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# Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre

The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity



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## RELIGION AND IDENTITY IN PORPHYRY OF TYRE

Porphyry, a native of Phoenicia educated in Athens and Rome during the third century AD, was one of the most important Platonic philosophers of his age. In this book, Professor Johnson rejects the prevailing modern approach to his thought, which has posited an early stage dominated by “Oriental” superstition and irrationality followed by a second rationalizing or Hellenizing phase consequent upon his move West and exposure to Neoplatonism. Based on a careful treatment of all the relevant remains of Porphyry’s originally vast corpus (much of which now survives only in fragments), he argues for a complex unity of thought in terms of philosophical translation. The book explores this philosopher’s critical engagement with the processes of Hellenism in late antiquity. It provides the first comprehensive examination of all the strands of Porphyry’s thought that lie at the intersection of religion, theology, ethnicity, and culture.

AARON P. JOHNSON is Assistant Professor of Humanities and Classics at Lee University, working on the intellectual and cultural history of late antiquity. He is also the author of *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica* (2006).

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*For Heidi, Albion and Asher*

σὺν γὰρ θεῷ εἰλήλουθμεν (Homer *Iliad* 9.49)





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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient sources follow S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (1996), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Oxford. Journal titles follow the list of *L'Année philologique* ([www.annee-philologique.com/aph/](http://www.annee-philologique.com/aph/)).

### ABBREVIATIONS OF PORPHYRY'S WORKS (USED IN THE NOTES)

<i>Abst.</i>	<i>De Abstinencia ab esu animalium</i>
<i>Antro nymph.</i>	<i>De Antro nympharum</i>
<i>c. Christ.</i>	<i>Contra Christianos</i>
<i>c. Nemert.</i>	<i>Contra Nemertium</i>
<i>Comm. Arist. Categ.</i>	<i>Commentaria in Aristotelis Categorias</i>
<i>Comm. Tim.</i>	<i>Commentaria in Platonis Timaeum</i>
<i>De Lib. arbitr.</i>	<i>De Libero Arbitrio (= Peri tou eph' hēmin)</i>
<i>Ep. Aneb.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Anebonem</i>
<i>Ep. Marc.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Marcellam</i>
<i>Intro. Arist. Categ.</i>	<i>Introductio in Aristotelis Categorias</i>
<i>Intro. Ptolem. Tetrab.</i>	<i>Introductio in Ptolemaei Tetrabiblum</i>
<i>Phil. Hist.</i>	<i>Historia philosophica</i>
<i>Phil. Orac.</i>	<i>De Philosophia ex oraculis</i>
<i>Quaest. Homer.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Homericæ</i>
<i>Recit. Phil.</i>	<i>Recitatio philologica</i>
<i>Regr. anim.</i>	<i>De Regressu animæ</i>
<i>Sent.</i>	<i>Sententiae</i>
<i>Simulac.</i>	<i>De Simulacris</i>
<i>V. Plot.</i>	<i>De Vita Plotini</i>
<i>V. Pythag.</i>	<i>De Vita Pythagoræ</i>



## CHAPTER I

### *At the limits of Hellenism* *An introduction*

Philosophers are interpreters of things that are unknown to most people.<sup>1</sup>

Even if they should make images of [God] in any way whatsoever and translate Him for us with a word – but He is beyond every word . . .<sup>2</sup>

#### HELLENISM IN THE THIRD CENTURY AD

The cultural history of the eastern Mediterranean following the conquests of Alexander and his Greco-Macedonian troops (in the fourth century BC) and then Pompey the Great and his Roman troops (in the first century) has for a long time been told as the story of a massive clash of cultures, in which Greek culture, under the sweeping term of “Hellenism,” came to dominate the native cultural landscape of the East. Modern historians have often preferred to use the term Hellenism to designate a colossal cultural process in which an active and powerful Greek culture overwhelmed passive or only weakly resistant Eastern cultures. The first and most memorable phase had, according to this modern model, occurred during and following the campaigns of Alexander the Great, whose work as a missionary of enlightened Greek culture is enshrined in the picture of his sleeping with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow throughout his conquests; the second phase under the Romans merely solidified the Hellenizing impact for future generations. Rome, after all, had itself fallen under the cultural hypnotism of Greek culture well before its own acquisition of the East, as Horace’s well-known dictum reminds us (*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*, “Captive Greece captured her wild conqueror”).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Porph. *in Categ.*, CAG IV.1, p. 55.10.      <sup>2</sup> Anon., *Comm.Parm.* fr. 4, p. 9.21–23 Hadot.

<sup>3</sup> Horace, *Epistles* 2.1; cf. Pliny *Ep.* 8.24, which indicates the two-edged nature of Roman imperialism in submitting to and paternalistically creating the Greek heritage; see Alcock 2001: 323–350; C. R. Whittaker 1997: 143–163, esp. 152–160.

The modern temptation to develop such a master narrative of clashing civilizations and the generalized representations of a monolithic cultural triumphalism have, however, begun to be tempered by searching investigations into the complexity of ancient cultural engagements or criticisms of prevalent models of cultural interaction. Conflict schemas are still useful, but in recognizably limited ways, while nuanced investigations are now providing wonderfully complex and vibrant accounts of the multiple, sometimes ad hoc, cluster of accommodations, assimilations, manipulations, resistances, refractions, cleavages, and connections in the various interactions and articulations of cultural players who cannot be categorized as simply active or simply passive.

Importantly, many recent discussions have attempted to set aside modern definitions of Hellenism and have called instead for careful attention to ancient identifications: What did ancient Greek speakers suppose the terms *Hellēnismos* and *hellēnizein* denoted?<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, it is difficult to find ancient usage of these terms to mean quite what modern conceptions have envisaged. While many Hellenistic and imperial era authors certainly did offer literary representations of a cultural clash of world-shaking proportions, they usually continued to conceive of “Hellenism” in the rather narrow and prosaic terms laid down already in the classical period.<sup>5</sup> At least as early as Plato, the verb *hellēnizein* (from which *Hellēnismos* derived) referred to speaking Greek well;<sup>6</sup> and, at least as early as the late Hellenistic period the noun *Hellēnismos* similarly designated primarily the proper use of Greek.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, ancient understandings of the Greek language and, in particular, the correct use of the Greek language, recognized its embeddedness within social, political, and intellectual matrices that were fraught with significance (and anxiety) for those intent on locating themselves at desired levels of authority, honor, and economic well-being. Properly contextualized, then, even the linguistically circumscribed domain for the term Hellenism (as “speaking Greek”) begins to answer the

<sup>4</sup> See the collection of essays in Said 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Significantly, it would be a Jewish text that seems first to have used the term *Hellēnismos* in a stronger sense, incorporating cultural or religious connotations; see 11 Macc. 4.13. While this is the earliest attestation of the term, it seems most likely that the linguistic usage was the original and more common, because of its derivation from the earlier well-attested use of *hellēnizein* (see the next two notes).

<sup>6</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 7.3.25; Pl. *Protag.* 328a; *Meno* 82b4; *Charm.* 159a; *Alcib.* 111a,c; Arist. *Rhet.* 1407a20, 1413b6; *Sophist.elench.* 182a14, 34; Philodemus, *Poem.* fr. 100.8 Janko; Dion. Hal. *Demosth.dict.* 5.21; Strabo 2.3.4; 14.2.28. See Casevitz 1991; Vassilaki 2007: 1118–1129.

<sup>7</sup> Diog. Bab. ap. Diog. Laert. 7.59; Philod. *Poem.* frs. 94.23, 100.12 Janko; Strabo 14.2.28; Sext. Emp. *Adv. Gramm.* 1.10–11; as well as grammatical handbooks bearing the title *On Hellenism* by Trypho, Philoxenus and others.

questions of cultural change, conflict, exchange, and absorption with which historians and classicists of the modern period have concerned themselves when using the term. Language was rooted in broader configurations of elite culture (*paideia*), historical traditions, conceptions of social life and practices, intellectual authority, political power, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Any attempt to grapple adequately with these clusters of culturally formative activities and conceptual frames must include an inquiry into the question of Greek identity. Not only must we ask how classical and post-classical texts used *hellēnizein* and *Hellēnismos*, and how these conceptions worked within broader constellations of meaning and practice; the question must also be addressed regarding how they identified themselves as Greeks (*Hellēnes*). What did it mean to be Greek for self-ascribed Greeks (or, for that matter, for non-Greeks)?<sup>9</sup> Connected to this, who were the other peoples from whom Greeks were distinguished and what marks of difference had been articulated to affirm the distinction? The movement of modern investigation towards a more cautious attempt to isolate and assess the various expressions of Greekness, or Hellenicity, in antiquity is surely welcome in that it provides more rigorous checks on the application of inappropriate models that simplify or distort the otherwise variegated expressions of ancient conceptual and performative frameworks. Any history of Hellenism (understood as a cluster of often disparate cultural encounters and processes) in the Roman Mediterranean or in late antiquity more broadly requires (even though it need not be strictly limited to) a history of Hellenicity, that is, a history of the rhetorical formulations of the Greek self in contradistinction from – or even in conversation with – its others.

The present inquiry is meant to be a chapter in that history. Porphyry of Tyre (c.AD 235–c.305) probably would have used *Hellēnismos* in its common usage as a designation for the proper employment of the Greek language, though we cannot be certain since the extant writings of Porphyry do not contain the term. *Hellēnizein* fares only slightly better with a single, yet highly significant, occurrence in a fragment of his *Against the Christians* where it is applied to a Christian who adopted Greek interpretive strategies when reading the Hebrew Scriptures; hence, “to Hellenize” meant something like “to read like a Greek.”<sup>10</sup> Numerous passages, however, discuss the Greeks (*Hellēnes*) and their history, literature, religious practices, and character traits. Yet, in none of these instances does Porphyry expressly

<sup>8</sup> Whitmarsh 2001; Gleason 1995; Swain 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Hall 2002; Jones 2004: 13–21; Kaldellis 2007; Johnson 2011a.

<sup>10</sup> Porph. *c. Christ.* fr. 39 Harnack. The bibliography on this fragment is quite large. See Zambon 2003; Schott 2008b; Johnson 2011b: 165–181; *idem* forthcoming a; also, Chapter 7 below.

identify himself as a Greek;<sup>11</sup> and, indeed, in some cases he is clearly critical of the Greeks. This may come as something of a surprise since he has been dubbed an “apologist of the Greeks” by one of the greatest modern scholars of Porphyry.<sup>12</sup> But, before we simply reject the appellation, further parsing of its meaning might be possible.

When Joseph Bidez adopted this label for Porphyry, he may have wanted only to emphasize that Porphyry was a defender of “paganism.”<sup>13</sup> In this signification, Bidez has been followed by most subsequent assessments of the philosopher whose infamous *Against the Christians* has received a great deal of attention – especially its reference to Hellenizing, which was just noted.<sup>14</sup> The observation that *Hellēn* came to mean “pagan” in late antiquity has been almost ubiquitously made in scholarly discussion of the religious history of the period.<sup>15</sup> If Porphyry were to defend paganism under the name of the “Greeks” or Greekness (either as *Hellēnismos* or as *to hellēnikon*) – or, even if he did not defend, but at least used the terms in this way – this would mark a noteworthy shift in the conception of religion as a cultural idea in late antiquity, and, indeed, he would stand as a precursor to the Christian adaptation of *Hellēn* as “pagan.”<sup>16</sup> Two points need to be made, however, before we can countenance such a possibility.

First, the claim that *Hellēn* came to mean “pagan” misleadingly simplifies the conceptual developments of late antiquity, *even among Christian authors*. In spite of Marius Victorinus’ assertion that the Greeks (*Graeci*) were those “whom they call *Hellēnas* or *paganos*”<sup>17</sup> (a statement that deserves further interpretation within the context of Victorinus’ corpus beyond simply invoking it as proof of the claim that “Hellene” means “pagan” in late antiquity), *Hellēn* continued to carry a cluster of ethnic identity markers among Hellenophone authors. Greeks continued to be identified as those who traced their lineage from Greek ancestors, bore a shared history, and possessed a common fund of writings, teachings, religious practices, theological ideas, and a language with various registers signifying levels of cultural and educational superiority.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, a religious valence could

<sup>11</sup> The only exception might seem to be *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 29.19–20 Sodano; see Chapter 6 below.

<sup>12</sup> Bidez 1913: 6. The most balanced assessment of Bidez’s contribution, though without reference to the issue of Greek identity, is Smith 1987: 717–773.

<sup>13</sup> Bidez 1913:154; an “apologista del paganesimo,” in Girgenti 1994: 23.

<sup>14</sup> e.g., Sodano 1958: xxxvi; Evangelidou 1992: 111–128; Digeser 2006: 57; Schott 2008a: 52–78 2008b; Sellew 1989: 88; Maurette 2005: 63–81.

<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, see Jüthner 1923: 97–99; Bowersock 1990: 9–11; Chuvin 1990: 7; Van Liefferinge 2001: 247–255; Al. Cameron 2011: 14–32.

<sup>16</sup> Digeser 2006: 57.

<sup>17</sup> Vict. *De homoois. recep.* 1 (PL 8, 1137C), cited at Van Liefferinge 2001: 252.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson 2011b; *idem* 2006a.



receive greater priority when the term “Greek” was used in theological debate or apologetic efforts to differentiate a Christian and Hebrew identity from its non-Hebrew “gentile” (*ethnikoi*) others (especially after *paganis/Hellēnes* begin frequently to replace the terms *gentiles/ethnikoi* in the fourth century to refer to polytheists).<sup>19</sup> Yet, throughout late antiquity Greekness rarely became a strictly religious identity (whether in the eyes of those who identified themselves as Greeks or those who attacked it), if a religious identity is understood to be an identity delimited by doctrinal or narrowly cultic elements alone. In spite of a heightened religious sense in works dedicated to theology, whether of a Christian or Neoplatonist stamp (i.e., whether of a Theodoret or a Proclus), the term *Hellēn* maintains its earlier breadth.<sup>20</sup> Though this conclusion may appear surprising, especially given the widespread assumptions to the contrary among historians, one is hard-pressed to find a clear instance of a “pagan” author of late antiquity who sought to limit the signification of *Hellēn* to a religious identity in any sustained way.

Even if we prefer the dominant interpretation (identifying Hellene with “pagan”), a second point needs to be made with respect to Porphyry in particular. His development of a “pagan” theological system and his philosophical appraisal of traditional religious activity deserve reassessment.<sup>21</sup> A fairly strong case can be made (and will take up a good deal of our attention in the following chapters) that Porphyry was not a defender of paganism, if the term is taken as a shorthand for the traditional religious practices, or “ways of the forefathers” (*ta patria*), traditionally understood and popularly performed in temples and shrines across the Roman Mediterranean.<sup>22</sup> Many of his works are filled with criticism or reserve towards popular

<sup>19</sup> Van Liefferinge 2001. <sup>20</sup> Johnson 2012.

<sup>21</sup> I agree with Pierre Hadot (1995:104–107, 267), who worries that looking for truly systematic thought (with the modern connotations of systematization) in antiquity has made obscure the fact that many ancient philosophical texts functioned as spiritual exercises within pedagogical and psychagogical contexts. I use system (and systematization) here and throughout this book only to refer to the philosopher’s activity of ordering knowledge and developing a totalizing vision of the world, its peoples, its gods, and its collections of knowledge – all of this, however, in ways which carried great weight for what we might call spiritual development in the most wide-ranging and cosmic of senses. Thus, I allow for doctrinal variation, albeit within a coherent vision and consistent set of philosophical and cultural tendencies. For Hadot’s approach to doctrinal variation within coherency in Porphyry’s thought, see Hadot 1968: 1.87–90.

<sup>22</sup> For consideration of the continued viability of the label “pagan” because of its connotations of rootedness and tradition (in spite of the fact that pagans never adopted the label for themselves), see Chuvin 1990: 7–9; McLynn 2009: 573; Johnson 2012: n. 13. Van Liefferinge’s critique of Chuvin (2001: 255) rests on the inadequately proven assertion that *paganus* was chosen in its sense of “civilian” in contrast to the “soldiers of Christ”; for criticism of the postulate *paganus* = civilian, see Al. Cameron 2011: 15–16, 19–21. Cameron, on the other hand, has adopted *paganus* = outsider (2011: 24).

religious expressions, and, even in those works that seem more open to such phenomena, a more nuanced interpretive framework necessitates a cautious evaluation of his pagan sympathies. A more flexible model of pagan religious and theological conceptions thus becomes a desideratum, so that we may adequately account for a philosopher who criticized popular religious devotion, pursued a heady rationalizing henotheism, and yet maintained a polytheist theology and vocabulary. Though terms like “pagan” and “paganism” remain convenient shorthand for discussing the religious practices of those who refused to follow (exclusively) the God of the Jews or the Christ of the Christians, it masks the great variety of theological systems, conceptions, habits of speaking, and repetitious forms of practice, at the levels of the civic, familial, and individual spheres of cult.<sup>23</sup> The present book will attempt to delineate at least one possibility of how a philosopher might go about making theological sense of his world and the manifold religious expressions it produced; the degree to which he broke with or perpetuated the strategies, questions, or formulations of other ancient thinkers will play a significant role here.

*Hellēn* continued, therefore, to carry a more-than-religious signification and, furthermore, “paganism” (which is only our modern attempt at a religious label) represented a mass of variegated and even contradictory approaches to religion, all of which were engaged in various ways with envisioning the embeddedness of religious cult within ethnic and cultural frameworks. Instead of an assertion of religious affinity shorn of cultural entanglements, then, we might find an alternative sense to the label “defender of Hellenism.” Porphyry’s Greekness might better appear to reside in his adoption of the Greek literary and intellectual heritage.<sup>24</sup> As a *pepaideumenos* (one who had been educated, or was “cultured”), Porphyry had been formed by educational processes that meticulously cultivated the reading of Greek texts and the imitation of Greek literary (and moral and philosophical) models.<sup>25</sup> If we take Hellenism (or Hellenization) to refer to the processes of an individual’s training in the Greek language and literary heritage then Porphyry stands as one of the most exquisite products

<sup>23</sup> See Maria Cerutti’s (2010: 15–32) comparable remarks in regard to “pagan monotheism.”

<sup>24</sup> This seems to be what Mark Edwards (2006: 94) is getting at when he designates the scholarly engagement with the Greek literary tradition as a “catholic Hellenism.” Earlier claims emphasized the philosophical nature of such engagement: “to be a philosopher [in the third and fourth centuries], one must become a Greek,” which entailed belief in “the sovereignty of intellect in the universe, the freedom and immortality of the soul and the sufficiency of virtue” (ibid., 19); again, Porphyry, Plotinus and others were “Greek in spirit” since they believed philosophy was the only means to true good (ibid., 39).

<sup>25</sup> On this phenomenon in the centuries before Porphyry, see Whitmarsh 2001; Schmitz 1997; Vogt-Spira 1999: 22–37.

of these processes. His wide range of learning and depth of philological knowledge are stunning. His *Commentary on the Timaeus*, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, and also *Homeric Questions* combined philological attentiveness with allegorical sensibilities.<sup>26</sup> Though lost to us, treatises on the preface to Thucydides' history, the sources of the Nile, and grammatical problems are included among his works. His *Philological Lecture* recorded traces of plagiarism detected in various authors, while his *Against the Book of Zoroaster* compiled a "string of refutations" proving it to be a recently forged counterfeit.<sup>27</sup> He wrote learned commentaries on many of Aristotle's and Plato's works, as well as on more recent works such as Ptolemy's *Harmonics*. Porphyry's corpus exhibits a firm grasp of Greek language and literature.<sup>28</sup>

With such erudition, one might reasonably conclude that the Phoenician philosopher was clearly a product of Hellenism, even if he never explicitly claimed a Greek identity for himself. Hellenizing processes formed his corpus and the vision of the world it depicts, even if he refused Hellenicity. But how far did Hellenism reach? Recognizing his deep immersion in the texts and thought of Greek antiquity can scarcely mark the end of analysis. I have argued elsewhere that Hellenism might best be understood as a toolbox from which authors in late antiquity drew in crafting their own particular literary, rhetorical, scientific, or philosophical projects.<sup>29</sup> To continue the metaphor, Porphyry may have had an amazing facility with many (even most) of the tools provided by the Greek heritage, but this did not predetermine the scope or aims of his various intellectual projects, nor did it preclude the ways in which he would conceive of the Greek heritage itself. For Porphyry and his late antique contemporaries, Hellenicity was a manipulable and contested identity. What it meant to be Greek and what element(s) of Greekness mattered most at any given time and within any given social or rhetorical situation shifted depending on the various ways in which a speaker or author had been shaped by Hellenizing educational processes, the felt constraints of discursive channels, the pressures of power relations, and the specific projects over which one sought to exercise one's agency.

One of the most complex and illuminating projects to which intellectuals of the imperial and late antique eras dedicated themselves, and

<sup>26</sup> Proclus, *Comm. Tim.* 1.204.26–27 (on which, Pépin 1966: 252; *idem* 1974: 323–330); Bidez 1913: 32; Lamberton 1986: 108–114; Smith 1987: 744–745; Romano 1979: 152, 184.

<sup>27</sup> The *Recit. Phil.* survives only in the quotations of Eus. *PE* 10.3 (= frs. 408–410 Smith); the *c. Zoroast.* is mentioned at *V. Plot.* 16.1–18.

<sup>28</sup> See the conspectus of works at Smith 1993: I–LIII.      <sup>29</sup> Johnson 2012.

indeed, a project which went on in tandem with other projects, thus shaping the contours of those more limited projects, was the task of cultural translation. A vast series of incessant cultural engagements by Greek (or at least, Greek-speaking) intellectuals has received the authentic-sounding name of *interpretatio Graeca*.<sup>30</sup> Here both senses of the term *interpretatio* come into play: not only were words found in Greek to match those in other languages (“translation”), but the ideas, stories, and deities of barbarian peoples were reformulated and reframed within a Greek conceptual apparatus (“interpretation”).<sup>31</sup> Aided by the imperial conquests first of Alexander and the Greco-Macedonian dynasties then of the Roman Empire, and in turn becoming a significant expression of those conquests, the *interpretatio Graeca* marked a cultural–intellectual hegemony over subject native knowledges.<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche’s declaration that “translation was a form of conquest” applies to a much broader frame of cultural engagements than he had noticed.<sup>33</sup> The climax of this project of Hellenism was thus the incessant inscription of local knowledge within a Hellenocentric and panoptic framework. The universalism of Hellenism’s all-embracing gaze only served to bolster a Greek cultural centrism. In other words, even when particular Greek authors sought to incorporate ideas or images that were allegedly foreign into their own frameworks, this was no innocent, inclusive universalism. Rather, the *interpretatio Graeca* was a translation of non-Greek elements into a Greek frame of reference that perpetuated Hellenocentrism. It was a universalism that masked a particular hierarchical arrangement of cultural power.<sup>34</sup>

As will be shown in a later chapter, the first-century biographer and philosopher Plutarch of Chaeroneia provides an example of this Hellenocentric form of *interpretatio Graeca*.<sup>35</sup> Yet, if identities could be and were contested and if, furthermore, Hellenism was not a single dominating process, but one which allowed for differentiation and even centrifugal

<sup>30</sup> And indeed, it is an ancient term, though of limited use; see Pliny, *NH* 16.249; Isid., *Etymol.* 1.30.1. For discussion, see variously Dillery 1998: 255–275; Fowden 1986: 45; see also, *mutatis mutandis*, the critical remarks about *interpretatio Romana* by Ando 2005: 41–51; cf. Moatti 2006: 109–140, esp. 111–117; Davidson 1995: 3.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, it should be doubted whether “translation” is ever possible without “interpretation” as schematically expressed here; see Sturge 2007: 8, 10, 19–21; Moatti 2006: 111–117.

<sup>32</sup> Schott 2008a: 16–28.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche 2004: 67–68. One may compare Jerome’s claim (*Ep.* 57.6) that Hilary’s translation of Greek homilies and commentaries into Latin: “Like a conqueror he has led away captive into his own tongue the meaning of the originals” (trans. NPNF 6.114–115).

<sup>34</sup> For the relation of cultural translation to power, see e.g., Asad 1986: 141–164; Robinson 1997; Sturge 2007: 6–10, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 6.

proliferation of rival projects by variously educated (or cultivated and “cultured”) thinkers, then we must foster a sensitivity to translational activity performed in Greek (i.e., in texts written in Greek), yet from other centers of ethnic gravitational pull, that is, Greek translation in another (barbarian) key.<sup>36</sup> Translation could be performed in Greek even while experimenting with interpretive strategies that sought to develop a non-Hellenocentric framework or a non-centrist framework altogether.

A differentiated picture of translational projects provides a helpful model for making sense of the otherwise convoluted picture that Porphyry’s largely fragmentary corpus leaves us. Much of his work is best seen as a persistent and wide-ranging series of cultural and philosophical translation acts. In Porphyry, philosophy and culture are largely inseparable (in spite of what he may have hoped to achieve ultimately): the task of doing philosophy involved multiple cultural engagements, ethnic representations, and religious investment and reformulation. For the purposes of our analysis, however, we shall focus first upon what looks like more strictly philosophical systematizing moves (in the first half of this book) before turning to the scattered and varied abundance of ethnic conceptions and representations (in the second half). Put differently, we shall first attempt to discern what may be called acts of “vertical translation” in Porphyry’s writings and then delineate his work of “horizontal translation.”<sup>37</sup>

#### PORPHYRY AS TRANSLATOR

Brief consideration of a Renaissance text, which, in spite of being so distant in time, develops a similar universalizing vision to that of Porphyry, may prove helpful for conceiving the dual processes of vertical and horizontal translation.<sup>38</sup> In Petrarch’s *Letter to Dionysius* (*Ep.fam.* 4.1), we possess an account of an ascent up Mont Ventoux that provided the author an apt metaphor for thinking of the soul’s progress towards God.<sup>39</sup> Unlike his brother, who proved a wiser mountain-climber, Petrarch repeatedly sought easy paths for reaching the peak, only to find himself lost in valleys and unable to make the proper ascent.<sup>40</sup> It was only by pursuing a rugged and difficult path that he belatedly attained the peak. The path to God

<sup>36</sup> Pace Romano 1979: 185, whose concept of philosophical translation is nonetheless suggestive.

<sup>37</sup> Stierle 1996: 55–67.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 65 (though here, Stierle argues that Petrarch’s letter shows an eclipse of vertical by horizontal translation).

<sup>39</sup> Text at Kallendorf 1986: 10–17; I am grateful to Guy Stroumsa (whose autopsy of Mont Ventoux enriches my imaginary vision of Petrarch’s letter), for conversation regarding the issues here.

<sup>40</sup> Petr., *Ep.fam.* 4.1.4.2–8.

was similarly difficult, the author surmised, and spiritual progress could be achieved only with difficulty.<sup>41</sup> Once atop the mountain, however, Petrarch turned his gaze towards the surrounding landscape laid out around the mountain's base and spreading into the distance.<sup>42</sup> Through the arduous verticality of the ascent the vast horizontality of the world stretching out below could be enjoyed.

Like many other ancient thinkers, Porphyry, too, portrayed the life of the soul seeking God (or pursuing virtue) as an ascent bound with hardship and rigor, which only a few would achieve.<sup>43</sup> As we shall examine in more detail in [Chapter 3](#), the road of the blessed ones was “steep and rough,” and the happiness at its peak was “found only with difficulty.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, it was precisely in considering the paths of ascent that Porphyry would pause over the peoples of the world and their various relationships to the mountain of divinity and truth. While Porphyry's formulation does not express it as explicitly as Petrarch's, the understanding of truth (both theological and philosophical) was deemed essential for properly understanding the world. One understood the world rightly only insofar as one understood well the mountain heights of divine truth. From this conception arises the dual process of translatability: on the one hand, everything one experienced needed to be translated in terms of the sheer unicity and *verticality* of the Platonic One (i.e., translation as an act of universalism); on the other hand, from the vantage point of the universalizing gaze provided by the mountain, all the world and its peoples required translation in terms of its profuse multiplicity and *horizontality* (i.e., translation as an act of particularism).

Part I of this book explores the vertical translational activity exhibited throughout Porphyry's works, conceived as a path of theological ascent. His attempts to speak properly of the divine world ([Chapter 2](#)), to live properly in respect to ritual performance ([Chapter 3](#)), and to maintain connections between esoteric knowledge and social power ([Chapter 4](#)) are best appreciated as part of a broader project of systematic translation. Its designation as vertical translation is especially fitting since, as a Platonic philosopher, Porphyry's universalizing vision (i.e., his attempt to account philosophically, that is, truthfully, for everything in the world in terms of that which was beyond the world) was rooted in a hierarchical schema. The

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 4.1.5, 10; it seems likely that Petrarch is drawing on an Augustinian motif here (he admits to having and reading the *Confessions* on his climb; see 4.1.9–10; also 4.1.7.4); see Nollhac 1907: 2.193–194.

<sup>42</sup> Petr., *Ep.fam.* 4.1.8.3; also 4.1.1.3–4; for context in Petrarch's geographical conceptualizations, see Montana 1988.

<sup>43</sup> On the “view from above,” see Hadot 1995: 238–250.

<sup>44</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 323–324; *Ep.Marc.* 6.99–8.137; see also *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 28.12–14 Sodano.

theological hierarchy (consisting of the God over all, the other gods, and then daemons) was predicated upon an ontological hierarchy (comprised in simple terms of the three Plotinian hypostases: One, Mind, Soul). This hierarchical vision was also expressed in terms of a sacrificial hierarchy so that certain rituals were appropriate only for certain levels of the theological hierarchy. This hierarchization, furthermore, found embodiment within the social practices of the philosopher; for, knowledge of the hierarchy was requisite for the salvation of the soul. Specialists in knowledge of things divine and religious – that is, both theological and religious propriety – were the arbiters of the transmission of truth to a select coterie of students (“those giving birth to truth,” to use the Platonic metaphor).<sup>45</sup> Turning from the confusing multiplicity of the material world towards the greater singularity of higher levels of truth required a sure guide with the authority rightly to interpret bodies and bodily acts (dietary, ritual, or otherwise), as well as philosophical or scientific texts, oracles, hymns, and even visual images. Philosophical education thus centered around a figure who could pass on to his students both the system of hierarchical truth and the skills requisite for discerning that truth in the multiplicity of particular and often concealed instances.

It is this art of interpretive discernment, understood as the ability to translate multiplicity into unity (vertical translation),<sup>46</sup> that invites the philosopher and his students to perform serious and studied engagements with the world and its peoples. The diversity of ethnographic conceptions and “data” that filled the cultural and geographical imagination of Greco-Roman literati became the object of philosophical translation and exploitation within a carefully articulated conceptual framework.<sup>47</sup> Part II of this book therefore addresses Porphyry’s notions of ethnicity as a category of communal identity and the ways in which such notions could be made useful to philosophical concerns in “ethnic argumentation” (Chapter 5), and in particular how such argumentation provided a vision of the world of nations that sought to avoid Hellenocentrism (Chapter 6) and emphasize Eastern wisdom as part of a decentering cultural strategy (Chapter 7). This latter strategy is grounded in an assumption of ethnic particularism. That is, in spite of the universalism of Porphyry’s Platonic project that transferred all the multiplicity of embodied things into the hierarchically organized verticality of truth, there persisted a simultaneous concern with

<sup>45</sup> Pl. *Symp.* 206d; *Phaedr.* 251e; *Rep.* 6.490b; cf. Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 303.31 Smith; Johnson 2009: 103–115.

<sup>46</sup> On multiplicity/unicity in Porphyry’s thought, see Zambon 2003.

<sup>47</sup> For surveys of ancient ethnographic literature, see variously Trüdinger 1918; Jacob 1991; Romm 1992.

the manifold particularities themselves. This horizontal translation went about making philosophical sense of varied peoples and their diverse customs and teachings, though without effacing the particular contours of their constructed identities.

His refusal of a model of cultural centrism, it will be argued, constituted a caesura between the terms of the *interpretatio Graeca*, so as to provide a model of *interpretatio* in the Greek language but with a disavowal of Greek identity (i.e., at once *interpretatio Graeca* and *interpretatio non Graeca*).<sup>48</sup> Porphyry could translate other peoples' doctrines and ways of life into Greek while eschewing a Hellenocentric interpretive framework. Whether he was successful in avoiding Hellenocentrism is less at issue here (indeed, he inadvertently perpetuated many aspects of that cultural vision);<sup>49</sup> rather, it is the ways in which he sought to translate ethnic diversity against the grain of such cultural centrism. The particular strategies of doing so will concern us further in the relevant chapters, but for now it is fitting only to highlight the ongoing double movement of vertical and horizontal translation, universalism and particularism, unifying transcendence and bodily multiplicity – this dual translational work being performed within a philosophical vision that was itself formulated within a single corpus, which was nonetheless fractured by a host of later opponents into the fragments we now have.

Since Porphyry himself seems on a conservative assessment not to have known any language other than Greek,<sup>50</sup> it might be objected that no “real” translation went on in Porphyry's corpus and that notions of cultural and philosophical translation are merely metaphors for what could just as well be labeled simply “interpretation” or even “systematization.” Yet, the notion of translation is particularly useful here for presenting the processes of “carrying over” ideas, activities, gods, and lifestyles from one context to another in such a way as to reframe and hence reinvest them with

<sup>48</sup> Pace Edwards 2006: 146.

<sup>49</sup> For discussion of the impossibility of escaping imperial cultural hegemony in translation, see Robinson 1997; Sturge 2007. For a different emphasis (and one avoiding the issue of translation in ethnographic literature and privileging the model provided by Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*), see Bhabha 1994: 327: “Cultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions” (emphasis in the original). One of the conclusions drawn by the present study is that cultural translation can be performed for rather different ends, in different contexts (literary, social, cultural, imperial), with different translational assumptions – Porphyry, Plutarch, Maximus of Tyre, and Philostratus are not all engaged in the same project, even though they are all engaged in practices of cultural translation.

<sup>50</sup> Millar 1997: 241–262.



new meaning. It is not merely the rearranging or organizing of discrete units of meaning (systematization), however, but the transmission and re-creation of them in a new frame of reference that involves the reallocation of usefulness, meaning, or relatedness to other already embedded units.<sup>51</sup> In the particular case of Porphyry, my preference for the term translation also gets at the ad hoc, contextual, nature of the interpretive acts Porphyry performs;<sup>52</sup> “systematization” may present the mirage of a clean ordering of all knowledge. Though I continue to use “systematization” at various points, it must be recognized as a sort of messy systematization, containing experimental and exploratory gestures, presenting partial translations, and allowing for multiple voices within the space of his system (and it is for this reason that we must acknowledge both modes of translatability, the vertical *and* the horizontal).<sup>53</sup>

Significantly, an approach to Porphyry’s philosophical, theological and cultural engagements that situates them within the frame of a dual translation activity resolves a fundamental issue of Porphyrian studies: the purportedly contradictory nature of many of his works. Apparent contradictions have been accounted for by recourse to the (hypothetical) intellectual development of Porphyry as he moved from Phoenicia in the East to Athens and then Rome. Imbued with the Orientalism of its primary modern exponent, Joseph Bidez, this narrative posits a series of stages of progressively greater rationalism as Porphyry departed from the crass superstition, magic and exotic religiosity of his home in Phoenicia, purged these elements by means of the “perfume of Hellenism” at Athens,<sup>54</sup> and finally moved to the heights of reason at Rome under Plotinus. Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, scholarly sentiment has found this model of intellectual development unsatisfactory. Postcolonial critics have attended to the misleading assumptions of the Orientalizing interpretive apparatus and

<sup>51</sup> Sturge 2007: 20; Bhabha 1994: 325.

<sup>52</sup> The process considered here is similar to Michel De Certeau’s concept of “poaching” (see De Certeau 1984). But, poaching designates certain ad hoc practices by the subject/subaltern involving elements of the dominant discourse for counter-purposes other than the uses intended by those in power; Porphyry does not necessarily quote Greek voices against themselves, as e.g., Eusebius of Caesarea (on Eusebius’ poaching, see Johnson forthcoming c).

<sup>53</sup> The “messy systematization” referred to here is fundamentally congruous with the pluralism noted by J. Pépin (Pépin 1966: 229–266); cf. Wallis 1972: 135; cf. Hadot 1968: 1.95. For difficulties with modern approaches to ancient “systematization,” see Hadot 1995: 105–107, 163, 267.

<sup>54</sup> Bidez 1913: 35; cf. Romano 1979: 112, 132; Turcan 1975: 63–64. Turcan went further than Bidez and Romano in asserting that “the critical spirit had never been strong in Porphyry and he was never very concerned with coherence,” even within the same work (in his case, the *Antro nymph.*, 64; cf. 71–72).

historians of philosophy have sought to discern a greater coherency to Porphyry's thought than the fragments (many of which were taken out of context by hostile interlocutors) might at first lead one to believe.<sup>55</sup>

Analysis of his vertical translational activity allows us to trace out in detail the sort of coherent theological vision that recent scholarship has suggested might be there (but has not yet been adequately examined).<sup>56</sup> At the same time, analysis of his horizontal translational activity provides the only adequate basis for assessing his ethnic vision as a totality. We are not claiming that he remained theologically and culturally inert throughout his travels<sup>57</sup> – rather, that a broadly consistent Platonic philosophical vision is evident throughout his theological and religious discussions (both in the fragments and in the complete works). Furthermore, a broadly consistent ethnic vision, which frequently favored Eastern wisdom over Greek sophistry, but nonetheless maintained a decentered particularism, is evident throughout his corpus (both in the allegedly early works, especially the *Philosophy from Oracles*, and his clearly later works).

A dual translation model for examining Porphyry's works carries the further advantage of bringing into a single framework of understanding *both* his metaphysics and theology, on the one hand, *and* his cultural and ethnographic representations, on the other. Most treatments of Porphyry emphasize only one or the other area of his thought. Whereas philosophers have usually (and with good reason) focused attention on Porphyry's position within Middle and Neoplatonism regarding his doctrine of the soul, the Demiurge, or the One, historians and classicists have tended to emphasize his religious politics, his reception and interpretation of the classical literary tradition, or his cultural location(s).<sup>58</sup> The dual translation model encourages an attempt to grapple with both levels of his vision of the world, its peoples and its Source. By discerning both the vertical and horizontal movements of such translational activity, it furthermore fosters interpretive nuance and invites contextualization of the relevant passages (even though doing so becomes quite difficult in the case of the fragments).

<sup>55</sup> Edwards 2006: 19, 37; Smith 1987. A post-colonial approach has been offered by Schott 2008a. In spite of the divergence in methodology and conclusions, the present study is in fundamental agreement with Schott on the importance of reading late antique philosophers in terms of imperialism and cultural engagements.

<sup>56</sup> However, see Smith 1974; Zambon 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, he admits to changing his mind on the issue of whether intelligibles were outside the Intellect; see *V.Plot.* 18. For ancient accusations of inconsistency, see e.g., Iamb. *Myst.* 9.3; Eus. *PE* 3.13.8–9; Eunap. *VS* 457/4.2.6 Giangrande (p. 360 Wright).

<sup>58</sup> Attempts to cover both areas are Romano 1979; Edwards 2006.

These general lines of approach prove fruitful in appreciating Porphyry as a key player amid the intellectual, literary and ethnographic discourses of imperial era Hellenism and its projects of cultural translation. As a philosopher so thoroughly trained in the Greek literary and intellectual traditions, he exhibits the *limits of Hellenism* understood in the sense of the extent to which Hellenizing processes of cultural and educational formation could perpetuate or reproduce themselves. Yet, in the light of Porphyry's attempted shift away from a Hellenocentric interpretive model towards the multiple rival centers of Eastern "barbarian" nations and even the attempt to transcend ethnicity altogether, he shows the *limits of Hellenism* in terms of the degree to which its allure failed and the identity it offered could be refused, even as the relations of power that its *paideia* fostered were productive of such divergences (rather than constraining or otherwise limiting them). Both of these senses of the limits of Hellenism express themselves in the seemingly indefatigable translational procedures of a philosophical project that pursued at once the transcendent and the particular. The remainder of this introduction will seek to offer a brief account of the basic elements towards which this model will be applied, namely Porphyry's life and the works he composed that are relevant to the current study.

#### PORPHYRY'S LIFE AND WORKS

We possess very little by which to reconstruct a narrative of Porphyry's life. Our primary source is his own biography of his teacher Plotinus, in addition to which a smattering of indications of various usefulness may be culled from his other works.<sup>59</sup> The only external source to treat of his life is the *Lives of Philosophers* by Eunapius, a late-fourth-century pagan philosopher and historian in the line of Iamblichus' school. His account is vitiated, however, by an undue (and possibly confused) reliance upon Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*.<sup>60</sup> Some limited usefulness nonetheless remains, since he did have access to at least one other book by Porphyry<sup>61</sup> as well as anecdotal material passed down by Iamblichus. Without attempting to delineate any narrative of intellectual development, we can arrive only at the following skeletal sketch of Porphyry's life.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards 2006: 35–37. <sup>60</sup> Smith 1987: 720.

<sup>61</sup> Eunapius 457/4.1.12 Giangrande (p. 358 Wright). He only tells us it was a book on oracles. The most economic assessment would identify this book with the *Philosophy from Oracles*. For the account of an exorcism of a daemon with the name Kausatha contained in the book on oracles, see below.

He was born about AD 232 in Tyre in Phoenicia<sup>62</sup> and originally bore the Phoenician name of Malchus, in the language of his forefathers.<sup>63</sup> His family may have owned property in Batanea (apparently not far from Caesarea in Palestine), though this remains conjectural.<sup>64</sup> Reports survive of a visit of unknown duration to Caesarea, where he was accosted by Christian thugs, motivating him to renounce the faith of his childhood.<sup>65</sup> The possibility of a Christian upbringing has been doubted, probably rightly, since it may only be an attempt by later Christians to make sense of his extensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Whether he met Origen at Caesarea<sup>66</sup> or studied at his library<sup>67</sup> cannot be proven.<sup>68</sup> It seems likely that it was sometime during his youth in the eastern Mediterranean that he successfully exorcised a daemon named Kausatha from a certain bath complex.<sup>69</sup> Eunapius, our source for this episode, impugns his own credibility by inserting the doubtful “he was probably young . . . so it seems,” at this point in his narrative. Yet, he cannot be dismissed too quickly. He obviously came across a text by Porphyry that contained a report of the exorcism and included an oracle of Apollo declaring his special capabilities. The doubtful clauses denote Eunapius’ uncertainty at the age of Porphyry when these events occurred – but there seems to have been something in the text that hinted at an early stage in Porphyry’s life. If Bidez is correct in supposing the name Kausatha to be of Aramaic origin then it may seem most plausibly located somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, exotic Eastern names

<sup>62</sup> Eunapius 455/4.1.1 Giangrande (p. 352 Wright).

<sup>63</sup> *V. Plot.* 17, 20, 21; Eunapius 456/4.1.4 Giangrande (p. 354 Wright).

<sup>64</sup> Bidez 1913: 5–6; cf. Beutler 1953: 276.

<sup>65</sup> Socrates, *HE* 3.23.37–39 (=9T Smith); Niceph. Callist. *HE* 10.36, PG 146.561A (=9aT Smith); *Fragmente Griech. Theos. Erbse* 201.1–5 (=10T Smith). For his purported earlier Christian faith, see also, *Scholia in Luciani Peregrin.* 11 p. 216.8–15 (=11T Smith); *Cod. Vat. Syr.* 158 fol. 1, in marg. These sources are doubted by Bidez 1913: 6–8.

<sup>66</sup> For Porphyry’s encounter with Origen, though without any hint at location, see *c. Christ.* fr. 39 Harnack. Beatrice’s claim that Porphyry studied under Origen at Caesarea results from a mistranslation of *entetuchēka* as “frequented” (Beatrice 1992a).

<sup>67</sup> Bidez 1913: 13; Beatrice 1992a.

<sup>68</sup> The single piece of evidence indicating a meeting between Porphyry and Origen is Eus. *HE* 6.19.5 (= *c. Christ.* fr. 39 Harnack). It has yet to be recognized that the verb used there (*entetuchēka*) need not require the sense of a personal encounter, but could equally refer to a textual encounter. *Entunchanein* may only denote that Porphyry “read” Origen when he was younger. Such an interpretation of the verb here cannot be proven with any certainty (indeed, it seems to run counter to Eusebius’ comments before the fragment; *HE* 6.19.3). It has the virtue, however, of alleviating the difficulties surrounding a personal encounter, as well as those surrounding how well Porphyry knew Origen at the time he wrote the *Against the Christians*; on which, otherwise, see Romano 1979: 107; Goulet 2001: 267–290, esp. 283; Beatrice 1992a; Schott 2008b: 260.

<sup>69</sup> Eunapius 457/4.1.12 Giangrande (p. 358 Wright), drawing on a book of Porphyry’s on oracles and hence possibly the *Phil. Orac.*, on which see below.

<sup>70</sup> Bidez 1913: 15 n. 1; for a Syriac possibility (meaning “cleansing”) and the suggestion that the episode occurred in Syria not in Rome, see Wright 1921: 358–359 n. 2.

could easily be applied to daemons in the West to instill greater terror at their strangeness and greater authority in those who could control them.<sup>71</sup> To make matters more uncertain, O'Meara has called attention to the fact that Eunapius continues to refer to Porphyry as a "youth" during his Sicilian period, and so the reference to his age at the time of the composition of the *Philosophy from Oracles* (again, only if this is the work referred to by Eunapius in oblique manner) is further obscured. Based on the severe limits of our evidence, we cannot determine the location, and hence the chronological possibilities, for this episode.

For reasons unknown to us (though it most likely had to do with an interest in further studies in rhetoric, philosophy, or both),<sup>72</sup> he sought an education first in Athens, where he pursued literary studies as well as philosophy, and then in Rome (AD 262–3),<sup>73</sup> where he immediately fell in with the great Plotinus.<sup>74</sup> He apparently returned to Tyre for a short time between his stays in Athens and Rome.<sup>75</sup> The only work that can be dated plausibly to his period in Athens is the fragmentary *Philological Lecture* (or rather, "Listening to Book-Lovers"), in which an erudite group, celebrating a symposium in honor of Plato's birthday, bantered learnedly in attempts to show off their abilities in detecting instances of plagiarism in classical authors.<sup>76</sup> Suggestions that his own erudite *Homeric Questions* was composed at this time is conjecture based on the faulty assumption that a philological approach to Homer could not have been performed by someone who had adopted an allegorical interpretive paradigm, which Porphyry certainly would have done by the time he was a student of Plotinus. It is clear from his *On the Cave of the Nymphs* and *Commentary on the Timaeus*, however, that Porphyry conceived of the philosophical interpretation of texts as attending closely *both* to the historical, literal, or surface meanings of a text *and* to the deeper meanings beyond the literal level.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is inappropriate to divide Porphyry's life into an early

<sup>71</sup> This is the case regardless of the fact that Eunapius states that the daemon's name was such "as they called it;" Porphyry could have written in the West of a daemon dwelling in a bath-house who had received an Eastern-sounding name – either by locals of an Eastern bath-house, or by Eastern immigrants who had become locals at a Western bathhouse – or Western locals who had picked up the name from their own travels, or books, or friends, or neighbors, or . . . Furthermore, if David is referring to the same oracle as that noted in Eunapius, the episode (or at least the Porphyrian text that recorded it) must be later, since the oracle he cites refers to both Iamblichus and Porphyry: "The Syrian [Iamblichus] is inspired, the Phoenician [Porphyry] is a polymath" (David, *In Porph. Isag.* proem. 92.2–6 [=6T Smith]); incidentally, Tyre is named a Syrian city by Eunapius (456/4.1.4 Giangrande, p. 354 Wright), a point which highlights the ethnic blurring in such identifications.

<sup>72</sup> Eunapius 455–456/4.1.2–6 Giangrande (pp. 352–354 Wright). <sup>73</sup> *V.Plot.* 4–5. <sup>74</sup> *V.Plot.* 5.

<sup>75</sup> *V.Plot.* 19; if he visited Caesarea (see above), it could be placed at this point.

<sup>76</sup> Frs. 408–410 Smith.

<sup>77</sup> Turcan 1975: 64; Bidez 1913: 32; Beutler 1953: 279; Pépin 1966: 252; Lambertson 1986: 108–114; Smith 1987: 744–745; Romano 1979: 133–134, 152.

philological phase at Athens and a later allegorical phase at Rome. The *Homeric Questions* could have been composed at any time during or after his studies in Athens and before 283, the death of Anatolius its addressee.<sup>78</sup> The use of the present tense in the opening sentences and Porphyry's remark that Anatolius had requested that he write down the things that he had said about Homeric interpretation "so as not to allow them to be destroyed by forgetfulness,"<sup>79</sup> give the impression that Porphyry and Anatolius were in close proximity to each other at the time of composition. If he is to be identified with the better known Anatolius of Alexandria (who later moved to Laodicea),<sup>80</sup> then this must have occurred at some point when Anatolius had visited or was living in Athens (since it is less likely that he spent time in Rome), possibly at the same time that he was teaching Iamblichus.<sup>81</sup> Hence, if we can assume the identity of these men named Anatolius, then it is most likely that the *Homeric Questions* was composed by Porphyry during his Athenian period. This situation is, to my mind, possible even though we lack sufficient evidence to determine whether it is probable.

Porphyry was already of no small philosophical abilities and well-imbued with Middle Platonist sensibilities when he arrived at Rome (AD 262), if his stubborn yet unsuccessful attempt to refute Plotinus' teachings on intelligibles and Intellect is any indication.<sup>82</sup> Most likely, his sole purpose for going to Rome in the first place was to study with Plotinus,<sup>83</sup> and hence his intellectual motivations and prior philosophical education were at a fairly high level. Unfortunately, none of the works that he explicitly assigns to his time in Rome have survived. These included a refutation of Diophanes' defense of homoerotic relations between teachers and students,<sup>84</sup> a refutation of certain Gnostics and their forged Zoroastrian texts,<sup>85</sup> and a poem entitled "The Sacred Marriage" for which he received praise from Plotinus as being both a philosopher and hierophant.<sup>86</sup> A strong case has been made for dating the *Letter to Anebo* to the five years he was in

<sup>78</sup> On Anatolius, see variously Dillon 1973a: 7–9; Goulet 1989: 1.179–183; Johnson 2006b: 78–79. If Goulet is correct in claiming that the recipient of the *Quaest. Homer.* is not Anatolius of Alexandria (and then Laodicea), then the year of death given here no longer applies, and we are left with no other indications of date.

<sup>79</sup> *Quaest. Homer.* praef. ad Anatol.

<sup>80</sup> Eus. *HE* 7.32.6–20; Jerome, *de Vir. illustr.* 73. For rejection of their identification, see Goulet 1989; in favor of their identification, see Dillon 1973a: 7–9.

<sup>81</sup> Eunapius 457/5.1.2 Giangrande (p. 362 Wright). <sup>82</sup> *V. Plot.* 18.

<sup>83</sup> Pace Beutler 1953: 277 (who claims that Porphyry was a student "in a sense" of Amelius at first).

<sup>84</sup> *V. Plot.* 15. <sup>85</sup> *V. Plot.* 16.

<sup>86</sup> *V. Plot.* 15; for Porphyry's own conception of the philosopher as a priest, see e.g., *Abst.* 2.49.1,3; 2.50.1. Plotinus' remark is probably meant to emphasize a mystical sensibility that is often not allowed to Porphyry in modern treatments that focus on his philological skills or role as a "popularizer" (as e.g., Saffrey 1982: 33).

Rome.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the *Life of Plotinus* does report frequent contacts with Egyptians, including Egyptian priests, in Rome. Anebo was an Egyptian priest as well, but whether he lived in Rome and whether, furthermore, Plotinus suggested that Porphyry confront him in writing cannot be proven.

Suicidal tendencies and ill health<sup>88</sup> sent him, after only six years with Plotinus, to Sicily where he stayed with a certain Probus outside the town of Lilybaeum (AD 268).<sup>89</sup> He maintained correspondence with Plotinus, receiving nine treatises from him before the latter's death in about 270.<sup>90</sup> His curiosity in things scientific led him, if our later sources can be trusted, to pursue firsthand investigations of the volcanic Aetna.<sup>91</sup> It is probably during his Sicilian phase that Porphyry visited Carthage where he obtained a pet bird.<sup>92</sup> It may be significant that historically there were strong Phoenician elements in both Lilybaeum<sup>93</sup> and Carthage, and we must acknowledge the possibility that Porphyry associated with fellow Phoenicians during this time (though to go beyond stating the possibility is unwarranted). His commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, addressed to Chrysaorius at Rome, has been dated to this period,<sup>94</sup> as well as the *Against the Christians*.<sup>95</sup> The latter work, at least, could not have been written any earlier.<sup>96</sup> There are difficulties, however, with securely dating his anti-Christian polemic to this period: the relevant information from Eusebius only states that "Porphyry, the one living in Sicily in our times, wrote books against us."<sup>97</sup> All later references to Porphyry's residence in Sicily (or even being a Sicilian) seem to depend or elaborate on Eusebius' testimony. The nature of our evidence thus neither affirms nor precludes the possibility of the treatise's composition in Sicily. Eusebius may have learned of Porphyry's residence in Sicily from the *Against the Christians* itself, or from another work, such as the *Life of Plotinus*.<sup>98</sup> If we avoid foisting hypothetical political and imperial

<sup>87</sup> Sodano 1958: xxiii–xxv. <sup>88</sup> *V. Plot.* 11.

<sup>89</sup> *V. Plot.* 11; Eunapius 456/4.1.7–8 Giangrande (pp. 354–356 Wright) [garbled]; see Saffrey 1982: 34–35.

<sup>90</sup> *V. Plot.* 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ammonius, *In Porph. Isag.* 22.12–22 (=28T Smith); Elias, *In Porph. Isag.* 39.8–19 (=29T Smith).

<sup>92</sup> *Abst.* 3; see Bidez 1913: 57–58.

<sup>93</sup> A Phoenician presence could have remained strong even though Lilybaeum became a Roman colony under Septimius Severus. On the other hand, it had become a center of Roman administration; see Mangano 1988: 11.11.1, 81. Saffrey 1982: 34, supposes Probus to have been a Roman functionary.

<sup>94</sup> Ammonius, *In Porph. Isag.* 22.12–22 (=28T Smith); Elias, *In Porph. Isag.* 39.8–19 (=29T Smith).

<sup>95</sup> This is not the place to enter into the convoluted debate about the nature (or even existence) and circumstances surrounding the composition of *Against the Christians*; however, I find most convincing the discussions defending it as a discrete work of Goulet 2004: 61–109; and Riedweg 2005: 151–203.

<sup>96</sup> Al. Cameron 1967: 382–384.

<sup>97</sup> Eus. *HE* 6.19.2; see T. D. Barnes 1994: 53–65; confirmed in detail by Morlet 2010b: 1–18.

<sup>98</sup> There is little indication that Eusebius knew the *V. Plot.*, though he may have read it if he possessed Porphyry's edition of the *Enneads*; see Morlet 2010b; Zambon 2006: 55–78.



affiliations upon him for which there is no solid evidence,<sup>99</sup> the Sicilian period remains just as likely as any other period for his polemic against Christianity.<sup>100</sup>

At some point following Plotinus' death, Porphyry returned to Rome (apparently rejecting the invitation to return to Tyre of his former teacher, Longinus, who would be executed by the emperor Aurelian in AD 273).<sup>101</sup> On his return, if not before, he was able to provide himself with the details of Plotinus' lonely death from Eustochius, the philosopher's sole friend at his departure from life.<sup>102</sup> Nearly thirty years would pass before he would begin (in his sixty-eighth year, namely, AD 301)<sup>103</sup> to compose his biographical account of Plotinus as a preface to his own edition of the master's lectures, arranged in sets of "nines," or *Enneads*. It was not, then, an act of homage performed soon after his master's death, but rather the final stamp of his own efforts to finish off the project of inventing Neoplatonism<sup>104</sup> through the careful editing, rearrangement, and self-authorizing prefatorial work of Plotinus' lectures.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, Eunapius reports that he engaged in philosophical disputation with public displays,<sup>106</sup> possibly in an attempt to revive the now defunct circle of Plotinus. Many of the key figures from Plotinus' school had, however, left Rome before his death. As Saffrey noted, Plotinus' school at Rome had died before he did.<sup>107</sup> It is more likely that he developed his own school by building on some connections (whatever they might have been), which were made during his earlier time in Rome.

We do not know when Porphyry married Marcella. Our only hint that the marriage may have taken place during this second period at Rome is from a reference in his *Letter to Marcella* that he had married her at a point when having a wife was a concern to him as he "slipped into old age." The evidence does not claim that he was already slipping into old age.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The anonymous philosopher reported by Lactantius as being in attendance at the imperial court at Nicomedia is most likely not Porphyry (see below). For connections to (potential) persecution under Aurelian, see Bidez 1913: 65–70; for connection to Diocletian's persecutions, see Beatrice 1993; Barnes 1994; Digeser 1998: 129–146.

<sup>100</sup> And, in any case, a reference to Sicily in the text, if vague enough, would not have to mean that Porphyry was still living there at the time of composition. It is unclear whether Eusebius (and Augustine after him) meant for Porphyry's Sicilian connections to taint his character with their connotations of stereotypical Sicilian luxury and vice (see Morlet 2010b: 9; *pace* T. D. Barnes 1994: 61).

<sup>101</sup> *V. Plot* 19; cf. SHA *Aurelian* 30; Suda, *Longinos*, s.v. <sup>102</sup> *V. Plot* 2. <sup>103</sup> *V. Plot* 23.

<sup>104</sup> I only refer here to the distinctively Plotinian form of Platonic thought. On the problems of defining Neoplatonism, see variously Wallis 1972: 1–15; Romano 1979: 39–43; Athanassiadi 2006: 22–26; Remes 2008: 1–10.

<sup>105</sup> Strange 2007: 20. For the *Life of Plotinus* as self-advertising preface to the *Enneads*, see esp. Finamore 2005: 49–61; also, Smith 1974: xiv–xvi; Edwards 2000: 52–71; Goulet 1992: 2.83; Watts 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Eunapius 456/4.1.10 Giangrande (p. 356 Wright). <sup>107</sup> Saffrey 1982: 2.35.

<sup>108</sup> Clark 2007: 139.



And, in any case, the *Letter to Marcella* was written while he was away on business for “the need of the Greeks,”<sup>109</sup> so he did not feel too old to travel (and, indeed, neither did she, since he avers that she had wanted to attend him but had been prevented by family matters – though again her need to remain with her daughters cannot adequately indicate their age either). Where he travelled and what the precise nature of his business was we cannot determine. The claims that Porphyry was at the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia, providing intellectual support for the so-called Great Persecution, lacks firm evidence.<sup>110</sup> The “need of the Greeks” will be discussed further in a later chapter, but it signifies academic business more readily than persecution of Christians.<sup>111</sup>

At an unknown point in his contemplative efforts, Porphyry attained mystical union with the transcendent God.<sup>112</sup> He died in Rome at an advanced age,<sup>113</sup> sometime before the end of the reign of Diocletian (in AD 305).<sup>114</sup> Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine seem to have been his students at some point;<sup>115</sup> but there was no one to carry on his legacy or edit or popularize his corpus of writings. Though there is evidence for a group of pagan Platonists residing in or with connections to Rome (including figures such as Firmicus Maternus, Macrobius and Marius Victorinus)<sup>116</sup> who seem to have read, abbreviated, supplemented, and translated some of his writings (or at least some of his arguments) into Latin,<sup>117</sup> it would be his detractors who were most vocal. During the first decades of the fourth century both the pagan Iamblichus and the Christian Eusebius would repeatedly attack him so forcefully that they would permanently mark later receptions of Porphyry.

#### PHILOSOPHY IN FRAGMENTS: PORPHYRY’S WORKS

The works from Porphyry’s hand that survive to the present are only the smallest fraction of a large and wide-ranging literary output. “No philosopher of late antiquity leaves us so many titles on so universal a

<sup>109</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 4; see Alt 1996: 201–210.

<sup>110</sup> Reasons for rejecting these claims will be offered in Chapter 7 below.

<sup>111</sup> Alt 1996. For similar phrases in Libanius, see Schouler 1991. <sup>112</sup> *V. Plot* 23.

<sup>113</sup> Eunapius 457/4.2.6 Giangrande (p. 360 Wright).

<sup>114</sup> Suda, s.v.; his reference at *V. Plot* 23 to reaching the age of 68 shows him living in the first years of the fourth century.

<sup>115</sup> For Iamblichus, see Eunapius, 458/5.1.2 Giangrande (p. 362 Wright); Porph., *De nosce te ipsum*, frag. 273.18 Smith; *Tübing. Theos.* 66 (=33cT Smith); for Theodore, see e.g., Proclus, *Comm. Tim.* 258DE pp. 64.8–65.7 (= fr.2.79 Sodano); Damasc. *v. Isid.* 166 (=33bT Smith).

<sup>116</sup> The bibliography is large; see e.g., De Labriolle 1934; Courcelle 1969.

<sup>117</sup> On translations of Porphyry into Latin, see briefly Courcelle 1969: 7 n. 29.

range of themes as Porphyry; his stature was recognized by friend and foe alike.<sup>118</sup> The numerous fragments remind us of the role that later polemic played in simultaneously preserving Porphyry's voice and silencing much of what he had to say. In the case of Porphyry, the term "fragments" is actually a loose tag for material that has been preserved as either general gestures to the sort of things Porphyry and other like-minded thinkers might have said, or paraphrases of greater or lesser closeness to the original, or verbatim quotations (even if we may sometimes doubt the complete accuracy of these quotations).<sup>119</sup> The study of Porphyry may now rest on the solid basis of the admirable edition of the fragments by Andrew Smith in the 1990s, which sought to clarify the reliability of the various fragmentary layers in the most exhaustive compilation to date.<sup>120</sup> Possessing the virtue of reliance on (or engagement with) the best critical editions of the source texts, Smith's edition is exemplary. As will be noted below, editions of other fragmentary works (excluded from Smith's edition) require caution, especially in the case of the *Letter to Anebo* and *Commentary on the Timaeus*.

Because many of the fragmentary works are little known and lack translations in English (or any modern language), or because they are the subject of ongoing and often vigorous debate among the experts, the remainder of this chapter provides a brief survey of the nature and general subject matter of those fragmentary treatises that will be relevant to the present study, as well as some of my basic assumptions about them.<sup>121</sup> This is especially necessary for those treatises whose identities and very existence have been doubted (especially in the case of the *Against the Christians*, the *Philosophy from Oracles*, and *On the Return of the Soul*). Further interpretation and occasionally an attempt at reconstructing the contours and aims of the original works will occur at various points throughout this book; an annotated table of the fragments is provided in Appendix 1. Nearly all of the works that survive intact (or mostly intact) have received modern attention in the form of translations and scholarly discussion and so will not be treated here (though they remain quite significant in the following chapters). These include the *On Abstinence*, the *Introduction to the First Five Categories of Aristotle*, the *Letter to Marcella*, the *Homeric Questions*, the *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, the *Life of Plotinus*, and the *Sentences*. Editions

<sup>118</sup> Beutler 1953: 278. <sup>119</sup> Magny 2010; *eadem* 2011.

<sup>120</sup> Smith 1993 is not quite complete; see Callanan 1995; Ballériaux 1996.

<sup>121</sup> Only the fragments from *De nosce te ipsum* (= frs. 273–275 Smith) have been omitted from the present survey, since they will be treated adequately in Chapter 4 (to which its importance is confined in the present study).

of these texts and English translations have been listed in the first part of the bibliography.<sup>122</sup>

Before proceeding it should be noted that the following account of the significant fragmentary works as well as the discussions of later chapters will limit its inclusion of the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides* to the notes. The fragments of this work (which were printed by Kroll from a single manuscript at Turin which was shortly thereafter destroyed in a library fire in 1904)<sup>123</sup> have received a powerful argument by Pierre Hadot (followed significantly by John Dillon) that they belong to Porphyry.<sup>124</sup> The argument for Porphyrian authorship was based not only upon comparison with relevant material in firmly attested works (especially the *Philosophical History*), but also with material from Victorinus and Proclus that does not explicitly name Porphyry (though the relevant passage from Proclus bears a greater likelihood of preserving Porphyry than the work of Victorinus).<sup>125</sup> Criticisms of Hadot (of varying levels of persuasiveness) have been rising in recent years.<sup>126</sup> Much of the scholarship has concerned itself with discerning whether it represents a Middle or a Neoplatonic frame of reference.<sup>127</sup> Such a concern is not helpful, however, for as Zambon has so well shown,<sup>128</sup> Porphyry continued to work within Middle Platonic frames of reference even in his post-Plotinian writings (and even Plotinus can best be seen as merely developing distinctive expressions of Middle Platonic problems and conversations).

Without here weighing in on the merits of the various arguments for and against Porphyrian authorship of the anonymous commentary, the working principle of the current study, which may be described as a “minimalist” one, precludes drawing any of its conclusions from material that cannot firmly be attributed by direct ancient attestation to Porphyry. I have thus limited references to the anonymous commentary to a few notes. Those who posit a Porphyrian authorship to the *Commentary on the Parmenides* will note that it would significantly alter my discussion of triadic thinking in Porphyry (in [Chapter 2](#)). Inclusion of the commentary among Porphyry’s works would also provide depth and nuance to my examination of the

<sup>122</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations throughout this study are my own.

<sup>123</sup> Bechtle 1999: 17–18.

<sup>124</sup> Hadot 1966 and 1968; Dillon 1992 and 2007b; see also Romano 1979: 171–173; Corrigan 1987.

<sup>125</sup> For discussion of the Proclus passage, see Dillon 1992 and 2007b; Majercik 2001; for critical discussion of the Porphyry–Victorinus connection, see Drecoll 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Edwards 1990a; Bechtle 1999; Corrigan 2000; Rasimus 2010; Drecoll 2010.

<sup>127</sup> Useful inquiry has also drawn out the relationship of the commentary to late-third-century Gnostic literature; see esp. Rasimus 2010.

<sup>128</sup> Zambon 2002.

reading and commentary on authoritative texts in [Chapter 4](#). Aside from these two areas, my minimalist abstention from using the commentary does not seem to make much impact on the remainder of the following discussions of Porphyry's thought.

### Philosophy from Oracles

If the testimony of Eunapius about the Kausatha episode is given weight (though, as we noted above, this is not an entirely safe assumption) and if, furthermore, his report about an oracle given to Porphyry is taken as belonging to the *Philosophy from Oracles*, then this treatise was likely an early work – though how early remains unclear (either during his youth in Phoenicia or Palestine, or later when he was a student at Athens).<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, many recent studies have sought to connect the work to his alleged participation in the propaganda campaign just before the Great Persecution (AD 303). This possibility has been raised due to two features of the treatise: first, Christian opponents in the following generations (especially Eusebius and Augustine) showed a good deal of interest in the work, with the result that we have more verbatim quotations of it than we do of his *Against the Christians*; second, a cluster of the fragments from the *Philosophy from Oracles* contain oracles that were explicitly critical of Christians (though, interestingly, not of Christ). A third consideration external to the treatise arises from Lactantius' report of an unnamed philosopher who delivered three books of anti-Christian polemic at the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia in the year 303.<sup>130</sup> However, Lactantius' concern with oracles (though predominately of Sibylline attribution),<sup>131</sup> combined with the facts that the *Philosophy from Oracles* had an anti-Christian component and that it comprised three books, is insufficient to prove that the work (or even part of it) was composed for or delivered at the imperial court.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, as will be discussed in [Chapter 7](#), Porphyry's philosophical sensibilities make it implausible that he would have wanted to contribute to an imperial religious agenda or that his works were informed to that degree by political concerns.

<sup>129</sup> Proponents of an early date have often relied more on assumptions about "Oriental" superstition in contrast to Western rationalism than on this single passage of Eunapius; see e.g., Wolff 1856: 38; Bidez 1913: 14–19. J. J. O'Meara 1959: 34, has adroitly noted that Eunapius continues to refer to Porphyry as a young man up to his Sicilian period, when he was in his thirties at least.

<sup>130</sup> For the argument that Lactantius' anonymous philosopher was Porphyry, see Digeser 1998; Beatrice 1993: 31–47.

<sup>131</sup> Freund 2006: 269–284.

<sup>132</sup> Riedweg 2005: 155–161.

Connected to modern reconstructions of a visit to the imperial court has been the unconvincing claim that *Against the Christians* was not the title of an independent treatise but rather relevant material extracted from the *Philosophy from Oracles* (and other works).<sup>133</sup> Such claims have been adequately refuted by Goulet and Riedweg, and hence do not require extended consideration here.<sup>134</sup> Suffice it to say that there is no reason to doubt the ancient reports regarding the distinct titles of these two works and the different number of books comprised by each work. Furthermore, the programmatic remarks that survive from the preface of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, as well as the fragments from the body of this treatise, strongly indicate purposes other than polemic against Christianity.<sup>135</sup> Even in those fragments that are critical of Christians, the aims seem to have been different (namely, an attempt to locate the soul of Christ within a theological hierarchy).<sup>136</sup>

The fragments we now possess in the form of verbatim quotation derive primarily from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*,<sup>137</sup> with some supplemental material from John Philoponus,<sup>138</sup> Firmicus Maternus<sup>139</sup> and the so-called *Tübingen Theosophy*.<sup>140</sup> Augustine's *City of God* furnishes highly significant material, whose reliability, however, is mixed.<sup>141</sup> The material from oracles themselves seems to be largely an attempt at quotation (translated into Latin, of course), but his reports about what Porphyry himself said are the result of a rhetorically manipulative engagement with whatever material he had at hand (and, in any case, he seems to have possessed Porphyry in some sort of mediated form).<sup>142</sup> A number of the fragments found in the other sources contain only quotations of the oracle quoted by Porphyry, without any of the philosopher's interpretation. The work contains oracles of the Apollo at Didyma<sup>143</sup> and possibly the Apollo at Delphi,<sup>144</sup> Hecate,<sup>145</sup> Serapis and Hermes.<sup>146</sup> The means of collecting them

<sup>133</sup> Beatrice 1991; 1992b; 1994; Berchman 2005: 2–6. <sup>134</sup> Goulet 2004. <sup>135</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>136</sup> See Chapter 2 for further discussion; also Goulet 2004: 67n.15; Riedweg 2005: 165; Busine 2005: 290–291; for a cautious and balanced view of the polemical elements of the *Phil.Orac.*, see *ibid.*, 290–294; *eadem* 2004: 149–166.

<sup>137</sup> Frs. 303–305, 307–324, 326–331, 333–336, 338–341, 347–350; and from Eus. *DE*, fr. 345.

<sup>138</sup> Frs. 330a, 332, 337, 340a, 341a, 342. <sup>139</sup> Fr. 306. <sup>140</sup> Frs. 325, 325a.

<sup>141</sup> Frs. 343–344c, 345a–346; and from Aug. *De Cons.Evangelist.*, fr. 345c. <sup>142</sup> Clark 2007.

<sup>143</sup> Parke 1985: 205–206.

<sup>144</sup> Busine 2005: 253–254, who argues, in addition, that fr. 322 Smith is from the Apollo at Claros, 254.

<sup>145</sup> For the claim that many of the Hecate oracles come from the *Chald.Orac.*, see Lewy 1956; for criticism, see Dodds 1961: 263–273; Busine 2005: 200–202, 247.

<sup>146</sup> For Hermes' connection to divination, see e.g., *b.Hom.Merc.* 568–573; Apoll. 3.115; Paus., 7.22.2; see also, Graf 2005a: 51–97. Hermes could be closely associated with Hecate; see, e.g., *PGM* III.47 (“Mistress of corpses, Hermes, Hekate, Hermekate;” for the claim that this is a divinatory context,

is impossible to discern. Porphyry may have collected them himself or relied on earlier collections.<sup>147</sup>

Of the nearly fifty fragments published in Smith's Teubner edition as fragments 303–350, four are clearly from the preface of the work.<sup>148</sup> In these Porphyry lays out his basic procedures and assumptions: he will quote oracles that resonate with philosophical teaching and will add only brief comments drawing out the important features of the oracles, that is, truths that are hidden in “riddles” within the oracles, which can only be transmitted to the serious student who shares with the author a vow of silence regarding these matters.<sup>149</sup> The *Philosophy from Oracles* was not to be a popular text, but was limited to a small circle of students; its esoteric teachings were to be circumscribed by the secrecy of its initiates in divine wisdom (*theosophia*).<sup>150</sup>

The remainder of the fragments deal with the following subjects:<sup>151</sup> the gods,<sup>152</sup> sacrifice,<sup>153</sup> images,<sup>154</sup> the oracles,<sup>155</sup> barbarian wisdom<sup>156</sup> in Book I; the highest God,<sup>157</sup> daemons,<sup>158</sup> astrology<sup>159</sup> in Book II; astrology continued,<sup>160</sup> a discussion of Christians and Hebrews,<sup>161</sup> and a section on binding the gods<sup>162</sup> in Book III. Hints as to how Porphyry organized the oracles on these subjects under various rubrics are provided at a few points in the fragments. There seems to have been a section on piety and another on the worship of the gods, as well as a treatment of the ranks of the gods (or was this subsumed under the section on the worship of the gods?).<sup>163</sup> This is not much of a basis for the reconstruction of a general outline of the treatise, however, and attempts at reconstruction, such as that of Wolff,

though this is not clear from the text as it stands, see Iles Johnston 2008: 161–162). Incidentally, one cannot find any clear link to the *Corpus Hermeticum* (though this does not mean that there could not have been one in the original work).

<sup>147</sup> Busine 2005: 255.

<sup>148</sup> The fourth of these, fr. 306 Smith, is of little help, however, since it is couched within the virulent polemic of Firmicus Maternus; once we have extracted it from that polemic, we are left only with the single line: “When Serapis was called and brought within the body of a human, he responded in this way.” Whatever Serapis said, or why Porphyry included an oracle by him in the preface, is entirely unknown, since Firmicus then breaks in with castigation against the practice of calling on a god to enter a body.

<sup>149</sup> For extended discussion of these fragments, see Johnson 2009.

<sup>150</sup> A point that was mockingly ridiculed by Porphyry's opponents; see e.g., Eusebius ap. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 320.26–27 Smith.

<sup>151</sup> The only indications of book numbers that we have are at *Phil.Orac.* frs. 323 (= first book); 325 (= second book); 330a (= second book); 341a (= third book); 345 (= third book).

<sup>152</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 307–313 Smith.

<sup>153</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 314–315 Smith.

<sup>154</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 316–321 Smith.

<sup>155</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 322 Smith.

<sup>156</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 323–324 Smith.

<sup>157</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325 Smith.

<sup>158</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 326–329 Smith.

<sup>159</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 330–340 Smith.

<sup>160</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 342–342 Smith.

<sup>161</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 343–346 Smith.

<sup>162</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 347–350 Smith.

<sup>163</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.13–16 Smith.

do not sufficiently correspond to the fragments.<sup>164</sup> In addition, the fact that nearly all of the fragments survive as quotation in Christian sources with particular polemical or theological aims (even though these sources often use the quotations as material to support a claim rather than as an object of criticism) means that we may have a collection of fragments that is unrepresentative of the scope and emphases of the original work.<sup>165</sup> The importance of due caution cannot, thus, be overstated. The following chapters (especially Chapters 2–4) will nonetheless attempt to develop the most plausible interpretation of the fragments and how they may have fit together within a coherent philosophical project based upon a minimalist assessment.<sup>166</sup>

### On the Return of the Soul

Augustine's *City of God* is our sole source for a series of fragments that are given under the title *On the Return of the Soul*, and nearly all of them come from the tenth book of the Christian's work. It cannot be determined with certainty that this is the title of a self-standing treatise and not merely the description of a section of some other work. Twice the phrase is used by Augustine to refer to a work of Porphyry, and one of those instances refers to a first book of the treatise.<sup>167</sup> The fact that this latter passage places the phrase *de regressu animae* between the numeric adjective and the noun (*in primo . . . de regressu animae libro*) might lend itself to the supposition that the phrase is, in fact, the title of the treatise. Nonetheless, O'Meara has raised a strong case for considering the fragments that go under this name as belonging instead to a section about the return of the soul in the *Philosophy from Oracles* (Hadot's criticisms, which have almost entirely convinced subsequent scholars, notwithstanding).<sup>168</sup> Two considerations point towards the plausibility of O'Meara's thesis. First, the passage that refers to a first book "on the return of the soul" claims that Porphyry admitted that he could find no "universal way" of salvation

<sup>164</sup> Wolff 1856: 40–43, followed by Romano 1979: 158; for criticism, see Busine 2005: 240.

