

DREAMS, THEURGY AND FREELANCE DIVINATION:  
THE TESTIMONY OF IAMBlichus\*

By POLYMNIA ATHANASSIADI

The men of the Antonine era shared with us a keen interest in divination, which they expressed in a variety of complementary or apparently contradictory ways: in polemic and dispassionate research, but more obviously in the act of reviving their ancient prophetic shrines and of establishing new oracles. If the rage that the vaticinating demons inspired in Oenomaus of Gadara and in Lucian is sufficient evidence of the rationalist's reaction to a mounting social and intellectual trend, the scholarly achievement of Artemidorus of Daldis at the instigation of Apollo himself exemplifies in more positive fashion the involvement of the age with prophetic lore.<sup>1</sup> So does the incredible success of the Pythagorean Alexander's oracular establishment on the inhospitable shores of the Black Sea, and the personality of Aelius Aristides, that professional valetudinarian whose night-diaries dictated by Asclepius covered more than three hundred thousand lines.<sup>2</sup> It was in precisely this world that the Delphic oracle underwent a remarkable renaissance under the auspices of a Platonist philosopher,<sup>3</sup> and that an emperor commended the publication by a senator of a work about the dreams which foretold his ascent to the throne.<sup>4</sup>

## I. THEURGY, THE CATALYST OF DIVINATION

The Antonine revival of such famous oracles as Delphi, Didyma, and Claros and of the cultural values for which they stood has recently formed the object of intense scholarly research,<sup>5</sup> though curiously no great interest has been displayed towards the fate of these same oracles in subsequent periods. An attempt in this regard to track down the archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Didyma and Delphi and compare it with literary testimonies has revealed an interesting picture; by the mid-fourth century prophecy had been definitively stamped out in both shrines, leaving only a vague memory of sanctity which was adroitly exploited by the Church; its polemicists, sticking to long-established rhetorical clichés, continued to fulminate against Delphi and Didyma in their anti-pagan attacks, while their real target was home-made oracles and oniromancy.<sup>6</sup> It was indeed this new divination, catalysed by theurgy, that dominated late antiquity to such an extent that it was viewed by both Church and State as at the same time the most representative and the most pernicious aspect of the pagan spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Before attempting to define the new discipline of 'theurgy' (a task to which the whole of this paper in a sense is devoted), it may be useful to try to dispel the notions which were sown almost fifty years ago when E. R. Dodds published his epoch-making article in this journal.<sup>8</sup> Spurred by his private interests in psychoanalysis and spiritualism, Dodds saw in the Chaldaean Oracles, which form the theoretical basis of theurgical practices, a prime example of automatic writing:

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<sup>1</sup> For the formidable attack on oracles by Oenomaus of Gadara, see Eusebius, *PE* v.18ff. and vi.7; cf. iv.2.14; for Lucian's attack, see his *Alex. passim*. For the true dimensions of Artemidorus' achievement, see S. R. F. Price, 'The future of dreams: from Freud to Artemidorus', *Past and Present* 113 (Nov. 1986), 3-37.

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<sup>7</sup> See *CTh* xvi.10.1 (321), ix.16.4 (357), ix.16.5 (357), ix.16.6 (358), ix.16.7 (364), ix.16.8 (370 or 373), ix.16.9 (371), ix.16.12 (409), xvi.10.7 (381), xvi.7.2 (383), xvi.10.9 (385), xvi.10.12.1 (392) etc. Equally all the *causes célèbres* of late antiquity involved the use of freelance divination: Ammianus xxix.1; Socrates, *HE* iv.19; Sozomen vi.35.

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ATHANASSIADI Polymnia, *Dreams, theurgy and freelance divination: the testimony of Iamblichus*: JRS 83 1993 115-130. Appraisals of the divinations of the Antonine era have been clouded by E. R. Dodds' overly psychoanalytic assessment of the practice of theurgy (cf. *APH* XVIII p. 245). Theurgy ought instead to be understood as a dynamic state of mind, varying from individual to individual; it is according to Iamblichus the manipulation of an inner state of sanctity deriving from a combination of goodness and knowledge in which goodness prevails.

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their diction is so bizarre and bombastic, their thought so obscure and incoherent as to suggest rather the trance utterances of modern spirit guides than the deliberate efforts of a forger. It seems indeed not impossible, in view of what we know about later theurgy, that they had their origin in the 'revelations' of some visionary or trance medium.<sup>9</sup>

Dodds' attitude towards theurgy was that of the uncharitable psychiatrist at work on the diagnosis of a morbid state whose random symptoms he raised to the status of unvaried characteristics. Absolving Plotinus of any involvement with the 'rigmarole' of theurgy, he turned for a definition of the discipline to that 'manifesto of irrationalism', Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*.<sup>10</sup> But in this task Dodds used as a criterion of his research post-Iamblichan practice and, examining the way in which Neoplatonists from Maximus to Proclus applied theurgical devices for divinatory purposes, he reached the conclusion that Iamblichan theurgy was a mere technique.<sup>11</sup> But of course theurgy is not just a technique (though by a tenuous definition it can be this as well), but rather a dynamic state of mind, varying from individual to individual and additionally undergoing constant change according to the theurgist's state of mind. Attempting a provisional definition based on Iamblichus' understanding of the term, I would describe theurgy as the often involuntary manifestation of an inner state of sanctity deriving from a combination of goodness and knowledge in which the former element prevails.

This revised form of prophecy, which gradually supplanted the traditional methods of the Roman East, naturally became the object of controversy both between pagans and Christians and between dissenting pagans, who discussed the merits of perpetual revelation in 'tens of thousands of essays' until their views hardened into party lines.<sup>12</sup> Of paramount importance among prophetological texts are Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. Composed at the beginning of the fourth century,<sup>13</sup> both works are of especial interest not so much as authoritative treatments of the theory and practice of divination (which is what they claim to be), but as complementary visions of the paths that prophecy was to take in the later Roman Empire. One of the aims of this paper is to show in what ways the *De Mysteriis* and the *Praeparatio Evangelica* influenced both the actual development of divination, and public opinion on the matter, but before doing that, a few remarks on Iamblichus and his posthumous fate are necessary.

Iamblichus was a revisionist thinker, and this characteristic was fully recognized by his followers, though not always as being a virtue; sometimes they complained of his unduly original interpretation of Plato and of a lack of clarity in expressing his views,<sup>14</sup> while at other times they took him at face value, failing completely to appreciate his considerable sense of humour.<sup>15</sup> This combination of intellectual ambiguity and playfulness is at the basis of Iamblichus' elusiveness; it is also however the source of his great charm, so that for centuries his followers displayed religious reverence towards his word and, beginning with the emperor Julian, claimed philosophical descent from him. This claim was considerably facilitated by a potent amount of misunderstanding on the part of Iamblichus' progeny, as Proclus' treatment

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 56–8.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 59: 'the *de mysteriis* is a manifesto of irrationalism, an assertion that the road to salvation is found not in reason but in ritual'.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius, *PE* IV.2.14.

<sup>13</sup> It is impossible to date the *De Mysteriis* on other than internal criteria. On the grounds that Chaldaean influence is not yet as prominent in this work as in Iamblichus' later writings, J. M. Dillon, *Iamblichus Chalcidensis in Plat. dial. comm. fragmenta* (1973), 13, 18, dates the *De Mysteriis* c. 280. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 183, proposes by implication a date c. 300. Both the fact that Porphyry addressed so important a questionnaire to Iamblichus, and the self-confident tone of the latter's answer, suggest that by then Iamblichus was an established master. A date around 300 or slightly later is therefore probable. I have communicated this view to John Dillon, who finds it 'perfectly reasonable' (letter of 6.7.1990). The *Praeparatio Evangelica* was begun shortly after 313 and completed before 320: Barnes, 71–2.

<sup>14</sup> See Proclus, *In Ti.* II. 240. 4–5: ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεῖος

Ἰάμβλιχος ἄνω που μετεωροπολεῖ καὶ τάφανη μερμυγᾷ; *In Ti.* I. 426. 3ff. (= Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 34 and Dillon's commentary ad loc. pp. 307–9). This passage offers an excellent illustration of the difficulties faced by Iamblichus' followers when dealing with his exegesis; *In Ti.* III. 257. 24ff. (= Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 82A): Iamblichus is accused of not being a careful reader of Plato, of actually disregarding τοῦ Πλάτωνος τὴν λέξιν. This attitude is perpetuated by Proclus' epigoni who, while accepting Iamblichus' greatness, pronounce him too intuitive and therefore unclear: Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 10.1, 7; 11.2; 13.4; Damascius, *In Phaed.* 1.207; 548 (a good example of sticking to the letter of Iamblichan passages). For the close dependence of these commentaries on Proclus, L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* I (1976), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Anecdotes which illustrate both the humorous attitude of Iamblichus towards miracles and the incapacity of his pupils to understand the spirit behind his remarks are reported by Eunapius (*VS* v.2, v.1.7–10), whose manner of telling the stories illustrates this attitude all too well.

of the Iamblichan exegesis of Platonic texts amply shows.<sup>16</sup> The ineluctable attraction then experienced by renewed generations of 'Iamblichans' towards their master, coupled as it was with misunderstanding, resulted in the wide diffusion of a singularly distorted image of Iamblichus' contribution to theology. An idea of what happened can be obtained by comparing what Iamblichus actually says about divination in the *De Mysteriis* with what his followers made of it.

Invented by Marsilio Ficino, the random title 'De Mysteriis' has long served to obscure the fundamental fact that the book is as much an assessment of contemporary divinatory belief and practice as a programmatic work. For, within the framework of a theoretical discussion, it contains an apology for traditional cult while playing down the importance of sacred places as compared with the authority of holy men, the theurgists, who are repeatedly contrasted with mere craftsmen of spirituality. In this text, Iamblichus deals in highly critical, if unsystematic, fashion with the different kinds of divination practised in his day, and it is worth trying to disentangle the threads of his narrative and pin down their historical relevance (cf. III).

