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## Pagan Symbols in Judaism: Astronomical Symbols

LATE ANTIQUITY was deeply committed to an astral approach to religion. The religions of earlier Greeks and Romans largely revolved round seasonal festivals, but neither people seem to have understood clearly that the seasons themselves are controlled by the astral bodies and relations. Similarly Apollo had been a sun god, but not at all as distinctively so as the later Helios or Sol Invictus who largely came to take his place. As the astral conception came in from the East, most of the older myths and divine personalities, and a large part of ancient ritual, were interpreted or altered to express the sense of fatalism and determinism that astral control of the universe and of man's fate indicated. With so much else from pagan religious thinking coming into Judaism, to find the Jews using astral symbolism, and presumably astral values, in their own worship and thinking is quite what we should now expect. We must begin, as before, to justify a consideration of the subject by reviewing the astral symbols preserved in Jewish remains.

### A. ASTRAL SYMBOLS IN JEWISH REMAINS

ONE OF THE BEST attested designs from Jewish religious art of the late Roman Empire and the "Byzantine" centuries is the circle of the zodiac with its twelve signs, in the center of which Helios drives his quadriga. The Jews squared this circle in the usual way of the period by putting a Season in each of the four quarters outside it. The magnificent mosaic at Beth Alpha shows this design almost intact. Here Helios is presented in full-rayed glory with the sickle of the moon beside him and twenty-four stars.<sup>1</sup> The Seasons in the cor-

1. See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, I, 248-251. Studies of the Beth Alpha mosaic, in addition to those cited there, are: R. Wischnitzer, "The Meaning of the Beth Alpha Mosaic," *Yediot: Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society*, XVIII (1954), 190-197.

In "The Beth Alpha Mosaic, a New Interpretation," *Jewish Social Studies*, XVII (1955), 133-144, also by Mrs. Wischnitzer, she follows the earlier article in making the mosaic as a whole a presentation of the Feast of Tabernacles. She did not succeed in convincing

ners, however, are put opposite the wrong signs. Spring, for example, is beside the signs of Summer, and the others are correspondingly misplaced. This seems to me to indicate that the members of the congregation had not even basic astronomical or astrological information or concern. And if they were without even elementary information about the zodiac, they must have had little interest in celestial observation or reckoning. For to know which months of the year correspond to which signs is the very beginning of such study. The zodiac, that is, does not testify to the congregation's interest in, or use of, astrology.<sup>4</sup>

The other zodiacs in synagogue mosaic floors are not so well preserved. Of the zodiac of Yafa we have only Taurus and a little of Aries. Each of them is set in a circular disk, and between these at the outer edge swim dolphins. The corners could not have had Seasons, since of the one corner enough is kept to show that there was no room for a Season. Instead we have vines and a leaping tiger, and, nearby, an eagle perched on a female mask head much like the ones at Dura. The association of the zodiac, accordingly, seems to be Dionysiac. Not a tessera seems left from the center, where we should expect Helios.

Of the zodiac in the synagogue at Naaran a little more is preserved, though Pisces is the only sign not deliberately mutilated, while the face of Helios and his horses seem likewise purposely destroyed, as well as the faces of the Seasons. Here even greater disregard appears for the signs as astral symbols, for the Seasons rotate counterclockwise, the signs clockwise. From the synagogue in Isfiya only one Season is left, and enough fragments to show that a similar zodiac was there, but Avi-Yonah thought the whole as inaccurate here as at Naaran. Helios has totally disappeared from the center—if, as may be presumed, he was originally there. We have, then, four assured cases of the zodiac in mosaic on synagogue floors, and though Helios is left inside only two of them, he probably once stood in all four. The Seasons surround only three of the zodiacs. Considering the few synagogue floors whose mosaic design is still preserved at all, the high proportion with the zodiac, Helios, and Seasons makes it inevitable to presume that such decoration must have been very common indeed.

The zodiacs in mosaic are now supplemented by a bronze hanging bracket

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me. S. Renov, in the same issue of *Yediot*, pp 198–201, published "The Relation of Helios and the Quadriga to the Rest of the Beth Alpha Mosaic." The whole is messianic, he believes, the astral panel means God's glory, the moon sickles on the four horses refer to the moon as symbol of the Davidic dynasty, and "the four horses stand for the four hundred years of Davidic rule in the messianic era" All three of these articles are excellent ex-

amples of attempts to impose ideas from medieval Judaism upon the old symbols

2 Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 193, suggests that such designs were "calendars," by which I suppose he means that one could recall from them which signs were in each season. That the Seasons are displaced beside the Jewish zodiacs shows this to be impossible for them

for lamps, fig. 12.<sup>3</sup> It was found in the excavations in Galilee, five kilometers east of Acre, at el-Mekr. An Aramaic-Hebrew inscription is cut on the bottom of the ring,<sup>4</sup> interrupted in two places by a familiar group of symbols, the seven-branch menorah flanked by a lulab and shofar. The inscription is extremely difficult. Frey and U. Cassuto read it: *Ce cercle [l'ont offert un tel et un tel] au lieu sacré [= à la synagogue] de Kefar-Hananyah. Béni soit leur souvenir. Amen. Sélah. Paix.* My colleagues Obermann and Pope kindly examined it, but pointed out that to translate this as "circle" is only to paraphrase a word literally meaning "crown." Following some unintelligible letters, they read "at the holy place of the village of . . . May they be remembered for good (or, the good of God) . . . Sélah. Peace." The object was probably not made after the fifth or sixth century, since the symbols of menorah, flanked by lulab and shofar, are extremely rare after that period, and it may well be considerably older. But the place name is by no means sure. The ring is perforated by twelve holes, and a central lamp is thought to have hung from the hook below the bracket. The form, then, is that of a central light surrounded by a circle of twelve lights, and I have no doubt that it represented the zodiac. For our word zodiac is from the adjective in the Greek expression "zodiacal circle," or "circle of *zōdia*," small animals. Each sign is in Greek a *zōdion*; the whole is the "circle."<sup>5</sup> The "crown" would here really mean the circle of the zodiac. The central light seems to be the sun itself. The "sacred place" to which the zodiac was given was almost certainly a synagogue, since the word "place" has turned up so often as a word for the synagogue building. We cannot conclude from this inscription that the zodiac had cultic implications or was a sacred object, because the same sort of language was used for the donor of any part of the synagogue. But we look with increased interest at the zodiacs now that we know the Jews used them alive, if I may call it that, alive with burning lights as well as in the static mosaics.

Interest in the zodiac is witnessed by other pieces from ancient Jewish art. A stone frieze, or piece from a screen, was found among the remains of the synagogue of Kefr Birim, carved with a running fret. In the interstices are a shell, a bull, a woman's bust, a goat, and, along with leafy rosettes, a centaur shooting an arrow. The stone is clearly a fragment, and may be nearly complete, but the centaur shooting can only be Sagittarius, so that the others are presumably Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn. Sukenik's restoration of the rest of the signs is possible, though all the signs need not have been originally repre-

3. Courtesy of G. Faider-Feytmans and the Mariemont Museum in Belgium. See also the photograph of the object, upside down to show the inscription on the bottom, in *Les Antiquités égyptiennes, grecques, romaines et gallo-romaines du Musée de Mariemont*, Brussels, 1952, 191 (no. S 15), plate 65.

4. See *CJ*, II, 164 f., no. 980, where the inscription is published in a circle after the reading of U. Cassuto.

5. LS. s.v.v. give full documentation for this statement. Cf. Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 227.

sented in this frieze, since odd signs appear elsewhere. Neugebauer kindly wrote me that he doubted if this was ever a complete zodiac.<sup>6</sup> For example, Pisces is unmistakable on a carved stone from the synagogue at er-Rafid. On a lintel from Nawa the menorah is made into a solar symbol by its central light elevated as a round object, while a fret runs on either side with several openings. Clearly something objectionable has been chipped away from the openings, and as in the openings of the fret at Kefr Birim, they may well have been signs of the zodiac.<sup>7</sup> Reports have been made that fragments of a carved decoration were found in the synagogue of Sheikh Ibreq (Beth Shearim) which seem to have formed part of a zodiac design. I have seen nothing to confirm the idea that a full mosaic was in the synagogue. Jewish acceptance of the zodiac appears from its identification with Moses and the twelve tribes at the springs of Elim in one of the paintings at the Dura synagogue.<sup>8</sup>

The potency of the zodiac in this milieu is, however, directly attested by a strange amulet that was kindly loaned to me from the de Clercq collection.<sup>9</sup> The two main faces were reprinted from de Ridder in my study of the Jewish amulets, with remarks that I now see were not entirely accurate. On one of these faces Adam and Eve stand beside the tree, not in Christian shame but in Gnostic triumph as the snake gives them the true knowledge. On the other a zodiac appears as a circular band with a boss in each division to represent its sign, while the sun and moon are on either side, and the seven planets (little bosses) below the sun. In the center of the zodiac circle a mound wrapped about with a snake takes the place of Helios, a fact which puzzled me earlier but which I now see represents the typical omphalos with snake, the symbol of Apollo. It seems entirely safe to see in this a product of some Jewish form of Naasene Gnosticism, in which the sacrament was to eat loaves about which a snake had coiled, for the Hebrew letters on every face, and the single long, if inscrutable, Hebrew inscription, must have come from Jews. The form of the letters dates the amulet in the second or third century after Christ. That it was typical of hellenized Judaism in general can hardly be suggested, but that this sort of thing was going on among some Jews can now hardly be denied. Our interest here is in its offering another example of astronomical symbolism in Jewish dress.

Use of the zodiac in synagogues is still customary among some groups of

6. The female bust seemed to him more likely "either sun or moon or one of the planets, e.g. Venus." But he does recognize Aries and Taurus as well as Sagittarius.

7. Morton Smith kindly reminded me that less than twelve openings are left, so that all the signs could not have been on this lintel. It was pointed out that they probably were

not all present at Kefr Birim. Galling thought he saw reminiscences of the zodiac on a lamp.

8. See fig. 47 and Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, XII, 170-171, and *By Light, Light*, 209 f.

9. It is to be published in the first number of *Greek and Byzantine Studies*.

East European Jews, especially those from Poland. A fine example is painted round the ceiling of a synagogue in New Haven, fig. 13.<sup>10</sup> Like so much in Jewish custom, this seems a survival whose origin and original meaning are now totally forgotten by members of the synagogue. No consecutive history of this device in Jewish art can be traced, so far as I know, from antiquity to the present, and its modern introduction in Poland, or wherever, may have been a fresh invasion of the symbol. But it is so surprising a "decoration" for a synagogue, surprising not least to Jews from all other parts of the world, that its adoption seems impossible as a "mere decoration" at any time. I should guess that its "explanation" was in terms of the rabbinic identification of the twelve signs with the twelve tribes, each of which had a sign on its "banner."<sup>11</sup>

Symbols of the sun and moon are likewise to be considered as marking an astral orientation of religion. We encountered these symbols chiefly on amulets. That Helios has the moon sickle beside him at Beth Alpha cannot be pressed as meaning more than that the moon, and the stars with it, show his heavenly setting. One amulet with no Christian detail shows Daniel kneeling in prayer between the lions within the den, while he is brought an ideograph of sun and moon by a figure carrying also the crook that is usually associated with such quasi-divine personalities as satyrs. The figure here stands on a mountain, and the starry heavens are indicated by a number of stars above him.<sup>12</sup> The whole seems a reference to astral piety, in which the symbol of divinity brought to the hero is not a wreath or a palm branch, but the sun and moon. The design would be as strange in Christianity as in Judaism, and I suspect, but can say no more, that the amulet was Jewish. In other amulets this ideograph is directly labeled *Iaō*. But astral symbols appear commonly on amulets, and are there Judaized. Not only are the anguipede and Chnoubis definitely solar, and definitely labeled *Iaō*, but the haloed cavalier is God, and these, with Harpocrates and many other figures, are identified with Helios, who is also *Iaō*. One of the alternatives, meaning the same thing, is the solar lion, but Helios in his quadriga, along with Selene driving her pair, together are labeled *Iao*, Sabaoth, Abrasax, the Existing One (ὁ ὄν). Helios and Selene are represented as busts on another amulet. The fascination of later pagan antiquity with solar and astral religion is clearly reflected in popular Judaism. This led to the adoption of solar symbols of all kinds on Jewish amulets, and to such explicit solar symbols as Helios driving the quadriga through the zodiac in the synagogues.

The charms give even more specific, because verbal, testimony to the same thing. One Jewess prayed:

10. The Temple Keser Israel. Photograph courtesy of Rabbi Andrew Klein. It seems unnecessary to show more than Libra over the Torah shrine. The other signs are equally vivid.

11. For the signs on the banners see

D. Feuchtwang in *MGWJ*, LIX (1915), 244.

12. I know this amulet only through the old drawing of Garrucci, and whether he has counted the stars correctly I cannot say. I count 24 of them.

Hail Helios, hail Helios, hail thou God in the heavens. Thy name is omnipotent . . . Make me . . . beautiful as Iao, rich as Sabaoth, blessed like Liliam, great as Barbaras, honored as Michael, distinguished as Gabriel, and I will give thanks.

Two brief charms hail "Helios on the Cherubim." Another Jewish prayer says: "Hail Helios, hail Helios, Hail Gabriel, hail Raphael, hail Michael, hail all of you. Give me the authority and power of Sabaoth, the strength of Iao."<sup>13</sup> I see no reason to be surprised at this, for we have all along known that the Essenes addressed prayers to the sun. The figure, then, must be understood as being if not a representation of God for Jews at least a manifestation of Deity, a sign of Deity, and, because of the potency to which the amulets attest, a symbol of Deity. The other symbols which have turned out to have solar references — the bull, the lion, rosettes and wheels, the gorgoneum, the eagle — all seem to have attested in their own ways to the heavenly direction of man's piety, and that the Head of this heavenly existence was best typified in the sun.

A clearly astral symbol appeared in the Jewish adaptation of the semeion, a symbol made up of tiers of "round objects" which was definitely used with astral deities. This sign was so far from being a conventional form of decoration that its being taken over by Jews in so many places seems to indicate the astral orientation of at least much of their piety.

We have also seen the Seasons oriented with Helios and the zodiac in a way to relate them with the same sort of piety. The Seasons are the chief form of alluding to astralism in the West. The most famous Jewish example is the sarcophagus fragment at Rome, where two Victories hold up a medallion in which is the menorah, with two Seasons at the right. Originally the other two must have been at the left of this central motif. The putti trampling grapes under the menorah, and riding one a hare and one a dog at the Seasons' feet, seem to orient the whole with Dionysiac thinking,<sup>14</sup> but this in no sense detracts from the value of the Seasons as astral or cosmic symbols. The Seasons also appear as cupids upon a sarcophagus lid from the Jewish Catacomb Monteverde at Rome, and, as Cumont recognized,<sup>15</sup> this makes the fragment more rather

13. See Morton Smith, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century," in Moshe Davis, *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, 1956, 69.

14. Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 195, argues against any Dionysiac reference in the putti on this sarcophagus. "The vintage scene under the medallion may be interpreted as a seasonal scene rather than as a symbol of Dionysiac happiness." This is a possible interpretation of the scene in isolation, but it is quite unlikely in view of the history of vintage scenes as we have seen them in ancient funerary art. On the sarcophagus at Dumbarton

Oaks with which he is primarily concerned, the little figures under the Seasons seem to me symbolic of fertility. A man milks a ewe (spring) in the way we have seen to be highly symbolic; a man carries a sheaf of grain (summer); and in the center is a vintage scene (autumn). All these seem to me to represent the fertility and life produced by the four Seasons above, with the fourth Season, winter, conspicuously unrepresented below. On the sarcophagus all together would naturally refer to the hopes of the deceased

15 *Symbolisme*, 496

than less likely to be Jewish. The same is true of two fragments, both apparently from a single sarcophagus, found in the Jewish Catacomb Torlonia at Rome.<sup>16</sup> On one of these fragments a reclining figure holds a cornucopia, while the bent-up knee of another has a basket on it, both of them as on the fragment from Monteverde. These fragments from Monteverde and Torlonia have been categorically pronounced chance fragments from pagan sarcophagi brought in for reuse, but there is no indication of such reuse on any of them. The judgment was pronounced because such designs of Seasons are common on pagan sarcophagi and seemed scandalous on Jewish ones. Like many such judgments, this one has gained weight by repetition. But the presence of these pieces in Jewish catacombs puts the burden of proof, not of assertion, on those who think them unfitting for Jewish original use. Since we have now seen that Seasons are so well attested in Judaism, we must assume as the greater probability that the pieces were parts of sarcophagi used for Jewish burials.<sup>17</sup>

In the corners of a painted ceiling in the Catacomb Vigna Randanini are four cupids, which Frey properly identified as the Seasons.<sup>18</sup> That these are Seasons is made likely by the very form of the ceiling design. For in this room, as well as in two others of the catacomb, the design was basically that of what Lehmann has taught us to call the "dome of heaven."<sup>19</sup> It consists of a central circle supported by designs at the sides and corners, usually also distinguished by being set in frames, which pull the whole into the square or rectangle of the room. The design is most basically seen in Painted Room IV of this catacomb, where the ceiling is divided into such spaces. There the spaces themselves are empty, except that lullabs are in the ones in the corners. This room presents a problem to which several answers suggest themselves, but none is satisfactory. It was obviously cut out, a most expensive operation, by a man of considerable means, and he, or his father, was almost certainly buried in the arcosolium opposite the door with the menorah above it. With this goes well the clearly expensive sarcophagus, part of which still stands in the arcosolium. Why was such an expensive operation finished off by the crudely drawn empty frames on the ceiling? There was money to have them properly painted. Was it aniconic prejudice that kept them empty? The broken corners of the sarcophagus seem to speak clearly of offensive carvings at the corners which, by deliberate effort, were hewn out and destroyed. I know of no way to account for such a

16 Cf. M. Gutschow in Bever and Lietzmann, *Torlonia*, 44, where pagan and Christian parallels are listed

17. I cannot agree with Hanfmann, loc. cit., that these need not be considered Jewish because not definitely attested as such. In these matters we must rely upon probability, not proof. That so high a proportion of the

"intrusive pieces" show designs of Seasons in itself makes it highly probable that they reflect Jewish love and use of Season symbolism

18. *Biblica*, XV (1934), 284.

19 Karl Lehmann, "The Dome of Heaven," *Art Bulletin*, XXVII (1945), 1-27



crude ceiling in so expensive a setting. Of only one thing can we be sure: the system of frames in the ceiling themselves had a meaning, whether they contained anything or not, and the meaning would seem to be that of the dome of heaven. This conclusion seems confirmed by the little painted catacomb in the Via Appia Pignatelli, of which only a verbal description is known. "The ceiling is simply decorated with lines, only that in the middle there is a circle which seems to have contained some representation. Within this circle are traces of a crown of laurel."

In the circle at the center of such ceiling designs, as Lehmann has demonstrated, was usually painted the chief hope of heaven, the deity to whom one desired to come, or the savior, or saving symbol, to take man there. The crown still to be seen in the ceiling last described would agree with this. So in Painted Rooms I and II of the Catacomb Vigna Randanini are pagan symbols of salvation, divine figures, which, contrary to antecedent ideas, it must be imagined the Jews had somehow reconciled with their Judaism. The young man getting the crown has already got to heaven. It is no more shocking that Jews should have made use of these figures than that they used Victory, or Helios himself.