<sup>165</sup> J. J. O'Meara 1959: 29–31.

<sup>166</sup> By "minimalist" I mean an attempt to interpret the fragments by bracketing (at least at first) the remarks of the quoting author before and after the quoted material. In the case of the fragments from Augustine, where there is little hope of determining precisely Porphyry's original wording, a good deal more caution is necessary. On Augustine's citational manipulation, see Clark 2007: 127–140.

<sup>167</sup> Given as the two testimonia at 283a–b Smith.

<sup>168</sup> J. J. O'Meara 1959; *idem* 1969: 103–39; Hadot 1960, with O'Meara's response at 245–247. In favor of Hadot: Deuse 1983: 130 n. 5.

among the teaching of various peoples (in particular, philosophers, Indians, and Chaldeans), or at least, it had “escaped his attention.”<sup>169</sup> The final two fragments given in Book I of the *Philosophy from Oracles* contain an oracle and Porphyry’s commentary which include the following assertions: a) the path to the gods is difficult (though he does not say that it is difficult to find, as such); b) various nations have found “many paths” thereto; c) the Chaldeans deserve special attention.<sup>170</sup> Augustine does not seem to be paraphrasing the fragments from the *Philosophy from Oracles* in his discussion of a passage “on the return of the soul.” Yet, whatever Porphyrian material he had in mind did at least exhibit a strong resonance of subject matter.<sup>171</sup> Various peoples discovered the road to the gods, which was not singular but manifold; its ascent was certainly difficult (so the *Philosophy from Oracles*), or even difficult to find (so the *On the Return of the Soul*).

A second consideration lending further support to O’Meara’s thesis is that the material in Augustine is critical of theurgical (or magical) means of attaining true salvation of the soul. Ritual in a physical or material mode can only, at best, provide a transitory elevation of the soul to the region among the stars; it cannot furnish a return of the soul to its divine source in the One (or even in Intellect). In spite of the caricature of the *Philosophy from Oracles* as a “handbook of magic” exhibiting crass excesses of Oriental superstition,<sup>172</sup> this treatise does contain indications of a concern with non-material forms of sacrifice and of ascent to the One, just as the material from *On the Return of the Soul*.<sup>173</sup> Both treatises, furthermore, address the binding of the gods and in the fragments of neither is there any clear evidence that Porphyry was favorable towards such activity.<sup>174</sup>

Similar subject matter is, of course, insufficient grounds for identifying the two works. After all, his *Letter to Marcella* refers to the difficulty

<sup>169</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 302 Smith.

<sup>170</sup> On the Chaldeans in these fragments, see [Chapter 7](#) below.

<sup>171</sup> J. J. O’Meara 1959.

<sup>172</sup> Bidez 1913: 18–19 (“The exegete wants to do the work of a philosopher but fails; the material he treats remains opposed to his aims. The superstitions he would want to ennoble are by nature too grotesque, and besides the veil of Greek ideas with which he covered them was too thin”); Cumont, 1949: 366; Edwards 2007: 114–115 (“in this same book both magic and astrology are praised as though they were sciences.”)

<sup>173</sup> Hadot 1960: 209 n. 16, admits as much, but claims that this is insufficient grounds for equating the two works. This is a fair remark; yet, it should, at least, remove one of the major differences assumed between the *Phil.Orac.* and the *Regr.anim.*, namely, that the former was a defense of magic while the latter was a criticism of magic (and/or theurgy). For further discussion, see [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>174</sup> It should be noted that my claim here directly contradicts the argument of Hadot 1960 (drawing on Lewy 1956: 452–453), that there is a difference of tone towards the *Chald.Orac.* in the *Phil.Orac.* and the *Regr.anim.*, the former being favorable, the latter being critical. While Porphyry is favorable to Chaldeans in general, his interpretation of the *Chald.Orac.* and of theurgical ritual is consistently more ambivalent; see [Chapters 3 and 7](#), below.



in advancing in virtue,<sup>175</sup> which is the preserve only of a philosophical elite<sup>176</sup> who reject physical forms of sacrifice for spiritual or intellectual forms,<sup>177</sup> in an attempt to flee the body;<sup>178</sup> while his *Letter to Anebo* at one point asks whether some other path to happiness has escaped his attention.<sup>179</sup> Nonetheless, O'Meara's thesis remains attractive because of the great number of parallels in subject matter and approach, as well as the coincidence of similar material in the same portion of the original work (namely, the end of the first book). We otherwise have no attestation for a separate treatise *On the Return of the Soul* except for in Augustine, a problematic preserver of Porphyrian material at best, who may not have possessed any works of Porphyry in their original form. Though in the following chapters I shall refer to the *On the Return of the Soul* as if it is the title of an independent treatise, I must confess a very strong suspicion that O'Meara is correct in identifying this material with a part of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.

The contents of the nineteen fragments that go under the title *On the Return of the Soul*<sup>180</sup> are mostly concerned with the proper means of purification of the soul in order to attain salvation, understood as the soul's return to its divine source in the Intellect and ultimately the One. Material forms of ritual (called "theurgy," Augustine makes sure to tell us, only as an attempt to make magic or wizardry look philosophically respectable)<sup>181</sup> can never affect the salvation of the intellectual part of a soul; at best they can only allow the lower part of the soul to ascend as high as the ether, so that it remains within the bounds of the visible physical world.<sup>182</sup> Not only this, but the practice of theurgy could become dangerous and backfire on the practitioner, as occurred in the case of a certain Chaldean whose ritual attempts were thwarted by an enemy equally well-trained in the Chaldean arts whose bindings could not be loosed.<sup>183</sup> The higher part of the soul can only be purified by the Platonic first principles (or hypostases), namely the Father and the Intellect of the Father.<sup>184</sup> "All body must be fled from" in order to achieve such rarefied purification, which depended on the perfection of virtue rather than material sacrifice.<sup>185</sup> Thus, there is no "universal way" for the soul in all its parts to achieve full salvation.<sup>186</sup> Only

<sup>175</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 6.99–114. <sup>176</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 15.250–264.

<sup>177</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 16.265–19.322; 23.364–369. <sup>178</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 10.175–176.

<sup>179</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 2 Sodano p. 28.12–14; see also *Ep.Aneb.* 1 Sodano, p. 3.8; *c.Nemert.* 281.7–8 Smith.

<sup>180</sup> Frs. 284–302 Smith. <sup>181</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 286 Smith. <sup>182</sup> *Regr.anim.* frs. 287–290, 292 Smith.

<sup>183</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 294 Smith. <sup>184</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 284 Smith.

<sup>185</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 291 Smith; cf. Plato *Theat.* 176a–b.

<sup>186</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 302 Smith; see Marx-Wolf 2010: 219–239.

a small group of ascetic-minded philosophers could hope for salvation, and this, only of the highest part of their souls.

The closest we come to something like a verbatim quotation (though obviously still in Latin translation) is the passage on the misadventures of the Chaldean theurgist;<sup>187</sup> the remaining material is of varying degrees of opacity in reflecting the words of the original treatise. The editor of the Teubner edition, Andrew Smith, opted for using italics in an attempt to mark what may have been Porphyry's words preserved in indirect discourse by Augustine. Even these must be taken with a good deal of caution, since, as already remarked above with respect to Augustine's fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the treatment of Porphyry in the *City of God* is more a series of rhetorical salvos against the infamous anti-Christian in an attempt to show the superiority of the Christian vision of history, the soul and salvation, than any attempt at taking his thought and writings seriously.<sup>188</sup>

### On Images

The fragments from Porphyry's *On Images* derive almost entirely from the third book of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*, though the title is only given in the two short fragments provided by John of Stobi (or Stobaeus) in his *Anthology*.<sup>189</sup> The single fragment from the preface lays out its aims: to provide allegorical readings of the various features of religious iconography for those who were learning to read the marks (*ta grammata*)<sup>190</sup> of the image like letters on a page.<sup>191</sup> The extant fragments contain allegories of the incorporeal powers behind various physical phenomena, especially those associated with plant reproduction and growth. A lengthy quotation of an Orphic poem with Porphyry's commentary on it, emphasizing the ways in which the description of Zeus' body in the poem corresponds to various elements of the world, is distinctive for its invocation of a literary, rather than a visual, image as deserving interpretive attention.<sup>192</sup> There seems to have been a lengthy treatment of Egyptian iconography, of which Fragment 360 is the only remaining indication. Throughout his iconographic exegeses, Porphyry displays an imaginative ability to discern

<sup>187</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 294 Smith.      <sup>188</sup> Esp., Clark 2007.

<sup>189</sup> The Stobaeian fragments are frs. 354a and 360a Smith. On the title, see Bidez 1913: 149.

<sup>190</sup> This term could denote any type of visual marking, whether painting in an artistic piece or letters in a book.

<sup>191</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 351 Smith; cf. Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 2.2.

<sup>192</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 354 Smith; see Krulak 2011.

meanings not readily apparent in the outward visible form. There is no “mania to justify the cult of images,” as Bidez suggested;<sup>193</sup> only a concern to identify significations that might not be known to the average worshiper.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, Porphyry shows no concern at all for the traditional forms of cultic engagement with images.<sup>195</sup> Insofar as he has religious motivations, they are more amenable to a philosophically critical analysis of traditional iconography whose deeper meanings have been forgotten by contemporary worshippers.

Unlike Eusebius’ quotations from the *Philosophy from Oracles* (also presented in the *Praeparatio Evangelica*), the Christian bishop admits to abbreviating the material from the *On Images*. At the end of one fragment he notes that he has “necessarily had to abridge (*epitemomenos*)” the passage from Porphyry.<sup>196</sup> Similar claims are made for other fragments.<sup>197</sup> Eusebius is usually known for remarkable faithfulness in quoting other sources when he explicitly claims to be quoting them “word for word.”<sup>198</sup> When he claims to be epitomizing his sources, however, the result ranges from being fairly accurate (in the sense that he only omits sentences in the original and does not insert specious material) to altering the order of the original or even supplementing his source with material drawn from another source without acknowledging that he is doing so.<sup>199</sup> Since all the Eusebian fragments of the *On Images* are provided within the context of an attack on physical allegoresis (that is, the form of allegorical interpretation that seeks physical or cosmic referents for the symbols within a text), we should not be surprised if he is not fairly presenting the scope of Porphyry’s treatise.<sup>200</sup>

### On the Styx

The nine fragments of this work are preserved solely in Stobaeus’ *Anthology*.<sup>201</sup> Aside from the relative ordering of fragments within the

<sup>193</sup> Bidez 1913: 154.

<sup>194</sup> It is not at all clear what an “average worshiper” would have been, aside from an overly neat anthropological category; I use the phrase here only to designate the non-philosopher who engaged in various forms of popular cult.

<sup>195</sup> Some element of criticism of the popular cult of images occurs at *De simulac.* fr. 354.44–48 Smith.

<sup>196</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 358.58–59 Smith; see Bidez 1913: 145–146.

<sup>197</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 359.3, 360.101–102 Smith. <sup>198</sup> Des Places 1956: 72–73; Diels 1929: 5–7.

<sup>199</sup> Bounoure 1982: 433–439, esp. 436 (on the insertion of Plutarchan material in his epitome of Diodorus Siculus).

<sup>200</sup> Eusebius himself even acknowledges that Porphyry does not fit neatly into the sort of interpretation he is attacking, since Porphyry avoids speaking of physical phenomena as such, but is concerned rather with the incorporeal powers behind such phenomena; see *De simulac.* fr. 353 Smith; with Chapter 4 below. Cf. Zambon 2002: 273–274. Bidez 1913: 145, nonetheless claims that there are no serious or intentional alterations in Eusebius’ representation of *On Images*.

<sup>201</sup> *Styx*, frs. 372–380 Smith.

*Anthology*, we possess little internal indication of how the fragments fit within the original work. Insofar as we can determine from comparison with works that survive independently of Stobaeus (especially Plato's dialogues), the anthologist usually followed the original in his arrangement of quotations.<sup>202</sup> Five of the fragments from *On the Styx* occur in consecutive order in the long Chapter 49 of the first book of the *Anthology*, which is subtitled "On the Soul."<sup>203</sup> These fragments contain, respectively: a lengthy quotation from Apollodorus on Underworld rivers and their etymologies (fr. 373);<sup>204</sup> consideration of the Styx in Arcadia, according to Herodotus and Callimachus (fr. 374); the claim that Scythian pack-ass horns are the only material that remains indestructible in the waters of Styx, according to Philo of Heraclea and an inscription at Delphi (fr. 375); treatment of the three places of souls in Homer, the third being Hades, and the claim that Tartarus is reserved for gods, or rather daemons who are subject to passions, who are punished by Styx "the daemon herself" (fr. 377); and discussion of the memory of souls in Hades (fr. 378). Since these last two fragments directly deal with Homer's narrative description of Hades, through which the Styx flowed, two fragments providing information on the poplar and the willow (both mentioned by Homer)<sup>205</sup> are appended to these fragments in the Teubner edition, even though they both come from much later in the *Anthology*.<sup>206</sup>

Two fragments remain, which are less easy to place in the relative ordering of the fragments. Though certainty cannot be achieved, a fragment from the second book of the *Anthology* is probably from the preface to the work.<sup>207</sup> In a programmatic tone, Porphyry makes the key assertion that Homer's poetry contains riddles of deeper truths. As he had done at the beginning of the essay *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry also criticizes the Neopythagorean philosopher Cronius for misappropriating the allegorical method. Smith is thus most likely correct in placing this fragment at the head of the fragments as deriving from the treatise's preface.

This leaves us with the final fragment (which, to my mind, is the most interesting).<sup>208</sup> It contains an extended discussion on reports of the

<sup>202</sup> e.g., *Anth.* 1.3.55a–c (from Plato, *Laws*); 1.9.12–17 (from Plato, *Symp.*); 1.47.13–15 (from Pl. *Phileb.*); 1.49.7c–9, 13–16 (from Pl. *Phd.*). This is not always the case, however; see the quotations from Plato's *Phaedrus* at *Anth.* 1.9.8–11 (where 1.9.10, a quotation from *Phdr.* 249de, breaks the order); see also 1.47.1–2 (from Pl. *Tim.*); 1.49.29–31 (from Pl. *Rep.*).

<sup>203</sup> *Styx*, frs. 373–375, 377–378 occur at *Anth.* 1.49.50–54. For discussion of this chapter, especially for its fragments of Iamblichus, see Dillon 2007a: 247–260.

<sup>204</sup> *Styx*, fr. 373 Smith. <sup>205</sup> Homer, *Od.* 10.510. <sup>206</sup> *Styx*, frs. 379–380 (= *Anth.* 4.41.57; 4.36.23).

<sup>207</sup> *Styx*, fr. 372 (= *Anth.* 2.1.32).

<sup>208</sup> *Styx*, fr. 376 (= *Anth.* 1.3.56); for discussion, see below, Chapter 5.

Styx in India according to Bardaisan, a Mesopotamian intellectual who hosted a group of Indians on an embassy to the emperor Elagabalus.<sup>209</sup> Drawing on Bardaisan, Porphyry's fragment recorded two pools where the Styx surfaced in India, providing contexts for the watery testing of the sages' holiness. Smith has placed the fragment in the middle of the five fragments deriving from the *Anthology* 1.49, though it comes from much earlier in Stobaeus' compendium (at 1.3.56) apparently because it seems to correspond in subject matter best to two of those fragments, which provide geographical and historical reports of the Styx and its amazing properties (namely that it could shatter any material except for the horns of Scythian asses).<sup>210</sup> If Smith is correct (and I hope to show in the remainder of this discussion on the treatise that his placement carries plausibility), then Stobaeus' reason for quoting it earlier in his *Anthology* no doubt arose from its being considered most appropriate for the subject matter of the third chapter of his first book, which was dedicated to the issue of the justice and punishment of God for sins committed on earth.<sup>211</sup>

Because of the *On the Styx*'s importance for the present study, an attempt at reconstructing the scope and aims of the original work will be offered here. It will exhibit the plausibility of Smith's ordering of the fragments, while certainly not claiming anything close to certainty. This reconstruction, at the least, provides one possibility of how his discussions on the Indians and on the nature of the afterlife, which will be treated separately in the following chapters of this book, might have fit within a particular literary context. The reader may additionally be helped by consulting the table of fragments in Appendix 1.

I would like to suggest a possible structure for the original work by looking to the short essay *On the Cave of the Nymphs* as a model.<sup>212</sup> In that treatise, Porphyry begins his account of the cave on Ithaca in the *Odyssey* with a refutation of the assertions of those, like Cronius, who had claimed that the cave was a pure invention of the poet and denied that the cave existed historically (*kath' historian*).<sup>213</sup> Cronius is, it should be remembered, the target of the (apparently) programmatic introductory material of *On the Styx*.<sup>214</sup> Porphyry cites evidence from learned geographers that there was,

<sup>209</sup> For discussion of other intellectual and cultural exchanges contemporaneous to Bardaisan, see Adler 2004; Van Bladel 2009: 23–63. For an earlier Indian embassy to a Roman emperor, see Strabo 15.1.73.

<sup>210</sup> *Styx*, frs. 374–375. <sup>211</sup> *Anth.* 1.3.title (Wachsmuth 1.52).

<sup>212</sup> For general discussion of the *Antro nymph.*, see Pépin 1966; Lamberton 1986: 119–132; *idem* 1983: 3–18.

<sup>213</sup> *Antro nymph.* 2, p. 55.14 Nauck. <sup>214</sup> *Styx* 372 Smith.

indeed, such a cave on the island of Ithaca.<sup>215</sup> This was hardly a problem for the allegorical approach, however, since, whether it was the intention of the poet or of those who first consecrated the cave to the nymphs, the symbolic value of the cave remained.<sup>216</sup> Porphyry then discusses the deeper meanings behind the key elements of the cave: the cave itself,<sup>217</sup> the bowls and urns,<sup>218</sup> the two gates,<sup>219</sup> the olive tree,<sup>220</sup> and Odysseus himself.<sup>221</sup>

Taking this outline of the *On the Cave of the Nymphs* as a model, we may tentatively propose that the *On the Styx* might have performed a similar interpretive exercise. It would then have begun with a section criticizing those who denied any historical correspondence to the poetic passages on the Styx. In this case, Apollodorus is cited as representative of this view: throughout Fragment 373, which quotes Apollodorus verbatim, the claim is repeated that the poets invented the Underworld geography based solely on the invention of names from current words denoting fear and pain (so Acheron comes from “agonies,” *ta achē*; the Styx from “being gloomy,” *stugnazein*, and “being hated,” *stugesthai*; the Cocytus from “shrieking,” *kokuein*; and so on).<sup>222</sup> The poets “invented” (*prosaneplasan*, *aneplasan*)<sup>223</sup> their geographies of the Underworld to express the natural fears of death, or the treatment of corpses (Pyriphlegethon comes from the “burning with fire,” *pyri phlegesthai*, of the dead).<sup>224</sup>

In response to Cronius’ and Apollodorus’ approach to the Underworld as the product of poetic fiction, fragments 374–376 form a distinct category dealing with issues of the historically and geographically specific contexts for the Styx’s coming to the earth’s surface in Greece and India. Porphyry asserts in Fragment 374 that, “Everyone records (*historēsān*) that the Styx is a water on the surface of the earth (*epigeion*),” and goes on to report what “the historians have recorded” on the matter.<sup>225</sup> The next fragment, too, offers “another historical report” (*heteran historian*),<sup>226</sup> confirming this with a citation of an inscription at Delphi set up by Alexander the Great. The historical proof that the Stygian water was “on the surface of the earth” (*epigeion*)<sup>227</sup> marks a clear correspondence to similar claims of the *Odyssey*’s cave actually being on the island of Ithaca. The fragment on the Indians,

<sup>215</sup> *Antro nymph.* 4, p. 58.2–11 Nauck.

<sup>216</sup> *Antro nymph.* 4, p. 58.12–23 Nauck; cf. 21, p. 70.22–24 Nauck.

<sup>217</sup> *Antro nymph.* 5–13, pp. 59–65 Nauck.

<sup>218</sup> *Antro nymph.* 14–19, pp. 65–70 Nauck.

<sup>219</sup> *Antro nymph.* 20–31, pp. 70–78 Nauck.

<sup>220</sup> *Antro nymph.* 32–33, pp. 78–79 Nauck.

<sup>221</sup> *Antro nymph.* 34–35, pp. 79–80 Nauck.

<sup>222</sup> *Styx* 373 Smith.

<sup>223</sup> *Styx* 373.31, 44 Smith.

<sup>224</sup> *Styx* 373.45–46 Smith.

<sup>225</sup> *Styx* 374.1–5 Smith.

<sup>226</sup> *Styx* 375.2 Smith.

<sup>227</sup> The Greek term should be translated, “on the surface of the earth” since it matches Porphyry’s use of *epigeios* at *Styx* frag. 377.10 Smith, where the term is qualified as being “throughout the inhabited world,” *oikoumene*.

too, would thus find a suitable context within this argument against the “poetic fiction” approach to Underworld mythology. The otherwise seemingly innocent assertion that he was providing “what the Indians report (*historousi*) about the water of testing among them,” is a clear indication of this purpose.<sup>228</sup> The waters of the Styx were not merely in the minds of poets but gushed through the valleys of Nonakris in Arcadia and bubbled up in the pools of India.<sup>229</sup>

The remaining fragments of *On the Styx* address the primary features of Homer’s representation of the Underworld and seek to elucidate the symbolic meanings behind them. Importantly, Fragment 377 begins with the only firm internal clue of the structure of Porphyry’s treatise.

So now, let so much be said about the gods. But since we made distinctions about the souls in Hades just as Homer ranked them,<sup>230</sup> and since we offered an explanation about those being punished, for the remaining time we may attach a discussion on the Styx, which we have supposed to have been ordained for the punishment of sinful daemons in Homer’s view. For indeed, when he had filled everything full of gods and confined their kingdoms to places, he again supposed that there were three places of the souls which he deemed to be immortal.<sup>231</sup>

Thus, there was a section on the gods, another on souls (including their punishments), and a third on the punishment of daemons. All of this material was apparently based for the most part on Homer’s narrative of Odysseus’ journey to Hades (the *Nekyia*, at *Od.* 11.1–332, 385–640, and preliminarily at *Od.* 10.487–540), with additional attention to Achilles’ dream vision of Patroclus (*Il.* 23.65–107). The various elements of sacrifice at the beginning of the *Nekyia* would have easily formed a textual platform for presenting a discussion of divine hierarchy;<sup>232</sup> and indeed, later in the same fragment he adds that he had previously offered an “enumeration of the races of the gods.”<sup>233</sup>

<sup>228</sup> *Styx* 376.90–91 Smith.

<sup>229</sup> For Indian mythological and geographical comparanda, see Castelletti 2006: 69–82, 248–280.

<sup>230</sup> See *In Remp.* frag. 187.4–8 Smith. <sup>231</sup> *Styx* 377.1–10 Smith.

<sup>232</sup> Porphyry performed a similar exegetical move with respect to an oracle on sacrifices in the *Philosophy from Oracles* (fr. 315 Smith); there, the oracle commanding the questioner to offer various sacrifices to various deities had been limited exclusively to its importance as a revelation of different levels of the divine hierarchy (for discussion, see Chapter 3). A discussion of the gods in *On the Styx* would likely have performed a similar elucidation of the text at hand: the *Nekyia*, after all, mentions drink offerings first of honey and milk, second of wine, third of water, then a sprinkling of white barley (*Od.* 11.26–28), followed by the sacrifice of a black ram (for Tiresias) and another ram and a black ewe (*Od.* 10.524–27; Tiresias himself would give further sacrificial prescriptions, *Od.* 11.130–134), and finally the promise of sacrificing a barren cow in the future (*Od.* 10.522–523). Though this suggestion remains hypothetical, it possesses plausibility by its comparability with other Porphyrian exegeses, such as the one in the *Phil. Orac.*

<sup>233</sup> *Styx* 377.85–86 Smith.

The Homeric text had prompted reflection on souls elsewhere, most notably in *On the Cave of the Nymphs*.<sup>234</sup> But Porphyry's other discussions on the ranking of souls had been limited to discussions of Platonic, more than Homeric, texts. A fragment from a work *On the Republic* mentions the ranks of souls in Hades, based on Plato's reference to Ajax being twentieth in the line of souls waiting to choose their next embodied lives (*Rep.* 10.620a–c).<sup>235</sup> Here Porphyry takes the “ranks” of souls as indicating their place in the order of the descent of souls through the spheres on their way into bodies. Alternatively, his *Commentary on the Timaeus* separated souls into divisions based on the characters of souls.<sup>236</sup> These Platonic exegeses are insufficient to elucidate the parameters of any treatment of souls in *On the Styx*. The discussion in Fragment 377 is our best indication of this treatise's possible approach to the subject. Souls are attached to three locations: the earth, the Elysian plain, and Hades.<sup>237</sup> Those in Hades are further divided according to their specific location (e.g., the groves of Persephone outside of Acheron)<sup>238</sup> or their order of approach to the blood.<sup>239</sup> The extant treatment focuses on the issues of post-mortem memory, the role of blood in perpetuating a soul's bodily thinking and remembering (that is, the humanity of the soul), and the intellectual nature of the punishments in Hades. Obviously, Porphyry's interest in things of the soul was much more wide-ranging than the points noted here; the lost discussion on souls in *On the Styx* may have contained a number of other doctrines regarding the soul that the philosopher claimed he could identify behind the riddles of the poetic text.<sup>240</sup>

We arrive, then, at the following sketch of the basic structure of the original work: a preliminary section providing remarks on the necessity of an allegorical approach to Homer, combined with a rejection of more radical allegorists who denied any historical or geographical reality to the features of Hades portrayed by the poet; next, the presentation of proof for the historical and geographical reality behind the poetic Hades, e.g., the pools in India; then, a discussion on the doctrine of the gods as derivable from Homer; then, a treatment of souls and their various ranks,

<sup>234</sup> *Antro nymph.* 10–13, pp. 63–66 Nauck.

<sup>235</sup> *In Remp.* frag. 187.4–8 Smith. The fragments of this work exclusively deal with the Myth of Er in *Rep.* 10; it may, therefore, have been a treatise dedicated only to the Myth of Er and not a commentary on the *Republic*, as such.

<sup>236</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frag. 21 Sodano. <sup>237</sup> *Styx* 377.10–26 Smith.

<sup>238</sup> *Styx* 377.26–29 Smith. The groves of Persephone are notably missing in the *Nekyia* itself; see Heubeck and Hoekstra 1990: 70. For the importance of locating the various sites of Underworld topography, see Torjussen 2010, on the Gold Tablets.

<sup>239</sup> *Styx* 377.78–83; 378.46–50 Smith.

<sup>240</sup> On Porphyry's psychology, see Smith 1974; Deuse 1983: 129–230.



in accordance with the poet; followed by a discussion of the punishment allotted to daemons, the “so-called gods;”<sup>241</sup> and finally there may have been a concluding section that widened its scope so as to incorporate the broader context of the *Nekyia* (that is, the time spent on Circe’s island), which would stand as a parting protreptic to the philosophical life as an escape from the passions of this life and the punishments of Hades.<sup>242</sup> This last suggestion would also be felicitous as a parallel to the concluding protreptic portion of *On the Cave of the Nymphs*.<sup>243</sup>

This reconstruction must remain tentative; the impulse towards flights of fancy in construing the fragments of Porphyry is a temptation that must be eschewed. Nonetheless, it may at least be recommended as a plausible (and not too fanciful) structure for the fragments as we now possess them.

### On Free Will

Four fragments from a work entitled *On What is Up to Us* (for which I will use the more manageable *On Free Will*) are preserved in consecutive order in the second book of Stobaeus’ *Anthology*.<sup>244</sup> The first fragment includes prefatorial material that reveals the addressee of the work as Chysaorius (and hence allows for a date following Porphyry’s arrival at Rome)<sup>245</sup> and indicates that the scope of the work was limited to the problems raised for notions of free will by the Myth of Er narrated in the tenth book of Plato’s *Republic*. Porphyry composed the treatise following a personal meeting with Chysaorius the day before in which they had puzzled over the text together. The Myth of Er had described the roles played by various powerful divine personages, including the three Fates, a personal daemon assigned by lot and a “throne of Necessity.”<sup>246</sup> All of this seemed to bode ill

<sup>241</sup> See Chapter 2 for discussion of this point.

<sup>242</sup> *Styx* 382 Smith; this fragment is probably Plutarch’s interpretation, rather than Porphyry’s own, however (either Stobaeus misidentified the author, or Porphyry was quoting Plutarch); see Helmig 2008: 250–255; Deuse 1983: 139–148.

<sup>243</sup> *Antro nymph.* 34–35, pp. 79–80 Nauck.

<sup>244</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* frs. 268–271 (= *Anth.* 2.8.39–42). Note that I have adopted the Latin abbreviation *De Lib.arbitr.* for *De Libero Arbitrio* (though this is not equivalent to the title transmitted by Stobaeus, for which the Latin equivalent would be less manageable). Unfortunately, the useful discussion and translation of Wilberding 2011 was published too late to engage more fully with it in the present study.

<sup>245</sup> On Chysaorius, a Roman senator, see schol. in Arist. p. 11a34–35 Brandis (quoted in Smith’s note at *Porphyrius*, 296); Porph. *Intro.Arist.Categ.* 1.1; J. Barnes 2003: 23–24; Deuse 1983: 149, does not believe the fragment mentioning Chysaorius comes from the preface of the work.

<sup>246</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.16–33 Smith.

for the prospects of human freedom of will, in spite of the fact that Socrates had claimed that personal virtue was nonetheless “without a master.”<sup>247</sup>

By distinguishing between two levels of “life” (e.g., human life and a soldier’s life) and by emphasizing Plato’s reference to a pre-embodied choice of life made by all souls, Porphyry exculpated the Platonic text from any connection to notions of determinism.<sup>248</sup> In a fragment that will concern us in later chapters, Porphyry deepens his analysis to consider the relation between Plato’s account of the descent of the soul through the planetary spheres and the astral fatalism of the Egyptians. Though a proper assessment of the fragment is troubled by textual difficulties,<sup>249</sup> we conclude that Porphyry wanted to allow for the possibility that Plato derived some notions from the Egyptians (or at least the general fiction of the Myth of Er),<sup>250</sup> but that he also wanted to keep Plato well clear of charges of fatalism (for Porphyry, Plato would grant that the stars *indicate* a person’s life, not that they *causally affect* a person’s life). The treatise is, therefore, highly significant not only for assessing Porphyry’s methods as an interpreter of Plato, but also for discerning Porphyry’s position on the key issues of the philosophical appropriation or reaction to astrology and the notion of Greek borrowing or “theft” of the teachings of barbarian nations.

### Against Nemertius

Seven fragments, all preserved in Cyril of Alexandria’s *Against Julian*, come from a treatise attacking the apparently Epicurean Nemertius, who had written a book criticizing the notion of divine providence.<sup>251</sup> In particular, Nemertius seems to have taken issue with those who would attribute the death of children or good people to God’s plans.<sup>252</sup> The content of the fragments, according to Smith’s ordering, begins with considerations on the importance of the doctrine of free will for Platonic theology and anthropology (a rational God created humans as rational beings to allow

<sup>247</sup> Pl. *Rep.* 10.617e3.

<sup>248</sup> On the two choices of kinds of life and the problems this doctrine raises for interpreting other evidence on Porphyry’s psychology, see Deuse 1983: 148–167.

<sup>249</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271.38–45 Smith, see app. crit. for lines 42 and 45; for discussion see [Chapter 3](#) below.

<sup>250</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271.100–104 Smith.

<sup>251</sup> Nemertius is otherwise unknown. The PLRE entry (1.621) notes, without foundation, that Nemertius is “presumably a disciple” of Porphyry. Nemertius’ anti-providential stance seems more resonant of Epicurean criticism than Platonic (or, for that matter, Stoic) providentialism.

<sup>252</sup> *C.Nemert.* 278–280, 282 Smith.

them to choose to exhibit their virtue or vice),<sup>253</sup> and then turns in the remainder of the fragments to examine the doctrine of providence more strictly (especially a defense of this doctrine in the face of death).<sup>254</sup> Though the first two fragments stem from earlier sections of Cyril's work (namely 3.79) and are distinguished from all the other fragments in their particular concern with free will, it is not clear that they come from an early section of Porphyry's treatise. Instead, the third fragment seems to come from the preface (though coming from the fifth book of Cyril's work), since it explicitly names Nemertius as his opponent, whose book, while attempting to teach justice to God, "was found to be full of the greatest injustice when it had been opened up."<sup>255</sup> While it is conceivable that Porphyry could have offered such a description anywhere in the treatise, it seems most fitting to assign it to a preliminary portion and to consider the discussion of free will as deriving from a later segment of the treatise. For instance, after his full defense of providence, he could have turned to free will as an attempt to steer clear of the possibility of determinism as a misleading and extreme form of providential thinking.

Some note should be made regarding the final two fragments, which, because they are not explicitly introduced by Cyril as coming from the *Against Nemertius*, have been questioned in Smith's edition. Fragment 281 is only introduced with, "Porphyry again speaks in this manner;" while Fragment 282 is introduced, "And indeed, elsewhere he also [speaks] again in this way." In favor of the former's attribution to the *Against Nemertius* is the fact that, though it occurs roughly five pages later than the secure Fragments 276–277 in the Migne edition of Cyril's *Against Julian*,<sup>256</sup> no other Porphyrian material intervenes. And so it seems most natural to take it as coming from the same treatise of Porphyry that had been cited previously.<sup>257</sup> There is also good reason to assign Fragment 282 to this treatise: it directly follows the material from Fragment 280 in Cyril's *Against Julian* 3.95 (PG 76.645B1–8), and is introduced with a remark nearly identical to that introducing Fragment 277 ("And indeed, elsewhere also"). There is no sufficient reason to believe that Fragment 282 is from another work of Porphyry since, aside from a single page quoting Porphyry's *Philosophic History*,<sup>258</sup> Cyril only quotes from the *Against Nemertius* in Book III. The "elsewhere" of Cyril's tag ought to refer to another passage within the same work, namely, the *Against Nemertius*.

<sup>253</sup> *C.Nemert.* 276–277 Smith.      <sup>254</sup> *C.Nemert.* 278–282 Smith.      <sup>255</sup> *C.Nemert.* 278.3–4 Smith.

<sup>256</sup> That is, fr. 281 occurs at PG 76.629 and frs. 276–277 occur at PG 76.621.

<sup>257</sup> For general discussion of Cyril's sources, see Grant 1964: 265–279.      <sup>258</sup> *C.Julian.* PG 76.633A–C.

## Philosophic History

Cyril's *Against Julian* is also our most important, though not exclusive, source for the fragments from Porphyry's *Philosophic History*. This work comprised four books and aimed to provide a chronological and biographical narrative framework for an enumeration of various thinkers' ideas. Whereas Plutarch, Aëtius and others had compiled lists of the particular positions of the major philosophers of the past in doxographies (that is, lists of *doxai*, opinions, of the philosophers), Porphyry offered historical material, culled from various sources, on the lives and contexts of these thinkers.<sup>259</sup> Book 1's fragments begin with the earliest philosophers, including Homer and Hesiod,<sup>260</sup> but also the Seven Sages. It also contained the extant "Life of Pythagoras," the only complete section of the *Philosophic History* that survives.<sup>261</sup> The "Life of Pythagoras" compiled earlier sources on the great sage's origins and youth,<sup>262</sup> education and early teaching,<sup>263</sup> his maturity and central teachings,<sup>264</sup> and finally, opposition to him, his death, and the transmission of his teachings.<sup>265</sup> Because of the limits of our other material from the *Philosophic History* we unfortunately cannot determine the extent to which this biography might be indicative of a general concern to cite multiple, sometimes contradictory, sources on a given figure, as well as any general principle of ordering his material.

The scant fragments of the second book discussed Empedocles and his student Gorgias. More substantial fragments survive from the third book, which focused on Socrates, and the fourth book, on Plato. The character of the fragments from these last two books is quite different, however, even though Cyril of Alexandria is our primary witness for both of them. The fifth-century ecclesiastical historian Socrates Scholasticus claimed that Porphyry's treatment of Socrates, "the pinnacle of philosophers," was so scabrous as to surpass Meletus and Anytus (the two primary prosecutors of Socrates at his trial) in his ridicule.<sup>266</sup> Indeed, the fragments do show Porphyry citing ancient authorities (such as Aristoxenus and Timaeus) on

<sup>259</sup> For the comparison with Plutarch and Aëtius, see Theodoret, *Curatio* 2.95.

<sup>260</sup> Apparently, Porphyry also wrote a treatise on the philosophy of Homer; see Suda, s.v.

<sup>261</sup> On the *Life of Pythagoras*, see Clark 2000a: 29–51; Lévy 1926: 90–102; Romano 1979: 166–168. On the separate manuscript tradition of the *V.Pythag.*, see Nauck 1977: vi–xi. Because two passages of the *V.Pythag.* are quoted as belonging to Book 1 of the *Phil.Hist.* by Cyril (at *c.Julian.* 1. 19C [PG 76.529D–532A]; 9. 300B [PG 76.961A]), it has ubiquitously been assumed that the *V.Pythag.* was part of the *Phil.Hist.* Alternatively, we cannot exclude the possibility that Porphyry may have re-used verbatim portions of an earlier literary work in a later one.

<sup>262</sup> *V.Pythag.* 1–5 Nauck.

<sup>263</sup> *V.Pythag.* 6–17 Nauck.

<sup>264</sup> *V.Pythag.* 37–53 Nauck.

<sup>265</sup> *V.Pythag.* 54–61 Nauck.

<sup>266</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 210 Smith (= test. Nauck).

Socrates' hot temper, humble origins as a stonemason's son, inability in reading or writing ("he was ridiculous, whenever he needed to write or read anything, stuttering like children"),<sup>267</sup> his inability to control his two wives,<sup>268</sup> and his excessiveness as the passive partner to his lover.<sup>269</sup> Yet, there is some indication that our Christian sources for these fragments (Theodoret and Cyril of Alexandria) may be a bit one-sided in too readily relishing those elements they found most repulsive and shameful. Most of the reports of morally offensive behavior or intellectual simplicity occur in Porphyry's citations of other sources. In many instances, furthermore, he seems to add his own words in defense of Socrates. For instance, Porphyry declares that Socrates' youthful sexual excesses were restrained by later training and education: "He did away with these types [of behavior] by industry and teaching, and he impressed in their place those of philosophy."<sup>270</sup> The fragment noting his lack of education in letters had been prefaced by the remark: "He was dull about nothing, but, to put it simply, uneducated in everything,"<sup>271</sup> indicating that Porphyry limited the inability to literacy not intellect. It seems, then, that we possess a somewhat misleading picture of Porphyry's original treatment of Socrates. It is likely that Book III once possessed a more well-rounded account of the life of Socrates than the later Christian sources cared to preserve.

The single Christian source for the fragments of Book IV, namely Cyril of Alexandria, changed tactics when quoting from Porphyry's narrative of Plato. Here, rather than quoting material that might have defamed the character of the great philosopher, Cyril confines himself to quotations summarizing Plato's theology.<sup>272</sup> The ineffability of the One,<sup>273</sup> the divine taxonomy of three hypostases (the One, Intellect and Soul),<sup>274</sup> the self-begotten nature of the divine Mind, which proceeded from God "before eternity,"<sup>275</sup> were all resonant of Christian Trinitarian theology. Again, therefore, we cannot conclude that these fragments are indicative of the scope, contours and general aims of Book IV; instead, they highlight more the concerns of the fifth-century Christian apologist.<sup>276</sup>

<sup>267</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 214 Smith (= fr. 11 Nauck).

<sup>268</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 215 Smith (= fr. 12 Nauck).

<sup>269</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 215a Smith (= fr. 12 Nauck).

<sup>270</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 216 Smith (= fr. 12 Nauck).

<sup>271</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 214 Smith (= fr. 11 Nauck).

<sup>272</sup> The only exception is a brief note on Plato's education, *Phil.Hist.* fr. 219 Smith (= fr. 14 Nauck).

<sup>273</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 220 Smith (= fr. 15 Nauck).

<sup>274</sup> *Phil.Hist.* frs. 221–222 Smith (= frs. 16–17 Nauck); see Strange 2007: 25–34. Romano 1979: 168, takes this feature as evidence of the work's post-Plotinian date.

<sup>275</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 223 Smith (= fr. 18 Nauck).

<sup>276</sup> The Neoplatonic formulations of these fragments do, however, provide adequate reason to resist attempts to date the *Phil.Hist.* (and particularly its "Life of Pythagoras") to Porphyry's earlier period (as Edwards 1993: 159–172).

## Letter to Anebo

The reconstruction and assessment of Porphyry's open letter to an otherwise unknown Egyptian priest named Anebo are beset with difficulties. It primarily survives in the verbatim quotations of Eusebius and the paraphrases of Iamblichus, though Cyril of Alexandria, Josephus of Tiberias,<sup>277</sup> and Augustine contribute some material.<sup>278</sup> It is unclear how much weight should be given to the Arabic sources that refer to two books to Anebo by Porphyry, though without any evidence of having directly seen the work.<sup>279</sup> All the Greek sources only refer to a letter to Anebo (and we possess no evidence otherwise of multi-book letters by Porphyry).<sup>280</sup> Nor is it at all clear, even if we grant that the letter was divided into two books, that these two parts dealt with theology and theurgy, respectively, as A. R. Sodano, the modern editor of the *Letter to Anebo*, believes.<sup>281</sup> Indeed, such a hypothetical reconstruction has led the editor to separate the fragments into two books that Eusebius claimed were contiguous in the original work.<sup>282</sup> Sodano's bald claim that Eusebius cannot be trusted in reconstructing the order of the fragments is not entirely persuasive.<sup>283</sup> Not only would it oppose Eusebius' known citational practices to separate the fragments so far from each other,<sup>284</sup> but the sources favored by Sodano for reconstructing the *Letter to Anebo*, namely Augustine and Iamblichus, are suspect. The former may not have had direct access to the *Letter to Anebo* and does not align closely with Iamblichus' ordering (Sodano's assertions to the contrary notwithstanding); while the latter explicitly claimed that Porphyry misunderstood the appropriate order of approach to theological and theurgical matters and hence his own response would "organize them in a fitting manner."<sup>285</sup> Sodano's separation by twenty-seven pages of

<sup>277</sup> Saffrey 2000a: 27–36; Moreau 1955: 241–276.

<sup>278</sup> Theodoret's quotations of the *Ep. Aneb.* depend upon Eus. *PE*; see Sodano 1958: XLII–VLIV. For discussion of the sources, see *ibid.*, XLI–XLVIII.

<sup>279</sup> References to the Arabic testimonies are provided at *ibid.*, XL.

<sup>280</sup> We should keep in mind that Iamblichus' response to the *Letter to Anebo* was itself not divided into books until the edition of Nicolas Scutelli in 1556; see Saffrey 1993: 145.

<sup>281</sup> Or divination and theurgy, respectively, as Saffrey asserts (2000b: 78).

<sup>282</sup> Saffrey (1993: 146) follows Sodano without question in this division. <sup>283</sup> Sodano, XLVI–XLVII.

<sup>284</sup> Based on a comparison with other "hinge formulae" in Eusebius, the two fragments at 14.10.1–2 could have been as close as one page or as far as nine pages from each other in the original letter; see Johnson, forthcoming b.

<sup>285</sup> Iamb. *Myst.* 1.1 (p. 5.5 Parthey). *Pace* Saffrey 2000b, who translates the adverb *prosēkontōs* as "in the order they were presented" (77), rather than "in a fitting manner" as I have rendered it here. On the other hand, Saffrey has provided a useful list of the instances where Iamblichus does indicate relative order (2000b: 77) and elsewhere has made a good case for seeing the material of *Myst.* 4–7 as following the order of the quotation of Eusebius at *PE* 5.10.1–9 (Saffrey 1993: 144–158).

material from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* 14.10.1–2, which is said by the ancient author to be “next (*hexēs*)” to each other, must be treated with a good deal of suspicion.<sup>286</sup>

Aside from an inability to discern the broader arrangement of the material within the original, the testimony of Iamblichus in particular, which has been presented in Sodano's edition of the *Letter*, cannot always transparently be taken as Porphyrian. Though Sodano sought to produce a critical edition that would overcome the arbitrariness of Gale's text (followed by Parthey) of Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, he only did so in the main text of the *Letter to Anebo* printed in the upper portion of each page. The “supporting texts” given in the lower half of each page, which are often necessary to confirm the legitimacy of the main text, were oddly left without such a critical evaluation – not only do these supporting texts, when derived from Iamblichus, follow Gale's edition, but they do so without notation of Gale's infelicitous emendations. One instance suffices to show the problems inherent in this approach. On page 4, the first two lines of main text come from *Myst.* 1.9 (pp. 29.17–30.1 Parthey). Sodano supports their inclusion by quoting Iamblichus' introductory remarks to those lines in the supporting text. Where the manuscripts of the supporting text read “not” (*ou*), however, Gale had altered to “from whom” (*hou*), and it is this latter reading that is printed by Sodano. Thus, we have a choice between two opposite readings: that of the manuscripts stating that Porphyry did “not” say what is given in the lines, or that of Gale stating that the material was from him. By completely omitting altogether the manuscript reading, Sodano's text cannot help but mislead. One must, therefore, use Sodano's text with the Gale–Parthey text at hand to determine emendations, as well as the critical editions of Édouard des Places (in the Budé series) or Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell (in SBL's Writings from the Greco-Roman World series). The modern student of Porphyry is thus in great need of a new edition of the *Letter to Anebo* that adopts a more critical methodology: the Iamblichan material must be based on an entire critical edition of *On the Mysteries*, not merely selecting certain material as Porphyrian and only then applying the tools of textual criticism; and the Eusebian material, since it is preserved as verbatim quotations, ought to receive greater priority in the reconstruction.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>286</sup> Given at p. 2 and pp. 29–30, respectively. Likewise, *PE* 5.10.1–9 is separated from 5.10.11 by twelve pages (pp. 18–22 and pp. 30–31, respectively). Sodano was led to this arrangement, both by his two-book reconstructive hypothesis and by concluding that the quotation at *PE* 5.10.11 was actually a continuation of the quotation at 14.10.2, and hence the latter could not be connected to 14.10.1 (while 5.10.11 was likewise not connected to 5.10.1–9 and 10). See Johnson, forthcoming b.

<sup>287</sup> Saffrey has made good progress in this regard; see Saffrey 1993: 144–158.

A duly cautious approach to the extant quotations and paraphrases of the *Letter to Anebo* allows us to affirm the basic issues that were raised therein. The letter consists of a series of questions directed to the Egyptian priest about the particular rituals of the Egyptians and the nature or classification of the deities associated with those rituals. The questions are of varying degrees of dependence upon a philosophical–theological system that saw certain Egyptian claims about the gods and their relations to humans as expressing invalid assumptions about their nature. For example, following his question as to why they use Egyptian words in their invocations of the gods, Porphyry reflects that those who affirm the necessity of the Egyptian words are either magicians (*goētai*) plying a deceptive trade or they are ignorant in their unquestioned assumptions about the gods, since the gods are not “Egyptian by race” nor do they speak Egyptian, or any human language at all.<sup>288</sup> There is thus a strong indication that the questions were not merely exhibiting an innocent quest for knowledge from an expert.<sup>289</sup>

The issue of his tone deserves further consideration. In the first place, Iamblichus provides a helpful, if brief, description of Porphyry’s general methodology in the *Letter* in the tenth book of his own response. “Your inquiry proceeds in a varied way, first laying down objections, then raising difficulties, and after this making a full investigation.”<sup>290</sup> This description gives the impression that Porphyry was already predisposed to a particular line of reasoning with respect to the difficulties raised in the letter. On the other hand, he may have feigned uncertainty. For instance, at one point Iamblichus says that Porphyry posited that the gods were “pure intellects” but “as though putting forth the idea hypothetically or bringing it forth as the opinion held by certain people.”<sup>291</sup> Because the doctrine was good later Platonic theology, Porphyry probably agreed with the definition; yet, he apparently presented it only in a tentative manner. Such an approach would have been well-fitted for a text that seems to have fallen into the *problemata* or *quaestiones* genre, which would have precluded setting forth the author’s own systematic account of the subjects at hand, though without disallowing the author’s holding of a particular position on the areas of inquiry.<sup>292</sup> Some earlier instances of the genre appear playful and even frivolous in their diverse assortment of a variety of often seemingly trivial or ingenious theories.<sup>293</sup> Like some earlier *quaestiones* treatises, Porphyry had begun the letter with an announcement of friendship.<sup>294</sup> Yet, a study

<sup>288</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 22.1–10 Sodano; see Knipe 2009. <sup>289</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 129–139.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 28.9–11 Sodano. <sup>291</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* fr. 1, p. 5.5–6 Sodano (= Iamb. *Myst.* 1.15 [45].8–9).

<sup>292</sup> Preston 2001; König 2007. <sup>293</sup> König 2007: 56–62.

<sup>294</sup> e.g. Plut. *Symp. Quaest.* 612d; 697d; König 2007: 55.



of the fragments shows a more unfriendly side to any playfulness that one might seek to find. Indeed, the tone of the fragments approaches that of taunting rather than amicable enjoyment of intellectual exploration.

In addition to Iamblichus' characterization, therefore, a second element is more determinative, namely Porphyry's scarcely concealed polemical tone in many of the fragments. This is most evident in explanatory comments following questions that describe the logical conclusions if the particular question is answered in an affirmative way. For instance, to the question "How can those who are wise in divine things (*theosophoi*) suppose the gods to be impressionable?"<sup>295</sup> (a question noticeably rhetorical in itself), Porphyry explains:

If some [deities] are impassible, but others are passible – those for whom they say that they thereby set up phalluses and make obscenities – then the invocations of the gods are in vain, and so are the titles of the gods that they announce, the propitiations against the wrath of the gods and the sacrifices, and, furthermore, the so-called compulsions of the gods. For, that which is impassible cannot be enchanted, forced or compelled.<sup>296</sup>

Furthermore, within the questions themselves, his use of indefinite interrogatives seems to bear a polemical tone. About the sources of divination: "Is it a god, an angel, a daemon, or *whatever else* could be present? And in what are they present? In epiphanies, divinations, or *whatever other kind* of sacred activity there might be?"<sup>297</sup> Or again: "Most of them even attached that which is in our power [i.e., free will] to the movement of the stars, by indissoluble bonds of Fate – *I know not how* – which they call Heimarmene."<sup>298</sup>

Finally, had Porphyry not written his letter in a somewhat hostile tone, it is doubtful that Iamblichus would have written such a lengthy, sometimes abrasive, answer to Porphyry's questions. Iamblichus himself does not seem to treat Porphyry's letter as an innocent start to a friendly conversation. Yet, while many of Porphyry's questions may have contained an underlying skepticism about his interlocutor's ability to provide a sufficient answer, or even a latent hostility regarding the issues he raised, we must exercise due caution and give sufficient weight to the particular context of each fragment, whether these be direct quotations or merely paraphrases.

<sup>295</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p. 4, n. 12 Sodano (= Cyril, *c.Julian.* 4.125).

<sup>296</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p. 4.11–p. 5.3 Sodano (= Eus. *PE* 5.10.10).

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 11.12–15 Sodano (= Iamb. *Myst.* 3.18). <sup>298</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 25.3–7 Sodano.

Commentary on the *Timaeus*

A work containing a great variety of important and intriguing discussions by Porphyry, the *Commentary on the Timaeus* is the best preserved of his philosophical commentaries, even though nearly all of the eighty-one fragments contained in Sodano's edition are paraphrases rather than verbatim quotations. These fragments cover only roughly the first half of Plato's *Timaeus*, but provided something like a passage-by-passage commentary on the dialogue, ranging from philological criticisms of earlier readings of the text (for instance, over the presence or absence of a rough breathing or whether an epsilon in a word was originally an ēta)<sup>299</sup> to allegorical interpretations of certain passages.<sup>300</sup> Of the latter, the more noteworthy for the present study are the expositions of Plato's account of Egyptian social classes as signifying various ranks of daemons and Plato's account of the war between the Athenians and people of Atlantis as signifying the conflict between souls and daemons.<sup>301</sup>

Only three rather short fragments are verbatim quotations, all of which derive from John Philoponus' work *On the Eternity of the World* and all of which provide the Christian philosopher with support for his attack against Aristotle on ether as a fifth element.<sup>302</sup> A single fragment from Macrobius' *On the Dream of Scipio* seems to be less a paraphrase and more a sweeping gesture at a much larger discussion in Porphyry on the proportional intervals between planetary bodies, which are in turn "an image for the interweaving of the soul."<sup>303</sup> Four other fragments from Macrobius have been included by Sodano, though their provenance in Porphyry is highly conjectural.<sup>304</sup> The remaining fragments are preserved in paraphrase form in Proclus' great *Commentary on the Timaeus*. It has not yet been noticed that one of these, which recounts an exorcism in Tuscany and will become important for the present study,<sup>305</sup> is independently attested by Michael Psellus, who provides additional information (though one wonders to what extent the additions or alterations depend on himself rather than Porphyry).<sup>306</sup> If Amelius, a native Etruscan,<sup>307</sup> was Porphyry's

<sup>299</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frs. 30 and 74 Sodano. <sup>300</sup> Romano 1979: 191–193; Edwards 2006: 52–53.

<sup>301</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano. <sup>302</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frs. 58–60 Sodano.

<sup>303</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 72 Sodano; this is the only time Porphyry's *Comm. Tim.* is named in Macrobius' text.

<sup>304</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frs. 65–68 Sodano. For defense of a Porphyrian provenance to these (as well as the general claim that Macrobius' philosophical system is based on Porphyry), see Courcelle 1969: 29–46, whose erudition conceals some faulty assumptions.

<sup>305</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 57 Sodano; see Chapter 3 below. <sup>306</sup> Fr. 471 Smith. <sup>307</sup> *V. Plot.* 7.2–3.

source for the account, then the *Commentary* would date to Porphyry's period at Rome in Plotinus' school or any time thereafter.

### Against the Christians

The polemical tome against Christianity gave notoriety to its author in antiquity, receiving official proscriptions from Christian emperors, lengthy counter-attacks by Christian intellectuals, and a bewildering smoke-screen of vague generalizations by authors who had never seen the work themselves. The majority of its fifteen books is lost, but a good deal of scholarly industry and ingenuity have been dedicated to finding new "fragments" (which are often no more than later reports of anonymous, even hypothetical, criticisms of Christianity) and reconstructing its original shape. A survey of the complex modern discussions and debates surrounding the *Against the Christians* would go beyond the purposes of the present study. We need only note that a more critical approach to the free-handed collection of fragments commencing with Harnack's early-twentieth-century edition has been presented by Benoit, Barnes, and others.<sup>308</sup> Those fragments not explicitly attributed to Porphyry, especially those deriving from Macarius Magnes' *Apocriticus*,<sup>309</sup> must be treated with caution and reserved for consideration only after thorough analysis of the indisputably Porphyrian fragments. On the other hand, a more extreme skepticism regarding the *Against the Christians*, namely that there was no work of that name but that it was rather a rubric for anti-Christian materials scattered throughout his corpus (from the *On Abstinence* to the *Philosophy from Oracles*), is unwarranted, as the incisive discussions of Richard Goulet and Christoph Riedweg have shown (two studies, already noted above, which unfortunately have received scant attention in Anglophone scholarship).<sup>310</sup>

Recent examination has shown that even Fragment 1 of Harnack's edition, which was drawn from Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* and had been accepted even by the more critical discussions of Barnes and Digeser, is most likely not from Porphyry at all.<sup>311</sup> The removal of this passage from the fragments is of substantial importance for our construal of the *Against the Christians* since it had been deemed either to be the sole surviving testimony from the preface or to be a summation of the aims and layout

<sup>308</sup> Benoit 1978; T. D. Barnes 1973; *idem* 1994; Depalma Digeser 2002; Ramos Jurado, et al. 2006; Morlet 2011a.

<sup>309</sup> For the position that Macarius' source was not Porphyry but Hierocles, see Depalma Digeser 2002.

<sup>310</sup> Goulet 2004; Riedweg 2005. <sup>311</sup> Morlet, 2010a: 41–49; Johnson 2010.

of the entire work.<sup>312</sup> Fragment 1 had criticized Christians of a double apostasy – first a rejection of their ancestral ways when they turned to Jewish Scriptures, but then a subsequent rejection of the Jewish Scriptures and the Law of Moses. If it could safely be assigned to the *Against the Christians*, or any Porphyrian work at all, such a criticism would certainly provide salient material for a study of Porphyry's cultural affiliations and assumptions. Its removal from the fund of fragments thus carries weighty ramifications for our considerations of Porphyry's conception of the Jews and of ancestral ethnic traditions in general. In fact, it leaves a lacuna in the standard modern accounts of Porphyry that cannot easily be filled with material from the firmly Porphyrian fragments.

Even with a more narrowly defined set of parameters for the collection of fragments of the *Against the Christians* (i.e., if we adopt a criterion requiring the explicit naming of Porphyry by the author quoting or paraphrasing anti-Christian material), the following issues are clear. Porphyry's polemic included careful chronological inquiries regarding the relative dating of Moses and other ancient figures and events (e.g., the Trojan War), on the one hand, and of the author of the book of Daniel, Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Seleucid chronology, on the other. A separate work entitled the *Chronicon* has now been shown not to have existed; nonetheless, chronological concerns did play an important role in the *Against the Christians* (and, we might add, in the *Philosophic History*).<sup>313</sup> Another major issue of the anti-Christian treatise was the identification of contradictions, mistakes or infelicities in New Testament writings, such as the dispute between Peter and Paul and the differing accounts of events surrounding Jesus' birth.<sup>314</sup> Whether Porphyry offered a systematic survey of the New Testament (or Old Testament) cannot be determined.<sup>315</sup> The fact that most of these fragments derive from later biblical commentaries of Christian authors makes it impossible to affirm whether Porphyry himself followed the order of the biblical text or the Christian commentator, following the order of the biblical text, extracted criticisms found in various places of the *Against the Christians*. To make matters worse, these fragments derive from authors for whom it seems likely that they depended on earlier Christian responses to Porphyry and probably did not know Porphyry's text at first hand. Nonetheless, the indications are many and widespread that

<sup>312</sup> e.g., T. D. Barnes 1994: 65.      <sup>313</sup> Esp. T. D. Barnes 1994.

<sup>314</sup> Frs. 21–22 and 11–12 Harnack, respectively. The most exhaustive and careful treatment is Cook 2000: 119–167.

<sup>315</sup> Magny 2010.

Porphyry availed himself of direct engagement with the Christian sacred texts in a way entirely unique to previous anti-Christian polemic.<sup>316</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The fragmentary works discussed here form only part of Porphyry's wide-ranging corpus. Together, these fragmentary treatises provide a diverse range of material of varying genres and literary contexts. They stand as expressions of a broad project of philosophical translation and exhibit Porphyry as a versatile and creative interpreter of the Greek and other traditions.

Acts of philosophical translation in antiquity often were, in some sense, acts of collecting fragments. The Platonic philosopher presumed a metaphysical framework that saw the physical world as one of dizzying multiplicity comprised of massive and incessant fragmentations of being. The philosophic task, then, was to identify and draw together traces of a lost unity within the manifold refractions of materiality. Translation involved naming, classifying, and properly conceptualizing the fragments of reality. It therefore required the skills of seeing well; one had to be able to spot the faint metaphysical traces of a world nearly lost to sight in the obscurity of the present.

The following study has no transcendent object. It only makes the attempt to discern a broad and rather elastic coherence to the relevant fragmentary works as well as the fully extant treatises. It has self-consciously, then, set itself the task of translating Porphyry.

<sup>316</sup> Cook 2004.



PART I

*A world full of gods*

*Porphyry the theologian*





*Porphyry's taxonomy of the divine*

For earlier generations of students of the classics, one of the more embarrassing features of Greek thought and literature was the centrality of the gods, who, aside from their plurality, were scarcely acceptable in their intellectual ability or moral behavior. One always hoped that the Greeks did not really believe their myths and, in any case, one preferred the profundity of Plato's dialogues or the timeless beauty of Greek sculptural forms more than the less palatable remnants of a primitive mind.<sup>1</sup> More recently, however, a good deal of scholarly industry has exhibited more productive approaches to Greek religion and enlivened our appreciation of the depth of classical conceptions and practices related to the divine world. One is struck now, more than ever, with the richness and complexity of the lives of the Greek gods alongside and in the midst of the lives of individual Greeks and the communities – familial, civic and ethnic – which they formed.

The philosopher who lived, read, and taught in such a climate could not easily dismiss the “world full of gods.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of Xenophanes' criticism of the anthropomorphism of religious images or Plato's rejection of the blunt crudities found in the traditional myths about the gods, most philosophers of the classical, and even more the post-classical, eras engaged in a wide-ranging and varied discourse on the divine.<sup>3</sup> Aside from mere criticism of the religious expressions and ideas associated with popular cult and imagination (to which we will turn in [Chapter 3](#)), philosophers also developed, with ever deeper elaboration, more systematic,

<sup>1</sup> On the primitive in Greek religion, see, e.g., Murray 1978: 15–55.

<sup>2</sup> The claim that, “Everything is full of gods” derives ultimately from Thales (quoted at Plato, *Laws* 10. 899b), and is echoed by Porphyry at *Antro nymph.* 2, p. 56.4 Nauck (paraphrasing Cronius); Iamblichus, *Myst.* 1.30.2 Parthey; cf. Symmachus, *Rel.* 3.5 (all things are full of God); Plut. *Consol. Apoll.* 26 (the aether is full of spirits).

<sup>3</sup> Decharme 1904; Attridge 1978; Gerson 1990; Brisson 2004; Kahn 1997: 247–262.

hierarchically structured approaches to the divine reality.<sup>4</sup> Platonists, in particular, formulated theological descriptions that persistently invoked an original divine unity from which the plethora of gods and other divine beings derived – an emphasis that has received the ever more popular label “pagan monotheism”<sup>5</sup> – though this is something of a misnomer in its adoption of the terms “pagan” and “monotheism” to refer to Greek-speaking intellectuals who would never have accepted the Latin appellation *pagani* for themselves, nor ever denied the existence of a multiplicity of beings who could properly be named “gods” and receive some form of worship, without the dangers of blasphemy or idolatry.<sup>6</sup>

A driving force that impelled such hierarchizing theologies lay in the imperial contexts of Alexander the Great’s successor dynasties and then the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Strabo had remarked about the importance of imperialism for the growth of geographic knowledge: “The spread of the empires of the Romans and of the Parthians has presented to geographers of today a considerable addition to our empirical knowledge of geography, just as did the campaign of Alexander to geographers of earlier times.”<sup>8</sup> The reflection may be equally applicable to the growth of other forms of knowledge, including especially religious and theological forms of knowledge. It has been argued that a key expression of Hellenizing processes was, in fact, those forms of religious syncretism<sup>9</sup> that moved towards a henotheistic framework.<sup>10</sup> As soldiers, merchants, slaves, administrators, and especially philosophers travelled along the channels of empire they sought to make sense of the rich religious diversity they encountered by drawing connections and making identifications between the deities of various places. Local religions began to be drawn into matrices of “world religions” or “imperial

<sup>4</sup> West 1999: 21–40; Kenney, 1986; Hirsch-Luipold 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Esp. Athanassiadi and Frede 1999; for problems with the category and label of “pagan monotheism,” see Fowden 2005: 521–523; Cerutti 2010: 15–32.

<sup>6</sup> In the present discussion, I have chosen to continue to use the label “pagan” to designate those whose beliefs and practices sought to maintain the ancient traditions of their city and people (though a pagan intellectual might often develop a broader universalizing vision that incorporated all or most of the traditions of the cities and peoples of their world); see Chuvin 1990: 7–9; Johnson 2012: n. 13. In spite of its problematic status as a Latin word popularized by Christians to designate their religious opponents, “pagan” has the virtue of excluding neither those with polytheistic or monotheistic tendencies or emphases in their theological thought.

<sup>7</sup> For comparative approaches and models for studying ancient imperialism, see Alcock, et al 2001; Webster and Cooper 1996. For the connection of translation to empire in a later period, see Haddour 2008: 203–226; Robinson 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Strabo 1.2.1 (trans. H. L. Jones, LCL 49); Clarke 1999: 210–228, 307–328; Isaac 2004: 304–323.

<sup>9</sup> It is now often noted that “syncretism” too easily masks the great diversity and continued particularity of different individuals’ attempts to frame their religious conceptual worlds; see e.g., Leopold 2004; Stewart and Shaw 1994; Lyman 2003: 213–214; Dunand and Lévêque 1973; Bonnet and Motte 1999.

<sup>10</sup> e.g., Bilde 1990: 151–187; Lightfoot 2003: 72–83.

religions," both in the practices and conceptions of thinkers and of the "practitioners of the divine."<sup>11</sup>

Whether an imperial context was a causative force or only provided an environment amenable to theological universalisms cannot be answered easily. If we consider Herodotus in the classical era, we might conclude that, while the historian was writing in a context which included the Athenian Empire, he made syncretistic identifications of Egyptian and Greek gods when there was no direct Athenian imperial control of Egypt (though his "mental mapping" of the world did follow trade routes, which were maintained by a complex interplay of imperial and trans-imperial dynamics).<sup>12</sup> If we can observe universalizing tendencies in a literary work produced outside of such direct imperialism, then we must admit that imperialism need not always be a causative source for the construction of universalizing frameworks by intellectuals. There was a fruitful, but not necessary, relationship between philosophical universalism and political imperialism. Strikingly, both Roman imperial policies and theological formulations by Greek and Roman intellectuals (from Celsus to Julian to Proclus) exhibited a range of emphases on a local–universal and polytheistic–monotheistic spectrum. The "solar monotheism" of the third-century emperor Aurelian (as well as of the later emperor Julian) hardly precluded their active support of polytheism throughout the empire.<sup>13</sup>

The denial of a necessary correspondence between imperialism and universalism (theologically expressed in henotheism or monotheism, or in other systematizing projects) is important for unsettling any presumed expectations we might have regarding Porphyry's theological system. While we noticed in the first chapter that Porphyry's corpus was a product of Hellenization (understood with the appropriate nuances), we must admit that the Roman imperial context did not simply determine the precise contours of his theological universalizing moves, even though it certainly provided the context and resources for such moves. The present chapter seeks to trace the broad contours of his vertical theological translation – that is, his sustained activity of transferring the knowledge about the gods expressed in various media (especially literary and iconographic) into a Platonic philosophical system. In particular, theological translation involved finding the

<sup>11</sup> On practices, e.g., sacrifices *Graeco ritu*, see Scheid 1995: 15–31; Šterbenc Erker 2009: 85. For general discussion of world/imperial religious developments, see the collection of essays in the volume just noted by Cancik and Rupke; Auffarth 2005: 17–36; Cancik 1999: 161–173; Beard 1994: 763–768. My use of the phrase "practitioners of the divine" is borrowed from Dignas and Trampedach 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Egyptian and Greek gods: e.g., Herod. 2.42–45, 144–146, with Hartog 2002, and more generally, Redfield 2002; mental maps: C. R. Whittaker 2008: 63–87; trade routes: Romm 1992: 35.

<sup>13</sup> Fowden 2005: 557–558.

proper ways of speaking about the divine so as to transfer “native” knowledge into the “target” system of knowledge. We shall see that a Platonic ontology was determinative for the “god-talk” (*theo-logia*) that Porphyry practiced. We shall also see, however, that there was a good deal of slippage in his vertical translation activity from the higher divine levels to the lower (God, gods, and daemons) – ontologically expressed, the One productively spilled over into plurality. Porphyry does not allow for an easy answer to the question of when a god stops being a god and becomes a daemon.

In terms of contemporary studies of cultural translation, the theological flexibility in speaking about divine beings at the boundaries of each level of theological hierarchy is similar to *mestiza* or hybrid translation.<sup>14</sup> In other words, one continues the usage of the “native” language in the “target” language, and thus maintains an active habitation on the cultural – or in the current instance, theological – borders. The demarcation between two languages of speaking about the divine (for instance, the poetic and the philosophical) is made problematic, and this even more so in the fragmentary treatises. We shall conclude that the best way to make sense of Porphyry’s various instances of speaking of the divine is to understand them as part of a persistent translational process ever moving back and forth between popular and more philosophically precise ways of speaking.

In terms of the long-standing concern among Porphyrian scholars over the perceived tensions and contradictions between his various works, the *mestiza* translational approach here resolves the great difficulty his corpus has posed in determining his precise location on the theological spectrum. On the one hand, works like the *Philosophy from Oracles*, *On Images*, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, and *On the Styx* have often appeared to elaborate a theological system that emphasized and legitimized polytheistic worship – even what might be deemed the “most superstitious excesses” of polytheism. Indeed, according to Bidez, Porphyry’s *Philosophy from Oracles* had formulated a theory of proper religious practices that would affect the salvation of the soul; “and, along with these practices, he puts in the first rank the most backwards superstitions and the most unusual rites of the cults of the Orient.”<sup>15</sup> In this “manual of magic,” Porphyry “wants to do the work of a philosopher but fails; the material he treats remains opposed to his aims. The superstitions he would want to ennoble are by nature too

<sup>14</sup> Sturge 2007: 92–94 discussing Anzaldúa 1987. Unlike Anzaldúa’s emphasis on a refusal to translate, however, I take Porphyry’s fragments to be exhibiting a processual movement of translation: not a discrete moment of translation, but an ongoing series of translational acts.

<sup>15</sup> Bidez 1913: 17; followed by Hadot 1960: 211.

grotesque and, besides, the veil of Greek ideas with which he covered them was too thin."<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, seemingly more rational and philosophically sound treatises, such as his *Sentences*, *On Abstinence*, the *Letter to Anebo*, the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, and the *Philosophical History*, have appeared to emphasize much more the problematic status of polytheistic belief and mark an attempt to focus on higher levels of divinity (the Demiurge, the divine Mind, or the One itself). The purported divergence between these apparently quite different theological visions by the same author is explained more adequately by an awareness that we are catching Porphyry in the act of translation (and this, furthermore, in a system of theological speaking that insistently remains permeable, or hybrid, at its boundaries), rather than by means of the fabrication of an intellectual development or even philosophical conversion (which is then too conveniently mapped on to Porphyry's gradual move westward). The problem faced in this chapter lies in the attempt to develop an account of Porphyry's theology that embraces within a coherent framework his engagement with traditional conceptions and images of the gods (typical of the first set of texts mentioned above) and his articulation of the philosophically more rarefied conception of the divine (typical of the latter set of texts). We shall find a flexibility in usage of the nomenclature of "gods" and "daemons" if we maintain sensitivity to what is said by his sources (especially oracles) and what he explicitly states in his commentary on those sources.<sup>17</sup>

The following investigation will begin with the highest levels of Porphyry's theological system (especially his discussions of the One and the Demiurge) and subsequently move to the lower levels (gods and daemons). Each level poses its own set of problems. We shall find that Porphyry uses the language of divinity loosely to designate all levels of the Plotinian metaphysical system; he also uses the labels of Father and Son interchangeably of each level of that system in order to convey a relational and "emanationist" logic of eternal begetting of lower beings by higher ones.<sup>18</sup> Though

<sup>16</sup> Bidez 1913: 18–19.

<sup>17</sup> This latter point will continue to be developed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the present study, where we shall move beyond the simplistic approach to the *Philosophy from Oracles*, which has supposed that Porphyry is a defender of the oracles he cites and seeks only to paraphrase them as authoritative texts without need of his own interpretation (see esp. Hadot 1960: 235–236, for this last claim). On the contrary, when we have sufficient material from his comments on the oracles, Porphyry makes carefully limited interpretive moves.

<sup>18</sup> In spite of well-placed concerns that the label "emanation" is somewhat misleading because it may gloss over the radical otherness of the One from the other hypostases, which derive from the One

the emphasis of Porphyry's philosophical vision is upon the One and the Intellect (the highest levels of the theological hierarchy), he maintains a persistent polytheism. When we turn to an examination of the traditional gods within his Neoplatonic framework, we shall find a category of gods (especially in the *Philosophy from Oracles*) who make Homer's Olympians seem rather well-behaved and rational in comparison; Plato would have shuddered.<sup>19</sup> After examining a consistently negative characterization of these gods in the treatise on oracles and other works, an analysis of his various discussions of daemons (especially in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*) will show them behaving similarly to the ignorant and impassioned gods identified in the other works. The best solution for accounting for this picture of the lower levels of the theological hierarchy lies in seeing Porphyry as accommodating his language to popular usage. He seems to have adopted an accommodationist (or theologically hybrid) stance that he had himself identified in Homer and Plato. Throughout his theological discussions, Porphyry exhibits a flexible yet consistently Platonic (even Plotinian) philosophical vision.

#### SINGULARITY AND DIVINITY

In simplified form, the great ontological system of Plotinus comprised three levels of being, or "hypostases."<sup>20</sup> In progressively more diverse forms of existence, the Intellect and then the Soul (and then individual souls) proceeded from the One. If one wanted to adopt traditional divine names for these three hypostases, one could apply Hesiod's genealogical schema of Ouranos – Kronos – Zeus.<sup>21</sup> But this was far from a traditional conception about the gods. Instead, Plotinus usually avoided philosophical exposition of the gods of the Greek religious heritage (especially as portrayed in Homer and Hesiod) and greatly emphasized the spiritual and religious end of union with one's divine source above Soul and even Intellect.<sup>22</sup>

by "procession" (see e.g., Strange 2007: 27), "emanation" remains a convenient shorthand for the doctrine of the lower hypostases dependence upon the One as source. It is meant, therefore, to contain, without obscuring, the important awareness of the transcendent otherness of the One, from which Intellect proceeds.

<sup>19</sup> For Plato's critique of Homer's (and Hesiod's) depiction of the Olympian gods, see *Pl. Rep.* 2.376d–3.403c.

<sup>20</sup> *Enn.* 5.1 (though "hypostasis" is not actually used by Plotinus); see Rist 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Esp. *Plot. Enn.* 5.8.12–13 (though only Zeus is named); cf. Pépin 1977: 203–206; Hadot 1981: 124–137; Wallis 1972: 135.

<sup>22</sup> On union with the divine, see *Plot. Enn.* 6.9; Bussanich 1999: 38–65.

