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IAMBlichUS, SYNESIUS AND

THE CHALDAEAN ORA-

CLES IN MARSILIO

FICINO'S DE

VITALIBRITRES:

HERMETIC MAGIC

OR NEOPLATO-

NIC MAGIC?

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AFTER DAME FRANCES YATES PUBLISHED her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* in 1964, the word "Hermetic" and its cognates became terms to conjure with. Following Yates's lead, other scholars have treated "Hermetic" as if it were roughly synonymous with "magical," and they have often tried to understand the meaning of these two words for Renaissance culture by referring to the thought of Marsilio Ficino, especially his *De vita coelitus comparanda*. This treatise on astrological medicine, hereinafter called *De vita III*, is the third part of *De vita libri tres*, completed in 1489 and widely read thereafter as the most important statement of a philosophical theory of magic in the early modern period.¹ While I agree that Ficino's philosophy became the basis of European thinking about magic in the post-medieval centuries, I have argued elsewhere that Ficino's contributions to the theory of magic should not be called "Hermetic." The Hermetic λόγος that Ficino translated from Greek, and

1. F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964), 44-52; idem, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," in C. S. Singleton, ed., *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1968), 255-74. For Yates's influence in this regard on other writers, see my "Natural Magic, Hermeticism and Occultism in Early Modern Science," forthcoming in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. R. Westman and D. Lindberg. See also *Marsilio Ficino: opera et quae hactenus cultae* (1576; repr. Turin, 1959), I: 529-572, hereafter cited as Ficino, *DVCC*. Other references to Ficino's works will be to this same edition as Ficino, *Opera*.

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the Latin *Asclepius* that he cited say little of theoretical interest about magic. Hence Ficino looked to other sources from antiquity and the Middle Ages for the metaphysical and cosmological ingredients of his magic, ingredients lacking in the *Hermetica*. In three previous papers I have tried to show how Ficino found the principles of his magic not in the *Corpus Hermeticum* but in Plotinus, Proclus, Thomas Aquinas and other thinkers of comparable stature.² Here, I shall extend this line of argument to three texts of later Neoplatonism—the *De insomniis* of Synesius, the *De mysteriis* of Iamblichus, and the *Oracula Chaldaica*.

Synesius, Iamblichus and the Chaldaeans all appear in the twenty-sixth and concluding chapter of *De vita III*, where Ficino picks up threads of his commentary on Plotinus which had originally inspired his iatromathematical treatise and which formed the substance of its first chapter. Because Ficino cites Plotinus regularly in *De vita III* and because he wrote a long commentary on the *Enneads*, the reader can consult the commentary to illuminate Ficino's use of Plotinus as a theoretician of magic; the influence of Hermes Trismegistus is more difficult to determine.³ Most of what scholars have mistaken for Ficino's commentary on the *Hermetica* (despite Professor Kristeller's identification of the material) was actually written by Lefèvre d'Étaples. Moreover, Ficino mentions Hermes in only three passages of *De vita III*, only twice by name.⁴ To discover Ficino's attitude toward the meager magical content of the *Hermetica*, we must examine the context of those parts of *De vita III* in which Hermes appears. Ficino's use of various Neoplatonic philosophers in those contexts will be especially enlightening.

All three sections of *De vita III* that make use of Ficino's *Hermetica* refer

2. Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Theory of Magic in the Renaissance," read at the Folger Library Conference on Hermes Trismegistus in March, 1982, and forthcoming in the papers of that conference; idem, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De vita* of Marsilio Ficino," *RQ*, 37 (1984): 523-554; idem, "Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4.3-5 in Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*," forthcoming in *Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi sul Marsilio Ficino*, Naples, Florence, Figline Valdarno, May, 1984.

3. Ficino, *DVCC*, 570-72; on *DVCC*, the *Enneads* and Ficino's Plotinus commentary, see Copenhaver, "Ennead 4.3-5."

4. Ficino, *DVCC*, 548, 561, 571-2; cf. 540-41, 550 where the references are not to Ficino's Greek *Hermetica* or to the Latin *Asclepius* but to the *Liber Hermetis de XV stellis* and the *De virtutibus septem herbarum*, two of the "popular" *Hermetica* of the Middle Ages, on which see A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris, 1950-54), 1: 146-186, esp. 169; Kristeller, *Supplementum* 1: cccix-ccxi; cf. Yates, *Bruno*, 28-35, and especially 40, note 1.

to the same two "god-making" passages of the *Asclepius*.⁵ Ficino made no attempt in *De vita III* to ground his theory of magic in a close reading of the fourteen Hermetic λόγοι which he had translated because, as I believe, any attempt to derive such material from the eclectic and philosophically jejune *Hermetica* would have been fruitless. The three passages that use the *Asclepius* are not so much references to philosophical arguments as appeals to authority, the venerable authority of the Hermes whom Ficino thought to be a contemporary of Moses.⁶ Ficino's clearest intention in the three passages is to show that the god-making magic described in the *Asclepius* is *efficacious*, i.e., that the artificial, material structure of a talisman or statue can cause it to be inhabited or animated by a spiritual being, a demon. Analysis of Ficino's reasoning and sources in these passages will also reveal an obscurer purpose: to admit that this *efficacious* magic might nonetheless be *illegitimate*, an idolatrous breach of the first and second commandments and a sin against religion.