## II. EUSEBIUS, IAMBlichUS AND PORPHYRY

At the root of both the *Praeparatio Evangelica* and the *De Mysteriis* lies Porphyry. But whereas Eusebius treated him somewhat slyly as an authority for polemical purposes, Iamblichus used his text with an intensely corrective intent. Since this holy or unholy alliance (as the case may be) between the three men proved crucial for subsequent developments, it is important to look at it more closely.

### *Eusebius and Porphyry*

Eusebius felt called upon to prove to the world the superiority of a religion that he intuitively knew to be the best. Confident in his belief, he saw nothing wrong in using any available means or method to achieve his objective. By contrast, Porphyry knew that truth had only been partially revealed to him, and saw life as the expanse within which he could find out more about the world and about himself. This attitude caused him to ask many questions and change his mind according to the answers he received. As Iamblichus put it, when it came to giving an opinion, 'Porphyry was at a loss'.<sup>17</sup> Eusebius cannot have failed to notice this feature of Porphyry's way of thinking; but, pretending not to understand how the philosopher's mind worked, he used Porphyry's fumbling hesitation and doubts to piece together a bible of paganism and put it at the disposal of his public.

However, the two men had much in common too. They were both voracious readers and ardent researchers. When Porphyry decided to investigate divination, he collected as many oracles as it was possible for a conscientious researcher to find. How he interpreted this material is not clear from the fragments of his work on the *Philosophy from Oracles*, which has reached us in the form of quotations by exclusively hostile critics. One thing seems certain however: Porphyry never suppressed evidence. Moreover, a careful study of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* suggests that, when faced with a collection of contradictory texts, Porphyry did not attempt to reconcile them. Rather than classifying his evidence at different theological levels — a method that would have allowed him nicely to combine conflicting views within the framework of a system — he viewed it with the critical eye of the philologist and was not afraid to admit his doubts or conclude his investigation with a question mark.

<sup>16</sup> For Julian on Iamblichus, see n. 99. A good example of Proclus believing that he agrees with Iamblichus, when in fact he does not, is provided by his *In Ti.* III. 173. 17–24; 175. 30–176. 1; for Proclus' conviction that he is following Iamblichus, cf. *In Ti.* III. 174. 16–17: ταῖς δὲ καθαρωτάταις ἐννοίαις Ἰαμβλίχου συνεψόμεθα, a

promise which is not kept. Striking examples of this circumstance in connection with divination will be provided further in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Πορφύριος δὲ ἐνδοιάζει: Iamblichus, *On the Soul* (ap. Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 1.41.32, 866).

Porphyry's intellectual honesty was duly exploited by Eusebius,<sup>18</sup> who made him present the gods as impotent beings in the service of magicians,<sup>19</sup> as liars,<sup>20</sup> or, at best, as passably competent astrologers subject to fate.<sup>21</sup> Once interpreted in this spirit, the oracles collected by Porphyry together with his commentary were used by virtually everybody who wrote against divination and fate in the centuries to come.<sup>22</sup> As for Eusebius, he argued with faultless logic that the weak and immoral beings behind the oracles could not possibly be divine: they were either wicked demons<sup>23</sup> or human charlatans, whose only incentive was gain.<sup>24</sup>

Demoted to the level of demons, the gods of paganism were further characterized by Eusebius as mortal.<sup>25</sup> Indeed one of the major themes of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* is that, when Christ appeared on earth, many demons were annihilated; this process led gradually to the demise of oracles which by his day, Eusebius asserts, were fully silenced.<sup>26</sup> The claim is, of course, a large one, often contradicted by the apologist himself, who cannot control his anger at the foolishness of mankind still being deceived by the fraud of divination.<sup>27</sup>

Eusebius' emotional tone when referring to the state of oracles is fully understandable, especially in the light of the connection that had by his day been established between pagan prophecy and Christian persecution, the former instigating the latter.<sup>28</sup> As for the odd contradiction and the occasional error of logic in his work, they formed part of the polemical game and did not in any way prevent the message of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* from being clear: the overwhelming impression left by this text is that divination, cunningly identified with the great oracular sites, was a godless discipline on the way to extinction.<sup>29</sup>

### *Iamblichus and Porphyry*

In his constant desire to understand the cosmos, Porphyry turned to his younger contemporary Iamblichus, and asked again some of the agonizing questions he had posed to Plotinus:<sup>30</sup> since gods and demons are topographically allocated in the universe, how is it that in theurgy gods are invoked as inhabiting areas not belonging to them?<sup>31</sup> What are the characteristic qualities of the different types of divinity?<sup>32</sup> Should one address prayers to gods?<sup>33</sup> Among gods, some are beneficent, others maleficent, or is this not the case?<sup>34</sup> How do incorporeal divinities mix with corporeal ones?<sup>35</sup> What is the typology of divine apparitions?<sup>36</sup> Above all, what exactly happens in the act of divination?<sup>37</sup> How does divination in traditional shrines differ from other more private types of prophecy?<sup>38</sup> How is it that the gods deign to serve flour-prophets (ἀλφειτομόνταις)?<sup>39</sup> Who reveals the future to men, a god, a demon, or an angel?<sup>40</sup> Is not the whole business of divination really a purely psychological phenomenon caused by a combination of inner and outward disturbances?<sup>41</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In *PE* IV.10–16.10 Eusebius makes Porphyry contradict himself on the subject of sacrifices by introducing abundant evidence from the *De Abstinencia* (II.7, 11–13, 24, 27, 36, 54–6, 60–1), while throughout the *PE* his main Porphyrian source is the *De Philosophia*.

<sup>19</sup> *Phil.* II (Wolff), pp. 154–64; *Ep. Aneb.* II.8–10b; I.2c and *PE* v.8–10.

<sup>20</sup> *Phil.* II, p. 169; III, pp. 175–6 and *PE* VI.5.

<sup>21</sup> *Phil.* II, pp. 166–8 and *PE* VI.1; *Phil.* II, p. 170 and *PE* VI.3.

<sup>22</sup> Two authors stand out in this respect, Theodoret (who actually acknowledges the *PE* to be his main source in his attack on paganism), *Affect.* II.97, and John Philoponus: Wolff, *Phil.*, pp. 118, 147–54, 156, 169, 170–7.

<sup>23</sup> *PE* III.14; IV.17.4–6; V.1.1, 16; 15.3 (an important passage); VI.11.82 (view already current in Christian polemic, cf. Origen, *Cels.* 7.3, but given unusual force by Eusebius).

<sup>24</sup> *PE* IV.1.10–11; 2.5; demons and charlatans: V.21.5 (on the authority of Oenomaus of Gadara); 26.5.

<sup>25</sup> *PE* V.1.3; 16.4; 17.11.

<sup>26</sup> *PE* V.17.6–9 (death of Pan under Tiberius); 13 (general statement), cf. IV.17.4; the theme was amply developed by Theodoret, *Affect.* X.11.43–8; *PE* IV.2.3; V.1.2–3 (silence of oracles).

<sup>27</sup> *PE* IV.2.13; V.27.5; cf. V.16. Delphi and Claros are

described as dead in IV.2.8, and in V.16 (quoting Porphyry, *Phil.* II, pp. 172–3) as the only still surviving oracles, along with Didyma.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *PE* IV.2.11; *VC* II.50; *HE* IX.3; Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* II.6.

<sup>29</sup> On the dishonest cunning of the Fathers in this connection, see my 'Fate of oracles' (op. cit. (n. 6), 278).

<sup>30</sup> J. Bidez, following Zeller, regarded the *Letter to Anebo* as a work from Porphyry's post-Plotinian period (*Vie de Porphyre, le philosophe néo-platonicien* (1913), 80–1), and placed the *De Mysteriis* after Porphyry's death (ibid., 87). A. R. Sodano, *Porfirio, Lettera ad Anebo* (1958), xxxii–xxxvi, on the other hand, dates the text between 263 and 268 on internal evidence. I assume both the *Letter to Anebo* and the *De Mysteriis* to be contemporary, and date them c. 300 or later, cf. above, n. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Porphyry, *Ep. Aneb.* I.2a.

<sup>32</sup> ibid. I.1c.

<sup>33</sup> ibid. I.3b.

<sup>34</sup> ibid. I.3c.

<sup>35</sup> ibid. I.3d.

<sup>36</sup> ibid. I.4.

<sup>37</sup> ibid. II.1.

<sup>38</sup> ibid. II.2.

<sup>39</sup> ibid. II.3a.

<sup>40</sup> ibid. II.3a.

<sup>41</sup> ibid. II.4, 5.

If such remarks were feasted upon by Eusebius and his intellectual progeny,<sup>42</sup> they do not seem to have upset Iamblichus, who was not in the least angry at such irreverent questions. Occasionally, it is true, he was shocked by Porphyry's naivety, especially when the latter echoed Christian propaganda unawares;<sup>43</sup> but on the whole he was pleased to receive the *Letter to Anebo*. For Iamblichus, like Plotinus, was above all a teacher. Consequently he set out patiently to elucidate obscure points, answer questions, dispel doubts. What resulted is a treatise on divination.

### *The De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*

What Iamblichus does in the *De Mysteriis* is to produce a theoretical framework by reference to which every known divinatory practice can be classified or rejected. This he does as an expert and fully confident Platonist, who believes in the essential, though incredibly complex, unity of the cosmos.<sup>44</sup> To him duality, let alone plurality, is a figure of speech, not a way of being; for being exists in unity (ἑνοειδῶς) and can only be comprehended by a simple act of intellection (μονοειδῶς), rather than by analytical thinking.<sup>45</sup> Thus, according to Iamblichus, the gods, demons, angels, rulers, heroes, souls, and whatever other powers are mentioned by philosophers, and currently believed to be used in divination, symbolize stages in man's spiritual progress towards or away from being and should under no circumstances be envisaged topographically, as linked with particular areas of the cosmos.<sup>46</sup> 'Such a division is false, while unbridled hunting after qualities is unreasonable',<sup>47</sup> exclaims Iamblichus. And yet, when answering specific points, he has no choice but to play the game of analysis and treat plurality as if it truly existed.<sup>48</sup> But then, he specifies he speaks 'philosophically', for otherwise Porphyry's questions would remain unanswered; at other times, he speaks 'theologically'; finally, there are moments when Iamblichus suspends thought and speaks 'theurgically'.<sup>49</sup>

This tripartite division of method corresponds to different approaches to divination, and enables Iamblichus to analyse and classify the various aspects of contemporary practice. Theoretically μαντική (prophecy) is consubstantial with the One. It has nothing to do with human dispositions and habits, and is not an art, but a wholly divine manifestation to which all psychological and bodily attributes as well as the peculiarities of specific places are subjected.<sup>50</sup> Yet, being co-extensive with God, the gift of prophecy is also present in the cosmos, and hence inherent in the divisible.

