HELENISTIC MYSTERY-RELIGIONS
THEIR BASIC IDEAS and SIGNIFICANCE

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I.

Approach to the Material, and Its Definition

What we are concerned with in the present investigations is not the Greek religion or religiosity as it developed in the city-states, nor the individual Oriental folk-religions as such, but a general expression of religious perspectives as it developed on the basis of both the above factors. Certainly the various separate nations and peoples contributed in varying degrees to its formation, but even when the Greeks assumed outward dominion its own specific property could no longer be distilled in its purity. The folk-religions continue to exist, but none of them purports or is able any longer to be limited to its own folk, its own nation. They have to compete in order to stay alive, and membership in the large political entities necessarily gives to this competitive activity its direction, its language, and to a certain degree even its concepts. Their missionary activity can only be directed to the dominant Greek world and to the world of the West that lies beyond it; here also that missionary thrust encounters the least resistance. In this struggle, and with this mixing, there necessarily appear in the very center those sacral actions which give expression to membership and participation in the new religion and to the promise that it offers: those actions are the mysteries. Hence in the investigation of them we shall do best to recognize the essential features or basic perspectives of that no longer Hellenic but Hellenistic religiosity with which the greatest of all missionary religions, Christianity, struggled for centuries and by which it also was necessarily influ-
enced in considerable measure. In Christianity we must trace out its effects upon world history.

The manner and method of any scientific investigation must be dictated by the state of the materials to be used. For the present study the material available is extraordinarily scanty we are, after all, dealing with secrets. Individual sacral actions are intimated to us only in outline, and reflections of them can be proven in some circumstances; the religious significance is more frequently given, and the words employed in technical way in stating this significance permit us to draw inferences about the actions themselves. But we can almost never say which mystery-actions belong to particular religions and where we assume an adoption by Christianity, we must refrain from what now appears to many a student of the subject as the most important thing, namely a demonstration of the actual origin of a given element. I do not consider this loss to be a crucial one. In the very nature of the case the proof of origin could never provide us with more than an interim result or an apparent conclusion. Even if without that proof the fact of borrowing is assured, still this has only secondary significance. In religio-historical investigations we are not, and never will be, so fortunately situated as to be able to start out from a specific number of well-known primitive religions and then analyze a newly emerging one as the chemist can analyze a mineral spring, whose ingredients he determines according to percentages. Let us take, for example the two great religions about which we are best informed, the Egyptian, for whose development incomparably abundant material is available to us, and the Persian, which surpasses all other in religio-historical significance: how much of what we can demonstrate in Hellenistic Egypt we now trace back to Persian influence, and how much can we now identify as Iranian that only fifteen years ago no one would have ventured to identify thus! We now search everywhere for connecting links and are amazed to discover how much information can be afforded us even by minor and relatively late religious groups such as the Mandaens. Thus for our investigation only one other procedure is offered, one which I attempted to set forth and to offer theoretical justification for, after the first edition of this book appeared, in the Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft XIII, 1912, p. 14. In this procedure we do not begin with religions, but with the individual written works and compare as many as possible with each other. The perspectives and the religious language of the individual personality belonging to the Hellenistic stage of development are what is really valuable for us; the question whether we can assign them altogether or even only in the main to a particular religion is only a secondary issue; what we are focusing our attention upon in fact is not this religion, but the religiousness, the piety, of an entire period or stage in the development. Hence the perspectives of the so-called Mithras liturgy are significant for us in spite of the fact that we certainly do not have before us here the liturgy of the official Mithras-mysteries and no one can say how many believers its author attracted. In the "Poimandres" the speaker is one of the demonstrably numerous prophets who in those days felt themselves to be divine beings and desired to redeem mankind by means of their teaching; this fact would be important for us even if we had not recently learned that he used as a basis an ancient Iranian writing, and in spite of the fact that we still do not know how strong was the flock of his followers or how that flock was organized. Piety is a matter of the individual personality and must first be explored in terms of that personality. Then by means of the comparison of a number of such
individual pictures we try to gain an overall picture of the
times. This may explain why so many apparently disconnected
writings and facts are strung together here. Whether the pro-
cedure is correct must be judged according to whether it leads
to authentic results.

Anyone who strikes out on a new path must expect that for
the most part people will condemn him without a hearing. I
have been neither surprised nor discouraged when it has been
reported to me that highly regarded colleagues have asserted,
"I don't know of any Hellenistic mystery-religions", and thus
an entirely different meaning has been given to the word "Hel-
lenistic". It has been my hope that the book would offer the
reader enough examples in which the religious element obvious-
lly is ancient Oriental and the Greek admixture must have en-
tered in long before the beginning of our era;\(^3\) of course I
did not attempt to establish a chronological sequence, which
indeed could never have been carried through successfully. I
am obliged to depart somewhat from this earlier intention be-
cause so eminent a historian as Eduard Meyer, in his uncom-
monly widely disseminated work, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*
(III, p. 393), which is devoted to the religious development of
this era, on the basis of a testing of the thesis has rendered
his judgment thus: "I cannot regard as established the proof
that 'a Hellenistic mystery-religion' or rather several such
competing religions had already been developed and disseminated
in pre-Christian times; their development—even that of the
Mithras-mysteries"—rather runs parallel to that of Christiani-
ty and in their later elaboration was frequently influenced by
the latter." This latter assertion, which in its consequences
would have to re-shape completely our view of the relationship
of infant Christianity to the surrounding heathen religions,
unfortunately remains without any attempt even to suggest a
proof of its validity; I dare not venture to guess at its
basis. Nor of course can I say where Meyer has sought that
proof and failed to find it. One polemical comment draws ex-
clusively on a passage from Wilhelm Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*
(ET, 1970, p. 312), which Meyer in fact has misunderstood.
Bousset mentions a statement of Wendland (*Zeitschrift für
Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* V, 1904, p. 353) that the
renascence of the mystery-cults comes only in the romanticism
of the second century of the Christian era. Meyer presents
this sentence as authoritative. Unfortunately, however, he
forgets that Wendland, who had placed the sentence at the be-


\(^3\)
of them incorrect in their one-sidedness, of the title of σωτήρ for Christ. 6

But even though with this limitation of the concept of the mystery-religions my book 7 appears to be just as little regarded as Wendland’s major work, Cumont’s book on Oriental Religiones in Roman Paganism, Dieterich’s Mithras—liturgies, and others, it will be necessary now at the outset to discuss, using some selected examples, in a summary way the sequential testimonies; I shall begin with the period just before the rise of Christianity.

With the fire of a Zealot Philo of Alexandria (De spec. leg. I 319–325) opposes those Jews who, in order to blend in with the Hellenes, turn to one of the numerous mystery-communities; 8 in that connection he makes an explicit distinction between their secret initiations and the public cultus of the Hellenic city-deities. He goes on to describe apostates who attach themselves to one of the many miracle-working and fortune-telling prophets of these publicly recognized city-deities, and—as is generally overlooked—he portrays these men very much as Lucian later portrays the Alexander of Aboneutelchos; like Lucian, he will not call them prophets, but soothsayers. I consider this a "witness" that for me acquires still more significance by virtue of the fact that the same Philo is already familiar with most of the words and concepts of the later language of the mysteries, for example, the so crucially important concept of rebirth. It does not matter here that perhaps one can infer from Philo’s words that he is talking here about smaller communities of a private character. This is the way mystery-religions almost always spread, and I have dealt with precisely such forms; these too, as we shall see shortly, become serious powers even capable of threatening states. Thus I add at once a community that has been much discussed in the last decade, whose rise we can date with some exactness: I mean the community established by a certain Dionysius in Philadelphia in Lydia, during the second or at the latest the beginning of the first century B.C.; the community’s statutes are preserved for us in an inscription. 9 Upon a command of Zeus, this Dionysius combined an earlier cult of the Phrygian mystery-goddess Agdistis, who appears as ruler of the house or of the temple—the temple was private property and housed the old traditional family cult—with the cult of various Hellenic gods (or personifications); cf. line 12: θεός χαρογέλιατος τοῦ δὲ ἄλογομος καὶ τοῦ καθαρουμάς καὶ τῶς θησείων ἐξετάζων κατὰ τῇ κάρω καὶ ὡς νόμον ἐποίησεν; thus both Phrygian and Greek, as Weinreich interprets it. Of course the actual mysteries are not disclosed to us; the ethical obligations laid upon the members could suggest the influence of Orphism, but also that of Judaism, but we cannot say anything certain on this point. In the light of Paul’s epistles, anyone likely would think here of the assemblies of the Christian communities, at first in private houses, and of their ethical discipline. 10 There must have been a similar organization among those worshippers of Hypsistos who are often attested in inscriptions in the region of the Bosporus, though to be sure only in the time after the beginning of the Christian era; 11 in the same city are found various communities of the same deity, separated according to their "fathers" and "priests". Here we also find ἅλκερος εὐκωνήστου united with and yet separated from the γυναῖκα, somewhat like the Gentile Christian and Jewish Christian members of the church in Antioch. The comparison is justified, for Iranian belief that had penetrated that area very early appears to have been assimilated there with Jewish faith. Now a Mysian inscription of the second or first century B.C. (Per-
drizet; Bull. Corresp. hell. XXIII, 1899, p. 592 and Plate IV) shows us the age of this hybrid cult and at the same time displays a strong similarity with the Dionysos- or Sabazios- mysteries, and in an altar inscription in the Thracian region a certain Sabazios-Thiasos venerates Hypsistos. Such a student of the matter as Cumont has already long ago pointed out that infant Christianity first found its footing and was disseminated in such communities existing between Judaism and paganism. But at this point I shall not go into this matter; instead, I shall select a witness about the great mysteries that tells us—perhaps superfluously—that Philo does not speak of the great and principal, purely Greek mysteries in Alexandria, as for example the Eleusinian, but of actually "Hellenistic" mysteries. From Rome, and indeed from the year A.D. 19, Josephus (Ant. XVIII.3.4) tells of the celebration of a ἱερὸς γάμος of a prominent matron with Anubis, which led to a temporary suppression of the cult of Isis by Tiberius. The priest, bribed by the man who was in love with the matron, reported to her the demand of the deity, which was thus her ὄλλος, and then admitted the man to the bridal chamber where she was. The woman innocently told her husband and her friends about her experience and boasted of the divine favor bestowed upon her; only the impudence of the man who had taken advantage of her subsequently led to the disclosure of all that had taken place. One cannot place Josephus' statements under suspicion on the grounds that one can follow out the motif of such a deception in other, light, entertaining literature. The tone is not that of a bit of fiction or of a prank, but it corresponds in its details to that of a judicial determination that is explicated literarily, much like Livy's account of the unmasking of the Bacchanalia. Josephus could also be very well informed, for the investigations of Oriental cults were admittedly not limited to the Egyptian ones. Even the Jewish community was affected by them, and more than four thousand Jews, Roman citizens, paid the price of being exiled to Sardinia for a swindle, according to Josephus much more innocent, practiced by four alleged priests. Even the Latin historians mention the matter as a noteworthy step for the Roman government. Now Egyptian belief actually is familiar with the idea of such connections of a deity with a married woman: the sexual union of the god Amon with the queen, who conceives by him the son who is destined to rule, is portrayed in the temple, and inscriptions give us the words exchanged between the two of them, the ἱερὸς λάγος of the sacred account. But wives of high officials also early receive the honorary title identifying them as concubines and lovers of Amon. When theological writings in Greek with which Plutarch is still familiar and which he cites in several places offer a philosophical justification for this idea, their aim certainly is not to vindicate to later Greeks the divine nature of the ancient Pharaohs, but to justify a continuing mystery-practice. Philo now uses these justifications in his allegorical expositions, that is, in the passages where he employs the language of the mysteries: for the mortal father the deity begets the son; he opens the womb, gives the δρωάς γενόμενος, and while the mortal man makes a virgin a woman, the deity, by his embrace, makes a woman once again a virgin. The survival of these mysteries is attested for Egypt by Rufinus in his Church History, and acquaintance with this view in Judaism is attested by the Midrash of Asemeth, the wife of Joseph. Gnostic mysteries such as the baptism of some of the Valentinians or the prophetic initiation of the gnostic Markos offer us further testimonies—we may not attribute the responsibility for this to Christianity. Fur-
ther, Lucian's report that prominent men in Rome brought their wives to Alexander of Abonoteichos, which itself sets forth such a mystery, becomes somewhat more believable, particularly when we recall similar aberrations in the last days of the czarist regime in Russia. I see no reason after all to deny that the Egyptian mystery whose shameful abuse in the year A.D. 19 led to the suppression of the cult of Isis had already reached Rome with the founding of the Isis-cult and the establishment of the collegium of the pastophori under Sulla; in itself it reaches back into an indeterminate early time.