Ficino's reader waits until the thirteenth chapter of *De vita III* for his first encounter with Hermes, a single sentence in a list of authorities—including Synesius, Iamblichus and the Chaldaeans—who claim that magicians can cause spiritual beings to enter material objects. Arguing at this point for the *efficacy* of talismanic magic, Ficino makes no clear statement about its *legitimacy*.⁷ But in chapter twenty, having announced his suspicion that the evident power of talismans arises *naturally* from the matter that constitutes them rather than *artificially* from the figures that they bear, he hesitates, writing that

the Egyptians attribute so much to statues and images fabricated with astrological and magical technique that they believe spirits of the stars are sealed inside them. But some think that these spirits of the stars . . . are demons. . . , [and] whatever they may be, . . . they think they are implanted in statues and talismans no differently than demons

5. *Asclep.* 23-24, 37-38; subsequent references to this work will include page and line numbers from the Budé text (Paris, 1946) of Nock and Festugière.

6. On the use of Hermes in doxographic or genealogical as opposed to theoretical contexts, see Copenhaver, "Natural Magic."

7. Ficino, *DVCC*, 548: Quales [imagines quae moverentur] et Trismegistus ait Aegyptios ex certis mundi materiis facere consuevisse et in eas opportune animas daemonum inserere solitos atque animam avi sui Mercurii; *Asclep.* 23 (326.1-2), 37 (347.13-20, 348.3-6), 38 (348.19-349.1); for other authorities listed in this passage, see *infra*, notes 13, 16, 27, 29, 33 and Copenhaver, "Proclus."

sometimes possess human bodies. . . . We believe that these things can actually be done by demons not so much because they are constrained by a particular [kind] of matter as because they enjoy being worshipped. We will discuss this elsewhere more carefully.⁸

Having once again established the efficacy of talismans, imputing it either to material or demonic agency, Ficino then raises the issue of legitimacy by comparing the animation of statues to demonic possession and by identifying an obviously evil motivation for the activity of the demons. Then Ficino abruptly suspends this religiously sensitive discussion of the Hermetic statues, which make their final appearance in the final chapter of *De vita III*.

Mercurius enters this concluding chapter as a precursor of Plotinus, the inspiration of Plotinus' belief that

the ancient priests or magicians used to capture something divine and wondrous in statues. . . . [Plotinus] along with Trismegistus supposes that, strictly speaking, divinities altogether separated from matter are not captured through material objects but cosmic [divinities] only, as I have said from the beginning and as Synesius agrees. . . . Mercurius, whom Plotinus follows, says that these are aerial demons—not celestial, much less anything higher— . . . [and] he adds songs resembling the heavens in which, he says, they take delight and thus remain longer in the statues and do good for men or else do them harm. [Mercurius] also says that when the wise men of Egypt, who were also priests, could not convince people by rational means that the gods existed. . . . they devised this magical enticement (*illicium*) by which, attracting demons into statues, they declared them to be divinities. But Iamblichus condemns the Egyptians because they not only took the demons as steps, as it were, on the path to higher gods but also frequently adored them. . . . Mercurius says that the [Egyptian] priests took from the nature of the world

8. Ficino, *DVCC*, 561: *Aegyptii tantum statuis imaginibusque attribuunt arte astronomica et magica fabricatis ut spiritus stellarum in eis includi putent. Spiritus autem stellarum intelligunt alii quidem . . . demonas . . . qualescunque sint, inseri statuis et imaginibus arbitrantur, non aliter ac daemones soleant humana nonnunquam corpora occupare. . . . Quae quidem nos per daemones fieri posse putamus non tam materia certa cohibitos quam cultu gaudentes. Sed haec alibi diligentius; Asclep. 24 (326.9–11), 37 (347.15–18), 38 (349.5–6); Aug. *Civ. D.* 8.24, 10.11; D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 22 (London, 1958), 41, note 2.*

a suitable power and mixed it in [with the statues]. Plotinus followed him. . . .⁹

This last point on which Ficino heard Hermetic echoes in Plotinus introduces an allusion to Plotinus' theory of seminal reasons, an important technical component in the metaphysics of Plotinus' magic and also in Ficino's.¹⁰ Given Plotinus' importance for Ficino in *De vita III* and elsewhere, his filiation with Hermes in chapter twenty-six would seem to imply a positive evaluation of Hermetic statue-magic. When Ficino finds Hermes and Plotinus agreeing that only cosmic—as opposed to hypercosmic—*numina* enter the statues, the *Asclepius* and the *Enneads* become the basis for a theologically cautious approach to lower cosmic powers rather than high gods. On the other hand, the *numina mundana* of the *Asclepius* are demons lured by an idolatrous rite to enter statues where they can do harm to humans, and (as Augustine had warned) the Egyptians who first made the statues used a deception, a "magical enticement," to trick their people into a blasphemous belief. The demons take delight in astrological song, recalling the illicit worship condemned in chapter twenty and the demonic chants scorned by Michael Psellos in chapter thirteen.¹¹ If chapter thirteen was silent on the legitimacy of statue-magic and if chapter twenty seemed to condemn it, what may we conclude from the ambiguities of chapter twenty-six? Can we learn anything from the other authorities—Synesius, Iamblichus, the Chaldaeans—associated with these ambivalent references to the *Asclepius*?