Only by negating himself can man become aware of the divine spirit within him and reveal it to others;<sup>51</sup> for if, while God is manifesting Himself in such a manner, either the soul or the body of the prophet intervenes, the oracle becomes disturbed and falsified,<sup>52</sup> the occurrence of passion and materiality at any stage of the prophetic action being fatal.<sup>53</sup> By making man alone responsible for the distortion of originally truthful oracles, Iamblichus frontally attacked the spatial conception of spirituality typified by Porphyry, which accepted that in their journey towards the earth the god's utterances might easily fall under the influence of the stars.<sup>54</sup>

Iamblichus' optimistic assertion that any cause of disruption in divination can be controlled by the man who has fully surrendered himself to God is at the root of the important division he makes of prophecy into divine and human.<sup>55</sup> He never tires of repeating that true prophecy is the gift of the gods alone, yet he also recognizes that in the course of history mankind invented many ways of foretelling the future, such as by the flight of birds, the study

<sup>42</sup> See above, n. 22; also *PE* v.10; vi.5.1; xiv.10.2; Theodoret, *Affect.* 1.48; iii.66–8; x.11ff.; it is worth noting that Theodoret, *Affect.* x.42, attributes to Porphyry a hostile attitude to divination, mentioning him in one breath with Diogenianus the Epicurean.

<sup>43</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* ii.7 and *Myst.* iii.31.179; *Ep. Aneb.* ii.8 and *Myst.* iv.11; *Ep. Aneb.* ii.18 and *Myst.* x.2, 4.

<sup>44</sup> A point made clearly by Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 45.

<sup>45</sup> *Myst.* i.3, 10.34.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* i.5, 8.28.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* i.8.29.

<sup>48</sup> Thus on the typology of apparitions, *ibid.* ii.3.70ff.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* i.2.7. For a good analysis of theurgy and the theurgic 'way', as also of Porphyry's intellectual limitations, see G. Shaw, 'Theurgy: rituals of unification in the

Neoplatonism of Iamblichus', *Traditio* 41 (1985), 17–27.

<sup>50</sup> *Myst.* iii.1.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* iii.4, 5, 7, 11, 31.176.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* iii.7.115: θεορρυθμίζονται καὶ ψευδῆ τὰ μαντεῖα καὶ ὁ ἐνθουσιασμός οὐκέτι ἀληθὴς ὑπάρχει οὐδὲ γνησίως θεῖος.

<sup>53</sup> *Myst.* iv.10: ἡ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τόλμα καὶ παράβασις τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τάξεως παρατρέπει τὰ καλὰ καὶ νόμιμα.

<sup>54</sup> *Phil.* ii, p. 170.

<sup>55</sup> Τεχνικῶς — θεουργικῶς: *Myst.* iii.28.170; ix.3.276; x.5. In this, as in much else, Iamblichus proves himself to be an orthodox Platonist; cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 244cd and Plotinus iii.1.3.13–16.

of entrails or the observation of the stars.<sup>56</sup> These methods are all fallacious, however, for they are the result of human science, which can at best only make conjectures about the future by using the clues of universal sympathy.<sup>57</sup>

But the distinction between human and divine prophecy is a fragile one. Just as the divine gift can be disorientated at any point and never reach its destination if it encounters violence or passion,<sup>58</sup> so too matter, when used by an expert with a holy disposition, can activate the divine word. This apparent paradox is explained in the light of Iamblichus' understanding of cult and theurgy, two inextricably entwined themes.

For the master of Apamea prayer and sacrifice, which are the very foundations of cult, are divine gifts to humanity;<sup>59</sup> they are rafts, so to speak, on which man can traverse more easily the ocean of diversity towards his goal of union with God. And, though it is possible that at the twilight of their lives a few men may indeed reach moral maturity and spiritual perfection and pass beyond the need of prayer, having already overcome their dependence on the body, the rest of mankind needs a routine of ritual.<sup>60</sup> If, suggests Iamblichus, man is ever to leave the world of diversity for that of unity, he needs the starting point which is provided by cult. Religion (θεοσηεία) is not a matter of human convention, but a divine gift.<sup>61</sup> In the context of this general thesis Iamblichus made a strong Cratylan point when he held against Malchus–Porphyry that in religion names cannot be translated because they lose something of their essence, which forms an inalienable part of the cosmos.<sup>62</sup> If distorted therefore through translation or otherwise, names injure divine harmony and can no longer operate as pass-words in the soul's upward journey.<sup>63</sup> In similar fashion religious music, whose origin is no less divine, helps the soul to ascend by reminding it of the music of the spheres.<sup>64</sup>

Having stressed the importance of ritual, Iamblichus devotes much effort to combating the common belief — abundantly illustrated through the magical papyri — that in theurgy the operant uses his knowledge of cosmic structures in order to bring down the god and obtain oracles.<sup>65</sup> 'How is it that the gods allow themselves to serve the vilest of magicians?', Porphyry had enquired in a passage that was feasted upon by Christian polemic.<sup>66</sup> Iamblichus solved the puzzle by anchoring himself on the Platonic principle of divine immobility and immutability: when the operant calls on the god, he explained, the god illuminates him with an excess of energy (περιουσία δυνάμεως), without of course descending in any physical sense. The divine δύναμις, manifest at that moment in the form of light, is perceptible to the theurgist who remains conscious.<sup>67</sup> Subsequently Iamblichus analyses for Porphyry's sake the wide variety of canonical methods by which light can be drawn for the purpose of divination.<sup>68</sup> Yet in his desire to convey more fully what happens during theurgical divination, he also uses the familiar Platonic image of the ascent of the soul: if 'the human soul is held by one image and darkened on all sides by the body',<sup>69</sup> its nostalgia, heightened by ritual, may indeed set it on the road of ethical and spiritual progress, symbolized by an upward motion in the course of which among other things the future is revealed to it.<sup>70</sup>

This is how Iamblichus conceives theurgy. In fact theurgical divination is presented by him not so much as an end in itself, but as a stage on the way to mystic union, a goal which may be reached either consciously or unconsciously. In this connection Iamblichus contrasts with the sober theurgist, who watches grace descend upon him,<sup>71</sup> the familiar figure of the prophet

<sup>56</sup> *Myst.* III.15; VI.4; IX.3.276.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* III.16, 27.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* IV.10.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* V.25; I.15; cf. VII.5. Here lies the essential difference between Plotinus and Iamblichus: having a more pessimistic view of humanity, the latter laid more emphasis on ritual than Plotinus, who expected the gods to come to him (Porphyry, *Plot.* 10.37–8). This could be because Plotinus believed that there is an element in our soul for ever unaffected by passion (*Enn.* III.4.3.22ff.; IV.1); against such optimism and spiritual autarky, Iamblichus reminded his readers that the charioteer of the soul cannot help sinking at some point, filling his pair of horses with lameness and moulting (*In Ti.* fr. 87).

<sup>60</sup> *Myst.* V.20.228: ὁψὲ, 22: ὁψαίτατα ... καὶ ἐν δυομαῖς τοῦ βίου, cf. 15.219, 18; I.11–15. On the stages of prayer, V.26.237–8.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* VII.4.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* VII.5. The Platonic view as defined in the *Cratylus* and finalized by Proclus (*In Parm.* 851.8) is that words are ἀγάλματα τῶν πραγμάτων λογικά. Disregarding this, the Tyrian Malchus had translated his name into Greek as Πορφύριος and allowed Amelius to call him Βασίλειος.

<sup>63</sup> *Myst.* I.15.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* III.9.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* III.17.139, 18.143: οὐ κατάγεται τὸ θεῖον εἰς τὰ σημεῖα τῆς μαντικῆς.

<sup>66</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* II.3a; cf. above, n. 43.

<sup>67</sup> *Myst.* III.14, 17; V.23.233.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* III.14; V.26.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* III.20.148.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* III.20.

<sup>71</sup> This is an important theme in Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers*: Sosipatra was σωφρόνως ἐνθουσιώσα, VI.8.1.

or prophetess who, falling into a trance, exchanges animal existence for a more divine life.<sup>72</sup> With reference to such states, Porphyry had wondered whether prophetic trance was not caused by some sort of mental disturbance.<sup>73</sup> To this irreverent remark Iamblichus opposed the two kinds of frenzy to which men may be subjected: ecstasy caused by passion, which is against nature (παρὰ φύσιν) and abases the soul, and ecstasy caused by God, which is beyond nature (ὕπερ τὴν φύσιν) and lifts the soul up.<sup>74</sup>

This second type of ecstasy, however, can only be induced by absolute virtue which causes utter forgetfulness of the self and absorption into God. But at that point Iamblichus conceded to Porphyry and to the magically-minded prophets a point which has given rise to much misunderstanding about his own view of theurgic divination: it is possible, he admitted, to obtain divine messages by manipulating the laws of nature,<sup>75</sup> but then, he warned his correspondent, divination becomes a technique which does not bring happiness.<sup>76</sup>

### III. THE *DE MYSTERIIS* AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

#### *Astrology and Private Oracles*

As well as a metaphysical text of universal value, the *De Mysteriis* can serve to the historian as a highly critical guide of divinatory practice at the close of the third century. Iamblichus' remarks on horoscope-casting — a discipline which he places at the lowest level of the astrological pyramid — are severe, for, like Plotinus, he wishes to castigate this extremely popular practice, which had adepts in all social and intellectual strata.<sup>77</sup> 'Your views on the subject do not seem to me either to be consistent or to bear any connection with the truth'<sup>78</sup> is his prelude, as Iamblichus begins to disentangle the threads of Porphyry's theories on fate, personal demons and horoscope-casting, all matters of great interest in philosophical circles, and central issues in the controversy between pagans and Christians. In the process, Iamblichus proves a stronger logician than Porphyry, who emerges as a man avid for knowledge but possessing a mind only superficially critical, rushing to analysis and classification before establishing whether his material is homogeneous. Thus Iamblichus shows that, when Porphyry uses astrological methods to find out about the personal demon, he is in fact attempting to grasp divine essence by applying human science.<sup>79</sup> For the teacher of Apamea the divinatory art (μαντική τέχνη) with its computation of tables is a useless technique based on the externals of astrology; only divine prophecy (ἡ θεία μαντική) can reveal the identity of the personal demon,<sup>80</sup> a power above fate who can indeed by the study and practice of theurgy be eventually turned into a god.<sup>81</sup> For this to happen, however, the prerequisite is absolute virtue.