Porphyry maintained a metaphysical system closely resonate to that of Plotinus (even in supposedly earlier works).<sup>23</sup> In his inquiry into Reality the philosopher ascended on an ontological road that led from Soul and its individual instantiations in the material world to Intellect and the intelligible Ideas thought by Intellect, and finally to the One in all its austere transcendence “beyond Being”<sup>24</sup> and, indeed, beyond positive description by the philosopher.<sup>25</sup> By means of intellect, one might be able to say something about the One that was beyond intellect; yet, as Porphyry noted in his comments on Plotinus’ *Ennead* 3.8, it was better to approach the One by an absence of thought.<sup>26</sup> A fragment of Porphyry preserved in the Tübingen Theosophy offers gnominically: “About the First Cause we know nothing: on the contrary, ignorance is knowledge of It, since It is neither perceptible nor knowable.”<sup>27</sup> All things ultimately had their source in the One, yet the cautious philosopher could not speak of a continuity between the One and the lower metaphysical elements since the One was radically unique and beyond predication.<sup>28</sup> Intellect at its best contemplated its Source with non-discursive thought at a higher level than the process of its discursive thinking of the multiplicity of Ideas.<sup>29</sup> The Soul, in its turn, engendered further multiplicity, even chaotic confusion and moral evil, at the lower levels of the ontological spectrum.<sup>30</sup>

It was the universal Soul, therefore, that created the material world in the role of Demiurge. This is explicitly presented in two fragments of his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. In the first, he designated “the hypercosmic Soul as the Demiurge; but its mind (Intellect), to which it turns, is self-living, so that the Demiurge’s model (*paradeigma*) is in accordance with this mind.”<sup>31</sup> In the second, it is reported that “Porphyry supposes

<sup>23</sup> As noted in [Chapter 1](#), we have no works that can with certainty be dated to his pre-Plotinian period. Works like *Phil.Orac.* and *Quaest.Homer.* may, of course, be pre-Plotinian. The investigation here reveals that those Middle Platonic elements consistent with Plotinus (the doctrine of the One, Intellect and Soul) are clearly evident in even those writings.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 6.509b9; Porph. fr. 427 Smith (= Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 2.4, p. 31, 22–28): “the First Cause, beyond Intellect and all that exists.”

<sup>25</sup> The best discussion of the road to the One is Plot. *Enn.* 5.1; cf. 3.9.

<sup>26</sup> Porphyry, *Sent.* 25 Lamberz.

<sup>27</sup> Porphyry, F \*427 Smith (= Tübingen Theosophy, 65, p. 183, 24–26 Erbse); the fragment might be from the *Phil.Orac.* since that is the only Porphyrian text quoted by the Theosophy and it seems to resonate with the other fragments from that work; see below.

<sup>28</sup> Anon. *Comm.Parm.* fr. 1.

<sup>29</sup> On Intellect’s multiplicity of ideas and hence its inability to be the One, see *Sent.* 43 Lamberz.

<sup>30</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 5.1, with Rist 1967: 112–129; Majumdar 2005: 31–48; Torchia 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Porph. *Comm.Tim.* fr. 41 Sodano. On the “hypercosmic soul,” see Dillon 1969: 63–70. The Demiurge is also given “hypercosmic” status at Apul. *de Plat.* 204; see Finamore 2006: 34–40.

the Demiurge to be unparticipated Soul, and the paradigm to be the Intellect.”<sup>32</sup>

All of this is generally consistent with later Platonic doctrine and Porphyry claimed that it was in harmony with Plotinus<sup>33</sup> – even though Proclus severely chastens Porphyry for this: Plotinus had identified the Demiurge with the Intellect not the Soul.<sup>34</sup> Yet, if one reads the litany of various Platonist views on the identification of the Demiurge recorded in Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*,<sup>35</sup> the various positions all stand well within a Platonic approach to higher levels of reality (because all were rooted in some way in the *Timaeus*). What makes Porphyry unique, perhaps, is his apparent concern to open up gaps in the barriers separating Intellect and Soul. In this, he seems to be carrying through the logic of an emanationist ontology and theology. For Porphyry, the Soul’s Intellect provided the paradigm for the Soul’s creative activity in such a way as to unite the two hypostases in the same ongoing activity of creation (yet, without collapsing their distinctiveness).

This ontological system of the three hypostases entailed a symmetrical hierarchical system in distinctly theological terms; or, starting from the opposite side, as Lloyd Gerson put it, there had to be an attempt “to construe the divine according to the exigencies of a metaphysical system.”<sup>36</sup> Porphyry spent a great deal of his scholarly labors in grappling with the implications of such an ontology for theology, both theoretical and applied. Ignoring Plato’s reticence to name the One or the Good with the appellation of God, Porphyry (like Plotinus) allowed for the frequent use of the divine name as an appropriate signifier for the One.<sup>37</sup> In other words, he translated from an ontological frame of meaning into a theological one. Preference was given to the epithet “God over all,” already a common denomination among Middle Platonist thinkers, though simply God (often in its anarthrous form) recurs throughout his corpus.<sup>38</sup> A concise expression of

<sup>32</sup> Porph. *Comm. Tim.* fr. 42 Sodano.

<sup>33</sup> Porph. *Comm. Tim.* fr. 41 Sodano; Porphyry may have had in mind *Enn.* 4.4.9–11 (where the close connection, even interconnectedness of Soul and Intellect is emphasized). For Porphyry’s distinctiveness from Plotinus, see Lloyd 1970: 291; Schwyzer 1974; Strange 2007: 17–34.

<sup>34</sup> Proclus, *Comm. Tim.* 2.307.5–14. For Proclus’ description of Plotinus’ view, see his *Comm. Tim.* 2.305.17–306.1. On Porphyry’s monistic tendency to “telescope” Plotinus’ hypostases, see Lloyd 1970: 288; cf. 291–292 (on telescoping in the anonymous *Comm. Parm.*); cf. also, Dillon 1969: 67. Runia 2008: ad loc. cites Opsomer: “It does not look like Proclus has made an honest attempt to give a fair account of Porphyry’s views.”

<sup>35</sup> Proclus, *Comm. Tim.* 2.303.24–310.2. <sup>36</sup> Gerson 2002: 365.

<sup>37</sup> Gerson 2002. The anon. *Comm. Parm.* likewise repeatedly designates the One as God.

<sup>38</sup> On the anarthrous forms of *theos* in Porphyry, see O’Brien Wicker, 1987: 90 n. 7.132. The phrase *theos epi pasin* is common in early Christian literature (of possible importance for Porphyry is



his concept of the divine One is offered in his careful distinctions about sacrifice in Book 11 of the *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*. “The First God,” he declares, “being incorporeal, unmoved and indivisible,<sup>39</sup> neither contained in anything nor bound by himself, needs nothing external.”<sup>40</sup> Without ever crudely stating the equivalence of the One with the First God, what could be said of the One could be translated equally to God; the need to opt for the latter title rather than “the One” was due to the context of his argument, which amounted to a discussion of the nature and appropriateness of sacrifice to the various members of a divine hierarchy.

Indeed, a translational context may be the best explanation for those instances where Porphyry adopts “God” rather than “the One” throughout his corpus: where he was dealing with religious concerns in discussions on cult, theology, or iconography he would translate the One in theological terms using the title “God,” “First God,” or “God over all.” But, in contexts where his concerns were more purely philosophical, for instance in discussions of the metaphysics of the hypostases, the One was left untranslated. In fact, it required an absence of translation: the One remained the “One” thereby emphasizing the One’s oneness. A text addressing the fundamental religious issues of sacrifice and cult called for taking up the task of theological translation. We can trace his application of divine language to the One when he develops his argument later in *On Abstinence*. In his delineation of the religious obligations of the philosopher, Porphyry first names him a “priest of the God over all,”<sup>41</sup> then as a “priest of the Father,”<sup>42</sup> and finally as a “close friend of great Zeus”<sup>43</sup> – a label from the *Odyssey* already quoted by Plotinus to define the relationship of the true philosopher to the One.<sup>44</sup>

If we are to assess adequately the question of any monotheism in Porphyry’s thought, however, we must feel the full weight of the complete lack of singularity of the One’s divinity.<sup>45</sup> Its oneness was exclusive; its divinity was shared. That is, the oneness of the One mattered a great deal (at least

Origen, *c. Cels.* 3.37; 5.46; 7.56; 8.64). The phrase, though frequent in Porphyry, is not a distinctively Porphyrian tag, therefore, and its presence in the anonymous *Comm. Parm.* is hardly sufficient to indicate his authorship (*pace* Romano 1979: 173); see Rasimus 2010: 90.

<sup>39</sup> Its indivisibility would set it above the Demiurge, who was divided through its creative work; see Numenius, fr. 11.11–12 (*Des Places*).

<sup>40</sup> *Abst.* 2.37.1; he attributes this conception to “some Platonists;” see Clark 2000b: 154 n. 299. See also, *Sent.* 31 Lamberz (on *Enn.* 3.9.43–6; 4.5.4); cf. *Enn.* 6.8.8.12–15 (the One “is altogether unrelated to anything”).

<sup>41</sup> *Abst.* 2.49.1, 3. <sup>42</sup> *Abst.* 2.50.1. <sup>43</sup> *Abst.* 2.52.4.

<sup>44</sup> *Od.* 19.178, cited at Plot. *Enn.* 6.9.7; cf. Ps.-Plato, *Minos* 319b. For his part, Plotinus uses Zeus in different treatises as a title for any of the three hypostases; besides the passage here (where Zeus = the One), see *Enn.* 3.5.8–9 (Zeus = Intellect); *Enn.* 5.8.12–13 (Zeus = Soul); *Enn.* 4.4.10 (Zeus = Intellect/Demiurge and Soul).

<sup>45</sup> Addey 2010: 149–165; Cerutti 2010.

in more metaphysical contexts); but, when Porphyry translated the One into theological language its oneness *as God* was not explicitly treated. The appellations of this God emphasize his supremacy or priority relative to the other gods (hence, “First God,” or “God over all”).<sup>46</sup> In contrast to Christian and Jewish authors who took great pains in firmly impressing upon their readers the unique singularity of their God by the very naming of that God (as signified in their incessant reminder that the Greek gods were “the so-called gods”<sup>47</sup>), Porphyry’s theological articulations set God the One at a heightened location atop a divine pyramid consisting of a multiplicity of other gods.

We detect, therefore, the presence of two registers in which Porphyry speaks of the One: in ontological terms, the One is unique and beyond being; in theological terms, as God, the One shares the divinity of the gods.<sup>48</sup> This absence of emphasis on the singularity of divinity of the highest God is exhibited in the ambiguity of his reference to a god or God in many of his works, especially the commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, as well as his *Against Nemertius*. Porphyry names both the First God and the Demiurge with the singular epithet *theos*; often, it is difficult to determine the precise identity of the hypostatic entity receiving the epithet. For instance, in an explication of Plato *Tim.* 30a, which addresses the goodness of the Demiurge, Porphyry draws on key passages of Plato in the second part of a four-fold attack against the followers of Atticus who claimed that there were multiple first principles.<sup>49</sup> The *Republic* supported the doctrine that the Good was the source of all things (6.508bc); the *Philebus* declared God to be the pre-existent cause of both the finite and the infinite (23c); the *Sophist* showed that it was necessary to have the One itself as first principle (238ff).<sup>50</sup>

In bringing these various texts into conversation with the *Timaeus* passage, which had asserted the goodness of God the Demiurge, we might think that we can now speak of the Demiurge as God the One (since the Demiurge is here identifiable with the Good, the pre-existent cause, and the first principle of the other dialogues). Yet, Porphyry quickly corrects such an erroneous interpretation in his response to those who suppose that the Ideas are outside of Intellect: “The Demiurge is not the First God, for the

<sup>46</sup> For the importance of hierarchy in henotheism, see Cerutti 2010.

<sup>47</sup> But cf. *Styx* fr. 377 Smith (on which, see below).

<sup>48</sup> *Phil.Hist.* fr. 221 Smith (= fr. 16 Nauck), on which, see below.

<sup>49</sup> Porph. *Comm.Tim.* fr. 51, p. 36.14–29 Sodano. The best discussion of this passage, and of Porphyry’s relationship with Atticus generally, is Zambon 2002: 129–169, esp. 143–146.

<sup>50</sup> It is precisely these passages that Gerson had questioned in regard to Plato’s concept of God; see Gerson 2002.

First God is greater than all intelligible being.”<sup>51</sup> The God who was “always creating” (literally, “always being a Demiurge”)<sup>52</sup> described in his comments preceding the enumeration of the Platonic passages – and indeed, the God of the *Timaeus* generally – cannot be the First God. As noted above, the Demiurge must be identified as one of the latter hypostases. Because of the unproblematic nature of naming multiple beings “gods” in Porphyry (and alleged “pagan monotheists” in antiquity generally),<sup>53</sup> he can follow the pattern set by Plato himself and consistently refer to the *Timaeus*’ Demiurge as God.<sup>54</sup> These passages from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* clearly exhibit the thoroughgoing imprecision of the label “God” in Porphyry’s theological vocabulary. The label is allowable in reference to each of the three hypostases, and hence further markers of distinction are required (such as “first” or “over all”).

Porphyry’s conception of the Demiurge deserves further consideration. In another work, Porphyry’s discussion of the providential administration of “God” most likely refers to the work of the Demiurge.<sup>55</sup> The greatest difficulty, however, is not so much that the Demiurge is named God, but that it is sometimes identified with Soul,<sup>56</sup> other times with Intellect;<sup>57</sup> sometimes with Father,<sup>58</sup> and other times with Son.<sup>59</sup> We noted above that the distinction between Soul and Intellect in creation may be softened since, for Porphyry, the Intellect is ever the mind of the Soul, and it is ideas in the Soul’s mind that constitute the paradigm from which Soul draws in eternally creating the cosmos.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in *Against Nemertius* we

<sup>51</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 51, p. 37.3–6 Sodano. <sup>52</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 51, p. 36.12 Sodano.

<sup>53</sup> On the “non-exclusion of a plurality of gods,” see Moreschini 1983: 137; cited at Cerutti 2010: 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Porph. Comm. Tim.* frs. 36, 47, 51, 56 Sodano.

<sup>55</sup> *C. Nemert.* fr. 282 Smith: “For unless it is [possible] to sketch out (*hupograpasai*) an administration better than that of God, we must entirely believe with respect to everything that happens that it was better for them to be as they are” (on the attribution of this fragment to the *c. Nemert.*, see Chapter 1). For the Demiurge as God, see also *c. Nemert.* frs. 276, 278–280 Smith (usually, but not always, in the articular form); *Abst.* 3.20.1–5.

<sup>56</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frs. 41–42 Sodano (Edwards 1990a: 18: “Porphyry was upbraided by the later commentators [in this] – though he was clearly true to Plotinus”).

<sup>57</sup> *C. Nemert.* fr. 281 Smith. <sup>58</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frs. 40, 46 Sodano; cf. *Phil. Orac.* fr. 344 Smith.

<sup>59</sup> *Styx*, fr. 376 Smith: “They say that God gave this statue to his son, when he was creating the world, in order that he might have a model to look at.” Admittedly this is a quotation from an unnamed work of Bardaisan; but it can be supplemented with *Regr. anim.* fr. 284 Smith.

<sup>60</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 36, 41–43, 53 Sodano. See Dillon 1973b: 180: in the *Chald. Orac.* the Father is the first cause who implants the ideas in the Intellect, which the second Intellect uses as a pattern in creation, presumably through the agency of the world Soul (Hecate) and the planetary gods (cf. Hadot 1966: 138). Alternatively, at Calcidius, in *Tim.* 177, p. 206.3 and 188, p. 213.1 Waszink (which echoes the anonymous *Comm. Parm.*; cf. Dillon, 1973b: 179), there is: a) Supreme God = the Good, b) Providentia, which the Greeks call Intellect, c) a second Intellect, or tripartite Soul of the world (tripartite = sublunary sphere, the planets, and the fixed stars); but I cannot otherwise find this precise way of speaking in the indisputably Porphyrian material.

find the following conceptual connections: the one who creates and orders the cosmos is named God;<sup>61</sup> this God is the same who is the protector and savior of all;<sup>62</sup> and, this God who acts providentially in the cosmos is the Intellect.<sup>63</sup> If we understand this portrait of the creative and providential divinity against the backdrop provided by the *Commentary on the Timaeus* noted above, then we may conclude that, when speaking of the relationship between the cosmos and the divine, both the Soul and the Intellect, the creative and the ordering elements, are equally closely relevant for the working of the world. The identity of the Soul and Intellect may be distinguished more or less strongly depending on the level of specificity of Porphyry's analysis.

The general emanationist principle in Porphyry's method of speaking about the hypostases of Intellect and Soul applies also to his naming of all three hypostases, at different times, as Father.<sup>64</sup> Yet, in various places he distinguishes them from each other as Father and Son, and hence there is a relational logic applicable between the hypostases. Apparently, this is even true of the One, which as we noted above was radically distinct from all else. The issue is given pointed expression in a testimony of Damascius that raises some difficulty in determining Porphyry's theology. According to Damascius, Porphyry had identified the single first principle of all things with the Father of the intelligible triad.<sup>65</sup> This view, however, was to be rejected, Damascius claimed, since it numbered the ineffable source of all with intelligible realities.<sup>66</sup>

Two issues immediately arise regarding this witness to Porphyry's metaphysics. First, Damascius may have had inadequate material to characterize accurately Porphyry's thought. In fact, he seems later to contradict his report about Porphyry's position on the relationship of the first principle to the intelligible triad (which he had emphatically marked off from Iamblichus' teaching on the subject) – since in a later passage of the same work (*On First Principles*) he would claim that both Iamblichus and Porphyry taught

<sup>61</sup> *C.Nemert.* frs. 276, 279 Smith.

<sup>62</sup> *C.Nemert.* frs. 279–282 Smith.

<sup>63</sup> *C.Nemert.* fr. 281 Smith.

<sup>64</sup> One should, therefore, avoid the search for singular correspondences between a "Father" in a text of Porphyry and a "Father" in a fragment of the *Chald.Orac.* (or any other text for that matter); for such an attempt, see Hadot 1966.

<sup>65</sup> *Comm.Chald.Or.* fr. ?367.8–10 Smith (= Damasc. *Princ.* 1.86). The attribution of this fragment to Porphyry's *Comm.Chald.Or.* is rightly questioned by Smith, since Damascius frames his report of Porphyry with claims that both Iamblichus' *de Chald.Theol.* and the *Chald.Or.* themselves contradicted Porphyry's doctrine, and nowhere does Damascius hint at the title or nature of the treatise of Porphyry in which this alleged doctrine was found. As will be argued here, furthermore, it seems that Damascius is inaccurate in his report.

<sup>66</sup> *Comm.Chald.Or.* fr. ?367.13–16 Smith.

that there was a single first principle beyond (*meta*) the intelligible triads.<sup>67</sup> This report is not readily reconcilable with the earlier one. In addition, there is reason to suspect that Damascius did not know much of Porphyry's text(s) at first hand. Most of his references to Porphyry are couched within contexts where he notes Iamblichus' views,<sup>68</sup> and one wonders if his knowledge of Porphyry in these instances is entirely mediated through Iamblichus' writings.<sup>69</sup>

Even if we were to grant greater reliability to Damascius' earlier testimony, the issue still remains as to whether Porphyry and Damascius had the same thing in mind when they referred to an intelligible triad. For, even if Porphyry is considered one of the primary instigators in the adoption of triadic structures to convey the progression from ontological transcendence to immanence in the sensible world, later developments pushed the triadic impulse well beyond what can be securely attested for Porphyry's own position.<sup>70</sup> Limiting ourselves to material explicitly attributed to him,<sup>71</sup> we are faced with some difficulty in determining the precise nature of the triad he may have had in mind in whatever treatment of the subject that lies behind Damascius' remarks. If we consider the several references to triads in Porphyry's thought we discover that there was no single primary triad, but rather that triadic thinking was a general mechanism within his vertical translational movements.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Damascius, *Princ.* 1.111, p. 288.12–14 (= Porph. fr. 429 Smith).

<sup>68</sup> *Comm.Parm.* fr. 171 Smith (= Damasc. *Princ.* 2.238); *Comm.Phileb.* frs. 173 and 175 Smith (= Damasc. *in Phileb.* 10.1–9 and 130.1–6 respectively); *Comm.Chald.Or.* fr. ?367 Smith (= Damasc. *Princ.* 1.86); incert. sed., frs. 429, ?430 Smith (= Damasc. *Princ.* 1.111 and 113, respectively); incert. sed., fr. 450 Smith (= Damasc. *in Phd.* 1.177); see also, *Comm.Phd.* fr. 179 Smith (= Damasc. *in Phd.* 1.2) where Porphyry is included in a doxographic list, though Damascius seems there to have found his information in Porphyry's commentary itself (since he expressly adds "in his commentary").

<sup>69</sup> See, however, *Comm.Phileb.* fr. 176 Smith (= Damasc. *in Phileb.* 134.1–18), which does seem to contain a verbatim quotation.

<sup>70</sup> The sage plea for caution in this regard by Edwards 1990a, seems to be ignored in subsequent scholarship. See Majercik 1992: 475–488; eadem 2001: 265–296; Dillon 2007b: 51–59.

<sup>71</sup> In other words, we must exclude the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides* as well as Proclus' discussion of certain unnamed "experts in theology" whose position is quite close to that attributed by Damascius to Porphyry (Proclus, *Comm.Parm.* p. 1070.15–23 Cousin); on which, see Dillon: 1992; idem 2007b; Majercik 2001: 267–269; Strange 2007.

<sup>72</sup> The following discussion omits altogether "enneadic" thinking in Porphyry, since the sole fragment that might hint at enneadic thought only states: "The number nine is divine since it is filled up from three triads and preserves the highest [teachings] of the theology according to Chaldean philosophy, as Porphyry says" (*Comm.Chald.Orac.* fr. 366 Smith [= Lydus *mens.* 159.5–8]). We thus only know that Porphyry commented that the number nine was divine and that it consisted of three triads – what any Neopythagorean would have declared. Of more interest is that he attributes this to something in Chaldean philosophy (though it is not explicitly stated that this is the *Chald.Orac.* nor, if so, the degree or nature of which this element was found in the *Chald.Orac.*). We certainly have no statement that Porphyry's theological system was based on any such posited enneadic thinking in

We possess the following material on triads in Porphyry's metaphysics:

1. The dominant triad for Plotinus was One–Intellect–Soul. Later Neoplatonic triads of Being–Life–Intellect cannot be seen as simple variations on this theme, since the precise ordering was crucial to Plotinus' entire ontological conception. Porphyry would adhere to this basic schema, as especially seen in his *Sentences* and the *Philosophic History*. We have already noted the doctrine of the One and its clear separation from the latter two hypostases, as put forth in the *Sentences*; the claims of the *Philosophic History* are consistent with the *Sentences* and will be discussed below. These passages uphold the Plotinian triad and mark off the first term of that triad as possessed of a special transcendence beyond everything else. This material has the merit of being securely attributed to Porphyry and of preserving a greater extent of verbatim text from its author (obviously more so in the *Sentences*, but also to a significant degree in the fragments of the *Philosophic History*).<sup>73</sup> As such, it deserves much greater weight in any attempt to determine Porphyry's metaphysics and theology than those testimonies by critical opponents from later generations who likely knew the relevant Porphyrian discussions only at second hand. This is especially true of Augustine, to whom we now turn, but possibly also of Damascius.
2. Augustine refers to a doctrine presented in Porphyry's *On the Return of the Soul* in which there was a Father and a Son, who received the appellation "Intellect of the Father" (or *patrikos nous*).<sup>74</sup> Augustine alleges that Porphyry had raised the possibility of there being some *tertium quid* between the Father and Son – "but about the Holy Spirit he says either nothing or [at least] nothing openly; or rather: I know not what else he might say is *between these*."<sup>75</sup> The bishop then goes on to say that, if Porphyry wanted to follow Plotinus, he should have posited the third entity (i.e., Soul, or for Augustine, the Holy Spirit) *after* the Father and Son.<sup>76</sup> We should be quite cautious with Augustine's report, since he gives every indication that, if Porphyry said anything at all about the

the *Chald. Orac.* Hadot's extensive reconstruction of Porphyry's supposed enneadic theology (1966; esp. 1968: 1.263; cf. Zambon 2002: 283) is thus unwarranted by this rather slender piece of evidence.

<sup>73</sup> The relevant fragments of the *Philosophic History*, all from Cyril's *Contra Julianum*, have the virtue of being preserved in a friendly, if Christian source (though see the cautionary note in Chapter 1). Though they are quoted in *oratio obliqua* they are coherent with other Porphyrian material preserved elsewhere, as well as with Plotinus and with the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides*; for parallels, see the helpful collection of notes in Smith's edition, ad loc; also Hadot 1966.

<sup>74</sup> For general discussion of the paternal Mind in Neoplatonism, especially as a progenitor to Hecate, see Iles Johnston 1990: 50.

<sup>75</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 284.12–14 Smith (the italics mark Smith's attempt to identify Porphyry's words).

<sup>76</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 284.14–19 Smith.

“in-between” entity, it was said only in passing. Even worse, Augustine had introduced this material with, “We know what he might say, insofar as he was a Platonist . . .”<sup>77</sup> All of this smacks of a polemical intervention into whatever text Augustine may have possessed of Porphyry.<sup>78</sup> If, however, we take Augustine as reporting some kernel of authentic Porphyrian teaching, then we might see here a trace of a Neoplatonic triadic formulation, Being–Power–Intellect (which drew on elements inexplicitly suggested in the *Chaldean Oracles*)<sup>79</sup> which would become popular in later Platonism. This triad would correspond to Porphyry’s triad thus: Father (Being)–*medium* (Power)–Son (Intellect). If such a triad is present here, however, it is not to be taken as a substitution for the Plotinian triad One–Intellect–Soul, but rather as a reflection on (or rather, a passing glimpse at) the relationship between the first two terms of Plotinus’ triad. Plotinus’ One and Intellect could be described relationally in terms of Father and Son.<sup>80</sup> Considered on its own, the second term was merely named Intellect; but in relation to its prior principle, it was the Son, or the Intellect of the Father. The further reflection on the relational bond between Father and Son (that is, on the hyphen separating Father and Son) could possibly be identified with the Power of the Neoplatonic triad. The fact that Porphyry’s note on the *medium* between Father and Son seems to have occurred (if it occurred at all) within the broader context of a discussion of the Chaldean approach to the purification and salvation of the soul (which, one must add, was ultimately dismissive of the Chaldean claims) might lead one to suppose that Porphyry is here adopting, or at least alluding to, a triad found in the *Chaldean Oracles*.<sup>81</sup> This may be (though no such triad is explicitly attested in any of the extant fragments);<sup>82</sup> but the supposition of intermediate entities or ontological stages in proliferating hierarchical extensions is rooted in Plato himself and it seems unnecessary to appeal to the *Oracles* in particular (which are themselves products of Middle Platonism).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 284.9–10.

<sup>78</sup> For the problems of Augustine as a source for Porphyry, see especially Clark 2007: 127–140; Clark 2011.

<sup>79</sup> On triadic thinking in the *Chaldean Oracles*, see Majercik 1992.

<sup>80</sup> See e.g., *Enn.* 5.1.4; 5.8.12–13.

<sup>81</sup> The fact that *Regr.* is so dismissive of Chaldean arts should be sufficient to make untenable any attempt to see Porphyry adopting Chaldean theology here.

<sup>82</sup> Again, I refer to the cautionary treatment of Majercik 2001.

<sup>83</sup> e.g., *Pl. Parm.* 143a–b; *Tim.* 31b8–c2.



3. The elements of the later popular triad Being–Life–Intellect occur together explicitly, but in a different order and in a far from transparent discussion, in a fragment of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*.<sup>84</sup> The following may be concluded from this fragment: the heavenly bodies Sun–Venus–Mercury are identified with Being–Intellect–Life, in that order; the next highest level of planets, Saturn–Jupiter–Mars might correspond to the triad Being–Intellect–Life, but not explicitly so (only Saturn is said to be Being); the reference to “three Fathers” seems to be a reference to each term of the Being–Intellect–Life triad, and each Father is said to have a planetary triad under it (“the first triad of planets is under Being, the second ascends to Intellect, and the Moon is under Life” – though why the space between Sun and Venus is named a triad, as well as the spaces between Venus and Mercury, and Mercury and the Moon, is unclear). We are left with two triads of planets (Sun–Venus–Mercury and Saturn–Jupiter–Mars) each of which apparently governs its own triad (which seems to amount only to its own planetary sphere) under the dominance of one of the terms of the ontological triad Being–Intellect–Life.<sup>85</sup> None of this contradicts the Plotinian triad of One–Intellect–Soul, insofar as we may substitute the term Being for One (which is far from certain), and Life for Soul. The fact that each term is named a Father alerts us to the fact that this fragment ultimately cannot help us determine precisely what Porphyry meant in the Damascius fragment about a Father of the intelligible triad. On the other hand, however, it does suggest the flexibility in the use of the appellation Father: as a relational term, it merely marks one thing’s priority to another as its source. Hence, each hypostasis is a Father to what comes below it in the ontological hierarchy.<sup>86</sup>
4. A final triadic possibility occurs in the *Philosophy from Oracles* and is rather different from the other instances so far mentioned. After quoting a lengthy oracle, preserved only in the *Tübingen Theosophy*, Porphyry apparently stated, “This oracle makes clear that there are three orders (*taxeis*) of angels: those ever present with God,<sup>87</sup> those separate from him and sent for the purpose of bearing messages (*angelias*) or doing acts of

<sup>84</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 79 Sodano.

<sup>85</sup> The planetary triads are treated in the same order in Ps.-Plato *Epinom.* 987b–c. Also, the varying rates of speed of the planetary bodies in this fragment ought to be compared with the varying rates of speed of souls entering the cosmos at Porph. *Lib. arbitr.* fr. 271.60–75 Smith (on which, see discussion in [Chapter 3](#)).

<sup>86</sup> In the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the Demiurge is named Father (*Comm. Tim.* fr. 46, with fr. 40 Sodano); gods are named the fathers of humans (*Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Comm. Tim.* 17 Sodano.



service, and those ever bearing his throne.”<sup>88</sup> The God in question is the “ineffable Father of immortals” of the oracle, who is described as being the source of all things through the extension of “your well balanced Intellect in ever-flowing channels.”<sup>89</sup> It is likely, therefore, that this God is the One, even though he is described in the oracle as presiding above the aetherial and astral levels (a position equally applicable to the other hypostases) and though one would wish to possess more of Porphyry’s own commentary on the oracle to bolster this conclusion.<sup>90</sup> We should not be surprised by the presence of a Neoplatonic hypostatic schema in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, since a discussion reminiscent of the *On Abstinence*’s attribution of highly-purified forms of “spiritual sacrifice” to the One occurs in other fragments of this work. “For indeed, God inasmuch as he is the Father of all, stands in need of nothing; but it is good for us when we honor him with justice and chastity and the other virtues, making our very lives a prayer to him through imitation and intellectual inquiry (*inquisitio*) about him. Intellectual inquiry, indeed, cleanses,” he says, “and imitation deifies by affecting an inclination towards him.”<sup>91</sup> If indeed we have to do with the One in the earlier fragment from the *Tübingen Theosophy*, then a triad of “rulers” are said to flow about him, “the most regal and sole Sovereign of mortals and Father of blessed immortals.”<sup>92</sup> It is possible that, in material now lost, Porphyry had interpreted the three ranks of “rulers” in the oracle as an “intelligible triad” – after all, their generations arose through the working of the Intellect. If the ineffable Father of this fragment is the One, we are tempted to see this passage (and its larger, now lost, context) as a fitting background to the Damascius discussion. The oracle at least, if not Porphyry’s surviving comments, fails to emphasize a radical ontological break between the Father and lesser divine or angelic beings.

Triadic thinking occurs in various contexts and allows varying levels of specificity. Any attempt to systematize these instances according to later triadic elaborations (as, most notably, Hadot has done, basing himself on the assumption of a clearly articulated Being–Life–Intellect triad in the *Chaldean Oracles*)<sup>93</sup> is misleading and confuses Porphyry’s metaphysical and

<sup>88</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325.24–27 Smith.

<sup>89</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325.4,12 Smith.

<sup>90</sup> We must remain cautious, however, since Porphyry adds a later segment of the long oracle that refers to a single divine being as: “Father and beautiful form of mother/ And soft flower of children, being a form amid forms,/ A soul and spirit, harmony and number” (fr. 325.31–33 Smith); this language would hardly be acceptable of the One. Unfortunately we lack Porphyry’s comments on these latter lines.

<sup>91</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.23–27 Smith.

<sup>92</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325.15–18 Smith.

<sup>93</sup> Hadot 1966; 1968: 1.258–264.

theological thought, in particular by combining discrete acts of theological translation. Porphyry's triadic thought was firmly resonant of Plotinian metaphysics. Further triads were always allowable within or even between any of the basic three hypostases; but these seem to have been suggested in a flexible exploratory manner and not in terms of rigid triadic compartments that were meant to correspond precisely with other triads raised in different contexts.

Having noted briefly these instances of triadic conceptualization in Porphyry, we may now come to the second issue raised by the fragment from Damascius. Even if there is some difficulty in determining precisely what sort of triad Damascius thought Porphyry presented, his complaint is limited to the purported lack of distinctness of the first principle from the lower ontological levels. On the one hand, Porphyry would have agreed with the concern of Damascius to protect the radical transcendence of the first principle.<sup>94</sup> As already noted, Porphyry deemed the One to be "beyond Being" and beyond thought. Damascius, therefore, should have found Porphyry a kindred thinker with respect to the One. As we remarked above, Damascius may have simply had incorrect information about Porphyry (reporting Porphyry's position at second-hand, either based on a doxography or on Iamblichus in particular). After all there is some confusion in Damascius' reports about Porphyry on the issue, since later in the same book he offers the contradictory report that Porphyry and Iamblichus both taught that there was "a single first principle beyond the intelligible triads."<sup>95</sup>

Damascius' earlier report, at least, should not be dismissed too quickly, however; for we possess good evidence that Porphyry simultaneously allowed for a) the assertion of the ineffable transcendence of the first principle, and b) the claim that all things below it stood in relation to it in such a way as to make appropriate the use of relational language. In an important fragment from the fourth book of his *Philosophic History*, Porphyry summarized the Platonic teaching about the first principle. This fragment is of special interest since he explicitly addresses how Plato used language about the divine.

Plato both believed and even said again about one God that no name was appropriate to Him nor could human knowledge comprehend Him, and he denounced

<sup>94</sup> See incert. sed., fr. 426 Smith (= Syrianus, in *Met.* 46.22–25): "Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and all those who spend time on this problem in a more theoretical manner say that the issue is a deep one, how all things are established from One though It has no duality nor hint of plurality in Itself, nor differentiation."

<sup>95</sup> Damascius, *Princ.* I.III, p. 288.12–14 (= Porph. fr. 429 Smith).

the so-called titles of Him [taken] from lesser ones [i.e., gods] as a misuse of language (*katachrēstikōs*).<sup>96</sup> But if it were at all necessary to dare to speak about Him using human language, then the title of “the One” and of “the Good” ought rather to be prescribed for Him. For the first [title] reveals His simplicity and, therefore, his self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*); since He needs nothing, not parts, not substance (*ousia*), not powers, not activities (*energeiai*),<sup>97</sup> but is the source of all of these things. And “the Good” shows that from Him is all that is good, while the others imitate,<sup>98</sup> insofar as is possible, this quality of Him – if we ought to speak like this – and by this are saved.”<sup>99</sup>

Here we have, on the one hand, an expression of the magnitude of the One's transcendence: one can use human language in describing it only if one recognizes at the same time the inadequacy of all language and thought in pointing towards such awesome transcendence. At the same time, however, Porphyry's is not an entirely negative ontology or theology. The first principle's simplicity and self-sufficiency could be indicated by the appellation One, and even more, its relation to lesser ontological levels as a source of goodness was signified by the appellation Good. It was this latter factor that placed the One in relation to others – or rather, it might be more appropriate to say that others were placed in relation to the One.<sup>100</sup>

Not only was its goodness shared; its divinity also extended to the other two hypostases as well. In another fragment of the *Philosophic History*, Porphyry reports Plato's doctrine that: “the highest God was the Good, and after Him also the Demiurge was second, and third was the Soul of the world; for the divinity went forth as far as Soul.”<sup>101</sup> Hence, the three hypostases could be named “three gods,”<sup>102</sup> and were enigmatically alluded to in a Platonic text (summarized by Porphyry thus: “everything is about [*peri*]<sup>103</sup> the king and everything is for His sake, and calling that [One] the source of all, and the second about secondary things, and the third about third things. For since everything exists around these three gods, nevertheless now [they are] firstly around the king of all, secondly around the god

<sup>96</sup> To this point the fragment has been in *oratio obliqua*.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. the anonymous *Comm.Parm.* 13.9–23, about the One's *energeia*, which “uses all things like instruments . . . it has no form, nor name, nor being . . . but is beyond all things and the source of all things.”

<sup>98</sup> Philosophers are elsewhere called to imitate his self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) at *Abst.* 1.54.6.

<sup>99</sup> Porph. *Phil.Hist.* fr. 220 Smith (= fr. 15 Nauck, = Cyril, *c.Julian.* 1 p.31A–B); cf. Zambon 2002: 285–290.

<sup>100</sup> Hadot, 1966, esp. 135, 143, 152.

<sup>101</sup> *Phil.Hist.* 221 Smith (= fr. 16 Nauck, = Cyril, *c.Julian.* 8 p. 271A).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Regr.anim.* fr. 284a Smith.

<sup>103</sup> This might parallel the *amphi se* of *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325.16 Smith, which would provide further (albeit slight) confirmation that the Father of fr. 325 is a reference to the highest hypostasis (see above).

from Him, and thirdly around the one from that one").<sup>104</sup> Thus, Porphyry could speak of the One as *both* transcendentally separated from all else *and* as related through an emanationist activity to all else (even though the attribution of activity to the One was to be discouraged when considering its oneness and simplicity, as "without activity").<sup>105</sup> For Porphyry, the first principle could be considered in simple and stark singularity as One; or it could be considered in terms of other entities participating in and deriving from it as their Source and as the Good (or the King, or Father).<sup>106</sup> Porphyry chose to maintain an economical ("telescoped") ontology limited to the Plotinian triad;<sup>107</sup> he seems to have sought to avoid the proliferation of terms or entities beyond that triad (as Iamblichus would do, according to Damascius, by splitting the One into a monadic transcendental principle and a dyadic relational principle).

This discussion of Porphyry's doctrine of the One has identified the tensions between the radical untranslatability of the One and the simultaneous tendency towards translating the One in theological terms. It was impossible, in the first instance, to speak of the One in any language but the (non-)language of silence. Yet, the impulse to speak of the unspeakable and to name what could not be named (as the Good, or God) lay concealed within the emanationist vision of an utter transcendence spilling over into immanence. It was the singularity of silence that paradoxically was the source for the multiplicity of words – in particular, words about God (theology), which translated the untranslatable.

#### PLURALITY AND DIVINITY

Porphyry evinces varying levels of flexibility in his different accounts of the hypostases, both in ontological and theological terms. So far, his reflections have mostly been well within Platonic and Plotinian discourses about reality and the divine. Consideration of his treatment of the traditional gods

<sup>104</sup> *Phil.Hist.* 222 Smith (= fr. 17 Nauck, = Cyril *c.Julian.* 1 p.32C–D), drawing on the Pseudo-Platonic *Epistle* 2.312e, which was a fecund source for much pagan and Christian triadic/Trinitarian reflection.

<sup>105</sup> Without activity: Porph. *Phil.Hist.* fr. 220 Smith (quoted above; this point seems to contradict the view of the anonymous *Comm.Parm.* 12.25–26, which states that the first principle is "pure act;" likewise, the *Comm.Parm.* 9.1–5 is critical of this notion of a Father who is at once part of the triad and yet transcendent from the triad; for the notion that there is only one first principle of intelligibles, though the first principle is not said to be the Father of the intelligible triad, see *Comm.Tim.* fr. 56 Sodano).

<sup>106</sup> Though I have attempted to avoid drawing on anonymous sources altogether, my conclusions about Porphyry's thinking on the Father of the intelligible triad, as witnessed by Damascius, is quite similar to Dillon 1992; and *idem* 2007b.

<sup>107</sup> I adopt the term "telescoping," though with different nuance, from Lloyd 1970: 288.

of the Greek pantheon will exhibit a similar flexibility in his theological engagement with them. But how flexible could that engagement be before translation failed? Here we turn to the extension of his theological translation project, which confronted the variegated ways of speaking about the divine in poetry and oracles and sought to draw them into his Platonic theology. The gods of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, in particular, pose a substantial problem in this regard. At first glance, they appear substantially contrary to the representation of divinity sketched above. How and where could they possibly fit within the Platonic (or Plotinian) system?<sup>108</sup>

Like his pagan contemporaries, Porphyry accepted a broad range of terminological applicability of the divine epithet in its plural form. However, it is not merely the gods' plurality that poses a problem in our attempt to discern Porphyry's theological framework or his vertical movement of constructing such a theological system. For the sublimity, importance, and even moral goodness of divine beings were deemed indicative of their ranking within a hierarchical schema that seems quite broad. The great diversity in the spheres of their activity, their ontological location, and their moral characterization all complicate our ability to see clearly Porphyry's work of philosophical translation. The fragmentary state of most of the relevant discussions only compounds these difficulties. The following examination seeks to put these fragments together in a progressively more coherent manner while not too readily dismissing tensions perceived between them. Before turning to his portrayal of daemons and their problematic relation to the gods, we shall consider two important elements in Porphyry's representation of the gods: their visibility and their communicative activity. Ultimately, reading these fragments within the context of large and complex processes of philosophical translation will provide the shift in focus critical for appreciating the coherency and resilience of Porphyry's project. Two explicit statements of where the gods fit within a theological hierarchy should be noted before we proceed. They both occur in his *On Abstinence*, in the context of a discussion on the religious appropriateness of animal sacrifice. The first provides the following progression: the God over all, the intelligible gods, the gods "within heaven," and other daemons.<sup>109</sup> The second claims to be a report of the doctrine of "certain Platonists" and is a variation on the same hierarchical order, but with important differences:

<sup>108</sup> As already noted, this problem is precisely what has caused some scholars to see the *Phil.Orac.* as pre-Plotinian; see esp. Wolff 1856: 38; Hadot 1960: 211.

<sup>109</sup> *Abst.* 2.34.1–2.36.6. The fact that he uses the phrase "gods and other daemons" provides a valuable hint of the conclusions we shall draw later in this chapter, namely, that "gods" can be translated as "daemons" in Porphyry's theology.

the First God, the cosmic Soul, other gods (the world and visible gods in the heavens), invisible gods or daemons.<sup>110</sup> This latter category is in need of some clarification, Porphyry avers, and so distinguishes good from bad daemons.<sup>111</sup>

The primary difference between the two versions lies in the substitution of intelligible gods for the cosmic Soul in the second position of the series. Since he explicitly claims to be reporting the view of other Platonists,<sup>112</sup> the omission of intelligible gods from the latter instance need not trouble us. On the other hand, the omission of the Soul from his first hierarchy might be explained by the fact that he considered the Soul to embrace all the theological space below the intelligible gods, both divine and daemonic. His turn to the gods of the heavenly realms would have been considered to be within the hypostatic domain of Soul (though admittedly, he fails to make such a point explicit). This divine hierarchy of ever-increasing multiplicity would thus fit easily within a Platonic framework and even within the Plotinian hypostatic triad of One–Intellect–Soul.

### *Visible gods*

Porphyry's fragments indicate persistent systematizing moves to organize the scattered incoherent formulations about the gods expressed in poetry, oracles, or even public ritual. The traditional gods of the Greeks were all conceptually transferred to and circumscribed within the lowest hypostatic category. In particular, the Olympian gods (or at least, gods who bore the names of the Olympians) were mostly constitutive of a single class of gods, namely that of the visible or "heavenly gods."<sup>113</sup> The Olympians were the stars and planets;<sup>114</sup> or, in the fragments of the *On Images*, the Olympians were the divine powers that controlled the different features of the physical world, from sowing and birth to the element of air, rocky or arable soil, the revolution of the vault of heaven, or the signs of the zodiac.<sup>115</sup>

The *On Images* certainly allowed for the visual representation of these gods, who were variously accorded images differing in age, sex, posture,

<sup>110</sup> *Abst.* 2.37.1–5; cf. Finamore 2006: esp. 40–42 (for discussion of Apuleius' identification of the invisible gods as "super-celestial," and hence above the realm of daemons).

<sup>111</sup> *Abst.* 2.38.1–2.42.3. <sup>112</sup> Clark 2000b: 154 n.299.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. *Phil.Orac.* frs. 314–315, 346–347, 349 Smith; *Abst.* 2.5.2; 2.37.3. For Indo-European etymological background, see Chantraine 1954: 55. As noted above, the One was given the Homeric epithet of "great Zeus," *Abst.* 2.52.4.

<sup>114</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 79 (discussed above); *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.*, *passim*.

<sup>115</sup> The fact that nearly all the fragments derive from a section of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* in which he was targeting the so-called "physical theology" (i.e., that the gods were to be identified with various elements of the physical world) leads one to believe that we may have a very partial picture of the scope and aims of the original work. For discussion, see Krulak 2011.

clothing, and so on.<sup>116</sup> The philosopher would, of course, reject the notion of the gods' possession of actual physical characteristics or body parts; but they were, to his mind, capable of visually signifying their various divine powers. His exegesis of visual images of these Olympian gods is consistent and careful in identifying them as powers and "symbols" of powers of the physical cosmos. Whereas the *Commentary on the Timaeus* and the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* simply identified the gods with the planetary and astral bodies, the *On Images* provides a nuanced picture in which they are not directly identical with any physical element of the cosmos as such (in spite of the criticisms leveled by Eusebius).<sup>117</sup> His was not the simple physical *allegoresis* attributed to Chaeremon and other Stoics;<sup>118</sup> rather, his interpretation of religious imagery found the gods in the *forces* at work in the material world (not the physical elements themselves). They remained, however, bound to the physical elements or cosmic processes as their special sphere of activity.

In this way, the Olympian gods were firmly ensconced in the material world with its incessant flow of generation and decay, even if not baldly equated with the material of that flow. Their role in divine-human communication would further mark this embeddedness in the confusion and obscurity of the physical. A strikingly similar representation of the link between the material world and divine oracles, and hence the problematic status of the latter, recurs in three important works: *Philosophy from Oracles*, *On Abstinence*, and *Letter to Anebo*. Not only will the ontological status of oracles in these treatises pose problems: the theological status of oracles will also raise serious issues that force a reevaluation of the nature of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, in particular, and Porphyry's aims as a commentator on oracles. We shall find in these discussions of oracles a persistent lack of clarity in the boundary between gods and daemons, which may result from a broader flexibility in the use of *theoi* and a willingness on the part of Porphyry to accommodate his language – though not his fundamental philosophical seriousness or theological position – to his sources.

### *Gods and oracles*

For centuries before Porphyry composed his treatise on the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the gods had been the givers of oracles, which despite complaints

<sup>116</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 352 Smith; *Phil.Orac.* fr. 321 Smith.

<sup>117</sup> Johnson 2006a: 86–87.

<sup>118</sup> Plutarch, *de Isid.* 377b–e; Hardie 1992: 4743–4787.

of decline by some and criticisms of their reliability by others<sup>119</sup> were persistently uttering divine directives to their human questioners in a great variety of media across the Mediterranean world.<sup>120</sup> The two most frequent types of oracle that found a place within Porphyry's treatise were oracles of Apollo (originally delivered at Didyma, certainly, while some may have been delivered at the two other major Apollo sites of Claros and Delphi),<sup>121</sup> and oracles of Hecate and Sarapis (apparently conjured at "freelance divination" sessions).<sup>122</sup> We are fortunate in our present inquiry to possess material treating of the nature and extent of divine causation in mantic revelations, both in the quoted oracles themselves and in Porphyry's comments on those oracles.

Gods who are named as the source of oracles in Porphyry's collection include the Apollo at Branchidae (= Didyma) and possibly the Apollo at Delphi,<sup>123</sup> Pan,<sup>124</sup> Hermes,<sup>125</sup> Asclepius,<sup>126</sup> Sarapis,<sup>127</sup> and Hecate;<sup>128</sup> but oracles are said generally to be the province of "the children of Kronos and Rhea," (namely, Olympians).<sup>129</sup> Penetrating the soft body of a human recipient, one oracle in Porphyry's collection declares, the divine power inwardly filled the person with "holy air," before "spouting back up again in blasts through the stomach;<sup>130</sup> it gave birth to a dear voice from a mortal flute."<sup>131</sup> The philosopher explains: "Nothing could be clearer nor more divine (*theikōtera*)<sup>132</sup> and more natural than this. For the thing descending is a wind and an emanation from the heavenly power entering into a body serving as an instrument with a soul, and using the soul [as] a base it gives forth a voice through the mouth like an instrument."<sup>133</sup> Porphyry and his oracle tap into a traditional understanding of the source behind mantic

<sup>119</sup> Plut. *Defect.Or.* 413F–414C, 418D; *Pyth.Or.* 396D, 407A–C; Oenomaus of Gadara (ap. Eus. *PE* 5.19–36); Geffcken 1978: 25–34; Levin 1989: 1599–1649.

<sup>120</sup> Busine 2005; Iles Johnston and Struck 2005; Mastandrea 1979: 159–192; Johnson 2009: 103–104. For daemons, not gods, as the source of oracles, see Plut. *Defect.Orac.* 417a.

<sup>121</sup> Busine 2005: 253–254. <sup>122</sup> Athanassiadi 1993: 115–130.

<sup>123</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 307, 322, 324 Smith; fr. 338 may be from Delphi (see Busine 2005: 253–254).

<sup>124</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 318, 320 Smith. <sup>125</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 313 Smith.

<sup>126</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 312 Smith. <sup>127</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 306, 318 Smith.

<sup>128</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 308, 342 Smith. <sup>129</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 337 Smith.

<sup>130</sup> For discussion of this phenomenon, see Wolff 1856: 47–48; one wonders if John Chrysostom (*Hom. Corinth.* 29.1) derives his account of inspiration by Apollo from this passage of Porphyry.

<sup>131</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 349.2–9 Smith.

<sup>132</sup> The occurrence of this word is striking; the *theik-* adjective occurs exclusively in Christian authors (before Porphyry almost entirely limited to Clement of Alexandria and Origen), and the comparative form is extremely rare (occurring only here and once in Gregory of Nyssa). Importantly, the adjective occurs with relative frequency in Eusebius' theological writings; see Klostermann 1906: 232, ad loc.

<sup>133</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 349.11–15 Smith; cf. Plut. *Defect.Orac.* 414c.



power. The divine bursts into the physical, rending any barrier that might be thought to separate gods and humans.

Any impulse to see such a divinatory encounter as a violent and forceful seizure of a human victim by a capricious god (as other ancient depictions had portrayed the oracular encounter)<sup>134</sup> is quickly defused, however, in light of a group of oracles on the binding of the gods. For while the human recipient lies prostrate on the ground, mute under the force of the divine flow of words, it is the god who was the reluctant victim, snatched from a blessed state by overpowering oaths capable of binding the gods. The humans forced an utterance from the subject deity. Porphyry strings together a series of lines from various Hecate oracles (all in dactylic hexameter) for a clear and repetitive proof of the compulsion of gods in these oracular affairs:

And again:

I came, hearing your all-wise prayer,

Which the nature of mortals discovered with hints from the gods.

And even more clearly:

Why, tell me, did you, ever seeking me here from hallowed aether,

Call upon me, the goddess Hecate, with god-binding compulsions?<sup>135</sup>

And next:

Dragging some by unspeakable spells (*inyges*)<sup>136</sup> from the aether

Easily, though unwillingly, they are led to noble earth;

[Dragging] others in the middle who tread on the mid-most blasts

Far from divine fire, just as you make dreams that are full of prophecy

Enter (*eiskrineis*) mortals, doing outrages to daemons.

And again:

But the heavenly gods, hanging from above,

Are carried, hastened by the swift whirlwinds;<sup>137</sup>

Bending lightly by god-binding compulsions

Hurrying on to Deo's earth, they rush,

Interpreters of what will be for mortals.

And again another one spoke under compulsion:

Invoke me though I am unwilling, since you have bound me by necessity.<sup>138</sup>

In contrast to the traditional depiction of the Pythian god's forceful domination of the lithe and trembling body of a woman in a scenario resembling divine rape,<sup>139</sup> Porphyry's oracles mark a reversal of the

<sup>134</sup> Lucan, *Bellum civ.* 5.120–223.

<sup>135</sup> These verses occur also at fr. 342 Smith.

<sup>136</sup> On *inyges*, see Iles Johnston 1990: 90–110; Lewy 1956: 132–137; Majercik 1989: 9–10.

<sup>137</sup> Lit.: Harpies. <sup>138</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 347 Smith.

<sup>139</sup> Strabo, *Geogr.* 9.3.5; Vergil, *Aen.* 6.77–82; Lucan, *Bellum civ.* 5.166–167 (though equally violent is the human treatment of the Pythia at 5.123–127, 145); John Chrys. *Hom. Corinth.* 29.1.

relations of divine–human power. The light aetherial breath of the god has been harnessed within a prophetic prison from which it seeks release.<sup>140</sup>

Porphyry elicits further limitations of the gods in the oracular proceedings. Their own knowledge of the future is often dependent on their reading of the stars, “so that they are excellent Magi and excellent astrologers.”<sup>141</sup> However, even they might misinterpret the movements of the stars or lack the ability to gain a sure knowledge of the future from the obscure astral significations.<sup>142</sup> The human desire for a prophetic revelation, however, forces down the divine hesitancy and compels the gods to speak falsely in their utterances. The fault does not lie with the gods, but with the humans: “[The gods] do not willingly add the falsehood; often, at any rate, they foretell that they are about to lie; but [the consulters] remain and out of ignorance force them to speak.”<sup>143</sup> These are weak, if well-meaning, gods indeed.

What is striking about the picture of the gods painted in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, fragmentary though it is, is its general resonance with what many have deemed to be a work with a rather different vision of the gods and their relations with humans.<sup>144</sup> The *Letter to Anebo*, which survives primarily in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica* and Iamblichus’ *On the Mysteries*, is a difficult text to assess securely with regard to tone, let alone content, since what remains of it consists largely of a series of questions.<sup>145</sup> While these questions might be taken as innocent queries motivated only by a desire to learn from the answers of the letter’s recipient,<sup>146</sup> there remains sufficient reason to doubt that they are entirely friendly, his opening remarks notwithstanding.<sup>147</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, the *Letter* possessed a polemical edge and seems to have arisen from a perceived dissonance between the Egyptians’ manner of speaking and acting with respect to the gods and what Porphyry deemed to be a proper philosophical conceptual grid.<sup>148</sup> Even with the interpretive limitations placed upon us, the fragments of the *Letter to Anebo* exhibit affinities with the picture of the gods offered in the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, it will be argued here (and in the next two chapters), that the questions of the *Letter* are calling

<sup>140</sup> On pleas for release made by the god, see *Phil. Orac.* 350 Smith.

<sup>141</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 330 Smith; see also frs. 331–338, 341 Smith.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. *Phil. Orac.* frs. 340–341 Smith.

<sup>143</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 341 Smith.

<sup>144</sup> Romano 1979: 160–161.

<sup>145</sup> See discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>146</sup> See Bidez 1913: 81; Busine forthcoming.

<sup>147</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 1, p. 2.11 Sodano.

<sup>148</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 129–139.

<sup>149</sup> Pace Sodano 1958: xvi–xvii; Hadot 1960.

for acts of theological translation, which Porphyry himself would fulfill in the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>150</sup>

As in the oracles, Porphyry's letter raises the issue of the binding of the gods, since it is they who provide divinatory proclamations. It is wrong, Porphyry avers, for those who are inferior in power to command those who are superior, and likewise for the humans to be pure in order to obtain impure ends, to abstain from sex in order to obtain sexual gratification, or to abstain from eating meat while offering to beings who were "themselves especially ensnared by the vapors coming from the sacrifices."<sup>151</sup> Porphyry was "greatly troubled" at all of this.<sup>152</sup> His tone becomes openly hostile:

It is much more irrational for a human, who is subject to someone else by chance, to try to frighten and apply threats, not to a daemon or the soul of a dead person, but to Helios the king himself or the Moon or one of those in heaven, lying in order to get them to tell the truth . . . What is this but the height of stupidity for one who threatens things he neither knows nor of which he has control?<sup>153</sup>

We find here, then, an element that had been unclear in the fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles* regarding the binding of the gods, namely, Porphyry's own evaluation of such practices. Too often modern readers of the latter work have supposed that the collector and commentator on oracles agreed with the content of those oracles.<sup>154</sup> Yet, when we are fortunate enough to have his comments on the oracles, they rarely concentrate on the obvious concerns of the oracular pronouncement itself.<sup>155</sup> An oracle dominated by proper sacrificial procedure becomes a source for Porphyry in determining the contours of a theological hierarchy.<sup>156</sup> It may very well be that similar interpretive moves were made by Porphyry in his now lost comments on the binding of the gods. The fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles* need not be taken as contradicting the *Letter to Anebo*: there is no good reason to suppose that a shift in Porphyry's thinking on such matters has occurred. We shall return to this point shortly, but first we should consider other areas of resonance between the two works.

As in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the dependence of the oracles on astrology for their knowledge of the future is noticed in the *Letter to Anebo*,

<sup>150</sup> Bidez 1913: 87 (followed by Romano 1979: 162), for the claim that the *Regr.anim.* sought to answer the questions of the *Ep.Aneb.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 19.6–20.1 Sodano. <sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* 2, p. 18.1 Sodano.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* 2, p. 20.3–10 Sodano. Later, Porphyry seems to have given Iamblichus the impression of a more apathetic tone: "It is not a concern to you and you yield as much when you say that no god or daemon is drawn down by them [images]," *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 16.5–6 Sodano.

<sup>154</sup> As e.g., Hadot 1960: 235–236. <sup>155</sup> Johnson 2009: 103–115; Busine 2005: 259–261.

<sup>156</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 314–315 Smith.

as well as the potential for the oracles to be false. “For they observe the course of the heavenly bodies and, from one of those in heaven revolving with one or another, they say that the divinations will be false or true, and that the things done will be undone, or be indicative, or be effective.”<sup>157</sup> It is difficult to determine the bearing that such a statement has upon the harmony or divergence of this letter from the *Philosophy from Oracles*, since the subject of the sentence seems to be the makers of religious images rather than the gods represented by those images. Furthermore, astrology seems here only to allow one to determine the truth or falsity of an oracle after it has been given, and not, as in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, as an element in the composition and delivery of the oracle itself. The two works do, however, share the assumption that not all oracles are true or effective.

Elsewhere in the *Letter to Anebo*, the claim is starkly made that the gods cannot always be separated from falsehood. In reference to manifestations of gods, angels, daemons, or souls, Porphyry concludes: “Boastfulness and inventing this sort of imaginary illusion are common to gods, daemons, and all the greater races of beings.”<sup>158</sup> Again, therefore, as we saw in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, gods may be responsible for misleading their consultants and delivering falsehoods instead of truth.<sup>159</sup> In both works, we fail to find a positive assessment of the gods or any overt defense of the less admirable characteristics of their oracular activity.

This brief collation of fragments treating the less admirable qualities of the gods (their role in divination, their susceptibility to being bound by humans, their potential for mendacity, and their dependence on astrology) in both the *Letter to Anebo* and *Philosophy from Oracles* reflects a critical attitude on the part of the philosopher to the character and role played by the gods in human affairs. Yet the gods are not consistently portrayed as deceptive, weak, or abettors in immorality; in other works they are noted as providing benefits for humans seeking salvation.<sup>160</sup> But according to the picture of these two otherwise different works, the gods possess the clear potential for ignoble activity. Their character and nature as gods does not exclude the possibility for this sort of philosophically inappropriate behavior.

<sup>157</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 16.1–4 Sodano.

<sup>158</sup> *Ep. Aneb.*, 1, p. 7.12–13 Sodano; cf. *Abst.* 2.42.1–2: bad daemons “abound in impressions of all kinds, and can deceive by wonder-working. Unfortunate people, with their help prepare philters and love-charms. For, all self-indulgence and hope of riches and fame comes from them, and especially deceit, for lies are appropriate to them. They want to be gods, and the power that rules them wants to be thought the greatest god” (trans. Clark).

<sup>159</sup> *Pace* Hadot 1960: 229.

<sup>160</sup> *Abst.* 2.34.5 (though explicitly the “intellectual gods”); *Ep. Marc.* 5.76–77.

As we shall see in the next chapter, further areas of thematic convergence remain between the two works with respect to human religious activity. If the nature of the gods is such as we have found here, the rituals they desire will reflect their faulty character. Again, contrary to the dominant ways of reading these works (or, at least the *Philosophy from Oracles*), we shall discover a fundamental similarity of tone and attitude to the cult of the gods.<sup>161</sup> At this point, we must emphasize the limits of the fragments (again, especially those of the *Philosophy from Oracles*) and maintain due caution by preserving a distinction between the views expressed in an oracle and those of its collector. Especially in the wake of so many scholarly flights of fancy, we must carefully attend to what Porphyry does and does not say in the very sparse remains of his own commentary on the oracles. Though we lack the sort of explicitly critical exclamations that are found in the *Letter to Anebo*, the *Philosophy from Oracles* identifies the same problematic areas as the *Letter* had. If the *Philosophy from Oracles* was intended as a defense of traditional religion and its gods (as so frequently assumed), it is doubtful that Porphyry would have so openly identified these areas.

If we cannot discover any sort of fundamental differences between the two works in Porphyry's description of oracular activity we may remain puzzled as to the precise translational work being performed in them. In spite of the different spheres of translation – Egyptian theological formulations in the *Letter to Anebo* and oracular poetry in the *Philosophy from Oracles* – the verticalizing project seems to be the same. In both works, Porphyry translates “local” theological expressions into a philosophical, hierarchized frame of reference. It is difficult to determine where Porphyry would have placed the bound gods of either of these works within the schema of his *On Abstinence* (noted earlier). One may be reticent at this point to posit an identification of these gods with the last divine category mentioned in the hierarchy of the *On Abstinence* – the invisible gods or daemons – since Porphyry does not use the label “daemons” for the bound gods. Yet they cannot be aligned with any higher divine level enumerated in that treatise, and as consideration of further material from Porphyry's corpus in the remainder of this chapter will show, identifying the bound gods with the category of “invisible gods or daemons” resonates strongly with what we know of the continuous movement of his translation project.

Again, his work as a philosophical translator cannot be construed simplistically as that of an apologist for traditional religion. Porphyry was not merely attempting to dress popular religion in philosophical garb. Indeed,

<sup>161</sup> Pace the careful reading of Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 121–139.

it was precisely as a proponent of a Platonic–Plotinian theological sensibility that Porphyry translated the gods of myths, oracles, and popular religion into a fixed space within his ontological system. The plurality of gods, combined with the fractured nature of the truth they represented, was necessitated by their lower placement on the spectrum of theological and ontological emanation. They resided at a great distance from the One, who was their source at many removes.

Once we examine the role of daemons in Porphyry's theology we shall find substantial commonality between the base and ignorant gods described above and the daemons. Such similarity calls for a resolution in terms of Porphyry's willingness to accommodate his language to popular usage while maintaining a Platonic philosophical vision. In fact, it seems likely that he continued to adopt popular usage, even while calling for translation into a (for the philosopher) more adequate idiom. We shall find strong evidence that this is the case after our examination of Porphyry's daemonology. Here, we should highlight succinctly the key points raised above:

1. As noted in an earlier section of this chapter, there is good evidence that a portion of the *Philosophy from Oracles* dealt with the higher hypostatic levels of divinity, probably even the One.
2. In the *Letter to Anebo* his polemical tone is frequent enough to prohibit seeing Porphyry as defending the base activities of the gods in that work, especially in their communicative role with humans.
3. In the *Philosophy from Oracles*, it is doubtful from Porphyry's comments that he would have engaged in defending the base activities of the gods in that work as well. Because of his more critical view elsewhere of such behavior (whether it is ascribed to the gods or more frequently to daemons, as we shall see), it seems rather unsafe to trust the Christian apologists who accused Porphyry of advocating the philosophically deficient behavior of the gods in his treatise on oracles.
4. It is doubtful that those gods who exhibit the flawed character described in the two works discussed here were to be translated to the category of the "intelligible gods" or "visible gods" of the hierarchical schema laid out in the *On Abstinence*. These latter gods were located at a higher level in his theological system. Rather, the gods of these treatises appear to display the character we might expect from daemons located in the lowest, most materially entangled, levels of the theological hierarchy.

Even if we reject Porphyry's reputation as a defender of the seedy underside of the divine world, we nonetheless may well wonder what it was that separated gods who exhibit such faults and limitations from the class of daemons. Indeed, the question of defining gods and daemons as distinct

races of divine beings had been raised in the *Letter to Anebo*. Fortunately, we have an abundance of material in his other works as to how he might construct a definitional boundary between gods and daemons, as well as what sort of evaluation he formed of the latter. We shall find the boundary more permeable than previously acknowledged, and hence, it will be suggested, we see the translator at work in a transference of divine categories.

### *Philosophy and daemonology*

As early as Hesiod, the Greeks had explored the possibility of divine beings who existed alongside of, or rather just below, the gods.<sup>162</sup> In contrast to Homer's near equivocation of gods and daemons,<sup>163</sup> his contemporary Hesiod had distinguished the two and placed them within a typological framework.<sup>164</sup> The gulf between gods and humans was filled with daemons and heroes. It would remain for Plato to make explicit the role of daemons as intermediaries between the transcendence of the divine world and the murkiness of the physical world that humans inhabited. Daemons were "interpreters and transmitters" in the theological space between immortals and mortals.<sup>165</sup> As such, they were at work in divination and the establishment of sacrifices, sorcery and initiations.<sup>166</sup> A more elaborate development of a theological and ontological space for daemons would occur in the Pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*.<sup>167</sup> Between God (the Demiurge) and humans were the visible gods of fire (the stars);<sup>168</sup> then daemons made of ether and air, who were invisible but not impassible and served as intermediaries between the higher gods and humans;<sup>169</sup> and finally, daemons of water, who were sometimes seen (though unclearly), but other times were invisible.<sup>170</sup> Their interaction with humans in dreams or oracles had provided the ritual basis of ancestral customs.<sup>171</sup>

Each of the features of this Platonic daemonology would appear in later philosophical reflection of the imperial era.<sup>172</sup> The logic of Plato's

<sup>162</sup> Kidd 1995: 217–224.

<sup>163</sup> For a nuanced account, see Chantraine 1954: 51–54; Bassett 1919: 134–136.

<sup>164</sup> Hes. *Erga* 110–201 (with discussion below); also, Plut. *Defect.orac.* 415ab; Max. Tyr. *Or.* 8.6 Trapp; Brenk 1998: 170–181.

<sup>165</sup> Pl. *Symp.* 202d11–203a4. <sup>166</sup> Pl. *Symp.* 202e7–9.

<sup>167</sup> The dialogue may have been composed by Philip of Opus; see Tárán 1975.

<sup>168</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 981d5–982a3.

<sup>169</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 984b6–985b4. This element would become more explicit in the transition from the Early Academy to Middle Platonism; see Schibli 1993: 147–149.

<sup>170</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 985b4–c1. <sup>171</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 95c1–d4.

<sup>172</sup> Kidd 1995: 222; for general discussion, see Brenk 1986: 2068–2145; Martin 2004; Marx-Wolf 2009: 87–138.

metaphysical system required a descending scale of Being emanating from the First God. As we have already seen, one could not posit the radically divine and the imminently human without a bridge of Being linking the two and filling up the ontological space.<sup>173</sup> If gods were immortal and impassible while humans were mortal and passible (or passionate) then daemons were immortal and passible, sharing in both divine and human attributes.<sup>174</sup> Imperial Platonism also continued to see oracles and religious ritual as the special province of daemons.<sup>175</sup> An important bifurcation in daemonology not found in Plato occurred during this period, namely the division of good and bad daemons depending on their benefit or harm to humans. Good daemons were those who maintained their role as intermediaries between gods and humans; bad daemons centered their activities more towards the pursuit of their own passions, rather than the fulfilling of divine directive or conveyance of human prayer.<sup>176</sup>

### *Porphyry's daemons*

The surviving corpus of Porphyry's religious writings stood squarely within this Platonizing discourse on gradations of divinity and the conceptualization of the daemonic, and sought more closely to map out the terrain inhabited by the daemons. His discussion in *On Abstinence* is the more well-known of his formulations on daemonic doctrine; yet, as we shall see, a number of other works contribute to the overall picture of this divine race within his theological system. In these, we may gain a sense of the ways in which Porphyry contributed to the ancient discourses on the daemonic by providing the most extensive account of the materiality of daemons to his date and thus severely limiting their moral status and importance for the philosopher.

When Porphyry had delineated the theological hierarchy propounded by "certain Platonists" (that is, the second version of the hierarchy mentioned in the *On Abstinence*, as discussed above), he had produced a sketch of divine multiplicity in which a realm of the invisible gods, "which Plato named daemons without distinction," lay below the visible heavenly gods.<sup>177</sup> Some

<sup>173</sup> Esp. Max. Tyr. *Or.* 8.8 Trapp.

<sup>174</sup> Plutarch, *Defect.orac.* 416c; Max. Tyr. *Or.* 9.1–5 Trapp; see Schibli 1993: 147–149.

<sup>175</sup> Plut. *Defect.orac.* 417a, 418d, 421b–e, 431b.

<sup>176</sup> Philo, *Gig.* 16; Plut. *Defect.orac.* 416c–418c; *de Isid.* 360e–361c; *de E apud Delph.*, 394a; Max. Tyr. *Or.* 9 Trapp; Apul. *de Genio Socr.* 153; Tatian *Or.* 12.3–4; Origen, *Ex. mart.* 45; *c.Cels.* 7.35; 8.30; for discussion (primarily of Christian sources), see Smith 2008: 479–512.

<sup>177</sup> *Abst.* 2.37.4; with reference to Plato, *Tim.* 40d (as Clark notes, ad loc., the daemons of the *Tim.* included the traditional Greek gods: Okeanos, Kronos, Zeus, et al.; see *Tim.* 40e–41a). This is



of the daemonic beings had been given names and were well-known among humans, while others were left unnamed and were relatively inconspicuous, receiving worship from only a few. With these it was the ongoing task of humans to maintain good relations through proper cult and to placate them when angered. Porphyry had registered, however, a certain degree of unhappiness with the vague way in which daemons were popularly understood as sometimes good but other times bad.<sup>178</sup> To prevent confusion, the Platonists had provided further knowledge on daemons: since daemons were in reality souls that had descended from the World-Soul, currently inhabiting the sub-lunar regions and resting upon their pneumatic soul-vehicles (*ochēmata*),<sup>179</sup> they could be categorized as either good or bad depending on their relationship with those soul-vehicles. Some maintained their pneumatic soul-vehicle in a rational way, but others lost control over their soul-vehicles and were driven impulsively by them into intense anger or insatiable appetites.<sup>180</sup> “Their character is wholly violent and deceptive and lacking the supervision of the greater divine power, so they usually make sudden intense onslaughts, like ambushes, sometimes trying to remain hidden and sometimes using force.”<sup>181</sup> It is only to these lowest and most immoral ranks of daemons that bloody sacrifices were reserved.<sup>182</sup>

A central element of the deceptive activity of these wicked daemons was the perpetration of evils around the earth (plague, earthquakes, and so on) followed by the consequent blaming of these evils on the gods, even on the highest God.<sup>183</sup> The wicked daemons went further and sought the honors allotted to the gods for themselves, “slipping on (as it were) the masks<sup>184</sup> of the other gods, they profit from our lack of sense, winning over the masses because they inflame people’s appetites with lust and longing for wealth and power and pleasure.”<sup>185</sup> The good daemons, on the other hand, were

rather different, it should be noted, than Apuleius’ conception of invisible gods as supra-cosmic gods (i.e., above the visible heavenly gods, but below the Demiurge); see Finamore 2006: 40–42.

<sup>178</sup> *Abst.* 2.37.5.

<sup>179</sup> Clark 2000b: 155 n. 306; also, *Comm. Tim.* fr. 80 Sodano. Though most scholars look to the *Timaeus* (cf. *Tim.* 41e), the doctrine of soul-vehicles may more fully derive from Ps.-Pl. *Epinomis* 986b4–5 (though with reference to the visible gods). For general treatment, see Verbeke 1945: 366–368; Dodds 1963: 313–321; Finamore 1985: 11–32; Schibli 1993: 163–164.

<sup>180</sup> Verbeke 1945: 366–368. <sup>181</sup> *Abst.* 2.39.3 (trans. Clark).

<sup>182</sup> *Abst.* 2.58.2, good daemons are pleased with offerings from “our own” (vegetarian) diet; but see, 2.36.5, where animal sacrifice is allowed for daemons, good or bad.

<sup>183</sup> *Abst.* 2.40.1,4.

<sup>184</sup> A similar metaphor from drama, which is applied to daemons, occurs at Tatian *Or.* 16.1 (the daemons use “diverse and deceptive *dramatourgiai*”).

<sup>185</sup> *Abst.* 2.40.3 (trans. Clark).

those mentioned by Plato in the *Symposium* as messengers between gods and humans and so were benefactors to humanity.<sup>186</sup>

The portrait of daemons painted by Porphyry in *On Abstinence* is thoroughly consistent with the daemonologies of earlier Middle Platonist thinkers like Plutarch, though the sacrificial implications were obviously more pronounced in the later philosopher, thus fulfilling a central role within his overall defense of abstinence from meat. Two classes of daemons, beneficent and maleficent, inhabited the theological and metaphysical space between the divine and human. While the good daemons fostered balance and reason with respect to the material world, always directing human souls beyond the material to the divine, the bad daemons had thrown themselves with reckless abandon into all things physical, especially the bubbling fat and savory smoke of roasting meat. Though the analysis of the *On Abstinence* remains the most detailed treatment of the daemonic in his extant writings, fragments from his other writings provide a glimpse at what was clearly a much broader and original translation of daemons into a philosophical system.

An elaborate taxonomy of the daemonic was suggested to the philosopher when he confronted the passage in Plato's *Timaeus* where Solon recounted the similar social structures reportedly shared by the primitive Athenians and contemporary Egyptians (*Tim.* 24a).<sup>187</sup> Not only could the respective historical records of the Egyptians be invoked to show that daemons measured time by millennia (and indeed, seemed to possess nine lives of a thousand years each),<sup>188</sup> but the very social classes of the Egyptians signified classes of daemonic beings. Here we see clearly allegory as philosophical translation. The "race of priests" in the *Timaeus* signified archangels who were turned towards the gods and whose messengers they were; the "soldiers" represented daemons descending into bodies; the "herdsmen" represented those who were assigned over flocks of living things ("whom they say were souls bereft of a human mind and having a disposition like the animals; since there was also a certain protector of the human flock, and certain individual [daemons] overseeing nations, cities or each person"); the "hunters" in turn were those daemons who hunt for souls and lock them in bodies, like Artemis and her pack of hunting daemons; while "farmers" were those daemons who watched over fruit.<sup>189</sup> This fascinating fragment closes with a sweeping reference to those daemonic ranks below

<sup>186</sup> *Abst.* 2.38.3; with reference to Plato, *Symp.* 202e.

<sup>187</sup> Vasunia 2001: 216–247; Johnson, 2012.

<sup>188</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 15 Sodano; for nine lives (applied at least to those souls that are descending), see *Comm. Tim.* fr. 16 Sodano.

<sup>189</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano.

the race of priests as “this whole society (*politeuma*) of daemons below the moon, having been distributed into many [classes].”<sup>190</sup>

Many features of this fragment are noteworthy. First, Porphyry allows for the presence of angels at the peak of this daemoniac hierarchy. In a manner anticipating Iamblichus, Porphyry filled the margin between gods and daemons with what otherwise might strike one as a distinctively Jewish or Christian element.<sup>191</sup> And indeed, it might ultimately derive from the Jewish Scriptures, especially as we also see in this passage the notion that some daemons were given responsibility over nations – a notion that reminds one of the “angels of nations” conception in Jewish and Christian thought.<sup>192</sup> Yet those entrusted with the supervision of nations here are daemons, rather than angels; and, in any case, the mediating priestly role of angels in this fragment is already rooted in the *Symposium*'s and the *Epinomis*' description of the mediating role of daemons. Their role as “interpreters and transmitters” between gods and humans involved, according to *On Abstinence*, their active role in “reporting” (*diangellontas*) the messages of the one group to the other.<sup>193</sup> The angels of *Commentary on the Timaeus* do, however, seem to be a subset of daemons, rather than merely a synonym for the entire spectrum of daemoniac beings. This is confirmed by a fragment from *On the Return of the Soul*, where “he distinguishes angels from daemons, stating that the places of daemons are aerial, of angels are aetherial or empyreal.”<sup>194</sup> Such a claim seems to exhibit an attempt in that treatise to make a firmer distinction between daemons and angels than in the *Timaeus* commentary. Both agree, in any case, that angels preside over a higher cosmic location than the remaining daemoniac classes.