9. Ficino, *DVCC*, 571: Plotinus . . . Mercurium imitatus ait veteres sacerdotes sive magos in statuis . . . divinum aliquid et mirandum suscipere solitos. Vult autem una cum Trismegisto per materialia haec non proprie suscipi numina penitus a materia segregata sed mundana tantum, ut ab initio dixi et Synesius approbat. . . . Mercurius ipse, quem Plotinus sequitur, inquit daemones aërios non coelestes nedom sublimiores. . . . Adiungit cantus coelestibus similes quibus, ait, eos delectari statuisque sic adesse diutius et prodesse hominibus vel obesse. Addit sapientes quondam Aegyptios, qui et sacerdotes erant, quum non possent rationibus persuadere populo esse deos, . . . excogitasse magicum hoc (*illicium*) quo, daemones allicientes in statuas, esse numina declararent. Sed Iamblichus damnat Aegyptios quod daemones non solum ut gradus quosdam ad superiores deos investigandos acceperint sed plurimum adoraverint. . . . Mercurius sacerdotes ait accepisse virtutem a mundi natura convenientem eamque miscuisse. Sequutus hunc Plotinus. . . ; the Basel, 1576, edition has *illicitum* in the passage above; for the important emendation to *illicium* I am grateful to the editorial work of Carol Kiske and John Clarke on *DVCC*; *Asclep.* 24 (326.9–11, 14–15), 37 (347.10–15, 18–19; 348.8–10), 38 (349.3–7, 8–11); *Plot. Enn.* 4.3.11.1–2, 8–10, 134–14, 16–18, 23–24.

10. On seminal reasons in Plotinus and Ficino, see Copenhaver, "Ennead 4.3–5."

11. Aug. *Civ. D.* 8.24; *supra*, n. 8; for Michael Psellos, *infra*, note 27.

Ficino, who translated Synesius' treatise *On Dreams*, calls on that work in chapter twenty-six to confirm that hypercosmic gods play no part in statue-magic; the matter of statues, which are artificial forms of lower nature, attracts only *numina mundana*, cosmic divinities. Ficino had made the same point in his first chapter, where he also cited *De insomniis* to show that lower material forms, acting as baits or lures for higher entities, can attract at least some powers of Soul. "Such congruities of forms to reasons of the World-Soul," wrote Ficino, "Zoroaster called divine baits (*illices*), and Synesius also confirmed that they are magical lures (*illecebrae*)."¹² Synesius appeared again in chapter thirteen in the list of authorities on animated statues, where Ficino's purpose was to show that matter can receive demonic and divine as well as celestial gifts. Ficino took all this material on magical enticement (though not on pneumatology, another important influence from Synesius) from the first two sections of *De insomniis*. He found these preliminaries useful, no doubt, because of their evident derivation from Plotinus' exposition of natural magic in *Ennead* 4.4.30-45. "Nature is everywhere a sorceress, as Plotinus says and Synesius also, everywhere enticing particular things with particular baits." Recapitulating Plotinus' account of cosmic sympathy as the basis of natural magic, Synesius insisted that such magic can provoke divine responses. All members of the cosmos are

parts of one living organism. . . . Even to some god, of those who dwell within the universe, a stone from hence and a herb is a befitting offering; for in sympathizing with these he is yielding to nature and is bewitched. . . . [But] whatsoever of the divine element is outside the cosmos can in no wise be moved by sorcery.¹³

12. Ficino, *DVCC*, pp. 531, 571: Congruitates igitur eiusmodi formarum ad rationes animae mundi Zoroaster divinas illices appellavit quas et Synesius magicas esse illecebras confirmavit; cf. Syn. *Insomn.* 132c3-4: καὶ μὴ ποτε αἱ μάγων ἑγγυες αὐταί, which in his translation of Synesius (*Opera*, p. 1969) Ficino renders: Consideratione vero dignum est utrum huc tendant illices vel motacillae magorum; see also *infra*, note 13. The edition of *De insomniis* by N. Terzaghi in *Synesii Cyrenensis opuscula*, *Scriptores graeci et latini consilio Academiae Lynceorum editi* (Rome, 1944), supersedes the text in Migne, PG. For an English version, see A. Fitzgerald, *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene* (Oxford, 1930), which contains an extensive introduction and notes. See also J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley, 1982), 145-154; C. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène, Hellène et Chrétien* (Paris, 1951), 150-169. Walker, *Magic*, 39, note 1 also mentions Synesius as an important source for Neoplatonic pneumatology, another important ingredient in Ficino's magic.

