

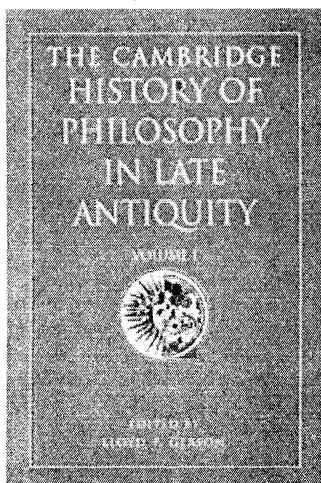
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The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity Volume 1



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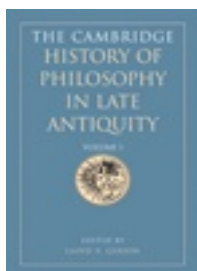
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THE CHALDAEAN ORACLES

JOHN F. FINAMORE AND SARAH ILES JOHNSTON

I BACKGROUND

'*Chaldaean Oracles*' is a term used to refer to Greek dactylic hexameter poems, believed to have been spoken by the gods (especially Hecate), either directly to a figure known as Julian the Chaldaean or through a divinely possessed medium – perhaps Julian's son, who later became known as Julian the Theurgist. The elder was reputed to have lived at the time of Trajan and the younger was said to have accompanied Marcus Aurelius on campaign, aiding him in battle by creating a mask that threw thunderbolts at the enemy, splitting stones by magical command, and conjuring up a rainstorm to save the army from dying of thirst.¹ According to another legend, the younger Julian competed with Apuleius and Apollonius of Tyana to save Rome from a plague; Julian won by stopping it with a single word (St. Anast. Sinai, *PG* 89 col. 252ab).

Although the *Oracles* date to the late second or early third century CE, the term 'Chaldaean' is not applied to them until several centuries later (e.g., Proc. *In Parm.* 800.19) probably as an attempt to associate the poems and their messages with the much esteemed wisdom of the East. Earlier authors who quoted the *Oracles* generally referred to them as *ta hiera logia* or simply *ta logia*.² The *Oracles* survive now only in approximately 226 fragments quoted by these later authors, including Proclus, Damascius and Michael Psellus (scholars disagree on whether all 226 fragments are genuinely from the *Oracles* or not). Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus also wrote commentaries on the *Oracles*, but these are lost; Iamblichus refers to the *Oracles* and probably even paraphrases them in his treatise *Concerning the Mysteries*.³ It can be difficult at times to sort out from these sources the words, doctrines and practices that are genuinely to be traced to the *Oracles* and those that have been contributed by their later interpreters and critics.

¹ *Suda* s.v. 'Iulianus' 433 and 434; Psell. *Script. Min.* 1.446.28, Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.18.7.

² Lewy 1978: 443–7. ³ Des Places 1971: 18–57; Lewy 1978: 449–56; Cremer 1969.

The doctrines and rituals presented by the *Oracles* were vital to those who called themselves theurgists. These include cosmogonical, metaphysical and theological information, and instructions for rituals that would help the theurgists to learn more about the cosmos and the gods, and to purify their souls, eventually causing them to rise to the heavens. Philosophically, the doctrines are heavily indebted to Middle Platonism, as we will discuss below. The rites grew organically out of the philosophical doctrines, insofar as they attempt to put the theurgist's understanding of the cosmos into practice. Nonetheless, in most of their specifics the rites are similar to those of contemporary magic and religion, relying on the manipulation of substances and the speaking of sacred words, for example. Theurgy also shares close affinities with certain strands of Gnosticism and Hermeticism; indeed, attempts to discriminate between theurgy and Hermeticism in particular are probably misguided, as Garth Fowden has argued.⁴

2 THE CHALDAEAN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

The Chaldaean metaphysical hierarchy is a variation of the Middle-Platonic schema. There is not yet a transcendent One-beyond-Being (as will be found in Plotinus and later Platonists). The Intellect is the highest god. Without a transcendent One over the Intellect, the Intellect itself must play a double role in the Chaldaean system, being both separated from the world below but also connected to and responsible for it. As in other Pythagorean/Platonic writers such as Numenius, Intellect is not simple but exists as a triad, as we shall see.⁵ Below these Intellects are the World Soul, a host of gods and lesser divinities, individual souls and nature.

The highest god in the Chaldaean canon is described in fr. 3: 'The Father carried himself away without enclosing his own fire in his own Intellectual Power.' The Father, dwelling in the intelligible or Empyrean World above the cosmos, is described in the act of separating himself totally from the lower intelligibles (about which we will speak shortly). His 'fire' is his ultimate essence,

⁴ Fowden 1986.