Further adaptation of the design appears in the Catacomb Torlonia, where the divisions of the ceiling are identical but where a flaming menorah occupies the circle at the center. Four dolphins with tridents are in the spaces at the four sides, but the corners are dedicated to three lulabs and a shofar. Adaptations of this design are put in the arches of the arcosolia, both with lighted menorahs at the center, in one case balanced by pomegranate and shofar, in the other by pomegranate and scroll. In another arcosolium the vault was covered with a design made up of a series of geometrical units each containing a star or sun, while at the bottom of the vault on either side a peacock seems to pick at a bunch of grapes. The combination suggests astralism as a symbol of immortality. In the vault of a fourth arcosolium were painted larger and more ornate geometrical units, with rosettes rather than the cruder star or sun symbols within them. Both can be taken to be designs of the starry heaven, and to be astral in reference. We see again that since the dome of heaven is interchangeable with the starry ceiling, both probably refer to an astral conception of religion.

Although no zodiac or Helios is preserved from Jews of the West, therefore, the Seasons and the ceiling decorations make it highly likely that they also thought of their religion in astral terms.<sup>20</sup> Cumont<sup>21</sup> noted that specific astral signs in the pagan West also were very rare, but he did not notice that the place of these was taken by the ceilings, which were so common in the West as to be-

20. A strange temple, striped in seven colors, stands among the paintings of the Dura synagogue. These seven colors have

seemed to reflect the seven planets  
21 *Symbolisme*, 240, 252.

come a most important part of Christian tradition, while the more definitely astral signs, such as the zodiacs and the sun and moon ("star and crescent") had little importance in Christian symbolism. It is clearly noteworthy that the same distinction is found in Jewish art.

The specific astral signs do appear at the back of two of the Torlonia arcosolia. In one the design is largely destroyed, but the top of a gabled shrine or temple is still preserved, and a crescent moon stands beside it on either side, waxing and red at the left, waning and green at the right. This little shrine I take to be a temple, since unlike the other designs of Torah shrines, it shows one side as well as the front. But in the other arcosolium an indisputable Torah shrine stands with its doors open, cult implements clearly about it much as at Beth Alpha. This shrine is definitely in the heavens also, however, because at its left, as Lietzmann describes it, "the sun (green) breaks through clouds which are striped in black, green, and red, while on the right the moon stands likewise in striped clouds, and a dark star is directly above the shrine itself."<sup>22</sup> His photographs do not show this, but the fact is highly important. The impression is that the synagogue implements are elevated to the heavens, that the Torah shrine is in some way equivalent to the little temple of the first arcosolium, and that the Jews buried here could hope for nothing better upon reaching heaven than to have their own forms of worship continue. Indeed the worship prescribed for Jews on earth anticipates the life in heaven, and prepares them to go there. One feels also that the same group of symbols above the Helios and zodiac at Beth Alpha have the same reference to the heavenly nature and preparation of Jewish worship.

Cumont's long insistence upon the astral significance of the seven lamps of the menorah goes very well with this interpretation, where the flaming menorah is three times in the center of the heavenly ceiling.<sup>23</sup> There is much more here than Beyer and Lietzmann's "hallmark of Judaism."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, they take the star over the shrine to be *unzweifelhaft* the symbol of the Messiah.<sup>25</sup> They identify it with the star that appears over a shrine on the coins of Bar Kokba, where they suppose it means: "The Messiah will restore the Temple and its cult." Cumont's astral interpretation of the menorah by no means exhausts its symbolism, but it has the virtue of considerable literary evidence. The interpretation goes perfectly with the position of the candlestick in the design, as it well may for the candlestick between the Seasons on the sarcophagus fragment. Identification of the star with the Messiah, however, is one of those specific interpretations which I consider so dangerous that I rarely in-

22 Beyer and Lietzmann, *Torlonia*, 13.

23 *Symbolisme*, 495 f. In his earlier publications of this study in *RA*, Ser. V, Vol. IV (1916), 11–13, Cumont seemed more nearly right, though he was not then so well in-

formed on the Jewish menorah of the period in general. He by no means abandoned his old position in his later revision

24 *Torlonia*, 20.

25 *Ibid.*, 24

dulge in them.<sup>26</sup> Largely because they were looking for such definite explanations, I feel, Beyer and Lietzmann thought that the fragments of the Seasons sarcophagus could not be Jewish, but must be pagan intrusions into the catacomb. Increasingly these fragments now seem in harmony with the astralism that appears on the walls.

One turns with fresh interest to a sarcophagus fragment found in the same catacomb which shows part of the hunting scene at which Adonis was killed. No weight can be put upon a single motif as evidence for the general beliefs of Jews at the time, but when one recalls that Adonis was an eastern symbol for the hope of immortality through the changing astral configurations that produced seasons, the irrelevancy of this piece is not so obvious as the first investigators supposed. Adonis came to be a favorite symbol in these terms throughout the West, and how far late antiquity went in lifting it above the literal level of the story appears in Macrobius' allegory of it:

One cannot doubt that Adonis was likewise the sun when one regards the religion of the Assyrians, among whom the worship of Venus Architis and Adonis especially thrived at one time, a worship now continued by the Phoenicians. For the "physicists" worshiped the upper hemisphere of the earth, the part on which we live, giving it the name of Venus, and they called the lower hemisphere of the earth Proserpina. Accordingly among the Assyrians or Phoenicians the goddess is represented as sorrowing because the sun, as it proceeds in its annual journey through the order of the twelve signs, goes down also with the part of the lower hemisphere, since of the twelve signs of the zodiac six are thought to be higher and six lower.<sup>27</sup> Now when it is in the lower, and accordingly makes the days shorter, the goddess is thought to grieve because the sun is as it were here lost in the grip of temporary death, and is being held by Proserpina, whom we have called the deity of the lower circle of the earth and the antipodes. They are pleased in turn to believe that Adonis has returned to Venus when, after the six signs of the lower order have been conquered, the sun begins to illuminate the hemisphere of our circle with increasing light and length of days. They teach that the killing of Adonis by the boar is a figure of winter, seeing it in this animal because the boar which is rough and tough likes wet muddy places, places covered with snow, and properly feeds on acorns, a fruit of winter. So the winter is like a wound upon the sun which diminishes both its light and heat to us, because both occur to animated things in death. A statue of this goddess has been set up on the mount Lebanon with her head veiled and with a sad expression. She holds her face with her left hand covered by her garments and they believe that tears trickle down at the sight of the onlookers. This image, besides representing as we said the sorrowing goddess is likewise a figure of earth during the winter, at which time when the sun is veiled

26. In reading explanations of symbols I have found that "doubtless" is almost always a prelude to a very dubious suggestion.

27. This conception of the zodiac is discussed from the astronomical point of view by Franz Boll, *Sphaera*, 1903, 247.

with clouds she is widowed and benumbed, and the fountains, as though they were the eyes of the earth, flow more copiously, and the very fields which for the time are left untilled show a sorrowful face. But when the sun emerges from the lower parts of the earth and passes over the line of the vernal equinox while the days lengthen, then is Venus gay, and the fields become beautifully green with rising grain, the meadows with grass, the trees with leaves. Wherefore our ancestors dedicated the month of April to Venus.<sup>28</sup>

We are getting ahead of our story, but it is at once clear that if the Jews had use for the Seasons as symbols of their hope, they could as well have used the figure of Adonis, whose death represented the death of the sun, of vegetation, and the hope of nature, and of us as part of nature and its resurrection. If a Roman Jew who thought of the future life in astral terms wanted a sarcophagus which expressed that hope, since the Roman world had no convention for direct designing of astral signs upon sarcophagi, it is hard to think how better, or, to those who knew, how less invidiously, he could plan his sarcophagus than to have Seasons, or the death of Adonis, upon it.

Steadily we are pushed back to the possibility that these astronomical symbols, and Helios himself, meant something in the Judaism of these Jews, something which could be as central in their thinking as the zodiac panels are physically central in the synagogue floors. In synagogues we cannot take them to be the pagan Helios, or personally divine Seasons or zodiac signs. Had these Jews regarded Helios or the Seasons or Adonis as valid and acceptable personal gods, their Judaism would have become meaningless: they might better have worshiped with the pagans in their temples and spared themselves the trouble of building distinct houses for Jewish worship and the distress of Jewish particularism in Roman society. We have seen, however, that Jews were indeed practising syncretism in another sense, for the other types of symbols we have discussed have shown a strong probability that Jews brought the symbols into Judaism in order to appropriate the values inherent in the symbols, and that though by giving them Jewish explanations the origin of the symbols in paganism was obscured, at least to the Jews who borrowed them the basic values were by no means lost.

The astral and cosmic symbols in themselves have superficially suggested that Jews had done much the same with them as with the others, that they had Judaized them with explanations in Jewish terms while they had used the original values of the symbols to enrich Jewish religious life and hope. If such a hypothesis seems suggested by the astral symbols as they appear in Jewish archaeological remains, we must test it by trying to isolate the essential religious

<sup>28</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 21 (ed. Eysenhardt, 117 f.) He may have had this from Porphyrus PW. XIV, i, 195. Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 42.

values of astral symbols in paganism, and then by looking to see if Jewish literature justifies our thinking that those values did go over into Judaism.

### B. ASTRAL SYMBOLS IN PAGANISM

THE PAGANS from whom Jews borrowed astral symbols could have used them with symbolic reference, or as mere ornament, so far, at least, as the designs themselves are concerned. We must accordingly recall the place of astralism in ancient thought before we can judge whether the representations had more than decorative value, and, if so, what that value was.

#### 1. In Religious and Philosophic Thought of the Greco-Roman Period

INFORMATION on the place of astralism in Greco-Roman thinking is scattered through a great number of ancient sources. Some of them are as familiar as the writings of Plato, even as his *Apology* itself, where Socrates takes it for granted that the sun and the moon are the one type of gods in which everyone (except the incredulous Anaxagoras) believes. Other sources are highly difficult astrological treatises of which the most commonly known are the *Astro-nomicus* of Manilius and the *Tetrabiblus* of Ptolemy, while new ones occasionally turn up in manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the literature of antiquity more or less elaborate allusions are made to the stars, their nature and relation to men, allusions which for our purposes have even more importance than the formal treatises. The monuments of antiquity furnish many references to the stars in inscriptions and carved representations. And the documents of later philosophers and Gnostics, such as the passage just quoted from Macrobius, as well as the literature and archeological data of early Christianity, offer perhaps most pertinent evidence.

To all this the beginner has still no adequate introduction, though the best approach is through the repetitious but highly imaginative (in the best sense of the term) writings of Cumont.<sup>30</sup> He is to be supplemented by technical his-

29. The most recently published, to my knowledge, is a Hermetic astrological tractate; see Wilhelm Gundel, *Neue astrologische Texte des Hermes Trismegistus*, 1936 (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophische-historische Abteilung, N.S., XII).

30. Aside from Cumont's many smaller studies in periodicals, the results of which

were usually incorporated in later studies, the most important for the religious value of astral symbolism are: "Le Mysticisme astral dans l'antiquité," *Bulletins de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres*, 1909, 256-286; "La Théologie solaire du paganisme romain," *Mém.*, AIB, XII, ii (1913), 447-479; *Les Religions orientales dans le Paganisme romain*, 3d ed., 1929, esp. chaps. VII, VIII; As-

tories of astronomy, the works of W. Gundel,<sup>31</sup> Hanfmann,<sup>32</sup> Nilsson,<sup>33</sup> and others.<sup>34</sup>

We have seen that nothing in the Jewish monuments seems to refer to astronomy as a science or to astrology as a technique of divination, so that we may leave those highly controversial subjects to the experts. Briefly it may be remarked that the experts still seem basically to disagree: champions of Egypt oppose protagonists of Mesopotamia as the original site of astronomy, the source whence it flowed to others. And there is just as little agreement on the contribution of Greece. One thing however is obvious: by the hellenistic period interest in the stars was spreading rapidly all over the western world. Philosophies like Stoicism early became drenched with astralism, as the pantheistic cyclical determinism of Zeno was seen to have its counterpart in the cyclical determinism of the stars themselves. According to Cicero,<sup>35</sup> "Zeno attributed a divine power to the stars, but also to the years, the months, and the seasons." Other schools were no less eager to adopt the stars as gods in order to get a deity, or deities, who, following the strictures of Plato and all thoughtful men of Greece, would take the place of the Olympians. Even in Aristotle the stars are what we should call personalities, and the efficient causes in the universe.<sup>36</sup> In this, as Cumont points out, Greeks were but paralleling (or following) a sim-

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*tology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, 1912; *Etudes syriennes*, 1917. *After Life*, 1922, "Zodiacus" in DS, V, 1046–1062; *L'Égypte des astrologues*, 1937; *Symbolisme*, 1943, *Lux perpetua*, 1949, esp. pp. 303–342.

31. Besides the work just cited see his *Sterngläub.*, *Sternreligion und Sternorakel*, 1933, *Dekane und Dekansternebilder*, 1936, and, with Boll, "Sternbilder, Sterngläub. und Sternsymbolik bei Griechen und Römern," in Roscher's *Lex. Myth.*, VI, 1937, 867–1071.

32. Hanfmann, *Seasons*, is so centered in the Seasons that other aspects of astralism are considered only incidentally. But the book is very rich, and critically developed.

33. See esp. his *Greech. Rel.*, II, 256–267, 465–498. He here gives elaborate references to the sources and to his and others' earlier works. See also his "Die astrale Unsterblichkeit und die kosmische Mystik," *Numen*, I (1954), 106–119.

34. Much of interest is in Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 2d ed., 1929, I; Ernst Herzfeld, "Der Typus des Sonnen- und Mondwagens in der

sasanidischen Kunst," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XLI (1920), 105–140; Franz Boll, *Sphaera. Neue Griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder*, 1903, P. Boyancé, "La Religion astrale de Platon à Cicéron," *REG*, LXV (1952), 312–350, one should never omit Robert Eisler, whose various works, especially *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt*, 1910, are highly valuable as phantasmagorias of uncritically used material.

35. *Natura deorum*, I, 36. Cf. Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, 108.

36. See W. D. Ross on the "Intelligences": *Aristotle*, 1937, 98, 181. Aristotle, perhaps, is thinking of the "spheres" as thus animate rather than the stars themselves, as E. Zeller insists (*Aristotle*, 1897, I, 495, n. 4), but Zeller admits that Aristotle says of the stars that we are to think of them not as mere inanimate bodies, but as partaking of intuitive and life: *On the Heavens*, II, XII, 292a18–21 (ed. W. K. G. Guthrie, Loeb ed., p. 206).

ilar tendency of religious thinkers in the East, which put the old gods of mythology, gods which were originally local fertility or nature deities, into the stars.<sup>37</sup> When Ishtar or Venus became a planet with a predictable course, and even the vagaries of Mercury or Mars had been stabilized, man himself took on a new and civilized dignity as he strove to live an ordered life in an orderly universe. From the point of view of science, astronomical and astrological (our sharp sense of distinction between these is very recent), the goal was to chart accurately the paths and influences of those cosmic rulers — that is, to achieve complete comprehension of what was now becoming comprehensible. Blind fortune, chance, disappeared from such a universe, and fate or providence, two terms for the same thing, took their place.

Iamblichus has already been quoted at length for his final summary of this development. Powers, says he, radiate from the sun to every part of the heaven, to each sign of the zodiac and heavenly motion. These recipients partially absorb the radiation. So the zodiac represents God who, hourly changed, is yet changeless. Plural in manifestation, God is single in himself and in his power.

Man's position in the universe was clear: the soul of man, whether in Platonic-"Orphic" dualism of matter and spirit or in Stoic distinction between finer and less fine matter, was a prisoner on this earth. This soul came, probably, from one of the stars and was destined at death to return, either immediately or after contingencies variously defined by different religions, to its source. The cycle implied with some the extinction of a star (a falling meteor) and then its later rebuilding as the soul returned to the primum mobile; or it implied the reverse, and the falling star was a death. With some the body, too, could ascend.<sup>38</sup> Great people, especially kings, could seem to be great stars, even the sun itself, on earth.<sup>39</sup> By no means excluding other beliefs, there came into wide acceptance the conception that the sun was the source of all souls and was their constant nourisher, just as the moon nourished men's bodies. At death the sun took the soul back to itself, was its "anagogue" to draw up the soul of men from cloying matter.<sup>40</sup> Cumont has brought this out, as so much else, and refers to the "mass of literary evidence and a number of figured monuments" which show the power of the sun god as god of the dead. The astral immortality was combined with the solar in many devious ways, such as in the theory that souls in ascent had to stop at each of the planets for certain purifi-

37. L.-H. Vincent discusses an interesting instance of this in his "Le Culte d'Hélène à Samarie," *RB*, XLV (1936), 221-232.

38. W. Gundel in Roscher, *Lex. Myth.*, VI, 1062 f.

39. On the Emperor as beyond the effect

of astral determinism because of his inherent divinity see Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, II, xxx, 4-7 (ed. W. Kroll and F. Skutsch, 1897, I, 86 f.).

40. *After Life in Roman Paganism*, 101-

109, 156-164; *Symbolsme*, 202-252

cations; or the astral and solar theories were just left side by side unrecconciled.<sup>41</sup> Still another conception, of great importance in the centuries when the Jewish monuments were being made, is lunar immortality, the notion that the abode of the happy dead was the moon. Cumont<sup>42</sup> has richly expounded with abundant documentation the manifold forms in which this doctrine was expressed. He shows that the sun and moon, in some circles especially the moon, came to be regarded as the actual site of the mythological Isles of the Blessed, where the fortunate had their immortality, and that this idea was expounded especially by later philosophers and popular oriental cults, but from all his material what emerges most clearly is that there was no standardized version of this conception. Sometimes the moon was this abode by itself, sometimes the sun; sometimes the souls of the blessed went into the sphere of the fixed stars, using the sun and moon as gates; sometimes they ascended through the seven spheres of the planets. Certainly there was no such unanimity of interpretation that we can recognize in the funerary symbols any definite system of reference to the heavenly bodies. Indeed, like the Dioscuri, the Seasons, and the zodiac, the sun and moon seem often to represent the great cycles of the universe, day and night, winter and summer, so that Eternity is often represented on coins as a veiled goddess holding in either hand the sun and moon. As such she could represent, as she seems to do on coins, the eternal power of the state; similarly the sun and moon on tombstones could represent eternity as the hope of the individual.<sup>43</sup>

To complicate this picture philosophers of the Platonic and Pythagorean tradition could neither escape the attraction of the astronomic scheme nor accept it literally. So by some all of this was transferred to that basic Platonic conception of the Good as the Sun which Plato originally set forth in the *Republic*. Here the visible sun, the material sun, is the highest existence in the material world, and is a copy of the ultimate self-subsisting entity of the world of Forms. Astronomy is studied by Plato's guardians in order that the conception of material units and order may lead to the higher conception of true order in the immaterial world. So for the later immaterialists and Neoplatonists astronomy and number had tremendous importance, but only as introductory to philosophy itself, which went completely beyond them into the One. The philosophers, of course, were also human beings, so that even Origen kept much

41 Christianity similarly has a double conception of the after life: by one conception the dead sleep in the grave until the day of the Resurrection, and by another they go at once, "this day," to Paradise or Purgatory as the case may be. Both conceptions are represented in burial services, and if they are reconciled by professional theologians the reconciliation is no part of popular under-

standing. A devotee, from a memorial mass for his father in Purgatory, goes to decorate the grave without the slightest sense of inconsistency. Consistency in beliefs is a necessity for very few people of any age.

