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# The Elixir and the Stone

Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Since the seventeenth century, science has been contending with philosophy, organised religion and the arts for domination over Western civilisation and society. By the middle of the twentieth century, the battle appeared to be won; scientific rationalism and scepticism were triumphant. Yet in the last few decades a strong and potent counter-current has emerged. One manifestation of this has been the so-called occult revival.

*The Elixir and the Stone* is a remarkably rich and ambitious book that adds up to little short of an alternative history of the intellectual world. Perhaps for the first time it puts into their true context those shadowy alchemists and magicians who have haunted the imaginations of people for centuries. Moreover it offers a way of looking at the world that is in one sense 'alternative' but, in another, deeply historical.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Baigent was born in New Zealand in 1948, and obtained a degree in psychology from Canterbury University, Christchurch. Since 1976 he has lived in England.

Richard Leigh studied at Tufts University, Boston, the University of Chicago and the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Together they have co-authored a number of books including the international bestsellers *The Holy Blood* and *The Holy Grail*, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* and *Secret Germany*.

ALSO BY THE SAME AUTHORS

The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail

(with Henry Lincoln)

The Messianic Legacy

(with Henry Lincoln)

The Temple and the Lodge

The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception

Secret Germany

The Inquisition

BY MICHAEL BAIGENT

Mundane Astrology

(with Nicholas Campion and Charles Harvey)

From the Omens of Babylon

Das Geheimnis der Templer

Ancient Traces

MICHAEL BAIGENT AND  
RICHARD LEIGH

# The Elixir and the Stone

A HISTORY OF MAGIC AND ALCHEMY



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Une forêt des symboles est la nature  
Où le meute cherche la mandagore.

Fouilles-toi, et tu percevras  
L'alisier, cormier et alchemilla.

Ave, regina elementorum.

Le riche art de la chimie noire  
Vient du sortilège du gros bois.

La cithare saumâtre lave l'hermine  
Et la genêt l'ensachant.

Ave, mundi rosa.

Mais sois sans crainte. et tu verras  
Le Normand vainc le capétien.

JEHAN L'ASCUIZ



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Once again, we gratefully acknowledge the pastoral skills of Ann Evans and Jonathan Clowes, who, displaying a Cistercian virtuosity with loaves, if not fishes, have shepherded us and this book through the traditional writer's wasteland of illiquidity.

We wish also to thank the staff of Arrow, and especially Robin Waterfield, our editor, for his help and support. And we are grateful as well to Sacha Abercorn, Jane Baigent, Ann Baring, Brie Burkman, Lindsay Clarke, Leonidas Goulandris, Belinda Hunt, Sonia Kanikova, Peter Kingsley, Beverly Kleiman, Francis Kyle, David Milne-Watson, Andrew Newmark, Andrew Nurnberg, Isobel Pilsworth, Peter Phillips, John Saul, Esther Sidwell, Lucas Siorvanes, Yuri Stoyanov, Geoff Vanderplank, Jan de Villeneuve, Tatiana Wolff, as well as the staff of the British Library Reading Room, Bloomsbury, and the Warburg Institute, University of London.

## INTRODUCTION

Through whom does our civilization seek to define its identity? The answer would at first appear obvious enough. People still speak of 'Christian civilization', 'Christian culture', the 'Christian world'. Although not quite as frequently as in the past, people still speak of 'Christendom'. From such phrases as these, it is clear that Western society flatters itself by regarding Jesus Christ as the defining figure of the reality it has created. In fact, however, the figure who most accurately personifies Western culture is not the lamblike 'saviour' nailed to a cross. On the contrary, it is a very different figure - the magus, the magician, the sorcerer who, in Renaissance folklore, signed a pact of blood with 'the Devil'. The defining figure for our civilization is not Christ, but Faust.