⁵ It is useful here to compare the systems of Moderatus, Nicomachus and Numenius. As Dillon 1977: 344–79 shows, there are common features as well as specific differences among these authors concerning the intelligible realm, and these underscore the range of possibilities among Middle-Platonic authors. Moderatus posits a triad of a god beyond Being, a second god at the level of Being that has a dyadic nature and therefore may be seen as the Demiurge in the system, and a third god that is Soul. Nicomachus prefers a simple Demiurge as the highest god in his system. Numenius envisions a triad of gods: the first (equivalent to the Good of Plato's *Republic*, but still conceived as an Intellect) sits above the others and communes with himself (frs. 11–16), the second and third are two aspects of the Demiurge proper, the second in his higher non-divided aspect and the third in his lower divided aspect; thus it is the lowest Demiurge who interacts with matter. It will become clear that the *Oracles* work in this Platonic tradition but create their own niche.

that aspect of him that is fully transcendent and unknowable. A central feature of Middle-Platonic speculations about the highest god was a tension between his transcendence from the world below him and his immanence in it. The highest god somehow possessed both qualities, since he was both responsible for the world's existence and also necessarily removed from it.⁶

In the *Oracles*, his connection with the rest of the Intelligible realm is made clearer in frs. 4–8. The intelligible realm is triadic, made up of the Father, a Power that emanates from him, and a Second Intellect that issues forth from the two. Thus, the activities of the Father that have an impact on the world below issue from his Power.⁷ This Power is very closely associated with the Father: it is with (*sum*) him, whereas the second Intellect is from (*apo*) him (fr. 4). In fr. 6, we learn that this Power, acting like a girdling membrane (*hupezōkōs humēn*), divides the first from the second fire. Although the two fires are clearly the first and second Intellects, the context of the quotation from Simplicius shows that he referred the term to the intelligible and sensible realms. Scholars have mainly followed him and therefore connected the 'girdling membrane' with Hecate as World Soul.⁸ Once we understand that the Power is not the Intellectual World Soul but rather an intelligible entity, we can see that the correct interpretation of fr. 6 is that this is an intelligible intermediary and separates the two Intellects. In such a position it is necessarily closer to the Father than the second Intellect is. Power is the actualized emanation from the Father, which at once helps preserve his transcendence while insuring a conduit to the world below.

We are introduced to the second Intellect in fr. 5, where we read that the Father acts on matter not through Power but through Intellect. The Demiurge of the cosmos is this second Intellect which comes from the Father; he is 'Intellect of Intellect' (*nou noos*). The Father perfects all things and hands them on to the Demiurge, whom human beings mistakenly call the first god (fr. 7).⁹ This second Intellect is a dyad, i.e., it has two functions: from the Father it

⁶ For the tension in Apuleius, which is in many ways reflective of the problem throughout the period and here in the *Oracles*, see Finamore 2006.

⁷ For the feminine nature of this Power and its relation to Gnostic texts, see Majercik 1989: 4 and 7.

⁸ Des Places 1971: 124–5; Majercik 1989: 143–4; Lewy 1978: 92. Van den Berg 2001: 252–6, however, has the correct interpretation. Majercik, like Turner 1991: 221–32, associates the Power with Hecate and then distinguishes a second, lower Hecate that separates the second Intellect from the lower realms, acting as a World Soul. Cf. Dillon 1977: 394. For more on Hecate and her role in the *Oracles*, see below.

⁹ It is impossible to determine whether Numenius is dependent on the *Oracles* for his similar remark that the Intellect that we mere humans place first is not first (fr. 16 Des Places) or whether the *Oracles* are dependent upon him or whether there is an independent third source that both Numenius and the *Oracles* are copying. For a summary of the various positions taken see Majercik 1989: 144–5. Athanassiadi 1999: 153–6 argues that Apamea and its temple of Bel (Adad) provides a connection between the *Oracles* and Numenius and that the Julians and Numenius may have been part of the same social network in the city.

possesses the Forms within itself and he uses these to bring form to the world of matter (fr. 8). Thus, the Father is further separated from the world below by the second Intellect which inherits the Forms as his own thoughts and uses them for the ordering of the cosmos. It is easy to see why human beings think this second Intellect is the primary god, for it is of him that we have the most direct evidence. The *Oracles*, however, make clear that there is a higher Intellect, though hidden and ‘carried away’ from our realm.¹⁰