42. *Symbolisme*, 177-252. Cf. Nilsson, *Grech. Rel.*, II, 471-475.

43. Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 78 f. (esp. 79, n. 5), 94, n. 2



literal astralism along with his Platonic immaterialism, as indeed did most of the Neoplatonists, such as Julian, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus.<sup>44</sup>

Popular theosophy made still other modifications. As represented by the Hermetic tradition, for example, the true God was one, quite beyond the universe; but the actual rulers of the material world are the visible gods, the stars, of whom the sun is the greatest. These give out the decrees of fate, and only rare people have so spiritual a nature that they can by gnosis ascend beyond fatalism through the spheres to the spiritual world.<sup>45</sup> This gnosis is the special and secret possession of the Egyptian priests, for to them the gods, and especially Hermes-Thoth, have revealed all human knowledge and useful inventions. Especially has Thoth invented writing and indited sacred books which cannot be entrusted to the profane.<sup>46</sup> Astrology and philosophy are conspicuous parts of this sacred and secret lore, for "philosophy" as Hermeticists use the term was the erudition wherein the old oriental mysticism has learned to use the terminology of the Greek philosophic schools.<sup>47</sup> During the most scientific period of the hellenistic age the connection of the stars with human immortality faded out. Men were content to study the stars and learn to submit to their implacability, or to try to ascend to them, or to the spiritual world they represented, in mystic ascent during this life.<sup>48</sup> It is to Ptolemy himself that these verses are attributed:

I know that I am mortal and ephemeral, but when I trace the dense multitude of stars in their circular courses my feet no longer touch the earth, but I am, along with Zeus himself, filled with the ambrosia on which gods are nourished.<sup>49</sup>

Centuries later, when the values of astralism for immortality had become central, its value for mysticism and ethics was still proclaimed. So Firmicus Maternus says:

Gaze upon the heavens with open eyes and let thy spirit never cease to regard that most beautiful fabric of divine creation. For then our mind is regulated by

44. Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism*, 107 f.; cf. *ibid.*, index, s.v. Neoplatonists. See also Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, I, 298–321.

45. Thorndike, 290.

46. Cumont, *L'Égypte des astrologues*, 152. This remarkable book was inspired by the discovery of the latest and greatest of the hermetic tracts on astrology, that published by Gundel (see above, n. 29), but Cumont made his reconstruction on the basis of all the available material. The chapters on religion and morality (pp. 113–206) are especially impor-

tant for the religious value of pagan astrology.

47. *Ibid.*, 122, 152 f.

48. *Ibid.*, 203–206.

49. *Anthologia Palatina*, ix, 577. Frequently quoted by Cumont, as in *L'Égypte des astrologues*, 206. He quotes this also in his "Le Mysticisme astral dans l'antiquité," *Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres*, 1909, 277. This entire essay, especially the collection of material on pp. 279–286, still has great value.

the memory of its own majesty, and so is freed from the vicious seductions of the flesh; stripped of the restraints of mortality, it presses forward with rapid steps toward its Author, and through every hour of the day with wise and ever eager curiosity it investigates nothing but divine matters. By doing this we get a notion, however inadequate, of divine knowledge, and even come through to the secrets of our origin. For as we keep ourselves constantly busy with divine discussions, apply our souls to the celestial powers, and initiate them with divine rites, we are removed from all desires of the wicked lusts.<sup>50</sup>

Philo so well reflects the spirit of his day that he, too, has amazingly little to say about personal immortality and seems to find complete satisfaction in mystical absorption of an almost Hindu type, although, with his predictable inconsistency, in a few passages he speaks of the next life in terms of more personal survival.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps here Philo's very inconsistency reflects the change which was coming upon men, a fresh desire for personal immortality in the Imperial centuries.

For after the great scientific advances of the hellenistic period there came a breakdown of interest in pure science and such a popularization that astrology or astronomy again seemed to have its chief point in nourishing a hope for immortality, which Plato had shown but which had largely disappeared in the age of science. These sciences, as Cumont said, no longer presented themselves as a learned theory taught by mathematicians but became sacred doctrines revealed to the adepts of exotic cults, which have all assumed the form of mysteries.<sup>52</sup> Now, while the philosophers could continue to use scientific conceptions, each school in its own way, the common man could increasingly put Seasons and other recollections of the starry hope on their graves, while the Emperor himself could, at last completely, base his claims to authority upon Sol Invictus.<sup>53</sup> Still the debate continued as to whether the cosmos was itself the ultimate, and the stars were the determining forces if they were not actually personalities, or whether the stars did not merely reveal the purposes and ineluctability of an immaterial causation. Neoplatonism, of course, took the second choice, but to Plotinus the stars had great power, or were manifest signs, in shaping the future. He did not like the astrologers or their works but seemed unable to get away from their influence. Only the soul, he felt, was free of magic and determinism: in the life of reason, and in it alone, could man rise above the tyranny of the stars.<sup>54</sup>

50. *Mathesis* (ed. Kroll, Skutsch, and Ziegler), VIII, 6, 7 (II, 282)

51. See my "Philo on Immortality," *HTR*, XXXIX (1946), 85-108

52. *Astrology and Religion*, 91. See the excellent presentation of the astral mysticism of Vettius Valens by Festugière in his *L'Idéal religieux des Grecs et l'Évangile*, 1932, 120-125.

53. *Astrology and Religion*, 94-99. One recalls the portrait of the Emperor Constantius Gallus in a toga covered with pictures, many of which recall signs of the zodiac, and which Eisler thinks shows the ancestry of the medieval starry mantle of royalty: R. Eisler, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt*, 1910, I, 38

54. Thorndike's chapter "Neo-Platon-

It becomes clear, then, that in adapting their various mythologies and types of worship to the new astronomy, the ancients of all sorts and places felt that they were squaring their faith with the new and true science. The old rites were kept, to be sure, though they had to be allegorized. For example, Porphyry asked why the ancients used the old phallic pictures and rituals if the gods are in reality these unruffled and unresponsive stellar beings? The answer which Iamblichus and all later antiquity gave to this was that the old rites were symbolic, valuable not for drawing the gods down to us but for elevating man to the impassive gods. So in a world of scientific causation religion kept not only its value but its ancient forms. "The [words] of the ancient prayers, like holy sanctuaries, must be preserved identical and unchanged, with nothing either taken away from them nor added from other sources," said Iamblichus.<sup>55</sup> One could not live, and still cannot live, in a scientific world and keep one's faith in a traditional religion, formed centuries before the science itself, in any other way. Presented with the dilemma, some will be "fundamental" to the point of rejecting the world of science: others in the interest of science will reject the traditional values (conceived now as injurious falsehoods) in favor of a "purely scientific" point of view. For religion itself the path is precisely such a compromise as the later Platonists devised, as well as Philo and the Christians after them. The major premise of all such compromising has been that if the traditional religion is literally false according to science but pragmatically true in its elevating effects upon human life, the religious act must be true in some symbolic sense which we may or may not be able to describe.<sup>56</sup> We may or may not, for example, identify our beloved Venus with a star and say that the old forms of address to her had always, though unwittingly, been directed to sidereal rulership. But if the science of the day asserts that causation in the universe is sidereal, we cannot continue to be wholehearted scientists unless our beloved Venus either is rejected or suffers from such transformation. Certainly we cannot continue to be religious and scientific at once without such allegory. The possibilities of these allegorical transformations are manifold. Our God may become immaterial and, rising to heights quite beyond this sidereal system, become the force behind it. The god ceases to be the old Venus or Dagon or Yahweh in this process and, beyond even physical determinism, becomes the immaterial Unmoved Mover. Religion saves its face, moves over into the age of the new science, as it learns to call the new force by the old

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ism," *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, I, 298-321, contains much pertinent material not to be found elsewhere

55. *De mysteriis*, VII, 5. Quoted by Thorndike, 311 f. See his pages 308-312. Iamblichus wanted prayers said in their original languages, since "words do not keep quite the

same meaning when they are translated" (*ibid.*).

56. See the argument to this effect by Sallust, *De diis et mundo*, xv, xvi, and the translation and commentary by A. D. Nock, *Sallustius Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, 1926, pp. LXXXIII-LXXXVI, 29-31.

name. The essence of religious continuity lies in the persistence of the rite — the name, the symbol, the emotional attitude — and when this continuity is preserved, the rest may change and welcome. The value thus survives into a new world of explanations.

Men of the declining Empire, like many of our own contemporaries, were more concerned to make this religious appropriation of science than to develop science itself. For the appropriation, as has been mentioned, brought a renewed source of inspiration and strength to this life, and a hope of life after death, as it devised a fresh expression of that hope in astronomical symbols. Cumont has shown how inscriptions indicate, even in the first century B.C., the widespread conception that the soul goes to the stars at death, as the body returns to the dust.<sup>57</sup> This was a popularization of the apotheosis of kings and other great ones, just as the general hope of immortality seems to have developed in Egypt from a popularization of the divine nature of the king. Most men, then as always, who had such hopes of ascent as that through the stars to the pure fire or ether, or to the immaterial nature behind all matter, based their hopes largely upon the effectiveness of ritualistic ceremonies, what is generally called "magic."

Plato had hoped for restoration to the Forms beyond the stars through the purification of his nature by philosophy, by mathematical discipline, by high ethics, and by strict asceticism, and the later Platonists fully agreed with him,<sup>58</sup> as did the Pythagoreans from whom Plato may largely have had the notion. Such a conception could easily be combined with that of a saving god, a Hermes or Helios, who, each in his own way, took the soul to the blessed regions. We have already found in the eagle, Pegasus, the griffin, the ladder, and the boat suggestions taken into Judaism of this saving activity of God. Now the sun god in his chariot is added as another symbol whose chief religious value lay precisely in the hope that the soul might rise to the stars, and beyond, in such a fiery chariot.<sup>59</sup>

## 2. In Pagan Art

SUCH WAS the meaning of the astral symbols to pagans. And these symbols went into all aspects of their religions. Not only does the zodiac normally ap-

57. *Astrology and Religion*, 174–179.

58. See my "Literal Mystery in Hellenistic Judaism," *Quantulacumque, Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake*, 1937, 227–241, and P. Bovancé, *Le Culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs*, 1936.

59. On this see the last chapter in Cumont's *Astrology and Religion*; his "Mysticisme astral dans l'antiquité," *Bulletins de l'Académie*

*Royale de Belgique. Classe des lettres*, 1909, 256–286, and his "La Théologie solaire du paganisme romain," *Mém., AIB*, XII, ii (1913), 447–479. See also Seyrig, "La Triade héliopolitaine et les temples de Baalbek," *Syria*, X (1929), 314–356, where is discussed the promotion of Hadad and other Near-Eastern sun gods to being the transcendent Deity; at the same time a minor deity, in

pear upon Mithraic shrines:<sup>60</sup> it surrounds a peculiar figure which seems a syncretistic softening of the leonine Chronos of Mithraic symbolism, whereby that ferocious figure is identified with some milder (perhaps "Orphic") personality.<sup>61</sup> Similarly the zodiac in the form of the twelve months surrounds a strange figure, enthroned and with a cornucopia, at whose feet lies another figure on a couch, with hand raised toward his companion, fig. 14.<sup>62</sup> The identity, and even the sex, of these figures is uncertain. Again the Seasons<sup>63</sup> are in the corners, and the border of animals, for all its striking differences, suggests the basic scheme of Beth Alpha. Cagnat recalls: "In this place in analogous mosaics we find Apollo surrounded by the signs of the zodiac, very often Bacchus or even Mercury with Abundance, or even Annus holding the sun and moon in his hands." The "Apollo" or Helios is now a familiar motif. The mosaic with Hermes and Abundance<sup>64</sup> to which he refers has only the Seasons, not the zodiac, with it, and at once suggests the figure on the ceiling of the Jewish Catacomb Vigna Randanini. Pellegrini thinks that this Hermes and Abundance, on the mosaic floor of what seems to be a private house, indicated that the house belonged to a rich merchant who was hoping for prosperity from the patron deities of commerce. He may be right, but the Seasons certainly had little to do with this, and I suspect that the "merchant," if such he was, used a symbolism which implied for him rewards in the next life as well as in this life. The Annus in the zodiac to which Cagnat refers<sup>65</sup> is a medieval adaptation of an ancient

Greek usually the equivalent of Hermes, was made the revelation of this supreme God in the material realm (the physical sun was one manifestation), and the psychopomp to take men to him. Hermes in this sense was also Dionysus, and his symbol was the grape.

60. See Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés . . . de Mithra*, 1896, II, plates v, vi, vii, and figs. 304, 315, 419. The Dura Mithreum also has a zodiac.

61. See F. Cumont, "Notices sur deux bas-reliefs mithraïques," *RA*, Ser. III, Vol XL (1902), 1-13, plate 1. R. Eisler, *Wellenmantel und Himmelszelt*, 400, suggested that this was an Orphic piece, as had C. Cavedoni much earlier (see Cumont, 5). Cumont in *Les Mystères de Mithra*, 3d ed., 1913, 107, n. 3 opined that Eisler had gone too far but argued that this relief might have resulted from Orphic influence upon Mithra. See also L. Ziegler, in *Neue Jahrbucher für Philologie*, XXXI (1913), 562; idem in Rocher, *Lex Myth.*, V, 1536; F. M. Cornford, *Greek Religious Thought from Homer to Alexander*, 1923, 56, n. 1. The best recent collection of zodiacs of this sort, and

discussion of them, is by Alda Levi, *La Patera d'argento di Parabiago*, 1935, 8-10 (R. Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, Opere d'Arte, V). Miss Levi agrees with Cumont. She discusses also two other Mithraic combinations, in which Mithra is born from the rock within a zodiac circle. see p. 9, and plate v, 2 f.

62. From R. Cagnat, "Une mosaïque de Carthage," *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France*, LVII (1896), 251-270, plate iv. Cagnat (p. 256) suggests the possibility that the seated figure may be *Annus*; Eisler *Orph-dion* 28, asserts positively that it is *Aeternitas*.

63. On the Seasons in Mithraism see Cumont, *Textes et monuments relatifs au culte de Mithra*, I, 92 f.; Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 182.

64. *BICA*, 1870, 167.

65. Ernst A. Weerth, *Der Mosaikboden in St. Gerreon zu Köln*, 1873, plate ix. Several other interesting medieval zodiacs are published in this volume: see plates I, VIII, and p. 22.

design, and while this and the medieval zodiacs in general are very interesting, it is dangerous to bring them into a discussion of earlier symbolism beyond noting that they persisted in spite of the official Christian prejudice against use of the zodiac.<sup>66</sup> Miss Levi<sup>67</sup> is probably right in identifying the central figure here with Dionysus, but the recumbent figure is probably Tellus, from analogy with the other zodiac scenes. The motif of a deity with zodiac or Seasons frequently appears. In the mosaic of Sentinum at Munich, Helios stands within the zodiac, with the Earth, or Tellus, and her four children, the Seasons, at his feet.<sup>68</sup> Helios in his quadriga rides at the center of a zodiac in the Munster mosaic. In this a pair of fish confronting an urn take the place of each of the Seasons in the corners.<sup>69</sup> In the cameo shown in fig. 157<sup>70</sup> the sun god rides through the zodiac, with the goddess Earth, or Tellus, cornucopia in arms, beneath him. We are beginning to feel that the god or goddess with the cornucopia symbolically declares that the old hope of immortality which man got through identifying himself with the fertility cults was the same as that one got through astral identification. For the cycle of the year itself is on earth as it is in heaven: that it brings fertility and life can be symbolized by Helios or another in the zodiac along with the Seasons, or by some abridgment of this.<sup>71</sup> Earthly and heavenly symbols together show that the early fertility-mystic hope of future life has identified itself with the new astronomical hope. The phenomenon is too familiar to need detailed exposition. The idea itself is as old as Egypt, where from very early times, we have seen, the Osiris of the Nile, the fertilizer of the earth, was identified with Ra of the sun, or took his place. It is again reflected in Plutarch's *On Isis*. From later times we need perhaps only a single

66 Cumont in *RA*, Ser. V, Vol. III (1916), 6, quotes the tenth canon of the Council of Braga (A D 563) *Si qui duodecim signa, quae mathematici observare solent, per singula animae vel corporis membra disposita credunt et nominibus patriarcharum adscripta dicunt, anathema sit* Cf. Augustine, *De haeresibus*, LXX (Migne, *PL*, XLII, 44); *Ad Orosium*, II (*PL*, XLII, 677). To this we shall return below.

67 Page 9

68 Frequently published: see R. Engelmann in *AZ*, XXXV (1877), 9–12, and plate 3

69 Reinach, *Peintures*, 25, no. 1. That this is not a chance motif appears from a mosaic from Vienne in which the head of Poseidon is in a circle at the center of a square design and surrounded by cantharoi and dolphins. *ibid.*, 37, no. 5; but Poseidon can ride his marine quadriga in a circle with the Seasons in the corners quite like Helios *ibid.*,

36, no. 2.

70 From J. B. Wicar and M. Mongez, *Tableaux, Statues . . . du Palais Pitti*, 1804, III. The plates are not numbered: this is the 39th from the beginning, the 10th from the back. The conception of Helios or Sol riding the chariot above, and Tellus or Earth as a prone woman holding the cornucopia is also found. Reinach recalls, on coins of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius: Reinach, *Pierres*, 67, and plate 69, fig. 87

71. We do not know what was in the center of the North African mosaic floor, in which a central medallion was surrounded by the twelve months, with the four Seasons in the corners. The religious importance of each seems to be indicated by the attributes. R. P. Hinks, *Catalogue of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman Paintings and Mosaics in the British Museum*, 1933, 89–96, plate xxix

illustration, a statement from the fourth century of what the old nature myth of the Mother of the Gods and Attis had come to mean, a statement important to the ancients because it appears almost identically in the writings of Sallust and of the Emperor Julian. I quote Nock's translation:<sup>72</sup>

If I must relate another myth, it is said that the Mother of the Gods saw Attis lying by the river Gallos and became enamoured of him, and took and set on his head the starry cap, and kept him thereafter with her, and he, becoming enamoured of a nymph, left the Mother of the Gods and consorted with the nymph. Wherefore the Mother of the Gods caused Attis to go mad and to cut off his genitals and leave them with the nymph and to return and dwell with her again. Well, the Mother of the Gods is a life-giving goddess, and therefore she is called Mother, while Attis is creator of things that come into being and perish, and therefore he is said to have been found by the river Gallos: for Gallos suggests the Galaxias Kyklos or Milky Way, which is the upper boundary of matter liable to change. So, as the first gods perfect the second, the Mother loves Attis and gives him heavenly powers (signified by the cap). Attis, however, loves the nymph, and the nymphs preside over coming into being, since whatever comes into being is in flux. But since it was necessary that the process of coming into being should stop and that what was worse should not sink to the worst, the creator who was making these things cast away generative powers into the world of becoming and was again united with the gods. All this did not happen at any one time but always is so: the mind sees the whole process at once, words tell of part first, part second. Since the myth is so intimately related to the universe we imitate the latter in its order (for in what way could we better order ourselves?) and keep a festival therefore. First, as having like Attis fallen from heaven and consorting with the nymph, we are dejected and abstain from bread and all other rich and coarse food (for both are unsuited to the soul). Then come the cutting of the tree and the fast, as though we also were cutting off the further progress of generation; after this we are fed on milk as though being reborn; that is followed by rejoicings and garlands and as it were a new ascent to the gods. This interpretation is supported also by the season at which the ceremonies are performed, for it is about the time of spring and the equinox, when things coming into being cease so to do, and day becomes longer than night, which suits souls rising to life. Certainly the rape of Kore is said in the myth to have happened near the other equinox, and this signifies the descent of souls. To us who have spoken thus concerning myths may the gods themselves and the spirits of those who wrote the myths be kind.

