

THE CONVERGENCE OF  
CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN THE  
MEDITERRANEAN AREA

The explorer who realizes that an island, a passage, an ocean for which he has been searching do not exist is compensated for his disappointment by an adjustment of the map to carry his name for all to appreciate; the ethnographer who pushed the *platypodes* and the *triamatikoi* over the brink into fable land had the satisfaction of a gain in the regularity and rationality of our world; but the historian who somewhere between analytical description and synthetic reconstruction discovers the non-existence, or better though less dramatically: the inappropriateness and functional inoperativeness of his key concept, can do nothing to mask his discomfiture than to set forth his negative conclusion as stringently as he would have its opposite.

Webster's *New International Dictionary* (Second edition) defines "to converge" as "to tend to one point; to incline and approach nearer together" (as do the radii of a circle toward the center); in biological usage, converging equals "developing or possessing like characteristics;" anthropology designates as convergence "the development of similarities between cultures by accidental changes" and it speaks of "convergent evolution."

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It is clearly this last field of meaning which concerns the historian most directly. The definition(s) adopted by Webster are no doubt correct; however, to make the concept heuristically (or even descriptively) significant for the historian the requirement must be added that the causal sequences that are seen to "approach nearer together" must be independent, that is to say, they must not have begun within the same *ambiance* as the result of a shared impetus. Rather must we be confronted with two separate identity sequences that gravitate toward merging into one.<sup>1</sup> Unless this condition is met the process will take place as the result of the same developmental impulse, the "launching pad" will have been shared, and the kinship that the tilting toward each other of the two sequences is to bespeak preexisted the movement.

To emphasize, whatever freedom the dictionary may bestow on the historian, the phenomenon is of scant significance as long as it is the outgrowth of a unification of background and motivation that was reached prior to its appearance. In other words: true convergence will, in our view, not occur if the strands share for historical reasons constitutive elements of their development.

This restriction, it must be admitted, makes convergence a rare event; in fact, it is becoming increasingly rare as we move toward our own time—not to speak of instances to be anticipated in the future. The more numerous the situations for which there exists a historically instituted *Vorverständnis* among the societies experiencing or exhibiting "convergence" the less are we entitled to diagnose the pertinent phenomena as such "convergence." One may almost go so far as to claim that genuine convergence is limited to cases where it is due to generic characteristics of man—prehistoric inventions such as the taming of fire, the making of certain elementary tools are cases in point; so is the independent development of languages such as Ancient Egyptian and Latin from a synthetic to an analytic stage in Coptic and the Romance tongues.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, convergence is almost always traceable to prior existence of links between the

<sup>1</sup> In the terminology used by W. Metzger, *Psychologie* (4th ed.; Darmstadt, 1968), p. 124, to describe causality (not convergence) we are concerned with "*getrennte Identitätsverläufe*," that, "*im Grenzfall*" unite into one "*Weltlinie*."

<sup>2</sup> Oral communication of Dr Miriam Lichtheim, UCLA, July 1, 1969.

incipient points of the sequences, owing to contacts (exchanges) of the communities involved, such as overlay or domination, unity of the population substrate, unity of (parts of) the cultural heritage (of which the latter-day carriers of that heritage may of course no longer be aware), a relation of trunk and branch, etc. etc. Thus, from the time of the Arab-Muslim conquest—and even earlier, the period doubtless to include the whole of Muḥammad's life-span—there are in the Mediterranean no major “convergences” that would not be explicable on the basis of developments already completed or well started. Subjectively, that is to say in terms of the experience of one or all of the societies involved, convergence may be felt to occur since the conditioning factors are frequently unavailable to memorial recall by the collective(s).

The implications of the limitation of “convergence” as it must be postulated to preserve, or regain, for the concept a constructive force are open to demonstration through instances encountered in various sectors of cultural productivity.

