

AION

Αἰὼν πάντα φέρει· δολιχὸς χρόνος οἶδεν ἀμείβειν
οὐνομα καὶ μορφὴν καὶ φύσιν ἤδὲ τύχην

(*Anth. Pal.*, IX, 51)

When the last campaign of the excavations carried out in Antioch-on-the-Orontes under the direction of Princeton University in the summer of 1939 was approaching

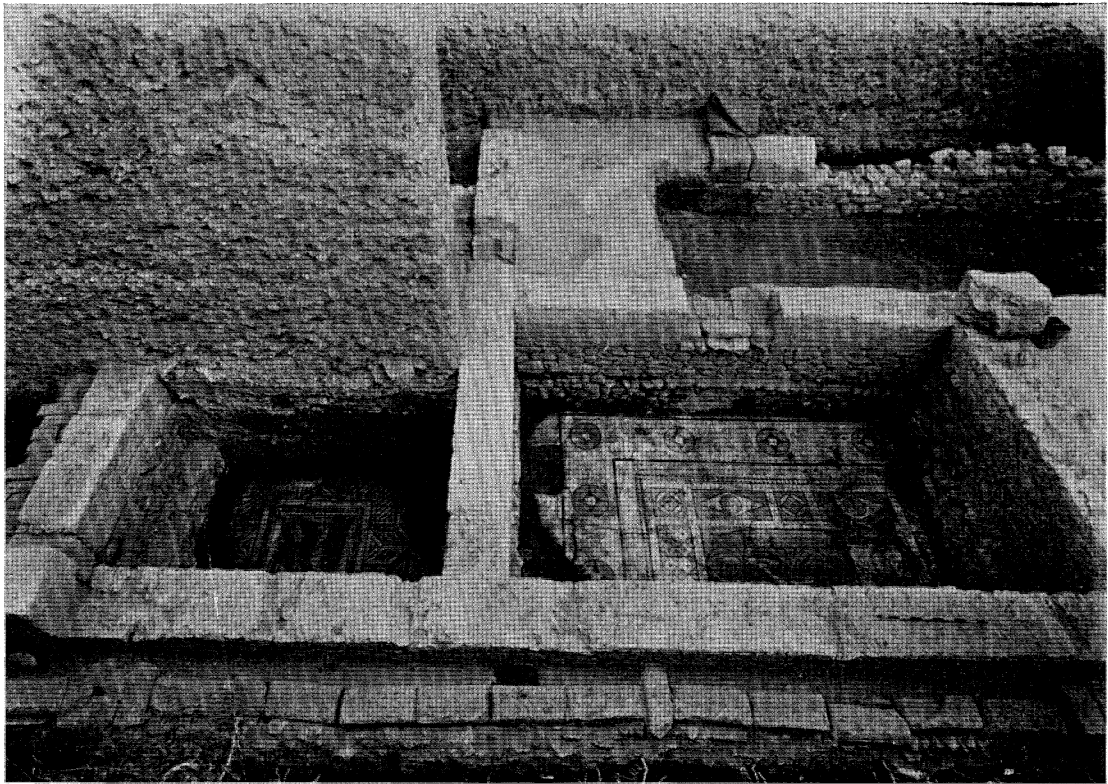


Fig. 1. The Excavation of the House of Aion at Antioch, on the Right the Mosaic of Aion and the Chronoi

its end, the ruins of a building came to light during the cutting of a long trench in the area within the Justinian walls in an effort to locate the main east-west street in the sector designated by 15-M (Fig. 1). The topographical purpose of this trial digging was not realized; but the corner of the house uncovered by it made known some mosaics of noteworthy importance. The ruins laid bare consist essentially of a

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long colonnade, to a side of which a spacious semicircular exedra was annexed, both decorated with floor-mosaics. Some rooms were set in a line with the colonnade on the sides of the exedra. Two rooms were on the northeast side, and their mosaic pavements had been torn away. Trials executed beneath the level of the pavements of the latest building existing on this place revealed remains of the mosaics belonging to an



Fig. 2. Excavation View of the Pavement with the Mosaic of Aion and the Chronoi

earlier house, which had been cut by the walls of the later construction. These mosaics were left *in situ* and covered again when the exploration had to be suspended at the closing of the campaign.¹

The whole figured panel of the mosaic belonging to the room next to the exedra was brought to light during these works, and only a part of its border remained concealed under the walls of the later structure (Fig. 2). The *emblema* (Fig. 3) was in fact flanked by two panels with diaper-pattern; beneath these three panels, and probably above them as well, was a series of five small geometric panels, two square ones between three rectangular ones, containing circles, rhombs, and dotted crosses.

¹ *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, III (Princeton, 1941), pp. 11 f., fig. 10; Plan IV on p. 257; pp. 176 f., nos. 110-111, pls. 50-51.

Beyond a narrow cornice of small light diamonds on dark background, a second border, consisting of circles containing curvilinear rhombs with white squares in the center alternated with dotted crosses, reached the edge of the pavement. On stylistic grounds together with the character of this geometric decoration we assign the mosaic roughly to the middle of the third century after Christ.

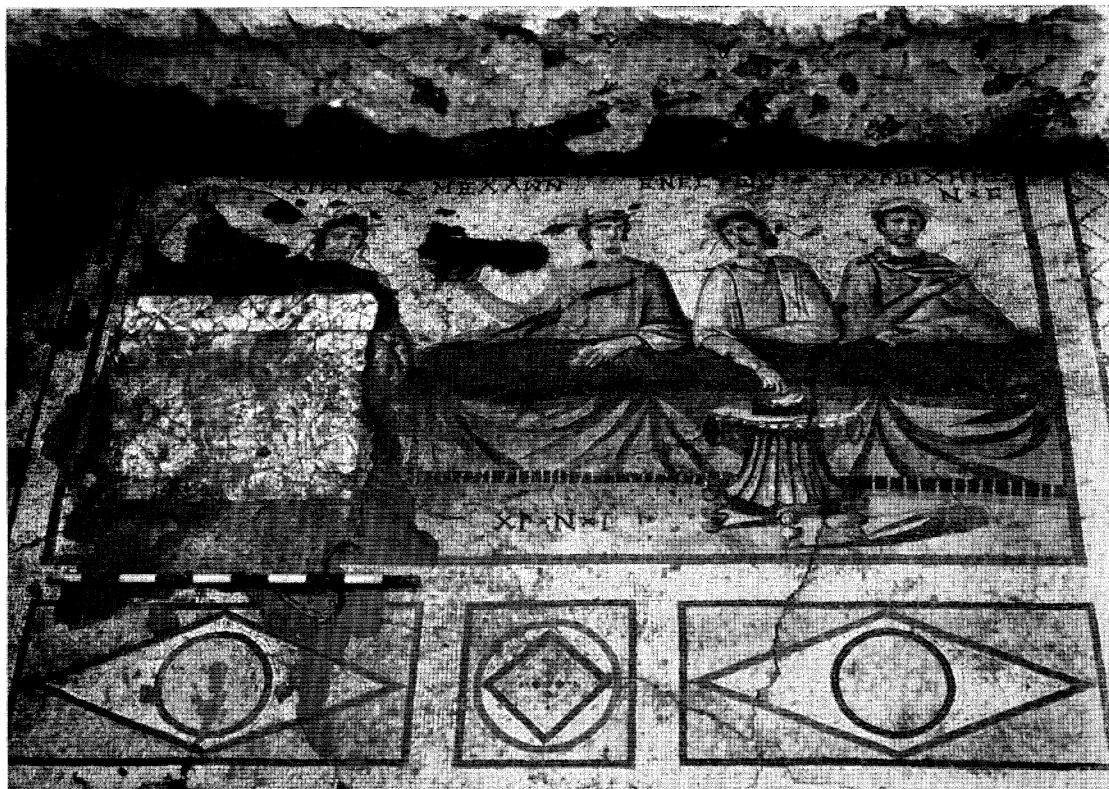


Fig. 3. The *Emblema* of the Mosaic of Aion and the Chronoi

In the *emblema* four men are sitting at table, three forming a close group on the right, the fourth apart from the others on the left. The *kline* on the right seems to come to an end beyond the third figure, where a vertical line of red squares shows apparently the border of the reddish blanket falling from the solid corner of the couch downwards, in the same way as a similar horizontal line shows the lower hem of the stuff. At the same solid corner begins also one of the three series of folds, represented by concentric arched strokes, which depict the falling of the stuff on the front of the *kline*. Ordinarily, indeed, one couch would not hold more than three guests. Along the front-edge of the top of the *kline* a padded ring, in a darker red and with black shadows, has replaced, as was often the case, the single *pulvini*. The bodies of the guests are partly concealed because of this ring and because of the evident inclination

of the couch—according to the older fashion—away from the table.² The two first figures on the right appear almost in a sitting position, the third evidently has his legs stretched on the couch, holding however his torso erect like his companions. The man on the right corner is adult, bearded, and wrapped up in a violet-gray mantle which covers most of his arms. A broad white-yellowish fillet adorning his forehead holds tightly to his temples some tufts of leaves and blades of grass, while a garland of yellow, red, and brown flowers encircles his neck. The left forearm rests horizontally on the couch, and the fingers hold a banquet-wreath. The elbow of the right arm rests on the couch, and the hand holds the bottom of a cup full of wine. The man's head is slightly tilted toward the left, and his eyes gaze downwards with a melancholy expression. The second figure is a young man with energetic features, whose black hair is adorned with a rich wreath of slender sprigs. His head is bending slightly to the right as he gazes intently forward. He wears a white-gray tunic with thin red *clavi* and with a red border on the neck. His left arm rests on the couch just as that of his fellow, but with his hand concealed under the garment; his right arm, on the contrary, is bare to the elbow and is stretched obliquely across the couch and its padded ring. The third figure is a robust adolescent, showing his body in full nudity except for the left shoulder and arm, around which a greenish-gray cloth is wrapped. The black hair is kept tight on the forehead by a red-pinkish fillet, and falls in waving curls on the nape of the neck. The youth gazes boldly, almost enquiringly before him, his head being slightly turned toward the man on his left. His left hand plays with another banquet-wreath which he presses between his open fingers, his right arm is stretched sideways, and the hand holds a cup on the palm. Of the fourth figure, unfortunately, only the head with a part of a shoulder is preserved: the rest of his body and the remainder of the representation were destroyed in antiquity, and have been then replaced by slabs of limestone and marble. The face depicts a man of advanced age, with grayish moustache and flowing beard. The thick curls of hair are adorned here too by a luxuriant garland of leaves and blades of grass. His look is directed to the other figures. Beneath his reddish shoulder the remains of a cushion are visible, where the man evidently rested the elbow of his left arm. On the left upper corner of the panel the man's hand holds an arched object which we shall discuss below. An object with a three-legged base stands on the ground before the central of the three figures on the right. Its body shows vertical grooves, expanding toward the three feet of the base and proving it a metal object. The top is a round plane adorned with an egg or tongue pattern on the edge and with two rings falling from it. It is undoubtedly an incense-burner (*θυμιατήριον*, or *ἑσχάριον*)³ of a shape used in Hellenistic and Roman times, and well known to us both through a large number of representations

² See J. Marquardt and A. Mau, *Das Privatleben der Römer* (in Marquardt and Mommsen, *Handb. der röm. Alterthümer*², Leipzig, 1886), p. 302.

³ Pollux, *Onom.*, X, 65: *θυμιατήριον ἂν τίς σοι προσκομίξοι· τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἑσχάριον, οἶμαι, καλεῖται.*

with many varieties in details, as well as through some preserved specimens.⁴ Most seem to vary from eight to sixteen inches in height; some are even lower, such as, for instance, the tiny incense-burner in the famous Dioscurides mosaic from Pompeii⁵ which presents a shape very similar to that on our mosaic, but others seem to have been much bigger. Two original specimens,⁶ probably from Egypt, have preserved to us even their calotte-shaped lids, decorated with open-work or with delicate reliefs. One of them shows in the center of the top a strongly projecting ring around which the lid rested, and thus explains the black circular mark on our mosaic. The same ring, only narrower and higher, appears also on the incense-burner represented on a coin from Smyrne,⁷ the age of which is better determined than that of the aforementioned monuments because it is certainly later than A.D. 190; in this, flames are rising from the mouth of the basin of the incense-burner, produced by the burning incense. The shape of the stand shows a very common variation, according to which both the base and the top flair out from a narrow central part. The three feet do not reveal clearly the usual shape of horse-hoofs or lion-paws. A ring decorates the narrowest part of the stand, and two rings hang from the edge of the top as in our mosaic. The same variety of incense-burner appears, especially, in the painting of the Aldobrandini Wedding, where the central ring has an egg or bead decoration, and a similar decoration appears along the edge of the top, as in our mosaic. In the painting not two rings but two little chains hang from the edge; on each side, to be precise, two vertical elements of the chains, ending with small beads at the bottom, are connected in the middle by a curved element. Here a woman brings to the basin of the tripod an object which has given rise to several hypotheses, but which is not yet definitely explained.⁸ It cannot be the lid, because it is smaller than the basin of the incense-burner. It has been interpreted as a cup. It is held, however, obliquely by the woman, in a strange way, as if she had already poured its content of incense. But it might be, on the contrary, a cake of incense itself; and indeed, the figure on our mosaic, with the fingers of the hand protruding beyond the border of the couch, seems to push and to arrange within the mouth of the incense-burner a whitish mass with a round outline, which might well be a similar cake of incense. Above the heads of our figures are inscribed their names: Παρω(ι)χημένος, Ἐνεστώς, Μέλλων, Αἰών. Under-

⁴ K. Wigand, "Thymiateria," in *Bonner Jahrbücher*, CXXII, 1912, pp. 72 ff., class *e*.

⁵ G. E. Rizzo, *La pittura ellenistico-romana* (Milan, 1929), pl. CXLV; E. Pernice, *Die hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji*, VI, *Pavimente u. figürliche Mosaiken* (Berlin, 1938), color-plate 70.

⁶ C. C. Edgar in G. Maspéro, *Le Musée Égyptien*, II (Cairo, 1907), pp. 57 ff., pl. XXIV; Wigand, *loc. cit.*, pl. V, 4-5.

⁷ This is also the shape of the *θυρίδιον* in the Carolingian Germanicus manuscript at Leiden; see G. Thiele, *Antike Himmelsbilder* (Berlin, 1898), p. 127, fig. 52.

⁸ Förster in *Arch. Zeit.*, XXXII, 1875, p. 85, note 25; Robert in *Hermes*, XXXV, 1900, p. 659; B. Nogara, *Le Nozze Aldobrandine* (Milan, 1907), p. 18. See on this picture also E. Pfuhl, *Malerei u. Zeichnung der Griechen*, II (Munich, 1923), pp. 873 ff., and fig. 709.

neath, at the bottom of the couch in the middle of the panel, there is another inscription: *Χρόνοι*.

We have, consequently, in this mosaic of Antioch a unique case in which we find not only a series of personifications, but also a kind of title helping us to grasp the general meaning of the allegory; undoubtedly the three figures seated on the same couch are included in the comprehensive conception of the "Chronoi."

Aion (Aevum, Saeculum) is time in an absolute sense, in opposition to Chronos, that is, time in relation to something, and especially to human life.⁹ The epigram attributed to Plato, which we have quoted at the beginning of this paper, well expresses the difference between the two: "Aion brings everything; the long Time knows how to change name and shape and nature and fate as well." In a passage of the *Timaeus* (37 D) Plato outlines also the philosophical definition of Aion, which will long have currency—although not obtaining a universal acceptance—as the conception of ideal eternity, in contrast with Chronos, empirical time. Even before Plato, however, Greek philosophy in its earliest stages was speculating about the concept of time. We can trace these speculations from Pherekydes of Samos, and they were bound of course to rise to the first rank of importance in the thought of the Pythagoreans. The personification of the conception would also occur naturally in the images of poetry, as is exemplified in numerous passages: for example, time is "a benevolent god" (*εὐμαρὴς θεός*) for Sophocles (*El.* 179). In much later times, Chronos is considered as a divine being, a *δαίμων* ruling over human destinies, in the interesting epigram which alludes to the battle of Chaironeia: *ᾧ Χρόνε, παντοίων θνητοῖς πανεπίσκοπε δαίμον. . .*¹⁰ From very old times the personification of Chronos enters into Hellenic mythology and cosmogony as well, because of the equation of Chronos with Kronos. Genealogies and assimilations are multiplied hereafter because, from the speculations of the Pythagoreans, Chronos enters as a cosmic principle into the Orphic doctrine, participates in the mysteries, is invoked in magic formulas together with the other primordial principles and with the other abstractions with which it is related. According to the Orphics, in fact, Chronos, identified with Herakles, husband to *Ἀνάγκη* or to *Ἀδράστεια*, "Time that does not grow old," is imagined in the shape of a snake with the

⁹ For recent and comprehensive bibliographies on Aion see: Wernicke in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s. v. Aion, I, cols. 1042 f.; Cumont, *ibid.*, s. v. Aion, Suppl. I, col. 38; C. Lackeit, *Aion, Zeit u. Ewigkeit in Sprache u. Religion der Griechen*, I, Sprache (Diss. Königsberg, 1916); eundem in Pauly-Wissowa, s. v. Aion, Suppl. III, cols. 64 ff.; R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (Bonn, 1921), pp. 188 ff. (§ 3, Der alexandrinische Aion); Max Zepf, "Der Gott Aion in der hellenistischen Theologie," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XXV, 1927, pp. 225 ff.; Cumont, *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles-Lettres*, 1928, p. 278, note 2; A. D. Nock, "A Vision of Mandulis Aion," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXVII, 1934, pp. 53 ff., especially pp. 78 ff.; Campbell Bonner, *supra*, pp. 30 ff.