13. Ficino, *DVCC*, 549, 570: Ubique igitur natura maga est, ut inquit Plotinus atque Synesius,

To this Plotinian material Synesius added the notion of ἑγγυες or magical charms, which he would have found in various Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Oracula Chaldaica*. The ἑγγυες of the *Chaldaean Oracles*—which are both magical material objects and immaterial processions from the Father—became Ficino's *illices* and *illecebrae*, magical lures to attract divine powers. Since the original ἑγγυς was a bird, the wryneck, whose striking behavior seemed a visible sign for invisible powers capable of attracting the circling heavenly gods, Synesius used it to introduce an analogy between the act of casting a spell (θέλγειν) and the act of giving a signal (σημαίνειν). Like other Neoplatonists of his era, he wished to distinguish a base, illegitimate magic from a nobler, licit magic, and he drew his distinction on the basis of the distance between matter and mind. As a magic of signs rather than things, divination had a greater share in the divine intellect than the lower γοητεία that bound the magus downward to matter.¹⁴ Thus, at the end of his introductory remarks, Synesius saw no danger in explaining μαντεία or divination, but in his "law-abiding treatise" he found no place for τελεταί, which Ficino translated pleonastically as "expiationes . . . solennitatesque," "purifications and rituals."¹⁵

What were the rituals to which Synesius objected? From his own ac-

videlicet certa quaedam pabulis ubique certis inescans. . . ; Syn. *Insomn.* 132d10-13: ἐνὸς γὰρ ἦν ἅμω ζῶν, καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς τι μᾶλλον ἐτέρω πρὸς ἄλληλα· καὶ δὴ καὶ θεῶ τινι τῶν εἰσῶ τοῦ κόσμου λίθος ἐνθόνδε καὶ βοτάνη προσήκει, οἷς ὁμοιοπαθῶν εἶναι τῇ φύσει καὶ γοητεύεται; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1969: Ambo enim illa et unius animalis sunt membra. . . . Atqui et alicui deo ex deorum numero mundanorum lapis hic herbae congruit, quibus quasi compatiens naturae caedit ac veluti fascinator; Fitzgerald, *Essays and Hymns*, 329-330 (my italics); Plot. *Enn.* 4.4.40.1-12, 42.14-17, 43.12-19; Copenhaver, "Proclus."

14. Syn. *Insomn.* 131a7-9, 132c3-5, 133b14-15; A. Smith, *Porphyrus's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague, 1974), 90 ff., discusses the notion of higher and lower theurgies (*infra*, note 19), beginning with such earlier authorities as Rosán, Lewy and Sodano. From Ficino's translation of Syn. *Insomn.* 132c3-4 (*supra*, note 12), it is clear that he identified the physical ἑγγυς as, among other things, the motacilla or wagtail (cf. Plin. *HN* 37.156), although the ἑγγυς of the ancients was the wryneck, *Jynx torquilla*. Ficino also mentions the motacilla in *DVCC*, 533. On various aspects of the ἑγγυς, see *Orac. Chald.* frgs. 77, 206 (*Des Places*); Michael Psellos *Comm. in Orac. Chald.* 133a3-b4, 1149a10-b11; Psellos, *Expos. dogm. Chald.* 1149c1-1152a6; *Oratio Ioannis Pici Mirandulani*, in G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, 1149c1-1152a6; *Oratio Ioannis Pici Mirandulani*, ed. E. Garin (Florence, 1942), 152; Gossen, "ἑγγυς," Pauly-Heptaplat, *De ente et uno e scripti vari*, ed. E. Garin (Florence, 1942), 152; Gossen, "ἑγγυς," Pauly-Wissowa, RE, 20/2, coll. 1384-86; Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*. Publications de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale, recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire, 12 (Cairo, 1956), 132-134, 156-157, 249-252.

15. Syn. *Insomn.* 133b15-c2: . . . καὶ τελεταὶ μὲν, ἀλλὰ μὴδὲ ὁ λόγος κινεῖται, νόμω πολιτείας πεπαισμένος· μαντικὴν δὲ ἀνεμύσητον ἀποδέχασθαι; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1969: Expiationes quidem solennitatesque sed nihil in praesentia sermo moveat civili tantum legi fidem adhibens; Fitzgerald, *Essays and Hymns*, 330.

count we may gather that illicit τελεταί were those magical procedures that trapped the magus in matter, unlike the higher rites of divine mantic that released him. That statue-magic (which Proclus called τελεστική from τελεῖν, "to consecrate") was the ritual that offended Synesius seems likely when we turn to Iamblichus' views on the subject—Iamblichus, whom Ficino cited along with Synesius as an authority on the statues.¹⁶

