



Overview of Greek Philosophy 4

Neo-Platonism and the Systems Which Led Up To It (From the end of the first century B.C. to the sixth century A.D.)

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The predominance of moral studies had produced, during the period just examined, an extreme distrust for all speculative knowledge. Abandoning all hope of finding certitude and happiness by way of rational speculation, philosophy began to seek for them in communication with the Divine. On the one hand, it placed God far away on heights inaccessible to reason. On the other, it admitted a *direct communication* of this inscrutable God with the human soul. This communication necessitated the recognition of new processes of knowledge in the soul: ecstatic and mystic intuitions of the subjective order; and the creation, in the objective or real order, of a series of intermediary beings in a descending scale between the inaccessible God and man. Influenced by those tendencies, it was natural that philosophy should incline towards religious doctrines, and towards those systems of the past which betrayed the closest affinities with religion.

External events favoured this characteristic evolution of Grecian philosophy in a very striking way. On the one hand, the philosophical centre of the age was Alexandria, the general rendezvous for three-fourths of the civilized world, a centre in which Grecian philosophy naturally felt the influence of oriental doctrines. On the other hand, in the second century A.D., the decadence of the Roman Empire was rapid. The people and the Caesars alike turned to strange religions, principally Eastern, for that principle of moral force which the depopulated Pantheon no longer afforded; and the introduction of these religions into the public life of the Romans exercised an indirect influence on philosophy.

Division.

The characteristic just referred to appears conspicuously in Neo-Platonism, the most interesting and most important philosophy of this period. Neo-Platonism filled the last three centuries of Grecian philosophy. It formulated a powerful synthesis, remarkable for the unity and coherency of its theories. This it is that distinguishes it from the similar systems which led up to it.

These latter imperfectly co-ordinated systems began to appear towards the end of the first century B.C. They influenced Neo-Platonism, and the new spirit lived in them: hence it is preferable to place them in the fourth period of this history, even though chronologically they were contemporary with the eclectic and sceptic systems treated above. We may, therefore, distinguish in the fourth period of Grecian philosophy: (1) the precursors of Neo-Platonism (§ 2); (2) Neo-Platonism itself (§ 3).

§ 1. THE PRECURSORS OF NEO-PLATONISM.
(From the end of the first century B.C. to the third century A.D.)

Two Groups of Precursory Systems.

The philosophical currents which developed, mainly at Alexandria, before the appearance of Neo-Platonism are two in number: (1) A current of Grecian philosophy, having its origin in a revival of Pythagorean ideas, and comprising Neo-Pythagorism and Pythagorean Platonism; (2) a current of Graeco-Judaic philosophy. There was besides, in the later years of the second century, and especially in the third century, a current of *Christian Philosophy* whose tendencies naturally connect it with the Patristic Philosophy.

Neo-Pythagorism and Pythagorean Platonism.

At a time when ancient doctrines of a philosophico-religious character were being revived Pythagorism was sure to attract the attention of philosophers. In the last century of the pagan era the Pythagorean *philosophy* reappeared (5), not indeed in the purity of its archaic form, but modified by compromises with other systems.

There were those, however, who would fain restore the Pythagorean doctrine just as it had been delivered by the philosopher of Samos: these were the *Neo-Pythagoreans*. But their Neo-Pythagorism is in reality an eclectic system, founded on Platonism and Aristotelianism, supplemented by fragments of Stoicism; its only Pythagorean attributes being its marked fondness for mathematics, for the symbolism of numbers, and for the mystic phenomena of religious asceticism. Indeed, its ascetical theories constitute the most original part of Neo-Pythagorism. Inferior gods and the daemons serve as intermediaries between man and the Supreme Divinity. God is so far above us that we could not know His wishes if He had not revealed them to us Himself: the *mantic* art puts man in communion with God; purificatory practices prepare him for commerce with the Divinity.