I am led to still another witness by the obvious question of what precedent the imperial government could appeal to. When Livy gives the unusually specific account of the suppression of the bacchanalia in a breadth that is quite disproportionate in spite of considerable abbreviation, I can only presume that it is his intention to offer a pattern for the treatment of such cases for his own and later times. The Augustan government is disinclined toward the incursion of Oriental cults at least since the principate was established. Thus here Tiberius is only continuing the tradition of his predecessor, though to be sure in a more precipitous form. In Greece as in Rome the suspicion of immorality or even of atrocities lies over the secret cults; Philo poses the question, "Why are they secret if they are not criminal?", and the well-known letter of Pliny shows me that already in his time the same suspicion was also raised against Christianity, as it was so often in later times. And when I read further in Livy the speech of the consul, I see that he was explicitly opposing a foreign cult. I hardly need to amplify the statement that the identification of the cult's founder as Graeculus does not guarantee that he was of genuine Hellenic origin. Livy identifies him as a priest and a prophet; the mystics too speak in rapture. What we learn of the cult appeared to me, in the first edition of this book, to point more to an Oriental than to a purely Greek origin; such a wild religious mass-movement appeared to me hardly any longer conceivable in the Greece of that time. Of the cult we hear that the rite of initiation was a ζευς γυμνος performed by the priest—it was preceded by a castimonium of ten days and a baptism, as in Apuleius' case—and we hear of sacred meals with food and wine, in which both sexes participated together. Finally we hear of an evaluation of the immediate revelation of God to the female leader or a priest, for which I know of no examples, at least in the Hellenistic cult; indeed, we hear of alleged ascensions to heaven (13.13). The conjecture was supported, even before the second edition appeared, by the discovery of a decree of Ptolemy Philopator: shortly before that time a similar movement appeared in Egypt, which led to the surveillance of the Dionysos-mysteries εν τη χώρῃ, i.e., outside Alexandria. All the priests of the mysteries (mystai) had to present themselves in person, demonstrate the source of their teaching through three generations, and submit the wording of their liturgy under seal to a representative of the government. Thus a guard was provided against arbitrary reconstructions on the basis of alleged revelations. The reason for this is obvious. The Greek god had much earlier been equated with Caeris (cf. Wilcken, Jahrb. des Deutschen Archäol. Institute XXXII, 1917, pp. 149-50); other deities from the vicinity soon followed suit; the danger of arbitrarily formed mixed cults was imminent. The decree is aimed at them, and thus it is in and of itself a witness to their existence. Now the history of the spread of religions, for example that of Manichaeism, offers instances enough of the phenomenon that when they are suppressed by force in one place, prominent priests migrate
as missionaries to distant lands. The idea of a connection between the Egyptian and Italian movements, which were so close together in point of time, was an obvious one, and it occurred to me as evidently to a good many others (Archiv für Religionswiss. XIX, 1918, p. 191). Already at that time Prof. Cichorius in a letter called my attention to how close the connections between Rome and Egypt were precisely in this period. The impact of these connections is soon thereafter shown by the attempt, by means of the books found in the tomb of Numa (Liv. XL 29), to introduce religious innovations into Rome. 

Cichorius (Römische Studien, 1922, pp. 21-22) then was able to supplement my statements by showing that M. Aemilius Lepidus, who as guardian of the children of Philopator had resided in Alexandria from 201 onward and was Pontifex maximus in Rome, had Philopator's decisions which were familiar to him from experience applied to the "Oriental Bacchanalia" (as Cichorius sees them) in Italy. Then in most recent times the discovery in Pompeii of the Casa dei misteri (Casa Item), which in any case belongs to the time of the republic, has provided us with surprising proof of a continuing life for these mysteries; they appear also to have enjoyed a flourishing existence in Campania. If the objection is raised that there is no compelling proof here of Oriental influence, I could counter by saying that through Livy there is indeed a barbarian and modernizing influence proven; they are Hellenistic mysteries, and these as such suffice as proof of the existence also of Orientally influenced mysteries. Yet I do not even need this argument. Livy himself suffices to show what must have been involved in this case.

On the year 139 B.C. the Epitome of Oxyrhynchus (col. VIII 2) remarks: Chaldaei urbe (e)ti..., and the first editors of the material made the connection between this and an allu-
tus a sexual union of the initiate with the deity is symbolically represented, as also in the later Orphic mysteries (Dieterich, Mithrailiturgie, p. 123). Indeed in Asia this deity is also equated with Dionysos. Cumont has already expounded almost all of this in two fine essays (Acad. des Inséc. Comptes rendus, 1906, pp. 63-64, and Musée Belge XIV, 1910, pp. 55-56), with important supplements offered by Schubart (op. cit.) and Kern. Schubart pointed to the references made in III Macabees 2:28 about the edict of Ptolemy Philopator against the Jews: as a sign of their belonging to the nation, all who persisted in Judaism were to be branded with the ivy-leaf of Dionysos (Sabazios), as was done in various locales with the hierodule of a deity, who in fact in many places even inhabited a particular section of the city and were named along with the citizens; anyone who voluntarily joined a Dionysios-mystery community became a full citizen and was regarded as a Hellen. Kern (Archiv für Religionswissenschaften XXII, 1923/24, p. 198) points to a note preserved in Hippolytus (και Χριστόν καὶ ἄντιχριστόν, 49) from Jason of Cyrene (?) about Antiochus Epiphanes: τοὺς τότε ἐκαθένες τῇ καρδίᾳ ἔγραψεν ὕπερ νομοὺς καὶ τὴν θυράν πεδίου (the Jews) ἐκλύσαναι καὶ κόσμος ἐπιθυμῶν τούτῳ τῷ Διονύσῳ (disregard meant the death penalty). The reference is confirmed on the one hand by Johannes Lydus (De mens. IV 53, p. 109. 18 W), and on the other hand by I Macabees 1:55: καὶ ἐὰν τῶν θυρῶν τῶν οἰκίων καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις ἐσώμεν. Thus here we have, in the seldom practiced sacrificial usage, which was supposed to attest the solemn consent of all the inhabitants to the cult, full agreement with Valerius Maximus, or Nepotianus: araque private et publica locis abecit. These Hellenized Jewish communities are to be regarded as followers of (Dionysos)

Sabazios. Even then they were carrying their missionary activity as far as Rome. But—it will be objected—here they call their deity Jupiter Sabazios, and this equation, which to be sure was also common elsewhere in the Orient, becomes dominant on Latin soil. Certainly! But on the one hand, no one guarantees that these Hellenized Jews came from the homeland or from Egypt—Valerius Maximus appears to have been very cautious in expressing himself—and on the other hand, in Rome they could not call themselves by Dionysos' name, because Dionysos-mysteries were forbidden under penalty of death. Since the cult of Sabazios also appears closely connected with the cult of the Magna Mater—even the surname of Μαγνάς occurs—and since Phrygian colonies of Jews were early Hellenized, I see nothing to cast suspicion on Valerius' statements. When Missowa (Religion und Kultur der Römer, second edition, p. 376) nevertheless exclusively emphasizes that the Sabazios cult can be proven to have been in Italy and Rome only from the end of the second century A.D. onward, he fails to note that this is quite understandable; the cult had once been legally forbidden as dangerous to public morals. We would have to assume, and we could prove, that it continued to survive in secret. Even in Trajan's time the Roman Jewish community still was not strictly orthodox, but either altogether or in large part worshiped the Ζεὺς Ὕπατος Ὀρθόος and the Phrygian Attis together with Yahweh. The proof of this fact, which is extremely important for the primitive history of Christianity, I shall present in Appendix II, since it leads into other connections. For the present I shall only mention that when Attis here evidently appears in place of the Sabazios who had been forbidden by the state—he is in fact likewise connected with the cult of Cybele—a mystery-cult of Attis at that time is a probability. It is true that we are
most inadequately informed about this cult. So far as I know, it still has not been explained to what extent personal mysteries (the rite of initiation, the vow of silence, and others) existed in the orgies of Attis in the second century B.C. All the analogies of course argue that the basic features of the cult are to be placed back in the early period, and here also, or rather precisely here, influences from Christianity are less than probable; there is not even the shadow of a basis for the assertion that the cult had existed for a long time while the mysteries only appeared in the Christian era.

I prefer to give the study a different direction and to pursue the practice of the Roman government. The treatment of the Bacchanalian cult obviously serves as an example in the procedure followed by the praetor Cornelius Hispalus, while this procedure in turn is imitated by Tiberius: a morally shocking mystery-cult becomes the occasion to fall upon other Oriental teachings that are regarded as injurious also. For we may go still further: the edict of Tiberius, which treats Jews and "mathematicians" in the same way, is after all only a repetition and contemporary expansion of the edict of Cornelius Hispalus; this is shown by Suetonius (Tib. 36), when after mentioning the Jews he says: expulit et mathematicos, sed deprecentibus ac se artem desituros promittentibus veniam dedit. Now we may say, on the basis of Tacitus' account (An. II 85), that the adherents to the Jewish as well as the astrological religion were compelled solemnly to renounce the practice of their religion or to leave Italy within a specified time. This is an uncommonly important precedent for later times.