1) Convergence occurs in the parallel development of the Orestes and Hamlet themes (the revenger masquerading as fool, rising to avenge the murder of his royal father on the uncle who succeeded him and the mother who married him) from early Greek myth to its treatment by Aeschylus and Euripides on the one hand, and from the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus (1185) and the *Ambales Saga* to Shakespeare on the other. Nothing but archetypal reminiscences can possibly be claimed as a common base provided always one is prepared to accept those as inescapable elements of the human psyche. A common origin is (if at all) traceable only in Indo-European myths of which the Greek tragedians may still have felt, but Shakespeare certainly no longer perceived, an echo sustained by contemporary sentiment (and not by literature). Convergence in emphasis and de-emphasis of sub-themes, in character portrayal, in moral postures does not here go back to shared literary conventions and materials; nor is influence to be assumed. Seneca whom Shakespeare knew is little interested in Orestes, and Hamlet does not incorporate what Seneca might have offered.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On the relationship or the parallel development of those dramatic themes cf. G. Murray, *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* (1927; New York, 1957), ch. viii: Hamlet and Orestes, pp. 180-210; and M. Delcourt, *Oreste et Alcmon*.

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2) A borderline case between convergence and parallelism, but best removed from convergence as representing the consequence of shared presuppositions (attitudes, intellectual aspirations) that were, and are, dominant in pre-modern civilizations, is to be found in the following series of identical reactions.

a) The Ismā'īlī theologian Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī, criticizes the concept of scientific truth affirmed by the famous physician and philosopher, Abū Zakariyyā' ar-Rāzī (d. 925 or 935), by resorting to this argument. If you are free to be at variance with your predecessors your students will feel free to discard your views. The only result that will come from discarding authority is an increase in variety, and contradictoriness of opinions. "On this basis corruption would be established in the world, truth disappear forever, and falsehood become methodically organized."<sup>4</sup> It is thus not the individual insight as such which counts but the stability of the total structure of such insights.

b) In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1819-1898) had to defend himself against the same kind of objection directed against accepting a measure of uncertainty as an element of a newly demonstrated truth. In his *Fifteenth Principle of Exegesis* Sir Sayyid says (in part):

"It is said to us sarcastically: 'When the Greek wisdom, astronomy and philosophy spread among Muslims, then considered in agreement with actual reality, the doctors of Islam confirmed these portions of the Koran which seemed in agreement with those sciences, and tried to work out corroboration of those portions (of the Koran) which seemed opposed to these sciences. Today when it is known that those sciences were founded on wrong first principles, that their astronomy was absolutely opposed to reality, and when natural sciences have made more progress, you contradict those meanings which earlier

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*Etude sur la projection légendaire du matricide en Grèce* (Paris, 1959), esp. pp. 74-76. It seems to me that our assessment of the relationship between Orestes and Hamlet is closer to Delcourt's than to Murray's who, p. 206, assigns to the theme the common ground of the "world-wide ritual battle of Summer and Winter, of Life and Death" which had been effective as late as the medieval drama.

<sup>4</sup> The passage is translated in full by this writer and M.G.S. Hodgson in Hodgson, *Introduction to Islamic Civilization. Course Syllabus. Selected Readings* (Chicago, 1958-1959), I, 388.

doctors determined according to Greek sciences and adopt other meanings which agree with the sciences of the present day. It will be no wonder if in the future these sciences advance further and the things which today appear fully ascertained may be proven wrong. Then need will arise of establishing other meanings of the words of the Koran and so on. So the Koran will be a toy in the hands of people.’”

Sir Sayyid accepts the challenge pointing out that it is the miracle of the Koran to guide mankind uniformly in those matters for which it was revealed regardless of the state of our knowledge in other areas. Misinterpretation was ever due to our ignorance and not to the words of the Holy Book. “Hence if in the future, sciences advance to a point where the things ascertained today are disproved, then we shall turn to the Koran again and will certainly find it in agreement with reality. It will become known to us that the meanings we had determined earlier were a shortcoming of our knowledge, and that the Koran was free of all shortcomings.”<sup>5</sup>

c) The Jesuits had obtained for themselves and for Western mathematics and astronomy great prestige at the Chinese Court. In 1685 a newly arrived group of fathers proposed to adjust instruction to the latest European discoveries. An earlier *équipe* of Portuguese fathers, motivated no doubt in part by concern for their position as the in-group at court, tried to dissuade them from changing the content of teaching on the ground that such a change would provoke a *crise de conscience* among their Chinese scholar-students and result in doubts regarding Western science.<sup>6</sup>

3) Convergence of philosophical and theological positions is, we suspect, mostly the apparent result of the adoption, in two separate schools, of the same epistemological stance in confronting similar inherited problems whose treatment tradition (doctrine, political situation, *Problemzwang*) has made mandatory. Systematic concern for man’s cognitive limitations—in

<sup>5</sup> A. Ahmad and G. E. von Grunebaum, *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan. 1857-1963* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F. Mauro, *L’Expansion européenne. 1600-1890* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1967), pp. 220-221. For detail on the Jesuit missions to China cf. V. Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l’esprit philosophique en France (1640-1740)* (Paris, 1932), esp. pp. 15-49.