Iamblichus wrote *De mysteriis*, which Ficino also translated, in response to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, a skeptical query into divination, theurgy and the role of gods and demons therein.¹⁷ In general, Iamblichus' strategy was to make the cause for efficacious, legitimate theurgy and divination through a series of distinctions and exculpations. He ascribed any evil detected in these practices to human rather than divine agency, or to demons rather than higher divinities, or to bad demons rather than good demons. He also distinguished bad ritual, marred by human error and evil, from good rites guided by divine intention.¹⁸ In particular, he described theurgy, including its ritual components, as a continuous process of two stages, a lower initiatory theurgy and a higher culminating theurgy. Lower theurgy, which appealed to cosmic gods, depended principally on the ritual manipulation of material σύμβολα and συνθήματα appropriate to such lower divinities; its efficacy came from the συμπάθεια that unified and vitalized the living cosmos. But the efficacy of higher theurgy addressed to hypercosmic gods originated in divine love, φιλία, that transcended cosmic sympathy. Although the higher theurgy still included ritual elements, its final stage was immaterial νόησις or intellection that led to union with the divine; the theurge reached these heights, however, from lower initial rites more dependent on material objects. These lower rites had their own sphere of efficacy, but since their power flowed from cosmic sympathy such effects were confined to the world of nature and to the lower divinities assigned to that realm. Unless they led the operator to the immaterial, noetic stages of higher theurgy, whose autonomous

16. Ficino, *DVCC*, 549, 571; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1968), 291–95.

17. R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London, 1972), 105–110, 120–23; on Iamblichus, theurgy and *De mysteriis*, see also *Les Mystères d'Égypte*, ed. E. Des Places (Paris, 1966), 5–33; B. D. Larsen, *Jamblique de Chalcis, Exégète et philosophe* (Aarhus, 1972), 148–196; A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1970), 283–301; and especially, Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 81–150.

18. Iamb. *Myst.* 82.9–15, 83.16–84.4, 91.9–92.7, 103.2–10, 114.3–115.15, 142.18–143.3, 144.1–8, 155.18–156.3, 160.15–161.2, 176.3–178.2, 219.12–18.

powers transcended the cosmos, the material rites of lower theurgy were worse than incomplete. They were dangerous.¹⁹

The perils in lower theurgy stemmed from human evil or human ignorance, not from any fault of the gods. If human operators were evil, if they confused the special rites required by the differing natures of hypercosmic and cosmic gods, if they made mistakes in conducting the rituals, if they forgot that the lower theurgy of sympathies was only antecedent to the higher theurgy of intellection, they might find themselves not rising to divine union but mired in the depths of otherness and vulnerable to the fierce, capricious powers governing there.²⁰ Even worse than failed or incomplete attempts at theurgy were other rituals that were not theurgic at all. To distinguish such practices from theurgy, Iamblichus called them φαντασμάτων θαυματουργία, the "thaumaturgy of phantasms" or "wonder-working through illusions." The genuine theurge contemplated the true essential forms (εἶδη) of the gods, but the thaumaturge only handled their false artificial images (εἰδῶλα). If this trickery derived any good from power descending from on high, through the cycling heavens, down to the darkest margins of the All, such good was merely physical; it came from magical technique, not theurgic contemplation. In describing this non-theurgic magic, Iamblichus had especially in mind εἰδωλοποιία, the making of images, which he condemned at length in *De mysteriis*. He ended his critique of the thaumaturgy of statues with a comment that recalls Ficino's claim in *De vita III* to be describing images but not approving them: "One must know about the nature of this thaumaturgy but by no means use it or trust it."²¹

Iamblichus shunned statue-magic not only as a distraction from theurgy but also as an invitation to evil, perverse demons who deceived men and harmed them: "If we were to speak truthfully now about images and the evil demons who pretend to appear as gods and good demons, it is clear that a great maleficent host streams into them from that source. . . ." ²² Ficino knew what Iamblichus feared. He cited his anxieties

19. Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 90–99, 105–107, 110, 149; Iamb. *Myst.* 96.11–98.15, 126.17–127.3, 135.14–136.10, 139.1–4, 184.1–13, 209.4–211.18.

20. Iamb. *Myst.* 70.18–71.18, 72.12–17, 82.9–15, 88.5–9, 176.13–177.12, 196.13–197.11, 227.1–228.12, 229.17–230.6, 231.5–232.9.

21. Iamb. *Myst.* 167.9–15, 169.1–170.2, 170.7–10, 171.5–13, 175.13–14: ὥστε εἰδέναι μὲν χρὴ καὶ ταύτην τὴν θαυματουργίαν τίνα ἔχει φύσιν, χρῆσθαι δὲ ἢ πιστεύειν αὐτῇ μηδαμῶς; Ficino, *DVCC*, 530; cf. *Opera*, 1: 573; 2: 1891; Walker, *Magic*, 42, note 3.

22. Iamb. *Myst.* 190.8–12: Εἰ γὰρ ἀληθῶς ἄρτι ἐλέγομεν περὶ τῶ εἰδῶλων καὶ τῶν κακῶν

in chapter fifteen of *De vita III* while describing correspondences between types of images and varieties of demons, and again in chapter eighteen, after having set forth warnings from St. Thomas on demonic images:

Iamblichus says that those who neglect sanctity and the highest piety, who put their trust in images alone and expect divine gifts from them, are most often deceived in this regard by evil demons who rush in under the guise of good divinities. Yet he does not deny that certain natural goods can result from images constructed according to legitimate principles of astrology.²³

Ficino's most striking restatement of Iamblichus' view that statue-magic was demonic thaumaturgy rather than divine theurgy comes in chapter twenty-six, where

Iamblichus condemns the Egyptians . . . because they frequently adore the demons. In fact, he prefers the Chaldaeans to the Egyptians as not possessed by demons—Chaldaeans, I maintain, who were ministers of religion, for we suspect that Chaldaean as well as Egyptian astrologers tried somehow to attract demons through celestial harmony into earthen statues.