As well as contrasting astrology with divine prophecy, Iamblichus distinguishes it from astronomy, a science given by the gods. But in its historical course astronomy (for which the term used is μαθηματική) suffered at the hands of men who, almost everywhere, spoiled the divine gift by creating a pseudo-science, based on the absurd assumption that man's divine nature can be ruled by cosmic powers inferior to itself.<sup>82</sup> Indeed if it were not for some Chaldaean experts and Egyptian priests, who still practised the god-sent discipline in its genuine form, the lessons of astronomy would have been lost to humanity.<sup>83</sup>

By splitting astronomy into a science and a pseudo-science, which extended the power of fate to regions free from it such as man's divine self, Iamblichus solved an important problem of morals and metaphysics much in the way Origen had done, and was therefore in full

<sup>72</sup> *Myst.* III.3: οὐδὲ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς.

<sup>73</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* II.5c.

<sup>74</sup> *Myst.* III.25.159.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* IV.10.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* X.4; cf. IV.10.

<sup>77</sup> Astrology and public life in the early Empire, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (1979), 119–26; for general belief in, G. Neugebauer and H. B. van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes* (1959), *passim*, esp. 176–90. For Plotinus' criticism of the discipline, III.1.5; in II.3.3 he condemns astrology on the grounds that its principles are incompatible with those of

astronomy, a true science. For the problematic passage II.3. 12–32, see A. H. Armstrong in his edition of the *Enneads* II (1966), 54–5. For Plotinus' punishment for his attack on fate and astrology, F. Maternus, *Math.* I.7.14–22.

<sup>78</sup> *Myst.* IX.3.275.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* IX.1–2.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* IX.3.276.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* IV.2.184; VIII.7; IX.6. For the case of Plotinus, Porphyry, *Plot.* 10.

<sup>82</sup> *Myst.* IX.4.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* VII.3; VIII.4.

agreement with Eusebius.<sup>84</sup> His view, however, did not prove influential. In the following centuries astrology and its practical applications continued to thrive, not least among Iamblichus' self-appointed adepts.<sup>85</sup>

Porphyry had also wondered whether it was possible to obtain truthful answers from home-made oracles based on magical symbols.<sup>86</sup> Concerning this practice Iamblichus was categorical:

This bad and superficial type of divination, which is accessible to the great majority of men, uses falsehood and intolerable fraud; far from causing the presence of any god, it produces a movement of the soul which attracts but a dim and ghostly reflection of the gods, which, because of its very debility, is sometimes disturbed by wicked demonic spirits.<sup>87</sup>

The facile practice that Iamblichus censures in this passage was widespread, as witnessed by many sources including amulets and the random collection of magical papyri now available to us.<sup>88</sup> Inexpensive, discreet and mobile, the various methods of telling the future by the use of magical symbols (χαρακτῆρες) flourished, especially after divination was officially banned. Besides, thanks to persistent misunderstanding, these methods enjoyed the authority of tradition. Believing that he was echoing Iamblichian views, the emperor Julian, for instance, encouraged belief in the intrinsic sanctity of magical characters,<sup>89</sup> and urged his friend and collaborator, Salutius, to do the same in a work that can be described as a pagan catechism.<sup>90</sup> With such a pedigree, divination by characters could scarcely disappear. Indeed our late antique and medieval literary sources are studded with divinatory scandals of this type, thus demonstrating the persistence of a practice whose appeal proved more durable than religious dogma.<sup>91</sup>

### *Divination by Statues*

According to Egyptian belief, the gods resided in their statues.<sup>92</sup> This belief and the hopes it stimulated are at the root of several theories of divination, one of which claimed that not all statues can serve as divine abodes, but only those manufactured in a certain fashion. Reported by Porphyry as a matter of fact, this theory seems to have annoyed Iamblichus; 'why should one exchange true existence for idols', he wondered, 'and descend from the first beings to the very last?'<sup>93</sup> Against Porphyry's view, that there are craftsmen who can produce statues able to attract gods for the purpose of divination,<sup>94</sup> Iamblichus argues that nothing made of matter can be inherently divine, and that a statue is merely an artificial mixture of many heterogeneous forces and elements, participating in a more divine world in its aesthetic dimension only.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Origen, *Philoc.* 23 and Eusebius, *PE* vi.11. For the important distinction between astronomy, a science, and astrology, a pseudo-science, Plotinus ii.3.3. For the semantic evolution of the term, see Liddell-Scott-Jones (1940), s.v. ἀστρολογία.

<sup>85</sup> *C Th* ix.16.8; 12; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 178–9. Eusebius, Bishop of Emesa and a pupil of Eusebius, lost his see for dabbling in astrology: Socrates, *HE* ii.9; Sozomen, *HE* iii.6. Basil of Caesarea, *Hex.* vi.5, faces the practice of astrology as a major social evil; G. Dagron and J. Rougé, 'Trois horoscopes de voyages en mer (5<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.)', *REB* 40 (1982), 118–19. For Marinus casting Proclus' horoscope, *Vita Procli* 35.

<sup>86</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* ii.2a: ἐπὶ χαρακτῆρων σπάντες.

<sup>87</sup> *Myst.* iii.13.

<sup>88</sup> Campbell Bonner, 'Magical amulets', *HTR* 39 (1946), 39–40. *P. Mag.* ii.150–82, for a detailed description of an ἰδιωτικὸν μαντεῖον with characters; i.262–78 and v.305–68, a clear account of the use of characters for magical purposes; vii. *passim* (1–148, a Homer oracle); x.36–50, xi.1–11, literally standing on characters, as suggested by the Porphyrian text. Cf. also Porphyry, *Phil.* i, pp. 137–8, 164.

<sup>89</sup> *Or.* vii.216c.

<sup>90</sup> *De Diis* 15, and P. Athanassiadi, *Julian: an Intellectual Biography*<sup>2</sup> (1992), 154.

<sup>91</sup> On magically obtained oracles: Ammianus xxix.29–32; Eunapius, *VS* vii.6.3, cf. vi.6.1–3; Synesius, *Insomn.* xii.144a–145b; Zacharias Scholasticus, *V. Sev.*, PO 2, 57–70, 90–1; John of Ephesus, *HE* 27–34. By contrast, Plotinus, in whose spirit Iamblichus speaks, defines the art of divination as the spontaneous ἀνάγνωσις φουικῶν γραμμάτων (iii.3.6), that is the reading of signs which are ubiquitous, as he explains in another passage: μεστά δὲ πάντα σημείων καὶ σοφός τις ὁ μαθὼν ἐξ ἄλλου ἄλλο (ii.3.7).

<sup>92</sup> See J. Cerný, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (1952), 64ff.; I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, 'The imperial chamber at Luxor', *DOP* 29 (1975), 242–3. The ferrying of the statue of Isis from Philae to the land of the Blemmyes and the Nobadae at fixed intervals for the giving of oracles is still attested in the mid-fifth century: Priscus, *FHG* iv.100 (= Blockley, fr. 27).

<sup>93</sup> *Myst.* iii.28.167.

<sup>94</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* ii.68; cf. *Phil.* i, pp. 130–4. For practical adaptations, see J. R. Harris, 'Iconography and context: *ab oriente ad occidentem*', in M. Henig and A. King (eds), *Pagan Gods and Shrines of the Roman Empire* (1986), 175.

<sup>95</sup> *Myst.* iii.28–9.

Iamblichus' refutation of Porphyry's view does not seem to have had any effect, at least in theurgical circles in Egypt. The sixth-century Athenian diadochus, Damascius, reports as a sign of spiritual perfection that Heraiscus of Alexandria could tell the difference between a divine and a lifeless statue even at a distance.<sup>96</sup>

Another theory which originated in the belief that divinity may reside in statues was that of εἰσχωρισίς, that is of the ritual purification of a statue so that it receives God for the purpose of prophecy. As we have seen, Iamblichus categorically denied that divinity may be drawn to a statue; yet this did not prevent the doctrine and practice of εἰσχωρισίς from becoming co-terminous with theurgy.<sup>97</sup> Among Iamblichus' successors at one remove we find Maximus of Ephesus using statues of gods in order to perform miracles. Iamblichus had warned that 'one must apprehend the nature of this miracle-mongering and under no circumstances perform it or believe in it!'<sup>98</sup> Yet one of his assiduous readers and warmest admirers could face Maximus as god on earth without sensing any contradiction in his allegiance.<sup>99</sup> As we learn from Eunapius, it was precisely a story about how Maximus had animated a statue of Hecate that set Julian in pursuit of him, despite both the danger that this act involved for his personal safety, and Iamblichus' verdict about technicians in divination: 'never will any divine light shine upon such souls!'<sup>100</sup> Julian, among many others, chose to forget this brief sentence.

From Maximus onwards, divination by statues became standard Neoplatonic practice, and emphasis was laid on the technicalities of the process which often involved the use of 'characters', the combination of the two methods having already been advocated by Porphyry.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, far from arresting the course of the practice, Iamblichus' condemnation of statue prophecy — or what has come to be called 'theurgical divination' — accelerated it by lending it the prestige of his name. This could indeed happen because Iamblichus' tenuous distinction between virtue and technical expertise — in other words, the opposition of theurgy to magic — could be understood and enforced only by another holy man. But sadly, neither Julian nor Proclus nor any of the impressionable or scholastic minds who claimed descent from Iamblichus were able to grasp and apply the criterion of holiness set by him, any more than they were in a position to see that Iamblichus' hierarchization of the cosmos was but a didactic device.