Such a combination of fertility and astral symbolism seems to have disappeared when in the North African mosaic of Bir Chana the days of the week

72. From Nock, *Sallustius Concerning the Gods and the Universe*, 7–11. See the notes on pages L–LV. It is generally supposed, as Nock indicates here following Cumont, that Sallust

has used, with discretion, Julian's Oration on the Mother of the Gods (*Orationes*, v, 161c–162a).

are surrounded by animals, and these by the zodiac, all worked into a six-point star.<sup>73</sup> For here the symbols are all temporal or astronomical, and fruits or a cornucopia are left out.<sup>74</sup> Yet precisely that combination appears very frequently, as in the gem in fig. 17,<sup>75</sup> where a young god in a zodiac (only ten of the signs) has the crown of Helios, the wings of Eros, and the cornucopia of Abundance. It is presumably Dionysus in the place of Helios in fig. 16<sup>76</sup> who holds the zodiac in one hand, the cornucopia in the other, along with a grapevine and the flowers of the Elysian Fields. The Seasons surrounded this. So when it is a Pan and goat beside an altar within the zodiac, fig. 18,<sup>77</sup> the Dionysiac nature-hope seems suggested, though this gem, with the star at Pisces, may well have been the lucky birth-piece of the owner. To be sure other gods appear within the zodiac frame: Zeus,<sup>78</sup> Serapis,<sup>79</sup> Heracles,<sup>80</sup> even Selene.<sup>81</sup> The portraits of the deceased can be put inside the same frame upon their sarcophagus, fig. 19,<sup>82</sup> and Cumont is certainly right in seeing in this their apotheosis in astronomical terms. He seems also right in associating such a conception with the Jewish Seasons sarcophagi. The same combination of astronomical and fertility hopes is symbolized in both. For on the pagan sarcophagus the Seasons stand beside the zodiac frame of the portraits, and

73. Frequently published. See Reinach, *Peintures*, 226, no. 4.

74. As was quite commonly the case when Helios rides without any such earthly concomitant: see, for example, the instances in Reinach, *Pierres*, plate 69.

75. From *ibid.*, plate 125, fig. 49.

76. From Levi, *La Patera d'argento di Parabiago*, plate IV, 2; cf. p. 9.

77. From Reinach, *Pierres*, plate 69, fig. 88.

78. C. W. King, *Antique Gems*, 1860, plate III, 7; two are shown in *Monumenti antichi inediti*, Rome, July, 1786, plate III, one on a medallion of Antoninus Pius, the other on a peculiar memorial to the dead, where Atlas holds the circle of the zodiac, in which Jupiter or Zeus sits enthroned with an eagle at his side, while another eagle, whose pose suggests the solar eagle of the east, sits above the whole. In Reinach, *Pierres*, plate 82, fig. 1, Zeus with a zodiac circle similarly sits enthroned, Ares and Hermes are at either side as throne guards, with Poseidon at his feet.

79. G. B. Passeri and A. F. Gori, *Thesaurus gemmarum antiquarum astriferarum*, 1750, plate XVII.

80. The funerary monument of the Secundinii at Igel has in relief a scene of the apotheosis of Heracles surrounded by signs of the zodiac, with the four Winds in the corners. The twelve labors and the twelve signs of the zodiac, if this association was not original, came together inevitably in the hellenistic syncretism: C. Picard, *La Sculpture antique de Phidias à l'ère byzantine*, 1926, 457, fig. 181. Cf. Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 174 f., with bibliography at 174, n. 3.

81. A. H. Smith, *A Catalogue of Sculptures in the British Museum*, 1904, III, 231. I am not at all sure that this is not a portrait, in which the person portrayed has the attributes of Selene. Aesculapius with other unidentified figures appears within the circle: *Monumenti antichi inediti*, Rome, July, 1787, plate II, and the group is quite perplexing in the same setting in Reinach, *Pierres*, plate 129, fig. 34.

82. Courtesy of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D. C. See Hanfmann, *Seasons*, II, 2-16; cf. I, 3-15. See also the similar sarcophagus at the Campo Santo, Pisa, with the comments by Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 487 f.



Dionysiac scenes of vintage and of milking a ewe are below. In comparison, the menorah on the Jewish sarcophagus may well represent the seven planets, and be an astronomical reference in Jewish terms, along with the Seasons and Dionysiac fertility representations, for such was the meaning of the menorah as Philo and Josephus described it. To this we shall return.

One interesting syncretistic variant was to make the twelve Olympians into the twelve signs of the zodiac (on a Dionysiac altar),<sup>83</sup> and here it is clear that the person who made such an identification wanted to keep the values of the old Greek gods as he went over into the new religion of the cosmos. The Jews seem to have transposed values in much the same way, we shall see, when they identified with the zodiacal signs the twelve stones of the ephod as well as the twelve tribes. The Christians did similarly with the twelve apostles.

Another syncretistic use of the zodiac is shown in fig. 20.<sup>84</sup> Here Helios and Selene ride their chariots above, led by the stars of dawn and sunset respectively. Below, in a quadriga drawn by lions, ride a male and a female figure, whom Miss Levi calls, with great probability, Cybele or the Great Mother with Attis. They are accompanied by three warriors in the dancing poses of corybantes. Before them is a group made up of Atlas supporting the zodiac again, and a young god within, who, Miss Levi says, is "evidentemente solare," but whose only attribute is the Dionysiac thyrsus. Miss Levi is aware of the strong assimilation to Dionysus of this figure, the position of whose fingers indicates the Taurus of the zodiac. Below these lies Tellus with the cornucopia, balanced on the other side by two nymphs of running water, but whose connection with fertility is stressed by the blade of wheat and of some other plant they hold. In the center of the lower group are the four Seasons as four wingless putti; Poseidon and a female companion are in the deep sea at the bottom. The central motif obviously represents the marriage of Attis and Cybele, at the season indicated on the zodiac, the spring; but the whole is given a cosmic setting by the zodiac, Helios, and Selene, and the fertility gods below. From the depths which Poseidon represents, to the heights of the sun and zodiac, the sacred marriage of these gods is alike celebrated. We have seen that the similar myth of Cybele and Attis had been given an astral interpretation in literary sources, and this interpretation now appears in the art of later paganism. The bowl has also assembled in brief the symbols for sky and earth with the saving gods of the particular faith between, in which man may hope for immortality. So it is not strange that the patera was found in a grave; it covered a vase containing the ashes of some man, to whom this design, it may probably be assumed, indicated hope of a future life.

The material suggests that when the zodiac was used in this way, and when

83. Reimach, *Statuaire*, I, 64.

84. From Levi, *La Patera d'argento di Parabiago*, plate 1.

in it Helios and earthly fertility were combined, the whole had definite religious value. The art designs seem to tell us of much the same hope which we summarized above from literary sources.

Another combination of symbols likewise speaks of the union of various deities in the one hypercosmic immaterial deity of late antiquity, the deity which Jews found so congenial. The monument is now broken and scattered in various museums of Europe.<sup>85</sup> It would seem to have had four faces of the same size, with the center of each depicting an empty throne covered by a veil. Fig. 21<sup>86</sup> shows the face where the god was Neptune, the god of the marine thiasos, with a dolphin under the throne, and cupids bearing his symbols on either side, a trident and a great "wreathed horn." The fourth little figure seems to be missing from the right. Fig. 22<sup>87</sup> shows only a bit of the throne and its veil, but the cupid beside it holds a quiver, so that the throne was presumably that of Venus or Diana. Fig. 23<sup>88</sup> shows only a cupid carrying a great thunderbolt, and we may assume he was approaching a veiled throne also, this throne conceived in terms of Jupiter. Fig. 24<sup>89</sup> shows the only side still largely complete. Here we have the cupids at the right holding between them what was presumably a scepter, while cupids at the left carry a heavy pruning hook, the symbol of Saturn. Beneath the veiled throne of this frieze is the starry globe of the cosmos, wrapped with the band of the zodiac. One can safely assume that these four faces were originally part of the same object. To me it is equally obvious that the person who made it, or ordered it made, had in mind not four gods but a single god, one that from its abstract nature could not be represented at all. The four faces would represent, in accordance with late Roman ideas, four aspects of the single Deity. This god could be approached through the symbols of the marine thiasos, those of the power of Jupiter, those of Venus or Diana, or those of the cosmic Saturn, quite interchangeably. At the top of any of these symbolic ascents was the same mysterious throne, whose occupant could not be represented because he (or it) was immaterial.

Many Neoplatonists were thinking in this way at the period when the plaques were probably carved, and some such connection of ideas seems inevitable. It is striking, parenthetically, that while not a detail suggests that these plaques had any connection with Jews or Judaism, yet a curtained throne is an

85 See C. Ricci, *Automa*, IV (1910), 249–259. Some pieces of it appear to survive in close duplication, though both were apparently made at the same time. I would not attempt to judge which was copied from the other. We may leave that problem to art historians.

86 Photo Umberto Trapani, cf Ricci, fig. 1. This piece is at the Church of San Vi-

tale, Ravenna.

87 From *ibid.*, fig. 9; at the Archeological Museum, Milan.

88. Compliments of Dr. Mario Bizzari and the Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Florence. It is at the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

89. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris. Cf Ricci, fig. 5.

important part of Merkabah mysticism in Judaism, in which the "throne" is generally central. Before this throne was the cosmic veil or curtain. Metatron describes it vividly to Rabbi Ishmael in a late Midrash, but the idea is found in the second century, and appears in the *Pistis Sophia*, as well as in III Enoch,<sup>90</sup> and "he who sees it penetrates at the same time into the secret of messianic redemption."<sup>91</sup> The throne of Solomon seems often to have been allegorized as the same throne, veiled and approached by six steps (the throne itself the seventh). References to these are collected by Wünsche.<sup>92</sup> The animals on the six steps were made into the zodiac, so that the veiled throne above the zodiac of one of the plaques would be only a variant representation of this idea. Wünsche's pan-Babylonian methodology is not now convincing, but the striking similarity of this veiled throne to that of the plaques remains.

Like the speculations of Julian or Proclus, the design of each of these plaques retains from popular cult the cupids beside the awful and empty throne. Nothing suggests identifying these four cupids with the Seasons, but notably there are four of them, and the number four seems to have had importance of its own in this connection. For whether the attendant spirits were the four Seasons or the four Winds or any other four made little difference, apparently.<sup>93</sup> I have not stressed number symbolism, for while I am convinced that Jung is right in emphasizing it (who that has glanced at Philo or Cabbala could deny its importance for Jews of the period as well as Greeks?), it is an extremely elusive subject, and the possibility is always strong that in any *single* object of art the number of cupids or whatever may have no meaning, be determined purely by artistic considerations. Still the four cupids here are suggestive. Which takes us back for a moment to the Seasons.

Cumont, as noted above, thought that the Seasons, even when they appeared on sarcophagi without the zodiac or other celestial symbols, reflected that cosmos which the East was teaching westerners to introduce into their religious hopes. This has been more elaborately documented by Hanfmann,<sup>94</sup>

90. See esp. *3 Enoch* x, 1 (ed. H. Odeberg, 1928, 27 f.): "Metatron . . . said to me: All these things the Holy One, blessed be he, made for me: he made me a Throne similar to the Throne of Glory. And he spread over me a curtain of splendor and brilliant appearance, of beauty, grace, and mercy, similar to the curtain of the Throne of Glory; and on it were fixed all kinds of lights in the universe." The curtain seems to be clearly the heaven with its stars. But in *ibid.* xlv this curtain has all the events of the world's history written upon it, presumably to indicate the heavenly determination of earthly events

91. Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, 71; cf. 43,

67-72, and 362, nn. 112-114

92. A. Wünsche, *Salomons Thron und Hippodrom. Abbilder des babylonischen Himmelsbildes*, 1906 (Ex Oriente Lux, II, iii).

93. Proclus uses the seasons in praising the number four, see his *In Timaeum*, 298c. (ed. E. Diehl, 1906, III, 193). He gives, as other examples of the four, the four elements and the four cardinal points (of the ecliptic), so that "in general the number four has great power in creation." Various groups of four in such a context are listed by Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 155 f.

94. *Seasons*, esp. pp. 142-159.

who, with even more emphasis than Cumont, regards the Seasons as primarily marking the regularity and order of the universe, and of the God of the universe. But he, too, recognizes<sup>95</sup> that during the Empire interest steadily shifted from science and philosophy to religion, from concern for the structure and nature of reality to anxiety about the relation of the individual to the cosmos and about his fate after death. In this atmosphere Hanfmann sees the Seasons as the bearers of annual and seasonal sacrifices, and as symbols of the passing of time, of the recurrent succession of life and death, even in successive incarnations. The Seasons became the four horses of the solar quadriga which took the emperors to immortality, but this had little general application. Still, the Seasons so often symbolized immortality that the early Christian fathers took them to represent the Resurrection.<sup>96</sup> Like all symbols, the Seasons in the late Empire came predominantly to refer to the world beyond rather than to the world of time and matter.

I am much impressed by a phenomenon noted by Hanfmann that the Seasons take on Dionysiac and erotic associations and values.<sup>97</sup> The Seasons so often appear as cupids that we instantly suspect that groups of four of them, as on the peculiar monument just discussed, represent the Seasons even though they have no symbols of the seasons. If the Seasons are not themselves represented as cupids,<sup>98</sup> they are put beside a scene where cupids are prominent,<sup>99</sup> or Cupid is brought in with them in any way possible.<sup>100</sup> On a sarcophagus the Seasons may flank Dionysus riding on a lion or panther,<sup>101</sup> and in decorative wall painting they often so closely represent maenads that it is impossible to say whether Seasons or maenads are intended (in which case it seems clear that the identification of Season with maenad is indicated as, other-

95. See his summary, pp. 191 f

96. Hanfmann cites Augustine, *Sermo*, 361, 10 PL, XXXIX, 1604.

97. For a quick review of ancient representations of the Seasons, see not only the plates in Hanfmann, *Seasons*, but the indices, s.v. *Saisons*, in the three collections of Reinach: *Peintures*, *Reliefs*, and *Statuane*. The frequency with which the motif is put with Dionysiac symbols becomes increasingly striking as one goes through this material.

98. As, for example, in Reinach, *Reliefs*, III, 253, no. 1, 296, no. 1; 410, no. 2; 475, no. 3. Robert, *Sarkophag-Reliefs*, III, iii, 504 f (where Eros is both Season and a miniature Helios in the chariot), and AAL, N, 1911, 92, fig. 14 (where the pose is as on the Jewish sarcophagus). See also *ibid.*, 1916, 140 f, fig. 1

99. As when they surround a bath scene

of Aphrodite in which two Erotes assist her Reinach, *Peintures*, 62, fig. 5.

100. See the gravestone from Boretto AA, *JDAI*, XLVIII (1933), 574 f., also the sarcophagus lid in Robert, *Sarkophag-Reliefs*, III, iii, plate CXXXVI, fig. 432

101. Reinach, *Reliefs*, II, 57, fig. 9; cf *idem*, *Peintures*, 110, fig. 1. For other representations of Dionysus at the center between the four Seasons on sarcophagi see Charles de Clarac, *Musée de sculpture antique et moderne*, 1828–30, II, plates 124, 146; Amelung, *Sculp Vatican.*, II, plate 24, fig. 1021; and compare the evaluation in the Text, II, 318. See E. Michon in *RB*, N.S., Vol. X (1913), 111–118. The Seasons were a part of the Dionysiac procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus described by Athenaeus, v, 198B. c

wise, of Season with cupid).<sup>102</sup> The Seasons as dancing maenads show the whole cosmos as a Dionysiac riot.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the Seasons, along with the animals, listen to the music of Orpheus.<sup>104</sup> It seems to me violent, as it does to Hanfmann, to try to make all of these indicate an astral hope of salvation, though since the two outer Seasons can become the Dioscuri on a sarcophagus the possibility of astral significance can never be excluded from them.<sup>105</sup> Widely used symbols like these, which are identified with a great number of older conceptions, fused with various older mythological figures, could hardly be expected to keep any sharp ideological or theological consistency. That they often appear as graceful figures floating in the corner of a ceiling does not indicate that they had become *mere* space fillers. As they were always bright symbols of hope apparently, for that very reason they were also good decoration. And when Cupid, or Victory, or a maenad, became a Season, the hope implied was intensified. Like the zodiac, like all these symbols, as we are coming to see, the real meaning of the Season itself was the hope inspired by the regularity of the seasons, the fertility and new life which always followed decay and death, hope that man, too, was safe in the regularity and reviving power of God or nature. So Proclus sees in the Seasons, along with the other celestial phenomena and divisions of time, a reflection of the unmoved and timeless Nature; they are properly worshiped for their power thus to reveal the Ultimate. The Greek worship of Month and the hymns to Month in the Sabazian mysteries of Phrygia seem to Proclus to be justified on that account.<sup>106</sup> He quotes Panaetius and "other Platonists" that the proper mixtures of the Seasons was what produced intelligence and, the passage implies, made souls immortal.<sup>107</sup> So he, too, is willing to pray to them.<sup>108</sup> The zodiac, Proclus thought, was figured in the Nile, and he saw in both zodiac and Nile a source whence life is poured forth.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly the Orphic hymns generalize the cult value of the Seasons in the prayer:

Seasons! daughters of Themis (Law) and Lord Zeus, Eunomia (Regularity),  
Dike (Justice) and Irene (Peace) lavish in blessing; ve of the Spring, of mead-

102. *Peintures*, 131–138.

103. Hanfmann, *Seasons*, 148.

104. *Ibid.*, 200.

105. B. Ashmole, *Catalogue of the Ancient Marbles at Ince Blundell Hall*, 1929, plate 47, fig. 233. The author on p. 90 suggests that the symbolism not improbably "implies a belief in some form of resurrection." See Helios in a zodiac with the Seasons painted on a tomb: G. Calza, *La Necropoli del Porto di Roma nell'Isola Sacra*, 1940, 184, fig. 92.

106. *Commentaria in Platonis Timaeum*,

249c–251c

107. *Ibid.*, 50b–f.

108. *Ibid.*, 66a, cf. 101d, 248d.