On the other hand, a group of eclectic Platonists produced a remarkable medley of Platonic, Stoic, and Peripatetic doctrines, mingled with theurgic and religious speculations. PLUTARCH OF CHAERONEA is responsible for this complex philosophy. In metaphysics he supports the Platonic dualism of God and the world-soul, but between these two opposing principles he interposes a whole legion of daemons as emissaries of Divine providence. He believes in the immortality and transmigration of souls (Plato); he teaches that the immediate intercourse of man, detached from himself, with God, makes up for the inadequacy of reason; he lays stress on religious practices (Pythagoras). MAXIMUS, APULEIUS OF MADAURA, ALBINUS whose lessons Galen had followed at Smyrna in 151-2, develop still more the role of those daemon-beings, intermediaries between God and matter. On this conception CELSUS bases a justification of polytheism. NUMENIUS (about 160) borrows from the Magi, the Egyptians, the Brahmins and Moses. Combined with Egyptian theories, we find again the same body of Platonic-Pythagorean doctrine in a series of works dated from the end of the third century, and transmitted to posterity under the name of HERMES TRISMEGISTUS. They contain a remarkable apology for national — especially Egyptian — polytheism, in which there is evidence of a vigorous though disheartened defence of paganism against triumphant Christianity. The writings of this Pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus figure largely in the Middle Ages.

Origin and Character of Graeco-Judaic Philosophy.

Of all the oriental peoples whom Alexander's conquests brought into touch with Hellenic civilization, the Jews alone may be said to have assimilated the Grecian philosophy, by

harmonizing it with their religious teachings. This assimilation was achieved in Alexandria. Sprung from religion, the philosophy of the Jews has ever been largely dependent on religion. It was at first considered *as a means for the thorough study of the Sacred Books*, though it soon outstepped this purely exegetic role. The Jews naively endeavoured to find in the Old Testament itself the ideas they had borrowed from the Greeks; and to this end they introduced the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. Like Neo-Pythagorism, the Graeco-Jewish philosophy looks for an opposition between the Divine and the terrestrial and emphasizes the contact of man with God by revelation. But these theories underwent very *characteristic modifications*, because they were adapted to Jewish dogmas and to the philosophical conceptions which these dogmas upheld. Considering it as a whole, this movement of ideas was in its tendency Jewish on the religious side, Grecian on the philosophic side.

Philo.

The complete fusion of Jewish theology and Grecian philosophy was the work of PHILO the Jew (30 B.C.-50 A.D.). The following are the most characteristic of Philo's theories

(1) *General relations of Jewish theology to Grecian philosophy.* — Philo proclaims the absolute infallibility of the Sacred Books and the subordination of philosophy to theology. But if philosophy is to be subject to theology, the latter cannot do without the aid of the former. Philo sets great store on Grecian science: it is in fact, for him, the very incarnation of rational speculation: Grecian philosophy, even down to its polytheism, is an incomplete and imperfect form of the doctrine contained in the sacred writings. To overcome the difficulties which must beset this contention, Philo has recourse to the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, and thus establishes an affiliation between the teachings of the Bible and Grecian philosophy.

(2) *The dualism of the Infinite God and the finite world.* — His idea of the Divine transcendence forces Philo to hold that God is without attributes (*apoiios*), that He is inconceivable and ineffable. We know *that He is*, not *what He is*. But these very negations have for basis the perfection of Jehovah; and Philo not only emphasizes the negative concept of God but strongly insists on the positive concepts of Goodness (Plato) and Omnipotence. Imperfection and limitation, being irreconcilable with the notion of God, cannot find their principle in Him. Their principle is matter (Plato and the Stoics). Philo explains the action of God on the world, by having recourse to a series of intermediary beings which he calls *forces (dunameis)*. These Divine forces are not only exemplar-forms, but immanent principles of activity, proper to each natural substance (Stoicism). Philo identifies them with the angels (Judaism) and the daemons (Grecian religion). His notion of these Divine forces is not at all clear: on the one hand, they are distinct from God, since they are to communicate with a world essentially distinct from Him; on the other hand, they partake of the nature of God, since they are the intermediaries of His action on the world. Philo considers them as somehow proceeding from God, without adopting the theory of strict emanation. The primordial Divine force is the *logos*, the wisdom of God. Is this a personal being, like God Himself? Philo gives no definite answer to the question. The world is the result not of creation properly so called, but of an application of Divine power to matter preexisting in a chaotic state. The Jewish philosopher was apparently so engrossed in Grecian speculations that he could not shake himself free of them and give philosophical expression to the fruitful doctrine of creation, which is written so clearly on the first page of Genesis. The same dualism is prominent in Philo's psychology: the soul is a Divine principle, an angel, a daemon, united to a material body which is antagonistic to it (Plato). This opposition is made the principle of a religious mysticism.