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contrast with scepticism, more or less flippant deprecation and resigned or enthusiastic surrender and acceptance of intellectual impotence—increases with the approach of the modern age. The Kantian postulate that no property may be ascribed to the *Ding an sich* that is based on the nature of human cognition is, viewed as an attitude to human thought (although by no means intended to discourage), diametrically opposed to the conviction that Saint Thomas, *De veritate*, has given the form: *eadem sunt principia essendi et cognoscendi*. The same conviction animates Muʿtazilism (although I do not believe a precisely parallel formulation has come down to us). In both cases, the supporting motivation and justification is twofold: a sense of man's dignity supported by a sense of God's righteousness and rationality, His *veracitas*. The possibility of a remote and indirect dependence of Saint Thomas on the Muʿtazila cannot be rejected a priori; but the theological convergences are probably accounted for more profoundly by recourse to the common heritage of ancient epistemological optimism<sup>7</sup> and the *Problemzwang* of structurally closely allied religious presuppositions.

4) Shared modes of perception, too, may produce "pseudo-convergences" while increasing, besides, the disposition to receive kindred ideas and materials. Atomism, not as a doctrine in the wake of Democritus or Epicurus, but as a fundamental outlook and principle of interpretative world construction, recurs in all medieval and modern Mediterranean and "post-Mediterranean" cultures. It can be identified<sup>8</sup> as the tendency to consider in any complex the simplest components (the elements) alone as fully real. All comprehensive entities are "and-sums" of their elements. The elements retain their identity in the aggregate like

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republic* V, 477a: *to men pantelōs on pantelōs gnōston* ("the absolute being is absolutely knowable.") The Muʿtazila never questioned the universality (universal validity) of human thought. The first principles of morality and of reason are peculiar to, and uniform for every rational being; cf., e.g., A. N. Nader, *Le Système philosophique des Muʿtazila* (Beyrouth, 1956), esp. pp. 239-258.

The 'Muʿtazilite' concept of the world's *Erkennbarkeit* and man's *Erkenntnisfähigkeit* was first formulated by Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C.) who, frg. 1, ascribes the same *logos* (law, rational principle) to the outer and the inner universe (although most men are incapable to reach a conscious realization of this complementarity). Cf. J. Stenzel, *Kleine Schriften zur griechischen Philosophie* (2nd ed.; Darmstadt, 1957), pp. 81-82.

<sup>8</sup> To paraphrase Metzger's descriptive definition, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

the stones of a mosaic; they have, in those agglomerations, no property which they would not have in isolation; conversely, the agglomeration has no property that would not be traceable in its elements, their sum or amalgamation.

This mode of perception has dominated Western psychological thinking until very recently and even today it is present as a powerful presupposition in political, sociological, and aesthetic doctrines and aspirations. Political atomism accompanied by reckless individualism, in turn accompanied by an unconditional sinking of the individual into the nearest communal unit is a pre-Islamic heirloom of the Muslim Middle Ages and beyond; but parallel phenomena stemming from the same atomistic and collectivistic outlook meet us in ancient Greece, in Corsica, in tribal North Africa (and so on). Hence similarities of mores, of human relations, of behavior patterns in family and body politic. Convergences? Hardly. The kindred influenced and shaped by the kindred; attitude provoked situations confirming the attitudes.