### *Public Oracles and Official Divination*

Based partly on post-Iamblichan Neoplatonic evidence, partly on Christian polemic, modern scholarship understandably claims that theurgy and magic are disciplines resting on the same presuppositions and using some of the same methods in pursuit of different ends.<sup>102</sup> Such a view of theurgy would have horrified Iamblichus, who in his letter to Porphyry went to great lengths to argue that theurgy is the way of the wholly virtuous; indeed, it is only because he saw it as the very flower of divination that he tried so hard to dissociate it both from fraudulent practices and from the compromised mainstream oracular tradition. In the former attempt he failed, though it should be seen as a measure of the influence of the *De Mysteriis* that the misunderstood figure of the Iamblichan theurgist gained such currency in subsequent times. But in the latter effort he was successful, though it must be pointed out that this was an easier task: the great oracular establishments were on the way to extinction and, sensing this, Iamblichus reserved no place of honour for them in his scheme.<sup>103</sup> Thus, to Porphyry's

<sup>96</sup> *Isid.* fr. 174.

<sup>97</sup> See above, p. 119. Εἰσχωρισίς by the help of χαρακτῆρες: Hermias, *In Phdr.* 87, 4ff.; Porphyry's question endorsed by Proclus: *In Ti.* III.6.9ff.; ritually purified statues symbolizing the presence of the gods: Proclus, *In Ti.* I. 273. 11ff.; statues becoming animate: *ibid.* III.6.12; *Theol. Plat.* I.29. *In Ti.* III.155.18ff. contains a straightforward statement that the god can be constrained to enter a statue and render oracles.

<sup>98</sup> *Myst.* III.30.175. For Maximus animating a statue of Hecate, see Eunapius, *VS* VII.2.6–10. For violence used against the gods, cf. *ibid.* VII.3.10–12: ἐκβιάζεσθαι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ φύσιν ἄχρις ἂν ἐπικλίνη πρὸς τὸν θεραπεύοντα.

<sup>99</sup> Julian, *Ep.* 12 (Bidez); *Or.* XI.157c: in Iamblichus there is to be found τὸ τέλος ... τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ... σοφίας. On Maximus, *Ep.* 89a.452a; 89b.298b.

<sup>100</sup> *Myst.* III.29.173.

<sup>101</sup> *Phil.* I, p. 137; see also n. 97; Marinus, *Procl.* 28; Psellus, *Ep.* 187 in Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη* V (1876), 474.

<sup>102</sup> 'The procedures of theurgy were broadly similar to those of vulgar magic' (n. 73), claims Dodds in his influential article (above, n. 8), an axiom which still seems to be universally accepted (cf. e.g. G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 126ff.).

<sup>103</sup> cf. above, n. 6.

questions about what was happening at Delphi, Didyma, and Claros, Iamblichus answered with the boldness of the intelligent reformer. To his mind, these places were sacred not theologically, but historically, because of an original association with the god: the holy water, the divine staff or the fiery element, as the case might be, played a preparatory role in the dispensation of the divine word; they were useful accessories, sanctioned by tradition, and not crucial elements in the wielding of prophecy.<sup>104</sup>

In his attitude to much that pertained to traditional oracular practice, Iamblichus gives the impression that he differed little from his Christian counterparts. And just as, rather than lamenting the fate of the great prophetic sites of the ancient world, he proclaimed their irrelevance to the core of divination, he likewise dismissed as mere craftsmanship some very ancient and popular divinatory methods, such as augury by the flight of birds and the observation of animal entrails.<sup>105</sup> Besides the emperor Julian, who here too did not prove a very careful reader of Iamblichus, there were many others who continued to honour these deeply-rooted practices in the Mediterranean world.<sup>106</sup> For Iamblichus, however, these technicalities were no better than the various methods of popular magic which sought to reveal the future by using corpses of animals.<sup>107</sup> Soon, bishops and emperors were to join their voices with Iamblichus' in denunciation of these squalid practices, which of course never went out of fashion, since they encouraged people to think that they would discover what would happen in everyday life, as Iamblichus had pertinently pointed out.<sup>108</sup>

Unlike his Christian counterparts, however, Iamblichus was not an intellectual snob. For him, truthfulness and falsehood in the spiritual sphere were not dependent on the simplistic scheme of learned versus popular religion.<sup>109</sup> Just as his view of the divine cosmos was built on the assumption of homogeneity and not of spatial hierarchization (yet a homogeneity that could at any moment be compromised by the intrusion of foreign elements),<sup>110</sup> so too the sphere of knowledge did not appear to him as a tiered structure, with truth inhabiting the level of learned opinion and suffering a progressive weakening as it associated with more popular forms of learning. Truth for Iamblichus could be found at all levels of religious experience, for it was a spiritual, not a merely intellectual entity. Thus he argued that Etruscan divination and street magic were equally ungodly disciplines, while theurgic divination and oniromancy, despite their occasional misuse at the hands of mortals, had kept their divine core intact.

### *Oniromancy*

Iamblichus lived in a world where prophecy by dreams was both traditional and popular.<sup>111</sup> He fully acknowledged the fact and joined in the discussion which, since Aristotle's day, had divided 'onirologists' into believers and unbelievers. Subscribing to the former category, he attempted to dispel Porphyry's doubts by having recourse to the current distinction between predictive dreams (ὄνειροι) and mere fantasies (ἐνύπνια). While the former, for which Iamblichus provides a full typology, are caused by the gods, the latter are a creation of the passions and should therefore be omitted from a serious discussion of mantic dreams, for any success they may have is purely coincidental.<sup>112</sup> Iamblichus' most interesting pages on prophetic dreams are those in which he describes how they occur, and offers a full 'theurgic' interpretation of their function in the cosmos.<sup>113</sup> As a natural sequel to this section,

<sup>104</sup> *Myst.* III.11; cf. III.22.154. On the transfer of the numinous from institutions to individuals in late antiquity see now P. Athanassiadi, 'Philosophers and oracles: shifts of authority in late paganism', *Byzantion* 62 (1992), 45–62.

<sup>105</sup> See above, n. 56.

<sup>106</sup> Ammianus XXV.4.17. *CTh* XVI.10.12.1 (A.D. 392).

<sup>107</sup> *Myst.* VI.1.4.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* VI.4: *περὶ συμφορῶν τε καὶ ἐφημέρων πραγμάτων*. Cf. above, n. 102, and *CTh* IX.16.4–9; XVI.7.2; XVI.10.7, 9; *CJ* I.11.7.

<sup>109</sup> A distinction imposed on us by Christian polemic (e.g. Eusebius, *PE* III.14.1–2) and propagated by modern prejudice, as in R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981), 72; for a corrective view, R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), 135–6. On the distinction

between the 'Roman' and the 'Christian' use of the term *superstitio* in the fourth century, see J. Gasco, 'Le rescrit d'Hispellum', *MEFR* LXXIX (1967), 652–5.

<sup>110</sup> See above, nn. 52, 53.

<sup>111</sup> Abundant evidence for dream oracles from the fifth/fourth centuries B.C. to the third/fourth centuries A.D., with the second century A.D. particularly well represented, is to be found in F. T. van Straten, 'Daikrates' dream: a votive relief from Kos, and some kat'onar dedications', *BABesch* 51 (1976), 1–38; for the third century see P. Veyne, 'Une évolution du paganisme gréco-romain: injustice et piété des dieux, leurs ordres ou "oracles"', *Latomus* 45 (1986), 259–83. See also below, n. 134.

<sup>112</sup> *Myst.* III.2 and Artemidorus I.1 (Pack) p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Myst.* III.2–3, 23.

he encourages incubation and, just as elsewhere he makes another province of human science, astronomy, solely dependent on revelation,<sup>114</sup> here he proclaims medicine to be the fruit of mantic dreams.<sup>115</sup>

Iamblichus' emphasis on oniromancy was fully vindicated by historical developments. While one by one the great oracular centres were falling silent, those shrines where prophecy was dispensed through incubation continued to thrive. Indeed, such was their popularity that in many cases they were allowed to go into abeyance only once their functions had been assumed by the Church.

An excellent example of this is provided by the ancient oracle of Apollo Sarpedonius in Cilician Seleucia, which was of such importance in Iamblichus' day that both the emperor Aurelian and Queen Zenobia felt the need to consult it as they prepared for their struggle.<sup>116</sup> As Apollo's prestige refused to dwindle, the Christians opened a rival oracle nearby some time before the end of the fourth century. The purpose that the imported martyr Thecla was expected to serve was twofold: on the supernatural level her relics would neutralize the demonic power of the pagan prophet, while in practical terms Thecla would appropriate to herself Apollo's clientèle. This indeed happened, but it took more than three generations for the transfer to be effected.

In his *Miracles of Saint Thecla*, an anonymous rhetor, active in the second and third quarters of the fifth century, has left a detailed account of the trickling of influence from the pagan to the Christian dream-oracle. The variety of ethnic and geographic origin, social status, intellectual level and age-group of the dreamers of Seleucia in this text indicates not only an atmosphere of religious ambivalence, but also universal belief in dreams and their prophetic/healing function.<sup>117</sup>

But the purpose of the anonymous author was quite different and though, by reporting the fruit of a life-time's observation, he justified Iamblichus' insight unawares, his real aim was to convince everybody of the truth of Eusebius' thesis on pagan divination. By having recourse to the same old examples, the author exposes in his introduction the fraudulence and wickedness of the pagan oracular tradition, and shows throughout how Sarpedonius Apollo was a pathetic demon frightened out of existence by Thecla's superior power.<sup>118</sup> Eventually he was. But the important theme remains that Thecla of Iconium made her reputation in the Byzantine world as a sender of prophetic dreams,<sup>119</sup> a skill that she acquired in Seleucia.

