HISTORY & TRADITION

OF EUROPEANS

DOMINIQUE VENNER

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Dominique
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OF EUROPEANS

30,000 years of identity

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DOMINIQUE VENNER

HISTORY AND TRADITION OF THE EUROPEANS

30,000 Years of Identity

For my children

Contents

1

At the borders of the kingdom and the time

of this book began to be written in the early days of a new millennium. It was born out of overcome suffering, ancient meditation and determination. It is not through weakness, but through strength of mind and resolve of heart that our future will be shaped.

Faced with the challenges of the times, being a historian, especially a historian who is a witness to his own time, provides tools but also imposes responsibilities. First and foremost, the responsibility not to remain silent.

For the first time in their millennia-long history, the peoples of Europe no longer reign over their own space, neither spiritually, politically nor ethnically. In the aftermath of the First World War, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset had a premonition of this catastrophe. Believing that the world could not do without being 'commanded' by a dominant power, he asked the question:

"Who is in charge today?" The implicit answer was that Europeans were no longer in charge, and that others would rule for them and in their own countries. The author of *The Revolt of the Masses* predicted that this reversal would cause an unprecedented moral collapse. As long as they were "in charge", Europeans were able to dispense with a strongly internalised sense of self, the attribute and defence of rebellious minorities. It was enough for them simply to exist. That is now over. Europeans no longer 'rule', even at home, especially at home. What is more, they are victims of the uncontrollable spiral of technological domination and the purely economic logic they have created.

Without knowing it and without wanting it, we have entered a new system. The system of nihilism and chaos. It is clear that we are living through unprecedented times.

We expect science to provide answers. But it remains silent. It does not have the power to think for itself. Politics has nothing better to say. Thought has run dry.

Modern man, the man of technology, obsessed with efficiency and objectives to be achieved, has a mental universe that is subordinate to this efficiency. Beauty, wisdom and poetry are subordinate, unless they can be monetised. The tyranny of efficiency leads to the unliveable, to a new barbarism without the health of barbarians: the city that is not a city, the domination of money, the destruction of nature and the manipulation of life. By dint of calculating, man encounters the incalculable. Heidegger foresaw this. We are there, but we do not yet know it.

Faced with "Faustian" threats, in an instinctive movement of survival, all peoples are returning to their identity. Islamism, Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Africanism are manifestations of this. Struck to the core by their self-forgetfulness and guilt, only Europeans are not doing so. And yet!

That European identity is a reality is already evident at the most basic level of sensation. Identity is perceived through contact with otherness.

But European identity is also attested to by the history and transnational character of major cultural events. Beyond the cave art specific to all of Europe 30,000 years ago, beyond the standing stones and great founding poems of the Hellenes, Germanic peoples and Celts, there is not a single major collective creation that was experienced by one of the peoples of the former Carolingian Empire that was not also experienced by all the others. Every great movement that arose in one European country immediately found its equivalent among its sister peoples and nowhere else. This demonstrates a common culture and tradition that cannot be denied by inter-state conflicts. Epic poems, chivalry, courtly love, feudal freedoms, the Crusades, the emergence of cities, the Gothic revolution, the Renaissance, the Reformation and its opposite, expansion across the seas, the birth of nation states, secular and religious Baroque, musical polyphony, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, the Faustian world of technology, and the awakening of nationalities... Despite their often different histories, the Slavs of Russia and the Balkans also share in this European identity. Yes, all these great cultural achievements are common to Europeans and Europeans alone, marking the fabric of a civilisation that has now been destroyed.

What is our tradition? Do Europeans uphold principles of regeneration and rebirth? Is it possible to remain true to oneself despite the prevailing confusion? These are the questions that drive this book.

A reflection guided the responses, stemming from a meditation on the long duration of our history. The state of chaos is not only the result of a series of coincidences, hostile acts and historical catastrophes. It is the consequence of a spiritual upheaval, that of absolute nihilism, in other words, the forgetting of our tradition. Like all peoples united by the same culture, Europeans are the custodians of a very ancient tradition, but they are unaware of it. They have always been denied this perception. Apart from Homeric poems, they have no holy scriptures, although the material for such scriptures is provided by their legends, epic literature and ancient philosophy. They are also victims of major historical fractures that have resulted in the removal of their memory and their view of the world. The young philosopher Simone Weil perceived this, writing shortly before her death in 1943: "Europe has been uprooted, cut off from the antiquity in which all the elements of our civilisation have their origin." Victims of their acculturation, Europeans will therefore look elsewhere and in the denial of themselves, illusory remedies for their ills.

Every great people has a sacred history that reveals its own values, those that give meaning to the lives of each of its members. But Europeans have been deprived of this history. It has never been shown or perceived for what it is, a continuous flow, as if the same being, carrying the same meanings, had traversed time, from *the Iliad* to *The Steel Storms,* from *the Odes* of Sappho to *the Soumets* of Louise Labé. It is true that a certain idea of women and love has always distinguished Europeans as much as the figure of the knight.

Faced with what fate imposes on them, Europeans have no choice but to break with fatalism and return to their primordial sources. Following the example of Perceval setting out on his quest for the Holy Grail, they must rediscover their tradition in the forest of symbols in order to seek out the standards for a life that they can make different.

This is the meaning of this book, understood as a metaphysics of history, a search for the values it reveals. In it, we discover the

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1. Each chapter of this book develops a specific theme and can be read separately. Chapter 2 provides the link.

account of our origins and our little-known history. We will follow the quest for our authentic sources, those that have received, century after century, the living echo of their permanence beneath changing masks.

The form adopted for this work may confuse readers of philosophical essays. It is also intended for them, but not only for them. This is one of the reasons why its mode of expression deliberately departs from the conceptual formulation and jargon of the humanities. It aims for clarity of expression as much as for reading pleasure. Anecdotes are often used as vivid illustrations and poetic suggestions. But what is enjoyable is not necessarily light. Beneath the appearance of literary narrative lies a genuine work of thought. This book intentionally refuses to be a theoretical treatise. While concepts are useful tools, they are too often reductive, confining reality and preventing it from unfolding. What we find here, then, is a meditation that reveals meaning, but without the heaviness of conventional vocabulary and without an inflation of footnotes. This meditation takes a historical approach. It explores the meaning of our myths and our literature. The re-reading of Homer heralds the method of this return to sources, whether it be the deciphering of Plato or Epictetus, of courtly love or feudalism, of the Roman heritage or the Arthurian imagination.

It should also be noted that this work was conceived, constructed and written according to a plan that is not linear but follows a logical spiral. This deliberate choice aims to give full rein to the imagination. Its intention is to encourage the reader's free thinking through creative abundance.

The goal is to turn what was a dead letter into a life's work, to understand who we are, to discover how to live and act according to our tradition. This is not just a prerequisite for action. Thought is action.

Our world will not be saved by blind scientists or jaded scholars. It will be saved by poets and fighters, by those who have forged the 'magic sword' mentioned by Ernst Jünger, the spiritual sword that makes monsters and tyrants pale. Our world will be saved by the watchmen posted at the borders of the kingdom and of time.

2

From nihilism to tradition

Every people carries a tradition, an inner kingdom, a wall-whisper of ancient times and the future. Tradition is what perseveres and transcends time, what remains immutable and can always be reborn despite shifting contours, signs of ebb and decline.

A natural response to nihilism, tradition does not advocate a return to a dead past. It does not call for distaffs or horse-drawn carriages. It does not advocate a political or social theory. It is what gives meaning to life and guides it. It carries within it an awareness of the superior and the inferior, the spiritual and the material.

The enduring tradition of a people is not to be confused with traditions, even if customs sometimes carry a part of the authentic tradition. The latter is the highest and almost 'divine' expression of a large, flesh-and-blood, historical community. It is its eternal being. It gives it its principles, its permanent truths, capable of withstanding the fluctuations of time.

It is rooted in history, but it is beyond and beneath it. It is not chronologically prior. The primordial is not the primitive. It is understood in terms of duration. Tradition is a deep stratum, a spiritual foundation, a gift from the gods. Like language, it is not a deliberate creation.

Without our knowing it, it continues to live within us. Like a musical leitmotif, it is the guiding theme. It is fundamental. It is the oldest and closest thing to us. It is the expression of a unique way of being for men and women in the face of life, death, love, history and destiny. It embodies principles that transcend life, thoughts and actions.

The essence of nihilism

The universal dominance of nihilism means that a European who is conscious of his tradition — a traditionalist, in other words — will find points of agreement and complicity with Chinese, Hindus and Africans who also think and live according to their specific traditions. Despite all that differentiates them, they share a common disbelief in the illusions of Progress.

While tradition goes hand in hand with specific advances, it scoffs at the religion of progress and its belief in the constant improvement of humanity through reason, science and 'development'. In this respect, it is in line with the most modern trends. For example, we have discovered that although the Sioux and Cheyenne of old did not invent the railway, they possessed a wisdom that commanded them not to destroy nature or slaughter bison. From this, we can deduce that wisdom ranks higher in the order of transcendence than railways. This amounts to saying that spirituality linked to wisdom — another word for tradition

— should inspire life choices, rather than the materialistic and temporary logic of railways.

If such a reflection is to be taken seriously, it is because it sheds light on the function of tradition, its generative role, which is to give meaning. Politics, science, artistic creation, and even religion, have not

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1. The bison was the source of sustenance for the Indians of the Great Plains. Hunting, limited to what was necessary, had a religious character. The systematic destruction of the bison began in the mid-19th century, initially to supply fresh meat to the mobile teams working on the construction of the railways that were penetrating the West. The massacre was then systematised in order to "settle the irritating Indian question", in the words of General Sheridan and future President Garfield. To kill the bison was to kill an Indian. It was also to kill a second time the ancient wisdom of the Europeans, which Chief Seattle echoed in 1855 in his futile address to the President of the United States: "Every part of this land is sacred to my people, every sparkling fir needle, every sandy beach, every mist in the dark forests, every clearing, every buzzing insect is sacred in the thoughts and experiences of my people. The sap that rises in the trees contains the memory of the red man. . . Our dead never forget this wonderful land, for it is like the mother of the red man. . ."

their purpose. Within each culture, as long as harmony reigns, these categories take on meaning in relation to the higher purpose of tradition.

The opposite of tradition is not 'modernity', a confused and limited concept, but nihilism. Nietzsche defined nihilism as the consequence of the death of God, which was restrictive. It would be more accurate to speak of the disappearance of the sacred in nature, life, love, work and action. In other words, the disappearance of the meaning that hierarchises the values of life, placing what is superior above what is inferior.

In July 1914, shortly before war broke out between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, Emperor Franz Joseph made a gesture that gives pause for thought. As chance would have it, the crisis had caught the commander-in-chief of the Serbian army, General Putnic, in one of the spa towns of the Dual Monarchy. On the eve of a conflict with Serbia, this presented an opportunity to capture him and disrupt the enemy's plans. So when General Putnic was recalled by his government, the Austro-Hungarian authorities took it upon themselves to arrest him. But on the personal intervention of the emperor, the Serbian general was released and escorted back to his country's border with the honours due to his rank.

Franz Joseph believed that there was a value greater than utility. Preserving the spirit of chivalry, the very spirit of Europe, was the priority. In his choice, he had subordinated the inferior to the superior. He had not allowed himself to be dominated by the spirit of nihilism.

Wanting to paint what he understood by nihilism, Dostoyevsky imagined the character of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov sees himself as a kind of Nietzschean superman. He believes that exceptional men have every right, even the right to commit crime. "If one day," he says, "Napoleon had not had the courage to shoot an unarmed crowd, no one would have paid any attention to him and he would have remained unknown. " Napoleonic greatness thus begins with a crime justified by excessive ambition. Subordinating everything to oneself and elevating one's ego to the highest value is indeed a manifestation of nihilism, without necessarily revealing its essence.

Jünger suggested that, to represent nihilism, one should think less of bombers or young activists who read Nietzsche, and more of cold-hearted senior civil servants, scientists or

financial institutions in the exercise of their functions. Nihilism is nothing more than the mental universe required by their status, that of rationality and efficiency as supreme values. In the best of cases, it manifests itself in the will to power and, more often than not, in the most sordid triviality. In the world of nihilism, everything is subject to utility and desire, in other words, to what is qualitatively inferior. The world of nihilism is the one that has been created for us. It is the world of applied materialism, nature transformed into a rubbish tip, love disguised as sexual consumption, the mysteries of personality explained by libido, and those of society elucidated by class struggle, education reduced to a factory for specialists, the morbid swelling of information substituted for knowledge, politics demoted to an auxiliary of the economy, happiness reduced to the idea given by mass tourism, and, when things go wrong, an unchecked slide into violence. This landscape is, however, dotted with numerous preserved islands — including, of course, among senior civil servants, scholars and financiers, proving the perpetual ability of tradition to be reborn.

The origins of nihilism

The ancients believed that man adds to his 'animal' part a 'divine' part that distinguishes him and directs the former. In *Timaeus* (§70-71), Plato identifies three parts of the soul and body, analogous to the three classes of his *Republic*. In this, he is faithful to the Indo-European tradition of hierarchical balance between three fundamental functions that govern the order of the cosmos. The first function is embodied in the divine part, located in the head, the acropolis of knowledge and spirituality. It is superior to the other two parts. The moon, located in the heart, relates to action and warrior courage. It is allied with the first to keep the third function, located in the belly, the seat of appetites and desires, under control. Plato describes it as a wild beast chained to its feeding trough.

Following a complete reversal, this "desiring" part has become dominant in the world of nihilism, dictating its law to the first two functions, which now exist only in memory. In the hierarchy of values, the inferior therefore commands the superior.

This did not happen overnight. It was the unpredictable effect of a fundamental fracture in our history.

If we were to attempt to reconstruct the slow evolution that led to nihilism, one of the stages would be associated with Thomas Aquinas. The considerable work of the Angelic Doctor had a twofold consequence. Continuing the work of the Church Fathers, he perverted the spirit of ancient philosophy, which offered wisdom for living. He made it an auxiliary to theology. At the same time, he introduced Aristotle's rational logic into Christian thought. This innovation would give rise to modern rationalism. The principle of reason, highlighted since Milesian philosophy, had not had the same consequences in Antiquity. With its vocation to discover the laws of nature in order to attain wisdom through knowledge, ancient reason did not claim to hold the Truth, let *alone* impose it. In a Catholic world, founded on the belief in a single Truth and spiritually subject to the absolute authority of the Church, things were different. To understand the intellectual collision that ensued, we must go back in time.

In the early centuries of our era, when confronted with the emergence of Christianity, the Romans denounced this religion as a form of atheism. This surprises us because we have forgotten the logic of polytheism. Denying the existence of the many gods present in nature in favour of a single god, who was moreover alien to the cosmos, amounted to destroying the abundant presence of the divine in the world, in springs and woods, in love and action. This led to seeing only the materiality of nature and life. By concentrating all that was sacred in a single God outside of creation, by persecuting the ancient cults deemed idolatrous, Christianity wiped the slate clean in ancient Europe. All that remained was the single, abstract God. And from the day when the existence of this God became dependent on reason — an unintended effect of Thomism — the risk arose that he would be refuted by reason, leaving only emptiness behind.

The next step was Cartesianism. For Saint Thomas Aquinas, reason was closely associated with faith in order to demonstrate its correctness. For Descartes, reason is self-sufficient. "I think, therefore I am." Man thinks of himself as the central "subject" of the universe. Prepared by the Christian desacralisation of nature, the way was open for calculative reason

, to the will to power of science and technology,
and the religion of Progress, the secular substitute for Providence.

After the death of the gods and ancient wisdom, after the subsequent evacuation of the Christian God, all that remained was nothingness, that is, nihilism. In a striking paradox, the religion of the one God had led to the most negative form of atheism.

From Machiavelli to Hobbes

Parallel to the movement of ideas, a transformation of the feudal political order had taken shape, which had long been nourished by a sacred ethic unrelated to the official religion. Among the many causes of change, we cannot ignore the Church's struggle against the spiritual principle embodied by the Empire and chivalry (see Chapter 7). In this conflict, the papacy supported the Italian communes and independent monarchies. These proved to be dangerous allies, insofar as they sought to establish their own foundations outside the faith. France led the way in the 14th century with the development by its legal experts of a rational legitimisation of sovereignty. Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) is a landmark sign of the change that took place in the spirit of the times.

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1. The shift from Christianity to atheism was highlighted by Marcel Gauchet in *Le Désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion* (Gallimard, Paris, 1985, p. xi): "What we usually call 'great religions' or 'universal religions', far from embodying the quintessential perfection of the religious phenomenon, actually represent stages in its decline and dissolution — the greatest and most universal of which, our own, the rational religion of the one God, is precisely the one through which the departure from religion was able to take place. The perspective must therefore be reversed. In religious matters, apparent progress is decline. Fully developed religion is the religion that existed before progress. In his essay *Le Progrès meurtrier* (French translation Stock, Paris, 1993, pp. 136-138; the original German edition dates from 1981), the theologian Eugen Drewermann also showed how the compassionate promises of Christianity, after being disappointed, gave rise to modern atheism. See also Alain de Benoist, Thomas Molnar, *L'Éclipse du sacré* (La Table ronde, Paris, 1986). See also Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat, *Le Nihilisme chrétien* (PUF, Paris, 2001). For more on this subject, see our chapter 10.

However, it has two contradictory meanings. The prince, that is to say the modern state, manifests a return to the ancient religiosity of the city, which is commendable. Conversely, as the state appears to be its own justification, this seems to authorise all kinds of deceit, violence and crime. However, it would be a mistake to take this common interpretation at face value. Another consideration weighed on the Florentine advisor's thinking.

Princes, Christian or otherwise, did not wait for Machiavelli to be treacherous or cruel. But for the first time, the vices of power seemed to be elevated to principles. This was an unforeseen consequence of the Christian vision which, unlike ancient thought, associated human nature with evil, the fruit of sin. Although he himself was detached from Christianity, Machiavelli remained imbued with Christian pessimism: "The founder of a state and the legislator must assume in advance that all men are wicked and ready to use their wickedness whenever they have the opportunity. " That is why, since men are deceitful, "a prince has never lacked legitimate reasons to cover up his lack of word".

Neither Aristotle nor any of the Ancients were unaware of human baseness, but they did not believe that everything about human beings could be reduced to this baseness and that laws and the city should be based solely on it.

Let us take note of Machiavelli's interpretation without judging him too harshly. The nobility of the Florentine counsellor's intentions is not in question. Living in an age of chaos and death, thinking of the glorious memories of Antiquity, loving his homeland "more than his soul", he dreamed of seeing the "redeemer" of Italy arise. He knew that "a man who wants to be good, always good, is doomed to failure, surrounded by so many men who are not". From his pessimism and historical study, he drew a political realism that echoes the new and secular conception of the law of states and the law of European peoples conceived at the same time, which neither Plato nor Aristotle would have denied (see chapters 5, 6 and 11). This law of nations became established in Europe after the Thirty Years' War and remained in force until the catastrophes of the

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1. Machiavelli contrasted Christianity with the ancient Roman religion. He saw in the former "a religion [which] placed the supreme good in humility, abjection and contempt for human things", unlike the latter, which
"placed it in greatness of soul [and] strength of body..."

20th century. The praise of cynicism and the will to power contained in *The Prince* remained implicitly subordinate to the higher purpose of the public good, that of the city or the state.

The shift towards nihilism took place in the following century through the work of Thomas Hobbes and his successors. The author of *Leviathan* was influenced by two schools of thought: the rationalism of Descartes and Calvinism. "My doctrine," he wrote in his *Autobiography* (1679), "differs from the practice of countries that received their moral education from Athens and Rome." Going so far as to break with ancient wisdom, which postulated that good was in conformity with nature and nature with perfection, he wrote at the beginning of *Leviathan* (1651): "Nature is an artificial creation of God." Apart from the biblical God, who is by definition alien to nature, everything is artificial and therefore revocable. Man is not a social being by nature, as Aristotle had established. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is chaos, a war of all against all. Therefore, self-preservation is the supreme value and each individual acts selfishly for their own preservation. There is no norm higher than this fundamental selfishness. As with Machiavelli, we find here the Christian pessimism towards human nature. But in Hobbes, in another era and under other influences, this inverted pessimism gave rise to utilitarian morality, the precursor to modern materialism. Man, he said, acts only to seek pleasure and avoid pain. His moral feelings are merely a cover for his selfishness, and we should be glad of this. The next stage in this nihilistic evolution was illustrated by Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Stuart Mill and Karl Marx, who each theorised in their own way that interest, and therefore desire, whether of individuals or classes, is both the driving force and the norm of human behaviour, history and social organisation. At the end of the cycle, the idea that matter determines consciousness flourished. Thus, after the unexpected journey from Christian pessimism to materialism had been completed,

The time would come when the vile and debased man would be sanctified.

Myths, religions and the need for meaning

Does this mean that nihilism had changed human nature? Mircea Eliade provided an answer through his work. He renewed the interpretation of myths and religions, showing that humans, regardless of their origins or culture, differ from even the most evolved animals in their need for meaning, in their need to give meaning to their lives.

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interpretation of myths and religions, showing that humans, regardless of their origins or culture, differ from even the most evolved animals in their need for *meaning,* for giving significance to their existence and that of the world. In other words, humans cannot live in chaos or nothingness. Even when they display complete indifference, they feel an irrepressible need to interpret and order the universe, the cosmos of the Ancients, even if this is done in unexpected ways. Even before being a *homo habilis,* man is a *homo religiosus.*

For tens of thousands of years, the people of Europe lived in this way in a religious world of their own creation. The woods, valleys, rivers and even stones were inhabited by gods, nymphs and fairies. Everything was ritual: work, fishing, hunting, love, celebrations, dancing, art and even the smallest tasks of daily life. Similarly, symbolic thinking opened the mind to the world and enabled it to be interpreted. This is what the Greek philosopher Protagoras expressed in the 5th century BCE with the aphorism: "Man is the measure of all things." " By this he meant that there is no reality in itself. Reality exists only through the interpretation given to it by humans. And myths were among the most powerful interpretations they gave.

Despite himself, the secularised man of the nihilistic universe retains traces of the ancient *homo religiosus* that he cannot cease to be. Even when he denies his past, he continues to be haunted by it. Part of his existence is fuelled by impulses that come from that little-known area called the unconscious, which controls the functioning of the viscera as well as sexuality, sympathy or antipathy, attraction and repulsion. This is why the purely rational man, whatever Descartes or Condorcet may have thought, is never found in reality.

The majority of "non-religious" people continue to carry within them remnants of religiosity. They unconsciously sacrifice to rituals and symbols that belong to the religious mental structure. This is evidenced not only by the resurgence of various superstitions, but also by the proliferation of sects and substitute religions, whether political or sporting. Without knowing it, in everyday life, modern man continues to organise his existence around degraded rituals whose meaning has been forgotten: seasonal celebrations and

seasonal celebrations, rites of marriage, birth or death, rites of passage, military or hunting rites, hazing, examinations, professions of faith maintained by families most detached from Christianity...

to inhabit a world and put down roots there

While it is up to humans to give meaning to things that would otherwise have none, they do not have the power to free themselves from their specific existence. The utopia of autonomy of the "subject" through reason, of emancipation from ties and norms, has produced the brilliant results we know. Modern individualism had claimed to make man an autonomous, self-sufficient being, free from all cosmic, ethnic and even sexual ties, an equal among equals. We have seen the results! Having lost the reassuring protection of ancient communities and beliefs, the individual king is sooner or later seized by the terror of emptiness and anxiety. He then takes refuge in the intoxicants of consumption and the hypertrophy of an "ego" enslaved to his desires. The conclusive experience of nihilism teaches us, *on the contrary*, that to be human is to be from somewhere, to belong to a lineage, to a tradition, to speak and think in a language that predates all memory, which we receive without knowing it and which shapes our perception in a definitive way. To be human is to inhabit a world and to be rooted in it. Our roots, our ancestral ties, those of culture and values, make us real men and women, connected to nature, heirs without merit, endowed with an identity. even when we reject it.

For any person who has not been denatured, the centre of the world is their country, that is to say, a territory, a people, a history, a culture and representations that cannot be compared or reduced to anything else. This country is the result of a choice for those who are torn between several origins. Maurice Barrès, champion of rootedness, was from a family in Auvergne, but he *wanted to be* from Lorraine. The migrations of our time have multiplied the "mixing" of cultures on a larger scale, which is not without drama and pain. In one of his books, Jean Raspail describes an island in the West Indies where the Caralbes Indians were wiped out, victims of European microbes and intermarriage with former black slaves. Yet some mixed-race people, in whose veins flow a few

last drops of Carib blood, claim this heritage and, pathetically, keep it alive in their hearts. One might object that it is not enough to want to be Carib to be so. At least we are something. And even if the support is imaginary, it helps us to live.

It also helps to answer the most fundamental question of all: *who are we*? To this eternal question, men and peoples respond with what matters most to them. "They define themselves in terms of lineage, religion, language, history, values."

It is not necessary to oppose others in order to be self-aware, although we never assert ourselves as much as when we oppose others. We also feel the warmth of the clan all the more when we are under threat from an enemy. It seems that this is as necessary for moral well-being as friends are, and not just to promote the expression of identity. We can trust fortune to provide such benefits. Peoples rarely live in isolation, which is the true condition for peace. As soon as their ethnic, economic or spiritual territories come into contact, conflict arises. And men are rarely in control of it. This is why Homer attributed the cause of war to the gods.

The Mosque of Rome

To a large extent, the history of mankind is therefore intertwined with that of its conflicts. Even peaceful minds cannot

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1. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations* (Odile Jacob, Paris, 1997, p. 20). This essay draws attention to the new phenomenon of conflicts between civilisations, which have nevertheless already occurred in the past in different contexts, such as Hellenism versus Asianism, medieval Christianity versus Islam, etc. However, we will not follow Huntington in his intention to encompass the United States of America and Europe within the same "Western" civilisation, defined by the same idea of law, which remains to be proven. Historically, the United States was formed in opposition to Europe and its values. They represent a utopia of uprootedness opposed to the rootedness and tragic spirit of Europe. We might add that during the two great wars of the 20th century, the United States' participation was dictated by its desire to prevent the formation of a continental power capable of escaping its commercial and maritime hegemony.

escape this inevitability. On the eve of the Greco-Persian Wars, the Greeks had no desire to fight the Persian Empire. All things considered, the Persians did not want war either. They only wanted to subjugate the Greeks. The refusal to become slaves was the cause of wars from which Greek freedom emerged victorious. Once designated as enemies, even the most peaceful have no choice but to fight or submit. In the words of philosopher Simone Wei, parodying the Gospel, those who do not take up the sword will perish by the sword.

Despite its undeniable pacifism, Christianity has rarely protected its followers from the impulses of the species. Its missionary vocation, its dogmatic intransigence and its links with the powers that be have often contradicted what its doctrine preached. This is evident, among other things, in the memory of the Wars of Religion and the countless conflicts between Christian kingdoms, each claiming the support of the same God, *Gott mit uns,* against the others. It took the exhaustion and profound demoralisation of the European peoples in the second half of the 20th century for the old pacifist message to coincide with the prevailing trends of the time, to the point of dangerously exacerbating them.

Elsewhere, the followers of other, more combative religions of the Book and the adherents of belligerent ideologies showed at the same time that they had lost none of their conquering ambitions.

Thus, three days before Midsummer's Day in 1995, the most imposing mosque ever built in Europe was inaugurated in Rome. After Brussels, Lyon and Madrid, the city of emperors and popes, the spiritual centre of pagan and Christian Europe, had been imposed with a minaret whose provocative significance was obvious. In terms of symbolism, this monumental mosque surpassed all those that had been built throughout Europe in previous years. The event was warmly welcomed by all Western leaders, even religious ones.

Reflecting on this fact does not imply any animosity in principle, nor any contempt for Islam, but rather lucidity. Totally incompatible with European tradition, this religion is a matter for Muslims. But its spread in Europe concerns Europeans. And a people condemns itself to death if it does not throw itself at the throat of the foreigner who comes to taunt its gods in its own sanctuaries.

Nor should we forget that medieval and modern Europe, since the 8th century, was built on the struggle against Islam, against the threat of the Arabs and then the Turks.

This legitimate defence cannot be confused with the thirst for conquest that also drove the West. It would be absurd and anachronistic to feel guilty about an endeavour that had its moments of greatness and was the manifestation of a powerful energy. But how can we fail to see today the disastrous consequences for Europeans of their colonial ventures? And if Muslim proselytism is unacceptable on European soil, it is difficult to see what could justify Western proselytism in India, China or Africa, whether carried out in the name of Christianity or democracy. Let everyone live in their own home, master of themselves: that should be the wisdom of the future. But this presupposes an awareness of who we are and a willingness to defend our freedom.

The second death of Domère and Sophocles

Europe was not born out of the treaties of the late 20th century. It emerged from brother peoples who, between the Baltic and the Aegean, over several thousand years, gave birth to a community of culture without equal. Europe can therefore be defined as a very ancient tradition, drawing its richness and uniqueness from its constituent peoples and their spiritual heritage.

Its geographical name already appeared in Hesiod almost thirty centuries ago. It is then found in Hippocrates and Herodotus, as opposed to Asia, and again in Hecataeus of Miletus' *Description of the Earth*. Herodotus' era was one of early self-awareness, arising from the mortal threat of the Persian Wars. Plato echoed this in *The Republic,* showing that a community becomes aware of itself when faced with an external danger.

Centuries passed. In the places where Greek and Roman Europe had so often clashed with Asia, a new threat emerged: the conquering forces of Islam, which swept across the eastern Mediterranean like lightning. Initially repelled before Constantinople in 677, the assault continued unabated, cut off from the backwash of the Crusades on the former Hellenistic and Roman space of the East. Taking over from the Arabs, the Turks inflicted defeat on the Byzantine emperor at Manzikert in 1071. This

gave them control of Asia Minor. In 1353, they landed on the European shore of the Bosphorus and took control of the straits. In the spring of 1389, in the bloody battle of Kosovo, Serbia lost its freedom for five centuries. This was only the beginning.

The capital of the Byzantine Empire was the next target. After a two-year siege, despite the heroism of its basileus, Constantinople fell on 29 May 1453. One of the most beautiful cities in the world passed into the hands of its enemies. At that very moment, the Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque.

The entire eastern front of Europe was now open to conquest. Habsburg Austria became the last bastion of defence. Twice, in 1529 and 1683, the tide was turned at the walls of Vienna.

This critical period fostered the emergence of a new European consciousness. In 1452, the Byzantine philosopher George of Trebizond, attached to the Venetian chancellery, had already published *Pro defenda Europa,* a manifesto in which the name Europe replaced that of Christendom for the first time. After the fall of the Byzantine capital, Cardinal Piccolomini, the future Pope Pius II, wrote: 'Europe is being torn away from its eastern part.' And to convey the full significance of the event, he invoked not the Fathers of the Church, but, higher in European memory, the poets of ancient Greece. This catastrophe, he said, signified "the second death of Homer, Sophocles and Euripides". This lucid pope died in 1464 in despair at not having been able to assemble an army and a fleet to deliver Constantinople.

That Europe is a very ancient community of civilisation is attested to by Voltaire: "For a long time now," he wrote in 1751, "Europe has been regarded as a kind of Great Republic, divided into several states, some monarchical, others mixed... . but all sharing the same religious foundations and the same principles of public law and politics unknown in other parts of the world. It is because of these principles that European nations do not enslave prisoners, that they respect the ambassadors of their enemies... and that they agree above all on the wise policy of maintaining an equal balance of power between them... More than twenty centuries earlier, Plato and Aristotle said much the same thing about the relations between Greek cities (see chapter 5). Thus we discover that we belong to the same living world, and have done so since time immemorial.

Catalan memory of the Reconquista

The episode of the Roman mosque not only raises questions about Islam's return to conquest. Above all, it invites us to question ourselves. The danger often lies more in our own weaknesses than in the actions of our adversaries. What, then, is Europe? What is a European?

Milan Kundera, a Czech writer steeped in French culture, offered an answer in his essay *The Art of the Novel.* A European, he says, is someone who feels nostalgia for Europe. Nostalgia comes from *the* Greek *word nostos*, which means return, a word laden with meaning. Those who want to return to Europe, to its primordial tradition, are not only European by blood, but also by spirit, voluntarily and consciously. Human beings are not farm animals whose only requirement is to possess raw qualities. Heredity is a necessary foundation, but it is no guarantee of behaviour. Everyone can say yes or no to their potential, embrace their heritage, ignore it or betray it.

The Europe that Europeans feel nostalgic about comes from memories transfigured by legend. That Europe cannot be confused with the uncertain institutions with which its name is associated. And yet, even in the least favourable places, the spirit can sometimes be felt.

In his memoirs, Archduke Otto von Habsburg recounts that before Spain joined the European Community, the Catalan government made a ceremonial tour of Europe. This tour did not begin in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg. It was to Aachen, the capital of Charlemagne, that the delegation first travelled "to report to Europe on the return of its Catalans". A few days later, during the visit of the Catalan representatives to the plenary session of the European Parliament, before an audience of indifferent or hostile MEPs, Otto von Habsburg recalled that the Catalans' veneration for the Frankish emperor dated back to the reconquest of Barcelona from the Moors in 801.

The Muslim conquest of Spain had begun in the previous century. Only the mountainous regions of the north and the small kingdom of Asturias had escaped. Established by Charlemagne, the march

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1. Otto von Habsburg, *Memoirs of Europe* (Criterion, Paris, 1994).

of Spain had given the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula renewed hope of liberation.

This hope was maintained from generation to generation for eight centuries, until until 1492, when Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella the Catholic entered Granada and completed the Reconquista.

It is significant that Æ *Chanson de Roland,* a seminal work of French literature, focuses on one of the early episodes of the Reconquista. Roland the Valiant was celebrated throughout Europe, far beyond the Romance-speaking countries. He embodied the specifically European figure of the knight, the man "clear of face and heart".

The European soul

The figure of the knight seems distant to us today. And yet it remains intact, having triumphed over the insults of men and time, preserved by the secret paths of nostalgia. Invincible dreams of chivalry continue to slumber in the hearts of little boys. Similarly, in the souls of little girls, the mysterious dream of love still beats when they discover the legend of the fair-haired Iseult.

The love and daydreams of little girls do not distance us from history and its interpretation. Nothing reveals the nature of a people more than their conception of love. While the purely physical function of sexuality knows no boundaries, love is inseparable from culture and therefore from the soul of a people. The image of women in Islamic countries or China is not that revealed in the legends of Helen of Troy, Andromache or Penelope, Brunhilde or Guinevere, the novels of Chrestien de Troyes or the poems of Louise Labé. Even by twisting the texts, Scheherazade's spirit will never be that of Marie de France. As much as the figure of the knight, the idea of love distinguishes the European spirit. Not sex degraded as a consumer good, but this force

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1. The theme does not lie in the raw historical fact (the massacre of the rearguard flank by the Basques in the Roncevaux Pass), but in the interpretation given to it by *La Chanson.* On the Spanish Reconquista*, see* Philippe Conrad, *Histoire de la Reconquista* (PUF, Paris, 1998).

magical and luminous, already present in certain stanzas of the Odyssey, in the poetry of Sappho, in many Celtic and Germanic legends, of which courtly love was the ultimate expression.

Meditating on the European soul and what distinguishes it from the Near and Far East, Ernst Jünger identified Alexander's free determination to cut the Gordian knot as revealing. While Asia embraces the energies of the world, Europe is tempted to seize them and bend them to its will. The moon is associated with the seemingly tranquil force of water, the other with that of fire. In the West, ethics and philosophy never escape the will. The moon and the other are not only paths to wisdom, but a construction of the self through the exercise of the body, soul and spirit, as in the gymnasium, that place of Greek education which has endured to this day despite its alterations. It is therefore not surprising that history, the theatre of will, was a European invention.

Unlike Buddha, who uses renunciation as a tool for his inner empire, Achilles and Ulysses fulfil themselves by braving fate and the gods. They show the contrasting faces of willpower. Achilles' is reckless ardour, while Ulysses' is cunning and patience. The former perishes in the prime of his youth, achieving the immortality of heroes. The latter survives all dangers and achieves his goals.

One need only strip Achilles and Ulysses of their Achaean armour and dress them in today's fashion to discover that they are timeless European figures. Their feelings and motivations are not specific to a particular era. They are characteristic of a certain type of human being. They express an inner world that has endured since the Homeric poems. One would search in vain for their equivalent in the best literature of the East or Asia. Despite superficial similarities, Sinbad is not Odysseus' cousin. The world of *the Arabian Nights* is devoid of the tragic sentiment that accompanies the combative sailor of the Odyssey, despite his mischief and mockery.

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1. Ernst Jünger, *The Gordian Knot* (translation, Christian Bourgois, Paris, 1970). In 334 BCE, at the beginning of his campaign against Persia, Alexander cut with his sword the knot that tied the rudder of the chariot of Gordias, the legendary king of Phrygia. An oracle had promised the empire of Asia to whoever could untie this complex knot.

Victims of their insatiable curiosity, Westerners have often paid tribute to exoticism and the East, sometimes to the point of losing themselves, without ever ceasing to be dependent on their origins. It is not enough to wear Tibetan-style make-up or mimic yogis to change one's nature.

For a long time, it was commonplace in polite society to link Europe to Egyptian sources. But what do we know about ancient Egypt, which is still sometimes used as a benchmark for an arbitrary chronology? What is the driving force behind a culture whose monuments attest to both its greatness and its tyrannical power? Ethnologists assure us that the fellahs of the Nile Valley were identical five thousand years ago to those of today. Above them, men of a different mental and physical type became their masters, imposing their culture. What connection does this have with our own culture, other than marginal influences, which can also be detected in China, to whom we owe a considerable number of techniques and inventions that we have transformed? Every culture borrows from those around it, but in order to digest, transform and recreate according to its own genius. In a very distant way, the Parthenon may be indebted to others, but it nevertheless stands in absolute purity, as did later the keep of Vincennes and Strasbourg Cathedral.

We say "the East", but the East has many faces. Egypt is not China, and the Semitic world is not that of India, which was itself marked by the Aryans of old. Nowhere, however, can we find the Western constants of the free warrior, the beloved and respected woman, the epic poet and the philosopher. Comparing the Carthaginians and Romans in his *History of Rome,* Mommsen wrote: "What the Phoenicians, like all Aramaic nations, lack above all else is self-governing freedom." This is a rock to anchor ourselves to. Let us forget for a moment the pernicious use we have made of individualism pushed to the point of absurdity. With the fire of will, the courteous idea of love, the quest for wisdom and the tragic sense of destiny, one of the native traits of Europe is the harmony between the clan, the city and free individuality, already affirmed in the days of Achaean feudalism.

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1. See Bernard Lugan, *Histoire de l'Égypte des origines à nos jours* (Le Rocher, Paris, 2002).

Plurality of peoples and cultures

A contemporary of Pythagoras in the 6th century BCE, the philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon observed that each people gives its own face to its gods: "The Ethiopians say that the gods have snub noses and black skin, the Thracians that they have blue eyes and red hair. Almost twenty-five centuries before Joseph de Maistre, Xenophanes established the principle of the plurality of humanity, religions, cultures and traditions.

Those who speak of man as if there were only one type, identical in all races and peoples, confuse the natural functions common to all men — feeding, reproducing — with the particular creations of the mind or sensibility that belong only to a people, a tradition, a culture. While raw sexuality and book learning are universal, the world of meaning
— love, art, spirituality — is local. All art is rooted. "The *Mahabharata* has a symbolic function in India, but not in Paris. And Racine has none in Benares. Neither does Poussin — who, however, does not need a translator [2] ."

Racism, child of the Enlightenment

In November 1945, the founding charter of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation was drafted. Some forty countries were represented at the conference that gave birth to UNESCO. The intentions seemed most laudable. The aim was to ensure freedom of opinion and to banish forever political doctrines that incite hatred. The target was Nazism, which had just been defeated, but communism, one of the victors, was ignored. By linking the moral progress of humanity to its intellectual progress, the founding conference of UNESCO placed itself under the patronage of the

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1. "There are no men in the world," Joseph de Maistre would say. "I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, and Russians in my lifetime. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, that one can be Persian; but as for man, I declare that I have never encountered him in my life; if he exists, it is without my knowledge. " *(Considérations sur la France,* 1796).
2. Régis Debray, *Life and Death of the Image* (Gallimard, Paris, 1992).

Enlightenment. Diderot, Condorcet and other French philosophers of the 18th century postulated the infinite perfection of man and his universal freedom. However, they taught that only enlightened men were truly free and on the path to progress. In line with this thinking, the Organisation therefore expected that international cooperation for education and free access to knowledge would establish human dignity once and for all. Bravo! But which humans were they referring to? The man of the Enlightenment, of course, the abstract and universal subject of the Declaration of Rights, a 'being without being, without flesh, without colour and without qualities, the individual minus everything that distinguishes him'. With the aim of combating demonic forces, at the request of UNESCO, Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote *The Savage Mind* in 1952. This book was a huge success. It emptied the concept of race of all scientific content and operational value. The differences between human groups are due "to geographical, historical and sociological circumstances, not to distinct aptitudes linked to the anatomical or physiological constitution of blacks, yellows or whites [2]". But, Claude Lévi-Strauss added, "it is not enough to combat the biologisation of differences; we must also oppose their hierarchisation. The multiple forms that humanity gives itself in time and space cannot be classified in order of increasing perfection: they are not the milestones of a triumphal march... ". The anthropologist had perceived the unwitting trap set by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. Their intoxicating picture of the development of knowledge, technical progress and refinement of manners, i.e. of "civilisation", applied only to Europe and not at all to the rest of the world. "Progress" was the sole preserve of Europe. Hence the arrogance displayed by most Europeans, regardless of their opinions, at least until 1945. What is commonly referred to as racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over others, with or without hostility, was the offspring of the Enlightenment and the ideology of progress. It was the

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1. Alain Finkielkraut, *La Défaite de la pensée* (Gallimard, Paris, 1987, p. 76).
2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History, Structural Anthropology* (Plon, Paris, 1973, vol. II, p. 378).
3. This fact was highlighted by Marc Crapez, *La Gauche réactionnaire. Mythes de la plêbe et de la race* (Berg International, Paris, 1997).

justification for the rapid expansion of colonial enterprises in the 19th century. Europeans took it upon themselves to bring the
the "savages" the enlightenment of "civilisation".

Lévi-Strauss causes a scandal

How can we put an end to white man's pretensions while remaining committed to the Enlightenment, and therefore to progress? This question did not arise for minds that had retained a sense of tradition, such as Nerval, D.H. Lawrence, Faulkner, Jünger and Lyautey. They did not believe in progress. Technical 'civilisation' seemed to them to be hypocritical, and in no way a sign of superiority. On the contrary, they knew that in all races there are superior beings worthy of admiration, and others who are less so. Having discovered the hidden wealth of primitive societies in the course of his research, Lévi-Strauss found himself at odds with the logic of the Enlightenment. He understood that the ideology of progress was a form of ethnocentrism. The concept of universal civilisation had to be replaced by that of multiple cultures. Taking up the ambition of the founders of UNESCO, he turned it against the philosophy that had inspired them. Evil will be defeated on the day when so-called civilised men come down from their imaginary pedestal and
"recognise that they themselves are a variety of indigenous people".

In 1971, twenty years after *Race and History,* UNESCO invited Lévi-Strauss to open the International Year for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Everyone expected another demonstration of the scientific invalidity of the concept of race. To everyone's astonishment, the speaker chose instead to take it seriously. Drawing on the latest research in population geˊlletics ˊ, he declared:
"Far from asking whether culture is a function of race, we discover that race — or what is generally understood by this term — is one function among others of culture."

> To say that race is an effect of culture contradicted the theories that scholars had advocated until the mid-20th century, for whom

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1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Distant Look* (Plon, Paris, 1983, p. 36).

culture was an effect of race. But it also meant restoring scandalous legitimacy to the accursed concept. That was intolerable. Incidentally, one may be surprised, however, at the zeal that pushes the rejection of racism to the point of rejecting any reflection on the notion of race, to the point of excommunicating any scientific work that rebels against the new dogma. Yet, as the taboo surrounding the word race grew thicker, the Organisation came to renounce its own catechism, this time in the name of cultural diversity. In 1982, at the Mexico City conference, it recognised that the identity of individuals is intertwined with their collective identity: "Cultural identity is the living core of individual and collective personality; it is the vital principle that inspires decisions, behaviours and actions perceived as the most authentic."

A few years later, increasingly free and drawing conclusions from the threats that modernity posed to the survival of cultures, Lévi-Strauss recognised, contrary to UNESCO's grand proclamations, that conflict between cultures is normal. It is
"the price to be paid so that the value systems of each spiritual family or community can be preserved and find within themselves the resources necessary for their renewal." The eminent anthropologist had just rediscovered what history had been teaching since the beginning.

From self-respect to respect for others

A gentleman from Anjou of ancient lineage, born in Liré on the banks of the Loir seven years after Marignan, protected by the king's sister, Joachim Du

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1. *Op. cit.,* p. 15. In a book of interviews, Lévi-Strauss paid unexpected tribute to Gobineau, author of *the* famous *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1855): "My idea that, in their evolution, cultures tend towards increasing entropy as a result of their mixing comes directly from Gobineau, who has been denounced as a father of racism." He added
"Gobineau's views are, moreover, very modern in tone, as he recognised that pockets of order can form as a result of what he called — also very modern — 'a correlation in the various parts of the structure'. He provides examples of this. He was aware that these successful balances between mixtures ran counter to a decline that he considered irreversible." (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Didier Eribon, *De près et de loin,* Odile Jacob/Le Seuil, Paris, 1990, pp. 206-207).

Bellay was fascinated by Italy. Thanks to the protection of his uncle, Cardinal Du Bellay, he was able to stay in Rome for three years. Alas! Reality did not live up to his expectations. On the banks of the Tiber, Joachim discovered with nostalgia the charms of the Loir. Distance is often necessary to appreciate the flavour of one's homeland. With a heart filled with melancholy, the poet wrote these unforgettable verses on parchment:

I prefer the home my ancestors built To the bold
facades of Roman palaces.

More than hard marble, I like fine slate. More my
Gallic Loir than the Latin Tiber.
I prefer my little Liré to the Palatine Hill.
And more than the sea air, the sweetness of Anjou.

Despite the proximity of European cultures, Du Bellay had discovered that every homeland, large or small, has its own way of being. He had discovered that the spirit of his country and its people permeated his sensibility to such an extent that separation was painful. He had learned that Anjou France possessed a gentleness and an art of living that were as necessary to his happiness as the water of the Loir was to the gudgeon. Yet 16th-century Italy was in no way inferior to France, to which it is as closely related as Germany. What would Du Bellay have said if he had had to emigrate to the Barbary Coast or to the court of a Mongol potentate?

Attachment to one's roots, to a certain way of being and living, does not imply any contempt for other cultures. The more self-aware we are, the easier it is to recognise the same dignity in others, even if certain Asian music grates on our ears, or certain African ritual mutilations scandalise our perceptions, which does exceed the limits. Dignity does not mean equality. Equality, superiority, inferiority, in relation to what? In this matter, there is no universal standard.

Contemporary suicidal tendencies

Our often-criticised era has at least recognised that the former claim to universality by the French, Europeans or

Americans, was merely a mask for their ethnocentrism, the arrogant illusion of taking *my* culture for culture *itself*. The influence of Christian universalism and its proselytism played a part in this, before the Enlightenment and human rights came along.

It was once thought that the norms forged in Île-de-France or on the banks of the Thames by several centuries of specific refinement should be imposed on all peoples and for all time. At least this chimera gave Europeans internal cohesion. It has been replaced only by emptiness or, worse still, by a relentless denial of self, which resembles a desire to disappear. In the last decades of the 20th century, this plague of the spirit spread throughout the white world, insidiously combining its self-destruction with widespread mixing. Conversely, the struggle for the survival of the group, which since the dawn of time had been the law of all peoples, was rejected as the expression of absolute evil.

Adopting interbreeding as their goal, most Western European countries encouraged migration from the East and Africa. Under new laws, in a complete reversal of vital morality, the guilty party was no longer the one who destroyed his people, but rather the one who worked to preserve them.

There is no historical example of a civilisation that has taken its refusal to survive and its desire to destroy itself to such extremes. The phenomenon is all the more perverse because it is accompanied by apparent displays of power and economic and technical efficiency, which serve to mask the decline and stifle the creative abilities of peoples of European origin.

This involution coincided with a reverse movement in Africa, Asia and, more generally, outside the boundaries of the former 'white world'. Everywhere, under the effect of decolonisation, minorities of European origin were excluded or expelled by violence. This elimination was carried out in the name of the principle of ethnic homogeneity, which only Westerners repudiate. They have reached this point as atonement for their collective suicide in the two world wars. It is also the result of concerted destructive actions. It is also the consequence of the former dominant religion and its secular transpositions. Universalist utopias have gradually destroyed in Westerners

Westerners the natural immunities that are evident in other peoples.

I, Symmachus, the last Roman

At the turn of the new century, Thomas Molnar, a leading Catholic intellectual, published an essay with the seemingly obscure title: *Moi, Symmaque* (I, Symmachus). It was a kind of desperate intellectual testament and an analysis of the decline affecting the four pillars of Western civilisation as the author understood them: France, the Church, the University and Culture.

Born in Hungary before the Second World War and a refugee in the West after 1945, Thomas Molnar had studied in Belgium and France before teaching philosophy at American universities. This change of scenery did not make him an American. His nostalgia for Europe had preserved him. However, at the turn of the millennium, he no longer recognised the Europe he had loved.

When one is familiar with the work of Molnar, one of the major Catholic writers of his time, it is surprising to see him identify, at the end of his life, with Symmachus, the 'last of the Romans'.

An important orator and politician living in the 4th century, a period of chaos that saw the triumph of Christianity, Symmachus is famous for having publicly protested when Christians, supported by Theodosius, removed the statue and altar of Victory from the Roman Senate in 382.

Why this sudden interest on Molnar's part in such a figure? Everything seems to oppose the pagan aristocrat of the late 4th century and the Catholic philosopher of the late 20th century. Molnar's identification with Symmachus reflects the turmoil of this superior mind confronted with a spiritual and civilisational collapse reminiscent of that of dying Roman civilisation. It also expresses a sense of solidarity in the face of a great historical tragedy, the awareness that the end of paganism was a catastrophe comparable to the end of Christianity. It is obviously this parallel that is surprising in the writings of a Catholic author, especially since, in his anxious view, the

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1. Thomas Molnar, *Moi, Symmaque* (L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris, 2000).

hiatus of Christianisation is not seen as a fundamental break, but as a change that does not profoundly affect an essential continuity.

Molnar acknowledges that the "Christian revolution" was a terrible tragedy for the authentic Romans, the collapse of a beautiful and respected world. "In Symmachus' eyes," he writes (p. 14), "the 'best' was the empire of the ancestors with its unquestioned *paganitas*. However, the future was going to be shaped—and he knew it—precisely by the forces of the 'worst' that he had to hate, despise and not understand... As a teenager at the time of Julian's attempt at repaganisation, [Symmachus] carried within him a preference for tradition [and] its symbols. As a result, the immense undertaking of Christianisation led by Constantine two or three generations before his own must have seemed like an immense betrayal, Julian's death a tragedy commensurate with the greatness of Rome, and his own retirement from city affairs following the emblematic episode of the statue a gigantic defeat. With Good buried, the reign of Evil began." This is well said and honest.

Roman *paganism* and Christianity

At the beginning of what would later become the 4th century, primitive Christian groups had spread throughout the eastern part of the Empire for a variety of reasons that have been thoroughly studied by historians since Gibbon in the 18th century and Renan in the following century (see Chapter 7). The ethnic orientalisation of the Empire and a few other more personal reasons prompted Emperor Constantine to support Christianity with all his might. Christianity experienced rapid growth after the Edict of Milan in 313 and even more so when it was proclaimed the official religion of the Empire by the Edicts of Theodosius.

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1. At the time, years were still calculated in relation to the legendary date of the founding of Rome in 753 BCE. Around 525, the monk Dionysius Exiguus calculated that the birth of Christ had occurred in the year 753 after the founding of Rome. He was a few years off. No matter. His calculations were gradually adopted by the Roman Church and thus by Europe to establish the calendar of the new era.

in 391-392, to the detriment of the old religion, which was now persecuted. This revolution accompanied and accelerated the collapse of *the* old Western *Roman Empire*, of which soon only the prestigious ruins remained. It is in this context of the end of the world that we find the figure of Symmachus, born around 340 and died after the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410.

Like Symmachus, Molnar rejects a future world in which he sees only morbid signs. However, he considers his own suffering to be more cruel than that of Symmachus. In his opinion, the great pagan could feel that part of his spiritual heritage would survive in Christianity, whereas the Catholic Molnar sees nothing of his own heritage remaining in the chaos unfolding before his eyes.

"Symmachus," he writes, "was able to escape despair: the environment changed gods, but the sacred remained" (p. 32). The symbols "underwent a decisive transformation after Constantine," he adds, "but the heavens were not emptied: the axis of the world continues to connect man to that which transcends him, the mysteries of Mithra or Christ" (p. 34). This is an image to remember. Coming from a Catholic as staunch as Molnar, the parallel and equivalence between Mithra and Christ makes sense. Contrary to the usual interpretation, the Christian essayist does not oppose the two divinities. He associates them. This must have surprised or scandalised his readers, who identified either with Mithra or with Christ. As this discussion is not new, the important point lies elsewhere, in what prompted Molnar to establish a kinship and continuity of an essential nature between Christianity and ancient *paganism.*

The toxic reversal of the ancient religion

In the uncertain dawn of the 21st century (the 29th century of the Romans and Hellenes), Europeans have the misfortune – or the good fortune, if one likes challenges – of living in a spiritually decayed, though technically flourishing, world, a world that is collapsing, but where the green shoots of a renaissance are nevertheless appearing.

What is at stake in this catastrophe transcends the political sphere. Therefore, the only means available to politics are ineffective remedies. Spiritual chaos must be understood in its own context, with its long-term causes, which are inseparable from history.

Western Christianity, in reality a form of pagan Christianity, had shaped the European soul for nearly a thousand years. Despite its collapse, it continues, through osmosis, to provide Europe with its representations. But this now takes pathogenic forms. The destruction of the ancestral consciousness that was the foundation of ancient health weighs more cruelly than ever. It is exacerbated by the heaviness of penance and the toxic burden of universal compassion.

If we take a broad view, from the 8th to the 18th century, this religion, structured around Roman tradition, provided Europeans, willingly or unwillingly, with internal cohesion and a justification for their presence in the world. The Christian God had become the God of Europeans who imagined themselves masters of the Earth. All that is now gone. With the overthrow of European royalty, the Christian churches drew their own conclusions. In the second half of the 20th century, turning their attention to the multitudes of other races, they ceased to seek to express the religion of Europeans. Despite some exceptions, they offer no resistance to chaos and most often act as a poison that amplifies evil from within. However, this development has met with resistance from traditionalist Catholics and autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

To be fair, we must also recognise that in France, within our dilapidated societies, Catholic educational institutions, partly heirs to Roman stoicism, remain the last to uphold firm educational principles, offering a level of competence and benevolent dedication that has deserted education everywhere else.

Europeans are not only victims of the upheavals brought about by nihilism and the "permanent revolution" of liberal society. The shifts in power following the two world wars have meant that Europe complacently accepts the intellectual domination of a world power that professes to be anti-Europe. France is particularly affected. For centuries, this nation has been spiritually deforested and uprooted by the combined effects of state centralism and the Counter-Reformation, by the trauma of its Revolution and repeated civil wars. Its very essence having been damaged, it has lost most of its natural immunities. Yet resistance to its disappearance continues to manifest itself outside the visible arena of politics.

politics. The fate of this once-great country cannot, however, be isolated from that of Europe as a whole, including Russia. Regardless of its future political configurations, this greater Europe harbours immense human, spiritual and material reserves.

Renaissances will not happen spontaneously. As far back as one can look, except perhaps to the worst periods of Roman decadence, there are no precedents for the trials imposed on Europeans by our times. Europeans are therefore forced to make an intellectual and spiritual effort commensurate with the challenges they face. Unable to find in Christianity the support that a people has a right to expect from an indigenous religion, they must look further back into their past. They must return to their roots in order to discover the underground current of tradition beneath the disguises.

For a creative hermeneutics

In his time, Nietzsche undertook to respond to the challenge of nihilism, the death of meaning, by forging the myth of eternal return, renewed by the Stoics. He embraced the idea of a resurrection of ancient Greece that had already haunted Hölderlin. This involved a reinterpretation of essential texts, what Mircea Eliade calls "creative hermeneutics". What does this mean?

Hermeneutics "ranks among the living sources of a culture, for every culture consists of a series of interpretations and re-evaluations of its specific myths or ideologies". Shortly before 1500, the publication in Italy of the first edition of Homer renewed Western culture, as Dante Alighieri had done previously by returning to Roman culture, and as Erasmus would also do by working on other sources. Later, the most creative aspects of Romanticism sprang from a hermeneutics of Scandinavian and Celtic legends and folk tales. A creative hermeneutics, Eliade says, "reveals meanings that were not previously understood". It can change people through the effect of awakening or *reawakening* that it has on them.

This is how we should conceive of a "return to the sources".
Neither the search for an impossible beginning nor the accumulation of

Sooty reveries about a hypothetical Golden Age or a lost paradise. Returning to one's roots is the quest for what is essential, the expression of a genius already accomplished in its ancient form, and always constant throughout time.

For Europeans, returning to the roots of their spiritual realm means going to what is most authentic in primordiality, the highest in time and most worthy of respect. This necessarily leads to Homeric poems.

Founding works, the Iliad and the Odyssey are not just Greek poems. They are the Greek expression of the entire heritage that constitutes the core of Europe. In their own way, they reflect the spirit and tumultuous grandeur of Celtic and Germanic myths. Siegfried and Cuchulain are brothers of Achilles, as are Roland and Perceval. This identity with other sources of European spirituality found its continuation in Western Christianity, then in the glorious awakening of the Renaissance. The perfection of the work of art, the ability to express the entirety of the heritage, the permanence through time, this is what designates Homeric poems as the quasi "divine" sources of Europeans. These sources were renewed, enriched and magnified by their extension into Greek philosophy and later into the chansons de geste and courtly romances of our Middle Ages.