The sense for the unbridgeable chasm between additive summation and the immediacy of wholeness, between atomism and *ganzheitliche Gestalterfassung*, precedes its conceptual analysis and articulation. In the section he devotes to the refutation of the Valentinian Gnostics, Saint Hippolytus (d. after 235 A.D.) relates their description of the Demiurg's failure to imitate the eternal, infinite character of the "Upper Eight:" "... they say that the Demiurg wanted to imitate the infinite, eternal nature of the Upper Ogdoad, not subject to any limit and any condition of time; but he was unable to reproduce its stability and perpetuity because he was himself the fruit of a failing [lit., the fruit of the *hysterēma*, a type of the left hand]. To this end [i.e., to approach the eternity of the Ogdoad] he appointed times, and seasons, and unending series of years, thinking by the accumulated multitude of times [*en tōi plēthei tōn chronōn*] to imitate its infiniteness [*to aperanton*]."<sup>9</sup>

Striking in its isolating enumerativeness that since classicism has become alien to us, the "atomistic" *Bildungsbegriff* of the classical Islamic Age presents itself as an additive concept of

<sup>9</sup> *Philosophoumena* VI, 54; translation adjusted from that of J. H. Macmahon, *The Refutation of All Heresies* (Edinburgh, London, Toronto, 1868), p. 263 (*Ante-Nicene Christian Library*. VI, i). For the *hysterēma* cf. VI, 52.

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“plus” perfection, a compendious amassing and juxtaposing of virtues, abilities, pieces of information, and an anthological command of literary expression—the camel of the Bedouin is described by minute listings of its “virtues,” the beauty of a woman is equally catalogued. Ornaments may be superadded *ad infinitum* until the fantastic intrudes into the dissecting pedantry. The poem is a sequence of independent verses and the sum of prescribed treatments of prescribed motifs. Literary beauty is analyzable into beauties (*busn/mabāsin*), literary defect into defects. Intellectualism reigns. The recognized motifs, the patterns of eulogy or lampoon, the figures of speech are like so many elements of which a dazzling aggregate is to be formed, outshining in cleverness of language and conceit the ever-present competitor. Literary history is the listing of poets by generations, rank, genre, provenience—addition and addition and summation... European parallels in literature and the arts, not least the *Gebrauchskunst* of our grand-fathers, come easily to mind.<sup>10</sup> Again: convergences?

And again: hardly. The logic of the mode of departure, unless counteracted by competing motivations and approaches, forces similar results; and the ubiquitous background of unremembered yet well-preserved Hellenistic habits of word and form and *Bildung* guarantees the common *Vorverständnis* and if not the acceptance at least an understanding of atomistic mannerism.<sup>11</sup>

5) The complexities of the convergence concept emerge boldly through consideration of Gnosticism. If one selects the first

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Metzger, *op. cit.*, p. 52; also, *ibid.*, pp. 311ff.

<sup>11</sup> If with Umberto Eco, *L'Oeuvre ouverte* (Paris, 1965), p. 102, style is defined as a system of probabilities—a definition that bears transfer to *Denkformen* (and thinking habits as conditioned by a given logical equipment), to cultural aspirations and to expectations—convergence becomes an (independent) entry into the same “field” of probabilities on the part of two or more appropriate entities that penetrate it from and at different points. Eco himself, to conclude from his discussion on p. 138, would be inclined to view form rather as a “field of possibilities,” a position that could be accepted provided it is realized that the possibilities of the inception will tend to turn into probabilities as with extended utilization the form confronts the potential former with increasing rigidity and, above all, *ab extra*. Incidentally, Eco’s contrastive descriptions of classical and modern poetry, although developed on Western materials alone, are applicable to certain phases of Arabic poetry as well. Where “classical” poetry contravenes the conventional (the Arab critic might have preferred to say: the “traditional”) *à l’intérieur de limites bien définies*, the modern poet, such as for example Ibn ar-Rūmī (d. ca. 896), inclines to *poser continuellement un ordre extrêmement improbable par rapport à l’ordre initial* (pp. 87-88).

century A.D. as the crucial “time line,” convergence between (relatively) independent movements, Gnostic and pre-Gnostic, one originating in Iran (and giving rise, above all, to Manichaeism) and dominated by the idea of two conflicting principles, and the other in the Semitic-speaking world where the movements develop in a hostile dialogue with the Hellenistic tradition and remain under the sway of the doctrine of one divine principle of which one part is separated and “falls”—if this vantage point is chosen the convergences have evidently long become historical reality when Islam appears.

Gnostic doctrine immediately becomes, and is to remain, anathema from the orthodox point of view; its proclamation of the superiority of sudden intuition, lightning-like transforming insight over ploddingly acquired reasoned and traditional knowledge together with a devotion to a number of typical motifs does, however, survive. In Christendom as in Islam the power of Gnosticizing dualism to inspire heresies continues strong throughout the Middle Ages as an almost complete alternative to the ruling faiths; but looked at closely the movement, or rather movements, are of divergence rather than convergence, except that certain strands of mythical thought evolved in the Muslim West—bearing on epistemology as well as on the typology of the *illuminati*—tend to approach speculative trends in the Muslim East. From the Eastern standpoint this development could be viewed as convergence, from the Western, though, the designation as influence would seem more appropriate.