¹⁰ See on this epigram P. Friedländer, *Studi italiani di Filosofia classica*, N. S., XV, 1938, pp. 117 ff.

heads of a lion and of a bull.¹¹ In the Orphic Hymns Chronos is called Herakles' son, or son of Mene = Selene, or father of Eros and of the Pneumata, father of Dike and

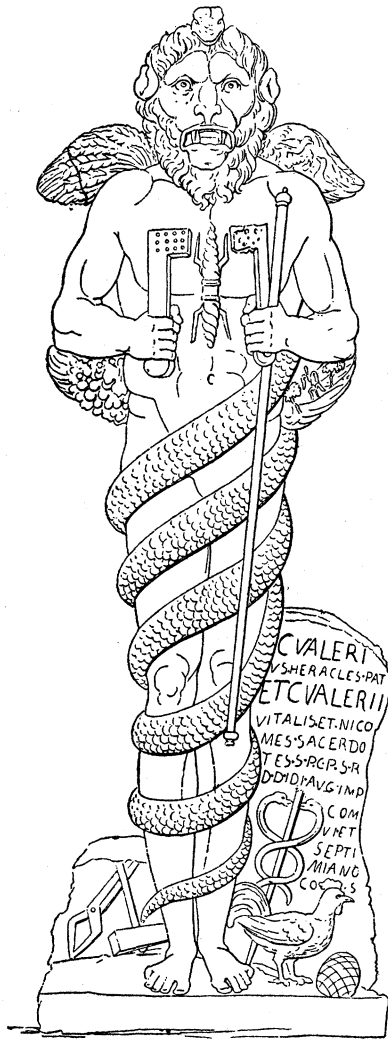


Fig. 4. Marble Statue from the Mithreum of Ostia in the Vatican Library



Fig. 5. Relief from Oxyrhynchus

of the Horae. In view of all this, a monstrous image, of which numerous monuments are preserved to us (Figs. 4 and 5), is generally considered nowadays to be a repre-

¹¹ Damascius Diad., *Dubit. et solutiones de primis principiis*, P. 381, F. 205 r, ed. Ruelle (Paris, 1889), I, p. 318. Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides' Herakles*², II (Berlin, 1895), pp. 154 ff.

sensation of Chronos and an expression of Orphic conceptions. It has usually a leonine head and a human body encircled by a serpent's coils, on its shoulders are four wings adorned with the symbols of the four seasons, and it holds two keys in its hands.¹² We shall see, however, that not at all to be rejected is the old theory of Zoega according to which this would be the divine being called, in the sacred books of the mysteries, Aion: Αἰὼν ποικιλόμορφος ἔχων κληῖδα γενέθλης, as he is described by Nonnus.¹³ Aion is called the son of Zeus as early as Euripides (*Heracleid.*, 899 f.), and is named in association with the Μοῖρα τελεοσιδώτειρα, the "Destiny which procures the fulfilment." In much later times the name appears in the proem to the Orphic Hymns, known by the title of εὐχὴ πρὸς Μουσαῖον (line 28). In a gold *lamina* published by Father Secchi¹⁴ he is identified with Sarapis and invoked with the words Αἰὼν ἐρπέτα κύριε Σάραπι: because of this appellative it would seem that with the name Aion was invoked an image of Sarapis with its body encircled by serpents, or a divine symbol in the shape of a serpent. This assimilation of Aion to Sarapis, the god of the dead, explains his association in a cult of Alexandria with a female divinity whom the Greeks called Kore. It was a nocturnal rite, described by St. Epiphanius (*Panarion*, LI, 22, 9 f.; ed. Holl, II, Leipzig, 1922, p. 285), which was performed in Kore's sanctuary by carrying in procession an image of Aion by the light of torches and to the sound of flutes and tambourines, to celebrate his birth from Kore, that is, from "the Virgin," considered here as the mother and not, as in the Hellenic myth, the bride of the god of Hades. Aion was represented in his wooden idol as seated, naked, with a gold cross on his forehead, two similar crosses on his hands and two on his knees.¹⁵ In the Alexander legend of Pseudo-Callisthenes (about A.D. 300)¹⁶ there is reference probably to the same idol in the "indescribable xoanon" representing Sarapis-Aion, or Aion Plutonium, identified also with Agathos Daemon, who is called the patron deity of Alexandria. In this passage a colossal image of Kore is

¹² G. Zoega, *Bassorilievi antichi di Roma*, II (Rome, 1808), pp. 32 ff., pl. LIX; F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, I (Bruxelles, 1899), pp. 74 ff.; II (1896), pp. 238 f., figs. 68-69; *idem*, *Les Mystères de Mithra*³ (Bruxelles, 1913), p. 235, figs. 26-27, p. 240 (statue of the Mithreum at Sidon: see on this also A. de Ridder, *Catal. de la Coll. de Clercq*, IV, *Les Marbles* [Paris, 1906], no. 49, pp. 61 f., pls. XXII-XXIII).

¹³ "But Time the manifold, holding the key of generation, spread his white shock of hair over the knees of Zeus, let fall the flowing mass of his beard in supplication," etc. (*Dionys.*, VII, 22 ff., transl. of *Loeb Class. Libr.*). Lackeit, *op. cit.*, p. 90, note 2, denies, on the contrary, any connection between the image by Nonnus, which would be purely poetical and symbolic, and the Mithriac monuments.

¹⁴ *Bull. Inst.*, XXIV, 1852, pp. 151 f.; R. Wünsch, *Sethianische Verfluchungstafeln* (Leipzig, 1898), p. 101; Campbell Bonner, *loc. cit.* See also another inscription in which Aion is identified with Helios Sarapis, Bonner, *supra*, p. 34.

¹⁵ See the bibliography on this festival and on the image of Aion by Cumont, *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles-Lettres*, 1928, p. 278, note 2; Nock, *loc. cit.*, pp. 90 ff.

¹⁶ I, 33 (ed. Kroll, Berlin, 1926, pp. 33 f.): ξόανον δὲ ἔνδον καθεζόμενον, ὃ θνητὴ φύσις οὐχ εὖρεν ἀπαγγέλλαι· παριστῆκει δὲ τῷ ἀφράστῳ ξόανῳ κόρης ἄγαλμα μέγιστον.

mentioned as well. These are indeed, in all probability, the two divinities represented on a relief from Rome or the Roman Campagna (Fig. 6), dating from the second or third century after Christ, and which from the Primoli Collection passed into the possession of Franz Cumont. Both divinities unfortunately are headless. Aion, with a bare torso and a kilt around his waist, had certainly the *klaft* on his head, the *ankh* in his right hand, and a two-headed serpent winding around his legs and looping its two heads over his shoulders.¹⁷ Elsewhere our god is identified with Osiris and Adonis.¹⁸ The identification with the Sun appears also directly, beside its being implicit in Aion's identification with Agathos Daemon, which is but another name often applied in magic papyri to the Sun-God:¹⁹ so, for instance, in the great magic papyrus of Paris there is an invocation to him identified with Ra: ὁ τῶν ὄλων δεσπότης, ὁ Αἰὼν τῶν Αἰώνων· σὺ εἶ ὁ κοσμοκράτωρ, Ῥᾶ, Πᾶν.²⁰ In the same way he is identified with the Sun in one of the hymns attributed to the Cretan poet of the Antonine period, Mesomedes:

Σὺ δ' ὦ λαμπραῖς ἀκτίσι
γαίαν πάσαν πυρσεύων
Αἰὼν ἀσβέστων φλογμῶν.²¹



Fig. 6. The Primoli Relief with Aion and Kore in the Cumont Collection

At Talmis in Nubia, at a short distance from the Nile's Little Cataracts, Aion is identified with another solar deity, Merul or Melul, Mandulis in Greek, whose cult, generally associated with that of Isis, had its center in that locality.²² By other authors,

¹⁷ Cumont, *loc. cit.*, figs. 1-2.

¹⁸ Suidas, *s. v.* Ἡραϊσκος: τὸ ἄρρητον ἄγαλμα τοῦ Αἰώνος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κατεχόμενον· ὃν Ἀλεξανδρεῖς ἐτίμησαν Ὡσιριν ὄντα καὶ Ἀδωνιν ὁμοῦ. See also *s. v.* Ἐπιφάνιος (ed. Bernhardt, I 2, 1852, cols. 871 ff.; col. 481; ed. Ada Adler, II, Leipzig, 1931, pp. 579 f., pp. 391 f.).

¹⁹ K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, IV, 3170 (Pap. Par., vol. I, p. 176): Αἰὼν, ἱερὲ Ἀγαθὲ Δαίμον, τέλει πάσας χάριτας καὶ τὰς σὰς ἐνθέας φήμας (cf. R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* [Leipzig, 1904], p. 30).

²⁰ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, IV, 2197 ff. (vol. I, p. 140).

²¹ See Delatte, "Orphica," *Musée Belge*, XVII, 1913, pp. 135 ff., especially pp. 138 f.; Wilamowitz, *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin, 1921), pp. 595 ff.; K. Horna, "Die Hymnen des Mesomedes," *Sitzungsber. d. Akad. d. Wissenschaften in Wien*, Phil.-hist. Kl., CCVII, 1928, pp. 7 ff.; Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 97.

²² A chapel erected to this god by one of the Ptolemies was enlarged at the time of Augustus into a big temple, conspicuous ruins of which still exist. During the third century after Christ the

on the contrary, Aion is declared a mortal: so according to the Phoenician Philo of Byblos he would be the son of the wind god Kolpias and of Baaut = Nyx, a brother to Protogonos = Phanes, father of Geneos and Genea, the inventor of nourishment with the fruit of trees. To him was even dedicated a feast-day, known to be the 5th of January (Ioh. Lydus, *De mens.*, IV, 1).²³ The mythological and cosmogonic elaborations around the divinized concept of Aion were bound in fact to receive a powerful stimulus when the peculiar Abraxas religion was founded in Alexandria, in the second century after Christ, by the genial Basileides. Here a deep Brahminical inspiration was combined with pagan, Egyptian, Mithriac elements, and with creeds of the young Christian religion. But in the last religious cycle where the conception of Aion found its widest diffusion, in Gnosticism, we find it also deprived of all its former mythological and philosophical content: the Gnostics have created a special doctrine and an elaborate nomenclature of the Aiones, who have multiplied by now and fill the world like categories of demons, but are reduced to mere conceptions of species, both temporal and spatial.²⁴

Alongside of these mythological and cosmogonic divagations, however, philosophy was evolving independently its own speculation on the concept of time, or rather, since Aristotle, was trying to disentangle the rational element from the religious involvements, and was addressing the thought to new, daring considerations: "As a matter of fact, this word 'duration' possessed a divine significance for the ancients, for the fulfilment which includes the period of life of any creature outside of which no natural development can fall, has been called its duration. On the same principle the fulfilment of the whole heaven, the fulfilment which includes all time and infinity, is 'duration'—a name based upon the fact that it *is always*—duration immortal and divine."²⁵ During the first centuries of our era the investigations on the time con-

town passed from Roman hands; later the temple became a church dedicated to St. Archelaus. One among the many invocations (*proskynemata*) inscribed on the pronaos and on the porticoes around the temple's cella is especially interesting, and has been thoroughly studied by Nock in his work quoted above. It was written by a worshipper who urges the god to make manifest to him whether he is the Sun-God. Among the invocations to the god, we read: ἀκτινοβόλε δεσπότα, Μανδοῦλι, Τιτάν, Μακαρεῦ . . . ; and finally: ἔνθα σε ἔγνω, Μανδοῦλι, ἥλιον τὸν παντενόπτην δεσπότην, ἀπάντων βασιλέα, Αἰὼνα παντοκράτορα. Again the identification with the Sun-God appears in the last words of the text: "O happy folk, that dwell in the city beloved by the Sun Mandulis, even holy Talmis, which is under the sceptre of fair-tressed Isis of the countless names."

²³ The false etymology suggested in this passage, that is Αἰών = Ianus, may have been inspired by the identification of Ianus, represented as double-faced and with the keys in his hand, with the lion-headed being we have described above, also holding the keys and also (see Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, p. 75, note 5) originally two-headed.

²⁴ See on these C. W. King, *The Gnostics* (London, 1887), pp. 257 ff.; Bousset, *s. vv.* Gnosis and Gnostiker in Pauly-Wissowa, *R.E.*, VII, cols. 1503 ff., 1534 ff.; Lackeit, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 ff.

²⁵ [αἰὼν] θείως ἐφθεγκται παρὰ τῶν ἀρχαίων· τὸ γὰρ τέλος τὸ περιέχον τὸν τῆς ἐκάστου ζωῆς χρόνον, οἷ μῆθ' ἐξω κατὰ φύσιν, αἰὼν ἐκάστου κέκληται. κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον καὶ τὸ τοῦ παντὸς οὐρανοῦ τέλος καὶ τὸ τὸν πάντα χρόνον καὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν περιέχον τέλος αἰὼν ἐστίν, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀεὶ εἶναι εἰληφὸς τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν, ἀθάνατος καὶ θεῖος (Aristotle, *De caelo*, I, 279a, trans. Stocks). At the end of this passage αἰὼν is derived from ἀεὶ ὢν.

ceptions are taken up again and with new vigor—alongside the blossoming of the theosophical doctrines of the Gnostics—by the philosophical schools of the Neopythagoreans and the Neoplatonics. The idea of Aion, eternal Time, is now clearly distinguished from the subdivisions of Chronos into past, present, and future, of which indeed the non-existence is pointed out. On the other hand, Chronos is distinguished from *Καιρός*, time in a generic sense, from time in relation to human activity, from “opportune time.”²⁶ Two passages by a thinker belonging to the Neopythagorean circle, Plutarch, oppose in fact Chronos on the one hand and Aion on the other:

“And as for that on which we most rely to support our conception of time, as we utter the words, ‘it is here,’ ‘it is at hand,’ and ‘now’—all this again reason, entering in,²⁷ demolishes utterly. For ‘now’ is crowded out into the future and the past, when we would look upon it as a culmination; for of necessity it suffers division. . . .

“But God is (if there be need to say so), and He exists for no fixed time, but for the everlasting ages which are immovable, timeless, and undeviating, in which there is no earlier nor later, no future nor past, no older nor younger. . . .”²⁸

At the end of the 2nd cent. after Christ, we find similar speculations in Sextus Empiricus, who uses the exact terminology of our mosaic: *ἀμέριστος* [ὁ χρόνος] . . . οὐκ ἔστιν· διαιρεῖται γὰρ εἰς τε τὸν ἐνεστώτα καὶ εἰς τὸν παρῳχηκότα καὶ εἰς τὸν μέλλοντα (*Pyrrhon. Hypotypos.*, III, 143: *περὶ χρόνον*; ed. Mutschmann, Leipzig, 1912, I, p. 172). Elsewhere even more explicitly: ὁ χρόνος τριμερὴς ἔστιν· τὸ μὲν γάρ τι ἦν αὐτοῦ παρῳχημένον, τὸ δὲ ἐνεστώς, τὸ δὲ μέλλον (*Adversus Mathematicos*, X, 197: *εἰ ἔστι χρόνος*; ed. cit., II, p. 344).²⁹ We do not need for our purposes, consequently, further to follow the successive speculations about the conceptions of Aion and

²⁶ See my papers on the conception of *Καιρός* in the thought of the Greeks, *Rendic. della R. Accad. dei Lincei*, Sc. mor. e filos., XXXII, 1923, pp. 260 ff.; XXXIII, 1924, pp. 93 ff.; *Atene e Roma*, N. S., IV, 1923, pp. 18 ff.; Lamer, in Pauly-Wissowa, s. v. Kairos (X, 2, col. 1510 ff.); A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, II, 2 (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 859 ff.; III, 2 (Cambridge, 1940), p. 1161; R. Hinks, *Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art* (London, 1939), pp. 117 ff.

²⁷ The text here and in several other words is somewhat corrupt.