The blurred sources of European tradition

Returning to our roots means that we must first clear away the undergrowth obscuring the path we have travelled backwards in order to reach the essence of tradition. This cannot be done without constant effort, without intense research and reflection, so hidden is the path.

In Burgundy, in the Basilica of Saint-Andoche in Saulieu, there is a capital that reveals a whole mentality, shaped by the distorted religious and historical vision that we have inherited. It is a very simple piece: the basket, which widens from the base to the top, is entirely decorated with stylised foliage. A postcard is available to visitors. On the back is the caption: "Leaves and branches of alder. Sacred tree of the Persians. Persian-Sassanid influence."

in the $^{11\text{th}}$ century, when the decoration of Saint-Andoche was carved, comments historian Régine Pemoud, who reports that 'more than half a millennium earlier, on the other side of the known world, the Sassanid dynasty had died out. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the veneration that the sacred tree of the Persians could have inspired in the little stonemason from this corner of Burgundy.

We have looked far and wide for influences on medieval art. To explain what seemed inexplicable in the rise of an art form so different in appearance from the classical model, we have most often resorted to the Orient. Much research could have been simplified, adds Régine Pernoud, if we had taken into account what existed on our soil before the arrival of the Romans.

The interpretation of what inspired the stonemasons of Saint-Andoche has been repeated thousands of times in relation to our history and our art. Generations of excellent teachers have been misled by a distorted view of the world of our origins, a barbaric world, it was said, rescued from its ancestral savagery by the light of the East. In reality, the medieval world was a continuation of the Celtic world, enriched by Roman, Germanic and Christian influences.

Western pagan Christianity

One of the founding events of medieval Europe was the baptism of Clovis, through which the Franks, who soon became masters of Gaul, gradually converted to Christianity. However, one might wonder whether Clovis and the Franks did not in turn 'barbarise' Western Christianity, and whether the famous baptism was not also that of Christianity by a Germanic-Celtic paganism that resurfaced in the Middle Ages in courtly literature, folk tales, the magical bestiary of churches and cathedrals, and a whole section of the chivalric imagination. Nor can we ignore the fact that the Church became the heir to the Roman tradition, even in its language— Latin—and its institutions. This heritage is obviously not unrelated to the continuity of the Catholic Church and its often beneficial structural role in the long history of Europe until the last century. Through an astonishing

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1. Régine Pernoud, *Les Craulois,* Le Seuil, Paris, 1962.

Paradoxically, after being the declared enemy of the Roman Empire until the end of the 4th century, Christianity came to embrace it and become imbued with its *ordo aeternum* once Constantine and his successors had made it the religion of the Empire.

Christianity then suffered the common fate of all religions by being transformed by the people who had adopted it. In Europe, it was often experienced as a transposition of ancient pagan cults. Behind the saints, people continued to worship familiar gods without asking themselves any big questions. In monasteries, ancient texts were copied without always being censored. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Church even accompanied the "return of the gods". The Renaissance popes, Alexander Borgia, Julius II, Leo X and Pius V, adorned the Vatican with a magnificent display of mythological allegories. Even today, Europe and all those it has influenced continue to live according to a seasonal calendar of Roman origin, whose twelve months and major holidays have remained independent of the liturgical calendar. As it was practised in Europe over the centuries, Christianity was in reality a form of "pagan Christianity", a very specific religious variety, far removed from its biblical origins.

This reflection leads us to recognise Christianity as a very real part of European tradition, while acknowledging that it is not its source.

The convictions of most Christian traditionalists, based on discipline and harmony, are in no way opposed to the perception of authentic European tradition and the order it imposes

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what they are and as a source of strength that adds without taking away.

Nor can we ignore the fact that the Catholic Church, the unexpected heir to Roman civilisation, whose history has long been intertwined with that of Europe for better or for worse, is today the oldest living European institution, a fact that its hierarchy tends to forget.

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1. In 2000, *La Libre Belgique,* a major Catholic daily newspaper, praised the autobiographical essay by a young Belgian academic, Christopher Gérard, *Parcours pai'en* (LÂge d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris), showing that old controversies could be overcome. Since 1992, Christopher Gérard has been the editor of the polytheistic studies journal *Antai'os,* originally founded in 1959 by Ernst Jünger and Mircea Eliade.

Tradition and traditionalism

Every great people has a unique and essential tradition. It is the past and the future, the world of depths, the foundation on which to build, the source from which to draw at will. It is the stable axis at the centre of the spinning wheel of change. In the words of Hannah Arendt, it is the authority that "chooses and names, transmits and preserves, indicates where treasures are to be found and what their value is". This dynamic idea of tradition differs from Guénon's conception of a single hermetic and universal tradition, common to all peoples and all times, originating in a revelation from an unidentified "ultramundane" world. The fact that such an idea is resolutely ahistorical has not bothered its theorists. In their eyes, the world of history, for the past three or four thousand years, has been nothing but a regression, a fatal involution, negating the world of what they call "the Tradition", that of a Golden Age inspired by Vedic and Hesiodic cosmology. It must be acknowledged that the anti-materialism of this school is stimulating. On the other hand, its syncretism is ambiguous, to the point of having led some of its followers, and not the least among them, to convert to Islam. Moreover, its criticism of modernity has led only to a recognition of powerlessness. Unable to go beyond its often accurate criticism and offer an alternative way of life, this school has taken refuge in a millenarian expectation of catastrophe. What in Guénon or Evola is high-minded thinking sometimes turns into sterile rhetoric in some of their disciples [2]. Whatever reservations Julius Evola's theses may raise, we can never be grateful enough to him for having forcefully demonstrated in his work that, beyond any specific religious reference, there exists a spiritual path of tradition that opposes materialism, including the Enlightenment.

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1. Generally speaking, the intrinsic pessimism of counter-revolutionary thinking — from which Evola stands apart — stems from a fixation on form (political or social institutions) at the expense of reflection on the essence of things (what persists behind change).

2. The Italian academic Marco Tarchi, who had long been interested in Evola, criticised him for his sterile discourse populated by "warlike" or "aristocratic" dreams (*Vouloir* magazine, Brussels, January-February 1991. This magazine is edited by the philologist Robert Steuckers).

were an expression. Evola was not only a prolific thinker, he also demonstrated in his life the values of heroism that he had developed in his work.

In order to avoid any confusion with the current meaning of ancient traditionalisms, however estimable they may be, we suggest a neologism, that of "traditionism".

For Europeans, as for other peoples, authentic tradition can only be their own. It is what opposes nihilism by returning to the specific sources of their ancestral soul. In contrast to materialism, tradition does not explain the superior by the inferior, ethics by heredity, politics by interest, or love by sexuality. Yet heredity has its part in ethics and culture, interest in politics, and sexuality in love. However, tradition establishes a hierarchy. It constructs personal and collective existence from the top down. As in the allegory of *Timaeus,* relying on the courage of the heart, the sovereign spirit commands the appetites. However, the spirit and the body cannot be dissociated. Thus, authentic love is made up of both a communion of the soul and a channel agreement.

Tradition is not an idea. It is a way of being and living in accordance with the aforementioned precept from *Timaeus:* "The goal of human life is to establish order and harmony in one's body and soul, in the image of the eternal order of the cosmos." This means that life is a path towards this goal.

Living according to our tradition

The desire to live according to our own tradition will be felt all the more strongly in the future as the chaos of nihilism worsens. In order to find itself again, the European soul, so often drawn towards conquest and infinity, is destined to turn inwards through introspection and knowledge. Its rich Greek and Apollonian heritage offers a model of wisdom in finitude, the absence of which will become increasingly painful. But this pain is necessary. We must pass through the night before we can reach the light.

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1. Julius Evola's major work, *Revolt Against the Modern World,* was translated by Philippe Baillet and published by Éditions de L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris, 1991.

For Europeans, living according to their tradition first requires an awakening of consciousness, a thirst for true spirituality that is exercised through personal reflection in contact with a higher thought. The level of education is not a barrier. "Knowing many things," said Heraclitus, "does not educate the mind. " And he added: "All men are granted the ability to know themselves and to think correctly." But one must still practise meditation. Austerity is not the rule. Xenophanes of Colophon even gave this pleasant recipe:

"It is by the fireside in winter, lying on a comfortable bed, after a good dinner, drinking sweet wine and nibbling on roasted chickpeas, that one should ask oneself these questions: Who are you? Where do you come from?" More demanding, Epicurus recommended two exercises: keeping a journal and imposing a daily examination of conscience. This is what the Stoics practised. With Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, they left us the model for all spiritual exercises.

Taking notes, reading, rereading, learning, repeating daily a few aphorisms from an author associated with tradition, that is what provides support. Homer or Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus, Montaigne or Nietzsche, Evola or Jünger, many others besides, the poets who elevate
, memoirists who encourage distance. The only rule is to
choose what lifts you up while enjoying the text. [1]

Living according to tradition means conforming to the ideal it embodies, cultivating excellence in relation to one's nature, rediscovering one's roots, passing on one's heritage, and showing solidarity with one's own people. It also means banishing nihilism from oneself, even if one appears to sacrifice oneself to the practical norms of a society enslaved by desire. It implies a certain frugality in order to limit oneself and free oneself from the chains of consumption. It means rediscovering the poetic perception of the sacred in nature, love, family, pleasure and action. Living according to tradition also means giving shape to one's existence by taking oneself as a demanding judge, looking towards the awakened beauty of one's heart rather than the ugliness of a decaying world.

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1. Accepting guidance is not superfluous. Marcel Conche for Homer or Epicurus, Pierre Hadot for Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius, Louis Rougier for Celsus, Paul Veyne for Seneca, Lucien Jerphagnon for Latin authors, Christopher Gérard for Emperor Julian, etc.

3

A history before history

From capital to capital, the exhibition arrived in Paris on the eve of the year 2000. It was highly symbolic, as highlighted by its name: *Europe in the Time of Ulysses.* The past came back to life and became part of the future. A stark and cold setting helped to convey the living mystery of the millennia-old objects displayed in the brightness of geometric niches. Jewellery, ritual objects, weapons and pottery had been brought together in such large numbers for the first time. They conveyed the idea of the vigorous cultural unity of the Europeans of the Bronze Age, from the Baltic to the Aegean, from Cornwall to the Volga, four or five thousand years ago. The perception of this unity was imposed with a force that books or photos cannot offer. The tactile demonstration came from the objects themselves, made by the expert hands of our unknown ancestors. Torn from their tombs, they fulfilled the function of eternity that had been entrusted to them on the day of their burial.

With them and through them emerged evidence of a very ancient sacred history that had long been hidden from us. These objects bore witness to one of our earliest civilisations, its sun gods, its mother goddesses, its undefeated heroes, its light war chariots, the sumptuous treasures of its palaces, its long, daring banks. Displaying a consistent aesthetic sense, these objects were from here and not elsewhere. Women's jewellery, elegant gold goblets, delicate pottery, all of it seemed contemporary, the best we could hope to see.

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1. This refers to the exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris in the autumn of 1999, *Europe in the Time of Ulysses.* It was organised under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The catalogue was presented by Katie Demakopoulou, Christiane Éluère, Jorgen Jensen, Albrecht Jackenhövel and Jean-Pierre Mohen.

today. The most eloquent of these living traces were the long bronze swords, admirable in their finesse and purity. In Europe, the sword has always been the double of free men, the acknowledgement of their prestige, their rank, their valour. Along with bronze armour, made to fit muscular torsos, swords spoke for these men and for their unity, the refinement of their civilisation, the organisation of their trade.

The manufacture of bronze required large-scale transport over long distances. Lead was found in Cornwall, while copper was mined in Central Europe or Cyprus. Trade was conducted using golden amber from the shores of the Baltic Sea or ivory imported from the Middle East. To achieve perfection, bronze working required production centres and numerous skilled craftsmen. Discovered under a burial mound in Denmark or in a tomb in Mycenae, the swords all seemed to come from the same mould, displaying the aesthetic unity of a single world.

30,000 years of European culture

As ancient as it may be, this bronze culture is not the first in Europe. It was preceded in our geographical area by another, much older culture, that of "prehistoric" engravings and paintings, created by peoples who are our most distant ancestors in time.

Illustrated by the magical bestiary of the Chauvet Cave, on the edge of the Ardèche Valley, this first great European culture is over 30,000 years old. Its most numerous and stunningly beautiful cave paintings are located between the Rhône and the Cantabrian Mountains, but examples can be found everywhere, from Germany and Bohemia to the Urals, with the paintings in the Kapova Cave. Due to its age and homogeneity in paintings and engravings of all kinds, this religiously inspired animal art is specific to Europe and Europe alone (see pp. 225-229). The production of objects of the same aesthetic design, such as carved flint weapons and harpoon throwers made of engraved bone or deer antler, also extends from the Pyrenees to the Urals, across what would become the original homeland of the future Indo-Europeans.

What is surprising about this early European culture is not only its spatial extent, but also its duration, at least two hundred centuries, an eternity. It flourished from around 32,000 to 12,000 years ago, and only died out a dozen thousand years ago.

The culture of the hunter-artists who decorated caves is thought to have lasted for at least 20,000 years. The cause of its disappearance can be explained by the end of the last ice age, which brought significant changes to the climate and, consequently, to the flora, fauna and way of life. In Western Europe, the shrubby taiga gradually gave way to deciduous forests and natural grasslands. But it did not disappear. Over thousands of years of warming, it migrated to northern Europe, remaining in what is now Siberian Yakutia and Scandinavian Lapland. Some of the reindeer-hunting peoples followed this slow migration northwards. Others remained in their former habitats, adapting to changes in climate, biotope and fauna. Abandoning reindeer hunting, they gradually invented animal husbandry, domestication and agriculture, becoming the protagonists of the "Neolithic revolution". Very slowly, over a transition lasting several millennia, they gradually exchanged their ancient beliefs and religious rites linked to hunting for new representations linked to the land, herds, harvests and seasonal fertility. However, the hunting deities survived, leaving traces that lasted into historical times.

We who are 'historical' beings, steeped to the core in the constant and rapid changes of the last four millennia, find it difficult to accept that our distant ancestors could have lived through millennia without apparently experiencing any significant changes. At least fifteen thousand years separate the drawings in the Chauvet cave from the giant frescoes in Lascaux. Yet what these representations depict is, for the most part, similar. The powerful realism of their artists is akin. Of course, there are differences in style and choice in the depictions of animals.

1. On the religious significance of animal art, by the same author, *Dictionnaire amoureux de la chasse* (Plon, Paris, 2000). Jérémie Benoît, *Le Paganisme indo-européen* (L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 2001).

But the similarities are much more obvious than the differences. This means that brother peoples remained in place for millennia, reproducing the same artistic culture, which was itself a direct reflection of a certain collective spirit, a shared world view, a shared relationship with nature, and a shared religious consciousness. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that these peoples experienced cycles of birth, peak and decline in a culture of which Chauvet would be the expression, while Lascaux could be that of a rebirth or a later cycle.

According to palaeontologists, these peoples are brothers of Cro-Magnon man, who shows no significant morphological differences from modern Europeans. Although there is insufficient information to link the hunters of that era to any present-day group, some of their descendants probably remained in Europe after the end of the Ice Age, forming the substratum of its population. Despite all the changes between that period and our own, something essential has nevertheless remained, as Ernst Jünger said in his own way in *The Gordian Knot:* "If the art of the hunters of early times moves us so much and speaks to us in a language stronger than that of the ancient or even recent East, it is undoubtedly a sign that the spirit of our spirit, the freedom of our freedom, lives on in it."

The discovery of Sir William Jones

The peoples of ancient Europe were resistant to writing, even though they were familiar with it, as evidenced by the prehistoric logographic symbols, which were undoubtedly the ancestors of cuneiform writing. Several centuries after Homer, in Gaul and the British Isles, the Druids still refused to transcribe their teachings in writing, which were therefore lost. The Greeks, too, favoured oral tradition and deified memory. Aware that memory is the main support of intelligence and knowledge, Plato still justified its use in preference to writing. The Muses were daughters of memory, and the poet's role was to remember and pass on the message of the past to mankind. But the poet's memory is not that of historians. Until Homer, memory had been mythical and in no way

history. The Greeks had therefore lost all memory of their origins and ancient history, that which preceded the arrival of their ancestors on the shores of the Aegean Sea. However, they had retained the mythical memory of a northern origin associated with the legend of the Hyperboreans.

The Hellenes had neither the resources of linguistics nor those of archaeology at their disposal. What these sciences have revealed about the very ancient history of the European peoples was unknown to them. The reconstruction of the past began with philology. A historian by training, Leibniz had sensed the kinship between the different European languages. But the true birth of European linguistics was the famous paper presented on 2 February 1796 by Sir William Jones to the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta, of which he was the founder. He was fifty years old.

Chief Justice of the British East India Company in Bombay, Sir William had successively learned Latin, Greek, Welsh, Gothic and Sanskrit. Comparing the syntax and certain forms of vocabulary, he came to believe that all these languages probably derived from a common ancestor. "The Sanskrit language, whatever its age," he declared before the Royal Asiatic Society, "is of an admirable structure, more perfect than Greek, richer than Latin, and more refined than either; yet it shows more affinities with these two languages, both in terms of verbal roots and grammatical forms, than could be expected by chance. This affinity is so strong that no philologist could examine these three languages without believing that they sprang from some common source, which may no longer exist. There are similar, but less compelling, reasons to suppose that Gothic and Celtic, although mixed with a very different idiom, had the same origin as Sanskrit; and Persian could be added to this family...

Sir William Jones' insights were popularised in 1808 by Friedrich von Schlegel before being taken up and further developed by Rasmus Rask (1787-1832) and Franz Bopp (1791-1867), who were the first to systematically compare the grammar of different Indo-European languages. While Kaspar Zeuss *(Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme,* 1837) explored the morphological correspondences between Slavic and Germanic languages, Adalbert Kuhn *(Zur âltesten Geschichte der indogermanischen Völker,* 1845) formulated the programme.

of linguistic palaeontology. Towards the end of the 19th century, while developing theories that have since been abandoned, Max Müller laid the foundations for the comparative history of religions. Since then, these studies have continued to develop. They draw on linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, comparative mythology, ancient history, the history of religions, and sociolinguistics. The names of Émile Benveniste, Georges Dumézil, Jean Haudry, Colin Renfrew, Marija Gimbutas, Bernard Sergent, and Jean-Pierre Mohen illustrate the constant advances and controversies surrounding scholarly studies of Indo-European languages.

Indo-European languages

Since the discovery of the Indo-European language family, scholars have continued to work and speculate on the geographical location of the native homeland of a mother tongue. They have put forward numerous hypotheses, some more debatable than others. However, the Indo-European fact is now universally recognised. The word itself appears to have first appeared in 1813 in the English journal *Quarterly Review.* It is used in France, Anglo-Saxon countries and Russia *(Indojevropejskij).*

Why do we call it "Indo-European" and not simply "European", the family of languages spoken today almost everywhere in Europe? Quite simply because this family of

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1. Among a rich and varied bibliography, we can cite Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1969); Georges Dumézil, *Mythes et dieux des Indo-Européens* ("Champs", Flammarion, Paris, 1992, texts compiled and presented by Hervé Coutau-Bégarie); Jean Haudry, *Les Indo-Européens* ("Que sais-je?" no. 1965, PUF, Paris, 1981); Bernard Sergent, *Les Indo-Européens* (Payot, Paris, 1995); Jean-Pierre Mohen and Christiane Éluère, *L'Europe à l'âge du bronze, Le Temps des héros* (Gallimard, Paris, 1999); Lothar Killian, *De l'origine des Indo-Européens* (Labyrinthe, Paris, 2001); Alain de Benoist, "Indo-Européens : à la recherche du foyer d'origine" (no. 49 of the journal *Nouvelle École,* Paris, 1997, *Les Indo-Européens,* 160 p.). This study summarises current linguistic and archaeological knowledge. It examines the existing theories concerning the original geographical homeland and chronology of Indo-European paleohistory. It includes a critical bibliography and a contribution by Jean Haudry on the *Indo-European mentality.*

languages once stretched from Cornwall to the Punjab, covering vast distances corresponding to the area of expansion of the various speakers.

In Germany, the word "Indo-Germanic" *(indo-germanisch),* which appeared in 1823, continues to be used. Indo-European and *Indogermanisch* are synonyms, unlike the word "Aryan", which is the result of a misinterpretation. Originally, the word *Arya* was used by the Indo-Iranians to refer to themselves. It designated the spiritual nobility of Mazdean society in ancient Persia and Brahmanic society in India. In 1763, the French orientalist Anquetil-Duperron, translator of the Avesfa, applied it extensively to all Indo-European languages. He was followed in this by Schlegel, Max Müller, Adolphe Pictet, and many others. The political use of this word became odious and absurd when the Nazis made it synonymous with "non-Jewish", persecuting, for example, the Gypsies, whose language is derived from Indo-Aryan, as "non-Aryans"...

The Indo-European fact is primarily linguistic, as Émile Benveniste pointed out in his *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1969, vol. I, pp. 7-8): "If we can extend it to other aspects of culture, it will still be based on language. " Indo-European languages are a number of idioms that share a common structure in terms of phonology, grammar (morphology) and vocabulary. They came into existence before prehistory, well before 5000 BC. They have continued to evolve and continue to do so today.

The numerous lexical and grammatical similarities and resemblances between them cannot, of course, be explained by chance. They suggest a common origin, which is the only satisfactory hypothesis, as Émile Benveniste explains: "Indo-European is defined as a family of languages derived from a common language, which have differentiated themselves through gradual separation." What they have in common can be explained by derivation from the mother tongue, while their differences can be analysed as separate developments in different environments.

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1. The various theories intended to explain the differentiation of Indo-European languages have been analysed by Alain de Benoist *(op. cit.).* Reference should also be made to Jean Haudry's linguistic study, *L'lndo-européen* ("Que sais-je ?" no. 1798, PUF, new edition 1994).

All these languages have the same way of saying *no,* based on the consonant o: *na* in Sanskrit, non in Latin, *no* in English, *na* in Breton, *neen* in Dutch, *niet* in Russian, *nie* in Polish, *nein* in German, *nao* in Portuguese, *nu* in Romanian, *no* in Spanish and Italian...

The mother tongue conveyed the root mon of motherhood into all daughter languages, giving *mêtêr* in Greek, *mater* in Latin, *madre* in Italian and Spanish, *mère* in French, *Mutter* in German, *mother* in English, and *mat'* in Russian.

The root designating the word *king* is found in Sanskrit **rajan,** Celtic *rix,* from which Latin *rex,* Aryan *raja,* Scandinavian *Rig,* etc. are borrowed.

The Indo-European root *tre* comes from the Greek *treis,* the Latin *tres,* the French *trois,* the Spanish and Portuguese *tres,* the Italian *tre,* the Romanian *trei, the* English *three,* the German *drei,* the Russian *tri,* the Polish *trzy,* the Swedish *tre...*

Georges Dumézü and comparative mythology

The intuition of this cultural community, thousands of years before Plato and Aristotle, received decisive confirmation in the later works of Georges Dumézil. It is the common heritage of the Indo-Europeans, as much as the major male deities, the cult of nature and ancestors, the tragic sense of destiny, respect for women, and a patriarchal and feudal social organisation, the foundation of freedoms that have always set European cities apart from Eastern despotisms.

Closely associated with Indo-European studies, Georges Dumézil's life was one of the great intellectual adventures of the 20th century. For a long time, it unfolded in silence. Then the scholar's work was recognised as an essential reference, even when his theses were debated.

Through his tireless work, drawing on his immense erudition and knowledge of many ancient languages, Georges Dumézil set out to discover the Indo-European world view. Developing the science of comparative mythology and drawing inspiration from structuralist methods, he revealed unexpected correspondences between seemingly heterogeneous texts and demonstrated a coherent system of thought emerging from legends.

Throughout his life, Georges Dumézil was passionate about comparative mythology and the religion of the ancient Scandinavians. In 1916, upon entering the École Normale Supérieure, he chose as his thesis topic the theme of ambrosia in the Eddic poems and an Indian legend. In *Le Festin d'immortalité (The Feast of Immortality),* combining his readings of the Üdda and the *Vedas,* he began his research on the theology of the Indo-Europeans before their dispersion across Asia and Europe. He then examined the sacred texts of Greece, Iceland, Persia and those of the archaic Roman religion. In *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus,* published in 1941, he showed that the Latins, after settling in Etruscan territory, had introduced their ancestral value system there. Meanwhile, having been a lecturer at the Swedish University of Uppsala from 1931 to 1933, he had perfected his study of Eddic literature. He understood, for example, that it was no coincidence that Odin, the sovereign god and magician, lost an eye in the fountain of knowledge, and that Tyr sacrificed his right hand to capture the wolf Fenrir. These two symbolic amputations, the price to pay for acquiring superior power, found their counterpart in Roman legend with the one-eyed hero Horatius Cocles and the one-armed Mucius Scaevola.

By drawing parallels between Norse mythology and that of Rome, Dumézil reconciled classicism and romanticism in a way. Some of his revelations refer us back to Latin authors and classical tragedies, while others suggest the world of the Round Table and Wagnerian dramas. Even when working on obscure legends gleaned from 'barbarian' chronicles, he always illuminates and reveals our own culture. He sees in it a powerful organising system, that of a trifunctional division present throughout the Indo-European pantheon.

Indo-European trifunctionality

By "trifunctional ideology", Dumézil conceives of a cosmic principle as well as a distribution of social functions, for which the three orders of medieval society or the three unequal classes of Plato's *Republic* offer the perfect model. The first function relates to knowledge and sovereignty, the second refers to the martial force that protects, and the third concerns fertility and

reproduction of life in all its forms. The three founding gods of the Roman pantheon and their three major flamines, *Jupiter, Mars,* and *Quirinus,* correspond to those of Germanic mythology: *Odin, Thor, Frey,* those of the legendary Gauls, *Taranis, Teutates, Lug,* those of Vedic India, *Mitra-Yaruna, Indra, Açvin,* and to a certain extent those of Greek Olympus, *Zeus, Ares (Athena), Aphrodite (Hephaestus).* However, each one signifies much more than the simple division between kingship, war and production.

The deeper meaning is that harmony between the three functions is necessary to establish and maintain world order. It is this idea of interaction and harmony that is specific to the Indo-Europeans, as Bernard Sergent has pointed out. The identity, for example, between the warrior function and the sovereign function, observable throughout the European world, is one of the visible manifestations of this harmony. One would search in vain for an equivalent to this in the great civilisations of the Middle East or Asia, whereas kings, warriors and rural deities can naturally be found almost everywhere.

Among all Indo-European peoples, who should rather be called "Boreans", the extended aristocratic society, that of free men, both warriors and landowners, anticipated what the Greek city would become from the 6th century BCE onwards. We see this expressed in the assembly of warriors in *the Iliad,* very similar to *the* Germanic and Scandinavian *Thing* described by Snorri Sturluson. The Celts participated in the same political order, as later evidenced by the Round Table. On the other hand, nowhere in the European world were there king-priests at the head of Babylonian or Egyptian-style priestly castes. In medieval and classical times, European monarchies and nobility continued to resist the theocratic pretensions of the Holy See, while maintaining the balance between the three orders.

Attested as early as the third millennium BCE, the association of spiritual and political power, that of the military aristocracy and land ownership, characteristic of the European tradition, was maintained for nearly 5,000 years, until the Second World War, despite

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1. Snorri Sturluson, *History of the Kings of Norway* (translated by François-Xavier Dillmann, Gallimard, Paris, 2000).

the vicissitudes of time and change. Before 1945, all European nations still honoured military symbols and the heroism of combatants. Even in France, despite the many consequences of the Revolution, reserve officers enjoyed a privileged moral status, on a par with landowners, while this privilege was denied to those in the commercial and financial professions. Without hindsight and historical perspective, we cannot yet gauge the extent of what has been destroyed.

Ideological excesses

Languages do not move by themselves; it is those who speak them who do so. Every language requires speakers. The mother tongue, as reconstructed by linguists, is fairly homogeneous and unitary. It has therefore been concluded that there was an original Indo-European people, also relatively homogeneous and unified, at least from the point of view of culture in the sense given to this word by Benveniste:

"I call culture the human environment, everything that, beyond the fulfilment of biological functions, gives form, meaning and content to human life and activity. These observations lead to two questions: the location of an original homeland and the ethnogenesis of the first Indo-European people. Linguistics, archaeology and comparative mythology have been called upon to attempt to provide answers.

Over time, political and chauvinistic considerations have clouded the debate. In Germany, particularly under the Third Reich, all kinds of ideological distortions have encroached on research. But the Nazis did not have a monopoly on ideological piracy. Marxists and their emulators did the same. In 1939, Gordon Childe theorised a movement of linguistic diffusion from east to west.

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1. However, the positions of scholars under the Third Reich were less homogeneous than one might suppose. Close to the Nazi regime, Hermann Güntert always supported the theory of an Asian origin for the Indo-Europeans. And he was not alone. Regarding the influence of nationalism on archaeology, see Margarita Diaz-Andreu and Timothy C. Champion, *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1997).

demonstrating, in his own words, "the irradiation of European barbarism by Eastern civilisation". Various nationalisms have also attempted to accredit theories useful to their claims. From the last third of the 20th century onwards, in the wave of self-denigration that swept over Europeans, a reverse movement developed. Influenced by the new intellectual fashion, many authors and researchers have sought to downplay the Indo-European fact, considered "politically incorrect", sometimes even resorting to *ad hominem* attacks against scholars as honest and indisputable as Georges Dumézil. Under the influence of the African American community, a far-fetched theory also flourished, claiming that Hellenism was an African creation [2].

Formative centre and original habitat

Where and when was the original Indo-European language spoken? It is obviously legitimate to ask this question, although it is very secondary to what interests us: the tradition of our distant ancestors. It is fairly easy to understand that linguistics is not equipped to answer the question of location in time and space, a subject of research that is more relevant to archaeology.

Since 1945, this science has undergone intense development in Europe, providing a wealth of new data. Dating has benefited from the "revolution" of radiocarbon 14 since 1949 [3]. Little

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1. Didier Eribon did justice to the attacks by Carlo Ginzburg, Bruce Lincoln, etc., against Georges Dumézil *(Faut-il brûler Dumézil ?* Flammarion, Paris, 1992). A long-running smear campaign, in which Jean-Paul Demoule took part, was also orchestrated against the Institute of Indo-European Studies at the University of Lyon III and against the professors who were members of it.
2. Martin Bemal, *Black Athena* (1987, translation, PUF, Paris, 1995). Maurice Sartre demonstrated the fallacy of this theory in *L'Histoire,* no. 207, February 1997 *(Is Plato African*?). See also the dossier on the subject in the journal *L'Afrique réelle* no. 31-32, spring-summer 2001, by Bernard Lugan and Jean Haudry *(L'Afrique réelle,* BP no. 6 — 03140 Charroux).
3. Carbon-14 is a radioactive isotope present in virtually constant quantities in the atmosphere. It decays by radioactive decay at a rate of half every 5,500 years. Measuring the amount of

Soon, mastery of this new technique, combined with other instruments, led to an upward revision of the old chronologies established in the past by comparison with those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. For example, it was discovered that the Neolithic period (agriculture) in the British Isles did not begin after 2000 BC, as previously believed, but at the beginning of the 4th millennium. Thus, the origin of the megalithic sanctuary of Stonehenge III appeared to be a millennium older (around 2200 BC) than previously thought. In a groundbreaking book summarising these new approaches, Colin Renfrew wrote: "What were considered innovations from the Eastern Mediterranean, transmitted to Europe by diffusion, are now found to be older in Europe than in the East. The entire diffusionist framework diffusionist framework is collapsing, and with it the hypotheses that have underpinned prehistoric archaeology for nearly a century [1]   Many Phenomena that had been attributed to external influences turned out to be indigenous. The need to push back the dating of most sites in Western protohistory by 1,000 to 2,000 years completely changed the idea we had of the first waves of Indo-European expansion. It also forced a revision of the chronology of the cultures to which these migrations had given rise. Since the carbon-14 'revolution', the period of the last common habitat of the Indo-Europeans has been pushed back significantly in time, beyond the 5th millennium.

However, these interesting advances do not allow us to locate with certainty the place where the mother tongue originated or the common habitat that preceded the various dispersals. Let us therefore take note of the findings of palaeontology, archaeology, linguistics and related sciences for what they are worth. They prove the great stability of the 'type'.

Carbon-14 remaining in a bone, piece of wood or fossil that has been protected from cosmic radiation can be used to establish a probable age scale. The carbon-14 dating method began to be mastered in the 1960s. It is controlled by pollen analysis, thermoluminescence, spectrography and dendrochronology for short periods (5,000 years). The latter method consists of a comparative calibration of tree growth rings.

1. *The Origins of Europe. The Radiocarbon Revolution* (Flammarion, Paris, 1983, p. 98). Diffusionism postulated that 'civilisation', which originated in the ancient East, subsequently spread to the West.

anthropological history of European populations over 30 or 40,000 years, i.e. since Cro-Magnon man. Today's Europeans do not differ significantly from these distant ancestors. In ancient times, probably more than 10,000 years ago, somewhere in the vast area between the Rhine and the Volga, within a specific and necessarily homogeneous population, the language that linguists call Pre-Indo-European crystallised and was reconstructed. Over time, this language gradually spread to an increasingly large circle of populations. Although there is no unanimity on this point among specialists, linguistic analysis suggests that an initial dispersion occurred around the 5th millennium, through the migration of Indo-European peoples to the south-east, Asia Minor and beyond. The conquering migrants are believed to be the origin of an eastern group of several historically attested Indo-European languages, including Hittite, Indo-Iranian (Hindi, Sanskrit), Tocharian, etc. At the same time, a western group is thought to have evolved independently, also giving rise to several historical languages: Italic (ancient Latin), ancient Greek, Germanic, Celtic, Baltic, Slavic, etc.

In the future, discoveries and research will certainly bring about significant corrections to the theories and hypotheses developed by archaeologists at the end of the 20th century. In itself, this is of little importance to our present concern. On the other hand, if one is interested in the worldview of the ancient Indo-European peoples, one cannot ignore what comes from their myths and traditions. Most of these peoples believed that their primordial cradle was located in a mythical and vague "north". Vedic India, ancient Iran, Greece, and the Celtic and Germanic worlds preserved the legendary memory of a northern habitat referred to as the "Islands of the North", the "Land of the Gods" or the "Land of the Hyperboreans". Herodotus, Aeschylus, Pindar, Pausanias, Strabo, Diodorus of Sicily, Plutarch, Pliny the Elder, Virgil and many other classical Greek and Latin authors evoked a primordial world of perfection likened to the mythical Thule and the land of the Hyperboreans, i.e. living beyond the regions where Boreas, the north wind, blows. Particularly celebrated in Athens, this deified wind contributed to the defence of the city during the Persian Wars, unleashing a storm that destroyed part of the Persian fleet.

Mythical memory of Hyperborea

Is the mention of the Hyperboreans the result of meaningless legends, mere fantasies? In the 17th century, French missionaries brought back astronomical tables from India, which were deposited in the Royal Library. They were examined by the astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who demonstrated that these tables were incorrect for the latitudes of India, but corresponded very precisely with a northern latitude of 49º North. The astronomer concluded that it was at this latitude that "different languages could have emerged from the mother tongue and primitive language". Bailly had a curious destiny. Born in Paris in 1736, a member of the Academy of Sciences, and favoured by the royal authorities, this scholar was a deputy of the Third Estate in the Estates General of 1789 and even president of the Constituent Assembly. Elected mayor of Paris in July 1789, he was soon swept up in the revolutionary turmoil and ended up on the scaffold in November 1793. He had corresponded extensively with Voltaire, believing that his work had advanced knowledge of the Hyperboreans. In a letter to the exile of Femey, dated 20 April 1778, he wrote: "It is not from the East that the source of enlightenment came, it is the West that produced the druids and teachers of the world... All the fables lead us back to the North... The Garden of the Hesperides is near the Pole. I admit that this conclusion is surprising..." In another letter dated 5 May, Bailly added: "We must always return to the awareness — however obscure — that the Greeks retained of their origins."

It is true that, in the absence of archives, the memory of peoples takes refuge in myth. The myth of Hyperborea probably reveals the nostalgic memory of the northern lands from which the first Hellenes, conquerors of Greece at the end of the third millennium, are said to have come. Assimilated to Atlantis and Thule, Hyperborea is the land of childhood and the Golden Age described by Hesiod. Leto, mother of Apollo, was born there. Every winter, as soon as the cold weather arrived, the sun god left Greece for Hyperborea, riding in a chariot drawn by white swans who welcomed him into their sheltered home. It was also believed that the Oracle of Delphi had been founded by the Hyperboreans, wise and good heroes who practised shamanic magic. During their adventurous journeys, Heracles and Perseus are said to have travelled as far as their home.

Traces of this legendary world can often be found in Greek tradition. Every four years, at the end of the Panhellenic Games, the last day was devoted to the awards ceremony. "In front of a huge crowd cheering them on, the winners stepped forward to receive their prize: a simple crown of wild olive leaves, cut from the
foliage of the sacred tree that Heracles, according to Pindar, had brought back from the land of the Hyperboreans to plant in Olympia [1]

Celtic tradition is also rich in references to Hyperborea. In ancient Irish legend, the Tuatha Dé Danann, conquerors of Ireland, received druidic initiation in the "Islands to the North of the world, which in Celtic tradition represent the primordial polar origins". Founders of a new order, the Tuatha Dé Danann are said to have arrived in Ireland on the day of Beltane, the great Celtic festival of 1 May. They brought with them four essential talismans: the Stone of Fai1, symbol of legitimate power; the spear of Lug, the pan-Celtic god of light; the sword of Nuada, warrior king of the Tuatha; and finally, the magic cauldron of the druid god Dagda, a precursor to the Arthurian Grail.

Plato, Atlantis and *Ultima Thule*

The legend of Atlantis, another name for Hyperborea, is known to us through two dialogues that Plato included in *Timaeus* and *Critias.* In all likelihood, they were written in the last year of the philosopher's life, in 348 BC. The story is told through the old man Critias, who himself invokes the testimony of his grandfather, a friend of Solon, the illustrious lawgiver of Athens. While travelling in Egypt, Solon is said to have gathered the confidences of a scribe from the temple of Saïs, who had discovered the marvellous traces of Atlantis on hieroglyphics that have since disappeared. According to Plato, this island was engulfed in a huge natural disaster around 9,000 years before Solon's visit to Egypt, i.e. around 9600 BC. This date is interesting to note, not for its accuracy, which is secondary, but

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1. François Chamoux, *La Civilisation grecque,* Arthaud, Paris, 1963, p. 222.
2. Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h, *L'lrlande ou la musique de l'âme (Ireland or the Music of the Soul),* Artus-Ouest-France, Rennes, 1995, p. 47.

because it shows that the Ancients saw the origin of their world as lying far back in time.

Plato's testimony is not unique. According to one of his distant disciples, the Neoplatonist Proclus, who lived in Athens in the 5th century AD, a Greek named Krantor, also visiting Saïs three hundred years after Solon, is said to have seen columns covered with hieroglyphics telling the story of Atlantis.

Critias' description is surprisingly accurate. According to him, Atlantis was the domain of Poseidon, god of the sea. From his union with one of the island's daughters, Clito, ten sons were born. The eldest, Atlas, was the first king of the Atlanteans. His successors founded a sophisticated civilisation. "The inhabitants had acquired such wealth that probably no royal house before them had ever possessed the like, and none will easily possess the like in the future... There were numerous temples, the ports were overflowing with riches from distant lands, warriors trained in military camps, and triremes were built in the arsenals for use in war.

Let us recall that for Plato this took place around 9600 BC. The description of the oath taken by the ten Atlantean kings who shared the island is quite strange. It largely foreshadows certain ceremonies of the cult of the Indo-Iranian god Mithra, whose introduction into the West was, however, three centuries later than Plato. Each year, after capturing a wild bull, the kings sacrificed it in front of a sacred column on which the laws of the Atlanteans were engraved. While sprinkling the blood of the beast into a brazier with golden cups, they renewed their oath to abide by the laws and punish anyone who violated them. Then they drank a little of the consecrated blood. Finally, they entrusted the golden cups to the sanctuary of Poseidon as a pledge.

Critias lists the laws of the Atlanteans. They forbade kings from taking up arms against one another and commanded them to deliberate together in the manner of their ancestors. They required them to maintain the hegemony of the Atlantean race. For a long time, this was the case. But, Plato reports, there came a day when the kings debased themselves by marrying women who were not of their blood. Then, 'when the divine element in them diminished through repeated intermarriage, they deserved the punishment of Zeus'. From the *Timaeus,* we know that

divine punishment fell upon the blessed land, which was engulfed by the waves in a single night.

The memory of Atlantis and the Atlanteans was so vivid that, a decade after Plato's death, a Greek navigator from Massalia (Marseille) named Pytheas undertook a daring voyage across the Atlantic to northern Europe in search of the legendary land. The commercial pretext was to bring back tin from Cornwall and amber from the Baltic. Having crossed the Pillars of Hercules (Strait of Gibraltar) and sailed north along Iberia, Pytheas reached the island of Ouessant, entered the English Channel, and sailed further north along the eastern coast of the British Isles. It was the very beginning of summer. When he reached the northern tip of Scotland, home of the Picts, the Massaliote gathered information about the mythical island of Thule, the mysterious home of the Hyperboreans. Without hesitation, the navigator set sail again, heading northwest, guided by the setting sun, which hardly sets at this time of year in these latitudes.

At the summer solstice, after six days of rapid sailing, Pytheas reached an unknown land, certain that he had discovered *Thule,* the island at the end of the world, probably Iceland. Without lingering, he set off on his return journey, sailing along the coasts of Norway and then those of the Baltic Sea. A few weeks later, he returned to Marseille with a full cargo of amber and tin, but also a wealth of prodigious information that Strabo, Pliny the Elder and other ancient authors made their own.

The founding wars of the Boreans

We will never know for certain where, when and how the ethnogenesis of the Indo-Europeans took place, which should rather be called

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1. The endless debate on the identification of Atlantis in space and time (at least 20,000 works) has no place here and is not relevant to our subject. We are only interested here in Plato's idea of Atlantis. For more information, please refer to Albert Rivaud's translation of the Critias (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1925).
2. Pytheas' journey has been analysed and commented on by several authors, notably Jean Mabire, sailor and historian, in *Thulé, le soleil retrouvé des Hyperboréens,* Robert Laffont, Paris, 1978, pp. 19-40.

Boreans in order to avoid confusion between the language and the ethnic group of which it is, of course, one of the essential manifestations. A language travels with its speakers and can also conquer populations that have no specific connection with the original people. The Amerindian populations, who became Spanish-speaking after the Spanish conquest of South America, cannot tell us anything about the Castilian people, their history, their culture or their archetypes. This is why the distinction between Indo-European languages and Borean peoples seems desirable.

Since prehistoric times or very ancient times, the Boreans, the original bearers of Indo-European languages, have imposed themselves on new territories on populations that did not have exactly the same origins, did not worship the same gods, and did not have the same worldview. Greek, Latin, Celtic and Germanic myths of founding wars recall ancient conquests of new territories, but also, as Jean Haudry believes, the mythical projection of a recurring concern for civil harmony.

The memory of the wars of foundation can be deciphered in the historicised legend of Rome and the abduction of the Sabine women. It is also expressed in the Scandinavian ñdda, which describes two divine races. First there were the Vanes, gods of fertility, agriculture and triumphant sexuality, symbolised by erect or gaping genitals. The three main Vanes are Niord, god of the sea, his son Frey, god of fertility, and his daughter Freya, goddess of love. Then came the Aesir, warrior and sun gods, Odin (Wotan) and his sons, Thor representing strength, Tyr representing war, and Balder representing youthful nobility. Faced with danger, the Vanir sent the sorceress Gullveig to the invaders, charged with corrupting them with gold. But after almost succumbing to the temptations of wealth and pleasure, the Aesir recovered and responded with war. Victorious, they imposed reconciliation in a new equilibrium, that of trifunctionality, where neither the Aesir nor the Vanir exist, but a new world, symbolised by Odin, Thor and Frey.

The same pattern can be seen in Greek theogony. Originally, chthonic, feminine deities reigned, living underground and at night. Then came the Olympian, Uranian and solar deities, embodying masculine principles, even through female-looking deities such as Athena. The cremation of the dead (who ascend with the flames towards the Sun) replaced chthonic burial. The solar gods arrived at the beginning of the second millennium, brought by the

Achaeans who imposed themselves on the indigenous populations, the Pelasgians. However, the victory of the solar gods did not eliminate the Pelasgian pantheon. It maintained it, but in a subordinate and submissive position.

A bold new culture

This is what was developing in the third millennium, the European Bronze Age, which is much better known than previous periods due to a wealth of archaeological finds and the memories preserved in Homeric poems. Throughout Europe, from the Baltic to the Aegean, from the Atlantic to the Caspian, we see the emergence of a new solar religion and new values: tragic heroism in the face of fate, suffering and death, and the individuality and verticality of the hero as opposed to the indistinct horizontality of the multitude. Valour, an essential masculine virtue, was rewarded by the eternalisation of the best, very present in the Edda, and femininity was recognised, respected and admired. At the same time, feudal kingdoms based on warrior and land-owning aristocracies were established. It was then that the spiritual physiognomy that would remain that of Europe was shaped. Weapons and jewellery visibly manifested a cultural homogeneity that would later be translated into literature in the Homeric poems. Their unrivalled influence made them the founders of Western civilisation through its myths.

The roots of the great peoples of the historical era – Greeks, Italics, Celts, Germanics and Slavs – can be identified in the cultures of the Late Bronze Age, at the end of the second millennium. Indo-European languages had long since diverged through contact with each other. prolonged by distinct indigenous human environments.

In a famous passage, Émile Benveniste described the men of the Borean conquests of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age:

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1. Walter Otto, *Les Dieux de la Grèce*, French translation, Payot, Paris, 1984/1993).
2. The *Edda. Tales of Norse Mythology by Snorri Sturluson.* Translated from Old Icelandic, with an introduction and annotations by François-Xavier Dillmann (Gallimard, Paris, 1991). In his essay on *Heroes,* Thomas Carlyle devoted a pertinent study to the god Odin, seen as the founder of Norse mythology. Reprinted with a preface by Bruno de Cessole (Maisonneuve et Larose-Éditions des Deux Mondes, Paris, 1998).

"Despite their diversity, these invasions share certain characteristics. They never involved large warrior peoples. Rather, they were small, daring, highly organised groups that established their order on the ruins of established structures... Throughout their particular destinies, they all retained the distinctive features of their original communities: the patriarchal structure of the 'extended family', united in the worship of ancestors, living off the land and livestock farming; the aristocratic style of a society of warriors and farmers; 'naturist' worship and royal sacrifices; a conquering instinct and a taste for open spaces; a sense of authority and attachment to earthly possessions. At first, they seem to be absorbed into the mass of peoples who are often more civilised than they are. A long silence follows their conquest. But soon, from the new order they establish, a culture springs forth, initially imbued with local elements, then developing into ever newer and more daring forms. These creations are marked by an inventive force, to which the language of the masters gives the most accomplished expression. The appropriation of land by ever-new invaders, but all from the same stock, thus creates the conditions for a flexible and assimilative political organisation, the cradle of a civilisation vigorous enough to outlive those who created it, original enough to leave a lasting mark even on those who oppose it. We find this same type of human being in historical periods, in new directions: Roman and Germanic conquerors of Gaul, Viking conquerors of Normandy, England and Sicily, Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors of America…

Érnile Benveniste, *Revue de synthèse, Synthèse historique,* 1939, p. 18. Quoted by Jean Haudry, *Les Indo-Européens, op. cit.,* p. 125.

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The founding poems

The first great epic poem, the /fiade is also the first tale of chivalry. To be convinced of this, one need only compare its content with the models of the medieval period, *La Chanson de Roland,* the Arthurian cycle of novels, or the Scandinavian sagas. With a few minor differences, the same man is described, driven by the same feelings and the same spirit, practising the same noisy, heroic and disorderly style of combat with great sword strokes in the youth of a feudal era.

In the 11th century AD, the valiant Roland seems like the brother of the divine Achilles, who died in the prime of life more than twenty centuries before him on another European stage. It is difficult not to be struck by the astonishing similarity between the poems that have immortalised the names of the two heroes, as if, two thousand years apart, the two epics described, in a similar form, men built on the same inner qualities, presenting the same spiritual morphology. We also know that they resembled each other physically, coming from the same stock. Apart from Hector, all the heroes of *the Iliad,* when described, are blond, like Apollo. Apart from the particularities of the plot, the marvellous and the literary form, the Frank and the Achaean are almost interchangeable. Roland's tragic heroism, knowing full well his destiny, is that of Achilles. And the initiatory quests of Lancelot and Perceval are similar to those of Ulysses. Each in their own way, they describe a specific type that reappears from age to age, founding figures of adventurous chivalry, for whom subsequent eras retain a sense of nostalgia.

Like the ancient Frankish knights in modern Europe and until recent times, the valiant knights, the *couroi',* of whom Achilles is the

the perfect example, remain a source of inspiration and an ethical model for the Hellenes of classical times.

Feudalism and Homeric chivalry

Kinship ties are not only spiritual. At the time of the Trojan War, the political, social and military organisation of the Achaeans foreshadowed that of Celtic or Germanic feudalism. The Greeks who laid siege to Troy were not an army in the modern sense, but a gathering of autonomous bands, each following a renowned leader, with the aim of carrying out a reprisal raid and hoping to gain booty. They came by sea aboard light and fast biremes, using a method that would make the Vikings successful some twenty centuries later. Like the Norwegian jarls or the Frankish knights of the First Crusade, the Achaean lords practised fierce equality among themselves. The dominant position of Agamemnon, king of Argos and Mycenae, was due solely to the fact that he ruled over the most opulent kingdom and commanded the largest contingent. But before making any decision, he consulted the other lords and kings, his peers, gathered in council. And his conflict with Achilles over the possession of a beautiful captive, an incident that forms the crux of the plot, shows the limits of his power.

The Achaeans of the 12th century BCE were feudal lords, each commanding a retinue of free warriors who recognised them as their leaders. Each of these lords and kings bound his companions-in-arms to him through ties of personal vassalage, reinforced by those of blood. For all serious matters, the leaders deliberated among themselves. Although kingship was hereditary and of divine origin, each king had to earn his rank through prudence in council and valour in battle, which was another feudal trait.

Yielding to epic exaggeration, the Nyiad and *The Song of Roland* describe immense armies facing each other. The reality was certainly different. Horses already played their part in battle. Companions of adventure for all northern peoples since the third millennium, they feature in Homer's account, not as mounts, but as draught animals pulling chariots, a distinctive sign of the warrior aristocracy.

In these times of early chivalry, war is not only a source of power, it is a kind of sacred hunt, the occupation

privileged among men worthy of the name, the one that distinguishes true men. The prospect of a fruitful raid adds to the pleasure. No doubt we fight to win, but even more so for the glory of a noble name, practising prowess, generosity and loyalty. Roland and Achilles both express this, in different languages with identical roots. As for their gods, seemingly so contrasting, the same way of imagining them makes them curiously similar. These heroes of the axe and the sword, who despise the bow and sling of Asia as cowardly, come from brother peoples, recognisable by their fair faces and heroic, virile souls. They belong to the long history of successive waves of northern peoples.

If we look beyond the surface, reading Homer introduces us to the very spirit of Europe. A spirit which, thirty centuries later, in the aftermath of the carnage of 1914-1918, resurfaces in *Storm of Steel,* this modern *Iliad.* A paroxysm of violence during combat, a demonic outburst of hatred confined to the moment, ephemeral, born of the rush of young, violent blood, without ever morally condemning the enemy. The Trojans described by Homer are as noble and estimable as the English or the French in Ernst Jünger's account.

What we were in our dawn

"Sing, goddess, of Achilles' deadly wrath, which brought endless misery upon the Achaeans and sent so many mighty heroes to Hades, where they were devoured by dogs and birds of prey. And Zeus's plan was accomplished, since a quarrel had divided the Atride, guardian of his people, and the divine Achilles..."

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1. In general, I refer to Leconte de Lisle's translation (1850), whose poetic vigour is incomparable (reprinted by Pocket, Paris, 1998). However, I have taken the liberty of rendering proper names in their current spelling. When in doubt about the interpretation, I consulted the classic translations by Paul Mazon (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1938), Robert Flacelière (Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1955 for the //iade), Eugène Lasserre (Garnier, Paris, 1965), and more recently Louis Bardollet ("Bouquins", Laffont, Paris, 1995), as well as Frédéric Mugler's interesting verse translation (Actes Sud-Babel, 1995), which uses "guardian of his people" to describe the Atreid — Agamemnon.

One never tires of murmuring the first stanzas of the /finde. One does so with a fervour that time cannot erode. This poem, composed around the 9th century BCE, nearly thirty centuries ago, sings of heroes even older than that. Yes, in terms of age, it is the first from the ancient European world to have come down to us. If it has withstood the test of time as if by miracle, it is because it is incomparable in every way and foundational in every way. In this sense, for us "old Europeans", it belongs to the most authentic primordiality.

This sacred poem tells us what we were in our radiant dawn, unlike any other. Beneath the artifice of epic legend, it is rooted in real history and characters, many of whom actually existed. It recounts the distant and forgotten history of all other Europeans, Celts, Slavs, Germans and Scandinavians, whose sacred poems and great legends offer constant analogies with the representation of the world revealed by the Iliad and the Odyssey.

For us French and Europeans, of Celtic and Germanic ancestry, as for all those who come from identical or similar roots, these poems convey the unique originality of our being in the world, our way of being men and women, facing life, death, childbirth and the city. Narrating the trials and passions of our distant ancestors by kinship, they tell us that our anxieties, our hopes, our sorrows and our joys have already been experienced by our forebears, who were also young, sometimes ardent to the point of madness, or wise and prudent. Achilles yielding to the fervour of impetuous blood, Priam mourning the death of his son, Helen bewitched, Andromache, a young wife and anxious mother, Odysseus the cunning, Penelope the faithful, Nestor the wise... Yes, what they tell us through their actions and revelations is still relevant today. Their fate reminds us that we are not alone in this world, which is by turns beautiful and disturbing. Their story speaks to us of feelings that are familiar to us, so different from those suggested by the most beautiful tales of Asia or the East. It speaks of respect for ancestors and enchanted nature, the benevolence of the strong towards the weak, the attraction to all that is noble and beautiful, and the contempt for baseness and ugliness. Full of pity for the cruel fate of his heroes, Homer also shows his admiration for them.

There is no shortage of comparisons in the epic poetry of other European countries. In his *Essay on Medieval German Literature...*

maniques (Christian Bourgois, Paris, 1966) Jorge Luis Borges cites, for example*, The Ballad of Maldon,* a poem that preserves the memory of a clash in northern England between Vikings and Saxons, the former demanding tribute. At the head of armed peasants, the Saxon lord replies that they will pay with their old swords. A river separates the two troops. The Saxon allows the Vikings to cross it. The battle begins. "The wolves of battle", the Vikings, attack the defenders. Soon, the Saxon leader is killed. Then one of his old companions says these words: "The smaller our strength, the more fearless our hearts. Here lies our lord, torn to pieces in the dust, he who was the most valiant. Whoever wishes to withdraw from this battle will lament forever. My years are already many. I will remain here to rest beside my lord, whom I love so much."

The sacred book of the Europeans

With the Iliad, Homer composed the first of the tragic poems, expressing a specific vision of the human condition. He sings of the lucid energy of men grappling with their destiny, devoid of illusions about the gods, whom they know to be subject to their whims, and hoping for no other resource than themselves and their strength of soul. He shows them facing the mysterious powers of nature and their own nature. Despite the omnipresence of the gods, the poet does not engage in religious or philosophical discourse. And yet, from his poem we can draw both a philosophy and a religious vision, which is what the Greeks did as long as Hellas existed. Dostoevsky understood this. "In the Iliad, Homer gave the entire ancient world an organisation of spiritual and earthly life just as strongly as Christ gave to the new world." Dostoevsky's devotion to Christ gives the measure of the compliment. In his commentary on the work, one of the French translators of the late 20th century emphasises that in Greece "Homer was the master of the single book to which everyone always referred. It is no exaggeration to compare the influence of Homer's two poems to that of the Bible, and, among Jews of all

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1. Dostoevsky, letter to his brother, 1 January 1840, *Correspondance* (Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1949).

centuries, to that of the Old Testament'. Young Greeks learned Homeric texts by heart at school and referred to them throughout their lives as the supreme authority. In Roman times, the rhetorician Dion of Prusa still remarked: "Homer is the beginning, the middle and the end for every child, every man, every old man, for from his own store he gives each one the nourishment he needs. ' And for us who are witnessing the end of the 'new world' evoked by Dostoevsky, Homer is once again becoming the source of wisdom and vitality that he once was, with even greater force now that he has stood the test of time. In the sidereal void of accomplished nihilism, the Iliad will regain its function as a sacred book, the perfect expression of an inner vision without which a people dies.

The gods in Homer

From the very first song, the actions of the gods are inextricably intertwined with those of heroes and men. Homer describes them in the most human terms, prey to the feelings of men and women. The audience of his time did not take offence, as this was the Greek representation of divinity. Homer, less than anyone else, shows them in all their majesty. One even senses a touch of irony bordering on farce in his depiction of the Olympians. Paul Mazon was therefore able to write that "there has never been a less religious poem than the Odyssey". This is an excessive opinion based on a comparison with the very different and overwhelming God of the Bible. The Greek gods are as far removed from the fierce God of the Old Testament as the Greek man is from the
Christian "poor sinner". To put it bluntly, Homer's gods, in conflict with each other, subject to very human whims and passions, are not very divine. Yet a constant pantheistic religiosity pervades the poem, contributing to its beauty.