(3) *Religious Mysticism.* — The trammels of the body prevent man from knowing God in Himself; He is known only in the Divine forces in which He manifests Himself. The more a man becomes detached from the body, the nearer he approaches knowledge and virtue (Stoicism).

Nevertheless, we can rise to the knowledge of God as He is in Himself if a supernatural illumination unveils the Infinite to us. In this higher state in which God reveals Himself to us human consciousness disappears: this is the annihilation of man in the presence of God, the state of ecstasy, the prophetic state, to which any one may possibly be called.

§ 2. NEO-PLATONISM. (From the third to the sixth century A.D.)

General Features. Division.

The most striking feature of Neo-Platonism is religious mysticism. Man must conquer his sense-feelings by struggling against them; he must draw near to God by a series of steps or stages, and unite himself to the Infinite by employing aids of a religious nature.

Dependently on this mystic conception a whole system of metaphysics is developed: a system which is the expression of the most absolute pantheistic monism. Although the opposition between the Infinite and the finite is emphatically and even extremely stated, yet God is the living force whence all finite substances proceed by emanation, matter included. It might be said that Neo-Platonism consists in a strictly systematic description of the development or *processus* of the Divine being into the universe, and of the return of the soul to God.

Neo-Platonism is an *original syncretism or mixture of the different systems of Grecian philosophy*, because it interprets all previous theories in a mystico-religious sense. It reflects the Graeco-Judaism of Philo, as well as the Neo-Pythagorism and the Platonism of the Alexandrian period; it also bears the impress of Stoicism; and it betrays the influence of Aristotle to whom it is indebted for its method. But it owes its character principally to Plato who supplied it with important metaphysical elements, — and whose doctrines it claims to restore in their ancient purity. However, we need only compare its fundamental theses with those of the head of the Academy in order to convince ourselves that Neo-Platonism mistakes the true spirit of the Platonic system.

We can discern three periods in the development of Neo-Platonism, according to the forms which it successively assumed: (1) the philosophic and scientific period (third century A.D.); (2) the religious period (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.); (3) the encyclopedic period (fifth and sixth centuries A.D.).

The Philosophic Phase of Neo-Platonism. Plotinus.

Plotinus was an Egyptian by birth (204-5 A.D.). After having spent eleven years attending the lectures of Ammonius Saccas, who is regarded as the founder of Neo-Platonism, he came to Rome where he conducted a school of philosophy with extraordinary renown until his death in 270. His works were collected by Porphyry under the title of the *Enneads*. Plotinus has given its fullest development to Neo-Platonism. We will follow his working out of the two fundamental ideas which, in his view, sum up all philosophy.

(1) *The Process of Emanation from a Supreme Principle, the one source of all existing things*, explains the physical and the metaphysical worlds. According as this principle gives out its energy, it exhausts itself; its determinations follow a descending scale, becoming less and less perfect. The following are the successive steps in the process: —