The most detailed report, that of Josephus, shows that the primary cause of offense was not the doctrines but the mysteries. All religions that have an initiatory rite (τελετῆ) are intrinsically subject to suspicion, because an oath, or some substitute for an oath, is connected with such a rite. I might go so far as to ask whether the accusations against the Christians which were repeated on down into the later times and which so strikingly correspond to the suspicions of Christian communities and groups about each other, can be understood at all apart from a strongly developed mystery cult, one that first was suspiciously observed by the state and in individual cases suppressed. For my own part, without this presupposition I cannot in any way understand even the account of the first persecution of Christians. Hence the present study cannot bypass a major question that is of significance for world history and that refuses to be settled quickly. That is so much the more impossible since the only account preserved for us has just been characterized by so eminent a historian as Eduard Meyer as a conscious and deliberate misrepresentation of the facts or of their internal connection. The situation of the philologist who speaks up on Tacitus' behalf against such a charge certainly is not an enviable one, since he appears as a partisan spokesman; that is all the more reason that he has the obligation to bring the demands of his scholarly discipline vigorously into operation, in order to show whether the critic here actually is a judge or rather the attorney for a party.

The well-known state of affairs is this: only Tacitus' account connects the persecution of the Christians with the burning of Rome; in his case this undoubtedly serves the function of making the emperor's responsibility for the burning more probable. For in contrast with all the sources that are preserved—among them the opinion of a contemporary historian who though embittered against Nero is generally conscientious, Pliny—Tacitus leaves some doubt about this guilt, by prefacing his account with the statement that one or some of his prede-
cessors had assumed that the fire started accidentally. He either softens the details related by Dio and Suetonius that most gravely incriminated the emperor or mentions them only as rumors and describes the imperial concern for those deprived of shelter and the other necessities of life. On the other hand he portrays what advantages the emperor gained for himself and for the city in the rebuilding. The accusation and condemnation of the Christians forms the conclusion of the points made against him. Tacitus' placing it at this point, in spite of the fact that the proceedings actually took up a considerable amount of time, is in harmony with his custom in dealing with minor issues to neglect the chronological sequence for the sake of the material connection. Besides, he has nothing more by way of dated events to report from the rest of the year. Any reflective author would proceed in the same way.

According to E. Meyer and many historians and philologists the suspicion against the emperor is absurd; Tacitus provides enough points by way of vindication to show this. When most modern presentations nevertheless blame the emperor, according to Meyer this is to be credited solely to the refined skill of Tacitus' presentation, which, while appearing to be entirely objective and non-partisan, imperceptibly convinces the reader with the interpretation that is unfavorable to the emperor. Meyer finds it striking that Tacitus alone connects the persecution of the Christians with the fire (p. 501), but of course once again he explains (p. 506) that Tacitus must have drawn this from one of his sources; according to Meyer, it is not in itself incorrect, but it sets the course of events in a false light. Thus up to this point there is nothing that would argue against the conscientiousness of Tacitus; for the modern historian also must draw on his own judgment for the light, that is, for the connection of the individual attested facts. Meyer concedes that the accusation against the Christians as those responsible for the fire must actually have been made and eagerly taken up (p. 507)—by Nero? But Tacitus himself says, Meyer notes, that this reason was soon dropped. "He expresses himself, altogether deliberately, it seems, very ambiguously: 'Hence those who confessed (qui fatabantur) were seized first'—he has deliberately (Reitzenstein's italics) left unclear whether he means those who confessed to having committed arson, or to being Christians, and this will continue to be a point of disagreement. His intention in so doing was to provide a transition to the fact that Nero's intended exposure of the arsonists becomes a proceeding against the Christians as such: 'then, upon their information, a great many others were added, not so much for the crime of arson as for the hatred of mankind'." We are not told how that could be; we are only assured, with great emphasis, that the Christians were not condemned as arsonists, and thus as common criminals, but, as Tacitus himself explicitly says in full agreement with all the other reports, because of their religion, as Christians. This is undoubtedly correct, but I do not see how it can be harmonized with the intention attributed to Tacitus to convince the reader of the emperor's guilt in the matter of the fire and with his introductory words. Meyer also appears to sense a contradiction in these two indications and hence to charge Tacitus with having deliberately made unclear statements in order to veil the contradiction. That is to say: Tacitus wanted to cast suspicion on the emperor and to create a false impression, but because he was conscientious he chose his words in such a way that they could also be understood
correctly; indeed, that he also explicitly told the truth, in addition to creating this false impression.

I cannot understand the psychology of such a procedure, and even less can I comprehend the words. According to Meyer Tacitus intentionally made an ambiguous choice of the words qui fabeantur; the reader was to be able to understand it just as well to mean "who confessed themselves to be arsonists" as to mean "who confessed themselves to be Christians". If he understood it to mean the former, as appears almost necessary after the preceding non deoedebat infamia, quin iussum incendium oreretur; igitur abolendo rumor rei sub-didit  reos (thus incendii), he could not understand the "great many others" who were arrested on their information as only Christians, and he is bound to have been amazed that they "were added", not because of arson, but "for the hatred of the human race" (this is the way Meyer translates the reading of the manuscript that he chooses to maintain, odio humani generis coniuncti). But added to whom? To the informers, who themselves were released because of their giving this information? Because of their hatred of the human race? How does this fit in with the eorum indicio and with the word vulgus? If the reader now, frightened off from that interpretation by such contradictions, should attempt to connect fabeantur with the confession of Christianity, this expression is at least odd for those who were known as Christians, the rest of the statement is subject to the same difficulties, and indeed those difficulties are even intensified, for if the fatetore does not refer to the arson, the words haud proinde in crimine incendii become utterly devoid of meaning, and the connection between the clauses is completely removed. In that case the author would have been expressing himself, not ambigiously, but meaninglessly. According to Meyer this is what he did, in order to find the transition that led from Nero's intended exposure of the arsonists to a proceeding against the Christians as such. But according to Tacitus Nero intended from the very outset to hold the Christians as such responsible for the arson. How then can he be seeking here, in intentionally ambiguous words, the transition to that stance? Further: Tacitus wants to put the blame on Nero—the latter's blaming others falsely itself shows that he was guilty—and he relieves him of the blame by adding that the general hatred of the human race had forced upon the emperor the condemnation of the Christians as such! I am unable to find here the refined skill in presentation which, though apparently altogether objective and non-partisan, requires the reader to be fully convinced that the unfavorable interpretation is the only proper one (Meyer, p. 502). The fact that it has become the fashion to accuse Tacitus of intentional distortion of the truth has led Meyer to make this attempt at interpretation. Hence he has utterly neglected the main question: on what legal grounds were the Christians condemned? He gives a psychological explanation of the universal hatred of the Christians and assures us—evidently in opposition to Mommsen—that even without the burning of Rome the persecution of the Christians would have had to break out within a short time. One may dispute such unprovable assertions or not: the question as to the legal justification for measures whose effect extends over centuries is never superfluous. Our previous attempts at explanation have not yielded a result that satisfies me. The objections made by Guérin (Nouvelle Revue historique de droit français et étranger XIX, 1895, 601) and by Heine (Berichte der Sächs. Ges. der Wiss. LXII, 1910, pp. 292 and 332) against Mommsen's brilliant
essay, "Der Religionsfrevel im römischen Recht" (Histor. Staehr. LXIV, p. 389, Juristische Schriften III, 389), appear to me entirely compelling, though of course the efforts of these two scholars still are not convincing. Mommesen has stretched the frame too wide for his statements, which juridically speaking certainly are splendid, to secure an adequate foundation for the treatment of Christianity. For that foundation the question may not be simply "What was the attitude of the state toward foreign religion?" but "What was its attitude toward secret religion?" Of course such a secret religion would usually be a foreign one, but not every foreign religion would fall into this category. A certain supervision was required even by the Hellenistic state, in which both Greek and Oriental secret services were traditional (on the latter, cf. the inscription of Philadelphiea, and on the law concerning supervision cf. the edit of Philopator). There too the suspicion was expressed that anything that requires secrecy is criminal, and nocturnal rites of consecration were regarded as immoral and for this reason shunned the light (Philo, De spec. leg. I 320). For Rome the reason for supervision is still more urgent. There are no native Roman mysteries; the woman's festival of the Bona Dea cannot be counted as such, since it was accessible to all. As Cicero expressly affirms (De leg. II 21), the law and the Roman custom were in harmony: nocturna miliarum sacrificia ne sunt, praeta olla, quae pro populo rite fient, neque quem initianto, nisi ut adaeqet, Cereris Graeco sacro. All mysteries are forbidden, and, as the continuation shows, all καταρασμος not commanded by a priest of the Roman state. The rationale for this emphasizes the danger to public morality and appeals explicitly to the senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus as the prime precedent. The mystery-oath was regarded as especially dangerous to the state

This is shown also by the rumors that were circulated about Catiline and his band (Sallust, chapter 22), but it is shown moreover by the mystery community of Philadelphiea, founded under Roman rule, which as a precaution posted in a public place its oath which obligated its members to a strict morality. As Nock has observed, the Bithynian Christians employed a similar precautionary measure, and it did not fail to make an impression on Pliny. Thus Mommesen also must concede (Strafrecht, p. 561) that particular sacral forms and particular aims are established, which by law establish the culpability. It is necessary to take these as our point of departure.

Now if we take as a basis Tacitus' account of the first and most serious collision of the authority of the state and Christianity, and compare that of Livy concerning the Bacchanalia, the course of events becomes comprehensible without any artificial constructions. Livy tells (XXXIX 14.10) that immediately after the discovery of the mystery—cult the city was guarded at night by soldiers: ne qui nocturni coetus fient utque ab incendiis cauaretur. From these "conspiracies" people expected arson (cf. Catiline) along with all sorts of other (especially sexual) crimes. The plot of a band of criminals appeared to be involved in the fire; it was in the public interest to find those who were guilty; and it is not surprising that people thought of the new secret religion. It was not only the rabble that regarded that religion as a criminal confederacy, but also later on such men as Suetonius and Tacitus. What could easily be ascertained at the outset was well suited to feed the suspicion: the Christians, who were longing for the return of their Lord, anticipated the world-conflagration that was bound up with that looked—for return; the zealots among them assumed a hostile stance toward the pagan
environment and the pagan state, and the moderates adopted a neutral attitude. How this was taken we see further in later pagan utterances as in Minucius (11.1): *quid quod tota orbis et ipse mundo...minantur incendiones, ruinam moliamur*! [148] Hence one can hardly make an accusation against the Roman government out of one investigation into whether the Christians were responsible for the fire. But in fact in the light of this fact the often discussed question whether the Christians were put to death as arsonists or as Christians seems to me to be utterly misleading. Tacitus leaves no doubt on that point: both happened. It is not that arsonists had been sought out, who later turned out to be Christians, but "the Christians" had been arrested on suspicion of arson, and "the Christians", or, if one prefers, "Christianity", had been condemned, but—because it bore the blame for the fire. Condemned, and therefore of course forbidden for the future, [149] unless a successor should cancel the decision.