A poet and creator of fiction, Homer is not a theologian. His interpretation of divinity is free, unconnected to the terrifying myths collected by Hesiod in the *Theogony*. His Olympus is modelled on earthly kingdoms. Zeus is its undisputed king, who watches over

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1. Louis Bardollet, *Homer*. The Iliad *and* the Odyssey. *New translation. Justifications and opinions* ("Bouquins", Robert Laffont, Paris, 1995, p. 708).

respect for the divine order by the other gods. This is not without difficulty. He has to intervene, threaten, and even punish at times in a comedic atmosphere that will upset Plato. Faced with the Trojan War, the immortals are divided. Hera, Athena and Poseidon actively support the Greek besiegers, while Apollo and Aphrodite are with the Trojans.

Despite their strong personification, one nevertheless has the feeling that, for Homer, the gods are allegories of nature, fate or human impulses. Most of the twists and turns that the poet attributes to them can be explained without them. In many cases, their actions merely mirror a natural psychological reality. In the first canto, Athena's intervention to prevent Achilles from drawing his sword against Agamemnon can rightly be understood as the representation of an inner warning. There are many other examples.

Does Homer believe that Athena, 'with a breath', deflects Hector's spear and makes it return to him (XX, 439)? That the river Scamander speaks to Achilles in human form (XXI, 212-213)? That Hera seizes Artemis' bow to strike her in the face, near her ears (XXI, 490-492)? That Zeus 'pushes Hector from behind with his great hand' (XV, 694)? That horses weep (XVII, 426-427)? that Aeneas is transported from one point to another on the battlefield by the hand of the god Poseidon (XX, 327)? Does Homer believe all this? Obviously not."

When the poet attributes the very origin of the war and its twists and turns to the gods, does this mean that he truly sees them as the cause of the conflict and then the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon? This is unlikely. But by giving credence to the supernatural, by accusing Zeus of having planned to "plunge so many strong souls of heroes into Hades" (I, 9-10), he expresses the great truth that war most often escapes the power of men. Whether they are attracted to it or repelled by it, they suffer it as an uncontrollable fate. Wars arise without really being desired or foreseen. They are in the nature of man. Their cause is the beauty of a woman, a blow with a fan, the murder of an archduke. Therefore, they will never end. And their outcome escapes even the gods themselves. In the final duel, to decide between Achilles and Hector and to know

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1. Marcel Conche, *Essays on Homer* (PUF, Paris, 1999, pp. 127–128).

who will be killed, Zeus refers to the golden scales of fate, and neither he nor any other god can oppose this decree of destiny (XXII, 209-213).

On this point too, Homer's vision is in line with that of Celtic and Scandinavian myths. Destiny rules over all things. Even the gods themselves are subject to it. But heroes do not accept it as inevitable. Even when it is known and foretold, as in the cases of Achilles and Sigurd, they face it with courage. In the hearts of the heroes of old, as in those of their brothers of today, love of life and contempt for death go hand in hand. The essential thing is to maintain self-esteem in the face of the worst trials.

Causes of the Trojan War

It has often been said that the Iliad is a poem about war. In fact, it is much more than that. This long saga of 16,000 hexameters in 24 songs is a complete poem, one about human destiny as perceived by European peoples since the dawn of time. The pretext is a brief episode lasting a few days during the last of the ten years of the siege of Troy, probably in the 12th century BCE. Troy, also known as Ilion (hence the name "Iliad"), was a powerful fortified city built at the entrance to the Dardanelles, on the Asian coast of the Hellespont, the constant border between the West and the East. Like today's historians, those of antiquity, Herodotus or

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1. Archaeologists and historians agree on the historical reality of the siege of Troy by the Achaeans and its destruction. For further discussion on this subject, see Jean Bérard, *Introduction aux poèmes homériques, Homère* (Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1955). In ancient times, the generally accepted date for the fall of Troy was that established in the 2nd century BCE by Eratosthenes after careful calculations: 1183 BCE. Herodotus, however, placed the event earlier, around 1270, which archaeologists consider more likely. See Jean-Pierre Mohen and Christiane Éluère, *L'Eumpe à l'âge du bronze* (Gallimard, Paris, 1999), which refers in particular to *Studia Thracia* 1 (1991) to 6 (1996). These publications presented the results of work carried out by the universities of Tübingen and Cincinnati at the archaeological site of Hisarlik-Troy, discovered in 1870 by Heinrich Schliemann.

Thucydides did not doubt the reality of the events that serve as the backdrop for *the Iliad*. The Trojans are Boreans of the same race as their Greek adversaries, the "blond-haired" Achaeans, also known as Argives (originally from Argolis) or Danaans (descendants of the mythical Danaos). The difference is that the Trojans are associated with Asia, and not only for geographical reasons. Their army includes contingents foreign to the Greek world, Barbarians. Archaeological discoveries in the 20th century would show that they had long enjoyed the support of the highly diverse Hittite Empire.

Tradition has given the conflict a mythical origin involving the gods. On the occasion of the wedding of the goddess Thetis and a mortal, Peleus, future parents of Achilles, a quarrel arose between three goddesses among the foremost of Olympus, the most beautiful and symbolic, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. This very feminine quarrel was stirred up by Eris, the goddess of discord. Which of the three immortals was the most beautiful? Zeus ordered that a mortal, Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy, be chosen as the arbiter. To win his vote, each offered to give the Trojan prince what she symbolised. Hera, wife of Zeus, promised him supreme power; Athena, the warrior virgin, offered him military triumph; while Aphrodite guaranteed him pleasure and possession of the most beautiful woman in the world. The latter choice was made by Paris, a handsome young man. His judgement in favour of Aphrodite provokes the implacable wrath and desire for vengeance of Hera and Athena, which will inexorably spread to Troy. A man exists and has meaning only through his clan, his people, his city.

Honouring her promise, Aphrodite grants her protégé the incomparable Helen, daughter of Zeus and Leda. As she is already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta, Paris will kidnap her from her husband's palace with the help of Aphrodite. The abduction of a woman by a stranger, especially a royal wife, is a crime that affects all Achaeans regardless of their kingdom. At the wedding, each of the Greek kings had sworn to uphold the union between Menelaus and the desirable Helen. So an army gathered at Aulis with its swift ships and set sail for the Asian shores of the Troad. Revenge would be taken on Troy and Helen would be brought back.

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1. The "Judgement of Paris" has been interpreted by several authors as an allegory of Indo-European trifunctionality.

Achilles' anger

After ten years of endless siege, a quarrel breaks out between Agamemnon, leader of the Achaean coalition, and the young Achilles, the most famous and formidable hero of his camp. *The Iliad* begins just after a raid in the hinterland, when the leaders have divided up the spoils. Under pressure from Apollo, who threatens to unleash a plague, Agamemnon is forced to return a beautiful captive he had taken, Chryseis, daughter of Chryses, a priest of the sun god. Full of irritation and spite, Agamemnon then uses his power to take Achilles' captive for himself. This abuse will have the most dramatic consequences. With great difficulty controlling his impetuous temper, Achilles decided to abandon the fight with his men. He withdrew to his tent. Imploring his mother, the divine Thetis, he obtained her intervention with Zeus to take revenge on Agamemnon by favouring the Trojans against him until he begged for mercy. Zeus promised to grant this favour (song I).

Zeus' promised intervention will only manifest itself slowly. In Book III, there is even hope for peace when Paris agrees to meet Menelaus in single combat in front of the two armies. Both sides agree that this duel could decide the fate of Helen and the war. Alas! That was without counting on Aphrodite. She saves Paris from death, and in such a deceitful manner that this misdeed leads to the general resumption of fighting. Depending on their personal disposition, ancient listeners could believe in a genuine intervention by the goddess of desire or interpret it as a poetic device, as we have already said. Be that as it may, slowly, after many twists and turns (books II to VIII), victory began to shift, favouring the Trojans, who soon threatened the Achaean camp. Hector, hero of Troy, son of Priam and brother of Paris, was so convinced of victory that he camped on the battlefield.

Faced with danger, Agamemnon agrees to make amends. He offers Achilles Briséis back, along with lavish gifts. Consumed by resentment, the hero rejects the king's proposals, stubbornly clinging to his desire for revenge and refusing to return to battle. The situation seems hopeless (Canto IX).

It is resolved by the drama that unfolds in Book XVI. After numerous admirably recounted adventures, despite the exploits of

Diomedes, Odysseus, and Ajax suffered successive defeats. The Trojans even breached their camp. The battle now raged over the ships lined up on the sand. One of them was set on fire. Stubborn in his resentment, Achilles still refused to come to the aid of his comrades. However, he yielded to the pleas of Patroclus, his dearest friend, agreeing to let him take part in the battle, clad in his own armour, which struck terror into the hearts of the Trojans. Indeed, momentarily deceived, the Trojans retreat. But, carried away by the heat of battle and the thirst for a feat that would make his name shine forever, Patroclus ventures too far. He is killed by Hector.

This death causes an unexpected reversal, introduced with consummate artistry by Homer. It strikes Achilles in his manly friendship. From then on, his anger is turned against the Trojans. Drunk with grief and despair, even before proceeding with his friend's solemn funeral (song XVIII), he throws himself into the fray, sowing terror and carnage. After a fierce duel, he kills Hector. His rage unsatisfied, he repeatedly insults his enemy's body, dragging it endlessly through the dust, face down, attached to his war chariot.

The hero facing Destiny

Added to the pain of his friend's death is the certainty that his own fate is sealed. An ancient prophecy predicted that he would be killed as soon as he took Hector's life. Achilles has known this from the beginning. Unlike other heroes who died in battle, he knows his fate in advance. He says so in the first canto of the Iliad, and we are reminded of this several times thereafter, notably in canto IX, in a dialogue with Ulysses. He repeats it in canto XXI before killing Lycaon, one of Priam's sons, who had the misfortune of crossing his path: "Poor fool! ... Why groan like that? Patroclus is dead, and he was worth a hundred times more than you. Look at me: I am handsome, I am tall, I was born of a noble father; a goddess gave birth to me; and yet death and Fate will seize me one morning, one evening or at noon, and someone will take my life too, with a blow of his spear or a shot from his bow."

The repeated invocation of this certain death gives the poem its tragic dimension, ensuring Achilles' exemplary status. Between the quiet happiness of a long, obscure existence and the dazzling brilliance

of a short and glorious life, the hero chose to send a message to the men of the future. Eighteen centuries later, in *Havamal,* one of the most beautiful poems in *the* Icelandic *Edda*, we hear words that echo Achilles' deeds: "Everything dies, except the glory of a noble name. " Perhaps, but with the exception of Achilles and a few rare heroes, the glory of a noble name also fades and is forgotten. What remains is internal, facing oneself, in the truth of one's conscience: to have lived nobly, without baseness, to have maintained a tension within oneself in order to remain in accordance with the model one has set for oneself. Homer does not say things this way, refusing to comment. He shows Achilles and lets him speak, leaving us to draw our own conclusions. The character is indeed more complex than the blind exaltation of his savage heroism suggests. He is a hero transformed by suffering that manifests itself in the last song of the //iade.

Night has fallen. Encouraged by the gods, old Priam comes to Achilles' tent to beg the ruthless Achaean to return the body of his son Hector so that he can bury him. Bowing before the man who killed his child, he embraces his knees and kisses "his murderous hands". In a tone of supplication, he implores him to think of his own father who is waiting for his return: "But I, my misfortune is complete. I gave birth to sons who were brave, and I think that none of them remain... Thinking of your father, take pity on me. I have dared what no mortal here below has ever dared: I have kissed the hands of the man who killed my children." Troubled by the old man's grief, Achilles helps Priam to his feet, agrees to return Hector's body to him, and even grants a truce for the funeral. This is the final episode of the last canto, while the death of Achilles and the capture of Troy are only hinted at. The two men weep, one for his son, the other for his father and friend.

Taking Priam's hands, Achilles said: "Let us put our sorrows to rest. them in our souls, whatever our sorrow may be." Then he speaks sadly of his own father: "He fathered only one son, doomed to die at once. And I am not there to care for him in his old age: far from my homeland, I remain in Troy to grieve you and your children! And you yourself, old man, do we not know that you were once happy..." Reconciliation comes through a sense of shared fate. Beginning with Achilles' anger, the long poem ends with his compassion and magnanimity.

Hector and Andromache

While *the Iliad* is a poem about war, it is also a saga of male and female heroes. The ordinary people we see in the intimacy of the *Odyssey* are reduced to mere extras. However, not all heroes are modelled on Achilles, who is devoted exclusively to glory and war. Several show restraint. When, on the ramparts of Troy, Priam consults Helen to describe the Achaean troops to him, they compete with each other in delicacy, striving not to hurt each other's feelings. Addressing Helen, Priam says to her

"my daughter" or "my dear child", adding: "You are not the cause of anything for me: the gods alone are the cause of everything" (III, 164). Helen responds with every sign of respect and repentance: "I have as much respect for you, father, as I have fear. Ah! How I should have preferred a cruel death on the day I followed your son here." This is a far cry from Aeschylus' condemnations or Euripides' sarcasm against this

"wicked woman".

Achilles is matched by Hector, his equal among the Trojans, who is equally far removed from stereotypes. Homer wanted them to be different, thus broadening the range of human feelings in the face of Destiny. Just as the scene of the reunion between Ulysses and Penelope in Book XXIII of *the Odyssey* is full of delicate sensuality, so the famous dialogue between Hector and Andromache in Book VI of the Iliad is a masterpiece of psychological truth, showing how the contradictory feelings aroused by the extreme emotions of the two characters clash in succession in a thrilling manner. At the beginning of the scene, warned by a dark premonition, Andromache, in tears, begs her husband not to expose himself any longer. And he, while fearing defeat, would like to give his life to spare his wife the horror of servitude, which would be the inevitable price. In the exact words of Jacqueline de Romilly, it is 'a kind of heroism of despair'. In a spontaneous gesture of tenderness, Hector reaches out to his son, little Astyanax. But the child is frightened by his father's large crested helmet. This makes his parents laugh and moves them. Hector then removes his helmet and takes the child in his arms, swearing,

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1. Jacqueline de Romilly, *Patience, mon cœur ! L'essor de la psychologie dans la littérature grecque classique* (Pocket Agora, Paris, 1994, pp. 24-26).

he says, that he will have a glorious future. Then he returns him to his mother. Waiting for the child, but still overwhelmed by anxiety, Andromache takes him back "with a laugh through her tears" (VI, 484), a delicate touch by the poet, which sums up the complexity of her feelings. Hector's reaction is suggested just as subtly. It is expressed in the change of tone in his words. Before the episode with the child, he had gloomily prophesied that Troy would fall. Afterwards, he seems to have regained hope for the future. But perhaps he is hiding his true feelings.

In ancient Greece, founding heroes were deified. They belonged to mythical times, before history began. While systematically using the epithet 'divine' (the divine Achilles, the divine Hector, etc.), Homer departs from a pious interpretation. His heroes are undoubtedly models of vigour and valour, superior to other men. But they are not accompanied by any moralising hypocrisy. Even though they accomplish extraordinary feats of war, they remain subject to common law, suffering, error, failure and death. None of them, however, despite their excesses of pride or anger, ever shows baseness. In *the Iliad,* the only character who is despicable, if we disregard the ambiguity of Paris, is Thersites the lame, described as ugly and deformed. Having challenged the legitimacy of royal power, he is beaten up by Ulysses to the laughter of all the Achaeans. In contrast, the heroes are all handsome, tall, strong and courageous to the point of recklessness. This contrast reflects the Hellenic conception of the unity of the human being, identifying physical appearance — a reflection of the psyche — with expected behaviour. The noble can only be handsome and brave, while the ignoble is both ugly and cowardly. The unity of being is not yet divided between body *(sôma)* and soul *(psyche).* The body is inseparable from the soul; physical appearance is an integral part of the person. With the exception of Paris, the heroes implicitly respect a code of chivalry that forbids them to flee, break their word or betray. None of them would be guilty of the terrible crimes that fill the works of the tragedians in the centuries that followed. Even in the Odyssey, Homer does not dwell on the crimes of the Atreides, those of Clytemnestra and those of Orestes. Ulysses may lie, but he does so out of necessity, for a worthy cause, never out of greed or gratuitous treachery.

The Return and Revenge of Ulysses

While the Iliad is set during the Trojan War, the Odyssey recounts in 12,000 lines the return of Ulysses and his revenge. Let us focus on the idea of revenge. But beyond this theme and the fabulous stories told by Homer for the pleasure of his audience, the adventures of Ulysses can be read as the stages of a journey of initiation.

Ulysses' long and perilous return journey around the Mediterranean, interrupted by a long, voluptuous wait in the arms of Calypso, took ten years, as long as the siege itself. The hero's name (Odysseus in Greek) is that of the poem. It entered everyday language at the beginning of the 13th century, with an odyssey becoming synonymous with a tumultuous journey.

Twenty years after his departure, Ulysses finally arrived home to his small island kingdom of Ithaca, after travelling to the gates of the Underworld. He was young when he left for the Trojan War, leaving behind a grieving young wife with a small child. What had become of them? And what of Ulysses himself, now approaching fifty? During his adventures fraught with pitfalls, he lost all his companions who were less skilled or less fortunate than him. During his long absence, his wife, the beautiful Penelope, was coveted and courted by a mob of "suitors" who had taken up residence in her palace, plundering

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1. In ancient times, *the Iliad* and the Odyssey were attributed to a single poet of genius, Homer, about whom little is known. Critics and scholars began to question this single authorship during the Enlightenment. Countless theories have been put forward. These are notably mentioned by Jacqueline de Romilly *(Homère,* PUF, 1985), Louis Bardollet (in addition to his translation of Homer for Éditions Robert Laffont "Bouquins", Paris, 1995), Paul Wathelet in his notes to the preface to the translation of the Odyssey, and Leconte de Lisle (Éditions Pocket, Paris, 1989-1998, pp. 25 ff.). In his note in the Pléiade edition, Jean Bérard developed the thesis of his father, Victor Bérard, translator of the Odyssey. This is what is known as the "Homeric question". Based on a rigorous philological and literary analysis, the majority opinion among scholars at the end of the 19th century was that Homer was the author of both poems, even if he drew inspiration from what other bards had composed before him. These discussions are not relevant here. We are only interested in the Hellenes' view of their sacred poems. When speaking of the author of the Iliad and *the Odyssey,* they said: Homer. Let us do as they did.

his property and living on his land. Arriving incognito in Ithaca, aided by his young son Telemachus and a few loyal followers, Odysseus takes revenge on the suitors in an exemplary and bloody manner. This revenge, anticipated from the first canto, gives the poem its dramatic tension and meaning.

The first of all novels

Taking the poetic form necessary for memorisation by the aedi, the Odyssey is, at first glance, an adventure novel. Indeed, nothing is more romantic than the story of Ulysses. He is handsome, strong, courageous, skilful, triumphs over a hundred perils, invents breathtaking stratagems, wins the love of the most desirable women, and in the final act defeats his odious and powerful enemies, regaining both his domain and the love of his beautiful wife.

Beyond all the supremely skilful ingredients of the story, the Odyssey is, in the highest sense of the word, the first true novel of Western literature and, by necessity, universal. In its fullest sense, the novel is a work of imagination aimed at exploring and understanding the human soul in a form that is neither philosophical nor moral. It does not say what is right or wrong, it describes the multiple ambiguities of life and human beings, pushed to the limits of extreme tension. In the words of Milan Kundera, the novel, an invention of European spirituality, "is a meditation on existence seen through imaginary characters". In this too, Homer is a brilliant pioneer.

Plagued by passions, prone to lies, giving in to anger, vulnerable to pretty girls, masking his mistakes under the guise of wanderings, Ulysses is a European of all times. And the enigmatic Penelope is also timeless. Despite the monsters and fairies that sometimes surround him, as François Crouzet notes, the tireless navigator remains in touch with the most everyday, earthly, immemorial things, humble and familiar things: the sea, the fast boat, the fields, the vineyard, the dog, the old hunting rifle — a bow in this case —, the bed we have built and through which we know everything about

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1. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (Gallimard, Paris, 1986).

the one who travelled there with you, the memory of the apple trees we planted with her father...

Penelope's femininity

For centuries, the hero of the Odyssey has fascinated and intrigued. Is he not the quintessential man—the male par excellence? Made for action rather than home life, for distant adventures rather than marital repose? Odysseus of a thousand tricks and Odysseus of a thousand faces, faithful and unfaithful, sincere and a fabulist, bold or cautious, but always ready to follow loyal companions into a little war, pillaging or women. And women were rarely cruel to him. A year of love with Circe, seven with Calypso and, finally, the gracious offering of the virginal Nausicaa. Enough to temper the impatience of the marital bed!

Generation after generation, Homer continues to inspire readers and writers alike. From Dante to Goethe, Voltaire to Joyce, Ronsard to Giraudoux, he continues to navigate our dreams and touch our hearts with the authenticity of his characters. He tells the moving truth of Ulysses and the simpler truth of his son Telemachus. He tells of the wait of Penelope, left alone and feeling herself grow old in the endless absence of her husband, who has gone off on endless adventures. She is beautiful, she is desirable. The men circle around her like wolves, wanting her in their beds. She defends herself against their lust by sharpening it. Before making a choice, she says, she must finish weaving the shroud for Laërte, Ulysses' father. And every night she undoes the day's work. But one evening, perhaps, weary and defeated, she will yield to the strongest, the most cunning. Homer tells us that she did not recognise Ulysses in his vagabond's disguise, but who knows if she did not take a somewhat underhand revenge on her husband, who was too slow to return? We see her as gentle and tender with her son, anxious and languishing for her husband, who may be gone forever. Her conduct is above suspicion and dignified, but she is a woman, subject to anxiety, suffering, time, and the secrets of her nature.

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1. In addition to his new translation of Homer (Bouquins, *op. cit.),* Louis Bardollet has undertaken a subtle psychological analysis of Ulysses and Penelope, to which we refer.

Progression of the Odyssey

Homer divided the Odyssey into three parts, each dominated by different themes that contribute to its richness. After invoking the Muses and the gods, the story opens with the *Telemachy,* the journey that Telemachus, the young son of Ulysses, threatened with death by the suitors, makes to Nestor in Pylos in the Peloponnese, then to Menelaus in Sparta, in an attempt to find his father (books I to IV). He was a very young child when Odysseus left for war. As a teenager, he saw his mother's suitors plunder his estate and behave like ravens. At sixteen, encouraged by Athena, who took the form of the old Mentor, he convened the assembly for the first time since Odysseus' departure. To the great anger of the suitors, he protested against their actions. The ordeal was too much for him. Hence his decision to leave, to run away. It was a harsh adventure for this boy. One day he wept, crushed by the feeling of his weakness, but the next day he regained his courage and was full of energy, 'like a god'. We have all experienced these alternations of despondency and elation in our adventurous youth. The name Telemachus means "he who fights far away". Indeed, he goes far away and his journey is an initiatory one.

In the second part of the poem, we find Ulysses, held captive by Calypso (song V), then arriving at the delightful Nausicaa's home (song VI) after a shipwreck in which he lost even his clothes. Welcomed by Nausicaa's father, king of the Phaeacians, the shipwrecked man, taught by bitter experience, initially conceals his identity. Afterwards, reassured about his hosts' intentions, he reveals his name: "I am Ulysses, son of Laërtus. ' As a reward for the hospitality shown to him, he recounts his adventures since the end of the siege of Troy (books VII to XII), notably his journey to the underworld (book XI). This episode confirms that for Homer and the Greeks, there is nothing after death but oblivion. Everything is played out here and nowhere else.

It took Ulysses ten years to return home. Others were quicker, Nestor, Menelaus and even Agamemnon, who would have been better off avoiding Mycenae, where his unfaithful wife was waiting to kill him. Ten years is a long time, suggesting that he was perhaps not always in a hurry. Of course, there were headwinds, storms, and Poseidon's hostility. But there were also good times, stops to linger, women with tender eyes and warm beds.

open. There was Circe, "the tyrannical Circe with dangerous perfumes" that Baudelaire breathed in. There was Calypso, who kept him for seven years. Seven years! Homer knows all the tricks to entertain his audience. Like the Celtic and Scandinavian bards, he fills the story of Ulysses with fearsome monsters, voluptuous nymphs and fabulous characters that appeal to popular credulity. We owe him many inventions, many of which still work very well today: the Trojan horse, the song of the sirens, Charybdis and Scylla '...

Recapture of the kingdom and the bed

The third part of the poem sees Ulysses return to Ithaca disguised as a vagabond (from canto XIII onwards). He is given hospitality by his former loyal servant, the swineherd Eumaeus, in whom manual labour is honoured. He is joined by Telemachus, who is also in disguise. The moment of revenge approaches. Father and son agree on their plans. Arriving at the palace, despite his disguise, Odysseus is recognised by his old hunting dog, Argos, who dies of emotion. He is also recognised by his nurse, Eurycleia, thanks to an old scar (Canto XIX). The final action takes place in the great hall of the palace, in front of the suitors who are drinking and lounging around with impudence. It begins with the bow test, which only Ulysses can pass. This is the prelude to the expected massacre of the suitors and the evil maidservants (Canto XXII). The scale of the revenge is commensurate with the crimes and insults we have been warned about since the first canto. This is followed by the sweet reunion with Penelope, after Odysseus, in order to prove his identity, describes in detail the bed he once built for their wedding night.

"You have revealed to me the certain signs of our bed that no man has ever seen," said Penelope. "Only we have seen it, you, me, and my servant Actoris, who guarded the doors of our bridal chamber. You have persuaded my heart, which was full of mistrust..." And Homer

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1. The geographical reconstruction of Ulysses' journey is irrelevant to our subject. Among others, Victor Bérard tirelessly endeavoured to reconstruct Ulysses' itinerary. It was a difficult and rather futile undertaking. It was certainly not Homer's intention to write a tourist guide to the Mediterranean.

continues: "She spoke thus, and the desire to weep seized Ulysses, and he wept as he embraced his dear, prudent wife... And the sight of her husband was so sweet to Penelope that she could not take her white arms from around his neck. And the rose-fingered Dawn would have reappeared if the goddess Athena had not held back the long Night on the horizon... Then Odysseus said to his wife: Come, let us go to our bed and enjoy sweet sleep together..."

The couple's night was thus prolonged by a miracle of Athena, conducive to all dreams. Thus ends the beautiful story, or almost.

A journey of initiation, an epic tale of righteous vengeance and romantic reconquest, a story of the sea and fantastic adventures, the Odyssey is also a hymn to the homeland. Odysseus never ceased to suffer from homesickness. Even when he was held captive by other women, nostalgia for his home and his family gnawed at his heart. "Every day, I want and desire to see the moment of my return and regain my home," he confesses to the divine Calypso. For ten years, despite long and pleasant breaks in the company of languid goddesses, he never gave up hope of seeing Ithaca, his small homeland, again, of finding his wife and dying on his land. Suffering from the same affliction, far from his native Anjou, Du Bellay invoked the memory of Ulysses in the 16th century in a sonnet that all French schoolchildren once learned:

> *Happy is he who, like Ulysses, has made a beautiful*
> *journey Or like the one who conquered the Golden*
> *Fleece*
> *And then returned full of experience and wisdom*
> *To live among his parents for the rest of his days.*

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1. This is, of course, an allusion to Jason and the legend of the Argonauts who set out in search of the Golden Fleece. This initiatory adventure has its counterpart in Celtic legend with the quest for the Holy Grail. The Order of the Golden Fleece was created in Bruges in 1429 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, on the occasion of his marriage to Isabella of Portugal. It symbolised the union of the nobility of the various Burgundian territories around the duke. Taken over by the Habsburg family, the order survived.

To be or not to be

Throughout the Iliad, as twenty centuries later in the chansons de geste, the pride of noble blood bursts forth. Before rushing at the Greek Diomedes, the Trojan Glaucus makes himself known and throws himself at him with pride: "This is my blood, this is my race! " Recognising each other as the sons of two noble warriors, once bound by friendship, they renounce their fight. The heroes and main characters of the Iliad are named according to their paternal lineage. It is this that establishes their identity. Among the Achaeans, there is Achilles the Peleid, son of Peleus, leader of the Myrmidons; Agamemnon the Atreid, son of Atreus, king of Mycenae and leader of the Achaean coalition; the blond Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, king of Sparta; Ajax, son of Telamon, leader of the Salaminians, Diomedes, son of Tydeus, king of Argolis, Nestor the Neleid, son of Neleus, king of Pylos, Ulysses the Laertid, son of Laertes, king of Ithaca, etc. On the Trojan side, it is the same. Priam, the old king of Troy, son of Laomedon; his son, Hector, the Priamid; his other son, the archer Paris, who abducted Helen, the beautiful and lascivious wife of Menelaus, is also a Priamid.

The Persian Wars and self-awareness

This identity between the opposing camps is hardly surprising. The Trojans were of the same origin as the Achaeans, spoke the same language and worshipped the same gods. However, there was one key difference between them, revealed by Homer at the end of Book II, in the "catalogue" of the Trojan coalition. The Troad was linked to Asia. While the Achaean camp was homogeneous, exclusively Greek, the Trojans had Asian Barbarians as allies. Homer

invented the word by phonetically transcribing an incomprehensible babble. The term *barbarophone* refers to a foreigner who speaks a language other than the Greek dialects.

That the Trojans were linked to Asia is the feeling of posterity, and not only in the eyes of the Greeks. Starting with the Persian Wars of the century before our era, which put Greece in danger of being conquered by the motley crew of Persian armies, spreading terror in the manner of the Huns ten centuries later in Gaul, a new interpretation of the Iliad was undertaken. After Herodotus and Thucydides, the rhetorician Isocrates said it explicitly in his *Panegyric* (early 2nd century): " If Homer's poetry has become famous, it is because he praised those who fought against the Barbarians; and that is why our ancestors wanted to honour his art in poetry competitions and in the education of young people, so that, by frequently hearing his verses, we might learn to hate the Barbarians in advance.." The identification of the Trojans and Asia is also visible in the painting of epic-themed vases, where the Trojans are equipped in the Persian style.

The Rellènes' identity poem

Long before the Greco-Persian Wars, the Iliad was understood as the founding poem of the identity of all Hellenes, beyond the differences and rivalries between cities. The Greeks could identify with it better than with any other legend. The war against Troy had united all the cities, as shown in the "catalogue of ships" in Book II. A pan-Hellenic epic, the Iliad ensured the recognition of small local communities in the unity of a legendary past and a historical will projected into the future.

The abduction of the beautiful Helen by a Trojan prince, the pretext for the war, ceased to be a private matter. It was recalled that her marriage to Menelaus, king of Sparta, had been guaranteed by the oath of all the other kings of Hellas. To seize women meant to plunder a

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1. The Sparta of the Trojan War (12th century BC) was not yet the city that would be founded by the Dorian conquerors around the 6th century and organised by the famous laws of Lycurgus.

people of its future. What was at stake, therefore, was not the anger of a scorned husband, but the very symbol of Hellenic continuity, represented by a woman of royal blood.

Wishing to unite all the cities for the conquest of the East, Alexander the Great clearly placed himself under the patronage of Homer. Before setting off for Asia, he came to bow before the tomb of Achilles and make a sacrifice on that of Protesilaus, the first Greek victim of the Trojan War.

The symbol survived well beyond Antiquity. In 1462, nine years after the fall of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmed II, en route to Lesbos, stopped at the site of Troy. There, according to the Greek chronicler Critobloulos of Imbros, who had rallied to the Turks, embracing the heritage of Asia in the face of Europe, he is said to have declared: "It was to me that God reserved the task of avenging this city and its inhabitants: I have subdued their enemies, ravaged their cities and made their riches my prey!" Twenty-eight centuries after the Trojan War, this is what is known as cultivating a "long memory", imaginary perhaps, but full of meaning. In the name of a memory no less long but opposite, deciding in the 18th century to found a city and a port on the Black Sea, opposite Turkey, the Empress of Russia Catherine II named it Odessa, the Greek name for Ulysses, in memory of the tireless navigator, inventor of the great wooden horse that enabled the Achaeans to capture Troy [2])

Plato, Aristotle, and the critique of cosmopolitanism

The fundamental distinction between Greeks and Barbarians was not very noticeable before the Persian Wars, before the sudden mortal threat posed by Xerxes' desire for conquest. Until it became a reality

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1. Quoted by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, preface to Paul Mazon's translation of the Iade ("Folio", Gallimard Paris, 1975, pp. 5-6).
2. The episode of the "Trojan horse" is not recounted in *the Iliad*. Homer makes a brief reference to it in *the Odyssey*. The imaginative and detailed account of this stratagem was written much later by Virgil in the Aeneid. *We* know that a group of Achaeans, led by Odysseus, entered the impregnable city of Troy hidden inside a large wooden horse, which the Trojans, overcome by curiosity, brought into their city despite Cassandra's warnings.

Without the threat of invasion or disappearance through assimilation or intermarriage, peoples have no reason to mistrust foreigners. On the contrary, they welcome them in accordance with the laws of hospitality. Everything changes, of course, when they discover that the guest is taking advantage of them to take their wives or daughters, steal their livestock, drive them from their homes and perhaps even capture the souls of their sons. The Hebrews experienced such trials during their first captivity in Babylon, during which those from Samaria allowed themselves to be assimilated and disappeared. This served as a lesson to those from Judah who, under the leadership of Ezra, gave themselves a very strict ethnic law, prohibiting mixed marriages in particular. This ensured the survival of this great people through more than twenty centuries of vicissitudes. The Ionian colonisers of the shores of Asia Minor also had experience of this kind of peril, mixed as they were with the indigenous populations.

After the first warning of a failed landing at Marathon and the even more serious threat, defeated at sea ten years later at Salamis, the Greeks made two major discoveries. The first was the danger posed by the Eastern Barbarians, radically foreign peoples. In return, they discovered their own identity, what it meant to be Greek in the midst of a vast world that was not. The peril posed by the Barbarians made the Hellenes aware of their community of origin and civilisation. Before, they had no idea. And we see the excellent Herodotus, a tireless traveller and friendly observer of so many other civilisations, suddenly change tone when discussing the Persian Wars, when, in his *Histories,* he makes the Athenians swear that they will never betray the Spartans in favour of the Persians: "Even if we were tempted to do so, many powerful considerations would prevent us. First and foremost, the images and statues of the gods have been burned and smashed to pieces; this deserves vengeance. Secondly, the Greek race is of the same blood, speaks the same language, shares the same temples and the same sacrifices; our customs are similar. To betray this would be a crime for the Athenians." This is a new way of speaking: "We are of the same blood." This argument will be repeated constantly.

It was part of the Hellenic conception of the city-state. This had a purely ethnic basis. Citizenship was determined by ancestry. The Greeks did not

1. Max Dimont, *Les Juifs, Dieu et l'Histoire,* Robert Laffont, Paris, 1964.

did not speak of the abstract entity called Athens, they spoke of a concrete reality, the Athenians. One had to be born of Athenian parents to be a citizen, a rule common to all cities.

A theoretical breach was opened by the Sophists, notably Antiphon the Sophist, who developed in a famous fragment the first draft of a cosmopolitan theory: "By nature we are all alike in every respect, both Barbarians and Greeks. [...] We all breathe the same air through our nostrils and we all eat with our hands." This thesis of the unity of the human race provoked the sarcasm of Aristophanes *(The Clouds)* and other comic authors. It was rejected by Plato in The *Republic* (§ 470 a-e). Socrates' disciple took the opposite view, contrasting the wars between the Greeks with those waged against the Barbarians. The former are not real wars *(@olemos),* but mere internal conflicts *(stasis).* Being "united by kinship and community of origin", the Greeks are by nature friends with each other. Therefore, peace is their normal state, not war. The situation is quite different with the Barbarians, because "the Greek peoples differ from the Barbarians in race and blood," and so it is not peace that is normal between them, but war [2]. In other words, Antiphon is a poor philosopher. Men are similar only in their share "animalistic": feeding or copulating. But their humanity makes them different. They are beings of culture, and culture is rooted in the blood.

Aristotle agrees. He develops the thesis that Greeks are born for freedom and Barbarians for slavery. In his *Politics,* he adds that ethnic unity is necessary for internal harmony in cities: "The absence of ethnic community is also a factor in sedition... For just as a city is not formed from a random mass of people, so it is not formed in any given period of time. That is why, among those who have so far accepted foreigners to found a city with them or to add them to the city, most have experienced sedition."

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1. *Les Sophistes, Fragments et témoignages* (translated and presented by Jean-Paul Dumont) PUF, Paris, 1969, p. 177.
2. The opposition between Plato and Antiphon was highlighted by Éric Werner, *L'Avant-Guerre civile,* UÂge d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris, 1998. See also Claire Préaux, *Le Monde hellénistique,* PUF, Paris, 1978, p. 547.
3. Aristotle, *Politics* (1303, a 25-30).

Resistance to Alexander's dream

However, a major impetus for cosmopolitanism came indirectly from the Greek world with Alexander's conquests. No other conqueror has inspired such dreams in posterity. His meteoric rise is unparalleled. After him, the world was never the same again.

Born in 356 BCE, he died at the age of 33. During his ten years of dazzling campaigns, the young king of Macedonia, Aristotle's unfaithful pupil, first conquered all the Greek cities of Asia Minor, then twice defeated Darius III and the Achaemenid Persians, the leading military power of the time. Seizing Greater Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt in turn, he found time to found the first Alexandria there. He then turned eastwards, crossed the Tigris and Euphrates, and took control of Mesopotamia, ancient Babylonia, and its fabulous cities. Having definitively crushed the Persian Empire at the Battle of Arbela in October 331, he gave himself the title of King of Asia and continued his impetuous march towards India. In 327, he crossed the Kyber Pass and continued his journey to the Indus...

He has now been marching and fighting for seven years, having crossed the Hellespont in the spring of 334. Recruited in Macedonia and throughout Greece, his great army has dwindled, falling victim to combat, disease and exhaustion. He has constantly replenished it with contingents forcibly recruited from among the defeated peoples.

The conqueror's political genius matched his military prowess. During his conquests, he respected ancient institutions, sacrificed to indigenous gods, spared local elites and retained satraps. After the assassination of Darius, he took on his attributes, even adopting the customs of the Achaemenid court. This was going too far. His Macedonians rebelled against this change, which made them subjects of an Asian despotism so contrary to their customs and Greek ideals. Like the Achaeans, Celts and Germans, the Macedonians did not consider themselves subjects of their king, but his companions – *hetairoi*. Similarly, they were reluctant to follow Alexander in his grand cosmopolitan design. Refusing to become Orientals, they intended to remain what they were: Greeks of the North.

In February 325, in Susa, Alexander married a daughter of Darius III. He had previously married a Persian princess, Roxane, with whom he had a son

who would be assassinated after his death. At the same time, he forced 90 of his companions to marry local women according to Persian custom. The conqueror was then at the height of his glory, but such practices were met with indignation and resistance from the Macedonians. Of the 90 companions of the king who married in Susa, only one, Seleucus, kept his Persian wife after Alexander's death. All the others repudiated theirs. In the same year, at Opis, his veterans mutinied when he wanted to demobilise them and replace them with young Iranian phalanxers. Faced with danger, Alexander relented.

Having reached the Indus River, the king intended to go even further. Despite the exhilaration of conquest and plunder, the army refused to follow him in this endless pursuit. The Macedonians wanted to return to their homeland with their king. Once again, Alexander had to give in, turning back amid enormous difficulties.

The Greeks in the Hellenistic East

In eight years of uninterrupted marching, he covered eighteen thousand kilometres and founded several military colonies. Then, on 10 June 323, he died suddenly, without anyone knowing for certain whether his death was due to malaria or poisoning. Before he died, he had time to divide his empire among his generals, the *Diadochi,* who would then spend the rest of their lives fighting each other.

Two dynasties formed by these generals would survive: the Ptolemies, founded by Ptolemy in Egypt, and the Seleucids, founded by Seleucus in Syria. They would transform the East by introducing Greek civilisation, while the rulers allowed themselves to be Orientalised. Thus was born Hellenistic civilisation, a scandalous marriage between Greece and the East. Amidst a sea of mixed populations, the Greeks, as the English would do much later in their colonies, strove to maintain their customs and integrity without allowing themselves to be swallowed up. Diodorus of Sicily reports that the Macedonians "regretted the Greek ways of thinking and living, they who had been cast out to the far reaches of the kingdom". Over time, a balance was eventually established. The small handful of Greek military colonists imposed their language, their statuary and their architecture. To protect themselves from dilution, they recreated a specifically Greek way of life far from home.

building temples, gymnasiums and theatres, whose ruins continue to impress us today. They also founded the two most important libraries of Antiquity, in Pergamon and Alexandria. The influence of the Greek language was such that even the Hebrews submitted to it, translating their Bible into Greek, the *Septuagint,* whose name recalls that it was established by seventy-two Jewish translators in Alexandria. The entire eastern Mediterranean had thus fallen under Hellenistic influence.

Despite their small numbers and multiple attempts at absorption, the Greeks resisted Orientalisation fairly well. Nearly two centuries after Alexander's conquests, while expressing his disgust at the chaos he found in Alexandria, Polybius nevertheless observed a certain resistance among the Greeks, as reported by Strabo: "There were three categories of inhabitants: the indigenous Egyptians, impulsive and unfit for civic life; the mercenaries, forming a mass of brutal and unruly people; and finally, in third place, the Alexandrians, who were still better than the previous two groups. Although they were of very diverse origins, they were of Greek descent and had not forgotten all the customs of the Hellenes." The colourful cities of the Hellenistic East were home to several separate ethnic communities living together in more or less harmony, forming as many "cities", or *pofi/euma.*

Refusal to be swallowed up

Although Greek culture spread, there was no integration of the various peoples. "Multiple contacts did not lead to a complete fusion of populations. In Alexandria, Greeks only married other Greeks. Even in colonial cities, families were wary of each other. Interracial marriages were rare, and the mixed-race population that resulted from them was marginalised. In Empérion, Spain, the Greek and Iberian quarters remained separated by a wall until Roman times. In Olbia, Crimea, the "Mixhellenes" were kept outside the city walls in the countryside, where they were eventually massacred by the Scythians, their half-brothers. [...] In

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1. Strabon, *Geography,* XVII, 1, 12, Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.

As physical education is linked to compulsory military training for future citizens, it has an undeniable political character, so much so that foreigners are excluded from the gymnasium.

In *The Laws* (693 A), Plato repeatedly expressed his aversion and that of his compatriots to mixing, which he saw as a factor in degeneration. He imagined what Greece would be like if it had not been saved from Persian domination at the time of the Greco-Persian Wars: "All the Greek tribes would be mixed together, the Greeks with the barbarians and the barbarians with the Greeks, just as the regions currently ruled by the Persians live in lamentable dispersion, due to dispersion and mixing [2]."

Contrary to the idea developed by Droysen in the 19th century, there was no "mixed civilisation" in the Hellenistic kingdoms of the East, nor did the indigenous populations desire one. Cosmopolitanism — a word coined by Diogenes the Cynic — remained marginal, confined to abstract discussion, never finding its way into political practice. "Cosmopolitanism, because it is a doctrine of 'counter-culture', reveals by contrast the attachment of the masses [of Greeks] to the dogma of Greek superiority and the excellence of the city."

Rome dies from its conquests

In the 1st century BCE, the Romans emerged as new conquerors from distant northern origins, much like the Greeks. But the history of their ethnogenesis unfolded differently, in a different geographical and historical context, with different results (see Chapter 7). Originally a small people, rough, austere, terribly organised, military in spirit, a people of peasants, lawyers and soldiers, devoid of poetry and even more so of philosophical spirit. When the Romans, late in life, began to learn from Greece and desired to be initiated into

1. Marie-Françoise Baslez, *L'étranger dans lvi Grèce antique (The Foreigner in Ancient Greece)*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1984, pp. 305, 322.
2. Plato, *The Laws,* III, 693 A. See also IV, 704 D, 705 A, 707 A-D, XII, 950 A.
3. Claire Préaux, *op. cit.,* p. 547.

philosophy, they would go to Athens, as the future emperor Julian would do in the 4th century. This philosophical deficiency undoubtedly explains many things.

For a long time, the Romans were not even masters in Italy. Constantly threatened, it was in order to avoid being conquered that they became conquerors. The great trial in which they nearly perished was the series of three Punic Wars, which ended with the complete destruction of Carthage, a Phoenician city, which was burned to the ground by Scipio Aemilianus in 146 BCE.

The more their military successes were confirmed, the more voracious the Romans became. The wealthy Hellenistic empire — a false empire without an emperor — was prey to their greed. It took them more than a century to seize it after conquering Greece. It began in 168 BC with their victory at Pydna over the Macedonian phalanx, which had rusted considerably since Alexander's time, and it never ended. From the 1st century AD – the 9th century of the Roman era – Rome's power replaced that of the Greeks everywhere, pushing the borders beyond the Hellenistic limits. The entire Mediterranean became a Roman sea — *mare nostrum* — with all its shores becoming provinces of the Empire. Even Spain was absorbed, where the legions had long struggled against resistance. relentless Iberian Celts.

Too much of a good pupil of Alexander, Rome triumphed everywhere, but it would ultimately perish from its conquests. The ancient virtues were corrupted by the enormous profits from plunder. The peasant soldiers disappeared without descendants, giving way to foreign mercenaries. The authentic Romans evaporated, replaced throughout Italy by waves of immigrants from all over. Even the emperors ceased to be of Roman stock. We saw emperors of African and Syrian origin with the Severi dynasty. Rome was no longer in Rome. However, supported by legions made up of "barbarian" contingents, the old framework of Roman *dignitas*, Stoic morality and imperial administration managed to hold together the immense edifice, whose language of culture had become Greek. The Empire became increasingly Orientalised. In 330, Constantine transferred the imperial capital to Byzantium after adopting Christianity as the official religion, which soon became the only and compulsory religion. Death was near, at least for the western and European part of the Empire.

Harmony, moderation and excess

Rome died of its excess, and the Romans with it. This exceptional people had not found within themselves the resources that had enabled the Greek colonies to resist the perils of the East. They had succumbed to *hubris,* excess, which the Greeks considered the supreme evil.

In Canto XVIII of the *//inde,* Homer departs from the epic narrative to describe the city of men according to his wishes. He uses the backdrop of Achilles' shield forged by Hephaestus as a pretext. What he shows is a universe in order, a cosmos. The term originally referred to a troop in battle formation. The idea of order is fundamental to the Hellenes. They could only imagine the cosmos as orderly. All philosophical endeavour has tended towards a rational explanation of the stability of the cosmos, the proof of which it sees in the course of the stars in the night sky and in the perpetual return of day after night. Establishing harmony between oneself and the cosmos — the order of the universe — is the watchword of ancient wisdom from Homer to Aristotle. The lives of men within the city, as well as in domestic economy and personal conduct, must reflect the cosmic order as closely as possible, which requires constant effort.

Men have an innate tendency towards excess, which must be combated through education, roots in a city, and just laws that themselves reflect the order of the cosmos. Philosophers have opposed capriciousness and subjective opinions with *logos,* objective discourse, and reason, which reflect the cosmic order. For Plato, for example, contemplating pure ideas means taking the perfection of the cosmos as a model. Finding this order within oneself and in one's life requires constant effort through knowledge and meditation, because human beings, due to their imperfection and desires, are not naturally inclined towards goodness and moderation.

The condition for harmony is moderation. This reigns in the structure of the city, the architecture of temples, and the proportions of statues, even if it is not always present in the lives of individuals. Of course, there is no moderation without limits. The philosopher par excellence of

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1. The Greeks' conception of reason is the opposite of the subjective abstractions of the Enlightenment.

measure and proper proportions, Aristotle shows, for example, that harmony in the city is impossible beyond a limited number of citizens. He also shows that it is inconceivable without ethnic homogeneity. There was no fundamental aversion to foreigners or barbarians, as long as they did not jeopardise the harmony of the city. This idea, of which Aristotle was merely the interpreter, underpinned the Greeks' concern for identity, which the Romans, in their excesses, unfortunately ignored.

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The legacy of Homer

By special privilege, the cosmos of the ancient Europeans was not created by a thunderous God or by reason, but by poetry. From the very first verses of *Theogony,* his poem about the creation of the world and the gods, Hesiod places himself under the inspiration of the Muses. He says that all revelation comes from them: "They inspired me with divine accents so that I might glorify what will be and what was. [...] Their song first glorifies the venerated race of gods, beginning at the beginning, those who were born of Earth and the vast Sky..."

In the beginning there was Chaos, then Gaia, the Earth with broad flanks, then Eros, the first of the gods. Chaos gave birth to Night and Day. Gaia gave birth to Ouranos, the starry Sky, then Ocean. By the name of Eros, the Ancients referred to the mysterious force that drives the elements and matter towards each other to create new beings. Thus Gaia, uniting with Ouranos, gave birth to Titans and monsters without respite. But Ouranos wanted to prevent them from living.

"The mysterious force that gives birth to life, if nothing comes to regulate and contain it, creates only confusion and death: it immediately destroys what it has just brought into being." This is the meaning of the myth. But Ouranos will be mutilated by his son Cronos. An end will be put to his odious fertility. From the waves fertilised by Ouranos' genitals, severed by Cronos and pushed by the Winds, Aphrodite was born — the Roman Venus, goddess of beauty and love. Botticelli dedicated a delightful composition to this myth, *The Birth of Venus.*

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1. Paul Mazon, introductory note to his translation of Hesiod's *Theogony* by Hesiod (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1982, p. 28).

Cosmogony heralds philosophy

The legend of Ouranos and Cronos, like the one recounted *in the* Scandinavian *Edda*, carries within it a terrifying 'truth' and a first principle of order. What it loses in rationality, it gains in power. The primitive chaos will ultimately yield only after the victory of the Olympian gods over Cronos, their father. Cronos devoured the children he had with his sister Rhea. Saved from his father's gluttony by Rhea's cunning, her son Zeus, the first of the Olympians, seized sovereignty. After defeating monsters and Titans, he established his order over the cosmos.

These myths, summarised to the extreme, have multiple interpretations. Unlike the fixed 'truths' of certain philosophies or dogmatic religions, myths offer an open, polymorphous, constantly renewable explanation of the world, foreign to logical expression, which gives them an inexhaustible creative power. They exist beyond true and false, just and unjust, good and evil, without ever losing their fertility.

Mythical times have their own chronology. Uranus precedes Cronus, who predates Zeus, that is, the ordering of the cosmos. The Titans, monsters and heroes lived before historical men, of whom they are often the ancestors, such as Heracles for the Dorian cities and Theseus for Athens. As in all myths, the ordering of the cosmos lends itself to several interpretations. It evokes creative chaos, before the elements and species were fixed. Legendary memories of very distant palaeo-historical times that preceded the establishment of the rules that ensured the coherence and survival of clans, tribes and cities. Also a mythical memory of forgotten times and events, prior to the settlement of the Hellenes in Greece...

The succession of Gaia and Ouranos, Earth then Sky, can be understood as that of the ancient chthonic deities mastered by the Olympian and solar gods. This succession will be interpreted as the opposite symbol of the telluric forces, considered feminine, and the Uranian forces, considered masculine. It reveals the antagonism and complementarity of Mother Earth, the passive principle, and the fertilising Sky, the active principle. From their polarity and union, life was born, as Heraclitus put it in his own words: "Nature loves opposites.

It is with them, and not with their own kind, that she produces harmony. Thus, for example, she unites the male with the female, but not each being with its own kind."

The first female deity, Aphrodite extended her power over the world by mating with male gods or mortals. From her lover Ares-Mars, god of war and eternal spring, she gave birth to Harmony. After the mutilation of Ouranos, "life will no longer perpetuate itself indefinitely, at random: the power to give birth will belong to the creatures themselves". Two beings of opposite sexes, by uniting, will create life. Two beings of the same species, for love can only be conceived within the species. The fixation of species was the first solid point to which the thinking of the ancient Greeks attached itself when, 'scanning the immensity of creation with an anxious gaze, it sought a principle of order. That in millions of beings of the same species, the same organs are always found in the same place to perform the same functions, without nature ever being caught in the act of caprice or error, is this not a subject of wonder capable of becoming the starting point for an entire philosophy? ([2]) A philosophy that will be based on the concept of *Nature,* another name for cosmic order.

The divine part of human beings

Hesiod's *Theogony* overlaps with the world of deities described by Homer. The difference is that the poet of the Iliad is not concerned with building a coherent system. Coherence is within him. His world is full of the myths later organised by Hesiod, but his intention is different.

Homer's Heaven ignores the distant era of Ouranos and Cronos. The chthonic element is absent. The poet retains only the light.

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1. Among all the ancient European peoples, like heroes, kings and their peers wanted to be seen as children of the gods. By attributing a founding hero, himself born of a god, to each Greek city, myth helped to shape civic identity. The Romans did the same. Through his own *gens,* Caesar claimed ancestry going back to Venus and her son, Aeneas.

2. Paul Mazon, *op. cit.*

Olympian, that of the northern conquerors of Hellas. With a boldness inconceivable in Eastern religions, he elevates men to the image of the gods and acts as their sometimes irreverent interpreter. In the words of Goethe, 'Greek religion did not humanise the divine: it saw the essence of man as divine'. Enabling man to connect with his divine nature, with cosmic forces, was the goal of Greek wisdom. Suggested poetically by Homer, this concern was expressed explicitly by Plato and Aristotle. "The most divine part of us," Aristotle explains, *"is manifested through contemplative activity."* Contemplation *"*constitutes perfect happiness if it continues throughout one's entire life. Man then no longer lives as a man, but as someone who possesses a divine character" *(Nicomachean Ethics,* chap. vH).

Like the gods themselves, who are not separate from creation and reflect the cosmos, humans are beings of nature, from which they cannot be isolated. But in the Hellenic conception, nature is sacred and humans are part of it. Their lives are immanent to it: "As leaves are born, so are humans. The leaves, in turn, are scattered on the ground by the wind, and the green forest brings them forth when the days of spring arrive. So it is with men: one generation is born at the very moment when another passes away" *(Iliad,* VI, 146).

Beyond their divine nature, the strength and energy at work in humans are no different from those at work in nature. As Heraclitus would say two centuries later, *polemos,* conflict, is the father of gods and men. The gods are in perpetual conflict and they engender conflict among beings and men. Conflict gives rise to the worst calamities, but it is also the source of life and harmony. Europeans will never truly forget this ambiguous truth. In ancient times, the omnipresence of conflict went hand in hand with *philia,* a feeling of goodwill towards others, very different from the charity and abstract love of one's 'neighbour' later preached by Christianity.

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1. J. Follon and J. MacEvoy, *Sagesses de l'amitié. Anthologie de textes philoso- phiques anciens* (Le Cerf, Paris-Fribourg, 1998).

Strength and wisdom in Homer

The value of heroes is determined by their *menos,* their vital energy, their ardour, their courage, their strength, their heart in the sense of "Rodrigue, have you a heart?". *Menos* is quite different from physical strength. This strength of heart sometimes manifests itself following a prayer. In Book V of the Iliad, devoted to the exploits of Diomedes, the bravest of the Greeks after Achilles, Athena instils it into the heart of her protégé

"Attack the Trojans without fear, Diomedes, I have put the strength *[menos]* of your father in your chest."

Homer's dynamic conception of strength is perfectly illustrated by old Nestor, "who has already seen two generations of mortals pass away", the personification of wisdom in the epic. *"*From his peaceful mouth flow words sweeter than honey. " But although his mouth is peaceful and his age prevents him from wielding a sword, he has not relinquished his warrior spirit. That is why he is listened to. He does not fight, but he is in the thick of battle to advise and guide the combatants who respect him. According to Homer, wisdom cannot be separated from action or strength. It does not retreat into the tent of moral values. The disappearance of his physical strength and agility does not diminish Nestor's spiritual vigour, his *menos.* His body, weakened by age, prevents him from fighting as he once did, but his heart has lost none of its energy. The decline in his vigour does not lead him to a reversal of values, as a simplistic Nietzschean model would suggest. It merely leads him to a change of function within the action. Nestor does not retreat into nostalgia for memories or the illusion of a substitute role. He remains at the heart of the fighting.

Faced with destiny, the wise Nestor proves himself greater than perhaps any of the other heroes. His experiences have taught him the futility of his personal desires. He is prepared to make any sacrifice, to live and die without complaint. Thirty centuries later, he foreshadows the old and blind King John of Luxembourg of Bohemia, who came to support the King of France at Crécy in August 1346. Learning that the battle was lost, the old king had himself tied to his horse and ordered that he be taken to the battlefield to die. His body was found the next day among six of his knights who had tied their horses together to remain by his side.

Homer presents Nestor's resignation as a strength. But is it really resignation? It is more a manly acceptance of

destiny. And in Homer, strength grows in proportion to this acceptance. It is the hallmark of wisdom. In the Odyssey, it is opposed to the foolishness of the young fool, such as Lycaon, who wants to see his dreams of the moment come true. The wise man, on the contrary, accepts the sanction of force. But while the fool who flees destiny is despised, the man who accepts it deserves no praise. Nestor is praised for the skill of his advice, not for his resignation. Accepting destiny with a steadfast heart is not a virtue; it is simply being a man, according to Homer.

The morality of beauty and ugliness

The figure of Nestor shows that Homer's characters cannot be reduced to physical strength. Helen, Andromache, Penelope, Priam, Achilles himself, are much more than the strength that inhabits them. These characters reveal what is most profound in the Hellenes, beginning with the tragic sense of the human condition, the awareness of what is common to all, but which is always experienced in a unique way: Fate.

In Book XXI of *the Iliad,* after the death of Patroclus, when Achilles announces to Lycaon that he is going to kill him, the essence is contained in a short sentence:
"Death is upon my head." Achilles knows what fate awaits him. Indeed, he will soon die, far from his loved ones and his homeland, forever ignorant of peace of mind and happiness. A different fate awaits Ulysses. The seer Tiresias foretells it to him *(Odyssey,* XI, 140). His death will be peaceful. He will die at home, after a happy old age, in the land where he was born.

No moral judgement justifies this difference. Only destiny intervenes, merciful or cruel, but always accepted if one is a man worthy of the name. Homer's world, like that of Aeschylus in the Oresteia, is unaware of the moral guilt that would later poison the Western conscience and inspire the worst condemnations and hatreds in the name of good and evil.