Faust, or Faustus, endures today primarily, though not exclusively, through two monumental works of literature - Marlowe's play and Goethe's dramatic poem. Both of these works confront Western civilization with an embodiment of its collective identity. Both revolve around a man who, when one first encounters him, has already mastered all spheres of established knowledge, has traversed the entire spectrum of human experience and wonders compulsively where to venture next - wonders what new worlds there are to conquer, what new disciplines there are to investigate, what new domains of knowledge there are to explore. Unlike Jesus Christ, this figure does not seek to lead others to God, nor even to attain his own personal oneness with God. On the contrary, he seeks nothing less than to become God himself. In pursuit of this quest, he

employs the technical apparatus of his age to conjure to his bidding the repository of an immense and untapped power - a power which, by the standards of traditional Christian morality, is labelled 'infernal', 'demonic', 'diabolic', 'satanic'. With the repository of this power, Faustus makes his pact. He will be granted the resources and capacity to achieve everything he wishes to achieve, to obtain dominion over new realms of knowledge, to scale the heights and plumb the depths of human experience, to probe and chart the hitherto uncharted and unknown. And in exchange, at the termination of his allotted span, he will forfeit his soul.

There is an important distinction, however, between Marlowe's sixteenth-century treatment of the story and Goethe's, composed during the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. At the end of Marlowe's play, Faustus' forfeiture of his soul is permanent, irretrievable, irrevocable and irredeemable. At the end of Goethe's poem, the forfeiture - thanks to the intervention of '*das Ewigweibliche*', the 'Eternal Feminine' or 'Feminine Principle' - is cancelled, and Faust is enabled to attain redemption and salvation.

Today, civilization has an opportunity to write its own collective Faust script. It remains to be seen whether we do so in accord with Marlowe or with Goethe.

# **PART ONE**

# 1

## HERMES, THE THRICE GREATEST

FROM THE VERY beginning of the human experiment, there have undoubtedly been magicians, shamans, seers, wonder-workers and healers. Long before any historical record, such figures were already performing the sometimes disparate, sometimes overlapping functions of priest, prophet, sage, sorcerer, soothsayer, dream interpreter, diviner, astrologer, bard and physician. Their activities are among the first to appear in recorded history.

In the Middle East, at the dawn of the Christian era, such figures abounded. Indeed, it has sometimes been asserted that Jesus himself was but one of a plethora of wonder-workers or miracle-workers of his time, whose subsequent influence and impact on civilization was merely a fluke. Thus, for instance, according to the late Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University, Christianity was no more than a chance occurrence, which, like so many other historical phenomena, could easily have evolved differently, or not at all. Save for a haphazard concatenation of circumstances, we could have had, instead of two thousand years of Christendom, two thousand years of a religion based on the teachings of, say, Apollonius of Tyana. And certainly Jesus, as he appears in Christian tradition, has much in common with Apollonius.

A native of Tyana, now in Turkey, Apollonius was born early in the first century and died between AD 96 and 98. An account of his life was composed by the writer



Philostratus around AD 220. According to traditions collected and reported by Philostratus, Apollonius healed the sick, raised at least one individual from the dead and, on his own death, ascended bodily to heaven, accompanied by the singing of temple maidens. At an early age, he reputedly embraced Pythagorean thought. A devout vegetarian, he wore his hair conspicuously long. His opposition to blood sacrifice prompted him to adopt garb of linen, rather than of leather, fur or any other animal product. His passionate propensity for philosophical inquiry impelled him to travel extensively - in Italy, Greece, Egypt, Syria and Babylon. He refused to visit Palestine because he believed the Judaic cult of temple sacrifice defiled both the people and the country. Between AD 41 and 54, he resided in India, studying Hindu thought and what remained of Buddhism. Among his devotees was the Roman Emperor Vespasian, who adopted him as a spiritual adviser. Apollonius believed the only valid philosophy pertained to what he called the soul, 'because it is the soul, subject neither to death nor to birth, that is the source of being'.<sup>1</sup>

It would not be difficult to imagine far worse things than two thousand years of a religion based on Apollonius - although, like any other religion, it would doubtless have been warped by time, by social and political pressures, by dogmatism or fanaticism on the part of its adherents. As circumstances fell out, however, Apollonius was, to all intents and purposes, elbowed out of the picture by the so-called course of history; and it is only through the biography of Philostratus - a document of often dubious reliability - that we now know of him at all. Other wonder-workers of the period have been consigned to an even more complete oblivion.