(a) *The One*. — At the head of the intelligible world, far removed from the world of sense (Plato), reigns One Supreme Essence. To safeguard its transcendence, Plotinus states it to be *absolutely indeterminate (apeiron)*. No quality marks or defines it; nothing can determine it, for all determination implies limitation (negative theodicy). The Supreme Being has no attribute,

not even intellect or will: knowledge and volition suppose a duality of knower and thing known, of that which wills and that which is willed; and all duality is irreconcilable with the infinitely perfect. However, as this negative concept has for basis the Divine perfection, Plotinus has recourse to positive descriptions, the insufficiency of which, moreover, he fully recognises. By preference he describes the Supreme Being as the First (*to prôton*), the *One*, the *Universal Cause*, *Goodness* (Plato), *Light*. Immutable in itself, this First Unitary Being does not diffuse its *substance* into other beings, as the advocates of substantialist pantheism maintain; but it permeates them by its activity (dynamic pantheism); and what we call the proper, specific substantiality of things is simply the product of this activity. Furthermore, this outflow of the Divine activity into all other beings is not direct and immediate; it is effected through the agency of intermediary forces which emanate successively from one another. And as the effect is always less perfect than the cause, these activities are arranged in gradation according to their respective degrees of perfection, each one occupying a position which is lower the greater the number of intermediate steps by which it communicates with the Divine energy. What are these intermediaries into which the Divine energy flows, as it were, by cascades? Plotinus reduces them to three: Intelligence and the World-Soul in the suprasensible order; and, in the sensible order, Matter.

(b) *Intelligence*. — The One Primary Being by knowing Itself gives birth to a second principle, Intelligence (*nous*), the generation of which introduces duality into the Deity. The *nous* is its own proper object, and under this aspect its object is *one*; nevertheless, this unity admits a plurality of representations. This must be the case, because in virtue of the principle of progressive decadence, the *nous*, less perfect than the *One*, cannot absorb in one single act of knowledge the energy communicated to it by the First Being; this energy is dispersed and radiated into a multitude of *ideas*. Here we have the *kosmos noêtos* of Plato, with this essential difference, that with Plato the ideas are substances, whilst with Plotinus they are forces (*noeraî dunameis*), clustering together in the unity of the *nous*, but destined to become in turn generative principles of further activities.

(c) *The World-Soul*. — The *nous* or second principle necessarily produces a third, the Soul of the World. This World-Soul is of a hybrid nature, on the one hand intelligent like the *nous* in which it contemplates the ideas, on the other hand tending to realize in the sensible world the image of those same eternal ideas. The plurality which it embodies is still held together, just as in the *nous*, but it is on the point of scattering itself abroad in the outer world.

The universal World-Soul generates the particular souls or *plastic forces* (*logoi spermatikoi*), which are the forms of all things. These forces are themselves wavelets of the universal life which circulates through all things, and whose primordial source is ultimately found to be the First Being (*to prôton*).

(d) *Matter*. — How does Plotinus pass from the suprasensible to the sensible, material world? How does he reduce the one to the other, after his having with Plato insisted on the fundamental diversity which separates the *Idea* from *Matter*? He does so by an ingenious theory which avoids the dualism into which all the Platonists had fallen: *The World-Soul, with forces which are native to it, generates matter, and by uniting itself with the matter, produces corporeal and sensible beings*. Matter, according to Plotinus, is merely the space which conditions all corporeal existence; it is a pure possibility of being, mere nothingness, the *me on*, of Plato, which Plotinus identifies with primitive evil, *prôton kakon*. But is it not contradictory to make *matter* the evolution-term of the *idea*, to make *nothingness* a manifestation of *being*, to make *evil* a product of *good*? No, answers Plotinus, for every generative process implies a decadence or inferiority in the generated product. And in the series of Divine generations *there must be a final stage*, at which the primal energy, weakened by successive emissions, is no longer capable of producing *anything real*. A limit is necessarily reached beneath which there cannot be anything less perfect: this limit is *matter*.

In the sensible world plurality predominates, whilst in the suprasensible world all plurality is confined within the bonds of a unity more or less perfect. The world of sense, imprisoned in matter, is only a faint reflection of suprasensible principles whose unity is as unchangeable as that of the sun reflected by many mirrors. It is engendered and sustained at each moment by the World-Soul: this explains how and why it is the prolongation of reality. Plotinus made use of this explanation to defend the beauty and order of the material universe against the attacks of the Gnostics.