Homer never pronounces judgement according to this duality of good and evil, which he ignores. If he judges, it is according to the criteria of beauty or ugliness, of what is honourable or not. Yet a high morality permeates the poems. Any transgression of harmony, moderation, or righteous conduct is paid for dearly, as is the "fatal" anger.

Achilles, pretext for //inde. Homer ignores the internalisation of a morality based on fault and guilt. In a less pernicious and healthier way, he puts virtues and their opposites into action: courage and cowardice, honour and baseness, magnanimity and resentment, loyalty and treachery. He also shows characters without concealing their contradictions: Hector and his lucidity, Penelope and her femininity, Achilles and his valour, Ulysses and his skill, Nestor and his reason, Paris and his weakness, Helen and her extreme sensuality. Homeric poems do not speak in conceptual or dogmatic terms. Yet they provide clear answers to questions of life and death.

From Homer to philosophical thought

Mircea Eliade said that Homer freed the Greeks from the burden of frightening deities that continue to haunt the East. To a large extent, he even freed them from the deities themselves, so humanised are they in his poems. Homer's freedom from the gods reflects the very spirit of the Hellenes. Homer is inconceivable in Egypt, Babylon or Phoenicia. While acknowledging his genius, it could only flourish in a privileged place, on specific human soil, whose light would assert itself after him in all fields of art and thought. By confirming the flame of freedom among the Greeks, the poet paved the way for the philosophical spirit as it was experienced by the Greeks, an effort of reason to understand the guiding principle of the cosmos beyond appearances and to let the primordial forces act within oneself in the manner of heroes and gods. Self-knowledge was inseparable from the perception of the cosmos. Homer thus anticipated the Delphic injunction: "Know thyself." But this was not credited to him for a long time.

The early philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Parmenides, and even Plato, often criticised him for expressing himself as a poet rather than as they did. It was a way of asserting the autonomy and novelty of their thinking. Academic history has

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1. For an interpretation of myths, see Walter *O'Rourke, Les Dieux de la Grèce* (Payot, Paris, 1993, p. 35).

generally modelled on the interpretation that contrasts myth with *logos,* i.e. reason, the former being devalued in relation to the latter. This was not Aristotle's view. He perceived that myth contained a truth that was all the more true because it was poetic fiction. During the 20th century, scholarly opinion rallied to this interpretation. In the meantime, it had been discovered that myth was not primitive and that it contained a richness in no way inferior to that of conceptual thought. Moreover, how can we conceive of a

"Progress" in art or thought, leading from the primitive to the evolved? This idea was nevertheless prevalent. It was fuelled by the vision of a linear time, moving from an imaginary beginning to a hypothetical end. This vision was reinforced by the very real scientific and technical progress accumulated since the 18th century. Under the pretext that machines improve and multiply their performance year after year and that technical inventiveness gallops at an intoxicating or frightening pace, depending on one's point of view, it was imagined that the same was true for other intellectual activities, forgetting that the physical sciences and technology proceed by accumulation and multiplication, while art, while relying on techniques, rules and influences, proceeds by pure creation. There is no reason to believe that Gothic aesthetics are superior to those of the Romanesque, the Parthenon or the Bayon of Angkor. Each achieves perfection in its own right. In their own right, the cave paintings of Chauvet or Lascaux have never been equalled. How can these earliest known European paintings, which are between 30,000 and 20,000 years old, be considered 'primitive'? And has Homer ever been 'improved'? Should we detect 'progress' between Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle and Epictetus, and if so, in what way?

Just as Homer achieved unsurpassable perfection in his field, so Heraclitus is unrivalled in his. He achieved a certain kind of perfection in his time that Plato or Epictetus did not improve upon, even when they hesitated. Their perspectives are different. What Heraclitus perceived, conceived and formulated with the brief and incisive force of lightning still speaks to us with the same force more than twenty-five centuries later, just as much as what Plato or Epictetus bequeathed to us at the height of another school of thought that nevertheless had identical sources. Why these three names, Heraclitus, Plato and Epictetus? Because they represent three essential moments in European thought; three

currents that have continued to influence representations and behaviours throughout time with a view to enduring wisdom.

In the eyes of posterity, Heraclitus is the most significant of the pre-Socratics, whose influence will continue to be felt without temporal limits. Plato is the founder of the method of questioning and the inventor of the system of Ideas, which much later, through his exegetes, would have a definite influence on Christian thought. Epictetus is the dominant figure of Stoicism, which, beyond Rome, would continue to influence the European psyche.

Nature and becoming in Heraclitus

The exact dates of birth (around 540 BC) and death (around 480 BC) of the philosopher from Ephesus remain uncertain. Heraclitus is thought to have belonged to a priestly family, but he gave up his privileges to his brother and withdrew to the mountains to live alone and devote himself to meditation. An original, harsh and passionate thinker, he never cared about pleasing others. Disdaining explanations, he addressed minds accustomed to reflection and for whom the search for truth was the supreme duty. The nickname 'obscure' given to him is clearly due to the enigmatic and elliptical nature of his thinking. Only fragments of his work *On Nature* remain. However, his thinking is also known to us through the commentaries of the Ancients, notably Diogenes Laërtius. It concerns the mysteries of life. Heraclitus rejects the idea of a world created by a deity distinct from the cosmos: "The universe, the same for all beings, was not created by any god or by any man; but it has always been, is, and will be fire eternally."

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1. Aristotle, Plato's distant successor, would be a subject in his own right. Among other things, his views on contemplation as a means of accessing the divine *(Nicomachean Ethics,* chap. vii) rival all the speculations on non-action in the East or China. His thoughts, of unrivalled breadth, are known to us only through the notes of his disciples. These texts lack the clarity and seductive expression found in the fragments of Heraclitus, in Plato or in the writings of Arrian, interpreter of Epictetus. For an overall interpretation of Greek thought, see Pierre Hadot's brief and dense synthesis, *Éloge de la philosophie antique* (Éditions Allia, Paris, 1997).

living..." The processes of nature can be reduced to the continuous transformation of a single principle. *Fire* (both symbol and element) is, he says, the primordial substance, the source of all that exists. Despite the incessant change (movement) that is the very law of nature, the primordial substance is stable. It undergoes no degradation.

Heraclitus expressed the idea that movement is the principle of everything in a famous metaphor: "You cannot step into the same river twice, nor touch twice the same perishable substance in the same state, for it disperses and reunites again." This principle does not refer to human history but to the cosmos. "Movement" is conceived as a dynamic of ever-renewed creations in the great flow of *becoming*. This leads the universe to die periodically in a general conflagration, then to be reborn in *Fire* and to embrace the phases of a new cycle. And this cyclical process repeats itself endlessly, introducing the poetic idea of eternal return.

Proving the deep kinship of the European spirit, the same idea is expressed repeatedly in skaldic poetry and in the *Eddas,* under the theme of Ragnarök, or "twilight of the gods". Unlike the biblical end of the world, the cosmic theme of Ragnarök is associated with the perpetual return of life. It applies as much to great cosmic or historical cycles as it does to those of the year or even a single day, opening up a theology of twilight and dawn.

The senses and reason

The principle of perpetual motion and becoming is the one on which Heraclitus insists most. Although conceived from a non-historical perspective, how could it not speak to people who are living through the end of one cycle and, without knowing it, the birth of another? The cosmic principle of change is, however, corrected by the assertion that, in nature, nothing happens by chance and that everything is subject to immutable laws governed by reason. The universal reality of becoming is characterised by the union and reconciliation of opposites, which are essential to the harmony of the world. There is neither beginning nor end in the universe; cosmic processes describe closed cycles and return.

Periodically. Like other beings, humans are products of nature. They have no particular destiny, and nature is certainly not designed to satisfy their whims. Their soul is not an abstract principle but an inorganic manifestation of the organic world. Determined by Fate, beings, in order to preserve themselves, are forced to overcome obstacles, to compete, to fight each other: "Conflict *(polemos)* is the father of all things. Justice itself is struggle. Everything comes about through discord and necessity." No, the philosopher of Ephesus was not concerned with pleasing others.

According to him, in order to attain knowledge, humans are equipped with two organs: the senses and reason. The former, he says, are deceiving. As for reason, or "divine reason", its existence is independent of humans, who acquire it through effort, observation and training. It is through reason that they are connected to the totality of things. Exercising this faculty is a duty. Socrates and Plato would agree with this precept. It is understandable that Heraclitus despised religious beliefs and practices, which led him to criticise Hesiod and even Homer.

"yet the wisest of all Hellenes". He criticises poets for spreading misleading fables. For him, the "divine" is identified with the totality of the cosmos and its becoming, which is not contradictory to Homeric metaphors. Man attains the divine when he rises above his selfishness and pettiness. Heraclitus' entire approach can therefore be summed up in this great task: to know the reason that governs all things. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice concern only men and lose all meaning in nature. However, there is no pessimism in him, no complaint about the miseries of life, except to criticise his fellow citizens who had banished his friend Hermodorus, "the most valiant of all". In his impassivity, however, the sage does not show himself to be entirely detached from the affairs of the city, chiselling out, for example, this aphorism: "The people must fight for their laws as they fight for their walls. " Or this one: "One man is worth ten thousand to me if he is the best." Several other sentences celebrate the courage of the warrior: "Those who have fallen in battle are honoured by gods and men. His own moral attitude was one of detachment and heroism in the face of the inevitable. It is understandable that Nietzsche wrote: "The world eternally needs truth, which is why it eternally needs Heraclitus."

Plato and the Decline of the City

The philosopher from Ephesus spoke in a world that was in order. A century and a half after him, that world had changed, mainly in Athens. The democratic revolution associated with the imperialism of the city, the conflicts with Persia, and finally the terrible thirty years of the Peloponnesian War had turned everything upside down. The virile spirit of the city had been struck down. The soul of tragedy had already degenerated with Euripides. The Sophists had set out to replace tradition with a jumble of uncertain opinions propagated by rhetorical persuasion. It was in this Athens of the second century, affected by decadence, that Plato's immense work took place.

Originally, Plato's motives were largely political. In his youth, he experienced the turmoil of civil war, which followed Athens' defeat by Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War. His uncle Critias, an intelligent and ambitious aristocrat and disciple of Socrates, had led the pro-Spartan party, establishing the dictatorship of the Thirty. He had perished during the revolt that restored the democratic party. Socrates himself had been involved with the Spartophiles, and this was not unrelated to his subsequent death sentence.

Suffering from these ills, Plato's ambition was to base the renewal of the city on indisputable values established and proven by reason. He believed that the only way to combat the perversion of ideas and the nihilism espoused by the Sophists, foremost among them Protagoras, was through a superior effort of conceptual thought. His work focused on seeking the essence of things, their intrinsic, indestructible, immutable and universal properties. Unlike the Sophists, who confined themselves to the world of appearances, becoming and its contradictions, he considered the sensible world to be a deceptive copy of the authentic world of essences, pure forms and Ideas. As a method, he favoured questioning in order to confront his interlocutors with their own intellectual contradictions, from which true philosophical reflection would arise.

To train the new elite for political renewal, he founded the Academy. His works, notably *The Republic,* define what the ideal city should be, with Sparta serving as a model of sorts. He himself was directly involved in the government of Sicily.

where he would experience great setbacks. In a paradox of consequences, with the intention of preserving tradition, he introduced a dualism into Greek thought that was foreign to it. The search for the essence of Ideas led him to contrast the perishable body, the shell of appearances, with the soul, reputed to be eternal, the seat of essences. The Hellenic spirit had always turned away from death to affirm the unique value of the present, earthly life. With Plato and especially his exegetes, death delivers the soul from its carnal prison: "Free and pure from the folly of the body, we shall know the pure Essence for ourselves." What part did Socrates and Plato play in this "revolution"? We do not really know. The fact is that with them began to disappear the world of innocence, sung by Pindar: "O my soul, do not aspire to eternal life, but exhaust the field of possibility..." A contemporary of the decline of Christianity, Nietzsche saw in Plato the source of Western metaphysics and unhappy consciousness, assimilated

to a slave morality. Against this interpretation, one might object that Plato did not have the soul of a slave. His aim was to escape from the

cave of the senses, to free men from the deceptive realm (in his eyes) of sensations in order to discover divine laws and conform to them. Unlike revealed religions, he never thought that these laws should be imposed from outside. They had to be discovered from within, through the constant effort of right reason. It should also be noted that at the end of his life, at the end of his questioning, in the *Timaeus* (see pp. 123-124), he corrected the dualism of his early writings.

Homer survives Plato

Under the pretext that poets are creators of illusions, Plato went so far as to say: "We will ban poetry from our Republic." This was an odious proposition, the result of logic taken to extremes. In his aversion to poetry and myth, Plato lamented that Homer had been "the educator of Greece". He criticised him for his fables in which the gods behave immorally or implausibly. But the function of poetry and myth is not that of philosophy. Poetic language is not unambiguous. In its interpretation of reality and its vision

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1. Abel Jeannière, *Les Présocratiques* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1996, pp. 32–33).

of the world, it is multifaceted and a source of renewal. It seems false, yet it is always true. Unlike moral discourse, myth warns and cautions rather than forbids. It ignores moral culpability, but shows the consequences of transgressions.

Elliade opens with Achilles' anger towards Agamemnon, "a fatal anger that caused the death of so many heroes...". Homer does not condemn Achilles' excesses, he describes them and reveals their consequences. All those who reflect on the story can learn from it. Yet Achilles is great. He is unique in his greatness and pays the price for it. Ordinary men cannot match heroes, who are superhuman in their excesses and their greatness. But they can admire what is admirable and turn away from what is fatal. Such is Homer's 'lesson'. He shows that the Greek order is not inert, that it was not born of peace but of war. He does not reject any energy or passion, even if it is bad. He seizes upon these impetuous forces to channel them, to turn them into a life force, something that Plato did not understand. The poet also shows us intimate happiness, harmony in couples and families, Priam and his wife, Hector and Andromache. But he shows that this happiness does not protect against the misfortunes of history or against Fate.

Faced with misfortune, Homer does not lament, but his compassion is evident. It is up to each reader to draw their own conclusions from his narrative. After enduring endless trials, Ulysses and Penelope find happiness once more. This is not a bland, blissful happiness. It is the result of a never-ending struggle against adversity. This struggle revealed that Ulysses and Penelope were a man and a woman of a superior kind. Not just any man and any woman. Two Hellenes, bearers of a specific heritage, roots, tradition and a particular mentality, which explain their being and their way of being.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that Plato and his successors undermined Homer's world. Their implicit universalism, dualism and heavy moral discourse had little practical significance until the advent of Christianity, which appropriated them. The influence of the great poems was hardly diminished. Later, departing from their master on this point, the Neoplatonists rehabilitated Homer to the point of deifying him. In the third century AD, Plotinus saw the poet as an immense visionary, the contemplator par excellence of intellectual Beauty.

legible. Porphyry and Iamblichus discovered in it the prefiguration of their idea of the immortal soul. A little later, Proclus believed that Homer was expounding the highest theology in a veiled form.

Countless exegeses of Homeric poems

The Neoplatonists undertook a spiritualist exegesis of Homer's poems. Many others engaged in reinterpretations based on their own choices and beliefs. From the end of the 6th century BCE onwards, certain philosophers believed they had discovered in Homer the foundations of a 'physics', that is to say, a scientific understanding of nature. Other philosophers, long before certain works of our century, undertook a historical and geographical exegesis of Homer's poems. Neopythagoreans devoted themselves to a coded reading of the great poems, believing that Homer had preceded their master Pythagoras in the esotericism of numbers and arithmetic. Political philosophers found in Homer the three forms of government identified by Aristotle, as well as the portrait of the ideal ruler, not to mention the teachings of the art of war. Plutarch, initially critical, later devoted himself to a moral exegesis of the poems, believing that Homer had intended to teach men all that they could expect from reason. Unlike Plato, Aristotle expressed in his *Poetics* the keenest admiration for Homer, especially for his exceptional literary qualities and for the supreme art of composition.

To those who could read, Homer taught everything about everything. "And the Stoics proclaimed that Homer knew the material soul, and the Platonists maintained that he saw it as immaterial, and the exegeses went their own way, each school in its own direction, so that the poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey found himself advocating the morality of Aristotle, that of the Portico, and even that of the Epicureans, despite their contempt for the gods of both poems. And everyone agreed to detect

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1. We know that the Neoplatonists had a considerable influence on Latin Christian thought. Saint Ambrose copied Plotinus, whose influence can be felt even in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. See Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* ("Folio", Gallimard, Paris, 1997).

in Homer a master of common morality, the morality that governs the lives of civilised men, the way they eat and drink, make love, practise pity '... From exegesis to exegesis, the Ancients came to consider Homer to be the source of all intellectual works and his poems to provide all the answers about the human condition and how to live one's life. This was not only proof of an influence similar to that of the Old Testament for the Hebrews. It was also a sign of perfect harmony between an exceptional work and an exceptional people.

The Stoicism of the Romans

Plutarch reports that during his campaigns, Alexander the Great always kept his sword and *the Iliad* under his pillow. Being prepared for any eventuality was also the purpose of Epictetus' *Manual*, a famous little book written several centuries after Alexander, whose Greek title, *Enkhiridion,* also means *dagger.* Like a dagger, this manual was designed to be kept close at hand in all circumstances.

In his *Breviary of the Vanquished,* Cioran writes of Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic emperor and disciple of Epictetus, that he "learned to measure the smallness of life in the clash of arms". However, he criticises him for having gone
"at the school of the Stoics", because this "bland wisdom preserved him from the contradictions that give life its mysterious appeal". A fairly accurate observation. The quest for "peace of mind" through absolute detachment can lead to self-sterilisation. Aiming to escape the sufferings and disappointments of existence, the Stoic effort also risks producing the opposite effect. Fixating on desires in order to get rid of them can cause them to overwhelm you. The more you resist something, the more it dominates you. Excessive focus on the "self" also has pernicious effects. The more you think about yourself, the more you shut yourself off, the further you distance yourself from the profound forces of life. Although questionable in its method, Stoicism nevertheless had a true greatness. It was understood and

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1. Louis Bardollet, *Homer. The Iliad and The Odyssey. New translation. Justifications and opinions (op. cit.,* p. 711). For a complete study of interpretations of Homer: Félix Buffière, Les *Mythes d'Homère* (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1973).

experienced as an inner discipline and a school of courage. The path to self-control found its supreme application in impassivity in the face of death. Learning to die well was the great concern of Stoicism. The Romans were not mistaken. In the face of death — particularly voluntary death — they turned to the Stoics. It was they and the Epicureans who made suicide the philosophical act par excellence, a human privilege denied to the gods, as Pliny the Elder said: "Even God cannot do everything: he cannot take his own life, even if he wanted to, the most beautiful privilege he has granted to man amid all the evils of life."

Spontaneously stoic, steadfast and courageous in adversity, the
The ancient Romans practised voluntary death, as the Japanese samurai
would do much later. They also honoured it among women, many of whom
resorted to it since Lucretia, whose suicide in 509 BC signalled the revolt
against the Etruscan monarchy. This could have tempered Cioran's contempt
for "bland wisdom". It is difficult to find "blandness" in Cato of Utica's
attitude towards death, or in Seneca, who was also undaunted by suicide.
A wisdom that teaches us to accept death or to take our own without complaint or hesitation deserves better than to be labelled 'bland'.

Stoic philosophy and the culture of heroism

However, we must be careful not to confuse true Stoic philosophy with what is commonly referred to as 'Stoicism'. In everyday language, to say that someone is 'Stoic' means that they face trials with a steadfast heart, without complaining. This was not the goal of Stoic philosophy, even if it was one of its consequences. The stoicism of the Stoics was not the heroism of certain heroes of the French Grand Siècle, such as those of Corneille, Chimène or Horace. These heroes submit everything to their 'glory' and pride, like the Princess of Clèves. By allowing one of their passions to prevail over the others, they are tragic characters, which true Stoics were not in principle. Stoicism was intended to be a recipe for happiness, a form of eudaemonism for purely personal use, without any proselytism. It is based on the idea that wisdom requires freedom from all desire and passion, which are causes of turmoil. It replaces the principle of pleasure.

by the principle of reason. The most delicious drink, after all, can be poison... But unlike Christianity, when the Stoics recommend refraining from luxury, it is not in the name of morality, but to train oneself not to depend on wealth. Far from opposing happiness and virtue, they see the former as the condition for the latter.

The Stoics were accused of cosmopolitanism. Indeed, in Seneca's *De tranquillitate animae (On the Tranquillity of the Soul)*, we find a profession of faith that would lead us to believe this: 'We consider the whole world our homeland...' But we must read on: '... so that our virtue may have more scope for exercise. " This changes the original meaning and sounds more like a satisfied imperialism that can go hand in hand with patriotism. Let us quote Seneca again:

"Certain goods, for the Stoics, are of the highest order," he says, "notably the salvation of the homeland." But it is true that the Stoics considered all men to be their fellow men, including foreigners and barbarians, which implied benevolence, except in situations of conflict. Thus Seneca did not hesitate to praise the wisdom of Scipio, the destroyer of Carthage. It may be added that, in the writings of Latin and Greek philosophers, the concept of "man" is most often an abstraction behind which lies a very concrete reality. When they say "men", they are not thinking of humanity in general. They are thinking of Greeks or Romans, free citizens, virtuous and endowed with reason.

Stoicism is above all a form of individual wisdom, a school of discipline and inner serenity that leaves the personality free to serve the *res publica*. Many Stoics held high office in Rome. Stoicism does not focus on the city, but it does not oppose it either. It even postulates a discipline of action based on courage, endurance, patience and magnanimity. The emperor Marcus Aurelius embodied this in his actions as well as in his *Meditations.*

Since its founding by Zeno under a portico in Athens around 300 BCE, the Stoic school had continued to evolve and enrich itself in Greece and then in Rome. Without being a religion, it sought to be more than just a philosophy. It sought to be a complete wisdom and a way of life, which Epictetus and his disciple Arrian, a general, statesman and philosopher, undertook to codify. Arrian therefore took up his pen or stylus

to write, in the most concise and vigorous manner, the *Manual* that bears Epictetus' name.

What depends on us

Born in Phrygia around 50 AD, the philosopher with the dagger proved his principles in his life. A freed slave, poor and lame, he managed through effort, reason and willpower to equal the best, if not the gods. In his youth, he witnessed the Stoic revival, through which a section of the Roman aristocracy, weary of corruption, sought the principles of moral recovery. Epictetus did not succumb to the illusion of changing the world order. His desire or ambition was to improve himself personally, to be an example.

The idea of describing human freedom as a conquest of will and reason was appealing to demanding minds. Even in chains and under torture, Epictetus asserts, if we so desire, we can remain masters of our perceptions. Good and evil depend on us, since they consist of the ideas we form of them. Epictetus therefore taught indifference towards external events. He showed that the will of the wise man coincides with destiny, virtue with happiness, and freedom with 'nature', that is, with what is reasonable. He believed that wisdom can only be gained through experience and that there is no other teaching than example. The virtues celebrated by the *Manual* are not fatalism, but courage, endurance, patience and kindness. On the other hand, he ignores pity and humility. When struck, Epictetus does not turn the other cheek.

In his *Conversations,* Pascal discerned in Epictetus' teachings "principles of diabolical pride". If evil is only an opinion, if happiness depends on our will, man can bring about his own salvation, and his "misery" is negated. This claim is incompatible with the idea of the "Fall" and its consequences.

Recommending that we free ourselves from "things that do not depend on us", the first precept of *the Manual,* the key to the edifice, establishes a

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1. There are several translations into French. For an in-depth study, see Pierre Hadot, *Manuel d'Épictète* (Livre de Poche classique, Paris, 2000).

principle on which one can base one's freedom. It is commented on in precept XIX: "There is only one road to freedom: contempt for what does not depend on us." The proud wording of precept LIII, the last one, is even more vigorous: "This or that may kill me, but it cannot harm me. Let us replace *harm me,* which is inappropriate, with *affect me.* Here we are at the heart of the matter. One can kill me, but not affect my soul, because I have made it invulnerable, inviolable.

Not everything in the *Manual* is written in the same ink. Taken to the extreme, Epictetus' stoicism sometimes turns against the best of what it drains. The school of absolute detachment carries within it a pernicious principle. Once one has truly detached oneself from everything—enthusiasm, ardour, passion, imagination, sympathy, altruism—what remains? A withered being, an arid soul.

Nor can we ignore how irritating certain paradoxes can be. When kissing your wife and children, for example, the *Manual* advises, you must think: I am kissing a mortal being: "If they die, you will not be troubled... " This kind of reasoning sometimes leads to absurdity, as in Zeno's syllogism: "No evil is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is not evil. " But there are many equally specious deductions in Plato's dialogues: "No one wants to harm himself, therefore all evil occurs involuntarily, for the evil man harms himself..."

With its goal of achieving happiness by escaping the sufferings and disappointments of existence, Stoicism may seem flatly utilitarian. But a nobler purpose is implicitly offered: self-control through the discipline of impulses.

For the Greeks, however, the word happiness did not have the same meaning as it does for us. Happy means conforming to an admired ideal, that

As Paul Veyne points out in his *essay on Seneca's Tranquillity of the Soul* [1] • When, for example, Aristotle says that the Greek city-state does not

not only to bring people together, but to enable them to live 'happily' *(Politics,* III, 9), he is in no way alluding to the fact that politics aims at what moderns call the common good, as is too often believed: he means that the city must conform its citizens to an ideal conception of man [...]. So

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1. Éditions Rivages, Paris, 1988, p. 55, no. 15.

while barbarian societies are populated by ordinary men, a Greek city can be proud of having higher standards.

On the surface, it is undoubtedly easier to adopt the Stoic wisdom of detachment when one has nothing or is a slave. Like a sick person imploring divine mercy, one can draw on this wisdom as a source of consolation to help bear one's condition. For Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who had all the promises of power, wealth and authority at his disposal, it was different. In him, the asceticism of detachment and scrupulous concern for the good bordered on heroism. And we can take this thought from the Stoic emperor as a talisman: "If everything is subject to chance, do not be yourself an object of chance."

Plato's philosophy of the body

"I am not my body, nor the involuntary emotions that can move it," says Epictetus in essence. From this negation of the body, the Stoics drew the idea of their freedom. In this, they were good students of Plato, who had taught that the body is "the tomb of the soul."

However, we find an exception in *Timaeus,* a late work in which Plato departs from his usual dualism. The friendly interest shown in the body here contradicts the rest of the work, where the body is described with contempt as the prison of the soul.

The *Timé* reveals an innovative cause-and-effect relationship between physical health and spiritual health: "It is because of the afflictions that affect our bodies that we experience joy, sadness, courage... Plato writes elsewhere in a rather contradictory but nevertheless judicious manner: "Seeking to conquer the health of the body without conquering the health of the soul is doomed to failure. " However, the opposite proposition dominates in the *Timaeus:* let us take care of our bodies and our souls will find their balance. With this postulate, Plato returns to the implicit wisdom of Homer and the Ancients. "Health is the effect of right proportions," we read again in the *Timaeus.* "The sickness of the soul comes from the fact that we have a body." By

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1. Catherine Joubau, *Le Corps humain dans la philosophie platonicienne. Commentaires du Timée* (Vrin, Paris, 1991). Clotilde Le Moël, *Le Problème du corps dans le Timée de Platon* (Master's thesis in philosophy, Paris, 1997).

By comparison, Epictetus' and the Stoics' indifference and contempt for the body seem like a disability.

In *Timaeus,* Plato distinguishes three parts of the soul integrated into the body. He ranks them according to the trifunctionality of *The Republic.* A divine and immortal part related to reason, whose seat is the head. A second part related to action and courage, whose seat is the chest or heart. Finally, a third part related to desires and vital impulses, located in both the genitals and the belly. There is no trace of dualism in this interpretation, which makes the body itself a constituent part of the soul, something Homer would not have disavowed.

Always the teacher, Plato emphasises the need to stimulate the different functions of the soul through appropriate exercises. The head and reason will be trained through philosophical reflection and mathematics. The heart and capacity for action will be exercised through music and gymnastics. A healthy balance in the stomach — and therefore in the vital influx — will be ensured by dietetics. The whole ends with a very Homeric aphorism: "The goal of human life is to establish order and harmony in one's body and soul, in the image of the eternal order of the world."

Spiritual desertification of Europeans

Among the Ancients, *Timaeus* is no exception. In *the Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle says that the health of the soul — in the ancient sense — cannot exist without the health of the body. Hippocrates was also concerned with ensuring the health of the soul through the health of the body. This theme was taken up and developed several centuries later by Galen, the illustrious physician of Pergamon. Thanks to his numerous works, we know that medicine can be the foundation of ethics. Galen believed that medicine for the body is necessarily medicine for the soul, and that all good medicine is based on sound philosophical principles, i.e. on the ability to question. He professed that diet directly influences character and mental state. Wisdom, timidity, boldness, intelligence, lethargy or appetite for work and study are, in his opinion, dependent on diet.

This lucid perception of vital harmony, *mens sana in corpore sano,* was subsequently erased by Christianity, its dualism, its contempt for the body, the explanation of illness as a consequence of

sin. However, the effects were much slower than is commonly believed. Medieval Europe was only superficially Christianised, as evidenced by scholarly and popular literature. The culture of the clergy was neither that of the nobility nor that of the people. And the culture of the clergy itself was not homogeneous. The ban on the body and sexuality only became truly stifling after the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Through their doctrine of the domination of the will over the body and the senses, the Stoics had, to a certain extent, prepared the ground. Christian thought found many justifications in them, which explains the favour enjoyed by Seneca, for example. It must also be recognised that not everything about Christian Stoicism was negative. The discipline of the passions had obvious civilising effects, from which Europe benefited for a long time.

However, the price to pay was excessive. The morality of sin, the guilt associated with the body and the senses, and the condemnation of carnal love deprived many Western women and men for several centuries of the most innocent and accessible forms of happiness. The demonisation of the body even gave rise to emotional disorders from which the Western psyche had still not been freed at the beginning of the 21st century. Its murky sexualism, a kind of inverted puritanism, is the antithesis of a fulfilment that unites spirituality and sensuality.

After the excesses of the Reformation and its opposite, a revolt was predictable. It manifested itself in perverse forms in the libertine philosophy of the 17th century, then beyond that in the wake of the discovery of the unconscious and depth psychology. After the upheavals of the First World War, the doctrines of "liberation" propagated by deranged literary and artistic circles led to the deconstruction of personality through psychoanalysis and the rapid destruction of ancient civilisation through radical criticism of the disciplines of judgement and morals.

Faced with the spiritual drought and cosmic void produced by the collision of rationalism and a collapsed Christian culture, Europeans lacking mystical inspiration were tempted to turn to Eastern religions or wisdom in the hope of finding answers. Failing to satisfy a legitimate need, this craving made a few charlatans very happy. There was no one left to tell the victims that the answers they sought could be found in their own culture and forgotten traditions.

7

Roman legacies

In 1665, a privateer captain was commissioned by shipowners in Saint-Malo to protect their vessels from Barbary attacks. After being captured, he was offered by the Dey of Algiers the opportunity to take peace proposals to Louis XIV. The lives of a hundred French slaves were held hostage to guarantee his success, and he was obliged to return to his chains if he failed. He went to Versailles. When the Dey's offer was rejected, he passed through Saint-Malo, put his affairs in order and said goodbye to his family. Then he returned to Africa. The Dey had him executed, tied to the muzzle of a cannon. His name was Pierre Porcon de la Bardinais. His name has been forgotten.

The "Roman" heroism of this French gentleman is irresistibly reminiscent of Probably that of Regulus, consul in 256 BC and general. Having been captured by the Carthaginians, they released him on parole and sent him to Rome to negotiate an exchange of prisoners. He promised to return if he failed. He addressed the Senate, but only to dissuade the Romans from accepting shameful terms. Then, despite their pleas, he returned to Carthage to surrender himself as a prisoner. The Carthaginians put him to death by horrific torture.

Virtus, the implicit morality of the Romans

Almost twenty centuries apart, the parallels between these two destinies reveal a striking similarity in mentality, that of *devotio,* a word that gave rise to the English word devotion. In ancient Roman times, *devotio* was a kind of suicide committed for the salvation of the fatherland, an oath by which a general offered himself as a sacrifice to the gods in exchange for the

victory. This ritual reflected even older practices that devoted an entire army to victory or sacrifice, such as Leonidas' Spartans at Thermopylae. The sacrificial acceptance shown by Hector in the Iliad (Book VI) was also common among the Germanic and Celtic peoples, as evidenced by the collective suicide of the defenders of Numantia in 133 BCE. A perfect example of *devotio* is provided by Vercingetorix surrendering to Caesar in the hope of sparing his army. The sacrifice of the Swiss peasant Arnold Winkelried at the Battle of Sempach in 1386 is another example. By rushing into the enemy's spears, he gave victory to his people.

In war as in peace, consenting in advance to personal sacrifice for the community seemed normal to the Romans. With voluntary death to protect their personal *dignitas* or that of their family, this acceptance was rooted in what they called *virtus,* which we have distorted into virtue. *Virnis* is what distinguishes a man, *vir,* moral energy, self-control, strength of character. There is no religious connotation in the current sense. The Roman gods had not promulgated a decalogue; they did not command men to behave in a particular way. Most historians of Roman civilisation have shown that before the idea of the "Fall", the Western consciousness was steeped in innocence, concerned only with maintaining the harmony of life and the city. "Good" *(agathon* for the Greeks) was that which conformed to the order of things and the cosmos. Roman *pietas* was above all respect for tradition. The Romans needed no one but themselves to know how to behave and limit their desires. Their tolerant morality was, in a way, *sui generis.* As with other northern peoples, it was foreign to any idea of sin, particularly with regard to sexuality. It coincided with the salvation of the city, the perpetuation of the family and that striking feature of the Roman temperament known as *gravitas,* a natural austerity, free from any puritanism. This is why, when the city opened up to Hellenic thought in the 1st century BCE, the Romans immediately embraced Stoicism, which coincided with their instinctive morality.

Urbs Foundation

Cicero praised Romulus for choosing a location for Rome away from the sea, thus sheltered from invasions but also from exotic influences. We know what happened with regard to the latter. The site of the city was one that had been occupied for many centuries by Latin tribes on the heights of Alba. As for invasions, they were a constant threat until the Romans gained control of the whole of Italy at the end of the 3rd century BCE. The destiny of this people was to be perpetually at war with a hostile natural environment and a hostile world, which indelibly shaped their character.

In broad terms, the prehistory of the Roman people is similar to that of other northern peoples. Coming from the north, practising cremation funeral rites, sacrificing to male and solar gods, and upholding heroic values, the first Borean conquerors appear to have entered Italy at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, at a time when the first Achaeans arrived in Greece, bringing with them identical rites and values. A second wave followed at the end of the second millennium, the time of the Dorian conquest of Greece. The oldest myths, such as that of the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia, allegorically suggest the birth of the Latin race through the fusion of the conquerors and the indigenous populations who practised a chthonic religion.

A third stage corresponds to the founding of Rome on 21 April 753 BCE. This legendary date is not contradicted by archaeology. As for Livy's account, it also seems to coincide with verifiable history.

Founding a city is a sacred act, the grandeur of which is attested to by the legend of the twins Romulus and Remus, sons of the god Mars — quite symbolic —, nursed by a wolf, a solar beast associated with Odin and Apollo. Having reached manhood, Romulus settled on the Palatine Hill and Remus on the Aventine Hill, thus symbolising the subsequent opposition between patricians and plebeians that would so mark Roman history. The gods favoured Romulus with the eloquent omen of twelve vultures flying overhead, and it fell to him to trace the founding furrow of the city, the *Roma quadrata,* with a plough, surrounding the sacred space, the *pomarium.* Then, in the heart of the city, on the site of the future forum, where the two main axes intersect, he laid the black stone marking the communication with the underground deities. Finally, at the highest point, on the future

Capitol, he had a temple built to the Uranian deities, Jupiter and Mars.

The divine nature of this foundation was immediately signified by the killing of Remus, who had dared to profane the sacred enclosure. This was a terrible act of parricide in the eyes of private morality, but a necessary religious and political act to establish the inviolability of the city.

Romulus embodied the sovereign attributes of Indo-European tradition, being at once a lawgiver, interpreter of the gods and warrior. Through his inflexibility towards his brother, he was the first incarnation of that imperious sense of civic duty that remained the distinctive feature of Roman culture. According to legend, he was also the first *princeps* and founder of the first Senate, an assembly of *patres* — patricians —, leaders of a *gens* claiming a common ancestor, whose members bear the name and whom they worship. Such an assembly, that of clan chiefs, was not in itself a novelty. It is one of the distinctive features of all peoples of northern origin.

The prehistory of Rome is thus full of signs that historians will strive to decipher. The Rape of the Sabine Women symbolises a new fusion between northern conquerors and local populations that were more or less related. From this fusion emerged a new race that would astonish the world, and within which the Indo-European tradition would always remain dominant. It seems, however, that the union between different populations remained partial, as shown by the persistent conflicts between the Romans and the Etruscans, the Sabines and the Samnites.

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1. Pierre Grimal, *La Civilisation mmaine* (Arthaud, Paris, 1960). Livy, *Roman History I. The Foundation of Rome* (bilingual edition, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1998). Plutarch, *Parallel Lives* (Les Belles Lettres, 1957-1983, "Bouquins" Robert Laffont, Paris, 2 volumes, 2001). Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Rome at the Height of the Empire* (Hachette, Paris, 1939). Georges Dumézil, *The Birth of Rome. Jupiter Mars, Quirinus II* (Gallimard, Paris, 1944). Id., *Archaic Roman Religion* (Gallimard, Paris, 1966). Claude Nicolet, *Les Idées politiques à Rome sous la République* (Armand Colin, Paris, 1964). M. Le Glay, J.-L. Voisin, Y. Le Bohec, *Histoire romaine* (PUF, Paris, 1991). Bertrand Lançon, *L'État romain* (Nathan-Université, Paris, 1995). Yann Le Bohec, *Histoire militaire des guerres puniques* (Le Rocher, Paris, 1996). Jacqueline Champeaux, *La Religion romaine* (Le Livre de Poche, Paris, 1998). Jean-Noël Robert, *Rome* (Guide Belles Lettres des civilisations, Paris, 1999), this work offers an organised bibliography.

The Romans, who were more rustic than their Hellenic cousins, owed this same influence to the Etruscans, who were strongly marked by the artistic and technical influence of Greece, and they were able to transpose it into their architecture. During the first centuries following the founding of the city, for reasons that remain enigmatic, Latin kings and Etruscan kings shared sovereignty until the "revolution" of 509 BCE, which established the Republic [1]

A feudal republic

To characterise the event of 509 BC, it would be more accurate to speak of "liberation" from Etruscan rule rather than "revolution", or else the word should be understood in its etymological meaning of
"return". According to Livy, the pretext was the rape of Lucretia, a young Roman woman of noble birth, by Sextus, son of Tarquinius Superbus — the proud. After revealing to her father, her husband and her brother Lucius Brutus the attack she had just suffered, the young woman pierced her heart. On the still bloody blade of the dagger, Brutus made those present swear to kill Tarquinius and his descendants. Having stirred up the city and taken the lead of the noble youth, Brutus drove out the Etruscan king and proclaimed his deposition. The comitia then appointed two consuls, including Brutus himself [2]. Brutus was an exemplary figure in more ways than one, liberator of the Romans, who himself ordered the execution of his own sons, guilty of conspiring to restore the Etruscan kings. Slower to establish than Livy says, the institutions of the *res publica* were intended to ensure the collective power of the aristocracy.

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1. Historians will continue to debate the origins of the Etruscans for a long time to come. According to Herodotus *(History,* I, 94), followed by Virgil *(Aeneid,* VII, 499, X, 141 and 155), they originated in Lydia, in Asia Minor, a region that was part of the Hittite cultural area. Piero Felini suggests talking about Etruscan *culture* rather than Etruscan *civilisation {Dossiers H Julius Evola,* L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris, 1997, pp. 160-161, no. 48). The major exhibition on Etruscan civilisation, organised in Venice in 2001, did not advance the solution to the enigma.
2. Two important figures in Roman history bear the name Brutus: one from 509 BC and his descendant, Marcus Brutus, who in 44 BC plotted the assassination of Caesar, his benefactor *(Tu quoque filii .Q.* Pursued by Antony, he killed himself two years later.

of *the patricians,* prohibiting the return of a monarchy associated with tyranny and the bad memories of the Etruscan kings. The collegiality of the magistrates and their term of office limited to one year had the same purpose: to prevent power from being monopolised by a single individual, except in exceptional circumstances when a dictatorship was proclaimed for a short period. The collective sovereignty of the *res publica* is symbolised by the phrase *Senatus Populus Que Romanus* (SPQR), 'the Senate and the Roman people'. As in the rest of the northern world, the Roman state is not defined by its territory. It is based on ethnicity. Just as Athens was the city of the Athenians, Rome was the republic of the Romans, a community of free men, descended from the same stock, worshipping the same gods and governed by the same laws. The Lepopu/es *Romanus* were not to be confused with the inhabitants of Rome as a whole. They represented only a minority, those citizens who were registered as such and performed military service. Citizenship was not a passive status granted to all. It was acquired and maintained through military service, at the risk of one's life. This virile conception of freedom explains why enemies who allowed themselves to be captured on the battlefield rather than die were made slaves.

Despite the similarity in words, the Roman *res publica* should not be confused with the plethoric and indistinct republics of our time. It constituted a kind of feudal system, as personalised as that of the Achaeans, Celts or Germanic peoples. At its heart was the Senate, a fundamental institution of the Empire, its power and its longevity, whose mythical origins date back to Romulus, but which certainly drew on an older structure. Its members came from the most prestigious families in Rome, initially patricians, then also plebeians following the reforms of the 1st century.   The list of senators is revised every five years by the censors, who replace those who have died and those they have excluded for unworthiness. Men of mature age from senatorial families who had proven themselves in military campaigns and held at least two magistracies *(cursus honorum),* elective positions of authority limited to one year and always voluntary, were eligible for membership. Senators formed a *nobilitas,* a Latin word that gave rise to our *word 'nobility'.* They were the guardians of the *mos majorum,* ancestral custom.

Like feudal lords, each *patrician* was at the centre of a network of relatives, allies and "clients" without fortune, attached to

them personally, whom they help and protect. Pierre Grimal pointed out that this patrician custom of "clientele" was by no means unique to Rome. It was also found in Celtic and Germanic societies during the Middle Ages and beyond. It is the internal principle of the feudal system, based both on reciprocal ties of vassalage and on the personalisation of power, of which the *res publica* is the manifestation.

The northern origins of the nobility

Over the centuries, among European peoples and in each of their particular cultures, the forms of noble power have constantly changed, often rapidly, but the political and moral function of the nobility, in Greece, Rome, Germania, medieval or modern Europe, has remained essentially the same. The nobility is not the aristocracy; there are aristocracies of fortune and money. It is only partially dependent on heredity. It is also based on merit, which must always be confirmed. Nobility is earned and lost. It thrives on the idea that duty and honour are more important than individual happiness. What distinguishes it is its public character. It is made to govern public affairs, the *res publica.* Its vocation is not to occupy the top of society but the top of the state. What distinguishes it is not privileges, but the fact of being selected and trained to command. It governs, judges and leads into battle. The nobility is associated with the vigour of public freedoms. Its chosen lands are feudal freedoms and aristocratic or constitutional monarchies. It is unthinkable in the great Eastern tyrannies, Assyria or Egypt. Even in Europe, it wanes or disappears whenever a despotic power is established, such as state centralism. It implies a personalisation of power that humanises it, in contrast to the anonymous dictatorship of offices.

"We have overlooked the fact that political and institutional power, from the Greek and Roman elites to the Roman and 'medieval' elites, has always been personalised power and at the same time public power," insists Karl-Ferdinand Werner in his innovative thesis on

origins of the nobility'. 'The person recognised as governor of a Roman province governed and made decisions there personally on behalf of Rome. Similarly, the Count of Flanders exercised his public prerogatives by personally governing that county, with the lands belonging to the treasury obviously remaining public property. In European history, the exception is not this personal power, but the anonymous and abstract power of the bureaucratised state established from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards. Trapped in the impersonal world that they initially made their instrument, the monarchies would eventually disappear in turn. Then, in the new faceless state, new occult feudal systems would form, dominated by the spirit of nihilism and lacking any of the merits of the old nobility. Over the long term, the latter had shown remarkable adaptability and longevity. In Europe, on the eve of the First World War, all the great powers, with the exception of France, were still monarchies supported by rigorous and
"modern" nobility. This only came to an end after 1918, with the destruction of the European empires.

Rome has no use for cowards

Rome granted the leaders of the *nobilitas* a quasi-royal status, enabling them to embody the power and majesty of the *Roman people* and their state both internally and externally. From the conquests of the Republican era onwards, the provinces created by the Senate around the Mediterranean were plundered by senators who had themselves appointed as promagistrates with absolute imperium. Victorious Roman generals placed the conquered cities and countries under their personal 'protection', a patronage that sometimes remained with their lineage. This led Max Weber to say that 'nowhere in the world was political patronage of such magnitude concentrated in the hands of certain families'.

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1. Karl-Ferdinand Werner, *Naissance de la noblesse* (Fayard, Paris, 1998, p. 88). In this prolific work, the historian, a specialist in the Frankish world, develops a rich reflection on the idea and reality of nobility, whose origins he traces back to Rome.

Never did the shadow of a guilty conscience or compassion touch the Romans with regard to the vanquished. The words attributed to the Gaul Brennus, who pillaged Rome in 390 BC, *vae victis!* Woe to the vanquished! are very Roman in origin, having been Greek before that. For the Ancients, the fate of arms decided everything, and the vanquished had to bear all the consequences of their defeat. They themselves expected no mercy in the event of defeat. They therefore preferred to kill themselves rather than be captured and suffer the infamy and yoke of slavery. After the disaster at Cannae in 216 BCE, Hannibal offered to return his prisoners to Rome in exchange for a ransom. But the Senate was unyielding, considering men who had failed to die to be worthless: "The prisoners will not be ransomed. " Rome had no use for cowards. Every battle is a judgement of the gods. The victor is necessarily right, and it is his right to deliver the defeated country to plunder and servitude, which the Greeks and Romans did with moderation compared to the Orientals. However, it was from the East, but in very specific circumstances, that the sick conscience of the West would one day awaken, with a new cult of the victim accompanied by the guilt of the victor.

Distorted as we are by an anachronistic moralism, we find it difficult to conceive that personal power, combined with overt lucrative ambitions, could coexist with devotion to public service. In Rome, the personalisation of power did not imply individualism, quite the contrary. The individual did not count. The citizen had no existence outside his lineage, the *familia,* and the *res publica.*

From ancient times until recently, Europeans have always understood that power must be embodied in men trained in leadership, who enjoy personal autonomy guaranteeing their freedom, who are educated in the fundamental values of *dignitas*, and who are committed to the greater good of their country.

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1. The exceptional favour enjoyed by General de Gaulle during his lifetime and even more so after his death is linked to this personalisation, to a historical stature assumed with pride and dignity. The same had been true previously for Marshal Pétain, whose pride was, however, more modest.

The virile straitjacket of *dignitas*

Where does the spirit that served as the backbone of Roman civilisation for so long come from? Where does the spirit that unfailingly animated Roman institutions come from? The answer can be summed up in two words: *virtus* and *dignitas.* The first, as we have already mentioned, refers to courage and fortitude. The second is close to what honour would become for the European nobility.

Each member of the Roman elite possesses a *dignitas* that belongs to him and his family. This "dignity" is embodied in political merit, in what each person accomplishes for the greatness of the Roman people. It implies membership in the Senate and the fulfilment of high political office, from which it derives its justification. The pride and prestige of the senatorial nobility were sacred, as they embodied the unique destiny of the Urbs and the auctoritas of the state. For every Roman nobleman, *dignitas* was the highest good, more important to him than his own life. The duties, risks and rights that increase with the degree of dignity *(gradis dignitatis)* make it clear what rank and its symbols mean to these men and their families. "*Dignitas* is not the ideal of all, but of each individual. Responsible for themselves while seeking divine help, each person must defend the rights conferred on them by their birth, the honour of their *gens* and, above all, their own honour, just as each person must 'live' their death with dignity [2]."

In the 1st century BCE, during an audience in Rome, the ambassador of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, described the Senate as "an assembly of kings". An assembly of kings: the phrase could have been used to describe the assembly of lords of the Icarius, the Germanic *thing*, or the Round Table of Celtic nobles. It eloquently emphasises the majesty and *dignitas* displayed by Roman nobles.

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1. The Latin word *honor* does not have the same meaning as the English word honour, which is derived from it. It applies to official functions in the *res publica.* On the other hand, *dignitas* can be translated either as dignity or honour.
2. Drawing on the work of Victor Poeschl and Hans Drexler, K.-F. Werner *(op. cit.,* pp. 169-175) devoted lengthy discussions to *dignitas*.

The association of being and appearing

Dignitas must be defended and even displayed to the point of ostentation in a life that is above all public. It is asserted through gestures, panache and lifestyle, all of which would later define European nobility. Appearances and "keeping up appearances" are not manifestations of vanity. They are obligations which, through a tireless demand to "behave" in full view of everyone, require true asceticism. Dignity comes from both being and appearing. The permanent obligation to appear gives its inner form to being. As was later the case for the European nobility, certain activities or professions were forbidden to Roman senators, such as trade and manual labour. On the other hand, land management was the norm, as was the ability to enrich oneself shamelessly in the government of a conquered province.

Personal and proportional to rank, Roman *nobility* implied stubborn ambition and a constant striving upwards. Everyone wanted to prove themselves worthy of their ancestors and, if possible, attain a higher rank than theirs. "My life has enriched the virtues of my race," Scipio Africanus had inscribed on his tomb. "I have fathered children and sought to equal my father's achievements. I have earned the praise of my ancestors, who rejoiced to see me born for their glory. My *dignitas* has made my race famous."

In its time, with varying degrees of success, Christianity attempted to replace the *dignitas* of the nobility with the humility of the believer. But what pride often entails in excess was corrected among Roman nobles by the gaze of their peers, the sanction of the censors of the Senate, the ethics of duty, and the severe self-criticism of Stoicism. *Dignitas* was too deeply rooted in the European soul to disappear. Its resistance would fuel much of the subsequent conflict between the medieval nobility and the Church. Its roots are so deep that, long after the disappearance of the nobility, at the heart of today's chaotic society, traces of it can still be seen in the most unexpected forms.

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1. Outside Europe, it is naturally in samurai Japan that we find an ethic similar to that of *dignitas.* Maurice Pinguet provided a profound analysis of this in his essay *La Mort volontaire au Japon* (Gallimard, Paris, 1984).

Although stripped of its former autonomy by the decline of the Roman Republic and the advent of the Principate under Augustus, the *nobilitas* continued to educate its members for the service of the Empire. Even when rampant corruption plagued the upper echelons of the state and society, *dignitas* continued to provide the imperial administration with the best of what remained.

The orientalisation of the Empire and its effects

From the 2nd century AD onwards, ethnic chaos, the extinction of the Roman stock, the centralisation of the Empire and its militarisation led to major changes in the composition of the *nobilitas* and its political role. Since Augustus, magistrates (in the Roman sense) were no longer elected but appointed by the emperor. The emperor thus acquired de facto control over the recruitment of the Senate. From the reign of the Severi onwards, under the fiction of the imperial principate, *the* ancient *res publica* became a despotic monarchy based on military force and reminiscent of the ancient Hellenistic monarchies. Following the reforms of Gallienus and Aurelian, but especially since Diocletian and Constantine, the nobility had been transformed into *militia principis,* a civil service nobility subject to the prince. High-ranking civil and military officials, now the sole representatives of the *nobility,* swore an oath *(sacramentum)* to the emperor every year, as soldiers did.

Between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, the city gradually lost its substance. Long invaded and corrupted by the rabble of slaves and freedmen denounced by Juvenal and Martial, Rome was deserted by emperors starting with Diocletian. Italy lost its importance and privileges, becoming a mere province. In the western part of the Empire, the imperial residences were then Milan, Trier, Arles and Ravenna. But from 330 onwards, the real capital became Constantinople, the "New Rome", founded by Constantine that year. The choice of this city on the border of Asia took into account the shift towards the East of the centre of gravity of an Empire that was no longer European. Since Aurelian, who deified the imperial person during his lifetime, emperors had adopted Hellenistic rites, much to the scandal of the last Romans. Mummified in

In their palaces, emperors imposed worship of their person in the manner of Eastern despots. Before being granted the honour of kissing the tips of their golden slippers, the great servants of the state now had to prostrate themselves before them for a long time. The adoption of Christianity as the imperial religion was a consequence of this Orientalisation. While Christians remained rare in the West, scattered throughout the Jewish and Syrian quarters of large cosmopolitan cities, their vibrant communities multiplied in the eastern part of the Empire, the richest part, in Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

In his *History of the Origins of Christianity,* Ernest Renan showed how much this shift in the Empire's centre of gravity influenced Constantine's conversion. For a long time, emperors had been searching for a religion capable of adapting to the Empire's ethnic diversity in order to strengthen its cohesion. From this point of view, the personal and universal God of the Christians, an all-powerful Eastern God, offered advantages over the Indo-European sun and Mithraic cults that had spread since the 1st century but remained confined to the western part of the Empire. The Christian god was all the more suitable because he preached submission to political power and could be interpreted as the emperor saw fit. For more than a century, despite occasional persecutions, Christian apologists had offered their services to emperors in exchange for the official adoption of their god to the exclusion of others.

Constantine and the Christianisation of the Empire

Catholic historian Karl-Ferdinand Werner pointed out that at the time of the Edict of Milan in 313, the first step towards the adoption of Christianity as the imperial religion, "the unity of the Church existed only in theory, for its members had neither a single, well-defined dogma nor an organisation

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1. Ernest Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme* (reprinted by Bouquins, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1995, volume 2, *Marc Aurèle et la fin du monde antique,* originally published in 1882). On the personality of Constantine, see André Lama, *Des Dieux et des empereurs* (Éditions des Écrivains, Paris, 1998, p. 93 *ff.*). On the evolution of imperial power, Lucien Jerphagnon, *Le Divin César* (Tallandier, Paris, 1991).

Constantine needed this dual unity to maintain the unity of the Empire. He was therefore not content with simply building huge basilicas in honour of the one God in ancient and new Rome. He took charge of the bishops' affairs in order to develop a single dogma, recognised by all, and to give them a strongly structured Church. The faith destined to save the Empire was a matter of state, as public worship had been. Imperial authority over religion, public worship and its organisation was self-evident. This was the meaning of the founding Council of Nicaea in 325, dominated by the vigilant authority of Constantine. Christians would easily fit into the theocratic framework created by the dying pagan Empire, without putting an end to their fierce internal quarrels, justified by divergent interpretations of their sacred texts.

Putting the rise of the imperial Church into context, in a world where the intellectual elites and rural masses in the West remained largely 'pagan [2]', Werner points out that this was not the case for members of the social and political elite belonging to senatorial families, who often had nothing Roman about them except their name: "How could they not have seen in the considerable privileges granted to bishops by the emperor an opportunity for an unprecedented 'career', but also a task commensurate with their status? Their recruitment would ultimately give unprecedented stature to the leaders of the Church, who now came from the senatorial class. " In fact, starting with Constantine and Theodosius, who prohibited the practice of the ancient Roman religion under penalty of death by the edict of 8 November 392, power

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1. K.-F. Werner, *op. cit.,* pp. 331–332.

2. The attachment to ancient culture and awareness of the values that Christianity sought to abolish provoked the brief and emblematic pagan reaction of Emperor Julian from 361 to 363. For criticism of Christianity by the Western Roman intellectual elite, see Pierre de Labriolle, *La Réaction païenne* (L'Artisan du Livre, Paris, 1934); Louis Rougier, *Celse ou le discours vrai* (Labyrinthe, Paris, 1997); Lucien Jerphagnon, *Julien, dit l'Apostat* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1986); Pierre Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens* (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1990); Christopher Gérard, *L'Empereur Julien. Contre les Galiléens* (Ousia, Brussels, 1995); Marc Lebiez, *éloge d'un philosophe resté païen* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianisme et paganisme du* IVe *au VIIIe siècle* (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1998).

The imperial balance tilted in favour of a transformed Church, which would become a
crucial political instrument and an unrivalled social power. The consequences will be immense for Christianity itself.

It was transformed in the West by its Roman mutation and by Greek, Celtic and Germanic influences. "An entirely Jewish product at its origin," wrote Renan, "Christianity has thus come to strip away, over time, almost everything it held from [these origins]. The exegesis according to which Christianity is internally carved out of the Old Testament is the most false in the world. Christianity was a break with Judaism, the abrogation of the Torah. Saint Bernard, Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa, Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul and Fénelon were in no way Jews. They were people of our race, feeling with our guts and thinking with our brains."

Death of Rome and survival of the Empire

For all the reasons we have mentioned, the empire of Constantine and his successors bore only a distant resemblance to that of Augustus or the Antonines. But although the Roman world had died, the Empire itself continued to live on. Formally speaking, it continued after 476, when the last puppet "emperor" of the West was deposed by Odoacer, a Roman general of Germanic origin. Odoacer had the imperial insignia brought to Constantinople, asserting that the West no longer needed an emperor, as the one in Constantinople was sufficient for the whole.

In fact, the Empire continued to exist in the East in its Byzantine form for nearly ten centuries, before an interminable agony that ended in 1453 with the capture of Constantinople by Mehmed II.

In the West, the ancient imperial tradition would also continue...
kill it off in part, but through the considerable changes that will see the emergence of this new world we call the Middle Ages, generated by a massive Germanic influx and a vigorous revival of Celtic culture. In many ways, this new world is closer to authentic Rome, that of the Republic and the nascent Empire, than the Byzantine world will be. The fair faces depicted

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1. *Op. cit.,* p. 1060.

on the bas-reliefs of the Ara Pietas Augustae, in 43, during the reign of Claudius, would not swear in Gaul or Germania. They even bear a resemblance to those of future Gothic statuary.