One, however, whether real or fictitious, has survived in Christian tradition, to be handed down as the prototype of the magician - and thus, by definition, the 'black' or evil magician, the 'first fully developed legend of ... the black

magician' in Western history.<sup>2</sup> This is the figure who appears in the Acts of the Apostles viii, 9-24, as well as in the writings of Church fathers and later commentators, as Simon Magus. It *is* in the guise of Simon that Faust, or Faustus, makes his *début*.

There is a body of evidence to suggest that the original Simon - or the individual or individuals on whom he is based - was probably an adherent of the 'heresy' known as Gnosticism. One fourth-century Church father, Epiphanius, actually condemns him as being the founder of Gnosticism - a rather implausible assertion.<sup>3</sup> Other ecclesiastical writers depict him as claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God and even a personification of God the Father. He is described as travelling in the company of a prostitute from Tyre known as Helen, or Helena - implying an intended identification with, if not reincarnation of, Helen of Troy. One of the other names conferred upon her is said to be Sophia, the Gnostic term for the embodiment of Divine Wisdom. According to one commentator: 'Her representation as a harlot is intended to show the depth to which the divine principle has sunk by becoming involved in the creation.'<sup>4</sup>

In scripture and in later Church tradition, Simon functions as a kind of arch-adversary - an avatar of the forces of darkness, of the unholy and unclean powers to which the newly formulated Christian message is diametrically opposed. Thus, in Acts, he appears as a self-proclaimed wonder-worker and would-be Messiah. A charismatic individual with a fervent following of his own, he is - like Peter, but in his more sinister way - a 'fisher of men', or 'fisher of souls'. And when he and Peter meet, he offers the apostle money for the gift of healing by the laying on of hands. In other words, he attempts to purchase the curative power of the Holy Spirit for selfish and venal purposes, whence the sin known as 'simony' derives. He

also casts doubts on Jesus' status and questions Peter's authority as apostle.

In later accounts, the encounter culminates with Simon casting down a symbolic gauntlet and challenging Peter to a species of spiritual or magical duel, each having to match the other miracle for miracle.<sup>5</sup> At first, Simon actually does 'outperform' Peter, the wonders he works being more superficially dazzling. Unlike Peter's, however, they stem not from any divine power or mandate, but - by means of mere sorcery - from a more questionable and (according to Christian commentators) demonic source. To that extent, they are sullied, tainted, impure. Flashy though they may be, they are only the products of trumpery, of legerdemain, of hoax or fraud, appealing to the surface of consciousness but having no more profound validity. And, needless to say, Simon, in the traditional accounts, receives his obligatory comeuppance - tumbling from the height to which he has levitated himself, breaking his leg and being discredited.

On the basis of his appearance in Acts, Simon is a minor and inconsequential figure - a venal showman and charlatan, a petty obstacle to be got out of the way as Peter proceeds on his triumphant evangelical mission to the Samaritans. For later commentators, however, he becomes much more than just Peter's paltry rival with God's cards stacked against him. He becomes conflated with no less a figure than the Antichrist - not merely a human adversary, but an embodiment or emissary of the supreme spiritual adversary. For devout Christians, the original arch-magician came to be perceived, by definition, as a 'black' magician, an ambassador of the forces of cosmic evil. The powers he exercised were seen as emanating, by definition, from the ultimate source of iniquity, the Antichrist or the Devil. And all subsequent magicians, to the extent that they practised 'magical' arts, were stigmatized as walking in Simon's footsteps. Given Church teaching, they could not be seen as anything else. They could not, obviously, be

regarded as having access to divine power, could not be regarded as latter-day apostles, for that would have challenged the Church's monopoly of such power. And any exercise of power which did not stem from officially sanctioned ecclesiastical sources could only, by definition, be demonic.