109. *Ibid.*, 30a; cf. 171d. That Deity was both solar and the Nile is abundantly attested from Egypt, especially in the later period, when, in a single song ("The Song of Isis and Nephthys," transl. R. O. Faulkner, *JEA*, XXII, 1936, 121–140) the same god is the Nile (9.26) and yet has "all the circuit of the sun" (16.9)

ows, blooming Seasons who recur in cycles, sweet of face, clothed in fresh robes of the many flowers that grow, playmates of holy Persephone when the Fates and Graces, to the delight of Zeus and her beautiful mother, lead her with circling dances to the light: come to the pious new initiates at our auspicious mysteries, and bring without reproach the fertilizing products of the Seasons."<sup>110</sup>

The zodiac and the Seasons were not, of course, the only symbols by which paganism expressed its hope of astral mysticism and immortality, if I may use the term "astral" to cover the whole variety of formulations of this hope. The cosmic cycles were now not limited to the seasons of the year, but could also be thought of as day and night, the yearly journey of the sun to the southern hemisphere, the phases of the moon,<sup>111</sup> the Cosmic Year of the fixed stars, the cycles of the planets and their influence upon terrestrial events, or the spheres of the planets as methods of ascent, or as seven heavens. Sometimes the details of a given design indicate in which form of astralism the thought of the devotee or artist (or both) was moving. But frequently the reference seems to be to astralism in general, or the symbols are so abbreviated that they can be interpreted in several of these ways even though they may have meant some specific one of the forms of hope to the devotee.

One could well stop at this point to reproduce entire the fascinating material presented by Cumont on the lunar symbolism of the funerary monuments of antiquity.<sup>112</sup> His material shows for the most part a general astralism rather than specifically lunar hope. For if the moon appears prominently upon the monuments he reproduces, it rarely stands alone.<sup>113</sup> It is interesting to see a gravestone from Numidia, fig. 26,<sup>114</sup> where above a pair of portrait busts, as above the shrine at the Catacomb Torlonia, the sun and moon stand at either side of a central star. Here a cupid flies with a torch beside the star. I am intrigued with the possible parallelism presented between this row of symbols

110 *Ophic Hymns*, XLIII. The description of the flowery, sweet-faced Seasons recalls the heads at Dura. One can at least recognize in this similarity a possibility.

111. This, which I have not discussed, may be sufficiently illuminated by a statement that Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 212 n. (cf. 218), quotes from Augustine, *Sermo*, 361 (PL, XXXIX, 1604): "Quod in luna per menses, hoc in resurrectione semel in toto tempore." I quite agree with Cumont (219, n. 3) in feeling that the phases of the moon have a real symbolism as, for example, they appear to have on a tombstone from Geneva (*ibid.*, plate xvii, 1), and in rejecting Déonna's attempt to reduce them to a mere artistic de-

vice for symmetry.

112 *Symbolisme*, 203–252.

113. It seems to be alone, above a portrait bust, on a tombstone from Pannonia which Cumont publishes, p. 206, fig. 36. But below it are two pine cones, and the pine cone can take the place of the solar disk or star: see Cumont's plate xvii, 4 (cf. 3). So one cannot be sure that the hope of this man buried in Pannonia was purely lunar.

114. From R. M. du Coudray la Blanchère and P. Gauckler, *Catalogue du Musée Alaoui*, 1897, plate xxiii, no. 871 (Description de l'Afrique du Nord). Cf. J. Toutain in *REA*, XIII (1911), 167, fig. 7; Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 212, fig. 40.

and the row at the top of the stone, for there, between two rosettes, and with a gable front, a cupid pours from a pitcher. If the rosettes on this stone are, as often, symbols of light or stars or the sun, they may here correspond in more astral form to the sun and moon below, while this star at the center of the lower row, with its light-bearing cupid, may be represented above by the triangular gable within which the cupid pours from the pitcher. To the triangular gable we shall come in a moment. Returning to the lower row, it is dangerous to suggest what the central star between a sun and moon could be. Cumont plausibly says that the star is Venus, since the cupid "bearing light" beside it marks the star as "Phosphorus," an alternative name for Venus as the morning star. But he has no suggestion as to why Venus should have been selected and so carefully specified, and he does not discuss at all a possible meaning for the cupid above with his pitcher. I feel strongly that the two cupids go together. The star may indeed be Venus immediately, but it is Venus as Phosphorus, the Light Bringer, in some special sense which goes with the cupid bringing fluid above. One of the cupids, literally, gives the heavenly light, the other the heavenly fluid. Now we have seen abundant evidence of the complete identification of the light of life and the water of life, an identification which through the Fourth Gospel has become deeply symbolic for Christianity. Both, separately and together, symbolize the Logos as the flow of life and power from God, a flow which is the great love of God, creating the world and ruling it, and bringing God to man. Once begun on such fancies, it is easy to go farther, but symbolic interpretation must at this stage hold rigorously back. All we can say as a fact is that the sun and moon with a star between them is a proper decoration to put on portrait busts on a gravestone, and it is still to be presumed that in some way, which now only uncontrolled fancy can fill out, this astral design was connected with hope of immortality in the astral terms omnipresent in the literature of late antiquity. For our immediate purposes this is sufficient.

It has been suggested that the triangle in which the upper cupid poured out his pitcher was itself symbolic. Cumont<sup>115</sup> has an interesting discussion of such triangles, in which he recalls that for the Pythagoreans the equilateral triangle represented the decade, and hence "the principle of celestial and divine life." He goes on to say that the Pythagorean triangle "explains why they carved the triangle on the funerary monuments, and why they preferred to put the crescent [and the other heavenly bodies] in the triangular gable" so common on the top of ancient tombstones. "The triangle expressed discretely the belief in a celestial immortality." Cumont shows several triangles in funerary ornament, some of which are actual gables above the inscription, and some little triangles<sup>116</sup> as isolated forms. But he also shows several tombstones, such

115. *Symbolisme*, 224, where the documentation is interesting

116. *Ibid.*, 223

as fig. 27,<sup>117</sup> where instead of a gable the upper part of the stones are equally distinctive sections above the inscriptions, and filled with astral symbols, but finished with a rounded arch. I am accordingly inclined to agree with Cumont that the gables represent the divine sphere to which the deceased has gone, but I should guess that it is so not through the symbolism of the equilateral triangle (which a gable rarely is) but through that of a temple, the abode of a god, which might have a peaked roof, or a vaulted one. That the temple contains the heavenly bodies is clear in the last figure shown, while the value of the upper section of the stones as the site of deification seems to me clearly indicated by fig. 25,<sup>118</sup> where the deceased, with the sun and moon on either side, has come up into the gable, and so been deified. The temple is of course not an earthly temple but its heavenly counterpart.

One of the reasons I am most reluctant to allow my fancy to carry on in explanations of these astral symbols is that no system I have been able to devise (and I have thought of a good many) for explaining the arrangement of astral signs on ancient funerary art actually seems to apply to more than a very small percentage of the stones that survive. Fig. 27, for example, shows three of the little six-point rosettes which appeared so important on Jewish ossuaries, the "banal" rosettes, and which seemed ordinarily to be solar. But in the middle is the "star and crescent," a design that I take normally to be the moon and sun, and two peculiar objects like carpenter's squares, facing either way.<sup>119</sup> None of these identifications is at all secure (except the lunar crescent in the middle), and I can make no sense at all out of the arrangement. Apparently here, and in most of the other such groups of astral symbols that Cumont shows, the aim was to suggest the celestial regions whither the deceased had gone, with no attempt at detailed elaboration or specific symbolism.

This, finally, is exactly the impression which we get from fig. 28,<sup>120</sup> the central figure on a beautiful relief from South Italy. It shows the funeral procession in which the funerary bed or litter was carried to the grave. The deceased is represented as being in heaven simply by the drape covered with moon and stars behind her. It would be useless to try to reconstruct a specific type of astralism expressed in this curtain. So far as I can see, the lady simply

117. From *ibid.*, 237, fig. 54, a grave-stone from Pamplona, Spain, cf. 235, n. 2

118. Courtesy of the Museum of Langres, France; cf. Cumont, *ibid.*, 225, fig. 46. E. Espérandieu, *Recueil général des bas-reliefs de la Gaule romaine*, IV, 1911, 273, fig. 3228

119. Cumont shows three other instances of such objects see *Symbolisme*, figs. 51, 53, 57. In Cumont's fig. 57 they have notched ends which strikingly recall the gams

on the costumes of the chief figures on the Dura synagogue. Cumont calls them squares, which they certainly resemble, and he quotes (p. 233) various suggestions, as that they can be locks or hinges on the doors of heaven. In such a case it seems better not to guess at all.

120. From Cumont, *Symbolisme*, plate XIX at p. 238. Cumont says that it dates from the end of the Republic or the Augustan period.



has gone to heaven, a conception as vague and varied then as now. This very vagueness of detail made the symbolism so generally acceptable to Christianity later, and, presumably, to Judaism. Christianity used astral symbols when it put upon Mary a mantle covered with stars to indicate that she is the "Queen of Heaven" — not that she actually was in, or one of, the stars but that she, as a cosmic figure above the stars, wore the starry heavens as her garment.<sup>121</sup> The astral symbolism appeared again in the tradition of turning the vaulted ceiling of the medieval cathedral into the starry heavens, and in representing apotheosis as "ascent to heaven" in forms that used the heavenly bodies.<sup>122</sup> But astral representations appeared nowhere in a religious setting, so far as I know, without having a definite value at least in turning the thoughts of the worshiper to a divine realm that might be astral or suprastral. I am convinced that astral symbols in paganism and Christianity may always be taken, when put with other religious symbols or with persons, to indicate the heavenly nature of the symbols and persons.

### C. ASTRALISM IN JEWISH LITERATURE

THAT THE RELIGION of early Israel was filled with solar and astral elements is now a commonplace, however much experts may disagree about details. F. J. Hollis<sup>123</sup> seems to me right in pointing out that this was rejected at or about the time of the Exile and of Ezekiel, when the plan of the new Temple was deliberately altered to destroy any orientation with the sun. Certainly the Old Testament as finally edited preserves only fragmentary relics of the earlier concern with the sun and seasons. The sudden re-emergence of sun, seasons, and zodiac in the synagogues and graves of our monuments is definitely a fresh invasion of astral representations. Clearly, then, the first hypothesis to be tested is that this invasion meant a fresh adaptation of Judaism to astralism, a fresh modification of Jewish thought by the current pagan ideas connected with astralism. Did Jews begin to show a sense of mystical identification with the macrocosm or with the cosmic spheres, or with the seasons and their promise? And does this identification, when it appears on a grave, mean that the Jews, too, hoped for immortality and thought of it, like the pagans, in cosmic or hypercosmic terms, or in terms of the seed which dies in the earth to revive

121. The phenomenon is too familiar to illustrate: see, for example, Eisler, *Weltentmantel und Himmelszelt*, I, 85, fig. 27, and indeed that entire volume for a great mass of material for the heavenly garment worn by royalty in ancient and medieval times, as well as by a great number of gods in ancient religions and on into Christianity.

122. Volume II of the same work of Eisler presents a similar body of material from sources of all sorts on the vault of heaven as a religious symbol.

123. In his article "The Sun-Cult and the Temple at Jerusalem," in S. H. Hooke, *Myth and Ritual*, 1933, esp. pp. 106 ff.

at the proper season in a new life? Since the symbols appear not alone on individual sarcophagi, as Cumont supposed, but everywhere in the Catacomb Torlonia in Rome, in the plan of two ceilings of the Catacomb Vigna Randanini, and, in Palestine, in synagogue after synagogue, our hypothesis would go on to suggest that this sort of thinking had great importance to the Jews of the time as a group, or groups, not merely to individual Jews. Such a hypothesis must be tested from Jewish literature. Did such conceptions appear anywhere in our survivals of literature of the period, and, if so, in what sort of literature?

### 1. In Rabbinical Writings

OUR INTEREST is not with use by Jews of astrology as such.<sup>124</sup> There is abundant evidence, as has repeatedly been pointed out, that Jews, even the rabbis, were much attracted by the pretensions of astrology to predict the future. Even rabbis who wanted to keep Judaism free of such speculations by asserting that Abraham and the Jews had been lifted above the stars admitted that the gentiles were under astral domination.<sup>125</sup> Insofar as astrology was a field of its own, to which Jews like Christians could turn without prejudicing their religious faith, Jewish astrology does not concern us here at all: its presence would simply mean that like the majority of the human race, perhaps, in one sense or another, the Jews who at that time practised astrology had a twofold religion or philosophy, each to be used on its proper occasion, but the two not blended. A modern Christian who goes to confession and communion over the week end, and to an astrologer or other type of fortune teller in the middle of the week, rarely makes the slightest attempt at reconciling the two, and to the extent that the two are thus kept separate, astrology has no part in the Christianity of such a person. But if the individual should attempt to unite the two, explain astrology in terms of Christian theology, or theology in terms of as-

124 In discussing this question I draw heavily upon material already collected by others, and without accrediting each citation to its secondary source. Much of the material I cite (although I have added much) will be found collected in the following: Leopold Low, "Die Astrologie bei den Juden," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1890, II, 115–131 (first published 1863), articles "astrology" and "astronomy" at different periods in the *JE*, II, 241–251, by L. Blau, K. Kohler, P. Jensen, and J. Jacobs, Eisler, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt*, 265–275, idem, *Oiph-dion*, 9, n. 8, 39, n. 5, D. Feuchtwang, "Der Tierkreis in der Tradition und im Synagogenritus," *MGWJ*, LIX (1915), 241–267, J. Frachtenberg, *Jewish*

*Magic and Superstition*, 1939, 249–259, 311–313; Cumont, *Symbolisme*, 382–388

125. *BT. Shabbath*, 156a, b (E. I., II, 798–801) is the locus classicus. Here is expounded what it means to be born under the power of each of the planets, and R. Chanina says that Jews also are under power of the birth-star. Rabbi Johanan, Rab as expounded by Jehuda, Samuel, Akiba, and Nachman bar Isaac, each in turn, deny this, as they give instances of how God has overcome astrological prophecies. But none of it is properly a fusion of astrology with Judaism. On Israel's superiority to astral determinism see also the passages cited by W. L. Knox in H. Loewe, *Judaism and Christianity*, 1937, II, 101

tology, astrology would become a part of his Christianity. The archeological remains, which put the astral signs within the synagogues and catacombs, or with Jewish tokens on graves, seem to witness this genuine fusion of Judaism and astralism.

For such a fusion in Judaism we seem at first to have much literary evidence in the rabbinic writings. The rabbis often said that the biblical references to the number twelve are allusions to the zodiac. When Jacob "blessed" his twelve sons (some he roundly cursed) he compared five of them to animals: Judah to the lion, Isachar to the ass, Dan to a serpent, Naphtali to a hind, and Benjamin to a wolf. The rabbis commented on the passage:

Twelve princes will be begot. The tribes are determined by the order of the world. The day has twelve hours, the night twelve hours, the year twelve months, the zodiac twelve signs, therefore it is said, "All these are the tribes of Israel."<sup>126</sup>

Many scholars have thought that this identification was originally intended by the biblical writer;<sup>127</sup> if that is so, it is amazing that astronomical conceptions should have played so rare a part in the Old Testament, and be so little integrated into the religious thinking of Israel and early Judaism. Not until much later were all these twelves, and many other twelves, made into explicit references to the zodiac. So Feuchtwang quotes R. Phineas ben Jaïr that the twelve silver basins, the twelve silver cups, the twelve golden spoons, twelve oxen, twelve rams, lambs, goats, as well as the twelve Princes and Leaders of the Soul, and the twelve tribes all similarly refer to the zodiac. R. Eliëser ha-Mudai added the twelve springs of Elim, which were created at the beginning of the world. The brazen sea of the temple was most elaborately identified in this way, for among various identifications of details, its ten ells of diameter represented the ten Sefiroth, its roundness the heaven, its two rows of knobs the sun and moon, and the twelve oxen on which it stood the zodiac.<sup>128</sup>

126. Gen. XLIX, 28; the rabbis' comment is quoted by Feuchtwang, "Der Tierkreis," 243, from *Tanchuma*, Wajchi, 16 (ed. M. Buber). The following material is taken from this section of Feuchtwang's discussion.

127. H. Zimmern, "Der Jakobssegen und der Tierkreis," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, VII (1892), 161–172. E. Stucken, "Ruben in Jakobssegen," in his *Beiträge zur orientalischen Mythologie*, 46–72 (Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft, 1902, VII, iv)

128. For references see Feuchtwang, 244, and L. Ginzberg in *JE*, III, 357 f. Another study is that of E. Bischoff, *Babylonisches Astrales im Weltbilde des Talmud und Midrasch*, 1907. Much interesting material is

here collected to prove the pan-Babylonian origin of astrology in Judaism. The first section on the heavenly counterparts of earthly things, like the Throne, the Temple, Jerusalem, etc., is interesting but of no value to our study, because the link between these heavenly counterparts and the starry heavens is so very shadowy. Bischoff, pp. 48–59, has interesting material on the zodiac, but it shows no more than does the material of Feuchtwang why the zodiac and Helios should have been put in a synagogue. The same is true of his material on pp. 116–126, which shows the traces of interest in astrology manifested by various rabbis.

In none of these identifications as made in rabbinical and cabbalistic writings can I find any motive, any real objective. In the form in which they are stated the identifications express a sort of idly curious playing with names and numbers, that could not, so far as I can see, explain why Jews would ever have made the zodiac and Helios a central symbol in their synagogues. A sample of identifications on this level is presented in the curious Syriac fragment published by A. Mingana, entitled "Fragment from the philosopher Andronicus and Asaph, the Historian of the Jews."<sup>129</sup> Who wrote this, and when, the editor only very vaguely conjectures, but the Asaph would seem to have been, as Eisler indicates, a ninth- or tenth-century Syrian Jew, whose amazingly diverse writings draw heavily upon much earlier material. The fragment purports to be "a discourse upon the twelve *stoicheia* of the sun, written by Andronicus." The *stoicheia* are obviously the signs of the zodiac. He wants to expound these and their influence, for they "gravitate circuitously in the number of the twelve months of the year, and foretell events which happen to us by order of God, creator of everything." This is clearly a theistic adaptation of zodiac fatalism: it is not the stars or the astronomical signs but the Creator God behind them which determines the future, but he acts through the signs. Andronicus then goes on to tell the names of what gods the Greeks gave to these twelve signs: Dio son of Cronos is Aries; Poseidon is Pisces, etc. But Asaph, the writer and historian of the Hebrews, while he "explains and teaches the history of all these," calls them not by their Greek names but by the names of the sons of Jacob. Asaph, we are clearly told, changed in all this only the names. In the Aramaic language he put Reuben as Taurus at the head, with Simeon as Aries, Levi as Pisces, etc. in procession behind. This fragment then concludes with the following strange paragraph:

As lovers of the truth you will see and understand that these [*stoicheia*] have been named according to the number of days (of lunar computation) I say this, even if it happens that the peal of thunder is heard [in them]. At each month of the year, each one of the *stoicheia* turns circuitously according to the *kanones* of the month and gravitates according to the number of the moons, each one of them having been brought about by the three *kanones* of the evolution of the moon. This is their exposition, their order, and all their influence of which we are aware.