The relationship between the two Intellects is made clearer in other fragments. We have already seen that the second Intellect is a dyad (fr. 8) in the sense that it looks in two directions: upward to the Father and downward toward Nature. The *Oracles* also called the first Intellect ‘once transcendent’ (*hapax epekeina*, fr. 169) and the second ‘twice transcendent’ (*dis epekeina*, fr. 125).¹¹ These terms again distinguish the monadic first god from his dyadic counterpart, and they point to the roles they each play in the system: the first god aloof and separate, the second involved in all the realms below him.¹²

The longest of the fragments (fr. 37) further articulates the roles of the two gods. The source of the Platonic Forms is the Father, but at his level these Forms remain unified. The Forms become divided at the level of the second Intellect. Once divided into individual Forms, they descend into our world through the World Soul. These Forms, the *Oracle* tells us, are the thoughts of the Father. We see again a kind of outpouring that begins in a fully unified, intelligible fashion at the level of Father and becomes more individuated at the level of the second Intellect. This notion of greater division and diversity the farther down the system one proceeds is clearly Platonic in conception. Further, the Father remains aloof and sends the Forms via his will (fr. 37.1), which appears to be not a separate hypostasis from him but rather another type of potentiality that emanates from him (while he himself remains above) and allows the Forms to become more than his unified thoughts as they move further downward in the system.¹³

¹⁰ Some of the Sethian Gnostic treatises from Nag Hammadi also introduce a ‘Triple Powered One’ which they locate between the Highest God and the Demiurge. This seems to be another use of the feminized intermediate potentiality, which bridges the distance between first and second gods in the Middle-Platonic systems. See Turner 1991; cf. Majercik 1989: 7–8.

¹¹ The term *dis epekeina* appears in the introductory remarks before the oracle itself in fr. 125. The term is nonetheless certainly Chaldaean. See Majercik 1989: 295, des Places 1971: 147, and Lewy 1978: 77–8 note 43.

¹² For the highest god as the Monad before the triad see frs. 26 and 27. (He is termed *hapax epekeina* in Lydus’ introduction to fr. 26.)

¹³ Majercik 1989: 157 says that the Will ‘functions as a hypostasized faculty of the Highest God’. Lewy 1978: 79 calls the Will and similar paternal functions ‘faculties who in their virtuality are identical with the Supreme Being, but acquire in the state of actuality a particular existence’. He rightly associates Will with the Chaldaean concept of the Father’s transcendence (80–1). The Will is a link between the transcendent Father and the second Intellect, allowing the Father immanence while safeguarding his transcendence. Two other such entities that spring from the Father and then

Below the second Intellect is the World Soul, described in frs. 50–6. It is usually held that the World Soul is the goddess Hecate in the *Oracles*. Such an interpretation runs into problems. First, there is fr. 50: ‘The centre of Hecate is carried in the middle of the Fathers.’ Although the most obvious meaning of these words is that Hecate is an intelligible goddess whose place is between the Father and the second Intellect (placing her in the intermediary position assigned to the feminine Power principle in fr. 6), Lewy¹⁴ interpreted it as saying that Hecate (as the Moon) is being identified ‘with the “midmost” of the three “Fathers”, that is to say with the Ruler of the Sun’. This interpretation allowed Lewy to argue that Hecate was equivalent to the World Soul. Although there is now consensus that the Fathers in fr. 50 are the First and Second Intellects, most scholars have still assumed that Hecate is the World Soul.¹⁵ Brisson,¹⁶ on the other hand, argues that she is placed too high in the system to be the World Soul. Van den Berg,¹⁷ making use of Proclus’ writings, argues that Hecate is double in both the Chaldaean and the Proclean systems: one at the highest levels above the Demiurge and the other in the realm below the Demiurge (i.e., among the Intellectual and the Hypercosmic gods in Proclus’ system).¹⁸ The concept of the same god or goddess appearing at different levels is common in Platonic authors from Iamblichus onwards. Although there is natural hesitation about assigning a full-blown theory of *seirai* (‘chains’) of gods to Middle-Platonic authors, there is sufficient evidence to suggest divine reappearance at various levels. Both Dillon and Majercik have suggested that this sort of doubling is possible in the *Oracles*.¹⁹

There is an obstacle to designating even this lower Hecate the World Soul. As van den Berg points out, frs. 51 and 52 show that Hecate is the cause of

play specified roles within the cosmos are the Aion and Eros. See Majercik 1989: 14–16. We agree with Majercik and Dodds 1961: 266 that Aion is not simply to be equated with time (*chronos*), as Lewy 1978 suggests. Aion, like Eternity in the *Timaeus*, is a higher entity. On the role of the Father generally within the cosmos, see fr. 21, where the Father ‘is all things but intelligibly’. He is therefore the transcendent source of all that exists throughout the system whose potencies spring from him and interact more directly below.