Thus Simon Magus paved the way for Faust, the magician who contracts a pact with the Devil. Nor was the relationship between them confined to thematic parallels and a shared association with the shade of Helen of Troy. In German, the word *Faust* means 'fist' - which might perhaps, albeit with some strain, be deemed metaphorically appropriate. In Latin, however, *faustus* means 'the favoured one'; and it is precisely this sobriquet that Simon Magus adopts. According to Professor Hans Jonas:

It is of interest ... that in Latin surroundings Simon used the cognomen *Faustus* ('the favoured one'): this in connection with his permanent cognomen 'the Magician' and the fact that he was accompanied by a Helena whom he claimed to be the reborn Helen of Troy shows clearly that we have here one of the sources of the Faust legend ... Surely few admirers of Marlowe's and Goethe's plays have an inkling that their hero is the descendant of a gnostic sectary, and that the beautiful Helen called up by his art was once the fallen Thought of God through whose raising mankind was to be saved.<sup>6</sup>

In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Magus does not see himself as genuinely evil, as an emissary of infernal powers. But even at the time - the mid to late first century - such a figure would have been castigated by most Jews, as well as by the adherents of what would coalesce into Christianity. For Jews, he would have been a religious outlaw, operating beyond the pale of the officially

sanctioned Temple priesthood, the fiercely nationalistic messianic sects and the devotees of the embryonic rabbinical Judaism. For the adherents of the new religion – whether promulgated by the faction of the early Church under James or by the converts of the maverick Paul – he would have been even worse.<sup>7</sup> He would have been perceived as a rival Messiah, whose claims and activities encroached on and usurped the prerogatives of the only ‘true’ one. To that extent, he would indeed have been a certifiable ‘anti-Christ’.

But if the figure of the magician, embodied by Simon Magus, was a pariah in the Palestine of the New Testament, there were other milieux in which he was altogether more welcome. During the first century, the most important of these milieux was Egypt, and especially the city of Alexandria.

### *Alexandria: the Heart of Greek Egypt*

During the first century of the Christian era, Alexandria was the wealthiest, most urbane, most cosmopolitan, cultured and civilized city of the Graeco-Roman world, and the ‘unrivalled centre of world trade’. The population has been estimated at 500,000, far exceeding that of any other Mediterranean metropolis. The city was renowned for its architecture. Among its chief attractions was the famous lighthouse of Pharos, numbered among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Built on the island of Pharos, the lighthouse was connected to the city proper by a causeway 1,300 m in length. The edifice stood 120 m high, the equivalent of a modern forty-storey building. It was constructed of glittering white stone and surmounted by a massive statue of Zeus. At the apex of the structure, a fire was kept permanently burning, its light being reflected far out to sea by an arrangement of magnifying mirrors.

According to one account, the city itself encompassed more than 800 taverns, more than 1,500 bathhouses, more than 2,400 temples and more than 24,000 houses. There were also theatres, a stadium for games, a forum, a large market, an immense gymnasium, numerous public parks and sacred groves. There were lawcourts. There were military barracks. There were innumerable monuments. At the entrance to the Temple of Augustus stood two columns subsequently known as 'Cleopatra's Needles', one of which now stands on the Embankment in London, the other in New York's Central Park. In all these constructions, there was so prolific a use of white marble that the eyes, in sunlight, were said to be dazzled.

Among the city's primary attractions at the time was the embalmed and linen-swathed body of Alexander, brought back from Babylon to the metropolis he had founded. The great commander's body rested in a gold sarcophagus, housed in an immense tomb which became a pilgrimage centre. The sarcophagus is believed to have been stolen around 89 BC by one of the Ptolemaic kings who needed money. The tomb survived somewhat longer. Its last appearance in the historical record dates from AD 215, when it was visited by the Roman Emperor Caracalla.