²⁸ ὃ δὲ μάλιστα τὴν νόησιν ἐπερείδοντες τοῦ χρόνον, τὸ ‘ἐνέστηκε’ καὶ τὸ ‘πάρεστι’ καὶ τὸ ‘νῦν’ φθεγγόμεθα, τοῦτ’ αὖ πάλιν ἅπαν εἰσδύμενος ὁ λόγος ἀπόλλυσιν. ἐκθλίβεται γὰρ εἰς τὸ μέλλον καὶ τὸ παρῳχημένον ὥσπερ ἀκμὴν βουλομένοις ἰδεῖν, ἐξ ἀνάγκης διυστάμενον (Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos*, 19, *Moralia*, 392 F). ‘Ἄλλ’ ἔστιν ὁ θεός, εἰ χρὴ φάναι, καὶ ἔστι κατ’ οὐδένα χρόνον ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τὸν ἀκίνητον καὶ ἄχρονον καὶ ἀνέγκλιτον καὶ οὐ πρότερον οὐδὲν ἔστιν οὐδ’ ὕστερον οὐδὲ μέλλον οὐδὲ παρῳχημένον οὐδὲ πρεσβύτερον οὐδὲ νεώτερον, etc. (*ibid.*, 20. Text and translation by F. C. Babbitt, *Loeb Classical Library, Moralia*, V, pp. 242 ff.). The notion of tripartite time goes as far back as Homer in Greek literature. Vision through time, through the past as well as through the present and the future, is the very quality distinguishing the wise man from the fool. Calchas is a seer who knows the future through having knowledge of past and present (A 70: ὃς ἤδη τά τ’ ἐόντα τά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ’ ἐόντα). See on this formula P. Friedländer, in his review of F. Jacoby, *Hesiodi Carmina*, in *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 1931, pp. 250 ff.

²⁹ The same terminology is generally used also by the grammarians for the tenses of the verb: see e. g., Dionys. Thr. in I. Bekker, *Anecdota*, II (Berlin, 1816), p. 638, 22. Variations of these terms are: *παρεληλυθώς*; *τὸν παρόντα* and *τὸν διελλθόντα χρόνον*; *ἐπιόντα*, *ἐπίλοιπον*, etc.

Chronos, which multiplied on a large scale in the later Neoplatonic doctrines, especially in Plotinus and Proclus;³⁰ the former's seventh book of the III *Ennead* bears indeed the title *περὶ αἰῶνος καὶ χρόνου*. In this school the conception of Aion is opposed to Chronos in the same relationship as that of *νοῦς* to *ψυχή*: as against the running Chronos, Aion stands immutable, constant, and eternally like himself.³¹ These qualities, emerging more and more in the late philosophical speculation, make him more and more nearly identical to the divinity itself.

Although the wide diffusion of the concepts we are dealing with in Orphic doctrines and in popular religion may have inspired artistic representations of their personifications, in our mosaic at least we do not find any trace of the fantastic and confused images described for them in the mystic texts. But as pure speculation in philosophy and literature has coexisted with its transformation into religious and mystic conceptions, so allegories in monstrous shapes have coexisted in art with personification in human shapes of the ideas referring to Time. These have left us a testimony from very early times indeed, that is, the only other ancient monument, beside our mosaic, indisputably representing Aion, whose name is determined by an inscription: a very fragmentary red-figured Attic vase in Karlsruhe (Fig. 7).³² Here Aion was introduced into a scene of the Underworld together with Orpheus and Eurydice: only a part of his head remains, with a hand on his forehead in a thoughtful and sorrowful attitude. The only representation of Chronos determined in the same way by an inscription is the winged youth in Homer's Apotheosis;³³ he stands behind the poet, together with Oikoumene who lays a garland on his head, and holds a roll. We do not need to deal here with the personifications of the subdivisions of time, such as the Horae and the months of the year, which had the widest diffusion because they entered into the illustrations of the ancient calendars. We may only mention that a personification of the Year himself, Eniautós, appeared wearing a tragic costume in the famous Pompé of Ptolemy II; he was accompanied by a rarer personification, that of Penteterís, with the palm of Victory in her hand; she was followed by the Horae.³⁴ The existence, at least, of another allegory of Aion in human shape in late

³⁰ H. Leisegang, *Die Begriffe der Zeit u. Ewigkeit im späteren Platonismus* (Münster, 1913); Lackeit, *op. cit.*, pp. 69 ff.

³¹ Also in *Poimandres* we find the same opposition exactly expressed: *τοῦ δὲ αἰῶνος ἡ ταυτότης· τοῦ δὲ κόσμου ἡ τάξις· τοῦ δὲ χρόνου μεταβολή* (see Lackeit, *op. cit.*, p. 78).

³² *Jahrbuch*, IV, 1889, pp. 227 f., pl. 7. Cf. however L. Séchan, *Ét. sur la trag. gr.*, pp. 275 ff.

³³ Brunn-Bruckmann, *Denkmäler*, pl. 50.

³⁴ Athenaeus, *Deipnos.* V, 198, a, b; cf. Fr. Studniczka, *Abh. Sächs. Gesell. d. Wissenschaften*, Phil.-hist. Kl., XXX, Leipzig, 1914, 2nd fasc., p. 15. Miss J. L. Harrison proposed the identification of the figure of a boy, who follows the three Horae in a famous relief of the Acropolis Museum, as the image of young Eniautós: see *Themis* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 188, fig. 44; cf. also R. Hinks, *Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art* (London, 1939), p. 45. Penteterís was probably the personification of the spring festival itself, rather than that of the period of five years. K. Lehmann-Hartleben and E. C. Olsen, *Dionysiac Sarcophagi in Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1942), p. 26 and fig. 8, suggest this interpretation of the admirable corner-figure of the sarcophagus with the triumph of

antiquity is testified by John of Gaza's famous Ἐκφρασις τοῦ κοσμικοῦ πίνακος, that is, the description of a cycle of paintings existing at his time in the winter-bath of his town.³⁵ Among a number of allegorical figures in this painting Aion also appears (lines 137 ff.) :

καὶ πολυδινῆτων ἐτέων αὐτόσπορος Αἰὼν
 . . . χρόνον εἰς χρόνον ἄλλον ἐρεύγεται ἄψοφος ἔρπων.

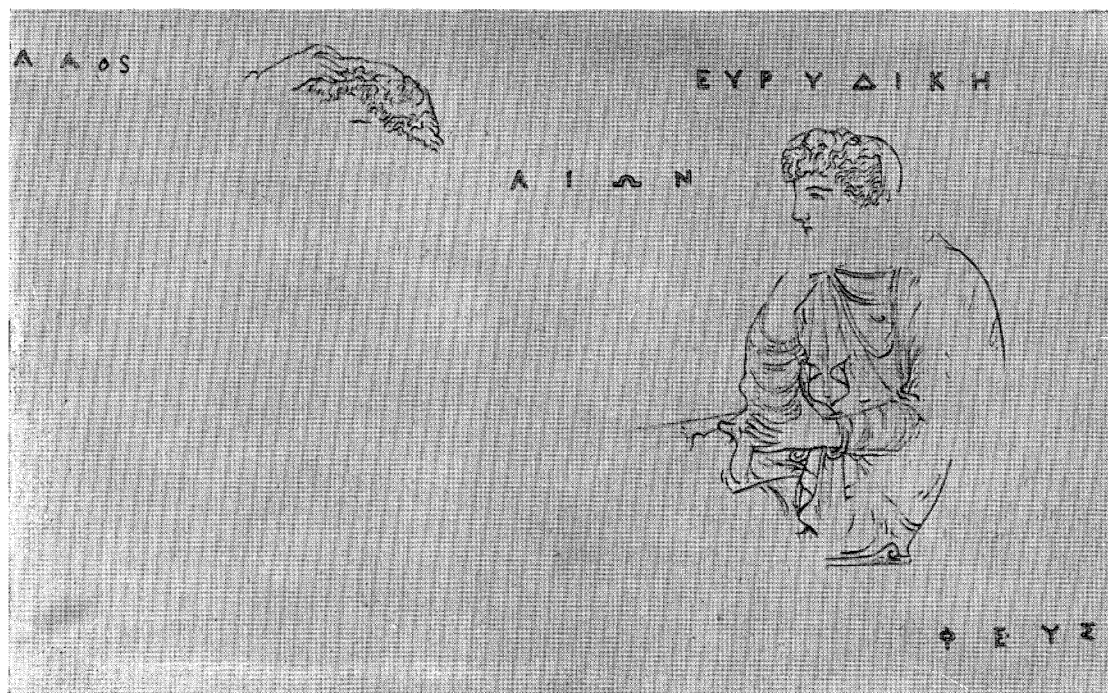


Fig. 7. Inscribed Figure of Aion from a Fragmentary Attic Vase in Karlsruhe

Before the discovery of the Antioch mosaic the only possible comparison to this description was offered by the illustration of Psalm 89 in the Carolingian Utrecht Psalter (Fig. 8),³⁶ certainly inspired by an earlier work which possibly goes back

Dionysius in Baltimore. Two incense-burners were carried in the pompé with the group of the Horae: θυμιατήρια δύο κίσσινα ἐκ χρυσοῦ ἐξαπῆχη.

³⁵ A reconstruction of the painting has been attempted by Paul Friedländer in his exhaustive edition of this text: *Johannes von Gaza u. Paulus Silentarius: Kunstbeschreibungen Justinianischer Zeit*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1912: on Aion see pp. 141 ff., pp. 177 ff. (See the reconstruction also in R. Hinks, *op. cit.*, pl. 2). Cf. also Lackeit, *op. cit.*, pp. 95 ff. In regard to this passage, nothing substantial is added by G. Krahmer in his valuable essay, *De tabula mundi ab Joanne descripta* (Halle Diss., Berlin, 1920), pp. 8 f.

³⁶ H. Graeven, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, XXI, 1898, p. 33. Different is the interpretation by E. T. DeWald, *The Illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter* (Princeton, 1932), p. 41, pl. LXXXIII.

beyond the limits of the Middle-Ages.³⁷ Here the Chronoi are really represented, on the left margin of the miniature, as three naked figures, very schematically drawn and consequently not necessarily as three children, as they have been generally interpreted; on the right the figure of Aion follows, also naked, and holding in his hand a long serpentine object; it is, in fact, in all probability, a misunderstood and rough sketch of a snake, such as is held by the image of Saturnus-Saeculum in the description of a

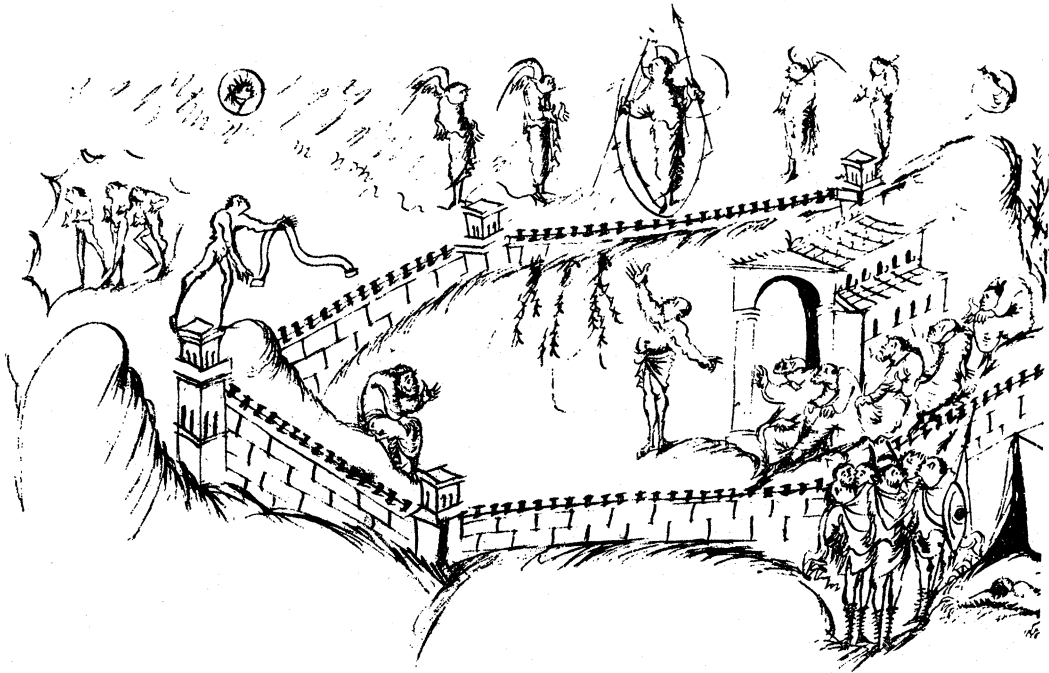


Fig. 8. Utrecht Psalter, Illustration to Psalm 89

medieval text, the *Mythographus Vaticanus III*:³⁸ *Tempora omnia in se recurrunt, qua de causa draconem flammivomum in dextra tenere perhibetur*. Another literary source confirms the possibility of the detachment of the serpent from Aion's body: it is a passage in the great magic papyrus of Paris, where for a magic ritual the usual demonic being with leonine head is described, not with a snake twisted around the body, but lifting with the right hand a staff around which one serpent is twined, while another creeps around his left arm.³⁹ On the relief of Aion and Kore, we have seen the serpent surrounding only the legs of Aion, and rising from there, supported by the god's left hand, above his shoulders. But a relief in the gardens of the Colonna

³⁷ Cf. G. R. Benson and D. T. Tselos, in *Art Bulletin*, XIII, 1931, pp. 13 ff.

³⁸ See Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, p. 53, § 6.

³⁹ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, IV, 2113 ff. (vol. I, p. 136); Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, p. 57, c: ἀνδρὶὰς λεοντοπρόσωπος, περιεζωσμένος, κρατῶν τῇ δεξιᾷ ῥάβδον, ἐφ' ᾗ ἔστω δράκων, τῇ δὲ ἀριστερᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ὅλην ἄσπίς τις περιεείχθω.

Palace on the Quirinale in Rome shows an image of the lion-headed Aion, wearing breeches on the lower part of its body, and stretching both arms holding torches; here the snakes are twisted around the four open wings.⁴⁰ On another relief, from Argentoratum in Upper Germany (Fig. 9), Aion is, on the contrary, a figure with



Fig. 9. Relief from Argentoratum in Upper Germany

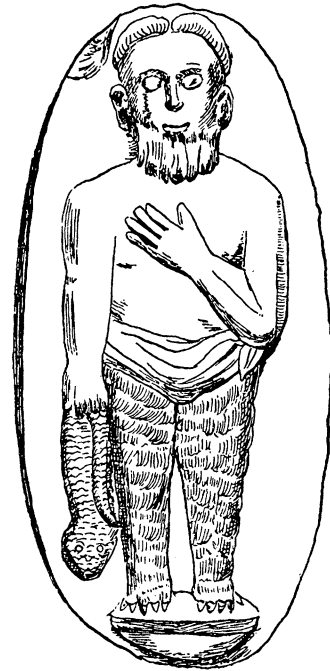


Fig. 10. Amulet in Black Stone with the Figure of Aion in the Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna

a human and bearded face, who stands, with four spread wings, before a lion. He wears a kilt around the waist similar to that worn by the god in the relief of Aion and Kore; his right hand holds a key and his left a torch. Here the serpent surrounds a crater lying on the floor in the left corner of the relief.⁴¹ Finally, the serpent is held in the right hand by another figure (Fig. 10) in which without doubt a variation of

⁴⁰ Cumont, *ibid.*, II, p. 197, no. 10 b, fig. 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 340, no. 240, fig. 214. Also the headless statue from the Mithreum of Emerita,

Chronos-Aion was recognized, although the cryptic text around it mentions specifically neither Chronos nor Aion: here neither the usual lion-headed figure appears, nor the human winged being we have described above, but a demon with a human upper part and a leonine lower part of the body. The image is roughly carved on an amulet of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna,⁴² in a black stone, the shape of which recalls a prehistoric axe. It is well known, indeed, that these prehistoric implements were considered in historical ages especially fit for magical purposes. The demon is here, too, bearded, but shows a bald head⁴³ adorned with horns;⁴⁴ his left hand rests on his breast. The amulet seems too big to be hung around the neck like a *περίαμμα*, and more fit for a house *φυλακτήριον*.

But the figure of Aion on our mosaic, in spite of its fragmentary state, casts a bright light upon a much discussed iconographic problem, and one destined perhaps to remain unsolved without the discovery of new decisive arguments such as that offered by the Antiochene monument. We have before us the figure of an old man with long white hair and beard, such as Aion is usually depicted, for instance in the Nonnus verses quoted above. But the curved object he holds with his out-stretched right hand is not a veil, as has been claimed, nor a roll. If continued beyond the fracture, it would describe a complete circle. It appears to be of solid material, not fluctuating, and its edges, drawn in perspective, are imagined as running parallel: it is in fact a wheel, probably of metal, thin, gray in color with brown edges. Consequently we have before us the first certain and indisputable artistic representation of Aion such as he often appears to us in poetical descriptions, turning the wheel of life, or of the human seasons. We may find a vague image of this conception as early as Pindar (*Isthm.*, VIII, 14 f.):

δόλιος γὰρ αἰὼν ἐπ' ἀνδράσι κρέμαται,
ἐλίσσων βίου πόρον.

But if we descend through many centuries, down beyond the age of our mosaic (but to about the age to which the original of the Utrecht Psalter may be attributed), in a passage by Nonnus—the poet who uses the image of Aion more often than any

surrounded by snakes, had originally in all probability a human head, since a leonine mask is represented on its breast: see Cumont, *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles-Lettres*, 1905, p. 149, fig.