¹⁴ Lewy 1978: 142 n. 283; 137–9 and n. 270; 455–6.

¹⁵ Des Places 1971: 124–5; Majercik 1989: 163; Johnston 1990: 153–63 and *passim*; Dillon 1977: 394–5. At the time that this article was written, Johnston had been persuaded by the arguments of Brisson and others that the connection between Hecate and Soul was not as direct as she had suggested in 1990. She is largely in agreement with Finamore’s sketch of Hecate’s place in the ontological schema as presented in this chapter.

¹⁶ Brisson 2000: 139; 147 n. 93; 151. Cf. van den Berg 2001: 254 and 256.

¹⁷ Van den Berg 2001: 252–9.

¹⁸ See van den Berg 2001: 40; Brisson 2000: 161–2, and Lewy 1978: 483–4.

¹⁹ Dillon 1977: 394, where he cites Speusippus, Philo and Plutarch as envisioning the reappearance of the female principle at various levels; Majercik 1989: 7–8, where she cites Gnostic and Hermetic texts, as well as the later Victorinus and Synesius; cf. 144. For the appearance of the same-named gods at different levels in Apuleius, see Finamore 2006: 47–8 n. 48, where again the evidence is not strong enough to call the phenomenon a *seira*.

soul, not the World Soul itself.²⁰ Fr. 51 states simply that ‘primal soul’ (*psuchē archigenethlos*) gushes forth from Hecate’s right flank. Fr. 52 names Hecate, from whose left flank Virtue springs.²¹ Thus, it would seem, in accordance with Proclus’ interpretation as well, there is a life-giving principle (= Hecate) from which Soul emerges. Further, if we are correct that Hecate is another feminine *dunamis*-figure at a lower level, then she should be representing the potentiality latent in the higher god (the Demiurge) and brought to fulfilment in the lower god (the World Soul), the sort of role that the higher *dunamis*-figure played between the Father and the Demiurge in fr. 6. Virtue, as Lewy says, ‘must signify a cosmic power’, which he applies to the Moon.²² Virtue then is a power emanating ultimately from the Father through the Intelligible *dunamis* to the Demiurge and from him through the Life-Giving Power that is Hecate to the cosmos below. Hecate as ‘the source (*pēgē*) of Virtue’ remains and does not proceed, but Virtue’s effects are felt in the planetary spheres (fr. 52).²³ Thus, it would seem that Hecate reappears among the planetary gods as the Moon, an intermediary between the cosmic gods and nature, which lowest sphere fr. 54 reports is supported on Hecate’s back. Indeed, this overarching power of the female goddess at various levels can be glimpsed in fr. 56 as well:

Rhea is the source and outpouring of the blessed Intellectuals, for she first in Power (*dunamei*), having received in her marvellous wombs the offspring of all things as they rush forth, pours them into the universe.

Rhea is the female Power in its highest form, the ‘Mother of the Gods’ between the two Fathers.²⁴ She is therefore ‘first in *dunamis*’ and she has wombs, as does the lower Hecate (frs. 32, 35, 96). Rhea receives Intellectual realities (Intellectual Forms, Souls, etc.) from the Father and transmits them below. It is easy to imagine the transfer taking place through the Intellectual Life-Principle Hecate.

The result of this schema is a well-organized, Platonic system with the highest entities connected to the lowest through a series of intermediaries. Such a system is conducive to bringing souls in the lower realms back into contact with their gods and *vice versa*, but it also exposes a differentiation between our souls and those of the gods. Human souls enmeshed in the world of matter think diachronically, moving from point to point in time. The Father’s thought

²⁰ Van den Berg 2001: 252 n. 2.

²¹ Lewy 1978: 88–90 discusses the two fragments. He argues persuasively that the fragments refer to a cult statue of the goddess Hecate.

²² Lewy 1978: 89. ²³ See frs. 107.10–11 and 182 along with Lewy 1978: 89 and 220–2.

