proclaiming: 'People no longer believe in wars, even if there once were some: they hear about them as about many other myths. But if wars break out somewhere on the extreme borders, as is inevitable in such a vast and boundless empire, they too quickly turn into myths'. And he goes on to say that, as if celebrating a feast, "the whole world has left behind its old iron robe, to clothe itself in freedom with the beauty and joy of life. The cities have renounced their rivalries with each other, or rather one ambition animates them all: to appear each as the most beautiful and the most attractive'.

In reality, the empire had long since turned into a besieged fortress. Even brief sorties were possible and limited successes were not excluded. But everywhere a new world flared up against the old one, and to provide for the defence of the frontiers, which stretched along such an enormous circle, an army of at least 450,000 men had to be kept in service: everything depended on being able to defend them. The last offensives had only made lasting gains in Mesopotamia.
Basically, the three-river frontier of Augustus had stood still. Where this frontier was crossed, a fortified *limes* enclosed the territory of the empire.

Rather than being the result of a pre-established plan, this arrangement was the consecration of a slowly established state of affairs. The frontier coincided with the line at which the Roman army had stopped in its forward march. Where the advance stopped, the forms in which it had taken place stiffened. The earth ramparts of the camps became stone walls, the tents wooden barracks or even a military village with massive buildings. The line of outposts was fortified. Bastions and moats equipped with palisades, watchtowers first made of wood, then of stone, formed a seamless line. The troops were also staggered according to a device that was both firmer and denser. From time to time they were moved to the most advanced line

and distributed along it, to meet the needs of keeping the border under continuous control.

But even so, a coherent order of defence and protection had not yet been achieved. The *limites were* far from constituting fortified lines of defence. One lived with the illusion that what had stood still could at any moment be on the move again. The legions could always consider their petrified camps not as a stable garrison but as the starting point for a new offensive: the frontiers could always be moved forward and penetrate deeper into enemy territory. Enterprises of this kind once again occurred on the main fronts under Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus.
The outcome had been of such little importance that no essential change had taken place. If the existing system for securing the borders had been retained, the assumption was that beyond the borders the superiority of Roman weapons was recognised and that, with the exception of occasional punitive expeditions, all traffic was limited to peaceful exchanges. It turned out later that this premise did not hit the mark. When whole peoples from the outer territories once again set themselves in motion and, with a hitherto unknown force, struck out against the frontiers, they were faced with a situation for which they were by no means ripe. The device that had been conceived for the offensive had been nullified in its potential, once stiffened to serve as a defence. It was ill-suited to its new tasks. The *limites* with their palisades and guard posts were also inadequate as defensive arrangements. The forts resembled fortified barracks more than fortresses in the proper sense. Once the frontier works were breached, it required immense effort to plug the gaps. Lacking reserve detachments, troops had to be diverted from the *limes* to be deployed elsewhere than where they were assigned, with the constant fear of arriving too late, or of a new assault at the point that was being weakened. The frontiers of the empire thus became a surface that offered itself to recurrent and everywhere ruinous assaults.

The empire's defence system suffered its first losses, which were to remain irreparable, under Commodus. A new era opened with this event, as indeed with the emperor under whom it took place. The northern part of Scotland, inhabited by the Picts, had until then remained

free from Roman occupation. Roman historians describe the region as mountainous, wild and waterless, interrupted here and there by marshy, deserted plains, dense with fog and stagnant fumes. Cities, masonry and agricultural occupations were alien to the Picts: cattle breeding, hunting and wild fruit gave them a living.
Their nature as a nomadic and hunting people was matched by their weapons: among other things, they had preserved the first instruments of warfare, such as chariots. The extreme mobility of their combat tactics, the use of ranged weapons, surprise attacks, and the use of flight reveal the link with the characteristic forms of horsemen peoples.

The constantly moving barbarian world of the north was now in the southern part facing the sedentary and conservative world of the territory under Rome's rule. Two barrier lines prevented access to the proud and independent races of the highlands of Scotland. There was the frontier line, set up for defence, from Hadrian's time, consisting of a mighty rampart two metres thick and twice as high: sixteen stone camps were embedded in it and, between them, smaller forts and walled towers followed at equal distances. Further north stretched a second device, raised under Antoninus Pius, but limited to ramparts reinforced with wooden supports. The garrison was not kept gathered in the camps, but distributed along the line at surveillance posts.

In the early years of Commodus' reign the Picts attacked: they overcame the Antonine Wall and beat the Roman forces in open combat. A commander of great energy, sent by the emperor, reorganised the Roman troops with the rigour of discipline and regained the lost ground: but the northernmost rampart was destroyed and the defence had to be retreated to Hadrian's line.

It was not long before this too was lost: Clodius Albinus had withdrawn the garrison to engage it in the struggle taking place in Gaul for the imperial throne. The Pictish tribes took advantage of the opportunity, which presented itself to them; they attacked the almost empty camps and destroyed them from the foundations. It was necessary on the Roman side to proceed with reconstruction and every effort was made to renew the

more suitable and adequate for the times. Not without reason did the new rampart bear the name of Septimius Severus: in the year 208 the emperor himself had rushed to Britain. The enterprise, which he had conceived, to subjugate the whole of the Scottish plateau, remained unfinished, however, and was abandoned after his death. The wall of Antoninus was never rebuilt.

Shortly after the middle of the century, a similar event occurred on Germanic soil: this time it was the loss of *the* Upper Rhine *limes*, the "Ten Lands' placed between the *limes* and the river, and finally of the retreat of the frontier on the lower Rhine. Caracalla had to repel a first attack by the Alemanni, who were trying to penetrate beyond the Main into the *limes* territory. Under Alexander Severus a second attack took place further south at the junction of the Rhaetian and Upper Germanic *limes.* Alexander Severus' successor barely managed to plug the breach once more. Under pressure from the Alemanni the Rhaetian *limes* was transformed
in stone walls. Cities surrounded themselves with a solid circle of walls. Numerous stone sections were also raised on the *limes of* Upper Germany. Despite all these measures, the course of destiny was not halted. Valerian was forced to deplete the frontier, when with part of the legions from Rhaetia, Noricum and the Rhine he moved south to conquer the imperial crown. The Alemanni made
immediately breached the frontier defences by reversing their striking force in two directions, descending on one side into the Main Valley, aiming on the other through the agricultural region at Ladenburg, Worms and Speyer. The line of the Rhine was already threatened, when Gallienus, son of Valerian and his colleague in the government of the empire, succeeded with the help of British reinforcements in stopping the enemy. The Rhaetian *limes* was broken, Augsburg severely tried and numerous other cities destroyed. The
Victorious Alemanni pushed on as far as northern Italy: it was Gallienus again who repelled the invaders near Milan.

There was certainly no lack of attempts at reconquest. The Romans were anxious to preserve the availability of the Main plain, because of its function as a link between Gaul and the important Danube territory north of Lake Constance and on the Neckar. However, the *limes* was no longer rebuilt. On this side of the Rhine a new line of. fortification arose, while already on the lower

Rhine cleared the river frontier. In 260 the *limes* along the Upper Rhine, which had its keystone in the stronghold of Utrecht, was abandoned. The invasion of the Franks was faced on a new line, moved further south into Belgium.

By this time even Gaul was no longer safe. Under Caracalla there had been a last period of economic prosperity: numerous monuments had sprung up at that time, including the 'Porta Nigra' in Trier. Towards the middle of the 3rd century everything seemed to be falling into ruin: one can measure the extent of the catastrophe by the treasures of coins, hidden underground, by the disappearance of the pottery industry and the funerary art of Neumagen, by the layers documenting the fires in the *villae*. Still under the rule of Gallienus, groups of Franks went fighting all the way into Spain and sacked Tarragona. Some also reached the northern coast of Africa, where Tamuda was sacked.

In connection with the calamities generated by the invasions of the Germans, it happened that Postumus proclaimed the separate empire of Gaul and it directly assumed the fight for its own defence. A new defensive frontier was erected on the Rhine: but as soon as a region was regained from central government, new invasions followed. The Lugi, followed by the Alemanni and Franks, crossed the Rhine frontier in the same period. Seventy defenceless cities went up in flames and populous regions turned into deserts: not even Trier was spared. It was undoubtedly the greatest catastrophe that had struck Gaul up to that time.

Piracy spread again in the Mediterranean. Frankish prisoners, settled on the Black Sea, embarked and spread terror in Greece and Sicily: they sacked Syracuse, were repulsed before Carthage and returned with the spoils of war to their seats without further hindrance. Probus tried to restore order. His generals drove the invading Franks out of the country: he himself drove the Alemanni back across the Neckar and Elbe.
The Rhaetian *limes* and the Rhine frontier were renewed: to the garrisons of the restored strongholds the emperor granted land and houses, so that together with the frontier the legionaries defended their property.

In neighbouring Britain, too, new forms of defence were devised. Fortresses, more powerful than those of the first period, were erected on the English coast.

of the empire: on the ramparts heavy launching machines were placed to dominate the beach. With these works, Constantius tried to cope with the invasion by sea of the Saxons and Franks, true forerunners of the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.

On the other hand, the state and military structure of the *imperium* also imposed new reforms on the Germans. Isolated tribes were replaced by coalitions of tribes. Swabians and Ermundurians united with the Sennonians, who came down from the eastern Elbe territories under the new name of Alemanni. A tribe from the interior, not yet reached by the Roman civilisation, made common cause with others already established in the border territories and caused a break in the line of defence. The Franks, too, formed a confederation of tribes and, as they passed through, continually stirred up new waves of Germans, who once in motion increased the pressure of those before them.

The same happened there, where Germanic tribes from the north or east clashed with others, settled earlier. In what was once the lake of Iellerup, weapons have been found, consecrated in burial rites, from the time when the Danes, bursting in from the north, fought with Saxons, Angles and Hutes. Depots of consecrated weapons have also been unearthed in Funen and the marshes of Schleswig: everywhere the victors consecrated to the gods the prey conquered in battle and
buried it deep in the earth. Findings document that this custom had been going on for centuries: the beginnings certainly date back to the 3rd century.

Under pressure from the Danes, the Saxons began their westward expansion. The geographer Ptolemy remembered them still installed on the 'cervix
"of the Cimbrian peninsula: three islands not far from the mouth of the Elbe also belonged to them. From there they advanced westwards, subjugating Cauci, Angrivari and Cherusci, who had once been powerful tribes: in the time of Diocletian they also harassed the borders of Rome. Their pressure was particularly exerted on groups of Frankish tribes, with whom they clashed during the advance: they pushed them ahead or dragged them towards the sea. Together with the Salian Franks they camped on the coasts on either side of the Channel Strait, all the way down into Brittany. On the coast

of Friesland and Holland, they erected their jetties and dykes, which formed the starting point of the future occupation of Britain.

The Saxons and Franks differed from the peoples who had settled inland, such as the Alemanni and Burgundians, the Iutherians, and the Vandals, in that their expeditions by land were almost always linked to expeditions by sea. The Germanic tribes of southern Russia went even further with their raids: from the middle of the 3rd century, they occupied the southern shores of the Black Sea in successive waves, reaching as far as the Propontid and the Agaid.

A tribe of Sarmatians long established in these places had provided an example to the Goths. These made their first appearance on that southern sea led by foreigners on foreign ships. Their success, particularly the sacking of the rich city of Trebizond, spurred them to act on their own initiative. They advanced by land beyond the mouth of the Danube and poured out by sea to the north-west of Asia Minor: Chalcedon, Nicaea and Nicomedia fell with immense booty into the hands of the Goths. It was no longer possible to stop them: the raiders renewed their raids, almost year after year, and pushed not only into the north-eastern Balkans, but as far as the Peloponnese. A raid followed in 262, which had a painful echo throughout the ancient world: the Goths ravaged Thrace and Macedonia, laid siege to Thessalonica and reached as far as Athens. Other hordes attacked the ancient sanctuary of Artemis in Ephesus: the temple located at the gates of the city was sacked and destroyed. Another sanctuary, the Didymis of Miletus, was also attacked, but this one was defended and the assailants repelled. Apollo himself seemed to save the people locked up in the temple from thirst, causing a sudden spring to gush forth.

The greatest pressure from the Germans in southern Russia, however, was exerted against the Roman front on the lower Danube and its deeply wedged bridgehead to the north, the three provinces of Dacia. The migratory movement of a people, moving from the north and north-east against the river frontier, represented by the Danube, had to flow back as in its natural bed into Moldavia and Wallachia. The Roman Transylvania was also reached by this wave, which did not, however, reach as far west as the towns and mines

of gold protected by two legions, while the solid position of Porolissum also allowed the attack to be deflected to the north. The threat loomed over the eastern part of Transylvania and the *limes of* Wallachia, east of the Olt.

In the vanguard again was a non-Germanic tribe, the Carpi: the invasion of the Goths partly pushed them forward, partly dragged them along. In 242 the line of defence east of the Olt had to be abandoned and brought back to the line of the river. Under Philip the Arab, the Carpi penetrated deeply into Transylvania: the emperor rushed immediately on the spot and thanks to the select Maura cavalry drove them back. But the economy of Dacia was severely affected and never recovered. Philip did what he could: unfortunately, towards the end of his rule he was forced, for the defence of Italy, to divert the younger recruits of the legions from the provinces of Dacia and transfer them to Aquileia. The battle was then concentrated on the lower Danube. The Goths were in the lead: they were joined by the Carpi and groups of Vandal tribes. Histria, at this time undoubtedly an open city, fell into their hands: and the same fate befell the other cities on the coast. Only in front of the fortifications of Marcianopolis did the efforts of the attackers fail. A new wave followed in the year 249. It was led by the king of the Goths, Kniva: with the bulk of his forces he broke through the fortified Olt line and spread south of the Danube. Some reached Phillipopolis, others Macedonia and the sea. Emperor Decius, who immediately rushed in, clashed with the king of the Goths at the siege of the fortifications of Nicopolis: Kniva, having lost 30,000 of his own men, was forced to abandon the enterprise.

Kniva was, however, a tenacious and skilful opponent. As Decius pursued him relentlessly, the Roman army suffered a heavy defeat near Beroia: Decius had to watch as one city after another fell, while the Goths deported over 100,000 prisoners. It was only in the spring of 251 that the emperor was able to attempt the feat again. After a few successes he cut the road in southern Dobruja to the Goths, returning to their seats, laden with prey. At Abritto, in June, the decisive battle took place.

After a happy beginning, fate turned against Decius: the emperor rode his horse into a swamp and, falling in, had to succumb under the crossbows of the

Goths. It was the most disastrous rout that had befallen the Romans so far. The humiliating peace concluded by Decius' successor temporarily ensured a respite for the Danube front. The advanced bridgehead in Transylvania was preserved, while the eastern part of the region was cleared. During the two-party government
of Valerian and Gallienus, the father assumed command of the East, the son that of the Rhine front. The defence on the Danube was left to itself, and moreover with much diminished forces due to the movement of troops to other theatres of war. The consequences were not long in coming: for some time it seemed that Roman rule would completely collapse. Fortifications were already being prepared on the first foothills of the Balkans: the frontline now stretched far behind the Danube line. Dacia began to be considered a lost outpost.

It had to wait for the Illyrian emperors, who belonged to the Danubian countries by origin, to look again at the abandoned border mark. Claudius reconstituted the Danube line and Aurelian's victories seemed to restore prosperity to Dacia and re-establish the ancient borders. *Dacia felix!* proudly proclaimed the coins and for a moment it seemed that the motto had become reality. But Aurelian knew there was a limit to his victory: Dacia was terribly devastated and could not preserve itself without a series of uninterrupted efforts.
Thus the front was narrowed, the bridgehead was cleared of troops: a part of the population followed them. But a fraction of the Romanised population, especially peasants, remained tenaciously in the western region of Transylvania: unequivocal linguistic evidence points to the region around Muntii Apusini as the centre where this Romanised population withdrew.

The fateful hour for the Rhine and Danube borders coincided with that for the east of the empire. When Gallienus rushed to the Rhine to stem the Germanic invasion, and the Danube regions were left to their own devices, his father Valerian took command on the Euphrates. He was faced with a task just as difficult and desperate as on the
western frontier. On the Black Sea the incursions of the Goths had begun: on the eastern front there were now continuous and successful attacks by the second Sassanid, Shapur I. Armenia fell to

first and immediately the attack against the empire began. By the time Valerian appeared on the theatre of war, Shapur had already conquered the metropolis of Antioch, killed or deported its population. The emperor tried in vain to remedy this disaster. The plague had decimated the best forces in his army, the infantry units of the Germanic legions and the chosen cavalry of the Maures. When Shapur launched a new attack in 259, Valerian came to him: the situation in besieged Edessa induced him to try his hand at battle. Initial success was followed by catastrophe. Decius had been the first emperor to die in combat: Valerian fell alive into the hands of the Persians. 'And with our own hands we seized the emperor Valerian' proclaimed Shapur in the grandiose inscription celebrating the victory. The victors swept through Syria, Cappadocia and Cilicia: ancient and famous cities were destroyed. In Paflagonia, Shapur's troops reached the sea: enormous war booty was piled up on all sides.

The catastrophe appeared general: but the very fullness of the victory of the Persians brought about a radical change. With the capture of Valerian, a command, which had grave responsibilities, was removed. The fortress of Edessa held out and part of the defeated gathered there. Another group succeeded in surprising the enemy returning laden with booty from Cilicia. The baggage and the harem of the Great King fell into Roman hands: he could hardly reach the Euphrates. At Edessa he had to count himself lucky to secure transit by paying a tribute. On the way he was attacked by Odenath, the lord of Palmyra, and suffered further losses.

With Palmyra a third power joined the two protagonists, Rome and Persia, for the first time. The city had special reasons to revolt against the Sassanids. Its prosperity was based on caravan traffic along the Euphrates River to the Persian Gulf. Under the Parthians, it had been granted the exclusivity of this trade, while the new dynasty, the Sassanids, did all they could to grab it and make the profits their own. Thus Palmyra's source of income had dried up, and the Sassanids' contemptuous rejection of an alliance treaty had embittered the city's ambitious and proud ruler.

The structure of the Palmyrene army was not then adequate for the role of a great power. Odenath carried out a real revolution in this field too. Alongside the chosen militia of archers on foot and horseback, he instituted an armoured cavalry corps, the cataphracts: these were ordered and equipped according to the Iranian model and enabled them to successfully face the cavalry units of the Sassanids. The relationship with Rome was decisive: Odenath embraced the party of Rome from the beginning and remained faithful to this attitude until the end. It enabled him to grant himself ever wider powers and make himself de facto ruler of the regions on the eastern frontier. Gallienus, forcibly detained on the Rhine and Danube, had no chance to intervene on that front.

However, the Roman army in the East was not prepared to put up with this. Pretenders rose up in opposition to Gallienus and were recognised as far as Egypt. Odenath did not hesitate to proclaim his loyalty to Gallienus: he defeated the pretenders, apparently in the name of the emperor, by whom he was awarded the title of *corrector totius orientis.* In reality the victor was not Gallienus, but Odenath, who
then reached the pinnacle of success.

Odenath could now turn, with the help of the remaining legions in the East, against Persia. The frontier was recaptured with its fortresses: twice victorious Odenath pushed on as far as Ctesiphon, the enemy capital. Trade routes to the Persian Gulf also came under the control of Palmyra. When Odenath fell by murderous hand: his wife
Zenobia assumed the regency for her still infant son. The situation had also changed in Rome: Gallienus had been succeeded by the first Illyrian emperors, Claudius and Aurelian, who had r e s t o r e d order on all other frontiers. For the time being they recognised Zenobia's succession to the throne, but it was now in the air that Rome would sooner or later return to assert its sovereignty in the East too.

Zenobia did everything to precipitate events. He tried to extend his rule in Asia Minor and Egypt, while ignoring the real situation: he added the title of emperor and Augustus to his son, and that of Augusta to himself. But even Aurelian now had his hands free and did not delay in rushing to the East with troops. Egypt, although occupied by the armies

of Zenobia, turned against her and Palmyra had to succumb under the harsh blows that were dealt to her: the attempted revolt only sealed the sentence of fate.

Palmyra having been eradicated, Rome's domination in the East was re-established. The failure of the frontier defence under Valerian had shown that the Sassanid military tactics could not be coped with by the means used until then. The strength of the Persian army lay in its cavalry. The horse archers, whose squadrons charged with speed no less
evading the enemy's grasp, they found support in the cataphracts, armed with iron. In the intimate relationship between light and heavy weapons, between mobility and striking force lay the merit of Persian military tactics. It was not difficult for an army of this capability to overcome the strongholds and camps of the legions, and to penetrate deep into Roman territory: this was as if it had been abandoned to the enemy, who could burn and plunder with impunity.

It is to Diocletian's credit that he created border protection on a new basis. He reconquered Mesopotamia and included it in his defence system. A dangerous adversary such as the Persian cavalry would now be faced with an accomplished system of fortifications, extending both in width and depth. Starting south from Bostra the
limes ran along the edge of the Arabian plateau: it adhered to the slopes of the Anti-Lebanon, which rises in a north-easterly direction from Damascus onwards. The Euphrates and the Shabur then ensured defence up to their confluence with the Tigris. Everywhere behind one line of fortifications stretched a second one; it was a system of parallel roads hemmed in by more or less powerful fortifications, connected to each other by transversal roads. It began in the interior with fortified cities such as Bostra, Palmyra and Nisiba and extended into the desert with outlying outposts, whose purpose was to protect the water wells and grass steppes of the nomads' territory from attack. Everything was arranged in order to cut off the road to cavalry formations, however skilfully led.

In addition to the defence against the Sassanid cavalry, the *limes* was entrusted with the control over the nomads. During the winter and spring rains, the Bedouin dwelt with their flocks in the steppe, in the 'Hamad'; with the onset

of drought he reached higher up the pastures of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon or the fertile plains of the Orontes and Belka valleys. The passage took place through the *limes,* whose device enabled the Romans to monitor the nomads' movements and keep them on the safest routes. Since the new military tasks had imposed the creation of special cavalry units, the Romans enlisted Bedouins, who were quartered in special entrenchments, built in the indigenous manner, to serve as cover against surprise attacks.

In the Syriac-Mesopotamian *limes,* Rome's organisation and its political sense of continuity, durability and stability triumphed over the great migratory and expansionist movements of the East. A similar process took place on the other frontiers. In extreme necessity, a double order of measures was resorted to: walling off the cities, even those in the interior, and creating new defence nuclei on the border. The border towns, and not only in the region of the Mesopotamian *limes*, had become the nerve centres of the struggle. When the Goths first appeared in Moesia, they still hoped to dislodge the defenders from the walls with hail of stones and projectiles and to seize the
city with little effort: before long, the Germanic invaders had to move on to building launching machines and setting up assault platforms. The Goths tested the effectiveness of the new assault tools against the walls of Thessalonica: and it may be that Roman prisoners or subjugated people from the cities of the Bosporus helped them in this operation.

Civilians and garrison troops on the other hand fought furiously, in mutual emulation, to defend themselves against the impending doom. No one allowed themselves to be terrified when the enemy filled the pits with the corpses of despoiled cattle or prisoners stripped of their weapons. The impiety of the aggressor only increased the spirit of sacrifice and the inventive resources of those who were humiliated. As the barbarians penetrated the heart of the empire, the civic sense of the populations awoke from its long slumber.
The youth of Athens met, arms in hand, the enemy who were preparing to sack the city: Desippus, a historian of the time, led them. Everywhere ancient ruined fortifications were restored or new ones built: special attachés were appointed to the

construction of the walls. The irregularity of the construction, the reclaimed materials included testify to the haste with which the work proceeded. By now, experience showed that effective fortification meant not only building a wall, but concentrating the defence on what could actually be defended. From the point of view of urban development, the construction of walls often coincided with a shrinkage of the city area. In Strasbourg, all the suburbs were cleared at this time and the former military camp was transformed into an impregnable stronghold, in which a maximum of 6,000 to 4,000 inhabitants could be accommodated. On the abandoned land, a wall three times as strong as before was built: in this form, the city survived the great migrations.