For many people at the time, however, and certainly for posterity, Alexandria's crowning glory was the famous 'Great Library'. By dint of its bibliographical collections, the city had outstripped other centres of study, such as Athens and Corinth, and emerged as the supreme seat of learning for the classical world. In fact, there were two major libraries in Alexandria. One, the larger, was built of white marble and connected with the 'Museum' - originally the 'Mouseion', or 'Shrine to the Muses'. A smaller library, a daughter, so to speak, of the first house of the temple dedicated to the god Serapis.<sup>8</sup>

The 'Mouseion' was originally a cult centre, a sacred site dedicated to the Muses. Under the Roman regime that

replaced the Ptolemys, it acquired a more secular character, evolving into the ancient equivalent of a modern university. Situated adjacent to the sea, it boasted a roofed walkway, an arcade with seats, a communal dining hall for scholars, rooms for private study, residential quarters and probably lecture halls and theatres. Members of its staff and scholars were subsidized by the institution itself. They paid no taxes. They received free meals and accommodation, good salaries and a host of other amenities, including servants.

The 'Mouseion' had been founded between 300 and 290 BC by Ptolemy I, an educated man who enjoyed the company of artists, philosophers, poets and other writers. Ptolemy decreed that all books found on ships in Alexandria's ports were to be seized and copied. The copies were given to the books' owners. The originals were entrusted to the 'Mouseion'. Ptolemy also commissioned copies to be made of books in other libraries, such as that of Athens; and private collections from all over the known world were bought up as well.

Ptolemy's bibliographical zeal was perpetuated by his successors. The library eventually came to consist of ten halls, each dedicated to a different sphere of learning. Like the Pharos lighthouse, it was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. Texts were preserved in the form of papyrus manuscript rolls, most of them containing two or more separate works. In the days of its greatest glory, the 'Mouseion' held some 500,000 such rolls, while the smaller library, attached to the Temple of Serapis, held another 40,000. Everything was meticulously labelled and catalogued. And everything was accessible not just to an educated élite, but, freely, to the public at large - to anyone with a desire to learn.





*Ancient Egypt under Greek Rule, 332-30 BC*

Much of the material held by the city's libraries was in Greek. After the Roman conquest, of course, this material was supplemented by texts in Latin. But there were works in numerous other languages as well, and from much farther afield. There were, for example, commentaries on Zoroastrian sacred writings. And there were also, in all likelihood, copies of ancient Egyptian works.

Like any other library, those of Alexandria were tragically vulnerable to the vicissitudes of war and the



excesses of doctrinal fanaticism. In 48 BC, for example, Julius Caesar laid siege to the city. Flames spread from the defeated Egyptian fleet to the buildings on shore, and 70,000 rolls were reportedly destroyed in the 'Mouseion'. Many of these were replaced; but from the end of the third century AD on, the libraries of Alexandria were subject to repeated depredations - from a new wave of Persian invaders, from the Roman Emperor Diocletian, from zealously dogmatic Christians. By the fourth century, the main library, that of the 'Mouseion', seems to have been destroyed - or so reduced as not to warrant any further mention in the historical record. At last, in AD 391, a rabid Christian mob, led by the Patriarch of Alexandria, destroyed the smaller library at the Temple of Serapis, as well as the temple itself. This loss - of the wealth of Alexandria's learning - must be reckoned one of the greatest catastrophes in the history of Western civilization. It constitutes a transgression for which Christianity has never been called properly to account. Christian fundamentalists, even today, are still only too ready to burn books.

The magnitude of the loss can best be illustrated by some of the distinguished names associated with Alexandria and its libraries. Among these 'alumni', so to speak, there was Euclid, the mathematician, whose geometry is still studied today. There was Eratosthenes, who concluded the earth was a sphere and actually worked out its circumference. There was the astronomer and astrologer known as Ptolemy. There was the physician Galen, whose teachings were to influence the next millennium and a half of medical thinking. There was the Egyptian priest and historian Manetho, whose compilation of Egyptian rulers and dynasties is even today, in many quarters, regarded as definitive. There were Church fathers and theologians, such as Origen and Bishop Clement. There were prominent Gnostic teachers, such as Valentinus and

Basilides. And there were numerous philosophers, whose work has influenced thinkers ever since - Plotinus, for instance, Proclus and the hellenized Jew Philo.