All the parts of the universe are soldered together by a cosmic sympathy; and the vibrations of the World-Soul, even in the tiniest things, have their influence on the whole universe. The sensible world is eternal, as is also the generation of the Divine activities. Plotinus analyzes in detail the efflorescence of the plastic forces of the World-Soul in sensible nature: from the heavens, whose soul presents the most perfect form of sensible life, the *stars* or the visible gods of the universe, and the *daemons* who are intermediaries between celestial and terrestrial things, — down to the *organic and inorganic bodies* of the earth itself.

Man occupies a definite place in this hierarchy. Souls existed before bodies; they dwelt in the bosom of the World-Soul until the needs of the cosmic evolution demanded their union with matter. On these principles Plotinus easily engrafts the Platonic theories of the survival and migration of souls, and of the extrinsic union of soul with the body. Those souls alone will be restored to their primitive state, which, at the moment of death, will be completely detached from sensible things; the others will animate new bodies proportionate in dignity to the degree in which each is found detached from matter. This is why the great end of life and of all philosophy is to achieve the mystic return of the soul to God.

(2) *The Mystic Return of the Soul to God.* — The whole metaphysical system of Plotinus depends on this mystic union, and is a preparatory step towards its realization. Happiness results from the perfect exercise of intellectual activity; but real science is independent of experience and opinion, — it is the fruit of thought. Hence Plotinus sees the essence of virtue in detachment from the world of sense, self-purification (*katharsis*) and the elevation of the soul to the invisible world.

The Understanding has being as its object; and in its subjective development it mounts in succession the different degrees of the metaphysical order. First, by way of reasoning it understands *ideas* and *genera suprema*. Then, looking inward, it contemplates directly, and without reasoning, the intelligible world. At this second stage the soul becomes united to the *nous*, to which it belongs: it is through the *nous*, and in it, that the soul arrives at this knowledge; it still, however, retains the consciousness of its separate personality. Finally, in a third stage, the soul contemplates the Primal Being itself: it becomes God. This contemplation is indistinct and unconscious, for the soul is now rapt above all knowledge and change, like the Supreme Being itself. Thus the highest form of intellectual activity is an unconscious form: the ecstasy (*ekstasis*) by which the ravished soul is lost in God.

We can easily understand then why Plotinus turns to religion as a means to facilitate the ecstatic union. In spite of his pantheistic monism, he adheres to polytheism and to magic, for he deifies several of the energies of the Primal Being. By their interposition man more easily raises himself up to the Absolute One. This thought became the fundamental dogma of the polytheistic mysticism of Plotinus's successors.

Porphyry.

PORPHYRY OF TYRE (232-33 to 304) is the most famous among the immediate disciples of Plotinus. He it was who popularized the master's tenets by collecting them into a treatise, *Aphormai pros ta noëta*. Porphyry adds nothing to Plotinus either in physics or metaphysics, but he develops the religious and ascetic side of Neo-Platonism. He tries to establish the doctrine of

mystic union on the worship of divinities and the mortification of the body, — which he subjects to purificatory privations in order to detach the soul from the senses. Porphyry serves in this twofold way as a link between Plotinus and Iamblichus.

Porphyry is also the first of the Neo-Platonic commentators on Aristotle. Neo-Platonism, in fact, considered the study of the *Organon* of Aristotle as an introduction to the philosophy of Plato. Porphyry devoted himself chiefly to formal logic, and he owes to the influence of the Stagirite the clearness and accuracy which posterity has always admired in his commentaries. His *Eisagôgê eis tas Aristotelous katêgorias* also called *peri ton pente phônôn*, met with unique success: it was not only commented by the Neo-Platonists of the succeeding centuries but afforded food for discussion to several generations in the Middle Ages. Porphyry wrote two commentaries on the *Categories*, defending them against Plotinus, and probably also a commentary on the *Prior Analytics*.