These passages recall the remarkable fragment of the *Philosophy from Oracles* (already mentioned above). After quoting an oracle evocative of an Orphic hymn,<sup>195</sup> whose lines called upon the highest God who created everything through a “well-balanced Mind” and below whom were three levels of “rulers” (*anaktēs*), Porphyry comments: “This oracle shows that there are three orders (*taxeis*) of angels: those ever present with God, those separate from him and sent for the purpose of bearing messages (*angelias*)

<sup>190</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 17, p. 11.13–14 Sodano.

<sup>191</sup> Hadot 1968: 1.394; Iamb. *Myst.* 2.3, pp. 70.6–74.8; 2.6, p. 82.2–7 Parthey; Sallustius, *de Diis*, 13, p. 26.7–9 Nock (with note in critical apparatus). For pagan angels, see Sokolowski 1960: 225–229; Sheppard 1980/81: 77–101; for later antiquity, see Muhlberger forthcoming.

<sup>192</sup> Deuteronomy 32:8; Origen, *C. Cels.* 1.24; 3.35; 5.26–32, 46 7.68, 70. On the notion of angels of nations, see Cumont 1915: 159–182; Danielou 1951: 132–137; Peterson 1955; Johnson 2006a: 166–168.

<sup>193</sup> *Abst.* 2.38.3. <sup>194</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 293 Smith.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. the Orphic hymn quoted at *Simulac.*, fr. 354, Smith (= *Orph.* fr. 168 Kern).

or doing acts of service, and those ever bearing his throne.”<sup>196</sup> The oracle’s declaration that one of the ranks of rulers was given the task of “pervading each thing” while another “daily leads you, praising you with songs,” seems to have been sufficient in Porphyry’s mind to connect them with angelic messengers.

Because we do not possess sufficient context for this fragment, it remains unclear what purposes Porphyry was ultimately intending. If, however, we read it in conjunction with his allegorical interpretation of the *Timaeus* passage, we discover an increasingly elaborate hierarchy being constructed in what otherwise might have seemed a rather undefined or chaotic sublunary space between gods and humans.<sup>197</sup> The archangels of the *Commentary on the Timaeus* could be triply subdivided in accordance with the three angelic orders of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, thus growing to match more fully the four daemonic rankings (of soldiers, herdsmen, hunters, and farmers). Even the rank of herdsmen daemons had, of course, been triply subdivided to embrace the protectors of nations, of cities, and of individuals. While it may lack discretion to yoke together the fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Commentary on the Timaeus*,<sup>198</sup> we are nonetheless faced with a hierarchizing impulse that is readily noticed in other fragments. Throughout, the task of philosophical translation was exhibited through a patient concern to match the particular entities under consideration with their proper place in the theological system.

The adoption of civic constitutional language for the ranks of daemons in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* fragment also deserves weight. Porphyry had there named his classificatory ranking a “*politeuma* of daemons below the moon.” The daemonically charged location below the moon is a commonplace in the literature preceding and including Porphyry’s writings;<sup>199</sup> the term *politeuma*, or “civic arrangement” in this context is more interesting. The term draws a parallel between human societal organization and the structured collective life of daemons. The term also highlights further Porphyry’s hierarchizing impulse: as Egyptian society (according to the *Timaeus*) was configured upon the strict delimitation of roles in which a member of one class (*genos*) did not encroach upon the responsibilities of the other classes, so daemons were distributed into many distinct classes.

<sup>196</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 325 Smith; Buresch 1973: 89 n. 2, denies that these lines could be Porphyry’s, not taking account of the other Porphyrian texts treating angels.

<sup>197</sup> Romano 1979: 159.

<sup>198</sup> It should be noted, e.g., that the archangels of the *Comm.Tim.* stand in relation to *gods* while those of the *Phil.Orac.* stand in relation to God (the Intellect? the Demiurge/Soul?).

<sup>199</sup> See e.g., Plut. *de Fac.* 942d–944a.

The duty of the philosopher was to identify and define the activity and characteristics that circumscribed these classes.

Some of the daemonic roles enumerated in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* fragment appear elsewhere. Their role in vegetal growth and fruition (limited to the good daemons) was already noticed in *On Abstinence*.<sup>200</sup> These responsibilities were, however, assigned to gods not daemons in *On Images* – a point that is important in assessing the language of Porphyry's theological divisions to which we must soon turn. The representation of daemons as a pack of dogs in the entourage of a female deity (here, Artemis)<sup>201</sup> reminds one of Hecate and her “dusky pack” of daemon puppies described in an oracle of *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>202</sup> The supervisory role of protection of individuals corresponds with the notion of guardian daemons assigned to people at their nativity, which forms a central concern of the remaining fragments of his *On Free Will*.<sup>203</sup> The identification of some daemons as soldiers created the basis for their martial role in what Porphyry would name a Titanomachy in other fragments of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*.<sup>204</sup> Though some of these sorts of assignments of particular roles to daemons had occurred in earlier literature, the conceptualization of the daemonic as modeled on human social structures and the consequent application of the label *politeuma* to the arrangement of daemonic ranks seems to be original to Porphyry.<sup>205</sup>

The use of *politeuma* here is reminiscent of the occurrence of *politeia* in a similar context in *Philosophy from Oracles*. It is worth quoting in full:

Not only have they [gods, or daemons?] revealed their social structure (*politeia*) and the other things that were mentioned, but they have also explained what things they take joy in and rule over, and indeed by what things they are bound, and what one ought to sacrifice and on which days to avoid [sacrificing], and what sort of form one must make for the images; and they declare in what sort of forms and in what sort of places they spend their time; and there is not one thing at all which humans have not learned from them and so give them honor.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>200</sup> *Abst.* 2.38.2.

<sup>201</sup> For the identification of Artemis with Hecate, see *Simulac.* fr. 359 Smith; see also, Graf 1992: 267–279.

<sup>202</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 328 Smith; for daemons and even Hecate herself in canine form, see Plut. *de Isid.* 379e; cf. Faraone 1992: 25–26, 45; Iles Johnston 1990: 134–142.

<sup>203</sup> Fr. 268 Smith. <sup>204</sup> *Comm.Tim.* frs. 10,24; for discussion, see below.

<sup>205</sup> The term could have been used earlier by Numenius, or by Origen's *On Daemons*, though there is no evidence. For Origen's *On Daemons*, see Weber 1962, fr. 12 (= Porph. *Comm.Tim.*, fr. 10 Sodano), with discussion at 117–121.

<sup>206</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 316 Smith; for discussion, see Busine 2005: 259–261. The rejection of the oracle as spurious by Wolff 1856: 102 and nn. ad loc., is not well-founded; see Johnson 2009: 110 n. 44.

This fragment does not at first seem to refer to daemons, however. Instead, because earlier fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles* treated the roles and responsibilities of many goddesses,<sup>207</sup> and because earlier fragments had delineated the “division of the gods,”<sup>208</sup> and furthermore since later fragments would be replete with oracular documentation on the binding of “the gods” and on their images,<sup>209</sup> the passage quoted here seems at first to refer to the *politeia* of the gods, not daemons. Certainly, if daemons are allowed a structured hierarchy, then the gods may well deserve one, too. Yet, one has already sensed an ambiguity over the different roles of gods and daemons when cross-referencing Porphyry’s fragments.

The assumption that Porphyry had changed his mind from one work to the next or that he was a sloppy and sometimes incoherent thinker are claims that resonate with the accusations of many of his ancient readers.<sup>210</sup> The ambiguity we find in his treatment of gods and daemons may, however, arise from a coherent yet flexible approach to the two lowest levels of the theological hierarchy, which is best explained by analysis in terms of a project of philosophical translation. Those beings that a late antique philosopher might recognize as daemons had been named gods for centuries. The philosopher would be faced with two courses of reacting to this situation: either a critical dismissal of traditional language or an accommodation to that language, possibly accompanied with reminders of the true nature and hierarchical location of the beings under discussion in any given text. Porphyry, it will be argued below, chose the latter course; but with the loss of entire texts and arguments his accommodationist (one might say, *mestiza*) stance has become more difficult to discern.

Another significant fragment of his *Commentary on the Timaeus* confirms the plausibility of such a flexible usage of divine and daemonic language. According to Proclus, Porphyry stood in the tradition of Origen<sup>211</sup> and especially Numenius,<sup>212</sup> when he had posited an opposition between daemons and souls that arose when the former were “leading down” and the latter were “being led up.”<sup>213</sup> In these thinkers, “Daemon is [used] in three ways: for they say that there is a race (*genos*) of divine daemons, and another race that is based upon position, which individual souls fill up when they have

<sup>207</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 309 Smith.      <sup>208</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315 Smith.      <sup>209</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 347–350 Smith.

<sup>210</sup> e.g., Eus. *PE* 3.13.8; cf. Augustine *CD* 19.23.43 (= *Phil.Orac.* fr. 345a).

<sup>211</sup> Surely the reference must be to his *On Daemons*. This Origen is considered to be different from the famous Christian of the third century; see Goulet 2001: 267–290. That this Origen is to be identified with the Christian Origen has now received a thorough defense by Böhm 2002: 7–23; Digeser 2010: 197–218; Zambon 2011: 44.

<sup>212</sup> So the last line of the fragment; *Comm.Tim.* fr. 10, p. 7.6 Sodano.

<sup>213</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 10, p. 6.6–8 Sodano; cf. Tatian, *Or.* 16.1–2.

received a daemonic allotment, and then there is another race of wicked and destructive souls.”<sup>214</sup> The reference to “divine daemons” may only be a Platonic way to designate the class of good daemons as delineated in *On Abstinence*, since Plato seems to be the first to use the appellation.<sup>215</sup> But elsewhere, good daemons seem to be treated as a separate class from the “divine angels.”<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, while daemons in Plato’s time could be called divine without much hesitation (since daemons and gods were used interchangeably in Homer),<sup>217</sup> by Porphyry’s time the distinction between the two was a legitimate question, especially as there was now a greater hierarchical rigidity that naturally arose from persistent attempts to refine and differentiate the conceptions of daemons unsystematically presented within Plato’s corpus.<sup>218</sup>

The precise nature of Porphyry’s class of “divine daemons” is uncertain. It may comprise those daemons who are highest within the hierarchical ranking of daemons; or, it may refer to those daemons who are popularly called gods, but which the philosopher speaking precisely knows to be daemons. In any case, they appear to form a sort of hybrid category that bridges the gap between the simple classes of gods and daemons – whether that gap is understood as one of language or of ontological difference. The fact that Porphyry could refer to Plotinus’ divine companion as a god, and then as “one of the more divine daemons,” clearly exhibits this attempt to maintain the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the line between divine and daemonic.<sup>219</sup> In an emanationist conception of being and divinity we should expect nothing less.

The second two classes of daemon in this fragment provide important material on the doctrine of wicked daemons and on the ascent and descent of the soul. The daemonic class intermediate between the divine daemons and the wicked daemons comprise individual (*merikai*) souls who have “obtained a daemonic allotment,” and so are only daemons temporarily and “according to rank (*kata schesin*).”<sup>220</sup> As they pass through the daemonic (sublunary) regions on their descent into, or ascent out of, bodies these souls adopt the name of daemons.

The souls are, however, not well-received by the wicked daemons who harass them on their journey.

<sup>214</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 10, p. 6.8–11 Sodano.

<sup>215</sup> *Pl. Apol.* 31c8; *Soph.* 271d6; cf. *Ps.-Arist. de Mundo* 391a1. <sup>216</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 21.342–343.

<sup>217</sup> As Porphyry himself claimed at *Abst.* 2.37.4; cf. *Plut. Defect. orac.* 415a–b; Chantraine 1954; Bassett 1919.

<sup>218</sup> e.g., *Plut. de Cohib. Ira* 458c; *de Esu Carn.* 1.996c; *Dio Chrys. Orr.* 2.18; 23.9, 10.

<sup>219</sup> *V. Plot.* 10.22–25, 28–29.

<sup>220</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 10, p. 6.9–10 Sodano; cf. *Max. Tyr. Or.* 9.6 Trapp.

The [wicked] daemons and the souls on their descent into genesis strike together in this battle. These are the very conflicts the ancient theologians ascribed to Osiris and Typhon, or to Dionysus and the Titans,<sup>221</sup> which Plato piously refers to the Athenians and Atlantians [*Tim.* 24d–25d]. They have handed down that [there is an opposition] of souls with material daemons before the souls enter into solid bodies.<sup>222</sup>

The wicked daemons in this battle are assigned the place of the setting sun, since the West, “as the Egyptians say, is the place of evil daemons.”<sup>223</sup> Because the description in these lines of the conflict taking place between lower daemons and souls descending from on high occurs after Proclus’ own introductory remarks that the daemons were leading downward and souls being led upward, it seems safe to presume that the opposition was continually going on against both descending and ascending souls. We possess material elsewhere in Porphyry’s writings that hint at the scale and nature of the daemonic threat to souls, not only in their pre- and post-embodied states, but also during their lives in bodies.

According to another fragment of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, which must refer to the same psychic–daemonic battle,<sup>224</sup> we are told that, “Porphyry refers the ‘great and wonderful deeds’ [*Tim.* 24d6–8] to those of souls, as many as are making their way (*prattetai*) towards matter and material characters (*tropous*),<sup>225</sup> and he calls daemons material characters. For, there are two classes (*eide*) of daemons: souls and characters, and these are material powers, which are habit-forming (*ēthopoious*) in the soul.”<sup>226</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Elsewhere, Porphyry had mentioned a Titanomachy between souls and daemons, though we are not given any details as to exactly what he meant; see *Comm.Tim.* fr. 24 Sodano.

<sup>222</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano, p. 6.11–p. 7.3; for background on Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Timaeus* passage on Atlantis, see Dillon 2006: 22–24; cf. *Corp.Herm.* 1.25.

<sup>223</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano, p. 7.3–5; cf. *Antro nymph.* 76 Nauck: the North is suitable for the class of souls falling into generation; the South to immortals; the East to gods; the West to daemons. The possibility of an Egyptian source for this information is increased by the fact that the Coptic term for the West (*ement*) is also the designation for Hades (I am grateful to Lois Farag for pointing this out to me).

<sup>224</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 23 Sodano; as with his edition of the *Ep.Aneb.*, Sodano’s ordering of the fragments is sometimes misleading.

<sup>225</sup> The concept of material characters (which, in precisely these terms, is apparently quite rare) seems to have arisen from reflection on the notion of material cause in Aristotle’s *Physics*; see Asclepius, *Comm.Arist.Metaph.* p. 305.18–26 Hayduck, commenting on a phrase from the *Metaphysics* 1013a (“it is said that the cause is a single *tropos*, turning/shape/character”); cf. Arist. *Part.animal.* 690b (“the cause is a certain turning, at once earthy and watery”). Cf. Proclus, *Comm.Tim.* 1.456.11 (on *Tim.* 138e): “Plato revealed that the cosmos is one from a singular paradigm. And furthermore, he deprecates the material characters of the attempt. For he showed that it was not from matter, since it is one, as Aristotle [claims], or from natural places being defined/limited, and it was not from substance being united, i.e., matter becoming a body, as the Stoics [claim].” Among Christians, the concept occurs only at Basil, *Adv.Eunom.* 2.6 (PG 29, 581B).

<sup>226</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 23 Sodano.



This clearly confirms the materially bound nature of wicked daemons elaborated in *On Abstinence* and alluded to in our previous fragment from the *Commentary*. It would seem that their “habit-forming” (or “character-forming”) effects on the soul indicate a distinctly moral valence to their conflict with souls. Thus, the attacks on the soul by these daemons should be identified with something like “temptations” to pursue bodily pleasures and submit to the passions. “They usually make sudden intense onslaughts, like ambushes,” *On Abstinence* tells us, “sometimes trying to remain hidden and sometimes using force. So passions which come from them are acute.”<sup>227</sup>

As we discover from other fragments, however, daemonic attacks were not limited to moral temptation. In a fascinating anecdote, Porphyry elsewhere recorded a story of daemons who were, in fact, formed from earth. While some daemons were visible because they consisted of the fiery element,<sup>228</sup> he explained, another class was tangible because they consisted of the earthy element.<sup>229</sup> This was proven by the fact that some of them became visible “in Italy in the territory of the Etruscans (*peri tous Touskous*)”<sup>230</sup> not only by sowing and begetting worms (*skōlēkes*) from their seed,<sup>231</sup> and also by being burned and leaving behind ash,<sup>232</sup> from which very thing it is also shown that they share in earth.”<sup>233</sup> Because of the physical harm done them and the physical remains that they left, all of this class of daemons was deemed to be earthy in nature.

Proclus, our source for this fragment, provides no further narrative details. We are fortunate that Michael Psellus referred to the same passage (though this has yet to be noted in any of the scholarship).<sup>234</sup> Smith placed the fragment from Psellus in a section at the end of his Teubner edition

<sup>227</sup> *Abst.* 2.39.3 (trans. Clark); on the passions here (which may have included physical sickness as well as extreme emotions), see Clark 2000b, 156, nn. 312–313.

<sup>228</sup> For fiery daemons, see Tatian *Or.* 15.3.

<sup>229</sup> For Plutarch, these two elements are what make up the stars; *de Fac.* 943d.

<sup>230</sup> Being an Etruscan, Amelius may have been Porphyry's source for this exorcism.

<sup>231</sup> One wonders if in tales such as this one we are not near the roots of the modern scientific assignment (beginning with Linnaeus) of the Latin *larva* to the worm-like stages of an animal's development. Apuleius (*de Genio Socr.* 153) in his daemonic taxonomy designated a rogue *Lar* (i.e., a household god who had turned bad) a *Larva*; both *Lar* and *Larva* were categorized as a class of daemon comprising human souls who had left their bodies (ibid. 152). Reference to the name for a daemonic class as *Larva* recurs in e.g., Aug. *CD* 9.11; Isid. *Etym.* 8.11.101; cf. Arnob. 3.41. For discussion of pre-Apuleian occurrences of the word, see Thaniel 1973: 186–187.

<sup>232</sup> This is probably a reference to an exorcism (as the parallel testimony of Psellus has it).

<sup>233</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 57 Sodano, p. 43.4–7.

<sup>234</sup> For the claim that this anecdote derives from the *Phil.Orac.*, see Kern 1919: 217–219. That it nonetheless should be attributed to Porphyry's *Comm.Tim.* see the relevant note in Appendix 2 below.

reserved for fragments of uncertain location in any particular work of Porphyry. Yet, it is so similar to the evidence provided by Proclus on the *Commentary on the Timaeus* that it must refer to the same passage of that work.

For a certain nocturnal daemon named Babo<sup>235</sup> is somewhere [mentioned] in the Orphic poems, its form oblong and its essence (*hyparxis*) shadowy. And Porphyry the philosopher also records that many people had come upon such nightly phasms in the region of the [Tusc]ans (these are a northern and barbarian nation),<sup>236</sup> which they say they burned at night, but by day they found certain burnt remains and faint bodies like the threads of a spider's web.<sup>237</sup>

The scene must have been horrific: ghostly apparitions performing some sort of sexual act, whose semen produced maggots, and whose remains when burned by the brave Etruscan exorcists who confronted them by night left weblike ashes.<sup>238</sup> The Etruscans were known for skill in the fulgural arts, which involved both the interpretation of lightning and also the ability to call down lightning. The fact that Porphyry's contemporary at Rome, Cornelius Labeo, wrote an entire book entitled *Liber Fulguralis*, dedicated to the fulgural arts of the Etruscans, may hint at a possible connection between the two thinkers, either personally or only textually.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, Porphyry's fellow student at Plotinus' school, Amelius Gentilianus, was an Etruscan and is thus another possible source for the story. The present state of our evidence allows us to go no further than the mere suggestion of a Roman context for Porphyry's daemonological investigations.

In the material from Proclus and from Psellus we have a vivid portrait of daemonic materiality and the threatening nature of such entities. In addition, Proclus' version again evinces the somewhat puzzling parallel between the first fiery class of daemons and what we find elsewhere applied to the

<sup>235</sup> This name is possibly a variant of Baubo; see Kern 1919: 219. Cf. Emped. fr. 153 D–K; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.20; *PMG* 2.33; 4.1257, 2195, 2712; 5.423; 7.681, 692, 886, 896; 13.926. A further variant appears to be Bombo; see Hippol. *Refut.* 4.35; cf. Heitsch 1961: 1.171.

<sup>236</sup> Kern 1919: 219, supposed this aside to be Porphyrian (though he had not emended “[Tusc]ans”); I think Smith is surely correct to follow Bidez here.

<sup>237</sup> Fr. 471 Smith.

<sup>238</sup> It would be of interest to know whether Porphyry was present at the exorcism. Unfortunately, we have no hint that he was; on the other hand, we do have a testimony from Eunapius that Porphyry himself once drove a daemon out of a bath complex; see Eunap. *VS* 457/4.1.12 Giangrande (p. 358 Wright).

<sup>239</sup> Mastandrea 1979: 74–102; 219–222. There is unfortunately no evidence of a connection (aside from a general Roman context of interest) between Porphyry's *Phil. Orac.* and Labeo's *De Oraculo Apollinis Clarii* (on which, see Mastandrea 1979: 159–192, 239–240).

astral gods, namely their visibility. *On Abstinence*, as we saw earlier, marked off the visible heavenly gods from the sublunar invisible daemons.<sup>240</sup> The visibility of a class of fiery daemons here points again to the high level of flexibility in using the terms “gods” or “daemons” when designating those entities inhabiting the lowest level of the divine but the highest level of the daemonic.

This material, it seems likely, is a development of the daemonology of Pseudo-Plato's *Epinomis*, which we have already noted briefly.<sup>241</sup> In this dialogue, all bodies with movement are said to possess soul; those whose movements are most orderly (i.e., the stars) are also most divine. Ensouled bodies are of five kinds: earthy and fiery on the extremes (which are identified with humans and astral gods, respectively); and intermediate to these are the aerial, ethereal, and watery beings (which are identified as daemons).<sup>242</sup> In a manner similar to the *On Abstinence*, the *Epinomis* explicitly notes the visible nature of the astral gods and the invisible nature of the daemons.<sup>243</sup> The juxtaposition of the earthy and fiery elements in the fragment from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* seems to recall the pseudo-Platonic dialogue, while substantially altering the identifications made there of astral gods with fire and humans with earth, so that different classes of daemons may be either fiery or earthy. This alteration seems most likely to be due to the fact that the passage of the *Timaeus* that had prompted Porphyry's reflections in the first place was dealing with the necessity of fire and earth for visibility and tangibility in bodies.<sup>244</sup> Porphyry seems to be drawing the *Timaeus* passage into the theological hierarchy, in particular the daemonology, of the *Epinomis*.<sup>245</sup>

Two points might be made in this regard. First, in Porphyry's fragment, “some of the daemons, having mostly the fiery element in their composition and being visible, hold onto nothing by way of an imprint (*antitupōs*).” The reference to their inability to receive an imprint contrasts with the claims made in *On Abstinence* that daemons “are not clad in a solid body, nor do they all have one shape, but they take many forms, the shapes which imprint and are stamped upon (*ektupoumenai*) their *pneuma* are sometimes manifest and sometimes invisible, and the worse ones sometimes change

<sup>240</sup> *Abst.* 2.37.3–4.

<sup>241</sup> It is precisely this point that raises a suspicion about the alleged dependence of Calcidius (*Comm. Tim.* 127–136) on Porphyry; their similarities can adequately be explained by taking the *Epinomis* as a common source.

<sup>242</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 981b–984d. <sup>243</sup> Ps.-Pl. *Epinom.* 981d6–7; 984e3–5.

<sup>244</sup> Pl. *Tim.* 31b5–c2; cf. Plut. *de Fac.* 943f.

<sup>245</sup> Porphyry would be followed in this by Calcidius; see Den Boeft 1977.

their shape.”<sup>246</sup> In a more reverent tone, the author of the *Epinomis* had asserted that daemons were the images (*eikones*, *agalmata*) of the gods. He does not use the term “imprint” (*tupos* and its cognates); but the metaphor is quite similar, whether receiving an impress or an image of something else. Importantly, the fragment from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* diverges from both of these passages. Instead, it denies the appropriateness of the metaphor to the fiery daemons. I have paused over this feature of the fiery daemons in order to emphasize the fact that such a class otherwise does not seem to fit the general nature of a daemon for Porphyry.<sup>247</sup> As elsewhere, Porphyry may here be using the term “daemon” interchangeably with “god” in this instance. Without further context for the fragment, we can only suggest the possibility; though this suggestion’s importance will become clear shortly.

A second point deserves emphasis. The anecdote on the Italian daemons only refers to the class of earthy daemons,<sup>248</sup> but it dramatically emphasizes the materiality of daemons generally. They exist at the lowest levels of the theological hierarchy, and could even be said to be more deficient in moral and rational terms than the embodied soul of a philosopher. Indeed, if it is appropriate to invoke an anecdote from Porphyry’s biographical work, Plotinus’ soul was reported to have already transcended the daemoniac and become divine, even while he was still in a body.<sup>249</sup> The daemons of Tuscany, however, were engaged in sexual activity, the extreme depravity of which was shown by their progeny of worms, and the fitting reward for their excessive closeness to their materiality was their being burned to ash.

### *Daemons and/as gods*

Repeatedly throughout the fragments of the *Commentary on the Timaeus* we have noticed a permeability to the boundary marking the difference between gods and daemons. We must now address this issue directly. If we were to sum up the contributions that the *Commentary on the Timaeus* makes to our understanding of Porphyry’s daemonology, the clearest feature is the taxonomical arrangement of daemons in sometimes quite

<sup>246</sup> *Abst.* 2.39.1; cf. *Sent.* 29; for the Stoic background to the notion that a *pneuma* could receive a impressions or stamps, see Smith 2008: 486–487, with the bibliography cited at n. 21. On the impressionability of souls, see *Plut. de Fac.* 945b.

<sup>247</sup> In an odd turn, in fact, it might be that Porphyry may be pitting two elements of the Stoic tradition against themselves, namely the notions that *pneumata* are impressionable, on the one hand, and that daemons are fiery, on the other.

<sup>248</sup> For a different interpretation of the passage, see the translation of Baltzly 2007: 51–52.

<sup>249</sup> *V.Plot.* 23; cf. *Sent.* 32.90–94.

elaborate ways, from the four ranks in the *politeuma* of daemons to the different double or triple classification schemas (fiery/earthy; souls/characters; divine daemons/souls/wicked daemons), all of which are apparently dependent upon the particular exegetical context of each fragment of the *Commentary*. We also discover a noticeable lack of concern to maintain the daemonic classes within domains carefully marked off from the class of gods (especially as described in his *Philosophy from Oracles*). The most satisfying solution to this issue lies in the possibility that Porphyry sought in his *Philosophy from Oracles* (and *Letter to Anebo* and *On Images*) to locate the traditional gods – or at least many of them – within the same classificatory ranking as daemons, but had continued to use the traditional label.<sup>250</sup> These gods could even be identified as the class of “divine daemons” (or literally “godly daemons”).<sup>251</sup>

Such a possibility would make sense of much material scattered throughout the fragments of many of Porphyry's works. As already noticed, the *politeuma* of daemons in the *Commentary* recalls the *politeia* of the gods in the *Philosophy from Oracles*: both works seem to consider similar roles and responsibilities (e.g., the growth of fruit) attaching to various members of a classificatory arrangement falling under the rubric of a *politeia/politeuma*. Whereas the *On Abstinence* placed the giving of oracles under the activity of daemons, the *Philosophy from Oracles* allotted it to the gods.<sup>252</sup> The gods are said to be bound and loosed by humans in the latter work,<sup>253</sup> while the *Letter to Anebo* claimed that the gods are properly said to be impassible as part of its criticism of those who misunderstood the distinction of gods and daemons.<sup>254</sup> If *Philosophy from Oracles* had, in material not preserved, made a claim that many of the “gods” (who were the source for, and many times the subject of, the oracles quoted in his treatise) were, in fact, nothing more than daemons, then many of the apparent inconsistencies or fractures in Porphyry's theological and daemonological formulations dissolve. It would not be surprising if Eusebius (our main source for the *Philosophy from Oracles*) were to have selectively omitted such an admission, since his criticism of Greek gods would have lacked impact if Porphyry himself, the great enemy of Christianity, had already cleared the gods of such faults and relegated immorality to a sub-divine grade of being.<sup>255</sup>

Such a hypothetical solution not only would indicate a possibility of an approach to theology in Porphyry that would be broadly coherent between

<sup>250</sup> For earlier attempts at equating daemons with the traditional gods, see Brenk 1998.

<sup>251</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr.10 Sodano. <sup>252</sup> *Phil. Orac.* frs. 330–332, 337 Smith.

<sup>253</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 340, 347–348, 350 Smith. <sup>254</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* fr. 1, p. 4.11–p. 5.3 Sodano.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Zambon 2002: 273–274.

different works; it also allows for the determination of coherency within the fragments of a given work. For instance, the *Letter to Anebo* not only asserted that gods were impassible, but also that they were “pure intellects,” whereas daemons only had a share of intellect.<sup>256</sup> Because the doctrines and practices of the Egyptians inadequately aligned themselves with this philosophical definition of gods and daemons, the rigorous questioning of the *Letter* was meant to force Anebo (or anyone who supposed that Egyptians were especially wise in divine matters) to recognize the need for philosophical translation. Egyptian theology and cult, as currently practiced, was philosophically inappropriate. Translation would force advocates of Egyptian wisdom to acknowledge that, if there was true wisdom within the Egyptian system, it was expressed in a confused manner that could only be disentangled by a translational process. Such a process would, then, stand as a critique of popular usage. This process is precisely what we detect in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, where a series of coherent translational moves are made that situate the traditional gods within the daemonic levels of a philosophical system. All of the fragments discussed here can be seen properly as instances of a massive translation project, which sought to identify, categorize and locate each instance of divine/daemonic activity within a hierarchical ontological schema.

In addition to the evidence hinting at such a possibility raised at different points throughout the previous sections, we possess a further piece of evidence that makes explicit what the earlier material only hinted at. In his treatise *On the Styx*, Porphyry contends that, though Homer called the cosmic gods “gods,” he did so only as a concession to ancient linguistic practice. Because of the passibility of the Homeric gods they were instead, he claims, daemons.<sup>257</sup> Porphyry himself should be seen as following Homer’s lead in the *Philosophy from Oracles* by accommodating the traditional usage while simultaneously placing such gods within the daemonic hierarchy in which they properly belonged. The long fragment

<sup>256</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* fr. 1, p. 5.4–7 Sodano. Iamblichus’ report is of further interest, since he claims that Porphyry “defends” (*apologizomenos*) daemons as participants of intellect. The verb can just as readily be rendered with the more vague “give an account,” and it is probably best to take it this way here since there is little in the fragments that would substantiate the possibility that he was writing in defense of daemons (or at least, the popular understanding of daemons). While a note is not the place to consider or develop a full interpretation of the term *apologizomenos*, another possibility should be registered: Porphyry may have used the term himself, but as a rhetorical masking of his critique (i.e., “I am not attacking the daemons when I critically inquire about the theology behind your practices; rather, I am defending them [from your misappropriations] by asserting their participation in intellect”). For just such a rhetorical twist, where critique is presented as defense, see Eus. *DE* 1.1 (8) Heikel, on the Jews.

<sup>257</sup> *Styx* fr. 377 Smith.

that attended to the hierarchy of heavenly, earthly, and under-earthly gods that was discovered in an Apolline oracle on sacrifice may, if this reading is correct, be seen as engaging in a sort of dialogue with Hesiod on the divine–daemonic hierarchy.

The oracle and Porphyry's consequent commentary addressed the existence and appropriate sacrifices for two classes of gods that were given localizing epithets of "on-earthly" (*epichthonioi*)<sup>258</sup> and "under-earthly" (*hupochthonioi*) gods.<sup>259</sup> These two categories were, in fact, laid out successively in Hesiod's myth of the five races in *Works and Days* 110–201.<sup>260</sup> The first golden race of mortals became after death "noble on-earthly daemons, guardians of mortal men."<sup>261</sup> The silver race, a violent and unholy generation, was given the name of "blessed under-earthly ones by mortals."<sup>262</sup> Though we have no explicit exegesis of Hesiod's poetry in the extant corpus of Porphyry, he certainly knew Hesiod, making allusion to the poet elsewhere, and may have drawn connections between the language of the oracle and the poetic analogues.<sup>263</sup> If so, the various divine levels of the oracle could be seen as an expression of what were ultimately equated with the daemonic levels described by the poet. These complex translational maneuvers brought Hesiodic and oracular poetic texts into conversation within the frame of a Platonic daemonology.

The terminological ambiguity or refusal to adopt exclusively the title of daemon or god for the beings inhabiting this low level of the hierarchy is not without precedent. Plato himself seems to have used the labels indiscriminately, in something of a Homeric fashion (i.e., daemons designated unnamed gods).<sup>264</sup> Plutarch had already noted that Homer had used the titles interchangeably,<sup>265</sup> and his own dialogues had allowed for different speakers to name the traditional gods with the title of daemons or gods. Before Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, the great world historian of the first century of our era, had similarly exhibited an accommodation to traditional language when he continued to refer to the earliest benefactors of humanity as "gods" in spite of his emphatically euhemeristic declarations.<sup>266</sup> Indeed, the slippage may exhibit a strategy of authorial representation (rather than an inability to draw on his sources in a smooth and seamless manner): once the claim had been strongly made that all the gods (except the stars)

<sup>258</sup> The phrase is awkward but necessary, in order to distinguish it from the simple tag "earthly" (*chthonioi*) in the same fragments; *Phil. Orac.* frs. 314–315 Smith.

<sup>259</sup> This fragment will be discussed in more detail in [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>260</sup> For the importance of Hesiod in later daemonologies, see Brenk 1998; Kidd 1995.

<sup>261</sup> Hesiod, *Erga* 122–123. <sup>262</sup> Ibid. 141.

<sup>263</sup> For another analogy between Hesiod and an oracle, see frags. 323–324 Smith; with Johnson 2012.

<sup>264</sup> Pl. *Tim.* 40d–e. <sup>265</sup> Plut. *Defect. orac.* 415a. <sup>266</sup> Cf. Diod. Sic. *Bibl.* 1. *passim*.

were humans, a subsequent consistency in rejecting the divine titles for the historical figures of his narrative would have detracted from the earlier authoritative interpretive claim. A preliminary exposition of the euhemeristic and rationalizing approach to the material and the making of universal generalizations served to present the author as an expert who knew better than to accept at face value the stories that would follow in his grand narrative. The refusal to translate fully his sources into a seamless theological and historical sameness reminded the reader of the interpretive pitfalls they otherwise might be unable to avoid if the master narrator had not provided the key to interpretation at the outset.

I would suggest here that Porphyry engaged in similar self-authorizing translational practices in his *Philosophy from Oracles* and other works. Such a reading has the virtue of plausibly and economically finding a deeper consistency between this and his other works. His theological and daemological vision was a broadly coherent yet flexible approach to the world that translated “native” popular accounts of the gods into a philosophically grounded system. Importantly, he did so without thereby legitimizing the popular knowledge, as is often supposed;<sup>267</sup> on the contrary, he maintained its location at a place in the hierarchy that was morally, epistemologically, and ontologically dangerous to the philosophic soul.

#### CONCLUSION

The accommodationist hypothesis suggested here does not point to a rejection of all forms of traditional polytheism. It is, rather, a minimizing of the number of beings given the label “gods.” Divinity extended from the One to the Intellect, then to the Soul and its individuation into the higher levels of the cosmos, namely the astral gods. This vision of divinity exhibited great fluidity because it was predicated upon an emanationist conception. Wicked daemons and embodied souls lacking a philosophical asceticism and control of their passionate impulses would remain at the lower levels of being; but, as we shall see in the next chapter, philosophy provided a means for transcending the material world – of translating it to a theological framework – and allowed for the possibility of a soul’s traversing the continuum from the daemonic towards ever higher levels of divinity (“alone to the alone” as his teacher would show).<sup>268</sup> Porphyry’s theology, that is, his way of speaking about the divine (*theologia*), had

<sup>267</sup> I refer again to the discussions of Bidez 1913: 17–20; Cumont 1949: 366; Sodano 1958: XIII; Hadot 1960.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Plot. *Enn.* 6.9.11,51; Porph. *V.Plot.* 23; *Abst.* 2.49.1, 3. See Rist 1967: 265 n. 11.



shown a corresponding flexibility to the somewhat loose hierarchy of divine and daemonic beings. In both language and conception, the boundaries dividing the ranks of this hierarchy were, for Porphyry, never entirely rigid. As such, he can be identified easily neither as a pagan monotheist nor a polytheist (if these labels are to be any more than vacuous gestures); his system, like that of most Platonists of his and later eras, neatly contained both a divine multiplicity and the transcendent singularity of the One within its emanationist schema.

This chapter has addressed the knowledge of the divine and the sources of that knowledge in Porphyry's thought. The knowledge of the gods evinced in his writings shows continuity with the Platonic philosophical traditions within which he worked (both Middle Platonic and Plotinian), while he seems to have exhibited a fuller, yet critical, engagement with the more popular forms and sources of that knowledge. Any system of knowledge, however, is rarely constructed for purely internal ends or for its own sake. Knowers (and translators) put their knowledge to work for a number of varying ends and in a number of varying contexts. In other words, knowledge is contingent upon a set of practices and bound by relations of power. Knowing always locates itself in relation to other knowers, both past and present, and in relation to social, religious, and bodily practices, both received and invented. It is to these features of power and practice that we will turn in the next two chapters.

*Salvation, translation, and the limits of cult*

One of the most consistent and charged elements in the works of Porphyry that we have been considering is the emphasis on the salvation of the soul. If God (or the One, or the Good) was vastly transcendent from the world in which embodied souls found themselves, and if, in spite of their embodiment, souls bore a spark of their divine origin, then the philosopher who had discovered this metaphysical and theological reality longed to escape from this world and return to the soul's source. If, furthermore, one's soul faced the likelihood of returning to its embodied state in repeated incarnations because of its ignorance or immorality – like a leaf caught in the swirling eddies of the stream of matter – then the philosopher's highest task would be the search for a means of salvation from this perpetual descent into the messiness of physical bodies. The search for salvation appears as a rather emphatic concern in Porphyry's corpus (in comparison to earlier philosophers), for it occurs in a wide swathe of the extant treatises and fragments from the Platonic commentaries to didactic letters and philosophical treatises.<sup>1</sup> After delineating the various contexts for Porphyry's notion of salvation (both literary and cosmological – especially astrological), the present chapter will trace the role of traditional religious ritual in affecting salvation and the related theological and anthropological assumptions that supported his ritual translations.

By ritual translation, I am not here referring to the geographic transference of a ritual from one place to another, as exhibited, for instance, in the adoption at Rome of sacrifices *ritu Graeco*, though there would be illuminating parallels.<sup>2</sup> Instead, this study considers the moral, spiritual, and conceptual transmission and reorganization of ritual acts (and clusters of ritual acts that might be, or have been, conceived as a system) from one way of life and frame of reference to another – in Porphyry's case, a

<sup>1</sup> For the distinctiveness of Porphyry's concept of salvation in comparison with Plotinus, see Smith 1974: 20–38, 56–61.

<sup>2</sup> Scheid 1995: 15–31; Šterbenc Erker 2009; Ando 2009.

thoroughly Platonic one. While the term “ritual” may designate any physical engagement with the divine, or the physical means of attaining an otherwise non-physical engagement with the divine (what might go under the name “theurgy”), many philosophers in antiquity had sought to push the definition of ritual beyond the physical realm in their development of notions of intellectual or spiritual sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> However, this philosophical move is best understood not as a rejection of ritual as the physical, embodied cult of gods or daemons, but rather its metaphoric extension. As the performance of embodied acts, ritual certainly functioned to inscribe social roles or identities among the members of the cultic community. But ritual was not merely a social function that organized communal life temporally, spatially, and hierarchically; functionalist approaches are helpful but far from exhaustive of the implications of ancient ritual.<sup>4</sup> Ritual developed technologies of the embodied and spiritual (or psychological) self, prescribed behavior, instantiated communication (both with mortals and gods), organized and embedded relationships between the ritual performers and animals, humans, gods, and their physical environment, and both produced and fulfilled states of reverence and worship.

For the late antique philosopher, ritual could be interpreted as symbolizing the nature and roles of various gods, daemons, spiritual powers, or natural forces.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, the components of ritual could be infused with potent efficacy as nodal points of cosmic connections in a scheme of *sumpatheia*.<sup>6</sup> In its Neoplatonic formulation, the conception of the interconnectedness of material with immaterial objects, the causal relation between embodied acts and psychic, daemonic, or divine effects, became articulated under the special province of theurgy.<sup>7</sup> The precise signification of *theourgia* differed according to the conceptual framework of the person using the word: for Augustine, the term was only a synonymous guise for magic; for Maximus of Ephesus it entailed the pyrotechnics of animating statues and invoking fire to burst forth unexpectedly;<sup>8</sup> for Iamblichus theurgy was the serious business of the philosopher seeking transcendence through a sacramental approach to salvation.<sup>9</sup> Any attempt to determine the signification of theurgy for Porphyry will ultimately be frustrated at

<sup>3</sup> Ferguson 1980: 1151–1189.      <sup>4</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 109–155.

<sup>5</sup> e.g., *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315 Smith; *De simulac.* fr. 360.34–42 Smith; *Antro nymph.* 6, p. 60.1–21 Nauck.

<sup>6</sup> On *sumpatheia*, see Fowden 2005: 527.

<sup>7</sup> Fowden, 2005: 529–533; Smith 1974: 83–141; Van Liefferinge, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Eunapius, *V.Phil.* 475/7.2.7–10 Giangrande (pp. 432–434 Wright); for a second century precedent, see Graf 1992: 267–279.

<sup>9</sup> Smith 1974: 83–99; Fowden 1986: 131–141; Shaw 1995: 1–28; Iles Johnston 1990: 76–89; Lewy 1956: 461–466.

the problematic nature of our sources. Only Augustine and Iamblichus use the term in reference to Porphyry; but both have polemical agendas that obviate their usefulness as accurate testimonies to Porphyry's exact terminology or even his general conceptual framework. This is a problem to which we must return. Whatever Porphyry's relationship to theurgical developments in late antiquity, one remains struck by the industry taken in Neoplatonist philosophical circles of Porphyry's era and after to delineate the nature and power involved in ritual. Philosophers were at great pains to determine the role of bodies and bodily performance for the well-being of the soul and the mind.

Rituals were thus broadly malleable in their meaning for the performers and observers (philosophers, initiates, or others) at differing sacred times and locations; and one could, of course, be equally sensitive to the theological and metaphysical ramifications of a ritual at the same time as fully appreciating its social, political, or emotive implications.<sup>10</sup> Because ritual enacted for the intellectual an entire metaphysical and theological framework, the present chapter's analysis of Porphyry's attitude to traditional ritual will first examine the recurrent mountain-path metaphor for the salvation of the soul in his works. As already noted in the first chapter, ritual could for Porphyry only be conceptualized and evaluated insofar as it contributed to such salvation. In Porphyry's works, ritual translation and philosophical critique are fundamentally part of the same process. Identifying certain rituals as hindrances to the ascent or as located only at the lowest levels of the philosopher's vision of theological hierarchy brought with it a critical judgment and rejection of those rituals.<sup>11</sup> Second, the metaphysical and cosmological scope and context for Porphyry's concept of salvation will be sketched, especially the notion of the soul's descent below the stars. This discussion focuses on a central problematic feature of the soul's descent, namely the precise role of the stars and their consequences for divination, which map onto the initial theological hierarchy laid out in the previous chapter and its corresponding cosmological framework. Finally, we shall attend to ritual and its translation within Porphyry's philosophical and religious vision. Even in a work such as the *Philosophy from Oracles*, deemed by many to have been his most religiously and ritually engaged work, vertical translation was performed that involved the careful placement of ritual

<sup>10</sup> For expression of ritual's social and political importance, see Aug. *CD* 3.4; 4.32; Cicero, *de Div.* 2.33.70; 2.72.148.

<sup>11</sup> The present chapter thus diverges from interpretations that see Porphyry formulating a two- or three-fold path to salvation that incorporated popular as well as more philosophically elite means of salvation; see e.g. Simmons 2009; Digeser 2009.

acts at various stages on the path to the divine. It involved reframing and recontextualizing ritual acts – no longer was the most relevant context the civic sphere or the mystery initiate's cloister, but rather the individual's particular linkage to the divine hierarchy.

#### SALVATION, OR THE PATH TO THE GODS

Given the modern tendency to represent Porphyry as philologist or literary pedant, the persistent concern with salvation, defined as the return of the soul to its divine origin, may surprise. Porphyry's spirituality is strongly and even fervently expressed in many of his works. Of course, as we shall constantly be reminded, his spirituality was inquisitive to the point of seeming bookish – but textuality need not be deemed inimical to spirituality. Not only were certain texts (such as those of Homer or Plato) treated as authorities in discovering salvation, but Porphyry's universal vision of truth required the acquisition of books that could inform him of the theological teachings of the otherwise inaccessible past or distant peoples. Even though we shall conclude that he was a consistent critic of traditional forms of ritual, his concern with sacrifice (understood in spiritual or intellectual terms) and the ultimate salvation of the soul (understood as becoming divine) are emphatic and widespread throughout Porphyry's corpus.

Probably the most salient metaphor employed by Porphyry to refer to salvation was "the path to the gods." Two passages that refer to this path currently jostle for scholarly attention in recent accounts of Porphyry's religious position: one from *Philosophy from Oracles*; the other from *On the Return of the Soul* (if they are not, in fact, different parts of a single treatise).<sup>12</sup> The latter work, which survives in the polemical paraphrase of Augustine, while at least seeming to echo some of the actual wording of Porphyry,<sup>13</sup> asserts that the pagan philosopher had sought but been unable to find a "universal path" (*via universalis*) of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

But when Porphyry says in the first book *On the Return of the Soul* near the end that, 'the sort of thing that would contain a universal way of freeing the soul has not yet been accepted into any one school, either by some truest philosophy or by the customs and discipline of the Indians or the initiation (*inductione*) of

<sup>12</sup> A single treatise: O'Meara 1959; cf. Pierre Hadot's criticism of O'Meara's thesis, Hadot 1960: 205–244, and O'Meara's response, 245–247. For recent discussion on the religious importance of the *Phil. Orac.*, see Busine 2004: 149–166; *eadem* 2005: 233–260; Digeser 1998: 129–146; *eadem* 2001: 521–528; Schott 2008a: 52–78; Simmons 1997 and 2009; Wilken 1979: 117–134.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the similar phrasing of *Regr. anim.* fr. 302 with frs. 302a and b Smith.

<sup>14</sup> On the *via universalis*, see especially, Smith 1974: 136–139; Marx-Wolf 2010: 219–239.

the Chaldeans or whatever other way, and this same way has not yet reached his attention through historic investigation,' he no doubt confesses that there is some way, but it has not yet come to his attention. So, whatever he had most zealously learned about freeing the soul and seemed to himself or rather to others to know and comprehend was insufficient for him. Indeed, he supposed that he still lacked any preeminent authority, which he was to follow in so great a matter.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine's claim that Porphyry "no doubt confesses" simultaneously the existence of a universal way of salvation and his inability to find it is, in fact, a clear indication that Porphyry never admitted such a thing; the "no doubt" marks his own polemical twist to whatever Porphyry had expressly stated.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine seems to be unfavorable and unfaithful to the original words of Porphyry; yet we ought not dismiss his report entirely. The assertion that the truth about the ultimate ends of the soul were difficult or impossible to fathom fully does occur elsewhere in Porphyry's fragmentary corpus. In his *Letter to Anebo*, he had also raised the possibility that the "path to the happiness [of the soul]" had escaped his attention.<sup>17</sup> Earlier in that letter, he had noted the impossibility of discovering (*adiereunēta*) the truth about the gods.<sup>18</sup>

The difficulty of the road to the divine is also emphasized in the second key passage on salvation. Commenting on an oracle of Apollo of unknown provenance,<sup>19</sup> *Philosophy from Oracles* comments:

Have you heard how much toil there is for someone to offer the purifications for the body – not that he would find the salvation of the soul?<sup>20</sup> For the bronze-bound road<sup>21</sup> to the gods is steep and rough, the many paths of which the barbarians

<sup>15</sup> Porph. *Regr. Anim.* fr. 302 (= Aug. *CD* 10.32.5–16).

<sup>16</sup> Clark 2007: 127–140. A comparable instance may be found at Aug. *CD* 9.13 (on Apuleius).

<sup>17</sup> Porph., *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 28.12–14 Sodano: "You enquire whether some other road to happiness has escaped attention; and what other ascent to it could be reasonable apart from the gods?"

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 1 Sodano, p. 3.8.

<sup>19</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 323 Smith (= Eus. *PE* 9.10.1–2), which runs: "Steep is the road of the blessed ones and quite rough/ Opening at first with bronze-bound gates/ The paths within are inexpressible/ Which to the ignorant condition of mortals those ones first declared/ Who drink the fair water of the land of the Nile/ And the Phoenicians learned many roads of the blessed ones/ Assyrians, Lydians and the race of Hebrew men."

<sup>20</sup> Most of this fragment is quoted in two passages of Eusebius' *PE* (at 9.10.3–5 and 14.10.5); this first sentence is given only in Eus. *PE* 14.10.5.

<sup>21</sup> This precise image "bronze-bound gates" occurs elsewhere only in tragedy; see Aesch. *Septem* 160 ("with gates of bronze-bound shields"); Soph. *Oed. Col.* 56–57 ("the bronze-footed path" to the Underworld). These are the only comparable instances I have been able to find. However, "bronze gates" occurs at Psalm 106:16 LXX and receives commentary by Christians (beginning with Origen, *Princ.* 4.3.11; Eus. *Comm. Psalm.* PG23.1324D, where he identifies them as "iron-bound gates" of

found, but the Greeks were misled and the rulers (*hoi kratountes*) already also destroyed [it].<sup>22</sup> The god assigns (*marturein*) the discovery to the Egyptians, the Chaldeans (since these are Assyrians),<sup>23</sup> Lydians and Hebrews.<sup>24</sup>

The “bronze-bound road to the gods” is here explicitly connected to the “salvation of the soul.” The nation-specific remarks on the discovery of the divine path in this as well as the previous fragment will concern us in a future chapter; for the present it is important to emphasize only that the fragment explicitly mentions salvation in terms of the metaphor of a path to the gods. There are some problems of interpretation, however, both with respect to the phrase “road to the gods” and with some additional material in the remainder of the fragment, as well as a passing comment of Eusebius, who is our source for it.

To begin with Eusebius: his introductory remarks inform us that the fragment comes from a section of the *Philosophy from Oracles* dealing with sacrifice (“... still [talking] about sacrifices, [Apollo] adds what [peoples] one should attend to as being full of all theosophy”).<sup>25</sup> We do possess other fragments from the same treatise detailing the specifics of animal sacrifices<sup>26</sup> – a rather problematic feature, since in other works Porphyry has provided lengthy refutations of the usefulness or piety of bloody sacrifice in affecting salvation (especially the *On Abstinence*). While this point will be taken up again below, it must be noticed that in this particular fragment, we already see indications of the sort of conceptualization of sacrifice that included a level of “spiritual sacrifice” which was deemed to be more fruitful in engaging with the divine and more appropriate for the sage.<sup>27</sup>

The very first comments made by Porphyry following the quotation of the oracle pronounce upon the great difficulty of obtaining the salvation

death which were turned into bronze after Christ’s entry into Hades). For “iron gates and roads of bronze” (in Tartarus), see Homer, *Il.* 8.15 (cf. Eudocia, *Homocentos* 1.1944; 3.569; 5.651; for “marble gates and roads of bronze” (in Tartarus), see Hesiod, *Theog.* 113. Cf. Iamb. *Myst.* 10.5 (291.12–13); Procl. *Comm. Cratyl.* 94.7; *Chald. Orac.* fr. 202.

<sup>22</sup> For the possibility that *hoi kratountes* refers to Christians, see Schroeder and Des Places 1991: 219 n. 2; Zambon 2002: 200–201; Cook 2004: 154; Busine 2005: 284. While there is no clear evidence for this interpretation, it would be consistent with Porphyry’s view that Christians had gone astray from the ancient wisdom. If taken as I have rendered it in this translation, it may mark a somewhat oblique criticism of Roman religion as a later corrupted form of an earlier primitive wisdom. The term is, after all, used elsewhere in Porphyry’s corpus to refer to earthly rulers; cf. *Ep. Marc.* 25.399–400 (*tēs tou kratountos dunasteias*). For discussion of this particular appellation, see Chapter 5; for discussion of Porphyry’s view of Rome, see Chapter 7.

<sup>23</sup> The insertion of Chaldeans here may be an oblique effort to legitimate the *Chald. Orac.* On Chaldean wisdom, cf. Porph. *Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano; *V. Pythag.* 1, 11 Nauck; for discussion, see Chapter 7.

<sup>24</sup> Porph. *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324 (= Eus. *PE* 9.10.3–5 and 14.10.5).

<sup>25</sup> *Phil. Orac.* 323.5–7 Smith (= Eus. *PE* 9.10.1).

<sup>26</sup> See especially, *Phil. Orac.* frs. 314–316 Smith.

<sup>27</sup> O’Meara 1959: 29–31; dismissed by Hadot 1960: 217.

of the soul. Bodily purification is quite difficult (as apparently shown in a missing portion of the *Philosophy from Oracles*), but matters of the soul require even greater seriousness and rigor.<sup>28</sup> The road with bronze gates of the oracle then becomes a symbol for the pursuit of salvation. It is here that Porphyry makes a slight, though possibly important, alteration in his summary of the oracle. The oracle's "road of the blessed ones" becomes the "road to the gods (*pros theous*)" in Porphyry's phrasing. The "road of the blessed ones" could have included any conception of pious acts performed in honor of the blessed ones (a typically Homeric appellation, and by Porphyry's time entirely common).<sup>29</sup> The "road to the gods" carries the possibility in its very locution of the soul's entering the presence of the gods or even becoming a god, i.e., the divinization of the soul.

Indeed, in a rather similar passage of the *Letter to Marcella*, Porphyry had spoken of the "road to the gods (*eis theous*)," which had been traversed by the likes of Asclepius, the Dioscuri, and Heracles – all heroes renowned for their apotheoses.<sup>30</sup> Since the arduous nature of the path to the gods is also echoed in this passage from the *Letter to Marcella*, where Porphyry declares that the ascent of the soul is like climbing a rugged mountain rather than walking on a well-paved road,<sup>31</sup> the identity of the paths and their goals in both works seem secure. Yet, if we turn to the supplemental oracles, which Porphyry quotes after his brief comments summarizing the oracle on the "bronze-bound road to the gods," we find that the issue is not so readily resolved. In these two oracles (or rather, parts of oracles), both the Chaldeans and Hebrews are expressly named. We might conclude from this that Porphyry had a special concern with just these two nations out of all those enumerated in the original oracle.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not this is the case, the two oracles remain somewhat opaque regarding the two issues already raised, namely that of sacrifice and of divinization (or at least, entrance into the presence of the gods). One of the supplemental oracles observes that the two nations both found true wisdom in the worship of the "self-begotten king" (possibly a reference to the Demiurgic Mind);<sup>33</sup> the other oracle refers to the seven planetary spheres.<sup>34</sup>

The issue of sacrifice is partly addressed in the first supplemental oracle: the "self-begotten king" was "worshiped in holy manner" by the Chaldeans

<sup>28</sup> Iamblichus would have concurred; see *Myst.* 10.5 (291.12–13): "It [the theurgic gift of happiness] has [as] its first power the purification of the soul, [being] much more perfect than the purification of the body . . ."

<sup>29</sup> e.g., Homer, *Il.* 5.340. <sup>30</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 7.128–131.

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 6.99–8.137; see also *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p.28.12–14 Sodano.

<sup>32</sup> See [Chapter 7](#) for further discussion of this point.

<sup>33</sup> *De Chald.Orac.* fr. 365 Smith.

<sup>34</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324.9–18 Smith.



and Hebrews.<sup>35</sup> This could very well hint at spiritual sacrifice and hence resonate with other works deemed to be later because more rational (especially *On Abstinence*, as discussed below). Unfortunately, we lack any commentary Porphyry might have provided for this oracle, and so we must content ourselves with recognizing only that there is nothing in the fragment, which we know to have come from a section treating the issue of sacrifice, that would necessitate taking any of this material as legitimizing or condoning blood sacrifice. This is an important acknowledgment given the current scholarly assumption that this work, if any, legitimized animal sacrifice.<sup>36</sup>

The role of the second supplemental oracle in his discussion on sacrifice or on the road to the gods is much more difficult to ascertain. I would suggest, however, that it might make the most sense if we take the reference to the sevenfold circuit of planets as somehow related to the road to the gods. If this is so, then Porphyry may have been attempting to show that the “blessed ones” of the first oracle were the supralunary deities (i.e., the stars),<sup>37</sup> and that salvation of the soul would require entering into their presence or astral apotheosis into one of them. Within a discussion of sacrifice, these astral considerations might represent what was seen as the product of correct sacrificial procedure (or of one type of sacrificial procedure). Such an interpretation ties together the diverse elements of the fragment as a whole, even if we cannot be entirely certain. In addition, an astral context, as we shall soon see, was a central feature of Porphyry’s conception of the fall of the soul into bodies and of its return to its divine source.

While the passages from *Philosophy from Oracles* and *Letter to Marcella* do not explicitly describe the rugged road to the gods as “universal” in scope, what unites these passages with that from *On the Return of the Soul* is the difficulty in discovery and in ascent of the divine path. Ultimately, all these passages are part of a literary tradition going back to Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. The path to evil is smooth, Hesiod warned, but the road to virtue “is steep and long and rough at first . . .”<sup>38</sup> Porphyry’s passages share with the ancient poet the metaphor of the path and the difficult nature of that path; they differ (from Hesiod as well as each other) in their indications of the goal of the journey. Hesiod had been concerned with the path to virtue, while Porphyry had variously described the object as

<sup>35</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324.11–12 Smith.

<sup>36</sup> Hadot 1960: 211; Busine 2005: 265 (though see, 259–261); Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 121–129.

<sup>37</sup> On astral gods in Porphyry’s thought, see Chapter 2.

<sup>38</sup> Hesiod, *Erga* 287–291; cf. Homer, *Od.* 13.195 (*tracheian atrapon*).

salvation, happiness, or the gods.<sup>39</sup> One could assume that the metaphor of the path was common enough to be applied to any number of ends even by the same author.<sup>40</sup> Further inquiry reveals, however, that the occurrences in Porphyry's fragments ought to be identified with each other. This conclusion is significant, not only for allowing greater precision in determining the nature of the philosophic task for Porphyry, but also for confirming the basic coherence of his practice of ritual translation throughout the many fragments. One confronts in many of Porphyry's works a fundamental and consistent vision of the path *to* the gods, as well as the prior path *from* the gods, on which the soul journeyed into the material mess in which it found itself when it finally came to the texts of Porphyry and began looking for a way out.

#### THE FALL OF THE SOUL

The doctrine of the descent of the soul, its imprisonment<sup>41</sup> in the material world and forgetfulness of its divine origins, and its need for an ascent from this world as the only true salvation was at the center of the Neoplatonist cosmological framework.<sup>42</sup> We are fortunate to possess lengthy fragments from Porphyry's hand delineating the distinctive features of his formulation of the soul's descent and the nature of its salvation. In a series of four fragments belonging to his *On Free Will* (or, literally: *On What is Up to Us*), Porphyry offered detailed reflections on the text of Plato's Myth of Er (in the tenth book of the *Republic*) in order to defend the notion of the soul's free will against elements of the text that might be open to deterministic interpretations.<sup>43</sup>

The work was dedicated to Chrysaorius,<sup>44</sup> with whom Porphyry had discussed these matters on the previous day and with whom it was agreed that the soul's freedom to choose was somewhat tempered by its experiences in previous lives and the limitations formed from its previous character

<sup>39</sup> Salvation: *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324.3 Smith; *Regr.anim.* fr. 302.7–9 Smith; happiness: *Ep.Aneb.* 2, p. 28.12–14 Sodano; the gods: *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324.4 Smith; *Ep.Marc.* 7.130–131.

<sup>40</sup> Knox 1999.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted at the outset that Porphyry followed Plotinus in seeing the descent as a descent of potency (*energeia* or *dynamis*) so that the lower soul was something like Aristotle's immanent form in a body, while at the same time speaking of a need to escape from the body; see A. Smith 1974: 1–15. It is this latter way of conceiving of the descent and ascent of the soul that will concern us most in what follows.

<sup>42</sup> For Plotinus, see, e.g., Torchia 1993; both Smith 1974, and Deuse 1983, remain essential for understanding Porphyry's notion of descent and ascent.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *V.Plot.* 3.1. On Porphyry's treatise, see now Wilberding 2011.

<sup>44</sup> On Chrysaorius, see Porph. *Intro.Arist.Categ.* 1.1; J. Barnes 2003: 23–24; Deuse 1983: 149.

development.<sup>45</sup> Plato had provided a scenario in which souls commenced new lives with a choice about the kind of life they would receive.<sup>46</sup> The difficulty for Porphyry and Chrysaorius lay, however, not with the choice but with what followed the choice; for it was then that, according to Plato, the soul was assigned a daemon as “an unalterable guardian for us” and then led by a daughter of Necessity to the Fates whose spinning was unchangeable, then to the throne of Necessity herself, before proceeding to the Plain of Forgetfulness and the River of No Cares.<sup>47</sup>

Since these things have been spun out, necessitated and confirmed in this way by the Fates, Forgetfulness and Necessity, and since a daemon attends [us] and guards our Fate (*heimarmenē*), of what are we the masters, or how still is ‘Virtue free, which each will have, honoring or dishonoring her more or less’?<sup>48</sup>

A closer examination of Plato’s text provided a basis for Porphyry to reconcile the difficulties of maintaining the doctrine of free will in the face of overbearing guardian daemons and the femmes fatales (in a literal sense) of the Myth of Er. Contrary to the Stoics, Plato’s narrative was inclusive of multiple kinds (or categoric levels) of lives;<sup>49</sup> later restrictions of a person’s will (such as the inability to choose one’s parents or bodily beauty) were consequent on the person’s prior choice to be a swan, lion, human, man, or woman before their “penetration into bodies.”<sup>50</sup> Even with physical restrictions of body and ancestry, and even with limitations of one’s personal condition (such as lack of experience or education), “To nearly everyone who has moderation and has not already betaken themselves to evil it has been granted to use, either poorly or well, the lives of which any of them has a share.”<sup>51</sup> In the end, despite a person’s complaints about their present life – even if a man wishes to be a woman and begins to “cross-dress” (*metaschēmatisēi*)<sup>52</sup> – his present life had originated in his own pre-embodied choice, which was only confirmed by Necessity and attended to by his guardian daemon.<sup>53</sup>

A further threat to the freedom of the will had been raised by those who claimed that the origins of Plato’s Myth of Er lay with the Egyptians, who were known for their astrological lore; for, if this was the case, his narrative’s

<sup>45</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.2–11 Smith. <sup>46</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 10.617d–621b.

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 10.620d6–621a9; Porph. *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.14–28 Smith.

<sup>48</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.28–33 Smith, citing Plato, *Rep.* 10.617e3.

<sup>49</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.45–89 Smith. <sup>50</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.12–13 Smith.

<sup>51</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.77–89 Smith.

<sup>52</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.90–97 Smith; similar concerns about gender and astrology are raised by Eus. *PE* 6.6.54; Origen, *Comm.Genes.*, ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.6; Bardesanes, *Liber leg. reg.*, ap. Eus. *PE* 6.10.44.

<sup>53</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268.81–89 Smith.

portrayal of the activity of the Fates and Necessity was merely an allegorical façade for an astrologically fatalist view of the soul's embodied condition. Porphyry opposed the assertion that Plato had borrowed the story from the astrology-inclined Egyptians. It was because the Egyptians interpreted lives as “attendant on the rising of the horoscope”<sup>54</sup> and claimed that “the kind of disposition of the constellations *compels* the lives to be of such a kind for the souls going into birth”<sup>55</sup> that Plato disagreed with them. We may designate the disagreement as one between “hard” causally *determinative* astrology and “soft” non-causally *indicative* astrology.<sup>56</sup> Contrary to any creed of astrological determinism, Porphyry claimed that a good Platonic view would see the souls themselves as determining their own horoscopes and descending through the planetary spheres at different speeds,<sup>57</sup> depending on their characters: “The different souls are moved differently on their own in accordance with their desires towards certain of the second [class of] lives.”<sup>58</sup> The Myth of Er was thus exonerated from any connection to astrological fatalism: “Plato, therefore, posited that the constellations *indicate* the lives, but do not further *necessitate* them,<sup>59</sup> rather the [souls] who have made their choice live and have the sequence of things inscribed,<sup>60</sup> just as it necessarily indicates.”<sup>61</sup> The souls, not the stars, dictated the nature and scope of the imminent embodied life; the stars merely marked visually the contours of a previous freely-chosen, unembodied decision.<sup>62</sup>

Though this synopsis of Porphyry's teaching in his *On Free Will* is admittedly brief and omits many intriguing details,<sup>63</sup> it is sufficient to

<sup>54</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271.45 Smith. <sup>55</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271.46–48 Smith.

<sup>56</sup> For discussion of this distinction in ancient philosophical approaches to astrology, see esp. Long 1982.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Comm.Tim.* 79, and *Pl. Tim.* 39a–d, on the differing speeds of the planets; a similar conception occurs in Nigidius Figulus' analogy of the potter's wheel (where he spilled two drops of ink on a quickly spinning potter's wheel at nearly the same instant, only to find when the wheel stopped that the two drops were quite distant from each other; in the same way, the planetary spheres whirled so quickly that two souls entering nearly simultaneously would nonetheless have rather different horoscopes), ap. Aug. *CD* 5.3.

<sup>58</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271.70–71 Smith; on the two classes or levels of lives, see *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 268 Smith.

<sup>59</sup> For the notion that stars have only an indicative, and not a causal, function, see the extensive argument of Origen, *Comm.Genes.*, ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.13–28, 55–72.

<sup>60</sup> That the constellations are “inscribed” on the heavens like a painting (or map, *pinax*), see *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 271 Smith, 52–53; see also, Origen, *Comm.Genes.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.63; Plot. *Enn.* 2.3.7.5–7; 3.1.6.20–22.

<sup>61</sup> *De Lib.arbitr.* fr. 27.87–91 Smith; cf. Plot. *Enn.* 2.3; 3.1.5–6; Bouché-Leclercq 1979: 599–601; Long 1982: 187–188.

<sup>62</sup> For the notion that stars have only an indicative, and not a causal, function, see the extensive argument of Plot. *Enn.* 3.1; Origen, *Comm.Genes.*, ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.13–28, 55–72; cf. Bouché-Leclercq 1979: 614–615.

<sup>63</sup> Deuse 1983: 148–159.

contextualize the nature of the soul's descent and ascent as involving entry into a world which simultaneously felt more restrictive upon the soul and nonetheless required the pursuit of virtue. It also opens up an adequate perspective for discerning the conceptual mechanisms of Porphyry's ritual translation. The characteristics of descent and the nature of the life lived are predicated upon a pre-embodied choice forgotten before the descent had even begun, yet still determined by the sort of character that would have guided the soul in its initial decision. Yet, before we turn to his discussions of the philosophic task of remembering, ascending, and attaining salvation, we must first fill out the picture given so far with additional material from other works of Porphyry's corpus.

### *Astrology and divination*

If Franz Cumont was correct to see astrology both as an "Oriental" import into the Greco-Roman world and as a crucial means, once introduced, of creating a religious *koiné* throughout the Mediterranean world (though there is good reason to look for a more nuanced account),<sup>64</sup> then a critical attitude towards astrology on the part of a philosopher would be significant for delineating his precise cultural and social affiliations.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, a simple rejection or acceptance of astrology, or of certain parts of astrology, could also be replaced by more complex engagements and acts of philosophical translation, especially insofar as astrology was related to other forms of prognostication. Divination by stars, dreams, or the entrails of sacrificed animals held an important place in ritual performance and ritual translation. Divination by entrails required a sacrifice, and for Porphyry as a vegetarian philosopher such activity was certainly a concern. We shall turn to this part of Porphyry's thought later in the chapter. For now, his framing of astrological divination must be addressed on its own since it is most important for our appreciation of the cosmological picture of the soul's descent into the material world. The cosmological conceptions set the context for locating ritual in Porphyry's thought.

When we turn to the astrological fragments (fragments 330–342 Smith) of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, Porphyry's attitude is persistently ambivalent. The closest that Porphyry comes to allowing for a certain causal power

<sup>64</sup> I simplify greatly Cumont 1912; cf. Long 1982: 166–170; Gordon 1997; Konstan 1997a.

<sup>65</sup> This is certainly the case with Porphyry's *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*; see Chapter 4 below. For general discussion, see MacMullen 1971: 105–116; Barton 1994: 50–54.

residing in the stars is in a passage from John Philoponus' *On the Creation of the World* (a not entirely reliable source).<sup>66</sup> He reports:

"For everything that descends to earth," he says, "when it descends, falls under the circuit of the prevailing gods, that is, the movement of the stars, so that even the gods themselves who descend are under the fates; and they all go down and chant oracles, and perhaps they have established their oracles and images. These are the [children] of Kronos and Rhea and all those [descended] from them."<sup>67</sup>

While the soul's entrance into the world and its correspondence with a particular horoscope stems from its prior choice according to the treatise *On Free Will*, Philoponus appears to report here that according to *Philosophy from Oracles*, once a being has fallen into the realm of the visible and material it is to be governed by the stars. Yet, even if we grant the full authenticity of the evidence from Philoponus, we should avoid concluding that Porphyry has here moved beyond his assertion of a "soft" astrology in *On Free Will* to a "hard" astrology. The two treatises need not be seen as opposed and we should aim for a more nuanced interpretation of the role of the stars in Porphyry's thought. *On Free Will* had asserted that a strong force was bound to a soul by Fate *after* the soul had already chosen its future life. Fate (and the guardian daemon) merely held the soul to its original decision.<sup>68</sup> This is not the traditional view of a cosmic force that determined a person's life entirely external to any faculty of choice on the part of that person. It may well have felt like an external force, but this was only because the soul had drunk from the streams of Forgetfulness before descending into the body.<sup>69</sup> The descent to the realm "under the fates" only denotes the sublunary regions as those in which pre-embodied free choices were now made binding on the souls who had made those choices. This is surely not an acceptance of astrological causality.

What is clear from the evidence of both Philoponus and Eusebius on astrology in the *Philosophy from Oracles* is only that Porphyry included a

<sup>66</sup> Aside from differences in wording from Eusebius (who does claim to provide verbatim quotation), Philoponus seems to be adding his own polemical deductions; see e.g., *Phil.Orac.* fr. 332 (the knowledge of the circuit of the stars is incomprehensible to some daemons and gods, "and furthermore simply to all of them"); fr. 337 ("that is, the movement of the stars," etc.).

<sup>67</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 337 Smith (= Philop. *Op. Mundi* 200.13–20).

<sup>68</sup> *De libr.arbitr.* fr. 268.83–89 Smith.

<sup>69</sup> Whether Porphyry considered "the gods who descended" to have forgotten is rather doubtful; and as we saw in the previous chapter, it should be doubted that Porphyry would have believed that those beings properly designated gods would have descended below the Moon. We probably have a case of Porphyry's accommodation to popular language, or, more likely, the language of the oracle on which he was commenting (which is no longer extant). The children of Kronos and Rhea would have been daemons in Porphyry's system (unless he means planets here).

number of oracular declarations regarding the power of the stars and the potential procedures thought to be requisite to escape from under such power, and that he provided summaries of these oracles in his own words. Philoponus and Eusebius do not tell us, however, Porphyry's larger purposes for quoting and summarizing them.<sup>70</sup> In spite of our limitations, the bulk of the astrological fragments from the *Philosophy from Oracles* provide sufficient reason to doubt that the philosopher advocated astrological determinism in that treatise. The basic problem addressed by these fragments is not astrology in general, but its particular relationship to oracular utterance. Porphyry reaches two fundamental conclusions on this relationship: the "gods" or daemons<sup>71</sup> who deliver the oracles in many places are dependent on the stars for the information given in those oracles so that "they are excellent astrologers"<sup>72</sup> (a claim echoed in the *Letter to Anebo*);<sup>73</sup> and, because the stars are difficult to interpret rightly or because the intervening atmosphere obfuscates clarity, the oracular divinities admit to inventing falsehoods in their oracles.<sup>74</sup>

Neither of these conclusions contradict the argument presented in *On Free Will*. There the souls were represented as choosing their future embodied lives, and then descending into the material world at various speeds, depending on their character and their individual decisions, in such a way as to correspond with their respective horoscopes. Porphyry's work on oracles emphasizes not a causative power inherent in the stars, but only the stars' ability to *indicate*, albeit obscurely, future events.<sup>75</sup> This is not at all inconsonant with the position expressed in his *On Free Will*, and it is certainly not an open advocacy of the power of the stars, or even an admission of the necessity or benefits of consulting horoscopes (even if the oracles may encourage this).

Caution and precision as to what the astrological fragments can and cannot reveal about Porphyry's position on astrology are necessary to appreciate

<sup>70</sup> The activity of citing oracles that one does not necessarily agree with, or rather, with whose surface meaning one might disagree, is explained by the pedagogical tradition within which *Philosophy from Oracles* was composed. For discussion of this aspect, see [Chapter 4](#).

<sup>71</sup> Of course, the stars themselves are properly called gods, and therefore those seeking to interpret them and pass on the message to humans would be "transmitters" (to use Plato's term), and hence daemons.

<sup>72</sup> *Phil. Orac.* frs. 330–330a Smith; Eusebius (in fr. 330 Smith) gives a slightly fuller epithet, based on the actual wording of the oracle quoted in the fragment, "they are excellent Magi and astrologers."

<sup>73</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2 Sodano, p. 16.1–4.

<sup>74</sup> *Phil. Orac.* frags. 332, 340–342 Smith; *Aneb.* 2 Sodano, p. 26.15–27.6; a similar conclusion, though based on different considerations, is reached by Origen, *Comm. Genes.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.28, 73–81.

<sup>75</sup> The only exception to this might seem to be the fragment of Philoponus mentioned above (*Phil. Orac.* fr. 337 Smith); but even here a nuanced interpretation, such as that suggested above, resolves any tension between the fragment and the position offered in *On Free Will*.

properly the translational moves Porphyry might be making with respect to astrological knowledge and philosophical truth. Far from a defense of paganism in all its bizarre, “Oriental,” excessive, magic-prone, and bloody luridness, the treatise sought to translate the particulars of the religious *koine* of the Mediterranean world into a universal philosophical framework. These particulars may not have found a location at a very lofty place on the theological, ontological, and ritual scale, but they nonetheless confirmed that scale and furthermore found their true valence by proper placement within it. By distinguishing between the hierarchical *translation* of astrology, ritual, and other forms of ancient knowledge and the philosopher’s *defense* of those forms of knowledge, we arrive at a model for interpreting fragments that often contain only hints of Porphyry’s interpretation or rationale for inclusion of various oracles. It allows us to hear Porphyry speaking a voice (even if exiguous) other than the voices of the oracular utterances, and importantly guards against glibly heralding contradictions in Porphyry’s corpus when so little basis survives for doing so.