²⁴ Lewy 1978: 83–5 mistakenly argues that the Greek term *Rheiē* in this fragment is not to be translated ‘Rhea’ but as the feminine of *rhadios*, ‘swift’. See the discussion in Majercik 1989: 165. Van den Berg 2001: 252–4 argues that Proclus most probably equates Rhea and Hecate, as does Damascius.

is clearly different. He exists in eternity with no chronic divisions. To discover and know him is to undergo a radical change of thinking.

This conception is best brought out in fr. 1.²⁵ The Father is intelligible (fr. 1.3 *ti noēton*), and we cognize him by a special psychic faculty, the flower of the intellect (1.4 *noein nou anthei*). The jingling of *noēton* / *noein* / *nou* reinforces the concept. To cognize god involves a special meaning of ‘cognize’ and a special instrument of the soul. If one should try to cognize god as something specific (the way, say, one perceives a tree or even the Form of a living thing), no cognition will take place. God is ‘a power of a strength that is visible on all sides and that flashes with Intellectual divisions’ (1.5–6). These words represent the Father in two aspects, first as the monad of the intelligible Triad, which shines magnificently in the surrounding realm, and the second as the Demiurge, who receives the unified Forms from the Father and divides them. The image is of a shining unbroken light that is fragmented by the prism of the second Intellect. To know these deities, we must relax our minds using not force but ‘the outspread flame of the outspread intellect that measures all things but that Intelligible [object]’ (1.8–9). The cognition is viewed as calm, passive. The human intellect has the capacity to measure intelligible Forms, and this is the capacity that the intellect should use but this capacity will still not cognize the Father, who is beyond such divisions. In the end, the cognition will be indirect: ‘bearing the pure eye of your soul turned away’ from the Father, you should ‘turn an empty intellect toward the Intelligible in order to learn the intelligible since it [i.e., the intelligible Father] exists outside of your intellect’ (1.10–12). Our minds are empty of all variety, including the Forms themselves, and by not focusing the soul’s eye on its object but rather by passively receiving it, we cognize the Father.

Thus, the kind of thinking that unites human beings to the Father is qualitatively different from the normal thinking we do. This distinction is, of course, central to the Platonic world view whereby the world of becoming differs from that of the Forms. Nonetheless, as is typical in other Middle Platonisms, the gap between human and divine is larger, filled with greater metaphysical space and populated by a host of intermediaries. The separation between human and divine is more difficult to bridge than it was for Plato and requires a spiritual ritual, to which we will turn momentarily.

First, we must consider a host of other, minor deities who, having a special role in magic and ritual (as we shall see in section 3), are placed within and are essential to the Chaldaean philosophical structure. These divinities include Eros, Iynges and the Connectors. All three of these agencies spring from the Paternal

²⁵ On fr. 1, see Lewy 1978: 164–9; Des Places 1971: 66 and 123; Majercik 1989: 138–40.

Father and help to bind the universe together and connect human beings with the higher orders.²⁶

The Father sowed ‘the bond of Eros with its heavy fire’ (*desmon puribrithē erōtos*; cf. fr. 39; cf. fr. 42). Eros, then, originates like the Ideas from the Father and, also like them, travels full of the intelligible fire, bringing the Paternal thoughts to the realms below. As a bond, it helps connect entities below with those above. Eros therefore performs a function in accordance with Plato’s view of Eros in the *Symposium*; Eros is an intermediary, one endowed with higher powers used for our benefit.

The Iynges (frs. 76–9) are thoughts of the Father that themselves think and travel the length of the Chaldaean system. As ‘transmitters’ or ‘mediators’ (*diaporthmioi*, fr. 78; echoing Plato’s description of *daimones*, particularly Eros, as ferryman at *Symposium* 202e3), they bring Paternal thoughts to our realm and also serve as ‘Intellectual Sustainers’ (*noeroi anocheis*, fr. 79), which help keep the planets in motion. As Majercik (1989: 9) suggests, the Iynges descend to the planetary sphere when invoked by priests in a theurgic ritual. Damascius tells us (fr. 76) that there are a great number of Iynges and they travel from the Father to the planetary spheres.

Connectors (*sunochēis*) also originate from the Father, who is called the ‘First Connector’ (fr. 84). They guard the cosmos, whose authority comes from the Father who has endowed the Connectors with his own Strength (fr. 82). This theme is echoed in fr. 81, where the Connectors are assimilated with the Father’s lightning bolts (i.e., the Forms) and ‘serve the Father’s persuasive Will (*douleuontai patros peithēnidi boulēi*)’. In fr. 83, Connectors make the Intellectual realms whole (*holopoioi*). In fr. 80, we learn that there are Hylic Connectors, i.e., the rays of the sun on which souls are uplifted.