⁴² R. Wünsch, "Deisidaimoniaka," in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XII, 1909, pp. 32 ff., fig. 4; Th. Hopfner, *Griech.-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, II (*Studien zur Palaeographie u. Papyruskunde*, ed. by G. Wessely, XXIII, Leipzig, 1924), p. 70, § 136 f., p. 76, fig. 2.

⁴³ A peculiarity attributed to *Καιρός*, bald but with a tuft of hair on his forehead: see Phaedrus, *Fabulae Aesop.*, V, 8 (Tempus). Also the image by Lysippos was bald; see the interesting epigram of the *Anth. Plan.* IV, 275. Cf. my paper quoted above in *Rend. Lincei*, XXXII, 1923, pp. 280 f.

⁴⁴ Goat's horns are characteristic of the Sun-God Ammon-Ra.

other ⁴⁵—we read of Aion, stooped, turning the wheel of time (*Dionys.*, XXXVI, 422 f.):

καὶ τότε τετραπόροιο χρόνον στροφάλιγγα κυλίνδων,
ἱππεύων ἔτος ἕκτον, ἐλίσσετο καμπύλος Αἰών. . . .



Fig. 11. Mosaic in Black and White from a Tomb of the Necropolis of the Isola Sacra near Ostia

What more enlightening artistic illustration of this passage could we produce than the recently discovered black-and-white mosaic from a tomb of the Isola Sacra near the mouth of the Tiber at Ostia (Fig. 11)? ⁴⁶ The nude old man seated on a rock and

⁴⁵ Lackeit, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 ff.

⁴⁶ G. Calza, *La Necropoli del porto di Roma nell'Isola Sacra* (Rome, 1940), Tomb no. 101, pp. 183 ff., fig. 92, pp. 312 f. The tomb seems to belong to the Hadrianic-Antonine period. A cloth

turning a wheel, is undoubtedly Aion. He eternally turns the wheel of time; but time rolls, in regard to human life, in the fourfold aspect of the seasons: the allegories of



Fig. 12. Silver *Patera* from Parabiago in the Palazzo di Brera, Milan

is spread on the rock on which Aion is seated. He seems to have a wreath around his head. The wreaths of the Seasons are respectively of flowers, ears of corn, vines and weeds.

Because he could not refer to figured representations, Tassilo von Scheffer, in his translation of the passage by Nonnus quoted above (Munich, 1933), fails to grasp the real elements of the poet's image. See the similar image by John of Gaza, where the months replace the seasons as periods of the year (*infra*, p. 311).

the four seasons indeed, each characterised by their usual attributes of different wreaths, are ready to pass through the wheel, preceded by Spring who is already treading over it with a dancing step. The link between eternal Aion and the earthly aspect of Time is furthermore symbolized by the nude female figure lying on the ground above the scene. It is evidently the image of Tellus. It is as Aion that we recognize now, consequently, another figure that appears in a similar attitude, turning a wheel, but now specified as the wheel of the Zodiac. The figure appears, to be precise, in a different aspect, not as a bearded old man but as a vigorous youth, standing within the wheel or nearby, on three well-known monuments, associated with other allegories or connected with other monuments clearly related to mystic cults. These three monuments are: the silver *lanx* from Parabiago (Figs. 12-13), and the two mosaics from Sentinum, modern Sassoferrato (Fig. 14) and Hippo Regius in Algeria (Fig. 15).⁴⁷ The youth, half-draped on the silver plate and on the African mosaic, in the former holds a scepter, and is supported within the wheel by Atlas and flanked by a snake wound around a bethel, in the latter holds the horn of abundance; he is naked, his head crowned with a rich wreath of flowers, on the mosaic of Sentinum. On the *lanx* the figure faces the triumph of Cybele and Attis; above are represented the divinities of Light, the quadriga of the rising sun preceded by Phosphorus and the biga of the moon preceded by Hesperus; below are the allegories of Tellus and the Horae, of Ocean and Thetis, and of the nymphs of the fountains. The mosaic of Sentinum decorated the floor of an annex to a Mithreum, in



Fig. 13. Detail of Figure 12

⁴⁷ Alda Levi, *La Patera d'argento di Parabiago*, R. Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, *Opere d'Arte*, fasc. V (Rome, 1935), pp. 8 f., notes 26-27, pls. I-IV; *eadem*, *Critica d'Arte*, II, 1937, pp. 218 ff., figs. 5-6; *Inventaire des Mosaïques de la Gaule et de l'Afrique*, III, *Algérie*, no. 41, plate. The mosaic of Hippo is still *in situ*; that from Sentinum is in the Room of Trajan in the Munich Glyptothek. The silver *patera* is preserved in the Palazzo di Brera, Milan.

The interpretation as Aion of the youth on the Parabiago plate seems to be suggested also by R. Hinks, *Myth and Allegory*, p. 41.

which also a relief with Mithras tauroktonos was discovered. In all three monuments, furthermore, by the gesture of the hand of the god of the Zodiac resting on the sign of the Bull, Aion seems clearly represented as *Sol in Toro*: a meaning that in the Parabiago plate is an obvious allusion to the marriage of Cybele and Attis which took place exactly in the spring equinox, from immemorial times fixed by the oriental



Fig. 14. Mosaic Floor from a Mithreum at Sentinum (Sassoferrato)
now in the Glyptothek at Munich

astronomers and astrologers at the entry of the sun into this constellation. The god of the Zodiac has been variously interpreted as Dionysos, the solar Apollo, Sol, Annus, Caelus, Phanes,⁴⁸ and finally as Mithras. But indeed we have already mentioned how Aion in the Gnostic doctrines was identified with the solar divinities, and how he was considered as a brother to Phanes. The equation with Mithras of all these solar divinities such as Aion, Helios, Dionysos, has already suggested also the interpretation of Mithras for the theriomorphic being who is called generally, as we have seen

⁴⁸ Albizzati, "La Lanx di Parabiago e i Testi orfici," in *Athenaeum*, XXV, 1937, pp. 187 ff. According to Albizzati, p. 190, note 2, the position of the youth's hand on the sign of the Zodiac would have a different meaning as well, and would refer, to be precise, to Phanes' birth.

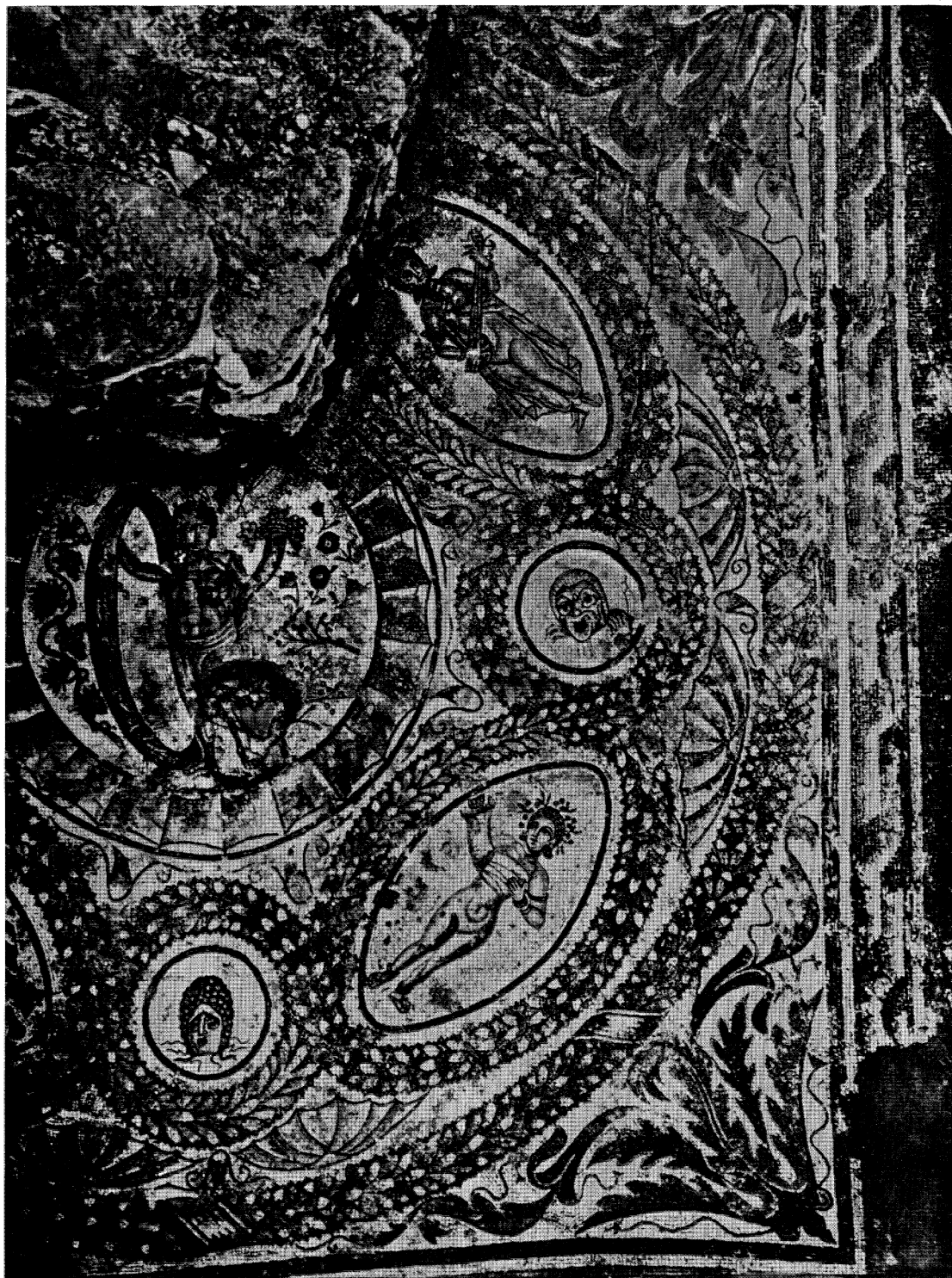


Fig. 15. Fragmentary Mosaic at Hippo Regius in Algeria

before, Chronos or Aion;⁴⁹ strictly analogous to this is another image, the relief of Modena (to which we shall return below)⁵⁰ now generally interpreted as Phanes (Fig. 16). If the name of Aion does not appear in the Mithriac mysteries, this means only



Fig. 16. Relief in Modena

that in all probability it could not appear because it was not to be pronounced by the profane; we shall repeatedly find an echo of this prohibition in magic texts, and we noticed before the reticence in pronouncing his name in the passage of Suidas mentioning his cult-statue at Alexandria. On the other hand, the relationship between the

⁴⁹ See A. Dieterich, *Abraxas* (Leipzig, 1891), pp. 53 f.

⁵⁰ Page 299.

late Gnostic conception of Aion and the religion of Mithras is undeniable; Aion is almost identical with the Mithriac personification of Time, with the Mithriac Saturnus-Kronos. And no wonder. We have said that originally the Hellenic Aion was not at all conceived as the supreme and eternal principle of the universe, but only as a period of time renewing itself, a duration of time repeating itself (and especially that of the year). In the cosmogonies preserved to us this subordinate position is made clear by the denomination of Aion as the son of Kronos, or of a Virgin, or of Helios.⁵¹ Slowly, however, the old conceptions of the astral mythology were transformed under the influence of the speculations of the theologians. To the divinized Aion are applied the definitions which philosophy had attributed to the cosmic principles of Time. This last conception of Aion-Time approaches consequently that abstraction of Time which played an important role in the doctrines of the Chaldaic oracles, from which the mysteries of Mithras were derived. Now can flow together into the conception of Aion all qualities of endless Time, the primeval cause of all things, such as is the character of the old Persian divinity Zervan Akarana whom a sect of magicians placed indeed at the origin of the world as the king of the celestial hierarchies, and from whom both the good god Ahura Mazda and the evil god Ahriman were born.⁵² Expressions, such as we have already found for the late god of the classical world, are used for this divinity: ἄπανστον ἐν ἀπαύστοις αἰῶνος περιόδοις (Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* XXXVI, 42; ed. G. Budé, II, Leipzig, 1919, p. 16). The image of the wheel, finally, which we have seen suddenly appear in the artistic repertory of late antiquity for Aion, goes back to him as well: the figure which we have met with before may exactly fit the image as described by Proclus, "always turning an untiring wheel and staying in it."⁵³

Again the poetical images of Hellenic classical literature agree exactly with the religious content of the oriental doctrines. The deity who moves the beginnings of things, and who stands immobile in the center of the wheel, recalls the statue of Aion,

⁵¹ σὺν [Ἡλίῳ] εἰ ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παλιγενεοῦς Αἰῶνος: *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, VII, 510 (London papyrus, vol. II, p. 23).

⁵² Nock, *loc. cit.*, pp. 79 ff. refuses to recognize the identity of Aion and Zervan. It is certain that originally there was nothing in common between Aion and the Babylonian divinities (see Cumont, in *Comptes Rendus cit.*, 1928, p. 279). We may accept also Nock's affirmation (*loc. cit.*, p. 82) that "so far as I know, Aion never renders Zervan," or rather that (p. 86) "Aion is not actually used of Zervan." This does not destroy, however, the general and plausible opinion that, together with Semitic, Egyptian, and other elements, also elements characteristic of Zervan contributed through Mithraism in shaping the complex figure of Aion in the syncretistic religion and thought of late antiquity.

⁵³ καὶ δινεῖν αἰεὶ τε μένειν ἀόκνῳ στροφάλιγγι (Proclus, *In Timaeum*, p. 242 D; ed. E. Diehl, III, Leipzig, 1906, pp. 13 f.); cf. W. Kroll, *De oraculis Chaldaicis* (in *Breslauer Philol. Abhandlungen*, VII, 1894), p. 27, and note 1. See also other similar passages, such as that by Proclus, *In Parm.*, 1161, 28: τὰ δὲ λόγια πάσας πηγὰς ἀποφαίνεται καὶ ἀρχὰς [τὸν αἰῶνα] δινεῖν αἰεὶ τε μένειν ἀόκνῳ στροφάλιγγι, etc.

who was adored at Eleusis, and whose dedication, belonging to the age of Augustus, is preserved to us: "for the power of Rome and the perpetuity of the Mysteries."⁵⁴ It is the eternal being, the ruler of the universe, without beginning and without end,

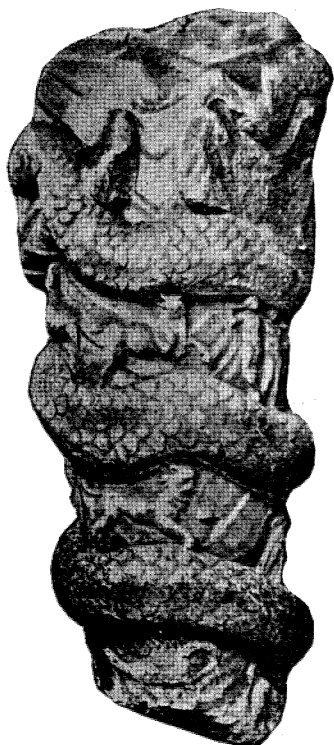


Fig. 17. Fragmentary
Marble Statue
in Arles

who was, is, and will be, the immutable and perpetual creator of the phenomena of nature. The wheel, which signifies the endless renewal of the phenomena of nature, is a symbol entirely akin to the circle of the Zodiac, indissolubly associated with the cult of Mithras. Sometimes we see the whole circle of the Zodiac surrounding the representation of the tauroktonos deity.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, especially on the large reliefs of Germany, the twelve signs of the Zodiac are carved around the arched upper border of the cave where the bull is immolated: this cave was considered as representing the world, and its border was consequently a symbol of the heavenly vault. We do not wonder, therefore, if the signs of the Zodiac are introduced into the representation of the lion-headed monster symbolizing the Mithriac god of Time, to signify that the sun in its ecliptic successively passes through the twelve constellations. On the fine fragmentary statue at Arles (Fig. 17) all the twelve signs are visible between the coils of the serpent surrounding its body, and probably hinting at the sinuous course of the sun through the sky, while only four signs appear on the statue, also mutilated, in the Vatican Library.⁵⁶ Another curious sculpture, found in the Mithreum of Housestead (Borcovicus) in Northern England⁵⁷ (Fig. 18) calls even more sharply to mind the monuments we are dealing with. Here within

the ring of the Zodiac the naked torso of Mithras, worked in the round, holding the knife and the flaming torch, appears between the two halves of a sphere or of an egg, one half beneath his waist and the other above his head. But in the confluence of ideas and symbols which characterizes the religious syncretism of late antiquity, the symbolism of Mithras passes to other religions and other mysteries as well. Other

⁵⁴ Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscr. Graec.*³ (Leipzig, 1920), no. 1125; Cumont, *loc. cit.*, p. 280; Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 83, note 97.

⁵⁵ E. g., Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, no. 220, fig. 192; no. 267, p. 389, fig. 304, etc. See more over the relief from Salona in Spalato, Bulié, *Bullettino di Arch. e Storia Dalmata*, XXXII, 1909, pp. 50 ff., pl. VII, 2. Cf. Fritz Saxl, *Mithras* (Berlin, 1931), p. 53, and fig. 141, pl. 27. Saxl, *ibid.*, pp. 95 f., believes that the circular representation of the Zodiac around the god is a Greek invention.