The demon-ridden Egyptians whom Iamblichus repudiates here are, of course, the *deorum fictores* of the *Asclepius*, for the gods they made were mere εἰδωλα, mere baits for evil demons, no true gods at all.²⁴

The Chaldaeans whom Iamblichus admired were, according to Ficino, "ministers of religion"; they were not makers of demonic astrological images. Chaldaeans or Magi or followers of Zoroaster appear frequently in *De vita III* as proponents of various astrological doctrines, most of them

δαιμόνων τῶν ὑποκρινόμενων τὴν τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν δαιμόνων παρουσίαν, πάλῃ δὴ πρὸς τι καταφαίνεται ἐντεῦθεν ἐπιρρόν τὸ κακοποιῶν φύλον. *Ibid.* 82.9–15, 129.18–130.6, 172.15–17, 176.13–178.11, 190.4–191.11.

23. Ficino, *DVCC*, 551, 558: Iamblichus ait eos qui, religione summa sanctimoniaque posthabita, imaginibus duntaxat confisi, ab eis divina sperant munera, hac in re a malis daemonibus saepissime falli sub praetextu bonorum numinum occurrentibus. Contingere tamen ex imaginibus legitima astrologiae ratione constructis naturalia quaedam bona non negat; *Iamb. Myst.* 91.9–15, 130.3–6, 172.15–17, 176.13–177.10, 178.4–5, 190.9–191.5; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1881, 1886, 1891–93; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 104–105; *De occultis operibus naturae*, 17, 20; Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy."

24. Ficino, *DVCC*, 571: Sed Iamblichus damnat Aegyptios quod daemones . . . plurimum adoraverint. Chaldaeos vero daemonibus non occupatos Aegyptiis anteposit — Chaldaeos, inquam, religionis antistites, nam astrologos tam Chaldaeorum quam Aegyptiorum quodammodo tentavisse daemones per harmoniam coelestem in statuas fictiles trahere suspicemus; cf. *Iamb. Myst.* 167.9–176.2, 246.16–20, 247.11–248.2; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1890–92, 1901; *Asclep.* 38 (349.8).

unrelated to the issue of demonolatry and traceable to Macrobius, Albumasar, Peter of Abano and other sources.²⁵ Another set of Ficino's Chaldaean references, however, comes from the *Oracula Chaldaica*. They contain theological teachings. Zoroaster, for example, called material forms "divine baits" for powers of Soul, and a precept of his Chaldaean disciples encouraged the mix of medical and theological concerns that we find in Ficino: "Raise up a fiery mind to the work of piety, and you will save a fallen body." From Michael Psellos' *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles*, Ficino would have known that this "work of piety" referred to "the methods of the rituals," i.e., to theurgy, but he also knew that Iamblichus treated pious theurgy as just the antithesis of demonolatry.²⁶ More problematic is the following item from Ficino's list of authorities on animated statues in chapter thirteen:

To evoke a spirit from Hecate, the Magi, . . . followers of Zoroaster, used a sort of golden ball marked with celestial characters and containing a sapphire within; as they chanted, it was whirled about on a sort of thong made from bull's hide. I gladly omit the incantations, of course, for Psellus the Platonist also disapproves and derides them.

Actually, it was in reference to the entire description of these material ἔργα that Psellos said "the whole thing is silly talk," but, as far as Ficino knew, this bit of nonsense—clearly a recipe for demon-worship—did not come from the *Oracles* themselves. Nothing corresponding to it occurs in the compilation of *Oracles* available in his time.²⁷ Moreover, Psel-

25. Ficino, *DVCC*, 542, 552, 556, 560, 562, 567; Macrobius, *Comm.* 19.1; Yates, Bruno, 54, 70; M. J. B. Allen, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis* (Berkeley, 1984), 118–19; C. Bezold, F. Boll and W. Gundel, *Stern Glaube und Sternbedeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie* (Leipzig, 1926), 21, 25, 29, 91–95.

26. Ficino, *DVCC*, 565: . . . praeeptum illud Chaldaeorum: . . . Si mentem ad pietatis opus ardentem erexeris, corpus quoque caducum servabis; *Orac. Chald.* frg. 128: . . . ἐκτελεῖν πύριον νοῦν ἔργον ἐκ εὐσεβείας βευστὸν καὶ σώμα σώσει; Psellos *Comm.* 1140b1–11: . . . ἔργα δὲ εὐσεβείας παρὰ Χαλδαίους αἱ τῶν τελετῶν μέθοδοι; *Iamb. Myst.* 178.3–18; *supra*, note 12; cf. *DVCC*, 531, 533, 534, 562; *Orac. Chald.* frg. 150; Psellos *Comm.* 1132b1–13, c1–11.