The new conditions were also imposed on the capital. The fortification of Rome that had begun under Decius was completed under Aurelian: the city corporations had to provide for their execution, as all the military forces were engaged in the war against Zenobia. The walls, which still stand today, were built entirely of brick,
with their walkways, jutting corner towers, vaulted gates, also flanked by towers, were a product of that realism and sense of grandeur, which were natural to the Romans. Trier, Milan, Sirmium, Byzantium, Nisiba and Edessa became the centres of defence of the empire at that time, where the emperor's headquarters were often located.

Everywhere one could see the beginnings of what Rome had hitherto ignored: a true defence system. The stable camp and the frontier defence, which had its basis in it, were formed by that same process. On the British *limes,* which was rebuilt by Septimius Severus, the transformation was already underway. The perimeter of the
fortification works to reduce the assault area: towers were used to protect the most directly threatened corners, and the camp was transformed into a stronghold to be used for nothing but defence.

No new works were built on the Danube, but only modernised existing ones. Forts were reinforced at the corners with towers, which often turned into actual bastions: the vulnerable surface area was reduced

closing the gates, except for one, in front of which, as at Intercisa, a mighty rampart was also placed. The pattern is repeated as much on the Arabian and Mesic *limes* as on Diocletian's installations in Morocco.

Everywhere, instead of a stiffened and continuous front along the borders, a deeply articulated belt of resistance fulcrums was replaced. The old frontier defences, once broken, were quickly bypassed and taken from behind: the breach, made in one place, always carried with it the threat that the whole line would have to be abandoned. The new fortifications, on the contrary, were arranged in such a way that, having their own autonomy within the system, they could be maintained even after the loss of neighbouring positions. Whereas before a large military force was dispersed along a vast array of thinly-veined lines, now small units were massed on carefully chosen and solidly fortified positions, with the consequence that the capacity for resistance was increased rather than weakened.

In this defensive system, the sedentary man, citizen or man of the countryside, had to seriously worry about the threat to his traditional form of existence: he thus found an answer to the constant provocations of the frontier tribes, the nomads, the great migratory movements, which on all sides threatened to submerge what had been his world. The fertile and cultivated lands were protected from devastating raids and the violence of conquest. This renewed awareness was not without consequences: everywhere the border countries experienced a new economic and cultural blossoming. The buildings of late Roman Trier, such as the Gallo-Roman school of oratory, Gallic pottery and weaving, bear witness to this. Towns in Moesia, such as Histria, Tropea, Tomi, Abritto, destroyed by the Goths, were rebuilt in the pacified region and were preserved, sometimes in more modest forms, until the 7th century. Syria too was finally at peace: Antioch, despite having been sacked twice, offered the splendid picture that Libanius draws of it and that has been confirmed by excavations carried out. For the following period, the figure of 200,000 inhabitants is documented, excluding slaves, children and people from the suburbs.

The recovery was also impressive in the regions where the protection offered by the borders awakened a new and autonomous life. The maintenance of border troops and the semi-rural forms in which people lived led to an intensive exploitation of the immediate hinterland. Above the Numidian and Arabian *limes,* vast steppe territories were cleared, which after that time became uncultivated. Ungrateful lands, such as the Sin Desert, between Sinai and the Dead Sea, were covered with villages and farms. Artificial terraces were laid out, water shortages were catered for with cisterns and reservoir installations: every usable strip of land was ploughed or hoed. In more than one case, that was the only blossoming that those territories have known throughout history.

The creation of a new defensive system went hand in hand with that of a field army that, disengaged from the frontiers, had its quarters in the interior, acting as a continuously available reserve. Gallienus, who was the creator of this army, had begun through the work of the his builders of military fortifications, Cleodamus and Athenaeus, by enclosing cities with walls: field armies and the new defence system conditioned each other. Whereas before offensive and defensive were not considered separately, they now asserted their specific function.

It has already been observed that the ancient lines of defence had originated from the army's advance, which, having stopped at a given position, had, so to speak, crystallised. Thus, although the attack was renounced, the defence had not been pre-arranged. In particular, the lack of an effective reserve was felt on the occasion of violent attacks and the breaking of the front by the enemy. The offensives, which were being unleashed simultaneously on two fronts, on the Rhine and the Danube and the Euphrates, put the empire in a desperate situation. These difficulties were now alleviated and largely out of the way. Instead of a swift and successful breakthrough, a firm chain of barrage, where the defender dictated to them. Since the defence works were staggered in depth, the greatest obstacles presented themselves as the attack proceeded. It was now added that the enemy, having pushed on to the attack, was threatened at all times by the field army, fresh in strength, eager to fight and with assembled formations, of a counter-attack conducted from inland and after an accurate calculation of the

weaknesses manifested by the adversary. The operational reserve, which had previously been lacking, was now available and, in the combined play of defence and counter-attack, the principle that attack is the best defence was once again valid. The division of functions, however, meant that the unity hitherto maintained in the army organism was broken. The units on the frontier, detached
in the strongholds and *limes* quickly decayed to the rank of mere garrison troops, while the imperial field army moved to the forefront.

Of this evolution, although the point of arrival is evident, one can hardly now distinguish the beginning and the individual stages. It has been attributed to Septimius Severus and Alexander Severus, while recently the beginnings have been found as early as the Antonine period on the Rhine and North African *limes.* As always, the evolution towards sedentary forms of life took place on the same borders. Soldiers changed into sedentary peasants and settlers: as a consequence of the hereditary nature of military service they remained tied to land ownership. The field army, whose creation took place under Gallienus, although it had already begun in the previous period, corresponded instead to the opposite concept of full mobility. The field army was recruited from the young recruits of the troops quartered in the camps; well-armed and strongly supported by cavalry, it was available at all times.

The two categories also differed economically. The plots of land, which were assigned to troops on frontier service, were inalienable: the concessionaires had to obligate themselves to military service for their descendants as well. With the collapse of the gold economy, which occurred from the middle of the century, the new system, based on natural income, became increasingly widespread. The field army, on the other hand, remained tied to the penny and, following the debasement of gold, to the forced requisition of the means of subsistence. Economic circumstances deepened that differentiation, which had been a consequence of strategic necessity.

Diocletian tried to reverse this process by redistributing all the large units along the borders. But he too could no longer do without a field army. With Constantine the separation is

definitive: the troops stationed on the borders were now countered by the field army reserve within the empire.

Chapter V

The Roman army

The century from the death of Marcus Aurelius to Diocletian's accession to the throne had a predominantly military character. One speaks at least from Maximinus the Thracian onwards of soldier emperors. The holder of the throne was increasingly chosen from among members of the army. It was the army that brought emperors to power, supported them and decided on the duration and end of their reign.

From the outside, the Roman army of the 2nd century A.D. presented itself as a compact unit. The Latin language of command and administration, the unbroken tradition of the legions, the uniform armament, a closed caste of officers, discipline and corps feeling constituted, at least it seemed so, an indissoluble bond. Wherever troops arrived
of this army, they held the structures and civilisation of Rome behind them: the unity of the army had paved the way for the military and spiritual unity of the empire. And yet numerous frictions secretly simmered beneath the surface. Contrasts between individual units, quarrels between the great expeditionary corps on the Rhine, the Danube and the Euphrates had already manifested themselves in the past. Warlike and arrogant auxiliaries such as the Batavians had repeatedly refused to deal with the legionnaires. In the capital's garrison, the frontier soldiers eyed the horsemen with jealousy, and they did not hide their satisfaction when it once happened that the horsemen had to disband in front of the plebs of the urbe. The esprit de corps was widespread and expressed itself in the desire to fight or the taste for challenge. Often the armies pushed for a fight, beyond the intentions of the pretenders themselves. There was also, very pronounced, the contrast between the frontier army, which protected the empire against the barbarians, and the guard, which protected the empire against the barbarians.
of the capital, which, favoured and showered with favours, provided court service. The legions on the frontier boasted of their strength and power, while the cohorts of praetorians flaunted their superior rank.

Similar frictions, always latent, though mostly stifled, erupted with violence from the 2nd century onwards. After the death of Marcus Aurelius it seemed

the great moment of the imperial guard had come. Commodus found support in it, while Pertinace eventually succumbed at the hands of the praetorians: from them Didius Julianus was put on the throne. The latter, having offered the highest sum among the various aspirants, literally bought the kingdom. The imperial dignity thus seemed to become prey, waiting for those who would plunder it. This haggling, this dishonourable representation, to which a soldiery greedy for money and the suitors, who outbid each other, abandoned themselves, filled the measure. The petty people of Rome no longer concealed their disapproval; but above all, these events echoed among the frontier armies.

These troops, who sometimes in inhospitable regions had the weight of the defence of the empire on their shoulders, felt neglected in the face of the garrison in the capital and looked with bitterness at what was happening in Rome. With the assassination of Commodus, the outbreak of conflict seemed once again postponed, not least because Pertinaces had ascended the throne on the basis of a compromise made with the frontier army. But when the new ruler fell at the hands of a Tungro knight of the guard, the hitherto stifled revolt could no longer be contained.

Three of the great frontier armies each proclaimed a man of their choice: the British, Clodius Albinus; the Syriac-Egyptian, Pescennio Nigro; the Illyrian-Pannonian, Septimius Severus. However different these armies were, each with their pretenders and hopes connected to the imperial throne, they were united in rejecting the shame of the praetorian regime. Septimius Severus surpassed not only Didius Julianus, but the other pretenders as well: the Danube army led its commander from victory to victory until he achieved sole possession of the imperial dignity.

It was nothing new for Rome that a frontier army, led by its own general, seized power. In 69, the year of the three emperors, the army of the Rhine on the one hand, and legions from the Danube and the East, allied among themselves, on the other, had asserted their claim to the imperial throne. The decision that time fell to Vespasian, alongside the

which the Danube army stood. Yet Septimius Severus' elevation to the throne differed from many others that had preceded it.

Ever since the wars against the Dacians, the Danube front had come to the fore. Already under Antoninus Pius there were twice as many troops on the Rhine, and Marcus Aurelius in the war against the Marcomanni was able to field forces such as had not yet been seen gathered together. After Commodus the command over the Illyrian troops was divided, in order to prevent
a force of such proportions remained in the hands of one man.

What happened under Septimius Severus was much more than the violent revolt of a frontier army. When Vitellius' Rhenish legions marched south in 69, murder and destruction marked their passage. A terrified population humbly begged the marching soldiers to spare their lives and property. The situation was now completely different. Garrison and border province, army and population of the interior were no longer in opposition to each other. In the year 193, the revolt of the Illyrian regions dragged the provinces with it: the entire Illyrian community rose up. Suddenly it became the decisive factor of power within the empire.

This profound change was a consequence of Hadrian's new order for the integration of the army. Outside the legions, the principle of local recruitment had always prevailed: complements were recruited in the country itself, where the auxiliary troops were located. With Hadrian this procedure was extended to the legions as well. If at one time the Illyrian legions were supplemented with elements from Gaul
southern Africa and Asia Minor, from Hadrian onwards, always
More often than not they supplemented their forces with young men born in the camp or in the provinces, where they were quartered. The new principle proved all the more decisive, the more attention the conscription offices of the Roman administration paid to the ethnic homogeneity of the individual units. For the historian of the third century it was now a fact that the legions settled in the Illyrian region were composed of Illyrians, those in Syria of Syrians.

The Illyrians were a race of large build, vigorous and valiant: but they had a simple spirit and were easily led astray by those who

knew how to take. It was easy to raise them against the praetorians who had stained themselves with the blood of the emperor and citizens, the more so by flattering the consciousness they had of their strength. There was no people in
whole empire, it was their firm belief, that they would dare to resist before the Illyrian name alone.

Septimius Severus was African by birth. He used the legions for his own particular, indeed personal ends. But by awakening the national sentiment of the Illyrians, by raising the watchword of Illyria on his eagles, he was both dragging and pulling. His men followed him to Rome, to the East, to Britain: this solidarity not only bound the
soldiers to the person of the emperor, but also the emperor to his Illyrian army. After the victory, what had been the body of praetorians was disbanded and replaced by a guard twice as numerous. It consisted of men of proven ability and loyalty, nominally drawn from the entire army, in fact from the Danube army.

With this decision, a new nationality ascended to the top of the state. If a North African, a native of what had been a Phoenician colony, ascended the throne, in the army the first place was indisputably occupied by the Illyrians. This gave rise within the army itself to an opposition, which, from initially muted, was to become increasingly virulent in the course of the 3rd century.

The primacy of Italy had already practically disappeared towards the end of the 1st century. In its place were those western provinces, in which the process of Romanisation was more advanced, and first and foremost Spain. Having established themselves in high literature with Seneca, the Spanish had ascended the throne and kept it until the end of the Antonines. If
a change had to take place, it was, so to speak, Latin Africa's turn.

In the territories around Greater and Lesser Sirte, Romanisation had long since taken hold. Africans of origin sat in the senate: even Septimius Severus and his brother had been elevated under Marcus Aurelius to the rank of senators. During the imperial peace there had been a period of great economic flourishing. At the same time, Africa was brilliantly established in literature. Leading jurists stood alongside literati, such as Phronton, a native of Ceuta, who kept

emphasise their Numidian origin; representatives of Christianity were confronted by illustrious names from pagan literature. Apuleius of Madaura, who still kept entirely to the ground of classical antiquity, but helped to enrich it with the instrument of a refined art, with the varied lights of his style - this sparkling and sceptical spirit, changeable as a mirror and at the same time anxious for salvation - operated at the same time as the powerful originality of Tertullian, who for the first time clothed fully Christian thoughts in a Latin form. The warm personality that emanates from Tertullian's polemical writings, his explosive antinomies, the subtlety of the juridical nature of his arguments already announced what was to find its highest and definitive expression in Augustine.

The ascension to the throne of an African by birth, such as Septimius Severus, thus appeared consistent with the evolution in progress: his rival Clodius Albinus also had the same origin. Yet there was a novelty, and a profound one.
These emperors did not rely on Africans and soldiers from Africa, any more than they helped African rulers to gain power. With the victory of Septimius Severus it was thus the Illyrian nationality that occupied first place in the army: two generations later the Illyrians
could think about imposing their own emperor. This meant that, from then on, the decisive weight was no longer the degree of Romanisation but the intact strength of a nationality,
scarcely attacked by the official culture of the empire. For the first time in history, barbarian 'virtue', as such, asserted itself as a measure of value, becoming rightfully entitled to aspire to supreme power in the struggle at the centre of the empire.

Of the territories that had once belonged to the Illyrians, not a few had been lost. The eastern German lowlands between the Oder and the Vistula, home of the Lausitic culture, as well as the part of France formerly occupied by the people of the urn fields, had long since been abandoned: the same was true of southern Germany, already colonised by the Illyrians, and of Bohemia. What remained of them was entirely within the frontiers of the empire: Rhaetia, Noricum, Dalmatia, the two Pannonias and part of Upper Mesia, Dardania. The Illyrians had defended themselves fiercely against Roman rule, even though they were eventually forced to

submit: with the new rulers, the process of Romanisation had begun. On the Dalmatian coast, infiltrations from Italy had taken place from the earliest times, so much so that it was later considered an integral part of it. Inland, the newly founded municipalities, in the hands of veterans of Italic origin, who had remained in the country, kept under their administration a large part of the territories, which had once belonged to the tribes: the local population had become largely economically dependent on the new landowners.

The Illyrian nationality had also managed to maintain its own physiognomy. In vast areas, the ancient tribal culture continued to exist: in the interior, farmers and shepherds, who remained attached to the land, retained their independence. The Illyrian nobility lived in the cities: the oldest Illyrian clans ruled in the ancestral territories and were recognised by Rome. Even in the towns and areas, where the legions were stationed, the process of Romanisation never penetrated deeply: the natives lived undisturbed in their villages and were only obliged to hand over part of the produce of the soil, as well as to perform certain labour obligations and military service.

The language was also preserved. Illyrian place names such as Ampass, Ambras, Stans, Ertens, Spertens, Tettens, Norfertens - particularly numerous in the Zillertal mountains - seem to indicate that they passed directly, and not through Roman mediation, into the German language. Habits and customs for their part confirm that, under Roman varnish, traditions were jealously maintained. Women wore a cap, a double skirt, an apron and a heavy shoulder buckle: men also wore the *pileus,* a large felt cap. Indigenous gods and their shrines, agricultural ornamental motifs and primitive constructions were preserved. On the banks of the Una and Sava rivers stood
still villages on stilts, almost witnesses to the world of the
origins overlooking antiquity now worn out and nearing its twilight.

Everywhere, an outspoken and intact popular force was preserved. The Illyrian countries were characterised by a strong birth rate: they did not cease to populate other territories of their vigorous lineage and colonised the border areas both south and north of the Danube. The struggles with the barbarians beyond

of the empire's frontiers and the hunting of wild animals tempered the youth: from their earliest years, they became accustomed to enduring labours of all kinds. The cities with their comforts had no hold on such a race. The legionnaires were mostly recruited from among the agricultural population, and citizenship was conferred on them with the entry into the army. in military service: such excellent human material, which was offered for war, could not be wasted, and they were therefore ready for any concession. The Cotines, under Marcus Aurelius still subjects without any rights, soon afterwards became soldiers of the guard, quickly achieving a position of privilege.

The foundation of the ancient civilisation and state was in the urban order. This character still dominated in the age of imperial civilisation: its expansion, particularly the process of Romanisation, was the result of rational urban development. The rise of the Illyrians coincided with the time when, for the first time, there was a departure from this orientation, which had been constant until then.

Soon there was obvious hostility between the cities and the soldiers of the Illyrian legions, who were mostly recruited from the countryside. Byzantium defended itself with desperate fury against its besiegers, Septimius Severus' legions from Mesia. Lyon in 107 was sacked and burned like a brazier: the city never recovered after this disaster. If the destruction of Cremona had moved and terrified everyone's souls in 69, the chronicle of Severus's time merely noted the fact.

The change was grasped immediately by those who were directly affected. When Emperor Maximinus marched against Italy in 238, the inhabitants abandoned their cities before the legionaries from Pannonia, Moesia, and Germania. Aquileia, on the other hand, while the soldiers devastated the surroundings, destroyed vineyards and orchards, with proud city pride it stiffened into a resistance, worthy of the forerunner of Venice. The walls, which had almost fallen into ruin during the long period of peace, were strengthened: the natives and those who had found shelter there all offered their services. It is rare for city people to give good soldiers in the field. Their strength manifests itself in the defence of their native soil. Before the walls of Aquileia, the Illyrian legionaries brought back broken heads: boiling pitch raged

horrendously against the attackers. It was known what awaited the city in case of conquest: Byzantium had been turned into a village and, thus reduced, placed under the neighbouring city. Aquileia was entirely flattened and designated as pasture land.

When the defence was successful and victory was achieved, thanks were given to divine help. The inhabitants of an Italic city, who had fought with extreme valour against the barbaric violence of Maximinus, saw their saviour in a barbarian god. To the Celtic Belenus, whose cult was familiar in Noricum and around Aquileia, the name Augustus was added, also a sign of changed times.

A new era had begun, overwhelming and decisive like no other in Roman history. Not only did the world of the barbarians now stand before Romanisation, the tradition of the countryside before that of the city, but the soldier of the frontier supplanted that of the interior, and the border province took over the centres of the empire, the formless force over the civilised form.

With the Illyrian army, the British and Syrian armies entered the race as competitors for supremacy. If the opposition of the former remained an episode, not so that of the latter. Pescennio Nigro was as little Syrian as Septimius Severus Illyrian: but again with the army emerged here a entire ethnic group. The east of the empire was rising against the other half of the west. Conflicts between the Danube army and the Syrian legions had already appeared in the past. Under Marcus Aurelius the eastern provinces had fallen into the hands of a Silvan usurper. Avidius Cassius. To avert this threat, a historian of the time has the emperor speak to the loyal Illyrian troops as follows: 'Cilicians, Syrians, Jews and Egyptians have not been and never will be superior to you, even if they outnumber you by how much they are now, in truth, inferior to you. Even this Cassius, who enjoys the reputation of a skilful and fortunate general, at the head of weak and inept troops is no longer a commander to be feared, and, besides, it was not Cassius but you who victoriously carried out the wars against the Arabs and Parthians.

In fact, the Syrian legions were not a formidable opponent for the Illyrians. Recruited since the time of Augustus in their country of origin, they were

consequences soon followed. The soldier lost fighting impetus, as the seductions of the cities soon sank esprit de corps and discipline. Rebellious, impatient, undisciplined, you could not even get them used to bearing arms: it happened that at the mere appearance of the enemy, soldiers like these beat a retreat. Rarely did one offer oneself for the life of the camp with its constant physical strains, and even more rarely did one tolerate it. There were soldiers who had been in the service for a long time, who had never stood guard, and of those who were as astonished before a camp as before a great curiosity. They were accustomed to the comforts and so little absorbed by the service that they simultaneously engaged in lucrative trade: in short, they lived a peacetime life. Mostly they lived in town houses, at the expense of the inhabitants and at the expense of their own training.

And yet the Illyrians found precisely among the Orientals a military rival, which they were wrong to underestimate. Two ethnic groups clashed in that 'fertile arc of the moon', which embraces the Arabian desert from the north-east to the south-west. The sedentary inhabitant of the cultivable region is endowed with solid qualities of tenacity, commercial talents, manual and artistic skills, but is also marked by an unrestrained yielding to the instincts of conservation and sex.

It always manages to keep itself afloat in the face of its rulers whoever they may be. This was experienced by the other group that determined the face of this land, the nomadic desert Semites. It was not difficult for them to subjugate the sedentary ones, but it was not so easy to drive them out or to annihilate them: or rather, those who had been subjugated returned, after a few generations, to assert themselves and ended up giving the victor the imprint of their own way of life. The desert tribes preserved their ancestral customs only in those places where they were numerically superior and could exchange mutual aid, on the other side of the Jordan, in the Hauran and on the southern bank of the Euphrates, or in oases such as Palmyra. If *fellah* and citizens from the interior of Syria never came to
Being experienced legionaries, the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes never belied their native warrior character. Their superiority was certainly not in close combat: but if heavy infantry was not their business, they provided excellent archers and horsemen at all times.

Palmirenians. and Nabataeans had their own cavalry units to protect the caravan routes. There were also armoured men mounted on dromedaries, and their units had pushed as far as northern Higiaz. The Romans had repeatedly had occasion to test the valour of these formations in the wars against the Parthians and recently, when Septimius Severus had laid siege to Hatra, the desert city.

It was therefore not a new world that Rome was facing, but only at the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. did it begin to make its influence felt on the structure of the Roman army. While the Illyrians merely placed their indomitable strength at the empire's disposal and otherwise conformed to traditional tactics, the East imposed its own peculiar ways of fighting on the Romans.

In Trajan's war against the Dacians, Syrian and Armenian archers met for the first time as auxiliary troops. They remained in the conquered region: thus in the border stronghold of Porolissum there was a Palmyrene unit.

Towards the end of the 2nd century, it was necessary to resort to a general increase in the army's numbers: and on this occasion, alongside the Thracians, the Syrians prevailed. The newly established units were recruited from among the Ichthyrenians, the Commagenians or the inhabitants of Chalkidiki and Damascus: an orientation that also became the rule for the future. These formations of archers, no matter where they were located, were fed exclusively from the East and began to constitute a closed corps with a national character within the general framework of the army. Under Septimius Severus, a new increase in personnel followed and from then on, even the indigenous units, which had remained outside and, in the event of war, had fought alongside the Roman troops as *symmacharii* were recruited as part of the imperial army.

As had happened with the Illyrians, so too with the eastern archers, a barbarian world, which had always remained outside the area of ancient culture, came to the fore. These people came from the desert, from the oases or its fringes, where sedentary life transitions into nomadic life: archers on foot could also be recruited from peasant villages, those on horseback almost exclusively from among the Bedouins, but in no case among city people. The

intact strength of peoples unreached by civilisation, here as in Illyria, stood against those forces, which had governed the life of the ancient world until then.