Religious Phase of Neo-Platonism.

Porphyry's successors retained nothing of Neo-Platonism but a mystic craving after the supernatural. A sort of religiosity is the sole preoccupation of the Syrian IAMBlichus (died about 330), who reared on the foundations of Neo-Platonism a regular international Pantheon in which he placed all the divinities he ever heard of. The long line of philosophers who constitute the theurgical school of Iamblichus, extends to the fifth century A.D., that is, to the very end of the era of Grecian philosophy. Before Neo-Platonism finally disappeared it rallied for a time: this last manifestation of life reveals a third phase of its history, the encyclopedic period.

Encyclopedic Phase of Neo-Platonism. Wane of Grecian philosophy.

During the closing period of its history, Grecian philosophy presents the characteristics common to all declines. Powerless to create, it merely commentates: it tries to make up for lack of originality by the great prolixity and excessive subtlety of its works. On the one hand, it amasses compilations of Neo-Platonism; on the other, it shows an increasing predilection — ever more and more pronounced — for commentaries on Aristotle. Porphyry had made this exegesis fashionable in the Neo-Platonic school (86); and his imitators were numerous. But still, not all Aristotle's commentators were recruited from the same ranks during this epoch of decline. Side by side with the Neo-Platonic interpreters, we have Peripatetic interpreters of the school of Andronicus of Rhodes and Alexander of Aphrodisias. While the successors of Porphyry try to reconcile Aristotle with Plato, the philosophers of the Lyceum, on the other hand, strongly accentuate the points of difference which separate the two great Grecian sages.

The philosophers of these later centuries are found in the three chief centres in the Eastern Empire: Constantinople, Athens, and Alexandria. With them we may also mention a few writers belonging to the period of the Latin decadence.

The School of Constantinople: Themistius.

The Christian emperors of the East made numerous attempts to start a school of philosophy at Constantinople and to set up the new capital as a rival of Athens and Alexandria. In the second half of the fourth century we find there THEMISTIOUS, one of the great commentators on Aristotle.

Though remaining an ally of paganism, Themistius, who held public office, made some concessions to the new religion which his personal protectors, the princes, were patronizing. The commentaries of Themistius on Aristotle reveal the disciple of the Lyceum; without any hostility to Plato, he combats the innovations engrafted on Platonism by Neo-Platonism.

Themistius had no immediate successors, and the philosophic movement at Constantinople lapsed into a slumber that lasted for centuries. In 618 the emperor Heraclius summoned an Alexandrian teacher to Constantinople in the hope that his lessons might arouse the Byzantine genius from its lethargy. The attempt was futile; the awakening was to be witnessed only by yet far-distant generations.

The School of Athens: Proclus and Simplicius.

Aristotle reigned as uncontested master at the school of Athens; it was there also that the most complete blending of Aristotelian dialectics with the mystic theosophy of the Neo-Platonists was finally effected. PROCLUS (410-485) is the most influential and characteristic representative of Athenian Neo-Platonism. He includes in his encyclopedia of Neo-Platonism (*Stoicheiôis theologikê* and *Eis tèn Platônos theologian*) all the topics discussed up to his time, — pantheistic metaphysics, mysticism, asceticism, divination, theology. Possessed of a systematic mind, and at the same time a fruitful writer, endowed with a striking talent for assimilation though powerless to create, Proclus embodies as it were in himself all the successive phases of the evolution of Neo-Platonism.

Triadic evolution is the vital idea in his philosophy. Every productive principle (*monê*) generates (*proodos*) a product which finally returns (*epistrophê*) into the bosom of the producing agent. For the term produced, although distinct from that which produces it, is only the continuation of this latter, and is consequently endowed with a fatal impulse to become absorbed in it again. This dynamic monism is the law of the world: the universal order is only its application. From the indeterminate *One* springs the *nous* (Plotinus), but this emanation is possible only because of certain intermediary unities (*autoteleis henades*) which Proclus makes personal gods (Iamblichus). In the *nous* he distinguishes three spheres, each of which he subdivides into groups of three and of seven, so as to form collections suitable for the pagan Pantheon. Matter is a direct product of one of the triads of the *nous* and not, as Plotinus taught, a final outflow from the World-Soul. Upon this system of metaphysics Proclus engrafts a mystic psychology; its basic principles being the ecstatic illumination of the soul by God and the deification of the soul by (polytheistic) religious practices (Plotinus and Iamblichus).