27. Ficino, *DVCC*, 548–49: Magi quinetiam Zoroastri sectatores ad evocandum ab Hecate spiritum utebantur aurea quadam pila characteribus insignita coelestium cui et saphyrus erat insertus, et scutica quadam facta tauri corio vertebatur atque interim excantabant. Sed cantiones equidem libenter omitto. Nam et Psellus Platonius eas improbat atque deridet; Psellos *Comm.* 1133a3–b4: "Ἐστὶ δὲ τὸ πᾶν φλόαρον; *Oracula magica Zoroastris cum scholiis Plethonis et Pselli*, in *Sibyllina oracula . . . emendata ac restituta . . . opera et studio Servatii Gallaei* (Amsterdam, 1689), 78–91; cf. E. Des Places, ed., *Oracles Chaldaïques avec un choix de commentaires anciens* (Paris, 1971), 52–53, frgs. 77, 206, 223.

los' analysis of *ἑρμῆς* that are mentioned in the *Oracles* known to Ficino treats them not as physical devices for working magic but as immaterial powers flowing from above, much like the "divine baits" of Zoroaster that attract soul to matter. Thus, one can discern throughout *De vita III* at least a rough distinction between Chaldaean piety and Chaldaean astrology, a division that corresponds to what Ficino saw as Iamblichus' choice of the Chaldaeans over the Egyptians.²⁸ The implication of this distinction—as in general of Ficino's use of Iamblichus in the "Hermetic" contexts of *De vita III*—is to devalue Hermetic statue-magic and elevate the status of Chaldaean theurgy.²⁹ One may call Ficino's iatromathematics "Chaldaean" or "Hermetic" with equal imprecision.

Thus far, our analysis of Iamblichus, the *Chaldaean Oracles* and Synesius in *De vita III* indicates that Hermetic statues and astrological talismans are to be avoided as demonic thaumaturgy. Even genuine but lower theurgy is a danger unless it leads to *νόησις* and the higher gods. For Ficino, as philosopher and Platonist, the attractions of noetic theurgy were powerful. His whole philosophical career was a pledge of fealty to what Iamblichus called the "intellectual and incorporeal law of the priestly [art that governs] . . . every part of theurgy." But the laws of theurgy that Iamblichus proclaimed gave small comfort to Ficino the physician. In Iamblichus' view, only men of poor character would show much interest in the merely physical efficacy—including therapeutic efficacy—of lower theurgy which, when confined to its own material sphere, kept the operator vulnerable to demonic affliction. The ambitions of a perfected theurgy were, for Iamblichus, necessarily hypercosmic.³⁰ If the Platonist in Ficino was perhaps tempted to follow this sublime path in his magic, the Christian in him must have trembled to aim so high except through rituals sanctioned by the Church.

Had Plotinus been Ficino's only guide in constructing a theory of magic, his choices would have been simpler and his results—if one may speculate—clearer. Plotinus never mentioned theurgy, a Chaldaean novelty

28. *Oracula magica Zoroastris*, 80–81, 89; *Orac. Chald.* frg. 77; *Psellos Comm.* 1149a10–b11; *supra*, notes 12, 24.

29. Ficino, *DVCC*, 549, 571; for other uses of Iamblichus in *DVCC* not yet discussed, see *ibid.*, 538, 549, 562–65, 571–72; *Iamb. Myst.* 100. 3–7, 11–18, 108.10–11, 111.5–9, 114.7–9, 118.16–119.4, 134.7–9, 169.4–14, 175.15–178.2, 215.1–7, 230.4–6, 232.10–234.4, 253.5–6, 255.9–11, 258.6–11, 269.9–270.7, 271.3–12; *Ficino, Opera*, 2: 1882–87, 1891–92, 1901–02, 1904.

30. *Iamb. Myst.* 219.1–225.3, 225.3–5: . . . νοερὸν καὶ ἀσώματον ιεροτατικῆς θεαμάτων δι-
αμελετώσιν περὶ πάντα τῆς θεωρίας τὰ μέρη; *supra*, note 19.

introduced into Neoplatonism by Porphyry. Magic for Plotinus was entirely a product of sympathy in the All. Like all else, sympathy could be traced to causes transcending the cosmos, but it opened no route to those causes for the sage. Because there was no magic without sympathy, all magic for Plotinus was natural magic. Had Ficino been content to advocate nothing more than non-demonic, natural magic for medical uses, this constraint might have suited his purposes. But from such sources as Iamblichus, Psellos and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Ficino learned of a magic that reached beyond sympathetic effects and acted as a bridge to *νόησις* and *ἑνωσις*, intellection and union.³¹ Knowledge of these more ambitious practices put temptation and complication in Ficino's way. As the higher noetic theurgy, initiated in a lower magical theurgy, approached the divine Mind, it appealed strongly to the fundamental Platonist yearning for pure immaterial union in the One, yet from a Christian point of view the unorthodox rituals required to satisfy such yearnings were at best gravely suspect. Faced with these conflicts, Ficino brought his treatise on magic to an ambiguous, perplexing conclusion in its twenty-sixth chapter.