The desert has a special spirit of its own: rapid transitions, changing play of colours, great distances, the bizarre world of the morgue fairies, vivid imagination, exaltation and abasement, mobility and flair are the dominant notes of the temperament of those who are born and dwell there: the clear and transparent, dry and scorching air of the desert has entered the Bedouin's soul. He holds in contempt the life of the peasant and the life of the city man, their sedentary habits, their love of comforts: there is no son of the desert who would voluntarily exchange his own life full of uncertainties for their security and regularity, his own free wandering for their limited horizons and lazy conformity. Nomads' combat is all about sudden shifts in direction, flight and pursuit, surprise attacks, impetuous charges and sudden dispersal. Mobility and distance: or, to put it another way, horse and bow are their weapons.

If dromedaries represent the Bedouins' wealth, their national pride is in the horse: it is the foundation of their existence as warriors and free lords. The Arabian horse, nervous and highly mobile, shadowy and proud, ready to react to any stimulus, is the perfect image of its rider. The Romans, who did not at first appreciate the horse and the art of riding, even less appreciated archery.

Like other peoples, they too considered this mode of combat to be less than noble. Now, however, they had to recognise its irreplaceable efficacy: in the Sahara and southern Russia, against the speedy inhabitants of the Scottish lowlands and the horsemen of the Hungarian expanses, the archer appeared just as indispensable as in the wars against the Parthians and Germans.

The fighting of the Germans sometimes seemed to the Romans to be a kind of mad dash: they felt that their lack of discipline and calculation, despite their brilliant warlike actions, prevented their ultimate success. However, it could not be denied that the Germanic attack, based on the mutual dependence of cavalry and infantry, was an excellent and effective tactic. Lacking iron armour and forced to give up the

sword for the spear, facing an iron-barred enemy, by the Germans everything was arranged in order to avoid long close combat and rout the adversary ranks with a surprise attack. The full charge was to replace the long and uncertain hand-to-hand combat.

In the archers Rome now had a weapon, which like no other was suited to confront the Germans. They approached lightly and unnoticed, and just as quickly eluded the enemy: their arrows struck the uncovered bodies of the Germans, and with greater effectiveness as their might offered a better target. The compound bow, with double curvature, taken from the Parthians, had been perfected and greatly surpassed the previous models, with simple curvature, in shot and penetration force: without difficulty the arrows pierced two men with a single shot. The new weapon did not fail to make its effectiveness felt against the Germans: the campaigns of Caracalla and Maximinus owed their success to it. We are faced with the extraordinary fact that
an eastern method of combat, completely foreign to the Romans, was gaining authority and citizenship in the army among them: moreover, they were fighting the barbarians of the north with means that had been learnt from the barbarians of the east. The time was ripe to apply these new experiences to the interior as well.

Since Septimius Severus had ascended the throne, the Illyrians had gained pre-eminence in the army; militarily they lived up to the expectations they had raised. Wherever they fought, they carried the greatest weight: Illyrian troops were employed in the wars against the Parthians and Persians, as well as in those against the Germans. But they, who were the heart of the whole army, became useless in the hands of weak emperors: the Syrian emperors had no small difficulty because of the Illyrian resistance, which at certain times became a refusal of obedience and rebellion. The Illyrian praetorians put up fierce resistance to Heliogabalus and eventually brought about his downfall: and Alexander Severus also suffered bitterness and scorn from his Pannonian soldiery.

What more natural that these emperors would try to counterbalance the Illyrian arrogance? Alexander Severus thought of solving the problem by returning to what had been his country's weapon from the earliest times.

When he appeared on the Rhine, he had with him a new corps of marksmen recruited both from among the Osroenes and the deserters and mercenary parties. The unit acquired a reputation as a terrible weapon, which remained with it until the following century: and it was a significant circumstance that it was in the emperor's immediate retinue. The Osroenian marksmen became a department dedicated to the family and person of the original rulers from the East.

Mounted archers and armoured lancers were formations of the Parthian army, and later of the Persian army: they were coordinated with each other in a bond of interdependence, since Surena, the victor of Carre, in the battle with the legions of Crassus, had brought the tactic, based on the link between the two mounted weapons, to its perfection, giving it annihilating effectiveness. It was natural that the eastern emperors, having turned their attention to the archers, would do the same with the armoured horsemen or, as they were called, the 'cataphracts'.

It was again Alexander Severus who gave organic arrangement and development to the new regiments. During the war, which he waged against the Persians, the Roman horsemen must have equipped themselves with heavy weapons taken from the adversary: from then on, a special regiment of heavy-armoured horsemen appeared in the army. Later, new formations were added: a distinction was made between the 'cataphracts', in which only the man wore heavy armour, and the 'clibanari', in which rider and horse were equally protected by armour. The frescoes of Doura-Europus on the Euphrates, some parts of the armour of the man and the horse, found in that same area, give us an idea of the appearance of these units.

The new regiment, formed and enlisted on the eastern border, rode with Alexander Severus, who had created it, to the Rhine: under the command of Maximinus they fought against the Alamanni and also took part in civil strife. When the legions of the Danube raided the Venetian plain, they rode at their side with squadrons of cataphracts, linked with Eastern archers, Maurian astates and Germanic horsemen. According to Iranian custom, teams with heavy weapons alternated at the light cavalry, fighting knights and archers in intimate liaison.

In the following period, there is no further mention of the use of cataphracts. The next development of these formations occurred in Palmyra, when it

took up the fight against the Sassanids. Odenath organised an army, the core of which consisted of armoured horsemen. They enabled him to successfully lead the fight against Shapur I: and even when came to the clash with Rome, it was the Palmyrene cataphracts who bore the full brunt of the struggle.

It must not have been easy for Aurelian to dominate such a dangerous opponent. In the first clash, the Dalmatian horsemen resorted to the expedient of tiring out the armoured men, who were charging with all their might, by feigning an escape, until men and horses were exhausted by heat, dust and exertion: at the attack, which followed, their capacity for resistance gave way. However, in the second battle, which was the decisive one, the ruse had no more effect: the Palmyrene cataphracts remained on guard, routed the opposing cavalry and only the intervention of the Roman infantry decided the fate of the battle.

From then on, there was no question of these formations outside the army of Rome. Cataphracts appear on the reliefs of the arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki, while a little further up one can see the clibanarius in perfect trim. The iron breastplate not only completely covers the rider, but also covers the horse's head and torso down to the legs. A division of clibanarians barred the way for Constantine's Gallo-Germanic army when he appeared in northern Italy: a whole mass of iron-clad troops had thickened into a wedge, to rout the adversary with one mighty blow.

For the first time, the medieval knight stands before us. In the tombs of the kings in Sweden - at Vendei, Valsgarde and Vimose - one observes how the late Roman clybanarian passes into his Germanic heir. He too fights with arrow and bow, with the long pointed spear and wears the steel-mesh tunic of Iranian origin. The heavy helmets covered with spiral ribbons and animal limbs in the North Germanic style recall a model already in use by the armoured knights of the late Roman army. King Arthur, the archetype of the heroes of chivalry, was verisimilarly at the head of a troop of cataphracts: in the earliest tradition he bears a Roman title. His armour consisted of the helmet with a golden dragon and the cuirass, the Roman origin of which is still evident under the Celtic model.

* * *

The horse archers were joined by a similar formation, which was, however, not recruited from the East, but from the desert lineages of North Africa: the Mauritanian astati.

They, too, fought on horseback and in close order. They had a long-standing reputation as the successors of the Numidian cavalry, famous for their bellicosity. These horsemen were considered irresistible whether they chased furious fugitives or, after a feigned escape, turned on the attackers too sure of victory. Violence and raids had accustomed the Mauritanians to the craft of arms: nomads like the Scythians and Sarmatians it was equally difficult to capture them. The practice they had of riding allowed them to drive the animal at full speed, without reins, with simple sticks. The safety of aiming when throwing the weapon was unsurpassed.

On the Trajan column one already encounters this formation: he rides a small, nervous horse, which is easily led despite its liveliness. Barely a strap around its neck: otherwise it is without bridle or saddle. The horsemen are armed with javelins, lances and small shields.
They wear their hair combed in long strips; their beards flow in thick curls.

With the archers, the Mauritanians also gained authority. A reputation preceded them as bloodthirsty men heedless of death and they confirmed this in the war that Macrinus, Caracalla's successor, led against the Parthians.
Especially to this emperor, whom they regarded as their leader nationality, they pledged their loyalty. In the following period they took part in all military enterprises: they were present in the army that Alexander Severus led against the Germans and, under Philip the Arab, the Maura cavalry broke the resistance of the Carpi, who had settled in Dacia. For a long time they were counted, like their sister weapon, the archers, among the formations of the guard. Even when Valerian went to the East to face the Sassanid Shapur I, the Maures were at his side.
The terrible epidemic, which decimated the Roman army, also raged violently among them: only then was Shapur given the green light for his advance.

A new employment of the Maures took place under Gallienus. He united them with the Illyrian horsemen enlisted under his banner, the *Delmatae*: together they formed the cavalry reserve, the core of the emperor's field army. The Maurian mounted astates thus fought together with a formation, which, armed with a short cuirass and a large shield, wielded the long cavalry lance: the Maurians and Dalmatians were always present wherever the fate of the battle was to be decided. The former defeated the legions, broken to the craft of arms, of Pannonia and Moesia, who had rebelled against Gallienus, the latter supported the emperor when he defeated the rebel Aureulus before Milan. In the Gothic war of Claudius as in the war against Zenobia the corps of the
newly established knights; and it was chosen for the occupation of the reconquered eastern provinces. There the Mauritanians, still under the rule of Aurelian, proclaimed their countryman Saturninus emperor, by throwing around his person, according to indigenous custom, the sacred mantle of a simulacrum of Astarte.

In the Maures, military eagerness was accompanied by that absolute lack of loyalty, which is a constant characteristic of the sons of the Sahara: to face this danger Aurelian created a new formation of archers, which was also recruited from among the easterners. Alongside them they
Other African lineages, and first and foremost the Blemmians from the Upper Nile region, were soon to be noted for their qualities: we find them for the first time in the contemporary relief frieze of the Arch of Constantine, recognisable by the fact that they carry their arrows not in their quivers, but under the bandages around their heads.

Orientals and Africans had thus aligned themselves with the Illyrians and gained their own prominence: however, the Illyrians' strongest competitors turned out to be among the Germanic peoples.

It was inevitable in case of need that in one way or another peoples from across the border would be called in to supplement the army. From the time of Septimius Severus the lament about the shortage of men did not cease: it happened that the most vigorous and healthy part of the empire's population was decimated by the demands imposed by constant warfare. To which was added that the barbarians from outside the empire still possessed to a high degree those

qualities, which had raised to their rank those who were now part of the empire. An intact force and reserves of valiant men, devoted by their nature to the craft of war, were on offer everywhere. The Germans and their neighbours achieved a privileged position in this race from the very beginning.

Yet a grave risk was being taken. Until now, barbarians from outside the borders had been opposed by others from within the territory of the empire: now the external enemies began to be fought with elements from outside the empire. Between these and the traditional formations of the army a clash was inevitable at one time or another. For the future and continuity of the empire this antagonism was to be of quite different importance to the rivalry of nations that were part of the empire and acted as such.

The historical evolution, mentioned above, took place beyond the time limits considered here. The beginnings, however, go back to the time of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, when Quadi and Marcomanni were needed alongside the Iazigi to supplement the army. Caracalla established a bodyguard, whom he called the 'lions', with tribes from the Danube borders and
of the Rhine: the men were enlisted in part with the
compulsory conscription of prisoners, partly by hiring mercenaries. These 'lions' could rise, with an innovation that was out of the ordinary, to the lower ranks of the officialdom.

Even Maximinus, in whose veins Gothic blood flowed, made use of Germanic horsemen, prisoners or mercenaries, whom he had brought with him from the Rhine campaign: their blind bravery was used to engage in battle and for all missions of a dangerous nature. Even Maximinus' opponents, the senatorially appointed emperors Pupienus and Balbinus, had set up their own Germanic bodyguards for the need
to counterbalance the arrogance of the garrison of the Praetorians of the Urbe; thus, for the first time, Germans and Illyrians faced each other.

From the middle of the century onwards, the participation of Germanic forces became more and more frequent: it was no longer limited to individual units, but grew to become an ever larger and unstoppable stream. The large rock inscription of the Sassanid Shapur I at Naksh-i Rustem in Persia caused surprise, revealing that Gordian III led the Persian enterprise with the conscript forces of "Gothic and Germanic tribes

". Postumus' empire of Gaul relied on Frankish auxiliary troops: on the coins of one of his successors, the image of Germania is seen for the first time. Claudius colonised the defeated Germans and even incorporated them into his own army. Aurelian followed his example: Vandal units are owed to him, and for the planned enterprise against Persia were enlisted by the Goths.

But the shadowy areas of this innovation were already beginning to reveal themselves. After Aurelian's death, the enlisted Goths rebelled by plundering Asia Minor and had to be reduced to reason. It was then decided to distribute the Germanic recruits in groups of 50 to 60 in each unit: this would be heard, but, it was thought, at least it would not be seen that Rome was supported by foreign forces. With all this, the future crisis between Illyrians and Germans could not be avoided. Claudius and Aurelian, by enlisting the Germans, had paved the way for the adversary of their people: another Illyrian, Constantine, led them to ultimate success.

Virtus Illyrici! announced the coins even under Aurelian and Gallienus: Illyrian valour had under those two emperors vanquished the East. An orator of the time could bring Pannonia closer to the ancient fame of Italy. "Who could doubt that in the course of so many centuries, since Pannonia united its strength to the glory of Rome, Italy has remained mistress of the world by grace of its ancient fame and Pannonia by virtue of its value? "And the same orator thus addressed the Illyrian emperor: "You were not born and bred in a land of peace, nor in a part of the world corrupted by comforts, but in provinces, which an adversary very often defeated, a frontier population always victorious harden to all sorts of hardships and make unassailable. Women here are also stronger than men anywhere else'. Suddenly a seemingly undisputed prestige was followed by a fall: in the battle on the Milvian bridge, a fateful turning point like few others in history, not only did a Christian emperor gain victory over the representatives of paganism, but the Gallo-Germanic army gained supremacy. *Virtus Illyrici* was replaced on the coins by *Virtus exercitus Gallicani.*

The victorious army of the Rhine already had a Germanic imprint: in the contemporary frieze of the Arch of Constantine, it bears

customs, which were in common use in the Gallo-Germanic border territory. Once again, a new world came to the fore: in addition to the clasp helmet, which was common to Iranians and Germans, insignia was accepted of Germanic shields, symbols and runes. Germanic impressions also began to penetrate the Latin vernacular, commonly spoken in the army: at the same time, the Germans ascended to the highest ranks of the military hierarchy. Already in the past, with Maximinus, a man had ascended the throne of Rome, in whose veins Gothic blood flowed, he who - with the appointment of the emperor exclusively by the army and the consequent pledge of allegiance - had created for the first time, at least so it seems, the decisive precedent for the Germanic idea of succession.

The military history of the 3rd century shows that the frontier armies began to play an autonomous role in contemporary events: but along with this centrifugal trend, the opposite trend developed. The circumstances, which had led to that assertion of autonomy, also created the countermeasure: a new strengthening of the power of the centre.

When Alexander Severus gathered his troops against the early Sassanids, the Danubian legions formed the nucleus: on the Mesopotamian theatre of war they proved worthy of their reputation. But the ruinous battles and the climate, to which they were not accustomed, claimed numerous victims, so much so that morale was severely shaken: the lack of success was attributed to the emperor and his eternal indecision. When news arrived that the neighbouring Germanic peoples had crossed the Danube border, the soldiers began to agitate, demanding to return to their lands. They thought that the Germanic danger was greater than any threat from the Persians: they were haunted by the idea of the oppression of their country, of their kinsmen being killed by the enemy.
Their attachment to the stable camps of their home country and the districts of their recruitment made their own interests appear more important to them than the demands of a unified imperial policy.

Alexander Severus fell victim to the wrath of his Pannonian recruits. If with Maximinus Thrax a man from the Danube had ascended the throne, with Decius it was the turn of the first Illyrian. Subsequently the

Danubian legions returned to support the candidature of this or that pretender. The antagonism between frontier army and central power continued, despite the fact that the last two antimperators had to succumb to Gallienus' manoeuvring skills. The dangers of the rise of regionalism also showed themselves outside the Illyrian countries. After the Valerian catastrophe, the East began to slip away from central power: if Palmyra hastened to declare itself Rome's champion in the fight against the Sassanids, it actually ended up usurping the exercise of power over the eastern provinces. Palmyrian, Syrian and Osroenian archers fought under national flags. Almost simultaneously, the third of the great frontier armies also took its own path.

Valerian owed his power in particular to the Germanic and Rhaetian troops. For the first time the Upper Celto-Germanic and Meso-Pannonian armies faced each other in the struggle for supremacy: if it did not come to a bloody clash, it was because at a certain moment the Pannonian legions abandoned their candidate and consigned him to death. Even the army of the Rhine, after the catastrophe of Valerian, had given up supporting his son Gallienus: as soon as he had run to the Danube, it came to an agreement with Postumus, thus leading to the foundation of the separate empire of Gaul.

Subsequently, attempts to establish powers of a regional character emerged everywhere, which relied on a regional army; in close connection proceeded the new regional organisation of the *annona mìlitarìs,* i.e. of the enlistment and subsistence, which, together with the command of the army, was subject to the local governors. Only the availability of economic means made it possible for pretenders to present themselves as candidates and make themselves autonomous.

Gallienus, against whom these attempts were mainly directed, tried to meet the new threat with various expedients. When he marched against the pretender of the Danube army, he was followed by the younger recruits of the legions of Britannia and the Rhine, who had formed autonomous formations. After he had tamed the revolt, he took with him similar formations - with the Latin term *vexillationes* - from the legions of Pannonia and Moesia. Two *vexillationes,* under single command, had the

same size as a legion. Thus a mobile army was gathered around the person of the emperor, made up of these *vexillationes*: its strength was variable, but it was a fact of decisive importance that this army represented a blockade, which could be continually disposed of.

The more the *vexillatio* remained distant from the troops of its own ethnic group, the more it also became detached from them in spirit: as its interests became linked to those of the emperor, it found a new homeland at court. The system of *vexillationes,* the army, i.e., the army constituted with them, available at any time became the weapon, with which the border armies' vague ambitions for independence and the usurpers, who were supported by them, were fought. Gallienus publicly acknowledged the help, which these formations offered him, in official ceremonies: on the coins he had the loyalty of the new army celebrated, where they were represented in the front line
the *vexillationes* of the Rhine and Danube legions.

Opposite the frontier armies was now an imperial field army, which was not tied to any fixed camp, but was constantly at the sovereign's side. Drawn from Germanic and Celtic, Illyrian and Thracian units, these *vexillationes were* distinguished by reason of their origin, but their assemblage, as the most diverse nationalities were brought together, It had no particular ethnic character: it helped to counterbalance the frontier armies, in which, on the contrary, the determining element was the individual nationality. State power, which encompassed all others, found its coherent expression in this army, in which all nationalities were grouped together in a single framework.

With the establishment of the new field army, one naturally did not fail to also point out its disadvantages. The frontier, they persistently complained, remained undefended, while the troops were in the very places, where no one claimed them, and moreover suffered the corrupting influence of city life. But these complaints were only marginally justified. Under Gallienus the continuous succession of military exploits kept the field army permanently occupied. It should be added that the longer the *vexillationes* remained away from the

legions of origin, the more national differences faded and were overcome. In this intimate fusion of different nationalities, the ideal unity of the empire began to express itself in its conflicting aspirations.

Together with the field army and with the same orientation, the special cavalry corps of the Maures and Dalmatians were created. They too were available at all times, and in relation to the *vexillationes* had an even higher degree of mobility. Like those, they were directly following the emperor and were made up of nationalities
different. In the union of the Africans with the Illyrians, the supranational principle returned to expression. The idea of the unity of the empire, like that of the unity of the army, once linked to the pre-eminence of the Roman-Italic nationality, then stifled by the rivalry between Illyrians and Orientals, Africans and Germans, regained its former vigour.

The supranational composition of the imperial army did not mean that it was made up of an arbitrary and random mixture of peoples. This army was recruited from the most warlike strata of the population: or more precisely, with the exception of the Africans, the core was made up of the Rhine and Danube peoples, Illyrians and Thracians, Celts and Germans. While the strength of Italy had been depleted over the centuries, an intact popular force was here available as a reserve: its men supported and renewed the empire at a time when it threatened to crumble.

Gallienus was not allowed to witness the re-establishment of unity. But his successors, Claudius, Aurelian and Probus, in barely half a century with mighty blows rebuilt the creaking unity. They made use not of the frontier armies, but of the field army, a creation of Gallienus. This army, from whose ranks they had been proclaimed sovereigns, came back to defeat the Germans on the Rhine and the Danube and reintegrated Palmyra and the countries of the empire of Gaul under the rule of Rome.

* * *

The Roman army was once formed by the compulsory and general conscription of citizens and rural dwellers. The crisis of the 2nd century B.C. brought about a profound change: in name the compulsory military service

remained general, in fact the legions changed from formations of city extraction into an army with a professional and permanent character of proletarian origin. Rome and Italy still supplied all or in the vast majority the human material: but from the beginning of the 2nd century AD.
C. provinces replaced the motherland. This occurred firstly for those provinces whose Romanisation process was at an advanced stage. With the advent of the Severans, a far more far-reaching change followed: at this time, if a province had opened up to urban civilisation, this no longer constituted any preference. Only by relying on this source of new forces was it believed to be able to overcome the powerfully increased tasks of defending the empire. It certainly could not have escaped notice that the mass of the army now included peoples who had hitherto occupied no place worthy of consideration or trust within the state. They now conquered, not only in the army, but in the state organism, an importance that had not previously been recognised. In a more or less short time they would come forward with demands of their own.

In addition to the constant wars on the frontier, there were also internal struggles between the pretenders, both of which led to a gradual increase in the army's numbers. Although it was a professional army, the indiscriminate increase and the preponderant contribution of the barbarian peoples threatened to turn it into a purely mass army. Only the distinction between the frontier army and the field army could at a certain moment avert this danger: from the mass of those who were tied to a fixed camp, the majority of whom had become sedentary soldiers and settlers, the new professional army was detached, where alongside the *vexillationes*, cavalry units formed the leading weapon.

Our age is also geared towards a professional army, not large in numbers, but qualified and perfectly and modernly armed: these are certainly not identical, but fundamentally similar, reasons that lead to this conclusion today.

Army and nation-state ideal in the 19th and early 20th century were essentially in a mutually dependent relationship. In this relationship is the foundation, from the time of the French Revolution and wars of independence, of compulsory military service for all citizens, and consequently of modern mass armies. Even in the two world wars, a number of powers leveraged those principles, leading the fight through the general conscription of their citizens, resulting in a vast attrition of their own popular and military strength. Even if they did not suffer defeats, those states are today unable to face a third world war. The number of the victims and the influence on the morale of the population to remove even their thoughts.

There were repeated experiences, which Rome had already made: with an army of citizens and colonists, one cannot conduct an imperial policy. As has happened in few other epochs in history, today we find ourselves in an age that is marked by such a policy, and corresponding to this is the fact that not only the citizen army but also the nation state, which is its foundation, has entered a crisis. The nation-states have not disappeared *sic et simpliciter*: in their place - the first result of the Second World War - have been replaced by wide-ranging state formations, which are not based on a single nationality, but constitute real aggregations of peoples, held together by a common state form or political ideology. For the most part, these are communities of states led by a imperating nation, where the analogy with *imperituri Romanum* is evident*:* and the concordance extends to the fact that modern empires, similar also in this to their ancient predecessor, they use aggregated peoples for their military purposes.

The resulting military principles had already been applied in the past in colonial armies: with few changes, they can be transferred to the new relationships.