The charge of inconsistency between Porphyry’s works possesses staying power only if we presume that the philosopher subscribed unproblematically to the oracles he quotes. As will become even clearer below, we need not draw such a conclusion. First we should consider the ways in which the Christian sources for the astrological fragments provide further indication of the plausibility of the interpretation of them offered here. In the case of his astrological fragments, the Christian sources often omit his comments altogether, finding the oracles alone easier targets for their polemical arguments.<sup>76</sup> When they do give us Porphyry’s words, these emphasize the dependence of the oracles upon astrological means of determining the future and their subsequent falsehood. This is not a positive assessment.

The Christian sources also hint at their own selectivity in quoting from *Philosophy from Oracles*. Their introductions to the fragments repeat phrases such as: “Then going down [the page] he says next,”<sup>77</sup> or “after other things, [he says . . .],”<sup>78</sup> or “and again he says.”<sup>79</sup> There is little indication in all of this how much material is being omitted or what the nature of that material might be.<sup>80</sup> Yet, however severe the Christian selection process may have been, the clear statement that the oracular deities admit to lying – and weakly submit to the forceful compulsion of humans – should

<sup>76</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 334–336, 338 Smith.      <sup>77</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 333 Smith.

<sup>78</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 335 Smith.      <sup>79</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 330, 339, 341, 342 Smith.

<sup>80</sup> For a study on the possible range of material left out between quotations, see Johnson forthcoming b.



be sufficient to mark Porphyry as at best ambivalent, or even a detractor of the astrological prognostications altogether. When Porphyry echoes the words of an oracle and declares that they make “excellent astrologers,” it may be best to take these words as sarcastic in tone.

Our Christian sources provide an additional confirmation: Eusebius’ argument against Fate in the remainder of Book VI of his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, that is, the discussion that follows his quotations of the astrological fragments from *Philosophy from Oracles*, shows that his target is not Porphyry, but only the oracles which he collected. While heralding the fact that his source is the great pagan philosopher, Eusebius’ polemic is turned against Apollo: “How was it that he who advised to loose the bonds of Fate by magic arts, though he was himself a god, did not annul the destiny of his own temple to be burned by lightning?”<sup>81</sup> After quoting the rest of the astrological fragments, Eusebius caustically declared:

That deluding and deceitful daemon makes pretences and cajoles the senseless, in order that whenever he should fail of foretelling what was to come, he might provide himself an excuse for his blunder in Fate. So when the daemon had by his oracular answers made everything depend on Fate, and had taken away the freedom arising from self-determined action, and subjugated this also to necessity, see into what a deadly pit of evil doctrines he has plunged those who believe in him.<sup>82</sup>

The daemon, not Porphyry, is the subject of criticism here. Had the philosopher advocated or defended the astrological tenets of the oracles he quoted, it is doubtful that his later Christian critic would have missed the opportunity to lambaste the inconsistency within his corpus or the irrationality of one who had claimed to be a philosopher seeking the pursuit of truth. Later, when Eusebius avers that “many, even of those who prided themselves greatly upon education and philosophy, have before now been dragged into agreement with the dogma [of Fate],”<sup>83</sup> he fails to make any mention of the philosopher who had taken so much of his attention earlier in Books IV–VI of his apologetic tome. There seems no sufficient reason to suppose that Porphyry had written favorably of astrology in his comments on the astrological oracles, and that Eusebius nevertheless decided, in spite of the pagan philosopher’s great reputation as a threat to Christians, not to provide an explicit and forceful attack against him in Book VI. Indeed, while Eusebius may not have been familiar with Porphyry’s *On Free Will*, *Against Nemertius*, or *Commentary on the Timaeus*, there is much in these works that resonates with his own argument or those of the sources he

<sup>81</sup> PE 6.4.3; trans. Gifford.

<sup>82</sup> PE 6.6.3–4; trans. Gifford.

<sup>83</sup> PE 6.7.44; trans. Gifford.

quotes against the doctrine of Fate (especially Origen's *Commentary on Genesis*). In light of these considerations, the claim that the *Philosophy from Oracles* was a youthful work, not yet having ascended from the pit of the "oriental" superstition of his Phoenician origins, is hardly tenable – at least with respect to the power of the stars.<sup>84</sup>

If the picture here is correct, which presents a philosopher who maintained a largely coherent position on the *indicative* function (distinct from the *causal* power) of the stars, even while translating those oracles whose surface meaning might otherwise point in another direction, then the sentiment of his *On Abstinence* must be seen as a similar expression of this position. In a chapter of his vegetarian treatise that will deserve further attention below, Porphyry claims that the wise man has no need of divination. The addressee of *On Abstinence* ought not to be concerned that rejection of animal sacrifice would involve the loss of divination from the entrails of sacrificial victims. Only one who was concerned with the ephemeral things of the material world would desire to divine the equally ephemeral future of bodily existence. The philosopher, on the other hand, will sense no need to practice divination,

For he has practiced detachment from the things with which divination is concerned. He does not stoop to marriage . . . or to trade; he does not ask about a slave, or about promotion and the other kinds of human fame.<sup>85</sup> What he does seek to know, no diviner or entrails of animals will show him clearly. Himself through himself, as we say, approaching the god who is established in his true entrails, will receive instructions for eternal life.<sup>86</sup>

If there are especially pressing straits in such a person's life, Porphyry avers, then good daemons will provide appropriate warnings in dreams and through other signs, without the philosopher needing to make consultation of any diviner.<sup>87</sup>

The *Letter to Anebo* is similarly ambivalent, if not overtly critical, of divinatory practices of any sort (whether from consultation of entrails, astrology, magical markings, inspired waters, or inspiring vapors – as at the three main Apollo shrines of Delphi, Claros, and Didyma – dreams, or the flight of birds).<sup>88</sup> Because of its fragmentary status, the degree to which

<sup>84</sup> Astrology, in any case, is not more at home in the Eastern than in the Western Mediterranean, as the works of Firmicus Maternus, Macrobius and others remind us.

<sup>85</sup> Questions of marriage or lost slaves were important in practical astrology (especially "katarchic" astrology); cf. Dorotheus Sidonius, *Anthol.* 5.35.1–3 (adapted by Hephæstion 3.42.2–4), with discussion by Riley 1987: 238.

<sup>86</sup> *Abst.* 2.52.2–4; trans. G. Clark. <sup>87</sup> *Abst.* 2.53.1.

<sup>88</sup> His questioning of divination is given at *Ep.Aneb.* 2 Sodano, pp. 9.2–17.8; see further context at Lamb. *Myst.* 3.11; Sheppard 1993: 138–143; more widely, Lane Fox, 1989: 168–261.

his questions are critical, or the degree to which the positions he recites are his own, or whether he is merely canvassing those of others, is not readily transparent. A recurrent theme, however, is that gods and (good) daemons are not present in the divinatory consultations. According to Iamblichus, Porphyry “attacked” the position that they “fulfill these things by being drawn down by the compulsions of our own invocation.”<sup>89</sup> The question of human compulsion of gods or daemons was apparently deemed so problematic to the philosopher that Iamblichus would polemically class Porphyry with atheists: “In vain you introduce the opinion of the atheists<sup>90</sup> since they consider the whole art of divination to be affected by the wicked daemon.”<sup>91</sup> Iamblichus is describing here the attribution of oracular activity to wicked daemons who impersonated the gods as if they were “play-acting” in order to receive divine honors and to obtain the blood and smoke of animal sacrifices.<sup>92</sup> Because of Iamblichus’ polemical posture, there is insufficient evidence for concluding that the *Letter to Anebo* made a universal claim that all divination, even that in dreams,<sup>93</sup> was entirely due to the activity of wicked daemons. But, we can at least conclude from Iamblichus’ response that Porphyry had severely limited any positive connection between gods (or good daemons) and divination (at least of some kinds, if not every kind). This critical stance resonates well with that of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, which had also emphasized the deleterious effects of human compulsion on the truthfulness of the oracles or their power.<sup>94</sup>

The foregoing investigation into the implications of the soul’s descent below the stars is relevant not only for determining the nature of salvation (understood as the ascent above the stars) but also the role of ritual in the pursuit of that salvation (as we shall shortly see). With respect to the problematic status of astrological knowledge for divinatory purposes, especially when seen within the context of Porphyry’s concern with the descended soul’s relation to the stars and the persistent threat of wicked daemons in the regions below the stars, the scope of his position ranges only from cautious ambivalence to firm criticism. An additional component of

<sup>89</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2 Sodano, p.11.16–17.

<sup>90</sup> For the suggestion that the “atheists” obliquely designate Christians, see Hadot 1960: 228; Edwards 1993: 168–169.

<sup>91</sup> Iamblichus ap. *Ep. Aneb.* 2 Sodano, p.17.12–13.

<sup>92</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2 Sodano, pp.16.7–17.6; cf. *Abst.* 2.40.3 (“slipping on the masks of the other gods”).

<sup>93</sup> *Abst.* 2.53.1, for the claim that good daemons sent dreams.

<sup>94</sup> The fact that Iamblichus’ witness testifies to a doctrine of oracular daemons further confirms our earlier argument that Porphyry was accommodating his language to include “gods” as a popular title for daemons. See Chapter 2.

the soul's descent would establish the central problem that most motivated his construal of the ontological condition subsisting below the stars. At some point subsequent to its fall below the stars, the soul faced a conflict with evil daemons.<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, the nature, causes, and ultimate results of this altercation are not made clear. The hostile activity and the threat they posed would, however, define the relationship between human souls and maleficent daemons for the remainder of their embodied lives. It seems likely that the conflict was somehow connected with the notion of an increasing attachment of material particles that stuck to the soul as it descended. These material-spiritual (pneumatic) agglomerations were encrusted around the wicked daemons like a dense fog.

The adoption of a spiritual envelope or "soul-vehicle" (literally, a chariot, *ochēma*) by both the fallen souls and the wicked daemons formed their link to the material world.<sup>96</sup> We do not know if *Philosophy from Oracles* treated the subject; but an interesting fragment from his *Commentary on the Timaeus* reports that "the followers of Porphyry" assert that:

The so-called corruption of the soul-vehicle and the irrational soul scatters [upon death], and they say that these dissolve and somehow are released into the spheres from which they obtained their composition, and that these are mixtures (literally, "dough") from the heavenly spheres and that the soul collected them as it descended, so that they both are and are not.<sup>97</sup>

Proclus, who gives us this fragment – or rather, paraphrase – appends some lines of the *Chaldean Oracles* that he supposes inspired Porphyry and his followers in the doctrine of the soul-vehicle: the descending souls take a part of the aether and a part, "Of the solar and lunar [grades], and as many as/ swim in the air."<sup>98</sup> Whether Proclus is correct in tracing the source of their doctrine to the *Chaldean Oracles*, the reference to the solar and the lunar as successive levels where greater accretions of pneumatic material became caked onto the soul evokes Porphyry's explanation of a passage from Plotinus' fourth *Ennead* (4.3.9) in the *Sentences*.<sup>99</sup> Again the context is the state of the soul after the death of the body, and again the soul is said to remain united with its soul-vehicle, which it "has received from the heavenly spheres."<sup>100</sup> But then further information is given about the levels of descent:

<sup>95</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano; for discussion, see [Chapter 2](#).

<sup>96</sup> Bidez 1913: 89; Cumont 1949: 367–370; Verbeke 1945: 366–368; Dodds 1963: 313–321; Schibli 1993: 163–165.

<sup>97</sup> *Comm. Tim.* frag. 80 Sodano pp. 68–69 (commenting on *Tim.* 41d1–2); see Deuse 1983.

<sup>98</sup> *Chald. Orac.* 47. <sup>99</sup> Deuse 1983: 161. <sup>100</sup> *Sent.* 29 Lamberz.

For in fact it is in accordance with its disposition that it finds a body of a definite rank and assigned to areas proper to it: that is why, when its condition is sufficiently pure, it gravitates naturally to a body close to the immaterial, that is, an aetherial one, while if it proceeds down from reason to the projection of imagination, it inclines naturally to a solar body; and when it becomes feminine and subject to passion a lunar one is standing ready for it as suitable to its form; but when it falls into bodies, as it comes to rest at the level of their unlovely form, constituted as they are from humid exhalations, there ensues complete ignorance of true being and black-out and puerility.<sup>101</sup>

The life of the soul is thus a more complicated affair than a simple soul–body conjunction that is annulled upon the death of the body. The breath (*pneuma*) on which the soul rides, as if on a chariot, is itself of a more or less humid nature; and thus, the soul’s entanglements in the material world are deeper and potentially more sinister than the physical body into which it is born and from which it departs upon death.

The sinister nature of wicked daemons is explained by means of this soul-vehicle as well. The daemons encased within these pneumatic envelopes could either withstand the material temptations they offered or submit to the bodily desires afforded them by their soul-vehicles. The *On Abstinence* provides the details, as we recall from the previous chapter. The wicked daemons are those controlled by their *pneuma* and its appetites and angers.<sup>102</sup> “There is no evil they do not attempt to do to the regions around the earth. Their character is wholly violent and deceptive . . .”<sup>103</sup> Plagues, disasters, violence, and civil wars are their special activity; the blame for these they cast upon the gods, even while seeking to receive their divine worship.<sup>104</sup> Though much fuller in its description of the heinous activities of wicked daemons and the placement of blame for such activities on their relation to their pneumatic envelope, the account of *On Abstinence* strongly echoes that of the *Letter to Anebo* noticed above. In both, deception, shape-shifting and wearing masks are the hallmarks of their work in the regions about the earth.<sup>105</sup> Whatever the precise nature of the conflict between these daemons and the souls descending into matter, which was alluded to in *Commentary on the Timaeus*, it is probably of the same sort as would persist throughout the soul’s embodied life. The daemons sought bloody sacrifices and veneration, and would pursue any means necessary in achieving their ends.

<sup>101</sup> *Sent.* 29 Lamberz (trans. Dillon, 806–807); see Cumont 1949: 367–370.

<sup>102</sup> *Abst.* 2.38.4.

<sup>103</sup> *Abst.* 2.39.3 (trans. G. Clark).

<sup>104</sup> *Abst.* 2.40.1–5.

<sup>105</sup> Shape-shifting: *Ep.Aneb.* 2 Sodano, p. 16.8; *Abst.* 2.40.3; masks: *Ep.Aneb.* 2 Sodano p. 16.8; *Abst.* 2.39.1.

## APPROACHING THE DIVINE

In spite of the constraints placed upon us by the fragments, we discern a broadly coherent vision of the context for the soul's embodied existence in the material world. Its descent into matter was fraught with significance for its life in a body. Its passage below the stars within the horoscopic configurations indicative of its previous choice, the gradual agglomeration of a soul-vehicle, conflict with daemons who flitted about the murkiness of the material world in their own pneumatic shrouds, and the subsequent difficulties in determining the astral indications of one's life as well as the obstacle to pursuing virtue easily because of the attacks of wicked daemons, all these were features presented with nuance and variation in particular instances within an argument or commentary, but were all expressions of a unified framework for understanding the condition of the embodied soul. Consideration of these elements of Porphyry's thought also provides the only proper context for examining his attitude towards traditional public cult. Without this larger framework we can only partially sense the force of his religious translation and the severe constraints that he persistently placed around common religious perception and performance. Astrology and (most) divinatory enterprises were focused upon the bodily life below the stars; the religious vision of those who pursued such acts was hopelessly near-sighted since it looked only to the concerns of the body and failed to grasp what lay beyond the soul's embodied life and above the stars, which marked something of a gateway to truths uncorrupted by material accretions.

In a striking and well-known anecdote recorded in his *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry recalls the provocative response of his master when he had been invited by Amelius "the lover of sacrifices" (*philothutos*) to attend a religious observance.<sup>106</sup> "They [the daemons]<sup>107</sup> should come to me rather than I to them," Plotinus had remarked before serenely returning to his philosophic pursuits.<sup>108</sup> Such an attitude to public religious performances is redolent of the critical engagement with sacrifice offered in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*. A common assumption, however, is that Porphyry's criticism in the treatise on vegetarianism is inconsonant with the religious sensibilities of

<sup>106</sup> On the representation of Amelius in the *V.Plot.*, see Finamore 2005.

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted that the Greek never specifies whether the subject of this sentence should be the gods (as it is usually rendered in modern translations) or the daemons. Based on the analyses of this chapter and Chapter 2, it seems unlikely that Porphyry (and probably Plotinus) would have thought that they were gods properly speaking.

<sup>108</sup> *V.Plot.* 10.33–39.

his purportedly earlier works, such as *Philosophy from Oracles*; or, if consistent, it is supposed that the episode in *Life of Plotinus* and the position of *On Abstinence* are not to be taken too seriously. Their dismissive attitude marks a temporary aberration from a general acceptance of traditional temple cult.<sup>109</sup> The following observations seek to delineate a largely coherent vision of cult practices throughout Porphyry's entire corpus; the approach of his *On Abstinence* is only a lengthier expression of his ritual translation that located such cult acts at low theological and ontological levels and hence formed a consistently critical, or at least ambivalent stance towards the public religious cult acts performed within the material, embodied world. While there is flexibility in the various instantiations of his religious vision, they all fall within a spectrum that ranges from outright criticism to dismissive ambivalence, not an open (or even tentative) acceptance. Analysis of Porphyry's attitude to theurgy will be postponed for the moment, since theurgy is, at least supposedly, an attempt to channel private cultic activity towards the higher philosophic goals of the salvation of the soul and escape from the material world.

Within the scope of our broader concerns, this critical or ambivalent stance towards popular religious cult is central to the sort of transcendent universalism and vertical translation exhibited in his general philosophical vision. If universalism is understood to be an *inclusionary* interpretive strategy that sought to familiarize the myriad "foreign" instances of cultic activity by incorporation into a category of the Same, in Porphyry such universalism shifted towards an *exclusionary* process. The plethora of material cult acts was categorized as inappropriate to the transcendent philosophical life and deemed to be misleading to the pursuit of wisdom.

### On Abstinence

Whether a late antique priest or other participant in public sacrifice considered the benefit of sacrificial performances to be the placating of divine beings, the solidification of social relationships, the preservation of ancestral traditions, or merely recreation and repast with friends and family, the philosophical vision of *On Abstinence* made all these assumptions problematic. The divine beings that were the object of material sacrifices (both animal and vegetal) were only the lower levels of the theological hierarchy. Most significantly, the animal sacrifices at the center of public religious

<sup>109</sup> Fowden 1986: 130–131; *idem*, 2005: 530–531 (where Porphyry is alleged to have been "confused" by the pull of Plotinus and religious cult in different directions); see rather, Smith, 1997: 29–35.

life were pleasing only to the lowest and most sinister level of that hierarchy. The cosmology discussed in the previous section showed daemons as deleteriously bound to matter. Even if the blood and smoke of sacrificed animals ameliorated the hostility of wicked daemons, it was only temporary and had no lasting impact on a person's virtue, a city's well-being, or the general health and prosperity of the regions about the earth.<sup>110</sup> Rather than steeling the soul of the philosopher to withstand their onslaught, the savor of roasting meat attracted malevolent daemons whose cantankerous characters were not satisfied for long.

The social hierarchies instantiated in the sacrificial procedures of the civic body were likewise avoided or refashioned as the philosopher became the true priest.<sup>111</sup> On the one hand, of course, Porphyry drew his picture of the philosopher–priest from images of similar persons within the societies of particular barbarian nations, such as the Egyptians and the Jews.<sup>112</sup> Yet, applied within the Greek and Roman context in which Porphyry wrote *On Abstinence*, the holy man became an obscurity precisely because of his recognition of the true theological and sacrificial hierarchy fostered by a Platonic view of the world. The splendid isolation and “drift to marginality” of the Neoplatonic sage (so lucidly represented by Garth Fowden)<sup>113</sup> is nowhere better depicted than in Porphyry's own works, and especially his *On Abstinence*, where the philosopher openly declares that if the city feels a need to placate wicked daemons with public sacrifice, it is no concern for the person seeking the true salvation of the soul and true piety towards the One.<sup>114</sup> Porphyry's position does not involve a rejection of the civic sphere as such – he claims that abstinence from meat would be good for the city as a whole,<sup>115</sup> that he has not come to destroy the laws of the city, but to affirm them if they are properly understood,<sup>116</sup> and, if undistorted, the common conceptions of humanity do aim at the correct idea of the gods<sup>117</sup> – but the emphatic dismissal of the priorities and obligations of civic life is persistently evoked throughout the treatise.<sup>118</sup>

If the goal of public sacrificial ritual was deemed to be the preservation of ancestral traditions, Porphyry severed such a connection by repeatedly showing the decline in national and civic religious forms from an age of

<sup>110</sup> *Abst.* 2.9.1–2.11.3; 2.25.1–7; 2.43.2.

<sup>111</sup> *Abst.* 2.49–50; see Zambon 2002: 60–62; Haake 2008: 145–165. For the claim that Lactantius' *antistes philosophiae* refers to Porphyry, see Beatrice 1993; Digeser 1998. For criticism, see Goulet 2004; Riedweg 2005.

<sup>112</sup> Egyptians: *Abst.* 4.6–10; Jews (Essenes): *Abst.* 4.11–14; see Chapter 7 for discussion.

<sup>113</sup> Fowden 1982: 48–59; Hadot 1995: 102–104.

<sup>114</sup> *Abst.* 2.43.2.

<sup>115</sup> *Abst.* 4.5.6.

<sup>116</sup> *Abst.* 2.33.1; cf. the words of Jesus at Matt. 5:17.

<sup>117</sup> *Abst.* 2.58.3.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 7.



vegetal offerings and its correspondingly peaceful way of life to animal and even human sacrifices, which were attended by increasing levels of violence and vice. The ancestral traditions were lauded, insofar as they could be accurately remembered through historical investigation and their later accretions of impiety could be identified and eschewed. An acceptance of the Greek and Roman traditions of a distant past must not obscure the force of his criticism of the Greek and Roman present, which had for centuries fallen into the severest forms of impiety according to Porphyry's moral and philosophical vision.<sup>119</sup> History thus provided a powerful mechanism in the ritual translation of *On Abstinence*. Not only were contemporary cultic practices transferred to lower levels of a theological and sacrificial hierarchy, but they could also be placed on a historical scale ranging from ancient piety to contemporary ignorance and impiety.

This hierarchical scheme was, furthermore, framed in terms that were at once ontological and moral. If the popular motivation of public sacrifice was less the worship of daemons and only the enjoyment of the pleasures of good company, good food, and good cheer, then once again Porphyry's critique was firm. Indeed, the philosopher diagnosed the religious malaise of his time as the result of the pursuit of pleasure, even if the defenders of animal sacrifice refused to admit it.<sup>120</sup> At the most fundamental level, eating meat obscured the vision of the soul, "thickened the chain" binding soul to body, and made it ever more difficult for the soul to detach itself from the body.<sup>121</sup> The life of the sage was a "competition in the Olympics of the soul,"<sup>122</sup> and so there was little time to waste in living "the good life" if this was understood in a bodily or material sense.

The central activity of public cult within the civic context was, therefore, a hindrance to the pursuit of the life of the mind, and hence the salvation of the soul. The conceptualization of a theological hierarchy carried with it a corresponding sacrificial hierarchy, as already noted: animal sacrifice for wicked daemons; vegetal sacrifice for the heavenly or astral deities; vocal hymns to the intelligible gods; but pure silence and pure thoughts to the God over all.<sup>123</sup> While the philosopher might stand in the crowds and enjoy the festive hymn as the sacred procession moved towards the sanctuary, he or she would find it most advantageous for the well-being of their soul to withdraw from the climax of civic cult, the sacrifice itself and the communal sharing of the sacrificed meat. It was no doubt best to avoid

<sup>119</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 2.56; 2.27.1–3; 4.18.4.

<sup>120</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 1.42.1 (with note of G. Clark at 139 n. 152); 3.18.5.

<sup>121</sup> *Abst.* 1.38.2; 1.31.1–5.

<sup>122</sup> *Abst.* 1.31.3. <sup>123</sup> *Abst.* 2.34.1–2.36.6; with discussion in [Chapter 2](#).

the crowds and the meal altogether, composing one's hymns in relative solitude for a small circle of sages than risk the swarms of daemons that hovered about the sacrifices along with the multitude eager for a savory meal.<sup>124</sup>

Here again, therefore, we find an exclusionary universalism as the dominant interpretive grid for framing and assessing the diverse cult acts performed in various civic and ethnic contexts. Porphyry's was a universalism that rejected a cosmopolitan at-home-ness and called instead for an austere attitude of vertical translation of ritual. A frequent way of expressing this exclusionary universalism in *On Abstinence* was through the language of withdrawal or apostasy (*apostasis* and its cognates) from the material bonds established in civic cultic contexts and the ways of life embodied therein.<sup>125</sup> Notions of intellectual sacrifice promoted an ethic of withdrawal, even of spiritual separatism.<sup>126</sup>

### Philosophy from Oracles

The text that seems most at odds with this picture of the sage's ascetic reaction to material sacrificial procedures is the fragmentary *Philosophy from Oracles*, which has been seen both as a defense of religious Hellenism and a defense of Oriental superstition. By either characterization, it has seemed that the treatise was an attempt to wed philosophy with the most crass and sanguine of religious expressions, to dress superstition in a philosophically respectable garb.<sup>127</sup> We have already seen in the previous chapter, however, that the original treatise, in spite of the attention paid to other details by its Christian detractors, may have sought to express the problematic or inferior status of the traditional gods traditionally understood, by locating them well below a Platonic or even Plotinian conception of higher deity (whether this was the Demiurgic Mind or the Good itself). His theological translation had located the traditional gods of oracles and poetry closer to and most likely within the daemonic realms. A similar translational move is apparent in his treatment of sacrifices, or rather, the oracles prescribing sacrifices, in *Philosophy from Oracles*.

<sup>124</sup> For daemons at sacrifices, see e.g., *Abst.* 2.47.1–3; *Regr. anim.* fr. 293.8–9 Smith.

<sup>125</sup> *Abst.* 1.32–33, 39, 47; cf. *Sent.* 32; *Ant. Nymph.* 34. The frequency of such language ought to be deemed striking given the widespread belief that his criticism of the Christians was for just such acts of apostasy; see Johnson 2010.

<sup>126</sup> My remarks here prompt an intentional departure from what is nearly a scholarly consensus on Porphyry's supposed criticism of Christians for separatism from ancestral religion; see Johnson forthcoming a; *idem* 2010.

<sup>127</sup> See esp., Bidez 1913: 17–19; Cumont 1949: 366; Hadot 1960: 211.

The primary discussion of sacrifice occurs in his comments on a lengthy oracle of Apollo. Before quoting the oracle itself, Eusebius of Caesarea, our source for both the oracle and Porphyry's comments, declares his apologetic intention in quoting this material. While the philosopher would "in other works"<sup>128</sup> hold the position that "the sacrifices of bloodshed and slaughter of irrational animals" were performed not to gods but to daemons, and claim "that it is neither necessary nor holy to make animal sacrifices to the gods,"<sup>129</sup> in *Philosophy from Oracles*, on the contrary, he had set forth the oracular utterance of Apollo calling for animal sacrifice "not only to the daemons and the powers about the earth, but also to make animal sacrifice to the aetherial and heavenly ones."<sup>130</sup> He then introduces the fragment: "Hear, therefore . . . how Apollo teaches that one must worship the gods."<sup>131</sup>

It is significant here that Eusebius does not bring himself to claim that Porphyry contradicted himself, but only that the teaching of the Apollo of the oracle prescribing animal sacrifices to gods was in tension with the philosopher who declared in *On Abstinence* that animal sacrifices were not appropriate to the gods.<sup>132</sup> We shall see that Porphyry does, in fact, continue to use the title of gods for the recipients of sacrifice in his comments on the oracle. Yet, as was suggested in the previous chapter, it seems likely that he deemed it unproblematic to adapt himself to the language of his sources at any given point in his treatise, and that there may have been programmatic statements elsewhere (as in *On the Styx*) declaring more explicitly the notion that the "so-called gods" of the poetic medium (whether Homer or verse oracles) were no more than daemons. Confirmation of this suggestion is the careful manner in which Eusebius avoids asserting that Porphyry himself teaches in the treatise on oracles that animal sacrifices are due to the gods, but identifies only Apollo as prescribing such things. It is clear, then, that Porphyry made no clear defense of animal sacrifice as being directed to the gods.

The oracle itself enumerates a number of different sacrificial victims, offered in distinctive ways, and dedicated to various levels of deity:

<sup>128</sup> Namely *On Abstinence*, which he would quote next, after the material from the *Philosophy from Oracles*, at *PE* 4.10.

<sup>129</sup> Eusebius, *PE* 4.8.5 (= Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.6–9 Smith); cf. Zambon 2002: 273–274.

<sup>130</sup> *PE* 4.8.4 (= Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.2–6 Smith).

<sup>131</sup> *PE* 4.8.5 (Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.9–12 Smith).

<sup>132</sup> Eusebius would elsewhere not be averse to pointing out what he deemed contradictions in Porphyry's thought; see *PE* 3.13.8 (= Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 353, on his criticism of Chaeremon in *Ep.Aneb.* and his praise of him in *De simulacr.*). Cf. Zambon 2002: 273–274.

To chthonian (*epichthonioi*) gods in one way, to heavenly (*ouranioi*) gods in another,<sup>133</sup> and sometimes

To the very kings of fair weather and of cloud-faring air

To all those of the sea and under the earth (*hupochthonioi*).<sup>134</sup>

Later, a class of gods would be named “netherworldly” (*nerterioi*);<sup>135</sup> nymphs would be included;<sup>136</sup> and astral and aetherial gods would be allotted certain sacrifices.<sup>137</sup>

While the original recipient<sup>138</sup> of the oracle may have begun to worry about the massive expense of the sacrificial outlay demanded by the oracle, involving birds and cattle, as well as incense, grain wine, and honey, Porphyry’s exposition of the oracle focuses entirely on the sacrificial logic of the prescription.<sup>139</sup> Not only were various titles for the ranks of gods employed, but the characteristics of the sacrificial victims also corresponded to a theological hierarchy, ranging from the netherworldly and “under-the-earth” gods, to the earthly (chthonian) and the “on-the-earth” deities, sea gods, and then the heavenly and aetherial gods. The color of the sacrificial victims was to match the divine gradation (“since like rejoices in like”),<sup>140</sup> as well as the number of victims required (“for three is the symbol of the bodily and earthy [element]”).<sup>141</sup> The fragment concludes by distinguishing the heavenly gods from all those below them: the heavenly gods “are the givers of good things, but the others are the prohibitors of bad things.”<sup>142</sup>

Even if the gods in the oracle and commentary on it are presumed to be daemons by Porphyry, no overtly critical attitude is discernible in the fragment as we have it. Yet, we should note the reserved expository style of his treatment of the oracle, which is given in the dry tone of a commentary.<sup>143</sup> He traces the distinctions presumed by the oracular utterance between various levels of divinities and different forms of sacrifice,

<sup>133</sup> The division of cultic practice between Olympian (heavenly) and chthonian deities in Greek literature is as early as tragedy; see Aesch., *Ag.* 90; Soph. *Antig.* 1070–1073 (see Henrichs 2005: 47 n. 3). Actual cultic practice contained greater variation and there remains lively debate over the usefulness of such a distinction; for more critical views, see Schlesier 1991–1992: 38–51; for more positive views, see Scullion 1994; Henrichs 2005; R. Parker 2005.

<sup>134</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.20–23 Smith. <sup>135</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.29 Smith.

<sup>136</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.30 Smith. <sup>137</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 314.40 Smith.

<sup>138</sup> The fact that the recipient is referred to in the singular (rather than being a civic community) may be taken as a slight indication of a Didymaeian provenance for the oracle, rather than from the Apollo at Claros, whose extant oracles are always to communities; see Graf 1992: 273.

<sup>139</sup> Busine 2005: 259–261; Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 124; Johnson 2009: 103–115.

<sup>140</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.30 Smith; the adage occurs in Plato, *Symp.* 195b5; *Leg.* 8.837a6; Arist. *EN* 8.1.2, 1155b7–8; 9.3.3, 1165b17.

<sup>141</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.34–35 Smith. <sup>142</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.43–45 Smith. <sup>143</sup> Johnson 2009.

“as the god advises them to sacrifice.”<sup>144</sup> In a manner resonant of the commentary genre, in which a lemma from the source text is followed by brief exposition by the commentator, Porphyry’s treatment identifies the details important to his broader purposes and then provides a brief account of their presence in the oracle. For instance: “They [the victims] are black: for such is the naturally dark earth. There are three of them: for three is the symbol of the bodily and earthy [element].”<sup>145</sup>

Porphyry’s attempt to identify the symbols of sacrifice here is significant. While *symbola* were part of traditional religious terminology, carrying the sense of a sacred implement, act or image agreed upon by convention, intellectual approaches to Greek religion had long felt that they possessed a deeper meaning and hence were “symbols” of a reality signified by the particular objects and acts of religious cult.<sup>146</sup> “Must we exegete,” Porphyry exclaims, “the symbols of the sacrifices since they are clear to the person who understands well?”<sup>147</sup> He then offers the exegesis anyway. Some of his explanation does not seem to be entirely esoteric – a general participant or observer of the sacrifice probably had little difficulty noting the correspondence of the dark skin of a sheep with the dark earth where chthonian deities dwelt, without the help of the philosopher. But, discerning the three elements in a triple sacrifice might have required a bit more skill (or imagination) in ritual translation. Indeed, the matter-of-factness of the commentary and the rhetoric of reasonableness are key features of Porphyry’s translational work. Even as he transfers the oracular formulations into a philosophical frame he evinces the naturalness of translation. Translation merely articulates what was (purportedly) there all along.

The salient feature in all this, however, is the carefully defined focus of the entire fragment on the single notion of a sacrificial hierarchy expressive of, or mapped onto, a theological hierarchy. Such mapping entails that meaning will be “lost in translation” – even as new valences are gained and connections drawn. Even without further context, the forty-five lines of the fragment evince a studied and patient elucidation of a narrowly circumscribed set of details. Entirely lacking is any expression of a religious reformer in the manner of Apollonius of Tyana or a preacher or popularizer in the tone of Maximus of Tyre.<sup>148</sup> Porphyry’s persistently exegetical tone is

<sup>144</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.7–8 Smith.

<sup>145</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.33–35 Smith.

<sup>146</sup> Struck 2005: 147–165; see also Talal Asad’s critique of Geertz’s anthropological approach to religious symbols at Asad 1993: 27–39.

<sup>147</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 315.27–29 Smith.

<sup>148</sup> It is precisely as a popularizer that Joseph Bidez most often characterizes Porphyry; see Bidez 1913: 60, 70, 72, 80, 106, 131; for criticism, see Zambon 2002: 16 n. 2. For two rather different comparisons of Porphyry with Maximus of Tyre, see Bidez 1913: 128–129, and Chapter 6 below.

better seen, rather, as the penetrating Neoplatonic analysis of a philosopher searching for traces of a veiled wisdom obscured in the prescriptions of embodied cult acts performed on the bodies of animals. We may miss here the overt criticism of *On Abstinence*, but this is most likely due to the polemical purposes of the opponents who preserved the fragments for us and the different literary project Porphyry had set himself in *Philosophy from Oracles*. Here, translation was primary over criticism (or at least it masked his criticism). His was the task of discerning deeper truths behind the surface meaning of the oracles, which were thus appropriate only to those already embarked on the (Neoplatonic) pursuit of salvation, as he himself declares in the remains of the treatise's preface.<sup>149</sup> Since the pedagogical aims of *Philosophy from Oracles* will be treated in the next chapter, it will suffice to note here that the treatise was hardly intended as a simple acceptance of the oracles into a philosophical framework, but rather it sought to instantiate the sort of careful philosophically nuanced interpretation requisite for deriving true benefit from the oracles for the few who were "giving birth to truth."<sup>150</sup> The expository and detached style of the fragment on Apollo's sacrifice prescriptions affirms such rationalizing aims.

Though we possess less evidence, it seems likely that a similar approach to the oracular prescriptions was at work in the two other fragments of this treatise that directly deal with blood sacrifices. In one, Apollo had prescribed an "atonement sacrifice to the wicked daemon," which included animal blood, wine, and milk.<sup>151</sup> Only a single line of Porphyry's introductory discussion of the oracle is preserved: "At least when the prophet was eager to be an eye-witness of the divinity and was pressing [the god], Apollo said that such a thing was impossible without first making atonement to the wicked daemon." Any commentary provided by Porphyry following the quotation of the oracle and the propitiatory prayer that followed it is now lost. Since the two surviving lines of the prayer to the wicked daemon located it "Below the aerial recesses and above the earthly ones,"<sup>152</sup> Porphyry's discussion may have limited itself again to the indications of a theological hierarchy found in the words of the oracle. Or, he may have focused on the information the oracle provided regarding the hostility of wicked daemons towards gods and the pleasure such daemons took in blood and other fluid material substances. The mere quotation of an oracle prescribing blood sacrifices must not be taken as manifestly indicative of Porphyry's religious stance towards propitiatory blood sacrifices or wicked daemons. We lack sufficient evidence for precisely how Porphyry might

<sup>149</sup> *Phil. Orac.* frs. 303–305 Smith; for discussion, see Johnson 2009; also, Chapter 4 below.

<sup>150</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 303.31 Smith.

<sup>151</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 329 Smith.

<sup>152</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 329.22 Smith.

have treated the details of the oracles cited. The quotation itself of such an oracle can tell us little about the philosopher's interpretive conclusions. The fact that the Christian opponent who quoted this material (again, Eusebius) limited his selection to the oracle itself without quoting the commentary of Porphyry not only shows that Eusebius was more concerned in attacking the purportedly divine source preserved in an authoritative work, but may also hint at the lack of similarly objectionable material in the words of the philosopher himself.

In the final fragment dealing with sacrificial cult we have a situation opposite to the fragment just noted. Here we have only the commentary of Porphyry and not the oracle (or group of oracles) on which it reflected. Porphyry claims that wicked daemons are ruled by Sarapis, "being persuaded not only by the symbols, but because the propitiations and their apotropaic rites arise from Pluto, as we showed in the first book."<sup>153</sup> We have only limited evidence on Sarapis-Pluto in the fragments of the first book,<sup>154</sup> so the nature of the symbols mentioned here eludes us. The remainder of the fragment describes certain apotropaic rites used to drive daemons away from temples (clashing thongs and slaughtering animals),<sup>155</sup> and the tell-tale signs of daemons in human bodies, not only in temples or houses.<sup>156</sup> The language used in the description of daemonic presences is never positive: violence, straining, inarticulate sounds, pleasure, flatulence, blood, and impurities. Again, wicked daemons are represented as hostile to gods and concerned only with the crass materiality of sacrificial acts. The threatening nature of the daemonic presence is described as "traps set about human nature."<sup>157</sup> It is quite doubtful that the one expounding upon phenomena in these terms would be favorably disposed to them. Indeed, our source for this fragment (again Eusebius), had just quoted lengthy segments of Porphyry's account of wicked daemons in *On Abstinence* (which we have noted above)<sup>158</sup> and nowhere indicates a contradiction between the quotations of that work and the succeeding one from the *Philosophy from Oracles*. Had there been any perceived contradiction, it is doubtful that the apologist would have passed up an opportunity to criticize the great philosopher for incongruity of thought.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>153</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 326.7–10 Smith.

<sup>154</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 318 Smith, with frs. 326 and 327 Smith (apparently from Book II).

<sup>155</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 326.14–20 Smith; cf. *Ep.Aneb.* fr. 2, pp. 19.5–20.1 Sodano.

<sup>156</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 326.23–38 Smith; cf. *Ep.Marc.* 21.335–339.

<sup>157</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 326.38–39 Smith.

<sup>158</sup> Eus. *PE* 4.22.1–12 (quoting selections from Porph. *Abst.* 2.38–42).

<sup>159</sup> For accusations of inconsistency, see e.g., Eus. *PE* 3.13.8; cf. Augustine *CD* 19.23.43 (= *Phil.Orac.* fr. 345a).

Porphyry's consistently critical stance was predicated upon the cosmological framework into which he translated blood sacrifice. Ritual translation, whose target language was built upon an ontological and theological hierarchy such as we saw in the previous chapter, could elicit no less than great caution and criticism towards any ritual acts that were located at its lowest levels. This conclusion is at odds with the widespread interpretation of *Philosophy from Oracles* as incompatible with his other "later" works. We must practice interpretive restraint: the author's voice exegetes oracles that favorably announced the necessity of blood sacrifices – that is all. Nowhere do we find clear and unmistakable evidence of Porphyry's advocacy of such sacrificial performances.<sup>160</sup> It is clear only that he believes in the existence of daemonic or divine beings who enjoy the sacrificial offerings. There is nothing here that overtly contradicts his position in *On Abstinence*. Indeed, were we to possess only fragments of the latter work – for instance, the paraphrase of Epicurean views in the first book,<sup>161</sup> the description of wicked daemons in the second book,<sup>162</sup> part of a report of Chrysippus' views,<sup>163</sup> and the cannibalistic practices of certain barbarians<sup>164</sup> – one can only imagine what sort of modern scholarly constructions might be produced regarding that treatise. The foregoing discussion has sought to mark out an interpretive approach that moves beyond the criticisms of contradiction between *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On Abstinence* by identifying the indications of a process of ritual translation. Inclusion of an oracle in his collection does not entail acceptance of the surface meanings of that oracle, especially since Porphyry had declared in a fragment of the preface (to be discussed further in the next chapter) that the gods uttered their oracular pronouncements in riddles requiring proper interpretation.<sup>165</sup>

*Philosophy from Oracles* did more than merely stake out ambivalent interpretive maneuvers towards the oracles. We also find the presence of features more characteristic of a Platonic–Plotinian philosophical approach

<sup>160</sup> More cautiously, see Smith 1997.

<sup>161</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 1.13.5: "That humans are flesh-eaters is demonstrated from the fact that no people abstains from animate creatures. The Greeks did not take to it as a perversion, for barbarians have the same custom" (trans. G. Clark).

<sup>162</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 2.42.3: "It is they who rejoice in the drink-offerings and smoking meat on which their pneumatic part grows fat, for it lives on vapors and exhalations, and it draws power from the smoke that rises from blood and flesh" (trans. G. Clark).

<sup>163</sup> *Abst.* 3.20.1: "That famous opinion of Chrysippus is, heaven knows, convincing: that the gods made us for themselves and for each other, and the animals for us" (trans. G. Clark).

<sup>164</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.3: "The Massagetae and the Derbikes think those of their relatives who die naturally are most pitiable; so they act first to sacrifice and feast on their nearest and dearest when they grow old," trans. G. Clark.

<sup>165</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 305.3–4 Smith.



to religion, which have not always received due consideration in treatments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>166</sup> Aside from calling for a deeper, more philosophical reading of the oracles, the preface makes a Platonic allusion that ought not be missed. “Those giving birth to truth” – a standard Platonic metaphor – marks off the treatise and its author as participants in a larger ongoing philosophical tradition of great seriousness and venerable status. Elsewhere in the fragmentary treatise, we are notified that Pythagoras of Rhodes (apparently not the famous sage of the pre-Socratic period)<sup>167</sup> had identified those divinities who had habituated themselves to being present with humans through bindings as posing the greatest threat to humans.<sup>168</sup> If Pythagoras said it, Porphyry avers, then the oracle that teaches similar ideas must be true.<sup>169</sup> The god-binding compulsions in the oracles he cites next are not quite flattering representations of the daemonic beings whom they draw down. This fragment moves closer to overt criticism than any of the fragments so far discussed.

At Fragment 346, Porphyry expresses open rejection of the worship of daemons and lesser spirits. In a manner similar to the prohibitions of the Hebrew oracles, Porphyry claims, “the gods have also admonished . . . and we have demonstrated in our previous discussion, how they advise us to turn our mind to God and . . . to worship him everywhere.”<sup>170</sup> It is the unlearned and impious who “do not hate the prohibited daemons, but rather revere them.”<sup>171</sup>

Moreover, pretending to worship God, they do not do those things alone by which God is honored. For indeed, God, inasmuch as he is the Father of all, stands in need of nothing; but we do well when we honor him with justice and chastity and the other virtues, making our very lives a prayer to him through imitation and a seeking (*inquisitionem*) after him. Indeed, seeking cleanses,” [Porphyry] says, “and imitation deifies by affecting an inclination towards him.”<sup>172</sup>

This expression of a notion of spiritual sacrifice recalls similar expressions already noted in *On Abstinence*. The rejection of daemonic cult, the

<sup>166</sup> In fact, it is the presumed *lack* of such elements that has supported the common claim that the *Phil.Orac.* must have been pre-Plotinian; see Wolff 1856: 38; Bidez 1913: 15–16; Sodano 1958: xxii; Hadot 1960: 211.

<sup>167</sup> Ziegler 1963: 303–305; Porphyry’s *V.Pythag.*, which canvassed a number of possible ethnic identities for Pythagoras, does not include Rhodes (or Cyprus) among them; see Chapter 7 for discussion. This Pythagoras might be identified with the anonymous “philosopher from Rhodes,” mentioned in conjunction with Porphyry and Iamblichus (and others) by Proclus in *Parm.* 1052–1058.

<sup>168</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 347 Smith. <sup>169</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 347.13–14 Smith.

<sup>170</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.15–17 Smith.

<sup>171</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.20–21 Smith; cf. *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p. 8.11–15 Sodano.

<sup>172</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.21–28 Smith.

emphasis on prayer and virtue, the focusing of theological vision onto a single God who is “Father of all,” and the aim of imitation or assimilation to the divine (a Platonic phrase of Neoplatonic gravity)<sup>173</sup> cohere well with the religious vision of the treatise on vegetarianism and its cosmological framework. All the diverse range of fragments, often containing only the briefest hints (or none at all) of Porphyry’s use of an oracle, must be read in light of this fragment, for it must have had some previously coherent place within the original treatise before its piecemeal selection, separation, and reuse by Christian intellectuals.

Augustine’s polemical sleight-of-hand techniques with other Porphyrian material (which, until recently, has not been fully appreciated)<sup>174</sup> are not discernible in the case of this fragment. Indeed, there seems no reason for Augustine to distort the lines of the fragment quoted above. His bone of contention with Porphyry in the present fragment was over the philosopher’s (or Hecate’s)<sup>175</sup> casting of aspersion on Christians who, along with superstitious pagans, had limited their worship of the divine to only the daemonic levels of the theological hierarchy. Christ’s soul could only, at best, be allotted the status of a daemon or hero within the Neoplatonic (as well as the oracular) system.<sup>176</sup> The conception of spiritual sacrifice was included as part of the broader passage in which Porphyry had criticized these worshipers of daemons, and, furthermore, occurs in what Augustine alleges to be a verbatim quotation of that passage.<sup>177</sup>

This fragment is the clearest expression of a concern for the higher levels of sacrificial and theological hierarchy in the fragments of *Philosophy from Oracles*. Its presence recalls hints of higher-level sacrificial sensibilities elsewhere in the same treatise. In the fragment dealing with the path to the gods, already discussed, Porphyry had quoted an oracle praising the Chaldeans and Hebrews for their worship of the “self-begotten God” who was ruler.<sup>178</sup> This was followed in quick succession by another oracle also referring to the Chaldeans and Hebrews (this time in reference to the seven heavenly spheres), and then ended without providing Porphyry’s commentary or offering any indication of the broader purposes for his

<sup>173</sup> Plato, *Thet.* 176b; *Rep.* 613b; Porph. *Abst.* 1.54.6; 2.3.1; 2.34.2–3; 3.26.13; 3.27.1, 2, 4–5; *Sent.* 25 Lamberz; 40 Lamberz. See D. O’Meara 2003: 31–39.

<sup>174</sup> Clark 2007: 127–140. <sup>175</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.1 Smith.

<sup>176</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 345 (with frs. 345a–c) Smith; cf. *Sent.* 32 (p. 31.4–8 Brisson).

<sup>177</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 346.4 Smith; the passage is given in *oratio recta* and interrupted by “he says” (*inquit*); see fr. 346.8, 15, 27 Smith.

<sup>178</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324.11–12 Smith.

quotation of the oracles.<sup>179</sup> The “holy manner”<sup>180</sup> of the Chaldean and Hebrew forms of worship of a sovereign God only offers us a hint at one possible interpretive direction that Porphyry may have taken: as these peoples had sought to transcend the multiplicity of Being below the stars and rise in their contemplation to a single sovereign God, so should the philosopher pursue non-material forms of cult in seeking the salvation of the soul.

Likewise, in a lengthy quotation of an oracle, which according to the so-called *Tübingen Theosophy* was presented in the second book of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the “ineffable Father of immortals” is praised as “Stretching out [his] well-balanced mind in ever-flowing channels/Which then conceives the universe, fashioning imperishable matter.”<sup>181</sup> A theological hierarchy is exhibited clearly in the oracle’s description of a second and third “race of rulers” who emanate from and sing hymns to the “most regal and sole Sovereign of mortals/ and Father of blessed immortals.”<sup>182</sup> A companion oracle to this one explicitly rejects the worship of daemons and beckons the human recipient to: “Turn your mind to the divine king.”<sup>183</sup> Again, we do not have Porphyry’s commentary on the cultic aspects of these oracles; but they certainly would have provided the appropriate basis for the sort of reflection on spiritual and intellectual sacrifice seen in Fragment 346, discussed above, as well as his fuller treatment of the subject in *On Abstinence*.

These later oracles created the opportunity for further discussion of the need to transcend the threats and pitfalls of physical sacrificial forms and the daemons who were the objects of such worship; whether Porphyry actually offered overtly critical expositions of them in this treatise is impossible to say with any certainty. The observations offered here have attempted to emphasize: (1) the interpretive reserve practiced by Porphyry in those fragments dealing with oracles prescribing animal sacrifice, (2) the explicit rejection of the cult of daemons and the invitation to spiritual sacrifice in other fragments, and (3) the possibilities presented by some oracles for further reflection on spiritual sacrifice in yet other fragments. The literary tradition in which *Philosophy from Oracles* stood will further confirm the

<sup>179</sup> For further discussion of the Chaldeans and Hebrews in these oracles, see [Chapter 7](#).

<sup>180</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324.12 Smith.

<sup>181</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 325.4, 12–13 Smith; for discussion, see Saffrey, 1990: 11–30.

<sup>182</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 325.16–17 Smith; for the fragment’s importance in Porphyry’s theological hierarchy, see [Chapter 2](#).

<sup>183</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 325a Smith.

general approach to sacrifice we have delineated here.<sup>184</sup> We must conclude that, given the numerous indications of our present collection of fragments, *Philosophy from Oracles* seems to represent the same philosophical and religious vision evinced by *On Abstinence*. The ritual translation of the ascetic philosopher of the treatise on vegetarianism, who was fully aware of the precarious condition of the embodied soul and the threats of pleasure, vice, forgetfulness, and the presence of wicked daemons, remains apparent in his fragmentary work on oracles, in spite of the distorting lens of many of our sources for those fragments.

#### SACRIFICE IN OTHER WORKS

##### *The Letter to Marcella*

Because no other fragmentary work presents the same difficulties as *Philosophy from Oracles*, we may move more quickly through an examination of the remaining material relevant for tracing the contours of Porphyry's conception of sacrifice in different literary contexts. Clear resonance with themes identified in *Philosophy from Oracles* appear in the largely extant *Letter to Marcella*. The *Letter* is commonly assumed to have been written towards the end of Porphyry's career.<sup>185</sup> Yet, as noted in [Chapter 1](#), the single piece of internal evidence to date the *Letter* to the end of his life is not entirely clear. His assertion that he had not married Marcella in order to obtain a companion as he slipped into old age does not clearly exhibit that he was slipping into old age at the time of writing: "Nor did I expect that there would be any kindness from another's service for me when I decline into old age."<sup>186</sup> Even if we locate this work at the furthest chronological distance from *Philosophy from Oracles*, they share a common vision of the role of ritual in the pursuit of the salvation of the soul.

Most significantly, the notion of spiritual sacrifice is proclaimed in the *Letter* as central to his conception of true religion and spirituality. The cultivation of virtue in a person, the *Letter* declares, exhibited greater reverence for the divine than the one who is immoral: "Even if he sacrifices hecatombs and adorns shrines with countless votive offerings, he is impious and an atheist and sacrilegious in his way of life."<sup>187</sup> In an allusion to a Pythagorean maxim with Platonic overtones (as so frequently in the *Letter*),<sup>188</sup> Porphyry insists: "You will honor God best when you assimilate

<sup>184</sup> See [Chapter 4](#). <sup>185</sup> Bidez 1913: 116; Beutler 1953: 278.

<sup>186</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 1.10–12; see Alt 1996: 207; [Chapter 1](#).

<sup>187</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 14.247–249; trans. modified from O'Brien Wicker.

<sup>188</sup> O'Brien Wicker 1987: 103.

your thought to God, and your assimilation to him will be achieved through virtue alone, for virtue alone draws the soul upward and towards what is kindred.”<sup>189</sup> In a manner similar to his castigation of Christians in *Philosophy from Oracles*, the *Letter* rejects the superstitious multitude who, in spite of their many sacrificial gestures, are guilty of impiety because of their lack of morality, ignorance, and irrationality. “Even if they think they honor gods and are persuaded that gods exist, but neglect virtue and wisdom, they have denied the gods and dishonored them.”<sup>190</sup>

One passage deserves comment as a potential affirmation of traditional cult. The greatest fruit of piety, Porphyry claims, is giving honor to the divine “according to the ancestral ways” (*kata ta patria*).<sup>191</sup> The general context of the statement makes it clear that he does not have in mind traditional sacrifices traditionally understood. Just before this, Porphyry had declared that one trained oneself in the knowledge of God, not through sacrifices, but through the practice of virtue; a foolish person dishonored god, even if continually praying and sacrificing.<sup>192</sup> Gillian Clark has aptly pointed out that we ought to read the *Letter*’s admonition here in light of *On Abstinence*, where “the true ancestral tradition is bloodless sacrifice, insofar as any material sacrifice is appropriate.”<sup>193</sup>

The “altars of God” spoken of in the next lines of the passage seem to be, in fact, a metaphor for philosophic or contemplative practices performed by the wise. After all, just as an immoral person was a home for wicked daemons,<sup>194</sup> so the wise person was a shrine to God and a living statue.<sup>195</sup> Throughout the *Letter*, the vision of correct religious practices was spiritualized, disengaged from bodily entanglements, and philosophically sublimated, since, as he had remarked near the beginning of the letter, philosophy was “the only sure life-line”<sup>196</sup> for those remembering the return journey of the soul.<sup>197</sup>

### Letter to Anebo

In spite of the difficulty of determining the tone of the fragments of the *Letter to Anebo*, a critical attitude towards popular religious expressions

<sup>189</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 16.265–257; trans. modified from O’Brien Wicker.

<sup>190</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 23.360–364; trans. O’Brien Wicker; on the gods of this passage, see Alt 1996: 201–210.

<sup>191</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 18.295–296; cf. Zambon 2003: 559. <sup>192</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 16.278–17.284.

<sup>193</sup> Clark 2007: 140; for a more cautious approach, see Alt 1996: 205–206.

<sup>194</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 21.335–339; cf. *Phil. Orac.* fr. 326.20–24 Smith; Matt. 12:43–45.

<sup>195</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 11.195–199; cf. 19.318–319; *Pl. Leg.* 11.931d–e.

<sup>196</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 5.79; cf. K. O’Brien Wicker, 87. See also, *Sent.* 32.104, with note at Brisson 2005: 2.640.

<sup>197</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 6.99–114; in general, see Alt 1996.

is evident, as well as echoes of the moral and intellectual emphases of a notion of spiritual sacrifice consistent with his other works. In one of the few direct quotations from the *Letter*, Porphyry states:

If some [deities] are impassible, but others are passible – those for whom they say that they thereby set up phalluses and make obscenities – then the invocations of the gods are in vain, and so are the titles of the gods that they announce, the propitiations against the wrath of the gods and the sacrifices, and, furthermore, the so-called compulsions of the gods. For, that which is impassible cannot be enchanted, forced or compelled.<sup>198</sup>

Because we lack further context, it is difficult to determine if the “some” and the “others” of the opening line refer to a distinction between gods and daemons or between one rank of gods and another. Preceding this fragment in our source (Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*) was a lengthy quotation of Porphyry’s *Letter* (misleadingly broken up in Sodano’s edition) focused upon invocations and compulsions uttered to the gods in Egyptian ritual.<sup>199</sup> Of course, one of his central problems with Egyptian theological conceptions was their failure to make a firm enough distinction between gods and daemons.<sup>200</sup> Most important, however, is the sense of inappropriateness of the ritual behavior conveyed in the fragment. Furthermore, he clearly stated the uselessness of such ritual behavior for the higher levels of a divine hierarchy. The invocations and compulsions of gods, as well as the phallic images and use of obscenity, join a whole host of religious expressions that Porphyry found unhelpful, inappropriate, or theologically incoherent. It is significant that what might seem to us (and to some ancient thinkers as well) to be instances of “magic” are apparently treated in the *Letter* as regular Egyptian forms of worship (what is “much talked about among the Egyptians”).<sup>201</sup>

In addition to the critical approach to popular cultic activity, the *Letter to Anebo* shares with the *Letter to Marcella* the assumption that knowledge and holiness are intimately connected to each other: “Ignorance and deception about these things [the difference between gods and daemons] are unholiness and impurity.”<sup>202</sup> Instead, “the knowledge of the gods is holy and beneficial.”<sup>203</sup> This fundamental set of connections between knowledge and holiness, on the one hand, and ignorance and unholiness, on the

<sup>198</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1 Sodano, pp. 4.11–5.3 (= Eus. *PE* 5.10.10).

<sup>199</sup> Eus. *PE* 5.10.1–9; for criticism of Sodano’s arrangement, see [Chapter 1](#).

<sup>200</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1 Sodano, pp. 3.1–4.8; p. 6.9–12; p. 7.5–8; pp. 7.12–8.7.

<sup>201</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 2, Sodano p. 21.1–2 (reporting material from Chaeremon); see also Tanaseanu-Döbler 2009: 134; for the problem of distinguishing magic from religion in Egypt, see Fowden 1986: 79–87.

<sup>202</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1 Sodano, p. 8.1–2. <sup>203</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 1 Sodano, p. 8.11–12.

other, forms the basis of a notion of spiritual sacrifice in terms of intellectual activity. Contemplation of the divine was heralded as the highest form of worship in all the other works so far discussed. In the *Letter to Anebo* we have no more than the bare hints noted here. Even if these statements were not part of a larger discussion on spiritual or intellectual sacrifice in the *Letter* that has now been lost, it is certainly consistent with, and basic to, such a conception. In other words, Porphyry would not need an explicit treatment or defense of spiritual sacrifice in the *Letter to Anebo* in order effectively to carry out ritual translation. Though in the interrogative form, his questions directly addressed the issue of proper translation (and Iamblichus would respond in just this way with his own ritual translations). Furthermore, it reminds us that the theological knowledge queried in the letter was not an isolated philosophical pursuit of the truth, but was conceived in terms of personal spirituality. Knowledge fostered holiness; the true philosopher became a holy man.<sup>204</sup>

*Forgetting the body: the ascent of the soul*

The afterlife of the soul had been portrayed by the greatest of poets and the greatest of philosophers in ways that, by Porphyry's time, were not seen as exclusive of each other.<sup>205</sup> Homer's representation of the Underworld in the *Iliad* and (especially) the *Odyssey* provided the Platonist reader with a fruitful narrative for thinking about the soul's situation once it had sloughed off the confining prison of its body. Porphyry's substantive treatment of Homer's vision of the afterlife, preserved in his treatise *On the Styx*, where he claims that it is only a necessary digression,<sup>206</sup> tells us nothing of his position on material sacrifice in this life; but it did perpetuate the same valences regarding blood and bodies that lay behind his general position on sacrifice.<sup>207</sup>

Homer had, according to Porphyry, marked out three habitations for souls: one was the obvious abode of embodied souls in the inhabited world; the second was the Elysian Fields, where Menelaus was told he would reside; the third was in Hades.<sup>208</sup> Bodies were present in the first two locations. While he never offers a defense for this claim, he apparently supposed the Elysian Fields to contain embodied souls, just as in the inhabited world, because the final line of a quoted passage from the *Odyssey* remarked that

<sup>204</sup> Fowden 1982.      <sup>205</sup> For general treatment, see Lamberton 1986.      <sup>206</sup> *Styx* fr. 378.50–53 Smith.

<sup>207</sup> For further discussion of *On the Styx*, see Chapters 1 and 7; also Castelletti 2006.

<sup>208</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.7–32 Smith.

humans are “revived” (*anapsuchēin*) there.<sup>209</sup> In any case, it was only in Hades that souls who had been released from bodies dwelt. A geography of Hades could be discerned, Porphyry thought, from the description of Odysseus’ visit there in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*.<sup>210</sup> The single most important feature of the landscape was the river Acheron, which divided Hades. On this side of the river resided souls who had not received proper burial or those who deserved punishment. Affliction of the souls worthy of punishment was performed by means of the memory of the misdeeds they had committed while in their bodies.

For they receive appearances (*phantasias*) of all the terrifying things they have done in life and are punished, the sin being present to them in their thinking and punishing them with the punishments which are assigned for their sins. For this reason some souls seem to carry stones and be punished by being squeezed, while others receive sensations of thirst and eternal hunger, and others [are punished] by some other thing that made them shudder in their mortal life.<sup>211</sup>

The other side of the Acheron, however, was unhindered by such bodily memories and provided “a respite for souls from endless evils because of forgetfulness.”<sup>212</sup> Even in the case of the unburied, though the soul did not deserve punishment, it could not cross the river, and so lived in a condition of suffering because of its bodily memory.<sup>213</sup>

The far side of Acheron represented a loss of memory of one’s bodily experiences, and so a state of bliss.<sup>214</sup> Remembering the life lived in a body required the blood offered by Odysseus to the souls of the dead.<sup>215</sup> In other words, that most crucial of bodily fluids was necessary to bring a disembodied soul back to what it otherwise would have happily forgotten. Homer was thus shown to be in agreement with Empedocles, who had declared that human thought resided in the blood.<sup>216</sup> Even on the other

<sup>209</sup> *Od.* 4.568.

<sup>210</sup> For discussion of other ancient descriptions of the geography of Hades, see P. Kingsley 1995 (on *Phaedo*); Torjussen, 2010.

<sup>211</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.37–45 Smith.

<sup>212</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.49–50 Smith.

<sup>213</sup> *Styx* fr. 378.7–15 Smith: “For the appearance (*phantasia*) arises through memory, as Plato says in the *Philebus* (39a); when memory is taken away, the thing imagined (*phantasioumenon*) is also taken, and when it joins in leaving, the soul’s bodily sufferings have also been taken away.” See also, *Styx* fr. 377.109–139 Smith. For Porphyry’s conception of *phantasia*, see Sheppard 2007: 71–76.

<sup>214</sup> For the opposite view, that memory was desirable in Hades, see the references to Mnemosyne in the golden tablets; Torjussen 2010.

<sup>215</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.60–65 Smith: “Nor would they speak about human things to those humans still living, unless they should receive the vapor of blood and thereby think human things, which those outside, though they do not drink of the blood, also think, having a sediment of the knowledge that occurs in the souls of mortals from drinking blood.”

<sup>216</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.68–77 Smith.



side of the river, it should be noted, the geography was marked by gender. The weaker, effeminate, souls were closest to the river and so closest to the possibility of bodily memory, while the masculine souls were further from the river.<sup>217</sup> “The souls of men certainly proceed in utter darkness, being far from the river and those who are punished.”<sup>218</sup>

It seems likely that the “utter darkness” of Porphyry’s interpretation of Homer is equivalent to the higher metaphysical levels of his Neoplatonic ontology. Though elsewhere he might refer to this as the light,<sup>219</sup> in the symbolic framework of Homer’s Underworld it was the darkest place, because it was furthest from bodily memories. But how did one achieve this blessed forgetfulness? How did one accomplish the metaphorical burial of one’s body and its memories and, furthermore, how did one transcend the metaphorical limits of “effeminate” souls to arrive at the complete (“masculine”) absence of embodied thought? The extant fragments of *On the Styx* do not provide the answers, and so we must turn to what must have originally been an exquisite glimpse of the soul’s return to the divine life in another treatise preserved solely by Augustine.

Any modern misunderstanding of *On the Return of the Soul* and consequently of Porphyry’s attitude towards theurgy is due, in no small part, to Augustine’s masterful manipulation of what may have been only a few scant lines of Porphyrian material (whether this was a separate treatise or a subsection of another work, namely *Philosophy from Oracles*).<sup>220</sup> Nonetheless, we can discern the broad outlines of a philosophical approach to theurgy, that is, ritual that sought to achieve nonmaterial philosophical–soteriological ends, particularly the salvation of the soul, through material means.<sup>221</sup> The most important pagan opponent of Porphyry, his erstwhile student Iamblichus,<sup>222</sup> had proclaimed the necessity of physical acts on or with physical objects for the salvation of the soul. A pagan “sacramental theology” was requisite if the embodied soul was deemed to have been separated from its divine origins.<sup>223</sup> Porphyry’s vision of the soul and its achievement of salvation from the body – the forgetfulness of bodily memories, as his *On the Styx* would frame it – was markedly different from that of Iamblichus.

The basic portrait of Porphyry’s thinking on the issue, as presented in Augustine’s *City of God*, was a double-sided coin, either side of which

<sup>217</sup> *Styx* fr. 377.78–83 Smith; fr. 378.46–50 Smith. <sup>218</sup> *Styx* fr. 378.48–50 Smith.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Beierwaltes 1961: 334–362. <sup>220</sup> See Chapter 1 for discussion.

<sup>221</sup> Smith 1974: 83–110, 122–141.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. *On “Know Thyself”* fr. 273.18 Smith, which seems sufficient evidence to conclude that the work was dedicated to Iamblichus.

<sup>223</sup> Shaw 1995; see also, Digeser 2009; Knipe 2009.

might be (and has been) emphasized in characterizing the philosopher's approach to theurgy. On the one hand, theurgical performances were ineffective in assuring the salvation of the soul, insofar as salvation was understood to entail the highest and best part of the soul (namely, the intellect) and insofar as the concept of salvation entailed the complete return of the soul to its divine origins beyond the cosmic ontological and theological levels that the Neoplatonic hierarchy had posited.<sup>224</sup> On the other hand, theurgical performances were effective (if we can trust Augustine's presentation of Porphyry's position) in elevating the spiritual part of the soul to the superlunary, ethereal, realms where the soul would be granted the vision of many "marvelous things."<sup>225</sup>

Attending to Augustine's frequent manipulation of his source through his own polemically and rhetorically charged distorting lens, as well as whatever pagan polemical role was played by those Neoplatonists who preserved and translated into Latin (only selections of?) Porphyry's original works, we are nonetheless left with a picture of Porphyry's position that made overtly negative evaluations of the role of theurgy in achieving "definitive salvation" of the soul,<sup>226</sup> while conceding a limited efficacy to theurgical acts. Apparently, Porphyry had allowed that a certain daemon could elevate the spiritual parts of souls slightly above the earth.<sup>227</sup> Theurgy, thus, was productive of only a "quasi-purgation" of the soul – and this admission was, according to Augustine, only made with much hesitation and embarrassment on Porphyry's part.<sup>228</sup> Such ritual acts were reserved only for those intellectually incapable of philosophizing.<sup>229</sup> We should note that these concessions may have been slight in the original work and were only capitalized on by the Christian polemicist, gleefully emphasizing how one of the greatest philosophical luminaries was left grasping at ritual straws in order to find (a still incomplete) form of salvation for non-philosophical souls. Given what we know of Augustine's use of Porphyry, it was probably only a passing statement or relatively brief notice that allowed (probably

<sup>224</sup> *Regr.anim.* frs. 284, 288, 290–292 Smith.

<sup>225</sup> "Marvelous things" noted at *Regr.anim.* fr. 290a Smith (which may be an allusion to Pl. *Phdr.* 247a); cf. also frs. 288a, 290, 292 Smith.

<sup>226</sup> Bidez 1913: 91–94, who nonetheless remains overly optimistic about the role of theurgy in Porphyry's thought; instead, see Hadot 1960: 239 (though his desire to see this as a principal reason to distinguish it from the *Phil.Orac.* is not entirely justified, as noted in [Chapter 1](#) above).

<sup>227</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 293 Smith.

<sup>228</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 288 Smith; Augustine's assertion of Porphyry's embarrassment may be a reaction to the tentative and hypothetical tone that seems to have been characteristic of his more critical discussions (see also Iamb., *Myst.* 1.15 [45].8–9).

<sup>229</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 287 Smith.

only hypothetically) some limited efficacy to theurgy, in what may have been a lengthy treatment of more philosophically rigorous conceptions of salvation with entirely different emphases than what we can determine from Augustine's rather free paraphrase.

Aside from the concessions noted here, the remaining evidence of the treatise seems to have been highly critical of theurgy. Theurgical activity (because it comprised material ritual) entertained daemons pretending to be ethereal gods,<sup>230</sup> who did not, even in the midst of their deception, promise a return of the soul to its divine Father; it therefore polluted, rather than purged, the soul.<sup>231</sup> "In truth, [Porphyry] denies that this art [theurgy] provides anyone with return to God."<sup>232</sup> Porphyry furthermore advised his reader "to beware this art as a deception, dangerous in its very performance, and prohibited by the laws."<sup>233</sup> Not only were the daemons deceptive, but the human proponents of theurgical practices perpetuated error and were "especially deceitful in the theurgic discipline."<sup>234</sup>

After relating a story of a Chaldean whose ritual practices were counteracted by a rival motivated by malicious intent, Porphyry seems to have concluded that theurgy destroyed the good more than the bad.<sup>235</sup> Even if we take this material with due caution because of Augustine's infelicitous motivations in engaging with Porphyry, it seems that the Platonic notion of fleeing from the body was the clear focus of this treatise.<sup>236</sup> This would hardly be surprising, since just such an emphasis is manifestly evident throughout much of his corpus. If "all body is to be fled from," then the bodily use of physical objects could hardly have been a primary or significant means for effecting salvation of the soul. Augustine himself admits that Porphyry's system allowed purification of the soul only through first principles, namely, the Father and the Mind of the Father.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>230</sup> On daemonic pretensions to the divine, see *Abst.* 2.40.3; *Ep.Aneb.* 2 Sodano, pp.16.7–17.6, with [Chapter 2](#).

<sup>231</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 288a Smith (it should be noted that Porphyry is not explicitly named in the fragment).

<sup>232</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 288 Smith.

<sup>233</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 289 Smith. The "laws" here are most likely the divine laws; cf. *c.Christ.* fr. 39; Zambon 2003: 553–563; Johnson forthcoming a.

<sup>234</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 289b Smith.

<sup>235</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 294 Smith; Hadot 1960: 227 (cf. Lewy 1956: 286), cautiously identified this Chaldean as Julian, the author of the *Chald.Orac.*

<sup>236</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 297 Smith; pace Hadot 1960: 213–214; *idem* 1956: 202–220; Courcelle 1956: 220–239, this focus is insufficient to prove Porphyry was the source of Ambrose.

<sup>237</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 284 Smith; for the connection of this fragment to the issue of Porphyry's rejection of a multiplicity of first principles, see [Chapter 2](#).

We must conclude, therefore, that *On the Return of the Soul* was a manifesto of the absolute necessity of a philosophical approach to religious and theological matters.<sup>238</sup> Since reality comprised an ontological hierarchy, which corresponded to a theological hierarchy, it was essential to conceive of a sacrificial hierarchy as well that encompassed the virtues of the soul and intellectual contemplation, while eschewing any effectiveness of material sacrifices because they only perpetuated the entanglements of the body. If such ritual performances elevated the soul at all, they were nonetheless incapable of freeing it from its spiritual, pneumatic, covering. Theurgy could not remove the clumps of pneumatic “dough” that had clustered about the soul on its original descent through the spheres.<sup>239</sup> Hence, it could never transcend the astral realms through which it had once descended. In terms of the discussion offered in *On the Styx*, the soul could never forget the things of the body through theurgical means.<sup>240</sup> Thus, Porphyry refused to become an advocate of theurgy, and would be recognized in later antiquity for just such a refusal.<sup>241</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Our examination of a broad range of evidence from Porphyry’s works provides a coherent vision of the philosopher’s relationship to the religious phenomena of his late antique world. In spite of the diverse literary contexts and rhetorical purposes of his numerous discussions of sacrifice and other bodily acts, we can discern the contours of a persistently rationalizing theological and spiritual framework. Unlike Plotinus, he was much more willing to grapple with the messiness of embodied religion in all its popular expressions and its misguided, daemonic, and deceptive variations. Yet, even his hostile opponents, who have provided us with so many of the fragments, were unable to silence the firm voice of Porphyry’s persistently detached spiritual and rational tendencies in ritual translation. Perhaps we

<sup>238</sup> Notwithstanding Augustine’s claim that Porphyry admitted to not finding a “universal way” even by means of philosophy; for it is doubtful that Porphyry would have valued a democratized “universal way” as Augustine conceived of it (as rightly noted by Hadot 1960: 239). See Chapter 4.

<sup>239</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 80 Sodano. On the aim of complete escape from the entire material cosmos, see Smith 1974: 66–68.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. *Antro nymph.* 35, pp. 80.18–81.1 Nauck, where Odysseus’ inland venture to a people who were ignorant of the sea and would not recognize his oar is parallel to the forgetfulness of the body in *On the Styx*.

<sup>241</sup> “There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer theurgy, like Iamblichus and Syrianus and Proclus and the rest of the hieratics” (Damasc. in *Phd.* 1.172, p. 105 Westerink).

should not dismiss Plotinus' evaluation of Porphyry, preserved though it is in the self-congratulatory *Life of Plotinus*. He was at once "a philosopher and a hierophant."<sup>242</sup> Any attempt to emphasize unduly one characterization over the other misleadingly severs the intricately poised rational spirituality of the philosopher.

<sup>242</sup> *V. Plot.* 15. For a different assessment, see Damasc. *in Phd.* 1.172, p. 105,8–10 (= fr. 475 Smith).

## CHAPTER 4

### *The master reader* *Contexts of translation*

One of the difficulties confronting us in our attempt to appreciate adequately Porphyry's theological and religious thought rests in the fragments themselves. It is in the nature of a fragment to say less than we would like. It is in the nature of most of the fragments of Porphyry's religious writings that they have been carefully excised from their contexts in those writings – or worse, polemically paraphrased – for the rhetorical purposes of his posthumous enemies. Even, or especially, when those enemies sought to make the bold move of claiming him as an inadvertent friend, we may detect the manipulative strategies in their reports and quotations. In spite of the difficulties inherent in this sort of evidence, we have been able to discern the outlines of a largely coherent theological and religious vision and a persistent process of vertical translation into a Platonic system.

However, beyond the constraints of working with fragments, there remain precious indications of the ways in which many of those original works functioned and the aims to which they had been set. The literary contexts in which he located his compositions would, if discoverable, be essential for determining the force and tenor of many of the fragments and would shed light on the social contexts of philosophical translation in late antiquity. In particular, some of the key texts that have concerned us in the present examination had noticeably pedagogical aims and seem to have been part of a wide-ranging curriculum developed by Porphyry for his students. What becomes surprising is not that Porphyry had pedagogical concerns, but the various areas of inquiry to which he seems to have directed those concerns. Not only was he responsible for the crucial role of Aristotelian logic within the Neoplatonic curriculum, and for the organization, editing, and introduction of Plotinus' corpus of writings. Porphyry also set his erudition and scholarly industry to developing a persistently rational and deeply spiritual program of study for the student of philosophy.