The last authority whom Ficino cites in this last chapter is Iamblichus, whom he calls upon to reinforce a point taken from Plotinus, a point that seems to contradict the Plotinian principle of a purely sympathetic, cosmic magic. Given the proper connections among ideas, forms and seminal reasons, writes Ficino,

higher gifts may also sometimes descend, in so far as reasons in the World-Soul are joined to intellectual forms of that same Soul and through them to ideas of the divine Mind, as Iamblichus also agrees.

Actually, the integrity of Plotinus' theory of magic was secure for attentive readers who, like Ficino, knew that magic, an artificial human action, could not *cause* the descent of divine gifts. Men wise enough to recognize the gifts simply took advantage of their presence, through magic or through prayer. Magic is given in the nature of things, divinely ordained, and some men are clever enough to find it. When Plotinus briefly mentioned the divinized statues of Hermes, he used them simply to illustrate the general metaphysical principle that even material objects accessible to humans could be fit receptacles for the divine—though they

31. *Iamb. Myst.* 162.13–164.5, 207.7–208.6; Dodds, *Irrational*, 285; Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 92–94, 122–127, 147; *supra*, notes 19, 28; Copenhaver, "Ennead 4.3–5."

became so as a consequence neither of divine intention nor of human manipulation.³² Iamblichus broadened and transformed this principle, as Ficino noted at several points:

Iamblichus confirms that not only celestial but even demonic and divine powers and effects can be caught in material objects which are naturally in sympathy with higher beings if they are collected and gathered in from various places at the proper time and in the correct manner.

So taken was Iamblichus with the magic of material objects duly purified and suitably assembled that he described them as working *ex opere operato*.³³ This automatic action might have been a desirable addition to a purely natural magic. But since "higher gifts may also sometimes descend," Ficino must have recognized that the continuity of lower with higher theurgy in Iamblichus opened a path to divinity that was philosophically enticing but religiously menacing.

More attention to the historicity of his sources might have resolved some of Ficino's confusions. His admiration for the *Hermetica* and his interest in their εἰδωλοποιία were, after all, results of an error in dating. In addition, it is worth recalling that the philosophy of Ficino's *Platonici* saw considerable change over a period of centuries: Plotinus began to write in A.D. 253; Porphyry, who introduced the *Oracles* to Neoplatonism, edited the *Enneads* after 298; Iamblichus wrote *De mysteriis* before 300; Synesius' treatise on dreams dates from 405-406; Proclus died in 485; Psellos studied the Neoplatonists in the eleventh century.³⁴ All the successors of Plotinus altered his themes and added to them, and if Ficino had been

32. Ficino, *DVCC*, 572: Fieri vero posse quandoque ut rationibus ad formas sic adhibitis sublimiora quoque dona descendant, quatenus rationes in anima mundi coniunctae sunt intellectualibus eiusdem animae formis atque per illas divinae mentis ideis. Quod et Iamblichus approbat ubi de sacrificiis agit; cf. *ibid.*, 549, 565; Iamb. *Myst.* 169.4-14, 232.5-234.4; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1736, 1745-48, 1891, 1898-99; Plot. *Enn.* 4.3.8.19-21, 11.1-6; 4.4.31.8-15, 24-29, 48-50, 32.1-32, 34.33-38, 35.4-8, 22-23, 36.25-27, 37.17-20, 40.1-9, 42.6-19; Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 127-28; Copenhaver, "*Ennead* 4.3-5."

33. Ficino, *DVCC*, 549: Iamblichus in materiis quae naturaliter superis consentaneae sint et opportune riteque collectae undique conflataeque fuerint vires effectusque non solum coelestes sed etiam daemonicos et divinos suscipi posse confirmat; Iamb. *Myst.* 96.11-97.19, 232.5-234.4; Ficino, *Opera*, 2: 1882, 1898-99; *supra*, notes 13, 23, 32.

34. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972), 17-21; F. Purnell, Jr., "Francesco Patrizi and the Critics of Hermes

interested in their development as much as their ideas, he might have been more sensitive to the contradictions among them. Yet in the end, other sources of tension in Ficino's magic, especially those arising from Christianity, were more basic. Neoplatonic magic had been notorious in Latin Christianity since Augustine wrote the *City of God*, and it was to remain so despite Ficino's learned efforts to reconcile magic with philosophy and religion. Clarifying the tension between Ficino's learning and his faith helps us understand the motivation of the last sentence of *De vita III*, a confession of Christian orthodoxy: "... how impure was the superstition of the pagan people, but by contrast how pure the piety of the Gospel...."³⁵

BRIAN P. COPENHAVER

Trismegistus," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 6 (1976): 155-178; Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 39, 46-7, 138, 162; Bergman, *Synesius*, 145; Larsen, *Jamblique*, 195-96.

35. Ficino, *DVCC*, 572: Qua de re alibi nos opportunius disputabimus, ubi etiam apparebit quam impura superstitio populi gentilis extiterit, contra vero quam pura pietas Evangelica fuerit, quod magna ex parte in libro *De religione christiana* iam fecimus; *supra*, notes 8, 11; Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy."

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