The particularities of the peoples must first be taken into account: each must be armed and guided according to its character. If one exploits foreign popular force, one must, however, avoid relying solely on it; otherwise one would leave it in the power of an aggregated people or

even in a state of subservience decisions about the *imperium* and the leading nation. It is therefore advisable to draw from this the core of the army, as far as possible equipped with special weapons. If the position of the leading nation is weak numerically, and the entire core or at least a considerable portion of the future army cannot be drawn from it, the other contingents of troops must, by necessity, be recruited from the various peoples aggregated or in subjection. In this case, the individual contingents will be limited: their mutual weight will be measured by reason, and under certain circumstances they will be played off against each other, so that they keep each other in check.

The individual armies, drawn according to limited quotas from the aggregate or subject peoples and armed in accordance with their character, will form an army with special weapons and a professional character. The nucleus of the army, drawn from the hegemonic nation, must also - and indeed primarily if provided with more qualified weapons - conform to these same principles. No imperialist state, and above all no capitalistically organised state, however rich and powerful it may wish to be, can any longer afford to keep a general conscript permanently in service, with training and armament ready for any emergency: it will hardly be able to provide the means required for this without permanently damaging its own economy.

Rome from the middle of the 3rd century was forced, by establishing a larger cavalry corps, to further specialise its professional army: not only did the numerical size of the special weapon increase, but so did the cost per soldier in the army. Knights have always been a
expensive troops as they need longer and more thorough training than any other weapons, and in the event of losses o f men and animals, it is difficult to replace them. Horses are particularly susceptible to the threat of epidemics and the wear and tear of service. In the case of unsparing employment, the more numerous the losses, the greater the difficulties of replacement and the subsequent utilisation of the weapon: it came to the point of limiting the employment of cavalry to favourable terrain from the outset, particularly in view of the close connection with the rest of the army. While infantry could fight in the mountains as well as in marshes, the theatre suitable for cavalry combat must, due to its characteristics,

be known in advance and its intended use carefully considered. All these obstacles lead to the consequence that the field army will only use cavalry when its success is assured, at least to some extent.

This is enough to understand that Rome had to be careful with its cavalry troops. Certainly, thought was given to supplementing their services with better weaponry, education, discipline and command that had been tried and tested: but even this was only possible insofar as the availability of revenue allowed them to bear the burden, and the possibilities in this field were not really unlimited. Growing military expenditure had increased the tax burden to the point of eventually making it intolerable: when the last economic reserves were consumed, it became inevitable for the state to reduce either the quality or the size of the army, including the special weapon of the cavalry.

If the transformation of infantry into cavalry had already significantly increased the cost of the army, then in that century there was a further increase in the number of personnel, the continual increase in military pay and gratuities, the construction of fortresses on the frontier and the cost o f hiring foreign mercenaries. Everything else - games and food, distribution of money, building, expenses for the bureaucracy, which also swelled its ranks, as well as the high cost of the imperial court - only followed at a great distance.

All voices of the time agreed in denouncing the inhuman tax burden, as well as in recognising that the army was the heaviest burden. Everything was given up to satisfy military needs. A measure of such importance, such as Diocletian's price-calming, should have prevented a rise when armies were in transit. In order to secure tax revenues, the expedient of tying the economic forces employed in the large state and private landed estates to land and occupation was prematurely resorted to. On the other hand, the threat of the transformation into a new economy of nature forced what it was still possible to preserve into fixed forms.

of the city economy, which was the basis of the state economy. The difficulties, which arose in ancient Rome as a result of the establishment of a specialised and professionally qualified army, grow out of all proportion in the case of modern armies.

Technology has accelerated the technical progress of weapons, ammunition and instruments of war to such an extent that the majority of weapons run the risk of being outdated as soon as they are introduced. With a national army, a succession of armaments that kept pace with technical progress would bring with it such costly expenses that even an economically prosperous state would not be able to bear them.

Adapting a modern-day national army to the latest weapons and instruments of war raises further difficulties. Adaptation cannot be limited to the possession and deployment of weapons: if it is to ensure success in the fight, it must be qualified to the point where troops are able to carry out swift and decisive actions. In particular, high levels of performance should be demanded of the leaders: this would require long periods of preparation, which, in the case of a national army, would not be economically viable for their duration.

These reasons also press for the introduction of a numerically limited army, which professionally performs the service of arms. Compared to a national army, it has the privilege of being economically feasible, although it still represents a not inconsiderable burden: it allows for a more accurate training period and an armament that, if technically it is not easy either, can however, adapt more easily than in the case of a mass army. Add to this, an advantage that also carries its own weight, that it allows immediate availability of attack and more extensive deployment. In conclusion, the professional army represents an attempt to replace mass with the virtue of quality.

Comparisons between today and the past finally extend to army command and tactics. Once again, the

fundamental difference between one type of army and the other. To the nature of the national and mass army corresponds the mass battle: the conduct of war reaches its apex in the challenge to annihilate the bulk of the enemy forces by means of battle. This goal must be pursued with every effort, and it must be achieved, if necessary, even if it costs the blood of countless victims. It was the doctrine of Clausewitz and Foch, that only the massing of forces at the decisive point procured success; that only he who used the mass without regard and without sparing blood was able to tip the scales on his side,

It has already been observed how costly this way of conducting warfare was for the national forces. Although Foch arrives at this conclusion, the theory that there would be no strategy but only tactical success means nothing more than that the victorious battle represents everything. To the brutal datum of the mass army corresponded a command, which both in theory and practice was not inferior to it in brutality.

The fatal word 'Canne' created the myth of the battle of annihilation, by whose yardstick Frederick the Great, Napoleon and Moltke were measured. This formula of 'Cannae' has been a misunderstanding in which we have lulled ourselves for so long, and one of the most serious and consequence-laden in the history of military theories. Cannae is not a mass battle at all, but the affirmation, in its purest form, both of a small but fully qualified professional army in the face of mass popular conscription, and of a strategy, meditated and cautious in the employment of the available forces, in the face of the attack of a bursting soldiery, which tries to force the decision by not caring in the slightest about losses.

The time has come to overthrow this idol of a whole school of military art: an ancient battle cannot be considered in its abstract episodicity, but only in its historical context.

In Carthage, less attention was paid to mass than to its employment: one tried to sniff out the weaknesses of the adversary and take advantage of them; one tended towards very calculated combinations; one hoped to bend even the

more powerful enemy by luring him into an ambush or laying ambushes. With the minimum effort, the maximum result had to be achieved: in this respect, Hannibal was a true son of his people. He knew the Roman military mass and his staff in their deeply rooted instincts, so much so that he would second the adversary's desire for a frontal attack and blind hand-to-hand combat and thus lure him into his own net. He calculated with this that the immense striking force of the Romans would be exhausted by itself.

Napoleon regarded the ability to act according to circumstances as the key to strategic wisdom. For Hannibal, Canne was linked to premises that occurred that one time: it was unrepeatable, so much so that the victor never attempted anything similar afterwards. Already earlier at Lake Trasimeno Hannibal had lured the enemy into pitfalls, but the battle situation was different, and later at Zama, according to the plan that was a masterpiece, the leader showed itself once again in an entirely new guise. In the still recent past, however, a recipe for universal use was made of Cannae: in fact, not even the victors of Tannenberg were able to repeat themselves.

What is called a 'Canne', therefore, is not possible without an enemy that has committed a certain amount of errors from the outset. This enemy must have shortened his forehead, thickened his flanks and thus condemned the main mass of his fighters to inactivity. Hannibal knew the Romans and judged exactly the their commander Varro. But what likelihood was there that Varro would also in the future adapt himself with perfect obedience to a new Canne that was included in the plans? And moreover, it is clear that Cannae means secrecy and surprise: how could one count on it when the recipe for general use, which had been in public use for years, was known and exalted in its infallible effects!

Cannae meant for antiquity that popular conscription constituted a social and economic loss and the formation of the professional army began. Rome's army of citizens and peasants never rose again from the defeat inflicted on it by Hannibal. Of course it did not disappear at once, but already Zama was decided not by the Roman legions,

but by the Numidian cavalry. From that time on, the victories of the mounted army marked the stages in the history of the Roman army. At Carre in 53
a. C., Crassus' heavy infantry had to succumb to the Parthian cavalry, which acquired the reputation of being invincible; Munda, Caesar's last battle, was a success of the Maurian horsemen of the Bogud;
Again at Mursia in 260, the Maures defeated the warlike legions of Pannonia and Moesia, and in the second battle at Mursia in 351, Constantius' clibanarians won a victory over Magnentius and his semi-Germanic army; the battle at Adrianople was finally decided by a single attack of the Gothic and Alanian horsemen.

And the last two world wars have confirmed something else as well: in the national army, the tone of morale drops almost from its first deployment in war. Already the reservists, not to mention the last-minute replacements, lack the esprit de corps that is proper to a long and carefully educated troop: the longer and harder the service required, the more rapidly the commitment to military duty and the behaviour of a troop made up of senior classes and reserve reservists decline.

Armies of this kind presuppose the use of the best prepared command forces for purposes other than actual troop command: complementary elements must take their place in this function. The lack of preparation must, moreover, be supplemented by the effectiveness of the material: but battles of material
cost the army the lives of its best forces. With the disappearance of the best from the point of view of war performance, the command once again sees itself exposed and increasingly reliant on poorly qualified reserve elements. The increase in equipment can also have a negative influence: it is true that qualified weapons and new instruments of war result in greater operability, but this is an effect that only occurs if they are placed in the hands of soldiers who know how they work and how to use them. Men, poorly trained and in too short a time, cannot be capable of handling weapons, the use of which poses the demand for high-level command and deployment, in a finalistic manner. Irresponsibly used equipment is deteriorated, damaged, falls into the hands

to the enemy or is otherwise lost: mistrust ensues and, consequently, a further lowering of morale.

Finally, the decisive influence of political unrest cannot be overlooked. Soldiers in the national army, non-commissioned officers and reserve officers - in general, all those who are soldiers not by vocation or profession, but as a result of occasional employment - bring with them from political life *slogans*, particular views and perhaps also personal convictions, the influence of which is strengthened the more methodically propaganda work and the formation of cells on the other side is carried out; germs of disorder penetrate the closed circle of the army, whose full and ready availability is severely hampered.

These processes are, moreover, not exclusive to modern armies. The crisis of Rome's citizen army basically presents an identical picture. Even then, there was an aversion to compulsory military service, especially on account of its duration and casualties, a lowering of the tone of discipline, deficient and inadequate instruction, excessive expenditure on material and general waste, distrust of command action, influences of political movements. The conscription of citizens and rural people showed no longer corresponded to the new demands imposed by imperial policy, the warlike peoples, which had to be faced, and the tactics of mounted combat, of which the Romans had no practice. The interminable wars led to an ever-worsening breakdown within the army: it became inevitable to run for cover. It was thus that Rome adopted the system of the professional army, that same path, on which tomorrow's evolution will have to take place.

In the professional army, there is not that atmosphere of compulsion, which sooner or later ends up negatively affecting the morale of a national army. Formed as it is of volunteers, military service is not an obligation for them but the substance of their lives. They have long periods of qualified education and learn to serve in the most profitable way of specialised arms, following officers, who spontaneously chose their activity and are prepared for their tasks. Their

morale is far less impressionable than it is, according to experience, in national armies.

The example of Rome applies not only to the advantages of the professional army, but also to the grey areas: the greatest danger lies in the tendency to create a world for one's own exclusive use.

An army like the professional army, committed to gaining its own autonomy, must keep away from all those manifestations that could undermine or even dissolve its morale: the professional army cannot conceive of itself without a esprit de corps and its own sense of honour. It tends to consider itself an organism in its own right, a state within the state: the renunciation by the majority of a people of the responsibility for its own defence can lead to the consequence that people and state are reduced to the condition of an object at the mercy of a professional army. In the last thirty years of the 2nd century B.C. the reins of power were grasped not by the leaders of politically revolting masses, like the great tribunes of the time, but by those Romans who had a professional army behind them: eventually, in the century of the emperor-soldiers, the situation is repeated, the proclamation of emperors being left to the arbitrary power of the armies.

The transition from the mass army to the professional army also ideologically represents a shift in power. The mass army corresponds in the government of public affairs to the rise and prevalence of the masses: these may well, like fatuous fires, advance rapidly, but it is rare for them to retain the positions they have attained. Capability is replaced by quantity, exactly the opposite of what is intended with the institution of the professional army. The ideals, which of
usually associated with the experience of war - valour, exaltation, spirit of sacrifice, comradeship - remain, in the case of the professional army, the jealous repository of a circumscribed group: they become the privilege of a social class, ultimately of a caste. Opposite it stands the rest of the population: masses that will eventually be absorbed by industrial mobilisation, where there is no need to bother with ideal representations, in order to achieve maximum performance. Coercion applies in this case.

Coercion can be exercised by spiritual means and is then called propaganda. There have always been urgings and appeals: they usually gather what is dormant in the hearts and only needs a spark, which sets the fire, to ignite. But propaganda serves to procure consensus for power, which is not available and is waiting to be aroused. It artificially generates opinions, which ordinarily correspond to the current policy but which do not
can count on being welcomed into the hearts of the masses: for
To make them take root in a soil, which only unwillingly receives foreign plants, requires constancy and an iron will to achieve the goal. Propaganda assumes that the people are not an organic product, but rather a mass of individuals, even if it is convenient to claim the contrary: aimed at uprooted beings and their defenceless instincts, it constitutes a veritable form of coercion, which only in appearance takes on the guise of persuasion.

Physical coercion is even stronger: through the mobilisation of the last man, women and children, even under the power of the professional army, the war remains total. This character that was characteristic of mass citizen armies, in their last form, is strengthened by the mobilisation of the masses: if before, the chances of winning the war
were based on both numbers and technical preparation, they now rest exclusively on the technique of warfare. The soldier in the city army could think in his heart that he was under arms for his homeland, for his family, for his home: on the contrary, in the new army, the soldier fulfils first and foremost the obligations of the profession, and the worker in war production, caught in the grip of industrial mobilisation, is only kept in service for the purpose of realising the technical preconditions. This means that those ideal stimuli, which more or less gave a halo to the soldier's life, fall away. A national army can exalt itself at the moment of battle to the last sacrifice, while, by throwing the men onto the sliding ribbon of war production, every glimmer of ideal light fades away. State coercion is revealed in its merciless reality.

The phenomenon appears in all its evidence especially in times of war: but already during peace, decisive steps must be taken if one wants to ensure

conditions, with which a successful war can be conducted. And this does not only apply to the structure and education of the professional army, but first and foremost to the armament, which it needs: one must continually renew their weapons and keep them in perfect working order and up-to-date with the latest developments. Ways and degrees of industrial mobilisation, planning of its structures, securing the stockpile of raw materials, preparation of the necessary machines and plans for readying them up to the limits of tolerance, everything must be solidly examined and fine-tuned: as war preparations proceed
Even before war breaks out, coercion, an unmistakable sign of its imminence, extends to the peace economy.

The police state indicates to each individual his place of work and obliges him to remain there, even if this is repugnant to him: it seeks to bind the individual to his maximum capacity for work and to prevent any misalignment both in production and in people. To the extent that each individual is compelled through the imperatives of the law, and in case of necessity, through physical coercion, to the profession or trade and the workplace, the work of propaganda proves superfluous: persuasion, even if formal, is replaced by the threat of punishment. Instead of the so-called work ethic, with which propaganda sought to influence minds, command takes over, instead of the citizen the state slave.

The character of the category of state officials and employees is also transformed. In the police state their number and importance grows, but whereas they were once entrusted with functions of direction, study, or administration, they are no more than pure organs of surveillance of the state's power of coercion: and as they must see to it that the course of the production process described above proceeds without stumbling, they are themselves subjected to constant surveillance. Just as they hold the threat of punishment hanging over the heads of those who are slow to perform the assigned task, they in turn are threatened with disciplinary measures, should they fail to keep all the gears of this state of slaves and ants in a perfect state of lubrication.

The state of the lower empire is fully within this framework. Economic compulsion, as a characteristic symptom, was already there for a long time

operating: the subjugation of settlers to the land and the system of compulsory guilds were a consequence of this. Taxes in kind, felt to be particularly oppressive, corresponded to the needs of the order given to the army by Diocletian: the city guilds became necessary to build the walls of the eternal city by order of Aurelian. Under the pressure of the demands imposed by constant border wars and civil strife, it was necessary to move to ever stricter regulation in every field: only in this way was it possible to preserve at least part of the ancient, crumbling economic structure. But the beginnings of the compulsory system date back to
much earlier: in Rome, signs of it are visible as early as the 2nd century, while in Egypt it has even earlier origins. As in other fields, Diocletian did nothing here but reduce long-standing processes into rigid forms.

Other forms, frequent in the chronicle of our time, find correspondences and analogies in that age. State propaganda with all its secondary manifestations had come into operation very early on. Horace had still been able to base the morality of his great Roman odes on the professional honour of the high magistrates: in place of this sentiment now came external coercion. In the writings of superiors to their employees, there was no longer any mention of professional dignity, but instead, in threatening ways, they were made to bear the responsibility for the consequences of even the slightest negligence. Every head of service vouched for his or her employees and every employee for his or her head of service with his or her property and, in case of need, with his or her freedom and life.

* * *

A continuous motion with a vast range and reciprocal influences had involved the ecumene. It had its starting point in the horse and the weapon of chivalry or, more precisely, armoured cataphracts and clibanarians had conquered the rank of the decisive weapon of combat: a new way of life, chivalrous customs and sentiments were heralded, and the Middle Ages began to take shape.

The Roman empire was surrounded by neighbours, who were historically still in the twilight zone: they stood, in a literal and metaphorical sense, on the edge of the ancient world. But the moment the new way of

fighting from horseback and was applied to war, these frontier peoples achieved a power of impact and penetration hitherto unknown. They became dangerous enemies and their assaults shook the empire to its foundations: Rome had to decide to renounce traditional methods of warfare and learn from the adversary.

The motion did not stop. Every profound military change had always been accompanied in the ancient world by other changes in a close interdependent relationship. Previously little-known races had come to the fore as the bearers of this change and had begun to make their own demands on history. Not only beyond the frontiers of the empire, but on its very soil, new races and peoples had emerged from the shadows, replacing the declining Italic nation in the leadership of the empire.

Among those in the front line were the Illyrians and the peoples of eastern Syria; these, Semites, the others an Indo-European lineage, and, behind them, waiting for their inheritance, Arabs and Germans. Both groups fought against each other for supremacy in the army and the empire. It would later appear that in this confrontation the stakes were even higher: both fought for the spiritual content of Rome.

Chapter VI

Eastern emperors

Adoption as the free choice of a child and heir assumed a particular prominence in the Roman view of life. What came into existence by natural means, it is as if it were dependent on chance and subject to the mood of a changing deity: whereas incomparably more favourable circumstances arise if one can choose according to one's will, in accordance with one's own vision. In the first case one often has heirs of blood of no value, while in the other one can associate with one's own person the most intelligent and best being. Adoption, an institution already long practised in private law, thus acquired capital importance in the succession to the throne.

The model came from Nerva with the solemn choice of Trajan as son and heir to the throne. Not the raw fact of kinship, but the intimate personal value of one and the other, of the one who chooses and the one who is chosen, so it was thought, created the mutual bond. A common commitment to the mission to be accomplished, a common vocation to the government of the state inextricably bound father and son. In other periods, the empire was the legacy
of a family circle: with adoption the choice was free and so at least one could compensate for the freedom long lost. "Not in the alcove' exclaimed Pliny the Younger addressing Trajan, 'but in the sanctuary, not before the conjugal bed, but before the asylum of Jupiter Optimus and Maximus has your adoption been accomplished, not to make us slaves, but for our freedom, health and safety'. Jupiter, contemptuous of all that is pure nature and exclusively private relations, guarantor of the political life of Rome, presided with his authority over the act, by which the best was chosen as the future ruler for the health of the state. And it matters not that the background to that imperial policy of adoption remains unsaid, that is, whether a virtue of necessity was made for lack of male offspring. In fact the principle was laid down and solemnly proclaimed; a whole century seemed to recognise itself in it.

Adoption was in this respect a clearly male-inspired institution, a pure manifestation of the spirit. Opposite to it, an opposing vision referred to the bond of natural dependence, where the decisive moment is no longer the spiritual succession in the work and mission, nor even the solidarity established between father and son, but solely the blood bond of the son with the mother who bore him: the one and the other feel one, because they are flesh of the same flesh. It is a feminine vision of the world that is expressed here.

Both conceptions had a prehistory: Roman adoption stood next to the Etruscan 'maternal right', the free choice of a child next to that natural intimacy, which made the Etruscan man feel and be designated as his mother's son. Roman domination had not brought about any change in this field: on the contrary, this female conception, substantially foreign to the Roman character, had gained ground where it was least expected. In the era of the Flavians, a component appeared in the name of the nobility of the Senate, declaring descent in the maternal line, which can only be explained as an influence of Etruscan custom: in the end, this new orientation also affected imperial dignity.

The first step was taken by a ruler, who was the last one to be expected. Marcus Aurelius designated his own son as successor to the throne: for his contemporaries it was like presenting them with an enigma. No one until then had so unconditionally represented the principles of the imperial policy of adoption, no one more than he had consecrated them with his own life. It was said that Marcus Aurelius' paternal love had not been blinded by human weakness, but that only his mother's insistence had driven him to recognise Commodus as heir to the throne.
Yet this interpretation manifestly fell into error: it was Marcus Aurelius himself who placed his son in the position he was to occupy in the future and underlined his decision with significant deeds. When Marcus Aurelius died, Commodus had been his colleague in the government of the empire for three years and assumed the succession without difficulty.

"My father preferred to call me his comrade rather than his son, as he considered this a purely physical bond, the other a bond in action and behaviour'. With these words Commodus seems to have expressed himself on his first appearance as emperor.

Did Marcus Aurelius believe that in his case natural succession and succession of the best coincided? Did he therefore accept the son's succession as a natural solution? Certainly the principle of adoption was violated and the natural succession returned. But by allowing nature to be given what seemed to be its due, the way was given to it: like watercourses that had been held back for too long, other forces, contrary to the spirit of classical antiquity, burst in, which also drew on nature and its impulses, and more generally on original forms of life.

It was precisely in Commodus that these forces resurfaced. Whether one gives his conduct the current judgement, tries to understand it or curses it, there can be no doubt in any case that with him a new type of man appeared on the scene, or rather that ancient and primordial instincts began to move in him again. Overwhelmed or stifled by classical antiquity, the primordial Mediterranean nature pressed towards daylight together with the almost forgotten forms of eastern autocracy. In the century in which antiquity sank, past worlds rose to the surface to pass with it into a new era.

The image of Commodus already speaks eloquently in itself: the heavy, sunken eyes, the gaze far beyond ordinary mortals, the pointed chin, the moistly folded mouth recall an Hapsburg infant or certain heads of the Greek. In that disdainful awareness of one's own very old lineage there is the feeling of being the unique measure of all things.

The very young ruler immediately asserted his imperial blood. The throne did not come to him from outside: it belonged to him by birth. He had come into the world in the imperial palace. As he emerged from his mother's womb, purple greeted him: daylight in him greeted the newborn and the emperor together. From three channels flowed imperial blood in his veins, and he was in fact immediately linked by descent in the female line to the emperors who had preceded him on the throne.

Birth and womb, the legitimate bond of blood and the order of female descent are the indefectible representations that are thus recalled. Everything was seen in its materiality, or rather corporeity. To which vision is connected the other: Commodus' pride in his well-proportioned and lovingly groomed body. He used to bathe it six or seven times a day: his hair and beard were such a shining blond that they were whispered to be sprinkled with gold dust. That was the time when Roman art, in the portrait of Lucius Verus as in that of
Commodus created exquisite specimens in the treatment of hair and Apuleius left us his splendid eulogy of women's hair. Everywhere a cult of the body took hold, which was
worshipped as a force, which with the magnificence of the senses and its dark impulses had a grip on the spirit and dominated it.