The structure of group formation among the Gnostics remains fairly constant, at least from the twelfth century onward. It would be difficult to deny, on surveying “Gnosticizing” doctrines and groupings within and without Islam, the existence of an innate disposition in man to experience the characteristically Gnostic *Erlebniskern*,<sup>12</sup> an assumption that would help to account for convergences in this sector of religion and philosophy but without relieving us of the obligation to correlate the specific historical context of emergence and re-emergence with the attitudes and tenets adopted at one time or another nearly everywhere along the Mediterranean coastal areas and in their hinterland.

<sup>12</sup> This *Erlebniskern* has been well described lately by W. Foerster, *Die Gnosis*, I (Zürich & Stuttgart, 1969), *Einleitung*, pp. 17-20.

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Shared destiny may initiate but does not in itself constitute convergence. Shared destiny does, however, leave its carriers with kindred experience and when this experience is forgotten, with kindred traits, dispositions, responses. For long centuries and more, the Mediterranean destiny has been to give a center to our civilization, or at other times, to connect centers and epicenters. With the waning of the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean area found itself displaced from this position in the middle, and shrunk to a satellite function; only segments, such as the South of France, would regain participation in a center, not on their own but through integration with another region to which leadership had passed. The supporting role may be differently cast—as Egypt gained in significance and prosperity through affiliation, though incomplete, with the British Empire—but the common fate of a past not greater perhaps but more influential than the present looms large whence often a refinement out of proportion to the substance on which it is displayed and a wistful addiction to memory, not always taken too seriously but almost habitually allowed to stylize the realities of the day.

Convergence presupposes difference. It also presupposes a certain complementariness of the converging: in late antiquity, the Western Mediterranean profited from the economic and political superiority of the Eastern parts, a relationship recurring in reverse from the thirteenth but more particularly from the sixteenth centuries, both flowerings contingent largely on the differential within the (ultimately) integrated region.<sup>13</sup> The shrinking of the Mediterranean world as a consequence of modern technology—a disproportionate countermovement to the expansion of the Central Sea through the disintegration of Rome and division of the shores between Christians and Muslims—is introducing a new factor of shared destiny bringing about unexpected confrontations and resistances, but, it would seem, resulting in submergence or withdrawal rather than convergence.

Minoans, Semites, Greeks, Romans—an almost arbitrary selection of commercial, cultural, political masters—represent

<sup>13</sup> Cf. F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1966), I, 126.

and symbolize some of the many layers of influence and experience in which the convergences of late antiquity and early Middle Ages in the spheres of religion, political expectations, organizational patterns, literary genres and ideals are rooted—to disregard unfairly but conveniently the impulses received from populations and movements whose power ebbed before reaching the Mediterranean shores from East or North.

Unification under Roman power and culture following on unification under Greek culture and power had long before Islam removed what barriers to convergence and *Spannungsausgleich* would exist. A vehicular language, succeeded by another such, both assuming in varying ways the role of culture tongues, had created a universe of communication which Arabic was destined to split while taking over its Eastern and Southern sectors. The freedom of circulation which had prevailed during the last millennium before Islam, and presumably earlier as well, rendered effective by the existence of one or more adequate *linguae francae*, allowed ideas and moods to sweep the area without let or hindrance, encouraging religious syncretism to accompany political unification and to erode the ambition of rational world mastery by substituting transrational experiences and constructs for the critically tested and austere disciplines of concepts of “classical” thought.<sup>14</sup> The conceptual achievements of the older languages remained, partly preserved in pagan philosophy and Christian theology of various hues, to be carried forward into Arabic when the need arose.