Summarising the immense upheavals that culminated in the adoption of Christianity as the imperial religion, Karl-Ferdinand Werner succinctly stated: "The Roman world became Christian in Constantinople, not in Rome... It was the 'end of Rome', but not the end of the Empire. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the evolution of the late "Roman" world without distinguishing between Rome and the Empire. The Empire was undoubtedly a creation of Rome, a slow, empirical creation, influenced by the memory of Alexander the Great. But it was also the negation of Rome and the cause of its demise. However, part of Roman culture continued to influence the 'barbarian' West of the Middle Ages, both among the educated classes, who practised Latin and what it conveyed, and in political circles. For eight centuries, it should be remembered, Latin remained the administrative language of the new kingdoms founded in the West, in the forms developed by the Roman State. It also remained the language of culture, at least until the 11th century, independently of its religious use. The clerics who used it were not necessarily ecclesiastical. Clerics were all those who had received an intellectual education in episcopal and monastic schools. Although under the control of the Church, culture remained largely open to ancient authors, even pagan ones. "Never did the masters of antiquity exercise a dominion comparable to that which was assured to them from Charlemagne to Saint Louis," said Edmond Faral. There is a profane side to medieval Latin literature that often likens it to the freest productions of vernacular literature. [...] Through their freedom of tone and sentiment, their appetite for pleasure, their libertinism and their abandonment to the delights of a tempting paganism, all these works by clerics, written for the pleasure of clerics, express all the turbulence of a popular and undisciplined force'.

In the institutional sphere, the memory of Rome also remained influential. In many respects, the political structures of the Merovingian and Carolingian periods were inherited from the imperial system.

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1. Edmond Faral, Introduction to *the Dictionnaire des Lettres françaises. Le Moyen Âge* (Fayard, Paris, 1984, La Pochothèque, 1992, pp. xvii-xix).

From the Roman Empire to the Frankish Empire

The idea of the 'Middle Ages', forged during the Renaissance and crystallised in the 19th century, is based on the legend of a brutal break with the Roman Empire, the end of the latter and the 'conquest' of Gaul by the Frankish 'Barbarians' and others, in the wake of the 'great invasions'. Patrick J. Geary, Jacques Heers, Pierre Riché, Karl-Ferdinand Werner and other historians have debunked this interpretation, which generations of excellent teachers, students and schoolchildren have been brought up on. The truth is that the Germanic peoples did not conquer the Roman Empire or Roman Gaul. After being successively contained and defeated by Galienus, Probus, Julian and Gratian, the Franks and Visigoths were drawn to Gaul from the 4th century onwards to protect the *limes* against other, more threatening Barbarians, such as the Vandals, Suebi, Alans and Huns. They entered the service of the Roman army and formed auxiliary contingents under the command of their kings. The political power gradually exercised in Gaul by the latter did not come from conquest, but from their Romanisation. Childeric and his son Clovis were both Frankish kings and Roman generals.

A plurinational model

This curious situation was consistent with Roman colonial and imperial logic. Two centuries before the Principate of Augustus, under the conquering Republic, the *Regnum,* the word used by the Romans to refer to both their state and their empire, was surrounded by 'barbarian' kingdoms. Over time,

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1. The concept of the "Middle Ages" was originally conceived in a derogatory manner by humanists who claimed exclusive knowledge. The concept was introduced in the 17th century into the teaching of general history, on the initiative of a professor at the University of Leiden, the Dutchman Georg Horn (1620-1670), and the German professor Christoph Keller (known as Cellarius, 1638-1707), who coined the term *Medium aevum (Mittelalter).* Cellarius published his own general history in three volumes: *Historia antiqua* (1685) for the period up to 324, the date of the false Donation of Constantine; *Historia medii aevi* (1688) for the period from 324 to the end of the Byzantine Empire in 1453; and finally, *Historia nova* (1696). Georg Horn opted for the dates generally used by his successors: 476 (deposition of the last Western Roman emperor) to 1453. Emphasising the pejorative connotation, the English preceded the *Middle Ages* with the *Dark Ages* (from 500 to the year 1000). See Jacques Heers, *Le Moyen Âge, une imposture* (Perrin, Paris, 1992) and K.-F. Werner *(op. cit.).*

Several were conquered and incorporated into the Empire. However, once any resistance had been quelled – as in Gaul – and the leaders and their followers executed, the Empire respected most of the laws and customs of each people *(gentes),* at least until the adoption of Christianity. Apart from taxation and the cult of the emperor, Rome did not impose any standardisation, even welcoming indigenous gods into its own pantheon as long as they were not exclusive. From the 1st century onwards, forced onto the defensive with its borders threatened on all sides, particularly on the Rhine and Danube, the Empire devised alliance treaties *(foedus)* to appease neighbouring peoples *(fentes)* and use them in its fight against other, more warlike Barbarians. The beneficiaries, known as federates *(foederati),* Goths, Franks and Visigoths, were welcomed into Gaul to defend it. This was also a way of providing them with remuneration and supplies. In the 4th century, barbarian kings who were already highly Romanised were thus granted Gallo-Roman territories. Part of Aquitaine became the kingdom of the Visigoths, part of Belgium that of the Franks, and part of the Rhine region that of the Burgundians. The creation of these Germanic kingdoms in Gaul was not the result of conquest but of imperial will and a situation accepted by willing populations. It was in this world that the *Regnum Francorum* was born*,* modelled on the *Regnum Romanorum.* One of the Frankish kings, Childeric, had his capital at Tournai. His son, Clovis, inherited his status as a Roman general and his royal dignity, confirmed on the battlefield by his warriors. He also inherited a vast "Roman" territory in Gaul, with Soissons as its capital.

But, as Constantine had done in his time, Clovis was baptised, an eminently political act that ensured him the support of the episcopate, i.e. the Gallo-Roman nobility. Thanks to this, he

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1. By convention, we use the term "Gallo-Roman" here, a debatable term that poorly summarises what the rural populations of Gaul might have been like, having retained their ancient gods, which had been more or less Latinised, and adopted only very partially the kitchen Latin of soldiers, merchants and tax officials. This was in contrast to the urban elites, who were largely Latinised.

2. Apart from Ireland, which was a special case, and the peoples who were Christianised by force, such as the Saxons and Balts, most European kingdoms followed the Frankish example and adopted the new religion by political decision of their sovereign. The late case of Norway is interesting in this regard, as it was the subject of a detailed account, beginning in 1230, by Snorri Sturluson in his

was able to extend his kingdom over the whole of Gaul, from the Rhine to the Pyrenees.

Alliance between the episcopate and the Frankish king

When Clovis came to power, a significant portion of the Gallo-Roman population remained distant from Christianity, which was essentially an urban religion. In rural areas, people retained their attachment to Celtic deities, some of which had been Romanised, and to the worship of miraculous springs and sacred sites, on which the Church would later build its own sanctuaries.

Above this population, two aristocracies coexisted harmoniously north of the Loire. A Germanic and pagan warrior aristocracy, whose leader held both political and military power inherited from the Empire. And, on the other hand, a senatorial nobility of Gallic origin, completely Romanised, with vast land holdings. From its ranks were recruited the bishops who exercised the powers of the imperial administration in their dioceses. This nobility even produced one of the last short-lived emperors of the West, Avitus, in 455-456. Avitus was a senator from Auvergne, father-in-law of Sidoine Apollinaire, a famous aristocrat from Lyon, son of a praetorian prefect, and himself a former prefect of the city of Rome, before becoming bishop of Clermont in 470.

Generally, bishops were chosen not from among the clergy, but from among lay members of the senatorial nobility who were recognised for their administrative talents. Most of them had no religious training and were primarily men of power who were fairly indifferent to spiritual matters. Generation after generation, in the cities of Gaul, the episcopal see tended to be occupied by members of the same powerful family, who used this position to further their interests. Thus, true episcopal lordships were formed, which would, in the

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History of the Kings of Norway {op. cit.), a historical work without equal in the Middle Ages. Although a Christian, Snorri makes no secret of the resistance of the free Norwegian peasants, who remained faithful to their traditions. He does justice to Duke Hakon the Mighty, who was to the Nordic world what Emperor Julian had been to the Roman world.

Until the 17th century, one of the enduring features of the Western political landscape.

In Gaul, the episcopate was a powerful force, indeed the most powerful force in political, social and religious terms, apart from the Germanic warrior kingdoms. Among these, throughout the West, only the Franks, settled north of the Loire, remained pagan. Paradoxically, they maintained much more trusting relations with the Church than the Visigoth or Burgundian kings who had converted to Christianity, but of the Arian variety, and therefore heretical. The letter addressed to Clovis shortly after his accession by Remi, the Bishop of Reims, reads like an act of allegiance. By inviting the young pagan king to consult the bishops, who were in charge of the civil administration of their city, and to act in agreement with them, Remi implicitly recognised that they were under his royal authority. The quality of the relationship between the king and the episcopate was largely responsible for his success. It enabled Clovis to successively eliminate his rivals in Gaul and subjugate the peoples who had escaped his power.

He first confronted the "barbarian" peoples north of the Loire, the Bretons of Armorica, whom he was unable to defeat, then the Thuringians, whom he subjugated around 491, and finally the Alamanni, whom he defeated at Tolbiac (the Celtic name for Zülpich) north of Trier. Clovis then attacked the Burgundians around 500, but without apparent results. Finally, he launched an attack against the Visigoths south of the Loire. This was the great event of his reign, sealing his pact with the Church. His victory at Vouillé in 507, followed by other, sometimes less successful battles, and finally the death of King Alaric II, sounded the death knell for the Visigoth kingdom of Toulouse and the Arian heresy south of the Loire, whose rich territories thus fell into Frankish hands.

Returning from this expedition, Clovis received in Tours the envoys of Emperor Anastasius, who, from Constantinople, conferred on him the title of consul, the highest in the Roman hierarchy. The Frankish leader's victory was complete. It was probably at this point that he decided to be baptised along with the members of his entourage. Having assimilated the principles of imperial power, he imposed an oath on the Frankish nobility that bound them to him. They would lose their autonomy for a long time to come.

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1. Patrick J. Geary, *The Birth of France: The Merovingian World* (Flammarion, Paris, 1989).

nomie. Appointed by the Merovingian kings of *the regnum Francorum,* it became their instrument, much like the imperial *nobilitas*.

Birth of Carolingian feudalism

This situation remained more or less unchanged until the Carolingian period. However, a subtle shift began under Charles Martel. To maintain his control over *the* vast *regnum Francorum,* alongside an ever-diligent episcopate, the mayor of the palace, the de facto ruler, instituted the *vassi dominici,* the prince's vassals, his trusted men, a sort of parallel hierarchy whose mission was to oversee the high territorial aristocracy. They were bound by the Germanic allegiance of vassalage. They presided over the royal courts, maintained marital relations with princely families and gradually formed local dynasties with land and autonomy that increased with distance.

In order to maintain sufficient permanent forces, Charles Martel, Pepin the Short and Charlemagne relied on the multiplier effect of vassalage. They encouraged their great vassals to commit themselves in turn to numerous vassals of lesser rank, and so on. As the vassalage bond was personal, the lowly vassal at the bottom of the hierarchy was bound to his lord, but not to the king. This last link tended to be the strongest, while the first, binding the great lords to the king, became increasingly loose. Slow to take shape, this system was overcome by an irresistible centrifugal force.

Originally, the *vassi dominici* formed the top of the feudal hierarchy. Allying themselves with the princely families of the vast kingdom, they formed the stock of the great vassals, princes and counts, numbering around forty in the kingdom in the year 1000, supported by a thousand "châtelains" (castle lords). In the 12th century, these seigniories became the backbone of the vassal state that had gradually taken shape and which protected feudal France from anarchy under the first, weak Capetian kings before Philippe Auguste.

Faced with Norman invasions and Arab or Hungarian incursions, widespread insecurity, and the absence of a central authority that had disintegrated and was floundering in powerlessness, the nobles and their vassals were the only ones capable of fulfilling the political duty of defence and justice. They were the only protection for the people. They had become the State.

Castles and castellanies

At the turn of the millennium, real power became the preserve of a feudal nobility entering its golden age. The powers devolved upon it since the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire in the mid-9th century were symbolised by the castle, or *castellum*, the centre of a castellany. This has been described as a "castle revolution", which can be seen in the charters. It was a veritable explosion. "In Provence, barely twelve castles were recorded around 950, but there were thirty in the year 1000 and over a hundred around 1030. In Poitou, there were only three before the Norman invasions, rising to thirty-nine in the 11th century. In Auvergne, there were eight fortresses in the year

and thirty-four around 1050. In Maine, the number rose from eleven in 1050 to sixty-two in 1100. Each former Carolingian county,

became an autonomous principality, is covered with a dense network of castles. And this phenomenon is widespread. In Catalonia, around 1050, under the threat of the Arabs, there were eight hundred fortified castles, an average of one per 45 km².

With their Celtic areas, Norman keeps, curtain walls and Roman towers, castles are highly representative of the diverse historical legacies that shaped the medieval nobility. From the 10th to the 13th century, castles served as administrative and political centres, seats of high justice, hubs of feudal networks and centres of culture. "They gave their name to the oldest administrative district of the Ancien Régime, the châtellenie, and created towns and even principalities. [...] After the Celtic settlements (which had not been altered by the Roman occupation), they were the second to divide up our territory [...]. We are structured by the Celts and medieval lords'.

Unlike the Roman bishoprics, which covered the old districts of *the* Gallic *pagi*, the territory of the châtellenies defined new political districts. Despite the cliché of 'feudal anarchy', feudalism was not opposed to political order or the principle of the state. It was the state, but a decentralised, personalised state.

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1. Martin Aurell, *La Noblesse en Occident, C-*   *century* (Armand Colin, Paris, 1996, p. 55).
2. Alain Guillerm, *La Pierre et le vent* (Arthaud Paris, 1985, pp. 51-52).

Alive, rooted. With the castle, political power—the power that protects and administers justice—has never been closer to the people. Never has self-government been more real. Whether free or serfs, the members of the seigneurial district form an autonomous community. Village assemblies made decisions within their jurisdiction, while the lord reserved for himself the political sphere, i.e. war and high justice. Contrary to the legend inherited from the Enlightenment, which portrayed the feudal noble as a brute bent on jealously enjoying his fiefdom, historical research by Georges Duby, Ellery Schalk and Karl-Ferdinand Werner, following in the fruitful footsteps of Fustel de Coulanges in his *Histoire des institutions de l'ancienne France,* reveals the reality of an elite trained to lead and supervise men, heirs to the Roman *nobilitas*, whose watchword was *dignitas,* or honour.

Throughout ancient Carolingian Europe and as far as Great Britain, the fortified castle defines the landscape. It is a major component of it. More widely represented and more diverse in its forms and architecture than the cathedral, it is the manifestation of a deeply rooted art that has left its mark on the entire Western world. It is the focal point of heroic legends. Along with the forest, its opposite, it was the focal point of all epic and courtly literature. The fortified castle brilliantly demonstrated the alliance of beauty and utility. A place of power, it was also a place of culture and pleasure. It combined military and palatial functions, defence, habitation and prestige as never before. Nowhere is this multifaceted richness more evident than in the contrast between the vertiginous roughness of the exterior of the keeps and the sumptuous softness of the seigneurial lodgings they shelter and conceal. Contemplating these austere masterpieces today, we can remember that they were the intense centres of culture between the 10th and 12th centuries.

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1. André Chastel, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'art français* ("Champs", Flammarion, Paris, 1993, p. 34). The historian believes that the republican horror of the Ancien Régime and feudalism, even more vindictive than anti-clericalism, removed castles from the definition of national heritage in favour of religious buildings.

From Otto the Great to Frederick II

Abandoned by Charlemagne's successors after the Treaty of Verdun, imperial dignity was restored in February 962 by the Saxon Otto I, King of the Germans.

A "divine" institution of Roman tradition, the imperial magistracy elevated the King of Germany above all others. Otto's coronation in Rome and the creation of the first German state *(Reich)* sanctioned a de facto situation. While there was still no French state, the King of Germany extended his power throughout Germany. However, this was not without difficulties. The lack of territorial unity was compounded by a cultural divide, inherited from the Roman conquest. Following the disaster of Varus' legions, massacred by Arminius (Hermann) in 9 AD, Rome limited its control to the western and southern territories protected by the *limes*. Two Germanies were thus formed. One was Romanised, while the other remained alien to Roman culture and then Christianity until the forced conversions at the end of the 16th century. In the 16th century, this dividing line became that of the Lutheran Reformation, an expression of ancestral hostility towards Rome.

Like the Capetians would do, Otto had to fight against his vassals. . Drawing on the power of Saxony, his personal fiefdom, he averted danger. However, the imperial heritage and the strategic opening towards the south that it favoured irresistibly drew him towards the wealth and prestige of Italy, distracting him, like his successors, from devoting himself to the construction of a German national state.

Consecrated in Rome in 962, Otto the Great spent most of his time in Roman Italy, which had already exerted an irresistible attraction on the Carolingians. He spent ten of the last twelve years of his life there. It was there, and no longer in Germany, that the political centre of an imperial state was located, although it remained German. A brilliant organiser, Otto had no choice but to rely on the feudal system bequeathed by the Carolingians to build the Holy Roman Empire. He was able to convince or compel the nobles to serve the Empire while also serving their own interests.

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1. Pierre Béhar, Du *I'' au IV' Reich. Permanence d'une nation, renaissance d'un* Etat (Éditions Desjonquères, Paris, 1990). Joseph Rovan, *Histoire de l'Allemagne* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1994). Francis Rapp, *Le Saint Empire mmain germanique* (Tallandier, Paris, 2000).

interests. He obtained from them a permanent commitment to supply contingents for the imperial army to hold Italy and the eastern marches. But after serving him, the great vassals took ever greater liberties with his successors.

The Ottonians, Saxon princes, were succeeded by the Salians, Franco-Nian princes, then the Staufens, who were Swabians. Committed to the imperial dream, they all shared the same fascination for Italy. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the last true emperor and the most illustrious, was Germanic in name only. In his heart and culture, he was Italian and Byzantine. Surrounded by a Saracen guard and Arab and Jewish doctors, he ruled from Palermo over an empire that stretched from Jerusalem to the Baltic. Indifferent to German affairs, he was interested only in the south and the East.

In 1250, upon his death, the imperial edifice disappeared. Pope Innocent IV, the emperor's implacable enemy, ordered that "his name, his body, his infernal seed and the offspring of this accursed brood" be eradicated. The sentence was carried out to the letter by his successors, with the interested assistance of the ferocious Charles of Anjou, brother of Saint Louis, who coveted Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples. Frederick II's first son, Conrad IV, who had been proclaimed emperor, died of dysentery in May 1254. His half-brother, Manfred, having asserted his rights, was killed in February 1266 by the men of Charles of Anjou, who had the prince's remains thrown into a field. Having captured Manfred's three young sons, he had their eyes gouged out and had them slowly burned to death in the dark cellars of Castel del Monte. When the young Conradin, aged sixteen, son of Conrad IV, appeared, Charles seized him again and had him executed in Naples in October 1268. But the hunt was not yet over. There remained one last scion of the 'cursed brood', Conradin II, the young bastard son of Conrad IV and last grandson of Frederick II. Charles of Anjou had him kidnapped by his soldiers and hanged in 1269. Thus was Innocent IV's curse fulfilled.

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1. Jacques Benoist-Méchin, *Frederick II of Hohenstaufen* (Librairie Académique Perrin, Paris, 1980). Paris, Ernst Kantorowicz, *Emperor Frederick II* (Gallimard, Paris, 1985).

The Habsburg Empire

Upon the death of Frederick II, the anarchy of the Great Interregnum began, fuelled by the ambitions of German princes and popes. From 1250 to 1273, there was no emperor or German king. The German crown was only restored in 1273 by a simple count, Rudolf of Habsburg, who was chosen precisely because of his weakness. For a long time, the princes took care to elect only powerless candidates. After Frederick II, the Empire was for a long time nothing more than a title with no political significance. The efforts led by Ferdinand II from 1618 onwards failed completely in the face of the coalition powers. In 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War and the Treaties of Westphalia, the Empire was weaker than ever. On the other hand, unlike in the Kingdom of France, the nobility remained strong, and society with it.

Despite his weakness, Rudolf of Habsburg strove to fulfil his imperial obligations. In August 1278, against all odds, he even defeated the King of Bohemia at Marchfeld, north of Vienna. This victory granted his family possession of Austria, Styria, Carniola and Carinthia. Thus assured, the Habsburg dynasty established itself in Vienna. Too remote to be a German capital, the city nevertheless occupied a decisive strategic position in the Danube region. It became the citadel of Germanism facing the east. Over time, the crowns of Bohemia and Hungary were acquired by the Habsburgs, who gradually became the rulers of a multinational empire focused on south-eastern Europe, that of the House of Austria. This early multinational character, very 'Roman' in nature, and a political philosophy based on feudal law explain the particular nature of the Habsburg system.

Since the Treaties of Westphalia (1648), a significant part of Germany, divided into sovereign kingdoms and principalities, had escaped this empire, continuing to live under feudal rule. The same was true of the Prussian power that was beginning to build itself up in the north, on the melancholic moors of the Brandenburg March and in the former Teutonic possessions.

The fate of the nobility in France and Europe

The contrast between the fate of the French nobility and that of the rest of Europe is striking. Unlike their counterparts in the former German Empire, Prussia, Poland, Hungary, England, Spain and other European kingdoms, the French nobility allowed themselves to be strangled. A domesticated nobility here, a vigorous nobility there. This dual evolution gave rise to two different worlds: the dead planet of the French state and the still-living universe, despite historical catastrophes, of the British world and the countries of Central Europe. The victorious struggle of the centralising monarchy against "feudalism", i.e. against feudal vigour, is celebrated unanimously in France. The result is indeed striking. At the end of the 18th century, the Revolution triumphed here, while it failed everywhere else, thanks to to the resistance of a nobility that remained alive.

A comparison with Russia is in order. Subdued and subjugated since Peter the Great, the weakened Russian nobility allowed itself to be wiped out in 1917, while a year later, its German counterpart, still vibrant, unapologetically crushed the Bolsheviks in Berlin and Munich.

Until the 16th century inclusive, nobility was not exclusively linked to birth. It owed its status to its aptitude for political leadership, its military function of protection and justice, and its

"virtue", in the Roman sense of virile energy, but also of righteousness and self-sacrifice. Even in Montaigne's time, who prided himself on being one, nobility was above all a matter of profession, that of arms, and dignity. The same idea is found in all the memoirists of the time, Montluc, La Noue, LAlouëte and La Taille. In France, after the Wars of Religion, under the influence of state centralism, the figure of the man-at-arms, knighted on the battlefield, faded in favour of the courtier enslaved to power by the chains of vanity. The Capetian monarchy, supported by the clergy of the Counter-Reformation, played no small part in this transformation. Its hostility to the old feudal freedoms, its desire to tame the nobility and exercise

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1. Ellery Schalk, *L'Épée et le sang, une histoire du concept de noblesse, 1500-1650* (Champ Vallon, Paris, 1996). For the previous period, see Martin Aurell, *op. cit.* (Armand Colin, 1996). Marc Bloch also observed that medieval thought separated heredity and nobility.

monopoly on legitimate violence encourages it to devalue the ethics of warfare, except when it is exercised for its own benefit, in its armies.

The revolution was different in Great Britain than elsewhere in Europe. At the cost of numerous conflicts, the feudal nobility managed to assert its authority, reaching new agreements with the emperor or monarchies. It achieved resounding political success with the *Magna Carta,* imposed on John Lackland by the English barons in 1215. Depending on the location and traditions, this partnership between the monarchy and the nobility took different forms. It was liberal in England and authoritarian in Prussia, where royal power was based on the support of a nobility whose feudal rights were guaranteed.

The conflict between the Pope and the Emperor

For several centuries, parallel conflicts pitted competing powers against each other: the Church, i.e. the Pope, the new 'national' monarchies, the Emperor and the feudal nobility. These intersecting conflicts successively forged and broke alliances, creating new alliances. The Pope did not always fight the Emperor, and the Capetian king did not always support the Pope, quite the contrary. On the other hand, there was a constant mistrust between the monarchies and the Church towards the feudal nobility, even though the upper echelons of the Church hierarchy were drawn from the nobility. But despite their shared family origins, the first two orders were shaped by goals, traditions and values that were too different not to clash. Paradoxically, it is likely that this permanent tension over so many centuries was one of the decisive factors in Europe's exceptional dynamism, both in the intellectual and scientific spheres and in terms of external conquests, crusades, discoveries and colonisation.

In Italy and in the lands of the Empire, for example in Provence, resistance to the power of the Pope and that of the Angevin dynasty had a name: Ghibellinism. It was an ideology, perhaps the first of its kind, aimed at changing social and political organisation according to philosophical principles.

In the Italian cities of the 11th and 12th centuries, two political parties opposed each other: the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. They took their names, by deformation, from the names of two cities: Guelph and Ghibelline.

mation, those of two great German families, the Welfen (Guelphs) and the Hohenstaufen, lords of Waiblingen (Ghibellines). The Guelphs were supporters of the Pope and, incidentally, of the Capetian king and his Angevin cousin. The Ghibellines were supporters of the emperor.

There is more than one root to the quarrel between the Pope and the Emperor. In terms of principles, the Empire is seen by its supporters as the spiritual heir to Rome. It is a sacred institution with a universal vocation, which claims to be of supernatural origin. It is God's law on earth, *lex animata in terris,* admitting no power superior to itself, not even that of the Pope. In the Byzantine Empire, the Church remained subordinate to the emperor, including in matters of dogma, as in the time of Constantine. In the West, the evolution was very different, due to the disappearance of imperial power. A contemporary of Clovis, Pope Gelasius already supported the thesis of the superiority of the Bishop of Rome over the distant emperor. His successors defended the same principle, which only had real consequences after the restoration of imperial dignity in favour of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III. In a beautiful ambiguity, the two allies legitimised each other, each conferring on the other an imperial *auctoritas* giving him the power to create kings by attributing to him the *potestas principalis.* A new stage was reached when Gregory VII declared that the Pope was the true emperor. This was the era when the doctrine of the "two swords" emerged, with the Pope supposed to wield both the temporal sword and the spiritual sword, something that the emperor also claimed. Conflict became inevitable. It broke out openly during the Investiture Controversy provoked in 1075 by Gregory VII. Two years later, Gregory forced Emperor Henry IV to come and humiliate himself at Canossa. Based on the false Donation of Constantine [2], the

1. K.-F. Werner, *op. cit.,* p. 367.
2. The work of an 8th-century forger, this Donation was intended to justify the temporal power of Pope Stephen II (752-757) over Rome and the western part of the former Roman Empire. According to the Donation, Emperor Constantine, before his death in 337, granted Pope Sylvester I (who had cured him of the plague) full sovereignty over the Western world. For a long time, the popes' claim to temporal power was based on this document, until Nicolas of Cusa and Lorenzo Valla exposed it as a forgery in 1442. See Lorenzo Valla's translation, *The Donation of Constantine* (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1993).

The Pope intended to lay the foundations for a true pontifical theocracy, asserting in particular the Pope's right to depose sovereigns and exercise temporal power himself. It is clear that the conflict was as much philosophical as it was political.

Ghibelline ideology

Implicitly since Plato and Aristotle, it has been accepted that there are two paths to human fulfilment: action and contemplation. The first is identified with the Empire and chivalry, the second with the Church. Ghibellinism professes that, through a life of discipline, combat and service, one can rise through action to a supernatural dignity that is in no way inferior to the contemplative or ascetic path. At the very beginning of the 14th century, Dante became the defender of this idea. Born in Florence into a noble Guelph family, he broke with family tradition when he saw the freedoms of his city threatened by Pope Boniface VIII. The victory of his opponents made him an outlaw. Faced with the chaos in Italy at the time, he felt a painful nostalgia for the former greatness of Rome. Writing *De Monarchia* around 1313, he denounced the temporal power of the popes as the cause of Italy's decline. In the second canto of the Inferno of the *Divine Comedy,* he invokes Virgil, making him speak of the eternal mission of Rome, a holy place willed by God, transformed by Constantine and the popes into a 'sewer of blood and stench'. While paying lip service to a highly Romanised Christ, Dante made the Roman eagle, the pagan eagle, the true symbol of divine will on earth.

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1. The Italian philosopher Julius Evola became the modern champion of the Ghibelline idea. In several of his writings *(Les Hommes au milieu des ruines,* Les Sept Couleurs, Paris, 1972, p. 141), he asserts that the Order of the Temple was its ultimate expression. As is often the case with Evola, historical information gives way to myth. Unless we distort the facts, it is difficult to see how a religious order closely subject to the papacy, which had also become a major economic and financial power, could have embodied the imperial, feudal and Ghibelline idea. The fact that it suffered violence at the hands of the Capetian king Philip IV the Fair cannot be a sufficient reason.

Philip the Fair, the Pope and the Knights Templar

The dispute between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the Pope and the Emperor, would be settled in favour of a new temporal power, that of the "national" kingdoms of England, France and Castile. Rejecting the authority of both the Pope and the Emperor, they attributed to "national sovereignty" the sacred character previously held by the papacy in the spiritual realm and by the Empire in the temporal realm.

Often allies of the Pope against the Emperor, the Capetians would sometimes prove to be formidable adversaries of the papacy. Philip IV the Fair would diminish papal power in ways no emperor could ever have imagined. The grandson of Saint Louis would win the unanimous support of his nation in this dispute. This was clearly evident when, in 1302, he convened the first Estates General in the history of the kingdom to support his cause. On this occasion, neither the barons, nor the bourgeoisie, nor even the clergy of France withheld their support. This was the first manifestation of Gallicanism, which Bossuet would later formalise.

The conflict began in 1297 when Pope Boniface VIII sought to intervene between the Flemish communes and Philip the Fair. The latter rejected any Roman interference, responding through his lawyers that "The king is emperor in his kingdom." When the dispute flared up again a little later, Guillaume de Nogaret was sent to Italy to depose the pope. He did such a good job during the "assassination attempt" in Anagni in 1303 that Boniface VIII did not survive. The king then had a French pope elected who was devoted to him, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Bertrand de Got, who became pontiff under the name of Clement V. To better control him, the king established him in Avignon. According to Michelet, this pope was one of the greatest scoundrels in Christendom, showering his mistress, the beautiful Brunissende de Talleyrand-Périgord, with jewels bought with funds begged for the crusade. This corruption at the top served the king's purposes. The debasement of the papacy enabled him to destroy the power of the Order of the Temple, both a major international bank and a leading maritime force in the Mediterranean, in a single day in 1307. As previously with the Jews, his goal was to seize the Templars' assets to replenish a perpetually empty treasury. He appears to have failed in this endeavour, as the Pope designated the Knights of Rhodes as the Templars' legal heirs.

The State according to Bodin and Althusius

The assertion of the temporal sovereignty of the King of France required philosophical justification, which was provided by the royal lawyers. They defined the king as *princeps in regno suo,* contrasting the king's territorial sovereignty with the emperor's spiritual sovereignty. Rationalists before their time, they sought to eliminate all "irrational" forms of political legitimacy, particularly customary rights. Against feudal freedoms, they laid the foundations for an administrative and centralising state power, using taxation and the institution of the 'royal case', which gradually gave the state a monopoly on justice and policing to the detriment of the feudal lords. In the abstract legal order they developed, the law, conceived as a rationally based general norm, became the attribute of state power. This revolution by the jurists, the 'revolutionary vanguard of the Third Estate', in the words of Carl Schmitt, made France the first country to break with European tradition. It is interesting to note that Jean Bodin (1529/1530-1596), an eminent humanist and leading theorist of absolutism, was also the author of *La Démonomanie des sorciers (The Demonology of Witches)*, a book which, more than any other, contributed to fuelling the bonfires on which "witches" were burned until the end of the 17th century. [2]

In *The Republic* (1576), a work that develops his theory of sovereignty, Jean Bodin rejects the model of the ancient city ("I do not

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1. *The Formation of the French Mind by the Legalists, in* Carl Schmitt, *Du Politique* (Pardès, Puiseaux, 1990, p. 190). "Much more than Roman law," notes Carl Schmitt, "the notion of the 'royal case', a political and legal instrument in the hands of French legal scholars, contributed greatly to subverting the legal world of the Middle Ages, heralding the evolution towards the modern centralised state. See also Alain de Benoist, *L'Empire intérieur* (Fata Morgana, Montpellier, 1995, pp. 124-125). See also Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856, Gallimard, Paris, 1967).
2. In the development of French systematism and rationalism, exemplified by Jean Bodin and René Descartes, one cannot overlook the exceptionally strong intellectual influence exerted on the kingdom by the Catholic Church and scholasticism. As Tony Judt writes: 'From the day the statutes of the University of Paris (1215) required scholars to establish a "systematic theory of the world", the dominant feature of French intellectual discourse was its propensity to organise knowledge within a single framework. " *(Un Passé imparfait,* Fayard, Paris, 1992, p. 365.)

does not inspire me from Aristotle"). He formulates the four principles of the doctrine of the *"modern"* state, which opposes reason to custom: the absolute power of the sovereign is exercised without any mediation between the power and its subjects; it ignores communities and recognises only individuals; the sovereign has a monopoly on the law, which is an expression of his will; finally, sovereignty is exercised territorially [1]. Whereas feudal monarchy is bound by its duties to the people and their customs, absolute monarchy is no longer limited in principle by any rules. Sliding into political nihilism, as suggested by Machiavelli in his portrait of *the Prince,* the state becomes its own end.

A quarter of a century after Jean Bodin, an opposing doctrine, traditionalist and federalist, found its theorist in Johannes Althusius, mayor of the city of Emden in Westphalia. In *Politica methodice digesta* (1603), his major work, he positioned himself as the heir to Aristotle, defining political life as a 'symbiosis' based on the innate need that drives men to pool useful and necessary things, while respecting customs and communities. He distinguished between two types of communities: simple communities (families, corporations) and 'symbiotic' communities (cities, provinces) endowed with civic autonomy. The civic body is not made up of individuals but of communities. Sovereignty is an indivisible and inalienable right that belongs to the people as a community, of which the prince is merely the representative. The state is conceived as the people organised in the federative form of organic, [symbiotic] communities. Speaking of his ancestor Charles V, Archduke Otto von Habsburg said that "in exercising power, he never departed from a fundamental maxim that a large entity should not be allowed to perform a function that a small one can perform". This is the very definition of the principle of subsidiarity.

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1. Louis Dumont identifies French-style "territorial sovereignty" as one of the major ideological causes of the Revolution: "The *community* is dissolved and becomes a *society.* [...] Ontologically, there is no longer anything between the Individual and the Human Species; concrete global society no longer exists." *L'Idéologie allemande* (Gallimard, Paris, 1991, p. 73).
2. Chantal Delsol, *L'État subsidiaire* (PUF-, Paris, 1992). Alain de Benoist, "Johannes Althusius," *Krisis,* March 1999. Thomas D. Hueglin, "Le fédéralisme d'Althusius," in *L'Europe en formation,* Spring 1999.
3. Otto von Habsburg, *Birth of a Continent* (Grasset, Paris, 1975, p. 108).

Multiple Roman legacies

Long after the definitive end of the Holy Roman Empire, which Emperor Francis II agreed to in 1806, the imperial imagination continued to inhabit the minds of many Europeans. Like Lyautey, they cherished the memory of a vanished order, a destroyed harmony. This imagination also responded to a nostalgia for power. Indeed, it could be argued that the Carolingian or Habsburg model of empire was the political form best suited to the organisation of the large economic and cultural areas that fragmented the world.

This view might seem to echo the ambition of the United States, which built its Atlantic empire on the submission of willing Europeans, more or less won over to the utopia of universal democracy, masking its implicit totalitarian logic behind the promise of individual well-being. In fact, the imperialist practice of the United States is in radical contradiction with the European imperial tradition, embodied by the Habsburgs [2]. Unlike the American system, which aims to assimilate individuals into an undifferentiated economic society, the Empire united different peoples. Its implicit function was to preserve the identity of all the communities it brought together. While the American empire is a utopia of uprooting, the Habsburg Empire was a reality of rooting.

Projections about the future cannot ignore the similarities between our era and the end of the Carolingian Empire, when the impotence of central power gave rise to feudalism, i.e. the territorial fragmentation of the state. While state bureaucracies have never been as sprawling as they are today, political power has rarely been so impotent. This is undoubtedly due in part to human beings, but the human factor always carries weight in historical developments.

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1. In his famous essay *Democracy in America* (1840), Alexis de Tocqueville was the first to identify a form of totalitarianism in American democracy. American hegemonic ambition has been the subject of numerous theoretical formulations since Admiral Alfred Mahan's famous work, *The Interest of America in Sea Power* (1897).
2. Despite a semantic abuse, the Napoleonic system was itself the negation of the imperial model. Its logic was assimilationist and uniformising. Its instrument was the Civil Code, the legal translation of its individualistic philosophy.

Nobility, empire, feudalism, monarchy, nation state, federal power or centralism: these changing realities describe the tradition of politics in European history. This overview of more than twenty centuries, from the founding of Rome to the modern era, gives prominence to another Roman legacy: Christianisation, a pivotal event of the second century, some of whose consequences are examined elsewhere in this book.

The Roman heritage that predates Christianity appears to be surprisingly enduring. This is evident in contrasting ways in political institutions, in the imperial imagination, in that of the French revolutionaries, and not least in General Bonaparte. It is also present in the models and values that can protect those in power from nihilism: the *dignitas* of the nobility, the *virtus* of the citizen, and the *devotio* of the leader who gives himself to his country. Examples abound in Roman history. We still see countless examples in 20th-century European history, where soldiers' sacrifices multiplied. Despite the weight of nihilism affecting the ruling classes, figures such as Russian Prime Minister Stolypin, Emperor Franz Joseph and Finnish Marshal Mannerheim demonstrate, in addition to their qualities as statesmen, a superior sense of duty that overshadows egocentricity and vanity.

8

Arthurian legend and chivalry

"Between Koblenz and Trier, I fell into the Prussian army..." Writing these lines in his *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave,* Chateaubriand recounts how he emigrated in 1792 to join the army of the Princes. The episode narrates the chance encounter between the young Breton gentleman and the King of Prussia. "I was walking along the column when, upon reaching the guards, I noticed that they were marching in battle formation with cannons in line; the king and the Duke of Brunswick occupied the centre of the square formed by Frederick's old grenadiers. My white uniform caught the king's eye; he called me over: the Duke of Brunswick and he took off their hats and saluted the former French army in my person. They asked me my name, the name of my regiment, and where I was going to join the Princes. I was touched by this military welcome: I replied with emotion that, having learned of my King's misfortune in America, I had returned to shed my blood in his service. The officers and generals surrounding Frederick William nodded in approval, and the Prussian monarch said to me: "Sir, one always recognises the sentiments of the French nobility." He removed his hat again, remained bareheaded and stood still until I had disappeared behind the mass of grenadiers."

What a scene! The King of Prussia saluting with his hat off to the former French army in this insignificant little officer! This is an image to remember on grey days. It conjures up a world of moral elegance and decorum, the memory of the old European chivalry whose dawn was the Round Table.

King Arthur, Merlin and the dragon

The figure of King Arthur and the Knights of the Grail became established immediately when Chrestien de Troyes wrote his novel *Perceval,* subtitled *Le Roman du Graal,* around 1185. The troubadour from Champagne had just created one of the most fertile myths in Western imagination. The mysterious legend has been constantly revisited, adapted and transposed over time by other poets, without ever losing its appeal. In the last decades of the 20th century, filmmaker John Boorman gave it a lush formulation in his film *Excalibur.* This work combined all the sources of the legend into a very modern yet timeless interpretation. It reawakened what had been dormant, giving new life to the Arthurian myth and that of the Grail.

The epic begins in the chaos and darkness of battle, accompanied by the haunting strains of *Twilight of the Gods...* It opens with the clash of weapons and the flow of blood among the black trees and grey rocks of the Celtic forest of the Early Middle Ages. In those days, the earth was young and death was but a dream. Spirits were pure, nymphs still populated the rivers, and the valleys were home to fairies. At the bottom of the waters rose the castle of the Lady of the Lake, guardian of Exca/ibur. Beneath the earth slumbered the untamed power of the dragon. It was a time of enchantment, a mysterious and violent era, symbolised by the dark reptilian armour of the first images.

But now, after the initial clash of armour and the cries of rage or agony, shouts of victory ring out. A red banner unfurls. Beneath the monstrous visor of a helmet appears the face of King Uther, Uther Pendragon. A face radiant with fury and triumph. He calls out and commands:

— Merlin, where are you? I am the strongest! I am the chosen one! I need the Sword!

In the mist, between the trees, amidst the black warriors, we see the misty silhouette of Merlin, the druid magician, appear and advance.

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1. Film made in 1981. The sonorous name ûxcaJibiir comes from Old Breton. It combines the hardness of the blade *(calad)* and the flash of lightning *(bolg).* It is under the original name of *Caliburn* that King Arthur's magic sword appears in the first known text devoted to the greatest myth of the ancient West, the Historia *Regum Britanniae*, written in Latin around 1135 by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

— Sword of power! You shall have it. But to heal, not to kill!

Forged in the Lake of Avalon "when the world was young", here is *Excalibur,* entrusted since the dawn of time to the guardianship of the Lady of the Lake. It emerges from the purity of the water, brandished and offered by a female hand. In the end, it will return to its original element, collected by the same hand, that of the Lady of the Lake, the fairy Viviane, Lancelot's teacher. In the magic of Celtic tales, the woman is the guardian of the Sword, the ultimate symbol of the living Tradition.

The character of Merlin gives the story its full power and mystery. Sarcastic humour and cryptic irony are Merlin's hallmarks. Like the king, the druid is the guardian of sovereign power, which explains his relationship with the Sword. While the king represents the force that civilises, protects and dispenses justice, the druid embodies the spiritual and magical aspect of sovereignty, which gives meaning beyond simple reason. Hence his complicity with the dragon, symbol of elemental forces and instinct. Within him lies the union of opposites, the future and the past, desire and regret, knowledge and oblivion. Like the dragon, *Excalibur* belongs to Merlin's universe. Imbued with spiritual powers, the Sword is his ally. He places it in Uther's hand.

The Sword in the Stone

With *Excalibur,* order succeeds chaos. By reconciling with the Duke of Cumbria, Uther establishes justice and peace. But that is without counting on passion, that "mad mood that strikes beggars and kings alike". Uther's desire for Igraine, the Duke's wife, will plunge the world back into violence and anarchy. Merlin did not oppose it; he even lent a hand with a magic spell. Perhaps he believes that passion, like the sword, has two opposing edges. It has the power to destroy the harmony of the world, but without it, the world would have no chance of regeneration.

By giving in to a selfish passion, Uther condemned himself. He is not worthy of being king. At Tintagel Castle, after his night of love with Igraine, obtained through trickery and magic, during which Arthur was conceived, Uther was hunted down by the Duke of Cornwall's feudal lords and

killed like a boar in the mud of a swamp. Before he died, he plunged *Excalibur* into a rock up to its hilt.

No one but the one who is to be king will be able to pull it out, prophesies Merlin.

From the illegitimate love affair between Uther and Igraine, a child is born and given the name Arthur — from the Old Irish root *art,* meaning bear. After taking him in, the wizard entrusts his education to a noble knight.

The years pass, anarchy grows. So does the child. The island of Brittany implores the advent of a king. Every spring, the knights gather for a tournament. And the victors try in vain to pull the magic sword that will designate the king from its stone sheath. One fine day, by pure chance, a young squire arrives who is not yet a knight. It is Arthur. Before the incredulous assembly of nobles and commoners, where all the barons have failed, he pulls *Excalibur* from the rock. He is about to be recognised as King! A stirring image. It rivals in intensity that of Arthur's knighting, in the midst of battle, a little later, in the flooded moat of the castle of Caméliard, attacked by the rebellious barons.

Arthur threw himself at Urien, the leader of the rebels. He unseated him and held him at his mercy, the tip of his sword at his throat.

– Urien, swear your allegiance to me!

The other does not waver:

– A noble knight cannot bow down before a mere squire.

Then the second royal miracle occurs. Slowly, Arthur kneels on one knee. Offering himself up to the mercy of the rebel baron, he holds out *Excalibur* to him*:*

– You are right! You, Urien, the most noble, knight me. Thus, from knight to knight, I will grant you my pardon and you will give me your faith.

– Kill him! cry the barons to Urien.

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1. The sword in the stone of sovereignty is a theme also present in the Greek myth of Theseus. In his version of Perceval, Wolfiam von Eschenbach makes the Grail a divine stone with the power to designate the one who is worthy of kingship. The theme of the sacred stone is common to the entire Borean world (ancient Europe). The Lomphalos of Delphi is the centre of the spiritual world of the Hellenes, just as the *lapis niger* is that of ancient Rome. The "stone of destiny" is the symbol of the sovereignty of the kings of Ireland and Scotland.

But, under Merlin's astonished gaze, the miracle is accomplished. The spirit of nobility prevails over ambition. Urien raises the Sword and, solemnly, strikes Arthur's shoulders with the flat of the blade, pronouncing the ritual words of knighting in a loud voice:

"In the name of Saint Michael and Saint George, I knight you. I give you the right to bear arms and to administer justice. I no longer doubt you, Arthur..."

Merlin's dream seems to be coming true: "One Land, One King."

At the head of his knights, wielding *Excalibur,* Arthur pacifies the kingdom, crushes the rebels, and repels the Saxon invaders. Following victory comes peace. Advised by Merlin, Arthur builds the marvellous castle of Camelot and founds the first order of chivalry, the Round Table. Urien, Kay, Lancelot, Gauvin, Perceval and others will distinguish themselves there. Then the young king marries Guinevere, daughter of Léodegrance of Caméliard.

Guinevere and her mystery...

Harmony shattered by private passion

Behind the opulent walls of Camelot, a new golden age seems to be dawning. What a false hope! Built on reason, this brave new world proves to be barren. Blood no longer flows or circulates. Arthur believed he could govern instincts. He will fail. His marble walls soon enclose nothing but emptiness. Around the Round Table, locked in peace, the knights are bored and quarrel. Arthurian utopia carries within it its own destruction.

– "Have we defeated evil?" asks Arthur.

– Good and evil cannot exist without each other, replies Merlin, who walks away.

– So what's the harm?

– Always where you least expect it, always...

The evil will arise from the illicit love between Queen Guinevere and Lancelot, her friend, her loyal companion, her best knight.

Discovering them naked and asleep in the forest, consumed by jealousy, Arthur loses control. *Excalibur* will be his vengeance. With a tremendous effort, he plunges the magic sword between the two lovers, separating them forever. A symbolic gesture, of course, like everything else in Arthurian legend.

By using the Sword for a private purpose, Arthur disrupted the harmony of the kingdom. "The king without a sword, the land without a king. It was not the queen's adultery that undermined sovereignty. In the ancient Celtic world, whose spirit continued to permeate the Middle Ages, marriage was not about love. Its purpose was to ensure the continuity of heritage and lineage. As for love, it lay elsewhere. As long as it remained secret, Guinevere's infidelity did not break the kingdom's pact. However, the offence carried within it this threat. And Lancelot, seemingly faithful among the faithful, took the risk of destroying the Round Table by indulging in a guilty love affair.

The rupture in the harmony of the Arthurian world comes from the passion that makes men unreasonable and mad. It stems from the fatal passion between Guinevere and Lancelot. It stems from the king's jealousy and his blind use of the Excalibur, transforming this attribute of sovereignty into an instrument of private vengeance.

Nothing could better emphasise how meaningless Arthurian power has become than the abandonment of the Sword.

Arthurian chivalry is eclipsed. The shining armour of the Round Table will tarnish to the point of resembling that of earlier ages. Chaos and misery spread across the kingdom. This is the time of the "wasted land", the time of arid land, famine and desolation.

Struck by a deadly languor, Arthur makes a final effort and sends his knights on a quest for the Holy Grail. He sends them in search of the lost values of Tradition, on paths strewn with traps and deadly challenges. Only one will reach the heart of the secret, the young Perceval, the central character in the reconquest of meaning through the trials of the Quest, in a devastated country no longer illuminated by the light of ñxco/ibtïr.

Initiation of Perceval

The legend of the Grail, as recounted by Chrestien de Troyes, is linked to the ancient Celtic theme of cauldrons of resurrection and abundance, symbols of initiation and immortality, of which Dagda, the druid god, is the guardian. We have a remarkable representation of this thanks to the discovery in Denmark in 1880 of the Gundestrup cauldron, dating from a century before our era. One of the embossed silver plates depicts a giant plunging warriors into a cauldron.

represents a giant plunging warriors into a

"grail" from which they emerge full of new vigour. In the *Perceval* of the Champagne troubadour, the Grail is described as a vase, without any Christian significance. The Christianisation in accordance with the Galilean legend of Joseph of Arimathea would take place later in Robert de Boron's account.

Chrestien de Troyes' *Perceval*, entirely consistent with Celtic legend, is the story of an initiation into knighthood, the tale of the transformation of a young man who moves from a primitive, purely instinctive state to knowledge, at the cost of a series of trials that put his very life at risk. The mystery of the Grail is the crowning glory of this initiation.

At the beginning of his story, Perceval "the Welshman" is a simple and ignorant teenager. He grew up in the solitude of the forest where his mother took refuge after losing her husband and other sons in knightly combat. To protect her last child, she kept him away from the world. Perceval knows nothing about the world. One day, in the forest, he sees strangers passing by in shining armour. Immediately, an irresistible desire awakens in him. He abandons everything to follow the armoured men and whips his horse without looking back. Abandoned, his mother dies of grief.

Perceval accompanies the knights to King Arthur's castle. In all innocence, he kills the Red Knight in order to seize his armour. Having proven himself on horseback and in combat, and also shown that he was pure of heart and upright in soul, he is initiated into knighthood by a lord, Gomemant de Goort, who dubs him, puts the right spur on his foot, girds him with a sword and gives him the accolade: "In giving you this sword," he said, "I confer upon you the order of chivalry, which brooks no baseness. Remember this: if you must fight, and your defeated opponent cries out for mercy, listen to him and do not kill him knowingly. Be careful not to speak too much: those who cannot hold their tongue often let slip words that will be taken as vileness. If you happen to find a man or woman in distress, whether a lady or a maiden, advise them if you see a way to do so..."

The Myth of the Grail

During his adventures, the ever-naive Perceval meets a young woman, Blanchefleur, with whom he falls in love. One evening, after riding far and wide

riding, he is welcomed at the castle of the Fisher King, a representation of the suffering kingdom. This king is afflicted with an incurable wound. He offers Perceval hospitality. While they are conversing and eating, a strange procession passes through the hall. A young boy carries a lance from whose tip a drop of red blood drips. Two other young boys carry lit candlesticks. Then

"A grail appeared, carried by a noble lady, ravishing and superbly dressed. When she entered the hall with this grail, there was such great brightness that the candles lost their light. Behind her came another lady holding a silver platter. The grail that went before had been cast in the purest gold and set with all kinds of precious stones." Before Perceval's astonished eyes, the Grail passed by again, as if imploring a question. Despite his desire to question the Fisher King, Perceval remained silent, applying the teachings of Gornemant of Goort.

Everything in this mystery of the Grail is Celtic-inspired. The scene takes place in a castle. The spear, associated with the god Lug, belongs to Breton legend as much as the Grail itself. This magical vessel, which will later be made into a chalice, is carried not by a priest but by a young girl. "The Adventure of the Grail reads and unfolds like the medieval metamorphosis of a very old story, passed down by the Celts, which, some four thousand years earlier, told how an apprentice king managed, through a series of trials, to conquer the talisman of sovereignty [...] and restore a fallen, unworthy or powerless monarchy in a country struck by sterility [2]."

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1. Chrestien de Troyes, *Perceval, or The Romance of the Grail,* translated by Jean-Pierre Foucher and André Ortais (Gallimard, Paris, 1974). Chrestien de Troyes' other works, *Erec and Enide, Cligès or the False Death, The Knight of the Cart, Yvain or the Knight of the Lion,* were also published by Gallimard, translated by Jean-Pierre Foucher.

2. J. H. Grisward, "From the Scythians to the Celts: the Grail and the royal talismans of the Indo-Europeans" *(Artus,* no. 14, summer 1983, p. 20). Inspired by the work of Georges Dumézil, Danielle Régnier-Bohler studied the symbolism of the three Indo-European functions in the legend of the Grail: "The Grail, a vessel linked to worship to symbolise the magical-religious function; the sword and the spear, symbols of the warrior function; and finally the table for the nurturing function, partly assumed by the Grail as well. (Preface to *La Légende arthurienne,*

"Bouquins", Robert Laffont, 1989, pp. xxxVII-XLIII.)

The morning after the extraordinary evening, Perceval leaves the deserted castle. He is now tormented by the desire to learn the secret of the Fisher King and that of the Grail. For five years, while joining in the adventures of the other Arthurian knights, he searches for the meaning of these secrets. One day, a mysterious damsel reproaches him for not having asked the fateful question in the Fisher King's castle. Had he asked the question that was burning on his lips, not only would his host have been healed, but the kingdom would have been saved. Chrestien de Troyes says no more. But with this deliberately unfinished tale, he left posterity with an inexhaustible myth. In the unfathomable void left by Perceval's silence, poets and novelists would give free rein to their imaginations. If the young knight had spoken, medieval literature would have lost its most disturbing legend. That day, as Michel Pastoureau wrote, Perceval had a rendezvous with Destiny, and a brilliant poet wanted it to be a missed rendezvous.

"Land and King are one!"

With a troubled heart, Perceval embarks on new adventures while striving to find the truth. A hermit teaches him that his life up to that point had been spent in spiritual blindness. He weeps and asks for forgiveness. Such is Chrestien de Troyes' Perceval, a much more moving and profound character than in later versions.

After plunging into deep water, a symbol of purification, and reaching the limits of exhaustion, terror and despair, Perceval once again enters the castle of the Grail by enchantment. This is how John Boorman sees it, returning to the original meaning of the myth. In his film, the Fisher King and King Arthur are merged into one character.

At the top of a luminous staircase where a Celtic cross looms, the Grail is represented by a precious cup. A voice from another world is heard:

   – What is the secret of the Grail? Who does it serve?
   – You, Lord, replies Perceval.
   – Who am I? asks the voice.
   – You are my lord and king. You are Arthur.
   – Have you found the secret I have lost?

    – Yes. Earth and King are one!

Magically transported to Arthur's bedside, Perceval gives him the contents of the magic cup to drink:

    – Drink from this chalice, and you will be reborn, and the earth with you.

A symbolic drink, as we understand, confirmed by the words of a reinvigorated Arthur:

    – Perceval, I did not know how empty my soul was until it was filled.

Having recovered *Excalibur*, which had been kept by a repentant Guinevere, Arthur gathered his knights once more. The kingdom was threatened by his own son, Mordred, born of his unwitting union with his half-sister, the evil fairy Morgana.

During the final battle of Camlann, Arthur and Mordred kill each other. Before succumbing, the king orders Perceval to throw *Excalibur* into a lake, a scene imagined around 1470 by Thomas Malory in *Le Morte d'Arthur.*

But Perceval is reluctant to throw away the sword. When Arthur asks him about it, he replies: "I saw only the wind on the surface of the water. " The king understands that he has not been obeyed. He repeats his order. This time, Perceval complies. Before his astonished eyes, a woman's hand emerges from the water, grasping *Excalibur.* The Lady of the Lake has regained possession of the sword.

In the moments that follow, a ship carries Arthur away, watched over by three Norns representing the past, present and future.

Legend has it that Arthur was taken to Avalon, the home of immortal heroes. Having fallen into a deep sleep, the king will awaken, it is said, when the time comes to fulfil the hopes of the Celtic peoples, symbolised by the magical *Excalibur.*

Chrestien de Troyes and Arthurian "material"

The name of King Arthur emerges from a misty era, without archives or written records. The historical figure was a contemporary of Clovis, at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries, a time when conquerors of Germanic origin, Picts, Angles and Saxons, landed on the eastern coasts of insular Brittany, the future Great Britain. As they pushed inland, they encountered resistance from the Celtic peoples, of whom Arthur is thought to have become the victorious champion.

The first mention of his name appears in Nennius' Hisioria *Briïonum*, written around the year 800. This author does not refer to him as a king, but as a warlord. **Later,** in his *Historia Regum Britanniae,* written in Latin around 1135, Geoffrey of Monmouth devotes long passages to King Arthur, son of King Uther. Arthur's reign is presented in the most glorious light. Victorious over the Picts and Saxons, he is also said to have defeated Lucius, the Roman procurator. But Geoffrey of Monmouth, who inaugurated the history of the Britons by claiming for them, following the example of the Romans, an imaginary Trojan ancestor named Brutus (hence the future *Roman de Brut),* cannot be taken at face value. Beyond its implausibilities, however, modern historians believe that he drew on sources that are now lost and on an oral tradition that cannot be underestimated.

From England, the Arthurian legend spread to France, with the translation and adaptation into Old French by the Norman Robert Wace in 1155 of *the Historia,* under the title *Roman de Brut.* For the time, it was a considerable success. Wace was the first to mention the Round Table. The legend was then taken up and considerably expanded by Chrestien de Troyes, the greatest French novelist of the Middle Ages. Between 1160 and 1190, Chrestien wrote at the court of Marie de Champagne, then at that of Philip of Flanders, a prince of Carolingian descent and a staunch defender of feudal liberties, who for this reason opposed the hegemonic attempts of the Church and the nascent centralising states. Drawing on the Celtic heritage spread throughout the West by singers and jugglers since the conquest of England at the end of the 11th century, Chrestien de Troyes transmitted an important part of the ancient oral tradition in his narratives. However, he altered the figure of King Arthur to such an extent that one can speak of a metamorphosis. In Monmouth and Wace, Arthur was a glorious conqueror, while Chrestien, an interpreter of feudal ideology, made him a good-natured sovereign, arbiter of courtly love, with the real heroes being the knights in his entourage. In 1170*,* the poet from Champagne completed *Erec and Enide,* the first of his works to have survived to the present day. A few years later, around 1177

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1. A translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Nisforin Regain *Britanniae*, supplemented by a modern French version of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, was published in a bilingual edition under the title *La Geste du roi Arthur* (UGE/l0-18, Paris, 1993). Introduction and translation by Emmanuelle Baumgartner.