All of these entities (Eros, Iynges and Connectors) share common features. They emanate from the Father, help conjoin and preserve the various levels of the universe, and as Intelligible beings help unite human beings to the gods in theurgic rituals. Fr. 32, which speaks specifically of the Connectors but whose point is easily extended to all of these entities, shows that the power begins with the Paternal Intellect, unfolds through Hecate, and bestows upon the Connectors ‘a life-giving, highly powered fire (*zeidōroio puros mega dunamenoio*)’. Thus, these entities are an actualization of the Father’s power to harmonize the universe.²⁷ As Intelligible entities, these active agents of the highest god provide the means for theurgy to occur. They themselves bring the initiating power of

²⁶ For a good overview of these minor deities, see Lewy 1978: 126–37 and Majercik 1989: 8–16.

²⁷ The Teletarchs, as rulers of the three Chaldaean worlds (Empyrean, Ethereal and Material), carry on this harmonization: frs. 84–5.

the gods to us and also provide the *sacra nomina* that will connect us to them. It is time to turn to the ritual and what we know of it.

3 THE CHALDAEAN RITUAL SYSTEM

In trying to recreate rituals advocated by the *Oracles*, we are in a precarious situation: relatively few of our extant fragments explicitly discuss rituals and yet the *Oracles*' later students and commentators describe rituals that they attribute to the *Oracles*, to other works composed by the two Julians, or that they otherwise associate with theurgy, in a fair amount of detail. It is usually impossible to be certain exactly how far back any ritual – or version of a ritual – might go. Here we focus on three practices that scholars generally agree to have been central to theurgy from an early period, and that demonstrate the close interdependence between the theurgists' philosophical and ritual systems, which was a hallmark of the system through its history.

ANIMATING STATUES The phrase *hē telestikē technē* ('the perfecting art') refers in theurgic contexts to two processes: perfecting statues and perfecting the soul of the theurgist so that it might rise above the material realm; the second of these will be discussed shortly below.²⁸ It is worth noting that the word *telestikē* and its cognates had long been associated closely with mystery cults in Greek religion; in using the term to describe their rituals, the theurgists suggest that they are following in – but improving upon – an old tradition of forging a special relationship between the human and the divine.

Forging such a relationship was a particular challenge for the theurgist because, as section 2 of this chapter made clear, the theurgic cosmos was stratified into discrete realms, each of which had its proper inhabitants. Travel across realms was not easy for either the soul that wished to ascend above the material realm, or the divinity who wished to descend into it. To ensure that the latter sort of transition could take place, the theurgist was required to prepare a receptacle in which the god could temporarily lodge (*hupodochē*, a word developed from Plato's *Timaeus*, e.g., 49a–51b, where it refers to the unformed substance that receives the Ideas). The *hupodochē* was fabricated from a combination of *sumbola* that bore an ontological relationship to the divinity in question (e.g., Iamblichus, *Myst.* 1.21, Proclus, *In Prm.* 847.19–29 and *In Cr.* 19.12) – later theurgic texts described these as being on the same ontological 'chain' (*seira*) as the divinity. In other words, the underlying theory in preparing statues made from material *sumbola* was 'like-to-like': if an object within the material world,

²⁸ On the animation of statues, with fuller reference to ancient sources, see Johnston 2008.

however small, could be created so as to be sufficiently similar in nature to the god, then the god could more easily descend into that object. These *sumbola*, which had been ‘scattered’ throughout the cosmos by the Father (fr. 108, cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.211.1–2), could include elements from the mineral, animal and plant worlds, as well as special names or words (the latter two of which are sometimes more specifically called *sunthēmata*, e.g., fr. 109). Proclus’ *On the Hieratic Art* gives many examples of these and the ‘chains’ on which they belong – *sumbola* related to Helios, for example, include gold and lions. In a fragment that probably comes from the *Oracles*, Hecate instructs the theurgist to make a statue for her out of wild rue, resin, myrrh, frankincense and the kind of small lizard that dwells near the house (fr. dub. 224). This would be our earliest reference to a telestic *hupodochē*.

It might be asked why theurgists made the *hupodochai* anthropomorphic – that is, made them statues – if what really mattered was assembling the proper combination of *sumbola* so as to replicate the ontological order to which the god belonged. The Emperor Julian (*Frag. Epist.* 293b–c Wright = Bidez 89b) suggested that those who are in the body (*sōmati*), as we are, can more easily worship divinities that are similarly embodied – but in the end, we must concede that the most important, if unacknowledged, reason probably was that statues were a well-established part of traditional cult, too familiar to be abandoned.