One of the hallmarks of Bidez's characterization of Porphyry reiterated throughout the entirety of his biography was the philosopher's role as a popularizer (*vulgarisateur*) of what he saw as the deeper, richer, more beautiful vision of his master at Rome.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter will show the limitations of seeing Porphyry as a popularizer in any sort of negative sense (i.e., that he performed a process of vulgarizing, or dumbing-down, the sublimity of a Platonic system).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Porphyry's pedagogy perpetuated a strongly elitist sensibility whose rejection of popular needs and concerns is markedly recurrent throughout most of his writings.<sup>3</sup> Porphyry's project of translation was a self-authorizing one, in which social and intellectual space was created for the translator as an expert in discerning and expounding metaphysical and theological truth. The religious *koine* required translation if it was to be rightly understood by the student, since the truth behind or beyond that *koine* was hardly common.<sup>4</sup> The authority of the philosophical translator was grounded in this interpretive necessity to transcend the common, and, furthermore, became weighted with spiritual urgency since such knowledge was requisite for one's very salvation. Vertical translation thus became productive of a social–spiritual hierarchy—subject to a hierophantic authority—at the same time as it presumed and created a theological and ritual hierarchy.

The following investigation seeks first to outline the broader context of isagogical literature in the Platonic curriculum (containing *eisagōgai*, “introductions”); then, it will consider the pedagogical features of two Porphyrian “introductions” for students (the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, and the *Introduction to the First Five Categories of Aristotle*), before considering the pedagogical indications and tendencies of some of his other writings (in particular, the *Philosophy from Oracles*, *On Images*, *On the Inscription “Know Thyself,”* and the *Letter to Marcella*). Key features in each of these works point to the sustained efforts to maintain a spiritual and philosophical elitism in Porphyry's teaching program.

<sup>1</sup> e.g., Bidez 1913: 60, 70, 104; Cumont 1949: 366; Romano 1979: 110, 115, 199–200.

<sup>2</sup> See also Zambon 2002: 16 n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> For general remarks on the centrality of elitism in pagan (as opposed to Christian or Jewish) spiritual direction, see Stroumsa 2005: 183–196.

<sup>4</sup> The modern historian need not believe that there was, in fact, a “real” or concretely expressed religious *koine* in late antiquity (on which, see most notably, Bowersock 1990) to acknowledge that at least some ancient intellectuals possessed a concept that lumped together the religious practices of all cities and nations generally. For the relationship of translation, exegesis, and the creation of “commonsense” in a later period and different context, see briefly Haddour 2008: 208.

## PLATONIC PEDAGOGIES

Well before Porphyry or Plotinus ever took charge of students, teachers of Plato had been faced with the challenge of introducing students to the complexities of the great philosopher's thinking and the complexities of the literary expression in which that thinking was found. At least since the time of the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* (dated variously between the first century BC and the first century AD), we see manifestations of a deeply-sensed need to explain texts deemed to be far from transparent.<sup>5</sup> The exegetical project evinced by the fragmentary remains of the anonymous *In Theaetetum* indicated a dual intellectual literary process.<sup>6</sup> First, the Platonic dialogues were considered unfamiliar enough, in diction and in thought, to require explication for a new age of readers.<sup>7</sup> This perceived fact fostered both the production of knowledge within a Platonic discursive tradition and the introduction of the commentary form into philosophical reflection. A significant part of "doing philosophy" comprised the activity of exegetically unpacking the wealth of meaning in a particular set of texts. Philosophical contemplation and textual commentary became part of the same pursuit of truth.<sup>8</sup>

This dynamic interplay between texts and truth was predicated upon the second development in the dual philosophical and literary process exhibited by the *In Theaetetum*. The commentary on a text of Plato embodied an evaluation of particular texts and their author as authoritative and a central locus in the search for truth and the recognition of the Good. It would require a brief period of time before Plato was given the honorific epithet "the divine Plato,"<sup>9</sup> but the commentary on the *Theaetetus* indicates that the process of carving out an authoritative space for Plato's variegated corpus was well under way in the Hellenistic period.

It has not often been noted that even in one of Plato's last dialogues he had already mentioned the collection and teaching of his own texts. In the seventh book of the *Laws*, the unnamed Athenian who is the work's primary speaker reflects on the textual nature of the dialogue written down in the *Laws* up to that point in hopes of finding a model for the education

<sup>5</sup> Sedley 1997: 122–129; generally, Snyder 2000; also, for the Aristotelian commentary tradition, see Sorabji 1990; Gottschalk 1990.

<sup>6</sup> For text, see Bastianini and Sedley 1995: 227–562; for discussion, see Tarrant 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Sedley 1997: 110–116.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann 2009; Dillon 2006; Hadot 1995: 61–65, 101–109.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *De cap.inim.util.* 90C; *Consol.Apoll.* 120D; *V.Peric.* 8.2; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 15.23 (et al.); Alex. Aphrod. *Comm.Metaph.* 18.3; Longinus, *Sublim.* 4.6; Plot. *Enn.* 3.5.1; 4.8.1; Porphy. *Ep.Marc.* 10.185.



of the youth of his proposed city-state. “When I look back now over this discussion of ours, which has lasted from dawn up until this very moment – a discussion in which I think I sense the inspiration of heaven – well, it’s come to look, to my eyes, just like a literary composition.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the pedagogical models based on the “whole poet” approach or the poetic anthology approach to teaching the youth, Plato (or his Athenian speaker) had been pleased to note that his own books had been collected and thus represented the ideal (“the most eminently acceptable and most entirely appropriate”) basis for his educational system.<sup>11</sup> All the elements for the later development of the Platonic school’s approach to the great philosopher’s thought and writings was presented *in nuce* here in Plato’s own composition: the divine authority granted to his writings, the educational context, the collection and attention to the texts themselves as well as the ideas expressed in them. The drive for authority had begun early.

Given the presumed difficulty in later centuries of understanding Plato, coupled with the perceived necessity of comprehending his writings as an authoritative foundation for the philosophical life, experimental forms of isagogical literature were produced in the form of “introductions” (*eisagōgai*), primers (*stoicheiōseis*), and handbooks of various kinds for use in the classroom.<sup>12</sup> Even if an ancient philosophical school might consist only of a teacher and a small handful of students of differing levels of commitment, meeting in the home of the teacher or a wealthy patron or at a public meeting place,<sup>13</sup> or even if the student of philosophy was attempting to approach Plato’s corpus alone through the texts themselves, there was a nearly ubiquitous sense that one needed a guide in order to avoid frustration and misapprehension. Indeed, the desire for a guide seems not to have left us: the great profusion of introductions to Plato as a thinker, as well as the preliminary considerations offered with modern translations of his works, commentaries of a more philological or a more philosophical orientation, popularizing handbooks (such as, for readers of varying levels of education, the relevant sections of *Philosophy for Dummies* or *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Philosophy*, to *Cliff’s Notes* to Plato’s *Republic* or other dialogues, the *Cambridge Companion to Plato* and to the *Republic*, the *Oxford Handbook of Plato*, and so on), and course notes posted on a

<sup>10</sup> Pl. *Laws* 7.811c6–10; trans. Saunders.

<sup>11</sup> Pl. *Laws* 7.811d1–5; trans. Saunders; for discussion, see Marrou 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Mansfeld 1994; I. Hadot 1987; Snyder 2000; Lamberton 2003; Johnson 2006b.

<sup>13</sup> Watts 2006; Dillon 2004; Lamberton 2001.

number of academic websites – all have their roots in the isagogical literature of the first five centuries of our era.

Two of the earliest introductions to Plato exhibit the basic trajectories of the ancient manuals.<sup>14</sup> At some point in the mid-second century Albinus, the otherwise little-known teacher of Galen, composed the *Prologos*, an introductory manual that seems, in fact, to be the transcription of notes taken in class when Albinus was attending the school of the Platonist Gaius.<sup>15</sup> Though it has been persuasively shown that the original title of this handbook was the *Prologos*, or “Preliminary Remarks [on Plato],” it deservedly received in manuscripts the subtitle *Introduction to Plato’s Dialogues*, for it explicitly set itself the task of helping the student “who was about to read the dialogues.”<sup>16</sup> The structure of Albinus’ textbook is clearly ordered. First, an inquiry was made into the literary form of *dialogos* to determine what it is (building upon the more basic question about what a *logos* is).<sup>17</sup> Second, he provided a classification of Plato’s dialogues based upon two general types (*charactêres*), followed by an enumeration of each of the dialogues into subcategories.<sup>18</sup> Next, an analysis of the various ordering schemes for approaching the dialogues surveyed the previous systems of Albinus’ predecessors<sup>19</sup> and concluded: “We say, therefore, that there is not a single and defined beginning of Plato’s corpus (*logos*); for it, being perfect, resembles the perfect form of a circle; just as, then, there is no single and defined beginning of a circle, so there is none for his corpus.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, in spite of this conclusion, Albinus offered his own recommendation for a personalized approach to Plato’s dialogues that was tailored to the individual character and training of the student.<sup>21</sup> The ultimate goal of the reading program presented in the *Prologos* is moral and spiritual. The education in Plato’s texts leads the student “to arrive at virtue; and . . . one must also grow in knowledge of divine things, so as to be able to become like them once one has obtained virtue.”<sup>22</sup>

The progress in virtue and spirituality of the student was thus predicated upon a deep engagement with texts. Confusion would arise if one did not understand the nature of a dialogue, the class of dialogue that one was reading at any given time, or the correct order of reading the dialogues. One could hardly become wise, pious, or good if one lacked proper reading

<sup>14</sup> The following remarks have been presented in different form in Johnson 2006b and 2011a.

<sup>15</sup> Göransson 1995: 34–77; Dillon 1977: 266–271, 304–306; Reis 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 1.1 Hermann. <sup>17</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 1–2 Hermann; see Nüsser 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 3 Hermann.

<sup>19</sup> Dunn 1974 and 1976; Westerink 1962: xxxvii–xxxviii; Mansfeld 1994: 59–71.

<sup>20</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 4 Hermann. <sup>21</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 5 Hermann.

<sup>22</sup> Albinus, *Prologos* 5.25–27 Hermann.

skills – much was at stake in the act of reading. And so the authority of Plato was absorbed by the teachers of his literary corpus who could claim to be masters in the art of reading well. The assumption of the task of composing an *eisagōgē* for students or fledgling readers was, therefore, nothing less than to presume one's own investiture of Plato's authority. Expertise in reading garnered for the teacher the privilege of knowledge and a role in the organization and production of that knowledge.

In addition to the *textually* centered approach exhibited by Albinus, Platonic introductions could follow a different, more *doctrinal* approach to Plato.<sup>23</sup> Our second example of the isagogical genre, the *Handbook* (*Didaskalikos*) drafted by Alcinous (though once attributed to Albinus),<sup>24</sup> exemplifies a concern to inculcate the proper comprehension of major features of Plato's philosophical system. Avoiding the issues of understanding the literary genre of Plato's oeuvre, the proper order of reading them, or distinguishing a classificatory taxonomy of the dialogues, Alcinous instead discussed Plato's teachings under the tripartite division of dialectical, theoretical (including physics and theology) and practical subject matters. Training in the proper conceptual apparatus in order to grasp Plato's doctrinal contributions to philosophy was deemed to be the best introduction for the student approaching Plato. He concluded the *Handbook* with the explicit claim that he had composed his manual "as an *eisagōgē*."<sup>25</sup> But, unlike Albinus' introduction to *reading through* certain books, Alcinous introduced the student to *thinking through* Plato's system.

The suggestion has been made that the *Handbook* is not the product of a Platonist author, but only proffered a sketch of Plato's system for the outsider wanting to gain a general impression of its distinctive features.<sup>26</sup> There does seem to be significant evidence for non-Platonist material here; and even more, the complete silence on difficulties or competing theories on the best approach to grappling with the texts of Plato is arresting. The emphatically doctrinal approach of the introductory treatise exhibits a pedagogical method quite distinct from that of Albinus' *Prologos*. If the *Handbook's* audience comprised students from other fields of inquiry (e.g., medical) or other philosophical schools, and so addressed itself to readers not intending to pursue deeper engagement with Plato, then the absence of any overt interest in the proper reading approach to his dialogues makes sense. On the other hand, for a student who might possibly choose to make

<sup>23</sup> For this distinction, see Johnson 2011a.

<sup>24</sup> The identification of the *Didaskalikos* as the work of Alcinous seems generally accepted; see J. Whittaker 1974; Dillon 1993: ix–xiii; Göransson 1995: 13–27.

<sup>25</sup> Alcinous, *Didask.* 13.1. <sup>26</sup> Dillon 1977: 272–304; Loenen 1956.

further investigations into Plato's thought and writings, the *Handbook* still would have provided a useful entry-point to higher levels of study.

The two tendencies in the isagogical genre of the *textual* and *doctrinal* approaches to Plato need not be seen as entirely separate movements. The content and the expression of Plato could not be so easily severed; yet the basic thrust, central focus, and particular aims of Albinus' manual are sufficiently distinctive in comparison to Alcinous so that the two-fold classification of Platonic *eisagōgai* remains helpful in suggesting the possible curricular contours of their use.<sup>27</sup> Paradoxically, Alcinous' less text-centered approach seems more bookish in its potential teaching context. An interested student, or anyone else for that matter, could peruse Alcinous' *Handbook* and gain the general understanding of Plato deemed appropriate for a general philosophical audience. The introductory textbook itself could take the place of a teacher and no particular social context or set of didactic relationships would be required. The taxonomy of ideas and the organization of Platonic knowledge was sufficiently general that no particular school setting was necessary for its effectiveness as a teaching tool.

Albinus' text-centered approach, on the other hand, provides more indication of a deeper social context for his curriculum of Platonic philosophy. His very bookishness provided a tangible sense to the study of Plato lacking in Alcinous' treatise. Under Albinus, the student could expect to be reading the dialogues in the presence of the teacher; the turning of Plato's pages, or rather the unrolling of his scrolls, would be performed under the scrutiny of the master reader.<sup>28</sup> And, even more than this, one could expect the scrutinizing gaze of the teacher to penetrate the student's own character. Their lives would be shared in a didactic collusion affecting the intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress of the student.

The general image of this sort of didactic and social context is not difficult to conjure because of the anecdotal images of isagogical activity found in other authors like Porphyry himself. The various episodes depicting the workings of the school of Plotinus in Porphyry's biography of the master are revealing.<sup>29</sup> The structure of the school in Rome does not seem entirely fixed. On the one hand, there was a looseness of personal didactic style that allowed outsiders to attend the seminars without formal approval (so that a painter could covertly study Plotinus' features without being recognized, or a former classmate from Plotinus' earlier years could drop

<sup>27</sup> Johnson 2011a.

<sup>28</sup> On the difficulties of such teacherly control of reading, see Johnson, forthcoming c.

<sup>29</sup> For considerations on similar procedures in Christian classrooms, see Johnson 2006b.

in unexpectedly),<sup>30</sup> as well as allow for interruptions by persistent students and tangents that could last for days, to the frustration of other students.<sup>31</sup> The impression given is of a dynamic, open-ended classroom atmosphere, the pedagogical movement of which was somewhat ad hoc.

This picture is tempered by another description, however, wherein Plotinus is shown busily reading texts with a small circle of students.

He would have commentaries (*hupomnēmata*) read to him in the seminars, whether of Severus or Cronius, Numenius, Gaius or Atticus; or among Peripatetics the commentaries of Aspasius, Alexander [of Aphrodisias], Adrastus and the others that happened to be there. Nor would he simply have something read from them, but he taught in a way all his own (*idios*) and quite different in his analysis, conveying the thought of Ammonius in his investigations. He used to be filled [with ideas] quickly and, after rendering the meaning of a deep observation in a few words, would stop.<sup>32</sup>

The texts of Plato (or Aristotle) themselves are passed over in silence here. We should probably presume that the commentaries of these Middle Platonists, Neopythagoreans, and Peripatetics contained at least full-sentence quotations (rather than shorter lemmata of a word or phrase) of the source text followed by exegesis, so that complete texts of Plato were not entirely necessary in the reading sessions. We are not informed whether separate copies of Plato were at hand for double-checking the quotations given in the commentaries or not. Some indication that verifying a given copyist's or commentator's version of the source text was deemed necessary is provided in Porphyry's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, where disagreement is registered against earlier readers on whether to take certain words in Plato's original text that began with vowels as rough or smooth;<sup>33</sup> or, again, he disputed Amelius' reading of *legei* ("he says") as *lēgei* ("he stops"), even though the latter reading could be confirmed by another commentator's text.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the sort of close attention to the precise wording of Plato's dialogue,<sup>35</sup> which was requisite for what Porphyry deemed an adequate allegorical interpretation, depended upon having a correct text upon which to perform one's interpretive work.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> On the painter, see *V.Plot.* 1.10–20; see Pépin 1992. On Origen's unexpected visit, see *V.Plot.* 14.21–25; for attempts at assigning this reference to either the Christian Origen or the pagan Origen (if, indeed, there are two such figures), see variously, Goulet 2001; Beatrice 1992a; Zambon 2011.

<sup>31</sup> *V.Plot.* 13.11–18; see Lim 1993. <sup>32</sup> *V.Plot.* 14.11–18.

<sup>33</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 30 Sodano. <sup>34</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr.74 Sodano.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., his attack on Praxiphanes' dismissal of Plato's shift from cardinal to ordinal numbers, *Comm.Tim.* fr. 1 Sodano.

<sup>36</sup> See, *mutatis mutandis*, Young 1997: 76–96.

Whether intact copies of Plato's works or only disjointed quotations within commentaries provided the parameters for the textual engagement, Plotinus' seminars were centered upon the reading of texts. Books established the foundations for doing philosophy – even if Plotinus was a creative thinker not constrained to adopt the conclusion of the commentators. The book-centered approach described in this particular passage of the *Life of Plotinus* diverges from the picture of the earlier anecdotes portraying open and extended debate. We might best understand the divergence by tracing a pedagogical division between the two levels of students of which Porphyry informs us in the *Life*. The more open-ended meetings consisted of a mixed audience of students from both the “auditors” (*akroatai*) and the inner circle of “disciples” (or, zealots, *zēlōtai*).<sup>37</sup> The prolonged three-day discussion in which Plotinus sought to expound adequately the relation of souls to bodies in response to the stubborn questioning of Porphyry, a member of the inner circle, took place in the presence of less patient auditors. Thaumasius, the auditor who vocalized his complaint about the long-windedness of what seemed an interminable round of questions and answers, wanted to return to the more expected introductory course that was more appropriate to his level of interest and ability (“he wanted to hear Plotinus making general statements and speaking with reference to books”).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *V.Plot.* 7.1–2.

<sup>38</sup> *V.Plot.* 13.13–15. The difficulties attendant on the Greek text of this passage have been discussed by Lim 1993. He translates the passage: “So that after a certain person named Thaumasius (who was studying universal propositions) had come into the lecture-room and said that he wished to hear Plotinus lecture with reference to written [philosophical] texts, but that he could not stand Porphyry’s answers and questions, Plotinus said . . .” Lim’s translation is not entirely compelling: a) *tous katholou logous prattontos*, while appropriate in a commentary context, should carry the sense of “making a general statement” about the particulars of the text, i.e., to render a judgment or offer a synopsis of a text’s argument, not “studying general statements” or “studying [a text, such as that of Ps.-Archytas, entitled] *On General Propositions*,” b) the *kai* just following *prattontos* is probably a conjunction linking the two genitive participles *prattontos* and *legontos*, both of which, if they are governed by *autou* (the object of “to hear”), refer to Plotinus, not Thaumasius (so: “he wanted to hear Plotinus making general statements and speaking with reference to books”); c) if this is the case, then we have no verb of speaking to govern the infinitive of indirect speech, *thelein*, which leaves us with the problem of implying a verb of speaking for Thaumasius (“he entered . . . [and said that] he wanted to hear . . .”); alternatively, if we take *legontos* as a participle modifying Thaumasius, not Plotinus (as suggested in [b] above), then we are forced to supply a verb of speaking or commenting that would connect Plotinus to the prepositional phrase “on/to the books,” since the following sentence refers to Plotinus’ “saying anything simple on (or, with reference to) the book,” it is best to take the *legontos* of the sentence under examination here as governing the prepositional phrase, and as modifying Plotinus (as in [b] above), rather than Thaumasius. In sum, I agree with Lim on the general nature of Thaumasius’ request (he wanted Plotinus to comment on books), but not on the application of “making general statements” to Thaumasius.

At other times, it appears that Plotinus would exchange this more doctrinal approach for a textual one, when the audience was limited to his inner circle. These would be the students more adept at tracing out the precise contours of the doctrines presented in the earlier sessions and more patient at pausing over textual details, hearing the various interpretations of the commentators, and then receiving the brief yet brilliant insight of the master. The textual approach to Plato, then, would be the special preserve of the inner circle seeking deeper truths and investing more of their lives in the doing of philosophy. The introductory texts of Alcinous and Albinus would thus, if the reconstruction suggested here is correct, find parallels in the different sides of Plotinus' pedagogy. The doctrinal emphasis of Alcinous complements the course open to a broader spectrum of students, while the textual emphasis of Albinus would match, though at a more introductory level, Plotinus' seminars for the advanced students. Both Albinus and Plotinus saw books as central to the task of instilling philosophical truth. Of course, there is no evidence that Plotinus knew either Alcinous' or Albinus' handbooks, and, in any case, they serve here merely as models for the possible aims and tendencies expressed within the isagogical genre. In the classroom (and even within the various instances of the genre itself), these tendencies were not exclusive of each other, but could be given more or less concern depending on the sorts of students in attendance at any particular time. The sublimity of intellectual and ontological vision in Plotinus was firmly rooted in the tactile concreteness of the scrolls or pages of commentaries opened in the presence of friends. In spite of his own limitations in writing or reading (namely, his poor spelling and poor eyesight),<sup>39</sup> his pedagogical activity was incessantly textual.

#### PORPHYRY THE PEDAGOGUE

Little of Plotinus' thought and teaching activity would probably be known<sup>40</sup> were it not for Porphyry's methodical editing and organization of the master's treatises and his concern to provide the chronological framework for those treatises<sup>41</sup> and, more importantly, to establish himself as their sole legitimate editor through his collection of anecdotes and letters in the *Life*. Longinus had dismissed Plotinus' philosophy based on the poor versions of his work produced by others in his circle, especially Amelius; it required the diligence and keen editorial skills of Porphyry to save the

<sup>39</sup> *V.Plot.* 8.      <sup>40</sup> Henry 1935.      <sup>41</sup> *V.Plot.* 4–6.

thought of Plotinus from being so quickly rejected by his contemporaries.<sup>42</sup> In a very real sense, Porphyry is responsible for all modern accounts of Neoplatonism (insofar as this label is centered on the thought of Plotinus).

That Porphyry himself took up Plotinus' school upon the latter's death is suggested by only the slightest evidence in a recognizably unreliable later source: Eunapius reports that Porphyry did return to Rome to assume teaching duties there.<sup>43</sup> But, given the personal nature of most ancient "schools" around a particular individual, without mechanisms in place for institutional continuity beyond that individual's life or active work,<sup>44</sup> and furthermore, given Plotinus' absence from Rome during his sickness leading up to his death, it is doubtful that there was much of a coherent circle of students left to teach when Porphyry returned to Rome. Eunapius' report on the popularity of Porphyry at Rome in his final years is probably based on some sort of evidence, however circumstantial, on which Eunapius drew; but its precise nature and reliability cannot be ascertained. We can only conclude tentatively that Porphyry *probably* returned to Rome and *may* have taken up sustained teaching activity with a circle of students of various levels (possibly following the two-fold structure of auditors and serious disciples along lines similar to that of Plotinus' school).

Our inquiry need not stop here, however, since some of Porphyry's writings bear the marks of functioning within a philosophical curriculum even if external descriptions elude us. We possess two complete *Eisagōgai* from Porphyry's pen, one of which quickly became renowned throughout late antiquity and the medieval period.<sup>45</sup> The other material relevant for our present aims comprises a diverse range of fragmentary writings and the nearly complete *Letter to Marcella*, which is something of a didactic philosophical letter. Each of the fragmentary works discussed below, however, exhibit only hints of how they may have functioned within a curriculum and of the pedagogical method(s) and concerns of Porphyry the teacher. Importantly, in these latter texts we find a persistent interest in teaching specifically religious texts to philosophy students. Of course, as we have seen in previous chapters, religion and philosophy, spirituality and reason, were intimately connected in his thought; indeed, they collapsed into the same activities and pursuits, when rightly understood. In the fragmentary educational texts discussed here, namely the *Philosophy from Oracles*, *On Images* and *On the Inscription "Know Thyself,"* Porphyry evinces a significant shift in pagan isagogical literature to focus upon religious texts as

<sup>42</sup> *V.Plot.* 20–21; see Finamore 2005; cf. Watts 2011: 45–50.

<sup>43</sup> Eun. *V.Phil.* 456/4.1.10 Giangrande (p. 356 Wright).

<sup>44</sup> Dillon 2004.

<sup>45</sup> I. Hadot 1987: 100–102; Rouché 1980; cf. Ebbesen 1990.



worthy of an introduction. Since these texts are exemplary of Porphyry's philosophical translation as considered in earlier chapters, the analysis offered here illuminates the contexts that informed and provoked such translation.

### *The didactics of dialectic*

In the two explicitly titled and complete *Eisagōgai*, we are confronted with two instances of the introductory genre that felicitously exemplify the methods of the two manuals of Alcinous and Albinus.<sup>46</sup> Like the former's doctrinal approach in the *Handbook*, Porphyry's *Introduction to the Categories of Aristotle* emphasized the introduction to a set of ideas rather than to a particular text or corpus of texts. One must know the five predicables (genus, difference, species, property, accident) not only for understanding Aristotle's teaching on the categories, but also for dialectic in general ("matters of division and proof").<sup>47</sup> It is this very feature of his *Introduction* that granted it such widespread popularity over the next thousand years in the Latin West, the Byzantine East, and the Arab world, as it became a staple of medieval educational systems and received its own introductions and commentaries in turn.<sup>48</sup>

By carefully and explicitly avoiding the "deeper issues" of the ontological implications of a theory of categories – a point of contention that had most notably pitted Plotinus against Aristotle<sup>49</sup> – Porphyry made it possible to adopt an Aristotelian logic separated from an Aristotelian ontology, and thus discovered a happy solution to the more polemical contestation over categories exhibited by Plotinus. Furthermore, by adapting a five-fold variation on Aristotle's four-fold classification of predicables in the *Topica*,<sup>50</sup> Porphyry reversed the order of reading the individual treatises of the *Organon* (in which the *Categories* preceded the *Topica*), thus shifting ways of being ("categories")<sup>51</sup> to the side and placing ways of speaking ("predicables") in the foreground. This move rendered Aristotle's ontology of particulars innocuous to the use by late antique and medieval Platonists

<sup>46</sup> Johnson 2011a.

<sup>47</sup> *Isagoge*, praef. p. 1.6–7; for general discussion of this text, Strange 1987; J. Barnes 2003: 24–32.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffman 2009: 607–613; and briefly but broadly, Girgenti 1994: 20–21.

<sup>49</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 6.1–3 (esp. 6.1); for nuanced discussion, see Strange 1992: 1–12; for further discussion on Porphyry's appropriation of Aristotle, see Evangelidou 1988; Karamanolis 2006: 243–330.

<sup>50</sup> Arist. *Top.* 101b16–25.

<sup>51</sup> "It is important to recognize from the start that the *Categories* is not primarily or explicitly about names, but about the things that names signify" (Ackrill 1963: 71).

of his dialectical tools.<sup>52</sup> Of course, this interpretive sleight of hand, whereby a modified version of the *Topica*'s predicables became the interpretive key for reading Aristotle's *Categories*, was never so overtly stated by Porphyry. The preface to the *Introduction* only claims that there were five predicables necessary for understanding the *Categories* and dialectic in general.

Dedicated to Chrysaorius (also the dedicatee of Porphyry's fragmentary *On Free Will* and the now lost *On the Disagreement of Plato and Aristotle*),<sup>53</sup> the *Introduction* otherwise offers little information on how it was to be used within a curriculum: whether it was an account of the sort of lectures provided in a classroom to students at a particular stage of their philosophical education or whether it was for individual use by readers not necessarily active within a certain curricular process; whether it was intended to be read before engaging with the text of Aristotle itself or whether it could function for a broader audience, for instance one including students of rhetoric as well as of philosophy, and could thus be followed by differing courses depending on the long-term interests of the individual student. The text itself provides no hints for answering these questions.<sup>54</sup>

Even without indications of its social and educational context(s), the preface to the *Introduction* does evince significant literary features of the isogogical genre. "[Since matters of division and proof, etc., are] useful, I shall attempt, in making you a concise exposition, to rehearse, briefly and as in the manner of an introduction,<sup>55</sup> what the old masters say, avoiding deeper inquiries and aiming suitably at the more simple [inquiries]."<sup>56</sup> Representative elements of the genre of introductions are present here: a concern to maintain brevity, the pedagogical focus on a student readership, the goal of providing what was beneficial, the invocation of earlier authorities ("especially members of the Peripatetic school," he would say a few lines later), and the explicit adoption of the label *eisagōgē* for the work in hand.

The body of the *Introduction* treats each of the predicables on their own terms and then moves on to delineate their similarities and differences from

<sup>52</sup> Porphyry would expend more effort to explain the categories in dialectical terms in his *Comm.Arist.Categ.* 56.6–60.10 Busse. It seems that earlier Platonists had already valued the *Topica* for its dialectical contributions within a Platonist ontology; see Sedley 1997: 127.

<sup>53</sup> T238 Smith; Al. Cameron 1977: 17–19; Barnes 2003: 23–24; Karamanolis 2006: 243–330.

<sup>54</sup> We know much more about how the treatise functioned within later curricula, and there must be some degree to which features of its later use can be retroactively assumed for Porphyry's own curricular forms; the degree to which we may do so remains uncertain; in general, see Hoffmann 2009: 607–613.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Porph. *Comm.Sophist.* fr. 169 Smith (= Boeth. *de Divis.*), p. 195, 5–6.

<sup>56</sup> *Isagoge*, praef., p. 1.7–10 (trans. Barnes); for useful commentary on this passage with further comparanda, see J. Barnes 2003: 32–37.

each other. In all of this, particular texts never come under the purview of the pedagogue; instead, the aim is the inculcation of ideas, or rather, of certain ways of thinking and speaking, and the introduction of the tools requisite for analysis and evaluation of the ways of thinking and speaking. Comprehension of the predicables examined in the *Introduction* would certainly have proved useful for the reading of texts, especially Aristotle's *Categories*. However, the textual approach modeled by Albinus' *Prologos*, that is, the concern with understanding the literary or other features of a particular text or group of texts, is absent. Porphyry envisioned the understanding of the text of the *Categories* as only a narrowly conceived first step for the student who mastered the analytical skills presented in his *Introduction*. The student of his introductory handbook would gain the basis for successful dialectical activity in general.

### Teaching texts

The second extant example of the *eisagōgē* genre is markedly different in this respect. The unfortunately undatable *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* represents clearly the text-centered tendencies seen in Albinus.<sup>57</sup> The central aim of this *Introduction* was to guide students through the terminological and conceptual quagmire of an astrological treatise. The second century Ptolemy's *Apotelesmatica* ("Astrological Fulfillments"), which is more often known by the title of *Tetrabiblos* ("The Fourfold Book"), contained a good deal of astrological jargon that would have been mystifying to the student uninitiated in the study of the stars and their effects. Since the *Introduction* is not well-known<sup>58</sup> it may be helpful to offer its preface in its entirety in order better to grasp Porphyry's isagogical aims in general as well as the particular textual emphases of this handbook.

Since Ptolemy completely distinguished the classes (*eide*) of the composite observation (*theōria*) of heavenly bodies from the effects (*apotelesmata*) which have been seen from this observation, albeit presenting his diction (*phrasis*) obscurely and unclearly because of the antiquated usage of the words (*onomata*),<sup>59</sup> I thought it necessary to lay out information pertinent to its comprehension for the sake

<sup>57</sup> For a date of c. 275 (though without explanation), see Pingree 2001: 7; for a date of c.295 (though again without explanation), see Holden 2009: vii, 44 n. 2.

<sup>58</sup> The translation of Holden (2009, which came to my attention only in the last phase of revising this book, and only after I had made multiple versions of my own [painstaking] translation!) should alleviate the obscurity of this text, which is otherwise almost entirely neglected in studies on Porphyry. (In spite of Holden's translation, I have decided to keep my own in the following discussion).

<sup>59</sup> On Ptolemy's terminology and its importance for determining his audience, see Riley 1987: 245–246.

of clarity. And it should be fitting in the present work (*ponēma*) to pass over that which was said clearly by Ptolemy in some passages, since they convey their meaning openly; but in the case of those said summarily (*kephalaïōdōs*) and at the same time unclearly, it seemed beneficial to us to present them in a way easy to understand insofar as that was possible. Straightaway, then, it [the *Tetrabiblos*] has made mention of aspect (*martyria*),<sup>60</sup> attendance (*doruphoria*),<sup>61</sup> prepollence (prevalence, *kathuperterēsis*),<sup>62</sup> and predominance (*epikratēsis*),<sup>63</sup> and those things set down in succession by us – whatever material, left entirely unexplained by him, would be a source of difficulty to the [student] coming upon the paths of astrology (*proteleseis*). For this reason, following our predecessors concisely and at the same time judiciously, we put forth this introduction (*eisagōgēn*) in a timely manner to be beneficial and easy to use for those uninitiated in [astrological] terminology (*logōn*).<sup>64</sup>

The general isagogic tendencies expressed here comprise a concern for brevity, an aim to provide an appropriate teaching tool for a particular level of student that would be of benefit for progress to higher levels of ability, and a claim to be synthesizing the work of predecessors.<sup>65</sup> Like the *Introduction to Aristotle's Categories*, the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* claims to provide the basis for a student's acquisition of necessary knowledge in their respective subjects of inquiry. Also, like the former, the latter *Introduction* claims to include relevant material from those who have made contributions in the field, but to do so while ostensibly avoiding exhaustive compilation<sup>66</sup> of earlier ideas and limiting the manual to a brief and useful exposition.

Beyond these generic similarities between the two *Introductions*, however, the one dedicated to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* possesses distinctive features that align it securely with the sort of textual approach modeled by Albinus. The preface declares that the work was specifically prompted by the antiquated and opaque diction of Ptolemy's text. The novice reader would have found words like *doruphoria* (literally, "a bodyguard" or group of those "carrying spears") puzzling in a treatise on the stars – and there were many such technical uses of words.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* ch. 8, "On the supporting by aspect (*epimartyria*);" ch. 54, "Presentation on the aspects (*martyriai*) of the planets."

<sup>61</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* ch. 29, "On attendance (*doruphoria*)."

<sup>62</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* ch. 21, "On prepollence (*kathuperterēsis*)."

<sup>63</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* ch. 30, "On the lord of the house, the master, and the ruling [star] (*epikratētōr*)."

<sup>64</sup> For the phrase, "those uninitiated in words/literature," see Eus. *GEI* 6.1 (PG 22.1024C); Theodoret, *Curatio* 3.42. For *logoi* as "sophistical arguments" in Porphyry, see Johnson, forthcoming a.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson 2011a; neither Porphyry's title nor preface claim to be a commentary on the *Tetrab.* (pace Pingree, 2001: 7).

<sup>66</sup> In fact, much of the *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* is a compilation of Antiochus; see Pingree 1977: esp. 205–206; and 2001: 7–8.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in spite of Porphyry's attempt to introduce the reader to the technical uses of such terminology, I sensed acutely the need to consult introductions to ancient astrology in order to follow

The chapters of the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* based themselves on key concepts or terms requisite for understanding the text of Ptolemy, like a glossary.<sup>68</sup> And even though other authorities were invoked at various points throughout the *Introduction* (Antiochus;<sup>69</sup> Apollinarius, Thrasyllus, Petosiris, and “other elders;”<sup>70</sup> Teucer of Babylon;<sup>71</sup> Antigonus and Phnaēs the Egyptian<sup>72</sup>), Porphyry feigned the interpretive dictum that Ptolemy was to be interpreted by Ptolemy,<sup>73</sup> without recourse to external astrological systems of thought (especially since there were fundamental differences between “the ancients” and “the moderns”).<sup>74</sup> If we did not possess other astrological works from earlier and later centuries, we would have little indication of “Porphyry’s extreme dependence” on a certain Antiochus, or of his inclusion of extraneous material.<sup>75</sup> Most chapters begin: “It is called a \_\_\_\_\_, when . . .,” and are sometimes quite short. In its entirety, for instance, Chapter 17 runs:

17. On “transference [of nature]” (*metocheteusis*).<sup>76</sup>

It is called “transference” whenever a star joins together with another star, and that one with yet another. For it transfers the power of the one to the power of the other.<sup>77</sup>

The following chapter is equally brief:

18. On the “aggregation [of planets in contact]” (*episunagōgē*).<sup>78</sup>

It is called “aggregation” whenever different stars should join together with one star; for at that time the [one] star takes their power.<sup>79</sup>

Other chapters walk the reader through the calculations necessary for solving certain astrological problems, such as the determination of zodiacal

Porphyry himself (when making a translation of the *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* and as yet unaware of Holden’s recent translation).

<sup>68</sup> For a more strictly formal glossary, see Serapion’s *Astrological Definitions* (text at CCAG 8.4; trans. in Holden 2009: 61–70).

<sup>69</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 38, p. 210.6–7; on Antiochus as the source for chs. 3–4, 7–11, 15, 20, 22–30, 35–39, 44–45, in part or in whole, see Pingree 1977: 205–206 (based on “Epitome I” contained in a fifteenth-century ms. [= CCAG 8.3.111–118]); see also, *idem*, 2001: 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 41, p. 212.14–17. <sup>71</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 47, p. 3–5 (= Antiochus).

<sup>72</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 51, p. 223.17–20 (= Antiochus).

<sup>73</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 41, pp. 212.26–213.1. For the notion that a problematic passage of an author should be interpreted by consideration of other passages of that same author, see *Quaest.Homer.* praef. ad Anatol.; see also, Lamberton 1986: 109.

<sup>74</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.*, 41, p. 212.7–26; for areas where Porphyry did introduce non-Ptolemaean thought, see Riley 1987: 246 n. 24.

<sup>75</sup> Antiochus: Pingree 2001: 7 (from which the quotation above is taken); extraneous material: Riley 1987: 246 n. 24.

<sup>76</sup> This term, as such, does not occur in the *Tetrab.* <sup>77</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 17, p. 200.24–27.

<sup>78</sup> This term, as such, does not occur in the *Tetrab.* <sup>79</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 18, p. 201.1–3.

triangles. Porphyry's tone is reminiscent of a math tutor: "Suppose that the Sun is in Aries in the region (*klima*) of Alexandria [in] the 1<sup>st</sup> lot and that Jupiter is in Leo [in] the 2<sup>nd</sup> lot, and that Mars is in Leo [in] the 5<sup>th</sup> lot, this is what I do: I first add together *a* and *b*, then I multiply the answer by *c*."<sup>80</sup> The fact that this material corresponds verbatim to the work of Antiochus (preserved especially by Rhetorius) does not detract from its effectiveness in Porphyry's *Introduction*.<sup>81</sup> Porphyry has provided an astrological "story problem" in order to teach his student how to perform correctly the basic calculations of astrology. Even in this last instance, however, his concern is not astrology for astrology's sake; rather, it is the explanation of the sorts of calculations that might arise from Ptolemy's conclusions in the text of the *Tetrabiblos*. Indeed, Porphyry's (or Antiochus') explanation had drawn from the astrological tables (*kanones*) set forth in a companion book of Ptolemy, *The Handbook of Tables*.<sup>82</sup>

Throughout the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, Porphyry's discussions are centered upon providing the student with the knowledge deemed requisite to understand the text at hand. While there may be broader doctrinal implications about how astrological knowledge might fit within a philosophical system, or how a philosopher ought to adjudge assumptions about astral determinism, these are never made the explicit point of the *Introduction*. Of course, a belief in at least some form of astral determinism would have made the understanding of astrological texts all the more relevant for a student. But no such belief is anywhere proposed or defended.<sup>83</sup>

How the *Introduction* was envisioned to fit within a broader curriculum is uncertain. What sort of context it was meant to be read in (alone or with the teacher?) is equally unclear. We must content ourselves with the striking textual features it possesses that allow us to see the possibilities of the isagogical genre at work. Its emphasis is persistently textual, aiding the student in comprehending a difficult text; yet it avoids the linear pattern of a commentary, which would follow the sequence of the source

<sup>80</sup> This is a simplified rendering of the sort of processes performed in *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 51, pp. 224.9–225.14. On directions and commands in astrological literature (which are absent from Ptolemy himself), see Riley 1987: 236–237.

<sup>81</sup> Pingree 2001: 7–8.

<sup>82</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 51, p. 224.5–9: "Since, therefore, we earlier set forth the trine, square and sextile side by degree (*moirikē*) by means of Ptolemy's *Handbook of Tables*, and [since] we just now gave a glimpse of the zodiacal [method], we thought it necessary to set forth the temporal [method] at a glance."

<sup>83</sup> The conception of the "fulfillments" (*apotelesmata*) in the world of planetary positions seems unproblematic as part of the system of the text of Ptolemy (*Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 52; = Antiochus); cf. *ibid.* 53–54 (= Antiochus, but not in Porphyry's original work; see Pingree 2001: 7–8).

text.<sup>84</sup> Instead, it offers a schematic ordering of the fundamental issues and terms that would raise difficulties for the beginning reader of Ptolemy (notwithstanding the fact that several terms do not appear in Ptolemy, at least in the form Porphyry gives them).<sup>85</sup> Refutation and polemics are minimized;<sup>86</sup> Porphyry's own position on any issue is rarely discernible. Certainly, he judged the text an important one to be read (but, by whom?), and he clearly deemed it worthy of an introduction for some sort of reason, beyond the sheer academic polymathy that sought to explain obscure texts merely because their obscurity posed a scholarly challenge.

The very opening lines of the *Introduction* provide a hint: "Ptolemy completely distinguished the classes (*eidē*) of the composite observation (*theōria*) of heavenly bodies from the effects (*apotelesmata*) which have been seen from this observation."<sup>87</sup> The distinction referred to might point to the two separate works of Ptolemy: the *Almagest*, a technical treatment of the stars themselves and the *Tetrabiblos*, a work focused on the relation of the stars to things on earth.<sup>88</sup> The separation between astral phenomena and human affairs, and the problematization of their linkage (whether causal or merely indicative),<sup>89</sup> had comprised an important discussion in Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*, as we have already seen. The problematic status of the relationship between the astral and human levels may have provided the initial impetus to take Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* so seriously. A student of Platonic philosophy who found in Plato mythical tales of souls passing through the heavenly spheres in their descent into bodies and who recognized a longing to grow wings and return to a home beyond the heavens<sup>90</sup> would have had serious questions about the role of heavenly bodies in affecting the soul's homeward journey. Were the mundane trivialities that made up most of the more popular expressions of astrologers and horoscope-casters to be embraced or rejected by the budding philosophy student? The student may well have felt a variety of social, intellectual, and "scientific" forces pulling in opposite directions. If the student was to appreciate fully the complexities and problematic nature of obtaining astrological knowledge, as declared in the opening discussion

<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Porphyry's *Introduction* seems to jump back and forth over the text of Ptolemy; see e.g., *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 11 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.24 and 4.5); 12 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.24); 31 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.14); 32 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.15); 33 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.15); 39 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.10, *passim*); 40 (corresponding to *Tetrab.* 1.6).

<sup>85</sup> e.g., *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 17 and 18, quoted above.

<sup>86</sup> Though he incorporates material that is at odds with Ptolemy's system, he does not highlight this fact. For contradictory elements, see Riley 1987: 246 n. 24.

<sup>87</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* praef., p. 190.5–7. <sup>88</sup> Riley 1987: 243.

<sup>89</sup> i.e., "hard" vs. "soft" astrology; see Long 1982; also, Chapter 3 above. <sup>90</sup> Plato, *Phdr.* 247a–d.

of the *Tetrabiblos*,<sup>91</sup> the very product of one known for his expertise in such knowledge, then the student required an introductory handbook on the key concepts and terms recurrent in that treatise.<sup>92</sup> Given what we know of Porphyry's philosophical thought elsewhere<sup>93</sup> and what we can discern of the salient features of his *Introduction*, some such context and motivation for composing it possesses ample explanatory value for determining its pedagogical functions.

Even if we can only guess at how the text might have fit within an educational context or curricular plan, it is important to recognize the authoritative function of such an *Introduction*. As Tamsyn Barton has noted regarding earlier astrological treatises and horoscope charts, a key function of these texts' mystifying complexities was the confirmation of the horoscope-casting author's possession of astrological expertise and authority.<sup>94</sup> The texts were intentionally obscure and obfuscating so as to perpetuate the necessary role of the expert in decoding the arcane knowledge. Porphyry may have "preserved a certain defiance toward astrology,"<sup>95</sup> but he shows a willingness to take it seriously as a potential rival form of knowledge and therefore a worthy object of philosophical translation. While his definitions and discussions do not overtly exhibit a one-to-one transfer of meaning into a philosophical idiom, the entirety of the *Introduction* as a pedagogical project was part of a larger, less blatant form of translation that domesticated astrology through the inclusion into its curricular process of one of the most "scientific" and authoritative texts of the discipline of astrology. Authority rested not so much any longer on the text but on its master expositor. His was neither a disdainful dismissal nor a glib acceptance of astrology, but rather a methodical examination of its terminology and concepts.

### *Oracular and iconographic pedagogies*

Similar concerns with reading difficult texts that stood in an ambiguous relationship to the philosopher and the philosophic life are apparent in the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On Images*, treatises that ought to stand beside Porphyry's two explicitly titled *Introductions* as expressions of Porphyry's pedagogical activity. Both of these fascinating works exhibit an exploratory application of the isagogical genre into new textual fields. While these

<sup>91</sup> *Tetrab.* 1.2–3; Bouché-Leclercq 1979: 591.      <sup>92</sup> Riley 1987: 245–246.      <sup>93</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>94</sup> Barton 1994: 82–85.      <sup>95</sup> Bouché-Leclercq 1979: 601.



treatises are not explicitly named *eisagōgai* as such (at least in the remaining fragments), there are the recognizably isagogical marks of an emphasis on maintaining brevity and an attempt to offer beneficial commentary on texts deemed worthy of exposition for a student reader. In fact, their overt and singular concern was to aid their readers in learning to read texts well. The exploratory nature of the enterprise lies in the type of texts chosen for interpretation: verse oracles and visual images. There seems to be no previous literary treatment of oracles or statues that had been aimed at a student readership and dedicated to overtly pedagogical purposes.<sup>96</sup> Such purposes are raised in the remains of the prefaces of each work and are amply confirmed in other fragments from later sections of each.

### *On Images*

The single fragment preserved from the preface of *On Images* is illuminating:

To whom it is right I will speak; close the gates, you who are uninitiated! I am showing the thoughts of a theological wisdom, with which men revealed God and the powers of God to physical perception through kindred images, delineating invisible things in visible forms, to those who have learned to pick out the outlines (or letters/ paintings/ characters – *ta grammata*) of the gods from the images as if from books.<sup>97</sup> It is not surprising that the most uneducated consider the statues to be wood and stones, just as indeed those ignorant of letters see inscribed columns as mere stones, writing tablets as pieces of wood, and books as woven papyrus.<sup>98</sup>

The opening evocation of the mysteries and the importance of not compromising the special knowledge conveyed in his treatise might be met with some degree of modern skepticism. The explicit limitation of his audience to those initiated in “theological wisdom” (*sophia theologos*) could be explained as a worn-out trope preparing the reader for the impending philosophical pontification that is about to come. Such skepticism about the seriousness of his opening exclusionary claims is warranted more by modern sentiment than by ancient evidence, however – though we might find a friendly reception among Porphyry’s Christian antagonists, who

<sup>96</sup> See, however, the religious protreptic of Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 2, and the moral-allegorical interpretations of visual art in, e.g., the *Tabula Cebetis*; for discussion of the broader school context (esp. rhetorical) for such interpretations, see Rousselle 2001. For the shift towards visual allegory, see Elsner 1995.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *Abst.* 2.41.4.

<sup>98</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 351 Smith; my discussion of *On Images* here is indebted to Krulak, 2011; see also Rousselle 2001: 399–402.

mocked such attempts to treat philosophy in terms of the mysteries.<sup>99</sup> Dismissing Porphyry's adoption of the language of the mysteries here scarcely allows us to appreciate the thoroughgoing spirituality of Porphyry's philosophical vision. Plotinus had named Porphyry a hierophant and the latter adopted such terminology as a valid identification of the philosopher who, as a priest, taught the salvation of the soul through purification from bodily pollution.<sup>100</sup>

If we take the preface of *On Images* seriously we must conclude that Porphyry had concerns about the dissemination of his texts and the hazards of their falling into unworthy hands (as they obviously did, since Eusebius is, aside from slight exceptions,<sup>101</sup> our sole source for the fragments of *On Images*). His introduction to the interpretation of religious images had clear pedagogical strictures placed upon it. Esoteric claims and warnings establish here a text reserved for the few who are fitted for the knowledge about to be divulged.<sup>102</sup> We lack further details on the standards of character or intellect to which Porphyry hoped to hold his audience. Because we do find more traces of just such a concern in the *Philosophy from Oracles* (as we shall see below), it is not unreasonable to suppose that the original preface of *On Images* contained a further delineation of the sort of reader deemed to be a worthy recipient of this text.

In the fragment we have before us we are alerted to the presence of a deep theological wisdom held within (or behind) the sacred images that cluttered the temples and sanctuaries of the Roman world.<sup>103</sup> Apparently, the ancients who had first set about honoring the gods with visual images had fashioned their plastic representations in accordance with a divine, rather than mundane, wisdom. Presumably, his intended audience had already gained some level of initiation in that wisdom from other sources, such as the study of philosophy under a master, or merely the previous initiation into a mystery cult. Unfortunately, the only ancient evidence we have that would indicate that the revelations at the mysteries contained teaching embodying Stoic or Platonic philosophical conceptions is from philosophers themselves. It may be the case that the average initiate would

<sup>99</sup> Eusebius, who is our source for the present fragment, had claimed that Porphyry was exemplifying "a rather great vanity" and spoke in the fragment "with such pretension" (Eus. *PE* 3.6.7). Of course, early Christian authors were not unaware of the richness such language afforded their own spiritual expressions; see, Riedweg 1987. For general discussion, see Stroumsa 1996.

<sup>100</sup> *V.Plot.* 15.5–6; *Abst.* 2.49.1, 3; cf. also *Abst.* 2.35.1; 2.50.1; and Chaeremon ap. 4.6.1; with Clark 2000b: 153 n. 295; 158 n. 337.

<sup>101</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 354a (= Stobaeus 1.31.7–10); fr. 357 (= Lydus *de mens.* 138.18–139.15); fr. 385a incertum (= Augustine *Civ.Dei* 7.25.1–12); fr. 360a (= Stobaeus 1.25.2).

<sup>102</sup> For illuminating discussion of esotericism in ancient philosophy, see Kingsley 1995.

<sup>103</sup> For background, see Clerc 1914; Mossman 1991; Graf 2005b; Rousselle 2001: 384–402.

not have been possessed of anything more philosophical or symbolic in the mysteries than the awareness that Demeter controlled the seasons and agricultural fecundity, or that Isis or Mithras would help the initiate escape the vicissitudes of Fortune in this life and grant blessedness in the next. If this is all that was required of Porphyry's readers then the esoteric declaration in *On Images* would lose a good deal of its force, since many of the inhabitants of Athens, Rome, or Lilybaeum (wherever he and his audience may have been at the time of composition) would have had some sort of initiatory experience in one of the numerous mystery cults.

It seems instead that some commencement in philosophical studies had already been made by his intended readership. Porphyry would reveal the depths of the wisdom hidden in sacred images only "to those who have learned to pick out the marks (*ta grammata*) of the gods from the images as if from books." The ambiguity inherent in the word *ta grammata* provided a rich conception of the ways in which images worked theologically as well as the demarcations of those who should read the *On Images*. *Ta grammata* referred to anything painted, etched, or written; hence, the term could designate equally well paintings on a wall or letters on a page.<sup>104</sup> Gazing upon a visual depiction of a divine person or a sacred narrative was an act of reading (of translating) for the viewer who had been properly educated. Such viewers would see painted or carved images as letters signifying a reality beyond themselves.<sup>105</sup> To the uninitiated, that is, the theologically or philosophically illiterate, the images were like the scrawled lines on a paper that were indecipherable since they remained uneducated in such reading and writing.<sup>106</sup>

Drawing especially on an Orphic hymn and Chaeremon the Egyptian priest, the extant fragments of the treatise attempt to catalog (and possibly systematize?) the various ways in which images could be read by the philosophical theologian. In contrast to the earlier philosophical exegesis of an image in the *Tabula of Cebe*s (first–second century AD), Porphyry's treatise lacks narrative progression in its iconographic exposition.<sup>107</sup> The *Tabula* had led the eye of the reader (along with the eyes of the fictive viewers) from one item in the single painting that was its subject to another in such a way as to elicit a narrative continuity between those features and the ways of life they symbolized. *On Images*, however, develops something closer

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Plot. *Enn.* 5.8.5.23–24 and 5.8.6.3–8.

<sup>105</sup> It is just this sort of shift to allegorical visibility that has been delineated by Elsner 1995.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 2.2 Trapp.

<sup>107</sup> For text, translation, and introduction, see Fitzgerald and White 1983; for interpretation, see Elsner 1995: 39–46.

to a generalized catalog of iconographic elements and avoids prolonged visual narration of any particular image. Rather, the brief narratives of the treatise (usually comprising only a single sentence) relate episodes of mythology, from which iconographic elements usually expressed in ancient art had arisen. For example, because “they told the myth (*emythologēsan*) that [Heracles] toiled through twelve contests, claiming this as the symbol of the division of the signs of the zodiac in heaven, [artists] confer on him a club and a lion-skin, the latter an indication of its unevenness, the former revealing the power of the zodiac.”<sup>108</sup> Typically, Porphyry begins from a cosmic principle or force, or an element of myth, and then attaches particular, sometimes isolated, features of visual artistic renderings to those principles and their mythic allegorizations.

None of the material moves much beyond a Stoicizing physical allegoresis of visual representation. The treatise largely limits itself to an enumeration of various elements of the visual depictions of the gods that signified various forces within the physical world. Greek (or rather, Orphic) visual thought is shown to resonate with the same conceptions in Egyptian visual thinking. This is hardly surprising given the fact that his main source for Egyptian religious representation was Chaeremon, a man who was both Egyptian priest and Stoic philosopher.<sup>109</sup> One could suggest, though, that Porphyry may have wanted at some point in his treatise (now lost to us) to move towards an interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphs as indicating a non-discursive wisdom of intelligible things. Plotinus had claimed as much in *Ennead* 5.8, where he asserted that hieroglyphs exhibited a means of avoiding letters and words by representing things in themselves; the Egyptian images thereby captured a thousand words simultaneously (*athroon*), so to speak, and transcended the discursive multiplicity.<sup>110</sup>

At the least, Porphyry’s reliance on literary sources like Chaeremon and the Orphic Hymns indicates an interesting and subtle move away from any concrete or particular religious images. Unlike Dio Chrysostom, who two centuries earlier developed an interpretation of the statue of Zeus in his temple at Olympia, Porphyry provides no hint of particular statues or paintings at individual religious sites.<sup>111</sup> Instead, as already noted, he seems to focus on regularities of visual articulation in many artistic manifestations, that is, how Adonis or Demeter are *usually* represented visually. Even

<sup>108</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 359 Smith. <sup>109</sup> Van der Horst 1984: IX–XI.

<sup>110</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 5.8.6; Grabar 1945: 24–25.

<sup>111</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12. One fragment (*De simulac.* fr. 354 Smith, which claims to be an exposition of the Orphic Hymn) does seem to represent the Olympian type of Zeus (as exegeted by Dio Chrysostom), though any mention of the statue at Olympia is absent.

though the extant fragments mostly limit themselves to physical allegoresis, and hence might appear ontologically compromised from a Platonic meta-physical perspective, they remain abstractions removed from any particular instantiations or visual embodiments.

The purported inability to move allegorically above the visible physical world, however, was a point of derision against Porphyry made by Eusebius, who preserves nearly all of our fragments. It has, furthermore, been one of the central reasons for locating the treatise in Porphyry's pre-Plotinian phase.<sup>112</sup> It has been alleged by modern scholars that he was not yet under the Platonizing sway of the master at Rome and so had not yet sufficiently purified his academic interests from such physicalist concerns. However, the preface had claimed to reveal "invisible things in visible forms,"<sup>113</sup> not that some physical things (visual iconography) represented other physical things (cosmic phenomena). We can, instead, detect a general practice in the remaining fragments of speaking of the images as symbols of the divine forces *behind* the physical phenomena. Most importantly, we should be wary of trusting the emphases of the extant fragments (aside, probably, from the fragment of the preface) for providing us with an accurate picture of the dominant concerns of the original treatise. The context of all the Eusebian fragments, which is the third book of his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, was an attack on Greek "physiological" theories as comprising one of the main branches of a tripartite theological system that could embrace all the theological possibilities of Greek religion and thought.<sup>114</sup> Any material in Porphyry's treatise that might have moved beyond the lower levels of the theological hierarchy would certainly have been inappropriate for such a polemical purpose. Eusebius had adopted a two-pronged strategy for making Porphyry useful within his apologetic work. The two types of material deemed worthy of quotation (and manipulation) were either discussions that could be used against the Greeks ("even the renowned Porphyry speaks against you . . ."), or statements that could be seen as instances of the kind of theology and cult practices that were under attack at a given point in the apologist's treatise.<sup>115</sup> It is this latter category into which the fragments of *On Images* fall.

There is nothing within the fragments as such that would exclude the possibility of seeing them as deriving from only one section of a larger

<sup>112</sup> Bidez 1913: 25–26, 152.

<sup>113</sup> See, of course, Krulak, 2011.

<sup>114</sup> Many have thought that Porphyry is the proponent of this tripartite theology attacked by Eusebius; see esp. Pépin 1956; see also, Dal Carolo 1988; Liebert 1975. For Eusebius' argument, see Johnson 2006a: 58, 80–88, 156–158.

<sup>115</sup> Kofsky 2000; Zambon 2002: 273–274.

project, one which sought to find visual significations in sacred images of all the levels of his Platonic theological hierarchy – or at least most of the levels (it is unclear how the One would find visual representation at all, if the philosopher only approached the One in an absolute silencing of words both in speech and in thought<sup>116</sup>). At least some levels of the theological hierarchy are specified at various points in the treatise: the Demiurge, aetherial, and heavenly gods.<sup>117</sup> We do, furthermore, have solid indications that Porphyry interpreted some images as symbolic of Intellect itself.<sup>118</sup> The invisible nature of the divine is found symbolized in the use of materials such as crystal or black stone.<sup>119</sup>

Strikingly, there is even a hint of criticism of the limits of visual representation for signifying the invisible: “Certainly while [Orphic] theologians have explained the [character] of God in this way, neither were they able to fashion the sort of image that the [Orphic] hymn (*logos*) revealed, nor did anyone show, if he thought of it, [God’s] living, thinking and providential [qualities] through a sphere.”<sup>120</sup> The God in question here is only the Demiurge or “the Demiurgic Mind,” not the One. And, though visual images (which were literarily depicted in the hymn of this Demiurge seated in splendor as Zeus the king of gods and men) do resonate with what we might recall of earlier literary accounts of the statue of Zeus at Olympia (especially that of Dio Chrysostom),<sup>121</sup> Porphyry seems to indicate discomfort with this (Stoic) tradition.<sup>122</sup> It is certainly significant, then, that Porphyry remarks on the inability to represent adequately some of the most basic elements of the Demiurgic Mind’s character: his invisibility and eternity.

We can only speculate on the contours of the original project behind the scanty remains of *On Images*. Porphyry may have sought to identify the range of significations of sacred images and their applicability to various levels of a Platonic theological hierarchy. He may have intended his study of images to result in the recognition of the impossibility of representing the higher beings with visual images, especially the hypostases of One and Mind, in any sort of adequate manner – a conclusion that would have made a fitting parallel to the sacrificial hierarchy of his *On Abstinence* where the higher divine levels received ever less material forms of cult. The

<sup>116</sup> *Abst.* 2.34.1–3, with Plot. *Enn.* 5.1.6.9–15.

<sup>117</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 354.58 Smith (Demiurge); fr. 355 (Hera is the aetherial “power”); frs. 352.18; 354.24 (heavenly gods).

<sup>118</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 354.5 Smith (Zeus is the cosmic Mind); fr. 354.58 (the Demiurgic Mind is king); cf. fr. 352.12 Smith (the divine is rational).

<sup>119</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 352.3–11 Smith; cf. fr. 354.54–55 Smith.

<sup>120</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 354.46–48 Smith. <sup>121</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12. <sup>122</sup> Pace Bidez 1913: 152.

project would thus have demarcated the parameters in which sacred images were even useful at all for the pursuit of the depths of theological wisdom for a small circle of students adequately prepared for moving beyond the material and the visual into the Beyond.

By attending to the ways in which the different “visual languages” of the Egyptians and Greeks differently yet equally signified a single unitary truth made available through Porphyry’s iconographic translation, the *On Images* placed itself within what Jaś Elsner has delineated as a massive shift in ways of seeing in late antiquity.<sup>123</sup> Unlike earlier approaches that prized the realism of art and its viewing, Porphyry’s expositions, even if what remains is largely limited to a physical allegorical approach, offered a sustained symbolic exegesis of religious iconography as part of a serious philosophical mode of viewing.<sup>124</sup> Significantly, he neither sought to evoke any particular statue or painting – no ritual locale is identified – nor did he seem to value any participatory experience that may have been connected to particular images. Thus, in contrast to one of the most serious viewers of religious iconography, the second-century Pausanias, whose own autopsy of images in their cultic contexts invited the reader to make a similar pilgrimage,<sup>125</sup> Porphyry immediately generalizes by emphasizing repeatable patterns in the images and omitting discussion of particular visual instantiations in a religious cult and which thereby might be open to a pilgrim’s lived experience. His starting point seems, rather, to have been the generalized principles first and only then the solicitation of the myriad scattered manifestations of those principles in the visual artistic world.

His avoidance or subordination of more experientially tangible details does not, however, detract from the religious or spiritual significance of his exegetical work. As we shall see more fully below, Porphyry represents himself as a spiritual guide in the pursuit of truth. However, since religious and philosophical truth were one, and furthermore since traditional religion, along with non-symbolic readings of images, belonged to the confusion of embodied existence, the acts of iconographic translation provided by *On Images* were limited to the philosopher’s circle, not the public festival or the temple. The spirituality of such viewing required a wise guide who was a priest of the divine Mind or even the One, rather than the temple warden or initiates’ guide of a mystery cult.

<sup>123</sup> Elsner 1995.

<sup>124</sup> Porphyry should thus be identified along with Plotinus as central exemplars of the shift of visual thinking and aesthetics from the classical to the Byzantine; for Plotinus, see Grabar 1945: 15–36; Elsner 1995: 90–92.

<sup>125</sup> On Pausanias, see Elsner 1995: 125–155.

*Philosophy from Oracles*

We find a close parallel of what *On Images* might have been doing in the other fragmentary, albeit somewhat better preserved, treatise that appears to have performed similar philosophical work in teaching students to read texts. Like the statues and paintings of the gods, verse oracles delivered at the shrines of Apollo or delivered from the mouths of entranced mediums of Hecate were characteristic features of the late antique religious world. How was the novice student of (Platonic) philosophy to evaluate the activity of divination or the inspired words produced by the oracles?

Collections of oracular pronouncements were apparently in wide circulation and not all of them were responses to mundane questions regarding the success of business negotiations, travel, marriage, or children. The third century produced an interest in asking theological questions of the oracles (especially at Didyma and Claros on the coast of Asia Minor), and the oracles were not averse to providing philosophically informed utterances pointing beyond the divinity inspiring the response.<sup>126</sup> All responses, whether of a theological nature or not, could be given permanence by inscription in the hometown of the one who consulted the oracle, as well as on plaques or walls at the sanctuary.<sup>127</sup> For instance, the *chrèsmographeion* at Didyma was a building dedicated to the housing of inscriptions, which were crammed onto the surfaces of its walls.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, some individuals took up the task of compiling a book of oracular responses.<sup>129</sup> Such oracle collections were nothing new and are reported in Herodotus as being in circulation as early as the late sixth century in classical Athens.<sup>130</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Porphyry alone in the third century went about to various sites collecting the oracles that would be included in his *Philosophy from Oracles*. While such a possibility cannot be excluded, it is just as likely that he gathered his oracles from one or more oracle collections previously compiled by contemporaries. It is impossible to ascertain the precise provenance of his collection – even though some of his oracles are assigned to Didyma or to a medium of Hecate.<sup>131</sup> Did he visit Didyma and copy the oracular verses from the inscriptions *in situ*? Was he in the audience at a séance where Hecate or Serapis was invoked to possess the body

<sup>126</sup> Robert 1968; Nock 1928; Busine 2005: 154–224.

<sup>127</sup> The location of these inscriptions is indicative of a Clarian or Didymaeon provenance, respectively; see Graf 1992: 273.

<sup>128</sup> Busine 2005: 53–54; Fontenrose 1988: 43.

<sup>129</sup> Cornelius Labeo's book seems to have contained a collection of oracles; see Mastandrea 1979: 159–192.

<sup>130</sup> Herod. 7.6.3; Dillery 2005.

<sup>131</sup> Busine 2005: 252–256.



of a human medium?<sup>132</sup> Or were the oracles given to him for reflection and response by a student or fellow philosopher?

We only know the following. Responses of Apollo given at the oracle at Claros were inscribed as far away as Gaul. The scholar Cornelius Labeo at Rome is known to have composed a book containing a compilation of oracles in the late third century, including at least one explicitly assigned to Claros. Christian authors in the fourth and fifth centuries (Lactantius, Arnobius, Ps.-Justin, the *Tübingen Theosophy*) quote from a number of oracles, some of which overlap with the oracles in our extant fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>133</sup> Of these, some provide the original Greek verses for oracles explicitly attributed to Porphyry's collection by Latin sources, though without naming Porphyry as their intermediary source.<sup>134</sup> Others provide further verses continuing the oracular responses given only in part in Porphyry's treatise. Had the *Philosophy from Oracles* contained the complete oracles and are their abbreviated occurrences only the result of that work's fragmentary status? Or had Porphyry himself selectively quoted from the oracles, excising portions deemed unsuitable for his philosophical exposition? Any attempt to develop a coherent picture of the ways in which Porphyry's text interacted with the other texts (such as Labeo's) are irrevocably hindered by the limits and diversity of our evidence.

The following observations still deserve to be made. Porphyry's is only one instance of a broader Mediterranean-wide interest in oracles at both intellectual and popular levels. Porphyry seems unique, however, in incorporating Hecate oracles from "freelance" divination sessions in a literary treatment of oracles.<sup>135</sup> Augustine polemically suggested that the philosopher had forged the Hecate oracles himself.<sup>136</sup> There is little reason to imagine Porphyry as inventing them, however, and we must instead see him as attempting to build his philosophical exposition upon a broader oracular base than hitherto might have existed. The Hecate oracles only rarely rise to heights readily amenable to a Platonic philosophical vision and it appears, rather, that he is exercising his ingenuity in developing philosophically palatable exegeses of these oracles than in inventing them in the first place.

<sup>132</sup> A comparable episode: *V. Plot.* 10.15–33. See also Athanassiadi 1993.

<sup>133</sup> See variously: Nock 1928; Robert 1968; Lane Fox, 1989: 170–171, 190–193; Courcelle 1953; Simmons, 1997; Digeser, 1998; Freund 2006.

<sup>134</sup> Lact. *de Ira Dei* 23.12; *Div. Inst.* 1.7.

<sup>135</sup> Lewy's claim (1956) that the Hecate oracles derived from the *Chaldean Oracles* cannot adequately be substantiated. See Dodds 1961; Busine 2005: 200–202, 247.

<sup>136</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 346.1 Smith.

Metrical observations are revealing. It has not yet been sufficiently noticed that the non-hexameter oracles in Porphyry's treatise are all in anapestic meter appropriate for processional hymns performed during festivals.<sup>137</sup> Of course, many of the hymns could have been claimed as inspired by the god in establishing the god's own worship; but they do not seem to represent the traditional oracular response given either in hexameters (or in prose as Plutarch's characters complained in his *On the Pythia's No Longer Using Meter*).<sup>138</sup> It is doubtful that Porphyry, one of the most erudite literary critics of his day who had written significant material on Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar, was unaware of their metrical and performative status as processional hymns. It seems clear, rather, that Porphyry intentionally included hymnic material within his *Philosophy from Oracles*, because of its usefulness for his philosophical project.

Whatever the precise provenance and nature of the "oracles" collected in the *Philosophy from Oracles*, key pedagogical functions are evident from our fragments generally, and in particular those from the preface. The enunciation of an esoteric concern occurs here in stronger form than that found in *On Images*.

But you – whatever you do – make it your aim neither to publicize these things nor to cast them out to the uninitiated for the sake of glory, gain or some other impure flattery. For, there is a danger not only to you when you transgress these commands, but also to me who easily trusted in one who could not guard my kindness.<sup>139</sup> It must be given to those who have set their life toward the salvation of their souls.<sup>140</sup>

Again, it is doubtful that we are confronted here with an empty literary topos in the declarations of secrecy and the employment of the language of initiation. To consider such an announcement as nothing more than a rhetorical flourish by one who wasn't taking himself very seriously is to be overly dismissive of a consistent feature of most of Porphyry's works.<sup>141</sup>

Secrecy was invoked, it should be noted, not in regard to the oracles themselves, which were frequently the subject of speedy publication on stone so that a wider audience could recognize the voice of the god and the social and religious position of the human consulter.<sup>142</sup> Instead, it was the

<sup>137</sup> Wolff 1856: 68–90; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1984: 372; Heitsch 1961: 1.168.

<sup>138</sup> *De Pyth.orac.*, esp. 402B–404B. <sup>139</sup> Cf. *Ep.Marc.* 15.253–255.

<sup>140</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 304 Smith (= Eusebius *PE* 4.7.2–4.8.1).

<sup>141</sup> Firmicus Maternus invokes Porphyry (as well as Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato) as a model of requiring his hearers to maintain secrecy about the philosophical knowledge imparted and to restrict it only to the initiated; see *Math.* 7.1.1–3; Hadot 1968: 1.83–85.

<sup>142</sup> Busine 2005: 19–86.

deeper meanings behind the surface of the utterance that required cautious handling by a select few who were seeking the salvation of their souls from the material world. It was a wisdom beyond the surface of the text that was the subject of inquiry in the *Philosophy from Oracles*. “It is necessary for me,” he avers, “to conceal these things that are ‘more unspeakable than unspeakable things;’<sup>143</sup> for the gods did not prophecy about these things openly, but in riddles.”<sup>144</sup> The interpretive assumption that poetic texts contained riddles (*ainigmata*) was basic to the allegorical approach and a prominent feature of philosophical discourses during the imperial era.<sup>145</sup> Such a supposition assured an authoritative position for the philosopher claiming the ability to locate and solve the riddles of a text – that is, to translate the oracular words into the language of philosophical truth. It also produced the opportunity to formulate an esoteric sensitivity, which reduced the circle of those deemed worthy of the knowledge behind the text, heightened the value of that knowledge, and, when applied to an oracular text, could function to divide the authority of the utterance between the prophetic source and the philosophical translator. Revelation required reason<sup>146</sup> if it was to have any efficacy as divine–human communication.

Porphyrus’s was not a crassly cynical manipulation of oracular authority for his own ends, however. A deep spirituality expressed in numerous of his works may have prompted, or at least informed, his translation of revelation into reason. Another fragment from the preface indicates the sacred status of the texts quoted in his treatise:

Firm and steadfast<sup>147</sup> is the one drawing his hope of salvation from here<sup>148</sup> as from an only firm source; indeed, you will contribute to them and hold back nothing. Since I call the gods to witness that I have neither added nor taken away any of the thought (*noēmata*) which was prophetically uttered,<sup>149</sup> unless perhaps I corrected an errant phrase, or altered it for greater clarity, or filled out an omitted meter, or crossed out anything not pertaining to the purpose,<sup>150</sup> so that I kept intact the

<sup>143</sup> The phrase seems to be derived ultimately from Soph. *Oed. Tyr.* 465.

<sup>144</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 305 (= Eusebius *PE* 4.8.2).

<sup>145</sup> Struck 2004 and 2005. <sup>146</sup> Pace Sodano 1958: xv.

<sup>147</sup> For the phrase *bebaios kai monimos*, see Plato, *Tim.* 29b6; *Symp.* 184b3; *Crat.* 411c3; Alcinoüs, *Didask.* 4.3.

<sup>148</sup> i.e., from the deeper wisdom contained within, or behind, the oracles; cf. Iamb. *Myst.* 10.5 (290.5–8): “Better, therefore, what you [Porphyry] ask from us, to show you the path to happiness, and in what its essence lies; for from this [i.e., knowing the path and essence of happiness] the truth is found and at the same time it is possible to dissolve easily all difficulty.” Cp. *Styx*, fr. 373 Smith.

<sup>149</sup> See Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 5; Josephus, *c.Ap.* 1.8; *AJ* 1.17; Revelation 22: 18–19.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. the aretology of Imouthes-Asclepius at *P.Oxy.* 1381.218–222: “Throughout the composition I have filled up defects and struck out superfluities, and in telling a rather long tale I have spoken briefly and narrated once for all a complicated story” (quoted by Fowden 1986: 51); see Nock 1928: 161 n. 5.

meaning (*ton noun*) of what was said, fearing the impiety from these things more than the avenging judgment following from temple robbery.<sup>151</sup>

His scruples over the impiety of altering the thought expressed in the oracles was accompanied by a statement of method that opened the possibility for all manner of alteration – at what point did greater clarification involve significant shifting of emphasis, intent, or doctrine? Excision of whatever did not “pertain to [Porphyry’s] purpose” might be deemed a rather liberal approach to the oracular texts. It is important, however, that he purports to maintain fidelity to the “mind” of those texts. Envisioned here was a dynamic engagement between the critic-philosopher and the somewhat faultily preserved textual instantiations of the inspired utterances.

The religious seriousness with which Porphyry took his task as editor and exegete of the oracles was performed within an isagogical frame. But the religious and educational concerns are heightened in the remainder of the fragment just quoted.

The present collection (*sunagōgē*) will contain a record of many philosophical teachings, since the gods prophesied that they possessed the truth. And I shall briefly adjoin a useful (*chrēstikē*)<sup>152</sup> discussion, which is profitable for contemplation and any other purification of life. What benefit the collection has those ones will especially know who, since they are giving birth to truth,<sup>153</sup> have ever prayed to obtain a manifestation from the gods and to receive rest from difficulty (*aporia*) through the trustworthy teaching of those who have spoken.<sup>154</sup>

In a manner resonant of his other explicitly named *eisagōgai*, the *Philosophy from Oracles* would aim at benefiting the reader through brief explanation that would resolve the difficulties faced by a novice to the subject. In this instance, the subject was a textual one: as with the *Introduction to Ptolemy’s Tetrabiblos*, Porphyry’s aim was to provide the beginning reader with a guide to appropriate interpretive engagement with the texts at hand. In this case, rather than a single text, it was a collection of texts that, if properly read, would be shown to be translatable into the philosophical system of truth.

Whereas the other introductions had not given explicit evidence regarding the level or character of the student, the *Philosophy from Oracles* specified its readership as limited to those having commenced philosophical pursuits

<sup>151</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 303.15–25 Smith (= Eusebius PE 4.6.2–4.7.2). Robbing temples was severely punished by gods or men; see, e.g., Thucydides 2.13.4–5; Diod. Sic. 16.14.3.

<sup>152</sup> For a defense of my translation of *chrēstikē* as “useful” here, see Johnson 2009; see also Busine 2005: 257.

<sup>153</sup> The metaphor is platonic; see Plato, *Symp.* 206d; *Phaedr.* 251e; *Rep.* 6.490b.