In 1180, he wrote *Le Chevalier à la charrette (The Knight in the Cart)*, the theme of which, as we know, had been imposed on him by his patron. This poem introduced the continental legend of Lancelot du Lac. Around 1185, in his *Perceval,* he created the myth of the Grail.

Chrestien had many followers, as evidenced by *Lancelot* written around 1225 by an unknown author. A few years earlier, in Germany, Wolfram von Eschenbach adapted Chrestien de Troyes' *Perceval*. The mysticism of his own *Parzival* would later inspire Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*.

Arthurian "m a t e r i a l" spread throughout Europe. Based on Celtic legends, spread by the bards and singers of Armorican Brittany, taken up, transposed and magnified by the troubadours of the langue d'oïl and the troubadours of the langue d'oc, translated into German, Dutch, English, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, the legend was encouraged by the powerful Plantagenet dynasty, which appropriated part of it [2])

Little by little, the legend was enriched with new literary inventions and underwent profound changes under the influence of the Church, which sought to Christianise this opulent corpus that inspired chivalry. Ecclesiastical influence was already noticeable in *Lancelot* "in prose", in *Parzival* and in *The Story of the Holy Grail*, written by Robert de Boron around 1200. It was even more evident in

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1. *Lancelot* has been published in several editions. Jacques Boulenger's modern French version, with a preface by Joseph Bédier, was published under the title *Les Romans de la Table Ronde* (Plon, Paris, 1941, reprinted by UGE/10-18, 1971 in 3 volumes). François Mosès' version, which presents the texts in Old French and modern French side by side, was published under the title *Lancelot du Lac* (Lettres Gothiques, "Le Livre de Poche", 1991). In 2001, the Biblio-thèque de la Pléiade published volume 1 of *Le Livre du Graal,* which brings together six texts: *Joseph d'Arimathie, Merlin, Les **Premiers Faits du Roi Arthur, Lancelot, La Quète du** saint Graal, and La Mort du Roi Arthur*. This edition, prepared by Daniel Poirion, was edited by Philippe Walter. In 1929, Edmond Faral compiled the essential texts in the three volumes of *La Légende **arthurienne.*** See also Reto R. Bezzola, *Les **Origines et la** formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident (300-1200),* 5 volumes (Paris, 1944-1967). Volumes 2 and 3 in particular show the political background of the princely courts.
2. On this immense European dissemination, see the study by Danielle Régnier-Bohler, preface to *La Légende arthurienne (op. cit.,* pp. XXXVII-XLm).

La Queste du Saint-Graal, written around 1230 behind the walls of a Cistercian monastery. This novel introduced the new character of Galahad, a devout knight, unlike Chrestien de Troyes' Lancelot and Perceval. In some tales, the sword thus yielded to the cross. Nevertheless, chivalry continued to follow its own path.

The pleasures of battle

In 1197, during the fierce war between Baldwin of Flanders, Louis of Blois and Raymond of Toulouse against Philip Augustus, the Count of Flanders suggested forming a barricade with carts pulled by pedestrians from his communes. The knights would lie in wait behind it for the French assault. The valiant knights were indignant at the idea of such a treacherous ruse. Placing the carts in front of the villains of the other side was acceptable, but for the knights, it was necessary to fight fairly, lined up in battle in the open field and without traps, seeking no other protection than that of their armour and valour.

What the man with the sword loves about war is combat, not carnage. Except during the Crusades, battles were usually fought without hatred and fairly. There were no tricks or deceit. Men charged without cunning—without playing games like a fox. All vigorous little boys still know this pleasure in the playground, minus the shadow of death. Combat is only worthwhile because of the quality of the opponent, a man of the same blood, from the same military brotherhood, trained in the only profession that mattered, obeying the same rules of prowess and loyalty.

The medieval knight is rarely a paragon of virtue; he is too healthy for that. He does not spurn booty or romantic adventures. But nothing surpasses the pleasure of combat, of measuring oneself against others.

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1. Under the title *The Arthurian Legend, the Grail and the Round Table (op. cit.)*, several texts were published in the same volume, including *Perceval le Gallois ou le conte du Graal* (Chrestien de Troyes, translated by Lucien Foulet), *Perlesvaus, le Haut Livre du Graal* (anonymous, translated by Christiane Marcello-Nizia), *Merlin and Arthur: The Grail and the Kingdom* (attributed to Robert de Boron, translated by Emmanuelle Baumgartner), etc.

— measure up — with the best. It also has a certain poetry of war, from the time when it was beautiful. No one sang of it better in the 12th century than Bertran de Born, troubadour warrior and lord of Hautefort:

I love the joyful time of Easter, which
brings forth leaves and flowers.
And I love to hear the joy of the
birds singing in the woods.
But I also enjoy seeing tents and pavilions
set up in the meadows.
And I am filled with great joy
when I see knights and armoured horses lined up
across the countryside.
And I like it when the runners chase
away people and livestock.
And when I see them followed by
a great mass of armed men coming
together...

Symbolism of the sword

A symbol of chivalry, the sword is not just any weapon. In the Middle Ages, it was identified with its master to the point of representing him in the conclusion of a contract or even a marriage. Its personalisation was often emphasised by a name. It was unique: *Joyeuse* for Charlemagne, *Durandal* for Roland, *Haute-Claire* for Olivier, *Tizona* for El Cid Campeador, and of course *Excalibur*.

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1. Born around 1140 and died around 1215, Bertran de Born dreamed only of battles and pillaging. He fought against Henry II Plantagenet and then against his son Richard the Lionheart. To secure his old age, like Bernard de Ventadour, he finally retired to an abbey. A poet and troubadour in the Occitan language, he was the undisputed master of *the* political *sirventès*, a poetic form that flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries. His poem on the pleasures of war was often imitated by those less talented than himself. Translation: *Anthologie des Troubadours* (UGE/10-18, Paris, 1979). *Le Livre d'or des troubadours* (Éditions de Paris, Paris, 1998).

In chansons de geste, particularly in *La Chanson de Roland,* conceived in the 9th century and transcribed around 1100, the importance given to swords and, more generally, to the knight's martial equipment, testifies to the cult surrounding them. The beautiful Aude, Roland's fiancée, is described in three words, no more: "a beautiful damsel", while it takes some twenty verses to detail the horse and weapons of an unknown man who disappears in the next line with a clean sword blow. Literature professors are often surprised by such imbalance, but the audience of barons and knights for whom the *Song* was intended found this rhetorical difference quite natural.

As he dies, Roland does not spare a thought for the beautiful Aude, but speaks to *Durandal* as if to a beloved mistress:

> *Ah! Durandal, how white and beautiful you*
> *are! Against the sun, how you shine and*
> *sparkle! Good sword, I pity you!*
> *Since I am dying, I no longer have charge of*
> *you. Through you, I have won so many battles,*
> *I have conquered so many vast lands!*
> *Never be to a man*
> *who could flee before another!*
> *A very brave knight held you for a long time,*
> *there will never be his equal in holy France...*

These are fiery words that knights love to hear. For a valiant knight, is not the sword his life, his double, his most precious possession and his justification? He derives all his glory from living by his sword alone, which is no small feat. The poem dedicated to the memory of William the Marshal in the 13th century bears proud witness to this

> *What is wielding weapons? Are they*
> *used as a sieve, a winnowing fan, an*
> *axe?*
> *No, it is much harder work than that.*
> *What then is chivalry?*
> *Such a strong and bold thing,*

And so costly to learn
That a bad man dares not undertake it.

Before the advent of firearms, European history shows a clear preference for bladed weapons, weapons of bravery, over projectile weapons, which require skill. In the Iliad, the hero is Achilles, armed with a spear and sword, not the archer Paris, who is accused of cowardice. To fight well, you have to see your opponent's eyes. Killing from a distance is murder. Describing a heated battle, Joinville, chronicler of Saint Louis, wrote: "It was a fine feat of arms, for no bows or crossbows were fired, but they fought hand-to-hand, with maces and swords. "

The knights stubbornly and vainly opposed firearms, which heralded their demise. "Would to God that this accursed instrument had never been invented," raged Montluc on behalf of all the gentlemen. "So many brave and valiant men," he added, "have died at the hands of cowards and fools who dare not look in the face those whom they strike down from afar with their wretched bullets." The Italian condottiere Gian Paolo Vitelli had the eyes gouged out and the hands cut off of the arquebusiers he captured. Bayard had them put to death before he himself was killed by an arquebus shot at the Battle of Sesia in 1524.

In 1672, during the crossing of the Rhine, more than three centuries after the first cannon shot was fired, the Prince of Condé had his wrist shattered by a musket shot. His sword fell from his grasp. A gentleman jumped down to pick it up. "Give it to me! Sir, give it to me!" cried the prince, grabbing the sword with his left hand; "and let us show this rabble that steel is mightier than lead!"

The golden age of tournaments

When knights do not risk their lives in war, they risk them in tournaments.

Gathered in council at Clermont d'Auvergne in 1130, the French bishops railed against this entertainment, which they considered scandalous and encouraging

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1. Quoted by Georges Duby, *Guillaume le Maréchal* (Fayard, Paris, 1984).

to the cult of the body and vanity: "We forbid these detestable fairs, where knights come to show off their strength: they gather there with reckless audacity, and often death and danger to souls ensues. Those who die there shall be denied Christian burial."

Nothing worked. The Church could rage against these traps of the Devil in its councils, but it was a lost cause. Repeated condemnations did not prevent the period from 1125 to 1225 from being the golden age of tournaments in northern France. This was surprising resistance in a period said to be one of radiant faith!

During the bad season, which imposes a truce in the war due to bad weather and lack of fodder, swords rarely remain in their sheaths, and people move from place to place almost every week. At the invitation of a great baron, young knights – and some not so young – flock by the hundreds with their servants from Hainaut, Normandy, Brittany, Burgundy and Poitou. Joyful and eager, they came to test their skills, make a name for themselves and win some tribute, which they hastened to throw out of the windows. After a feat of valour, generosity was a knight's duty! The game was played like a real battle on vast spaces.

Poitevins against Normans, or Flemings against Manceaux. The high lance is raised, the opposing camp is charged. The aim is to break it up, then capture a knight for whom a large ransom can be demanded, to be spent on merry drinking bouts or fine clothing. The only ones who get rich are the traffickers and usurers who swarm around behind the scenes.

To ensure capture, the opponent must be knocked down and stripped of his helmet, which is easier said than done. Alternatively, after knocking him unconscious with blows to his steel armour, the horse is taken by the bridle and the living prize is dragged to the armoury.

Sometimes a horseman regains his senses and, abandoning his mount, manages to escape, like Simon de Neauphles, who clings to a gutter in a village alleyway. When his victor turns around, he is left with nothing but a riderless horse. The adventure is laughed about a great deal.

These games were dangerous, and people were killed in tournaments, perhaps even more so than in warfare. Death or mutilation was the other price to be paid in these jousts. This was precisely what made them so appealing to spirited, bloodthirsty young men.

To be recognised in jousting, distinctive signs were invented, which appeared on shields before being engraved on seals. Thus were born coats of arms and the complex code of heraldry, free of any religious symbolism.

An embodied ethic

Knighthood is not nobility, even though it allows access to nobility through military service. Nobility has a political function linked in part to birth and territorial roots. Unlike nobility, knighthood is not hereditary. It is an order that is accessed through co-optation. From its origins in the 11th century, especially in the north, it included sons of the highest Carolingian aristocracy, but also men-at-arms, some of whom came from the peasantry. In the 12th century, knighthood became an ethical community that was much more than just a professional group. Its prestige can be gauged by the fact that, starting with the future Louis VI, who was knighted in 1097 without his father's knowledge, all the kings of France insisted on being knighted, as did François I on the evening of Marignan, by the hand of Bayard.

The chivalry of medieval Europe bears no relation to what is known as "chivalry" in Rome. It owes its name to the military use of horses, which became widespread during the Carolingian period. Throughout the Middle Ages, mounted warriors, more or less armoured, who fought with lances and swords were called "men-at-arms". The successive inventions, between the 6th and 9th centuries, of the high-gutted saddle and stirrups, followed by iron shoes to protect the horse's hooves, transformed the rider and mount into a formidable centaur in battle, capable of covering long distances quickly.

The word chevalier, derived from the Late Latin *caballarius* (horseman), only came into use at the end of the 11th century. It is attested in *The Song of Roland* (in verse 110): "On white silk carpets sit the knights" *(cevaler).* In the language of the clergy, in Latin, it is *miles,* a member of the *militia armata.* One of the first texts to mention this *militia* is by Saint Bernard, in a critical

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1. On this difference, see chapter 7.

The Abbot of Clairvaux contrasts this chivalry, which he considers ungodly and disrespectful to the Church, with the *nova militia* of the warrior monks of the Temple, which he encourages wholeheartedly.

The chivalric ritual, described by Chrestien de Troyes, was established in the 12th century. It is based on knighting, a symbol of recognition of specific qualities and initiation. The Church sought to extend its control over the institution through the blessing of weapons.

If we were to focus solely on the strictly military function, we would not understand what defines a knight. He is the embodiment of ethics. Prowess, generosity and loyalty are his attributes, summed up by honour. The elegance of the soul commands valour to the point of recklessness. In tournaments, it is said, "it is in the feet of horses that one must seek the valiant". Generosity combines contempt for money with the clemency and generosity of heart taught to Perceval by his mentor. Keeping one's sworn faith until death is the third natural obligation, which implies feeling bound by one's word or by a pact of friendship more than by any contract.

Borean origins of chivalry

Among the portraits of different social types drawn by Chaucer at the end of the 14th century in The *Canterbury Tales,* that of the knight resembles Chrestien de Troyes' Perceval, but also most of the heroes of ancient Europe.

> *From the earliest days he began to ride, he loved*
> *chivalry, loyalty and honour, generosity and*
> *courtesy.*
> *He **had** performed great deeds for the glory of his lord, And*
> *ridden further than anyone else,*
> *Always drawing honour from his valour...*

Although the use of horses gave its name to the medieval institution, it was not an integral part of the spirit of chivalry. The Achaean warrior,

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1. Georges Duby, *Warriors and Peasants, 11th-12th Centuries* (Gallimard, Paris, 1973).

The Greek hoplite, the Irish fian, and the Germanic berserker are fanatics, yet they are precursors of the knight. This is why we can refer to "Homeric chivalry" to describe the brotherhood of *couroi* in Homer's world. The *couros* is a "noble warrior, whose birth and education have devoted him to the profession of arms [...] and to the refinements of a certain ideal". History attests to the existence, in pre-city Greece, of a brotherhood of warriors united by a spirit, bonds of initiation and commensality, performing specific functions in times of peace and war. The same structure is found in ancient Germania as described by Tacitus. In chapter XIII of his *Germania,* he recounts the ceremony during which a young German receives his first weapons, the sword and the shield. It anticipates the knightly dubbing of the mid-century. Same symbolism, same mental world. All Celtic legend attests to similar rites of passage in the warrior militia of the Fianna, which is at the origin of Arthurian chivalry [2]. Like the nobility, medieval chivalry also inherited Roman military traditions, *dignitas* and the ethic of service.

These connections were not lost on those concerned. In the 12th century, in the prologue to his *Cligès,* Chrestien de Troyes wrote: "Our books have taught us that in Greece, the prestige of chivalry and knowledge reigned supreme. Then chivalry came to Rome, along with all knowledge, which has now reached France. May God grant that they remain there! "

The figure of the broken hero

At its birth, medieval chivalry was still steeped in ancient Celtic and Germanic religiosity. The descendants of Clovis' Frankish warriors may have forgotten even the name of

1. H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes. Essay on Spartan education and rites of adolescence in ancient Greece* (Lille, 1939). See also Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Le Chasseur noir* (The Black Hunter) (La Découverte, Paris, 1983), and Alain Schnapp, *Le Chasseur dans la cité* (The Hunter in the City) (Albin Michel, Paris, 1997).
2. Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h and Françoise Le Roux, translation of *The Cattle Raid of Cooley* (Gallimard Paris, 1994). Jean Markale, *King Arthur* (Payot, Paris, 1976).
3. Karl-Ferdinand Werner, *op. cit.*

their ancient gods, but they had retained in their blood a warrior spirit that Christianity only superficially baptised.

"The ongoing hostility between clerics and knights that persisted throughout the Middle Ages clearly shows how ill-suited the military aristocracy of Western countries was to a religion that had been theirs for centuries."

In fact, although the chansons de geste are full of invocations to God and attacks on "pagans", i.e. Muslims, they reflect an inner life in which only the mystique of combat, bravery and death are exalted. They thus revive the spirit of Homeric poems, Scandinavian sagas, and Germanic or Irish legends, without however achieving their symbolic richness. In comparison, their crude nature reflects a mutilated culture, amputated from its spiritual sources.

However, the fundamental vitality of the race and its fiery pessimism survive in this literature. The chansons de geste exalt suffering and death rather than victory. The stories they describe are by no means consoling. The hero, "fair of face, broad of shoulder, slender of hip", despite his prodigious strength, his boundless courage and his unbreakable sword, will still be defeated. It is always in the story of a great misfortune that the beauty of the deed is manifested.

The merciless description of the sufferings of war is free from all compassion and sentimentality. "Suffer to understand," wrote Aeschylus in *Agamemnon.* It is implicitly accepted that it is in the face of defeat, pain and death that man reveals himself.

Although Charlemagne enjoyed many more victories than defeats during his campaigns, his most famous and celebrated companion is Roland, about whom nothing is known except that he was probably defeated and killed at Roncesvalles. Over the centuries, the glorification of this intrepid hero, suddenly struck down by fate, has remained a constant feature of the European imagination. The Napoleonic myth would not have been what it was if the glory of Austerlitz had not been followed by the defeat at Waterloo and the martyrdom of Saint Helena. It is also significant that Vercingetorix was adopted – albeit belatedly – as France's first national hero.

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1. Zoé Oldenbourg, *Les Croisades* (Gallimard Paris, 1965).

An indestructible spirit

Despite the removal of memory, we constantly see the celebration of the fallen hero resurface in the most unexpected forms. Such is the case with the posthumous cult devoted to Che Guevara by a fraction of Western youth in the last third of the 20th century. A solitary and unlikely guerrilla fighter, ravaged by fever, without hope or illusion, he went to seek death in a remote corner of the Bolivian mountains. And no doubt, despite his materialistic philosophy, he had discovered this great truth: one dies well only for the idea that death gives you of yourself. The acceptance of Christianity by the knighthood owes much to the European idealisation of the sacrificed hero. The Western Church of the Early Middle Ages made Christ a powerful god. According to legend, after giving victory to Constantine, did he not also grant it to Clovis? In the 10th century, an epic version of the Gospels, the *Heliand,* was even produced for the use of the warlike and rebellious Saxons. In it, Jesus became a Germanic prince, his disciples his vassals, and the wedding at Cana a warrior's feast. But the victorious god was also a hero defeated by adverse fate and enemies as treacherous as they were overwhelming. This was certainly more important for the conversion of the Celts, Franks and other Germanic peoples than the Gospels, which were largely ignored during the Middle Ages due to a lack of access to the Scriptures. Being a Christian meant believing in the divinity of Christ, which the aristocracy of the sword made their own.
a rather unchristian idea.

Barons and knights had retained only those words from the sermons that were pleasing to their ears. The expression "God of armies" was taken literally. Accustomed to a Valhalla populated by warrior deities, the new converts created a paradise in their own image, without questioning the true genealogy of the newly promoted. Saint Michael, Saint George, Saint Maurice, Saint Martin, Saint Eustace, and a few other former part-time soldiers were favoured. It was not so much the steadfastness of martyrdom that they remembered, but rather the supposed bravery of the soldier. The Crusades helped to clear up the ambiguity. The Church finally spoke a language that men of the sword could understand, reconciling their still uncertain Christian faith with their deepest aspirations. Having become soldiers of Christ, the "Barbarians" became Christianised. But in a reciprocal movement, the Church became "barbarised" and Europeanised. For several centuries, Christianity drew its strength from this massive injection.

of violence, energy and courage, which received religious endorsement as a "just war".

However, the knight's clear conscience remained conditional. It was not the warrior vocation itself that was justified — a major impossibility for a religion whose essence is foreign to the values of the sword — but the use that was made of it, in convergence with the interests of the Church.

Despite the Crusades, mutual distrust only saw a relative truce. The feud between the Guelphs and Ghibellines began at this time. The divide widened during the Renaissance. First in the cities of Italy, then in Germany, France and elsewhere, arrogant equestrian statues sprang up, even on church steps. They proclaimed the return of the hero and his eternity. This was also the case in the paintings of El Greco, Velázquez and Titian, and in Dürer's highly subversive engraving, in which we see the Knight walking towards his destiny, indifferent to both Death and the Devil.

In Germany first and then in many other countries, the overwhelming success of the Reformation was largely due to the support of the nobility, who were hostile to Rome and loyal to feudal values. From the 16th century onwards, the century that saw the separation of the sword and the faith, the ruptures caused by the great European crises were also contained in Europe's contradictory legacies.

Had the spirit of chivalry disappeared altogether? During the century, amid the many horrors of the two world wars, there was no shortage of chivalrous gestures between European belligerents. Even later, in an era that had moved away from the old ethics, noble sentiments continued to be expressed in literature and cinema.

In the most unpredictable way, the chivalrous spirit took hold of a new literary genre where no one expected it. A whole section of noir fiction and the films inspired by it revives, often in bad boys, the honour, courage and loyalty that have deserted visible reality. The spirit that circulates here and there in this vigorous literature, faithful to the classic virtues of the novel, seems to spring from the same soil as that of Greek tragedies, Scandinavian sagas, and chansons de geste. Nothing better demonstrates the imperishable nature of a spirit capable of traversing time and re-emerging in the most unlikely of guises.

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Female royalty and courtly love

From 20th century, an era of revolutions and betrayed hopes, the only successful revolution was that of feminism, the "liberation" of women. However, this liberation owes little to activism. It arose and grew in the wake of nihilism and a series of events. The first of these was the call for women to work during the First World War. Then came the invention and commercialisation of effective contraceptive methods around 1960. A giant leap forward! When it came to physical love, women now enjoyed the freedom that had always been the preserve of men. The beneficial consequences of this revolution are obvious. Others are less so. What women have gained is visible. On the other hand, the price to pay is difficult to measure. However, it can be discerned in the instability of couples, the breakdown of families, the collapse of education, a certain female aggressiveness, the malaise and frustrations experienced by many young girls and of women, despite a sense of optimism.

On the surface, the times seem favourable for women. And it is true that, in legal terms, they have never enjoyed more extensive rights. But these rights only apply to one aspect of life, to the detriment of another that is sacrificed. These rights reflect the purely materialistic and individualistic philosophy that inspired them. A philosophy that ignores or condemns fundamental needs of a different order. Thus, strictly individualistic morality proves inadequate when faced with questions raised by the arrival and future of children, or by those of the continuity of the family group and lineage. As for materialistic interpretations, they have nothing to say about the essence of femininity. This is not only biological in nature.

or social. It cannot be reduced to a demand for equality with men.

The purely materialistic logic of gender parity triumphed on the day when the US Army tested a bizarre device on its female personnel that allowed female soldiers to urinate standing up like men. Grafting a male penis onto a female anatomy sums up the ambition and impasse of feminism. Its horizon is not the feminine, but the masculine. Its ultimate goal is to make women copies of men, by adopting masculine styles and values, thus denying the values of femininity.

Fundamental polarity of masculine and feminine

A "man", "men" – these are imprecise and ambiguous words. Latin and Greek are richer in this respect, distinguishing between what refers to the species *(homo)* and what refers to masculinity *(vir)*. This is not insignificant, since words convey ideas. The fundamental polarity of masculine and feminine is not only the primary source of life. It is present in many religious and social rituals in Europe and elsewhere. It is the source of eros, of romantic attraction magnified by courtliness. It also reflects spiritual values, those of virility and femininity, which have their applications in other areas of existence.

The creative function of Eros and the differentiation between the sexes was placed by Hesiod's *Theogony* at the origins of the world. The poet merely took up and organised much older traditions, those already collected by Homer and the cosmogonic poems attributed to Orpheus, which belong to the most ancient times. Without the absolute distinction between the sexes, there would be no life and no love.

This distinction is present throughout the animal kingdom, in the physiology of reproduction, appearance and behaviour. There is no possible confusion between the plumage of male and female birds. Everything distinguishes the stag from the doe: the mysterious presence of antlers, opposite morphology, solitary or gregarious social behaviour, and sexual rituals during the rutting season. To all these "animal" differences, humans add their own in terms of spirituality, values, sensitivity and emotions.

and even language. Without us realising it, the words used by some people do not have the same meaning for others.

Two opposing and complementary principles

The two sexes are different and complementary in the most fundamental way. Complementary because they are different. Men's appearance is rough and aggressive, while women's is graceful, gentle and smiling. Since time immemorial, men have been programmed to fight and act in a hostile outside world. Women have been programmed to love, seduce, bear children and pass on their genes. Men derive satisfaction from their successes and achievements. They enjoy confronting their peers, including in discussions. Women find pleasure in peaceful relationships. The natural aggressiveness of men is as foreign to them as it is painful. Men are inclined towards abstractions and general ideas. Women are sensitive to the intimate and personal aspects of things. In their relationships, men need to feel useful, while women need to feel loved. Men need to give. Women need to receive. When faced with danger and adversity, men close themselves off, while women willingly give voice to their emotions and tears, unless they are being cunning. Confronted with the lust of suitors during Ulysses' long absence, Penelope uses artifice. She even pretends to play along with those who desire her. And what does Ulysses do? He acts like a man, in the most expeditious manner, which does not exclude skill or dissimulation. Upon his return to Ithaca, he slaughters the suitors and thus regains his place in Penelope's bed.

Rooted in morphology and psychology, the differentiation between the sexes is very clearly expressed in the games of love and in fertilisation. The male is the active, enterprising principle. The female is the receptive principle. Pointing this out does not imply any devaluation, superiority or inferiority, but rather an essential complementarity. Creation, as manifested in love

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1. "The masculine can be characterised in that it has its principle within itself, the feminine in that it has its principle in the other," writes Julius Evola in *Metaphysics of Sex* (1948). This idea is inspired by the theses of the Swiss philosopher Jacob Bachofen (1788-1877). He theorised an opposition

or in childbirth, is the result of two antagonistic principles that are closely linked. One cannot exist without the other. The masculine function is emissive, the feminine function is receptive, transformative, transmissive. It is because she is receptive that the woman accomplishes, in apparent passivity, analogous to that of Mother Earth, the fundamental creative activity that is the gestation of the child. Her privilege is to receive and give with gentleness and patience, which never precludes energy. Women have time on their side, which is also their obsession. Through their gentleness and patience, they give children what men can never give. Gentleness and patience are the means of their power and the irreplaceable gifts they bestow on social life.

In its often justified but misguided rebellion, feminism has ended up condemning feminine values: receptiveness, patience and gentleness are equated with submission. Its materialistic philosophy has shown it only the external and superficial aspects of the relationship between the sexes, which relate to social and political life. Given that masculine principles are necessarily dominant in this sphere, feminists concluded that women should adopt them and thus abandon their own values. As a result, masculine principles have been both overvalued and blamed as synonymous with oppression.

This is the source of the turmoil of which women are the primary victims. Locked into their system, feminists were resistant to the essence of femininity and the harmony of life. They could not understand that if either sex abandons its principle, harmony is disrupted. It has been observed that women who are absorbed in intense social or professional activity, in the same way as men, are frequently infertile.

The lady and the knight

Before the great European catastrophes of the 20th century, masculinity was associated with the warrior function, while femininity was associated with

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fundamental difference between an archetype he calls ourano-solar-masculine, and a telluric-lunar-feminine archetype. But it is not clear why the "pure feminine" would not have its own principle of love within it.

love. This is why, in the West, Mars and Venus have always been the two antagonistic and complementary figures of the masculine and the feminine, without however summarising all their complexity.

The conflicting and reciprocal attraction between Venus and Mars has never been celebrated with greater force and refinement than in medieval courtly *love*, full of sweetness and fury. Courtly love reveals the conditions for total love and lasting harmony. Its imagery is accessible to us in 12th-century French, the language of Perceval le Gallois and Lancelot du Lac. We read that "the heart of a knight who loves with fine love must strive for only one goal, which is to surpass all others". Nothing could be less obscure than this programme, of which Lancelot is the champion. In the novel of the same name, his love for the lady does not distract him from being himself. On the contrary, it pushes him to surpass himself in his own order, that of combat, quest and honour. The dangerous and chivalrous festival of tournaments provided the most striking demonstration of the link between war and love. Courtly eroticism found a place to express itself freely, in full view of everyone and in defiance of all conventions. One of the most beautiful courtly tales shows a knight entering a joust wearing only the shirt of his beloved lady. Terrible clashes and cruel wounds follow. After the fight, as a reward and visible sign of her love, the lady puts on her knight's bloodstained shirt.

heroes, displaying it as the most magnificent of trophies.

Through the songs of troubadours and trouvères, through the writings of Chrestien de Troyes and his emulators, after surviving the early Christian centuries, the European spirit rediscovered in the 12th century the secrets and refinements of love known to Homer and Ovid, to the point of sublimating them as never before. Masculine and feminine are the two polarised worlds, which are irresistibly attracted to each other, clash and unite in a kind of war that preludes ecstasy. Prestige and prowess are the hallmarks of the knight, the masculine archetype. Offering and seduction are those of the lady.

Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne

In the Arthurian cycle, the lady of high lineage often leads the game, at least in the initial phase of seduction. Lancelot's novel

Lancelot reports that the queen "took great pleasure in noticing, in his attitude and words, the turmoil that had seized him". It should be noted that Lancelot is an eighteen-year-old youth, while the powerful lady who moves him is much older than him. At the decisive moment, the queen takes the initiative. The matter is stated bluntly: "She takes Lancelot by the chin and kisses him very long..."

Many texts support the interpretation of a female strategy of seduction. This is hardly surprising. Women were never slaves in the West and often used their own weapons to achieve their ends. This was true of the female deities of Greek mythology: Hera, Aphrodite, Artemis, but also the heroines of tragedy, Electra, Antigone, Phaedra... In a different form, Rome reproduced this autonomy of women and the respect due to them. This is evidenced by the Roman principle of marriage based on inclination, but also by the suicide of Lucretia, who founded the Roman Republic. It is also evidenced by so many great female figures of the imperial era. Despite the implicit condemnation of women as the source of 'original sin', the co-author of biblical texts, associated with the dark forces of sex and the earth, yes, despite this latent misogyny, the feudal world celebrated women and the erotic pleasure of *love*. This paradox cannot be explained if we forget that the great source of inspiration for courtly literature was the Celtic legend of '. In this

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1. The Celtic source of courtly love is generally overlooked by academic scholarship, which cites: 1. popular poetry; 2. Latin literature (Ovid) revisited by medieval authors; 3. Hispano-Arabic poetry. This last theory, which is based on exotic prejudices, is refuted by the study of Arabic poetry, whose rather poor inspiration is quite different. On the other hand, as the authors of *the Dictionnaire des Lettres françaises* note, without drawing any conclusions, *Le Moyen Âge (op. cit.,* p. 340): "The works of the North, especially Arthurian romance, are often characterised by a more refined psychology, a tendency towards analysis and moral insight that is lacking in Occitan poetry. Martin Aurell makes the same observation in *La Vielle et l'épée, Troubadours et politique en Provence au XIIe siècle* (Aubier, Paris, 1989). For his part, Michel Pastoureau emphasises that
"It is to authors from the North that we owe the literary promotion of women." *(La Vie quotidienne en France au temps des chevaliers de la Table Ronde,* Hachette, Paris, 1976, p. 145.) For a general overview, see Reto R. Bezzola, *Les Origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident* (5 volumes, Honoré Champion, Paris, 1949-1962).

Here, most of the female characters are by no means effaced: Queen Guinevere, Enide, the Lady of the Lake, the fairies Viviane and Melusine. This is a major Western characteristic, also very present in Germanic legend. One thinks of the princesses Brunehild and Kriemhild in the legend of Sigurd and the *Song of the Nibelungs.*

Among the sources of courtly culture, one cannot overlook the dazzling personality of Eleanor of Aquitaine, granddaughter of William the Troubadour, future mother of Richard the Lionheart, and to some extent the embodiment of Queen Guinevere. After her divorce from Louis VII of France in 1152 and her remarriage to Henry Plantagenet, the queen made her court in Poitiers a centre of courtly life, open to the Celtic influence favoured by her new husband's ambitions. Nor can we overlook the initiatives of her daughter, Marie de Champagne, patron of Chrestien de Troyes, to whom we owe the immense influence of courtly literature. The poet himself acknowledged that the spirit of *Le Chevalier à la Charrette* owed everything to the princess. In this commissioned work, Lancelot is a plaything at the mercy of the whims of his beloved, which led to the novel being rejected by the nobility.

The very different "prose" *Lancelot*, whose author is unknown to us, tells of a typically "courtly" love, respecting an ideal and contradictory code. It unites a young knight without a lawful wife to a noble married lady, in this case the queen. It is an adulterous love, a passionate love, subject to perfection.

Courtly love, perfect love

Although *courtly* love was not yet discussed in the Middle Ages, as the term was recent [2], *courtesy* was discussed, synonymous with virtues and

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1. "*I will only say that the more his*
   command acts in this work
   than the spirit and effort I will put into it."
(Chrestien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier à la charrette.* Quoted by Gustave Cohen, *Histoire de la chevalerie au Moyen Âge,* Richard-Massé, Paris, 1949, p. 81.)
2. The term *courtly love* was not in use in the 12th century. It was invented by Gaston Paris in 1883. In the 12th century, people spoke of *fine love (amor fin),* meaning perfect love.

of moral or social qualities, specific to court life. It is an art of living, a refinement that gives women an increasingly important place. Soon, courtesy also became a conception of love, requiring loftiness of soul, nobility of heart, courage and generosity. It implies both a taste for luxury and a contempt for money. The opposite of courtesy is the harsh, greedy and coarse mentality attributed to the peasants, the ancestors of the bourgeoisie.

Courtly love, or perfect love, is based on spiritual harmony and respect for certain feminine values. It is also based on a strategy of desire. By definition, desire demands to be satisfied, but satisfaction seals its demise· Love therefore strives towards its satisfaction and simultaneously fears it, since it signifies the death of desire. This explains the complex links that unite suffering and pleasure, anguish and exaltation, happiness and torment in courtly love. To make desire last, love must not be satisfied quickly or easily. Obstacles to its fulfilment must be multiplied. The lady must not be inaccessible, since this love is not platonic, but she must be difficult to access. This is also why love cannot, in principle, manifest itself in marriage, since the male's right to the female's body tends to eliminate desire.

For a man to see a woman as his *mistress* in the literal sense, her favours must be freely given. In most cases, therefore, one must love another man's wife, which requires discretion as the lover's foremost quality. Courtly love gains nothing by being displayed. Its strength lies in secrecy, in jealously guarded intimacy. The lady is often of a higher social rank than the lover, "so as to model the romantic relationship on feudal relations and to avoid the temptation for both partners to grant her favour out of self-interest or for him to use his authority to coerce her into yielding to him". In cases of adultery, the legitimate husband is ignored. His presence would only tarnish with a stain of immorality the beauty and dignity of a conquest that culminates in carnal union.

As a counterpoint to courtly love, the 13th century entertained itself by reading or listening to the delightful satire of *Reynard the Fox*. This bawdy story with its many twists and turns is all about sex. It draws its

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1. *Dictionnaire des Lettres françaises. Le Moyen Âge (op. cit.,* p. 336).

success of transparent allusions to the marital woes of Louis VII, powerful king of France but poor husband. Listening to the misadventures of Ysengrin, it is him we think of. And when Reynard, the "great fornicator", joyfully "trod the grapes" of Ermeline, who was leaving...

"Kissing closely [...] embracing lovingly" the man she wanted to make her new husband, everyone thought of the good fortune of Geoffrey Plantagenet, who had got to know Queen Eleanor very well during his visit to the French court. He did not become her husband, but her father-in-law, since the fickle queen finally married his son, Henry II Plantagenet, after the huge scandal of her divorce.

The ambiguities of love and marriage

The picture painted by courtly literature cannot be taken as an accurate portrayal of 12th-century customs. It reflects an imaginary world, not the reality of romantic or marital relationships in the noble society of the time. Although adultery was common, it was not the norm. The poem of Erec *and Enide* depicts a perfect marital love, modelled on courtly love. In Chrestien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier au lion*, the character of Yvain is also a model of a courtly knight, but in the service of his lawful wife. In a different genre, the famous correspondence between Heloise and Abelard depicts a couple bewitched by a love that is both philosophical and very carnal, a couple who were briefly married before being separated by the castration of the husband and the conventual seclusion of both partners. In one of her letters, burning with sensual passion, Héloïse, now abbess of a convent, still claims her absolute submission to "desires" and "pleasures" of her husband, "sole possessor [...] of both her body and her soul". And to emphasise the strength of her abandonment, she proclaims herself her husband's *"*whore" rather than his wife. In this poignant letter, she suggests that "marriage can also be the crucible where *amor,* or lust, is converted, transfigured, and becomes, without losing any of its vigour, *dilectio,* or the purified impulse of the soul."

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1. Georges Duby, *Dames du   siècle* (Gallimard, Paris, 1995).

For Héloïse and Abélard, spiritual love preceded sensual love. Their union presents an extreme example where the wife is a lover, with no vocation to be a mother. This type of bond neglects the primary function of marriage, which is the transmission of lineage, the eternity of life through the birth and upbringing of children, and the legacy of a spiritual and material inheritance. Apart from the Romans, perhaps, no one was ever more attached to this conception of marriage than the European nobility, despite individual exceptions. By chance or effort, such a marriage could be happy in the current sense of the word, but its primary purpose was not sensual or sentimental bliss. The confusion between marriage and love is an invention of romanticism, of the bourgeois and individualistic era. Its frequent failure has shown its limitations. The extended family is a more durable group than that of the married couple. The family can survive the breakdown of a couple. Its bonds are of a different nature.

Duration of lineage and individual transience

On 4 May 1693, the young Duke of Saint-Simon dipped his pen in black ink and wrote the following words in his diary:
"At ten o'clock in the evening, I had the misfortune of losing my father. He was eighty-seven years old... I learned the sad news on my way back from the King's bedtime... The night was given over to the righteous sentiments of nature..." What conciseness of feeling for such great mourning! "The night was given over to the righteous sentiments of nature..." Let us be wary, however, of our own distortions. Unlike in subsequent centuries, the 17th century cultivated modesty and restraint. Displaying grief was considered a weakness, if not a disgrace. A gentleman was expected to overcome such infirmities. A student of Plutarch and the Stoics, The honest man considered mastery of one's emotions to be a mark of elegance.

The day before his father's death, the future memoirist was still just the little vidame of Chartres. The next day, before the Court, he was a different man. In two laconic sentences, he makes us feel it: "Monsieur, who was standing at the King's bedside, saw me: 'Ah! There he is,' he said aloud, 'Monsieur le Duc de Saint-Simon!'"

Monsieur's words were enough to ease many pains! They are of the same ilk as the words spoken on 14 May 1643, just as the Louvre was mourning the death of Louis XIII. Anne

of Austria, filled with anxiety about the future, exclaimed: "My God, what will become of us? The king is dead. " Then Chancellor Séguier's voice was heard: "In France, Madam, kings do not die." And, pointing to the child who would become Louis XIV, he added: "Here, Madam, is the living king!"

Royal words, certainly. Worthy of one of the most beautiful kingdoms under the sun. But with simpler words, and without even words being spoken, the powerful feeling of family continuity flourished in this kingdom among free peasants almost as much as among dukes and kings.

Everywhere we find examples of peasant and bourgeois families who continue to stubbornly cultivate the aristocratic virtues of heritage and name.

By combing through court records from the 17th to the 19th century, two ethnologists meticulously studied three centuries of social life in Gévaudan, now known as Lozère. This investigation was certainly not intended to promote a return to the land. And yet, what valuable observations it yielded! In Gévaudan, until the Revolution and sometimes well beyond, fathers chose one of their sons or daughters to succeed them. The other children were therefore excluded from the inheritance. As for the chosen son, he remained subject to his father's authority even after his marriage. This age-old practice naturally gave rise to tensions, but, as the two authors note, revolts and refusals were rare. When the Civil Code established equality among heirs and the distribution of estates throughout France, the families of Gévaudan stubbornly resisted, devising ways to circumvent the law. The most interesting thing is that this was done with the full agreement of the younger sons who were excluded from the inheritance. In this mountain society exposed to hunger and wolves, the poorest farmers naturally practised the aristocratic ethic of lineage. The family system of the poor peasants of Gévaudan, attached to the prestige of their "house", was no different from that of the European nobility since the Carolingian era. These starving rural dwellers skilfully arranged marriages in the manner of princely families, for lesser stakes, no doubt, but according to the same logic. That their alliances did not have the effect of

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1. Élisabeth Claverie and Pierre Lamaison, *L'lmpossible mariage, violence et parenté en Gévaudan, xMi, xViIF and   centuries* (Hachette, Paris, 1982).

bring France and Spain closer together, but two pieces of land do not change their nature.

What were they doing, if not ensuring the future of their heritage and preserving their name? The rustics of Gévaudan had not had the leisure to ponder the meaning of their age-old efforts. Like their ancestors before them, they were driven by an inner necessity that was not open to question, perpetuating from generation to generation that which creates life and opposes death. Without theorising, they knew that possessions, when they are not simply marketable goods, but contain tradition and culture, whether castles or cottages, books or antique objects, belong to the soul. Even tools carry within them the spirit of those who made them. These things contain my soul. Their possession is metaphysical. From the outset, the peasants of Gévaudan contrasted the permanence of the lineage with the transience of the individual. To have a son, children, who beyond oneself ensure the continuity of one's name and deeds, who will in turn have children and be a part of us without even knowing it, perpetuating the endless chain of generations since the dawn of time, is that not what it is all about? eternity? And what would family be if it were not this fragment of eternity? These values do not conflict with those of courtly love. However, ensuring a lineage is not the same as romantic exaltation.

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The Romance of the Rose

Like a magnifying mirror, courtly literature reflects the dreams and attitudes of the feudal world. Through its poems and tales, we can reconstruct an entire system of values. Historical research agrees on the very wide influence of this literature, given the way it was disseminated. Courtly poems were not read as books would later be read, individually and silently. It was an oral literature, recited in castles at evening gatherings by professionals, trouvères, troubadours and others, who relied on copies of an original manuscript. The fact that so many of these stories have survived over the centuries proves the extent of their distribution in the Anglo-Norman region, the Île-de-France and the rest of Europe.

They were composed at a time when the Church was making great efforts to reform itself and thoroughly Christianise the noble class. Within

its own ranks, it imposed celibacy on priests and monks. For the main use of the laity, it instituted the obligatory sacrament of penance. Inspired by judicial methods, this sacrament imposed not only contrition, but also redemption and even punishment in the afterlife, according to a scale of penalties kept by the priests. This rite proved to be a major instrument of ecclesiastical power. Nevertheless, the Church continued to encounter widespread resistance, as evidenced throughout medieval literature.

Appearing in the 12th century, courtly culture continued into the following centuries, albeit in a modified form. Around 1225, at the end of Philip Augustus' reign, in a Paris that had become the main European capital, the first part of *the Roman de la Rose* was published, and it was a huge success. Its supposed author is Guillaume de Lorris, about whom little is known, except that he was a lay cleric. The setting of the work is no longer the Celtic forest but a domesticated orchard that is intended to mirror society. A peaceful sensuality pervades the entire poem. There is no trace of religion. Instead, there is this maxim: "There is no greater paradise than to have one's sweetheart." It could not be clearer, especially since the author expels two allegorical figures from his garden: *Poverty,* a major virtue of official morality, and *Papelardise,* or devotion. Inviting us to enjoy all the pleasures of life, this novel is quite subversive, and also out of step with the courtly era. The *Rose* that we go to pick is a young maiden in bloom. What she rewards is no longer the knight's bravery but beautiful language. This *novel* thus reflects the evolution of court society towards ever greater refinement. Around 1250, the success of the first poem prompted the ambitious Jean de Meung to write a sequel, which also enjoyed long-lasting fame and was constantly reprinted until the early 14th century.

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1. Georges Duby, *op. cit.* The first true woman of letters in French literature, Christine de Pisan sparked debate about *Le Roman de la Rose* by writing Epffre *au Dieu d'Amour* (1399), criticising Jean de Meung for his overly masculine interpretation and arguing for a balance between the impulses of the heart and the pleasures of the senses. The theologian Jean Gerson, the provost of Paris Guillaume de Tignonville, and Marshal de Boucicaut lent their support to Christine de Pisan. A "Court of Love", composed of men, was established in Paris by order of Charles VI in 1401 to judge poetic contests involving the honour of ladies.

FHeptaméron by Marguerite de Navarre

The early decades of the 16th century, a period marked by tremendous upheaval, offer us a new and important document on love in the West: Marguerite de Navarre's Nepiaméron.

What a woman Marguerite was! Passionately devoted sister of King Francis I, she was the true queen of France, replacing the good but non-existent Queen Claude, who left her name only to a plum. With panache, she ran her brother's court, charmed ambassadors and directed ministers. After the disaster at Pavia, she rushed to Spain, exhausting horses to reach the prison where her devilish brother was dying of fever. She saved him, plotted an escape that failed, and was expelled by Charles V. No matter! François was safe. He would return at the cost of a breach of oath, which reason of state absolved. While presiding over the brilliant Pètes, Marguerite, so indulgent of her brother's escapades, herself courted, involved in all the intrigues of the boudoir and all the secrets of the chancellery, yes, this Marguerite, in the evening, shut up in her room, wrote by candlelight.

She first engaged in a long mystical correspondence with Guillaume Briçonnet, the saintly bishop of Meaux. In her letters, she expressed a kind of disembodied love, transposed onto the divine plane. But this did not satisfy her sensibility. In the twilight of her life, she became involved in secular literature. These were the tales of the Nepfaméron, inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but in a freer and more confident tone. Every evening, this very Christian lady narrated the most salacious stories fuelled by court gossip. They were all about illegitimate love affairs, deceit, seduction and adultery. They began with morning devotions and ended in amiable or violent sexual encounters. Each day began with a mass that seemed to implore the Lord's blessing for the lewdness of the story. The narrator is both devout and bawdy, or, to put it another way, Christian and pagan, without any apparent conflict. Several tales reveal a genuine hatred of the monks of the mendicant orders, accused of being fornicators who use ecclesiastical power to achieve their ends. "I have such a horror when I see a monk," she says, "that I could never confess to one, considering them to be worse than all other men, and never visiting a house without leaving some shame or discord in their wake (XXII)."

In his insightful study of Marguerite de Navarre, Lucien Febvre expresses surprise at the queen's double standards, given that she wrote for an audience of the elite of her time. His logical mind rebels against what is revealed in the Nepfaméron. He cannot understand how the characters can switch so abruptly from extreme sexual licence to the most pious devotion.

In truth, it is the historian's questions that are surprising. *EHeptaméron* shows what we see at work throughout much of Western history. Marguerite de Navarre's contradictions have been commonplace among Europeans since Christianisation. In her life and writings, the excellent queen demonstrates the juxtaposition within the same person of two contradictory and incompatible moral representations, which nevertheless coexist as best they can. She sheds light on this curious alteration that has transformed many Westerners into two-faced Januses, professing one moral code while living by another. At a loss for explanations, Lucien Febvre gets away with imagining that the French of today are so different from those of the 17th century that any effort to understand them would be futile. The historian studied and wrote in the relatively stable society of the 1940s. Later, in a chaotic world where the family is in tatters, disorder is everywhere, and sexuality is on display, we will not have the same difficulty understanding the Hepfaméron. The editor of *the Annales,* a man of strong intellect, was not immune to his own preconceptions, particularly the idea that the past is truly past and therefore impenetrable. On this point, we disagree completely. On the contrary, we believe that the past is always present. Unlike the cultures of China, India or Africa, that of 20th-century Europe   is not an enigma. If we pay attention, it even sends us signs where we can recognise ourselves.

Priority of the heavenly spouse

Almost four centuries separate the first courtly novels from the Hepfainéron, as well as from Marguerite de Navarre to Marcel Proust.

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1. Lucien Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane* (Gallimard, Paris, 1944). Nietzsche said: "Christians behave like everyone else, but they have mood swings."

However, in *the Heptaméron*, we see a reflection of women and their relationship with the male world that has not changed much from courtly literature. The lady of thoughts and heart, the lover, the mistress of the 16th century, is rarely the legitimate wife. This should certainly not be seen as a challenge to marriage as such. But it is not considered a place for the fulfilment of the senses. Based on the solid Roman law of the family, but according to a very different philosophical and religious projection, the medieval Church gradually transformed the "holy institution" into a kind of cloister from which women could never escape. In ecclesiastical teaching , before the timid efforts of Saint Francis de Sales in

XIXth century and his *Introduction to the Devout Life,* nothing can help the poor humans to achieve a little love and pleasure in married life. Unlike the Roman practice of consensual marriage, the rule is not to marry *"for pleasure"*. The example came from above. Joseph and Mary never experienced carnal union or pleasure. Because of this model and the prohibitions against the body, the seat of sin, virginity was considered superior to marriage. Love in marriage had to remain moderate, and the Church cited the words of St Jerome as an example: "He who loves his wife too ardently is an adulterer." On Thursday, 30 January 1556, commenting on chapter XXIV of *Deuteronomy* before the people of Geneva, Calvin recalled that God said, when he spoke of creating woman: 'Let us make a helper for man'. He did not say: 'Let us make him a woman'. The fact is that ancient Christian tradition imposes the submission of women in marriage, following the example of Hebrew law. The husband is not there to make love but to command. 'Marriage is a yoke placed by God on the neck of man', and especially on the neck of woman.

Conceived in this way, marriage requires outlets that justify adulterous tendencies. Among the minor rural nobility or the bourgeoisie, men resorted to chambermaids. "If your wife refuses you," Luther said, "take your maid." But what about married women in the 12th or 16th centuries? Little is known about their

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1. Lucien Febvre, *op. cit.,* p. 337. In his study *La Peur en Occident, XVI''-XVIII Siècle* (Fayard, Paris, 1978), the Catholic historian Jean Delumeau devoted a well-documented chapter to Christian anti-feminism and the demonisation of women.

her sorrows, joys, or torments. She does not appear in courtly literature. Only ecclesiastical recommendations provide some guidance. Among the documents he studied, Georges Duby highlighted letters of spiritual guidance addressed to a countess of Perche, a neglected wife, by the Abbey of Perseigne, a Cistercian monastery where, at the end of the 12th century, work was being done to edify the laity. In the human person, says the spiritual director, there is the soul and the body. God is the owner of both. But, by virtue of the law of marriage that he has instituted, he grants the body to the husband. The husband is authorised to use it. But, continues the abbot of Perseigne, God keeps the soul for himself alone: "God does not allow the soul to pass into the possession of another." The woman therefore has two husbands whom she must serve. One has the right to use her body, the other is the absolute master of her soul. She cannot escape her husband's demands. It should be noted that Abbé de Perseigne ignores the legitimate demands that might also be those of the wife. But the essential point is in the conclusion. It would be wrong for the countess to surrender her soul at the same time as her body. Certainly, you do not have the right to refuse, the abbot tells her. However,

"When your earthly husband unites with you, set your joy (a word that refers to carnal pleasure) in remaining spiritually attached to your heavenly husband."

In other words, remain unmoved, Duby soberly comments. These letters were written in the style of sermons, to be circulated in order to teach noble ladies how to behave in marriage. It is difficult to see them as encouraging mutual pleasure, and one can imagine the devastation such teaching wrought on anxious and confused women, who had only this advice to guide them. For a long time, the remnants of this frigid culture continued to disrupt the lives of couples. In reaction, it gave rise to the excesses of sexualism and feminism, both of which are far removed from sensual fulfilment.

For several centuries, the theme of sin and conditional salvation amplified the torments of women and men in the face of love, doing nothing to help them accept themselves as women and men in possession of both body and soul. Nevertheless, paradoxically, in the world of contemporary nihilism, the vestiges of ancient Christian spirituality can have effects

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1. Georges Duby, *Féodalité* ("Quarto", Gallimard, Paris, 1996, pp. 1405-1406).

beneficial. Shaken by the great revolution in morals, the Church implicitly renounced the old prohibitions on sexuality. This can now be experienced without excessive harm by Christian couples. Unlike the children of nihilism, these couples, especially the traditionalists, can find in a shared spirituality the essential harmony that leads to the fulfilment of pleasure and the most intimate understanding.

Merging of souls and carnal understanding

This is what courtly literature implied, but from a perspective that was by no means Christian. Beyond pleasure and the glorification of femininity, it suggested that carnal harmony and happiness in love cannot be conceived without the prior fusion of loving souls. The courtly strategy is not only one of desire. It is the slow and necessary prelude to a mutual spiritual discovery, a path of seduction that begins with the complicity of minds before reaching that of the senses. For the body to open up, it suggests that the soul must first open up in a deep understanding and intimate trust.

The fact that courtly literature flourished in a masculine and warlike society is a paradox that has puzzled many scholars. In his essay *Love in the West* (1939), Denis de Rougemont rightly noted a mystical aspect to courtly love that is rarely found in Eastern erotic treatises. But this is a secular mysticism, unrelated to the chaste love of the Cathars, in which Rougemont believed he had found, with fragile arguments, the model for *fine love*. Studying this from a social history perspective, medievalist Georges Duby attempted to refute
"comments that saw courtly love as a feminine invention. It was, he asserts, a game for men... the exact counterpart of the tournament...". Courtly love, Duby continues, was forged to "affirm the independence of a culture, that of warriors, arrogant, resolutely rooted in joie de vivre, against the culture of priests."

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1. Georges Duby, Que *sait-on de l'amour en France au .ai siècle ?* Texts collected under the general title *Féodalité {op. cit.,* pp. 1418-1419).

The last remark is certainly true. On the other hand, it is hasar-deux to see in the refined code of courtly love an adulterous game orchestrated by the feudal lord "agreeing to place his wife at the

centre of the competition" between young males. Nothing supports such a such a bold assertion, which would make every suzerain a willing cuckold

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Nietzsche's interpretation is more subtle. "Wherever powerful instincts and restrictive habits prevail, legislators must consider introducing intercalary days during which these instincts will be shackled and experience hunger once again. [...] This helps us to better understand the paradox: why it was precisely during the Christian era in Europe, and under the pressure of Christian value judgements, that the sexual instinct was sublimated into passionate love [2]. This is an interesting observation, provided we do not ignore the fact that courtly love arose as one of the feudal nobility's protests against the Church, in the name of earthly love and sensuality.

Entwining of Mars and Venus

If courtly love captures our attention, it is because it was an exceptional moment in the long history of the Western soul, an ideal whose expression is rarely found at such a level of perfection. The 12th century, the era of its flourishing, manifested with the utmost intensity the obvious nobility of a superior culture of chivalry and warfare, closely associated with that of refined eroticism. Courtly love arose at the precise confluence of Western masculinity and femininity at their peak. It reveals itself in the crossfire of the triumphant sword and Eros. And such was the condition for its flourishing.

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1. "The lady thus had the role of stimulating the ardour of the young men, of wisely (?) and judiciously appreciating the virtues of each one. She presided over the constant rivalries. She crowned the best. The best was the one who had served her best. Courtly love taught how to serve, and serving was the duty of a good vassal. " G. Duby, *op. cit.,* p. 1420.
2. F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* § 189.

With astonishing freedom, the noble lady, often married, grants her favours to the knight who has proved himself the best and most valiant in combat and quests, to the champion who risks his life, lance in hand, in his own order, the warrior order, that of accomplished masculinity. Because he has nothing left to prove in his order, because he is fully virile, the courteous knight can lower his guard and strip off his armour before the lady he loves without losing face. In the intimacy of this relationship, the man of combat can yield to refinement, gentleness, tenderness, even frivolity, without renouncing anything of what he is otherwise. By taking this path, he achieves the fulfilment of his being in its entirety, as hard and violent in action as he is delicate in the secret of courtesy. Here, the worlds of war and love are inextricably intertwined. One cannot exist without the other, as expressed in the exquisite grace of Marie de France's *Lai du Chèvrefeuille*, giving voice to Tristan, a rough knight speaking to Iseult in the most tender language of love:

> *It was the same with their two*
> *hearts As with the honeysuckle*
> *That clung to the hazel tree When*
> *it was thus laced and bound And*
> *wrapped itself around the wood,*
> *Together they can last a long*
> *time, But if one wants to separate*
> *them,*
> *The hazel tree dies quickly, The*
> *honeysuckle too.*
> *My fair lady, so it is with us,*
> *Neither you without me, nor me without you.*

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1. This is what Henry de Montherlant failed to understand, having a superficial and misogynistic interpretation of courtly love, and moreover being mistaken about the chronology: "Far from playing the noble role we believe they did in chivalry, women were one of the catalysts of its decline when, in the middle of the 12th century, their tastes became dominant and imposed the transition from the healthy and sublime Germanic literature of chansons de geste to the bland and false nonsense of the Breton romances of the Round Table. The novels of the Round Table, under the guise of gallantry, are the beginning of vulgarity; and it is
— even more serious — the morality of teenage girls. .." *Le Solstice de juin* (Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1941, in *Essays,* La Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, p. 865).

When, long afterwards, the archetype of the warrior temporarily disappears from the European horizon, love will cease to be what it was because the fundamental and complementary polarity of masculinity and femininity will cease to operate. Man, stripped of his essential dignity, will no longer deserve the conquest of which he was both the actor and the object. Yet even in a debased world, whenever a man shows himself in his preserved masculinity, he has the chance to rediscover the primordial harmony with femininity.

Primitive survival and successful differentiation

When attempting to interpret the differences between the two sexes, we cannot overlook the unique origins of the species. For hundreds of thousands of years, through their distant ancestors, men of all races were shaped by hunting, their main source of food and a necessity for survival. Forced to pursue their prey but also to defend themselves against those stronger and better armed than themselves, primitive hunters developed specific qualities that became part of the genetic makeup of the species. Before the advent of war, hunting made males solitary creatures, even in their interactions with their fellow clan members. For this 'naked ape', slower than the reindeer or the hare, less well-armed than the wolf or the jackal, hunting required thought, cunning and silence. Something of this has remained in male behaviour.