In similar circumstances, though with considerably greater difficulty, the obscure saints Cyrus and John served their apprenticeship at the shrine of Isis at Menuthis. Long after Bishop Cyril sent their relics to the Alexandrine suburb with the intent of ousting the goddess, she kept her supremacy unchallenged.<sup>120</sup> As late as the 480s Isis was in a position to summon her faithful from afar to her incubatory centre at Menuthis merely by appearing in their sleep;<sup>121</sup> indeed, at that date her establishment could still boast a staff of several priests and dream-interpreters, largely thanks to the venality of the local Christian community.<sup>122</sup>

The process of transfer of power was set in motion at Menuthis only after the dislocation of its crypto-pagan community. Yet, even after twenty camels loaded with sacred objects

<sup>114</sup> See above, n. 82.

<sup>115</sup> *Myst.* III.3; cf. Philostratus, *VA* III.44; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), 163–4 (on Thessalus).

<sup>116</sup> Zosimus 1.57.2–4. On the history of the site, see G. Dagron, *Vie et miracles de Sainte Thècle* (1978), 55–73, 85–8, and H. Hellenkemper and F. Hild, *Neue Forschungen in Kilikien* (1986), 44–7.

<sup>117</sup> Thecla appears to Jews and pagans, *Mir. Intr.* II. 91–2, and bestows her blessings on them, *Mir.* 14, 17, 18, 39, 40; those who ask for prophecy are πάντες ἀνθρώποι· ὅσα γὰρ ἔθνη, ὅσα γένη, ὅσαι κόμαι, ὅσοι ἄγροί καὶ οἶκοι: *Mir.* 10, II. 34–5, cf. *Mir. Intr.* II. 84–91; she is perpetually dashing all over the place, like Asclepius, *Mir.* 12, II. 100–101; her yearly festival attracts people from the whole area, including Cyprus, *Mir.* 15, 26, 29, 33, 34, and even rhetorical contests take place, *Mir.* 41; but her church is always thronged with the sick of all ages, *Mir.* 24, 38, while the whole suburb has become an informal sub-monastic refuge, *Mir.* 43, 46. The point concerning the universality of dream divination was explicitly made by Synesius of Cyrene, *Insomn.* XIII.145d–146a.

<sup>118</sup> *Mir. Intr.*, *Mir.* I, cf. II, 18, 40.

<sup>119</sup> For Zeno's vision, in which St Thecla prophesied that he would regain the throne, his subsequent campaign and his construction on the site of a μέγιστον τέμενος, see Evagrius, *HE* III.8 and Dagron, op. cit. (n. 116), 59–63.

<sup>120</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *De Cyro et Johanne*, PG 77, 1101: ὅτι τὰ μέρη ταῦτα ἔχρηξεν ἱατρῶν θεραπευόντων διὰ θεοῦ ... καὶ χριστιανοὶ ὄντες ἐσφαλλόντο, διὰ τοῦτο ἀναγκαίως ἐξητήσαμεν ἁγίων μαρτύρων λείψανα. 1105: ἐρχέσθωσαν εἰς ἀληθινὸν καὶ ἀκατήλεутον ἱατρειὸν· οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἡμῖν ὄνειράτα πλάττεται· οὐδεὶς λέγει τοῖς ἐρχομένοις· Εἰσηκεν ἡ Κυρά (i.e. Isis)· ποιήσον τὸ καὶ τό.

<sup>121</sup> cf. the case of Asclepiodotus of Alexandria, living in Aphrodisias in Caria, when he received an order in his sleep to go to Menuthis, Zacharias, *Vita Severi* 17.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.* 18, 22–31 and Cyril of Alexandria, op. cit. (n. 120), PG 77, 1105.

arrived at Alexandria and the idols were festively burned, the renown of the Menuthian Isis remained unblemished abroad, as the bearer of the synodal letter by which Peter Mongus asked Nonnus of Aphrodisias to publicize the matter was corrupted by the pagan network in Caria, and the letter never reached its destination.<sup>123</sup>

If abroad people could still at the close of the fifth century enjoy the nocturnal visitations of Isis, at Menuthis itself pilgrims came increasingly under the sway of Cyrus and John. Indeed the monk Sophronius, to whom we owe the impressive list of miracles performed by the two saints around the end of the sixth century, spent many a night incubating at their shrine before his eyesight was restored to him so that, as Patriarch of Jerusalem, he could enjoy the doubtful privilege of seeing the city fall to the Muslims.<sup>124</sup>

At Seleucia and Menuthis then, Apollo and Isis kept the oracular tradition going against all odds for so long that in the end the Christian establishment had to suspend pretence and adopt it. More obscurely, at Abydos, 'in the depths of the Thebaid',<sup>125</sup> another ancient dream-oracle had been functioning without interruption since Pharaonic times and, despite its relative remoteness, it went on enjoying international fame long after paganism was officially banned.<sup>126</sup> In a period of a thousand years the identity of the divine prophet changed twice, and the second time the Hellenistic *Erzatz* Sarapis was supplanted by the increasingly popular Bes, the dream-giver. People from all walks of life addressed their enquiries to Bes, often by correspondence, though the most pious came and slept at the shrine in the hope of obtaining prophetic dreams.<sup>127</sup> As an articulate pilgrim from Caesarea Panias in Galilee put it:

I have often slept here and had truthful dreams,  
I, Harpocras, inhabitant of the holy city of Panias;  
A priest myself, the priest Coprias' beloved offspring,  
To Bes the diviner, in infinite gratitude.<sup>128</sup>

Like Harpocras, people returned to repeat their experience, and told others of the reliability of Bes.<sup>129</sup> When in the fifth century the Thebaid was filled with monasteries, Bes continued to be all-powerful at Abydos and it is not unlikely that Christians too came to sleep at his oracle.<sup>130</sup> What is certain is that, more than a century after the death of Theodosius I, the belief was widespread that, if a hostile person dared approach the temple of Bes, he would be assaulted by the demon and handicapped for life. This information comes from the very fragmentary Coptic *Vita* of Apa Moses of Abydos, the founder of a monastery in the region, who one evening, after the repeated entreaties of his disciples, took seven terrified monks, among whom was the author of our *Vita*, and led them to Abydos to confront Bes. The demon played many tricks on his aggressors, but Apa Moses kept encouraging his monks and, though our text comes to an abrupt end at this point, we are left in no doubt of which way victory went.<sup>131</sup> According to the Eusebian pattern, the wicked demon was annihilated by coming into contact with the power of Christ.

We do not know whether Apa Moses undertook to Christianize Abydos' oniromantic tradition, as his peers in Cilicia and Alexandria had done, yet one suspects that the locals continued for some time to receive Bes' nocturnal visitations. After all 'the laws of the

<sup>123</sup> Zacharias, *V. Sev.* 33–6; for a fuller description of the situation, see R. Herzog, 'Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis', *Pisciculi: Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums*, Franz Joseph Dölger... dargeboten (1939), 117–24. For the eventual Islamization of the dream oracle (re-named in due course Abukir after Aba Cyrus!), see P. Athanassiadi, 'Persecution and response in late paganism: the evidence of Damascus', *JHS* 113 (1993, forthcoming).

<sup>124</sup> Latest edition by N. Fernandez Marcos, *Los Thaumata de Sofronio. Contribución al estudio de la incubatio cristiana* (1975). For the history of the site, see P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient* (1985), 318–19 and Athanassiadi, *op. cit.* (n. 123).

<sup>125</sup> Ammianus XIX.12.3.

<sup>126</sup> P. Perdrizet and G. Lefebvre, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos* (1919), xix–xxiii.

<sup>127</sup> For a case of high treason under Constantius II, implicating high officials and intellectuals in Egypt and

Syria, who had consulted Bes by correspondence, see Ammianus XIX.12.3–15.

<sup>128</sup> *Memnonion* no. 528.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, no. 489: μάντιν ἀληθέα; no. 492: παναληθῆ, ἄψευστον; no. 493: παναληθῆ; no. 500: πανταληθῆ, ἄψευστον καὶ δι' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης μαρτυρούμενον; no. 503: τὸν πάντων ἀληθῆ; no. 528: ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐπὶ τοῦ, together with L. Robert, *Hellenica* XIII, 102.

<sup>130</sup> *Memnonion* no. 524: τὸ προσκύνημα τοῦ Ἰωάννου, who may, of course, be of Jewish extraction.

<sup>131</sup> E. Amélineau, *Mémoires de la mission archéologique française au Caire* IV.2 (1895) fr. VI, pp. 689–90. For the prosperity of paganism in the area in the early sixth century, cf. *ibid.*, 685–6. For the date of Apa Moses, see R.-G. Coquin, 'Christianismes orientaux', *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Ve Section (Sciences religieuses)* 92 (1983–84), 374.

malicious state cannot prevent dream divination nor indeed could they do so, if they wanted to',<sup>132</sup> for the practice is ἐχέμυθος.<sup>133</sup>

The evidence drawn from papyri, amulets, temple inscriptions, the historians and the hagiographers makes it overwhelmingly clear that the commonest method of divination in late antiquity was by dream-oracles.<sup>134</sup> 'When Apollo enters', we read in a Greek papyrus from fifth-century Egypt, 'ask him about what you wish, about divination, oracles by means of epic poetry, sending of dreams, revelations in dreams, interpretation of dreams, incubation (περὶ κατακλίσεως), about all that pertains to the magical experience'.<sup>135</sup> To such an extent were mantic dreams normal in late antiquity that by the end of the fifth century the Alexandrians called their dreams (τοὺς ὄνειρους) oracles (χρησμούς).<sup>136</sup>

Against the complete security attached to oniromancy wielded outside an institutional framework, the famous dream-oracles, however, offered a guarantee of professionalism, and this is what ensured their exceptionally long life. For where God has been known to speak truthfully neither reasoning nor violence can deter man from seeking out this truth. Just as Asclepius was known since classical times to be present at Epidaurus (a circumstance to which we must attribute the prosperity of this sanctuary in late antiquity),<sup>137</sup> so too Apollo, Isis, and Bes (incidentally, the gods most frequently encountered in the magical papyri) were resident at Seleucia, Menuthis, and Abydos respectively and appeared in person to their visitors.<sup>138</sup> Conversely, magically produced dreams run an increased danger of not being truthful as well as of not being precisely remembered, two preoccupations which haunt all magical texts.<sup>139</sup> Here too Iamblichus seems to have provided the clue: though the magician could produce prophetic dreams by following technical instructions, it was only the theurgist who, through his experience of divine union, could guarantee that the ὄνειροι were actually θεόπεμπτοι.<sup>140</sup>

#### IV. EUSEBIUS, IAMBlichUS AND THE FUTURE OF PROPHECY

Magic, sublimated under the name of theurgy, and oniromancy are the two aspects through which prophecy prospered in late antiquity, and in this connection both the *Praeparatio Evangelica* and the *De Mysteriorum* proved in their different ways strangely visionary and influential texts.