Despite the persistent strength of localisms of many kinds, a network of economic relations and legal institutions together with

<sup>14</sup> The abandonment of the rational calls for, among others, this consideration. Repetition, which implies the acceptance of limitations only a major effort will push back, entails a kind of collective listlessness, a sense of drabness of self and world which is unquestionably a contributory factor to the recurring inclination of man to relinquish or put to one side reason and its works. Leibniz already noted: “...C'est un malheur des hommes de se dégoûter enfin de la raison même, et de s'ennuyer de la lumière. Les chimères commencent à revenir et plaisent, parce qu'elles ont quelque chose de merveilleux. Il arrive dans le Pays philosophique ce qui est arrivé dans le Pays poétique. On s'est lassé des Romains raisonnables, tels que la *Clélie* française ou l'*Armène* allemande; et on est revenu depuis quelque temps aux Contes des Fées.” (*Cinquième écrit de M. Leibniz, en réponse à la quatrième réplique de M. Clark*, § 114; quoted by P.-M. Schuhl, *L'Imagination et le merveilleux. La pensée et l'action* [Paris, 1969], p. 45).

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the acceptance of assumptions regarding man and his world, God and his universe, individual and society, man and woman, had spread, its meshes wide enough to leave diversity alive and aggressive, but sufficiently narrow not to allow any sector of the area to remain untouched. The decline of the philosophical spirit notwithstanding, the elements of Aristotelianism, Platonism, a revived Pythagoreanism remained confusedly but ineradicably implanted and available. Whereas early Hellenism had occidentalized the Eastern Mediterranean, subsequent centuries tended to orientalize the West. Seen from the vantage point of the Hellenized Roman or Near Easterner of the early Empire, the Muslim Middle Ages reversed convergence, proclaimed separation, promoted the fiction of irreconcilable conflict between the Arabicized and "Latinized" descendents of pagan and Christian antiquity. It cannot be repeated enough that the indubitable unity of the Mediterranean Middle Ages—Muslim, Byzantine and Latin—was in no way contingent on Islam, in fact, pre-existed it; the elimination of disturbing enclaves, e.g. of pagan pockets, no doubt intensified that "tripartite" unity as did the adoption by Islam of a modified (and suspect) cult of saints; but the historical and psychological predispositions for these developments did not wait Islam which, quite on the contrary, represented *also* a wide tent under whose shade a large variety of local particularities and particularisms were able to survive and, the vagaries of political vicissitudes permitting, gain strength and, on occasion, actual power. Differently put: Islam as such did not set convergences in motion; rather it is itself in a manner the symptom or the result of a convergent movement.

To illustrate this diagnosis one should perhaps turn from ideas to institutions as possessing a double footing, in ideology and in the "logistics" of everyday life. Avoiding the caliphate or rulership in general because of the overpowering heritage of theory and postulate, it may be preferable to consider the Muslim city in the Mediterranean region, approaching the question of convergences in terms of comparison with the Christian Mediterranean town of medieval times. The degree to which the classical urban tradition has carried over into the Muslim Middle Ages is under debate. Whether or not my own sense of essential continuities (not continuity) will be proven right is fortunately of slight importance in the present context. For continuity is not conver-

gence. The "conglomerate character" of early Aegean city culture (Seslo, Knossos) traceable to the first half of the third millennium B.C.,<sup>15</sup> fortified by wave upon wave of cultural overlay and immigration, has established the basis for structural similarities at least within the Greek and Greek influenced areas.

Orientalization sets in during the early centuries of the Christian era; in some of the most characteristically urbanized regions a complete break occurs. In North Africa, for example, only Constantine has survived throughout from Roman to modern times; Volubilis-Oualili-Fez, some settlements in the *Sāhil* of Northern Tunisia, may perhaps also be regarded as an urban continuum. Otherwise, to speak of North Africa and of the many towns of the Fertile Crescent that were "refounded" again and again in the Muslim period, new administrative beginnings, new populations, new geopolitical functions allow to look for convergences with reference to the Byzantine and the European towns, the latter of varying *ancienneté*. Muslim influence on architecture, building habits and urbanism in general is unmistakable on the Iberian Peninsula for example;<sup>16</sup> the fortified castle towns on either shore bear strong resemblances which, whether compelled by functional considerations or by the tastes and habits of their dominant strata, do warrant the noting of converging trends. But the efficacy of those trends is curtailed by the legal-administrative framework of the development on the one hand and the demographic structure and the mores of the inhabitants on the other. One may perhaps go so far as to venture the generalization that whenever a convergence appears to be in the making—as in the organization of the crafts, the formation of "citizen militias," the concurrence of the lowest orders in establishing urban independence—the development either turns short or is cut off (as in the case of the militias) or takes a direction diverging from its European parallels. The *Eigenständigkeit* or *Eigenwilligkeit* of the Muslim Mediterranean town (to which Aleppo and Damascus may be reckoned for the purposes of this study) is such that even today when Westernization is sweeping the area, both consciously sought and introduced by the weight of circumstances,

<sup>15</sup> Cf. F. Schachermayr, "The Genesis of the Greek Polis," *Diogenes*, No. 4, Autumn 1953, 17-30.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. X. de Planhol, *Les fondements géographiques de l'histoire de l'Islam* (Paris, 1968), pp. 286-287.