⁵⁶ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, p. 80; II, no. 281, p. 403, fig. 325; no. 37, p. 213, figs. 43-44.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II, no. 273, p. 395, fig. 315; Saxl, *Mithras*, fig. 159, pl. 29.

deities ⁵⁸ can now be represented in the Zodiacal ring as astral divinities. Similar representations not only express the eternity of their evolution and their rule over the sky, but also—because of the wide expansion of the astrological doctrines, spread through-



Fig. 18. Stone Sculpture from the Mithreum of Borcovicus (Housestead) in Northern England

out Egypt especially by the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus—their rule over all nature submitted to the influence of the stars. So Helios on his quadriga may be surrounded by the Zodiac, or some single signs of the Zodiac may be placed in an arc behind his carriage or be represented on the shoulder-belt crossing the breast of a

⁵⁸ See Cumont, *s. v.* Zodiacus, in Daremberg-Saglio, *Dict. des Antiquités Gr. et Rom.*, V, 1919, pp. 1056 f.

statue of the Sun.⁵⁹ Elsewhere, on Alexandrian coins and gems, we may find in the center of the Zodiac the bust of Sarapis, or the busts of Sarapis and Isis, or those of Helios and Selene, and even the figure of Pan—risen to the rank of a panthean deity in stoic philosophy thanks to a pun on his name—playing his flute, with a probable allusion to the harmony of the spheres. The eternal renewal of the cycles of human life is the obvious meaning of the famous coin struck at Alexandria in A.D. 138-139 by Antoninus Pius on the occasion of the beginning of a new Sothic cycle (Fig. 19 *a*): the planets are depicted around the bust of Sarapis, and the ring of the Zodiac in an outer circle.⁶⁰ In the same connection may be classified probably also another Alexandrian coin of the same Emperor (Fig. 19 *b*), where the inscription ΑΙΩΝ surrounds an image of the Phoenix, symbolically representing the renewal of human life.⁶¹ The relations between the supreme and immortal divinity and the destinies of the mortal beings appear even more clearly on the coin struck at Nicaea in Bithynia (Fig. 19 *c*), where Zeus, seated on his throne within the ring of the Zodiac, is flanked by the carriages of the Sun and the Moon, and dominates the figures of the Earth and the Ocean lying at his feet:⁶² a compendious representation which immediately recalls the symbolism used for Cybele on the Parabiago *lanx*. Finally the youthful image of Aion himself appears on another coin (Fig. 19 *e*),⁶³ this time standing within the wheel with an aspect and an attitude practically identical to those of the god of the Parabiago plate, the mantle falling from the shoulder behind the naked body, but holding in the left hand, instead of the sceptre, a globe on which the Phoenix rests. The coin, which has passed from the Montagu Collection to the British Museum, is an *aureus* struck by Hadrian during his third consulate (A.D. 119-138), on which the Greek name of the god is translated into one of its Latin equivalents, *Saeculum*: *Saec(ulum) aur(eum)*. But the artistic representation of the Zodiac, following the same process

⁵⁹ Thus on the famous Vatican torso, see Rapp, *s.v.* Helios, in Roscher's *Lexikon*, fig. on col. 2002.

⁶⁰ Head, *Historia Numorum*², 1911, p. 863; Cumont, in Daremberg-Saglio, *loc. cit.*, p. 1049, fig. 7588.

⁶¹ Brit. Mus., *Cat. of Greek Coins, Alexandria*, pl. XXVI, 1004; F. Imhoof-Blumer and O. Keller, *Tier- u. Pflanzenbilder auf Münzen u. Gemmen* (Leipzig, 1889), pl. XII, 24; J. Vogt, *Die Alexandrinischen Münzen*, I (Stuttgart, 1924), p. 115. As regards the meaning of the symbol of the Phoenix and its most important representations, see the imposing mosaic from Antioch in the center of which again the Phoenix stands on top of a rock, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, II (Princeton, 1938), pl. 43; J. Lassus, "La Mosaïque du Phénix," in *Mon. Piot*, XXXVI, 1938, pp. 81 ff., pl. V.

⁶² Cumont, in Daremberg-Saglio, *loc. cit.*, p. 1057, fig. 7597; see on other similar coins *ibid.*, note 7; also A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, I (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 752 ff., figs. 551 ff.; and the Thracian coin, Saxl, *Mithras*, fig. 196, pl. 35, our Fig. 19 *d*.

⁶³ P. Strack, *Untersuchungen zur römischen Reichsprägung des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, II (Stuttgart, 1933), pp. 100 ff., pl. I, 78; H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the Brit. Mus.*, III (London, 1936), pp. cxxxi f., p. 278, no. 312, pl. 52, 10; Albizzati, *loc. cit.*, p. 190, note 2, pl. 2, 2. On coins of Faustina, *Aeternitas* holds the Phoenix upon a globe: see Mattingly, *op. cit.*, IV, 1940, p. lxxxiii.

which we have noticed for the word Aion in the language, may finally, devoid of practically all its philosophical and religious content, express by itself merely the concept of Eternity: so in a bronze medallion struck by Hadrian for the apotheosis

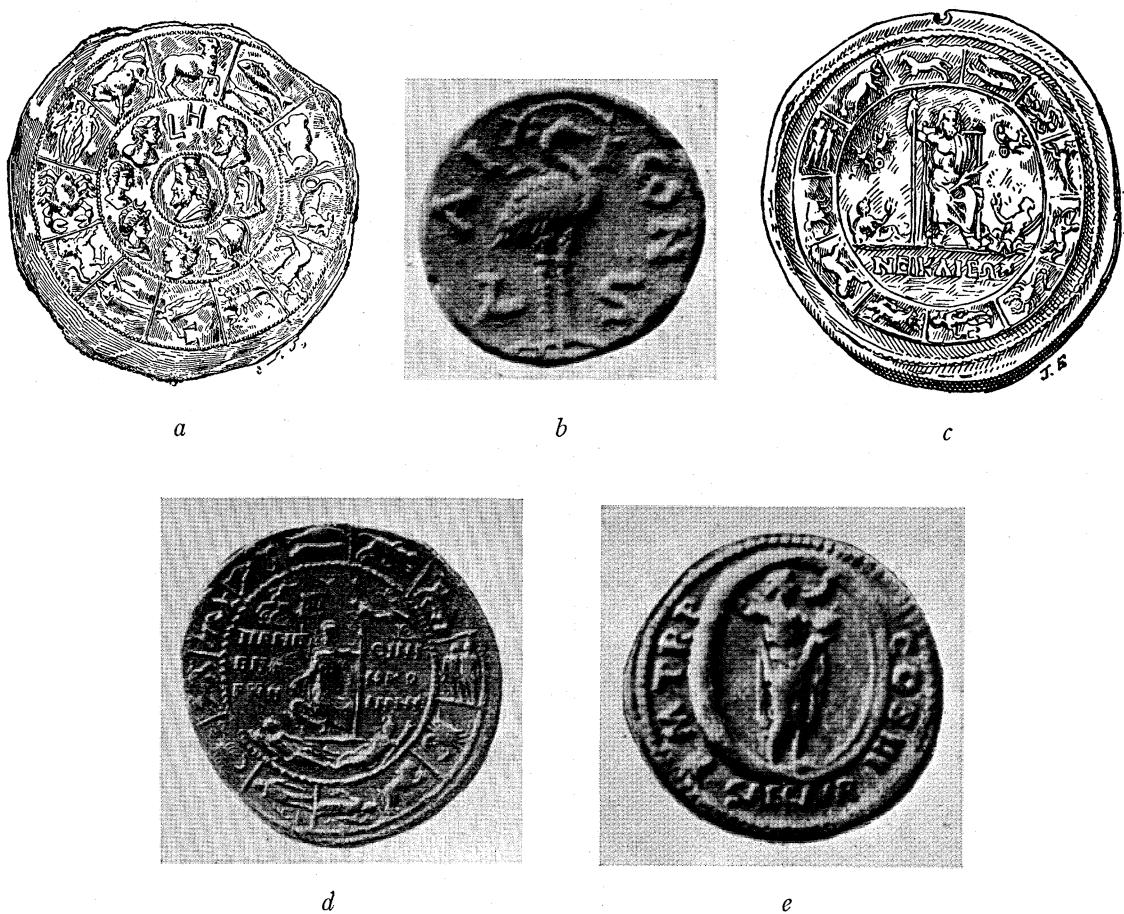


Fig. 19. Coins: (a) Antoninus Pius (Alexandria, A.D. 138-139), with Zodiac around Bust of Sarapis; (b) Antoninus Pius (Alexandria), with AIΩN around Phoenix; (c) Nicaea (Bithynia), with Zodiac around Zeus; (d) Thracia, Type as c; (e) Aureus of Hadrian, with Aion (Saeculum Aureum) within the wheel, holding Globe Surmounted by Phoenix

of Trajan, where the latter Emperor is represented probably in the attitude of Zeus, seated and surrounded by the Zodiac.⁶⁴ In the same way, later, the two busts of the dead couple appear within the Zodiac on the Barberini sarcophagus of the Bliss Col-

⁶⁴ F. Gneecchi, *I Medaglioni romani*, III (Milan, 1912), no. 105, pl. 147, 3-4 (two specimens, in Padua and Copenhagen).

lection at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington;⁶⁵ beneath are putti as vintagers, on the sides are the personifications of the four Seasons. The Seasons, the divisions of Time in its relationship with human life, belong to Mithriac symbolism. Representations of the Zodiac were often painted on the walls of Mithriac temples, while sometimes the signs of the Zodiac, worked separately in bronze, were applied to the walls. These in some cases were grouped three by three, according to the seasons. We have mentioned above a statue of the lion-headed demon adorned with four signs of the Zodiac: these are the signs of the months of the solstices and equinoxes, that is, of the beginnings of the seasons. The Seasons themselves are represented on a conspicuous number of Mithriac monuments.⁶⁶ With the Seasons often the Winds are associated, each of which was considered to rule over a period of the year and to determine the climatic conditions to which a season was submitted. We have mentioned before the tradition of Philo according to which Aion himself was a son of the wind god Kolpias; Aion is invoked, moreover, as god of the four winds in magical texts.⁶⁷ This is the reason for the conspicuous presence of the Seasons on all our three representations of the god of the Zodiac: Summer and Spring are indeed, in all probability, the two preserved figures in the mosaic from Hippo.⁶⁸ In the mosaic from Sentinum the opposition between human time and the god of astral eternity is stressed even more by grouping at his feet the four putti of the seasons around the figure of the reclining Tellus. Finally on the *lanx* from Parabiago we find again the complete symbolism we have noticed before on the coin of Nicaea, not in direct relation to Aion, but to the gods of the mysteries, Cybele and Attis, as it is to the supreme astral god on the coin. In the mosaic of Hippo the god of the Zodiac, standing outside the ring he is moving with his right hand, holds in his left a horn of abundance the mouth of which is full of grapes; a vine branch with bunches of grapes spreads beyond the Zodiac along the edge on the left of the scene, while colored flowers and twigs are in the field on the right. This does not compel us necessarily to identify the divine youth with Dionysos,

⁶⁵ E. Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life* (London, 1915), pl. XXXII; H. Kähler, *Zwei Sockel eines Triumphbogens im Boboligarten zu Florenz*, 96. Berlin. *Winckelmannsprogramm*, 1936, p. 31, fig. 20; R. Hinks, *Myth and Allegory in Ancient Art* (*Studies of the Warburg Institute*, vol. VI), London, 1939, pl. 6. A comprehensive study on this monument by G. Hanfmann is soon to appear.

⁶⁶ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, pp. 92 f.

⁶⁷ Thus on the Leiden papyrus, *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, XII, 238 (vol. II, p. 74). The winds may refer to a quite different symbolism, both in Mithriac and in other mystic religions. See their representation, e. g., in the Palermo mosaic of which I have recently tried to demonstrate the symbolic meaning referring to mystic doctrines, in *Berytus*, VII, 1942, pp. 47 f., pls. V and VI, 2-3. On this quite different symbolism of the winds cf. Saxl, *Mithras*, p. 79.

⁶⁸ The theatrical masks represented on this mosaic between the Seasons might be an allusion to the masks used in the mysteries of Mithras and in other religious mysteries: see Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, pp. 315 f. Elsewhere masks allude undoubtedly to the stars: so e. g., above the edge of the great altar at Carnuntum around which the Seasons and the Winds are represented, together with Coelus supporting the vault of the firmament: see *ibid.*, II, no. 228 bis, c, p. 496, figs. 432 ff.

represented as a solar god, the dispenser of the fruit of the year: the same meaning indeed is possessed also by the Mithriac deity of Time, who, while bringing the succession of the various seasons, is at the same time the fecundating god—or on the contrary the destructive god—who brings to maturity the fruit of earth and devours it, according to another passage of the *Mythographus Vaticanus* quoted before.⁶⁹ To this god is given the name Frugifer, which identifies him with the strange divinity of Saeculum Frugifer worshiped especially at Hadrumetum in Africa and represented on numerous imperial coins, a divinity which is nothing else but a not completely disguised Romanization of the Punic Baal: another confirmation of the confluence into the Mithriac religion of Mazdeian and Semitic elements, like the assimilation of the Phoenician Baal Shamin by Aion in the cosmogony of Philo we have mentioned above.⁷⁰

On the plate from Parabiago the figure within the Zodiac holds the scepter, an attribute which we have seen also in the hands of the lion-headed demon. He is flanked by a serpent winding around an obelisk: the bethel is in the Mithriac legend an obvious allusion to the god's birth from a rock, *θεὸς ἐκ πέτρας*. Such a rock, besides often appearing associated with the god in his representations, was worshipped in the form of a conical stele in his sanctuaries; some original specimens were found in the Mithrea, and several of them are surrounded by the serpent.⁷¹ We have seen, however, that the serpent⁷² became also the unfailing attribute of the demon of Time in Mithriac mythology; as such we have seen it also completely detached from the demon's body, and in one case winding about a crater, an object around which it appears also on numerous Mithriac representations. This represented in the Mithrea, according to information by Porphyrius, the source springing from the cave originally consecrated to the cult of Zoroaster.⁷³ On the Parabiago plate, finally, the god of the Zodiac is supported by a naked torso of Atlas, the "faultless Titan," who in fact, according to the Orphic doctrines, had not participated with his brothers in Zagreus' slaughter (see Kern, *Orphic. Fragm.* no. 215, pp. 235 f.). The Hellenic bearer of the heavenly globe is a motif which was introduced in fact into the Mithriac symbolism and into the oriental religions, where the figure of the Titan appears as an image of the Mithriac deity of Caelus. Similarly in the Mithriac mythology is mentioned a

⁶⁹ Annua fecunditatem atque proventum omnium devorat frugum: Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, p. 53, line 11.

⁷⁰ See Nock, *loc. cit.*, pp. 86 f. Also this quality of Aion as the inventor of nourishment with fruit recalls the mythology of Mithras, who immediately after his birth is said to have picked leaves and fruit from a tree.

⁷¹ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, p. 160, note 1. Cf. also Saxl, *Mithras*, figs. 155-161, pl. 29.

⁷² On the serpent in Mithriac iconography see Saxl, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 ff. Cf. also E. Swoboda, "Die Schlange im Mithraskult," *Öst. Jahreshefte*, XXX, 1936-7, pp. 1 ff.

⁷³ Παρὰ τῷ Μίθρᾳ ὁ κρατὴρ ἀντὶ τῆς πηγῆς τέτακται: *De antro nymphaeum*, 17, ed. Nauck (Leipzig, 1886), p. 69. See Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, p. 40, c. On the snake around the crater, cf. G. W. Elderkin, *Kantharos* (Princeton, 1924), pp. 9, 37; Saxl, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

gigantic angel who sustains the firmament on his shoulders (᾽Ωμοφόρος), while to Atlas apparently even a cult was dedicated in the Syrian religion, since a statue to him is mentioned in the temple at Hierapolis.⁷⁴ The Titan's image does not appear only on our Italic object dedicated to the mysteries of Cybele, but sometimes also in the repertory of the usual Mithriac representations: he raises a large sphere on his shoulders, for instance, on the big relief at Osterburken near the Roman *limes* of Upper Germany, while, nude and bent forward, he supports only the cornice of the altar of Carnuntum in Pannonia.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, however, the classical iconography is not accepted by the oriental repertory in its integrity, but Atlas' image puts on oriental garments: so, for instance, on the relief of Neuenheim,⁷⁶ where a figure in oriental costume and wearing a Phrygian cap lifts with upstretched arms not the heavenly sphere but a disc, that is, the disc of the Zodiac like that sustained by Atlas on the sculpture at Villa Albani.⁷⁷ Atlas, finally, is described as supporting a disc surrounding the image of a child in the *ἐκφρασις* by John of Gaza. Friedländer correctly asserts⁷⁸ that nowhere else, either in literature or in art, does Atlas lift the disc of the sun. But here too we do not gather from the poet's words⁷⁹ that it is a question of the solar disc, but rather of the sphere of the universe, evidently represented as a ring—and perhaps as the ring of the Zodiac—in order to leave free space in the center for the divine being. And the child in the center does not necessarily represent the rising sun,

⁷⁴ Lucian, *De Syria dea*, 38: μετὰ δὲ τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα ἑορτάζον ἔστιν Ἀτλαντος.