Living in the steppe or savannah, in open spaces, he had to watch over his family day and night to feed them, provide them with a safe place to sleep, and care for and protect the children. A year after birth, lion cubs and wolf pups can follow their parents on the hunt and fend for themselves. But human children mature slowly. For years, they are exposed to all kinds of threats. They therefore need a protected space where they can be breastfed, crawl, take their first steps, meet other children, and learn from the experience and knowledge of adults. This space must be defended. With the males spending all day hunting, this task fell to the mothers. Literally, at least as soon as fire was mastered, women became the guardians of the home, and this continued uninterrupted for hundreds of thousands of years. The vital need to defend the breeding ground against any incursion made them

be as aggressive as the male when necessary, while establishing the polarity of roles within the human couple. Unlike the male, devoted to silence and solitary action, the women of the clan lived together, sharing emotions and confidences, chatting and helping each other. It is easy to understand that, in the distant past, war arose from the attempts of a starving group to encroach on or seize the game-rich territory of another clan. Conflict could also arise from the intrusion of looters in search of nubile girls, or from the vendettas that these raids provoked. The instinct for survival drove people to defend their territory and women ruthlessly. Combat strengthened the cohesion of the group. It enhanced the status of victorious males in the eyes of wives and daughters. It consecrated the survivors.

We come from those who survived.

In men, in males, the taste for war is akin to the passion for hunting. These are the two fundamental activities that constitute masculinity. It is these activities that women have long celebrated, even in courtly love. Like hunting, war was a celebration. A dangerous and cruel celebration, but a celebration nonetheless. In honour of which warriors adorned themselves with the most dazzling finery.

Of course, neither hunting nor war created the differences in mentality and sensitivity between the sexes. Already visible in the animal world, these differences have only been confirmed genetically and culturally. Men and women think and feel differently. The two sexes are opposites in the way they perceive, react, communicate and love [2]. Their "code" of expression is

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1. Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1957).
2. On the fundamental difference between the sexes, American psychologist John Gray has developed a compelling theory about relationships within couples: "Men and women seem to come from different planets, so different are their languages and even their needs." This thesis is much more seriously thought out than the very *American behaviour* of the manual in which the author gives his advice, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (original version 1992, translation by Éditions du Collectionneur and J'ai Lu, 1997), would suggest. On the other hand, we know that a woman of letters, Simone de Beauvoir, made a name for herself by writing: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" *(The Second Sex,* 1949), which did not speak well of her powers of observation.

fundamentally different to the point of being incomprehensible to the other sex. Generally speaking, within a couple, the rhythms are not in sync, with men being more passionate and women more slow-paced.

Acceptance and rejection of differences

In traditional societies and in Europe until the 19th century, differences between the sexes were recognised and not contested. Roles in the family and in social life were clearly defined and separate. For this reason, differences in behaviour were accepted without major drama. The sanctity of marriage was based in part on the sacralisation of differences, as highlighted by Karen Blixen in one of her *Letters* from *Africa,* dated 13 January 1928: *"*A very great change,*"* she wrote, "which perhaps not everyone has yet fully realised, took place when 'femininity', the fact of being a woman, lost its meaning. I believe that women of old, and especially the best among them, felt themselves to be representatives of something great and sacred, by virtue of which they had influence beyond themselves and could feel proud and invested with a certain dignity, which gave them a sense of profound responsibility."

The changes that affected women's perception of themselves as women profoundly disrupted the lives of couples. "I think," says Karen Blixen, "that it was largely the meaning and sacredness of 'femininity', accepted by all, that made marriages in the past, if not truly happier, at least easier to bear. In married life, the emphasis was placed much less on sympathy or antipathy than on the relationship that could exist between 'a man and a woman' — and both found themselves, in their married life, somewhat in the position of ambassadors of two great powers, fully aware of the strengths and values that each represented, and ready to acknowledge their existence. This picture belongs to the past. For a variety of reasons due to changes in prevailing ideas and society, especially since the First World War, acceptance of differences has turned into rejection. One can cite women's work, which forces

Women often behave like men. We can highlight the obsessive effect of discourse on equality and gender diversity. We can note the extent of feminism, which pushes women to deny and despise their femininity. Conversely, we see men denying their masculinity in turn. Claiming that one sex is a victim of the other only amplifies the difficulties. Women become aggressive and men become selfish. As for married life, it can easily turn into hell. More than half of marriages end in divorce, and many of those that remain intact do so only because of habit, practical considerations or social conventions.

However, in this social desert, partly due to the prevailing hedonism, the mutual need for love has probably never been greater. But after the magical phase of initial attraction, most couples experience the disappointment of mutual misunderstanding. Having forgotten that women are not men, men expect their wives or girlfriends to think and react like them. As for women, in exactly the same way, they take it for granted that men think and act like women. On both sides, unaware of the specific code that governs the other's thoughts and feelings, mistakes are made with the best of intentions. Soon, love dies without anyone understanding why.

Unlike in the past, marriage is never an end in itself and guarantees nothing. It should be the beginning of a journey, in the initiatory sense of the word. To love is not to gaze into each other's eyes, but to look beyond oneself together, to share the same spiritual vision, the same idea of life, the same sense of beauty.

Virility and verticality

Although embellished, the concept of masculinity remains irreplaceable in defining what is masculine. It is obviously not a matter of body hair, posture or brutality. Masculinity is a disposition of the soul and temperament, which goes hand in hand with delicacy and sensitivity. In times of chaos, very feminine women can often be more "masculine", i.e. energetic, enterprising and combative, than men who have accepted being made to feel guilty about their masculinity, which they have renounced. It is no

coincidence that feminism, this revolt of women against male degradation, appeared precisely at the height of the bourgeois era, when the man of the sword disappeared as a paradigm and the advantageous businessman, the shady politician, the intellectual larva and the arrogant histrion triumphed.

In his 1886 publication *Beyond Good and Evil,* Nietzsche foresaw what would strike Western societies: "As soon as the social body appears to be established and secure against external dangers [...] powerful and dangerous instincts [...] appear immoral and are subjected to slander."

After Hiroshima, the disappearance of war as a mental horizon for Western Europeans was a cosmic catastrophe that has yet to be analysed. The initial effects were not felt everywhere to the same extent. In France, they were delayed until the early 1960s by the Cold War and the military campaigns in Indochina and Algeria. Associated since time immemorial with masculinity, the figure of the soldier or warrior had not yet been entirely condemned as morally reprehensible, ridiculous or synonymous with abhorrent violence.

From its origins in the 12th century, war had been the norm in an orderly world, while peace was a precarious and abnormal state. The reversal was brought about by mass warfare and the enormous bloodshed caused by the democratisation and industrialisation of conflict. The atrocious excesses of war in Europe between 1914 and 1945 killed the old relationship with war. They tarnished and destroyed the once-admired figure of the warrior and, as a result, masculinity. Despite changes in social relations, the figure of the bourgeois, "that false man who claims to be emancipated from everything and who is a slave to his own interests, [...] with sincerity slung over his shoulder, but lies in his heart [1]", yes, this figure had not been able to establish itself as a model.

Until the 1960s, the French Republic, Third or Fourth name, though very bourgeois, remained dependent on the war, hence

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1. François Furet, *Le Passé d'une illusion* (Robert Laffont/Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1995, pp. 20 and 26). The United States of America presents a more complex situation than Europe. From the end of the Civil War in 1865 until the terrorist attacks of September 2001, no threat of conflict had ever touched American soil. Although the United States had participated in numerous foreign wars, maintaining the most powerful forces in the world, it had previously escaped the spectre of war.

masculinity. It was a "society of men". Political office was strictly reserved for men, and the initiation of young males was still ensured by military service, despite the extreme mediocrity of the institution. In this respect, this republic was not substantially different from Mycenaean feudalism, the Greek cities of the classical period, republican or imperial Rome, Celtic or Germanic communities, medieval societies or the monarchies of the Baroque era. The continuity of the state in the masculine and European sense of the word, whatever its external form, had never ceased to exist until around 1960.

Ancient Greek society, like medieval feudalism, carefully distinguished between the political sphere *(poli),* that of virility, and the domestic sphere *(oikos),* that of femininity. Contrary to what Bonald or Fustel de Coulanges believed, the city and the state in Europe did not arise from an extension of the family, whose purpose is private, despite its role as an ethnic and social stabiliser. The order of the city, that of public affairs, is masculine. It did not arise from the family, regardless of the importance of blood ties within aristocracies and monarchies. It was established and maintained by the brotherhood of free men, who were often heads of families. It is completely separate from the domestic sphere, where women reign. It is accessed through initiation rites, the form of which has evolved, but whose meaning remained unchanged in Europe until the beginning of the 20th century. It is still a matter of tearing the young male away from the maternal society where he spent his childhood, purging him of this influence in order to liberate his virility and welcome him into the vertical society of men.

Verticality is intrinsic to masculinity and the old European order
. It manifests itself in a natural tension towards risk, difference, and altitude in all things. It despises security, tranquillity, indolence, and hedonism, which are horizontal tendencies. It distinguishes, elevates, and assigns rank. It hierarchises ideas and people. Homer's order is vertical, as are language, elegance, grammar, dungeons, and the form given to authentic creations.

Being fully woman or fully man

How can one be fully woman or fully man in a period of decay and nihilism? Faced with a certain resignation

Unlike men, women, who are linked to the duration and perpetuation of life, are often forced to take on the role of both sexes. Not only are they expected to be both lovers and mothers, but they also have to be daring sportswomen, business leaders, ministers, judges, soldiers, police officers... As for men of the same generation, they sometimes give the impression of having abdicated. Symbolically, they have exchanged the rifle of yesteryear for the pram, unless they dress up as harlots. It is therefore not surprising that sexuality invades all appearances and deserts all realities.

Wanting to be fully female or fully male necessarily leads to...
towards a return to enduring tradition, not in outward forms
that are no longer relevant, but in fidelity to the spirit.

The masculine vocation is fertile. It is realised in action and combat, in protection and generosity. Conversely, the feminine vocation is receptive. It manifests itself in the intimacy of personal relationships, through sensitivity. It is fulfilled in love, childbirth, family and intimacy. If the mother and the lover represent the two perfect types of female fulfilment, risky action and creative meditation are the two higher paths of masculinity.

Undoubtedly, each sex can occasionally do without the other. Women can live alone, even finding satisfaction in freedom, even if they do not see their femininity blossom. For their part, men readily find fulfilment in the solitude of action or contemplation, away from any female presence. For those who devote their lives to a higher calling that demands exclusive dedication, giving in to love can be seen as degrading. This is reflected in the old military adage: "A married officer loses half his value... " Men may fear being contaminated by a certain sentimentality, a certain trivial futility, which does not speak well for their ability to choose their partner wisely. Conversely, the most demanding individuals may find additional inner strength in the serenity and complementarity of a total, spiritual and channelled love.

In a chaotic society, everything conspires to thwart a desire for higher harmony, which presupposes that a genuinely masculine man and a genuinely feminine woman meet, accepting and respecting their differences. Remaining a man without allowing oneself to be emasculated, remaining a woman at work and in private life without mimicking the aggression

inherent in social life, rediscovering pride in feminine values: these are the challenges of our time.

The petulant Catherine de La Guette

Throughout history, women in our countries have known how to turn their apparent weakness into strength, and men have become, if not their slaves, at least their partners. Our legends bear witness to this, as do courtly literature and life itself. Thanks to the wealth of memoirs and written sources, the 17th century in France, still a traditional era, offers a wealth of biographies that reveal female archetypes. In very different genres, we think, for example, of Ninon de Lenclos and Madame de Maintenon, who came from humble backgrounds and had nothing to predispose them, except their intelligence and feminine talents, to play such important roles. Among the lesser-known biographies, those of Madame de La Guette and the Marquise de La Fayette reveal two forms of radiant femininity.

Catherine de La Guette would have remained unknown *had it not been for* her *memoirs.* Neither precious, nor a grande dame, nor a courtesan, she was a woman of intellect and heart, always cheerful and in good spirits. She navigated a particularly turbulent era with courage, mischief and composure. She was also a wife who was always in love and always fulfilled.

Born in 1613 into the minor landed gentry of Brie, daughter of Mr Meurdrac, Catherine is radiant with health and spirit. She receives a careful education, Parisian salons, the art of conversation, music, but also horse riding, hunting, an introduction to foil fencing and pistol shooting, which, she says, gave her the greatest pleasure. At eighteen, her qualities as a young lady, her cheerfulness and her vivacity brought her to the attention of the Duke of Angoulême at the Château de Grosbois. Her brother-in-law, Mr. de Vibrac, was the captain there. She met a young officer, an upright and ardent gentleman, Mr. de La Guette. It was love at first sight for both of them. But a gentleman's sword without fortune was too little to satisfy a father who wanted to secure his daughter's future. Mr Meurdrac therefore refused.

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1. Originally published in The Hague in 1681, the *Memoirs* of Madame de La Guette were republished in 1856, then again in 1982 in the "Le Temps retrouvé" collection by Mercure de France.

this party and wants to impose another, more in line with his idea of marriage. Wise, but confident in her instincts, Catherine allows herself to be kidnapped and married in secret after midnight, while her father sleeps peacefully in the house next door. In the 17th century, this kind of rebellion was no laughing matter. It could lead to the girl being sent to a convent and the seducer to the galleys.

Her father's wrath would only subside much later, during a stormy confrontation. The father and husband would have come to blows had it not been for Catherine's composure. Using her body as a barrier, she protected her father and wrestled the sword from her husband's grasp, "as he was unable to resist me in any way, for he loved me too much for that ." Having disarmed her husband, she simultaneously disarmed her father's anger. However, she did not make a theory out of her rebellious love. "I would never advise any girl to do what I did," she wrote in her *memoirs*. "I have since realised that it was a great mistake to disobey on the matter of marriage." A mistake she bore at the time without remorse.

A unique and shared passion

Their unique passion, shared until death, produced ten children. Speaking of her husband, she said, "He loved me in an extraordinary way, and I idolised him." The successive births did not weaken this very strong love, which was heightened by his absences. She recounts that during their time in Nördlingen, when Mr. de La Guette was sent to Paris by Condé, he took the opportunity to come and embrace her for a quarter of an hour. This, she said, gave her such "ecstasy" that, balanced as she was, she lost sleep for three months.

However, her daily concerns kept her busy. Monsieur de La Guette was always away on campaign. He could be found in Holland, Lorraine or Spain, first fighting for Louis XIII and Richelieu, then, after 1648, for the princes' party during the Fronde. With tenderness and realism, she raised and buried her children. On horseback, she watches over her lands and protects her people from the mercenaries and marauders who sack the country, pillage, rape and kill indiscriminately in this period of endemic warfare. But this dangerous existence suits her. She takes it on cheerfully, even carrying out a dangerous mission on behalf of the Queen during the Fronde.

Between visits from her warrior husband and two childbirths, while keeping watch over her estate, she does not forget to enjoy herself. One carnival evening, disguised as a man, she is a guest at her sister's house in Grosbois, surrounded by cheerful company. Suddenly, there is a knock at the gate. It is

Mr. de La Guette, still steaming from a long ride. He enters. "He looked everywhere for me and had trouble finding me. I took pleasure in this. Finally, I said to him, 'Here I am; if you are missing a cavalier in your company, I am fully equipped, as you can see, and ready to serve you.' ' He was delighted and replied in the most gallant manner. Then, 'grilled meats, capilotades and all sorts of good things were prepared to treat the newcomer'. She approved of this welcome, but she was expecting something else. 'I was eager for the tablecloth to be lifted so that I could go and talk to my husband at my leisure in our bed.'

Modest without ever being prudish, Mme de La Guette hides nothing of the passionate love that always unites the two spouses. After the siege of Nancy, the officer is granted leave. "I believe he would have liked his horse to have wings, but as he had people with him, he had to go at a walking pace. He finally arrived, and there was nothing but affection on both sides. I am not being coy here, for a woman cannot love her husband too much. Say what you will, I do not think much of those who act sweet because they are not to be trusted."

Reading the *Memoirs,* one senses that the spell will never be broken. Catherine does not hide the fact that she once suffered from jealousy. The accepted norm in society at the time was not to feel such emotions towards one's husband. But Monsieur de La Guette was his wife's lover. He remained so until his death in 1665. Catherine almost lost her mind. She transferred her love to her children, mainly to Louis, her eldest, who was the spitting image of his father. When he was ten years old, her husband took him with him to train him in the art of war. In 1671, Louis was given command of the Nassau cavalry regiment, stationed in Holland. His mother followed him to The Hague. There, she learned of the death of her beloved son during the second siege of Maastricht in 1673. Plunged into utter despair, she was given up for dead. However, she survived, but all trace of her was lost after the publication of her *memoirs* in 1681. In them, she had revealed the essentials, leaving posterity one of the most beautiful portraits of a woman one could imagine.

Madame de La Fayette and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld

The Marquise de La Fayette offers a very different profile and a much more compared to that of Catherine de La Guette. After a marriage of convenience, she lived with the Duke of La Rochefoucauld in an exemplary love that was not merely cerebral. Born of the mind, this love nourished by it until the end [1]

Despite her soon-to-be illustrious name, the Marquise de La Fayette (1634–1693) was born into commoner status. Marie-Madeleine Pioche belonged to the wealthy lower middle class. Her parents were skilled at securing high-level protection, notably that of the Duchess of Aiguillon, Richelieu's niece. Widowed prematurely, Mme Pioche married Renaud-René de Sévigné, uncle of the letter writer, in her second marriage. The Pioche family entered the ranks of the nobility and high society. Imitating other more illustrious ladies, Marie-Madeleine's mother opened one of those literary salons that were better than Molière suggested. Gilles Ménage honoured her with his presence and wit. This was very beneficial for the young girl. Through her connections, the former Mrs Pioche married her daughter to an unattractive nobleman from Auvergne, a childless widower, Count François de La Fayette.

It was a marriage of convenience, as was the norm at the time. The matrimonial union was not based on love. It was an arrangement, if not an investment, an insurance policy against the material uncertainties of life. The new Mme de La Fayette took after her family. She always proved to be a wise manager, agreeing to go into exile in Auvergne for a time. Through her correspondence, she did not allow her Parisian friends to forget her. In a letter to Gilles Ménage, she shows a very reasonable mind and suggests the control she was able to exert over her husband: " The care I take of my house keeps me busy and amuses me greatly; and as I have no sorrows, my husband adores me and I love him dearly, and I am my own mistress, I assure you that I am very happy with my life..." Two sons were born of this marriage, but they did not occupy her excessively.

Returning to the capital in 1661, she settled there permanently, without her husband, who was never heard of again. "I am a mistress abso-

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1. Claude Dulong, *Amoureuses du Grand Siècle* (Le Rocher, Paris, 1996). In this book, which is worth much more than its title suggests, Ms Dulong devotes a long and beautiful portrait to the Marquise de La Fayette.

read," she said. She would remain so, particularly when it came to matters of money. In 1659, she published her first work, the only one she ever signed. It was a portrait of her friend, Mme de Sévigné. Other books followed, published anonymously, until *La Princesse de Clèves* in 1678, which, with its sober form and psychological depth, revolutionised the art of the novel for a long time to come.

In one of the salons she frequented, she met the Duke of La Rochefoucauld. From 1662 onwards, they were seen together in the most prestigious houses. Marie-Madeleine was thirty years old. He was twenty years older. Backed by a great name, an adventurous military past, and the sovereign air of a grand seigneur, he still cut a fine figure. His courtesy was proverbial, as was his wit, as evidenced by his *Maxims*. Their pessimism, tinged with Jansenism, greatly shocked Mme de La Fayette, but did not turn her away from him. Since the failure of the Fronde, the duke had lost his feudal hopes and many of his illusions about women. At the time of his passion for Mme de Longueville, the most capricious of the Frondeuses, who had spectacularly betrayed him, he had written:

> *To deserve her heart and please her beautiful eyes, I waged*
> *war on the king; I would have waged war on the gods.*

M. de La Rochefoucauld was saddled with a wife as discreet as M. de La Fayette. This wife had the tact to disappear in 1670. It was in the company of Mme de La Fayette that the duke showed himself in town. Through her, he came to know those great feelings of love that she had wanted to protect herself from by insisting that she could never experience them.
"He gave me wit, but I reformed his heart," she would later say. Judging by Mr. de La Rochefoucauld's later writings, this reform was confined to the intimate sphere.

An exceptional love

How far did their relationship go? Certainly beyond friendship. From the memoirs of the time, we know that they were inseparable. "You are true," he said to his friend. In front of a "true" woman, he could lay down his armour and open his heart, without fear of weariness or betrayal. For her part, Madame de La Fayette managed to overcome her fear of

the passionate love she had felt since her adolescence, a love that "eats away at the heart, obsesses the mind, kills peace of mind, before destroying the being itself". Because there was first a strong intellectual attraction between them, they then let their hearts and senses speak. "I believe," wrote their friend Madame de Sévigné, "that no passion can surpass the strength of such a bond." And everything suggests that this bond was not platonic.

Their exceptional love came to an end with the death of Mr. de La Roche-Foucauld in March 1680, after fifteen years of happiness. "Where will Mme de La Fayette find such a friend, such company, such gentleness?" lamented Mme de Sévigné, adding: "Poor Mme de La Fayette no longer knows what to do with herself. " She also said that she was "insensitive to everything," including religion. In fact, not once is the name of God mentioned by the Princess of Clèves.

Madame de La Fayette passed away thirteen years after her friend.

Extraordinarily, they had experienced a love as strong as passion, but free from the suffering of passion. They had granted each other only happiness, their mutual constancy nourished by the inexhaustible source of their spirit. This happy, strong and serene love was the antithesis of the desperate passion and raging jealousy described by Madame de La Fayette in *La Princesse de Clèves*. The novel was written under the watchful eye of the author of *Maximes*. By a stroke of good fortune, the two lovers were able to describe torments that they themselves had never inflicted upon each other.

Harmony and voluptuousness

There has been talk of a metaphysics of sex [2], meaning that true experiences of love and pleasure lie beyond

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1. Claude Dulong provides a wealth of convincing evidence on this point. After the death of his wife, Monsieur de La Rochefouaulx took to spending all his afternoons at Madame de La Fayette's house. They were often the sole guests at friends' houses, where one can assume that they did not devote themselves solely to conversation. Several allusions by Mme de Sévigné suggest that she was not fooled, while respecting their exemplary discretion.
2. Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of Sex* (1958, French translation published by Éditions de L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne, 1989).

physical, distinct from reproduction, and cannot be interpreted in biological terms or by simple sexual mechanics. Where does the mystery and powerful fascination of eros come from? Where does the vibration that draws a man and a woman to each other to the point of ecstasy come from? What is it, if not magnetism arising from an essential polarity, then from an accord arising from this polarity? Physical attraction does not explain everything. It is only part of a much broader mutual seduction, made up of the meeting of two complementary principles, as well as intimate complicity and harmony of sensitivity, intellect and spirituality. Physical attraction may arise later, prompted by a mutual and intense seduction of the personality that illuminates the body as if under the effect of an inner radiance.

The ultimate accord manifests itself in a higher state of consciousness that gradually elevates desire to a kind of magical intoxication. The height of pleasure comes through "the slow and gradual familiarity achieved through the gaze, the voice, touch, and finally physical cohabitation, preceding carnal climax." This awakening also requires a great deal of respect and delicacy. Each person must overcome the obstacles imprinted in the unconscious by an ancient puritanical culture. The harmony between a man and a woman, the state of fusion they achieve, requires the prior discovery of an intimate spiritual complicity without which voluptuousness inevitably dies out. And this has never been expressed in the West with more wisdom and force than in the courtly imagination of the 12th century, born of love and the sword, of Celtic wonder and a certain Christian mysticism that corrected the paganism of the senses and mentalities.

1. Marguerite Yourcenar, *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur* (Gallimard, Paris, 1983).

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Nihilism and the destruction of nature

During the first third of the 20th century, several writers and philosophers attempted to imagine what the future would be like in a world entirely dominated by technology, economic imperatives and nihilism. One of the most perceptive was Aldous Huxley.

In 1932, he published *Brave New World,* a science fiction novel set around the year 2500 AD. The author thought he was anticipating the evolution of the economy, science and society by five or six centuries. Wrong! In 1946, in the preface to a new edition, Huxley estimated that we had moved incredibly quickly towards his description. Three or four generations would be enough to bridge the gap between fiction and reality. This time, he was not mistaken.

In the new era of *Brave New World,* years were counted from Ford, the inventor of consumer society: "The higher the wages, the easier the sale." In fact, the standard of living increased and, as a result, so did everyone's dependence on the system. The planet of *Brave New World* is ruled by an oligarchy. Technology reigns supreme, as does order. Great progress has been made thanks to genetics. Reproduction is no longer left to the family, which has disappeared. It is carried out through cloning. Sexuality is now nothing more than a game, but its function is of paramount importance. As long as people play along, the social order remains undisturbed. Unlimited sexual licence tames males and compensates for the disappearance of other freedoms. At the same time, the system cultivates a horror of beauty and gratuitousness. Children are taught to hate books and flowers. Nothing could be wiser. Books could awaken critical thinking, and a love of nature does not encourage the consumption of goods.

Since everything must be planned for, in case of failure, an effective tranquilliser called "soma" is prescribed.

Brave New World

About fifteen years after Huxley, George Orwell published his own equally famous dystopian novel, *1984.* It was clearly inspired by the communist model he had before his eyes—it was 1949. But Orwell outlined a development that also affected liberal societies. The universal surveillance exercised by *Big Brother* and his telescreens to inform the thought police can now be seen at work with its specialised "observatories" and the giant listening devices of Echelon and the Internet. Informant culture is encouraged, and intellectual terrorism works effectively to neutralise any incorrect thinking. Four major ministries dominated society in *1984:* Truth, Peace, Love and Plenty. These ministries of lies have proliferated.

A brief retrospective of prescient analyses cannot ignore The *Society of the Spectacle,* an essay published by Guy Debord in 1967 from a fairly Marxist perspective. Without the imagination of previous authors, Debord developed an interesting theory of market society. However, he did not reveal its underlying logic. His theory of the spectacle, i.e. of lies through simulacra and images, described one of the instruments of the system, but without penetrating its nature. This undoubtedly explains the flattering reception given to his book, a privilege denied to the Russian essayist Edward Limonov for his *Grand hospice occidental* [2] , a provocative pamphlet that hit the mark much better.

For similar reasons, an eloquent silence greeted the pertinent essay published in 1999 in L'Âge d'Homme by Flora Montcorbier under the title *Le Communisme de marché (Market Communism).* Its author is both a philosopher and an economist. With vigorous clarity, she updated and went beyond the

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1. Jean Sévillia, *Le Terrorisme intellectuel* (Perrin, Paris, 2000); Éric Werner, *L'Après-démocratie* (L'Âge d'Homme, Lausanne-Paris, 2001). Charles Champetier, *La Nouvelle inquisition. Essai sur le terrorisme intellectuel et la police de la pensée* (Le Labyrinthe, Paris, 1993).
2. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1993.

intuitions of his predecessors. It provided a convincing interpretation of the organised chaos that characterises Western society in the advanced stages of nihilism, although this concept is not used.

The Making of Zombies

No one before her had bothered to understand the curious outcome of the Cold War, a pivotal stage in the great upheaval. Who had emerged victorious from this false war? The United States, of course, and the market economy. But also the religion of Humanity, one, uniform and universal. A religion common to both adversaries of the previous day. And that was not their only affinity.

What did the communists of yesteryear want? They wanted the pooling of humanity's wealth and rational management to ensure abundance and peace for all. They also wanted to create a *new man,* capable of desiring these benefits, a rational and universal man, freed from all the constraints of roots, nature and culture. Finally, they wanted to satisfy their hatred of concrete men, bearers of differences, and their hatred of old Europe, multiple and tragic.

And what does the American West want? Well, the same thing. The difference lies in the methods. Rejecting planning by coercion, the American system sees the market as the main factor in economic rationality and change. Hence the name *"market communism"* given to it by Flora Montcorbier.

Market communism, another name for globalism, shares not only with its former Soviet enemy a radiant vision of the final goal. To change the world, it too must change man, creating the homo *economicus* of the future, the *zombie,* the man of nihilism, emptied of content, possessed by the spirit of the market and universal humanity. The zombie is multiplying before our eyes. He is happy
"because the spirit of the market tells him that happiness consists in satisfying all his desires". And his desires, being those of the market, are only aroused to be satisfied.

But there is resistance. As the plan is grandiose,
No expense is spared in breaking them. Those stubborn souls who

recognise the benefits of the system can expect the fate of Iraq from 1991 or Serbia in 1999. The world is full of potential perverts who must be subdued or re-educated.

In order to zombify Europeans, once so rebellious, the advantages of immigration were discovered. The results are excellent. The permanent settlement of immigrant communities accelerates the proletarianisation of the immigrants themselves, but also of native workers, the "little whites". Deprived of the protection of a coherent nation, treated as suspects by the public authorities, denounced by the moral authorities, the natives are losing their last remaining community immunities. They are becoming "naked proletarians", potential zombies.

To overcome these difficulties, the stroke of genius was to use former communist intellectuals, their fellow travellers and their relatives. They provided the important inquisitorial clergy of the religion of Humanity, this new opium of the people, whose high masses are structured around football. A religion that has its tablets of law with human rights, in other words the rights of the zombie, which are the duties of man. It has its dogmas and its secular arm, the American army, its European auxiliaries and international or national courts. One of its favourite tools is the simultaneous exploitation of Europeans' collective guilt and their compassionate tendencies. "Victimology" has become the system of legitimisation for a society that is not very legitimate. To make people forget what is questionable about it, it sets itself up as a permanent tribunal of a criminalised past. In this way, it kills two birds with one stone. By denouncing the 'crimes' of the past or those of exotic dictatorships, it cheaply awards itself a certificate of high moral character. By comparison, it suggests that, despite its corruption and flaws, it is still the most moral, and therefore the best.

But even the best-designed systems are subject to unforeseen circumstances. We thus see "victimology" sometimes backfiring on its users.

The thought police hunt down Evil, which is to say, being different, individualised, loving life, nature, the past, cultivating a critical mind and not sacrificing oneself to the universal deity. Evil also means not being fooled and seeing that the system, in the words of Flora Montcorbier, "appeals to liberal beliefs, moralising humanism and compensatory environmentalism to mask the inevitable and essential nature of its destruction of man, nature and social life".

Through genetic manipulation and industrial pollution on a global scale, the destruction of nature is well underway.

From technical arrogance to disasters

Warnings are completely futile. Nothing seems capable of limiting the mad spiral of nihilism applied to technology. From marvellous discoveries to biological "advances", interventions in living organisms are driving the world towards a predictable abyss. They are fuelled by the desire for power among scientists, the greed for financial gain, and the demands of a public that has been promised the moon.

Touted to the naive as a prospect for salvation, the "biotechnical revolution", with its cloning and genetic manipulation, will contribute to catastrophes of unimaginable but certain proportions. Man is not up to the task. Despite all his pride, his "big" brain is far too small to master the complexity of life. From a nihilistic perspective, nature is viewed as a foreign body subject to unlimited exploitation. The scientific method consists of mechanically breaking nature down into partial and quantifiable phenomena. Applied to biology, systems theory gives a terribly false and simplified picture of living organisms. Biotechnologies are nothing more than empirical tinkering, but they are highly profitable in the short term. Each isolated success only exacerbates the damage done to the whole. We can trust Doctor Faust. He will blow everything up. With new incurable diseases and a few so-called disasters.

"natural," the dawn of the 21st century gives us a glimpse of what the future holds. And we can rely on experts and specialists in forecasting.

The engineers and architects who, around 1975, designed the two giant towers of the World Trade Centre in New York wanted to make them the tallest in the world. They embodied Faustian pride in its most childish form. On the morning of Tuesday, 11 September 2001, they disappeared in a matter of moments after being struck by two hijacked airliners, themselves symbols of hyper-technology. All that remained was a pile of rubble and twisted beams covering dead bodies. While the Parthenon, Stonehenge and our cathedrals had withstood

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centuries, historical disasters and a few bombings, the sudden collapse of these glass castles stood as an eloquent sign of their era.

Experts had guaranteed that the two towers were storm-proof, even capable of withstanding a plane crash. We saw what happened! In a matter of minutes on that Tuesday in September 2001, the largest and most powerful of all empires, confident in its invulnerability and its gigantic arsenal, which ruled the seas and the skies, the wealth of the world and the imagination of subjugated peoples, this empire that mastered science and technology, suddenly found itself kagi-ised by the actions of a tiny group of fanatics whose only weapons were derisory box cutters, their will and their practical intelligence. As usual, the experts had neither predicted nor warned of anything.

The same kind of experts also guaranteed that the nuclear power plants built in large numbers from the 1960s onwards would be safe from all risks. The premonitory tragedy of the World Trade Centre temporarily dampened these claims. Then technical arrogance took over again, waiting for the next disaster.

Humans and nature

Born in Missouri in the summer of 2000, a pair of black American twin girls were soon sold for a fortune on the Internet. Belinda and Kimberley were not the first babies to be traded by their mother online, via a specialised *broker*. What was new was that these children were sold twice. First to a Californian couple, then to a Welsh couple. Each couple placed their order on their computer and paid. A story of our times.

While the British tabloid press was making headlines with this edifying story, in the same year, 2000, 1,700 deer were quietly slaughtered in Canada, victims of a variant of BSE (mad cow disease). The wilderness was no longer immune to the morbid manipulations of technology and money. Farmed salmon are not immune, nor are pheasants or partridges. Wild game par excellence and mysterious migrants, woodcocks have been found in France irradiated by radioactivity from Chernobyl. Is nature no longer what it used to be?

Nature, a beautiful word and often an illusion! What exactly is it? Is the rose that bloomed this morning in my garden nature? Yes and no. Yes, because it could perhaps live and renew itself without my help. No, insofar as it is a "creation" of knowledgeable gardeners, without whom it would not be what it is. So, what is nature? Answer: it is that which exists and lives by its own movement, without human intervention or despite it. According to Aristotle's definition, it is that which possesses within itself the principle of becoming. The wind, the tides, vipers, woodcocks, deer, wasps, foxes, wasteland, and water running off after rain are all part of nature. But neither the rose garden, nor the field of genetically modified wheat, nor the sanitised orchard are entirely natural, and they will become less and less so. They are domesticated nature, under perfusion, the only kind that humans tolerate.

Contrary to legend, humans are rarely friends with true nature, except for hunter-gatherer peoples. More often than not, they distrust it, they fear it, even when they claim to protect it. Today's men love nature in poems or in manicured gardens, that is to say, in its negation. When it is real, alive, disturbing, they flee from it and destroy it. It repulses and frightens them. In ancient times, as sung by Hesiod and Virgil, our ancestors respected nature even though they feared its dangers. They had an intimate awareness of the unity of the world, which they perceived as a harmony of conflicts. They knew that they themselves were dependent on the forces that governed its balance. Nature had a soul. It was animated. It manifested its universal divinity in all things. The woods, moors and springs were populated by nymphs, goblins and fairies. And men respected their sacredness. Having slain the dragon and tasted its blood, Siegfried understood the song of the chickadees. In our myths and rituals, we sought a coincidence with the image of an orderly cosmos. The circular layout of the solar temple at Stonehenge thus reflected the order of the world symbolised by the course of the sun, its eternal return at the end of the night and at the end of winter. It represented the circle of life linking birth to death. It also represented the eternal cycle of the seasons. Despite the break with this ancient order, the construction of Romanesque and Gothic churches still responded to the old symbolism. Built on ancient sacred sites, they ensured its perpetuation. They continued to be "oriented" in relation to the sun.

rising up, and their sculptures were all teeming with a fantastic bestiary. In its impressive splendour, the stone forest of Gothic naves was intended to be a brilliant transposition of the ancient sacred forests.

Yet a fundamental break was underway, dissociating humans from nature and postulating the vain and senseless idea that the universe had been created for man alone. By defining man as "master and possessor of nature" and seeing animals as "machines", Descartes merely theorised what had been prepared by the separation from nature inherent in the religions of the Book. He expressed the logic of nihilism, anticipating technical arrogance and the manipulation of living beings. He heralded the universe of the universal megapolis, built on hatred of nature.

The more 'modern' a person is, i.e. urbanised, the more their hatred of nature grows. They believe they love animals by condemning hunters, for example, without realising that they are obeying a moral code of compassion that is foreign to nature. In reality, what they hate in hunters is the animality, true nature and savagery that still remains in them.

The religion of decorated caves

Our distant ancestors, the predatory peoples of prehistory, shared a way of life based on a sense of harmony between humans, nature and animals. Hunters survived only by imitating animals. The animal world not only provided them with protein, skins and furs, it was also a model, unrelated to good or evil. This view of things is difficult for "modern" minds, shaped differently, to understand. It is a view that is diametrically opposed to our belief that man is the centre of creation, master of nature, through relationships of power and submission, even annihilation.

For more than 20,000 years, in the decorated caves of southern France and Spain, on rock engravings from the Urals to the Pyrenees, a very specific art form has manifested the symbolic communication between humans and the animal world they admired. It expresses an early and strong religiosity. Humans are almost never depicted on the sacred walls

of the caves. If the paintings and drawings, in their incredible aesthetic perfection, celebrate anything, it is a religion that is by no means anthropocentric. It is a religion in which the splendour of animal life is celebrated. Where the representation of animals promotes communication with the spirit of nature.

Two fractures profoundly altered what connected European man to nature and animality.

The Neolithic "revolution" left no room for hunter-gatherer peoples and their representations. Insidiously, animal husbandry and nascent agriculture showed that savagery could be the enemy of the herder and the farmer, that is, of men. This tremendous change was reflected in art. Human representation made its appearance with the mother goddesses of chthonic cults, and later with Greek statuary. The idealised image of man occupied a central place as a reflection of divinity. Wild animals were no longer the model they had been in the time of Chauvet and Lascaux. Man becomes his own model. However, he remains in communication with the spirits of nature, of which the gods are manifestations, as suggested by Cernunnos, the archaic god with deer antlers from the Celtic pantheon. The gods symbolise the power of the elements in the manner of Poseidon-Neptune, Aeolus, Demeter and Zeus himself. They are also associated with animality and the preservation of nature, such as Apollo and Artemis.

The eternal return of Diana

Artemis, Diana to the Romans, was one of the twelve great Olympian deities. She should not be confused with Artemis Ephesia of the Hellenistic period, who resembles an Asian Cybele. The Greek Artemis is a young virgin with nimble feet and blonde hair, skilled in the use of the bow, whose short skirt leaves her knees exposed. She is described in the Homeric hymns composed nearly thirty centuries ago: "I sing of the impetuous Artemis with golden arrows, the pure and respected virgin who strikes agile deer with her arrows, the glorious sister of Apollo. I sing of the light goddess who runs through the mountains to the dark forests, drawing her bow, all for the joy of the hunt... " Twin sister of Apollo, the sun god often associated with the

Deer, she was the daughter of Zeus and the beautiful Leto, who was turned into a doe to escape Hera's vengeance. She was greatly revered in Greece, as she later was by the Romans and then by the Gauls, who fervently adopted Diana, as her cult was similar to that of the Celtic goddess Arduina, the Irish Dé-Ana, who was later Christianised as Saint Anne. Artemis-Diana was later revived in the Arthurian novels as the fairy Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, guardian of üxcaJibur, tutor to Lancelot, and possessive lover of Merlin.

The myth of the huntress goddess was indestructible. It experienced a prodigious revival during the Renaissance and the rediscovery of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Revived by Italian poets, it was introduced to France by Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf and Louise Labé, the
"Belle Cordière". The character of Diane de Poitiers flourished there. The eldest daughter of Jean de Poitiers, married at thirteen to Louis de Brézé, Grand Seneschal of Normandy, widowed at thirty-two, she became a few years later the mistress of the future Henry II, crowned in 1547. Nineteen years older than her royal lover, Diane reigned supreme over the king. Catherine de Medici, the king's wife, had to step aside in the face of the influence of the favourite, who surrounded herself with a glittering court. It was for her that the king had Philibert Delorme build the Château d'Anet, entirely dedicated to hunting and the mythological transposition of their love. At the end of the following century, the charming and lively Marie-Adélaïde de Savoie, Duchess of Burgundy and mother of the future Louis XV, was also depicted as Diana. Her statue by Coysevox is kept at the Louvre Museum.

The myth of Artemis and Actaeon

Goddess of the forest and the night, *dea silvarum,* as Ovid calls her, wearing a crescent moon in her golden hair, Diana-Artemis is always accompanied by a stag or does. She is both the protector of wildlife and the embodiment of hunting. These are two complementary functions that have always been juxtaposed in ancient times. Unlike Aphrodite or Artemis of Ephesus, the Greek Artemis is not associated with love and fertility. Instead, she is the goddess of childbirth, the protector of pregnant women, pregnant females, vigorous children, young animals, and for

to say everything, about life before the stains of age Her image fits with the idea that the Ancients had of nature. They did not see it in the sweet manner of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Sunday strollers. They knew it to be formidable to the weak and inaccessible to pity. It is through force that Diana-Artemis defends her modesty and virginity, that is to say, the inviolable realm of savagery. She ferociously killed all mortals who offended her or neglected her rites. Such was the case with two rabid hunters, Orton and Actaeon. By insulting her, they had transgressed the limits beyond which the order of the world descends into chaos.

In the Greek legend recounted by Ovid in Book III of *Metamorphoses,* Actaeon is a frenzied hunter, possessed by the urge to kill. It was said that he boasted of being more skilled at hunting than Artemis herself. He was what we would call today a "meat eater," and a braggart to boot.

While he was travelling through the hills with his pack of dogs to hunt a deer, chance led him to a spring where the goddess was bathing naked with her companions. Seized by a sacrilegious desire, the young man approached, saying: "How beautiful you are! Let me admire you!" Irritated at being exposed to the gaze and lust of a mortal, the goddess threw water in the reckless man's face. He was immediately transformed into a stag. No longer recognising him, his dogs pounced on him and devoured him...

Actaeon had just been punished in a terrible way, but for what?

Of course, this myth should not be interpreted literally, but rather by discovering its symbolic meaning. Artemis' modesty and virginity are an allegory of the prohibitions that protect nature. The vengeance of the *dea silvarum* is that of the world order threatened by excessive desire, hubris, and excess. Actaeon is punished.

— and how! — for having transgressed the limits of cynegetic passion, for having symbolised that which, in human intervention, threatens the free and wild nature represented by Artemis. In Greek philosophy, as in Celtic literature, excessive passion leads those who succumb to it to their own destruction. It was therefore commendable that the *dea silvarum* cruelly punished those who defied the prohibitions. The fate of Actaeon is a timely reminder that man is not the master of nature.

This is a truth that Ovid, like all the Ancients, understood deeply. In his world of representations, all living species have the

same original source, come from the same depths and are therefore intimately linked, which justifies his concept of metamorphosis. This is a new birth through which a living form returns to its original matrix to take on a new form. The kinship of all beings thus allows humans to transform themselves into animals, trees or flowers. This is the recurring theme of *Metamorphoses*. It will also frequently be that of Celtic and medieval legend, despite the separation between man and nature gradually imposed by Christianity.

Desert religion and anthropocentrism

The idea that man is at the centre of the cosmos and that nature was created to satisfy his appetites and whims only took on unpredictable proportions in the wake of Christian anthropocentrism, which inherited this view from the religions of the desert [i] "The New Testament was born in a very narrow cultural context; its image of the world is not fundamentally different from that of the Old Testament; from the point of view of the natural sciences, the knowledge of the Greeks had already surpassed it centuries before it was even written, which unfortunately led to the prolongation of Jewish anthropocentrism despite all common sense [2]."

It is interesting that this observation was not made by an opponent of Christianity, but by a Catholic theologian, Eugen Drewermann, which proves that we should never despair: "Faith in the absolute truth of Christianity cannot and must not mean perpetuating the errors and biases of a given civilisation that date back to the founding of the Church. Or, to put it in very blunt terms: the desert religion of the Old Testament, elevated by Christianity to the status of a universal Church message, could indeed turn the whole world into a desert."

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1. Protagoras' aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things," does not mean that man is central to the universe. It means that reality exists only through the interpretation given to it by men.
2. Eugen Drewermann, *Le Progrès meurtrier* (French translation, Stock, Paris, 1993, p. 136. The original German edition dates from 1981).

Unable to expect anything from a barren and unforgiving natural environment, the nomads of the arid wilderness of Sinai pinned their hopes on imploring a fearsome and all-powerful deity, born of the imagination of their priests. A stranger to the cosmos, the one god, protector of the tribe, concentrated all that was sacred in his person and condemned as impious the sacredness of springs, woods and their familiar inhabitants, that is to say, the benefits granted by nature outside of his intervention: "There is no god but God."

Having adopted this God, while profoundly modifying him, having made him a universal deity, transplanted from his original habitat, nascent Christianity took up his anathemas. The new religion decreed the death of the spirits of nature. It made nature a soulless, 'inanimate' thing that could be used and abused with impunity. With nymphs, fairies and goblins banished from the moors, woods and rivers, nature was desacralised and could be studied, exploited and manipulated like inert matter.

Free thoughts of a theologian

Convinced of this belief, Westerners initially seemed to benefit from the upheaval that elevated them above other beings and the cosmos. Just as man was subject to God, nature was subject to man. This is what the Scriptures said: "Subdue it. ' That was the end of the friendly agreement with the cosmos. Having become half-mad with presumption, the new 'master and possessor' of nature, the Faustian man described by Spengler, did so much that by the dawn of the 21st century he had brought it to the brink of destruction.

According to Eugen Drewermann, by applying the idea of providence, which initially concerned only the chosen people, to the destiny of the individual, early Christianity radicalised, to a certain extent, the anthropocentrism of the Old Testament. "The pattern of sin and punishment, which allowed the prophets to interpret the history of Israel with its catastrophes and triumphs, was projected by Christianity onto the fate of the individual struggling with nature: from then on, illness and suffering were to be considered the consequences of sin and transgression. Weaving together the thread of evolution that led from Christianity to the atheism of the Enlightenment, the theologian showed the consequences

for each individual's break with nature: "Christianity, which has set human beings against the soothing influence of nature, must now face the consequences of its efforts: the result is a man who, out of fear of himself and his most natural instincts, no longer trusts either himself or the natural world around him. [...] Having proved incapable of accepting the simple facts of nature, such as illness, old age and death, Christianity has engendered a mentality which, following the 'death' of God due to the despair of disappointed pity, continues to sacrifice itself to the old anthropocentric morality, striving to anchor the promises of salvation on earth '.

Medieval resistance of forest deities

Like any spiritual upheaval, the one described by the Catholic theologian was slow to produce effects. Beyond the 11th century AD, the animal was still frequently represented in religious statuary. Romanesque and then Gothic art gave it a place that was by no means negligible. It was often transposed into a mythical creature by the Celtic imagination that was reborn in the Middle Ages. Celtic legends show that the ability to communicate with sacred animals had not been lost. As in Greek mythology, the Celtic gods of hunting protected animals while favouring hunters. Medieval literature, chansons de geste and novels from the Breton cycle, brimming with Celtic spirituality, invariably elaborate on the theme of the forest, a perilous world, a refuge for spirits and fairies, but also a source of purification for the tormented soul of the knight, whether he be called Lancelot, Perceval or Yvain. By pursuing a deer or a boar, the noble hunter appropriates its spirit. By eating the heart of the game, he appropriates its very strength. In the *Lai de Tyolet,* by killing the deer, the hero becomes capable of understanding the spirit of the wild nature he has penetrated.

However, efforts had not been lacking to demonise and destroy the great emotional forces of the ancient tradition. From the early Middle Ages onwards, one of the concerns of the episcopate had been to combat pagan practices associated with trees and springs. Writing his

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1. Eugen Drewermann, *op. cit.,* pp. 110, 136-138.

Historia Francorum at the end of the 6th century, Gregory of Tours thundered against the Frankish people, saying that they "have always been seen to devote themselves to fanatical cults; they do not know God; they make images of forests, birds, wild beasts and other elements; they worship them; they offer sacrifices to them as if they were gods". Sacred trees were particularly targeted, following the example of Saint Martin, the evangeliser of Gaul. But sometimes the Church chose to compromise, applying the instructions given in 596 by Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury, who was sent to evangelise the people of Britain: "As long as the nation sees its ancient places of worship remain, it will be more inclined to go there, out of habit, to worship the true God." Places of worship were therefore annexed and familiar gods were Christianised, transformed into local saints.

Despite its efforts and inflexibility, mainly in Saxony, Scandinavia and the Baltic States, the Church struggled to eradicate beliefs associated with trees and forests. In the 13th century, Gervais de Tilbury used the term *sylvains* to refer to forest spirits. This word refers, of course, to *sylva,* but also to Sylvanus, the Gallo-Roman deity, master of the forest, equivalent to the god Pan. Sylvanus had a temple in Rome on the Aventine Hill, although he spent most of his time in the forest. The sylvans were also the "Green Men" from Romanesque and Gothic sculptures. They referred to rebellious spirits that the Church had been unable to integrate or devalue.

Three types of woodland creatures proved particularly resilient: elves, nymphs and fairies. Elves originated in Germanic and Celtic mythology. Directly associated with trees, they gradually took on a beneficial significance. Absent from courtly novels, they appeared in France around the 15th century, at the end of the medieval period. They later enjoyed immense poetic fortune during the Romantic era.

The eternity of nymphs and fairies

Nymphs, originating in ancient Greece, were adopted by medieval Europe. They were the sisters of the Muses. They were also called Dryads, Orestiads, Naiads, Oceanids... Born of water and oak foliage, they were the embodiment of grace and feminine beauty. They suggested a fresh and velvety image

of the woman that men love to caress. Knowing that they lived in the heart of trees, Ronsard defended them against the axes of the woodcutters:

> *Listen, woodcutter, stop your axe! It is not*
> *wood you are cutting down;*
> *Can't you see the blood dripping from the force,*
> *from the nymphs who lived beneath the hard bark...*

Whether known or anonymous, the fairies also miraculously managed to triumph over the demonisation of the spirits of the forest. In vain did the Church denounce them as creatures of the Devil, symbols of lust and adultery. Nothing worked. In the forest, the "Good Ladies" continued their benevolent work. Every knight errant hoped to meet them. But it was they who chose. At the fountain of Soif Jolie, like Melusine, they gave themselves to the chosen one, lavishing him with every pleasure and ensuring his fortune and glory, provided he respected a secret pact. The founder of the Lusignan dynasty, the young Count Raymondin, broke the pact and saw Melusine fly away forever. It is also said that Gerbert d'Aurillac, who became Pope around the year 1000 under the name of Sylvester II, a philosopher, astronomer and somewhat of a magician, was the lover of the fairy Méridiana, who ensured his fortune...

Among all the fairies, one of the most honoured was Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, already mentioned. She was the protector and godmother of Lancelot, whose education she oversaw. Her parentage is revealed in the novel *Lancelot "*in prose*"*. Before becoming a fairy, "she was the daughter of a vavas-seur [vassal] from a very noble family named Dyonas. Diana, the goddess of the forest, often came to talk to him, as he was her godson". Thus, a link was forged between Diana and the fairy. It is said that Viviane inherited the powers of the goddess of the woods.

Some men of the Church were not insensitive to the beauty and sacredness of the forest. The great Bernard of Clairvaux even uttered words bordering on heresy: "You will find more in the forests than in books. Trees and rocks will teach you things that no teacher will tell you." Others would have been burned for less. One had to enjoy exceptional favours to dare to utter words that could be seen as questioning the sacred authority of the Scriptures and the exclusive magisterium of the Church. The case of the abbot of Clairvaux is

However, it is not unique. One naturally thinks of St Francis of Assisi. Some clerics continued to cultivate a love of nature through reading Ovid or Virgil. Born in 1291 and died in 1361, the Bishop of Meaux, Philippe de Vitry, was a man of letters and a friend of Petrarch. Still steeped in ancient culture, he wrote *Dit de Franc Gontier,* a fairly secular novel in which he expresses a very Virgilian love of free and frugal living, with his hero, Gontier, and his beautiful friend frolicking in an idyllic forest. But these are exceptions.

Revenge of the Gothic Forest

Traditionally and doctrinally, the Church viewed forests with suspicion, as they were refuges for pagan cults that were still thriving. Biblical imagery, from which much of its symbolism was drawn, saw forests as the realm of sacred nature and multiple gods, resisting the one true God. Although trees and forests had their place in the Scriptures, it was most often in a negative way. In medieval texts, clearing the forest became a metaphor for the apostolate. Was not the deep forest a symbol of dark powers? The tangled forms of roots and branches seemed to represent the devil described by theologians. So numerous in Celtic and Germanic legends, the spirits of the woods and springs were disfigured. The vouivre was interpreted as a representation of evil. Benevolent fairies were disguised as witches. The fear of the Devil, which was imposed after the year 1000, provided weapons to fight against the ancient cults that still sheltered under the canopy of trees.

Begun around the year 1000, deforestation changed the landscape of ancient Gaul. After three centuries of effort, the horizon receded at the pace of the axes. Ancient fears faded away. Elves and korrigans took refuge in the memory of fairy tales, imitated by the dwarves who protected Snow White. However, the ties between European man and the forest could not be broken. Trees took root in myths and art, and even in the city. They can be seen in

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1. Sophie Cassagne-Brouquet and Vincent Chamberlhac, *L'Âge d'or de la forêt* (Éditions du Rouergue, 1995). Robert Harrisson, *Forêt, essai sur l'imaginaire occidental* (Flammarion, Paris, 1992). Bernard Rio, *L'Arbre philosophal (L'Âge d'Homme,* Lausanne, 2001).

presence in the half-timbered houses of medieval cities and even more so in the stone forest of Gothic churches. Misunderstood and disparaged during the Renaissance, the Classical period and the Enlightenment, the secret of Gothic art was rediscovered by the Romantics. Already, the young Goethe, during his visit to Strasbourg Cathedral in 1772, had marvelled at an architecture he compared to a tree with a thousand branches. His compatriot, Friedrich von Schlegel, who studied Cologne Cathedral in 1805, saw in its structure that of an immense forest. The same image came to mind in 1802 when Chateaubriand wrote: "These vaults carved with foliage, these pillars supporting the walls and ending abruptly like broken trunks, the coolness of the vaults, the darkness of the sanctuary, the obscure wings, the secret passages, the lowered doors, all retrace the labyrinth of woods in Gothic churches. " From the 14th century onwards, tree-like vaults multiplied throughout Europe. One of the most striking examples in Great Britain is the cloister of Gloucester Cathedral and the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, completed in 1515, whose vaults

The fan-shaped design gives the impression of a vast, tall forest.

In designing the vertical trunks of their pillars and the profusion of vegetation in their ogives, Gothic architects were clearly inspired by the forest model. Georges Duby sensed this: "The upward movement of Gothic structures breaks free from measurable dimensions, extending and losing itself in the profusion of flowering bushes and foliage climbing up the ridge of the gable. At the top of the flight, carried on the wings of angels, the sun itself becomes

a flower. Such an outburst is that of the tree of the high forests [lg] › Figurant the forest foliage of holly, hawthorn and rosehip, the sculpture itself displayed its affinity with European flora. Even more surprising was the face of the "Green Man", masked by leaves, watching over the walls of our cathedrals in Chartres, Auxerre, Dijon, Poitiers, Bourges, but also in Bamberg, Marburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Exeter, Lincoln, Norwich... The eternal presence of the forest took its revenge in the sacred stones.

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1. Georges Duby, *Le Temps des cathédrales* (Gallimard, Paris, 1976). In *L'Äge d'or de la forêt, op. cit.,* Sophie Cassagne-Brouquet and Vincent Cham-berlhac devoted a remarkable chapter to this relationship between the Gothic church and the forest.

11

Metaphysics of history

Decline is an old temptation of the European soul, the dark side of its tragic courage. Despite the Attic sun, Hesiod had already whispered the song of twilight, before it was taken up by the bards under the grey skies of ancient Germania and the Celtic countries. It was this song that haunted Master Robert Wace on his island of Jersey one day in the middle of the 12th century as he traced the first verses of his *Roman de* Non on parchment:

> *Everything turns to decline*
> *Everything falls, everything dies,*
> *everything comes to an end. Man dies, iron*
> *wears out, wood rots.*
> *Everything collapses, walls fall, roses*
> *wither, Every work of man's hand*
> *perishes...*

No doubt, no doubt. But also everything returns, everything is reborn, everything lives again. Children are born and succeed their fathers. And even if generations are forgetful and unfaithful, without knowing it, through them life is transmitted and with it a part of the heritage that will be rediscovered

later ᵇʸ other generations eager to return to the sources of the kingdom, beyond time.

The idea of perpetual rebirth forms the main theme of this chapter. Before addressing it, however, it is useful to clear up a few basic concepts that obscure them.

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1. In addition to reflections on history, readers will naturally refer to the developments in Chapter 2, 'From Nihilism to Tradition', Chapter 5, 'To Be or Not to Be', and Chapter 7, 'Roman Legacies'.

Men, peoples and conflicts

Throughout history, men have asked themselves the fundamental question of who they are. They answer this question by invoking lineage, language, religion, customs—in other words, their identity and traditions. They were not given the choice of being Scheherazade or Marguerite de Navarre, of being born into the skin of a Babylonian slave or that of a 21st-century Parisian bureaucrat. In other words, men and women are not volatile beings, without heredity or belonging, souls fallen from the sky into a body to give it an inner form. They are not "men by nature and French by accident," as Montesquieu said. The "man in himself" of the Enlightenment does not exist. There are only concrete men, sons of a heritage, a land, an era, a culture, a history, a tradition... which form the fabric of their destiny.

Belonging to a people is the natural foundation of identity. But a human group is only a people if it shares the same origins, inhabits a place, organises a space, gives it direction, and establishes a boundary between the inside and the outside. This place, this space, is not only geographical, it is spiritual. Yet the site is here and not elsewhere. This is why the uniqueness of a people is expressed in particular in the way they work the soil, wood and stone, in what they build, in what they create, in what they do. Each people also has its own way of relating to space and time. The African's sense of time is not the same as the Asian's. And punctuality is not understood in the same way in Zurich as it is in Riyadh.