Now let us look at Tacitus' wording which we set out to explain: to turn the suspicion of arson away from himself, Nero had accused and condemned to the most frightful death—thus accusation and condemnation must refer to the same crime, or otherwise the whole narrative form becomes meaningless—those *quo per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat*. Tacitus himself would not have spoken in this way; in his time the designation *Christianus* undoubtedly was as well established and self-explanatory even in the mouths of the Christians as Pliny, Suetonius, and Ignatius show. The agreement with Acts 11:26 convincingly shows that this term stems from Nero's time; they themselves would have used the name ἄγων or ἔλατυνος as a self-designation; the populace, holding them to be criminals, named them Ἀρνικαλατος after the criminal crucified under Pontius Pilate. If we must trace the first allusion either directly or indirectly back to the official proceedings, then of course we must do the same with the second also. It is unnecessary to talk about an addition made by Tacitus or even to construct inferences on the basis of the obvious agreement with I Tim. 6:13: ἐν κύκλῳ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ χωριορρύθνου τα κάτα καὶ Ἑρωτοῦ ἱεροῦ τοῦ μαντηρήσαντος ἐκ Ποντίου Πιλάτου τῆς καλῆς ὀμολογίας. The name of the long-since deceased founder of the religion is stated also in the proceedings against the Bacchanalia; here it is far from unimportant for the judge that the originator [51] had already been put to death as a criminal by a Roman official and that the despised land of the Jews is the homeland of this religion; this too is contained in the records, as of course is the outcome of the hearings. Tacitus' wording offers some difficulties, which to be sure have been exaggerated: *igitur primum correpti qui ftabantur, deinde indicio eorum multitud in gens haeu proinde in crimen incendii quam odio humani generis convocati sunt*. The genuinely Tacitean striving for brevity and imbalance of parts of the sentence that are homogeneous shows us the basic ideas: *primum correpti pauet qui ftabantur, deinde indicio eorum multitud in gens, quae non ftabatur, sed convoca est*. Non quidem in crimen incendii sed in odio humani generis. As soon as this sentence is reconstructed, it becomes obvious that the reading *continuit* is utterly impossible. There must be a *convocati* to correspond to the *reos* (*incendii accusatos*), *fassi*; Tacitus has assumed a *damnati* following it in the series. The sequence is clear: the former group present no problem, and indeed the basic principle of Roman law is that *confessus pro damnato est*; for such a person no further inquiry is needed; but one who does not confess must be convicted. From this it follows that *odio humani generis* corresponds to the words *in crimen incendii*.
These are altogether precise and pointed statements about the outcome of the trials: the full confession of some few is followed by the collapse of the attempt at conviction of the great majority: no punishable act, but only an attitude of hostility toward the world could be proved. Thereupon all of them were condemned to death. These facts of the case would hardly have been misunderstood if the unusual imperfect tense in *qui fataeabantur* had not aroused some doubts; thus there arose the remarkable assertion that this *fateri* must precede the arrest, and thus could only mean "those who were accustomed to confess their Christianity". In that assertion no note is taken of the fact that then it would have to be true of the *ingenia multitudo* that they did not confess their Christianity, while the bold confessors immediately denounced all Christians. Then it remains utterly incomprehensible how they were convicted of the *odium humani generis* and why they were condemned to a criminal's death; the whole narrative is fragmented and meaningless, while with the other interpretation it progresses clearly and according to a plan. In such a case I would ask first of all: what other tense could Tacitus have used? The form *qui fessi erant* is ruled out; that would mean "those who had already confessed their guilt in the arson". The perfect tense *qui fessi sunt* was subject to misunderstanding and contrary to good style; hardly any other possibility remained but the imperfect of portrayal, or of the accompanying, more subordinate circumstance. The real offense lies in a logical dislocation; everyone expects the simple narrative to read *qui primum corripiebantur, fessi sunt*. The main clause, as everyone feels, had to contain what appears to us to be the main point and is now found in the subordinate clause; otherwise the reader is taken aback. Might Tacitus have intended precisely that? He places the emphasis upon *primum corripiti (sunt)*, and with similar emphasis he places over against that *haud proinde in crimine incensit quam odio humani generis convicti sunt*; a bad attitude could be ascertained, but no specific act, and only such an act is punishable. The objective statements must in fact give pause to any attentive reader. How strange: precisely the very first ones to be arrested confess the arson and name the names of all the Christians; all the others do indeed confess their attitude, but a confession of actual culpable behavior cannot be forced from any of them, and none of them can be convicted. If we are not to assume an accident that was miraculously favorable to the emperor, then the police first seized those of whom they knew that these would confess, because they had been sent into the churches as spies. I think that a reader familiar with the circumstances could hardly form any other opinion, particularly when he immediately thereafter read something that could be restated, as far as its content is concerned, as *qui indicium profitebantur* (cf. An. VI 3). Now the question arises as to which are the exemplary cases and thus the legal norms. In the proceedings against the Bacchanalia it was a matter of a religious practice that demonstrably had led to the gravest offenses, whose oath in fact obligated its adherents to do these things. All the participants were imprisoned, but only those against whom a criminal action could be proven were executed. Not even the oath that obligated them to this, and thus clearly set forth their intention, sufficed to incur the death penalty. Here imprisonment was sufficient punishment. Then the practice of the *cult* is forbidden; from now on, everyone who practices it is punished by death; *now it is the crime*. Since Christianity was not yet prohibited, a similar procedure had to be followed. Tacitus obviously regarded a prohibition of Christianity as necessary,
just as Suetonius did; as he explicitly declares, he believed the common rumor that it was a criminal religion whose adherents deserved death. But the crime of which they were accused at that time was not proven; one would have to search for others, convict them of those, and then place the religion under penalty. The cruelty of the punishment and its transformation into entertainment for the people he thoroughly disapproves; that sort of thing only arouses undesirable sympathy for people who in the interest of the state must be eliminated. The severity of the Roman gives us a contrary impression, but so does the pronounced sense of the tradition of the law, the shameless violation of which shows the judge to be the one actually guilty.

In my opinion it is doubtful whether with the available material we actually can prove that the insane emperor, who still craftily strove to cloak his crimes, must have been innocent of setting the fire. What has been adduced—precisely from Tacitus—for this purpose certainly does not suffice. That he had been absent at first is conceivable, particularly if he had the fire set, and his attempt to alleviate the distresses of those affected by the fire then was necessary. We do not know how strongly the contemporary sources followed by Tacitus agreed among themselves; we only learn from him that their agreement was not complete, and only he indicates that only psychological reasons settle the issue for him. Whether one approve of those reasons or not, this does not form the basis for accusing him of intentionally misleading his readers. The connection between the setting of the fire and the proceedings against the Christians, which is found only in his writings,—Dio's account is known only in fragments at this very point, and Suetonius, according to his plan of composition and his judgment, must separate the two—should not arouse any suspicion at least in the person who regards it as objectively correct. Thus it appears to me that Eduard Meyer's charge against Tacitus is based solely on his interpretation of Tacitus' words and that this interpretation is rendered utterly impossible because of its own internal contradictions.

Now let us see to what extent the next development confirms our construction of the matter. I need only to preface this by noting that, as Guérin has correctly emphasized, as a rule the decision on such general decrees about religion were brought before the Senate and that this also had to be in Nero's interest and best explains the continuing force of the decision. But even if this sanction first came about under Domitian, unfortunately I know too little about his handling of this issue: in any case the crucial precedent had been set by Nero: the underlying issue was the criminia, but it was the nomen that was made culpable. The results that must issue from this are first shown by Pliny (ep. X 96, 97). A genuine alarm over these results prompts him, who first has strictly followed the general custom, to lay three questions before the emperor. The occasion for this is provided by the fact that he has been obliged to send a number of Christians, as Roman citizens, to the imperial court; it is in his interest to inform the court what has been his procedure and how strong the new sect is in his province. He also wishes to offer counsel according to his knowledge of the situation, but of course he can do this only in the form of stating that he is uncertain and is requesting guidance. The emperor also accepts this counsel in part: full immunity from prosecution is decreed for those who abandon their Christianity, and this immunity remained in effect. For this there was, as we shall see, a precedent. The first question was: is the nomen ipsum punished, or the flagitia
_it will be seen that the condemnation of the religion ensues from crimes in the civil realm. Even Tacitus believes that the religion evokes such crimes (cf. the words atruida aut pudenda; he must have been thinking of the Lord’s Supper). Pliny has sought for such crimes and has not found them. Except for its folly, the cult itself contains nothing offensive. He has been able to prove that there is an oath (sacramentum); however, it does not obligate the adherents to commit crimes, as is assumed in the case of the mystery-oaths (the Bacchanalian oath), but rather to avoid them; he has also found that they have a sacred meal, but it is morally inoffensive and not actually secret, but open to the entire community. Moreover, many Christians have been neglecting that meal: post editum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hactearias esse vetuerum. Thus in the edict Christianity is not specifically and exclusively prohibited; it is subsumed under the secret societies, by which the religious societies particularly were meant. Therefore Pliny asked the accused Christians three times—apparently at intervals—with specific reference to the penalties involved, whether they were Christians. Only if they persisted did he have them executed, as he was compelled to do, according to his conviction, by law and by duty. Such persistence is open rebellion against the command of the state as well as participation in a bacchanalian observance, according to the decree of the Senate. Pliny asks, secondly: is there a distinction to be made among punishments? In spite of the dreadful harshness of the proceedings against the Bacchanalia, a difference was made there, though Nero did not make any distinction in his actions. Finally, as is actually already manifest in the portrayal of what he has done, he asks in the third place: is it possible to show clemency toward those who repent? For political reasons he would urgently recommend such an exercise of clemency. In fact, he has already been acting accordingly: he has had the person denying his Christianity to offer a sacrifice to the gods—and maleficere Christo (thus there is an example for the anathemas later demanded by the church). Here the judicial fiction is that no Christian can do this, and therefore anyone who has done it is no Christian, regardless of whatever else may argue against him. The rights of the state are given very strong emphasis. Thus it seems a bit of tragic irony that precisely through this attempt at mildness the inner contradiction between Christianity and the Roman idea of the state and of religion must come to light. Anyone who can read between the lines will sense that Pliny wants more than this. In veiled fashion he poses the question whether the folly of a belief itself is enough to deserve punishment, whether the designation of Christ as God is a capital offense. Any Roman must answer that in the negative. It is Pliny’s wish that the nomen remain unpunished, but that the crimina that might be connected with it be punished. But that would be a yielding on the part of the state and would evoke disgust from such men as Suetonius and Tacitus. Trajan tacitly rejects this, by giving full approval to Pliny’s previous procedure; he wants to soften the harshness in a significant measure. The Christians are not to be sought out (anquirendi non sunt); denunciations are not to be accepted, but only complaints (?). Herein is the full contrast to Nero’s procedure, a noticeable softening as compared with the practice employed in actions against the Bacchanalia. If the Christian comes into conflict with the authority of the state, the odium should in no case concern the officials. The principle of nomen punitendum is maintained, only it is applied as seldom as possible. In
the general establishment of full pardon for the person who officially renounces Christianity it is shown that the state is concerned only with an outward acknowledgment of its rights.