This piece, whatever its date, seems to me to represent the sort of adaptation most common in rabbinical Judaism, for it makes no real identification in a religious sense at all. The author obviously liked to use astrology for predictions, and had freed himself of the notion that it was the stars themselves which de-

129 No 3 in *Some Early Judeo-Christian Documents in the John Rylands Library*, 1917, 29–33 (reprinted from the *Bulletin of the John*

*Rylands Library*, IV, 1917, 1). See Eisler, *Orph-dion*.. 39, n. 5 For Asaph. Eisler refers to the very interesting article in *JE*, II, 162.

terminated the fates: he saw their "influence" as the work of God. So he gives the signs of the zodiac good Jewish names, which at once clears his conscience. He can continue to cast horoscopes without feeling that in doing so he is in any way betraying his Judaism.

In another Syriac fragment published by Mingana in the same essay the zodiac appears forced into a similar artificial relationship to Judaism. Here, Shem, son of Noah, gives a series of prophecies of what is to be expected when the year begins in each of the zodiac signs. Except that it is Shem who makes the prophecies and that the Passover is three times mentioned, not a hint of Jewish thinking emerges in the document. Shem predicts the high or low flooding of the Nile for that year, the weather, the crops, and the political, sanitary, and moral conditions. That is, again a Jew would seem to have believed in both Judaism and astrology but to have been content to join the two together thus loosely rather than try really to fuse them. Conspicuously the Judaism is made to give its blessing and terminology to astrology; astrology contributes nothing to Judaism. Feuchtwang concluded from his study that although the rabbis condemned astrology ("Thou shalt be a prophet, but not an astrologer") they conquered it only in theory, for in the lives of the people it remained important to the seventh century, and even to the present time.<sup>130</sup>

Yet that theoretical condemnation is of great importance for us, since it would have closed the door upon the admission of the zodiac into formal Jewish symbolism insofar as it was under rabbinic control. This is not enough to explain the zodiacs in the synagogues. For while we have not the setting for the other three zodiac mosaics in Palestine, the one at Beth Alpha, occupying the center of the floor, with sacred Jewish symbols above it and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac below, can hardly have been inspired by the fact that Jews, in spite of official disapproval, liked to cast horoscopes. Sukenik<sup>131</sup> in discussing the phenomenon says that there is much evidence that the zodiac and astrology played a great part in the life of the people. He quotes Philo and Josephus, to whom we shall come, and mentions the hymn-prayers of Ha-Kalir, who lived probably in the ninth century and whose two poems, one a prayer for dew, the other for rain, are oriented in the twelve signs.<sup>132</sup> Feuchtwang says that so far as he

130. *Op. cit.*, 267.

131. *Ancient Synagogues*, 66; see also his *Beth Alpha*, 36.

132. These will be found conveniently translated and discussed by Feuchtwang, "Der Tierkreis," 257-266. I am not certain that Feuchtwang has not missed some of the meaning of these prayers. That they were only literal prayers for dew or rain seems to me quite dubious: I should guess that they were also mystical prayers for an experience

which being wet with dew, or drenched with rain, very strikingly and commonly symbolizes. Indeed it may be a symbolic prayer for immortality, since the rain, and more especially the dew (usually so translated, but see the *EB*, s.v. dew) was something kept in the highest heaven, called the "Dew of Resurrection," by the descent of which the dead will be revived. See also *JE*, IV, 552, and V, 643, s.v. *geshem*, for references. And see I Enoch xxxix, 5: "Mercy like dew upon the earth"

knows these ninth-century compositions are the only things of the kind in synagogue ritual. Sukenik adds the hymns of the *Paytonium* discovered in the Ginza, but these, most dubious evidence for Judaism, are likewise late compositions and betray Hebrew connections only in the fact that the twelve signs are given their Hebrew names.

What still appears is that while the hymns of Ha-Kalir might possibly have been sung in a synagogue like that of Beth Alpha, they are unique in rabbinic and synagogal literature and are as little to be expected from talmudic references to the zodiac as are the mosaics themselves.

Actually the feeling of the earlier rabbis about representations of the heavenly bodies is plainly recorded.<sup>133</sup> The Mishnah reads:

If one finds utensils upon which is the figure of the sun or moon or a dragon, he casts them into the salt sea. Rabban Simeon B. Gamaliel says: if it is upon precious utensils they are prohibited, but if upon common utensils they are permitted.

Upon this the Gemara comments in a very interesting way. Assuming that the Mishnah represents the attitude of the earlier rabbis (before A.D. 200, when the Mishnah was codified), they seem to have taken an uncompromising position. Figures of the sun, moon, or dragon are so abhorrent that they are to be utterly destroyed ("cast into the salt sea" is only figurative) if they are found. This was the general law, and one may suppose that the law mentions only samples, and that other types of images are implied in these. Actually such inference is extremely difficult, because sometimes a passage which originally meant what it said, such as the cooking of a kid in its mother's milk, was later expanded into the whole superstructure of Jewish milk and meat meals. On the other hand, the rabbis were just as competent to take a law couched in specific language and virtually annul it by insistence upon literalism. Here, however, it is clear that the feeling against astral images was so strong that they, with the "dragon," were taken as the illustration par excellence of what could not be touched, even if found by chance. It seems to me a fortiori intentionally implicit that if one must destroy any object found with these images on them, much more must one do so with images of gods, and still more is it forbidden to Jews themselves to make such images. So, at least the great majority of Jewish scholars through the ages have understood the passage.

In ancient society, however, it is interesting that as early as the Tannaitic

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The zodiac and astral signs would be appropriate if the prayer was literally for dew and rain, it would be highly significant if these were at the same time prayers for mystical visitation or immortality. See also *Apocalypse of Abraham*, XIX, with G. H. Box's note *ad loc*

*BT. Hagigah*, 12b (ET, 71, cf pp 61-104) puts the dew in heaven in one of the loci classici for the conception, where it is explicitly a piece of Maaseh mysticism. On this see below 133 *BT. Abodah Zarah*, 42b-43b (ET, 211-217).

Age — that is, before the Mishnah was closed — the rabbis showed some tendency to modify this strictness. So Simeon ben Gamaliel did not fear that a Jew would worship an image of the sun or a moon-sickle on a common object like a water pot, but saw danger in a golden or silver moon-sickle which might be worn as a talisman, as he is quoted in self-explanation in the Gemara. It is clear that Simeon would not have the Jew himself put such a mark anywhere, but neither would he require a Jew to destroy some useful object just because it bore that mark.

In the next two centuries the feeling changed. The Gemara in commenting upon this mishnaic statement, presents several divergent points of view. The remarks of Rabbi Abbaye, of the fourth century, are especially interesting. He first seems to be trying to restrict the mishnaic statement to the three objects mentioned, for he says that these three objects are the only ones which pagans made for worship. They might actually be found worshipping almost anything, but as to fabricated images, all but these three were made "only for ornamental purposes." It might seem then that the Jew could do as he pleased. But this is by no means the implication, especially of making images of the sun or moon or stars, or of human faces. The argument is extremely confused, and has in general been already reviewed. As to astral symbols, however, the prohibition is definitely joined with the biblical text "Ye shall not make with me,"<sup>134</sup> in the sense that this means to prohibit not only the keeping when found of representations of any heavenly bodies, but the making of them as well, for they are God's attendants who serve before him in the heights, and while there was some disagreement, it was made to apply to all creation down even to worms in the ground.

As to the astral figures, the text repeatedly recalls the stubborn fact that the great Rabbi Gamaliel had a chart in his room which illustrated the different phases of the moon. This he used to show to rustics who came to report seeing the moon in its different quarters, reports on which festival dates were based. Gamaliel would say to them, "When you saw the moon, did it look like this or that?" The great rabbi was finally excused for having this chart, on the ground that presumably he did not make it but had it made by gentiles. Or perhaps, it is added, this chart was in sections, and was joined only momentarily, which would seem to imply that a small part of the chart could be shown at a time, and the whole could be put away when not in use. The advantage of this was that the danger of worshipping images was considered much greater if they were exhibited to a large number of people, especially to a formal assembly, than if kept privately. And, clearly, the cycle of the moon was more dangerous a thing to show than its single phases in isolation. So there was a synagogue, of Shaph-weyathib in Nehardea, where an image had been set up.

134. Exod. xx, 23.

Into this synagogue, it is a matter of unique record, two great rabbis actually entered to pray, but only when the congregation was not present. "It is different when there are many people together."<sup>135</sup> Needless to say, this was not an approval of putting such an object in the synagogue in the first place, let alone indication that the rabbis would have done so themselves.

When from this passage we turn back to the actual Jewish monuments, we see how the monuments go against the decisions of the rabbis on point after point. The rabbis quoted in the Talmud would never have approved Helios, the zodiac, and the Seasons for the center of the careful Jewish symbolism of the synagogues, or have put the Torah shrine between phases of the moon or between sun and moon on their graves. Meaningless as representations of the zodiac might have become in synagogues and prayer books a thousand years later, their original invasion into popular Jewish symbolism, obviously never approved by the talmudic rabbis, must have had a great deal of meaning indeed.

It is here that Sukenik's remarks, while quite true, prove inadequate. He has not distinguished between the testimony of nonrabbinic types of Judaism and the Judaism of the rabbis. None of the evidence we have seen suggests that Jewish astralism originated with them, for as R. Eleazar Hisma said, they considered astronomy and geometry "mere fringes to wisdom."<sup>136</sup>

The difficulty for an outsider is that no secondary work I have seen seems to me sufficiently to contrast the types of Judaism, or to keep a sense of chronology, in quotations from rabbinic sources. Anything which any rabbi approves is usually taken to be rabbinical in origin, and generally characteristic of a mythically uniform rabbinic Judaism. That there were various currents alive and productive in Judaism which often influenced the thought of individual rabbis seems to me obvious from the rabbinic writings themselves. Yet such ways of thinking were essentially foreign to what has come to be regarded as the usual rabbinic positions. Scholem<sup>137</sup> is an illuminating guide to some of these nonrabbinical sorts of Judaism, and he repeatedly emphasizes the "contrast to the tendencies which already during the Talmudical period dominated the outlook of the great teachers of the Law."<sup>138</sup> One type of speculation, he

135. *BT. Abodah Zarah*, 43b (ET, 216)

136. *Pirke Abot*, III, 23. It may be noted that A. Marmorstein completely ignores the problem ("Some Notes on Recent Works on Palestinian Epigraphy," *PEF, QS*, 1930, 154–157). He thinks it adequate explanation of the mosaics (p. 155) that in the *Pirke Eliezer*, VI, the sun is mentioned as riding in a chariot, with "the only difference" being that the chariot of R. Eliezer is drawn by four hundred angels. Similarly he is confident (p. 156) that the poets Ha-Kalir and R. Phineas

"must have had before their eyes these newly discovered mosaics in Ain Duk [Naaran], or Beth Alpha, calling the attention of their hearers to these signs." It may well be that Ha-Kalir did have such a mosaic before his eyes. Still we must ask: how did such a thing get into the synagogue in the first place; and why Helios?

137. *Jewish Mysticism* is his most valuable single contribution (out of many) to the subject.

138. *Ibid.*, 59, cf. 62.



thinks, must have "originated among heretical mystics who had all but broken with rabbinical Judaism."<sup>139</sup> The same must have been true of the "Metatron mysticism," says Scholem, since the whole Babylonian Talmud makes only three references to it.<sup>140</sup> Still another type which Scholem calls "gnostic" and the beginning of later cabbalism, centered its interest in creation and cosmology, and hence was akin most closely to the symbols we are here studying. It was invented by Jewish Gnostics, who "tried to stay within the religious community of rabbinical Judaism," but have left only the fewest and faintest traces in haggadic literature.<sup>141</sup> These were types of Judaism which came to the rabbis from the outside, and captivated a few of them (usually, it is said, to their eternal damnation), but which had no proper part in rabbinism at all, and certainly had not arisen out of the rabbinic movement as such. For these Jewish schools orthodox rabbinism has today as little use as did most of the Tannaim and Amoraim. They are a part of a "naive popular Jewish faith" of the first centuries of the Christian Era, which was preserved finally in the Cabbala.<sup>142</sup> Our art symbols heighten the sense of contrast between that popular Jewish faith, to which they obviously belong, and the Judaism of the rabbis. For the rabbis would have disapproved representing the zodiac and Helios in the synagogues as much as they as a group frowned upon Metatron and the mystics of the *Shiur Komah*.<sup>143</sup> When these art symbols are studied in connection with the Jewish literature which the rabbis rejected, both the art and the literature take on full meaning. In that literature I must include a group of writings which Scholem unfortunately never brings into his studies, the writings of hellenistic Judaism.

## 2. In Merkabah and Apocalyptic

IN SEEKING a Judaism that would show such an open and conscious appropriation of astralism as to warrant the astral symbols of the Jewish art, we naturally turn with great expectations first to the literature on which Scholem reports. The earliest Jewish mysticism that he considers (he works exclusively with literary evidence) is of the sort which he groups under the term Merkabah mysticism. For this he has texts which, he thinks, go back in part to the second century of our era.<sup>144</sup> Astral immortality, in fact, even appears in the earliest Jewish Apocalypse, Daniel xii, 3: "Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."<sup>145</sup> The notion continues in II Baruch, IV Esdras, and the

139. Ibid., 64.

140. Ibid., 67.

141. Ibid., 73.

142. Ibid., 202 f.

143. Scholem (pp. 81 f.) quotes without naming him a "distinguished Jewish scholar"

who said of the writings of a later mystic "that he hoped they would never emerge from their well deserved oblivion."

144. See Scholem, 44, and 353 f., nn.

13 f.

145. Cf. Matt. xiii, 43. Wolfson, *Philo*, I.

early Enoch literature, such as the Slavonic and Ethiopic Enoch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham, with the Hebrew Enoch<sup>146</sup> a valuable if later source. In this literature the astralism of the pagan world has clearly made a deep impression, and we must stop to recall it.

In I Enoch (Ethiopic), for example, chapters LXXII–LXXXIII are devoted to the “luminaries in heaven.” The passage begins (chapter LXXII) with a description of the twelve signs of the zodiac, six in the east, six in the west, and of the yearly course of the sun through them, with the variations of length of days that ensue. The next chapters describe the moon, how she “rides in her chariot driven by the wind,”<sup>147</sup> with arithmetical reckonings of the lunar year as compared with the solar, an interest in astronomical accuracy which was quite beyond the Jewish mosaics. The winds are now discussed<sup>148</sup> as coming through twelve portals, four groups of three each—that is, the seasons, as we judge from the benefits brought by each of four main directions of the winds. The seasons and their power to lead the stars are set forth in greater detail in chapter LXXXII. No religious interpretation is given this exposition of astronomy. True it is stated (LXXX, 2–8) that “in the days of the sinners” the regularity of the heavenly bodies will be confused;<sup>149</sup> but no hint of mysticism or astral immortality appears here. The very presence of such an account in this book, however, suggests that it may have had religious value, and so it is not surprising that in an earlier part of the book the fate of the soul after death

399, quotes the passage in Daniel as a parallel to Chrysippus, who says that the souls of the wise “mount to heaven and there assume the spherical shape of stars.” Wolfson thinks that Jewish apocalyptic statements of astral immortality “must have been a combination of these two sources,” i.e. Daniel and Chrysippus. Wolfson likes to move thus precisely from one literary document to another without considering active popular religious currents. Actually all that Eustathius, Wolfson’s source of Chrysippus, says is that Chrysippus did not agree with Homer and others who, like him, made the soul resemble the body: διάφορός ἐστὶ δοξάζων σφαιροειδείς τὰς ψυχὰς μετὰ θάνατον γίνεσθαι. There is no ascent or even comparison to the “stars” in the passage. See Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homerum Iliadem*, Leipzig, 1830, IV, 267, line 19 (1288, line 11).

146. *3 Enoch, or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*, ed. and transl. by Hugo Odeberg, 1928. Odeberg, whose notes are secondary in value only to the writings of Scholem, dates III Enoch in

the third century, but Scholem, p. 44, calls it “very late,” certainly after the *Greater Hekhaloth* of the sixth century. Scholem describes this latter, as well as the *Lesser Hekhaloth*, as being much more valuable than III Enoch, but as existing only in defective Hebrew MSS never edited, much less translated.

147. I Enoch LXXIII, 2. Many of these passages are discussed by Hanfmann, *Seasons*, I, 192–196.

148. It is strange that no Jewish representation of the winds as psychopomps has appeared in Jewish remains, in view of Cumont’s elucidation of their meaning (*Symbolisme*, 104–176), and of this passage and I Enoch xviii.

149. The disturbance of heavenly order—a stated element in apocalyptic writings to describe the “last days”—is familiar in the words ascribed to Jesus in Mark xiii, 24–27. In *Sibylline Oracles*, v, 512–531, this final cataclysm is described in terms of the various creatures of the zodiac fighting each other in utter confusion; cf. IV Ezra v, 3–6.

is discussed, and it seems that the old Sheol has quite disappeared. The righteous are "at the end of the heavens," or in the heavens, where is the Elect One and his angels; and righteous souls will be "without number before him for ever," will be like "fiery lights."<sup>150</sup> That is, obviously, they become stars in a purely astral immortality. The book is, indeed, filled with astralism.<sup>151</sup> But so is most of the apocalyptic literature of Judaism. The seers go up to the heavens in their visions,<sup>152</sup> and there, it is taken for granted, the blessed will abide. II Baruch LI, 10, says:

For in the heights of that world shall they dwell,  
And they shall be made like unto the angels,  
And made equal to the stars.

Different strata of "heavens" are also familiar,<sup>153</sup> a conception which seems to come from the planetary spheres through which one goes to the highest heaven.<sup>154</sup> In II Enoch (Slavonic) the planets still have their Greek names,<sup>155</sup> and not only are bodies but each is a "heavenly circle." A sun's journey through the zodiac is also important,<sup>156</sup> and the houses of the twelve signs are in the ninth heaven, just below the tenth, where Enoch

saw the appearance of the Lord's face, like iron made to glow in fire, and brought out, emitting sparks, and it burns. . . . But the Lord's face is ineffable, marvellous, and very awful, and very, very terrible.<sup>157</sup>

Here clearly we have the Jewish God as Helios above the zodiac. Astral immortality is indicated by the fact that the souls of the righteous will shine seven times brighter than the sun.<sup>158</sup> In IV Ezra VII, 88–99, it is described how the souls of the righteous will rest in the "seven orders," which are explained as orders of joys. But since verse 97 says that the righteous in the sixth "order" will shine like the stars, their faces like the sun, Cumont<sup>159</sup> seems to me quite right in seeing in the passage a moral adaptation of "sidereal immortality."

Now it is familiar that in popular and rabbinic Jewish parlance "Heaven" was a name for "God," so that in the Gospels the "Kingdom of Heaven" directly means the "Kingdom of God." Similarly we go not to Sheol or Hades or the pit,

150. I Enoch xxxix, 3–7; cf. XLVII, 3; CIV, 2, 6

151. See esp. *ibid.*, xvii, xviii, xxi, xxxiii, xlvi, xlv. In II–V the regularity of the stars and seasons is contrasted with the willful wanderings of men. In Ps. Sol. xviii, 12–14, it is denied that this order has ever failed, except at the special command of God's servants: the author clearly has Joshua in mind

152. See, for example, the opening

chapter of II Enoch (Slavonic)

153. Testament of Levi III–V.

154. So Abraham goes to the Seventh Heaven in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (ed. G. H. Box, 1919), xix

155. II Enoch xxx, 2–4

156. *Ibid.*, 5–7; cf. XIII and xiv.