As the diversity of these figures indicates, Alexandria, at the dawn of the Christian era, was a proverbial melting-pot. The city's population was composed of people from every quarter, every race, every culture, every creed of the known world; and this made for a cosmopolitan metropolis whose modern equivalents can only be found in such centres as London and New York. There were, of course, the native Egyptians. There were representatives from every corner of the Greek-speaking Mediterranean - not just from the Greek mainland and islands, but also from Sicily, Syria, Turkey and Asia Minor. There were Babylonians, Arabs, Persians, Carthaginians, Italians, Spaniards, Gauls from France. And there was the largest concentration of Jews in the world outside Judaea.

Like other ethnic communities in Alexandria, the city's Jews occupied a quarter of their own. Although they looked to Jerusalem for spiritual leadership and paid their annual tax to the Temple there, they had, in their habits, their lifestyle and most other respects, become hellenized. Many had married Greek wives. Many could no longer speak Hebrew; and services in their one large and numerous smaller synagogues were conducted in Greek. There were Greek translations of the Torah. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran, some are in Greek and written on papyrus - which suggests the possibility that they may have originated in Alexandria.<sup>9</sup>

The Jews enjoyed the highest status of any non-Greeks in Alexandria and possessed considerable autonomy. They had their own lawcourts, for example, and their own community leaders. Some rose to exalted positions. One of the Ptolemaic monarchs is said to have entrusted the administration of his entire kingdom, as well as control of

the armed forces, to two Jews. Two of the generals in the army of Cleopatra III were Jewish.

When the Ptolemaic dynasty fell, friction inevitably arose between the Jewish community and the new Roman regime, which fostered an increasing and unprecedented anti-Semitism. Palestine, at the time, was in a state of incessant insurgency against Roman occupation, and repercussions of this turmoil radiated across the desert to Alexandria. In AD 66, Judaea erupted in a full-scale rebellion which was to last for the next eight years. As Rome's armies gradually re-established imperial control over the country, many messianic Jewish rebels - Zealots or, as some of them were known, 'Sicarii' - sought refuge in Alexandria, where they endeavoured to foment fresh uprisings.<sup>10</sup> The ensuing riots provoked a dismally predictable backlash. Subsequent insurrections in Judaea intensified the anti-Semitic reaction. By the middle of the second century AD, Alexandria's once populous Jewish community had been decimated.

By that time, Alexandria's own halcyon days were all but over. Yet as late as the fourth century AD, the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus could write of Egypt: 'Here, first, far earlier than in any other country, men arrived at the various cradles (if I may say so) of different religions. Here they still carefully preserve the elements of sacred rites as handed down in their secret volumes.'<sup>11</sup> Both Pythagoras and Plato, Ammianus Marcellinus stresses, obtained much of their wisdom from Egypt. And even in the fourth century, he adds, fountains of such wisdom survive in Alexandria:

... yet even now there is much learning in the same city; for teachers of various sects flourish, and many kinds of secret knowledge are explained by geometrical science. Nor is music dead among them, nor harmony. And by a few, observations of the

motion of the world and of the stars are still cultivated; while of learned arithmeticians the number is considerable; and besides them there are many skilled in divination.<sup>12</sup>

Ammianus Marcellinus concludes: 'But if anyone in the earnestness of his intellect wishes to apply himself to the various branches of divine knowledge, or to the examination of metaphysics, he will find that the whole world owes this kind of learning to Egypt.'<sup>13</sup>

If Alexandria at its peak was a centre for trade in commodities, it was also a centre for trade in ideas. If it was a melting-pot for diverse peoples, it was also a melting-pot for cults, creeds, beliefs and philosophical systems. The city was, in effect, a nexus, a junction and clearing-house for the learning and knowledge of the entire known world. Within its precincts, virtually every religion and mode of thought was accommodated.