As immense as this concession is for Roman feeling, Trajan has a precedent for it in Tiberius’ proceedings against the Jewish propaganda in Rome, and he must have used it in his obvious dilemma, even though the two cases were somewhat different. In the investigation and the prohibition of the Isis-mysteries and of Jewish propaganda among Roman citizens in the year A.D. 19, Tiberius had the Senate accept the decree: ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infesta, quis idonea aestas, in insulam Sardiniam veheretur, oecovendis illicatrocinitis et, si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum; et eri eiderent Italia, nisi certam ante diem profanos ritus exuisissent (Tacitus, An. II 85, on the expansion from Suetonius; cf. above, p. 126). People might seek, on grounds of fairness and justice, for a lightening of the earlier decree. That it had to do essentially with cultic prohibitions one could conclude from Tacitus’ words and from Suetonius’ statement coactis qui superstitione ea tenabantur religiosas vestes cum instrumento omni comburere, and sofar as it had to do with practices from the old Hellenistic-Jewish Sabazios-cult, the Jews could easily yield. Astrology, which with some justice was likewise regarded as a kind of religion, was similarly forbidden only in its practical exercise. The entire regulation, traced back by Philo to Sejanus’ influence, had only ephemeral significance. But an example was actually given thereby for no longer punishing one for belonging to a religion earlier declared to be injurious to public morals, if it were abandoned in a definitive way, and Trajan seems to me to have utilized this example with reference to Christianity. This clemency had to be denied the person who relapsed. In the period that followed the state steadily softened its stand; it purports to be satisfied with outward acknowledgment also of its own gods; but Christianity cannot grant that recognition, and the fearful and crucial struggle begins. The underlying legal basis for subsuming Christianity under the concept of criminal religions that had been shaped by the Bacchanalia and for the historic consequences issuing from that classification is provided by the one erroneous judgment about the guilt in the burning of Rome. Hence we may also demand from the historian a precise interpretation of the only extant account.

We see the prevailing of a fixed tradition which in fact we can follow also in lesser issues—thus when Neopythagorean wonder-workers are punished by Caesar, Tiberius, and Domitian with the same penalty, banishment from Italy. For the Armenian =G0, the religion of magic, the same principle was followed, and, in fact, as I shall show later, here always in the earlier harshness: the state has the right to forbid cultic activities and cultic forms that must or can lead to civil crimes and to impose criminal penalties upon the disobedient. Whether he has participated in crimes makes no difference: he is only asked about participation in the cult. The fact that the presupposition did not hold true for Christianity—at least in its predominant form—was first noted when it appeared too late for reversal and one could only recommend to the official in charge as much restraint as possible. Except for the fateful first mistaken judgment, the matter was not handled differently from individual mystery-religions that were once identified as objectionable. It is conceivable that from about the beginning of the second century A.D. some of the great mysteries had achieved a kind of general official recognition, and for these numerous "wit-
nesses" are now available; but this in no way justifies the conclusion that they had not existed earlier, and others besides these as well, nor the conclusion that "the mystery-religions" first arose with Christianity and previously were without significance for the general religious outlook. We have the obligation to look for indications of their existence.

Among these I reckon, first of all, ideas that have the character of the mysteries. As we shall soon show, they are closely related to magical ideas; indeed, the boundaries between cult and magic can never be clearly drawn. They have still closer connections with the so-called secret literature, which to be sure only seldom offers us writings that can be dated. By way of example I cite a recent fascinating discovery of Cumont to which this applies and which certainly is not connected with any actual mystery, but with the basic perspective of everyone.

There is extant a little writing, part of it in Greek and part in medieval Latin translation (Catalogus cod. astrol. graec. VIII 3.134, 4.253), from the physician and astrologer Thessalos of Tralles, who according to the testimonies of Galen and Pliny was held in high regard in Rome under the emperor Nero. In the foreword addressed to the emperor—Nero rather than Claudius—he boasts of having traveled from his place of study, Alexandria, into the interior of Egypt: τῆς ψυχῆς ἐρωτηματικοῦ ἑνίκης ἀμάθους, συνεχώς ἐκ τῶν ὁμανυτῶν τῆς κηροσίας ἀκτεῖνων ἐλπιδόνεον, ὅτι ὁ μεγάλες φαντάσιας ἦν ἡ κυστικὴ τῆς θεοῦ καρδιάσσωσθαι μοι τοῖς τόποις, ὅτι ὁ γαμοφαρμακὸς λάρσος ἐκ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρεων καὶ τῆς πατρίδας κατεληκένει θυμίων. Everywhere he inquires εἰ τῷ τῆς μαγικῆς ἐνεργείας ὅφειται, and finally he finds in Diospolis (Thebes) a venerable old priest of Asklepios who promises to arrange for him to meet a god or the spirit of a deceased person. Both of them wait for

three days in strict asceticism; on the fourth day he hastens to the priest, who has already furnished a little temple (οἴκος) that has been purified, and asks to see Asklepios and to talk with him in private (μόνος κριτέριον). The priest reluctantly promises this. He has him sit down opposite the seat where the god customarily sits, goes out, and locks him in. Suddenly the god is there—his beauty and the ornamentation of his garments are beyond description—and, with his right hand raised, greets the hearer by name: "Blessed Thessalos, who are even now honored with God and whom men will venerate as a god in the future, when your successes become known. Ask what you will; I will gladly grant you anything." Thessalos, who has foresightedly smuggled in some writing materials, asks why he has had no success with the directions given by Nechepso about the powers of herbs, and is told that Nechepso had not given them out of divine revelation, but only out of his own knowledge, which to be sure was excellent; but he did not know when and where the herbs should be gathered. Asklepios reveals this, and Thessalos faithfully writes down his statement.

The time and the personality of the author make the writing uncommonly interesting; the connections with the magical papyri are conspicuous, but the connections with Apuleius also are inescapable. Even though Thessalos may have secured the experience itself by fraud, he certainly had models to follow, and a miracle of this kind could easily be faked; he splendidly reproduces the religious perspectives and testifies, moreover, to the antiquity of this mystical literature. In fact, we still possess the beginning part of a very ancient alchemistic writing, Βύσσλος εἱράγων τῶν φατών καὶ ὁμανυτῶν τῶν ἁρματέων διανοοῦντος τοῦ Πείρακον τοῦ Ἁρχιξερέας, Πρὸς Κλεοκάτραν τὴν σοφῆν. Ἐν τούτῳ τῇ
dence can almost never be demonstrated, because the belief and the practice of magic are so universally manifest. Thus Cumont rightly goes into the psychological presuppositions. The agreement with the belief in the mysteries is often utterly amazing. What Thessalos pictures or Lucian offers in the description of the magician which he himself inserted⁷⁴ (Mithrobusanen: the one redeemed by Mithras?) is the same thing that Apuleius purports to have experienced, only abbreviated and simplified.⁷⁵ When in the early or middle Ptolemaic period Petosiris—Nechespo presumes the mystery-perspectives and in Nero’s time Thessalos⁷⁶ tries to impose on an educated public, and indeed on the emperor himself, by means of such a bit of fakery, as I see it, we may conclude that the mysteries had already existed earlier in the Orient and were in some measure familiar in their basic outlook and perspectives. How long these perspectives survived in Egypt and what they signified to the pious here I have already attempted to show, more than twenty years ago, through a brief monastic tale which I repeat here (Cotelier, Eccles. graec. mon. I 582): εἶδεν ὁ ὁμόφων ὁ ἔλευθερός ὅτι θαυμάζειν τὸν Ἡρακλείον ὅπως ἠκολούθησε τὸ κεφάλαιον ἡφαίστειον τὸν Ἅρησυ οὕτως ὁ ἔλευθερος τῇ τυχῇ ἣμών; καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ: ὡς ἦν· καὶ λέγει μοι ὁ ἔλευθερος: τῶν ἔλευθερων τῇ τυχῇ ἧμων οὐδὲν θεωρεῖται ἢ ἦμων, ἀλλὰ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἡμῖν τὰ μυστήρια αὐτῶν. καὶ ὡς ἔκτασιν κόποις κοιλοῦσι, ἀγρυπνός, ἔσχος (rejection to the cells), ἄσκησις λέγεται διότι οὐδὲν ἰσχύει; καὶ τῶν οὐκ ἐχειν, τῇ τυχῇ πάντως. ὁ λόγος τοῦ κοιλίαν ἔχει τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἡμῶν τοῖς ἑωράζονται ὡς ἄνα τίς ἡμῖν καὶ διὰ τὸν τοῦτο ἄνθρωπον ἀποκαλύπτεται ἡμῖν τὰ μυστήρια αὐτῶν. καὶ ἀκόλουθον καὶ ἀφήγειλα τοῖς γέρου τὰ ῥήματα τῶν ἑρέων,
As a general norm for my investigation I have earlier established the position that for the period which alone is under consideration here, in procedures and perspectives in which Christianity is in agreement with several different pagan mystery-religions, the priority is probably to be credited to the latter. A borrowing of cultic terms from Christianity by paganism is more difficult to conceive; here the burden of proof always falls on the person who would assert the priority of Christianity. Whatever may still be in dispute in individual cases must be judged individually according to the character of the writing and the context of the terms. By way of justification I may add only that most of the Christian authors probably knew something of pagan literature, while only very few of the pagan writers would have known anything of Christian literature, and that in general conversion from paganism to Christianity was more common than conversion from Christianity to paganism. Until this is proved to me to be erroneous, I shall hardly be able to abandon these guidelines, and I must wait for proof that Christianity has influenced the pagan mysteries.79

For the purpose of these studies we may omit the question to what extent the cultic terms even of the Hellenistic religions have been influenced by the earlier Greek mysteries, which in the main have lost their significance. They do not directly influence Christianity. The earlier literature certainly must have transmitted individual words, but those mysteries that were limited to specific locations will hardly have had any inner impact; they lacked the propagandizing of prophets and missionaries and the support of established communities. It is surprising that Epicurus still makes numerous references to the mysteries and borrows from them, for example,
the use of the word τέλεως as Diels (Abh. d. Berliner Akad. 1915, pp. 44 and 93; Philodemus, περὶ δὲν ἀγ., col. 24.12) has shown: οὐδὲ τὸν τελεώς τελείων ὁ θεὸς εὐλυπτεῖς ἄνω [φο- βεῖν] γεννυμίουνται. If one connects this passage with Lucretius I 80–81, one will have to attribute to Epicurus himself or to one of his closest pupils the grand picture that portrays this τέλεως bursting open the gates of the heavenly temple and bringing knowledge back to his disciples as booty (cf. Lucretius III 14, Heinze, p. 52). Of course it is precisely at that point, then, that the question arises in my mind whether Epicurus had not already heard of Oriental views of this kind. The agreement with the didactic writings that have their heroes ascend into the heaven of the gods that is guarded by a terrible monster and bring down from there the infallible truth is indeed quite striking. 80