Commodus, eager to show off at every opportunity, derived his pleasure from the art of physical display, whether at the hippodrome or the circus. It was rumoured that the emperor had an innumerable *harem* of beautiful women and boys in the royal palace: nor was Commodus ashamed to publicly display that which exalted him. He lived his life and lived it in a manner that seemed worthy of a sovereign, indeed the only one worthy in his eyes to be in the full light.

During his triumph on his return from the Danube campaign, he turned on his chariot to the boy, who held Jupiter's golden crown on his head, and kissed him with his bent body: he did this several times and before the eyes of all. If Zeus and Ganymede offered him the model, if by the identification of the
triumphant with the god, the emperor drew this consequence, the god of the Roman state was certainly not before his eyes. Jupiter Optimus Maximus was outside all contingencies of marriage or birth, he was above all alien to all those amorous delights, which other times and places had generously attributed to him: the Roman feeling of divinity did not admit these lustful traits in the image of its supreme god.
For Commodus, on the contrary, in front of this virulently reserved Roman god, the representative of the state principle, reduced almost to an abstract concept, the ancient and flattering image resurfaced, allowing the ruler of heaven to live with all his senses and savour pleasure to the last drop.

And yet Commodus took what he regarded as a religion tremendously seriously. His standard of living drew from that same source as he seemed to profane the dignity of triumph. The emperor subjected himself to the cruel impositions of the oriental mysteries and likewise demanded of his fellow believers. Nor was this merely the fanaticism of an exotic religiosity expressed: the ruler of the ancient East was very close to the gods, but he had a duty to humble himself every year before the gods and do penance. The deepest abjection opened the way to the sublimity of a godlike majesty. Commodus drew on this tradition when he longed to experience on his flesh the horrors of a bloody treatment, when he gave material reality to what appeared to others to be only image and symbol.

Even in animal combat, so dear to Commodus, he displayed the same attitude. His confidence in archery was unsurpassed: with a single shot he would kill the most dangerous beast. The infallible shot in a hunting match was from primitive times the consecration of the Iranian king and hero: nor can we forget in this respect the representations in the ancient East of exterminators of lions and dragons. Mithras, the slayer of the bull, offered precisely at that time a model, present to everyone's soul. Presenting oneself as a gladiator and showing off one's victory in the arena are attitudes perfectly consistent with the model: the cult of Heracles and the consequent identification of the person of the emperor with that of the god represented its crowning and emblematic conclusion.

The aspiration for metamorphosis was irresistible in Commodus from an early age. It happened to see the emperor appear in the theatre in a robe of white Chinese silk, worked with gold threads and with wide sleeves according to Asian fashion: or he would appear with a diadem of Indian diamonds and in his hand the caduceus of the god Hermes. It would be called a masquerade, and it was much more: to appear under a divine mask is to represent how one's own being is penetrated by that divine power. Before Commodus was worn the skin of Heracles
together with his club; in the theatre, whether the emperor attended the performance or not, the servants placed one and the other on his golden throne. The hero, whose emblem had become that of the emperor, had by his deeds

subdued and pacified the terrestrial orb. His emulous on the throne called himself the 'invincible bringer of peace to the terrestrial orb' and the Roman Hercules.

The cult of the great wrestler, who had endured so many trials, was already alive under Commodus' predecessors: but the way in which he conformed to the model of Heracles remained his own personal experience. All that was exotic, primordial even if apparently new, pressed towards the light in the person of Commodus, was once again clothed in a traditional form. And yet Heracles, before he became the model of the patient man who overcomes all trials, already had his place in a pre-classical world: he had never been able to free himself entirely of the signs and ambiguity impressed upon him by that origin, signs and ambiguity that revived in Commodus' experience. The exploits of the Idian Dactylus and groom of the fifty Thespiads found an imitation in the orgies of the imperial palace in the same way as Onphale's servant.

Roman historians have always devoted their attention to the death of great personalities. The manner of death or the last words reveal once again the unrepeatable singularity of the character who leaves history. Contrary to the Greek spirit that even in the instant of death found the common element of universal law, the Roman's gaze rested on the unique and individual detail. Commodus died a victim of those same powers, which had shaped his life: in taking full possession of him, they annihilated him. The day before the emperor planned to move into the gladiators' barracks, his mistress handed him the chalice of poison and the wrestler, with whom he used to practise, overthrew his competitor and strangled him. A mysterious fate seems to have presided over the foundation of the Severan dynasty. It was something more than pure chance that led to the union of the Roman knight Lucius Septimius Severus from a city in North Africa and Julia Domna, a Syrian woman from a priestly family: and what was to follow this union was fraught with incalculable consequences.

From his youth, Septimius Severus had been a follower of the art of astral auspices: this inclination brought him close to an agonising death and opened up his great future. A "mathematician" had

predicted that he would attain imperial dignity, and he, destined to be emperor, sought a bride, born under the same signs, and found her in Julia Domna, whose nickname already foreshadowed the idea of sovereignty.

The people Septimius, originally from Leptis Magna, was honoured with the equestrian order and at least in part with the senatorial one: but her centuries-long residence in the Sirti had left indelible marks, which were also evident in Septimius Severus. He, cunning and overbearing, restless, changeable yet obstinate, ready to indignation and anger yet taciturn, greedy and economical, was a pure product of the African soil. The turmoil of the
his youth recall Augustine and the feeling of dependence on fate and magic the crime of which Apuleius was accused. Until the early imperial era, the name of his hometown was written on coins in Phoenician characters: the Punic language was still in common use, both in inscriptions and in family language. Septimius Severus spoke it fluently, alongside Greek and Latin, so much so that, despite the excellent education he had received, he always felt himself to be the Africanus until late in life. Septimius Severus always retained an awareness of the
his origin: having ascended the imperial throne, he embellished his native city with grandiose buildings. Carthage, Utica and Leptis were promoted to colonies of Italic right. He had the funeral monument of the greatest of the Carthaginians, Hannibal, rebuilt in marble in the distant Libissa in Bithynia, and authorised the use of the Punic language in judicial documents. The wife of Septimius was given divine worship as the heavenly Juno, tutelary goddess of the city of Carthage.

In a way, the emperor, by taking a Syrian woman as his bride, was returning to his origins. The man from the Semitic city on the African coast joined the powerful family of priests of the solar god of Emesa. The cult of the god had long since spread beyond the city's borders: pilgrims flocked from all parts of Syria and neighbouring countries. It was not long before he would also conquer Rome. The faith
in the omnipotence of the stars had united the imperial couple and they had themselves portrayed on coins under the aspect of the sun and moon. Here, too, ancient forces were returning to exert their arcane power within them. The stars, so it was taught, were lords of space and time, completely

and of the eternal: fate was in their hands and men subject to the paths they traced.

Septimius Severus adhered to this faith throughout his life: he was powerfully fascinated by whatever was secret or mysterious, whether found in magical writings or in the sayings of seers, or announced in the monuments of a past shrouded in mist. Strange dreams and omens accompanied him everywhere, so much so that the contemporary Dion Cassius could fill a book with them. Egypt, the land of wonders, was a great experience for Septimius: the cities of kings, the colossus of Mennon, the Serapeion and the tomb of Alexander attracted him with their enigmas. The Septizonium, lying at the south-east corner of the Palatine and the emperor's palace, bore the images of the gods of the seven planets and, in the centre, that of the sovereign.
In the interior of the palace, too, the images of the stars could be seen, but the sign, under which Septimius' birth and death stood, remained indistinct, so that no one could know when the hour of his death was fixed.

This man, who had faith in the stars, by which he allowed himself to be guided on his path, was wary that they would not turn against him. The death penalty struck those who had dared to question a Chaldean about the time of his birth. Distrust and suspicion accompanied Septimius everywhere and a secret obsession weighed on all his acts.
No one could be sure of the emperor's trust: even for the one who seemed to be an exception, the all-powerful Plautian, a ghost in a dream was enough for Septimius to lend an ear to his accusers. A subterranean feeling has been mentioned by the North African: in his representation of the firmament never an accent of liberation, but only closed and oppressive tones. It weighs heavily on man with its irrevocable law, which in the lonely soul of man turns into a cloak of oppression and anguish.

If Septimius' soul was filled with this universal feeling, his person instilled pity and terror. Whoever had once been his enemy he pursued relentlessly to the last: there was no place for generosity or forgiveness. Only the annihilation of the object of his hatred would put an end to the emperor's anguished distrust: and then he would rage against the

woman and the son of the fallen. Against this zone of shadow rayed in his eyes the security promised him by the stars and confirmed by ever new visions: it was by the grace of this consecration that he had forged an indissoluble bond with the bride, elected to him by destiny.

A marriage concluded under such auspices could not fail to accord from the outset a privileged position to the female half as well: Julia wanted to be not only the bride, but also the sovereign, as her name dictated. Admirers celebrated her as a philosopher, and in reality she was a woman of high culture, a fine spirit: she loved to surround herself with the philosophers and sophists of the time and was fond of displaying her philosophical knowledge at official meetings. To her circle belonged Arria, to whom Diogenes Laërtius thought of dedicating his lives as a philosopher and who deserved the esteem and admiration
of Galen. There belonged Elianus, the poet Oppianus and Gordianus, who, before becoming emperor, dabbled in poetry: and also Ulpianus, Papinianus and Paulus, the great jurists of the time, but above all Philostratus, who, inspired by the empress, wrote the life of Apollonius, the magician of Tyana. This reveals whose spiritual daughter Julia was.

Septimius Severus and Julia had also met in their common tendency towards mystery and the marvellous. But Severus' attitude had an all-male gravity: that arcane knowledge was for him a source of power and security, and trade with the otherworldly world was transformed into a fever of activity, constant agitation, a thirst for revenge. A longing for security also lurked behind the woman's behaviour: but she was incomparably more fragile, full of abandonment, greedy for comfort. With Julia appears in the history of religions that feeling that is defined as the 'need for religion'.

There are times when religion seems to coincide with the need to satisfy this need. Faith is then generated from this intimate nostalgia: but faith and doubt belong together like light and shadow. One and the other condition each other: only in a religiously dissident world can faith and nostalgia for faith coexist at the same time. Achilles and Alexander, the great heroes *of the Edda,*
outspoken Romanity knew no such motion of the soul: for them, the gods simply existed. They were an immediate reality and

natural: there is still a reflection of this in Severus' behaviour. Behind Julia's anxieties and efforts, on the other hand, the consciousness of the fall and guilt emerges, a consciousness that appeared to be given at one and the same time with the man's personal existence.

Busts and coins show us the expressive head of this woman, hunched and full, but with an incisive relief; a strongly curved nose and above her massive chin a warm, sensuous mouth. Her beauty, it was said, was surpassed only by her rudeness. Yet not only did the emperor tolerate her at his side, but great was her power over him. In the
Desperate cases turned to her, and indeed she was sometimes able to soften the emperor's harsh ferocity with her intervention. Only the prefect of the militia, Plautian, represented a dangerous rival in the husband's favour, at least until his son Caracalla, in whom she found an ally, caused the favourite's downfall.

On this basis Settimio's rule rested: he soon found himself in the need to think about the future of his house. For a time he made believe that he was in favour of the adoptive system, but his mask soon fell off. His eldest son Caracalla was appointed Caesar and his successor: then it was the turn of the younger Geta, who had at first been excluded from succession to the throne. The imperial father boasted of leaving the state two heirs to the throne, like Antoninus Pius, but while the latter had annexed them to his house by adoption, he, Septimius, gave Rome two sovereigns by birth. But at the same time he sought to confer on his own lineage that legitimacy which it lacked, and by making the series of the ancestors of Commodus his own, and raising this "brother" of his
" to the rank of *Divus.* The confirmation of the principle of natural succession was emphasised by elevating Julia to the honours of 'mother of Caesar'. She thus received, the same year that Caracalla was appointed to the succession, the ancient honorary title in use in the *harem of the* East.

Anxiety and suspicion, the spirit of vengeance and cunning, the questioning of the stars, as well as the favourable treatment of soldiers and the establishment of a guard of praetorians, all stemmed in Septimius from the same germ: anxiety for security. All his thought was directed towards it, and he sought
to compel by all means, if necessary by magic, what one does not

freely conformed to this aspiration of his. To this faith in the stars and in destiny, which had pointed out the bride to Septimius and made all other considerations overcome, to this security, promised to him by the gods corresponded in the succession to the throne the choice in favour of the heir of the blood.

An oracle from Syria had prophesied to the emperor of his future greatness, but had not hidden from him that his house would perish in blood. The father left no stone unturned to secure the future at least for his children. He left them a treasure, the like of which no-one had ever before bequeathed to their descendants: their mother, Julia, was represented in the figure of 'Concordia', watching over the peaceful agreement of her children.
A golden statue of Fortune, which accompanied the sovereign on his travels and which he kept in his chamber, was made into a double copy, so that each son would have his own 'Fortune'. It was as if the man devoted to his own goddess wanted to reduce everything to the paths traced by his will.

Septimius' plans collapsed. His aspirations have been shattered by the very forces on which he relied. Blood and kinship, understood in their crude materiality, as magical powers and bonds, develop their own singular demonism: and it was to the dark powers of blood that the emperor was forced to give up the reins. This father, in every other case inexorable and deaf to complaints, always yielded to his children.
Although he foresaw what was to come, he only forgave and admonished. So he did, when he caught Caracalla plotting against his own life, nor did he behave differently when faced with the bloody quarrel between his two sons. But if Septimius felt far too attached and indulgent towards his own blood, this blood in his sons had diverted into a fury, which set them against each other. What should have united them and made them secure had broken out in a sudden and angry revolt and had broken all restraint. The imperial dignity shared by the two brothers, in which Septimius saw the support of his dynasty, had generated hatred
each other: from the union, which seemed to be perfect, came deadly discord and hatred. The hatred, which began when the father was still alive, did not subside until Caracalla had taken his younger brother out of the way.

Geta, his mother's favourite, had inherited the nature of the Syrian woman and her race: the taste for feasts and pleasures, the joy of leading an amiable life, in which free and friendly forms found a place. He won hearts more easily than his brother with his inhuman sneer, but he was also softer, more effeminate, announcing in
this an Heliogabalus and an Alexander Severus, beings raised entirely under their mother's wings. It was not a coincidence that Geta was subjected to his unscrupulous brother and cut into a harder material, nor that the fatal blow reached the young man on his mother's breast.

Much of Septimius' nature continued to act in Caracalla. He had inherited from his father the feeling of inexorable rancour, but the thirst for blood had changed in the son into ferocity, the cunning into fraud and malice. If Septimius tried to lean on the army, Caracalla flattered the soldiers and showered them with gifts. He spoke to the praetorians as comrades and in times of danger went so far as to call them his benefactors. As for him, he wanted to be no more than a common soldier, sharing his bread with them and preceding them in their work. The simple man, who saw the sovereign, in spite of his appearance, not shying away from any physical exertion, accorded him in return a boundless devotion.

For the first time, the barbarians, who had become a role model for the emperor, found in him a force with which to impose their will. Caracalla showed himself in Germanic costume, with a blond wig and his hair knotted in the manner of the Germans: the Germans and Scythians formed his bodyguard and always kept unlimited loyalty to him.
Caracalla, on the other hand, held justice in no regard, and whoever brought one of his men before the court, he branded him a coward. Culture, fine and elevated traits were for him an object of derision: the basest instincts of soldiery had taken possession of his soul.

Already in the chubby face of the young Caracalla, we are struck by the puffy, ball-like eyes and the impertinent nose; in his adult torso, the man is before us with all his notes: the brutality and impatience of his manners, the vulgarity of his low forehead, the malice of his sad and rancorous eyes. One can understand how Caracalla could rejoice when an oracle compared him to

a ferocious beast: vulgarity became a way of life in him. Yet this man too had fantasies of a lesser nature: the world-conquering Macedonian was his model. The outward imitation of Alexander crept into his every action, took on the most diverse forms and shone like a fatuous fire, even when the advancing obscenity could no longer be denied.

When Caracalla stopped in Macedonia, he dedicated statues to his idol, the heads of which bore half the emperor's face and the other half that of the great Macedonian: in addition, a Macedonian phalanx was assembled and its commanders were given the name of Alexander's generals.
Weapons and tools believed to have once been used by the conqueror of the world, his late follower took them for his own use. Satire could not be missing in the end, all the more so in a city like Alexandria, which claimed mockery and laughter as its privilege.
It found easy nourishment in the contrast between the petty figure of the emperor and the heroes he had chosen as models, Alexander and Achilles. But just as the mockery had its poisoned tip in the name of the Great King, so did Caracalla's revenge. He made it known that he intended to enlist among the citizens of Alexandria a phalanx worthy of the name of their great patron; on the unwary, who without suspicion took the bait, he exercised his bloody retribution.

The great name of Alexander, who had acted with his prestige in this shot, helped the misunderstanding in another questionable venture of Caracalla. He let it be believed that he wanted to take the daughter of the Parthian king as his wife, and as the Parthians showed up for the wedding, he had them slaughtered. Parthians and Romans, he implied, were to unite: their different ways of fighting and economic conditions indicated the opportunity for mutual integration between the two peoples. United under one crown they could have subjugated the whole earth. In the union thus proposed, Alexander's thought of creating with the Macedonians and Persians a new people of rulers was revived. But Caracalla behaved in the ways of the age: his was but the vain and cruel dream of a madman.

An Alexander of a different kind - the ruler of the world, who also included the peoples subject to the empire's rule, i.e. an eastern Alexander - was the model for the author of the *Constitutio*

Antoniniana by which Italic citizenship was conferred on all foreigners.

Under Caracalla the importance of Julia grew even more: at certain times the care of all affairs was left to her. But the hand of that uncouth and ferocious being also weighed on his mother. She tried, like a new Jocasta, to reconcile the two quarrelsome children each time, without ever tiring. The idea of dividing the empire between the two was put forward to end the quarrel,
she would have preferred to be split in two than to acquiesce. Then the horrible thing had happened: Geta had bled in Julia's arms. But Caracalla's savage nature forced her to hide her grief and show her happy, smiling face.

It is also believed that the son did not flinch before the extreme horror. To him, who desired her, Julia is said to have replied "What is permitted is permitted" and with these words she taunted and aroused him. Again Julia was Jocasta: with this difference, that she performed, wide-eyed and possessed by her demon, what a pitiful destiny had hidden from the other until the hour of death.

Caracalla thus received the death that was his due. He was on his way to bring a sacrificial offering to the god of his maternal ancestors: at the moment when he was fulfilling a need and the guard had withdrawn, the avenging iron struck him. Luriously, as he had lived, he left.

The family of Septimius Severus, seen from the perspective of history, represented the union of Carthage and Syria in the Near East. The collateral branch of the dynasty, which came to the throne with Heliogabalus, remained in the same circle. Julia's sister Mesia had married her daughters to Syrians of the equestrian order: Septimius had not wanted this branch to be on an equal footing with him. The groom of Soemias nevertheless successfully pursued his
career. Under Caracalla, after a period of extreme favour for the equestrian order, the highest magistracies of the capital were in his hands: and his and his brother-in-law's inferiority in social rank was amply compensated for by the renewed bond with the maternal *humus of* the family. Emesa remained for Mesia and her descendants the homeland, also in a spiritual sense. The city, one of the most fanatical, then as now, of all

Syria, found the reason for their existence in the worship of the sun god. While Julia had given herself to contemporary philosophy, Mesia and her people remained devoted to the god of their homeland, who was as powerful and jealous a god as any of his race. Mesia had personally seen to it that the his two nephews became priests of the sun god, and Heliogabalus, even after ascending the throne, continued to feel that he was the god's servant.

The god was of Arab origin, as was, according to the name, the priestly family. But whatever name Heliogabalus had, posterity has simply given him the name of his god: even if he never bore it, justification is implicit in the designation. Heliogabalus' will and actions were directed towards the service of his heavenly Lord, and he had nothing else in mind but that his god should also become the Lord of Rome. So he did not content himself with uniting him in marriage to the sky goddess of Carthage, but had the sacred treasures of the Roman religion, the stone of the Great Mother, the shield of the Salii, the fire of Vesta, brought into the temple of the new god.

. Rome then experienced extraordinary spectacles. In Emesa, in a shrine adorned with gold and precious stones, was preserved the stone of the god that had fallen from the sky. It was brought to Rome and Heliogabalus dedicated a sumptuous shrine to it. At public festivals Heliogabalus danced as a priest around the altar, accompanied by choirs of Syrian maidens, with their cymbals and drums. Around him stood senators and knights, spectators of the exotic ceremony, while the holders of the highest offices, dressed, according to Syrian custom, in white linen, lent their support to the rite of sacrifice.

Another temple to the god of Emesa was erected at the gates of the urbe. At the height of summer, the emperor carried the sacred stone to the villa. Six steeds of resplendent white pulled the vehicle, on which no mortal was allowed to ride, nor anyone to hold the guides, who were left free around the sacred stone, since the god himself, it was believed, led the pull. Heliogabalus preceded in the lead car, turned back, so as not to look away from his god.

Heliogabalus' tenor of life aroused the indignation of his contemporaries: he seemed to indulge in the basest of impulses with enthusiasm. There are few nefarious deeds that have not been held against him or for which he has not been

considered capable: and yet what at first sight seems simple and clear, was in truth complex and determined by harsh tendencies
contrasting. In the figure of Heliogabalus, a complicated lust for enjoyment alternates with the abandonment and absolute freedom of the mystic, refinement,
whim and whimsy with religious fanaticism: sensuality and religious devotion formed a strange mixture in him.

It seems that states of ecstasy were not unknown to him: the longed-for self-violation, which fits in so poorly with his habit of debauchery, was intimately linked to motives of a religious nature. Just as the supreme pontiff, who was also the emperor, provided his lord God with one after another brides from the most diverse parts of the heavens, so Heliogabalus united himself with the most diverse women, from whom he immediately parted: as among the divine brides was the Palladium, taken from the temple of Vesta, so among the earthly ones was the vestal. God and emperor were subject to the same law, and it may be that Heliogabalus found justification for his conduct in the union of a priest with a priestess.

Perhaps in another sensational episode, which gave rise to a major scandal, there is also a religious play. If it was fitting for the emperor to offer himself as a love commodity, it was fitting that he should be rewarded with money. Did the sacred prostitution that flourished in Syria provide the model? Even in Carthage at the service of the virgin, whom Heliogabalus had given in marriage to his god, such prostitution was in use.
practices. They aroused the indignation of polemicists for a long time Church fathers: to the virginal goddess, they said, were presented things, which even a married woman could learn as a brand new science.

Not only here, moreover, did Heliogabalus like to present himself in a female role. At Emesa, as a young priest, he was splendid to behold with the precious diadem, the golden purple robe, under which, according to Oriental custom, he wore long trousers of the same fabric. The delicate splendour of youth matched the figure of feminine loveliness: he was compared to the young Dionysius. As an emperor he exhibited himself dressed in Chinese silk, with a painted face, necklaces and fine
female drapes: she seemed to have completely renounced nature

male and only when forced to, he wore the toga. 'Among the bird-like Arabs,' C. M. Doughty remarks, 'it is the male sex that shows itself adorned and adorned with multi-coloured feathers. M. Doughty remarks: "It is the male sex that shows itself adorned and adorned with multi-coloured feathers. With long hair parted on both sides, with eyes artificially bistrusted with blue, the petite head of the Arab, under the coloured turban, has more than feminine reflexes, and indeed in other respects they resemble females'. In the relationship between Heliogabalus and his mother, the decisive function of the female element finds expression once again.

Mother and son lived in perfect harmony as if they had been created for each other. Once at court and recognised as Augusta, Soemias unashamedly indulged in all debauchery: it was publicly judged that the mother was worthy of the son. She made use of her influence everywhere; she accompanied her son to the Senate and to the barracks; but she never heard that
had distracted him from his intemperance. Nothing happened without the consent of Soemias: but where a word of restraint was needed, she was silent. The emperor continued to live his wild life. Favourites, companions of his debaucheries, reigned supreme.
Dancers, actors, coachmen, hairdressers, once they had proved themselves in court orgies, were called upon to hold the highest offices: until finally, the unspoken indignation of the Senate and the people was joined by the open revolt of the capital's garrison.