⁷⁵ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, pp. 90 f.; II, no. 246 e, 2, p. 349, pl. VI; no. 228 bis, c, 1, p. 497, fig. 432. See the first monument also in Saxl, *Mithras*, fig. 83, pl. 15.

⁷⁶ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, no. 245 d, 1, p. 346, pl. V.

⁷⁷ G. Thiele, *Antike Himmelsbilder* (Berlin, 1898), p. 25, fig. 3; Helbig, *Führer*³, II, p. 458, no. 1929.

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 175 f.

⁷⁹ That the reader may check this affirmation I give here the translation of the principal passages of this description, a translation in which I sometimes differ from Friedländer's interpretation.

96 ff.: In order to raise his fiery burden Atlas stands stooped, holding near his temples the life-prolonging sparks, bending his head aside and with his hands uplifted, his neck turned sideways, stretching his tired limbs, taking care thus to lighten his load. As though equipped for toil he is lightly-clad, covered only by a kilt around his waist.

107 ff.: . . . the governing Word curved the sky as an endless sphere, and by the will of the same Word the earth is suspended within it as the center of the sphere. From the north stands unshaken its axis, equally balanced, rectilinear, supporting nature, piercing the sphere from pole to pole and affixed to both poles. Upright, it pins the earth and holds it tight, and Atlas in his enduring and tireless eternal strength stands as this steadfast axis. The tips of the axis are fixed in the fiery pole near the southern end and in the dry frozen vault of the north. The starry pole of the North which is always visible in the luminous rotations of the supernal sphere they call the right pole, and the fiery south pole near to the ground bare of stars, which runs invisibly, the left pole. . . .

126 ff.: But also the wanderer son of glowing Orient, Phaethon the bringer of light, established the generation of Harmony; and giving heed to the center of the intellectually perceptible wheel of the world, with his generative spark he keeps everything flowing around. . . .

134 ff.: . . . they fixed a disc to the axis so that Atlas rooted in the ground might the better attend constantly to lifting the prince of ether, himself driving the world's charioteer.

but rather perhaps the cosmic deity, such as the child Mithras appearing in the center of the zodiacal disc on the Mithriac relief of Trier⁸⁰ (Fig. 20).

We have thus cleared the way to consider another famous and much discussed image of a god in the Zodiac, which differs from those examined before inasmuch as he does not turn the wheel of the Zodiac, but only stands in a majestic attitude within it; this is the relief in Modena (Fig. 16).⁸¹ The strange deity shows his beautiful and youthful body in full nakedness, and an imperious and thoughtful head certainly derived from a solar image, while only his bull or goat hoofs depart from human nature. The body, provided with wings, is wrapped about with snake coils, and the tips of a moon-crescent protrude from his shoulders. The god holds the scepter and the thunderbolt; flames rise toward the sky from the two halves of a sphere or a cone placed beneath his feet and over his head; the head of the serpent wound around his body rests on the front of the upper hemisphere. A lion's mask is repre-

⁸⁰ S. Loeschke, *Die Erforschung des Tempelbezirkes im Altbachtale zu Trier* (Berlin, 1928), p. 16, fig. 28; *id.*, "Bedeutung u. Gefährdung der grossen Tempelgrabung in Trier," from *Trierer Zeitschrift*, IV, 1929, p. 16 and p. 36, pl. IV; Saxl, *Mithras*, p. 96, fig. 199, pl. 35; A. Levi, *La Patera di Parabiago*, pl. V, 2. As regards the excavation of the sanctuary near Trier, see now the first fascicule of the final publication, S. Loeschke, *Der Tempelbezirk im Altbachtale zu Trier*, I (Berlin, 1938). On this monument, contrary to the description of the painting in Gaza, only the child's bust is represented, naked and wearing the Mithriac Phrygian cap, whose outstretched right hand supports the ring of the Zodiac while the left holds the sphere of the world. A position of the god in the Zodiac more resembling that of the Gaza painting appears on the Borcovicus sculpture we mentioned above (Fig. 18), where the god stretches both arms sideways so as to reach the ring of the Zodiac. His hands, in fact, hold the divine attributes, which however are almost concealed against the edge of the Zodiac, and might have escaped the attention of the poet. A similar position recurs elsewhere for the figure of Mithras being born: so, e. g., on the sculpture from the Mithreum of Alt-Ofen near Budapest, Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, no. 213 d, p. 322, fig. 187; Saxl, *Mithras*, fig. 161, pl. 29. We remark that, as a matter of fact, in John's text the name Helios never does appear. To the divinity of the disc of the universe is often applied the epithet Phaethon, which not only can be justified by the equation Mithras = Sun, but which is used indeed for Mithras by Nonnus, the primary source of John's poetry (see Ἀσσύριος Φαέθων, *Dionys.*, XXI, 249 [or 251]; the same epithet can be used also for the Orphic primeval deity: Πρωτογόνος Φαέθων, *Orph. fragm.* 57, Abel, *Orphica*, p. 175). The position and the attitude of the child within the Zodiac in the Trier relief hint at the birth of the young Sun at the beginning of the year (see Saxl, *Mithras*, pp. 96 f.): the relief contains, in other words, a symbolism very similar to that attributed by John (lines 56 ff.): to the childish figure supported by Atlas in the Gaza painting.

Also the terms used for the object lifted by Atlas do not fit better the image of the sun's disc than that of the sphere of the universe. Sometimes (e. g., in line 66) the word disc is used. Elsewhere (line 53) it is called κώνος ἀερισπότητος, "the high-soaring cone." Its flame (φλόξ) is related, in lines 69 f., to the πῶλος, and a similar image is that in line 95, αἶγλη οὐρανίου λαμπτήρος.

⁸¹ See especially Cavedoni, in *Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per Modena e Parma*, I, 1863, pp. 1 ff.; F. Cumont, *Rev. Arch.*, XL, 1902, I, pp. 1 ff., pl. I; *eundem*, *Les Mystères de Mithra*³ (Bruxelles, 1913), p. 109, fig. 12; R. Eisler, *Weltenmantel u. Himmelszelt*, II (Munich, 1910), p. 400, fig. 47; *eundem*, *Orpheus-the-Fisher* (London, 1921), pl. V; Deubner, *Röm. Mitt.*, XXVII, 1912, p. 18, note 5; Alda Levi, *La Patera di Parabiago*, p. 9, note 29, pl. V, 1; F. Cumont, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CIX, 1934, pp. 63 ff.; Albizzati, *loc. cit.*, pp. 192 ff., pl. 1; Doro Levi in *Berytus*, VII, 1942, p. 48, note 133.

sented on the god's breast, and the heads of a ram and a goat project from his sides. The old and ingenious interpretation by Cavedoni, who recognized in this image the



Fig. 20. The Birth of Mithras in the Zodiac, Relief from a Mithreum near Trier

image of Phanes as described in the *Theogonia*, by Hieronymos and Hellanikos (Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, no. 54, pp. 130 ff.), which contains the closest points of resemblance to our relief. It was obviously derived, as Cumont has noticed, from the

Orphic god Phanes born from the cosmic egg,⁸² reinforced with new arguments by Eisler and L. Deubner, still prevails. On the other hand, the monuments we have examined before, support also Cumont's comparison of this image to the Mithriac god of Time. The explanation was provided to Cumont himself by the recent discovery of three Greek Mithriac inscriptions under the slopes of the Aventine near the Tiber. All three are dedications to "Zeus Helios Mithras." In one of them the identification of divinities of different origins proceeds further; this is dedicated "Διὶ Ἑλίῳ Μίθρα Φάνητι. . . ." Here for the first time the introduction of Orphic doctrines into the mysteries of the Persian god is explicitly and unmistakably attested. Since Mithras and Phanes were confused into one and the same supreme deity, and since the religious exegesis was applied to assimilate the qualities of the two gods and to conciliate the differences of the two sacred traditions, it is no wonder that we often remain uncertain how to interpret some artistic monuments. The youthful image of the Modena relief is at the same time Mithras and Phanes. Moreover, the assimilation of elements and attributes does not stop here. The serpent surrounding the body of the god does not belong to the

⁸² On the cosmic egg, and the recent studies on this subject, see I. M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus*, 1941, p. 226, note 25. On the assimilation of Mithras with Phanes, and the confusion of the sphere or the rock of Mithras' birth with the cosmic egg (perhaps, e.g., on the Borcovicus sculpture), see Saxl, *Mithras*, p. 73, p. 74, note 1.

Mithriac statues of Aion we have examined before. In fact, in the same way as we have previously seen the identification of Aion with the supreme Sun-God, in the Orphic texts Phanes is described as having an aspect entirely similar to that of Chronos, by whom he was begotten. The same contamination of different deities and legends and confusion of heterogeneous elements appear also on other monuments. We have seen the two halves of the cosmic egg or sphere above and beneath the bust of Mithras-Phanes on the sculpture from the Mithreum of Borcovicus (Fig. 18), and the lower hemisphere under other representations of the Mithriac "Chronos," especially under the bearded image on the *φυλακτήριον* of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna (Fig. 10) perfectly suitable for Aion-Chronos, but not at all becoming to the figure of Phanes coming to life. We have seen the lion-headed demon holding the attributes of the supreme command, and we have noticed on its body the signs of the Zodiac symbolizing its rule over the seasons. In the same way, probably, on our relief the leonine mask is the sign of the Zodiac dominating in midsummer, the ram and the capricorn those presiding over the beginnings of spring and autumn. We have said also that the heads of the winds in the four corners of the relief are related to the conception of the four seasons. The animal hoofs of the god, finally, call to mind, as well as the identification of Phanes with Pan, also the invocations to Aion identified with this god, for the accentuation, we said before, of his character of a panthean deity. A fortunate discovery of recent years, indeed, presents us with one of the monstrous images of Chronos-Aion we have often mentioned before, but this time standing on sheep's legs and hoofs (Fig. 5).⁸³

The disc of the Zodiac, we were saying, replaces sometimes the sphere of the universe on Atlas' shoulders. If indeed the disc of the Zodiac is the fittest image of the wheel of Time, both as a representation of the rotation of the sky determined by eternal laws and of the first Cause generating and renewing human destinies, on the other hand the heavenly sphere is another obvious attribute of that first Cause, the globe which is the Empyrean where it has its residence.⁸⁴ Zervan-Τύχη,⁸⁵ the primeval Cause that rules over human destinies through the rotation of the planets and the revolution of the Zodiac, as early as in the Avesta is usually associated in

⁸³ This is a relief discovered during the last excavations at Oxyrhynchos in Egypt by the Italian Society of Florence: see E. Breccia, "Un 'Cronos Mitriaco' ad Oxyrhynchos," *Mélanges Maspéro*, II (*Mémoires de l'Inst. français d'Archéol. orientale du Caire*, LXVII), Cairo, 1934-37, pp. 257 ff., pl. The statue, similar in all other details to the other specimens of the Mithriac demon, shows higher artistic qualities than usual. A rayed halo appears behind the lion's head; keys and sceptre are held in its hands, from which, furthermore, two snakes creep down, one on each side, to lick respectively a flaming altar and the usual Mithriac crater on the ground. The monstrous tongue develops into another serpent reaching the small altar. Between the two wings of the right side are represented a small lion and a star.

⁸⁴ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, pp. 85 ff.

⁸⁵ According to Theodorus of Mopsuestia: Ζορονάμ, . . . ὃν καὶ Τύχην καλεῖ (Photius, *Bibl.* 81; ed. Bekker, I, Berlin, 1824, p. 63).

invocations with the sovereign Heaven; in Firdousi fate is still represented sometimes by the image of Heaven, sometimes by that of Time. Ahura-Mazda was for ancient Persians "the eternal circle of Heaven": consequent, therefore, is the increasing identification, caused by astrological speculation, of this concept of the eternal Heaven with that of Zervan, the infinite Time ruling over the upper spheres. Thus Ahura-Mazda is invoked in Latin as *Caelus aeternus Iupiter*; and other allegorical representations of the Mithriac Caelus occur in the form of an eagle leaning over the heavenly sphere, adorned with the signs of the planets or with the zodiacal ring. The intermediate nature of χρόνος between the infinite time and the determination of time through the influence of the sky, is repeatedly the object of the Western philosophical speculation.⁸⁶ We are not surprised, consequently, when we find⁸⁷ the lion-headed demon (which we have seen associated with the signs of the Zodiac) standing on the sphere of the globe, either smooth or adorned with the two crossing bands of the Zodiac and the milky-way,⁸⁸ or otherwise on a hemisphere adorned with a moon-crescent. But it is Aion who is described in this position in the magic papyrus of Berlin: ἀκιννοκράτωρ, αἰωνοπολοκράτωρ, ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑπταμερίου σταθείς.⁸⁹ Elsewhere in the same papyrus⁹⁰ a figure, named Sol-Horus, is described as the decoration of an amulet, and presents the form of the lion-headed demon we know well by now, its body wound about by the coils of a serpent biting its own tail. He holds on his left hand the world's sphere and in his right the whip of the Egyptian gods. Shortly after this passage (line 164), the invocation again identifies the divinity with Aion: δεῦρό μοι, βασιλεῦ, . . . θεὸν θεῶν ἰσχυρόν, ἀπέραντον, ἀμίαντον, ἀδιήγητον, Αἰῶνα κατεστηρίγ- [μ]ένον. . . . Nor should we be surprised to find again the world's globe held by the solar deity in his quality of Kosmokrator in Western representations, and not only in a relief from the Esquiline belonging to the repertory of a Mithreum,⁹¹ but also in an earlier Pompeian fresco from the Casa di Apolline (Fig. 21).⁹² On both these

⁸⁶ . . . ἡ τοῦ χρόνου φύσις, ὥς φησιν . . . ὁ θεὸς Ἰάμβλιχος . . . μέση ἐστὶν αἰῶνος καὶ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τοῦ μὲν ἡγείται, τῷ δὲ ἀφομοιοῦται: Proclus Diad., *In Platonis Timaeum* 38 b; ed. Diehl, III (Leipzig, 1906), p. 51.

⁸⁷ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, no. 10 a, p. 196, fig. 21; no. 35, p. 214, fig. 41; no. 39, p. 215, fig. 46; no. 40, p. 216, fig. 47.

⁸⁸ On the meaning of the two λοξοὶ κύκλοι see Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, p. 89, note 5; *Röm. Mitt.*, LI, 1936, pp. 55 f.

⁸⁹ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, I, 203 (vol. I, p. 12). In the great Paris magic papyrus (*ibid.*, I, p. 147, lines 2373 ff.) is described another effective amulet, "which Hermes created for the wandering Isis," useful in magic operations for the benefit of the house or workshop: it is a waxen figurine representing a pilgrim holding his stick and his bag, standing on a ball around which a snake winds; another snake creeps along his stick. The figure must wear a περίζωμα which calls to our mind the garment of the god on the Roman relief of Aion and Kore, Fig. 6.

⁹⁰ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, I, p. 10, line 144: ἐστὶν δὲ ὁ γλυφόμενος εἰς τὸν λίθον Ἡλῖωρος ἀνδρ[ῖας] λεοντο-πρόσωπος, τῇ μὲν ἀριστερᾷ χειρὶ κρατῶν πόλον καὶ μάστιγα, κύκλῳ δὲ αὐτοῦ δράκοντα οὐροβόρον. . . .

⁹¹ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, no. 18 b, p. 202, fig. 29; Saxl, *Mithras*, fig. 88, pl. 17.

⁹² S. Reinach, *Rép. de peintures*, p. 24, 9; A. Schlachter, *Der Globus* (Στοιχεῖα, fasc. VIII, 1927), p. 99, fig. on p. 106; *Röm. Mitt.*, LI, 1936, p. 57, fig. 8.

monuments the solar god holds in his other hand also the second attribute described for the magic amulet. This also occurs on the coins dedicated to the cult of Sol Invictus



Fig. 21. Helios as Kosmokrator, Pompeian Fresco from the Casa di Apolline

introduced into Rome from the East, and not before the third century after Christ, to be precise first by Elagabalus and later again by Aurelian.⁹³ This whip may be, as

⁹³ Cf. M. Bernhart, *Handbuch zur Münzkunde der röm. Kaiserzeit* (Halle, 1926), p. 68, p. 235. See also the Syrian bronze coin, or *tessera*, from Damascus in Berlin, Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, p. 215, note 2: it is datable about A.D. 300, and represents on one side the radiated bust of the sun holding the heavenly sphere in the right and the whip in the left, on the other the bust of the moon with the torch and with a crescent on the forehead; the inscriptions

generally interpreted, a mere abbreviation of an element belonging to the Western iconography, peculiar to Sol as a charioteer. On the other hand, it may well be a derivation from the image of the cosmic god of Egypt and of the East.⁹⁴ As a matter of fact, symbols and attributes becoming to the supreme deity of the Eastern religions could not meet any difficulty in being applied to the representations of the eclectic doctrines which spread throughout the late classical world. Similar symbols and attributes were familiar indeed as early as the time of the pre-Socratic philosophers to express the ideas referring to the divinity. To god, the primeval being, without a beginning and without an end according to Thales' definition, was compared the sphere, which presents the same peculiarities, and before which we see grouped the seven wise men, meditating, on the two well-known mosaics from Torre Annunziata in Naples and from Sarsina in the Villa Albani:⁹⁵

Haec aeterna manet divisque simillima forma,
Cui neque principium est usquam, nec finis in ipsa.