But even if that is doubtful, I should in any case assume for Poseidonios an acquaintance with the perspectives of Oriental mysteries. I have earlier referred to a passage from Seneca's ninetieth epistle, where he opposes Poseidonios but also makes heavy use of him (§27–30): non est, inquam, (philosophia) instrumentorum ad usu necessarios opifex. quid illam parvula acdivnas? artificem videas vitae; illam ( Cod.: alias) quidem artes sub dominio habet—nam aut vita, illi vitae quoque omnes servientes—ce terum ad beatum statum tendit, illo duuit, illo via aperrit. quae sint mala, quae video aut ostendit, vanitatem esquit mentibus, dat magnitudine solidam, inflatam vero et ex animi speciosae reprimis, nec ignorat sinit, inter magna quid intres et tumida. totius naturae notitiam ac suae tradit: quid sint illae qualesque declarat, quid inferi, quid lares et gentii, quid in secondam numnum formam animae perpetitas, 81 ubi consistant, quid agant, quid possint, quid velit. haec eis initianta (τελεως) sunt, per quae non municipale saecrum, 82 sed ingene deorum omnium templum, mundus ipse, reseratur, cuiva vera simulacra versusque facies cerendas mentitus protulit. nam ad spectacula tam magna hebes visus est. §29. ad initia deinde rerum redit aeternam rationem toti inditam et vim omnium seminum in eis singula propri (labores) figurantem. 83 tum de animo coepit inquirere, unde esset, ubi, quando, in quod membra divisus. deinde a corporibus se ad incorporali transmutit veritatemque et argumenta eia extusseit. post haec quemadmodum discernerentur vitae aut voce ambiguæ; in utraque enim falsa veris immixa sunt. non abduxit, inquam, se, ut Poseidonio videtur, ab ipsis artibus sapiens, sed ad illas omnia non venit. Seneca himself says in essence that the characterization of the main task of philosophy is taken from Poseidonios, and this is confirmed by its own distinctiveness. For him philosophy is the science of human and divine matters and of their relation; he bases religion on the inner experience. From him we have a kind of definition of deity (Sto- baeus I, p. 34.26 Wachsm.): κυνάμα νοστόν καὶ κυρίνδες, οὐκ ἔχουν μὲν μορφῆν, μεταβάλλον δὲ εἰς ὁ βούλεται καὶ συνεχουμοῦν- μενον κάσον. That sounds like a formula of Oriental mysticism that repeatedly stresses concerning God: "He becomes what he will, and he remains what he is." It later finds expression in the cult of the Aeon as the καντομορφος θεὸς or omniomnis deus. In the Naassene Prophecy it assumes the form of de- clarating that he is the life-force, in itself ἀχαρακτήρωτος, but in the seed of the individual being or thing κεχαρακτηρου- μένος. Seneca's words, which in the tradition are hardly compre- hensible, seem to me to point to this interpretation. Later we shall also find in Seneca some mystery-terms and images which we must trace back to Poseidonios and in him to Oriental
mysteries in relation to Christianity—testimonies that are quite otherwise compelling render this absolutely certain, and, I trust, this will be even more clearly set forth in the further course of this book—but to prepare the way for an understanding of the style and manner of perception characteristic of these mysteries. The next appendix is meant also to serve this purpose.
NOTES

1. Even for Paul, other than the Jews only the Ελληνες come into consideration; it is a fixed, unitary concept that is attached to the culture. That culture is the instrument of propaganda of the ruling class. There is little question that the propaganda activity of the peoples in various territories represents the religious counter-thrust against a politically oriented and compulsory dissemination of the Greek cult. As a rule, a strong spread of the Greek culture appears to precede that activity, and, since the Greek religion lacks an inner strength, it prepares the way for an Orientalizing of the Greek piety rather than a Hellenizing of the Oriental piety.

2. As I have constantly emphasized, this word has for me the sense of a designation of essence. Only thus can one employ it at all in the history of religions, for which the arrival of Roman rule does not signify any kind of break. I also sense it as a deficiency that with this term only one component, and even the less important component, of a mixture is expressed; but I know of no practically usable remedy for that deficiency.

3. If we seek solid witnesses for the dating, we must realize the nature and the limited range of the literary pieces preserved from the time between Alexander and Augustus. Those witnesses cannot have been numerous.

4. Here it seems to be indicated that Meyer gives no credence to the well-known testimony of Plutarch (Pomp. 24) or rather to his ancient source; that source speaks explicitly of the initiatory rites. I can only appeal to the judgment of the best expert, Cumont (see now his The Mysteries of Mithra, pp. 36-37). Cumont even regards as entirely possible the associated supposition of Plutarch that the Roman Mithraic community arose at that time (67 B.C.), and he is firmly convinced of the great antiquity of the mysteries. I do not see what can be offered in objection to this view. On the other hand, I cannot share Cumont's confidence in connecting with the actual Mithras-mysteries the report of the elder Pliny (XXIX 17) that Tigidates had initiated Nero through magicae sacrae. A passage from Juvenal will later point us to an Armenian-Iranian cult that fits better into the total context of the passage from Pliny. It too of course was also a mystery cult and was at that time officially recognized for Armenians; hence the king belonged to it. We may also presume a certain measure of antiquity for it.

5. His views on this subject are adequately indicated in Chapter VII of his Hauptprobleme der Gnosis and in the article on "Gnosis" in the Realencyclopadie.

6. Of course even less was he conceding what Eduard Meyer in the next comment has him conceding.

7. I have discussed the Mithras-mysteries not at all, and the Attis-mysteries only incidentally, because I have presupposed the presentations of Cumont and Heding; in Meyer's work nothing at all appears of what I have cited as demonstrably ancient.

8. The intention here is clear; only these communities can establish an actual commonality of life with the Hellenes. The decree of Ptolemy Philopator, to be discussed later, even recognizes the Jew who has joined such a community as a Hellen and a full citizen. The oath of initiation is regarded as the renunciation of Judaism. In the kingdom of the Diadochi it was in the state's interest to encourage such sacral associations, so long as they would admit "Hellenes"; this was not the case at first in the Roman empire.


10. There are few more absurd assertions than the recent one to the effect that the mystery-religions were intended only for the pure, the righteous, or the holy, and that this constituted their difference from Christianity. The very opposite of this is constantly presupposed by the Hellenistic mysteries—even the passage from Philo under discussion—: it is precisely the sinners, indeed the criminals, that turn to them. Of course before their initiation they are absolved and make their vows to live pure lives henceforth. If they violate their oath, they are excluded from the community until they have been absolved. When Philo pictures the mystery-communities as recruited from robbers, pirates, and throngs of dissolute women, he is not too far from what Paul discloses about the former life of the Corinthian Christians. And yet for Paul the Christians as a community are the δικαιού and Ἑλεκτριώ.


13. *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, 1911, p. xxi. I had at first overlooked Cumont's warning, but later came myself, through the analysis of pagan and Gnostic-Christian writings, to a similar stressing of that part of Judaism that had dissolved in paganism (Heizenstein-Schaefer, I). The fact that Cumont, in the work cited, explicitly emphasizes that in the Hellenistic Orient, "whose religious development in the last three centuries B.C. is almost wholly unknown to us", lie the closest sources for the West and that he emphasizes, as I do, that the Oriental mystery-religions are determinative for the piety, may be noted in passing. The attempt to set us in opposition to each other is based on selected details from earlier works and on the diversity of the tasks which we have set for ourselves.

14. Norden has recently pointed to the significance of this Egyptian theology in his fine book, *Die Geburt des Kindes*. I shall later come back to this theology and to the passages that are not cited in the text.

15. It is worthy of note that Cicero (De leg. II 37) has precise knowledge of the course of events and presupposes that his readers are similarly informed; for him it is the earliest and the normative example of the penetration and the suppression of a mystery-cult. One might conjecture that in the final analysis it is the *annales maximi* that underlie this information.

16. He would hardly have felt this way about a purely Greek cult of the deity who in fact had long ago been adopted in Rome.


18. On the other hand, to cite only one example, in the Phrygian inscription published by Ramsay (Journal of Hellenistic Studies IV, p. 419), the chief priest and **ύπαπατος** of Hecate Epitychamnus receives, on the basis of divine revelations, the right of **χρησιμοδοτευ** as well as of **νομοθετευ**, and indeed **κατ δρος κατ υπάπατος** (this is the correct reading). In this context **νομοθετευ** denotes the cultic arrangements (cf. in the Mithras-liturgy, *δι* **κατ** **κατοικίας κατ ήπαπατος ποιμνηρος* (Dieterich 14, 35)); and the **δεσπότης** are the initiates (cf. *ibid.*, 2.5: τα **φυκοπαραδοσια** μυστηρια, μοι δε τακων αδεωνατοι; 4.7: μεταφερομενες με τα διαποτα γενετο αποικιαρωσεις; 12.5: **δικαστευτευ**). The addition of **κατ υπαπατος** presupposes, as I may mention in anticipation of later studies, that the number of the **δεσπότης** in their activity as prophets in the area belonging to the temple, their **κτερις**, as the inscription says, was limited (cf. the inscription in Bull. de Corr. Hell. LXI, p. 393: *Imp. Caesar Augustus fines Dionae restituit—Αυτοκρατορ Καίσαρ Σεβαστος δρος Ἀρτέμιδι δικαστευτευ*). Propagandizing in the Diaspora requires a special commission and special permission.


20. It is assumed that every mystery-cult had liturgies set down in written form, like any somewhat complex magical procedure. Livy's source was familiar with the prayers and the oath pronounced by the priest in the presence of the initiates in the Bacchanales (18.3), and with the name of the long-since deceased prophet and founder of the religion (8.3).

21. One may think of Dusares and the Be'alim of various Syrian cities.

22. This too, as I shall emphasize in anticipation of the following, concerned the Senate.

23. I am informed about the paintings only through oral communications by friends, and am not yet able to estimate to what extent they confirm the account given by Livy.

24. This is still used as a formula in Diocletian's edict against the Manicheans and the mathematicians (Chaldeans).

25. The treatment by Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes* (fourth edition, 1919, III, p. 57), is utterly arbitrary. He tries to attribute to Valerius only the words that the two excerpts have in common.

26. This expression appears later to have acquired the status of a formula (cf. Paulus sent. 5.21: *vaticinatores qui de deo plenos adsumunt, idemque civitate expellit placuit, ne humana credulitate publica moras ad apam diutius—i.e., for the hoped-for advantage of the prophet—corrumpentur*; cf.
Julius Paris). Philo portrays men of this kind in De spec. leg. I 315. The original meaning is shown in the proceedings against the Bacchanalia.