DAMASCIUS — a disciple of Ammonius of Alexandria — gave the Athenian school, about 520-530, a tendency in the direction of the dreamings of Iamblichus. Finally we come to the last notable personage of this pagan generation of philosophers, Simplicius, the fourth and last of the great Greek commentators of Aristotle.

SIMPLICIUS, a disciple of Ammonius and of Damascius, is the author of a voluminous commentary, several portions of which have come down to us. His commentaries are personal. He professes the greatest respect for Plato. He has left us many fragments and items of information, which are of the greatest possible utility for the elucidation of the teachings of his predecessors.

When the pagan spirit of the teaching at Athens could be no longer reconciled with the convictions of the majority of the hearers, now become Christians, the emperor Justinian, by his famous decree of 529 A.D., ordered the school to be closed. It is to this date historians refer the celebrated exodus from Athens of a group of incensed philosophers — Damascius and Simplicius were of the number — into the kingdom of a “barbarian” prince who sympathized with the spirit of the Grecian civilization. Their sojourn at the Persian court of Chozroës Nuschirwan was of short duration. Home-sickness drove them back to Grecian realms when the king of Persia concluded a treaty of peace with Justinian in 553. The school of Athens, however, remained closed for good; its old masters drifted apart and continued their labours in the obscurity of private life. It was mostly after 529 that Simplicius wrote the commentaries which are preserved to us from his hand.

The Alexandrian School: Ammonius.

AMMONIUS, a disciple of Proclus, is the most striking personality in the Alexandrian school of this later period. He perpetuated the tradition of scientific Neo-Platonism, and took up the interpretation of Aristotle in the spirit of Porphyry. During his long and influential career, Ammonius formed the minds of most of the philosophers of this closing epoch. Damascius was his disciple, and later on John Philoponus, Asclepius, Simplicius and Olympiodorus. Christians attended his lectures and he always avoided wounding their religious susceptibilities. Not only in fact did the Alexandrian school display a considerate sympathy with the Christian beliefs, but — unlike that of Athens — it even tended daily more and more in the direction of Christianity. JOHN PHILOPONUS, who wrote Aristotelian commentaries, and a treatise on the Eternity of the World directed against Proclus, within the first third of the sixth century, expressly professed the Catholic religion. OLYMPIODORUS was also a convert; indeed we might say that from the middle of the sixth century the Alexandrian school was mainly Christian.

A new cycle of speculations was thus gathering force when in 640 the Arabs invaded Egypt and burned the Alexandrian schools and the famous library which had long been the glory of the Caesars.

Philosophy in the West.

When Rome ceased to be the political capital of the world, she also lost her scientific preeminence. The fourth century produced in the West only a few insignificant commentaries on logic and a few Latin translations of Greek works. VEGETIUS PRAETEXTATUS and MARIUS VICTORINUS (who lived as a rhetorician under Constantius about 350) are the only writers worthy of mention. In the fourth or fifth century CHALCIDIUS, and in the fifth MACROBIUS, devoted themselves to Platonic and Neo-Platonic compilations which were afterwards widely read and consulted in the early Middle Ages. As for MARTIANUS CAPELLA and Boëthius, although they are both products of Grecian culture, they belong rather to the medieval period.

The influence of Grecian philosophy extended down through the medieval period, making itself felt in three separate centres: in the Byzantine, in the Asiatic, and in the Western philosophy. Accordingly, we find it in the philosophy of the Fathers of the Church, which marks the transition from Grecian philosophy to the philosophy of the Middle Ages.

Maurice de Wulf. *History of Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1909.

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