(Manilius, *Astronomica*, I, 211 f.)

Thus are especially defined the peculiarities of the heavenly globe in the exact formulation of Aristotle as against Plato's *Timaeus* (*De caelo*, I, 10, 280 a). And, by antithesis, according to Alcmaeon of Croton (see H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*⁵, I [Berlin, 1934], p. 215, fr. 2), men are bound to die because they cannot turn the straight line of life into a circle: *τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φησὶν Ἀ. διὰ τοῦτο ἀπόλλυσθαι, ὅτι οὐ δύνανται τὴν ἀρχὴν τῷ τέλει προσάψαι*. But the identical expressions and formulas pass from pure speculation to cosmogonic and religious doctrines, to the world of magic and of mysteries. Thus in an Orphic hymn Uranus has taken up all the qualities of the supreme god without beginning and without end, the primeval being and creator of everything, which turns around the earth like a sphere.⁹⁶ Almost with the identical words Isis—or rather perhaps Isis assimilated with Aion—is in-

read Ἀνατολή and Δύσις (cf. A. v. Sallet in *Zeitschr. f. Numismatik*, V, 1878, pp. 108 f., p. 350, pl. II, 8). Reitzenstein mentions this coin, in a passage in which he compares Aion to the conception of the two-headed Ianus; Orient and Occident would express here the whole extension of the sky.

⁹⁴ As a matter of fact, as regards the Sol from the Mithreum on the Esquiline, Saxl not only suggests on stylistic grounds the oriental origin of the relief with Mithras tauroktonos from the same find, but proves also that the image of Sol himself because of the gesture of his right hand finds an exact parallel on similar fictile representations of Egyptian provenance, on which indeed the sphere and the whip on the left are replaced by a crocodile: see Saxl, *Mithras*, pp. 30 f., figs. 88-89, pl. 17.

⁹⁵ Schlachter, *op. cit.*, *passim*; O. Brendel, "Symbolik der Kugel," *Röm. Mitt.*, LI, 1936, pp. 1 ff.; pp. 28 ff.

⁹⁶ Οὐρανὸν παγγενέτορ, κόσμον μέρος αἰὲν ἀτειρές, | πρεσβυγένηθ', ἀρχὴ πάντων πάντων τε τελευτή, | κοσμοκράτορ, σφαιρηδὸν ἐλισσόμενος περὶ γαῖαν, | οἶκε θεῶν μακάρων . . . (*Orph. Hymn.*, IV; E. Abel, *Orphica*, 1885, p. 60).

voked in another hymn as the beginning and the end of things, the only and eternal ruler of the world.⁹⁷ Going back to the symbolism in the representations of the sphere, the globe on which the Phoenix is resting on some coins⁹⁸ may replace the inscription AION which we have seen elsewhere associated with the bird symbolizing the renewal of the ages. The evident meaning of the symbol has appeared to us in the *aureus* of Hadrian (Fig. 19 e), in which the globe with the Phoenix is held by the youthful image of *Saeculum* himself, surrounded by the turning wheel. But, in the same way as we have already noticed for the ring of the Zodiac, little by little the symbol of the sphere too becomes devoid of all its original philosophical and religious content; it appears thus on innumerable Roman coins bearing the same meaning as the late meaning of Aion, and merely signifying, like the symbol of Aeternitas, or rather of Aevum, an omen of long life to the Emperor.⁹⁹ Elsewhere in the later iconography the sphere, sometimes crossed by the two bands of the Zodiac and the milky-way, becomes the material image of the heavenly globe: so, for instance, in the image of Urania and in the representations of the Parcae on the sarcophagi depicting the myth of Prometheus.¹⁰⁰ Here the Parcae, standing before the heavenly sphere or before the sundial, have preserved the mere function of reading the horoscope of the newly born child; and to the sphere, of all its former content of thought, only the modest part remains that was tenaciously assured to it, because of its connections with human life, by the superstitious practices of the astrologers.¹⁰¹

In the Pompeian fresco from the Casa di Apolline we have seen the sphere of the cosmic deity of the Gnostics held by a divine figure deriving from the classical iconography. In the same way the marble figure representing the Mithriac god of Time in the Mithreum of Emerita¹⁰² shows a blooming youthful body, surrounded by serpents, and which probably had, as we said before, a human head. But we do not need to adduce the attraction always exerted by the artistic images of the classical world upon the representations of the later syncretistic and mystic religions—an example of which we have mentioned above when speaking of Atlas—in order to explain the youthful aspect of Aion on the monuments where he appears as the god of the

⁹⁷ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 270: ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος εἶ, πάντων δὲ σὺ μόνῃ ἀνάσσεις· ἐκ σέο γὰρ πάντ' ἔστι καὶ εἰς Αἰῶνα τελευτᾷ. According to Reitzenstein Isis is here identified with Αἰών; but see Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 78, on the difficulty of deciding when on these magic formulas it is a question of a personification and when of a common noun.

⁹⁸ Schlachter, *op. cit.*, p. 74, p. 76, pp. 81 ff.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80 f.; W. Koehler, *Personifikationen abstrakter Begriffe auf röm. Münzen* (Diss. Königsberg, 1910), pp. 23 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Brendel, *loc. cit.*, pp. 89 ff.

¹⁰¹ Cf. W. Gundel, *Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Begriffe Ananke u. Heimarmene* (Giessen, 1914), pp. 71 ff.

¹⁰² *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles-Lettres*, 1905, fig. on p. 149; J. R. Mélida, *Cat. Mon. de España, Provincia de Badajoz*, Madrid, 1925, no. 1084, pl. C, fig. 138; R. Menéndez Pidal, *Historia de España*, II, *España Romana*, Madrid, 1935, p. 440, fig. 248.

Zodiac. We may find the explanation from within the mystic religions and the magic literature themselves. In fact, although Aion mostly appears in them in the form of an old man,¹⁰³ we may read, in the *Mythographus Vaticanus III* we have mentioned before, the following passage: Saturnus secundum fabulam cum sit senex posse fieri puer fingitur, quod commentum ab hac re ortum fertur, quod corpus singulis annis senescere in hieme et rivivescere in vere videtur.¹⁰⁴ And Nonnus says similarly¹⁰⁵ that Aion "changes the burden of old age like a snake who sloughs off the coils of the useless old scales, rejuvenescing while washing in the swells of the laws [of time]." The clearest formulation of the conception may be quoted from a still later hymn (IX) by Bishop Synesius of Cyrene:

ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἀγήραος
Αἰὼν ὁ παλαιγενής
νέος ὢν, ἄμα καὶ γέρων. . . .

And the contrast between the current poetical image of Time as a gray-headed old man and his artistic representation is most strikingly confirmed in the ἔκφρασις of John of Gaza, where Aion is indeed called by the stereotyped poetical formula *προπάτωρ*, but is described on the contrary in his picture as a youth in his full bloom, in shining majesty, radiating light from his body as he sits on Olympus.¹⁰⁶ We have thus found as well in literature as in art a convincing confirmation for the interpretation as Aion of the winged and naked youth who lifts on his wings to heaven the imperial couple on the base of Antoninus Pius' column (Fig. 22).¹⁰⁷ Around his left arm winds the serpent which, together with his powerful wings, recalls the lion-headed demon and the images of the oriental religions; and he holds in his left hand the globe, adorned with the Zodiacal ring, the moon, and the stars.

The monuments have thus reflected to us the multiplicity of the conceptions expressed by Aion in thought and religion of late antiquity. On one hand the symbols flowing over to the primeval and supreme god of Time from the religions of the East as well as from the speculations of the West in the doctrines of magic and mysteries, appear crystallized in the lion-headed demon; on the other hand, for the cosmogonic divinity is forged an anthropomorphic image, by which already classical art had visualized the concept of time of Hellenic philosophical speculation, and whose attitudes, attributes, and associations may be derived either from the philosophical thought

¹⁰³ Lackeit, *Aion*, pp. 89 ff.

¹⁰⁴ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, II, p. 53, § 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Dionys.*, XLI, 180 ff.: . . . γήραος ἄχθος ἀμείβων, | ὥς ὄφρις ἀδρανέων φολίδων σπείρημα τινάξας, | ἔμπαλιν ἡβήσειε λελουμένος οἶδμασι θεσμῶν. In this passage too Aion is associated with the Horae.

¹⁰⁶ ἀμφιθαλής, line 136; ἀρτιθαλής, line 146; with θαλερὸν δέμας, lines 145, etc. A derivation from Nonnus' poetry is also the image of Aion in his wheel, line 140: ὃς νοερῇ στροφάλιγγι γονὴν βιώτοιο φυλάσσων. . . .

¹⁰⁷ W. Amelung, *Skulpturen des Vatik. Mus.*, I, p. 883, no. 223, pl. 116; L. Deubner, *Röm. Mitt.*, XXVII, 1912, pp. 16 ff.; R. Hinks, *Myth and Allegory*, p. 42, pl. 20.

or from the oriental religions. This may be introduced with its own meaning, by now universally understandable, into a representation of oriental mysteries. It is quite true that in this age Aion is a fluid conception;¹⁰⁸ and no wonder, since we have seen converging to it from the most different sources a multitude of ideas and terms, often

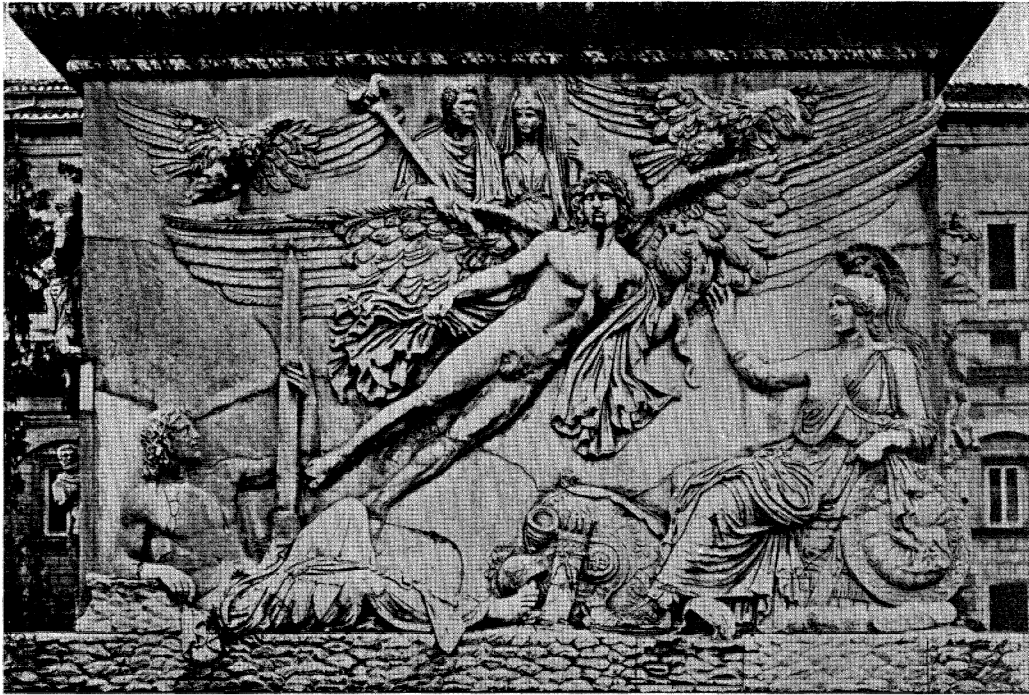


Fig. 22. Aion on the Base of the Column of Antoninus Pius

disagreeing among themselves, from philosophical speculation and from religion, from the East and from the West.¹⁰⁹ The name of Aion may well be used often as a mere attribute, since its essence is nothing else than the first quality from immemorial times assigned by philosophy to the primeval divine being; furthermore Aion is the quality which religion and mysticism assign to the supreme deity, under whatever name he is worshiped. As this first quality of the supreme being Aion himself becomes a god, but he may still be distinguished from the supreme being, whose first born child he is,

¹⁰⁸ This is the point on which Nock especially insists. We shall not entirely follow, however, his most radical conclusions, such as "there was not under the Empire a well-known and influential complex of ideas about Aion" (*loc. cit.*, p. 99); that "it was not a proper *nomen*—hardly an individuality" (p. 84), etc.

¹⁰⁹ "So ist auch die Gestalt des Gottes Aion ein typischer Vertreter der gnostisch-synkretistischen Bewegung, in der sich orientalisch-religiöse Vorstellungen mit der Gedankenwelt der griechischen Philosophie umkleiden und dadurch diese seltsam schillernden Gestalten hervorrufen, deren Wesen uns so schwer fassbar ist": Zepf, *loc. cit.* in note 9, p. 274.

a *δεύτερος θεός*.¹¹⁰ On the other hand it has appeared to us by all evidence that Aion is not merely a name running from mouth to mouth, but that it has assumed itself by now, in cosmogony as well as in the world of magic, the pantheistic meaning of the supreme and primordial divinity of the mysteries, that Aion has become himself one of the panthean deities of this late syncretistic religion. So much the less shall we be surprised, consequently, when we find used for him adjectives and attributes which occur endlessly also for other deities, which we may rather say are granted practically to each divinity rising to the rank of supreme and panthean deity. If in the magic invocations *αἰών* may be used certainly as a mere attribute of the god invoked, it appears certain, notwithstanding, that other times *Αἰών* is the name of one of the divinities identified with the supreme god. Nay, sometimes, the position of his name is specially emphatic, revealing both the great value attributed to its expression in magic practices, and the first rank attributed to it among the denominations of the supreme being, in the same way as the essence of Aion is his first quality.¹¹¹ By Apollo himself Aion is described as the supreme divine being in one of the oracles from Claros: "a fire rising above the cavity of heaven, continuously in movement, infinite." He is invisible even to heavenly powers if he does not want to reveal himself; and his name is unspeakable.¹¹² The same terms occur everywhere in the magic papyri.¹¹³ In the Berlin papyrus describing him standing on the sphere of the universe, he is invoked as the primordial being (*προπάτωρ . . . αἰωναῖε Αἰών*),¹¹⁴ and in the Leiden papyrus¹¹⁵ he is invoked as *παντοκράτωρ θεός*, the ruler of the generations, who nourishes and makes everything to prosper, "who has a secret, unpronounceable name." And in fact the identical invocations return in two other magic passages, where, however, the name Aion is not pronounced.¹¹⁶ We have seen before in the great magic papyrus

¹¹⁰ σὺ εἶ ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παλιγενοῦς Αἰώνος (*Pap. Gr. Mag.*, VII, 510; vol. II, p. 23); and in *Poimandres*: ὁ θεὸς αἰὼνα ποιέι, etc. See Lackeit, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 84.

¹¹¹ Thus, e. g., in the Leiden papyrus (*Pap. Gr. Mag.*, XIII, 995; vol. II, p. 129), where this final invocation follows a long series of cryptic formulas: ὁ μέγας, μέγας Αἰών, θεέ, κύριος Αἰών; or in the London papyrus, A. Dieterich, *Abrahas* (Leipzig, 1891), pp. 68 f.; cf. *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, V, 460 ff. (vol. I, p. 196):

καλῶ σε τὸν κτίσαντα γῆν καὶ οὐρανόν

 ὁ ἀπλάνητος Αἰών, εἰσάκουέ μου.

¹¹² K. Buresch, *Klaros* (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 97 f.:

Ἔσθ', ὑπερουραίου κύτεος καθύπερθε λελογχώς,
 φλογμὸς ἀπειρέσιος, κινούμενος, ἄπλετος Αἰών . . .
 οὐνομα μηδὲ λόγῳ χωρούμενος, ἐν πυρὶ ναίων, . . .

¹¹³ See Nock, *loc. cit.*, pp. 97 f.

¹¹⁴ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, I, 201 (vol. I, p. 12).

¹¹⁵ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, XII, 238 ff. (vol. II, p. 74); XII, 246 ff.: τίς δὲ Αἰὼν Αἰὼνα τρέφων αἰῶσιν ἀνάσσει; εἰς θεὸς ἀθάνατος ("What Aion, nurturing Aion, rules the aiones [ages]? There is one immortal god": transl. by Nock).