The differences between peoples are shaped by their surroundings and climate. Living under the southern sun or northern skies, in the desert or forest, in the mountains or plains, surrounded by green or red, these are the elements that shape peoples. Neither white nor black, blue nor red have the same meaning under all skies. Words and languages, sounds and musicality, play an even stronger role in the sense of communion within a single people. Because it is the custodian of a unique treasure, every historical community legitimately considers itself to be the chosen one of its own gods. Through the form it inherits, each people has its own path.

Its vocation is to hold fast by proving itself capable of facing external threats and the risks of internal dislocation.

The history of humankind is that of organised communities, born of nature and history, of time, space and challenges overcome. Ever since humans have existed, they have lived in communities, clans, tribes, peoples, cities, nations and empires. And the same universal law has always prevailed. Within the hereditary group, regardless of social status, there was a form of understanding, even in servitude, and a concern for continuity. Outside, there was conflict, even if it was masked by alliances or tempered by a momentary search for balance. The history of mankind is one of conflicts and wars between tribes, cities, empires and religions.

European law

Whatever form it takes, conflict is universal. As Heraclitus said, conflict is the father of all things; it is inscribed in the life of the universe and in human nature. This is so true that even religions that claim to be based on love have ferociously persecuted their heretics and blessed the armed forces that supported them with their strength and ensured their conquests. As shocking as it may be to the mind, history shows that hatred, as much as love, is part of human nature. Experience also consistently proves that mobilising against an enemy is the most powerful factor in group cohesion.

At the end of a life devoted to fighting war, Gaston Bouthoul, the founder of polemology, made this ironic admission

" During my long career, I have often spoken to audiences of pacifists. It is rare that I have not encountered combative, if not bellicose, reactions, and very often nostalgia for violence and its simplifying power. Pacifists believe themselves to be peaceful, but their unconscious is not [i] ." Disillusioned, he added:

"Every man has a warrior slumbering in his heart. Everyone carries within them war aims that enchant their dreams."

Conflict has always arisen when a hostile group, whether a clan of hunters, nomads or an organised power, encroaches on the vital circle of another group. Unless reconciliation is possible, force is the only way to settle the matter. The victor seizes the women and riches of the

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1. Gaston Bouthoul, *Open Letter to Pacifists* (Albin Michel, Paris, 1972).

defeated, crushed or exterminated. Sometimes it even seizes their souls. History only knows the victors and curses the vanquished. It has always been this way and always will be, regardless of the flattering appearances and false justifications that the victor gives to his war and his victory. Recognising this constant does not mean that we must accept it as inevitable. The hallmark of a civilisation is to impose its form on inevitabilities. The permanent reality of violence must be taken into account in order to control its excesses, not through virtuous or indignant speeches, but through determined and thoughtful action, as exemplified by classical European times, in harmony with the philosophy of moderation implicit in Homer and then explicit in Aristotle and the Stoics.

After the atrocities of the Thirty Years' War, during the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648, under the influence of the secularisation of power and a return to ancient philosophy, a law of war and a law of nations *(jus publicum Europaeum)* were established in Europe, echoing the idea of limited war developed by Plato in his polemic with Antiphon (see p. 95). The aim was to contain war within certain limits by rejecting the Augustinian notion of 'just war'. This law of nations was based on the distinction between armies and civilian populations, which were to be spared. It was also based on the

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1. In 1919, during the Russian Civil War, Trotsky, acting on behalf of the Bolshevik government, issued the Decree on Hostages, which allowed for the deportation and execution of entire families of opponents of the revolutionary government. Subsequently, as some socialists criticised him for his terrorist laws, he wrote a pamphlet in 1938, *Their Morals and Ours,* in which he justified revolutionary terror on the grounds of its "social nature" and its "objective historical role". Terror was legitimised by morality. Identifying themselves with the Absolute Good (History) in its struggle against the Absolute Evil (the "reaction", etc.), the revolutionaries considered themselves justified in the unlimited use of cruelty. In the last years of the 20th century, Islamists condemned the United States as "the Great Satan". In his press conference on 11 October 2001, steeped in biblical culture, President G.W. Bush responded with these words: "We are good... We are fighting the Devil." When one considers oneself to be the embodiment of Good and when the enemy is Satan or the Devil, anything goes, including the use of terrorism or the bombing of civilian populations. It is true that interpreting history and politics in moral terms (Good versus Evil) is the source of fanaticism and totalitarianism.

symmetry between states. Each state is considered the judge of the legality of war (the right to wage war or not). All states mutually recognise that each other's cause is just (legal and moral equality). This concept makes it possible to negotiate a genuine peace treaty, since yesterday's enemy is not a criminal, but an adversary who fought for a just cause, his own, with whom a new balance must be established through mutual concessions. Thus respected, yesterday's enemy can become tomorrow's ally. This European law of nations permeated European civilisation at its height, as celebrated by Voltaire in 1751 in his *Siècle de Louis* ÆK (quote on p. 28). It was first undermined by the French Revolution and Jacobinism, but was restored after 1815. It was only abandoned after 1918 and even more so after 1945. In the meantime, Jacobinism as embodied by Clemenceau, the Bolshevik Revolution, Nazism and American Puritanism had reintroduced in new forms the idea of "just war" and the criminalisation of the enemy.

The protective function of the state

In privileged parts of the world, temporarily sheltered from violence, insecurity and hunger, the realities of conflict seem shocking and absurd. It is therefore easy to forget that places of happiness and peace cannot last unless there is a strong determination to defend them. Places of peace survive only through the virtues required in war.

Ensuring the group's survival in the face of external dangers, internal strife and threats of internal entropy is the primary function of the state (see pp. 157 and 209). It is its justification, the foundation of a legitimacy that, among Europeans, goes hand in hand with acquiescence. The designation of enemy and friend, the assertion of sovereignty, the primacy of legitimate decision-making over legal norms, and the accepted risk of death as a tragic sanction are the attributes of politics. Whether they are momentarily forgotten in times of peace or violated by an unworthy oligarchy, this only serves to highlight a danger or an illegitimate situation.

The security of peoples lies in their homogeneity, their resolve, their intelligence and their bravery more than in miraculous weapons.

and treaties that cannot, however, be ignored. Whatever specious and self-serving propaganda may say, multi-ethnic states are inevitably doomed to internal strife and divided loyalties. Their borders are not only external, but also internal. They intersect between multiple and opposing affiliations, creating as many fault lines. As soon as tensions arise within diasporas, everyone feels solidarity less with the host country than with the countries that represent their identity.

The cyclical and pluralistic nature of history

Contrary to finalist interpretations, the history of peoples, nations and empires does not follow a straight line. It is subject to the unexpected and the tragic. Darwin may be right about the evolution of species, but history is not subject to the laws of zoology. It is multifaceted, uneven and diverse. Within a single continental or cultural entity, it does not follow a continuous upward trajectory. It is much more like a spiral with no beginning and no end, following the twists and turns of comebacks, cycles, declines, disappearances and rebirths. The death of a civilisation does not mean that history stops. On the ruins of the collapsed system, new shoots appear, born of what came before. There is no such thing as a clean slate. Even the soul of the Aztecs survived its assassination by the conquistadors and missionaries. In the 20th century, that of Russia withstood eighty years of a clean slate. The spiral always unfolds and the wheel of life always turns.

Real history is not universal. It is pluralistic and multifaceted, made up of a large number of different stories, each with its own beginning, peak and end. Empires, kingdoms and republics are founded, grow and disappear. However, certain groups of related peoples, such as China, India, the Arab-Muslim world, Europe and others, have gone through several cycles, consisting of a birth, a peak and a decline, followed by a rebirth in new forms. A people of the same stock, remaining young and sheltered from historical wear and tear, suddenly emerged, brutal, barbaric and conquering, just as a previous cycle had ended in decline. In the historical period, we thus see a succession of cycles in the West, lasting

ten centuries at most, dominated first by the Achaeans, then the Dorians, the Romans and finally the Germanic peoples associated with the Celts. All come from the same northern stock and sacrifice to related gods. They fulfil themselves by gathering the previous legacies, manifesting the eternity of a tradition that blossomed before them.

Every twilight era gives the most lucid minds a despairing sense of the end of the world. The Romans of the 1st and 5th centuries experienced this pain. They could not have known that their world would be reborn in unusual forms a few centuries later. Following their example, the kings of France claimed to be descendants of the Trojans, failing to be the seed of Aeneas. The Trojans were undoubtedly not their direct ancestors, but they were to a certain extent through distant kinship. Carried by royal legend, the poetry of origins met history. Homer's tradition nourished the spiritual treasure of kings.

Fortune and *rirfñ*

To explain the sudden changes of which history provides so many examples, Machiavelli invoked *Fortune*, whom the Romans had made a goddess. She was symbolised by a woman balancing precariously on a spinning wheel. While acknowledging the role of Fortune in the unpredictable course of events and the inconsistent behaviour of men, Machiavelli also believed in the role of virtù, the quintessential Roman quality of will, audacity and energy: "I certainly think this: that it is better to be impetuous than circumspect, for Fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to subdue her, to beat and strike her. [...] That is why, always being a woman, she is the friend of young men, because they are less circumspect, more violent, and command her with more audacity. " The fate of Bonaparte, Machiavelli's personification of the Prince, is a striking illustration of this theory. A few years before Brumaire, who could have predicted his dizzying rise and the upheavals it signalled?

A member of the London Parliament and a lucid and horrified observer of the early days of the Revolution, Edmund Burke understood as early as 1791 what the fate of the royal family would be, particularly that of Marie Antoinette. He was outraged that the nobility did not rise up in revolt.

to defend the insulted queen: "In a nation of gallantry," he wrote at the time, "in a nation composed of men of honour and knights, I believed that ten thousand swords would have been drawn from their scabbards to avenge her even for a glance that threatened her with insult! But the age of chivalry is past. It has been succeeded by that of sophists, economists and calculators; and the glory of Europe is forever extinguished... In fact, most swords remained in their sheaths despite the insults inflicted on the queen and the execution of the king. It was enough to make one despair of French *virtue*. But suddenly, without anyone having foreseen it, the Vendée rose up, as did Lyon, Marseille and Toulon. It was no longer a handful of gentlemen but an entire peasant population that took up arms "for God and for the King". Soon Thermidor arrived and, a few years later, a young general reputed to be a rabid Jacobin buried the Revolution to the applause of the former regicides. What had happened? The wheel of fortune had turned.

Revelation of human conditioning

Between 1914 and 1945, despite violent demonstrations of power, Europe lost its former moral and political hegemony along with its confidence in its civilisation and destiny. A detailed and unconventional analysis of the two world wars would show that they not only pitted Slavism and Germanism in the East, France and Germany in the West, but also the great continental power that Germany had become since the end of the 19th century, and the great maritime power that was Great Britain, soon to be replaced by the United States of America. During both wars, the maritime powers prevailed over the continental power, as they had done a century earlier against Napoleonic France. But in 1945, despite appearances, there were only objective losers in Europe. Britain could claim victory, but in reality it was broken, replaced in its former maritime and commercial hegemony by the United States. From this suicide of two world wars, Europe emerged politically defeated, socially disrupted and morally decomposed.

In addition to the easily discernible factual causes, there were other less apparent reasons. Silent changes were underway

well before 1914, which altered Europeans' perception of themselves. Nietzsche's psychological interpretation of moral choices and behaviour was reinforced by the theories of the unconscious developed by Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Thus began the disintegration of the long-held Western idea of man as an autonomous subject or privileged creature of God, separate from time and culture. The humanities and some other disciplines amplified this silent revolution.

It is indeed a paradox of 20th-century science that it has exalted human pride through Promethean conquests, while at the same time humiliating man in the Christian and humanist ideal: "Zoology humiliates him by placing him in the animal kingdom, not far from tarsiers and lemurs. Chemistry humiliates him by attempting to explain his internal movements by the same reactions as those of matter. Geology humiliates him by locating his reign in a tiny fraction of the ages of nature. Astronomy humiliates him by humiliating his dwelling place before cosmic excess. Science takes pleasure in crushing its free will against enormous fatalities, in grinding its reason against the millstones of infinity, the infinity of atoms, the infinity of galaxies; on the other hand, it disdains to answer the only problem that matters to it, the problem of its being and its becoming."

Following Marx and Nietzsche, but also philosophers of history such as Dilthey, Croce and Spengler, Westerners also learned that they were historical beings, shaped by history and culture, inseparable from space and time. Under the influence of Christianity in particular, they had long considered themselves the exclusive beneficiaries of a divine revelation that had made them masters of the world, creators of the only truly universal civilisation. They suddenly found themselves relegated to the same level as other human beings, conditioned by the unconscious, heredity, organic chemistry and history. Dethroned as king and demiurge, Europeans were no longer the authors of civilisation par excellence. They were no longer masters of the world. They were

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1. Mr Saindrail, quoted by J.-L. Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1969, pp. 431-432). In the same vein, Michel Foucault wrote: "To all those who still want to talk about man, his reign, his liberation [...] one can only respond with a philosophical laugh [...]. Man is an invention whose recent origins are easily revealed by the archaeology of our thinking. And perhaps its imminent demise." *Les ñfots et les choses* (Gallimard Paris, 1966.)

even threatened with extinction, which Paul Valéry summed up in his apostrophe: "We civilisations now know that we are mortal."

Awareness of human conditioning and the humiliation felt by Westerners had both beneficial and less beneficial effects. It opened up new avenues of wisdom by revealing the previously unknown connections between the body and the psyche. It helped us gradually rediscover what the ancients knew. Humans belong to the world and to nature. They are not separate from them, nor are they their masters. No divine decree has given them the right to use them excessively and irresponsibly.

In contrast, the idea crept in that humans were prisoners of a set of determinations that left no room for their will, their imagination, or their freedom. This is what the human sciences, psychology, and sociology repeat to them, as well as countless popularisers who regurgitate what they have learned from other popularisers.

Determinism and historical necessity

Throughout history, humans have always felt the need to peer into the future. The Greeks consulted the Pythia of Delphi. She was known for delivering oracles whose obscurity lent themselves to multiple interpretations. Following tradition, Alexander came to consult her before embarking on his conquest of Asia. As she was slow to reach her tripod, the impatient Macedonian dragged her there. She exclaimed, "No one can resist you..." Hearing these words, Alexander let her fall, saying, "That prediction is enough for me." He was a wise man.

Every era has had its prophets, soothsayers, haruspices, astrologers, palmists, futurologists and other charlatans. In the past, people used to spin tables; today they use computers, often ending up with mountains of nonsense and rubbish. Catherine de Medici consulted Nostradamus. Cromwell listened to William Lily. Stalin questioned Wolf Messing. Hitler consulted Eric Hanussen. Briand and Poincaré shared the talents of Mme Fraya. Mitterrand consulted Mme Hanselmann-Teissier...

This constant credulity stems from an idea rooted in the unconscious of men of all races and all times: we are governed

by forces that escape us and are at work in history. The ancients invoked the intervention of the gods, who were themselves subject to the unpredictable and to fate. Others, like Bossuet, imagined a divine plan in universal history. Joseph de Maistre invoked Providence, to which Hegel gave the secular interpretation of the Enlightenment, that of Reason at work in history. Historical logic, he believed, unfolds according to a necessity that escapes individuals. Necessity is the word to remember.

The idea of historical necessity imposing itself on human will was taken up by many followers. Karl Marx added to it the thesis of economic conditioning and that of class struggle conceived by the French socialists.

Several theories that emerged in the 19th century, especially Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, lent unprecedented credence to Hegel's idea of a universal spirit governing history.

Previously considered an art, history now sought to be a science. More precisely, historians claimed to be scientists. Quickly followed by sociologists, they endeavoured to explain history through causal research. It was appealing to explain complex phenomena through a single cause. Thus, various deterministic theories were born. Hippolyte Taine proposed an explanation based on the physical environment and climate. Karl Marx built his work around proving economic determinism. Vacher de Lapouge theorised racial causality. The latter two theories, supported by arguments, had unpredictable consequences when they encountered politics and the passions of the masses.

In France, Durkheim's sociology sought to be the equivalent of the physical sciences in terms of understanding society. Its application to historical study led to the birth of the *Annales* school, a journal founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. A quarter of a century earlier, the true father of this school, François Simiand, had denounced what he considered to be the three reprehensible "idols" of classical historiography: the political idol — facts, events and wars —, the individual idol — in other words, leading figures —, and the chronological idol, which needs no explanation. This "new history" gave rise to some remarkable works, but the exclusion of politics and events in favour of social causality alone soon revealed its limitations.

The masters of *the Annales* remained deaf and blind to the two major phenomena of their time, Bolshevism and Fascism, or rather National Socialism. Marc Bloch himself agreed, offering his own self-criticism shortly after the French disaster of the summer of 1940:

"Our disciplines have accustomed us to considering only massive forces... This was a misinterpretation of history."

Lucien Febvre's successor, Fernand Braudel, criticised the notion of the event like his predecessors predecessors, but with greater nuance [2]. He also devised the fruitful concept of the "long term"*,* which he put into practice in his thesis on *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II (The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II),* and in many other works.

Studying a historical phenomenon over the long term allows us to highlight continuities and slow causalities, as Alexis de Tocqueville did in his famous study *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution.* The "long term" is a perfectly legitimate method, provided, however, that real people, events and the unexpected are taken into account, as Bossuet said in his *Discourse on Universal History:* "The true science of history is to observe, in each period, the secret dispositions that prepared the way for great changes, and the important circumstances that brought them about." Events, or "circumstances", are not only the markers that make history intelligible, they often impose an unpredictable direction on it. Napoleon is an event, as was Alexander, whose conquests cannot be said to have been without far-reaching consequences. These two figures remind us that history is lived and made by real people, not by abstract social entities: knights, peasants, priests, bourgeois, etc., not to mention "man", the most false of abstractions.

Most philosophies of history arose from an interpretation of the long term, from the theorisation of a major determinism and from the comparative method — for example, between the Peloponnesian War and 1914–1918, or between the decline of the Roman Empire and that of contemporary Europe. Marx's work illustrates this type of construction, as do those of Dilthey and Spengler.

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1. Marc Bloch, *L'Étrange Défaite* (Éditions du Franc-Tireur, 1946, p. 188).
2. Fernand Braudel, *Les Ambitions de l'Histoire* (De Fallois, Paris, 1997, p. 17 *ff.*).

Cyclical history according to Vico

Any historical theory that disregards events, i.e. real history, carries with it a fatalistic vision. Karl Marx made deliberate use of this to give his supporters certainty and destroy the resistance of his opponents. Without having the same strategic motivations, interpreters of Western decadence also theorised an inexorable determinism.

The fear of decline was evident as early as the 19th century in poets such as Baudelaire, writers such as Gobineau, philosophers such as Nietzsche, and historians such as Taine. It was expressed with unparalleled force at the beginning of the following century in the work of Oswald Spengler, particularly in the two volumes of *The Decline of the West* published in 1918 and 1922.

Spengler does not believe in progress. He shows that history has no beginning and no end. It is made up of discontinuous cycles, each describing the birth, flourishing and death of a great "Culture" becomes rigidified into "civilisation" when it is in decline. Every culture, he says, is a unique experience, an art, a science, a moral code, a way of thinking and creating, which are incomprehensible outside the spirit that animates them. "A culture dies when [its] soul has realised the full sum of its possibilities. " Western civilisation, which he calls "Faustian civilisation", is therefore not the latest advance in humanity's evolution, as linear history claims, but the terminal phase of a culture in decay. After it, a new cycle will spring forth, bearing new truths and generating new mental races and new sciences.

The debt owed to Spengler will remain outstanding for a long time to come. He restored and enriched the concept of cyclical history, which he did not invent. Present in Hesiod, the cyclical interpretation permeated the European vision before Christianity, itself heir to biblical finalism. It was renewed at the beginning of the 18th century by Giambattista Vico in his *Scienza Nuova*. In a striking formula, the Italian philosopher described the cycle that leads to the birth and then the death of civilisations. First came forests, i.e. the primitive state, then huts, villages, cities and finally learned academies. These were not a peak, but a sign of decline that would lead to a return to the forest, to barbarism. "Men are first of all in search of

of what they need [...]; they then seek out useful things [...], then they devote themselves to pleasures before indulging in luxury and finally [...] squander their wealth. What leads a system to its downfall when it seems to be at the height of its greatness? The answer can be summed up in one word: irony. By this term, Vico expresses the excesses of critical thinking. Irony, he says, "consists of a false statement presented under the guise of truth." In his time, Plato denounced this corruption of thought among rhetoricians and sophists. Vico speaks of "barbarism born of reflection." In the conclusion to *Scienza Nuova,* he paints a very topical picture of decline: "When peoples reduced to the last extremity find no monarch to govern them, and no other superior nation presents itself to conquer them and ensure their preservation, then Providence applies an extreme remedy to this extreme misfortune. Reduced to the rank of beasts, men have become accustomed to thinking only of their own particular interests [...]. They live at the mercy of their desires, each thinking only of satisfying his own whims, thereby incapable of reaching any agreement with his neighbour. Such are the reasons which, combined with factions and civil wars, transform cities into forests [...]. Long centuries of barbarism follow, covering with their rust minds that have become perverse through subtlety and malice, which the barbarism born of reflection has made more cruel than the ancient barbarism, the work of the senses."

Spengler and the concept of decadence

With his vast erudition and powerful exposition, Spengler systematised his own interpretation of the cycle of great cultures based on eight examples taken from history and according to his own classification. This systematisation is what makes his work so appealing.

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1. Spengler's classification of certain great cultures is debatable. For example, he associates the Greeks and Romans within the same
" Apollonian culture," as opposed to the "Arab culture" of the early Christians and the "Faustian culture" that emerged in the Middle Ages in the West. Why not? However, when we take a closer look at the Hellenic and Roman worlds, the differences are as striking as the links of succession, ruling out a common cycle. Spengler defies plausibility by claiming that the Greeks and Romans

thesis but also its weakness. Often, real history is absent from this giant fresco, where peremptory and unjustified assertions abound. The cultural facts brilliantly evoked by Spengler are rarely supported by historical evidence. One senses that he wants to force real history into his scheme.

Despite this reservation, there are many stimulating and novel views, expressed in a broad and impassioned style. To Spengler's credit, we must note in particular his concept of "Faustian" culture, which could also be called "Promethean". He thus provides a useful key to deciphering the internal logic of the world of technology. Appearing as early as the High Middle Ages as a creative dynamism tending towards infinity, the Faustian spirit, he says, projects itself ever further, with no limit other than a final catastrophe.

On the other hand, Spengler's idea of decadence as the inevitable senescence of a great culture is appealing to the mind but has little historical validity.

Are we doomed to the inevitable, as Spengler claims, and therefore to passivity and despair? This was also the opinion of the Italian philosopher Julius Evola, who nevertheless differed from Spengler on the cyclical interpretation of separate cultures. An original and highly intellectual mind, Evola did not content himself with thinking about decadence, he strove to give it a coherent interpretation through his timeless doctrine of traditionalism. Many of his views, strongly influenced by the esoteric theories of René Guénon, clash with the historical realities he dismissed with disdain. I have already said that unless one is inclined towards occultism, one cannot accept his idea of a universal, unique "Tradition" common to all cultures, originating in "another world". Nor can one agree with his idea that history is a process of decline, that is, a perpetual involution from an imaginary "Golden Age" that would have preceded history, i.e., prior to 5,000 years ago. Evola's thinking, however, extends far beyond these interpretations. It is marked by a boldness

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are "Apollonian" because they are alien to the perception of history. Were Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius not Greek? Were Tacitus and Livy not Roman? Spengler's thinking has often been compared to that of Arnold Toynbee *(Study of History,* 10 volumes), which lacks both its power and stimulating originality. Toynbee was concerned with decadence, but rejected any deterministic interpretation.

and a courage that contradicts the gloominess one draws from his theories.

Polybius' foresight

In itself, the idea of decadence comes from an accurate perception of a universal law of existence. The life of individuals, peoples and cities is a perpetual struggle against death, which requires painful and constant effort. Historical communities are constantly threatened by entropy and extinction. Every ethnic or social group carries within it its own seeds of decay. It remains 'fit' as long as its organism fights them off spontaneously. Otherwise, it declines, no longer able to produce antibodies, while the germs that will destroy it multiply. The onset of a phase of decadence is signalled by qualitative changes that transform a people, causing it to seem to renounce everything that had enabled its ethnogenesis and specific existence. Observing the example of Sparta, Spengler says that decadence can be recognised by the fact that it is no longer the Spartans who mock the drunken Helots, but the drunken Helots who laugh at the Spartans. What are the causes of decadence, of which the fall of Rome is the archetypal example? The variety of theories explaining this event proves that there are multiple causes. The following are cited successively or simultaneously: the dislocation of the patriarchal and military structure, the corruption of secular institutions, the disappearance of *virtus* killed by the influx of immense wealth, the genetic entropy affecting the Roman stock itself, the invasion of Italy by migratory waves of slaves and populations from the East or Africa, the spiritual subversion of foreign Eastern religions alien to the genius Roman, the blows dealt by the Barbarians, etc. [2]

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1. Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World,* originally published in 1934. New translation by Philippe Baillet, Éditions de l'Âge d'Homme, 1992. One can also consult the philosopher's intellectual autobiography, *The Path of Cinnabar,* translated by Philippe Baillet (Éditions Arché/Arktos, Milan-Turin, 1982).
2. For the history of Rome and its decline, see Chapter 7, "Roman Legacies," and its bibliography. See also Santo Mazzarino, *La Fin du monde antique. Avatars d'un thème historiographique* (Gallimard, Paris, 1973).

Admirers of the Roman Republic and its "Spartan" virtues may see the victory at Zama over the Carthaginians in 202 BC as the beginning of the end. This victory, which ended the Punic Wars to Rome's advantage and gave it control of the Mediterranean, marked the republic's entry into the imperialist era that would gradually destroy the city's ancient family and peasant structure. The conquests would ruin its social and spiritual balance. Some contemporaries were aware of this. Scipio Aemilianus, conqueror and destroyer of Carthage in 146 BC, himself experienced this anxiety. Polybius, who was at his side at the time of his victory, testified: "He took my right arm and said to me: 'Yes, Polybius, this is, but I don't know why I am afraid, and I have a premonition that one day someone else will give the same news about our country [as now about Carthage].'"

Polybius is not really surprised by these unexpected remarks. The history of his homeland, Greece, has given him occasion to reflect on decline: "It is only too obvious that the threat of ruin and change hangs over all things. The truth is that every state can die in two ways. One is ruin from outside; the other, on the contrary, is internal crisis. The first is difficult to foresee, the second is determined from within. Writing in the middle of the 2nd century BCE, the Greek historian clearly predicted what the internal evolution of Rome would be after its victory: "When a society has overcome numerous and serious dangers, when it has acquired unquestionable power and domination, new factors come into play. Prosperity takes hold in society and life becomes oriented towards luxury. Men become ambitious and compete for magistracies and other distinctions. In the long run, the aspiration for honours and the protests of those who see themselves ousted, pride and luxury will lead to decadence. The masses of the people will be responsible for the crisis. They will be inflated with vanity and flattered by demagogic deceit. Excited and set in motion, they will no longer want to persist in obedience or remain within the limits of the law imposed by the patricians. After that, the constitution will have the most beautiful name there is: freedom and democracy. In fact, it will be the worst possible, that is, the reign of the masses."

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1. Polybius, *Histories,* VI, 3-9 (Les Belles Lettres, Paris).

Several centuries before it became apparent, the future decline of Rome was predicted by Polybius, along with some of its internal causes. He refrains from making predictions about external causes, although he also has things to say on this subject. His horizons extended beyond the Roman world of his time. He was well acquainted with the Hellenistic kingdoms created by Alexander's conquests in the East and Asia. He was a personal friend of the Seleucid king Demetrius I. The Seleucid Empire, which had once stretched from Syria to eastern Iran, was in decline. The Hellenistic decline allowed him to imagine what *the* Roman *Empire* would later become. The state of Bactria had separated from the Seleucid kingdom a century earlier, around 250 BC. Then, in 130 BC, nomadic tribes from Central Asia had overwhelmed and barbarised this Hellenistic outpost. "Barbarised" is the word used by Polybius. He reflected on events that had struck a world seemingly very different from the Roman world. But he imagined that one day, the latter could be struck by the same scourge. He perceived the terrifying lesson. In a passage expressing his concern, he puts into the mouth of the founder of Bactria a lucid anticipation of what the "migration of peoples" would be like in highly civilised states *(Histories,* XP).

With admirable foresight, Polybius predicted, long in advance
, two of the evils that would lead to the downfall of the Roman Empire: internal chaos and "barbarisation" due to the unstoppable influx of migrants.

Stages of Roman decadence

Often carried out at random, the conquests brought fabulous riches and an enormous slave labour force to Rome, which would "barbarise" Italy long before the Great Invasions. The small pastoral republic of its origins became a huge and wealthy imperial metropolis. The conquests brought hundreds of thousands of African and Syrian slaves. Over time, through intermarriage, they profoundly changed the population of Rome and Italy. Wealth, which was very unevenly distributed, benefited the powerful families who shared power. Meanwhile, the former free citizens, farmers in times of peace and legionnaires in times of war, were stripped of their rights and proletarianised, transformed into a shapeless herd, prey to demagogues.

The Gracchi's attempts at agrarian reform, aimed at restoring the old republican model, failed. The decline therefore continued and accelerated until the civil wars and Caesar.

His nephew and adopted son, Octavian, later known as Augustus, would continue and expand his uncle's work with immense skill. He gave the nascent empire the political centralism and firm administration it needed. He also gave it an almost metaphysical sacredness that would survive the worst emperors and the destruction of the Empire itself. The first philosopher Caesar, surrounded by Stoics, he intended to base the government of the Empire on virtue. He himself set the example, which was extraordinary in itself. In doing so, he established imperial power on a higher idea that would leave an indelible mark on two millennia of European history.

With these facts in mind, are we justified in arguing that Rome entered into decline after Zama? A decline that lasted almost seven hundred years (from 202 BC to 476 AD), which included the splendour and influence of the imperial era, for which we still feel nostalgia.

If we think that Zama was, in a way, the beginning of the end, then we need to agree on the concept of decline. We can indeed recognise an undeniable decline in the Roman Republic, heralded by the disappearance of its ethnic homogeneity, its military austerity, its *gravitas,* and its moral sense of duty symbolised by the first Brutus, Regulus, and Cato the Elder. But this decadence was not that of the energy or influence of Roman civilisation. On the contrary, it was from Zama onwards that it began to flourish.

For ethical and political reasons, in the name of a Lacanian conception of the city, one can naturally condemn the imperial evolution of the republic in retrospect. But can we speak of decadence when the Empire is in full ascendance? When this manifestation of powerful vitality will last another five centuries, the period of time that separates us from Charles VII and the Hundred Years' War.

This would be in complete contradiction with the image we have of Rome. The long imperial period, at least until the 15th century, had left the admired traces of its monuments and cities throughout Europe and North Africa. It is French that has shaped or coloured so many other languages. It is French that continues to influence customs and institutions throughout much of Europe.

So what other date could mark the beginning of the decline, or more precisely, the beginning of its manifestation? It seems obvious that it began with Septimius Severus, an African mercenary of Syrian origin who was proclaimed emperor in 193 in a coup d'état and who had nothing Roman about him. With greater certainty, we could pinpoint the year 212, the year of the edict by which Caracalla, son of Septimius Severus and a false Roman, granted Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the Empire, regardless of their origin. After he was assassinated, he was succeeded by a young priest of the Syrian rite, Heliogabalus, a weak-willed and debauched character who allowed the women and freedmen of his entourage to rule through cruelty and corruption. With Heliogabalus's Eastern court, the enemy was within the gates. The mother of the pseudo-emperor, the Syrian Julia Soemias, encouraged women of senatorial rank, the heart of Roman society, to take husbands outside their caste. At the same time, the Christian bishop of Rome, Callixtus, authorised marriages between senatorial women and men of lower rank, even freedmen and slaves, without them losing the advantages of nobility. Such encouragement was intended to deal a fatal blow to the last vestiges of Roman society.

Heliogabalus ended up being assassinated by his own guards, along with his mother. In his time, Rome had long since ceased to be Rome. The Empire was only maintained on its former course by the weight of its institutions and a body of magistrates still imbued with *dignitas* and *the* old *virtus.* However, there would still be periods of remission and recovery under the Illyrian emperors, who came from the legions.

Pareto and the idea of continuity

We cannot ignore Plutarch's interpretation of decline, both as a contemporary and a historian. He wrote his *Parallel Lives* around 100-110 AD. As a Greek who had spent a long time in Rome, he was convinced that he was living in an era of pernicious and definitive change. In choosing his *Lives,* he imposed a rule on himself not to go beyond a certain point in time.

For Greece, he chose the loss of independence symbolised by the death of Philopœmen, 'the last of the Greeks', in 182 BC, after his defeat by the Romans. For Rome, Plutarch stopped at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, which granted power to Octavian and ended the republic.

Plutarch's assessment is interesting in that, for obvious chronological reasons, Christianity is not yet involved. However, many historians, following Gibbon, have accused this religion of Eastern origin of having polluted the Empire to the point of killing it. It must be acknowledged that Gibbon's arguments were not without force. The same idea was taken up in the following century by Nietzsche in his *Genealogy of Morals,* in the name of the adage *"who benefits from the crime?"*. So was it Christianity that caused the decline, or was it a pre-existing decline that favoured the spread of this religion, whose primitive form was the very negation of Romanity? The second interpretation seems more convincing. However, Christianity certainly played an accelerating role within a body already stricken with a fatal disease. It would therefore be less the cause than the symptom.

Among the thinkers on decadence, Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto developed an idea that departs from fatalistic interpretations. He rightly sees decadence as the degeneration of a historical model. But the example of Rome shows him that decadence is not necessarily the definitive ruin of a civilisation; it does not constitute a total and definitive break, except in cases of genocide or widespread interbreeding. While one historical form disappears, we see the beginnings of a new civilisation, its heir, emerging from its ruins. Just as Rome had developed on the ruins of Hellenism, Frankish and medieval Europe took root in Roman continuity without any radical break. The idea of perpetual rebirth was already contained in the Norse myth of Ragnarök.

These critical considerations show that historical cycles are a reality, but without the rigidity imagined by Spengler. They are traversed by undulating movements of decline and revival that undermine the absolute fatalism of the great pessimists.

In the language of myths, one interpretation of fate would equate its fundamental passivity with the subterranean and nocturnal powers of the chthonic world of Mother Earth. Conversely, freedom based on will would be Uranian, diurnal and masculine. Hesiod made Heracles the symbol of this freedom. The first of the heroes, he was granted to men by Zeus to defeat monsters and titans, to bring order to the cosmos dominated by elemental forces and chaos. From the cradle, by slaying the serpent, Heracles proved that he was will

and determination. How can we not be struck by discovering his counterparts in Scandinavian and Celtic mythology, in the persons of Sigurd and Cuchulain? They too begin by defeating the monster, that is to say, fate. It is obviously no coincidence that this myth has been placed at the origins of our world in all its diverse expressions. It tells us and reminds us that there are no monsters or titans that cannot be defeated.

The illusion of inevitability

In the age of nihilism, Freud and the theorists of the unconscious, Marx and most sociologists, Spengler and the prophets of decadence, each in their own theories, rejected the freedom of men to decide their own destiny. Individuals and societies were believed to be imprisoned in a web of relentless ties woven by multiple conditioning factors, the psychological unconscious, economic constraints, and the cycle of cultures.

No one would dispute the reality of powerful determinisms at work in history. It is clear, for example, that the map of the Reformation's successes coincides with that of north-eastern Europe, which escaped Roman influence and never ceased to oppose it. Does this mean that the Reformation was necessarily inscribed in the *limes* and that no other major cause should be taken into account? No one would argue that. We no longer believe that a single determinism can explain major historical movements or developments. The principle of causality is based on explanation through antecedents. But since the same cause can produce several effects, the explanation loses its credibility. Faith in a single causality, so strong at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, has been undermined by events, by the collapse of grand simplistic ideologies, and by deeper historical reflection. It is clear that if a multiplicity of determinants manifests itself, freedom regains its rights. Moreover, can we imagine that the creative ability of human beings, particularly Europeans, is exhausted? Is the ability of ideas to influence the course of events, as those of the Reformation did in their time, illusory? Is the *virtù* celebrated by Machiavelli, that is, the will combined with intelligence of action and luck, meaningless? To all these questions, history

responds firmly in the negative. Indeed, there is no shortage of examples of rebirth after decline. Rome's is the most striking. Since the Gracchi, the Roman Republic had been heading towards inevitable decline. However, after a century of corruption and civil wars, Augustus came along, his path having been paved by the efforts of a generation of philosophers. Through him, the foundations of the Empire were laid for a long time to come, a unique creation whose nostalgia continues to haunt Europe.

The scale of Augustus's work is obviously exceptional. But the creative capacity of men throughout the ages, particularly that of Westerners, let us say, is attested to by the whole of history, the eternal and permanent theatre of active will and the unexpected.

The usefulness of uchronia

Only a superficial glance at the past can give the impression of inevitability. If we look, for example, at the impressive spectacle of the French Revolution, the reassuring interplay of causes seems to impose itself as fate. We forget, however, that the sequence of events was not inevitable and that other variables were possible.

This oversight stems from an error of perspective, that of history written or read backwards, starting from the end. If we adopt the correct method of starting from the beginning, everything changes. We discover that the field of possibilities remained open.

For intellectual hygiene, historians should always practise uchronia, history with "what ifs". What if Napoleon had been victorious at Waterloo, what if Constantine had been defeated by Maxentius on the Milvian Bridge in 312, what if Martin Luther had been killed by bandits on his way to Rome in 1510, etc.? We then realise that the causes generally cited for major events were not necessary. Louis XIV, for example, would certainly not have left his mark.

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1. Imagining Louis XV renouncing the acquisition of Corsica in 1767, Jean Dutourd wrote the most delightful alternate history under the title *Le Feld-Maréchal von Bonaparte* (Flammarion, Paris, 1996). In a Corsica that remained Genoese, and therefore within the Habsburg sphere of influence, it was logically in the service of the latter that a character gifted for military life would have made his career.

French and European history as he would have done had chance endowed him with the temperament of Louis XVI, his descendant. The 20th-century historian will readily admit that the era would have been very different if Corporal Hitler had not survived the gas attacks in his trench south of Ypres during the night of 13-14 October 1918. Those who study the history of the United States know that the evolution of this great power, and therefore of the entire world, would have been very different if General Robert Lee had been victorious at Gettysburg in July 1863 and if the independence of the Southern states had been accepted by the North in order to achieve peace.

In other words, uchronia is a useful complement to critical reflection on history, the only one capable of awakening minds. Major historical, political, religious or social developments have never responded to necessity. 'Historical necessity' is an invention *made after the fact,* based on a superficial reading of known history. Conversely, unless we remain in the realm of vague generalities, we can see that the most lucid and learned thinkers, such as Marx, were most often wrong when they ventured into the field of prediction.

The future is the realm of the unexpected

During the 1975-1976 academic year, Raymond Aron, a most knowledgeable and perceptive mind, gave a course at the Collège de France on *The Decline of the West.* He concluded: "The decline of the United States from 1945 to 1975 was the result of irresistible forces. " Let us remember the word "irresistible". In his *memoirs,* published in 1983, the year of his death, Aron returned to this reflection: "What I observed in 1975 was the threat of disintegration of the American imperial zone. ... To those who reread these lines around the year 2000, under the shadow cast by the American global empire, this analysis cast doubt on the lucidity of its author. And yet, it has never been disputed. Simply, history had galloped ahead in an unexpected way. As always.
On 22 January 1917, Lenin, then unknown and still in exile in Switzerland, spoke in Zurich before a circle of socialist students:

"We old people," he said, referring to his generation, "may never see the decisive battles of the revolution..." Let us remember the date: 22 January 1917. Less than eight weeks later, tsarism was overthrown without Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades having anything to do with it. The "decisive battles" he no longer believed in were about to begin. But they could have turned out very differently. General Ludendorff, for example, the real master of Germany at the time, was not forced in April 1917 to send Lenin and his comrades to Russia by special train "like plague bacilli". Ludendorff achieved the desired effect. Russia collapsed. However, in similar circumstances a year later, at the turn of 1918 and 1919, in a Germany shaken by defeat, hunger, the abdication of the Kaiser and civil war engulfing all the cities, yes, in this homeland of the revolution according to Marx, the German Lenin failed in his endeavour, ending his career with a bullet in the back of his neck fired by the Berlin "White Guards". Why did Lenin succeed in Russia and fail in Germany? Neither Marx nor sociologists offer an answer. The answer can only be found by studying the facts.

Like earlier periods, the history of the 20th century reveals the interplay of multiple causes. Economic, technological and ethnic factors all played a part, but they were integrated into a much larger and more complex whole than Marx or Vacher de Lapouge could have imagined. In its extraordinary abridgement, the history of the Russian Revolution, like that of fascism, highlights three major sets of determinants, within which all variables are conceivable.

Historical heritage is, chronologically, the first major determining factor. Its legacy includes the form of society or power, latent conflicts, ideas in action, and the specific culture of a people or nation. The bundle of legacies is in itself a subject for historical analysis. It allows us to outline a situation conducive to major upheavals.

Added to this situation is fortune, in the Roman sense of the word, that is to say,

That is to say, circumstances and chance, triggers of a future upheaval

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1. *The Whites and the Reds. The Revolution and the Russian Civil War* (Pygmalion, Paris, 1997).

For Russia in 1917, we think of the war of 1914 and its effects, the failings of the imperial family, the incompetence of the political class, the revolt and illusions of the high command, the mutinies that accompanied the riots in Petrograd in February-March 1917, etc.

The moment then comes when the actors exercise their *vinù*, their aptitudes in action and their ability to seize opportunities. History and fortune offered opportunities to Lenin and others in the open game of 1917. But Lenin was the only real player with superior *virtù*, as was Mussolini in the turbulent Italy of 1922.

A certain historical legacy, fortune and virtù are the three major determinants that can be seen at work behind all the great events of history.

History and memory

What is history? According to the simplest answer, it is knowledge of the past. But *this* knowledge does not come for free. It encourages reflection on the events of yesterday or of times gone by in order to shed light on the present. Neither Babylon, nor ancient China, nor Egypt, nor the various Semitic civilisations were concerned with history in this specific sense. Traces of the past were sometimes engraved in stone or wax to celebrate the glory of a pharaoh or keep his accounts, but it was Western scholars, several millennia later, who transformed them into history, because they themselves were steeped in it.

Conceived as a reflection on the past, history is an invention of the European mind. In his epic account of the Trojan War, Homer laid the distant foundations for it. This is why the Hellenic historians who came after him regarded the famous siege as the beginning of history.

However, the true inventor of the genre was Herodotus, who lived in Ionia at the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. Cicero rightly called him "the father of history". With inexhaustible curiosity, Herodotus gathered together all possible sources, oral traditions and written texts. "He was the first to use a comprehensive method of historical research, acting sometimes as a compiler, sometimes as an archaeologist.

or epigraph, observing and questioning relentlessly'. He discusses the sources, inventing historical criticism. 'I am obliged,' he said, 'to report what is said, but I am in no way obliged to believe it.'

Shortly after Herodotus came Thucydides, an actor and witness to the Peloponnesian War. Free from passion and moral judgement, he remains, after twenty-five centuries, a model. Among many others, Hippolyte Taine praised him: "He walks through murders, seditions, and plagues like a man freed from humanity, who, with his eyes fixed on the truth, cannot stoop to anger and pity."

Yet an implicit lesson emerges from the cold description. Thucydides shows how, carried away by pride and the desire for power, the Athenians hastened their own downfall. With him, history claims an educational function for the benefit of posterity.

Two centuries after Thucydides, another Greek historian, Polybius, assigned history the goal of finding the causal explanation for major events. Defeated by Rome but filled with admiration for his conqueror, he strove to understand how and why this Italian republic had managed to take over the Mediterranean world in fifty years. He invented the questioning of causes. His posterity would be immense.

As a record of the past, history also reflects the concerns of the present. This was true for Thucydides and Polybius. It would also be true for the great Roman historians Sallust, Livy and Tacitus. All three sought lessons that could be applied to the decadence and corruption of their own times. Each in his own way, they imposed a literary effort on themselves, constructed a narrative and developed a plot. If they have survived to this day and are still read, it is because of the factual interest of what they teach us, the depth of their thinking, but also the quality of their narration and their artistry.

Erasured by theology during the long Christian centuries, history reappeared in the 16th century with Machiavelli. It flourished in the 18th century with Vico, who developed the first historical philosophy and restored cyclical interpretation. Next came Gibbon and his monumental study of the fall of the Roman Empire, Schiller, who subscribed to a finalist vision, and Dilthey, who founded historical relativism.

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1. François Chamoux, Communication on *Le Moteur de l'histoire (The Engine of History),* annual public session of the Institut de France, *Le Monde,* 25 October 2000.

Metaphysics of History

Is history a science, an art, or metaphysics? The ancient world answered this question in its own way. It recognised a Muse named Clio who placed history among the arts. Conversely, historians who claim to be exclusively scientific seek to adorn themselves with a prestige they consider superior, while displaying a pretence of objective neutrality. But who could believe that 'science', so often invoked in the 20th century by most ideologues, could be a guarantee of impartiality? The humanities relate to a reality that is not abstractly constructed, as in the physical and mathematical sciences, but known intuitively, thanks to a psychological understanding of what has been experienced. This is why history remains an art of interpretation, as summed up in a quote by Georges Duhamel:

"Historical impartiality is a deception. The true historian is not a clerk but a poet."

Yes, in its fullness, history is poetry, but it is also metaphysics. What does this mean? To speak of a "metaphysics of history" is not to interpret it according to a particular metaphysical doctrine, but to take into account its full significance. What history reveals goes beyond the factual, beyond the "physical", beyond the simple restitution of facts and the past. History creates meaning. It contrasts the transience of the human condition with the feeling of the eternity of generations and traditions. By saving the memory of our forefathers from oblivion, it commits to the future. It fulfils a desire for posterity inherent in human beings, the desire to survive one's own death. The object of this desire is the memory of future generations. It is in the hope of leaving a mark that we strive to shape the future. Along with the perpetuation of a lineage, this was one of the means devised by our ancestors to escape the feeling of their own finitude.

Although history is memorable, "memory", so often invoked at the end of the 20th century, is distinct from history. History is factual and philosophical, whereas memory is mythical and foundational. Jewish memory, for example, before the Holocaust, was rooted in the legendary event of the Exodus from Egypt, which demonstrates Yahweh's concern for his people. Conversely, Hellenic memory is rooted in Homeric poems, in the exemplary nature of heroes confronted with destiny.

Orwell understood the modern challenges of history and memory. "Who controls the past controls the future," he wrote in his novel *1984*. "And who controls the present controls the past."

It would be wrong and naive to overlook the reality of hostile actions in the causes of the great upheaval in Europe since the Second World War. An upheaval that has had repercussions in the humanities and in the interpretation of history. Having gone from arrogance to masochism, Europeans have endeavoured to eradicate their former ethnocentrism, while flattering that of other races and cultures. Great efforts have been made to break the thread of time and its coherence, to prevent Europeans from finding their own image in their ancestors, to rob them of their past and make it foreign to them. Such efforts have precedents. From the High Middle Ages to the Renaissance, many centuries were subjected to the erasure of memory and a total rewriting of history. Despite these efforts, this undertaking ultimately failed. The purely negative one, conducted since the second half of the 20th century, will last much less time. Coming from unexpected quarters, resistance is widespread. As in the tale of Sleeping Beauty, the dormant memory will awaken. It will awaken under the ardour of the love we will show it.

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1. In his memoirs *{Sol Invictus,* Ramsay, Paris, 1974), Raymond Abellio recounts that, having been captured like so many other French soldiers in 1940, he found himself in Germany in an Oflag (prisoner of war camp) in the company of a leading communist intellectual, Marcel Prenant, future chief of staff of the FTP in 1942-1944. Abellio himself came from a Marxist background. Referring to the mass of prisoners, Prenant said: "We must demoralise them." Strange words on the surface, yet perfectly coherent.
"Demoralising" these unfortunate defeated people meant destroying them completely, reducing them to zombies deprived of all inner life and defence. Once emptied, the party was determined to fill them with its merchandise and mould them internally. A huge effort to demoralise people was thus undertaken after 1917, particularly against Europeans. The disappearance of the USSR did not hinder this, as there were so many who had acquired a taste for being its perverse or self-interested actors.

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From eternity to the present

A constant feature of the European soul is revealed by the journeys of Ulysses and the Argonauts, but also by the pleasure we take in recounting their adventures and all those recounted by others long afterwards. A part of the European soul has always been drawn to faraway places. European discoverers, navigators, explorers and colonisers are unrivalled. The curiosity of Herodotus, who travelled the world of his time to describe it, has no equal in China, Egypt or Babylon. The Christian centuries amplified this trait through the biblical imagery of the desert and the effects of proselytism. The discovery of America added to the fascination with the 'noble savage' that had been widespread long before Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the first half of the 16th century, Francesco Guicciardini, exiled in 1537 by Cosimo de' Medici, echoed this sentiment in his bitter reflections on the vices of his time. In his *Storia d'ltalia,* recounting the exploits of Spanish and Portuguese navigators, he contrasted the imagined purity of the Indians' morals with the supposed corruption of the old world: "They are content with the bounty of nature; they are tormented neither by greed nor ambition, but live happily, having neither religion, nor education, nor craftsmanship, nor experience of arms and war..."

The hope of finding greater purity and beauty elsewhere is not new, even if the era of nihilism gave it added vigour. Disgusted by the prevailing materialism, disappointed at no longer finding anything at home to satisfy their thirst for the absolute, somewhat mystical minds often feel the irresistible call of the exotic, at the risk of dissolving into it.

Mircea Eliade's Indian trial

"All I had to do was open up a travelogue about the Orient to immediately start dreaming," writes Mircea Eliade in his memoirs. India fascinated me, drawing me to it like a mystery in which I believed I could read my own destiny. I had to break all my ties at any cost and go where I felt called." Like Eliade, many Europeans felt this kind of enchantment. He himself returned after a long and cruel ordeal. Many others, men and women, went to lose themselves forever in Africa, the East or Asia, caught up in a mirage, transformed into wrecks or sexual objects. And in the creation of this mirage, as Eliade says, reading tropical novels and travelogues often played a major role.

Mircea Eliade was twenty-one when he left for India. He stayed there for more than three years. A young Romanian intellectual promised an exceptional career as a novelist and historian of religions, he had very early on subjected himself to experiences that put his body and mind under the Faustian domination of the will. These attempts had awakened his interest in yoga and Hindu philosophy, which he wanted to discover for himself. "In this freedom that I imagined I would conquer, I saw above all a means of transcending my historical, social and cultural condition. In a sense, I no longer felt conditioned by the fact of being Romanian, and therefore integrated into a marginal culture with its traditions, which included Latin, Slavic and Western elements. I felt free to venture into the spiritual universe of my choice" (p. 160).

His ambition, which he would achieve, was to write a doctoral thesis in philosophy on yoga. During a stay in Rome, he obtained permission to work at the library of the Indian Studies Seminary. He was twenty years old. "I will never forget that afternoon in May when I opened Surendranath Dasgupta's *History of Indian **Philosophy**.*" An extraordinary stroke of luck soon led him to study in India under Dasgupta himself and later to be welcomed into his home as a privileged disciple. He described his almost religious enthusiasm to his

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1. Mircea Eliade, *Mémoires I, Les Promesses de l'équinoxe* (Gallimard, Paris, 1980, p. 357).

Arrival in India: "The emotion of my first stop in India is linked to the turmoil I felt as I approached the famous temple of Rameshwaram, to the shock I felt at its wild and inhuman splendour. " At the time, he still spoke only poor English, knew nothing of Hindustani, and was just beginning to decipher a little Sanskrit. Through hard work, he soon filled these linguistic gaps.

After studying for over a year under Dasgupta's tutelage, the latter invited him to stay under his roof. He was welcomed there almost like a son.

"Soon, I began to eat with my fingers like everyone else. And when I sat cross-legged on the floor for the first time to eat a meal served on a tree leaf instead of a plate, I felt that I was truly becoming part of the family" (p. 252). He took advantage of his long stay to travel to various parts of India, including Benares, Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. He stopped in Allahabad to attend the *Kumbh Mela,* a huge procession of ascetics and yogis that takes place only once every twelve years. "From then on, I no longer felt like a casual visitor. On the contrary, I felt more and more at home, and these cities, temples and monuments that I was so keen to visit were those of an adopted homeland that I was eager to get to know better" (p. 253).

Roots and creativity

Professor Dasgupta had a young, intelligent and pretty daughter named Maitreyi. She helped the young Romanian with his research in the library and encouraged him to learn Bengali. In exchange, he gave her French lessons. A romantic friendship developed between them. Naively, Eliade imagined that the whole family was in on it. One day, in the library, the two young people's hands met above a file and could not be separated.

"Despite our scruples and reservations, despite the gulf that separated two sensibilities and two temperaments as different as those of an Indian woman and a Western man, despite our false boldness and clumsiness, the feelings that drew us to each other only grew stronger, and what was written in the stars eventually came to pass" (p. 260).

One day, the two young lovers were abruptly torn from their dream. Their relationship had been discovered. The young girl had confessed everything to

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her parents. That same day, during a frosty meeting, Dasgupta expelled Eliade from his home. "I would never see the Dasgupta family again" (p. 261). The writer adds: "This India that I had dreamed of so much and loved, I saw it closing itself off to me forever. It was now unthinkable that I would ever acquire the Indianness to which I aspired" (p. 262).

However, he did not give up all hope. Dressed in a saffron robe, he was admitted for several months to an ashram, a kind of hermitage in the foothills of the Himalayas, to try to forget his misadventure and learn the techniques of yoga and meditation. Alas! Without meaning to, he was to transgress another major prohibition, which earned him another banishment. These two painful experiences would help him, in his own words, to find his true path.

It was not by living the life of an adopted Bengali or a Himalayan hermit that I would have been able to develop the potential with which I had been born. Sooner or later, I would have broken free from the bonds of my 'Indianness'. What I had attempted, in my desire to tear myself away from my Western roots in order to better blend into an exotic spiritual universe, was essentially equivalent to prematurely renouncing my own creativity. To create, one must remain in the world to which one belongs, and mine was that of the Romanian language and culture. After dressing in European clothes for the first time in six months, I took the first train to Delhi" (p. 281). From there, he returned to Europe.

Mircea Eliade's experience is exemplary. His courage, clear-mindedness and philosophical training enabled him to see clearly into this adventure and learn from it. His long stay in India would also later benefit his work on the comparative study of religions. He had not allowed himself to be swallowed up. Faced with adversity, he had pulled himself together, reconnecting with his origins and his European identity.

Like Rudyard Kipling in his day, young Europeans with a taste for adventurous travel are usually immune to the exotic mirages and spells that Eliade fell victim to. On the other hand, the danger is great for weak individuals who cannot overcome their physiological deficiencies or the effects of the climate. The history of colonialism in the past and languid travels today is littered with wrecks destroyed by sexual delirium, alcoholism or disease. The danger also exists for mystical natures in

search for the absolute, motivated by the hope of finding in Africa or the East what rationalism has destroyed in European tradition. This was, to a certain extent, the tragedy of Isabelle Eberhardt and René Guénon, who died in Muslim garb.

Revelation of identity

I knew a young woman who had suffered in her flesh and soul an ordeal even more cruel than that of Mircea Eliade, and who managed to overcome it. At the end of her adolescence, she frequented a Christian circle. In her own words, she was in the midst of spiritual and existential chaos, as were the other members of the circle, most of whom were women. An avid reader of novels and travelogues, she developed an imaginative passion for the wilderness. Having accompanied a pilgrimage to the desert, she decided to stay there and share the life of the ancient lords of the sands. Unlike some deranged European women, she was not neurotic. She was not driven by the demons of tropical sexuality. She was in search of a wisdom she had not found in the decaying Europe of her time. There, she succumbed to the charms of a local man. The cosmopolitanism of her Christian culture had not prepared her for such a danger. What she experienced then was of a different order than for Eliade. In her distress, however, she was fortunate enough to escape the shipwreck of her being. The man she loved was a noble spirit, a fighter committed to defending his people, to the point that he lost his life. Through him, she discovered what roots are. Without knowing it, this man brought her back to her own identity.

Faced with the challenges of an unexpected but accepted motherhood, this young woman needed extraordinary strength of character to keep her from sinking into despair. It was the beginning of a long journey from which she emerged victorious and transformed. After working hard on herself, the lost young girl found her footing again. She resumed her studies, understanding, with astonishing intuition, that by working on ancient thought she might find, if not answers to her torments, at least the tools to see clearly within herself. And that is exactly what happened, despite other trials. Slowly, she emerged, gradually transformed, having rejected the old utopia forever.

having returned to her roots, without ever denying what she had experienced. One day, as we were talking about this new beginning that had started among the men of the desert, she came up with this image that revealed her transformation: "I am a bit like a soldier who went to serve in a foreign army and, once trained, returned to his own people, now determined to fight for them."

She had acquired a kind of inner radiance. Among sad and grey people, her smile radiated a beneficial energy. This was undoubtedly due to her nature, but also the result of her long journey. She was always searching and on the path to self-improvement. But for her, this quest was one of happiness and serenity, without even the appearance of effort. From her studies, she had drawn life lessons, proving, unlike so many teachers, that knowledge can lead to wisdom.

In the chaos of our times, the youthful journeys of Mircea Eliade and the young unknown woman are shining examples. They are examples of an inner reconquest that authentic Europeans can set as the goal of their highest ambitions.

Whether they know it or not, men are dependent on their representations, their ideas, even if they are uncertain or unconscious. It is therefore not wrong to claim that ideas rule the world, regardless of how they are formed. Despite appearances, human actions are not determined by utility but by conflicting value systems. And there will always be an obligation to win the battle of ideas or be defeated in one's very essence.

Analytical table

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