27. It was not at all the intention of Antiochus thereby to impose upon the Jews a new God, but only the idea and the cultic form which was already familiar to the Hellenized Judaism of the Diaspora. This idea viewed Yahweh as the giver of fertility, just as the Hellenized Syrian in many places viewed his Baal. Prof. Willrich has kindly called my attention to the interesting tetradrachma of Ashkelon, dating from the fourth century B.C. (R. Weil, Ztschr. für Numismatik XXVIII, 1910, p. 26; a better reproduction of it in Regling, *Die antike Münze als Kunstschatz*, 1924, Plate XIV, N. 416). This coin represents Jahu (the form of the name attested in Elephantine) as Triptolemos, though of course also in the external form of the Aion or Baaltar, the year-deity. This does not differ from the idea of the law-observing Jew who on a Roman sarcophagus to be discussed later, under the seven-branched lampstand, connects the ἄπποι τε ἀιδὸς del oracle of Klaros with the winepress. In the edict of Philopator also the equation of Yahweh and Dionysos is presupposed as familiar in wider circles of Judaism; the only additional thing expected of them is to accept the genuinely Hellenic Dionysos-mysteries; then they will be full citizens. When Jews put in Dionysos’ place his counterpart, the Thracian Sabazios, this naturally suggests the name of Sabboth. It is utterly wrong to attribute this equation to the arbitrariness of later philosophers, as Ganischinietz (*Realencyklopädie* IX 715) assumes, or to a foolish misunderstanding of later authors, as Schürer (op. cit.) assumes. Whom should we hold responsible for this? Livy would be ruled out; he had a different view of the God of the Jews (Norden, *Agamostos Theos*, pp. 59-60). For Valerius or Julius Paris it would be unusual, to say the least, and altogether improbable; besides, we would then have to assume that Nepotianus invented the reference to the altars. If we reject that idea, this demolishes the entire assumption that the embassy of the Maccabean high priest Simon or, as Schürer expresses it more cautiously, people from their entourage had made proselytes in Rome and therefore were expelled, and thus also the assertion of Eduard Meyer that the Jewish community in Rome arose in the year 139. That community is older than that, and it grows out of the Hellenized Diaspora-Judaism. The coinciding in point of time of the Jewish national embassy and the expulsion of the Hellenistic missionary merchants can at the most suggest the assumption that precisely those law-observing men called attention to the fact that what was involved here was not a genuine national cult, but a reprehensible mixture and innovation. It is not clear to me how E. Meyer (op. cit., II 262, 264; III 460) conceives of the course of events, or to whom he traces the equating of Jupiter Sabazius with Yahweh Sabboth. It is uncertain whether on this occasion or on that of the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey Livy spoke of the God of the Jews. (Lytsus offers a confirmation even if Willrich, *Archiv* XXIV 171, is correct.)


29. Cumont’s two essays are cited there in note 4, but they are evidently misunderstood. How uncertain are the conclusions drawn from the lack of “witnesses” is shown by the fact emphasized by Wissowa himself (p. 323), that no inscription from the city of Rome before the time of DIOCLETIAN attests a teurobolium, while an inscription from Lyons dating from the year A.D. 160 explicitly derives the cult in that city from the Roman cult. I hardly need to recall the accidental discoveries of most recent times such as the discovery of the tomb of a Mithraic “lioness” in African Tripoli, or others. All this gives just that much greater significance to the indirect attestation.

30. The very tortuous account of Josephus shows that that community was not strictly orthodox in the time of Tiberius. Though the *nomen* and the recognition of Jerusalem are maintained, as is understandable in the Diaspora, the leaders are abandoned.

31. The punishment of the citizens who had been led astray must have been milder, or they all submitted to the decree; the Epitome says nothing on this point.

32. The freedmen (thus Roman citizens) who for religious reasons refused military service appear, according to Josephus, even to have been put to death.

33. It is not Livy alone who calls the Bacchanalia a *clandestina coniuvatio*: the well-known *senatus consultum* proposes, using four synonyms, to make every kind of binding commitment subject to punishment. On the basis of thorough knowledge of the official sacrificial policy Dio also has Macenas
advise Augustus to punish all religious innovations: the 
μοναχοῦ καὶ σωμάτων ἐκτελέσας ὅτι that arise from them are
dangerous to the state. Pliny (ep. X 96.6) tells us that the
latter expression was adopted into official Latin and that
hetaeria does not signify the religious society in itself—
the laws allowed this—but the society that was bound by an
oath, one that conducted secret ceremonies (clandestina conu-
ratio). According to Pliny neither of these actually applied
to Christianity. The Christians themselves had given some
thought to whether their common meal was a mystery in the legal
sense; it was in fact open to everyone. Pliny is inclined to
recognize this distinction from the individual initiations
which were in a certain measure oath-bound. It is judicially
significant that even in the time of Pliny the governor's
dict did not mention a religion, but only "the societies
bound by an oath". It was the regulation of societies, asso-
ciations, that was involved here.

34. In my *Hellenistische Wandererzählungen* (p. 143, note
2) I have indicated the connection between the two, in my
opinion incontestable, and here I shall only add the explana-
tion of the only accusation that was not given an explanation
there. Even the "Thyestean banquets" appear to have had some
kind of basis in an accusation against certain Gnostics. I
have no other explanation for the little story of the monk
I 421): a great ascetic is unwilling to believe that the
bread in the Lord's Supper actually becomes Christ's body.
Two devout brethren fast with him for a week and pray for a
revelation. On the next Sunday, when the priest takes the
bread, their eyes are opened: they see the bread as a little
child. When he lifts his hands to break the bread, they see
an angel with a knife come from heaven, pierce the child, and
catch its blood in the cup. Then when the priest breaks the
bread, they see the angel cut the child's body into small
pieces. The ascetic is given one of these bloody pieces and,
overcome, he cries out, "Lord, I believe!" Then the vision
disappears, and the piece once again is bread. There must be
a connection here of the conception attested as Christian and
the charge made by the pagans (cf. the wording in Minucius
Felix, chapter 9). This assumes no more than that very early
in one circle the epiphany of Christ, which it was believed
was experienced in the sacrifice of the mass, was connected
with the idea of Christ as a child, an idea that was especially
cherished in the early period. Dark rumors about this then
could cause the suspicion of the *magica sacra* to be transferred
to the Christian mystery (cf. below, p. 185). These were re-
garded as deserving the death penalty.

35. Gercke ("Seneca-Studien," Jahrbücher, Supplement
XXIII, 1896, pp. 213-14) would like to identify Pliny as the
source of both of them. That cannot be proved, and I am con-
vinced that it is impossible. Even for Tacitus it is not
possible to limit his sources to just a few, and E. Meyer
has rightly rejected this argument.

36. Tacitus certainly did not cite as exoneration the
fact that finally on the sixth day, when Nero at long last
returned, the fire was halted by the demolition of all the
buildings in a belt surrounding the fire. If the emperor
was responsible, he would have been achieving his intended
result just as well in this way.

37. Here I must also disagree with Leo ("Tacitus"), a
speech delivered on the Kaiser's birthday in 1896, p. 13):
"Tacitus himself treats the table that Nero had set fire to
the city as unbelievable; and yet he does not drop the matter
of the suspicion, but refers to it again and again, just as
he does not fail to mention every accusation or to express
the doubt over whether an enemy of the emperor was at work
here." This is refuted by the mention, cited by Leo himself
(p. 12) of the "very words" of the brave tribune Subrius
Flavus: *odisse coepi, postquam parriicida matri et worixi,
auriga et histrion et incendiarii extitistu*, and the addi-
tion by the author, *nihil in illa consurbatione gravis aur-
bis Neronis accidisse constitit, qui ut faciendis sceleribus
promptus, ita audieni quae faceret insolens erat*. Tacitus
is inwardly convinced of Nero's guilt, but openly admits that
there is no compelling proof of it. The same may be said of
other cases cited by Leo. We may refer in passing to Dessau's
more sober judgment, which is much more favorable to Tacitus.

38. Among theologians I mention E. Th. Klette (Die Chris-
tenhjristen von unter Nero, Tübingen 1907), because Meyer agrees
with him on the main points. Only he substitutes for the two-
fold treatment a single one, citing an "interruption" which is
incomprehensible to me. Klette's major mistake, it seems to
me, is that he does not take the only account (that of Tacitus)
as his point of departure, but rather moves directly to the
conclusion, and does not interpret, but rather forcibly adapts
it to what he thinks he has gained from wholly inadequate
materials.
39. Of course if he had actually said that, he would have utterly destroyed the aim of his presentation as Meyer assumes it, and would have been acting not craftily but foolishly. So then Gercke also assumes not an intention but an act of negligence on Tacitus' part, who has assembled a mosaic from two contradictory accounts without noticing the discrepancies involved.


41. The passage cited by Andresen from An. XI 1, fateri gloriamque faciortis utro petere, is hardly pertinent here. It has to do with a crime, a crime; at that time in Rome belonging to the Christian community did not yet fit into that category.

42. The translation "because of the crime of arson" somewhat obscures the fact that in crimine coniuncti could only mean "included in the accusation", and could not form a contrast to the causal ablative odio.

43. This is not improved but worsened if this Roman reader interpreted quam odio humani genus, more correctly than Meyer, as in odio...coniuncti or here convicted. Then it would mean for him that the overwhelming majority renounced their Christianity (!) and were included only as a consequence of their hatred of the human race (or convicted of hatred, but by what means?). Then the condemnation of the Christians would have been sheer madness. It is clear, as I shall note in passing, that odio humani genus here must mean more than the separation that the Jew practices; that had never been punished (Zeller, Ztschr. f. wissensch. Theologie 1891, pp. 356-57, incorrectly asserts that it could mean only υποτιθεμένος); here it is the intent to injure, actual hatred, to which one could attribute arson. But neither the deed nor their belonging to Christianity is proved against them, so they were added to those who confessed Christianity (or declared to be convicted), for whom likewise the deed had not been proven! Who could comprehend that?

44. The real sacrilege, i.e., disruption of the state's cult (Clodius at the festival of the Bona Dea; cf. Heinze), of course has nothing to do with this.

45. An imitation of Greek mysteries (even the priestess must in fact be Greek) is indeed present (Wissowa, Religion und Kult der Römer, second edition, p. 300). But it is as little developed as the sacrifice to the Bona Dea.

46. Meyer rightly points this out; comparable is the passage in Minucius Felix 9.5: haec foedera sunt hostia, haec conscientia sacerdos ad silentium mutuum pigmentur (on the expression cf. the Senatus consultum).

47. Classical Review 1924, p. 58.

48. Stylistic influence exerted by Seneca, Ad Polyb. 1.2, is of course probable. Nevertheless the expression remains characteristic of the feeling of the time with respect to the doctrine of the world conflagration.