157. *Ibid.*, xxi, 6–xxii, 1

158. *Ibid.*, LXVI, 7.

159. *Symbolisme*, 383 f.

but, if worthy, to “heaven” after death, so that “to lay up treasure in heaven” could be understood by the simplest audiences. This represents an invasion of “sidereal immortality” that is probably very old in Judaism, one whose origin is not to be recovered.<sup>160</sup> Such vague references, however, one feels to be distinct from the apocalyptic ascents, the rehearsing of the seven heavens (or three), the turning of the blessed into stars, the religious value in recounting the stages of the zodiac. A Jew, like a Christian later, could hope to “go to heaven” with no specifically astral thought at all. But the apocalyptic schematizations, like the later Merkabah, seem much more in the spirit of the astral symbols we are trying to evaluate than a simple hope of “going to heaven.” To put the sun, moon, and stars with the Jewish cult objects is to put the cult objects definitely into the heaven of astralism. In a fragment from an early apocalypse the following is said:

In time to come, the Holy One, blessed be he, will take his seat in Eden and expound. All the righteous will sit before him: all the retinue on high will stand on their feet. The sun and the zodiac [or constellations] will be at his right hand and the moon and stars on his left. God will sit and expound a new Torah which he will, one day, give by the Messiah's hand.<sup>161</sup>

The definite connection of God and the righteous with the cosmos is here an important matter, and it is notable that the eschatology is messianic as well.

Astral symbols and language were thus a means of bringing out the cosmic nature of God, or his hypercosmic nature, and the universal significance of the human soul, as well as man's destiny to become himself a cosmic or hypercosmic being. In Merkabah mysticism of the earliest stages the mystic ascended through the seven heavens (that is, the seven planetary spheres) to the throne of God. This later became an ascent through the seven heavenly palaces,<sup>162</sup> and in all cases one needed proper knowledge of the passwords to be allowed by the dread keepers to enter each heaven or palace or gate. The state of this literature, its rudimentary form in the earliest sources, its tendency to abandon literal astralism in the later writings, may well misrepresent the tradition. It may be that when the later texts are properly edited, they will show such astralism, but if so Scholem has completely misrepresented their character, and I do not think he has done so. The mystic colors and temples, the throne atop the vine, on the walls of the Dura synagogue, the seven steps to the shrine in

160. One recalls at once the chariot of Elijah, II Kings II, 11.

161. The passage is quoted at much greater length by Herbert Loewe in his essay “Pharisaism” in the collection edited by W. O. E. Oesterlev, *Judaism and Christianity*, 1937, I, 117 f., whence this is excerpted. It is from *Yalkut* to Isaiah, Sec. 429, but seems to

be early because it mentions “Antoninus,” supposedly one of the Roman Emperors who bore the name.

162. Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, 48. A Christianized version of this Jewish pattern is preserved in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, VII–XI (transl. Charles, 1919).

Sheikh Ibreiq, tie up with these writings, as we shall see, in a way the zodiacs and Seasons do not.

### 3. *In Jewish Gnosticism of the Maaseh Bereshith*

IN CONTRAST, some Jewish writings do use astralism in quite essential form, and Scholem calls these more Gnostic than the Merkabah. They belong to the Maaseh Bereshith, a little known mystic teaching about the Creation. One of the books, the *Sefer Yetsirah* or Book of Creation, was written, Scholem thinks, probably between the third and sixth century, and so is "the earliest extant speculative text written in the Hebrew language."<sup>163</sup> It is primarily concerned with explaining the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the fifth chapter the author collates the twelve simple letters with twelve activities of man, the twelve directions of the compass, the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve months of the year, and the twelve major organs of the human body. And at the end of the book the letters all "shine in the seven stars and lead in the twelve zodiacal signs." The Gnostic or Bereshith fragments thus give extremely important hints that popular Judaism did have a real use for the zodiac and other astral symbols.

Judaism was genuinely influenced by solar conceptions wherein God is not himself the sun, but is an immaterial source of light. The "light" of God's countenance, the fact that in heaven there need be no sun since the light of God illumines all things, these are familiar in Judaism and Christianity alike.

The sun shall be no more thy light by day;  
neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee by night.  
But the Lord shall be thy everlasting light,  
and thy God will be thy glory.  
Thy sun shall no more go down,  
neither shall thy moon withdraw itself:  
for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light,  
and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.<sup>164</sup>

This is an early example. A later one is in the prayer ascribed to Abraham:

Eternal, Mighty, Holy, El,  
God only — Supreme!  
Thou who art self-originated, incorruptible, spotless,  
Uncreate, immaculate, immortal,  
Self-complete, self-illuminating;

163. *Sefer Yetsirah: The Book of Formation*, by Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, transl. Knut Stenring, 1923. See esp. pp 29 f., 32. The seven planets also appear on pp 27 f. On the little treatise as a whole see Scholem, *Jewish*

*Mysticism*, 74–76; and 363, n 127. On p 76 he contrasts this with the Merkabah tradition.

164. Is. LX. 19 f., cf Rev xxii. 22.

Without father, without mother, unbegotten,  
 Exalted, fiery One!  
 Lover of men, benevolent, bountiful, jealous over me and very  
 compassionate;

Eli, that is, My God—  
 Eternal, mighty, holy Sabaoth, very glorious El. El. El. El. Iael!<sup>165</sup>  
 Thou art he whom my soul hath loved!  
 Eternal Protector, shining like fire,  
 Whose voice is like the thunder,  
 Whose look is like the lightning, all-seeing!<sup>166</sup>  
 Who receiveth the prayers of such as honor thee!  
 Thou, O Light, shinest before the light of the morning upon  
 thy creatures,  
 And in thy heavenly dwelling places there is no need of any  
 other light  
 than (that) of the unspeakable splendor from the light of thy  
 countenance.<sup>167</sup>

This psalm of praise, in which as in the Johannine writings God is light and love, Abraham recites as he approaches the throne of God. In many ways it resembles the Merkabah mystery, for the next vision is of the fiery throne itself, and the fiery chariot. In this connection we recall that in the Midrash Rabbah, Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman tells Rabbi Simeon ben Rabbi Jehozadak that the "light" created in Genesis 1, 3, was something with which God wrapped himself as a garment, and then irradiated the whole world.<sup>168</sup> But he tells the conception to the younger rabbi in a whisper, suggesting again that this was part of a mystic teaching, presumably of the Bereshith.<sup>169</sup> From whatever source the conception of God as light came to Second Isaiah, then, and though it was used always by rabbinic Judaism,<sup>170</sup> it seems to have been developed most

165. Box notes that this four-fold El. as well as Iael, are each substitutes for the tetragrammaton. We are clearly very near to the language and atmosphere of the charms and amulets.

166. Box compares Dan. x, 6, Ezek. 1, 13 f.

167. Apocalypse of Abraham xvii, as translated from the old Slavonic by G. H. Box 1919, 58–61.

168. *MR. Genesis*, III, 4 (ET. I, 20 f.)

169. Incidentally the passage (see the beginnings of chapters xviii and xix) shows the similarity of the Light-Stream to water which was one of the dangers of the mystic in his ascent—see Scholem, *Jewish Mysticism*, 51 f. Box

compares this passage with *Pirke Eliezer*, III see the transl. of G. Friedlander, p. 15.

170. Box (p. 60, n. 7) recalls II Enoch xx, 1, xxxi, 2. There is also the radiance of God, still older in the story of Sinai, and how Moses' face shone when he merely approached this Light, itself utterly unendurable to humans (*BT, Megillah*, 19b). In the benediction over light which immediately precedes the *Shema* in the Synagogue Liturgy, the light which God created is described as being "eternal light in the treasury of life; for he spake and out of darkness there was light," a statement quoted by Box, p. 61, n. 3.

by the mystics of Judaism, as represented by hellenized Jews<sup>171</sup> and the Maa-soth, and by Christianity in the Pauline and Johannine tradition. Actually it is in hellenized Judaism that we find the full appropriation of astralism which, we have felt, was suggested by the art.

#### 4. In Hellenized Judaism

IN A THOROUGHLY hellenized, yet thoroughly Jewish, book, IV Maccabees, immortality is presented in astronomical terms. Seven brothers accept martyrdom by torture rather than eat pork, and they are made the equivalent of the seven planets turning as a choir in harmony round "piety"; or they themselves circle round the hebdomad.<sup>172</sup> The text is corrupt, but the general astral meaning of the passage is confirmed by the eulogy pronounced after the mother had followed her sons to death:

Not so majestic stands the moon in heaven amid the stars as thou. Having led thy seven starlike sons with light into righteousness,<sup>173</sup> thou standest in honor with God; and thou art set in heaven with them<sup>174</sup>

The Wisdom of Solomon, unique among the Apocrypha in many ways, shows astralism fully taken into Jewish ideas and worship. How old the conception was in hellenized Judaism cannot now be said. That it was proverbial when Wisdom was written seems likely from its appearing as a passing allusion, almost unintelligible in itself, an allusion which seems to refer to a conception already widespread. The passage describes how the Logos intervened in several episodes of Israel's history; so it was the Logos as the avenging Angel who slew the eldest sons of Egypt.<sup>175</sup> But when in the desert the Israelites were threatened with death, Aaron as the Logos, or with the Logos' help, "subdued the Chastiser":

He conquered the Wrath not by strength of body,  
Not by the force of arms,  
But by Logos did he subdue the Chastiser,  
In recollection of the oaths and covenants of the Fathers.  
For when the dead were now fallen in heaps upon one another,  
He stood between and cut off the Wrath  
And obstructed his [the Wrath's] path to the living.  
For upon the robe that reached to his feet was the whole world,

171 See my *By Light, Light*, passim, esp. the passages listed in the index, s.v. Light

172. IV Mac. xiv, 7 f.

173. The word *phōtagōgēsasa* is perplexing. This clause may well mean: Having

drawn down supernal light upon thy starlike sons for their righteousness.

174 Ibid., xvii, 5. Cf. M. Simon, *Verus Israel*, 1948, 68.

175. Wis. xviii, 15.

And the glories of the Fathers upon the carvings of the four  
rows of stone,  
And thy magnificence was upon the diadem of his head.  
To these the Destroyer yielded, these were the things he feared  
For it was sufficient merely to put the Wrath to the test  
[i.e. by presenting him with these symbols].<sup>176</sup>

Commentators have long recognized that this description of Aaron in robes was to be understood in the light of Philo's and Josephus' accounts of their significance, to which we soon will come. But I some time ago pointed out that this was a peculiar combination of Logos with Aaron's regalia, in that to confront Death with this group of symbols was to confront Death with the Logos.<sup>177</sup> And now I should add that in the author's mind the presentation of these symbols specifically conquered Death. Of Aaron's regalia Wisdom says only that upon the robe was the universe—in some sort of symbol, we presume; that the glories of the Fathers were upon the twelve stones (of the breastplate, we understand); and that God's own magnificence (his glory or Shekinah) was upon the diadem of the priest's head. In what sense these were true the author assumes the reader need not be told; apparently the author took it to be common knowledge.

It is in the writings of Josephus, Clement of Alexandria, and Philo—all of whom, I suppose, were later than Wisdom and none of whom seems to me to have used any of the others as a source on this subject—that the allusion in Wisdom becomes clear. I have already discussed the matter at considerable length,<sup>178</sup> and need here only summarize it. These sources together indicate a widespread belief, though one that does not register in any but writings obviously influenced by Greek sources,<sup>179</sup> that the worship of the Jews, even in the Temple, fell into two main categories. The first was the religion of observance, the halachic Judaism of the rabbis, what Philo called "literalism."<sup>180</sup> Here God's rewards—usually of a material nature but perhaps including a resurrection—came to those who were actually observing the laws, the sacri-

176. *Ibid.*, 22–25.

177. In *By Light, Light*, 276.

178. *Ibid.*, 95–120. "The Mystery of Aaron."

179. W. L. Knox, in an essay in *Judaism and Christianity*, II, edited by H. Loewe (1937), p. 79, discussed this material briefly, and Loewe inserted a footnote that "symbolism of the High Priest's robe has penetrated into rabbinical theology," with references to *JT. Yoma*, vii, 33, 44b (FT, V, 244 f.), *MR. Levit.*, x, 6 (ET, IV, 129 f.). But neither of these passages has an astral interpretation of

the robes. The rabbis saw in the different parts of the priestly regalia atonement for different types of sin.

180. Wolfson's denial (*Philo*, I, 49, cf. 43–55) that there was any distinction between the mystic Jews and the "literalists" seems to me to dismiss the evidence without considering it. The evidence as presented in the passages which he himself cites still seem to me decisive. See M. J. Shrover, "Alexandrian Jewish Literalists," *JBL*, LV (1936), 261–284.



fices, the Sabbath, the Jewish diet, and the rest. Over against this was a Judaism which saw its true being not in the physical observance of those laws (careful as most Jews, like Philo, were to observe them) but in going on from this literal conception to discover a deeper meaning in the laws and to be led by them into a spiritual perception and apprehension that far surpassed the mere observance of the law in physical act or abstention.

The higher Judaism seemed to Philo (whatever it may seem to modern writers) so much like a mystery that he himself constantly used mystic terms for it without the slightest hesitation. But it divided itself in turn into two main types, which were both represented in the sanctuary of Judaism itself, the Temple, or, more properly, the Tabernacle as described in the books of Moses. The cultus in this sanctuary was on two levels, one the cultus in which the ordinary priest shared, the other the entry into the Holy of Holies allowed only on the Day of Atonement, and then only to the High Priest. The distinction between the ordinary priest and the High Priest was made to represent that the cultus of the mass of priests was a material thing, one which used visible objects. Philo regarded these "visible objects" as symbols, to be sure, and awareness of their symbolic reference seemed to him to lift Jewish worship above the "literalist's" level, for the visible symbol became a help to the Invisible. In contrast even to this, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle he came into the presence of a new symbol, the Ark of the Covenant with its sacred contents. Philo so allegorizes the Ark that it represents to him the ontological procession from Deity, the very inner and immaterial evolution of the nature of God itself. Actually Philo never forgets that that room was empty in his own day, and it is this, it seems to me, which suggests to him a contrast between a cultus that used material symbols and a cultus that did not but that appealed to the mind alone, and abstractly. Actually, even the High Priest should so blind himself with incense that he could not really see the Ark at all.

The symbols of the outer shrine were material also in another sense. They represented the material manifestation of God in the universe, represented indeed the universe itself, and one who properly shared in this cultus joined the great cosmic worship wherein all creation manifested and worshiped the Creator. Philo himself preferred the mysticism of the inner shrine, the mysticism represented by the High Priest, who, stripped of his robe of splendor, clothed in simple white, went alone into the Alone. Yet he gave a great deal of attention to the Cosmic Mystery of Aaron, as I have called it, and in doing so he made the chief cultus of the Jews into a truly astral worship.

To Philo the Universe was, in good Neoplatonic sense, the lowest manifestation of the effulgence from the One. Philo was not a true monist, for unformed matter itself seemed always to him to be in contrast to the immaterial nature of God. But God, in himself utterly remote and abstract, presented

himself by a descending series of divine representations, a series with several collective names, the most common of which was Logos. This creative and ruling radiation of divine nature was also to be thought of as the world of forms, and therefore it could, in a sense, further be represented as the formal aspect of the universe. Like Plato, and like most Platonists, Philo considered the universe as a whole, especially its organization of the heavenly bodies, to be the purest of these representations. In the order of the heavenly bodies, their action, the zodiac, and the sun itself, collectively, the nature of God had its supreme visible revelation. And these not only gave visible revelations: the heavenly bodies in their harmony constituted the greatest of all choirs, offered the supreme cultus—to the God manifest in them, to be sure, but in truth incomprehensibly above them. One of the highest achievements of man was to join in this cosmic cultus, since the stars and the zodiac, the four seasons and the four winds, the four elements, and the sun, moon, and planets all function as the cosmic priesthood. This sort of astralism was not like the Chaldean and Stoic astralism which Cumont has described, for there men saw in the heavenly bodies, supremely in the heaven itself (“heaven,” *ouranos*, was in Greek an equivalent for “cosmos”), the object of worship as a materialistic pantheism which Philo hated above all heresies. For Philo the cosmos was itself not God and should never be worshiped; but it was the supreme priest of God, the only true priest, and the Jewish High Priest when ministering in the outer shrine clothed himself with symbols of the cosmos to guarantee the source and validity of his own priesthood. Philo has much to say of this regalia, but the following is the best single summary of his conception:

The high-priest is adorned in this fashion when he sets out to perform the religious rites, so that, as he goes in to offer the ancestral prayers and sacrifices, the whole cosmos may go in with him by virtue of the symbols (*mimēta*) which he wears: the long robe reaching to his feet a symbol of air, the pomegranate of water, the flowered [embroidery] of earth;<sup>181</sup> the scarlet of fire, the ephod of heaven; he wears in type the two [celestial] hemispheres in the emeralds on his shoulders, with the six characters engraved on each; symbols of the zodiac are the twelve stones upon his chest arranged in four rows of three stones in each row, while the breastplate (*logeion*) as a whole represents that Principle [i.e., from the context, the Logos] which holds together and rules all things. For it was necessary that he who was consecrated to the Father of the world should have that Father's Son who is perfect in virtue to plead his cause that his sins might be remembered no more and good gifts be showered in abundance.<sup>182</sup> Yet perhaps it is also to teach in advance one who would worship God that even

181. That is, the tunic symbolizes air, water, earth—the strictly sublunar elements and parts of the universe.

182. I have in several places improved

the translation I gave of this passage in *By Light, Light*, 106, by comparing it with Colson's version in the Loeb ed.

though he may be unable to make himself worthy of the Creator of the cosmos, he yet ought to try increasingly to be worthy of the cosmos. As he puts on his imitation (symbol) he ought straightway to become one who bears in his mind the original pattern, so that he is in a sense transformed from being a man into the nature of the cosmos, and becomes, if one may say so (and indeed one must say nothing false about the truth), himself a little cosmos.<sup>183</sup>

Here the two types of mysticism are clearly named. One type is to be "worthy of the Creator," which in the context clearly means to become worthy to be identified with, to take on the characteristics of, the Creator through mystical union and transformation. This is the supreme experience, Philo's highest ambition. Second best to that, in the cosmic mysticism one takes on in one's mind the pattern of the Son of God, the cosmos, and so has the intercession of that Son with God, to the remission of one's sins and the gaining of all other spiritual gifts. The conception of the microcosm emerges in one of its earliest expressions, but man is a microcosm not because of his material form, or because the parts of his body resemble the universe as the reflection of the zodiac or of the later Sephiroth. He resembles the cosmos in the Platonic sense, in that the worshiper's mind appropriates the Form of the world, is transformed into the cosmic pattern. This Form is the Logos itself, as the reality of the material cosmos is the Logos present in it. As the Logos thus clothed in matter, the Son of God, turns in worship toward God, similarly the worshiper can become like the universe, a microcosm, as his mind becomes one with the Logos-Form. With that Logos-Form he is fused in such a mysticism that the cosmos, his type and ultimately himself, intercedes for him as he joins in the cosmic worship now by his own right: for he is the replica of the universe, its very self. This the High Priest teaches men, and represents to them as he wears his cosmic robe in the Temple that symbolizes the cosmos. The High Priest in putting on the cosmos, and becoming in his robes the Logos in the Cosmos, typifies the ideal (by this cosmic-mystic formulation) for every worshiper. The High Priest only shows the way for us all. In another place, where Philo allegorizes the whole burnt offering, he says of the stipulation to wash the feet of the victim:

By the washing of the feet is meant that his steps should be no longer on earth but tread the upper air. For in truth the soul of one who loves God springs up from earth to heaven and with its wings flies about, longing to take its place and share the dance with the sun, the moon, and that most sacred and perfectly attuned company of the other stars, whose marshal and leader is God.<sup>184</sup>

Again Philo says:

For the cosmos is a temple in which the high priest is his first-born, the divine Logos . . . of which the one who offers up the ancestral prayers and sacrifices is

183. *Mos.* II, 133–135.