By ignoring the more fluid aspects of divination and concentrating his attack on the great oracular centres, Eusebius narrowed and confused the issue. Whether he did this fully consciously we cannot tell, for it was natural for him to transpose the concept of sacred place from his Judaeo-Christian background into the area of paganism. In similar manner, he exploited the semantic ambiguity of the word *demon*; pretending not to know anything about the history and the actual state of paganism, he imported into his argument an idea from Jewish theology and applied it unequivocally to a dynamic philosophical notion. His vision of contemporary prophecy and of the ways in which it could be exterminated was disarmingly — if dishonestly — simple, and that is why it worked. It was an image eminently graspable and

<sup>132</sup> Synesius, *Insomn.* XII.145c.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, 146a.

<sup>134</sup> cf. above, n. 111; for a systematization of the evidence for inducing dreams, see now S. Eitrem's posthumous study, 'Dreams and divination in magical ritual' (trans. F. Graf), in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera* (1991), 176–87; also A. D. Nock, 'Studies in the Graeco-Roman beliefs of the empire', *JHS* 45 (1925), 95–6 [= *Essays*, 45–6]; L. Robert, *Hellenica* 1, 72, n. 1; II, 148; W. Günther, *Ist.Mitt.* 35 (1985), 189–91 (first dedication made at Didyma κατὰ ὄναρ), together with R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1986), 150–67. The practice was not limited to the lower classes: Dio Cassius LXXIII.23.4; LXXV.3; LXXIX.10.1–2; Herodian II.9.3, 5–7; IV.8.3; VI.8.6. According to tradition, Delphi had originally been a dream-oracle: Euripides, *IT* 1259ff.; cf. Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 59.

<sup>135</sup> P.Mag. 1. 328ff.; κατακλίσις may also mean horoscope-casting at the hour a patient takes to his bed, as in Galen 19. 529.

<sup>136</sup> Damascius, *Isid.* E.P. 12.

<sup>137</sup> M. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* II (1974<sup>3</sup>), 336–7.

<sup>138</sup> As the order of Isis to Asclepiodotus implies (see above, n. 121). Belief in the god's residence in his main sanctuary was well entrenched, cf. G. Roux, *Delphes: son oracle et ses dieux* (1976), 73; R. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidaurus*, *Philologus Suppl.* xxii.3 (1931), 16, no. 23: at the Asclepieion at Troezen, Aristagora had her head cut off from her body by Asclepius' sons, who then found it impossible to replace it; Asclepius was immediately sent for, but could not come from Epidaurus until the following night, while in the meantime the patient remained headless καὶ ὁ ἱατρὸς εὖς ὄρηι [ἔπαρ τ]ῆν κεφαλάν ἀφαιρημέναν τοῦ σώματος. See also the famous passage in Lucian, *Bis Acc.* 1.

<sup>139</sup> cf. the characteristic inscription on an amulet from Rome, *IG* XIV.2413.16: Κύριε δόξης καὶ χρησμάτων χρημάτισόν μοι ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ταυτῇ ἐπ' ἀληθείᾳ μετὰ μνήμης. Also P.Mag. VII.664–85 (μαντοσύνην ... ἀληθῆ); 704–26 (βεβαίως καὶ διὰ μνήμης).

<sup>140</sup> *Myst.* III.2.

therefore it could easily be propagated by other polemicists or put into effect by men of action.<sup>141</sup> One should not be surprised to find that both the spirit and the phraseology of all anti-pagan legislation down to the time of Justinian are strongly Eusebian. If Eusebius' vision as it emerges from the *Praeparatio Evangelica* ignored the more fluid forms of divination, it at least provided a formula for their destruction whenever they could be pinned down against an institutional background. The demons who dispensed prophecy were by definition inferior to Christian saints, dead or alive, to whom sooner or later they were bound to abandon their patrimony, as Apollo, Isis, and Bes did. Ultimately the magic of the cross was superior to pagan magic.<sup>142</sup>

Against Eusebius' clear and purposeful, if unsubtle, view of the pagan prophetic tradition and its future, Iamblichus set an infinitely more shaded picture, in fact so shaded that even his own followers did not succeed in grasping its nuances. Of course, as has already been suggested, the main culprit for this was Iamblichus himself, who produced a text often lacking in clarity and in structure. Against his emphatic denial that divinity may be ritually drawn to a statue,<sup>143</sup> his readers could quote, admittedly from another context, the statement that God manifests Himself through pebbles and stones, wood and flour.<sup>144</sup> To his objection to the divinity of statues on the grounds of their materiality,<sup>145</sup> his readers might oppose his statement that even matter can be called pure and divine, providing they overlooked Iamblichus' qualification, that the matter which presents affinities with the divine is not man-shaped, but rather to be found in its raw state in the natural world.<sup>146</sup> Above all, what must have confused Iamblichus' readers is his ambiguous position on the issue of cult. Although he often qualifies his defence of ritual by making its efficacy dependent on virtue, and decries several traditional forms of divination, nevertheless the inescapable impression left even on a careful reader by the *De Mysteriis* is that Iamblichus is a ritualist. As well as his vagueness of exposition, what must have finally contributed towards making his theory of divination either ungraspable or inapplicable by posterity were his austere monism and the ethics of sanctity which underlie it. As much by their teaching as by their example, men like Maximus of Ephesus and his pupil Julian foisted on Iamblichus the image of the magician. This impression was heightened and further spread by the representatives of the revived Athenian School, until the diadochus Proclus — or was it Syrianus? — administered to the saint of Apamea the *coup de grâce*.<sup>147</sup>

Perhaps Iamblichus' greatest misfortune is that none of his pupils produced a biography that could convey something of the man's substance. All that survived was a trivial halo of sanctity, which inspired in his intellectual progeny a mood of religious respect. In tune with the rest, Proclus lavished on Iamblichus his admiration,<sup>148</sup> yet both his methodology and metaphysics are strangely un-Iamblichian. Whereas Iamblichus is sarcastic towards those who stick to the letter of the Platonic text,<sup>149</sup> and has recourse to analysis only as a last resort,<sup>150</sup> Proclus is fascinated by the word,<sup>151</sup> opts gladly for the splitting of hairs, and seems to be happy

<sup>141</sup> See above, n. 23; Theodoret, *Affect.* II.97, for the specific admission that he depends on the *PE*; x.2–3, on demons. For the survival of belief in the demonic power of statues, see C. Mango, 'Antique statuary and the Byzantine beholder', *DOP* 17 (1963), 59–64; and more recently, G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* (1984), 127–50; Averil Cameron and J. Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (1984), 31–4.

<sup>142</sup> For Aphrodite at Gaza, Mark the Deacon, *V. Porphy.* 61: (ἐβαστάζον δὲ χριστιανοὶ τὸ τίμιον ξύλον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦτέστιν τὸν τύπον τοῦ σταυροῦ), ἐωρακώς ὁ ἐνοικῶν δαίμων ἐν τῇ στήλῃ, μὴ φέρον ἰδεῖν τὸ φοβερόν σημεῖον, ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ μαρμαρίου μετὰ ἀταξίας πολλῆς, ἔρριπεν αὐτὴν τὴν στήλην καὶ συνέκλασεν αὐτὴν εἰς πολλὰ κλάσματα. For the temple of Isis at Philae, converted into a church of St Stephen in 537, see E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae* II (1969), nos 200–4 (esp. 201: ὁ σταυρὸς ἐνίκησεν, δὲ νικᾷ). *CTH* XVI.10.25 (A.D. 435).

<sup>143</sup> *Myst.* III.30.175.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.* III.17.141–2.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.* III.28–9.

<sup>146</sup> *Myst.* v.23, where the ὅλη apt to receive divinity is surely our own body; besides, this is only a way of speaking (μὴ δὴ τις θαυμαζέτω ἐάν ... λέγωμεν: *Myst.* v.23.232). On the eternity of matter, *Myst.* VIII.3 and *On the Chaldaean Oracles ap.* John Lydus *Mens.* IV.159.

<sup>147</sup> On Syrianus' influence on Proclus, see Anne Sheppard, 'Proclus' attitude to theurgy', *CQ* 32 (1982), 214–15, and J. Dillon in his introduction to Proclus' commentary *On the Parmenides* (1987), pp. xiii, xv. For Iamblichus and Syrianus, *ibid.* p. xxxi.

<sup>148</sup> *In Ti.* I.19.9; 77.24; 147.25; 152.28; 156.31; 159.27; 165.23; 209.1; 307.15; III.33.1; 34.5; 334.3 etc.

<sup>149</sup> Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 9: ταῦτα γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐπάξια τῆς τοῦ Πλάτωνος διανοίας, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη τῆς λέξεως. Cf. Proclus, *In Ti.* III. 107. 29ff. and J. Dillon, *JHS* 108 (1988), 244 for the attribution.

<sup>150</sup> In *In Ti.* frs 34 and 71 Iamblichus disapproves of unnecessary distinctions; in frs 58 and 61 he opts for the simplest explanation.

