

# Plotinus

**Plotinus**, (born 205 CE, Lyco, or Lycopolis, Egypt?—died 270, Campania), ancient philosopher, the centre of an influential circle of intellectuals and men of letters in 3rd-century Rome, who is regarded by modern scholars as the founder of the Neoplatonic school of philosophy.

## Origins And Education

The only important source for the life of Plotinus is the biography that his disciple and editor Porphyry wrote as a preface to his edition of the writings of his master, the *Enneads*. Other ancient sources add almost no reliable information to what Porphyry relates. This must be mentioned because, though Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* is the best source available for the life of any ancient philosopher, it has some important deficiencies that must necessarily be reflected in any modern account of the life of Plotinus that does not use a great deal of creative imagination to fill in the gaps. The *Life* is the work of an honest, accurate, hero-worshipping, and serious-minded friend and admirer. Apart from a few fascinating scraps of information about the earlier parts of the life of Plotinus, Porphyry concentrates on the last six years, when he was with his master in Rome. Thus, a fairly complete picture is available only of the last six years of a man who died at the age of 65. It is the elderly Plotinus, as it is the elderly Socrates, who alone is known. Plotinus's own writings contain no autobiographical information, and they can give no unintentional glimpses of his mind or character when he was young; they were all written in the last 15 years of his life. Nothing is known about his intellectual and spiritual development.

According to Porphyry, Plotinus never spoke about his parents, his race, or his country. Eunapius, a late 4th-century writer, and later authors wrote that his birthplace was Lyco, or Lycopolis, in Egypt, either the modern Asyūt in Upper Egypt or a small town in the Nile delta. Though this may be true, there is no real evidence in the *Life* or in his own writings to suggest that Plotinus had any special knowledge of or affinity with Egypt; the fact that he later studied philosophy in the great cosmopolitan city of Alexandria is not necessarily evidence that he was an Egyptian. His name is Latin in form, but, in the 3rd century CE, this gives no clue to his ethnic origins. All that can be said with reasonable certainty is that Greek was his normal language and that he had a

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Origins and education

Expedition to the East

Life in Rome

Plotinus's teachings and writings

Last years