Once the statue had been properly constructed and consecrated, the god was called into it; from here he or she could instruct the theurgist or, by simply being present, shed divine light onto his soul and thus improve it. There were alternative means of bringing gods into the material realm as well, but these were more difficult: Iamblichus makes it clear that a direct visit from a god – understood to be rare in any case – severely disturbed the terrestrial realm, bringing on earthquakes, for example. The brilliance of direct divine light, moreover, could be tolerated only briefly by human eyes and the theurgist was enfeebled and struggled to breathe while experiencing it.²⁹ The god might also enter into a medium to speak to the theurgist, so long as the medium had been properly purified and prepared; mediumship was, then, essentially like using telestic statues insofar as the vessel to hold the god had to be made suitable. Indeed, Proclus closely associates the purificatory preparations of mediums with those used to prepare telestic statues (*In Cr.* 100.19–25) and also tells us that mediums had to wear clothing suitable to the deity to be invoked, which was marked with appropriate *eikonismata* – a practice that again echoes the construction of statues from suitable elements (*In R.* 2.246.23; cf. Porph. fr. 350

²⁹ In comprising this description, we draw on passages throughout Iamb., *Myst.* book 2; cf. frs. 146–8. Cf. Johnston 2008.

Smith). Suitable mediums were hard to find, however, and hard to maintain in a pure state; creating a teletic statue was undoubtedly an easier means of enabling a god to temporarily breach the boundary between the noetic and material worlds.

ANAGOGĒ If it was hard for a theurgist to prepare for a god to descend, it was even harder to get his own soul to ascend, a process called *anagōgē* ('leading upwards'). As with teletic statues, the principle underlying the ritual means of doing so was like-to-like: one's soul had to become as similar to that of the upper realms as possible. This meant making the soul, and the vehicle that surrounded it and by which it was carried upward (variously called the *pneuma* or *ochēma*),³⁰ as fiery and light-filled as possible, given that the upper realms and the entities within them were fiery (as expressed, e.g., at frs. 34–9 and discussed in section 2 above).³¹

He could accomplish this in several ways. The most direct was through *sustasis*, an encounter with the divine (which might be face-to-face or might be when the god was in a statue or a medium). Iamblichus tells us that during *sustasis*, the gods, 'being benevolent and propitious, shine their light upon the theurgist in generous abundance, calling their souls upward to themselves . . .' (*Myst.* 1.12, 40.19–41.8; cf. fr. dub. 208). This process was called the 'illumination' (*ellampsis*) of the theurgist. Another way involved 'drawing in the flowering flames that descend from the Father . . . from which the soul plucks the soul-nourishing flower of the fiery fruits'. Elsewhere, we hear that 'those who drive out the soul by inhaling are set free' (frs. 130 and 124). Together, and particularly in combination with evidence from a similar anagogic rite described by the so-called Mithras Liturgy (*PGM* 4.475–829), these two fragments of the *Oracles* suggest that the theurgist was supposed to inhale sunlight – that portion of divine light that reaches down into the material world.

Anagōgē required other preparations as well: Psellus tells us that the theurgists used stones, herbs and incantations to prepare the vehicle for ascent, for example (*PG* 122, 1132a8–12). But the incorporation of fiery light into the soul and its vehicle was pre-eminent, and it is here, too, that we clearly see again the degree to which the rituals of the theurgist grew organically from his cosmology, metaphysics and ontology, however similar they might have been in many ways to non-theurgic rituals of the same era such as lychnomancy (a process of calling a god into one's presence through the flame of a lamp and then questioning

³⁰ On the vehicle see Finamore 1985 and Majercik 1989: 131–2.

³¹ On ascent rituals and the role played by light, with fuller references to ancient sources, see Johnston 2004.

him, which is mentioned frequently in the magical papyri of late antiquity). Lychnomancy itself, as well as most other traditional forms of divination, were rejected by the theurgists (fr. 107, cf. Iamblichus, *Myst.* 2.10, 90.7–95.14), but it is worth noting that those traditional forms that they did accept were usually justified by reference again to their metaphysical ideas: the Pythia at Delphi is said to prophesy because the divine light enters the vehicle of her soul and the prophetess at Branchidae similarly is said to be ‘filled with divine radiance’ when she speaks (*Myst.* 3.11, 123.11–128.11).