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“orientalizing” (or better: “re-orientalizing,” restorative) tendencies make themselves felt in the city plans—though not in city planning.<sup>17</sup>

“Without invalidating our assessment of the occurrence of convergences on the Islamic and Christian “levels” a certain number of intra-Islamic developments do bear a striking resemblance to contemporary developments in the Byzantine (and the “Latin” medieval) culture areas, a resemblance which includes the major factors of causation as well, obliging the spectator to note them as instances of “minor” convergences.

1) Between the revival of enthusiastic piety in Byzantium toward the end of the tenth century, a modification of religious sensibilities traditionally connected with the name of Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), and the not inconsiderably later growth of sacramental mysticism in Catholicism, both implying a shift in the impulse of faith from a piety of fear to a piety of hope, there occurs in Muslim religiosity a similar shift of motivation from the *mysterium tremendum*, God’s awesomeness and majesty, to the *mysterium fascinans*, God’s grace and loving kindness. These shifts unparallel to a refocussing of piety from God the Father to Jesus, from the Lord to His Prophet; this refocussing in turn goes together with a reorientation of doctrinal thinking where, making good a lag in relation to Christianity, in the key problems of God’s essence and righteousness, the relation of man with God replaces the integrity of the divine transcendence as the primary concern. It is man and his needs, the “service function” of religion, which take the place of God and His statutes as the axis of theological reasoning.<sup>18</sup>

Yet it must be remembered that the possibility of such shifts and reorientations precedes the specific revelation of Islam as does the disposition to anthropolatry which throughout the Mediterranean area is powerfully reemerging in the later Middle Ages as one

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the work of the Erlanger group around Eugen Wirth; e.g., E. Wirth, “Strukturwandlungen und Entwicklungstendenzen der orientalischen Stadt,” *Erdkunde*, XXII/2 (1968), 101-128, and K. Dettmann, “Islamische und westliche Elemente im heutigen Damaskus,” *Geographische Rundschau*, XXI (1969), 64-68 (both papers with ref. to the literature).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. E. von Grunebaum, “Parallelism, Convergence, and Influence in the Relations of Arab and Byzantine Philosophy, Literature, and Piety,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XVIII (1964), 91-111, at pp. 104-105; German tr. in *Studien zum Kulturbild und Selbstverständnis des Islams* (Zürich und Stuttgart 1969), p. 85.

factor responsible for the religious role of Prophet and saints—once again, heritage spurs convergence or interferes with it.

2) What for want of more specific words must be called the rise of realism and of the popular in both Byzantium and Islam (from *ca.* 1100, with *ca.* 1300 as the high point) constitutes doubtless a recourse to older and to some extent shared strata of cultural experience and hence should not be identified as convergence. The occasion for that rise is, however, the same on both sides of the religious and cultural border; since this sameness is produced by independent strands of causation the identification of the development as a convergence does, after all, become legitimate. The releasing factor is the collapse or, better, the breaking up of the high-standard culture carried forward by the Muslim and Byzantine elites and now succumbing to a severe crisis under the impact of military, economic, social and intellectual catastrophes. The regression of centralized political and social controls liberated particularisms, even individualistic tendencies, permitted the growth of sects and with it the spread of uncertainty, an experimental mood, and, ultimately, that craving for security and stability which led to orthodox reintegration on both sides of the religious barrier.<sup>19</sup>

A further and final test: How does modernity, how does modernization fare when examined in the light of our concept of convergence? The answer may be ambiguous, which is another way of saying that the situation allows of different diagnoses, the diagnoses of different interpretations. But this much is clear:

Modernization is primarily Westernization. This is true psychologically even more than an analysis, element for element, of a "bioptic" cross-sectioning done at a given moment at a given geographical point would suggest or sustain. This Westernization is simultaneously a phenomenon of domination (regardless of any existing, no longer existing or never experienced colonial regime), of cultural *Ueberlagerung*, and of recession from

<sup>19</sup> For detail see the paper cited in the foregoing note, pp. 100-104 (*Studien*, pp. 80-85). A third instance of convergence, preceding the others by some three hundred years or more, is the iconoclastic movement—better described in Islam as a "misiconic" mood—of the eight and ninth centuries. An analysis of the movement resulting in the affirmation of the essential independence of the Byzantine development was attempted by the writer in his study "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," *History of Religions*, II/1 (1962), 1-10.

## *The Convergence of Cultural Traditions*

direct to indirect, of imposed to elected reshaping and adaptation.

In terms of outlook and attitudes the essential traits of modernization "in a westerly direction" are these:

1) The feeling that the chains of the *Sosein* are no longer unbreakable, that in fact, much of the value of life is predicated on determination and ability of individual and collective to remove the bonds of past and present, to redefine oneself and transform the essence of one's being in accordance with such, more or less arbitrary redefinition.

2) Temporary, self-superseding truth and perpetual obsolescence of programs and achievements in the light of a permanent striving after endless enlargement of scope and power.

3) Mathematization of the universe of experience as precondition of its manipulability.

4) Simultaneously (though not in harmony with it), its historization as proof of temporariness and accidental nature of current defects and deficiencies and also as evidence of potential for the future through the testimony of the (often recklessly stylized) past.

5) A blend, not easy to describe, of combative individualism, outraged by the memory of past and the suspicion of present and future restraints, with an insistence that the collective is to crush individual and group resistance to an acceleration of a semiutopian future of which not too much is known beyond that it must be different, such difference to include social justice and political power (sometimes in reverse order).

Three alternatives present themselves for interpretative categorization. Integration of two culture areas into one with Western dominance; influence; convergence. Apart from the consideration that the causal sequence need not and will not be the same throughout the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, it may be argued that all three categories are in evidence and, above all, that to separate influence and convergence is bound to be risky in a psychological situation when self-development is sought by every means within society's reach. It is, however, perhaps the resistance that may suggest a sorting out; and such resistance would appear to be directed principally against introspective self-analysis and historization, the latter when it threatens, by relativizing experiences, to undermine activist drives and to erode the uniqueness of Islam. Uneasiness toward

self-analysis is in part no doubt also a precautionary attitude to which sociology but also anthropology are apt to fall victim; for another part this shying away from systematic introspection—which, on another plane, has contributed to preventing the growth of anything corresponding to European Oriental studies—is the concomitant of an impatient pragmatism that craves results now and feels that the “superstructure” will follow automatically once political victory is won—the phrasing should not suggest that this sentiment is peculiar to the *marxisants*. The uninterrupted contact with the West which the Eastern Mediterranean has maintained since 1798 (and earlier) makes convergence less likely there than the systematic isolation of Japan would suggest in assessing the comparable redesigning of man, society and universe which that country experienced.

Arab self-definition tends, at this point, to be rather restrictive. Defensiveness goes ill with universalism. Yet the great tradition of both Islam and the Arab Muslim Empire is precisely universalistic. Some of the best among the young thinkers are seeking to reconcile the particularism of nationalistic aspirations with a latter-day universalism. Thus the Moroccan, Abdallah Laroui, arguing that the *Nationalgefühl* of German classicism was wider, more inclusive than its French predecessor of the eighteenth century, postulates an even wider, even more humanistic self-definition of Arab nationalism on the ground that, culturally at least, universality alone will in the long view propel and justify national individualisms.<sup>20</sup> The biculturalism of some North African circles when not impeded by a bad conscience for having stepped out of the traditional boundaries of self-identification and thus been alienated from the “people” (as has happened, for example, to the Algerian, Malek Haddad) is evidence extraordinary for the integrative power of a creative convergence. On laying aside a document like the poems *D'un soleil réticent* of the Moroccan, Zaghoul Morsy,<sup>21</sup> one takes a long moment to reawaken to the fact that the Mediterranean is not yet and, owing precisely to the Arab resurgence, may never again become one cultural region.

<sup>20</sup> Oral communication of A. Laroui, May, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> Paris, 1969; the poems were written in 1964.