In a desperate situation Soemias had already once engaged in the fight on behalf of his son. When Heliogabalus, proclaimed emperor by the legions of Syria, clashed in open battle with his antagonist Macrinus, his militia had succumbed: on that occasion Soemias, together with his mother Mesia, had approached the fugitives and stirred them up to resist and retake the initiative. Now that the soldiers were threatening to abandon Heliogabalus and turn to the side of Mamea's son, Soemias was again in the front line. To the astonished eyes of the citizens a strange spectacle offered itself: the two cousins, Heliogabalus, hitherto emperor, and Severus Alexander, designated to succeed him, were publicly bringing their quarrel before the praetorians. In the courtyard of the barracks, in a tumultuous nocturnal assembly, they decided on the empire. To the two mothers
was granted the right to speak. The daughters of Mesia, two mothers, the one

the other sister, they were facing each other, overpowering each other with their voices and casting hateful glances at each other, fighting for themselves and their children: they fought, each hoping to survive that night. At dawn the last followers abandoned Heliogabalus: he died together with his mother, who held him close to her breast until the last moment. The corpses were decapitated and dragged away: the mother's was thrown into some song, the son's torso into the Tiber.

The open antagonism between Mamea and Soemias, which ended in this tragic end, had only recently erupted. It had begun when Heliogabalus had been forced to take his slightly younger cousin as his son and thus as co-ruler: but in a way it was latent in their nature.
Soemias and Mamea were a mismatched pair of sisters, much like their cousins Caracalla and Geta.

Julia Mesia had spread the rumour that Caracalla had fathered children with her cousins. Mesia's aim was obvious: to create a state of legitimacy where none existed. Soemias reinforced this rumour, making it his own with good reason. Mamea also spread the rumour of her secret affair with Caracalla, but, unlike her sister, never admitted it publicly. Her elder sister's life of ambition and unruliness remained alien to her: but she too was a mother and therefore interested with the very roots of her being in the life of her son.

Mamea had Alexander educated, lavishing him with care and trying to preserve him from all vices. With the help of soldiers she personally watched over the life of her Alexander, who was threatened by Heliogabalus. She held the government in her hands until her son was a minor and continued to hold it even when, having become a man, he was to assume the
command. A creature in everything of his mother and grandmother, Alexander
He never ceased to be: his love of peace made him recoil in horror from every military endeavour, and the slightest effort showed how precarious his health was. By his meek surrender he hoped to give his power the security and stability that his predecessors had lacked.

In this desire for security the mother and son met, but the mother thought to achieve the goal by other means. Already Septimius Severus,

In order to secure the future for his children, he had amassed enormous wealth. For him, in truth, money was just one means among others; for Mamea, on the other hand, it undoubtedly represented power and salvation. The demon of possession, once awakened, no longer abandoned her: she was no longer able to part with her treasures, even if it was worth using them in her and her son's interest. The emperor's mother was accused of greed, and the son was powerless against this passion.

After the fate of Jocasta befell Julia Domna, the tragedy of maternal love is revealed for a second time. Taken by love for her son and always ready to make any sacrifice for the sole purpose of obtaining and preserving his power, Mamea nevertheless leads her protégé to ruin. For it is precisely these[1] cares, properly maternal cares, that are the cause of the ruin of the son, when the latter does not set a limit to it by his will. Maternal love otherwise becomes short-sighted and the constant concern for security achieves the opposite end to the desired one.

But in the folds of maternal love, nestling in the depths of female nature, another demon stirs, jealously watching that no other woman takes possession of her son's heart. The Alexander-Mamea relationship lies in that area that the Irish visionary and poet defined with the words 'sons and lovers'. This mother led
herself to her son his first bride and as the marriage appeared happy, by her brutal intervention she forced its dissolution. Mamea's heart was swollen with inordinate pride: she envied the other the title of Augusta and even more so.

Soemias and Mamea with the best part of their being were mothers: but they were no more than that. The damage that one did by yielding everything to her son, the other did by keeping him always bridled. The power of the house of Emesa rested on other foundations. In the face of the feeble successors, which Julia Mesia had in her daughters and grandchildren, her personality was not far removed from a certain spiritual greatness. She too had lust for possession and wealth in her heart, but unlike Mamea she also knew how to hunger for use.

Sister of the emperor, she had lived at court for a long time. Her son-in-law, the husband of Soemias and father of Heliogabalus, had held the most responsible positions in the administration of finances; indeed, he seems to have been the

first to publicly declare alongside his public appointments the salary he received. Mesia took advantage of this to procure a fortune and one can guess how she managed it. But then came the collapse.
When Caracalla was assassinated, the new ruler exiled her. She
She returned to her homeland and took all her possessions with her: as Letizia Bonaparte prepared the way for the new fortunes of her family, which, unlike her Corsican mother, she herself was able to raise. In Emesa Mesia she lived with her relatives: for her, who craved the highest power, it was intolerable to be reduced to the status of a subject. With secret joy she observed the errors of Macrinus, which alienated the hearts of the soldiers from him: his effeminacy, his neglect of the affairs of state, his lifestyle of excessive luxury and lack of soldiery. Mesia soon went on the attack. A legion was camped near Emesa and it was not long before the soldiers came to the city, where they saw the nephew of Mesia, Heliogabalus, in the glory of his priestly dignity. His beauty won the hearts of those rough soldiers, and immediately the wily Syrian spread the rumour that he was the son of Caracalla. She counted on the soldiers' attachment to the emperor, who was still on everyone's lips, and she did not hope in vain.

At night Mamea appeared with his men in the camp: the soldiers proclaimed Heliogabalus emperor. The unpopularity of Macrinus, the memory of Caracalla's generous handouts and above all the money, which Mesia spread profusely, decided the course of events. Macrinus did not attach much importance to the revolt. When he eventually sent troops to suppress the uprising, as the attackers approached, from the top of the walls of the city, Heliogabalus was shown: a youthful portrait of Caracalla had been placed next to him to confirm Heliogabalus' birthplace with the evidence of resemblance. The spectacle was not without effect: Macrinus' soldiers lost the will to fight. Yet once again fortune seemed to favour Macrinus. In the decisive battle before the walls of Antioch the troops of Heliogabalus' followers were about to succumb. Then Mesia and Soemias got out of the chariot: with their prayers and promises they managed to persuade the hesitant to resist.
It was Macrinus himself who brought about the defeat by abandoning his cause prematurely: having shaved his beard, in a hasty disguise, he tried to flee, and in his flight his fate caught him.

Mesia had achieved her aim: but again everything seemed to be called into question. The women tried to direct Heliogabalus as far as they could, but this time Moesia's intervention could not counterbalance the continuing scandal of his life. She watched as Heliogabalus' unpopularity grew: she sensed the end. Again the spectre of a relapse into the sad condition of subjection rose before her.

Faced with this fate, she made the decision to set Heliogabalus aside and put the docile son of Mamea in his place. No decision could have been harder for her: she had always lived, schemed, acted for her own flesh and blood. But she had no doubt: the infected member had to be cut off to save the whole organism. Mesia once again went resolutely to her work: together with the rise of Alexander, the ignominious end of Heliogabalus. Nowhere is it said that she intervened in what was to come: but when all was accomplished, she came forward again. She took the initiative again, with complete awareness, even allowing the memory of the slain to be cursed, since a more fortunate government seemed to be inaugurated, one that would definitively secure the sovereignty of her family. For four more years she savoured the joy of power: fate spared her from seeing the end with her own eyes.

* * *

After the Syrians, on the imperial throne the Bedouins. Maximinus, at whose hands Alexander Severus fell, the senate emperors by whom Maximinus was eliminated, were only an interlude. Their successor Philip came from south-east Syria, at the foot of the Druze massif.

The ancient Traconitide is a frontier land, beyond which the desert opens up: it stretches as far as the volcanic deserts of western and central Arabia. A dark grey stone covers those lands and gives the villages, built with that material, their characteristic appearance. In the Gebel Druso, the land thickens into wild, sharp massifs or arches into peaks and domes of burnt black or sulphurous yellow. This bleak landscape, exuding cruelty and loneliness, was Philip's homeland.

An old tradition held that his father had been a brigand. Nomads and raiders, landowners and notables in this country were essentially indistinguishable from one another. He may indeed have been a Bedouin sheikh; but as everywhere, he adapted to the associated life,
As the territory of Gebel Drusus was also covered with settlements, so the former tribal chieftain became a member of the municipal aristocracy.
After his death, his son dedicated a cult to him in his hometown.

Philip had the same significance for imperial policy as the emergence of the Palmyrene archers had for the evolution of the army: in both cases the semi-barbaric frontier areas on the edge of the desert took the place of the lush region of eastern Syria. The bleak nature of the Traconitic landscape, its pitiless harshness communicated itself to the inhabitants: Philip aimed at the throne with cold calculation, he knew he
can only be achieved by setting aside scruples and mercy.

Gordian III was thirteen years old when he ascended the throne: his two colleagues in the government had fallen victim to the savage will of the praetorians, who instead of their victims raised the child to the throne. Led by the hand every step of the way, the child emperor ultimately found himself under the guardianship of the prefect of the guards, Timositheus, who, although in fact he had everything in his hands, had refrained from taking the final step, limiting himself to giving his daughter in marriage to the young emperor.

In the course of his victorious exploits against the Persians, Timositheus died and was succeeded in rank by Philip. By shrewdly adopting restrictive measures on food rations, he succeeded in raising the army against the young and inexperienced Gordianus. As in the case of Heliogabalus and Alexander, the soldiers had to choose who should be emperor: the rightful incumbent or the one who had hitherto been
subject and was now revealed to be a usurper. It was soon clear that the atmosphere was hostile to Gordian. It is said that he prayed that, if he was no longer wanted as Augustus, he should be retained as Caesar, or given the post held by Philip, or any other office. At

finally begged for his life. Everything was denied him. Philip watched the degrading scene, unmoved and apparently indifferent, but secretly manoeuvring every move. For a moment he considered whether prudence wanted him to show mercy: then he ordered that the whimpering creature be taken away, his imperial insignia torn from him, and that he be killed.

The new emperor did everything in his power to wash away the stain that was at the origin of his assumption of the throne. He ordered solemn funerals for his predecessor, whom he had had assassinated, and paid him divine honours: he paid homage in every form to the senate, which hated the usurper. But nothing could make him forget: discontent and gloom took deep root in the emperor's soul. Thus all his busts show us, with the vertical crease at the root of the nose, the angled lashes, the lips jutting out in a gloomy grimace. As in so many of his countrymen, the profile resembles the dromedary's unsteady expression in its mute anguish. Slowly Philip abandoned the attitude he had initially assumed. He showed himself lenient towards the Christians, who were then growing in numbers on the fringes of the Holy Land: that Christianity, which everyone spoke of in his native places, was much more familiar to him than the prehistoric pomp of Roman religion. In Baalbeek he built the hexagonal vestibule, symbol of Baal and the astral gods: he now turned to the worship of his family and his home country.

The new Philippopolis rose at the foot of the Drusus massif: as an imperial foundation it was built not in the style of the place, but in that of the capital. The funerary temple of Philip's father occupied the centre of the city: portraits of the entire family were placed in it.
The ancient Bedouin sheikh was promoted by his imperial son to divinity. But Philip's attachment to his family was not limited to these monumental and cult-like honours. He thought of his own for positions of command: to his brother he entrusted the administration of all the territories of the East; two of the great frontier armies were in the hands of close relatives and thus any danger of defection seemed removed.

And yet the rebellion against Philip broke out there. The brother's choice had not been a happy one at all. The tax burden without possible

temperaments, which was imposed in the East under his rule, immediately brought two pretenders to the scene: neither could be defeated. Less serious seemed the revolt of the Danube legions, who themselves soon afterwards overthrew the emperor, whom they had chosen. But this very uprising sealed Philip's fate.

The emperor sent one of his most trusted men to the Danube border to restore order there. Decius was himself a native of Illyria: he knew the situation well and foretold the emperor what was to happen. He ordered the fierce repression of the rebels and defeated the external enemy: but his troops proclaimed him emperor and forced him to accept. At this juncture Decius appealed to the confidence of the sovereign: that he should rest assured, as soon as he, Decius, had returned to Rome, he would lay down the insignia of his illegitimate office. Philip was not a man to be trusted. And he believed he had better provided for his own security: he had long since concentrated his troops in the north-east for the defence of Italy. So all that remained was the decision of arms. In Verona 'the Arab' fell fighting in the front line.

But the government of the East did not have to adapt to this new situation. The focal point moved to the emperor's own homeland: eastern Syria became the centre and starting point of a new empire. Ten years after Philip's death, Odenath founded the power of Palmyra: a woman of royal vocation, as Julia Domna and her sister Mesia had been, was at his side and took over his succession.

Palmyra, nothing more than a city subjected by Tiberius to Hadrian, had been promoted by Hadrian to the rank of a free city, and by Septimius Severus to that of a Roman colony. It was not until the middle of the 2nd century that a lively independence movement began, prepared by the appointment of Palmyrian notables to the highest offices of the imperial administration and the urbe.

"Odenath, son of Hairan, senator" is recorded in an inscription from 230. He was the first in a series ending with the founder of the power of Palmyra, who bore the same name: this first Odenath was given the title of senator under the Syrian emperors. Son of Odenath
was Septimius Hairam, senator like his father and also 'exarch of the Palmyraeans

". In this vague appellation, the aspiration to secure Palmyra and its first family a position of independence is evident. That was the time when two usurpers were coming forward in Emesa: in both neighbouring cities, local potentates were trying to establish themselves, in Palmyra with greater foresight and luck than in the homeland of the sun god.

When, after the catastrophe of Valerian, it seemed that Rome's dominion over the East was falling apart, the right man was found at the right time, Odenath, probably younger brother rather than son of the 'exarch': he openly called himself lord of Palmyra. The title he claimed was matched by action: in the struggle that flared up between Persians and Romans, he intervened on behalf of the latter, who would be the victors and, under the guise of serving Rome, laid the foundations of his own rule over the East.

Palmyra had strong economic interests in lower Iraq and the Persian Gulf. The inscriptions reflect the extent to which its trade relations had reached. Caravans travelled along the course of the Euphrates as far as the Shatt-el Arab: everywhere the Palmyrians had their own warehouses, and even on the coast they had their own warehouses. From the Persian Gulf ports, such as Spasinu Carace and Forat, they sailed as far as India. The most important import commodity was Chinese silk, which reached the West via Ceylon: incense from Hadramaut, its place of origin, also reached the mouth of the Euphrates via the trading metropolis of Gerrha. The resurgent power of the Sassanids threatened this vital vein of Palmyra. Ardashir I had occupied Spasinu Carace and Forat. Odenath tried to reach an understanding with Shapur I, but every approach was rejected by the haughty ruler. Thus it came to war. Three times Odenath penetrated into the heart of Persian territory; and if he did not succeed in conquering Ctesiphon, he again freed the road to the Persian Gulf and ensured the transit of caravans.

Odenath was not content with the positions he had achieved. Once victorious, he assumed the title of king, probably as a champion of the Arsacid cause against the Sassanids. It is known that his most direct collaborators were fugitives, partisans of the Arsacids, who in Palmyra still retained their ancestral name and were represented in Iranian costume: a

their origin and ancient position at the court of the Arsacids had ensured a favourable reception.

Odenath, as the name indicates, was of Arab origin. As in Emesa, so too in Palmyra the ruling class was of Bedouin stock, the same social stratum to which Philip the Arab belonged. Likewise, the archers enlisted among the nomadic and semi-nomadic vassals of Palmyra constituted the basis of the military draft: with them, however, the brilliant cavalry formations of the Sassanids could certainly not be beaten. Odenath, probably on the advice of his trusted Parthians, created armoured militia corps according to the Iranian model. They enabled him to wage war against Shapur I with increased energy.

After the defeat of Valerian, Odenath had taken over the direction of imperial policy in the East, which was now in his hands. As *dux Romanorum he* commanded the remnants of the Roman army in the East, had fortifications built on the *limes* of Chalkis, and in Damascus, Emesa and other cities in Syria, inaugurated new buildings in the name of Gallienus. Towards the end of his life he also waged war against the Goths, who had invaded Asia Minor. However, he never came into open conflict with the central power of Rome. His thinking was perhaps that his own interests coincided with those of the empire: but it could hardly escape him that sooner or later a time must come when his own power would be at odds with the imperial insignia of Rome.

The defection to Rome occurred only with Odenath's bride, Zenobia, who succeeded him on the throne. If Odenath had always kept his eyes fixed on his Sassanid neighbour, in whom he had seen his natural enemy and rival, with Zenobia Rome and the western world came to the fore. Zenobia coveted for her sons, in whose name she ruled, the dignity of 'Augustus'. Imperial insignia appeared on the coins of Palmyra, and Roman court ceremonial replaced that of Iran.
Zenobia took up the tradition of the great empresses of the Emesa dynasty.

It has already been observed that this eagle-eyed, regal-looking woman with a warm and sombre voice was born with the vocation of the position she occupied. She claimed to be descended from Cleopatra, but unlike the

the wife of Ptolemy, she was perfect on horseback and, even more so, tolerated long marches: she could keep up with her man in hunting and drinking. She knew the value of money and knew how to conserve it, rarely lavishing her own gold. She mastered the Greek language better than the Latin, but the great past of Rome was constantly before her eyes. She also seems to have tried her hand at Alexandrian history and the East in general: this participation in the literary life of the time highlights a new difference from Odenath. Like a second Julia Domna, she attracted numerous intellectuals to her circle: the Neo-Platonist Longinus, originally from Emesa on her mother's side, was her teacher and political advisor. When, after Plotinus' death, his disciples dispersed, Longinus tried to lure them to the East. Amelius answered the call and settled in Apamea. Porphyry was also invited, who by birth was
of Tyre, but he could not make up his mind: Palmyra was neither Athens nor Rome. The friendship shown to the philosophers was for show: on which Amelius himself had no illusions.

Zenobia was also mother and queen at the same time. It is said that she only gave herself to her husband in order to perpetuate her lineage. She gave her children the Latin education, which she lacked: she educated them to become rulers, in the not too distant future, even Romans. When Zenobia's generals had subdued Egypt, she first had them coin
of the coins, which on one side bore the image
of the emperor Aurelian and on the other that of his son Valballath. Then it was
the decisive step: the image of the Roman was removed from the coins. In the spring of 271 he had completely independent coins minted: it was the definitive break.

Aurelian was the most dangerous enemy Zenobia could choose. Egypt was lost barely a year after the conquest: the Roman army was now under the walls of Palmyra. Zenobia left the besieged city on the back of a dromedary, but was caught up by her pursuers. Beaten and losing all courage, in the power of her enemy, she was no more than a woman with her weakness. Before the court of indictment, she blamed all those who had advised her and urged her into action. She saved her life, while her most trusted advisor, Longinus, was executed by the executioner.

Many historiographers report that Zenobia was carried by the victor in Aurelian's triumph. At the time, when they carried their heads high, the women of Palmyra walked about with gold and jewellery: diadems studded with precious stones, gold filigree earrings, clasps and bracelets, necklaces in four tiers. All these ornaments were heaped in mockery on the person of the captive queen: hands and feet clasped in golden chains, a Persian jester pulling her with a leash, also made of gold. The mass of ornaments, by which she was burdened, was such that more than once she was forced to stop, her body being too weak to drag her. Zenobia fell under the weight of that same power, which had already overwhelmed Mamea and Alexander: the new Illyrian-Danubian empire. With it came a transition to another universe, from a world of women to a virile one,
from the East to the West and the North.

Chapter VII

Illyrian emperors

Alexander Severus had the Illyrian guard to thank for becoming the sole ruler of the empire: the Illyrian guard, having become the arbiter of the fate of the emperor and the state, was able to maintain this position of supremacy, and although Alexander behaved towards the praetorians with extreme breadth, relations between the guard and the emperor remained strained.

The same happened with the frontier armies. It is not that Alexander underestimated the Illyrian legions: when he undertook the campaign against the Persians, they formed the core of his army and performed their task with honour; but the losses of the ill-fated campaign affected the more valiant elements, and the climate and the poor diet made, from the their side, too many gaps.

Alexander was never a soldier, nor did he want to be. The education given to him by his mother bore fruit. He undertook the Persian campaign out of necessity, but only felt good when he returned to be surrounded by the comforts of Syrian Antioch: and how much more bitter it was for him to be immediately recalled to the Rhine frontier by the Germanic danger! Here it came to an open uprising of the army: the emperor was covered with a long series of complaints, beginning with the domination of his mother to the lack of energy in the conduct of the war and the attempt to resolve the conflict by the payment of tribute, repugnant to the souls of those valiant men accustomed to fighting. Recruits from Pannonia eager to fight improvised orators to give passionate expression to their discontent. " Sissy ", " rabbit ", " cat " were muttered in the ranks: until it came to the point of choosing a new emperor. In vain Alexander tried to avert the danger with handouts: when the warlike tumult announced the approach of the usurper, even the last supporters abandoned Alexander to his fate.

The new emperor, Maximinus, was a ruler after the heart of the soldiers. Originally from the Danube like them, he was in every way the opposite of the emperors of Syria and their effeminate rule. He had pursued a military career from the lowest ranks: he had participated in the Persian campaign, and was now entrusted with the education of recruits, mostly people of Pannonia. Maximinus was for his soldiers a splendid model: as a good comrade, he shared all the hardships and struggles of the simple soldier.

When he became emperor, he kept to this way of life. In the Senate, he had larger-than-life pictures placed, depicting his deeds of valour: how he sank into the swamp up to the belly of his horse and still led the attack against the Germans: how he forced the soldiers to follow him on the path fraught with danger by his example. Maximinus, as emperor, he never went to Rome: he felt more at ease in the midst of his army and where he was surrounded by the dangers of war, on the Rhine or on the homeland Danube.

What was his origin? The recruits of Pannonia had elected him; as for him, he had deep roots in the Danube countries. Sirmio was his headquarters; from there he planned to subjugate the Germans and reach the northern ocean. An ancient tradition indicated him as a native of Thrace, but this term seems to mean not the province of the same name, but the *ripa thracica* in Lower Moesia, south of the mouth of the Danube. According to another indication, Maximinus' father was a Goth and his mother an Alana woman. The news fits in perfectly with the relations then existing between the populations of the lower Danube. After all, in that century, in which the rise of African, Syrian and Illyrian troops was followed by the appointment of emperors of the same origin, it is understandable that the military importance, acquired by the Germans, was matched on the imperial throne by the son of a Goth. Maximinus himself employed an increasing number of free Germans in his formations.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was under Maximinus that a new legal basis for the appointment of the emperor gained authority. For the first time in Roman history an emperor was appointed exclusively

by the army without the consent of the senate: the simple acclamation by the assembled army decided the recognition of the pretender as the best, and consequently the most worthy to be called to the highest power and to demand unconditional loyalty. If one compares this procedure with the Germanic tradition, the correspondence is evident.

Tacitus distinguishes between the kings of the Germans and the leaders of companies of volunteers. Caesar describes with plenty of detail how among the Germans one of the nobles appears before the assembled people and army. He offers himself with personal initiative as a leader in a war enterprise.
Whoever trusts in him and his offer rises up and thereby contracts
a personal obligation of allegiance: if he does not observe it, he becomes a traitor and a betrayer. Therefore, there are two fundamental elements: first, a leader who deserves trust, because he has proven himself and earned a name by fighting and commanding an army; second, loyalty, which personally binds those who have lent it to the leader they have recognised and decided to follow.