49. Suetonius, who does not use Tacitus, confirms the latter's presentation when he counts a suppression of Christianity among the glorious and genuinely Roman actions of Nero.

50. The name arose among their opponents in Antioch; Acts 26:28 also clearly follows this usage: Agrippa says, Καὶ ἀλλὰν ἡμᾶς ἡ Χριστιαναὶ ἔχουμεν, and Paul avoids the word (γενόσας τοῦτος ἕκας καθός εἰμι). The tradition Christians, which only apparently is suggested by the contrast with per flagittia, would only distract and disturb the reader's attention.

51. In the words auctor nominis Tacitus is following the language of his time; nomen is also the sect itself, as in Pliny.

52. This must belong in the train of thought, because of the contrasting ingens multitudo that follows.

53. Construed followingprehendere in.

54. We are still seeing the influence of Haase's mistaken view that the imperfect is a purely relative tense, one that has reference to a preterite used elsewhere. It does in fact often occur where the person speaking has no interest in representing the action as still in the process of being executed.

55. Tacitus is rather free about alternating in his usage; cf., for example, XI 19: sed caede eius motae Chauworum mentes, et Corbulus semina rebellitionis praebat; XII 6: Postquam haec
favorabili oratione praemisit multaque patrum assentatio sequitur, and so on.

56. The confession should be given weight similar to that accorded Anicetus' confession that he had committed adultery with Octavia. This is not contradicted, as Gercke seems to assume, by the fact that in the account of the horrible death he says quanquam abeversus santes et novissima exempla meritos. Tacitus would render his own account and its position absurd if he connected this with the case of arson. He demands that his reader simply hear him out: they were criminals anyway (cf. above, per flagititia) and they were deserving of any punishment that might be meted out. He wants to prevent having his decision taken as a protest against the culpability, still existing in point of law at that time, of the nomen Christianum. Pliny's letter to Trajan, to be discussed shortly, probably had already been published at that time.

57. Moreover, it would not have been very prudent of the later Christian authors if they had referred back to a guilt with which they were no longer being charged and which had once been established as proven by a judicial judgment, even though prominent historians had subsequently labeled it as an erroneous judgment. It was far more effective when they kept to the accusations actually raised against them, which were never investigated at all, into which indeed the judge did not even venture to inquire, since the confessio (the nomen) was sufficient. Therein these Christian authors see the shocking and unprecedented occurrences.

58. As grace, to be sure. The emperor's words almost entirely rule out any similar mildness in case of a relapse, but he avoids making any absolute rule.

59. One should note this concept, which at the outset must seem strange. As I earlier indicated, following Mommsen, it presupposes a universal norm.

60. Not many accusers would be found who would present to an unwilling judge a complaint (on what ground?) that the accused person could render illusory simply by denying it. There was no longer any sense of a crime, not a word of artimia, nothing of matria or of the emperor-cult. As Guérin rightly emphasizes, here the character of the judicial process, the cognitio, is maintained, even though a question and an answer would suffice to settle the matter: confessus pro damnato est.

The coercitio is not involved, and yet as much as possible was to be left to the consideration of the official in charge: neque enim in universum aliquod, quod quasi certum formam habeat, constituui potest. It is a halfway measure, which exacts a fearful vengeance precisely because it issues from a well-disposed and powerful ruler.

61. Nero's teacher Cn. Remus had made him especially sensitive to astrology and Egyptian secret literature. He provided a residence in his palace for the magician who boasted that he would visibly fly up to heaven (below, p. 219). In his last period then he adopted Armenian magical arts and methods of manipulating the gods (Pliny, XXX 14-17). He had a lively interest in everything pertaining to magic. Unfortunately Cumont's essay in the Revue de Philologie XLII, 1918, 85-86, is inaccessible to me. In addition to the Catalogus I have used his presentation in "Le culte égyptien et le mysticisme de Plotin," Fondation Eugene Piot, Monumenta et mémoires XXV 77-78.

62. Actually the sanctuary here is officially called Ἀσκληπείον, yet originally Imuthes must have been meant. He also appears in the religious literature as a revelational deity.

63. Apuleius also mentions the ἄγνωστον. To the impatient Thessalos the waiting-time seems like three years. On the mystery-action cf. below, pp. 310-11.

64. This is the approximate meaning; the textual tradition is corrupt. The vision is the honor (τιμή).

65. ἔγα κατὰ προμθέων τῆς φυλῆς ἔχον ἄγνωστον τοῦ ἀρχαῖως χάριν καὶ μέλαιν.

66. The polemic resembles that in the religious Hermetic writings.


68. The word is probably an explanatory gloss on the name (komar in Aramaic means "chief priest") which was added in the old edition to the picture as it is described here.

69. The Asklepios who is connected with Hermes Trismegistos is the grandson of the originator of the healing arts also
in Pseudo-Apuleius, Asclepius, c. 37: *Avus enim tuus, Asclepi, medicinae primum inventor, ut templum consoratum est in monte Lybiae circa litus crocodilorum*. What is meant must be the Ἄσκληπειον in Thebes, mentioned above (p. 145), which Thessalos had visited. Zielinski thought it was Cyrene, but there are no crocodiles there. *Lybiae* only signifies the west bank of the Nile.


71. It had already occurred to the lexicographer Pamphilos to incorporate into his lexicon a mystical plant-name (a code name) from a Hermetic writing which resembled that of Thessalos (Galen, *Tom. IX* 758K).

72. Chiefly from the introduction to the Recognitions of Clement and from Lucian's Menippos.

73. *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* XIX 2, 1922, pp. 76-77.

74. Cf. my *Hellenistische Wandererzählungen*, p. 20; Boll, *op. cit.*, 146.

75. The άλεκτος δαύων, whom according to Porphyry (Vit. Plotini 10) the Egyptian priest proposes to show to Plotinus in the temple of Isis, is the άλεκτος δαύων of magic, one's own perfect nature, the heavenly self of the religious texts that bear Iranian influence. It has nothing to do with the personal 'Αγαθός δαύων (Laum, *Stiftungen* II, N. 117).

76. The charlatan is further characterized by the fact that in his burial inscription he is called 'Ιαρονώσις (as well as 'Ολυμπολώσις).

77. Of course it can only be such a witness on the basis of collations and comparisons; such comparisons and collations are indeed the presupposition for any hypothesis of a borrowing, and the presupposition that such a borrowing is possible is the necessary precondition of any construction of a historical connection. Anyone who with insufficient reasons simply rules out this hypothesis *a priori* then arbitrarily gives the decisive tendency to his own construction. Of course we can, as a consequence of centuries-long tradition, understand the thought and language of primitive Christian literature purely in terms of Judaism and development within Christianity, for we are familiar with it from our childhood onward, the ideas dogmatically reinterpreted according to the catechism, bent to serve the purposes of edification, and the words faded and lifeless. The question why a particular word or figure is chosen, what it originally meant, and what the contemporary reader had to feel upon encountering it, does not even occur to us any more; for unusual terms like "the body of this death" or "buried by baptism into death" we hear only "the physical frame" or "baptized". Thus the linguistic evidence escapes us. When the whole of modern (i.e., philological) interpretation of Scripture expressly constructs the history of a term, it is—whether the individual intends it or not—oriented to the history of religions, and only if one were to forbid the actual interpretation of the texts could one again ban the history of religions from the history of our religion. I hope that on the contrary a stronger involvement of Oriental philologies will rather heighten their influence.

78. Here I leave aside the fact that if he is religiously sensitive, he must feel this also as an obligation to himself; even if he has only a historical interest in the intellectual history of the West, he cannot at all pass over this issue or deny its validity.

79. Of course for me it is no proof when Christian authors speak of imitations perpetrated by Satan.

80. One may compare, for example, those introductory narratives common in the secret literature, which I have discussed in the Festchrift for F. C. Andreas, 1916, pp. 33-34, and in part already in *Poinandres*, pp. 361-64. The agreement seems to me to be compelling.

81. ἀκολούθων άδεστα (perpetuae). Bückler remarks: *novum vocabulum tum fortasse ex apostothesae ritibus inobbru-erat*. Possibly so; but I would say not solely from the one case of apostheses of the emperor, but from the belief in the ascent of the souls that influenced that apostheses.

82. Μάγας τύους ίδεσες ίερόν.

83. Thus I would prefer to write it. M. Pohlenz has called my attention to Cicero, *De nat. d.* II 81.
84. In 129 he would have to say transit instead of redit. but he probably is already thinking of tum de animo coepit inquirere; from the vision of the ἀπογάφος the way leads back to ma

85. The continuation shows even more clearly that a mystery-order is being imitated here. The decree about the Abate at Philae (H. Junker, Denksch. d. Wiener Akad. 1913) can also make this perceptible.

86. To my surprise, Erich Reitzenstein, in his writing *Theophrast bei Epikur und Lukrez* (Heidelberg, 1924), has shown that we may no longer count Poseidionios as a source of Lucretius. What this distinctive re-shaping of the Stoic idea of God means with respect to Poseidionios I cannot pursue here; I only point out that precisely in him we may at least recognize the combination of Oriental and Greek life of feeling, which in recent times is being sought again in Plotinus. E. Petersen (*Theol. Blätter*, edited by K. L. Schmidt, 1926, p. 291) rightly emphasizes that Reinhardt, even in his recent studies of Poseidionios, has not done justice to this testimony, because he ignores the really religious and particularly the Oriental element in Poseidionios. Moreover, the myth in Plutarch's *De facie in orbe lunae* is so closely connected with Oriental ideas that anyone who relates him to Poseidionios must go into those ideas. Similarly the description of the elements in the Κόρη κόσμου, which stems from an earlier Hermetic writing; cf. Reitzenstein-Schaeder I 138.]

II.

Oriental and Hellenistic Cult

In the following I combine some shorter studies of Hellenistic cultic practice which can only be derived from the Orient. What is involved here is first of all a cultic practice that necessarily presupposes closed and closely knit communities, such as the mystery-communities in fact also were. Yet I by no means connect with that the assertion that in all these communities there must necessarily have existed such mysteries. In most cases the question could not be settled, and for our main purpose it would not matter. We must attempt first of all to acquire a feeling for the nature of Oriental piety, making use of as much material as is available.

For our point of departure I choose the institution of confession and penance, which in its original form was indeed proper to most religions, but in Greece as well as in Rome quite early lost its import; the development of civil law restricted it to cultic offenses, and the only loose tie to the national cult weakened its force in this area also. I should like to tie my consideration of the topic to a distinctive Oriental form which Franz Steinleitner has discussed in a splendid dissertation entitled "Die Beichte im Zusammenhang mit der sakralen Rechtspflege in der Antike" (München 1913). He starts out from a number of Lydian and Phrygian inscriptions of the second and third centuries A.D., which contain, in dreadful Greek, confessions of ritual offenses and divine punishments which then are lifted from the penitent by God's miraculous power. Literary witnesses from other regions and