As a kind of sub-stratum, there were the cults deriving from, and often still associated with, the religion of ancient Egypt, extending back to the times of the pharaohs and perhaps before. Superimposed on this sub-stratum, and frequently suffused by it, there were cults to a variety of Greek deities - as well as to Alexander the Great, the city's founder, and to the Ptolemaic dynasty, whose members had no compunction about deifying themselves. Of particular consequence was the cult of the god Serapis. Serapis can best be described as a deliberately fabricated divinity, calculated and synthesized to appeal to Greeks and Egyptians alike. According to one commentator, Serapis 'was virtually the result of the investigations of a body of philosophers and priests, who collected from all sources and fused together whatever ideas or attributes would be of service'.<sup>14</sup> The cult of Serapis was particularly encouraged by the Ptolemaic dynasty because it transcended religious differences and could be used to

maintain civic order. It derived in part from the ancient cult of the sacred bull, Apis, formerly based in the old Egyptian capital of Memphis. This, in turn, had subsumed elements of the even more ancient cult of Osiris. Thus Serapis was often depicted as husband and consort of Isis, the archaic Egyptian mother goddess. Thus inscriptions in Greek addressed to Serapis were, when transliterated into demotic hieroglyphics, addressed to Osiris. For Greek consumption, however, Serapis was amalgamated with Zeus, and the compound name of Zeus-Serapis occurred frequently. Serapis was also associated with other Egyptian deities, such as Amon, and with other Greek gods, such as Poseidon. In every district of Egypt, there was a temple to Serapis. His temple in Alexandria was one of the major architectural features of the day.

Subsequent to the Roman conquest, cults to Roman deities appeared, as well as to Romanized variations of Greek deities; and, as a self-appointed god, the Roman emperor enjoyed his own official cult. There was also a vigorous cult of the eastern Mediterranean goddess Cybele, whose self-castrated priests were, apparently, a common sight in Alexandria's thoroughfares. There was a cult to Ahura-Mazda, the central figure of Persian Zoroastrianism. There were teachers, exponents and practitioners of so-called 'gymnosophy' - of Hinduism, that is, Buddhism and their attendant philosophies, yogic disciplines and methodologies imported from India. And, as previously noted, there were - second only to the Greeks - the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

By the middle of the first century AD, the new creed subsequently known as Christianity had also begun to establish itself in Alexandria. In order to survive and hold its own amid the maelstrom of the city's other beliefs and traditions, it had to adapt. It had to shed certain of the specifically messianic, specifically Judaic, aspects which had characterized it in Palestine. And it had to become more sophisticated, transcending the message preached by

Paul to his largely untutored flocks. According to one commentator, 'if Christianity was to be more than a religion for the uneducated it must come to terms with Greek philosophy and Greek science'.<sup>16</sup> As a result, Christianity in Alexandria assumed a radically new direction. Under the auspices first of Bishop Clement, then of Origen, his successor, Christian theologians began to acquaint themselves with Greek thought - with the teachings of the Stoics, for example, and with those of Aristotle and Plato. Thus intellectually equipped, they proceeded to engage in a 'dialogue with paganism' - a dialogue which was to become increasingly 'a dialogue between intellectual equals'. There was often much common ground. Origen, for instance, one of the most influential of the Church Fathers, was a pupil of the same Alexandrian teacher as Plotinus, the founder of the school of pagan philosophy generally known as Neoplatonism. The Christian conception of the Logos was derived from the interpretation of the hellenized Jew, Philo.

The modern mind habitually makes a distinction between theology and philosophy. Theology is perceived as the intellectual formulation, or perhaps rationalization, of a faith, a creed, a system of beliefs pertaining to the divine or the numinous. To this extent, theology is seen as an attempt to address, or account for, the sacred. Philosophy, in contrast, is perceived as something more 'profane', in the traditional sense of that word. Philosophy may be purely secular. It may also, however, be as metaphysical as any theology; but even then it will not be invested with quite the same dimension of the sacred. In most faiths, theology is regarded as divine in origin. Philosophy is essentially human.

In Alexandria during the first centuries of the Christian era - and, indeed, for most of the two subsequent millennia - such fine distinctions did not exist. Theology and philosophy were more or less interchangeable - or overlapped to such a degree that the lines of demarcation