<sup>151</sup> cf. Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 6; *ibid.* 82a, where Iamblichus is accused by Proclus of not being a careful reader of Plato.

only when he can indulge in an orgy of scholastic analysis.<sup>152</sup> Inevitably then, the way in which Proclus describes the theurgic ascent of the soul sets emphasis on knowledge rather than virtue and on the fragmentation of the cosmos rather than its unity.<sup>153</sup> More specifically, instead of the one δόσις claimed by Iamblichus, Proclus admits a hierarchization of the prophetic spirit, which becomes weaker as it is dispensed by lower powers in the pyramid of being.<sup>154</sup> Ironically, the theory of divination put forward by the influential head of the Athenian School has a lot in common with those ideas of Porphyry which are challenged in the *De Mysteriis*. Likewise, Proclus' conception of the function of the theurgist is in tune with the tradition which stems from Porphyry and is rejected by Iamblichus. For though occasionally Proclus denounces the technicians of prophecy, one cannot escape the impression that to his mind theurgical divination is primarily dependent on complicated ritual acts.<sup>155</sup>

What is remarkable from our point of view, however, is not the disagreement of Proclus and his successors with Iamblichus on the topic of divination, but their firm conviction that their theory and practice of theurgy stemmed directly from his. By the sixth century this belief was put forward unambiguously in a statement which has become classic:

There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer hieratic practice, like Iamblichus and Syrianus and Proclus and the adepts of the hieratic School in general.<sup>156</sup>

Yet the pattern that emerges from these men's writings is different. Whereas for Plotinus and Iamblichus, the highest qualities in the spiritual and the moral spheres respectively are intuition and virtue, and their teaching manner is rather careless, concentrating as it does on the essential, often to the detriment of clarity and detail, Porphyry and Proclus keep good company with the rest of the philosophers mentioned by Damascius as thinkers attached to the letter either of the Platonic texts under discussion or of cult.<sup>157</sup> In short, if Iamblichus spoke ἐνθεαστικῶς,<sup>158</sup> Proclus had a scholastic mind which clung to the letter of both sanctity and metaphysics, with the result that he can be said to have played Porphyry to Iamblichus' Plotinus.<sup>159</sup>

With friends like this, who needs enemies? If the same people who extolled Iamblichus to the rank of the gods distorted his teaching on divination to the point of rendering it unrecognizable, what of the Christian 'enemy'? Following the mainstream of inside pagan opinion, many Christians presented Iamblichus as the arch-magician, the person mainly responsible for belief in obtaining oracles through the animation of statues, John Philoponus being a typical representative of this trend.<sup>160</sup> Yet, paradoxically, this was by no means the majority view among Christians, and the testimony of Synesius of Cyrene is worth recalling in this connection.

<sup>152</sup> A juxtaposition of the methods applied by the two men is to be found in Proclus, *In Ti.* iii. 14, 16ff.; cf. Iamblichus, *In Ti.* fr. 63; see also below, n. 159.

<sup>153</sup> cf. *Theol. Plat.* iv. 9; also the valuable remarks of L. G. Westerink in the introduction to his edition of Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Phaedo* (1976), 19.

<sup>154</sup> *In Ti.* i. 158. 12ff.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.* i. 51. 24ff.; iii. 6. 12ff.; 155. 18ff.

<sup>156</sup> Damascius, *In Phaed.* i. 172 (Westerink); cf. John Lydus, *Mens.* iv. 53.

<sup>157</sup> For Iamblichus agreeing with Plotinus, Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* iv. 5; *In Ti.* i. 307. 15ff. Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus was sometimes felt to be a pure Platonist: Damascius, *In Phil.* 10, p. 7 (Westerink). The essential relation between Plotinus and Iamblichus is one of vision and methodology, as observed by L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* 1 (1976), 15: 'Iamblichus' purpose is to make Plotinus' belief of the superiority of intuition to reason the guiding principle of a new systematic approach to Plato. Intuition, which is a superior form of sight, does not proceed from point to point, but has a unified vision of the structure of all reality.' See also nn. 45-9, 55.

<sup>158</sup> Iamblichus' manner is ἐποπτικώτερον (intuitive), as opposed to Porphyry's which is μερικώτερον (analytical): Proclus, *In Ti.* i. 204. 26-7; he writes ἐνθεαστικῶς (in an inspired manner): *op. cit.* i. 156. 31; cf. Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* p. 57. 1ff. N).

<sup>159</sup> For Proclus' daily programme, Marinus, *Procl.* 22. A good example of Proclus' incapacity to grasp Iamblichus' simplicity of thought is provided by his interpretation of *Ti.* 28c (*In Ti.* i. 307-9), where he is obliged to convict Iamblichus of inconsistency, cf. J. M. Dillon, *Iamb. Chalc. in Plat. dial. comm. fragm.* (1973), Appendix C, 417-19.

<sup>160</sup> According to John Philoponus, in his lost treatise περὶ ἀγαλμάτων Iamblichus attempted to prove the intrinsic sanctity of statues: ἐστὶ μὲν ὁ σκοπὸς Ἰαμβλίχῳ θεῖά τε δεῖξαι τὰ εἰδῶλα, Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 215, 173b. Dodds, who takes the statement of Photius-Philoponus at face value, is nevertheless slightly uneasy about it (*art. cit.* (n. 8), 64, n. 94). Even Julian seems to have understood what Iamblichus was saying on the divinity of statues and to have followed his teaching on this issue: *Ep.* 89b, 293ab.

In a work of rare historical, if not literary, value the idiosyncratic bishop undertook to present divination by dreams as the only form of prophecy leading to God.<sup>161</sup> Claimed by its author as the product of automatic writing, which occurred towards the end of a night of inspiration in 405,<sup>162</sup> the *De Insomniis* — an otherwise flippant text — makes an important distinction: on one side stands dream divination which, though disdained by experts,<sup>163</sup> is the only universal road to the foreknowledge of the future, and on the other hand are to be found the rest of contemporary oracular methods — all manner of private divination classified as *θύραθεν μαντική*.<sup>164</sup> As we have seen, divination by dreams was an extremely popular practice,<sup>165</sup> and the interest of Synesius' text resides in the fact that it provides an apology for it, which was clearly influenced by Iamblichus' outlook:<sup>166</sup> even though he espoused the conventional Neoplatonic view of the cosmos which laid emphasis on its hierarchical nature rather than its unity,<sup>167</sup> Synesius still presented prophetic dreams as the fruits of holiness, and dismissed magical divination on the grounds that it uses violence towards the universe.<sup>168</sup>

The great majority of Christians, however, did not pay any attention to Iamblichus. His name, unlike that of Porphyry, is hardly ever mentioned by Christian polemicists. Yet neither Eusebius nor Theodoret, who does not allude to Iamblichus even once, can have been ignorant of his writings.<sup>169</sup> At the root of this treatment (which arises from negligence rather than deliberate scorn) lie three circumstances: firstly Iamblichus' style is not particularly relaxing; secondly his views on fate and prophecy are not at such variance with standard Christian belief; but most importantly he never writes in a defensive or aggressive spirit, apt to arouse the Fathers' eristic vein. This must indeed be the main reason why, despite his cult among pagan intellectuals, Iamblichus does not constitute an obvious Christian target. After all, as a qualification to the second point, one must remember that, if on matters of divination the two parties reached similar conclusions, they started their journey at diametrically opposite ends. The Christians rejected belief in fate solely on moral grounds; for they felt that, by contradicting divine omnipotence and abolishing man's freedom of conscience, belief in fate offended both the Creator and the created and rendered virtue superfluous.<sup>170</sup> For Iamblichus on the other hand, fate had no place in the universe for purely ontological reasons: he conceived of the cosmos as a unity, where everything was produced by progression rather than craftsmanship, as is the case in the Judaeo-Christian cosmology. To his mind man and God were for ever united, and any elements that could blur this unity — whether one chose to call them fate or passion — were a passing intervention with no real power over Being.<sup>171</sup>

Iamblichus' natural environment is, of course, the mystical dimension of Islam, as it developed from discussion in Sufi circles. That the teacher of Apamea was actually known in these milieux is established,<sup>172</sup> though how and to what extent he was exploited by them is a subject awaiting research. Yet their belief in the essential unity of the cosmos and in inspired revelation, and their constant effort towards achieving reunion with God are eminently Iamblichian themes, often expounded or pursued through methods which could well be described as 'theurgical'.

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<sup>161</sup> *Insomn.* XI.143b: *μαντικῆς ὁδοιποροῦσης ἐπὶ τὰ θεῖα*. It is in this work that Synesius offers abundant information about private oracular consultation as an expensive, but widely practised pastime which was persecuted by the state, XII.144a.

<sup>162</sup> *Ep.* 154 ad fin.

<sup>163</sup> *Insomn.* V.135c: *ὄνειρων δὲ ὑπερορῶσιν ὡς προύππου πράγματος, οὐ μέτεστιν ὁμοτίμως ἀμαθεῖ τε καὶ σοφῷ*.

<sup>164</sup> *Insomn.* XII.144b.

<sup>165</sup> See above, pp. 123–6. Synesius knew people who were collecting books on oniromancy, *Insomn.* XVII.151b.

<sup>166</sup> *Insomn.* XIV–XV.148–149a. One should not forget that the Aristotelian view, which did not recognize a divine origin to dreams, enjoyed a wide following, *PG* 149, 557.

<sup>167</sup> *Insomn.* II.131d–133a.

<sup>168</sup> *Insomn.* XII.145b: *ὀντισμῷ καὶ μοχλείᾳ κινεῖν*.

<sup>169</sup> cf. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981), 168.

<sup>170</sup> See, among others, Basil of Caesarea, *Hex.* VI.7 and Gregory of Nyssa, *Fat.*, *PG* 45, 145–73.

<sup>171</sup> *Myst.* VIII.8.272; cf. *In Alc.* fr. 5 (= Proclus, *In Alc.* 88, 10ff.).

<sup>172</sup> M. Steinschneider, *Die arabischen Uebersetzungen aus dem griechischen* (1960), 144; P. Kraus, *Yābir ibn Hayyan* II (1942), 123ff. (Iamblichus on ritual); R. Walzer, 'Al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy and divination', *JHS* 77 (1957), 147–8 [= *Greek into Arabic* (1962), 218–19] (for Iamblichian influence); F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (trans. E. and J. Marmorstein) (1975), 42 (on Pythagorean commentaries); for an unpublished Arabic commentary on the *Golden Verses*, attributed in the title to Iamblichus and dated 677/1278–9, see N. Linley (ed. trans.), *Ibn al-Tayyib, Proclus' Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses*, Arethusa Monographs 10 (n.d.), v.