IYNGES In section 2, we discussed the fact that Iynxes were the thoughts of the Father that travelled throughout the various strata of the theurgic cosmos, helping to bind them together, keep the planets in motion and perform other demiurgic acts. In earlier Greek and Roman sources, however, ‘iynx’ referred both to a bird that could turn its head nearly all the way around and to a wheel that could be spun on a looped string to as to make a whirring noise; in either case, by manipulating the iynx, one could draw an unwilling person to one’s bed. The theurgists maintained a variation of this practice even as they developed the cosmogonic functions of the Iynxes. That is, theurgists used material iynxes (i.e., the wheel called the iynx) to do such things as invoke divinities to earth (fr. dub. 223; cf. Damascius 2.95.15, Psellus, *PG* 122, 1133a) or draw rain from the heavens during a drought (Marinus, *Proclus* 28).³² In other words, here again we find that metaphysical concepts and rituals are closely linked, and that earlier practices from ‘mainstream’ religion and magic have been revised to serve new, more soteriologically oriented roles.

SUMMATION OF THEURGIC RITUAL In the ritual system of the theurgists, even as we have only briefly sketched it here, we see a determination to put into effect what were, for other Middle Platonists, philosophical concepts only to be thought about (and indeed, by common interpretation, this is the connotation of the word ‘*theurgia*’: a theurgist participated in ‘divine works’, whereas others only spoke about the divine [*‘theologia’*]).

The *Oracles* had a long life in Late Platonism. Although there is some controversy over whether Plotinus mentioned the *Oracles* in his extant writings,³³ Porphyry knew the *Oracles* and made use of them in his *Philosophy From Oracles* and *De regressu animae*. For Porphyry, the theurgy of the *Oracles* affected only the lower human soul.³⁴ Iamblichus on the other hand raised the importance of

³² Johnston 1990, ch. 7.

³³ See Dillon 1992: 131–40; Majercik 1998: 91–105; Finamore 1998: 107–10.

³⁴ For discussion of the role of the *Chaldaean Oracles* in Porphyry’s writings, see P. Hadot 1967: 127–63, O’Meara 1969: 103–39, and Smith 1974: 128–36.

theurgy in philosophy, making theurgy necessary for the soul's salvation. In his *De mysteriis* he argues directly against Porphyry's scepticism concerning the role of theurgic ritual. Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius wrote commentaries on the *Oracles*.³⁵ They believed that the teachings of the *Oracles* were in complete harmony with those of Plato. Hierocles, Hermias, Olympiodorus, Synesius, and other Platonic writers make use of the *Oracles* in their writings.

It is interesting that, even as Christianity conquered the Greek and Roman worlds and, eventually, all of Europe, the ritual system developed by the theurgists (and their close colleagues, the Hermetics) continued to fascinate intellectuals, some of whom adopted its terminology for describing Christian practices and others of whom even strove to justify its continued use in tandem with Christianity. (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite, for instance, incorporated many theurgic concepts into his exegesis of Christian worship, particularly using the doctrine of *symbola* to discuss the Eucharist.³⁶ Marius Victorinus and Synesius of Cyrene also discussed the *symbola*.³⁷ A first edition of the *Oracles* with commentary, heavily influenced by Psellus' work on them, was produced by Gemistus Pletho in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century under the title *The Magical Oracles of the Magi of Zoroaster*. And from Pletho, who saw in theurgic lore the beginnings of a new, universalizing religion, theurgy and the *Oracles* passed into the Italian Renaissance. Pletho encouraged Cosimo de Medici to found a new Platonic Academy, and within that Academy, Marsilio Ficino began the work of editing and translating ancient theurgic texts.³⁸ From Ficino, these ideas passed onward to Cornelius Agrippa, Campanella and others.³⁹

³⁵ Damascius refers to the twenty-eighth book of Iamblichus' commentary in his *On First Principles* vol. 2, p. 1 Westerink-Combès. Marinus tells us that Proclus spent five years writing his commentary: *Vita Procli* 26. Damascius refers to his own commentary in his *Parmenides* commentary vol. 1, p. 9 Westerink-Combès.

³⁶ Shaw 1999, Struck 2001; cf. also more generally Klitenic-Wear and Dillon 2007.

³⁷ Des Places 1971: 29–41.

³⁸ Further discussion of the influences on Ficino at Copenhagen 1988 and throughout Kaske and Clark 2002.

³⁹ Walker 1958.