184. *Spec.* I, 207.

a material imitation. He is commanded to put on the aforesaid tunic as a copy of the universal cosmos, that the universe may worship together with man, and man with the universe.<sup>185</sup>

The supreme instance of this sort of mystic identification occurred at the death of Moses. Moses throughout Philo's writings supremely reveals the human possibilities of perfection, is indeed the chief incarnate representation of the Logos to men. In one of his more exoteric writings Philo thus describes his death:

He gathered together a divine company, consisting of the elements of all existence and the most important parts of the universe, namely earth and heaven — one the hearth of mortals, the other the house of immortals. In the midst of these he composed hymns in every type of mode and interval, in order that men and ministering angels might hear: men that as disciples they might learn from him a similarly grateful attitude; angels as attendants to watch how, judged by their own technique, he made not a single false note. The angels could hardly believe that a man imprisoned in his mortal body could have a power of song like the sun, the moon, and the sacred choir of the other stars, in that he could attune his soul to the divine musical instrument, namely the heaven and the whole universe. And Moses the hierophant, when he had taken his place in the aether, mingled, along with the choral hymns of praise to God, his own true feelings of good will to the Nation. He reproved them for their past sins, gave them warnings and corrections for the present, and advice for the future based upon good hopes which were bound to be fulfilled.<sup>186</sup>

When Moses had finished the song he began to be changed

from mortal into immortal life, and noticed that he was gradually being disengaged from the elements with which he had been mixed. He shed his body which grew around him like the shell of an oyster, while his soul which was thus laid bare desired its migration thence.<sup>187</sup>

The comparison of the body to an oyster shell goes back at least to Plato's *Phaedrus*,<sup>188</sup> and shows "Orphic" immortality put here into a cosmic frame. Although Philo always resisted the Stoic and "Chaldean" resolution of the personality into an ultimate cosmic substance, aether or fire or what not, still this passage closely resembles the Stoic conception. Cosmic mysticism opens the gate to immortality, and Moses' gate, Philo feels, can still be ours. Here at last appears a true astral or cosmic Judaism such as we have felt from the beginning must have lain behind the art.<sup>189</sup>

185. *Som.* 1, 215, see 214–219, and *Migr.* 102–105.

186. *Vit.* 73–75.

187. *Ibid.*, 76.

188. *Phaedrus*, 250c.

189. The reader may perhaps be reminded that the argument is basically as follows. At a time when astralism was an almost universal form of religious hope, Jews widely took over the symbols of that hope. That they

Can it be inferred at once that Philo's cosmic and astral conception of Judaism did lie behind the art? Certainly not. But it does help that his remarks seem to be a full expression of the ideas briefly alluded to by Wisdom. And a third Jewish writer, Josephus, in less detail than Philo, describes and evaluates the Temple or tabernacle cultus in terms of astral mysticism in a way essentially identical with Philo's explanation, but with such minor variations of detail that Josephus could hardly have been drawing directly upon Philo's writings.<sup>190</sup> From these independent sources, then, we have evidence that Jews actually made their temple cultus, made Judaism itself, into an astral religion.

Philo's evidence must in the second place be taken to indicate the beliefs of the Jews of his day, because, much as he made of their allegorization of the cultus, he really did not like it, and the allegorization of Judaism which seemed to him the truest took man definitely beyond the stars into the immaterial world. This comes out very clearly in several extended passages where he analyzes the experiences of Abraham.<sup>191</sup> Abraham had been brought up in Chaldea, where men believed in astral determinism, and identified God with the material world itself, or with the "soul" of the universe. Now Philo, like the rabbis, believed in astrological predictions, though he lists only natural phenomena—the weather, crops, earthquakes, and the like—as thus predictable.<sup>192</sup> He followed Plato in asserting that man learned to be philosophical first by means of his eyes, which could observe the cosmic phenomena.<sup>193</sup> He believed that the stars were intelligent beings<sup>194</sup> but repeatedly denounced their worship as the deepest heresy. Abraham, certainly, could not remain on the Chaldean level.<sup>195</sup> He was told to leave Chaldea first to go to Haran, where he discovered how to distinguish his senses, and the sensory mind in his soul, from what he thought must lie beyond the material universe altogether, a great Charioteer who drives and controls according to law the parts of the universe, as the mind in man controls the senses and bodily members.<sup>196</sup> These passages emphasize not the value of Jewish cultus, or man's joining with the cosmos even in its great worship of the God above it, but in withdrawing alto-

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did so cannot be explained by casual allusions in Jewish writings to astral concepts, but suggests that many Jews adopted astralism deeply into their Judaism. Such an adoption we are finding in some aspects of Philo's allegory.

190. I have analyzed these remarks of Josephus in *By Light, Light*, 99.

191. The following is a composite of ideas in *Abr.* 70–88; *Migr.* 178–199, *Heres* 96–99; *Som.* 1, 53–60; *Virt.* 212–216.

192. *Opif.* 58. He definitely called upon men to abandon astrology (*Migr.* 194),

though he said that the planets make all things grow (*Opif.* 113)

193. *Opif.* 53 f., 77, *Spec.* III, 185–191.

194. *Gen.* 7, *Plant.* 12, *Som.* 1, 135.

195. Much as Philo praised the study of the stars, he was quite aware that he had no technique for arriving at scientific knowledge of their nature and so felt that, fascinating as astronomy might be, it had its limitations: *Som.* 1, 22–24; *Heres* 97–99. Yet he proposed to keep trying. *Spec.* 1, 39.

196. *Migr.* 186; *Abr.* 84; *Heres* 99.

gether from the world which is seen into the world which is not seen, the true world of the immaterial Reality, God.<sup>197</sup>

I have elsewhere elaborated what I called this "Higher" or Immaterial Mystery as contrasted with the "Lower" or Cosmic Mystery, and this need not here be repeated. But the contrast is now in point because it shows that Philo had no personal interest in the cosmic and astral interpretation of the Jewish temple cultus. Astralism appears rather dragged into his scheme, more properly integrated with the "Higher" mystery of his own preference. From that I can conclude only that astralism was so generally popular among the Jews of his day, especially those influenced by Hellenism, that he could not omit it.<sup>198</sup>

#### D. HELIOS

WE ARE STILL LEFT with the problem of what Jews meant when they put the zodiac in their synagogues and the other astral signs on their graves. The central position of the zodiac in the synagogues made us suspect that astralism was a vital part of the Judaism of these synagogues, and we have found a Judaism in Philo, Josephus, and the Wisdom of Solomon which centered high aspirations in an astral worship of God. But we have not yet had any explanation of why the particular symbol of Helios the charioteer within the zodiac should have been chosen especially to express this Judaism. We have seen that Helios supremely symbolized God in the Syrian world, indeed in the Roman world in general from the third century onward. We have often been reminded of Helios by such symbols as the bull, the lion, the eagle. It has appeared that to pagans the zodiac with Helios meant the supremacy of the law of nature, the orderly cosmos, under the direction of Sol Invictus. To some, we have seen, Sol Invictus was literally the physical sun, to others the real Sol lay behind the material sun. The astral system promised immortality, as the soul returned to its cosmic, or hypercosmic, origin.

It seems to me that, divergent as the suggestion may be from orthodoxy, Jews could hardly have used the device in any essentially different way themselves. When they saw the Seasons and the zodiac, they were presented—if

197 On the power of man's mind to soar above the material universe see *Opif* 31, 54 f.; *Det.* 85–90; *Heres* 88 f.; *Spec* 1, 37–40; 11, 45; *Praem* 41, 65. One reads the story of Abraham's leaving Chaldea in the Apocalypse of Abraham, 1 (transl. G. H. Box) with a sharp sense of contrast, as well as the passages Box has collected in the appendices, pp. 88–96. In the rabbinic tradition Abraham goes out from the folly of idolatry, and while in the Midrash Ha-gadol, as quoted

*ibid.*, 92. Abraham does come to see that the heavenly bodies are powers inferior to God, the Apocalypse shows none of the mysticism of Philo in the interpretation, the active use of the stars in worship or in ascending to God.

198. It should be noted that Philo, like the rabbis, equated the twelve tribes with signs of the zodiac: *Praem.* 65; cf. Colson's note *ad loc.* in the Loeb ed., VIII, 454 f.

Philo and Josephus and the Wisdom of Solomon are any guide to us — with the conception of God's rule, of the beneficence of the seasons, their regularity, and the starry world of heaven which the zodiac most succinctly represented. For the continuity of the notion into later cabbalistic Judaism, the statement of the *Zohar* is most illuminating:

We are aware that the structure of the Tabernacle corresponds to the structure of heaven and earth. The Companions have given us just a taste of this mystery, but not enough for a real mouthful.<sup>199</sup>

Above these was the charioteer. And here Philo comes again most forcefully to mind. For he tells us that God is the shepherd of the flock of the stars, and that the twenty-third Psalm is a cosmic hymn, the hymn of the heavenly flock to the God who leads them.

This hallowed flock he leads in accordance with right and law, and sets over it his true Logos and first-born Son, who shall take upon him its supervision like some viceroy of a great king.<sup>200</sup>

This supervision of the world by God, whether directly or through his Logos, Philo usually describes in terms not of a shepherd but of a charioteer. He describes how God made the seven zones and put a planet in each, and continues:

He has set each star in its proper zone as a driver in a chariot, and yet he has in no case trusted the reins to the driver, fearing that their rule might be one of discord, but he has made them all dependent on himself, since he held that thus would their march be orderly and harmonious.<sup>201</sup>

In another passage Philo shows how God foresaw astral worship directed toward the stars and Seasons themselves. He took many steps to forestall this, chiefly in that he gave the stars power, but not independence, and himself retained direct control of all things, the stars included.

Like a charioteer grasping the reins or a pilot the tiller, God guides all things in what direction he pleases as law and right demand.<sup>202</sup>

Again Philo says:

The oracles tell us that those whose views are of the Chaldean type have put their trust in heaven, while he who has migrated from this home has given his

199 *Zohar*, Terumah, II, 149a (ET, IV, 22).

200. *Agr.* 51, see 50–54.

201. *Cher.* 24. We recall a curious Roman gem with Medusa, certainly a solar symbol, on one side; on the other a seated deity (I cannot agree with Reinach that it is a man —

I should guess it is Apollo with his bow) is surrounded by two concentric bands. In the outer band are the signs of the zodiac, and in the inner band are the seven planets represented as seven charioteers in their quadrigas. See Reinach, *Pierres*, plate 127, figs. 96 f. 202. *Opif.* 46.

trust to him who rides on the heaven and guides the chariot of the whole world, even God.<sup>203</sup>

All of this might well have been symbolized by the Seasons and zodiac, with the Charioteer, and such a design would properly come in the very center of the synagogue floor. Such a conception of the meaning of the zodiac does violence to predominant rabbinic opinion, but we cannot cling to the determination to explain the pictures from rabbinic writings. The pictures must be explained in terms of a Judaism in which they have meaning. Were astral symbols the only ones which suggest interpretation in terms of a hellenized Judaism, we should have less confidence in suspecting that Helios and the chariot symbolize the divine Charioteer of hellenized Judaism, God himself.

#### E. SUMMARY

THE ZODIAC in the synagogues, with Helios in the center, accordingly, seems to me to proclaim that the God worshiped in the synagogue was the God who had made the stars, and revealed himself through them in cosmic law and order and right, but who was himself the Charioteer guiding the universe and all its order and law. Nothing indicates that the Jews in these synagogues followed Philo's stricter philosophy in regarding the Charioteer as the Logos, while God was himself the remote and unaffected Monad in self-sufficient isolation. Actually the floor of Beth Alpha as a whole, the only one that shows the zodiac in its full original setting, seems to me to outline an elaborate conception of Judaism. In the center is presented the nature of God as the cosmic ruler. Above are the symbols of his specific revelation to the Jews, primarily the Torah in the Torah shrine; below in the sacrifice of Isaac is, I suspect, the atonement offered in the Akedah. All this is surrounded by familiar mystic symbols: birds, animals, and baskets within the interstices of the vine. At the top of all inconspicuously stand the little fish and the bunch of grapes.

As I explained the three large scenes before, the first seems to me to be the Akedah as the atoning sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac, by which Abraham became the priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek. This corresponds to the first step in mysticism of the *philosophia perennis*, purgation. In the second panel, one goes up to the illumination of the heavens. In the third, one comes to the implements of the revealed cult of Judaism, the whole properly veiled but here shown with the veil drawn back to allow what was behind the veil to appear. It is no coincidence, I believe, that the Higher Mystery had its chief symbol for Philo in what lay behind the veil of the Holy of Holies. But here the most sacred symbol of all is only implied, the Torah behind the closed doors of

<sup>203</sup> *Heres* 99. *Theos* at the end is without article and may thus refer to the Logos. Equally definite are *Decal* 53, 60; *Spec* 1, 14.



the Torah shrine. Here the third stage of mysticism was possible, that of unification. It is this scene which we found so prominently used for the back of arcosolia in the Catacomb Torlonia. To this closed shrine also ascend seven steps in the cemetery of Sheikh Ibreq. We shall see other apparent references to the same idea in the paintings at Dura. The menorah in the center of the ceilings at the Catacomb Torlonia seems to me to go with this astral symbolism, since the menorah has been seen to symbolize, among other things, the seven planets.

Similarly the four Seasons that appear in the mosaics and on the sarcophagi would have represented to Philo an abbreviation of the cosmic order. The twelve stones in the High Priest's breastplate were arranged in four rows of three each, he says, to correspond to the fact that there are three zodiacal signs in each season.<sup>204</sup> The transitions of the seasons are controlled by strict mathematical laws, and reveal the Logos who guides them.<sup>205</sup> Philo warns against the pagan hypostatizing of the seasons, with the assumption that they have in themselves the power of producing what grows upon the earth.<sup>206</sup> But once he has entered that caveat, he has no reluctance to saying, like any pagan,

The four seasons of the year bring about achievement by bringing all things to perfection, all sowing and planting of crops, and the birth and growth of animals.<sup>207</sup>

He even schematizes the Jewish Festivals according to the seasons, and so makes the Festivals into a cosmic worship.<sup>208</sup> The Jewish calendar is, he thinks, designed to make the whole cycle of the year into a Festival.<sup>209</sup> Celebration of a Festival in the true sense is

to find delight and festivity in the contemplation of the world and its contents and in following nature, and in bringing words into harmony with deeds and deeds with words.<sup>210</sup>

204. *Spec* 1, 87.

205. *Mos* 11, 124-130. In Greek the breastplate is called the *logeron*, we have seen, which makes it for Philo a symbol of the Logos, ruling the cosmos as presented in the zodiac. His allegory of the breastplate could largely be transferred to the design of the zodiac, Seasons, and the Charioteer. See *Mos* 11, 133-135. *Spec* 1, 88. On the mathematical scheme of the seasons see *Heres* 148-150; *Spec* 1v, 235.

206. *Opif* 54 f. Cf. *Congr.* 133.

207. *Opif* 59. "The yearly seasons by which all things are brought to their consummation." *Spec* 111, 188. See *Spec* 1v, 99. Some of the crops of the earth are sown by farmers,

some "every springtime spontaneously brings forth." *Aet.* 63.

208. It hardly needs documentation that Philo's guess here was very credible, since most modern scholars see in the Jewish festival cycle a celebration of the year of nature and its seasonal goods. Taken over, possibly, from Canaanite nature and fertility cults, the seasonal nature of most of these was always transparent. See, for example, W. O. E. Oesterley, "Early Hebrew Festival Rituals" in S. H. Hooke's *Myth and Ritual*, 1933, 111-125.

209. *Spec* 11, 48.

210. *Ibid.*, 52.

Specifically the Feast of the New Moon celebrates beginnings, the coming of light, and the fact that the moon goes through the zodiac most rapidly of all the heavenly bodies. The new moon calls us to imitate the heavenly kings (the stars), and the moon also makes important contribution to earthly fertility.<sup>211</sup> Philo, as is customary, combines Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which, as the Feast par excellence of the Spring equinox, commemorates the act and product of God's first creation and the creative power of God in nature.<sup>212</sup> Most elaborately the Feast of the Sheaf is likewise made into a spring Festival of fertility.<sup>213</sup> But there is no reason to review each Festival here. The substance of the long section on Festivals is stated in another treatise, where, after showing the cosmic importance of the mystic number seven, and its repeated presence in the stars, Philo says:

The sun, too, the great lord of day, brings about two equinoxes each year, in spring and autumn. The spring equinox in the constellation of the Ram, and the autumn equinox in that of the Scales, supply very clear evidence of the sacred dignity of the seven, for each of the equinoxes occurs in a seventh month, and during them it is enjoined by law to keep the greatest national Festivals, since at both of them all fruits of the earth ripen, in the spring the wheat and all else that is sown, and in the autumn the fruit of the vine and most of the other fruit trees.<sup>214</sup>

The Seasons, then, symbolize at once the regularity of the cosmos, its law, and the beneficent power which comes to earth from heaven and its God. In them we find united again astralism with fertility cult, the combination most generally in favor in the symbolism of immortality and mysticism in the Roman world. That Philo does not connect the seasons specifically with immortality is only to be expected of a man who was himself so little interested in immortality. For Judaism in general their presence on the graves and their mention in other sources is sufficient indication that like the stars they suggested the hope of man at death to change into a greater life. But Philo does show that the seasons had been elaborately accepted into Judaism by such allegory of Jewish Festivals as makes them celebrations of precisely this combination of astralism and fertility cult, and so the basis of genuine mystical experience and sacrament within Judaism itself.<sup>215</sup> The figures of the Seasons on the Jewish sarcophagi at Rome, then, were more in harmony with Judaism than Cumont himself indicated, in harmony with a strongly hellenized Judaism. The menorah, itself a sign of the seven planets, flanked by Seasons, meant much in terms of Jewish thought: it meant hope of immortality, astral immortality

211. *Ibid.*, 140–142.

212. *Ibid.*, 150–161.

213. *Ibid.*, 162–175.

214. *Opif.* 116

215. On the Festivals see esp. my "Literal Mystery in Hellenistic Judaism," *Quantula-cumque, Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake*, 237–241

granted by that beneficence which, while it came from the relentlessly regular heaven, made all the earth fertile and promised renewed life also to man. But the menorah added that all this came from the Jewish God who governed the universe. When Christians took over the same value and put Christ enthroned between the Seasons upon a sarcophagus in place of the candlestick, it may be assumed that in Christian terms the design indicated the same hope.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>216</sup> *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*,  
XIV (1894), 445, plate IX