<sup>154</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 303.25–34 Smith.

but who as yet were hindered by the difficulties attendant on making philosophical sense of the myriad oracular voices announcing divinely inspired utterances. A student cognizant of the higher truths of Platonism, wary of embodied opinion, aware of a theological hierarchy whose more sublime levels called out for greater purifications and a more intellectual spirituality would have confronted the oracles with no little consternation. On the one hand, their utterances prescribed bloody sacrifices, announced the births of babies, or struck terror into the hearts of those consulting them.<sup>155</sup> On the other hand, some oracles called for worship of an “ineffable immortal Father”,<sup>156</sup> or hinted obliquely at the divinity’s connection to Mind and Soul.<sup>157</sup> An appropriate philosophical response to the diversity of oracular words required a master reader who could skillfully recognize interpretive pitfalls or identify phrases loaded with symbolic meaning.

The fragments from the body of the text fulfill this purpose (though some of them are limited to the oracle quoted by Porphyry and lack any of his comments as to how he might have interpreted the oracle). An oracle that recommended the offering of animal sacrifice prompted extensive commentary only on the presence of indications (*ta symbola*) of a theological hierarchy.<sup>158</sup> Hecate’s cosmic “ensouling” activity signified the tripartite soul.<sup>159</sup> A section of the *Philosophy from Oracles* addressed the organization (*politeia*) of the gods and daemons with respect to hierarchical ranking.<sup>160</sup> Often, in those cases where we have a sufficient amount of Porphyry’s comments on a particular oracle, the details in the oracle that caught his exegetical attention seem rather minor.<sup>161</sup> It is precisely this unexpected nature of the interpretive enterprise, its attention to seemingly insignificant details of the text being quoted, that confirm the necessity of a master reader for the inculcation of beneficial reading habits and skills of philosophical translation in the student lacking sufficient training in such a difficult corpus of texts.

<sup>155</sup> e.g., “The mind of the Fates has brought on these things, and determined/ To overpower [you] with ashen-evils unto black strife/ Since Kronos of the lofty citadel is coming downward on evil path” (*Phil. Orac.* fr. 334 Smith [= Eus. *PE* 6.1.4]).

<sup>156</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 325.4 Smith (= *Fragmente Griechischer Theosophien* 173.17–174.22 Erbse).

<sup>157</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 308 Smith (= Eus. *PE* 5.6.2–5.7.2).

<sup>158</sup> Oracle: *Phil. Orac.* fr. 314 Smith (= Eus. *PE* 4.8.4–4.9.2); commentary: fr. 315 Smith (= Eusebius *PE* 4.9.3–7).

<sup>159</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 308 Smith (= Eusebius *PE* 5.6.2–5.7.2).

<sup>160</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 316 Smith (= Eusebius *PE* 5.10.13–5.11.1); cf. *Comm. Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano, on the *politeuma* of daemons. See [Chapter 2](#) above.

<sup>161</sup> e.g., *Phil. Orac.* fr. 307 Smith (= Eusebius *PE* 5.5.7–5.6.2): an oracle on Pan’s culpability in the death of a group of woodsmen is quoted, apparently *in toto*, only to exhibit Pan’s relationship to Dionysus, mentioned in a single line of the oracle.

The persistent attention to obscure or not easily identifiable details and relentless carefulness of exegetical strategy has produced in no small part the modern inclination to follow the hostile sources of our fragments in deeming Porphyry a friend of daemons and defender of sacrifices.<sup>162</sup> His purpose of finding philosophically sound teaching hidden behind the obvious surface meaning of an oracle, combined with the frequent aim of quoting Porphyry's oracles in order to attack them by later Christian opponents, presents a difficult task of determining Porphyry's position regarding the express message of the oracles he cites. Attention to the pedagogical features of the text and due caution in attending to the precise exegetical moves Porphyry makes (insofar as we have sufficient remains of his comments) alleviate the tensions often perceived between elements of the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the fuller expressions of Porphyry's thinking in later works like *On Abstinence* or *Letter to Anebo*. Instead, we discover a text that evinces a broader consistency of vision with his other treatises in spite of different pedagogical or rhetorical aims.

A critical attitude towards popular religious expressions, or at least the popular understanding of those religious expressions, recurs throughout much of his writings on religious and theological matters.<sup>163</sup> His role is not that of a "propagandist" pandering to the whims of the multitude,<sup>164</sup> but of a pedagogue guiding a small group of serious students as they learned to read texts, even those of a not transparently philosophical nature such as sacred images or oracles, in a philosophically sound manner. This was an elite education offered by an expert exegete and translator.

### *Pedagogy and privilege: the hierarchy of reading*

The lack of explicit references internal to these commentaries as to their place within a specific curriculum or their location within a school context may disappoint, while the external evidence for Porphyry's pedagogical activity from Eunapius is quite thin at best. The sort of contextualization

<sup>162</sup> Friend of daemons: Eusebius, *PE* 4.6.2; Augustine, *CD* 10.9.37–45 (= Porph. *Regr.anim.*, fr. 293 Smith); similarly, "eulogist and messenger" of daemons, Augustine, *CD* 10.27.25–29 (= Porph. *Regr.anim.* fr. 288a Smith), an "ambassador" of daemons, Eusebius, *PE* 4.6.2 (= Porph. *Phil.Or.* fr. 303 Smith), an "advocate" of the daemons, Eusebius, *PE* 5.1.9 (= Porph. *c.Christ.* fr. 80 Harnack); *PE* 6.praef.3 (= Porph., *Phil.Or.* fr. 331 Smith); defender of sacrifices: Firmicus Maternus, *de Errone*, 13.4 (= Porph. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 306 Smith). On Porphyry's "defending" daemons as psychic sharers in intellect at *Ep.Aneb.* fr. 1, p. 5.7 Sodano (which should instead be rendered "giving an account"), see [Chapter 2](#), note 256.

<sup>163</sup> See [Chapters 2 and 3](#), above. <sup>164</sup> Bidez [1913](#): 64, 72, 102.

of the two introductory treatises suggested above, however, provide the most plausible framework for understanding the numerous indications within those texts themselves. They also are expressive of a persistently felt feature of Porphyry's writings (and possibly of his personality), namely his elitist sensibility.<sup>165</sup> The tendencies expressed in his articulation of a Platonic theological hierarchy, which was then mapped onto a sacrificial hierarchy, extended to the field of social relations. If the One could be approached only in the purity of soul and mind, if the salvation of the soul was impossible without the austere rigor of training both body and soul in the discipline of detachment from the body while remaining in the body, then only a small elite could persist in such training and attain such a lofty goal.

Plato had often expressed antipathy for the masses and his Socrates would remark on the dangers of thinking or living like the multitude.<sup>166</sup> Porphyry's elitism was a natural expression of Platonism. What is more marked in his case is the consistency with which that elitism was applied in the various contexts of embodied life, in particular in the area of religious cult. There was no question in Plato of turning away from civic cult forms; by contrast, the emotional and intellectual reserve towards such practices by Porphyry (and Plotinus) are noteworthy. The force of their reserved posture towards popular religious activity is keenly felt if we briefly rehearse the various declarations marking out the distance between the philosopher and the general populace.

In addition to (and as confirmation of) the constricted audience of *On Images* and *Philosophy from Oracles* to those few initiated in philosophical theology, *On Abstinence* resounds with claims to superiority over the masses. The disregard and complete lack of concern for the morality and rationality of the masses is manifest in his adoption of the metaphor of sleepiness and wakefulness. I do not write to everyone, he avers,

But to the person who has thought about who he is and whence he has come and where he should try to go . . . So I shall not complain at anyone who is not like that, for even in this common life the same advice does not apply both to the sleeper who tries to achieve sleep throughout his life, if he can, surrounding himself with things which induce sleep, and also to the man who is eager to shake

<sup>165</sup> In other words, his characterization as a popularizer is misplaced. Porphyry's alleged popular concerns are a frequent feature of modern treatments; see Bidez 1913: 70, 72, 80; Sodano 1958: xix–xx; Romano 1979: 110, 115, 199–200, 211–214; Simmons 2009; Leveils 2007: 152; Ashwin-Siejkowski 2004.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. *Porphy. Abst.* 2.61.6.

off sleep, and organizes everything around himself for wakefulness. For the first, drunkenness and hangover and surfeit must be basic, and one must advise him to choose a dark house and a bed which is “soft and wide” and “lush,” as the poets say.<sup>167</sup>

He concludes that the philosopher ought “to leave the sleepers lying in their own beds,” lest he catch their disease and fall into forgetfulness as well.<sup>168</sup> We should not be surprised that ordinary people have no problem eating meat, since they are the same ones who value luxury and sex; if the many do not adopt a philosophical life, “it need not concern us, for among ordinary people there is nothing reliable and consistent.”<sup>169</sup> Even though Porphyry claims not to abrogate the civic laws established for the many (the written laws),<sup>170</sup> he emphatically proclaims the philosopher’s way of life as exemplifying the higher divine law (the unwritten law).<sup>171</sup> In spite of assertions that his philosophy was good for civic life, his unconcern for popular traditions and religious forms is clear: “If it is necessary for cities to appease even [wicked daemons], that is nothing to do with us. In cities, riches and external and corporeal things are thought to be good and their opposites bad, and the soul is the least of their concerns.”<sup>172</sup> Such an assessment firmly demarcates the gap between the moral and intellectual visions of the philosopher and the city.<sup>173</sup>

A treatise that may have been a variation of an *eisagōgē*, dedicated to his erstwhile student Iamblichus,<sup>174</sup> directs the reader’s attention beyond popular cult and concerns as well. *On the Inscription “Know Thyself”* remarks that the well-known inscription at Delphi did not address the needs of the average sacrificer who was ignorant of himself and only sought a favorable answer to the questions put to the oracle. “What, then, and from whom,<sup>175</sup> is the holy command at Pytho, which bids those about to consult the god to ‘know themselves’? For it does not seem to encourage the one ignorant of himself to honor the god with fitting [offerings], nor again [does it offer a promise] that he will obtain the things asked from the god.”<sup>176</sup> Instead, the injunction to know oneself had to be exegeted as to its precise meaning

<sup>167</sup> *Abst.* 1.27.1–3; trans. Clark; cf. *Abst.* 2.3.1–2; 2.36.6; Pl. *Theaet.* 158bc.

<sup>168</sup> *Abst.* 1.28.2; trans. Clark. <sup>169</sup> *Abst.* 1.52.4. <sup>170</sup> *Abst.* 2.33.1; cf. 4.5.6.

<sup>171</sup> *Abst.* 1.28.4; 2.3.2; 4.18.4–9. See Johnson, forthcoming a.

<sup>172</sup> *Abst.* 2.43.2. <sup>173</sup> Pace Goldin 2001.

<sup>174</sup> *De nosce te ipsum*, fr. 273.18 Smith; because it is addressed to Iamblichus it seems unlikely that this work was intended as a protreptic.

<sup>175</sup> *tī pote ēn ara kai tinos*: the “what is it” formula, while common enough in philosophical texts, is also a frequent feature of the isagogical literature; cf. Albinus, *Prologos* 1 Hermann; Origen, *Comm. Ioh.* 1.27–46; Anatolius, *Arithm. Isag.* (PG 10.231–236); Eus. *PE* 1.1.1.

<sup>176</sup> *De nosce te ipsum*, fr. 273.1–6 Smith.



and its implications.<sup>177</sup> Knowing oneself commenced with the recognition that one was a thinking being. Next, the existence of the thinking thing was suggestively reckoned as a little cosmos, and so knowledge of oneself entailed knowledge of humanity and the All – in other words, it required the activity of “doing philosophy” (*philosophhein*).<sup>178</sup> But, strikingly, philosophy was not an end in itself, but was performed ultimately for that which was beyond philosophy, namely happiness itself,<sup>179</sup> the “beatific contemplation” reserved for the sage.<sup>180</sup>

The three fragments of the treatise rest upon the assumption that only the philosopher knows himself (or herself, as we shall see in the *Letter to Marcella*), since only the philosopher pursues and is capable of the knowledge of being – both of oneself as microcosm, and of the All as macrocosm. Furthermore, the philosopher recognizes the divinity inherent within humanity, “that he might know the immortal man within.”<sup>181</sup> We must be wary, the final fragment concludes, lest by confusing the “immortal with the corruptible and earthly, we do this laughable and yet lamentable thing, constrained within a tragicomedy<sup>182</sup> of unintelligent lives.”<sup>183</sup>

Though we have so little of this fascinating treatise, the indications noted here convey the narrowed parameters of those who could adhere to the exhortation inscribed at Delphi. Most of those who passed by the inscription would never guess the sheer magnitude of the task set forth by the god. The exposition of the inscription was limited to a student of Iamblichus’ stature – and this, in the single surviving explicit piece of evidence internal to Porphyry’s corpus of Iamblichus’ position as his student.<sup>184</sup> Precisely because its dividends were great, Porphyry’s conception of doing philosophy reserved its performance and the true happiness that

<sup>177</sup> *De nosce*, fr. 274.2–5 Smith.

<sup>178</sup> *De nosce*, fr. 274.6–18 Smith. On individual souls as a little cosmos, see Plot. *Enn.* 3.4.3.22; 4.7.10.32–37; Wallis 1972: 70.

<sup>179</sup> *De nosce*, fr. 274.18–34 Smith: “But perhaps the god encourages us to perform self-contemplation not for the sake of philosophy, but for the sake of some greater thing, for which philosophy also was taken up . . . He encourages those who are truly themselves to contemplate and to learn, not so that we might do philosophy (*philosophhein*), but so that being wise we might be happy. For the attainment of our being, which truly exists, and the true knowledge of this, is the attainment of wisdom, if, at any rate, the understanding of the true being of things is particular to wisdom, and through wisdom arises the possession of perfect happiness.”

<sup>180</sup> Bidez 1913: 101; on the beatific goal of philosophy, see Iamb. *De myst.* 10.5 (291.12–13).

<sup>181</sup> *De nosce te ipsum*, fr. 275.29–30 Smith.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *ad Marc.* 2, p. 274, 10–11: “appeasing the daemons who preside in this tragicomedy.” Smith also notes Pl. *Phileb.* 50b3; V.Plot. 2.2.15.43ff.

<sup>183</sup> *De nosce*, fr. 275.36–40 Smith.

<sup>184</sup> The only other evidence is Eunapius which is ambiguous (see Chapter 1). Admittedly, the dedication of this treatise to Iamblichus is hardly firm grounds for Iamblichus’ studentship under Porphyry, who could easily have addressed the work to Iamblichus as a colleague rather than a student.

it might attain to those capable of understanding not only themselves but the universe. Porphyry assumes the posture of the philosophical master guiding the disciple through a sketch of the magnitude, sublimity, and intellectual and spiritual awesomeness of the philosophic life. While no explicit claims to a pedagogical role are present in the extant fragments of *On the Inscription "Know Thyself"*, his position of authority as an expounder of the riches of wisdom comprised in the seemingly simple exhortation of the Delphic god is felt throughout. In the better known *Letter to Marcella* overt assertions of his role as spiritual guide find expression.

The letter, written while Porphyry was absent from his wife of just under a year, was prompted by his desire to remind and encourage Marcella in the philosophical calling. Indeed, it was her aptitude in philosophical pursuits that had ostensibly led Porphyry to marry her in the first place (as well as a sense of responsibility to protect her, as the widow of a friend, from the predatory attempts of others).<sup>185</sup> Philosophy, he affirms, is the "only sure lifeline,"<sup>186</sup> for recovering what one has lost in the fall into a body. The return would not be easy: the smooth path of pleasure and laziness was to be forsaken<sup>187</sup> since, in words reminiscent of *On Abstinence*, "a life of ease leads to forgetfulness and is conducive to estrangement and to sleep, should we slumber, beguiled by dreams which lead our souls astray."<sup>188</sup> The "blessed road to the gods," on the other hand, is traversed "through hard work and steadfastness."<sup>189</sup>

Due to the difficulty of the terrain, a guide was requisite for the philosophical journey: Porphyry himself.<sup>190</sup> His absence from Marcella thus posed an acute problem for success in making progress on the path of salvation: "The contest of your current situation . . . is of the highest import, as you consider that with me you have lost both the path of salvation and its guide (*kathēgemōn*)."<sup>191</sup> Fortunately for her, however, the true philosophy (*orthē philosophia*)<sup>192</sup> involved a process of separating oneself from one's body, even while living in the body. Since this was the case, the bodily presence of her spiritual guide was unnecessary. It was misleading to desire the "shadow of a guide" in physical presence.<sup>193</sup> There existed an intellectual and spiritual unity that could not be broken by physical absence.<sup>194</sup>

Because of the difficulty of the journey and because of the need of an expert (if physically absent) guide, few were those who made the trek

<sup>185</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 3.35–51; on Porphyry's marriage, see O'Brien Wicker 1987: 4–10.

<sup>186</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 5.78–79. <sup>187</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 6.99–105.

<sup>188</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 6.111–114; trans. O'Brien Wicker. <sup>189</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 7.130–131; see Chapter 3.

<sup>190</sup> O'Brien Wicker, 90 n. 8.137. <sup>191</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 8.134–137. <sup>192</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 8.140.

<sup>193</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 9.170. <sup>194</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 10.174–191.

successfully. Material sacrifices mattered little for the soul untrained in virtue. The failure to offer spiritual sacrifice, regardless of how many hecatombs one might offer, was a mark of “irrational faith.”<sup>195</sup> God was honored by virtue alone.<sup>196</sup> Because of the austerity of true sacrifice and philosophical forms of spirituality, the wise person should even avoid talking to common people about God. There was an equal risk whether one spoke with them truly or falsely about the divine.<sup>197</sup> The exclusionary sentiment is clear and persistent. The sage had no reason to share conversation (*logos*) or life (*bios*) with the ignorant;<sup>198</sup> the laws of cities and nations were drafted for the many, while the law of God defined the life of the wise.<sup>199</sup> In a letter whose second half consists of a pastiche of Pythagorean sayings, the esoteric tendencies central to the Pythagorean way of life is fitting. Resonating with the intellectual and spiritual elitism of his other works discussed above, this didactic and hortatory letter embodied a pedagogy of privilege and marked out the limits of learning to the few. All the indications of the letter point not towards a popularizing intent but a philosophically circumscribed elite who were advised to cut their ties with the rest of society, beset as it was by every material hindrance to salvation.<sup>200</sup> Even if a “simplification process” is evident in the letter,<sup>201</sup> the philosophical system of Porphyry was nonetheless restricted to a philosophical novitiate, not a broader readership. His was a spiritual–philosophical elitism that went beyond the cultural elitism proffered through *paideia*.<sup>202</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Reading Augustine’s complaint that Porphyry had failed to discover a *via universalis* that allowed for all people, “Greek and barbarian, rich and poor, free and slave, ignorant and educated”<sup>203</sup> to share equally in the benefits of a universal religion, one wonders whether Porphyry was very concerned that the lower social elements in each of these polarities was excluded from

<sup>195</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 14.247–250; 23.362–364; faith, it should be noted, is not problematic here, but only the irrational forms of faith. Later in the *Letter*, Porphyry asserts that faith (along with truth, love, [*erōs*] and hope) was one of the four primary elements of the philosophic life; see 24.376–384. The fourfold schema was probably an attempt to provide a Platonic rival to the threefold schema of the apostle Paul (faith, hope, and love [*agapē*], 1 Cor. 13:13), *pace* O’Brien Wicker 1987: 110.

<sup>196</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 16.265–19.322. <sup>197</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 15.250–264. <sup>198</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 15.251–252.

<sup>199</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 25.384–27.438; for discussion, see Chapter 7.

<sup>200</sup> *Pace* Whittaker 2001; see instead Alt 1996. <sup>201</sup> O’Brien Wicker 1987: 20–21.

<sup>202</sup> On the cultural elitism of *paideia*, see P. Brown 1992 (the present study offers a corrective, however, to his treatment of philosophers).

<sup>203</sup> Bidez 1913: 95.

definitive salvation according to his philosophical inquiries.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, even the wealthy, the well-educated (*pepaideumenoî*), and the politically important were equally incapable – apart from *theosophia* – of obtaining salvation (and so, Augustine’s polarities would not have been easily commensurate with the philosophical vision of transcendence developed by Porphyry at all).

Porphyry did not entirely limit his written compositions to the elite. His *On the Cave of the Nymphs* may well have possessed something of a protreptic function, encouraging a broader – but, still well-educated – audience to attend to higher matters.<sup>205</sup> The authority of the Homeric text could be marshaled for the purposes of philosophy. We might see Porphyry’s criticism of Cronius’ rejection of a historical cave on the island of Ithaca as a rejection of a too-rarefied audience for this short exposé of Homeric allegory. The acceptance of a physical cave on the island marked an acceptance of a broader readership.<sup>206</sup>

If this is so in the case of *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, we are nonetheless confronted by a clear, persistent, and dominant concern of developing a hierarchical philosophical and theological schema of reality for a tiny philosophical elite perched atop a social–intellectual–moral pyramid. Throughout his corpus an exclusionary elitist sentiment is expressed, limiting his audience and confining his concerns to the reality behind the shadows of the material world, which obscured the vision of one seeking illumination. It was this concern to clarify the vision and guide the soul seeking ascent from its bodily prison that illumines for us the purposes and tenor of his key fragmentary works.

*On Images* and *Philosophy from Oracles* do not so readily show a philosopher pouring forth his scholarly industry in defending daemons and legitimizing bloody sacrifices, magic, and astrology, though this is precisely what the Christian sources who polemically quoted him would have us believe. When understood as variations on an isagogical theme and driven by the necessity of philosophical translation, we may attend more carefully to the precise points the master reader draws out from the words of oracles or the appearance of sacred images in these two treatises. The points he

<sup>204</sup> Rightly noted by Hadot, 1960: 239; also, Bidez 1913: 95; Edwards 2006: 118–119, 132; for a different assessment of Porphyry’s concerns, see Simmons 2009; Digeser 2009; Ashwin-Siejkowski 2004: 239–240.

<sup>205</sup> It seems that he would have already had a different pedagogical relationship with an educated (though not necessarily philosophical) elite, if the fragments of his rhetorical works are any indication.

<sup>206</sup> Turcan 1975: 66, suggests as much (though focused on inclusion of popular cults in the treatise’s contents, more than a popular audience, he names Porphyry a “popularizer” in this work, 64, 69).

makes are often not those most readily perceived on the surfaces of the texts. The recognition of such hidden truths would require the sure and steady guidance offered by Porphyry, whose authority as a guide rested on his powers of interpretive vision and theological insight.

The “drift to marginality”<sup>207</sup> and exclusionary moves evident in Porphyry’s religious and philosophical writings marked out a steady esoteric ascent beyond bodily obscurity and entanglement into the true light of pure reason. Yet, for one seeking the purification from bodily taint and pollution, there is what seems to be an inappropriate abundance of reflection on and report of the practices and customs of those groups of bodies known as nations or races. The escape from bodies so frequently preached by Porphyry should attend, it might seem, upon a simultaneous escape from the bodily identities of family and nation. The persistence of ethnic descriptions throughout much of Porphyry’s corpus thus presents a fascinating, if problematic, element of his moral, religious, and philosophical vision. It is to this problem that we must now turn.

<sup>207</sup> Fowden 1982: 48–59.



PART II

*A world full of nations*

*Porphyry the ethnographer*





*Knowledge and nations*  
*Porphyry's ethnic argumentation*

A striking feature of Porphyry's thought is the overwhelming preponderance of ethnographic material and expressions of a wide-ranging racial conceptual framework. Given the rationalizing movement of Porphyry's religious and theological translation described in Part 1 of this book, one might readily suppose that the philosopher would eschew the ethnic baggage attendant on the soul's bodily prison and determine ethnographic knowledge an enterprise not worthy of the one aspiring to freedom from the body ("all body is to be fled from"). Indeed, the metaphysical investigations of Plotinus had little to say of the customs and histories of the numerous peoples that dotted the ethnic landscape of the world;<sup>1</sup> his student could easily have followed suit. However, philosophers in the imperial period had long engaged in reflection on the cultural and conceptual variety produced by national ways of life and ways of thinking in their investigations into the true and the good.<sup>2</sup>

During the second century, thinkers of various philosophical schools reflected on the importance of ethnographic knowledge for doing philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Cornutus the Stoic, for instance, in a short treatise working out the deeper truths behind the Greek myths through the interpretive tool of etymology, acknowledged a common set of practices of enshrining certain truths within the mythologies of other peoples. Homer, declared Cornutus, provided evidence that "among the ancient Greeks there arose the crafting of many assorted myths about the gods, just as other forms arose among the Magi, the Phrygians, Egyptians, Celts, Libyans, and the other nations."<sup>4</sup> Numenius, the Neopythagorean philosopher of Syrian Apamea, went a step further and suggested a common core to the truths

<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians are mentioned once (5.8.6), and the Greeks once (2.9.6); the Magi are mentioned more frequently (1.4.9; 1.6.8; 2.9.14; 4.3.13; 4.4.26, 40, 43; 4.9.3), and hence, M. J. Edwards may be a bit too dismissive (1994: 141, and 2006: 92).

<sup>2</sup> Festugière 1950: 19–44.

<sup>3</sup> Andresen 1955.

<sup>4</sup> Cornut. *Epidrome* 17, p. 26.7–13 Lang; see Boys-Stones 2001: 54–59.

discovered among various nations. For him, there arose the necessity of studying the wisdom of barbarian races as a confirmation of the truth of Pythagoras' thought.<sup>5</sup> His invocation of passages of the Hebrew Scriptures has led some to suppose that he was of Jewish, if not Syrian, descent.<sup>6</sup> Just as Strabo, one of the greatest ethnographers of antiquity, had sought to include descriptions of the world's peoples within a Roman imperial embrace, so thinkers like Numenius presumed an inclusion of all national wisdoms within an overarching framework of truth.

Alternatively, the Skeptic Sextus Empiricus used the ethnographic data at his disposal to establish the validity of withholding intellectual assent from all claims to certain knowledge. If the habits, laws, and ways of life were different from nation to nation (in the areas of sexual and dietary practices, institutions prohibiting or allowing robbery and piracy, burial customs, and so on) then sure knowledge of truth appeared much less of a possibility.<sup>7</sup> Such attention to the local particularities of incongruous cultural features of the world's nations would appear to be an unexpected channel through which imperial gathering and organizing of ethnographic knowledge could go. It seemed to fly in the face of the certainties of the more controlling and seemingly stable forms of universalism by the imperialist Strabo more than a century earlier.<sup>8</sup> However, the ethnographies of Strabo's *Geography* and the ethnographic data invoked by Sextus Empiricus towards relativistic ends were only divergent results of a common imperial context and both arose from the same attempt to make knowledge about national particularities work within the construction of an argument. As we shall see in the following pages, Porphyry, along with some of the most important thinkers of the second and third centuries (especially Plutarch, Philostratus, and Maximus of Tyre) were exploring a similar range of cultural engagements and performing varied continuations and adaptations of ethnic and ethnographic discourses. Each employed different strategies of using ethnicity to bolster visions of the world and to produce (even as they were simultaneously shaped by) cultural or philosophical centers of gravity.

Here, we shall observe Porphyry translating philosophy into cultural terms. That is, in distinction from the vertical translation that transferred the world's knowledges into a singular Platonic hierarchical knowledge comprised of ontological, theological, ritual, social and spiritual threads carefully implicated in and reflective of each other, there was simultaneously

<sup>5</sup> Numen. fr. 1a Des Places.

<sup>6</sup> Numen. frs. 1c, 10a Des Places; Puech 1934. For criticism, see Edwards 1990b.

<sup>7</sup> Sext. Emp. *Pyrrhon. hyp.* 3.198–234; cf. 1.148–152; 1.79–84. <sup>8</sup> Clarke 2001: 307–328.

a horizontal translational movement in Porphyry's corpus. In something of an ontological "bell curve" the unicity of the heights of the hierarchical vision spread out in ever greater instances of multiplicity as the lower regions leveled out onto a horizontal plane of embodied life. For Porphyry, one could only understand rightly the dizzying profusion of bodily and material experiences from the vertical vision provided by the Platonic universal interpretive vision. However, once he had ascended the heights of truth, in turning back his gaze to the multiplicity below in a sweeping translational effort he mapped that philosophical truth onto the ethnic landscape. Bodies and the identities of embodied existence, not only of the individual soul but of collectivities of embodied souls in bonds of kinship, civic allegiance, or ethnic rootedness, were deemed to be expressive of the theological truths of philosophy in varied ways. In terms of the metaphor of translation, the univocal language of philosophy was translated into the multiple languages (or, ways of life) of the *ethnē* (nations), *genē* (races or families), and *poleis* (cities) of the world.

#### RACIAL THINKING IN PORPHYRY

Any inquiry into ancient ethnic identities must begin with the language used to express such identities. Much historical work on antiquity has rested in the false comfort that the classificatory labels of humanity like nation, race, tribe, or ethnic group were non-problematic and the only question worth asking was the degree to which any of the ancient collective titles like Dorians, Achaeans, or Phoenicians fell into one or another of these categories.<sup>9</sup> But a growing number of recent studies have shown the difficulties in clearly determining what a modern nation or ethnic group might be, let alone how well the ancient terms of *ethnos*, *genos*, or *phulē* might match up with these modern collective identities.<sup>10</sup> The solution to such a terminological and conceptual confusion lies in eschewing any one dominant conceptual framework that would attempt to constrict all manifestations of ethnic, racial, or national identity into its definitional criteria, and instead attending to the contours of particular articulations of each of the distinctive visions of the world and its peoples.<sup>11</sup> The delineation of Greeks or Egyptians in Herodotus, Plato, Diodorus Siculus, Aristides, or Philostratus need not, and indeed, do not, convey the same biases,

<sup>9</sup> e.g., Hall 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Connor 1978; for critical discussion see variously, Duara 1996; Baumann 1999; Johnson 2006a: 25–54.

<sup>11</sup> Konstan 1997b.

nuances, emphases, historical figures, national character traits, or other possible markers of ethnic difference. Nor need they, at the most basic level, share identical usage of the classificatory terms of *ethnos*, *genos*, or *phulē*. Ethnic and national sensibilities, visions, and overarching conceptual frameworks differ between authors, texts, and rhetorical situations.

This is not to argue for an incessantly fractured series of racial or national identities as we turn from text to text, or from speaker to speaker (or from image to image). Identities of peoples, even with all their diversity of individual expression, can be rather sluggish things.<sup>12</sup> In late antiquity, as in modern states or regions, sometimes seemingly massive discursive continuities appear to drive all texts, authors, anthems, and epitaphs before them in stable channels of identity. Evocations of ethnic, racial, or national identity, therefore, mark a rich interplay between, on the one hand, an entrenched rootedness in repeated narratives, ethnographic topoi, racial biases, and ethnic terminology, and on the other hand, moments of socially and historically dynamic, shifting, and contingent engagements with others. The work of the historian, not just the philologist, must involve tracing the ethnographic rhetoric and the varied formulations of identity within the many texts that have survived from late antiquity in order to appreciate more fully the range and depth of ancient racial thinking. This is an overwhelming task; we are fortunate in our present discussion to be focused on a single corpus of writings with the more modest aim of elucidating Porphyry's racial or national conceptions and the ways in which these could inform a project of philosophical translation.

We are troubled at the outset, however, by the difficulty, if not the sheer impossibility, of determining the rhetorical contexts of many of his fragments. Even when we have indications of the order of the fragments within otherwise lost treatises, reconstruction of the particular role or force of the fragments remains, to varying degrees, conjectural. The sense and general connotations of a reference to a specific people or the passing use of an ethnonym are, in many instances, impossible sufficiently to ascertain. A fragment from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* offers an example of the difficulties attendant on our inquiry. "The Chaldeans also served the divinity in general and worshiped the very virtue of the gods, saying that it was a god, being far from over-proud in their sacred worship because of their virtue."<sup>13</sup> Beyond the fact that they worshiped the virtue of the gods, we are

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the reification of identities by individuals and communities is a result of their seeming naturalness, even banality; see Billig 1995.

<sup>13</sup> *Comm. Tim. frag.* 28, p. 19.9–11 Sodano.

told nothing about how Porphyry conceived of them as a people, or even if he even thought of them as a people at all. They form the last entry in a list of “those who are distinguished for wisdom among all the nations (*ethnesin*),” though the other entries in his list had contained two parts each – the name of the group of philosophers and the ethnonym of the nation to which they belonged (Brachmans among the Indians, Magi among the Persians, the theologians among the Greeks).<sup>14</sup> Do the Chaldeans of this passage only refer to the two Julians responsible for the *Chaldean Oracles*,<sup>15</sup> or do they designate a philosophic class within a larger ethnic group, or even the ethnic group itself? And what counts as an ethnic group (*ethnos*) here: territorial location, language, common ancestors, shared history, religious customs, theological tenets, dietary practices, phenotypical distinctions? As the sole explicit reference to the Chaldeans in the fragments of the *Commentary on the Timaeus*,<sup>16</sup> we have little to help us answer these questions.

The following discussion will seek the safer ground of a much larger and nearly complete text, the *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, in order to trace Porphyry's use of ethnic terms and the cluster of ethnic indicia associated with them, before turning to the less stable footing of the fragments. The *On Abstinence* has more to recommend itself than merely its completeness, moreover, since its arguments for vegetarianism are frequently based upon Porphyry's portrayal of a world full of nations. A wealth of ethnographic data is marshaled within this treatise's pages. We can thus trace the ways in which the terms of *ethnos*, *genos*, and *phulon*<sup>17</sup> are used and ask the question of their taxonomic status in relation to each other. Most helpful here, though, is the fact that Porphyry explicitly discusses the nature and boundaries of genetic filiation (what is a “race,” *genos*?) in the third book.

If defenders of killing animals raised the point that justice only applied to humans,<sup>18</sup> the counter-argument depended upon two basic issues: the proof that animals possessed souls and the consequences of this for understanding the expansion of the realm of justice so as to include both human and animal society. At *On Abstinence* 3.25, this second issue is addressed through a

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 19.6–9 Sodano.

<sup>15</sup> On the two Julians, see Lewy 1956: 3–5; Majercik 1989: 1–2; skeptically, Lane Fox 1989: 715 n. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Though *Chald. Orac.* 47 is quoted at *Comm. Tim.* frag. 80, p. 69.7–8 Sodano.

<sup>17</sup> The feminine form, *phulē*, occurs only in the *Quaest. Homer.*; the feminine and neuter forms appear to differ in the classical period in the limitation of the feminine form to human familial groups (whereas the neuter can include animals and gender, much like *genos*; LSJ ss.vv.).

<sup>18</sup> *Abst.* 3.1.4.

summary of an argument taken from Theophrastus (but which Porphyry clearly appropriated as his own).<sup>19</sup>

We say that those who are born from the same people, I mean the same father and mother, are related (*oikeioi*) to each other by nature. We also reckon that descendants of the same ancestors are related to each other and yet that their fellow-citizens are also related by sharing in the land and in association with each other. We do not judge fellow citizens to be related to one another by descent from the same ancestors, even at that distance in time, unless the founders of the race were also their first ancestors or were descended from the same ancestors.<sup>20</sup>

This allows him to conclude, in an escalating series of relations, that Greeks are “related and akin” (*oikeioi kai sungeneis*) to Greeks, barbarians to barbarians, humans to humans, and even humans to animals” – which is the point of his considerations here – “either because they have the same ancestors or because they share in “food, habits, and the same birth.”<sup>21</sup> For our present purposes, this passage is important for its explication of human relatedness based on birth (*genos*) or a shared way of life that granted citizenship in spite of differences in birth. Even when relatedness is extended to the race (*genos*) of humans or the race of animals, the notion of *genos* is firmly rooted in birth and parentage (that humans and animals can share the same race is due to the fact that heaven and earth are parents of all). *Genos* is not merely a “genus” based upon some posited classificatory criterion, but designates a class of beings related specifically by ancestry – even if that ancestry is broadly conceived, such as the heaven and earth.

Yet, in the midst of his racial and relational concerns in this passage, he does use an unambiguously generic use of *genos* in the sense of “class” or “kind.” Humans and animals have the same bodily principles: “skin, flesh, and the kind (*genos*) of fluids that are natural to animals.”<sup>22</sup> The occurrence of this generic, non-racial, usage of the term within a thoroughly racial context reminds us that it is unsafe to assume that *genos* continues to carry residual or latent racial connotations as based upon ancestry and birth. This point would seem especially obvious for a handbook on logic like the *Introduction*, where genus-species (*genos/eidos*) taxonomies are discussed at length. It is remarkable, however, that even here Porphyry has recourse to racial examples, e.g., the Ethiopians or the Tantalids.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> That Porphyry adopts the Theophrastean argument (given at 3.25.1–3) as his own is shown by his statement at 3.25.4: “If this is true, then . . .” His following remarks depend upon its being true.

<sup>20</sup> *Abst.* 3.25.1; trans. modified from G. Clark; cf. *Isagoge* 1.20–2.14 Busse.

<sup>21</sup> *Abst.* 3.25.3–4. <sup>22</sup> *Abst.* 3.35.3.

<sup>23</sup> *Isag.* 1.20–2.14; 6.2–3; 13.1–2; 21.16–17; 22.1, 6 Busse; cf. *Comm.Plat.Sophist.* fr. 169.76–107 Smith. I am not yet fully convinced that the very lengthy material given as fr. 169, which is the entirety of

In Porphyry, as well as in other late antique thinkers, *genos* or *genē* (in the plural) can carry senses that cover various points on a spectrum from fully racial to fully generic, but that in any given instance or cluster of instances can quickly traverse (or even collapse) the distance between the two poles of that spectrum.<sup>24</sup> The following conclusions may be drawn from an analysis of *genos* in the *On Abstinence*. Among racial uses, some passages refer to families or family groups (what we might label “clans”): three families perform the rites associated with the *Bouphonia* in Athens; one is descended from Sopatros; the other two are descended from anonymous men;<sup>25</sup> and certain priesthoods in Egypt belong to families.<sup>26</sup> An apparently somewhat broader kin group seems to be evoked in other occurrences of the term: among the Indians the Brachmans “receive divine wisdom by birth (*genos*)” and belong to a single “race” (*genos*).<sup>27</sup> Particularly interesting here, however, is that *genos* is used in the generic sense of “class” in the same passage. The Brachmans, who are related by “race,” are part of a broader “class” of Indians who possess divine wisdom and are called gymnosophists. The reason to opt for the more generic “class” instead of recognizing a kin group here, even though it embraces a human collectivity, is that included in the class of gymnosophists are the Samanaeans, who “do not belong to one race (or family, *genos*),” but are chosen from among all the Indians.<sup>28</sup> Porphyry’s account of the Magi is similar in the rapid succession of racial and generic uses of *genos*: among the Persians, the Magi are “so great and reverend a race (*genos*),”<sup>29</sup> yet they are divided into three classes (*genē*) distinguished by their dietary practices.<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere, *genos* can refer to groups more broadly related than families or local kin groups, and might best be seen as ethnic groups. In this category are the following: the Egyptians,<sup>31</sup> the Arcadians and Carthaginians,<sup>32</sup> the Athenians,<sup>33</sup> the Jews,<sup>34</sup> and the Phoenicians.<sup>35</sup> In most of these instances, the formula is used, “so-and-so, a Phoenician (for example) by race.”<sup>36</sup>

Boethius’ *Liber de divisione*, derives from Porphyry: while Boethius does refer to “translating this (*id*),” 169.12–13, the “this” probably refers to Andronicus’ book *De divisione*, mentioned at 169.3–4, rather than Porphyry’s *commentarii* on the *Sophist*; in any case, Boethius’ translation is rather free, since neither Andronicus nor Porphyry would have mentioned Cato, Vergil, and Cicero as examples of individual humans, 169.54, or drawn on examples from Roman military history, 169.738–745; nor would they have noted Greek technical terms for a Roman audience, 169.72–73, 470–471, while presuming Latin as the common language of their audience, 169.126–130.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Johnson, 2006a: 35–40. <sup>25</sup> *Abst.* 2.30.5. <sup>26</sup> *Abst.* 4.7.5.

<sup>27</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.1, 3. <sup>28</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.3, 7. <sup>29</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.2; see Turcan 1975: 31–32. The Magi are identified as a tribe of the Medes at Herod. 1.101; cf. Strabo 15.3.1.

<sup>31</sup> *Abst.* 2.5.1. <sup>32</sup> *Abst.* 2.27.1. <sup>33</sup> *Abst.* 2.29.1. <sup>34</sup> *Abst.* 4.11.3. <sup>35</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.1.

<sup>36</sup> This formula is quite common; see Johnson 2006a: 37.

Such a formula can readily be translated “by birth” – one’s parentage and ancestry remain central within the broader conception of the ethnic group.

Even more broadly conceived kin groups – indeed, we might not consider them kin groups at all, if it were not for Porphyry’s considerations at 3.25 discussed above – include the races of animals (i.e., species) and the human race,<sup>37</sup> or even the “golden race” of humanity, that is, a particular generation of humans (explicitly drawing on Hesiod’s notion of the races of humanity).<sup>38</sup> Beyond these groups, the remaining instances of Porphyry’s use of *genos* are generic classes of entities: categories of moral activity,<sup>39</sup> different kinds of physical substances,<sup>40</sup> classes of animals determined, not by some sort of genetic filiation or notion of species, but by human categories of appropriateness for sacrifice,<sup>41</sup> and finally, the class of divinities inhabiting the heavens.<sup>42</sup>

What can be recognized in all this is a taxonomic impulse that remains most frequently rooted in the ancestral origins of the individual (or grouping of individuals) being described. That is, Porphyry saw himself as inhabiting a world full of races, and furthermore, this racial thinking formed the way he thought about eating. If we look for further elements comprised in a *genos* of humans, beyond that of parentage, which might serve to mark one race off from another, we find that dietary customs are (unsurprisingly) rather important. What a people eats (and when they eat it) is closely connected to how they worship the gods, or even whether it was gods who were the objects of cultic veneration at all. A race who dined on meat or practiced human sacrifice were the devotees of daemons, not gods. In Porphyry’s world, a person who was by birth (or by race) an Egyptian or Phoenician could be assumed to recognize certain animals as not to be eaten and to adopt a religious legitimation for such dietary restrictions.

A further mark of racial difference was “bodily constitution” (*hexis*). The argument that animals are irrational because they have a different bodily constitution than humans falls flat, according to Porphyry, since differences of bodily constitution exist between various human “races and nations” (*genē kai ethnē*), as well.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, no further indications are given of what exactly he means by differences in bodily constitution between peoples, nor what taxonomic distinction he might be making with the phrase “races and nations” (or is it merely pleonastic?); instead, he only enumerates examples of illnesses to which both humans and animals are

<sup>37</sup> Animals: *Abst.* 1.14.3 (pigs); 2.11.2 (cattle); 3.3.5; 3.8.4; 3.18.4 (in general); 3.20.2 (birds); humans: *Abst.* 1.5.3; 1.20.2; 2.6.1; 2.14.1; 3.26.6.

<sup>38</sup> *Abst.* 3.27.10; 4.2.1–2. <sup>39</sup> *Abst.* 4.3.4. <sup>40</sup> *Abst.* 4.20.4.

<sup>41</sup> *Abst.* 4.14.3. <sup>42</sup> *Abst.* 2.32.2. <sup>43</sup> *Abst.* 3.7.2.



susceptible.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the use of *hexis* seems to refer more to the internal constitution of the body rather than external appearances, such as skin color.<sup>45</sup>

If we turn to the use of the term *ethnos* in *On Abstinence*, the passage here noted is of interest since it is the only instance in which bodily characteristics are seen as marks of difference between *ethnē*, as well as between *genē*, however these two might be distinguished as categories of identity (a distinction to which we will soon turn). Other occurrences of *ethnos* emphasize the sacrificial and dietary particularities of a given people. Some, for instance, may be labeled generally, “fish-eating nations.”<sup>46</sup> While no nation, or *ethnos*, can be characterized as possessing a fully vegetarian diet,<sup>47</sup> each is considered to abstain from eating different animals.<sup>48</sup> When he surveys “nation by nation” the various customs of abstention in the fourth book of *On Abstinence*, he includes the Greeks, Egyptians, Jews, Syrians, Persians, and Indians;<sup>49</sup> and then, in quick succession, the Nomads, Troglodytes, and Ichthyophagi;<sup>50</sup> then Massagetae, Derbices, Tibareni, Hyrcanians, Caspians, Scythians, and Bactrians.<sup>51</sup>

Again, the overwhelming concern to attend to the eating habits as a mark of collective identity is not surprising in a work on vegetarianism. But, the fact that both *ethnos* and *genos* can designate a people bound together by shared customs of food and sacrifice, as well as common bodily characteristics, might lead one at first to wonder if the two terms are nearly synonymous with each other and have lost any earlier classificatory distinctiveness between themselves.<sup>52</sup> Further examination of the marks of ethnic difference applied to the *ethnē* in this vegetarian treatise, however, precludes such a possibility.<sup>53</sup> The features of land, language, and legislation are important for the identities of those peoples labeled *ethnē* by Porphyry.

Porphyry's references to land, or geographical regions specific to certain nations, are limited to contexts where he claims that regional particularities are responsible for differences in diet and sacrificial practices of various peoples. For instance, Porphyry reports the interesting claim that the laws

<sup>44</sup> *Abst.* 3.7.3–7.

<sup>45</sup> Skin color is referred to as a trait of some ethnic groups at *Isag.* 17.12 Busse; *Comm.Arist.Categ.* p.131.7ff.

<sup>46</sup> *Abst.* 1.13.5.

<sup>47</sup> *Abst.* 1.13.5 (though here Porphyry claims to be reporting the views of common people); 4.1.2.

<sup>48</sup> *Abst.* 2.11.1; 4.2.1.

<sup>49</sup> *Abst.* 4.2–5 (Greeks); 4.6–10 (Egyptians); 4.11–14 (Jews); 4.15 (Syrians); 4.16 (Persians); 4.17–18 (Indians).

<sup>50</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.1. <sup>51</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.3–4. <sup>52</sup> Cf. Jones 1996.

<sup>53</sup> For similar distinctions in ethnic terminology in another late antique author, see Johnson 2006a: 48–51.

of particular peoples that call for eating and killing animals need not be followed: “Among most nations (*ethnē*) these laws have been formulated according to the particular character of the land, and we need not follow them because we do not even live in the same place.”<sup>54</sup> Though this is part of his paraphrase of Epicurean arguments, it nonetheless remains part of Porphyry’s overall conception of ethnic difference. This is clear from a later passage where the Nomads, Troglodytes, and Ichthyophagi apparently have exclusively meat diets or eat raw or semi-cooked meat because of the lack of edible vegetation or suitably flammable materials in the lands they inhabit.<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, he claims that many nations lack proper sacrificial animals where they live.<sup>56</sup>

An *ethnos* may also designate a people with a distinctive language. Inability to understand animal languages is little different from inability to understand the languages of foreign peoples: Greeks cannot understand the Indian language and Attic-speakers do not understand Scythian, Thracian, or Syrian languages.<sup>57</sup> Yet some nations (*ethnē*), most notably the Arabians and Etruscans, have “an affinity” for understanding animal speech.<sup>58</sup>

More important than land and language for the elements of an *ethnos* in the *On Abstinence* is the legislative ordering of the communal lives of the various peoples.<sup>59</sup> The survey of nations in Book IV is limited to those nations who were concerned not only for piety towards the divine but for exhibiting good laws (*eunomia*).<sup>60</sup> The laws of particular importance for Porphyry would be those laid down regarding abstinence from eating certain animals “for the security and advantage of cities.” In fact, in nearly every discussion of the legislative elements of a nation’s ordering a civic context is explicitly named, and the formula *ethnē kai poleis* expresses the link. So, priests sacrifice on behalf of all “for nations and cities,”<sup>61</sup> or again, “throughout nations and cities” sacred laws ordain purity.<sup>62</sup> The laws often go back to hoary antiquity,<sup>63</sup> but only rarely are specific lawgivers named (most notably and extensively Lycurgus the Spartan legislator).<sup>64</sup> A historical depth is thus a shared feature of the members of particular *ethnē* whose laws have deep roots in the past. The ongoing practices of ethnically distinctive laws further embody and instill a national character for the people.

<sup>54</sup> *Abst.* 1.12.4, trans. modified from Clark; cf. Epicurus ap. Diog. Laert. 10.151.

<sup>55</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.1, with 1.5.1. <sup>56</sup> *Abst.* 2.14.1.

<sup>57</sup> *Abst.* 3.3.3–5; on the importance of this passage, see Millar 1997; Clark 1999. See also Sext. Emp. *Hyp. pyrrh.* 1.74.

<sup>58</sup> *Abst.* 3.4.1; for comparanda, see Bouffartigue and Patillon 1979: 156 nn. 1–2 and 233–234.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Johnson 2006a: 45–48.

<sup>60</sup> *Abst.* 4.5.3; cf. 4.18.4.

<sup>61</sup> *Abst.* 4.5.4.

<sup>62</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.9.

<sup>63</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 1.11.1 (though the passage is a paraphrase of Epicurean arguments).

<sup>64</sup> *Abst.* 4.3–4.

While this national character might be seen as contingent on the particular pasts and particular laws of the *ethnos*' forefathers, and furthermore, as contingent upon regional limitations, as noted above, nonetheless Porphyry offers in one instance an interesting admission that the characters of *ethnē* are determined by nature.<sup>65</sup> "Some nations grow wild and are beastly by nature (*phusei*)."<sup>66</sup> When combined with the statement noted above about bodily condition, this statement, opaque though it otherwise may be, reveals a rather strong sense of naturalness and determinacy to national identities. The constraints of geography, legislation, bodily condition, and historically formed national character might coagulate as a nearly unbreakable bond tying one to a national identity – at least in the case of the many. After all, Porphyry was writing his defense of vegetarianism as a protreptic for the philosophically minded to move beyond the laws and limitations of their cities and nations in order to become a law unto themselves.<sup>67</sup>

We may sum up the distinction between *genos* and *ethnos* in Porphyry by stating that a *genos* had a more explicit racial-kinship sense. And, while an *ethnos*, too, could vaguely be remarked as determined by nature, the most definitive elements of an *ethnos* were legislative features and the various implications attendant on these features, such as shared history, forefathers, and national character. Also potentially significant for an *ethnos* was the distinctiveness of language and land. Beyond these differences between *genos* and *ethnos* there was, in certain contexts, a taxonomic hierarchy in which *genos* designated the more particular and *ethnos* the more expansive group identities.<sup>68</sup> Brachmans, most notably, were of the same *genos* (namely, the Brachmans) and the same *ethnos* (the Indians), while the Samanaeans were unconnected by *genos*, in the sense of a familial group, but were part of "all the *ethnos* of India."<sup>69</sup>

Examination of the ethnic and racial vocabulary of other works relevant for our present inquiry can briefly supplement the foregoing sketch of such language in *On Abstinence*. The term *genos* maintains its sense of birth and parentage in the biographical works, in particular.<sup>70</sup> Broader racial designations occur in a number of works.<sup>71</sup> Broader still, *genos* is applied to species of animals,<sup>72</sup> classes of divinities (gods, daemons, heroes),<sup>73</sup> the

<sup>65</sup> Goldin 2001. <sup>66</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.2. <sup>67</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.5; for further discussion, see Chapter 7.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Jones 1996. <sup>69</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.3. <sup>70</sup> *V.Pythag.* 4.2; 54.6; *V.Plot.* 1.3; cf. *Comm.Tim.* 22 Sodano.

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., *Ep.Aneb.* 2.10a.4; *V.Pythag.* 1.2; 10.5; *Phil.Orac.* fr. 323 Smith (quoting an oracle); c. *Christ.* 82 Harnack.

<sup>72</sup> *V.Pythag.* 19.11.

<sup>73</sup> *V.Pythag.* 38.2; *Ep.Aneb.* 1.1b.3; 1.1c.1, 7; 1.4b.2; 2.7.1; *Phil.Orac.* frs. 325, 328 Smith (quoting oracles); *V.Plot.* 10.23; *Comm.Tim.* frs. 10 and 17 Sodano; *Styx* 377 Smith.

human race,<sup>74</sup> or, in its most generic usage, categories of various phenomena (such as “kinds” of divination).<sup>75</sup> Porphyry’s ease at moving between these different senses of *genos* appears in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* where the “race of priests” in Plato’s text is taken allegorically to refer to the various classes of angels and daemons.<sup>76</sup>

The Egyptians, Persians, Indians, and Greeks are all labeled *ethnē* in contexts where religion and spirituality are concerned.<sup>77</sup> The term probably lies behind the Latin rendering *gentes* in the *On the Return of the Soul*, where the subject is the various ways of achieving the purification and salvation of the soul among Eastern peoples.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the foreign *ethnē* visited by Pythagoras are all noted for distinctive fields of esoteric wisdom: interpretation of dreams, ritual uses of frankincense, knowledge of sacred and symbolic scripts, purifications from past lives, and the nature of the universe.<sup>79</sup> “From his wandering among these nations (*ethnē*) Pythagoras acquired most of his wisdom.”<sup>80</sup>

The laws also continue to play a role as integral elements of an *ethnos*. Even the formula “in nations and cities” occurs as descriptive of human laws.<sup>81</sup> In the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the separation of nations and cities appears to be taxonomic in nature. Nations are broader, less localized collective identities, while cities are narrower and more localized; only individuals, in this passage, are more specific than cities.<sup>82</sup>

Porphyry seems to avoid the broader non-ethnic senses of *ethnos* as a class or group of any entities (bees, warriors, the sexes), which were possible since the earliest Greek literature.<sup>83</sup> For instance, among the fragments of the *Commentary on the Timaeus* we have no direct discussion of Plato’s use of *genos* to refer to the class of poets (*to poētikon genos*) and *ethnos* to refer to all those who practiced imitative arts (*to mimētikon ethnos*) – even though the passage in which this language is employed was commented on by

<sup>74</sup> *V.Pythag.* 39.3; *c.Christ.* fr. 81 Harnack.

<sup>75</sup> *Ep.Aneb.* 2.2f.1; 2.7.12 (divination); praef.1.1; *Isag. passim*.

<sup>76</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano. <sup>77</sup> *Comm.Tim.* frs. 17 and 28 Sodano.

<sup>78</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 302b Smith. Because of similarity in language fr. 302b Smith certainly alludes to fr. 302 Smith. I suggest that *ethnē* is behind the Latin *gentes* here because of the similarity in the grouping of nations at *Regr.anim.* fr. 302 Smith and *Comm.Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano.

<sup>79</sup> *V.Pythag.* 11–12. <sup>80</sup> *V.Pythag.* 12. <sup>81</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 25; see Johnson, forthcoming a.

<sup>82</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano. Elsewhere in his corpus the formula *ethnē kai poleis* is used (see below); the phrase is frequent in imperial Greek authors, most notably Herodian, and occurs most often in descriptions of empire; see Sherwin-White 1973: 440–441; MacMullen 1975: 409 n. 4; Johnson 2006a: 41.

<sup>83</sup> Johnson 2006a: 40.

Porphyry.<sup>84</sup> Significantly, Homer's application of *ethnea* to bees<sup>85</sup> receives attention in his *Homeric Questions*. Such a usage of the term, Porphyry remarks, is an instance of a metaphoric application (*tas parabolais*) of the ethnic term.<sup>86</sup> If the corpus were less fragmentary, we might have found him using *ethnos* in broader metaphoric ways as well. We would also, no doubt, find an author of Porphyry's broad interests using the term to highlight other elements of ethnic or national identity in various contexts and for a number of differing purposes. It is to those purposes that we now turn.

#### ETHNIC ARGUMENTATION IN A PHILOSOPHICAL CORPUS

Our analysis of ethnic terminology in Porphyry's writings has allowed us to recognize some of the basic building blocks of his racial conceptualizations. The philosopher recognized himself as inhabiting a world in which a soul's embodied experiences and knowledge were organized by corporate identities associated with shared kinship, cult, customs, land, laws, and languages. At different points any one of these elements could be brought to the foreground depending on the particular needs of his historical or biographical narratives, the contextual requirements of his textual commentary and exegesis, or the rhetorical inclinations of his philosophical or ethical argument. We might note a certain inescapability of ethnicity in the philosopher's oeuvre. Even while seeking the escape from the body, the philosopher had nonetheless discovered a peculiar usefulness to the identities of embodied existence. Thus, if Porphyry performed a sort of vertical translation in organizing and speaking about the divine and rituals relating to the divine within a framework constituted by the scale of Being, from the One to multiplicity, he nevertheless maintained a horizontal translation which not only formulated philosophical truth in terms of the variegated breadth of his ethnic vision, but indeed used ethnographic data to defend and foster philosophical pursuits. In this way, (horizontal) translation becomes argumentation.

In abstract terms, one translates one's philosophy onto the ethnic landscape, searching the ethnographic material (invariably textually mediated) so as to identify local, particular embodiments of truth and so confirm and

<sup>84</sup> Pl. *Tim.* 19d; the passage is otherwise commented on at *Comm.Tim.* fr. 8 Sodano. Pl. *Tim.* 19e goes on to refer to the *genos* of sophists.

<sup>85</sup> e.g., *Il.* 2.87 (bees). <sup>86</sup> *Quaest.Homer.* 6 Sodano.

enrich one's vision of a transcendent unity diffused throughout multiplicity. Such identifications mark simultaneously a translation of philosophy in terms of its instantiations in the world of nations and a translation of the world in the idiom of philosophy. The horizontal and vertical movements of philosophical translation are thus inseparable for the philosopher.

### *Ethnic exempla*

The ways in which Porphyry found ethnic identities useful for philosophical argumentation fall into two general patterns: ethnic exempla and ethnic doxographies. The isolated ethnic exemplum invokes the doctrines or practices of a single *ethnos* in order to buttress a point, whether in a positive or a negative manner. An instance of a positive exemplum occurs in the report in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* that the Egyptians say that the West is the primary abode of wicked daemons. This Egyptian idea is adduced in order to support Porphyry's claim that souls, on their descent into the material world, face opposition from wicked daemons – the setting of the sun in the West and the setting of the soul into matter are thus made parallel with the help of the Egyptian teaching.<sup>87</sup> The Egyptians can also provide a negative ethnic exemplum, most notably when Porphyry criticizes the usage of nation-specific words in religious or magical rites in his *Letter to Anebo*. “Why are meaningless words preferred,” the philosopher queries his Egyptian informant, “and of meaningless words, why are barbarian words preferred to each person's native tongue? For if the [divinity] hearing it looks at its meaning, it is sufficient that the concept remain the same to communicate, whatever the word might be. For the one invoked is surely not an Egyptian by race, and even if he is an Egyptian, he certainly does not use the Egyptian language or any human language at all.”<sup>88</sup> In both of these instances of what I have termed ethnic exempla, Porphyry limits his reporting of ethnic doctrine and practice to a passing reference within a broader philosophical or religious argument. In each, a single element of Egyptian ethnic identity is drawn upon: in the former instance, the Egyptian teaching about the West, in the latter, the Egyptian language.

<sup>87</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano (the “fragment” is really only a rather broad paraphrase); for discussion, see [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>88</sup> *Aneb.* 2, p. 22.1–6 Sodano (= Eus. *PE* 5.10.8–9). For the broader context of such claims regarding the translatability or untranslatability of words, see Hirschle 1976; Fowden 1986: 37–38.

More than a passing reference to a particular nation occurs in the stunning allegorical essay that seeks to provide a philosophically sound reading of a passage from the *Odyssey*. In *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, the Persians appear as part of the defense of Porphyry's interpretation that caves represent the material world. The Persians, "mystically conveying (*mustagōgountes*) the souls' descent below and return, initiate the neophyte, naming the place [where initiation occurs] a cave."<sup>89</sup> Porphyry then provides a brief sketch of the historical importance of Zoroaster as a religious founder who first consecrated a mountainous cave to Mithras, who created the material world. The parts and layout of Zoroaster's cave were symbolic of the elements and climates of the material world. After Zoroaster, the practice of performing initiations in consecrated caves continued. Cave cults, Porphyry then adds, became an important part of the Persian theological and sacrificial hierarchy: Olympian gods were worshiped with temples and altars (*bōmoi*), chthonian gods and heroes with grills (*escharai*), nether-worldly gods with pits (*bothroi*) and chamber shrines, and finally, "to the world they dedicated caves and dens."<sup>90</sup>

Multiple elements of Persian ethnic identity are brought to the fore here: religious concepts concerning the descent and ascent of the soul, religious practices, a historical figure important for the development of Persian religion, and theological tenets and their impact on sacrificial procedure. Roughly half of his discussion of caves as symbols of the material world is taken up with this extended ethnic exemplum.<sup>91</sup> The invocation of these features of Persian religious identity, though we would not characterize it as a driving force in the argument, serves as a final authoritative confirmation within the section of his essay dealing with the material world. Not only does the ethnic exemplum confirm his argument that the poetic cave was a symbol of a metaphysical level of reality; a series of theological transfers are performed. The particular features of the Homeric cave receive their proper interpretation by reference to a Platonic ontological vision; the Homeric cave is identified with the caves of Persian cult through the logic of that vision; the system of Persian religious cult into which the caves fit in turn corresponds to more elements of the ontological vision. The multiple correspondences of the three systems of meaning (Homeric, Platonic, Persian) thus translationally played off each other in mutually reinforcing ways.

<sup>89</sup> *Antro nymph.* 6, p. 60 Nauck.

<sup>90</sup> *Antro nymph.* 6, p. 60 Nauck; cf. R. Parker 2005; note the similarity to the divine hierarchy discussed in [Chapter 2](#) above.

<sup>91</sup> This section of his treatise runs from *Antro nymph.* 5–6, pp. 59–60 Nauck.

This clearly moves us into what I have elsewhere labeled “ethnic argumentation,” that is, the use of ethnic representations as one of the principle mechanisms driving an argument.<sup>92</sup> It designates an argument that depends, in large measure, upon a particular historical and ethnographic vision of the world and its peoples. The use of the Persians in *On the Cave of the Nymphs* begins to exemplify such ethnic argumentation. Here, however, the Persians confirm the truth of the claims being made; they do not thereby provide constraints to the argument itself, or determine the direction of the argument. Before turning to Porphyry’s use of ethnic doxographies, which will provide us with clear evidence for his ethnic argumentation, there remain two significant instances of ethnic exempla that represent the movement towards making nations (the Egyptians and Indians respectively) integral parts of arguments, though we lack sufficient context to delineate precisely how extensively they may have functioned within his larger arguments.

The first instance, or cluster of texts, centers on the connection of Egyptians to the field of astrological lore.<sup>93</sup> In a work that has already been of interest in an earlier chapter and will again receive further examination in the next chapter, the Egyptians are included in *On Free Will* as a possible source for Plato’s teaching on the descent of the soul through the planetary spheres. Porphyry assumes here that the reader would recognize that the Egyptians were known to be representatives of specific teachings in the area of astrology: Egyptian sages “interpret human lives from the horoscopes<sup>94</sup> and from the disposition of the natal stars to the zodiacal stars [interpreting them] <as><sup>95</sup> attendant upon the rising of the horoscope.”<sup>96</sup> The Egyptians believed that “the position of the constellations necessitated the sorts of lives” that embodied souls would live.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, someone might suppose that the Myth of Er itself had been stolen from “the traditions of

<sup>92</sup> Johnson 2006a: 10, *passim*. <sup>93</sup> For further discussion, see Chapter 3.

<sup>94</sup> In ancient texts, this word usually refers not to the entire astral configuration at a nativity, but to the degree of the zodiac ascending at the time of birth in the eastern angle; see Garnett 1899.

<sup>95</sup> Following the addition of Heeren.

<sup>96</sup> *On Free Will* frag. 271.43–45 Smith. The Greek text of this passage is difficult and has been the subject of a number of emendations; the translation here represents a rejection of the *para* added by Wachsmuth (and followed by Smith, which would be rendered briefly: “From where did Plato take this material . . . I would say . . . that [it was] <from> the Egyptian sages . . .”), because (a) the given text works well as a genitive absolute construction (“since the Egyptian sages interpret . . .”); (b) the prepositional phrase *para* + dative within the prepositional phrase *para* + genitive seems rather clumsy; and (c) the meaning would seem to contradict the following sentence (“he disagreed with the Egyptians that . . .”).

<sup>97</sup> *On Free Will* frag. 271.46–49 Smith.



the Egyptians," though Porphyry maintained an ambiguous stance on this claim.<sup>98</sup>

The issues at stake in such claims about Plato's purported borrowing, or outright theft, of Egyptian teaching, will concern us at length in the following chapter. For the present, it is significant only that the Egyptians are deemed as the purveyors of particular astrological doctrines and their ethnic exemplarity serves as a foil (if not a source) for Plato's own thinking.<sup>99</sup> Resonant with much Hellenistic and imperial Greek literature, Porphyry considers particular nations to be in the special possession of particular teachings, inventions, and advancements in culture, art and technology.<sup>100</sup> While the Chaldeans or Babylonians are the more typical nations known for being experts in astrological knowledge, Egypt stood as another plausible hotbed of astral lore for Hellenophone authors.<sup>101</sup> Chaeremon, most notably, had claimed that the Babylonians borrowed their knowledge of the stars from the Egyptians who were the original founders of astrology.<sup>102</sup> As an Egyptian priest, Chaeremon's discussion of Egyptians would have been in reference to the astrological knowledge of at least the ancient priestly class if not the entire nation.<sup>103</sup> In spite of his apparently racial origins as an Egyptian, Chaeremon's account of Egypt has fallen under suspicion for its attempt to "translate" native traditions into a Greek cultural and intellectual idiom.<sup>104</sup>

For our analysis of Porphyry, the authenticity or accuracy of his (or Chaeremon's) knowledge of Egyptian traditions is not here at issue. The particular object of the label Egyptians is of particular interest, rather, in assessing the ethnic or racial connotations of Porphyry's discussion.<sup>105</sup> The Egyptians in the astrological passages scattered throughout his corpus, and especially the passage in *On Free Will*, could be the nation in general, only the class of priests, or merely those individuals who wrote on astrology and who, by Porphyry's identification, could be named with that ethnonym. In the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, the Egyptians are represented as being at variance with Ptolemy over the demarcation of

<sup>98</sup> *On Free Will* frag. 271.100–104 Smith. For the argument that Plato borrowed from Eastern wisdom, see Swift Riginos 1976: 60–69; Dörrie 1973; Johnson 2006a: 137–142.

<sup>99</sup> For Egyptian astrological doctrine, see *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 49.

<sup>100</sup> Thraede 1962a and 1962b.

<sup>101</sup> For the limited importance of Egyptian influence historically on Greco-Roman astrology, see Fowden 1986: 67–68; Cumont 1912: 43; on the rise of astrology in Egypt, see Kákosky 1982.

<sup>102</sup> For Porphyry's knowledge of, and attitude towards, Chaeremon, see *Aneb.* 2, p.21.1 Sodano; *Abst.* 4.6.1; 4.9.1.

<sup>103</sup> The material at *Abst.* 4.6.1–4.8.5, which claims to be reporting the testimony of Chaeremon, is explicitly limited to the class of priests.

<sup>104</sup> Fowden 1986: 52–56. <sup>105</sup> For earlier representations, see Vasunia 2001.

zodiacal boundaries.<sup>106</sup> In a later chapter of the same work, the astrological writer Phnaēs, who is identified as an Egyptian, is mentioned together with Antigonos as offering a competing system of establishing the differences between the triangular, quadrangular, and hexagonal constellations.<sup>107</sup> However, Ptolemy himself was probably a native Egyptian; he certainly spent much of his adult life in Alexandria in Egypt. The question of the precise identity of the Egyptians of *On Free Will* and the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* is a bit elusive on the grounds of these two texts alone.

If we consider Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* itself, we find the Egyptians named in numerous passages.<sup>108</sup> For Ptolemy, they were a people who inhabited a common country, shared certain (astrologically determined) national character traits, along with other barbarian peoples, perpetuated certain sexual and dietary practices (see esp. Book II), and were the inventors of a system of astrology that was a weak rival to that of the Chaldeans.<sup>109</sup> While caution is always warranted when attempting to determine the precise dimensions of ethnic identities within the fragments, it seems likely that Porphyry's conception of Egyptians (in both the *Introduction* and *On Free Will*) went beyond a limited number of individuals known for astrological expertise (faulty though it may have been) to incorporate generally the inhabitants of the land, speakers of the language and performers of certain cult acts. If this inclusive conception of the ethnonym is appropriate here, it would certainly resonate not only with the identifications of the base text of the *Tetrabiblos* but also with Porphyry's own identifications elsewhere in his corpus, especially the *On Abstinence*.

In these passages connecting the Egyptians to astrology, Porphyry has moved beyond the passing ethnic exemplum in his representation of foreign peoples. The nation has become an integral element within the argument. The Egyptians are posited as a source for Plato's own thought, or at least, the mythic form by which he expressed his thought – an important point to which we must turn later – and they serve as a means of more clearly expressing the distinctiveness of Plato's notion of astrological determinism. While Plato may have felt there was a correspondence between a person's life and the horoscope at birth, he disagreed with the Egyptian doctrine

<sup>106</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 49, p. 222.18–24; of course, Porphyry is here only explaining Ptolemy's own explicit rejection of the Egyptian system of boundaries for the Chaldean one (*Tetrab.* 1.21), rather than making any overt statement against the Egyptians here; his couplet, "I was forced to say this," marks an apologetic tone for even having to explain the divergence.

<sup>107</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 51, p. 223.17–20.

<sup>108</sup> On the importance of Ptolemy in ancient racial thinking, see Isaac 2004: 99–101, 319–320.

<sup>109</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrab.* 1.21.

that "the position of the constellations necessitated the sorts of lives" that embodied souls would live; "but rather, when the souls are carried to the horoscopes according to the internal dispositions and when they see the lives, <which> the constellations indicate, inscribed in the heavenly region as if in a painting,<sup>110</sup> those [souls] having made a choice<sup>111</sup> are also capable of not living this way because of free will."<sup>112</sup> Porphyry then offers an explanation that seeks to combine a pre-embodied free will and an embodied necessity by delineating the transition from the one stage to the other as souls descend through the spheres.<sup>113</sup> Plato is thus similar to the Egyptians in seeing a connection between stars and life, but diverges from them, according to Porphyry, in protecting free will.

The second instance of an extended ethnic exemplum that may have given considerable weight to the philosopher's argument occurs in his *On the Styx*, in a fascinating, if under-studied fragment on the Indians deriving from Bardaisan.<sup>114</sup> Aside from a partial translation in the nineteenth century and a paraphrase in the standard twentieth-century treatment of Bardaisan,<sup>115</sup> the fragment had largely been ignored or unknown in discussions of Porphyry and of the Indians in Greek philosophical thought until the highly important recent work of Winter, Castelletti and Ramelli.<sup>116</sup> The neglect is unfortunate, since the fragment offers tantalizing details on contacts between Indian and Greek thought through the medium of a Syriac-speaking Mesopotamian Christian. The fragment almost certainly derives from the same unnamed work of Bardaisan reported by Porphyry in *On Abstinence*,<sup>117</sup> since both passages refer to an Indian embassy that conversed with Bardaisan while on their way to Rome.<sup>118</sup>

Sometime during the reign of Elegabalus (AD 218–222), an embassy of Indians including Dandamis and Sandales<sup>119</sup> met Bardaisan, "a Babylonian

<sup>110</sup> *Pinax*; similarly, Origen claims that the heavens are "a book (*biblos*) of God," indicating what is about to be (see *Comm. Genes.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.63).

<sup>111</sup> This participle is set within daggers by Smith.

<sup>112</sup> *De Lib. arbitr.* fr. 271.46–55 Smith. <sup>113</sup> See [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>114</sup> *Styx* frag. 376 Smith (Stobaeus 1.3.56; misprinted by Smith as 1.3.96). For its order in the fragments of the *Styx*, see [Chapter 1](#) above.

<sup>115</sup> Priaulx 1873: 148–159; Drijvers 1966; a full English translation of this fragment is provided in Appendix 2.

<sup>116</sup> Winter 1999; Castelletti 2006; Ramelli 2009a and 2009b: 91–108; see also the brief note at Clark 2000b: 189–190. Even before Smith's edition of the Teubner fragments, the *On the Styx* fragment was noted as a parallel to *Abst.* 4.17 in Nauck's edition of the latter work (p. 256).

<sup>117</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.2; Ramelli 2009b: 108–109.

<sup>118</sup> Porphyry most likely knew Bardaisan through a translation into Greek made by one of the latter's students; see Schaefer 1932: 31–32. On Porphyry's lack of knowledge of non-Greek languages, see Millar 1997.

<sup>119</sup> Dandamis: *Abst.* 4.17.2; Sandales: *Styx* frag. 376.49 Smith. For other Indian embassies to a Roman emperor, see Strabo 15.1.73; Eus. *VC* 4.7, 50; generally, see Priaulx 1873: 65–253.

who lived in our fathers' time,"<sup>120</sup> and "who is from Mesopotamia,"<sup>121</sup> in order to exchange words, or books (*logoî*).<sup>122</sup> Bardaisan learned that the Indians visited two pools of testing: the first tested perpetrators accused of misdeeds by remaining knee-deep if an innocent person waded into it, but rising so far as to all but submerge (*baptizetai*) the head of the guilty;<sup>123</sup> the second was situated in the depths of a cave and tested the general purity of a person's life by allowing passage through an opening only to those who "were purified from the baseness of life."<sup>124</sup> At the mouth of the cave stood an androgynous statue representing the entire cosmos, which God gave his son, according to the Indians, as an archetype (*paradeigma*)<sup>125</sup> for creating the world. As in the other geographical–historical fragments, Porphyry concludes the report of the two pools in India with the testimony of a Greek author as confirmation. "I think Apollonius of Tyana also makes mention of this water – I mean that which is in the cave. For when he writes to the Brachmans he swears a certain oath: 'No, by the water of Tantalus, of which you initiated me.'<sup>126</sup> I think he says this water is 'of Tantalus' because it always checks with foreboding those who have been eager to go to it and draw a drink from it."<sup>127</sup> The comment on Apollonius' letter seems somewhat offhand. It should, at least, be noted that the Greek author confirms the Indian report, not the reverse (especially when we turn to the problem of Porphyry's Hellenicity in the next chapter).

<sup>120</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.2. <sup>121</sup> *Syxx* frag. 376.4 Smith.

<sup>122</sup> The cultural historical context for such an exchange deserves fuller treatment than that offered here: at the same time that Eastern wisdom was being transmitted to third-century Hellenized Roman circles through the persons and writings of intellectuals like Bardaisan and Julius Africanus, Greek (or Hellenized Egyptian) wisdom was being transmitted to the East; see Adler 2004; Van Bladel 2009: 23–63. For discussion of the problems of dating Bardaisan, see Priaux 1873: 152–155 n. 67.

<sup>123</sup> For the similarity of this passage to an episode in Achilles Tatius (*Leuc. et Cleit.* 8.11–14), see Castelletti 2006: 270–274; Ramelli 2009b: 110–111.

<sup>124</sup> *Syxx* frag. 376.69–70 Smith. For similar ordeals of passage, see Castelletti 2006: 278–280; Hasluck 1919–1921. Alternatively, Priaux 1873: 159 denies its historical existence, claiming that the pool ranks with fictions like the Fountain of Youth.

<sup>125</sup> One cannot help hearing here an echo of Pl. *Tim.* 31a, which became an important text in late antiquity (quoted at Clement, *Strom.* 5.12.79; Eusebius, *PE* 11.13.2; Stobaeus 1.22.3d [200.1–3 Wachsmuth]; Theodoret, *Curatio* 4.49; Cyril, *C.Jul.* 8 [PG 76.908CD]).