The leader of a Germanic escort and the ruler of a world empire represent quantities of a different order. This must hold us back from placing them in a relationship: and yet this relationship exists. Maximinus earned the approval of his soldiers by the exemplary nature of his military conduct. As he stood before his assembled soldiers, they threw purple on his shoulders and acclaimed him emperor. The experienced man, whose personality and singular evidence inspired confidence, was called to the command post and for his part Maximinus could not but have had faith in the loyalty of his comrades, who had recognised themselves in their leader. Never did he fail in his absolute trust in those, either,
who had raised him to the throne and pledged to stand by his side and face all dangers for him. He was the escort of his faithful, bound to him by a personal and free decision.

From the institution, described to us by Caesar and Tacitus, and which Maximinus first transferred to a much wider sphere, developed the monarchy of the faithful, of Germanic tradition (*Gefolgschaftskonigtum*). It is the fruit of the consensus offered by stocks of young people ready, under a leader

experienced, to run the risks of combat, to conquer a new kingdom. Ariovistus, who crosses the Rhine to procure a new empire in Gaul, or Philimer, who procures a new homeland for the Goths in southern Russia, belong to these kings of the faithful, as will be Hermannric, Theodoric, Gunther and Rolf Krake.

By virtue of his Gothic origin, Maximinus was made aware of this warlike and conquering character of his monarchy. One can therefore understand Maximinus' renunciation of the Senate's approval as his certainty that the proclamation by the army was sufficient to give his election as emperor the value of legitimacy. After the death of Probus, when Carus was elevated to the throne, the same procedure was used and continued for the following period. Maximinus, it is true, procured the deadly hostility of the Senate and of all those, who saw in it the highest organ of the state; but he did not have to worry about this: his life of war and conquest fitted the picture perfectly.
Maximinus, who never visited Rome, who spent all the years of his reign in the fields, on the Rhine and the Danube, and from there dreamed of gathering the Germans under his sceptre all the way to the North Sea, was also in this a true champion of the Germanic loyal monarchy.

Maximinus was a man of the Danube, but the Gothic blood, which ran through his veins, imprinted him with a special character. While the Illyrian emperors felt themselves to be champions of Roman greatness and tradition, conscious representatives of the idea of Rome, as few others were, nothing similar can be found in Maximinus: it was those who claimed
the value of Romanity, to rebel against him.

Maximinus was loved by his soldiers and respected even by his enemies across the borders. The mood of the population inside was different: Maximinus never showed any understanding of the peaceful citizenry, and the latter reciprocated him in the same coin. The rule of Maximinus weighed heavily on the landowning and intellectual classes: the emperor never had the slightest concern about gaining their favour, all his efforts being directed towards always having the army on his side. All money was previously earmarked for the army: when it came to satisfying its needs, the means were procured at any cost.

Everywhere the lamentations of the people resounded, so much so that sometimes the soldiers on their own impulse found it appropriate to restrain themselves.

Eventually, revolt broke out. When it came to expropriating the African landowners to meet the demands of the imperial armies, the youngest of the landowners armed the slaves and peasants, killed their oppressors and offered the crown to the proconsul M. Antonio Gordiano Semproniano. This was a canine man from a noble and wealthy family,
was prepared for anything but such an offer: but the desperate situation made him accept. From the seat of his governorship, Tisdro, he marched with the rebels against Carthage.

Rapidly the movement spread. In Rome, having set aside the prefect of Maximinus' guard, the Senate immediately intervened in favour of Gordianus: it recognised him and his son, who bore the same name, as emperors, while declaring Septimius Severus and Maximinus gods responsible for his death and an enemy of the state. Most of the provinces fell into the hands of the two Gordianos. But at that very moment in Africa events took another turn. Faced with the feared cavalry of the Maures, the ragtag army of the rebels, which was advancing on Carthage, dispersed; the youngest of the Gordian fell, the old man at the news of his death killed himself.

Thus, the revolt against Maximinus' mannish government appeared, as soon as it had begun, doomed to failure. The civil population did not have the strength to shake the yoke. Then the miracle happened: the Senate of the City decided to continue the fight. The defence of Italy was entrusted to a committee of twenty men, and the punitive expedition of a furious Maximinus was awaited. All the
mass of the army gathered on the Danube was given the order to march against Rome.

A cyclone seemed to rage against the cities and countryside of Italy. The German horsemen formed the vanguard: they were followed by the assault troops broken in war and proud of their victories. Like a warrior king from the north, Maximinus preceded them. But the Senate did not lose heart. From its bosom it elected two emperors, M. Godius Pupienus Maximus and D. Caelius
Calvin Balbinus: at the desire of the population of the urbe and the soldiers stationed there, he added as Caesar the grandson of old Gordianus, the third

of that

name. Pupienus was given the task of gathering an army against Maximinus. Ravenna was chosen as the gathering place: the core of the new army was formed with the Germans.

Before clashing in open battle, the weight of the attackers was concentrated against fortified Aquileia. The power of its walls, the valour of its citizens, and the prudent measures that had been taken by the Committee of the Winds proved to be insurmountable obstacles. In a devastated and exhausted region, the army, tormented by hunger and decimated by assaults on the impregnable fortress, rebelled against Maximinus. The emperor and his son, who was also in the field, were put down. Their heads were skewered on pikes and displayed before the walls of Aquileia as a testimony to what had happened: whereupon the images of the hated emperors were lowered from the battlements of the fortifications to the Senate and the act of homage was imposed. And so tame was this army - once so proud of its victories, now leaderless, despairing over its own fate - that it bowed to what was asked of it.

This time the people had won over the army: the tyrant had been overthrown by the courage of the Italic citizens and the firm will of the Senate. Italy had not appealed in vain: the days of ancient greatness had returned. With the choice of the two emperors, they had returned to the most venerable institutions of Rome and, in conscious opposition to any dynastic policy, it was decided to exclude their relatives from government and succession.

However, the victory of an order that consciously relied on the models of ancient Rome was short-lived. The days of the Senate emperors in that age were always numbered: even Pupienus and Balbinus did not last more than three months. Their union did not last beyond the end of Maximinus: they both fell at the hands of the Illyrian guard, who had rejoined the garrison of the urbe from Aquileia. Intolerant elements, who could not forget the disgrace they had received, broke into the palace, seized the emperors, dragged them through the streets amidst mockery and slaughtered them. Their successor was Gordian III, the only survivor and a laughing stock in the hands of the strongest, until Philip the Arab put him out of the picture.

And yet, this interlude had its importance. During the first half of the century, men from Syria, Asia Minor and Africa sat in the Senate; the Italics, once the predominant element, were reduced to a third. But they all came from social classes, familiar with Latin training.

By virtue of their careers in state service, the greatness of Rome and the idea of empire constituted a dominant thought that was always present to them. They did not hesitate to make use of this ideal representation in the struggle against the barbarian emperor; indeed, in opposition to his barbarity, they revived institutional forms of the ancient Roman heritage. The orientalised Senate brought victory in the name of Romanity.

A movement, which consciously presented itself with a Roman character to the point of winning over the souls of the Orientals in their exile, an ideal motion of this strength could not have arisen by chance: its roots must be sought in the past.

* * *

The victory of the East over Classical Antiquity and the West in the later centuries of the imperial era is a current idea. It is customary to portray Rome "in the arms of the East":' to the features, which contributed to fix this image, belong the invasion of the eastern gods and mysteries, as well as the advent of religion, which was to bring victory over all rivals to it. In the comparison, far less attention has been paid to those clues, which precisely at that time testify to a profound awareness of the essential values of Rome.

At times, it is true, it might have seemed that the gods of Rome were to be overwhelmed by foreign powers. By every route oriental forms penetrated the ceremonial of the state religion. With the temple of Serapis erected by Caracalla, the rule was broken for the first time, whereby foreign cults were excluded from the area within the sacred limits of the city of Rome. The Alexandrian god was worshipped in a sanctuary, ordered according to the model of an Egyptian temple in the New Empire.
Hierodules provided the cult, thaumaturges could conjure up a specific deity on demand (as they did for Pertinace). As he had granted

with the *Constitutio Antoniniana the* Roman citizenship to all peregrines, so the emperor attributed legitimacy in Rome to the Egyptian gods and in general to every foreign god.

It was always the same great phantom, that of Alexander, that was before Caracalla's eyes: with the introduction of the cult of Serapis, no other aim was pursued than with the *Constitutio Antoniniana* or the construction in colossal style of the Imperial Baths. In Alexander's late vision, the aim was the fusion of all men into a higher unity, the reconciliation of peoples. The cult of the god
Serapis, first introduced by early Ptolemy, was
has been attributed to Alexander. In a recently found fragment of a novel by Alexander from the time of Caracalla, the king addresses a prayer to Serapis in the city of Alexandria. When Caracalla built the temple on the Quirinal in honour of the god, he may have believed he was following in the footsteps of his great archetype, the Macedonian.

A further step is represented by Caracalla's plan of conquests in the East, always with the idea of collecting Alexander's inheritance. By marrying a Parthian princess, he deluded himself into thinking he could achieve the fusion of the West with the East. In these same years, Curtius Rufus took up the myth of the great expedition to the East, of the conquest of the world, and enriched it with all those colourful traits, which suited the atmosphere of the
time, Philostratus, the celebrated leader of the second sophistry,
had gone even further with his fictionalised life of Apollonius of
Tyana,
giving literary expression to this nostalgia for oriental wisdom.

And there was more, leading away from the ways followed by the hereditary religion of Rome. Christianity, now publicly brought into the light of the streets, was not a foreign movement for the easterners seated on the imperial throne: Caracalla is said to have been raised by a Christian nurse. The famous dialogue, attributed to Bardesane, on the laws of nations was dedicated to the emperor, so the connection with that great idea of the union and reconciliation of peoples, which he vowed, is compelling. The dialogue in fact announced a universal religion, which transcended the borders and particular laws of nations: Christianity.

Under Heliogabalus the tide rose again. But when the climax was reached and it looked as if Jupiter Capitolinus would give way before the solar god of Ernesa, the reaction came. In March 222 Heliogabalus was killed; everything that reminded him was erased and the sacred stone, symbol of his god, was sent back home. His successor, Alexander Severus, consecrated the abandoned shrine to the avenging Jupiter; although he, like Heliogabalus, was descended from the same priestly family of Emesa, he had no choice but to recognise the strength of the Roman-national reaction and meekly become its instrument. Alexander thus returned to the attitude, which had prudently always been observed by Septimius Severus, and which only Caracalla and Heliogabalus had thought they could disdainfully abandon.

The first of the Severans was linked to the East, as no one else had been before him. But his intimate trade with astrology, dream interpretation and magical practices took place entirely within his private life. He, however little he might have cared for it in other respects, was very careful not to undermine Rome's religious tradition. The second revival of Augustus' secular pomp was celebrated with the most scrupulous observance of all the singularities of an ancient ritual. To the amazement of those present, a prayer could be heard coming out of the emperor's mouth, imploring for Rome the eternal obedience of the Latin peoples.
The words, with which the Augustan feast intended to legitimise itself in the continuity of another very ancient one, an anachronistic reflection of the situations of primitive Rome in a much brighter and more spatially wide-ranging present, were repeated at a time when the empire had reached its greatest expansion.

And it was not an isolated episode. The records, preserved in the inscriptions of one of the most illustrious priestly colleges, the Arvali brothers, maintained certain particularities of religious ceremonial with scrupulous exactitude.
The confraternity's very ancient hymn, which had been sung for more than seven centuries by its members, although it had long since been almost incomprehensible to them, was engraved in stone at this time. It was that same jealous observance of the ancient Roman ritual, of its older traditional forms and even structural particularities, that had manifested itself in the jubilee festivities of the year 204. The virulence with which the fathers of the Latin Church, first

among them Tertullian, attacked the Roman gods and the traditional cult fits into that atmosphere.

Alexander Severus, after Heliogabalus' failed attempt, could only return to his previous positions without delay. His attitude matched the obsequious deference he publicly showed to the Senate. Many of the members of the assembly belonged to the ancient priestly colleges of the urbe and were strict guardians of the traditional religion.
A representative of this group of senators was the historian Dion Cassius, an intimate friend of the emperor. In his history he included a speech in which Augustus is warned by Maecenas against the dangers of foreign religions and is urged to strengthen the purely Roman one. Dione's aversion extended as much to the cult of Isis and Osiris as to those of Liberius and Hercules.

Alexander's coins show the extreme caution with which he proceeded. He carefully avoided all those images, which could have been interpreted as an intervention in the debated religious issues of the time. The emperor (of him as well as of his mother it was rumoured that they had Christian tendencies) had himself depicted on the coins as a priest of the goddess Rome: he thus set himself on a path, which Philip the Arab later followed with different authority. These too
He showed tolerance and favour towards Christianity, and perhaps even more insistent followed the murmur that he had adhered to the new faith: but as head o f state he did not hesitate to bow to national demands. It was his turn to solemnly order Rome's millennium celebrations in 248.

This event powerfully moved contemporaries and the age that followed. Under the weight of the dark and bitter present, people turned to the future and filled it with their hopes and aspirations. A new *saeculum* seemed to be opening, infinitely greater and richer in prosperity than the previous secular festivities had heralded. One hundred years later, it could be said of this jubilee (compared to the Republican and Augustan jubilees) that it had been the only one truly felt.

In Christian Rome itself, awareness was being raised of the properly Roman way. The Greek tradition was abandoned: Rome became a Latin community. A list of Latin popes was compiled: the

Pope Cornelius was the first to have an inscription in Latin. At the same time, in the dispute with Carthage, the supremacy of the Roman Church was at stake.

In this situation it happened that the eastern emperors disappeared and, starting with Decius, an almost uninterrupted series of Illyrians ascended the throne. The change immediately affected Rome's ideal tradition: if until now it had been tolerated out of prudence or acknowledged out of political calculation, it now passed to a higher plane, that of idea-guidance.

The countries close to the Danube border combined the preservation of their native character with a marked tendency towards a more straightforward Roman character. Italic goods, Roman coins and the Latin alphabet had become established there, and the Roman language had entered into use from the very beginning. The inhabitants of Pannonia in particular wanted to be true and outspoken Romans. On their tombstones one finds Aeneas and Anchises and even more often the she-wolf with twins. When the emperors of Pannonia ascended the throne, the coins and reliefs on the armour of the imperial guard bore effigies of the mythical nurturer of Rome.

The situation was the same in Noricum and Dalmatia. The provinces of Moesia on the lower Danube and Thrace, on the other hand, were areas of Greek influence: a turning point occurred, however, when Dacia, just conquered by Trajan, although inhabited by people related to the Thracians, pronounced for Romanity instead of Hellenism. They also wanted to be Roman here, and this had a decisive importance for the entire Danube region. In Dacia, almost all the inscriptions are in Latin: while in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the cult of eastern gods had spread almost everywhere, in Dacia there appear to have been no more than a fifth of temples consecrated to them, while those dedicated to Roman gods account for more than half of those found. Even in
In Dacia, the Roman she-wolf can be found in every locality: embedded in the wall of a peasant house in Transylvania, it still amazes the visitor. Words have been preserved in the Romanian language that derive from the heritage of Roman religion: Diana has passed on her name to today's 'fairy'.

The spiritual preconditions for the resumption of a 'Roman' policy were there everywhere and they decisively oriented the emperors from the Danube countries. Decius had a whole series of

coins the images of the deified emperors and assumed the nickname Trajan, which was a whole programme. Claudius and Aurelian resumed, after time immemorial, the solemn questioning of the sibylline books. It seems that Claudius, before embarking on the war against the Goths, consecrated himself to death in order to fulfil the conditions set by the oracle. It was as if the days of the Ten of ancient Rome had returned. The ancient heroism, with which one volunteered one's life for the health of the state, celebrated its resurrection in this man from Illyria. When Caligula appears in Julian's *Symposium*, all the gods turn their eyes elsewhere, but fix them smugly on Claudius and shower him with praise and admiration for his love of country. At this time coins with engravings dedicated to the tutelary deities of the emperor, the state or the goddess Rome began to appear: and next to them appears the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus, testifying to the eternity of the urbe by virtue of its divine origin.

This conscious reintegration of Romanity was matched on the other hand by a determined opposition to Christianity. Decius, Claudius and Aurelian were in agreement in this. For Decius there was also the contrast with Philip the Arab, who relied on eastern archers: the Osroenian units in particular had to count many Christians in their ranks. The state-imposed obligation of worshipping the gods was still in force but the Christians shunned it. Because of their small numbers, at first the renegades were left quiet: but now their numbers were increasing and under Decius the time for tolerance had passed. Christians were required to sacrifice to the gods: if the sacred person of the emperor was included among the gods, any refusal was considered as rebellion against the authority of the state.

Christians were not frightened by the consequences. Public scourging, an infamous punishment doubly so for a woman, appears as a title of glory on the tomb plate of the martyr Elijah Aphanasia.
To the emperor as saviour and earthly bliss, Christians opposed with deliberate obstinacy his heavenly rival. Christ was, Origen argued, stronger than the emperor and all his officials, stronger even than the senate and the Roman people. The struggle for recognition of the new religion became the struggle against the supremacy and omnipotence of the state: one can understand why convinced representatives of the Roman idea such as the Illyrian emperors remained adamant on this point.

The fight, moreover, was not only directed against Christianity: with the disappearance of the Syrian emperors, the gods of Syria also lost the favour they enjoyed in the army. The inscriptions relating to Jupiter Dolichenus quickly ceased after the middle of the century: where his cult still survived as in Rome, only the common people, who could not separate themselves from their beloved idol, remained attached to him. How insignificant that god was by then, is shown by the lack of any controversy on the part of the Church Fathers. Yet under the Severan dynasty he had begun a victorious march that was unprecedented. Thrace, the two Mesias, Dacia, Dalmatia and Pannonia, as well as Noricum and the entire Rhine frontier, distant Britannia and Numidia, Italy, including Sardinia,[1] and not least Rome, have preserved memories of his cult.

The special character of Illyrian Romanity needs clarification: it is explained by the strength and, as it were, the indestructibility of the idea of Rome. Originally bound to a specific nationality, this gradually changed into a spiritual form, endowed with a life of its own. Spiritual forms obey a different law from that which presides over living organisms, linked to the process of birth, maturity and death; once defined, they remain beyond all contingency as a warning and stimulus to understand and penetrate new realities in their own light: they become the measure and archetype for the forms to be realised in the present and future.
As a spiritual and political form, the Roman idea fascinated and conquered the Illyrians.

The fateful choice, which the Danube countries had been faced with, was once again presented to the emperors who came from there: just as for those peoples the decision between Greece or Rome had been imposed on them, so now for Claudius, Aurelian and Probus. Hellenism once again presented itself as the solution to the difficulties in which the state and the ancient world in general languished.

Gallienus did not belong to the Illyrian people by his origin: on the contrary, he was fought against them and eventually removed by a conspiracy of the Illyrian general staff. He cannot, however, be separated from the historical process, in which his rivals and successors are included. It was he who created the

military premises, which made the reconstruction of the state possible, and to orient them decisively on both the spiritual and political side towards future grand resolutions.

The origin of Gallienus' father, Valerianus, is still unknown to us. His son bore the pre-name of Falerius, with which tradition agrees, making him a native of Etruria: his mother's lineage, Egnatia, was familiar in Faleri, as it was throughout Etruria. Even Decius, who was Illyrian, had a bride of Etruscan origin: her name Herennia Cupressenia Etruscilla, that of her eldest son Herennius Etruscus and the *cognomen of* Perpenna of the youngest are unequivocal. Decius' successor and Valerian's predecessor, Trebonius, also came from Etruscan Perugia, from the Vibii family, one of the most prominent there. All these lords were closely related to each other: one thinks of a group belonging to the nobility of the senate rich in property in Etruria or even related to the most illustrious families of the region.

Gallienus thus was wholly or partly of Etruscan blood. His homeland, Faleri, belonged to a lineage akin to the Latins, but by the 6th century BC had already been absorbed into the Etruscan language and culture. Even today, Civita Castellana gives the impression of an Etruscan town. The Soratte with its shining crags of clay, inhabited by an indigenous deity, a kind of Etruscan Apollo, dominates the whole town. The light of the whitish rock is allied to its death-like rigidity, the elusive distance to an omnipresent threat: the vision evokes at once the ecstasy of solitude and the mystery of an underground world.

The Etruscan element has been preserved in Italy with a tenacity that is sometimes surprising. There are men and epochs whose imprint is made by the incisive force of this ethnic group. Who would deny the Etruscan in Maecenas of Arezzo, in Persius of Volterra? Even Gallienus represents a revival of this ancient force, a surprising sign of Etruscan vitality. It is worth placing him next to the other manifestations, where one has reason to find a similar reawakening of activity: the urban architecture and painting of Tuscany, the beauty of its women and the infernal visions of Dante.

The personality of Gallienus was already debated in antiquity: rich as it was with opposing tensions it gave rise to the most diverse interpretations. A conviction or acquittal, as has been attempted until recent times is a question

abstract: the important thing is to understand how this character appears in its own complex multiplicity. The Etruscan origin of Gallienus offers us the key to this.

That same nervous richness, which characterises Gallienus, is a constant of this people. The Etruscan character, for what that expression is worth, is alive in contrasts. Etruscan was the delight in the pleasures of existence, in banquets, in women and beautiful adolescents, in scenic games, cruel or comic, in gladiatorial combat, in circus and farce, in indolence, amiable and contemplative... But Etruscans were also the chivalrous hero and the individual fighter, who yearned for adventure and fame, profoundly different from the obedient and disciplined soldiers of Roman training. And just as Etruscan life unfolded in the opposing tensions of laughter and cruelty, sensual pleasure and adventure, carefree indolence and heroic affirmation, it was no different in the opposition of knight and lady: woman dominated over man and in the home and also took part in public life. A female vision of the world is expressed everywhere in Etruria, not only in the chivalrous forms of social relations and in the ideal of a wandering heroism, but in art, costume and not least in the way Greek forms were absorbed.

The biography, which has remained to us, of Gallienus contains a long list of his
"vices': it emphasises the emperor's softness and indifference, his penchant for the pleasures of the senses, his taste for the circus and the stage, for gladiatorial wrestling, for rough jokes, the pleasures of the table, brilliant parades and theatrical performances. What we already knew from other sources, this description confirms. The 'almost Homeric feat', with which he challenged the antimperator Postumus to a singular fight, the
Worthy of the adversary's scathing reply, that 'one was not a gladiator after all', thrown in the face of the Etruscan gladiator game enthusiast. But this chivalrous sense also showed itself in the high esteem in which he held chivalry and in the offering of his own person at risk. The sarcophagus of battles, already in the Ludovisi collection, belonging to the period of Gallienus, shows us the supreme commander, surrounded by his paladins, rushing to the centre of the fray. Chivalrously as he lived and fought, Gallienus died: at a false alarm he rushed to the front line and fell under the blows of the conspirators. If Gallienus lacked neither

audacity nor talent, but only the necessary *constantia,* this is the proof that he was a true knight.

From the traits sketched so far, one can already grasp what Gallienus' fight for the spiritual foundations of Rome and the empire, and the ancient world in general, was all about: here too he had his own way of fighting, as can be seen from his behaviour towards Christians. He suspended the persecution decreed by his father Valerian. Christian communities everywhere were given back their confiscated property and granted the right of assembly: it was Gallienus' intention to overcome the Christians not with violence, but with the weapons of the spirit. And in this he accorded with the spiritual atmosphere of the time, as antiquity was just then beginning to reflect on itself and its own foundations.

At the beginning of the 3rd century there was still no inkling of the approaching storms. A Philostratus candidly shared with Pliny the Younger or with Favorinus the joys of literary work and the celebrities of the day, the naive enthusiasm for a supposed spiritual flowering: and it was a vain play of mirrors. One could still delude oneself that science did not was dead: but none other than the taste for compilation and the doctrinal florals bore witness to a certain spiritual vivacity. The light and easy style of these collections, which offered their subject matter in the feeble form of a pleasant eclecticism, set the tone for the mass of writings of the time.