¹¹⁶ We have read before another testimony of the ineffability of his name in Suidas' gloss dedicated to Ἡραῖσκος, when dealing with his cult-statue at Alexandria, as well as in the gloss

of Paris the appeal to Aion as the *κοσμοκράτωρ*, and identified with Ra. We have mentioned before also other identifications with the supreme solar god of the Egyptians, and we have seen the mystic deity of Time assume his attributes. In the same way we have noticed the identification of Aion with other pantheistic divinities. We have seen him little by little usurp the place of Kronos-Chronos, and invested with the same peculiarities. In the passage by Suidas where his statue at Alexandria is mentioned, it is affirmed that the Alexandrians identify him with Osiris and Adonis, and in Philo of Byblos the name of Aion covers the image of another Semitic divinity, Baal Shamin. Athenagoras tells us that Isis was considered as "the nature of Aion."¹¹⁷ In other magic texts we find indeed the equation of Isis to Aion and to *Σοφία*: it may be that the magic amulet we have mentioned before with a beggar standing on a sphere "like Isis" hints at this identification.¹¹⁸ The convergence of religious ideas of East and West is noticeable in other identifications. Thus in a passage by Ioh. Lydus (*De mensibus*, IV, 64) Aphrodite's birth from the genitalia of Kronos is explained as her birth from Aion, and in another passage (*ibid.*, IV, 17) one of the Dioscuri is called Aion, and the other Physis: the Twins, indeed, representing life and death, mortality and eternity, have assumed also the significance of the two heavenly hemispheres, and may appear consequently on both sides of our lion-headed demon.¹¹⁹ We have seen, finally, our pantheistic deity as an object of cult, of magic practises and of mystic ceremonies. Beside the cult-statue at Alexandria, we have mentioned the statue of Aion which stood, in the age of Augustus, on the basis of Eleusis on which its dedication was preserved to us.¹²⁰ The qualities of benefactor attributed to Aion in the Eleusinian mysteries, are very similar to those extolled in the invocations of the magic texts. Thus we read, for instance, in a prayer which

Ἐπιφάνιος regarding the ceremonies of the god Aion. We should not wonder, consequently, since we have seen his frequent identification with Chronos, to see this latter name used for the mystic deity showing the characteristics of Zervan in the Orphic theogony of Hieronymus-Hellanicus (O. Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* [Berlin, 1922], p. 130, no. 54; Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 82, note 96). Here also the appellative Herakles is used, that is, the name of another god also identified often in Eastern-Hellenic mysticism with the solar deities (on this point see Pauly-Wissowa, *R.E.*, s.v. Herakles, Suppl. III, col. 1104; Saxl, *Mithras*, p. 78; and also in my paper, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, III, 1941, p. 230).

¹¹⁷ *Legatio*, 22, 6 (ed. Ubaldi, p. 101): *ἣν φύσιν αἰῶνος, ἐξ ἧς πάντες ἔφυσαν καὶ δι' ἣν πάντες εἰσὶν, λέγουσιν.*

¹¹⁸ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 156, note 1; p. 270; p. 31; *id.*, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, p. 174. See also Lackeit, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹¹⁹ Cumont, *Textes et Mon.*, I, pp. 85 f. In this connection Aeternitas is flanked by the two Dioscuri on coins of the third century after Christ.

¹²⁰ Nothing can be said about the aspect of this image, but that it had perhaps the attribute of a serpent, because the head of a serpent was found next to its base: see *Ἐφ. Ἀρχ.*, 1887, cols. 112 ff., no. 33. The presence of a serpent would exclude by itself Perdrizet's hypothesis,—very unlikely on other grounds as well,—according to which the statue at Eleusis did not represent the Mithriac and Orphic deity, but the Egyptian bird *Bennou*, the equivalent of the Greek Phoenix: see *Mon. Piot*, XXXIV, 1934, p. 112.

belongs to an interesting small group the purpose of which is to ensure good luck and prosperity to a determined place by way of hiding in it a cult-image or an amulet: *πλουτοδότα Αἰών, ἱερὲ Ἀγαθὲ δαῖμον· τέλει πάσας χάριτας καὶ τὰς σὰς ἐνθέας φήμας*.¹²¹ Indeed the very divine child born in the Eleusinian mysteries is called, in a passage by Saint Hippolytus, *Αἰῶνα Αἰώνων*.¹²² Damascius, in the aforementioned gloss of Suidas on Epiphanius, specifically speaks of these cult ceremonies, when he tells us that Epiphanius and Euprepus were two citizens of Alexandria experienced in different categories of rites, to be precise the latter in Persian ceremonies and the former in those of Osiris as well as in those of the god “who is celebrated as Aion,” whose name the writer does not dare to utter. To this god the prayers of the mystes are directed, that he may reveal himself to him in his real aspect.¹²³ The elected men have in themselves the divine *νοῦς*, which inspires in them the desire for a renewed union with the divinity: when the initiate will enter into ecstasy, he will be identified with Aion, and he will then achieve the knowledge of god.¹²⁴ The mystes indeed becomes himself Aion, in the same way as he is transformed into Osiris in the mysteries of Isis, when the initiation is accomplished: “Because today I—being born a mortal from a mortal womb, risen by powerful strength and by an imperishable right hand—I shall contemplate, with immortal eyes, with immortal spirit the immortal Aion, the ruler of the fiery diadems. . . .”¹²⁵

The god of the mystical vision, who, immobile, moves the celestial spheres, is the same whose image we have recognized in the artistic representation of the ruler of the Zodiac. It is after all the image of the old philosophical and poetical conceptions, which we have already found in Pindar’s description of Aion turning the wheel of time, but which is imbued now with a richer religious content and with an astrological meaning as well. The wheel of time moved by the cosmic god has assumed the aspect of the ring of the Zodiac, the symbol of the heavenly spheres, and at the same time the allusion to human destinies dictated by the supreme being and ruled by astral laws, which astrological science can interpret. This is why Aion, the cosmic god, may be identified with the *Εἰμαρμένῃ*, in the same way as Zervan may be called *Τύχη*, and why Tellus and the seasons, the aspects of time in relationship to humanity, are his un-failing associations. But this artistic type was created only in the late age,¹²⁶ in which

¹²¹ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 30; *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, IV, 3167.

¹²² *Refutatio omnium Haeresium*, V, 8, 45, p. 97, line 19, ed. P. Wendland (Leipzig, 1916); V, 8, 116, p. 166, ed. Duncker and Schneidewin (Göttingen, 1859).

¹²³ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, p. 23, 4.

¹²⁴ See Lackeit, *op. cit.*, p. 81: *συναύξησον σεαυτὸν τῷ ἀμετρήτῳ μεγέθει, παντὸς σώματος ἐκπηδήσας καὶ πάντα χρόνον ὑπεράσας Αἰὼν γενοῦ, καὶ νοήσεις τὸν θεόν*.

¹²⁵ A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*³ (ed. by O. Weinreich, 1923), pp. 4, 18 ff.; *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, IV, 517 ff.: *ἐπεὶ μέλλω κατοπτεῖν σήμερον τοῖς ἀθανάτοις ὄμμασι, θνητὸς γεννηθεὶς ἐκ θνητῆς ὑστῆρης, βεβελτωμένος ὑπὸ κράτους μεγαλοδυνάμου καὶ δεξιᾶς χειρὸς ἀφθάρτου, ἀθανάτῳ πνεύματι τὸν ἀθάνατον Αἰῶνα καὶ δεσπότην τῶν πυρίνων διαδημάτων. . . .*

¹²⁶ Not one of the representations of the god of the Zodiac can be earlier than the second

to the spreading of the oriental religions corresponds the revival of the old philosophical speculations in the schools of the Neopythagoreans and of the Neoplatonics. This is made evident by the fact that the same figure may appear also, in the mosaic of Antioch, devoid of any religious meaning, depicting with the very image provided by the old poetical description a purely philosophical conception. A valuable commentary on this is offered by the mosaic's inscriptions. And if the god of the Zodiac is represented as befits the solar and cosmogonic being, as a blooming and resplendent youth, Aion on the Antioch mosaic, more suitably to the common philosophical and literary image, has the aspect of an old man. But we have said that a youthful image was not excluded even for the representation of the philosophical conception of Aion elaborated by the Neoplatonics, and further that Aion appeared as a youth on the painting described by John of Gaza. From the monuments we have previously examined we have gained much light for a correct interpretation of this poet's passage referring to Aion (lines 137 ff.), of which we may venture now a new translation: "And self-sown Aion was represented in blooming splendor leaning toward another running circle ¹²⁷ of the much-whirled years, the forefather, surrounded by the ever-running roads; he, who, preserving the generation in an intellectually perceptible rotation, and lifting the whirling helm of Harmony, herds the year of twelve months turning it around, and causes one year to discharge itself into another, then noiselessly creeps away. . . ." Aion, much as the figure on our mosaic, is sitting on Olympus,

century after Christ. The particular popularity of the concept of Aion in the age of the Antonines is evidenced both by the monuments and by the literary tradition. To this age belongs the only great monument exactly datable, that is, the base of the column of Antoninus Pius. We have seen that in the year 138-139 the name of Aion was associated with the image of the Phoenix on the coins of Antoninus Pius perhaps celebrating the inauguration of a new Sothic cycle. To this age the hymns by Mesomedes belong. Also the creation of this new iconographic type of the god of the Zodiac might seem, consequently, to confirm Nock's conclusion (*loc. cit.*, pp. 95 ff.) that Aion's cult at Alexandria must be an institution of this time as well, and probably due to the same occasion of the coinage. But for this conclusion it is necessary to resort to the *extrema ratio* of considering as an interpolation the passage by Ioh. Lydus containing the reference to Aion's festival on the 5th of January which we have quoted before (*De mens.*, IV, 1). If we accept this passage, we must go at least as far back as the end of the Republican age for the celebration of the festival. And, furthermore, the existence of a mystic cult dedicated to Aion already in the age of Augustus seems to be confirmed by his statue at Eleusis belonging to this age.

In addition to the monuments dealt with above, see also the mention of an amethyst with an inscription probably reading Aion (ΑΙΩΝ), and the conjecture that on another amulet the inscription *ιαωμ* is isopsephic for *αἰών*, Nock, *loc. cit.*, p. 84, note 103.

¹²⁷ Πόλος is used not only for the heavenly vault, but also for a circle, such as the orbit of a star: see, e. g., Plato, *Epin.*, IX, 986 C: τοῖς δὲ μήτε τινὰ μοῖραν τάττωμεν μήτε τινὰ χρόνον, ἐν ᾧ διεξέρχεται τὸν αὐτοῦ πόλον --- "but to none of them let us appoint either a certain lot or a certain time in which it travels through its particular orbit. . . ." In an opposite way, a globe may represent an orbis, like the *orbis anni* (cf. Livy, I, 19, 6: anno qui solstitiali circumagitur orbe) upon which Tellus rests her right hand on some Hadrianic coins; see J. M. C. Toynbee, *The Hadrianic School* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 142, pl. VI, 23.

and probably turning the wheel of Time, but he appears in shining youthful aspect.¹²⁸ He is again differentiated, however, from the supreme and primeval being, who, in form of a solar deity appears as a child rising in the center of the universe, represented by the disc of heaven supported by Atlas' shoulders.

On the mosaic of Antioch we have perhaps an illustration of the arguments of discussion in the intellectual classes of the Antiochene society: a subject of philosophical discussion fit to entertain the nobility of the luxurious town during the sumptuous and everlasting banquets celebrated in the very halls and triclinia which similar mosaics were destined to embellish. The inscriptions of the mosaic seem to present to us the title of an argument for an evening's discussion, corresponding almost exactly to the title of the book of Plotinus' *Enneads* we referred to before: "Περὶ Αἰῶνος καὶ Χρόνων." Beginning from the age to which our mosaic belongs, in fact, the mosaics representing at least single personification of philosophical conceptions, if not complex ideas as that with which we have dealt, multiply themselves in Antioch.¹²⁹ All these may be an illustration of the philosophical movement in the learned and religious metropolis. They may be also, however, a mere testimony of the conceptions which were passing from mouth to mouth, of words which were much in the air, which were used more or less by everybody, *excerpta* of philosophical speculation which together with religious and mystic ideas had passed over, as would often happen, into popular philosophy. In the same way, already much before the time of our mosaic, philosophical doctrines of Orphism are transformed into formulas of popular wisdom in the funeral epigram of Hecataeus in distant Panticapaeum in Crimea.¹³⁰ But perhaps the mosaic of Antioch does not aim to be either exclusively a figured representation of a philosophical speculation, or that of a current conception. Opposite to eternal Time moving the everturning wheel are seated and intent on a solemn religious function the three fugacious times, transient like man's life. For the representation of the various aspects of the conceptions of Time, the artist would be irresistibly lured to bestow upon the image of Aion, together with the characteristics befitting its content of thought, at least the most peculiar attribute it had by now obtained in the artistic repertory. He must be satisfied, on the contrary, to differentiate the other figures—which nowhere else appear to us in ancient art—only

¹²⁸ Lines 145 f.: ἐν γὰρ Ὀλύμπῳ φαῖδρος ἐφεδρήσσει. . . . The action of moving the wheel by the uplifted hand may have been somewhat indistinct, as it is on many of the similar monuments we are dealing with, especially because of the fact that this hand was holding a group of folds of the mantle. John may easily have overlooked the most important feature in Aion's gesture, concerned as he was with the symbolical interpretation of his apparel.

¹²⁹ See G. Downey, "Personifications of Abstract Ideas in the Antioch Mosaics," *Transactions of the Amer. Philological Assoc.*, LXIX, 1938, pp. 349 ff.; *id.*, "Representations of Abstract Ideas in the Antioch Mosaics," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, I, 1940, pp. 122 f.

¹³⁰ See A. D. Nock, "Orphism or Popular Philosophy?," *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXIII, 1940, pp. 301 ff. Cf. also G. Downey, in *Church History*, X, 1941, p. 376.

through the age and the expression most suitable to the conceptions expressed by each of them. He groups these figures in a conventional banquet-scene, to which the presence of the incense-burner gives the obvious meaning of one of the ritual banquets particularly peculiar to the religious and mystic associations of his age. We may perhaps point out a last element, which seems to be quite new and unique in ancient art, in a detail used for the characterization of the conception represented by one of these figures, precisely in the strange modelling of Mellon's body. His torso seems to be painted with colors entirely different from those generally used for naked bodies, with dark tawny tones, with shades of red and violet; they may be meant, consequently, to signify the mist which is still enveloping the Future, before he acquires the clear appearance of present reality.¹⁸¹ Aion is displaying only the activity assigned him by philosophy and poetry, he has not the aspect of a cosmogonic deity nor the character and the attitude proper to a magic talisman. Our mosaic is neither a profession of faith, a kind of a perpetual hymn renewed by a mystes to his divinity, as we have interpreted another mosaic of Antioch in the House of the Isiac Mysteries; nor is it a prophylactic means to avert bad luck, such as we have recognized in the mosaics of the House of the Evil Eye.¹⁸² It is the representation of a philosophical concept. It is not improbable, however, that to the very artistic representation of Aion—a philosophical concept, but indissolubly bound by now also to the name of a pantheistic divinity—a supernatural power was attributed, similar to that exerted by the very presence of the statuary image of a god within a house, even without the practice of a cult devoted to him. In the artistic expression of the purely philosophical conception of Aion, to which in this age, however, so rich and lively religious content had been conveyed both in scientific speculation and in popular wisdom, a kind of wish was bound to be implicit. Its presence may have been almost an equivalent to one of those *φυλακτήρια* which lower social classes and more superstitious people used to bury beneath the foundations of the house for its safeguard, and among which we believe we have recognized one with the very image of Aion (Fig. 10). From the contempla-

¹⁸¹ The increasing importance of color and light in the painting of late antiquity appears, e. g., from the descriptions by John of Gaza. Flesh-color is accurately described, varying according to the nature of the person represented: the complexion of Sophia is pale, that of laborious Virtue is brown, the face of the personification of Summer is sunburnt. Attire, as well as lights and shadows, may accentuate the color of the complexion (see Friedländer, *op. cit.*, pp. 220 ff.). The importance of color in painting is stressed again in a passage by Chorichius of Gaza, when he says that he would represent the allegorical figures of Ἀρετή and Ἀρχή, εἰ τέχνην τὴν Ζεύξιδος ἡσκησάμην καὶ κρᾶσις χρωμάτων ἐμοὶ τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα ἦν (Eis Ἀράτιον δοῦκα, 6, ed. Foerster, Leipzig, 1929, p. 49). Much before the time of these writers, Lucian (*Pisc.*, 16 [587]), in a rhetorical description of several personifications, describes the color of Truth as gray and misty: ἡ ἀμυδρὰ δὲ αὕτη καὶ ἀσαφὴς τὸ χρῶμα ἢ Ἀλήθειά ἐστιν.

¹⁸² See my papers on these subjects in *Berytus*, VII, 1942, pp. 19 ff., and in *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, III, 1941, pp. 220 ff.

tion of the mosaic may almost have risen an echo of the magic invocations, so frequent by now, to the cosmogonic and mystic god in order to obtain a similar protection:

δὸς πόρον, πρᾶξιν τούτῳ τῷ οἴκῳ,
ναὶ, κυριεύων ἐλπίδος, πλουτοδότα Αἰών.¹³³

DORO LEVI

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

¹³³ *Pap. Gr. Mag.*, IV, 3167 ff. (vol. I, p. 176).