Philostratus and Favorinus were considered to be the great philosophers from an age of decadence: with these names, their series was thought to come to an end. In reality, the last great philosophers had yet to appear. At a time when the celebrities of the second sophistry were enjoying the greatest favour, the future renewer of Plato, the master of Plotinus and Origen, was still living in the dark: Ammonius Sacca, an unknown, was carrying sacks in the warehouses of the port of Alexandria... And around the middle of the century, the great turning point: silence was imposed on that buzz of literary talent by the one and only enormous personality, who united in himself all the scattered spiritual wealth.

To consider Plotinus a mystic is to misunderstand what mysticism is: what was taken for such was *theoria, the* form-creating contemplation, and therefore an inherited form of the spirit of every science of the divine of the Greeks. And yet to call Plotinus a mystic strikes one, out of all intention, as a

essential moment, for he appears to us as removed from any dependence on time: one could believe that he had fallen by chance into that graceless century.

But relations with time do not end there, whether man conforms to it or dissolves in it. Opposition to that viscous gear, which presses from all sides and seeks to suffocate every voice under its buzz, is a force, which one cannot fail to recognise in its value. This awareness must have penetrated and moulded Plotinus to the point, that he was able to enter that zone, where the essence is not becoming and change but being, not agitation and noise but silence, not success but greatness. In his time, Plotinus appears to us as a loner: yet he will perhaps be his justification, when it presents itself, with others of its kind, before the Judge's seat.

The epoch was overloaded with facts and a humanity constantly on the move. In Plotinus, the world of the spirit takes shape against it, the only one, which has peace within itself, before which the other seems to dissolve like a ghost. In front of his distant, inaccessible, incorruptible world, everything else is transience and death. Permeated with death, it is true, is also Plotinus' thought. But death is not here appearance, fragility, putrefaction; it is remoteness and greatness, Apollonian knowledge. It could thus happen to a man, who for his entire life had meditated on and created spiritual forms, that what he had up to
at a certain moment it had appeared to him as a fragment, as a glimmering shadow rather than the light of knowledge, suddenly composing itself into the whole, the non-sense into the light of truth, the contradictory into unity. In the illumination of an instant, the divine conformation of the universe is revealed to him. For the ultimate knowledge remains unrepeatable: it is knowledge of death. But over all that is and remains perishable, it has the supreme privilege, that from the moment it has looked death in the eye, it bears the seal of its greatness.

Plotinus is Apollo, his last clear-cut flare-up in history: as always, he remains distant and sublime, nor does he stoop to the busy round of human action, where he does not intend to bring order, direction or meaning. But the god leaves him

in his fragmentariness and ambiguity, while on the surface he overcomes what is disturbed and false and corrupt: alone, he opens up the abyss, which divides the divine being from the human. In a century such as this one, there is a need for this abyss to be rediscovered, so that what is mortal and what is eternal, what has greatness or not, may appear.

Gallienus understood what this man represented. He had sought to realise Plotinus' Platonopolis in Campania: the Neo-Platonic school provided him with the best prepared comrades in the ideal battle, which he intended to wage. But a gulf remained between the two of them that could not be bridged. It separated not only he, who was the lord of a worldly empire, by those whose kingdom was not of this world: the emperor with the dreamy eyes and sensual lips lacked the other's Apollonian hardness, just as he lacked the moving simplicity and native disposition to the essential, which were the mark of Plotinus even in his outward habits.

Gallienus in his striving for spiritual renewal was inspired by Greekism: but what attracted him there were not the rigour and clarity of thought, the *more geometric* form, motifs inseparable from the classical creations of the Greek spirit. In his thirst for and love of beauty, the emperor was moved by the warm manifestations of life and imagination and the effects of colour more than by the exact measure of sublime style: Hellenism offered him what he needed. The legacy of Alexander and the Diadochi is evident, especially in the coins: the gaze to the heavens in the statues and coins can only be explained as an imitation of Hellenistic models.

The philhellenism of Gallienus - as it is now beginning to appear to us - could not, as another circumstance shows, be assimilated to Greekism: the emperor's most illustrious ally in his action in favour of traditional religion was Eleusis. For some time, the priestly caste of this centre, made up of the most illustrious local families, had formed an alliance with philosophy: religion and philosophy, albeit by different routes, led mortals to immortality and union with God. Gallienus in his initiation into the religion of the mysteries may recall the examples of Hadrian and the Antonines, but even here his conception has its own particular traits.

The divinities of Eleusis, mother and daughter, were female, and not only as an external fact: a female vision of the world was expressed in myth and cult. The passion with which Gallienus adhered to this vision is attested by the coins, on which he appears crowned with ears of corn.
as Demeter, with feminine features and feminine curled hair. The inscription Galliena Augusta, which was only later replaced by the male form, shows that the emperor, who had himself depicted in this way, intended to assimilate himself to Demeter, the great lady of the Mysteries. Nothing similar is found either before or after him; to penetrate
the personality of Gallienus, it is worth going back to its origins.

Etruscan tomb inscriptions present a peculiarity, which finds no correspondence either in Rome or in the rest of Italy: the indication of the maternal origin of the deceased. The conception of the relationship between man and woman, of the special position of women in the household and in the lineage, which is expressed in the given name, was preserved until the imperial era. The Italic municipal nobility made the maternal origin explicit in a second given name.
Gallienus conformed to this tradition: not only was he Etruscan by origin, but he bore his mother's name in his own. Already by ancient historiographers he was regarded as 'the emperor made woman' and both the assimilation to Demeter and the forms preserved by the art of
time confirm that a real fact was reflected in that expression. In the luxuriant curl and waviness of the hair and beards, as in the pale, smooth faces, a feminine nature finds expression: not the virile hardness of the man of action, but sensitivity and reverie were also sought by the portraiture of the time in shaping the figure of the emperor.

The representation in the guise of Demeter was not without parallels: on one cameo the emperor appears in the figure of Minerva and seems at times to have paid particular adoration to Diana. One is confronted in such cases with existential data, which cannot be explained in any other way than by Gallienus' origin: only from here can one grasp it,
in its true measure, the contrast with Plotinus. At Apollo's side appears his divine antagonist. The feminine element belonged to Gallienus as well as to the young Dionysius; to the god, who fixed his gaze on the horrors of the

madness and dissolution and from this vision he drew his creative force.

The catastrophe of his father, the first and only emperor to fall alive into the hands of his enemies; the loss of the territories on the right bank of the Rhine, the revolt of the Danubian countries, the defection of Postumus and the formation of a separate empire; the death of his son in the war against his rival; the unstoppable rise of Palmyra: such were the decisive events in the emperor's life. Nothing was spared to Gallienus, who, with his nervous excitability, doubly had to suffer every misfortune, yet this 'feminine' character after every blow rose with redoubled tension.
That indestructible strength, which a woman has, to do and to restore, was also given to him. The repeated blows of fate matured the man Gallienus, as the medals of his later years show, to the point of surpassing himself in a noble calm and manly dignity.

Gallienus turned his back on his father, who had made the name of Rome an object of derision in the East, and did not even attempt to free him from captivity. Rebuilding the unity of the empire was Gallienus' aspiration: he never lacked plans and new ideas; his talents were superior to those of all his adversaries and his efforts were not infrequently crowned with brilliant victories. To the last he must have had faith in his own star. The Mysteries, to which he was initiated, gave him faith in the salvation of the individual, if the god was also saved: but in that man, who wanted to play a part in the construction of Plotinus' ideal community, faith in an order, in a better state and in its real possibility, was alive above all. There are coins of Gallienus, which show us that he wanted to be a new Augustus, to save the world and bring back a new golden age: even in the coins of his last years, at a time of new and heavy calamities, images appear that allude to future happiness.

* * *

For the Illyrian emperors, who took over Gallienus' succession, this was a completely foreign world. An abyss separated them from the ideals of a Hellenic rebirth. Even Greekness, not unlike the idea of Rome, had now detached itself from its national base. The followers of Plotinus were mostly Syrians and the community of philosophers, after it had

dispersed with the fall of Gallienus, tried to reconstitute itself at Zenobia's court: Longinus had become the guiding mind behind the politics of Palmyra. These attempts collapsed under the Illyrian iron fist. Aurelian was against everything that was not Roman, wherever he found it; he was against the Christians and the political pretensions of the literati, against Syriac restlessness and against Zenobia's will to power. Longinus suffered death as his teacher and advisor: the emperor personally pronounced his sentence.

Along with the philosophical renaissance came a renaissance of art with Gallienus. Once again the sensual joy of ancient man had reappeared, the taste for beautiful form and appearance. Virtuosity in the treatment of the surface, opulent and soft modelling of the skin and mouth, an ecstatic and distant gaze, all the spiritualised corporeity that was expressed in this art disappeared with Gallienus. It now came
gloomy and grandiose, joyless art: in the heads of the Illyrians to those of the Tetrarchs, it speaks to us more by its imperiousness than by persuasion. With their close-cropped hair, lean and severe, their profile hard and sharp, their skull angular and their nape taurine, this is how Aurelian and Probus portray themselves.

These men were of a completely different temperament from the philosophers and artists of Gallienus's circle, and also somewhat different from him: of a less fine and mobile sensibility, and far less gifted, the Illyrian emperors revealed themselves to be natures of steel, willing and active, similar in this to the Romans of old.
They realised that fighting was now the only law and that any dream of a Greek renaissance was over. As army officers they had obeyed their general Gallienus as long as things went well: but they probably looked upon his Hellenistic tendencies with native revulsion. Having come to power, they wanted to be nothing more than Romans, fully in keeping with their Illyrian tradition.

The reconstruction of the state was the task Aurelian had set himself: the great past of Rome, the unity of the ecumene and of humanity urged him imperiously towards this end. The sun, shining equally on all, seemed to him to make the sense of this unity present. The devout Greeks and Romans could under that sign find themselves together with the

eastern worshippers of Heliogabalus and Mithras. From the Sun the emperor thought he was guided in his victories, and to him alone he owed the throne.

Aurelian thus anticipated what was to be one of the spiritual foundations of Constantine's monarchy: God, he claimed, gave purple to kings and fixed the time of their reign. In Constantine this idea translated into Christian terms returns: he felt himself as emperor a divine instrument for the victory of the Church; and as such he was under the sovereignty of the Almighty, who made his will operative in the world and in human history. For Aurelian, the Sun god guaranteed the loyalty and concord of the troops, who worked for the final blessing of the state: by his grace the East, which had been lost, rejoined the community of the empire. The Sun appears on coins as the lord of the *imperìum Romanum,* and as its terrestrial representative the emperor guided the fate of the world.

The testimony of coins, inscriptions and literary documents is clear and consistent. It was intimately repugnant to Aurelian, as it had been to Augustus in the past, to think only of political expediency in religious reforms, because one does not worship a god manufactured for one's own use. What hold the new religious idea had on his contemporaries is testified to by Constantine, who, before his final choice, adhered to the faith of the solar god and placed the kingdom under his guardianship. Even after his conversion to Christianity, the cult of the Sun retained its place in the emperor's soul, as if it had remained anchored in his most secret self... A man of Aurelian's linearity and absoluteness must have been possessed by the generous grandeur of this mission and placed himself once and for all under its symbol: he must have felt it as a divine command and investiture.

Outwardly, Aurelian echoed the failed feat in Heliogabalus. The solar god of Emesa was solemnly returned to Rome: on the anniversary of 25 December, the birthday of all eastern solar gods, a festival in honour of *Deus Sol Invictus* was instituted to be celebrated every four years in a setting of extreme magnificence. And yet something essential had changed.

Heliogabalus' total collapse had not made the local clergy lose heart. While in Rome all traces of the overthrown god were being erased, in Emesa they plotted to overthrow the new rulers. They did not cease to support

pretenders to the throne, both under Alexander Severus and under Philip the Arab and Valerian. None of those pretenders succeeded in asserting themselves: nevertheless, the god's credence rose again: Gallienus and Claudius had his image coined on coins, as did the antimperators in the East and West. While politically it was not possible to break away entirely from the model represented by Heliogabalus' sudden success, religious propaganda had realised that it had to use more appropriate means in the work of proselytising in favour of the native god. This new orientation is consecrated in Heliodorus' Ethiopian novel, which, composed even before the middle of the century under the impression of the failure of Heliogabalus' enterprise, in fact highlights the enormous difference in spiritual climate.

Heliodorus prudently kept himself on the periphery of that Roman world, from which the resistance had originated: he limited himself at first to gaining the favour of the Greek-speaking East. This new Helios could be to the liking of Greeks as well as Orientals: he had risen from the depths of Eastern orgiastic excitements and aligned himself with the purer, more distant, spiritualised deities of the Greeks. Like the star in the sky, it was not bound to any fixed place: it did not reside in a sacred stone, nor did it have brides with whom to celebrate nuptials. If Selene was placed next to Helios, she did not, however, accompany him as a consort: likened to the demure Artemis, she accepted, like Helios, only virginal offerings. And it was a couple still intact, like the two heroes of the novel, whom the divinity elected as its priests.

Like Heliogabalus, Heliodorus bore in his name that of the sun: but just as the god is never called Syrian, so is his servant. Not once is the name of Emesa encountered: or more precisely, it only appears at the end. The reader, after being won over to this purest of Heliodorus' gods, to this perfect replica of the Hellenic Apollo, learns with astonishment that he is none other than the god of Emesa. It is a surprise that Heliodorus wished to reserve for himself until the novel's dissolution: it is evidently impressive, but it also reveals the caution with which it was necessary to proceed in order to win the god's allegiance in his new guise.

When the god of Emesa entered Rome for the second time, his image corresponded to that purified representation that had been proposed and popularised by Heliodorus. No one thought any more of a return of the sacred stone, nor of unseemly exotic rites, nor of brides or a foreign name. The novel of Heliodorus had its share of merit in this: but the image Aurelian had made of his god had too particular and intimate a meaning for him to be able to limit himself to accepting the inheritance of a thought that was foreign to him.

Heliodorus' work represented proselytism by way of literature. The novel as an instrument of religious propaganda was no longer anything extraordinary since Apuleius and Xenophon of Ephesus had paid homage to Isis and Philostratus had recounted the life of Apollonius of Tyana. In Emesa they had set out on this path, when the others had proved impracticable. The ages, which had had an image of the world
as of a whole in itself concluded or where the presence of divinity was felt with immediacy, had not known the novel: this literary genre, on the contrary, has been taken over by those ages, in which the ancient order wanes and wanders and searches without rest. The novel has been said to be the expression of an open vision of the world, but it is also something else: the creation of a bookish age. The novel can only be read, and consequently real experience is replaced by literary experience: even if it is addressed to a large circle of readers, it leads to isolation and solitude; even if it has proselytising intentions, it can only act on the individual.

The novel thus meant the dissolution of ancient bonds, where they still existed, escape from an oppressive present and, escape from the community: and it was because of these characteristics that it met the aspirations of the time. In Emesa, this instrument of dissolution was grasped with a subtle flair, which proved to be so timely: the waning of an ancient world and the advent of a new one, in which one hoped, appeared to condition each other.

Aurelian swung the rudder decisively: the solar god was torn from the private sphere and consecrated as god of the empire. Instead of remaining an object of bookish experience, far removed from reality, as it was in the novel,

with his intervention was reshaped into a new reality: moreover, the god was invested with a myth with the traits of Romanity, and as such, history.

At Emesa the Palmyren had faced Aurelian for the decisive battle: the city was, as it were, the gateway to their capital and was also the main seat of the sun god, whom they also worshipped. In the battle, the god would decide whether he would stand by Aurelian or Zenobia. As the battle came to a head, the Roman horsemen faltered and were already thinking of flight: a divine apparition then appeared where the infantry was, urging the doubters to resist. The victor entered Emesa and recognised the apparition in the local sun god, who had come to the aid of his soldiers. In her honour Aurelian erected a temple in Rome on the slopes of the Quirinal.

The Roman mentality not only took over the myth, but also penetrated the cult of the new god, to transform it to its measure. Aurelian's *Sol* had a state temple, whereas Heliogabalus had erected his shrines in private imperial possessions. The 'new' god remained without a bride and without offspring, as all Roman state gods had always been, first and foremost the Capitoline Jupiter. The new celestial lord was an abstract, spiritual and political symbol, also similar to Jupiter in this respect. The divine service was performed not by Syrians, but by Roman senators, assimilated to the ancient venerable *pontifices* and forming a Roman priestly college.

By elevating the divine lord of Emesa to god of the empire, the emperor did not only bring about a revolution in the spirit of Romanity. It has already been noted that this divinity had to be universal. Not only to the Romans and the subjects of the eastern half of the empire, but also to the Illyrians, Celts and Germans, Aurelian wanted to give them a god that was congenial to them: where it becomes clear what importance these peoples had
now in the army, and in the empire in general.

Images of the insignia of the army of the lower empire have been handed down to us in a whole series of monuments (including the mosaic recently found at Piazza Armerina in eastern Sicily), but mainly in the military and political manual - the so-called *Notitia*

dignitatum - which, in the redaction in which it has come down to us, was completed between 428 and 429: it contains over 300 images of multi-coloured military insignia on 22 pages. Many of these insignia originate from central or northern Europe: there are spiral animals and crowns on poles, as they were in use by knightly peoples, and Germanic runes of symbolic value. But in the manual a large space is taken up by military coats of arms, which can be linked to the sun and the zodiac, and in general to the stars: the Celtic sun wheel and concentric circles, a symbol of the sun, can be recognised in the
Scandinavian rock images, but which was also known to the Celts and Illyrians. For other Illyrian lineages, a disc resting on a rod served as a symbol, under which the sun was honoured: the mentioned rock images also show us this sign, which returns frequently in several combinations among the military coats of arms. Once again, in this symbolism, Illyrians and Germans meet.

Some of the insignia was probably executed or put into circulation in the 4th century, but the mass of solar symbols, engraved on the insignia, can only be traced back to the initiative of a will, which recognised in the sun the centre of its own representative world, whether religious, political or military. An army, which bore that symbol on its arms, could only be an army of the Sun god: to him it belonged, obeying and fighting under his command. This being so, it could only be Aurelian's army. Just as Constantine ordered his soldiers to place the sign of the Cross on their shields, so did Aurelian before him: with the difference that the latter had the shields of his army decorated with a symbolic solar express, the crucified god corresponding here to the solar god. It was he who was the absolute lord of the *imperium,* who invested the emperor with the mission of reconstituting the unity of the terrestrial orb: hence Aurelian's comrades bore on their shields the sign of their belonging to the Sun. And it was consistent with these ideal relationships that Illyrians, Celts and Germans were in the forefront on this occasion.

An unfavourable tradition has preserved too few personal traits of Aurelian: in comparison to the numerous details that have been handed down to us about the lives of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, above Mesia and Heliogabalus, almost nothing is known about the greatest of the Illyrians. All the stronger therefore the

desire to profit from the little information that remains to us: it would already be a lot to have managed to grasp the fundamental religious vision of this emperor.

Once again, the comparison with Gallienus is compelling. In these, we have seen the expression of a rich and ruthless individuality, which incorporated all the great ideas and problems of the time. A receptive, imaginative temperament, hypersensitive to the point of vulnerability, Gallienus rarely knew how to impose the necessary limits on himself. His vital energy did not abandon him until the very end, but it was an energy of an unstable, restless force: it was stimulated by a feeling of personal superiority, not by suprapersonal powers, where the source of Aurelian's valour lay.

What he lacked in sensitivity and universal openness, Aurelian made up for with virtues of firmness and consistency. He was but an army commander and a statesman, and more the former than the latter.
Gallienus mirrored himself in a multitude of divinities, all of which he brought back to his own 'person'. Aurelian had only one divine lord. Instead of a personality, which in its own unfolding enjoyed itself, Aurelian affirmed the consciousness of being the instrument of a higher will. This is a contrast that always offers material for new meditations and especially in the age of transition takes on acute significance.

Aurelian's creative work was oriented in several directions. It was connected to Rome's great past and sought to fulfil the aspirations of a new life. But firm in it was the national inspiration: Rome, already a living reality, had changed into the idea of Rome. The Illyrian renaissance, if we can now call it that, was the first of a long series of Roman renaissances that would follow over the centuries: it no longer had an ancient character, but a western-European one. In reality Aurelian,
while he seemed to be looking at the past, he was looking at the future.

The anticipation of measures and perspectives, which are found under Constantine with Christian inspiration, has already been noted: in particular, in associating the Germans with the defence of the empire and in his religious conception, Aurelian was a precursor of Constantine. The one and the other thus presided over the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, with the difference that while with the latter

now loosened all ties with Romanity, Aurelian still held on to it with conscious strength.

Chronological table

180-192 M. Aurelius Commodus.

192 (31/12) Killing of the Emperor; proclamation of Fr. Elvius Pertinace.

193 (28/3) The Praetorians kill Pertinaces and sell the throne to M. Didius Julianus. Proclamation of L. Septimius Severus in Pannonia, of C. Pescennio Nigro in Syria and of D. Clodius Albinus in Britannia.

194 Victory of Severus over

Nigros. 193-211 L. Septimius

Severus.

197 Victory of Albino.

194, 197-199 204 Wars against the Parthians. Mesopotamia becomes a province.
Ludi saeculares.

from 208 Military Campaigns in Britain.

211-212 Collegial government of M. Aurelius Antoninus Caracalla and his brother Geta.

212 Killing of Geta. Granting of the *Constitutio Antoni-niana.*

212-217 Single government of

Caracalla. 213 War against the

Alemanni.

215-216 Caracalla in the East.

217 (8/4) Killing of Caracalla. M. Opilius Macrinus Emperor.

218-222 M. Aurelius Antoninus, called Heliogabalus.

222-235 M. Aurelius Alexander Severus.

226 Ascension to the throne of Ardashir I, first of the

Sassanids. 230-232 Military campaign against the

Persians.

234 Military campaign on the Rhine; killing of Alexander.

235-238 C. Julius Verus Maximinus.

238 M. Antony Gordianus Sempronianus and his son of the same name (Gordian I and II). M. Clodius Pupienus Maximus and D. Celius Calvinus

238-244 M. Gordian III; military campaign against the Persians. 241-

272 Shapur I

244- 249 M. Julius Philip called the Arab.

245- 247 Military campaigns against the Quadi and

the Carpi. 248 Millennial Celebrations of Rome

249-251 C. Messius Quintus Trajan Decius, the first of the Illyrians on the throne.

250 Beginning of the persecution against Christians.

251 Decius falls near Abritto.

251-253 C. Vibius Aphinius Trebonius

Gallus. 253 M. Aemilius Aemilianus.

253 Collegial government of Father Licinius Valerianus and his son Father Licinius Ignatius Gallienus.

260 Valerian is taken prisoner by Shapur I.

260-268 Gallienus.

260-261 T. Fulvius Junius Macrinus and T. Fulvius Junius Quietus.

261 Rebellion of M. Cassian Latinus Posthumus. Foundation of the Empire of Gaul. Assertion of Odenath of Palmyra.

267 Odenath is slain: Zenobia regent for Valballath.

268 Proclamation of Aureolus. Gallienus is killed.

268-270 M. Aurelius Claudius II; victory over the Goths near

Naissus. 270-275 L. Domitius Aurelianus.

271 Evacuation of Dacia.

273 Conquest of Palmyra. Reconquest of Gaul

274 Consecration of the Temple of the Sun in Rome.

275- 276 M. Claudius Tacitus.

276- 282 M. Aurelius (Equitius)

Probus. 282-283 M. Aurelius Carus.

283 M. Aurelius Carinus and M. Aurelius

Numerian. 284 C. Aurelius Valerius Diocletian.

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Table X.	• Prisoner parties (Arch of Septimius Severus).
Table XI.	*Left:* Emperor Commodus in the guise of Hercules. *Right*: Emperor Heliogabalus' head.
Table. XII. -	■ *Left:* bust of Emperor Philip the Arab. *Right:* the emperor Trajan Decius.

Table XIII. Two heads of barbarian fighters.

Table XIV. - A corridor of the palace of Septimius Severus.

Tav. XV. - Portrait of a high priest of the *Magna Mater.*

Table XVI. - Roman villa in Piazza Armerina: detail of the floor with dancers and gymnasts.

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