<sup>126</sup> On Apollonius' letter-writing, see Philostr. *V.Apoll.* 1.2.3. The letter here is given as 78 in C. P. Jones' collection (LCL 458, p. 74). I can find no firm evidence that Porphyry knew the *V.Apoll.* (the fragments of the *c.Christ.* mentioning Apollonius in terms resonant of the Philostratean holy man and miracle worker [frs. 4 and 46 Harnack] are all suspect from being in Latin sources that class Apollonius with Apuleius; it is not unthinkable that Porphyry could have had some knowledge of Apuleius and his writings, which were in Greek and Latin; however, the fact that Jerome and Augustine, our sources for these fragments, seem to have carried on an independent engagement with Apuleius on his own terms suggests that it is more likely that they are invoking Apuleius and Apollonius in a caricature of Porphyry's arguments – which both authors seem to have known only at second hand; further analysis is certainly a desideratum).

<sup>127</sup> *Syxx* frag. 376.91–98 Smith.

Only the Brachmans are named as the group of Indians for whom both pools and the statue were matters of continual concern. Nowhere is their racial status made explicit. But, the representation of them, whether in the direct quotation or in the paraphrase of Porphyry, includes common conceptions of morality and purity, a shared geographical location (though some Indians are said only to visit the holy site for part of each year), and common possession of a distinctive set of theological notions and corresponding religious (or, more properly, philosophical) activity.

The fragment is noteworthy for its claim to be presenting Bardaisan's first-hand account of Indian philosophers. Features of the first pool and the statue raise significant possibilities for examining Bardaisan's role not only as a reporter of Indian customs but also as a translator of cultural knowledge from a foreign context into a Greek idiom, a Platonic framework, and even (potentially) into a Christian perspective.<sup>128</sup> As noted above, the fragment possesses a parallel with a Greek novel and language resonant with Platonic and Christian texts. Bardaisan's role, or agency, in the act of translation becomes almost insolubly complicated, however, by the lack of information about the presence of translators (resident in Mesopotamia or members of the embassy) from the Indian language into Syriac (if that is the language of Bardaisan's original work),<sup>129</sup> and the translational work of his students from Syriac into Greek. The scope and purposes of Bardaisan's work are, furthermore, lost to us: was it a work solely dedicated to Indian thought and practices, or was the discussion of Indians part of a larger project?<sup>130</sup>

Even if we leave the question of Bardaisan's original work to one side, the same questions must be asked of this passage in regard to Porphyry's original treatise *On the Styx*, especially if we are to assess the role of ethnic identities in the development of a philosophical argument. In spite of the extensive length of this ethnic exemplum, we are frustrated by the lack of firm evidence on which to base any attempted reconstructions of the work as a whole and this fragment's place and purpose within the work.<sup>131</sup> The fragment is alone in coming from Stobaeus' *Anthology* 1.3 (nearly all the others derive from 1.49 or from later books of the *Anthology*), so we are left with little hint of the placement of this fragment relative to the others within the original work. It is, furthermore, the only one to contain substantial

<sup>128</sup> Cf. the use of *baptizein* (at l. 20) and *stauros* (at l. 33), as well as reference to "the son of God" (at l. 46); see Ramelli 2009b: 95–107. On Bardaisan's Christianity, see Eus. *HE* 4.30; Ramelli 2009a.

<sup>129</sup> See Schaefer 1932: 31–32. On the omission of details about native translators in modern ethnographic literature, see Sturge 2007: 67–80.

<sup>130</sup> Some indication of the possibilities might arise from consideration of Bardaisan's compatriot Julius Africanus; see Adler 2004; Thee 1984; Wallraff 2006; *idem* and Mecella 2009.

<sup>131</sup> For such an attempt at reconstruction, see Chapter 1.

ethnographic data. The only other note involving ethnic knowledge is a reference to the indestructibility of the horns of Scythian pack-asses.<sup>132</sup>

While the fragmentary status of the work prohibits any certainty regarding our conclusions, the suggested reconstruction offered in [Chapter 1](#) at least allowed a glimpse of the ways in which the ethnic exemplum on the Indian philosophers might have been put to work. To repeat the contours of that reconstruction: a preliminary section provided a statement on the necessity of the allegorical approach to Homer, combined with a rejection of radical allegorists like Cronius; next, a proof of the geographical and historical reality of the Styx (as shown in its appearance in Arcadia and India); then, analysis of the Homeric doctrine of the gods, the ranking of the souls, and the punishment of daemons, the “so-called gods;” finally, a discussion of the broader context of the *Nekyia*.

We must acknowledge the tentative nature of this reconstruction. The fragment on the Indians *may* have functioned as grounds for rejecting the radical allegorists (Apollodorus and Cronius) who posited a purely fictional status to the poetic texts. It *may* have provided confirmation for the doctrine of the Styx’s role in punishment: it served as a judgment of humans on the surface of the earth in a manner analogous of its judgment of daemons under the earth. Indian philosophers did not fear its waters on the earth’s surface, nor did the philosophic soul fear its waters under the earth. The divine and metaphysical hierarchy etched on the arms of the androgynous statue at the mouth of the Indian cave, which became the center of attention and inquiry among the Brachmans, *may* have provided a historical model for Porphyry’s own philosophical inquiry into the hierarchies of gods and the ranks of souls in Homer’s text. I do not think it presses the evidence too far to see the Indian fragment functioning as part of the argument in some such way. Rather than a passing ethnic exemplum, the fragment probably presents a striking instance of Porphyry’s ethnic argumentation in a work otherwise not known for the invocation of ethnographic knowledge or racial conceptualizations.<sup>133</sup>

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC DOXOGRAPHIES

The second pattern in which Porphyry manipulates knowledge about ethnically specific doctrines and practices may be designated by the term “ethnic doxographies.”<sup>134</sup> I adopt the term doxography from the textual

<sup>132</sup> *Styx* frag. 375 Smith.

<sup>133</sup> The fragment should fill in an important gap in our understanding of Greek philosophical engagement with Indian wisdom, on which see G. Parker, 2008; Stoneman 1994 and 1995.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Johnson 2006a: 205–210.

practice of listing the doctrines of particular philosophers or philosophic schools on particular issues, which had begun in the Hellenistic period and become more widespread in imperial Greek literature.<sup>135</sup> Such doxographies were used as easy reference manuals for students wanting to identify the various positions on key issues and the thinkers who espoused them. While they may have originally been used only as a useful reference tool enumerating a given range of philosophical doctrines, they could also function within philosophical arguments (frequently of a skeptical nature). For instance, Sextus Empiricus provided a survey of contrasting doctrines about material principles as part of a defense of his Skeptical philosophy. If Pherecydes thought the first principle was earth, Thales water, Anaximander the infinite, Anaximenes and Diogenes air, Hippasus fire, Xenophanes earth and water, and so on, then choosing one of these positions as the correct one became a difficult affair (especially since no approved criterion was available).<sup>136</sup> Elsewhere, Empiricus would offer a brief ethnographic doxography that presented the opposing habits and customs of various races (homosexual unions, sex in public, prostitution, tattooing, piracy, or kin-killing were deemed shameful or acceptable depending on the particular standards embodied by different nations), as part of his criticism of notions of natural good and natural evil.<sup>137</sup> In a similar manner to these expressions of the doxographic tradition, we find in Porphyry lists of nations and their particular positions on key philosophical ideas or their particular practices regarding diet, prayer, religious cult, and so on. Likewise, his ethnic doxographies were frequently employed as integral parts of larger arguments.

One of Porphyry's ethnic doxographies, while not labeled as such, has received a good deal of attention in recent scholarship on his religious position and has concerned us already in an earlier chapter. The oracle on the "bronze-bound road of the blessed ones" offered the list of nations that could be included within a doxography of pious nations.<sup>138</sup> Unfortunately, we lack sufficient evidence for the criteria of inclusion within this list. Some are more obvious: the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Jews had all been posited as peoples whose history and culture extended to the furthest reaches of antiquity by Hellenophone authors of the imperial period. The Lydians are a less popular candidate for ancient wisdom and piety.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Mansfeld and Runia 1997–2009, with bibliography.

<sup>136</sup> Sext. Emp. *Pyrrhon. hyp.* 3.6.30–35; cf. Eusebius, *PE* 15.23–61. On the "argument from disagreement" within which these doxographies function, see Boys-Stones 2001: 123–150.

<sup>137</sup> Sext. Emp. *Pyrrhon. hyp.* 3.198–234; cf. 1.148–152; 1.79–84. <sup>138</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 323 Smith.

<sup>139</sup> One would think a negative religious allusion would more readily be at play, since Tantalus, known for his crimes against the gods, was a mythical king of Lydia. On the other hand, Herod. 1.7



Porphyry's comments on this oracle are given in the next fragment: "The many paths [to the gods] the barbarians found, but the Greeks were misled and the rulers (*hoi kratountes*) already also destroyed [it]. The god assigns the discovery to the Egyptians, the Chaldeans (since these are Assyrians),<sup>140</sup> Lydians and Hebrews."<sup>141</sup> This note both clarifies and supplements the list of nations in the oracle. The Assyrians of the oracle were to be identified as Chaldeans – an interpretive move that may express an attempt to legitimize Porphyry's dependence on the *Chaldean Oracles* by means of the authority of Apollo's oracle. Two groups not mentioned in the oracle are added as negative examples set in contrast to the sterling examples of theological perspicuity and piety mentioned there. That the Greeks were a foil to the explicitly labeled "barbarian" nations who had sought out the difficult road to the gods is a striking declaration on the part of one often seen as a defender of Hellenism.<sup>142</sup> Because of its importance for appreciating Porphyry's Hellenicity, fuller discussion of this point is reserved to the next chapter.

The second group that Porphyry adds as a supplement to the oracle's list of nations is the obscure "rulers" who have already destroyed the knowledge of the salvation of the soul. The term *hoi kratountes* could possibly denote divine powers (either gods or daemons) in Porphyry. If these are the referents of the term here, it would be a fairly strong critique of notions and practices of piety that were aimed at the lower levels of the theological hierarchy. Such a critique is possible in the framework of Porphyry's religious concerns, as we have seen in an earlier chapter; and the fragment is apparently from a section of the *Philosophy from Oracles* dealing with sacrifices.<sup>143</sup> Standing last in a list of nations, however, we should expect *hoi kratountes* to refer to a people group rather than a class of divine beings.

It has been suggested that the term refers to Christians, who were "prevailing."<sup>144</sup> There is no doubt that Porphyry considered the Christians to be perverters of true piety and wisdom. There are difficulties with

connects the Lydian kings to Heracles. Lydia was also claimed as the source of the Etruscans (through Tyrrhenos); Herod. 1.94.

<sup>140</sup> The insertion of Chaldeans here may be an oblique effort to legitimate the *Chald. Orac.* On Chaldean wisdom, cf. Porph. *Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 (Sodano); *V. Pythag.* 1, 11 (Nauck).

<sup>141</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324 Smith, = Eus. *PE* 9.10.3–5. <sup>142</sup> See [Chapter 1](#).

<sup>143</sup> See Eusebius' introductory comments at *Phil. Orac.* 323.5–6 Smith; for discussion, see [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>144</sup> Schroeder and Des Places 1991: 219 n. 2; Zambon 2002: 200–201; Cook 2004: 154; Busine 2005: 284. Gifford's translation renders the phrase as "those who already held it [i.e., the ancient teaching about the gods and salvation]," but I am unsure whom this might refer to: converts to Christianity, specifically, or rather the present-day Egyptians, Phoenicians and others who have fallen away from the ways of their forefathers in a modern decline in religious values?



this interpretation, however. Eusebius tells us that the oracles and Porphyry's commentary were part of a section on sacrifices. The philosopher's first remarks on the oracle were given in the form of a rhetorical question: "Have you heard how much toil there is for someone to offer the purifications for the body – not that he would find the salvation of the soul?" This certainly confirms the statement that this material derives from a discussion on sacrifices and, furthermore, seems to point to a concern with spiritual sacrifice.<sup>145</sup> The latter part of Porphyry's comments support this assessment. After remarking on the difference between the barbarian nations and the Greeks and "rulers," he added two additional oracles of Apollo. The first declares "the Chaldeans and Hebrews alone" to have obtained wisdom in their worship of God "in purity as the self-born king."<sup>146</sup> The second recognizes the Chaldeans and Hebrews as discoverers of the seven spheres.<sup>147</sup> Both of these oracles seem to be appended to Porphyry's discussion because of their clear statement about the theological superiority of Chaldeans and Hebrews, and both of them emphasize the higher levels of spirituality exhibited by these peoples. It seems doubtful that Christians would be the most likely candidates for the *hoi kratountes* who apparently rejected spiritual sacrifice and the higher, less material, forms of cult.

Another possibility for "the rulers" of this fragment is that the Romans themselves are here put forth for oblique criticism. The criticism might be a manifestation of a philosophical, Neoplatonist response to heightened sacrificial activity involving blood sacrifice. Given the dominant scholarly inclination to see Porphyry as one of the intellectual masterminds behind the Great Persecution in the opening years of the fourth century, this suggestion might seem absurd. While we must, for the present, postpone further analysis of Porphyry's attitude to Rome, we should note that there is nothing in the fragment (or in any of the fragments from the *Philosophy from Oracles*) that would make the identification untenable. Earthly imperial rule is, furthermore, designated with the phrase: *tēs tou kratountos dunasteias*, elsewhere in Porphyry's corpus.<sup>148</sup> With these considerations, I can think of no more likely candidates. Contemporary Roman religion may have been added to the list of nations as a later corrupted form of an earlier primitive wisdom.

Even if one finds another identification of the "rulers" more satisfying, the fragment remains a firm instance of what I have labeled an ethnic doxography. What might have otherwise been limited to a singular ethnic

<sup>145</sup> J. J. O'Meara 1959: 29–31; Chapter 3 above. <sup>146</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324.11–12 Smith.

<sup>147</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324.15–18 Smith. <sup>148</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 25.399–400.

exemplum is replaced by the collocation of multiple nations that represent (or contradict) the point at hand. We shall offer further discussion of what the point at hand may have been in this fragment,<sup>149</sup> but the limits of what the fragment reveals are rather frustrating. In a treatise that collected and commented on oracles, one might assume that Porphyry merely compiled and paraphrased as many oracles as he had to hand, his sole purpose being the collation into a single document of oracular texts, which otherwise might have remained geographically limited in their circulation, and so also impressing a stamp of philosophical approval on the pagan religion expressed therein.<sup>150</sup> However, analysis of the fragments of the preface as well as the indications of his comments on the oracles scattered throughout the remains of the treatise (such as we have offered in earlier chapters) precludes such an approach to the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>151</sup> The oracles were organized according to a general plan (even if we cannot fully discern all its contours),<sup>152</sup> received careful philosophical translation, and were employed for specific theological ends.

A context similar in its theological and religious aims to that of the *Philosophy from Oracles* provides a less well-known ethnic doxography in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. After denouncing those who did not believe in the gods at all, as well as those who did but believed that the gods did not care about the prayers of humans or that there was an ubiquitous Necessity (in other words, Epicureans and Stoics, respectively), Porphyry recorded those who did hold the proper beliefs about the gods and the cosmos, and hence performed the proper practice of prayer: “In all nations, those distinguished for wisdom are serious about prayer: Brahmins among the Indians, Magi among Persians, those among the Greeks who are most theological, who have established initiations and mysteries; the Chaldeans even served the divinity in general and worshiped the very virtue of the gods, saying it is a god . . .”<sup>153</sup> The other nations listed here functioned within his Neoplatonic argument on the nature of Providence and the correlative practice of prayer as an appeal to authority so as to bolster his position against his Stoic and Epicurean opponents.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>149</sup> See Chapter 7. <sup>150</sup> For this view, see Bidez 1913: 15–20; Hadot 1960: 235.

<sup>151</sup> See also, J. J. O’Meara 1959: *passim*; Busine 2005: 256–295 (who offers a more moderate approach than the one put forth here, in that she emphasizes the divine authority of the oracles for Porphyry; see 255–256).

<sup>152</sup> The plan reconstructed by Wolff 1856: 40–43 cannot bear the full weight of the fragments as we have them. See Busine 2005: 240, and forthcoming.

<sup>153</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Lucian *Macrobii* 4ff., for a similar formula of various wise elites of each nation.

What a modern reader finds most striking in all of this is that a philosopher who made such efforts at a rationalizing form of religious translation is simultaneously a clear example of the ancient habit of racializing religion.<sup>155</sup> Theological knowledge and religious cult were envisioned as distinctively ethnic traits. Various nations were known for their distinctive contributions to (or detractions from) culture and science, and especially those highest forms of culture and science, namely piety (*eusebeia*) and theological wisdom (*theosophia*). These ethnographic doxographies of theological or religious features exhibit the play of “mental maps” in construing one’s world and, more specifically, in developing one’s philosophical argument or explanation.<sup>156</sup> Porphyry sought to oppose the defects of Stoicism and Epicureanism by an appeal to the best of national theologies, or rather, spiritualities. In the fragments of both the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the philosopher “mapped out” a topography of piety and wisdom. What the modern era sought to erase, namely the ethnic and social “baggage” that ensnared Reason from attaining epistemological certainty, is invoked with remarkable ease by Porphyry – and this, in spite of the consistent concern to seek the salvation of the soul from its bodily (and hence, one might presume, its ethnic) entanglements. Here, one might quaintly put it, is an instance of “Reason within the bounds of Race” (though one is hesitant to continue the phrase, “of Race alone”).<sup>157</sup> The late antique philosopher’s quest for truth involved a vision of the different nations (or at least elite groups within each nation) as the various purveyors of that truth.

Such doxographies can be multiplied, especially if we attend to the almost entirely intact treatise *On Abstinence*, which contains a number of doxographic passages. The dietary practices of many nations are reported early on: Greeks do not eat dogs, horses, or donkeys, while they do eat pigs; Phoenicians and Jews abstain from pigs, as apparently do the Ethiopians; or again Cyprians, Phoenicians, and Egyptians do not sacrifice pigs, while Greeks do.<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere, Egyptians and Phoenicians are recorded as not eating cow’s flesh,<sup>159</sup> the Jews practiced holocaust sacrifices, while the Egyptians refused all animal sacrifices and instead made images of animals as gods;<sup>160</sup> a doxography of human sacrifice tabulated the historical information on this abominable practice among Phoenicians, Cretans,

<sup>155</sup> Indeed, what we now designate “religion” was merely a part of what made a “race” in antiquity.

<sup>156</sup> On “mental maps,” see C. R. Whittaker 2008: 63–87.

<sup>157</sup> See, oppositely, the titles of Kant 1960 (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*) and Wolterstorff 1984 (*Reason within the Bounds of Religion*).

<sup>158</sup> *Abst.* 1.14.3–4. <sup>159</sup> *Abst.* 2.11.2. <sup>160</sup> *Abst.* 2.26.1–5.

Syrians, Libyans, Arabians, Greeks, Thracians, Scythians, Athenians, and Romans;<sup>161</sup> and finally, zoomorphic religious elements were reported for the Egyptians, Greeks, and Cretans.<sup>162</sup> These enumerations of parallel nations, tabulated either for their similar or different practices, as well as for their positive or negative instantiation of the topic at hand, stand as examples of ethnic argumentation in varying degrees of strength.

The most exquisite instance of ethnographic doxography functioning as ethnic argumentation occurs throughout the entirety of Book IV of *On Abstinence*. Here, an extended ethnographic doxography sets forth the ancient dietary practices of the most prominent nations as being originally vegetarian. The ancient Greeks,<sup>163</sup> Egyptians,<sup>164</sup> Jews,<sup>165</sup> Syrians,<sup>166</sup> Persians,<sup>167</sup> Indians<sup>168</sup> and Cretans<sup>169</sup> received lengthy discussions providing an account of their original eating practices. Liminal peoples such as the Nomads, Troglodytes, Ichthyophagi, Massagetai, and others<sup>170</sup> receive less space as negative examples, though their presence provided the sense of the universal truth of Porphyry's historical vision and hence of his argument for abstinence from meat.

Earlier ethnographic doxographies like those of Plutarch and Bardaisan had presented their lists of national practices or knowledges as confirmation of particular claims (e.g., the Greek culture of Alexander domesticated the barbarous customs of foreign nations) or as proof of the inefficacy of something deemed by one's opponents to be universal in scope (e.g., the power of astrological determinism).<sup>171</sup> Porphyry, however, used the ethnographic doxography in the fourth book of *On Abstinence* in a different way.

The priests of some peoples are required to abstain from eating any animal; the priests of others must abstain from eating only some kinds of animal. This applies whether you consider Greek or barbarian custom, but different peoples have different restrictions; so that if you consider them all together, it will be apparent that those taken from all regions abstain from all animals.<sup>172</sup>

Porphyry's enumeration of national dietary customs (or at least those practiced among priestly elites in each nation) is meant to carry a cumulative effect: if every nation's dietary restrictions are combined into a single list

<sup>161</sup> *Abst.* 2.56.1–9; for other uses of human sacrifice in imperial literature, see Rives 1995; also, Hughes 1991.

<sup>162</sup> *Abst.* 3.16.3–6; see Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984. <sup>163</sup> *Abst.* 4.2–5; see further Chapter 6.

<sup>164</sup> *Abst.* 4.6–10. <sup>165</sup> *Abst.* 4.11–14. <sup>166</sup> *Abst.* 4.15. <sup>167</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.

<sup>168</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.1–4.18.4. <sup>169</sup> *Abst.* 4.19. <sup>170</sup> *Abst.* 4.21.

<sup>171</sup> Plut. *Fort. Alex.* 328c; Bardaisan ap. Eus. *PE* 6.10.

<sup>172</sup> *Abst.* 4.5.5; translation modified from Clark, 103–104.

of restricted foods, one discovers that all animals are included in the comprehensive list. Hence, the philosopher seeking to live well the life in the body must adopt the best customs of each nation (namely, the abstinence from certain animals) and so abstain from all animals.

This particular sort of doxographic argumentation offers a variation on the “proof from consensus” exemplified in earlier philosophical literature, most notably in Cicero.<sup>173</sup> Universal agreement on some doctrine or practice represents evidence of its truth or rightness. Porphyry, however, goes one step further, since not only must every nation exhibit customs in agreement with each other (at least some animals are to be abstained from), but the prohibited animals of each must be combined so as to produce the prohibition of all. “One should either imitate the priests of each nation [who abstain from all animals], or obey all the legislators [whose combined prohibitions produce universal prohibition]. Either way, the fully law-abiding and pious man should abstain from all [animate foods]; for if in particular cases some people abstain in piety from some foods, the person who is pious in all cases will abstain from all.”<sup>174</sup>

One point, however, which might be considered a weakness in his argument, should be registered at the outset. Porphyry fails to substantiate fully his claim that, when combined, the dietary prohibitions of all the nations would entail universal prohibition of eating meat – some lacunae remain. A brief enumeration of the animals prohibited by the various nations of his ethnographic doxography includes the following:

1. Egyptian priests – little or no wine; at certain times, no bread; little or no oil; no fish from Egypt; no quadrupeds with solid or cloven hooves, or no horns; no birds of prey; at certain times, no animals, vegetables or sex; some priests never eat animals; no female cattle, nor male twins, spotted, dappled, deformed, or those accustomed to the yoke; no turtle-doves;<sup>175</sup>
2. Jews – no pigs;<sup>176</sup> Essenes abstain from use of oil,<sup>177</sup> eat only “pure and holy food” (apparently a reference to abstinence from meat);<sup>178</sup> among all Jews: no fish without scales, animals with solid hooves, or animals that take refuge in homes; no animals who are parents of nurselings or labor animals;<sup>179</sup>
3. Syrians – no fish;<sup>180</sup>
4. Magi – a first class practiced total abstinence; a second class, no tame animals; a third abstained from some animals;<sup>181</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.6.11; Obbink 1992.

<sup>175</sup> *Abst.* 4.6.8–4.7.4.

<sup>176</sup> *Abst.* 4.11.1.

<sup>174</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.9–10; translation modified from Clark, 115.

<sup>177</sup> *Abst.* 4.11.6.

<sup>178</sup> *Abst.* 4.12.3.

<sup>179</sup> *Abst.* 4.14.1–2.

<sup>180</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.5.

<sup>181</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.2.

5. Indians – abstinence from all animals;<sup>182</sup> Brachmans eat only fruit, crops, rice;<sup>183</sup> Samanaeans eat only rice, bread, fruit and vegetables.<sup>184</sup>

Unless we take the complete abstinence practiced by the Indian gymnosophists, the Jewish Essenes, one class of the Magi, and some of the Egyptian priests as proof for Porphyry's claim of universal prohibition resulting from a combination of ethnically specific dietary customs (a doubtful interpretation of his methodological statement quoted above), then the specific animal prohibitions listed here are certainly not exhaustive of all types of animals. One can readily think of animals that remain permissible, such as rabbits, lions, or poultry. This criticism lacks force, however, since Porphyry did not claim that his ethnographic doxography would be exhaustive, only that a complete catalog *would* show all animals prohibited by one nation or another. His argument in Book IV continues to possess the merit of containing prohibitions of most of the animals more commonly considered for human consumption and thus the important ways in which philosophy translated onto the communal embodied lives of various peoples.

More significantly, the ethnographic doxography of the last book of *On Abstinence* is not entirely consistent in the sorts of phenomena in each nation which it includes. For some nations, the way of life of an elite group is described and complete abstinence from animal food is noted. Only the Essenes among the Jews<sup>185</sup> and the gymnosophists (i.e., Brachmans and Samanaeans) of India<sup>186</sup> fall within this category. For other nations, different groups of elites are identified as practicing various levels of abstinence from animal food. The Egyptian philosopher-priests<sup>187</sup> and the three races of Magi among the Persians<sup>188</sup> correspond to this category. For still others, an ancient time of complete abstinence is reported as giving way to a narrative of decline into eating animal food. The Greeks<sup>189</sup> and Syrians<sup>190</sup> are described in this way, though it should be noticed that the decline was not complete in either case (the Lycinian reforms in Lacedaemon sought to restrain indulgence and extravagance in eating, and the Syrians continued to abstain from fish).<sup>191</sup>

There is, therefore, no fixed pattern that each ethnographic description follows – though there is some overlap (e.g., the fixed times for prayer among Egyptian priests and the Indian Brachmans, or the isolation from

<sup>182</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.5.      <sup>183</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.4–5.      <sup>184</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.8.

<sup>185</sup> I take the phrase “pure and holy food” (4.12.3) to refer to non-animate food.

<sup>186</sup> *Abst.* 4.17.4–5, 8.      <sup>187</sup> *Abst.* 4.6.8–4.7.4.      <sup>188</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.2.

<sup>189</sup> *Abst.* 4.2.1–9.      <sup>190</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.1–4.      <sup>191</sup> Lycurgus: *Abst.* 4.3.1–4.5.2; fish: *Abst.* 4.15.5.

public life of these same two groups).<sup>192</sup> The inconsistency in criteria for inclusion in the ethnographic doxography as well as any narrative pattern is puzzling. It may be due, at least partly, to a lack of information about some peoples. Porphyry may not have known of any philosophical elite among the Syrians and so resorted to a narrative of decline. The resort to a narrative of decline in his treatment of the Greeks might remain difficult to explain, though, since he certainly had access to material on the Pythagoreans, yet decided not to mention them. The reason for a narrative of decline among the Greeks may result from his supposing Dicaearchus' narrative, which traced moral decline in terms of dietary decline, as too good a model to pass up. Or, it may be that he was hesitant to allow Pythagoras a Greek identity, and so, Pythagoreans generally remained somewhat out of his purview for the ethnography of Greek dietary habits.<sup>193</sup> The issue is not easily resolved. What may, at least, be appreciated is Porphyry's avoidance of singularity and sameness in his portrayal of practices that remained ethnically distinct, even while (purportedly) sharing common philosophical and religious aims. It is precisely this feature that invites us to emphasize horizontal (particularizing) translation over vertical (univocalizing) translation.

The ethnographic doxography of Book iv refuses to adopt a rigid classificatory or narrative schema in its presentation. His is no simplistic interpretive grid that prunes off peculiarities of ethnic identities perceived as useless for the immediate purposes of his argument. He has allowed a good deal more material than dietary restrictions alone to enter his portrait of each nation. Dress, times of prayer, social or familial organizational patterns, historical incidents and anecdotes, and theological or philosophical doctrines are presented in addition to food customs. Though his inclusion of such material may largely depend on his sources for each nation, a more selective compiler could easily have omitted the information as extraneous to his argument. It is a quaint, but unhelpful, modern caricature of ancient authors to see them as often carelessly or helplessly at the mercy of unwieldy sources that said more than was wanted or needed in the texts that depended upon them.<sup>194</sup> More likely, at least in the case of Porphyry, the philosopher has deliberately included the sorts of material he wanted in crafting distinctive portraits of each nation included in his ethnographic doxography.

<sup>192</sup> Prayer: *Abst.* 4.8.2 and 4.17.6; isolation: *Abst.* 4.6.5 and 4.17.6.

<sup>193</sup> See *V.Pythag.* 1–2, pp. 17.2–18.10, with discussion in [Chapter 6](#).

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Johnson forthcoming c.

These supplementary additions functioned, on the one hand, to embed the food prohibitions within broader ways of life, by which one could make better sense of the particular prohibitions. A narrative of decline possessed explanatory value for answering the questions of why a nation no longer prohibited meat-eating; or again, the combination of priestly and philosophical roles within the daily life of Egyptian temples provided a basis for understanding more suitably their injunctions regarding food. On the other hand, the supplementary material rendered those injunctions, and more importantly the assumptions that informed those injunctions, as fitting subjects of admiration and imitation. Among the various nations, with all their diversity of location, language and communal customs, were groups of practitioners of the truly philosophical life. Here were living exemplars of the ideal of the true and the good for souls biding their time in earthly, ethnically specific, bodies.<sup>195</sup>

Brief protreptic declarations convey Porphyry's goals in explicit terms. The Jewish Essenes "demonstrated [their firmness in discipline] in the war with the Romans, when they would not grovel to their torturers or shed tears, but smiled in the midst of pain and mocked those who applied the tortures, and cheerfully let go their souls in the expectation of receiving them again."<sup>196</sup> More memorable than the particular food prohibitions, therefore, was the discipline, courage, and conviction in which they could enact the truth of the soul's eternity and the body's ephemerality in the face of external pressures and violence. Or again: "Neither among [the Samanaeans] nor among the others I have described, has a sophist come forward, 'such as men now are'<sup>197</sup> among the Greeks, to say, pretending he is at a loss, 'If everyone imitates you, what will become of us?' . . . But those who have imitated them have brought about order rather than chaos for their peoples."<sup>198</sup> These remarks lead to a longer defense of seeing the ethnographic descriptions of the philosophical elite from different nations as models inviting one to imitation. In sum, "A man who engages in philosophy should prescribe for himself, as far as possible, the holy laws which have been determined by gods and by peoples who follow the gods."<sup>199</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

We have discovered in the corpus of Porphyry a philosopher deeply rationalist (a vertical translator) and yet thoroughly embedded within a pervasive

<sup>195</sup> Compare with Brown 1983. <sup>196</sup> *Abst.* 4.13.7; translation from Clark, 110.

<sup>197</sup> An allusion to Homer, *Il.* 1.272.

<sup>198</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.4; translation modified from Clark, 114.

<sup>199</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.9; translation from Clark, 115.



framework of racial thinking (a horizontal translator). Whether in a passing ethnic exemplum or a lengthy and carefully crafted ethnographic doxography, his philosophical thought and form of argumentation are formed in varying ways and differing degrees by a stable, yet manipulable, translation of philosophical truth into an ethnographic vision. Ethnic identities were not only something one had or fostered for oneself and others, which were then subject to contestation and negotiation in the social or political moves one made while seeking success, status, or survival in the world.<sup>200</sup> The identifications of one's *ethnos* or *genos* could be applied fruitfully in developing a philosophical or theological argument, or in framing the moral life consistent with truth, however defined.

Porphyry was not alone in formulating arguments that depended, sometimes to a rather high degree, on the construction and representation of ethnic or racial identities. But he is certainly one of the more striking, especially since he wrote many of his works within the framework of Neoplatonic rationalism presented by his teacher Plotinus. Even though he shared the aspirations of seeking the escape of the soul from the body, Porphyry extensively put ethnicity to work within the different contexts and concerns of many of his treatises and commentaries. He found in it a productive (and potentially inescapable) source for confirming claims, driving arguments, presenting models of philosophic living, and for conceptualizing his world.

<sup>200</sup> See e.g., Geary, 1983; Goudriaan 1992; Johnson 2006a: 28–29.

*Ethnic particularism and the limits of Hellenism*

Platonic philosophy in the imperial and late antique periods had not found itself willing or able to cut itself off from its ethnic moorings. Philosophic and theological truth claims were often inextricably entangled within larger visions of national identities and the mental maps of the world inhabited by the philosopher or holy man. Ethnic identities were not absent (even if less frequent) in the other-worldly systematic explorations of Plotinus, let alone in his polymath student. For Porphyry, ethnic identity and racial conceptualizations were formative of (while being informed by) philosophical rumination and argument. Yet, our analysis must not be satisfied with recognition of the general importance and varied expressions of ethnicity in his arguments. For, among Hellenophone authors of the Hellenistic and imperial periods, the discursive construction of ethnic, racial, or cultural identities had been employed for distinctive ends within, or alongside of, the problematic processes that have been made to fit (sometimes too neatly) under the rubric of “Hellenism.”<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the difficulties and disagreements in settling a definition of Hellenism, or of Hellenization, the delineation of such a concept cannot (and should not) be easily dismissed. The terms *Hellēnizein* and *Hellēnismos* were first used in ancient texts: the former occurs first in the classical period; the latter is found later in Hellenistic era texts.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the terms with their attendant conceptual clusters (however we might define them) cannot be ignored. Even as we begin to recognize more fully the dominant mechanisms driving the creation and development of our modern concepts of Hellenism (as formulated, for instance, by Droysen or Harnack) and their relationship to certain political, religious, and intellectual forces of the modern era,<sup>3</sup> recent scholarship has begun to appreciate the richness and diversity of ancient articulations of Hellenism and Hellenization.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Johnson 2012.      <sup>2</sup> Casevitz 1991; Vassilaki 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Esp. Bichler 1983; Momigliano 1955; Helleman 1994.

<sup>4</sup> e.g., Kaldellis 2007; Bouffartigue 1991; Johnson 2012.

Hellenism was not an active monolithic cultural force dominating or destroying weaker, passive cultures as it spread under Alexander the Great and rooted itself in foreign soil under his successors. An active–passive, Greek–barbarian, high–low cultural model is misleading and insufficient for appreciating the highly local variability and the dynamic interchange of social and cultural negotiation.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, a feature of ancient cultural engagements that is receiving greater interest in recent analyses is the issue of how the participants in such engagements sought to identify themselves. The commissioning of an inscription in the Greek language in the region of Syria, or the placement of a mosaic of Dionysus or another Greek god in one’s courtyard in Palestine, may have had little to do with how one chose to identify oneself as a member of an *ethnos*. Identities in late antiquity were discursively articulated and it is to those articulations, rather than to the adoption or use of elements that we suppose count as part of Hellenism (language, art, religious cult, and so on) that we must turn in order to determine precisely how individuals in late antiquity conceived of themselves and their activities.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the *Hellenicity* of the speaker of an oration or the author of a book, poem, or inscription is at issue.

As we have already begun to see in the previous chapter, the question of what it meant to be a Greek (or an Egyptian, or an Indian) was a matter of some concern to Porphyry. But, the question of his adoption of a Greek identity for himself remains to be evaluated. The tenability of Bidez’s chronological and cultural model, which saw Porphyry progressively adopting more of a Greek identity as he became more thoroughly Hellenized – a process that was easily mapped onto his steady migration from the East to the West, from “Oriental superstition” to Greek rationalism – must be carefully reconsidered. Was Porphyry the “apologist of Hellenism,” as Bidez declared?

In order to answer the question of Porphyry’s Hellenicity, that is, the degree to which he would have been happy with the designation as the defender of Hellenism or of being a “Hellene” at all, we must begin with how claims to Greek identity could be expressed within Hellenocentric interpretive grids for envisioning the other “barbarian” nations within the literary works of earlier imperial era Greek authors. First, therefore, Plutarch

<sup>5</sup> Frankfurter 2000; Johnson 2012. I have recently become impressed at the ways in which Michel De Certeau’s analysis of “poaching” (the use of ruses and so on) represents an ad hoc, playful (though I would claim potentially quite serious) tactic of working with or “making do,” or manipulating the processes of dominant regimes or discourses (1984: 165–176).

<sup>6</sup> Kaldellis, 2007; Johnson 2006a and 2012.

of Chaeroneia, the Delphic priest and Middle Platonist philosopher (of the first and second centuries AD), will provide a useful model here of what we might designate the *interpretatio Graeca* (namely, a Greek-centered vision of the world). Second, we shall identify key instances of Hellenized Phoenician authors writing against the Hellenocentric grain in their literary portrayals of other nations (namely, Philo of Byblos and Maximus of Tyre). The battle over “cultural centrism” was fought, at least in part, on the fields of competing ethnographic visions and racial representations. How one narrated the world of nations was neither simple nor uncontested in the ongoing struggles for identity and self-positioning. Importantly, Maximus might otherwise be identified as maintaining a Hellenocentric version of the *interpretatio Graeca*. A more careful reading, however, points the way to recognizing a fissure in the universalizing Greek interpretive framework: while some Greek authors perpetuated a Hellenocentric vision (similar to Plutarch), others pushed towards greater degrees of decentering Greek cultural primacy. Third, this chapter will seek to identify salient features of Porphyry’s ethnic argumentation that indicate his place within the competing Hellenocentric and anti-Hellenocentric traditions. I name his approach “ethnic particularism” and see it as the basic assumption undergirding his horizontal translation.<sup>7</sup>

#### BARBARIAN WISDOM AND THE *INTERPRETATIO GRAECA*

Appeal to the teachings or practices of barbarian peoples (as we saw Porphyry doing in the previous chapter) need not be deemed as necessarily softening an author’s Hellenocentric assumptions. By the time of the orators and authors of the so-called Second Sophistic in the first and second centuries, Greeks had long developed ways of incorporating foreign knowledge and traditions within the interpretive frameworks of what many historians dub an *interpretatio Graeca*.<sup>8</sup> Though the phrase had originally conveyed the sense of verbally translating a word from a foreign language into Greek, there has been (and should be) a healthy skepticism about whether words could be “merely translated” at all apart from a range of conceptual grids, social and political relations, and imperial contexts, which were formative for such translations.<sup>9</sup> Yet, even if we grant the dynamic

<sup>7</sup> The significance of Porphyry’s ethnic particularism was already noticed in the final discussion of [Chapter 5](#).

<sup>8</sup> Bickerman 1952; Momigliano 1975; Richter 2001a and 2001b; Romm 1992; König 2009: 77–85.

<sup>9</sup> For the term, see Pliny, *NH* 16.249. For the difficulties of clarifying what processes exactly are meant by an *interpretatio Graeca*, see Dillery 1998; Fowden 1986, 45; see also, *mutatis mutandis*, the critical remarks about *interpretatio Romana* by Ando 2005. See also, Sturge 2007.

play of multiple forces behind every act of translation, the complexity of delineating the precise nature of that dynamic play remains problematic. To note a well-known example, for instance, when Herodotus or Diodorus Siculus claimed that Osiris was Dionysus, their equation of the names and hence the identities of the god in question might potentially entail the further identification of the Egyptian and Greek characterizations, myths, mysteries, and iconic expressions.<sup>10</sup> Where the identifications might stop or what nuances might be lost or gained in these acts of cultural and religious (as well as onomastic) translation can thus become difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain. Complicated religious and cultural engagements were certainly at play in every act of translation, and every translation project.

The collection, cataloging, classification, and arrangement of native ethnographic material often corresponded quite closely to imperial and military control of native populations.<sup>11</sup> Local knowledge, traditions, and histories was selectively placed within a Greek frame of reference and master narrative, especially through the invented connections forged by the travels of Dionysus, Heracles, or Odysseus.<sup>12</sup> Geographical surveys and world histories provided fitting means of embracing foreign knowledge, while rendering it innocuous for a purported Greek cultural and historical superiority. As Josephus succinctly put it:

Of the peoples [after the tower of Babel], some still preserve the names which were given to them by their founders, some have changed them, while others have adopted a form of name designed to be more intelligible to those who are settled among them. It is the Greeks who are responsible for this. For when they subsequently rose to power they appropriated to themselves even the glory of the past, adorning the peoples with names which were intelligible to themselves and imposing on them a form of constitution as if they were descended from themselves (*AJ* 1.121).<sup>13</sup>

Following the Greek military conquests, then, were subsequent conquests of history, as well as philosophy, science, theology, and so on. The act of translation, of *interpretatio Graeca*, went beyond the merely verbal and marked a process of a Greek cultural and intellectual conquest of native knowledges.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Herod. 2.42, 144; Diod. Sic. *Bibl.* 1.11.3; 1.13.5; 4.1.7; cf. Plut. *de Iside* 362B; Porph. *Simulac.* frag. 360.29–32 Smith.

<sup>11</sup> Sturge 2007; Robinson 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Bickerman 1952; Bowersock 1990: 41–53.

<sup>13</sup> Cited at Millar 1983: 55.

<sup>14</sup> Even the natives could adopt these Greek ways of telling their own stories; see, e.g., Menecrates of Tyre, *FGrH* 701.

Among Greek philosophers, too, barbarian wisdom was filtered through the interpretive grid of the *interpretatio Graeca*: incompatible elements were rejected, while others became resituated within a conceptual context that privileged a presumed Greek superiority over other forms of knowledge. What might at first look like the all-inclusive embrace of universal truth was only a mask for a more threatening agenda of Hellenocentric intellectual imperialism.<sup>15</sup> What elements were deemed incompatible to the pursuit of truth varied depending on the particular Greek philosopher and his philosophical allegiances and vision of truth. Furthermore, the narrative strategies and cultural polemics could take quite different manifestations depending on the rhetorical contexts of different treatises.

Plutarch of Chaeronea (c.46–120) represents a helpful model of the *interpretatio Graeca* for better appreciating the other possibilities of interpreting ethnic diversity by philosophers, including Porphyry's own cultural engagements. In numerous instances throughout his oeuvre, Plutarch provides evidence of a sustained interest in ethnographic oddities and particularities. Importantly, some of these instances are employed to bolster a claim about the universality of truth. In the *Obsolescence of Oracles*, for instance, one of the interlocutors declares that the doctrine of a race of daemons between gods and humans has solved many difficulties (*aporias*), “whether this is the teaching of Zoroastrian Magi, or Thracian teaching from Orpheus, or it is Egyptian or Phrygian.”<sup>16</sup> The list of potential candidates for contributions to daemonology seems at first glance to evince a broad ecumenism in its range. However, the statement is somewhat off-hand and the range of possibilities is not pursued further. Instead, Hesiod is invoked as offering a more advanced level of reflection on intermediate races than any of the nations mentioned (Hesiod taught the existence and characteristics of four races: gods, daemons, heroes, men).<sup>17</sup> The poet remains a primary testimony in the remainder of the treatise, along with a great number of other sources – all of them Greek.

A similar process may be found in his *On Isis and Osiris*, where, according to an illuminating analysis by Daniel Richter, Plutarch drew upon the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in providing what he deemed an appropriate frame for understanding, or rather retelling, the myth of Isis within Greek narrative patterns.<sup>18</sup> Plutarch's “Hellenization of the Egyptian myth” goes beyond providing a Greek conceptual and narrative framework for the foreign myth and becomes a clear manifestation of Hellenocentrism in

<sup>15</sup> Schott 2008a: 15–28. <sup>16</sup> *Defect. Orac.* 415A.

<sup>17</sup> *Defect. Orac.* 415B; see Chapter 2 on Porphyry's engagement with Hesiod's daemonology.

<sup>18</sup> Richter 2001b: 201–202.

his baldly stating that Isis was a Greek name (deriving from *eidon*),<sup>19</sup> that the myths and doctrines about her were Greek in origin,<sup>20</sup> and that the Egyptians, as barbarians, had only maintained the lowest interpretive level in their comprehension of Isis.<sup>21</sup> The highest interpretive levels, namely the allegorical, only confirmed the metaphysical teachings of Plato's *Timaeus* (a text that had, incidentally, made similar claims to Greek superiority over Egyptian teachings).<sup>22</sup> After offering his own narrative synopsis of the myth, the Greek philosopher explicitly acknowledges that he has excised those elements of the myth that were "disreputable,"<sup>23</sup> or "contrary to custom (*paranomous*) and barbaric,"<sup>24</sup> in order to present the story in a form more amenable to Greek philosophical allegory. This admission is significant, since the presence of inappropriate, odd, or contradictory features in a myth could alternatively be recognized as hints in the text that would trigger the allegorical impulse in the careful reader. Features that, on the surface, seemed inappropriate or even embarrassing were precisely those that marked the traces of concealed truths hidden behind the bare letter of the text.<sup>25</sup> Plutarch, however, had chosen another path to his allegorical project: instead of allowing incongruous barbarisms to remain and seeking higher metaphysical truths behind the uncouth oddities of the myth, he has commenced with a (Hellenizing) retelling of the myth, from which allegorical understandings may be elicited with a greater sense of naturalness.

For Plutarch, then, the Egyptians were dependent upon the Greeks for myth, religious truth, and metaphysical knowledge; yet they had only imperfectly understood the philosophical wealth of Greek wisdom and their understanding was retarded by their barbarism and inept interpretive abilities. Any who might claim otherwise would become the target of his cultural polemic. Hence, Herodotus, "like a painter using bright colors and shadow to hide the truth,"<sup>26</sup> had given preference to Egyptians, Phoenicians, and other barbarians over Greeks in the areas of religious and cultural advancement. When Phoenicians or Egyptians were in fact the perpetrators of history's violence and injustice, the "barbarian-loving"<sup>27</sup> historian had exculpated them and instead turned the blame against the Greeks.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *De Iside* 2.351F–352A; Richter 2001b: 195–199.      <sup>20</sup> *De Iside* 61.375E–376A.

<sup>21</sup> *De Iside* 20.358E–360D; for discussion of Plutarch's levels of interpretation of myth, see Hardie 1992.

<sup>22</sup> *Tim.* 21e4–7 (which seems, to my mind, to be the archetype for Plutarch's claim that "Isis is a Greek name"); for discussion of Egypt in the *Timaeus*, see Vasunia 2001: 216–247. For the *Timaeus*' usefulness in later apologetics, see Staab 2006: 63–67.

<sup>23</sup> *De Iside* 20.358E.      <sup>24</sup> *De Iside* 20.358E.      <sup>25</sup> Origen, *Princ.* 4.15–16; see Pépin 1977: 178–188.

<sup>26</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 28.863E.      <sup>27</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 12.857A.

<sup>28</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 11.856E; 12.857AB.

Furthermore, whereas the Greeks were indebted to barbarians for wisdom, they had, in exchange, only transferred their own immoral customs to those nations.<sup>29</sup> Plutarch had little patience for such anti-Greek moves, and retorted that insofar as there might be any influence of Egyptian upon Greek it would only result in the overturning of the holiness of Greek rites by the nonsense and fables of the Egyptians.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to general claims about the national characters of Greeks and barbarian nations, as well as the broad cultural transfers and interactions between Greeks and others, Plutarch attempted to save the ethnic identities of particular historical individuals. Those whom Herodotus had claimed were originally of barbarian extraction were taken back for the Greek side. Aristogeiton, one of the popularly alleged founders of democracy and slayer of the tyrant Hipparchus at Athens, was a Greek for Plutarch, not a Phoenician as alleged by the lying historian.<sup>31</sup> The paragons of ancient wisdom, the Seven Sages, were also firmly Greek, contrary to Herodotus who misidentified them and belittled their accomplishments in his history. Thales was not a “Phoenician by birth, a barbarian in origin,” as reported by Herodotus.<sup>32</sup>

The concern to preserve the Hellenicity of the Seven Sages was not Plutarch’s alone. It would be shared by the great biographer of philosophers’ lives, Diogenes Laertius, in the third century. Indeed, the very opening words of his *Lives of Philosophers* suggest a lively debate over the origins of philosophy itself: “There are some who say that the study of philosophy had its beginning among the barbarians. They urge that the Persians have had their Magi, the Babylonians or Assyrians their Chaldeans, and the Indians their Gymnosophists; and among the Celts and Gauls there are the people called Druids or Holy Ones.”<sup>33</sup> According to Diogenes, such claims go back at least to Aristotle.<sup>34</sup> His own response is firm: “These authors forget that the achievements which they attribute to the barbarians belong to the Greeks, with whom not merely philosophy but the human race itself began.”<sup>35</sup> With respect to the Seven Sages, then, the canonical list embraces only those who are Greek; other potential candidates, such as Anacharsis, are only supplements to the legitimate Seven.<sup>36</sup> While some disagreement might be registered about their racial origins, the biographer supports

<sup>29</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 13.857C (Greeks taught Persians pederasty); 13.857C–E (Greeks learned religion from Egyptians).

<sup>30</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 13.857E. <sup>31</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 23.860EF. <sup>32</sup> *De Malign. Herod.* 15.857F.

<sup>33</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.1. <sup>34</sup> Boys-Stones 2001: 27 n. 33. <sup>35</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.3.

<sup>36</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.13; the others are “added to the number” (*prosarithmousin*) of the Seven Sages. For conflict over the list, see 1.41–42; with Richter 2001a: 99–129.



their Greek pedigree with gestures to the majority opinion. For instance, Thales had been reported by some as a Phoenician, albeit within the line of Cadmus and hence among those Phoenicians who had immigrated and become well-ensconced within the Greek world; but “most reports, however, say that he was a genuine (*ithagenēs*) citizen of Miletus and of illustrious birth (*genous*).”<sup>37</sup> Diogenes’ portrait of Solon included the well-known quip that the sage was fortunate in “being a Greek and not a barbarian.”<sup>38</sup> And Cleobulus, though he may have “had a share of the philosophy in Egypt,” could nonetheless happily be said to “trace his race (*genos*) back to Heracles.”<sup>39</sup>

Even Anacharsis the Scythian, who otherwise could not strictly be ranked as one of the Seven in Diogenes’ view, was apparently half-Greek<sup>40</sup> and exhibited his great learning not only by representing external criticism of the less salutary elements of Greek culture (as centered in the gymnasium and agora), but also by attempting “to Hellenize” (*Hellēnizein*)<sup>41</sup> his fellow Scythians – an activity that led to his death. Indeed, he might be seen as something of a martyr for Hellenism, showing that Hellenicity (even if not of the blue-blooded racial kind) was worth dying for. In a quick-witted response to Solon while in Athens, he had even claimed that he “was now in his own fatherland.”<sup>42</sup> Whether Diogenes’ Anacharsis would have gone as far as Favorinus, who in the rather different context of second-century Roman Corinth wanted “not only to seem, but to be, a Greek,” remains uncertain.<sup>43</sup> But, Diogenes’ biographical sketch of the Scythian sage would certainly make such a sentiment seem fitting.

Returning to Plutarch, his Hellenocentrism is again manifested in the illuminating treatise *On Superstition*, where even atheism comes out better in the philosopher’s view than superstition. As has often been remarked in modern studies, Plutarch’s representation of superstition, or excessive fear of the divine (*deisidaimonia*), is characterized in distinctively ethno-cultural terms. Piety is depicted as Greek – though never explicitly so – and superstition is “barbaric and contrary to custom (*paranomoi*),” a phrase we have already seen above in his *On Isis and Osiris*.<sup>44</sup> While the equation of piety and Hellenicity is never baldly stated as such, the presence of this assumption is ubiquitous throughout the short treatise. A tacit or banal Hellenocentrism, especially in an author whom we have seen elsewhere to adopt an ecumenical or cosmopolitan approach may, in fact, be the

<sup>37</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.22.      <sup>38</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.33.      <sup>39</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.89.      <sup>40</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.101.

<sup>41</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.102; for Anacharsis’ criticisms, see also Plut. *Septem* 5.150E; Lucian *Anacharsis*.

<sup>42</sup> D. L. *V.phil.* 1.102.

<sup>43</sup> Favorinus, *Corinthian Oration* (= Ps.-Dio, *Or.* 37), 25.

<sup>44</sup> *De superstitione* 12.171B; *De Iside* 20.358F.

most powerful form of a culturally centrist interpretive framework and the best exhibition of its position of strength.<sup>45</sup> It is in the presumption that author and audience would naturally – as right-thinking and sensible men of culture – find appalling “the strange names and barbarous phrases” adopted by the superstitious, who “distorted and sullied their tongues” in such “disgraceful and transgressive (*paranomein*)” speech acts, that the sheer force of the Hellenocentric vision is most firmly felt. Again, it is in the taken-for-granted ease of condemnation of the Jewish superstition regarding the Sabbath,<sup>46</sup> Syrian dietary restrictions,<sup>47</sup> or the human sacrifices (enumerated in a brief ethnographic doxography) of Gauls, Scythians, and Carthaginians,<sup>48</sup> that Plutarch’s Greek conceptual apparatus is most pervasive and powerful.

Elsewhere, Plutarch would vividly depict the massive moral and cultural impact that Hellenism made upon the barbarian landscape of the East in the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquests, which gave the conquered a true education (*paideia*). “He educated the Hyrcanians to respect the marriage bond, and taught the Arachosians to till the soil, and persuaded the Sogdians to support their parents, not to kill them, and the Persians to revere their mothers and not to take them in wedlock. O wondrous power of Philosophic Instruction, that brought the Indians to worship the Greek gods, and the Scythians to bury their dead not to devour them.”<sup>49</sup> Here, the presumed blessings of Greek military domination and cultural hegemony went hand in hand. Hellenism was an active agent of the spread of civilization, rationality and piety that ineluctably displaced the weaker forms of irrationality and impiety of barbarian nations.

Plutarch’s ethnic vision was hardly innovative, but was, rather, the bearer of a deep tradition of Hellenocentrism stretching back to Isocrates in the classical period and forward to Aelius Aristides, Philostratus and others in the following generations. This Greek cultural centrism would be evinced within the contemporary polemic against Christians as well. Celsus, most notably, had asserted Greek superiority even while acknowledging some contributions to civilization on the part of other nations. Following the pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, Celsus argued that barbarian peoples were “capable of discovering doctrines . . . but the Greeks were better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered, and to establish the doctrines and put them into practice virtuously.”<sup>50</sup> Much of what

<sup>45</sup> Billig 1995. <sup>46</sup> *De superstitione* 8.169C. <sup>47</sup> *De superstitione* 10.170D.

<sup>48</sup> *De superstitione* 13.171B–C. <sup>49</sup> *Fort. Alex.* 328c (trans. Babbitt).

<sup>50</sup> Celsus ap. Or. c. *Cels.* 1.2; translation modified from Chadwick, 7, who notes pseudo-Plato, *Epinomis* 987E: “We may take it that whatever the Greeks take from the barbarians, they turn it to something better.”

remains of Celsus' argument (extant solely through Origen's work against him) stand as striking instances of his own form of ethnic argumentation.<sup>51</sup> It was through his own *interpretatio Graeca* that Christians were adjudged to be bad Jews, and Jews, in turn, were nothing more than Egyptians who had been turned away from their original homeland. Christian conversion was, for Celsus, only a blatant rejection of one's ancestral traditions, while the adoption of barbarous phrases in religious contexts was merely a sign of superstitious irrationality (notions shared by Plutarch).

Christian apologists would respond with their own carefully crafted defenses of the faith within the same racial and ethnic conceptual framework; and often their works would make the same universalizing claims that philosophers like Plutarch had made, even if they might express those claims in rhetorically different ways. Their apologetic method exhibits some of the most creative and wide-ranging examples of ancient ethnic argumentation, beginning with Aristides, the earliest extant apologist, and continuing in the apologetic tradition with Origen, the great opponent of Celsus, Eusebius of Caesarea, arguably the culmination of the apologetic tradition, and Theodoret, his fifth-century successor and in some sense his perfecter (at least in terms of literary style).<sup>52</sup> Each of these apologists would attempt in their own way to turn the *interpretatio Graeca* on its head and dismantle the Hellenocentric projects of Plutarch and his compatriots – and this, even though they all wrote in Greek, were trained variously in the Greek literary and intellectual heritage, and even conceived of theological truth using the language (if not always the conceptual nuances or bases for that language) of Greek philosophy. It is to such alternative visions of the racial landscape of antiquity that we now turn.

#### AGAINST THE GREEKS: PHOENICIANS AND THE *INTERPRETATIO GRAECA*

Their Christianity and its rootedness in the Jewish traditions and Scriptures certainly were determinative for the particular forms in which the early apologists developed their ethnic argumentation. However, even while the contours of their apologetic treatises are integrally based upon distinctively Christian interpretive visions of the world, themselves, and the divine, their opposition to the *interpretatio Graeca* and its hegemonic universalism was hardly a distinctively Christian reaction. Indeed, examination of authors of

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Andresen 1955; Boys-Stones 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson 2006a and 2012. Overly polemical towards Theodoret is Siniosoglou 2008; with reviews at *BMCR* 2009.05.05 and *Rhizai* 6 (2009): 101–105. For Eusebius' response to Celsus, see Ehrhardt 1979; Morlet 2010a: 45–47, 292, 301; *idem* 2010c.

Eastern, non-Greek origins produces a picture that subsumes the Christian instances of ethnic argumentation within a broader context of similar cultural processes and engagements. My claim here will be that not every author of the imperial and late antique eras, who was Hellenophone and Hellenized (defined, at least, in terms of language and *paideia*), necessarily identified themselves as a Greek. The adoption of the Greek language and the training in Greek literature, even of the most rigorous quality, did not entail a corresponding adoption of self-ascribed Hellenicity.

In order best to set the stage for our analysis of Porphyry's place within the context of the *interpretatio Graeca* and its detractors, it may be helpful to focus our attention on two earlier Hellenized Phoenicians who wrote and lived within the Roman imperial context. For both of them – the historian Philo of Byblos and the philosophical orator Maximus of Tyre – bear all the markings of being fully Hellenized, if by Hellenization we mean that they spoke and wrote in Greek, were educated in Greek history, literature, and philosophy, and were exponents of a pagan, rather than a Jewish or Christian, religious mindset. If these authors' Hellenism (or their embeddedness within processes of intellectual Hellenization) ran deep, did it provoke a rejection of any Phoenician identity they might have otherwise claimed for themselves? Or on the contrary, could a self-ascribed Phoenician identity become a source for reconfiguring the Greek narratives and systems of knowledge in which they were educated?

### *Philo of Byblos*

Philo of Byblos, who lived in the first half of the second century (at least long enough to be able to compose a biography of the emperor Hadrian), unfortunately survives solely in the fragments preserved by Porphyry himself and Eusebius of Caesarea.<sup>53</sup> While we know the names of other works, only fragments of his *Phoenician History* are extant. For our present concerns, the following elements are noteworthy. First, in spite of the fact that Philo's history of Phoenicia sounds remarkably similar to Hesiod's narrative of the genealogy of the Olympian gods in the *Theogony* (e.g., Ouranos' castration at the hands of his son Kronos), Philo assures his reader that the stories were authentically Phoenician.<sup>54</sup> They were, furthermore, the accounts of historical humans, the ancestors of the Phoenician people, not the myths of Greek gods.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Gudeman 1913; Baumgarten 1983.

<sup>54</sup> Albright, 1972.

<sup>55</sup> Pépin 1977: 217–220.

In his adoption of euhemerism, the Phoenician historian was precisely at odds with the Hellenizing allegorical approach of Plutarch.<sup>56</sup> Whereas Plutarch had quickly dismissed the literal historical understanding of the myths as barbarous misrepresentations, Philo took them up as true histories of his own non-Greek people. The only misunderstanding, by Philo's reckoning, was that perpetuated by the Greeks who had stolen the foreign histories and transformed them into myths so as to adapt them to a Greek context. The nationalist historian spares no venom in his accusation: it was the Greeks who were thieves of Phoenician traditions, and they distorted and misunderstood them in the process.

The Greeks, surpassing all in ingenuity, appropriated most of the earliest stories, and then variously decked them out with ornaments of tragic phrase, and adorned them in every way, with the purpose of charming by the pleasant fables. Hence Hesiod and the celebrated Cyclic poets framed Theogonies of their own, Gigantomachies and Titanomachies, and castrations; and with these fables, as they traveled about, they conquered and drove out the truth.<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, Philo is translating (or, claiming to translate) from ancient Phoenician sources into Greek<sup>58</sup> and provides numerous explicit instances of *interpretatio Graeca* in the linguistic sense.<sup>59</sup> The Phoenician "nationalist" may, furthermore, be more a product of Hellenism than he would allow. Recent studies have placed him firmly within the signs and tendencies of Greek conceptual categories: euhemerism, nationalism, anti-Hellenism, and the invocation of ancient sources are all deemed to be the products of Hellenism and the marks of a Hellenistic context.<sup>60</sup> The *Phoenician History* has been dubbed "a Hellenistic imposture."<sup>61</sup> Such strong assessments may not be wholly accurate though, since it could be argued that only from a Hellenocentric vantage can the notions of euhemerism, nationalism, and so on, be rendered the products of the Hellenistic period. These patterns of thought can, after all, be found in earlier periods and among peoples not encompassed by the Greek cultural gambit.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson 2006a: 68–71. <sup>57</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.10.40; trans. Gifford.

<sup>58</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.9.21; his claim to have access to ancient traditions has, at least partly, been vindicated by the discovery of the cuneiform tablets at Ugarit (Ras Shamra); see Albright, 1972.

<sup>59</sup> e.g., "Beelsamen, which is in the Phoenician language 'lord of heaven,' and in Greek 'Zeus'" (ap. *PE* 1.10.7); Chrysor was Hephaestus, "he was also called Zeus Meilichios" (ap. *PE* 1.10.12); Taautus, "the Egyptians called him Thouth, the Alexandrians Thoth, and the Greeks Hermes" (ap. *PE* 1.10.14); "Melkathros who is also called Heracles" (ap. *PE* 1.10.27); "Kronos, whom the Phoenicians call El" (ap. *PE* 1.10.44; cf. 1.10.16, 20, where the named is given as Elos).

<sup>60</sup> Edwards 1991; Oden 1978. <sup>61</sup> Edwards 1991: 219.

More importantly for our present concerns, an emphasis on delineating the ways in which Philo is a product of larger Hellenizing forces obscures his own stated claims about what he thinks he is doing in his history. His acts of translation, even if they inadvertently move beyond the mere verbal transference of particular names into the much broader transference of patterns of thinking, boldly and explicitly claim only to expose an early transfer of cultural goods, that is, the Greek theft of Phoenician history. Even as he attempts to translate the ancient Phoenician sources into the Greek language, his manifest aim was the apprehending and refuting of earlier mistranslations and misappropriations on the part of migrant Greek poets. In other words, his *interpretatio Graeca*, or translation of Phoenician sources into Greek, accomplished the unmasking of the *interpretatio Graeca* in its wider sense as the transfer of Phoenician stories into a Greek cultural idiom – that is, the appropriation of the stories as their own cultural property and the transference of what was originally *historical* in content and expression into a poetic, *mythic* (or mythologizing) form.<sup>62</sup>

Another element of the *Phoenician History* worth noting is that Philo represents the Greeks as so divided amongst themselves as to be hopelessly locked in perpetual confusion regarding the stories and their theological and religious significance. The claim of Greek discord is only made in passing, so it is difficult to know what kind of divisiveness exactly Philo is attributing to them. He had written his history, Philo avers, “after a thorough investigation of much matter – but not that which is found among the Greeks, for that is contradictory and compiled by some in a contentious spirit rather than with a view of truth.”<sup>63</sup> This assertion is significant given the pervasive claims in this period that truth was unitary and ancient, whereas error was fractured into a plurality of later misinterpretations of the original truth.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout the fragments of Philo, the argument of Greek dependency on barbarian knowledge and subsequent discord because of their ineptitude in interpreting that knowledge exhibited a forceful attempt at decentering Greek claims to cultural, historical, religious, technological, and scientific superiority. Some have named this Phoenician patriotism, and deservedly so, since the fragments emphatically point to the antiquity and cultural priority of the Phoenicians.<sup>65</sup> Yet, my use of “decentering” to describe Philo’s cultural engagements is more than a mere shift from one cultural center (Greece) to another (Phoenicia). For he does allow Egypt a partnership in

<sup>62</sup> Pépin 1977: 217–220; Johnson 2006a: 64–72. <sup>63</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.10.37; trans. Gifford.

<sup>64</sup> Pilhofer 1990; Boys-Stones 2001. <sup>65</sup> Oden 1978.

the privileged history that he writes. It is, he states, “the most ancient of the barbarians, especially the Phoenicians and Egyptians,” who provided the religious basis for later Greek trajectories.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, in a treatment of animals sacred to the Phoenicians, Philo makes repeated parallels to Egyptian words and concepts.<sup>67</sup> It is here that he also gives Persian wisdom (in particular, that of Zoroaster) a privileged place.<sup>68</sup> Ancient wisdom, for Philo, was thus exhibited at a number of cultural centers east of Greece. Hellenocentric claims were severely rebuked, while Phoenician claims were privileged, though not to the exclusion of others.

Throughout Philo’s fragments we see a complicated maneuvering between purportedly ancient barbarian sources of knowledge and what looks to the modern classicist like Greek frames of reference and patterns of thought. I remain uncertain of the benefit in labeling Philo’s interpretive framework as unproblematically “Hellenized” since it is unclear where the Greek elements acquired during his education would have stopped and the Phoenician elements would begin. A more thorough analysis than the cursory sketch offered here would reveal a complicated and inextricably entangled cultural engagement between various culturally and ethnically specific names, principles, details, patterns, and interpretive strategies, which drew from different literary and religious traditions and were reworked for particular rhetorical purposes in the *Phoenician History*.<sup>69</sup> Even if we could simply say that Philo thought in Greek categories and followed Greek tendencies of shaping his narrative, his overt polemical program remains clear. He would stoutly deny our modern characterizations of his thought as “Hellenized” since, according to his *interpretatio*, the Greeks had already earlier been Orientalized (though he no doubt would have preferred terms like “Phoenicianized” or “Egyptianized”),<sup>70</sup> albeit deemed to be an imperfectly performed process because of the deception of the Greek poets and the lack of understanding of their audiences.

### *Maximus of Tyre*

The philosophical orator Maximus of Tyre came from Phoenicia to Rome in the generation following Philo (our only firm piece of information is that

<sup>66</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.9.29.      <sup>67</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.10.46–51.      <sup>68</sup> Philo ap. Eus. *PE* 1.10.52.

<sup>69</sup> Baumgarten 1983, for the most extensive analysis. For a comparable treatment of the complexities of cultural analysis in another ancient author, see Lightfoot 2003; Elsner 2001.

<sup>70</sup> *Phoinikizein* occurs at least in the next generation after Philo; see Lucian *Pseudolog.* 28. *Aiguptiazein* seems more common; see Plutarch *Quaest. conviv.* 670E; Lucian *Symp.* 18; *Philopseud.* 31; Origen *c. Cels.* 7.60.

he spent time in Rome under Commodus, so AD 180–192).<sup>71</sup> His corpus of philosophical orations reveals a rather different possibility for Phoenician engagement with the *interpretatio Graeca* than what we have seen in the case of Philo. In the forty-one extant philosophical discourses, which sought to popularize various tenets of Platonism, we find a complete lack of evidence that the author was Phoenician at all. Our sources univocally give him the epithet “Tyrian,” but whether this was a reference to racial origins is not quite certain, given the city’s diverse demography and cultural complexity.<sup>72</sup> If this Maximus is the dedicatee of Artemidorus’ *Oneirocritica* (*On the Interpretation of Dreams*), then we possess further confirmation of his Phoenician identity, since at one point the author refers to Cassius Maximus and himself as continuing the traditional bond of friendship between Phoenicians and Lydians.<sup>73</sup> We should probably maintain some caution here; but, at the very least, we can affirm that all the external evidence points to his being a Tyrian from Phoenicia. The complete absence of any clear internal evidence for a Phoenician identity is, therefore, remarkable.

In fact, the depictions of Phoenicians within the orations are far from flattering. Phoenicians and Egyptians are both presented as stereotypical hedonists in two different orations, without any outcry from the philosopher.<sup>74</sup> Other barbarians receive similarly infelicitous characterizations. Vulgar pleasure-seeking might be customary for “a barbarian just come from Babylon,” he declared, but not Odysseus.<sup>75</sup> In a sweeping generalization, he determined that “True love does not seem to dwell among barbarians,” since among them, “most are slaves, and the rule is despotic;” but love opposes compulsion and fear.<sup>76</sup> So far, the picture of Maximus’ ethnic vision would appear to show no resonance with any barbarian identity, Phoenician or otherwise.

His portrayal of non-Greek nations often repeats traditional stereotypes of barbarians. Eastern peoples as the gluttons of pleasure and wantonness was a rather long-lived characterization, having been formulated and transmitted in the archaic and classical periods.<sup>77</sup> Other Hellenized authors of the imperial era exhibited a range of strategies for dealing with such stereotypes about their own peoples, from silence about the stereotypes, combined with criticism of the Greeks (as we saw in the case of Philo), to

<sup>71</sup> Suda s.v.; see discussion at Trapp 1994: LV–LVIII. <sup>72</sup> Millar 1997: 244–247; Chéhab 1962.

<sup>73</sup> Artem. *Oneirocr.* 2.70; cf. 2. praef; 3.66. Trapp 1994: LVIII suggests the possibility of identification, but remains uncommitted.

<sup>74</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 14.2; 39.5; for the stereotypes of Phoenicians in antiquity, see Isaac 2004: 324–335.

<sup>75</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 22.2. <sup>76</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 20.2.

<sup>77</sup> See Isaac 2004: 324–491; Byron 2002; with review at *Catholic Historical Review* 91 (2005): 510–511.



satirical playfulness and self-mockery (as in the cases of Favorinus, Lucian, or later Julian). Neither reaction is clearly evident in the corpus of Maximus, for whom the uses of ethnic exempla seem to reside somewhere in between the two opposing poles.

In addition to the unfavorable depictions of barbarian nations noted above, the Greeks fall within the scope of the orator's ethnic disparagement as well. In particular, the argument from discord, which had already occurred in Philo, recurs in Maximus. At one point, he claims that "Greece, since it was divided into hostile factions," had lost sight of the Good.<sup>78</sup> The accusation of Greek discord also occurs in an oration on friendship: in Greece, friendship is entirely lacking since it has been replaced by strife and ethnic conflict among Dorians, Ionians, Boeotians and other groups.<sup>79</sup> Their discord is attended by other instances of morally questionable character. The Greeks aim at pleasure rather than beauty, and so join the ranks with a number of barbarian nations, including Egypt, Babylon, Media, Phrygia, Sardis, and Sicily.<sup>80</sup> Differences among the Greeks regarding virtue and wisdom were not denied, but only a few came out on the more favorable side (for instance, the Spartans and Plato).<sup>81</sup> And, unsurprisingly, Anacharsis is reported to have had great difficulty in finding any wisdom in Greece.<sup>82</sup>

Our examination of Maximus' ethnic vision does not end here, however, with his critical remarks about both Greeks and barbarians. For, elsewhere he seems to adopt a more favorable stance towards the Greeks, and even something of a Greek outlook. In a discourse on the nature of love, he claims that there are two kinds: the good love pursues Beauty, the bad pursues pleasure. "The one is praiseworthy," Maximus proclaims, "the other reprehensible. The one is Greek, the other barbarian. The one is manly, the other effeminate," and so on.<sup>83</sup> Then, drawing on an episode from Xenophon's *Agésilas*, he evaluates the hero's virtue in terms of the Greek-barbarian dichotomy, especially in the light of the barbarian military threat to Greece. Agésilas was greater than Leonidas, since the latter died at the hands of Eastern barbarians while the former was able to withstand the otherwise overwhelming beauty of "a barbarian youth." Rhetorical platitudes aside, the assumption of the polarity of Greek and barbarian as congruous with the self-other opposition, the former needing protection from the sinister threats, moral or military, of the latter, is certainly striking

<sup>78</sup> Max. Tyr. Or. 26.2.      <sup>79</sup> Max. Tyr. Or. 35.5, 8.      <sup>80</sup> Max. Tyr. Or. 21.3.

<sup>81</sup> Max. Tyr., Or. 17.1; 18.4.

<sup>82</sup> Max. Tyr. Or. 25.1; cf. Lucian, *Anacharsis*.

<sup>83</sup> Max. Tyr. Or. 19.4.

in an orator who had otherwise seen both Greeks and barbarians as equally worthy of criticism.

We might, however, temper our assessment of this passage as wholly or unproblematically an instance of Greek cultural centrism. Though the youth who tempts Agesilaus with his stunning beauty is noted as a barbarian, Maximus' forceful downplaying of the earlier Greeks' heroic stand against barbarians might seem to sit somewhat awkwardly with a clear Hellenocentric interpretation. "Love," the Phoenician orator declares, "is a far more difficult opponent than the barbarian, and Love's arrows wound more deeply than any Cadusian or Mede. So it was that Xerxes trampled on the corpse of the fallen Leonidas and advanced beyond the Gates; but when Agesilaus' love had advanced as far as his eyes, it halted there at the gates of his soul. This is the greater achievement."<sup>84</sup> Expressed in this way, the passage might be seen as a subtle critique of one of the high points in Greek history and Greek self-identity formulated against the barbarian threat (namely, the Battle of Thermopylae). Yet, even if we see a pronounced lack of concern to venerate the memorable self-sacrifice of Leonidas and his men against the barbarian hordes pouring through Thermopylae, the defining framework of the entire oration on Love is explicitly rooted within the series of oppositions of Greek–barbarian, self–other, good love–bad love, safety–threat, virtue–vice. The moral victory of Agesilaus against the anonymous barbarian youth was a Greek victory.

This passage from *Oration 19* is nonetheless the only overtly Hellenocentric expression in the entire corpus of Maximus. Coming from the mouth of an author clearly identifiable as Greek, like Plutarch, this range of criticism and commendation of Greeks at various places in his orations is well within the bounds of a clear and widespread Hellenocentric *interpretatio Graeca*. Greek literature is, after all, filled with instances of Greek authors criticizing other Greeks or those of the present day, and harking back to a bygone era of Greek virtue and heroism. But, when the author is a Hellenized Phoenician who evinces a clear (albeit nuanced) Hellenocentrism only once, then it becomes more difficult to determine a satisfying solution that accounts for the various representations of Greeks and others in his corpus.

What, then, are we to make of Maximus' overall ethnic vision, or *interpretatio*? Like Plutarch, but unlike Philo, he never makes use of native sources for his claims. Even if we think Philo was inventing his sources, he had at least wanted his readers to believe that his *Phoenician History*

<sup>84</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 19.5; translation modified from Trapp 1997: 173–174.

was built upon the ancient texts of Phoenicians, Persians, and Egyptians.<sup>85</sup> Plutarch, on the other hand, resorted to a Hellenizing paraphrase of Egyptian myth in order to expunge the barbarian elements from it. Maximus avoids explicit reference to any of his sources, Greek or barbarian, aside from philosophical ones (especially Plato). His representation of barbarians appears mostly to instantiate the sort of paraphrasing activity performed by Plutarch; there is nothing in his orations that could not have come from well-established Greek sources, such as Herodotus, Xenophon, or Plato. This consideration would count as a not inconsiderable step towards seeing Maximus as a representative of the *interpretatio Graeca*, even if a weaker form than that seen in Plutarch's model. Characterizations of barbarians and elements of barbarian teachings or customs were not merely linguistically set in Greek terms (and there is no reason to suppose that Maximus knew any language but Greek); the ways in which barbarians are invoked and narrated were within Greek interpretive parameters and categories of thought.<sup>86</sup>

This assessment has a good deal of truth in it: Maximus is certainly a product of Hellenizing processes and forces in the imperial era, and his evocation of Greek–barbarian contrast seems justifiably designated as an instance of Hellenocentrism given his failure to draw on non-Greek sources or think within non-Greek patterns of thought. However, a more helpful way to account for his variegated response to the Greeks and other peoples is provided elsewhere by Maximus himself. Odysseus, he says, was able to gain wisdom progressively as he traveled through many lands and met many peoples. The philosopher, however, was an armchair traveler:

As for the sights seen by the philosopher, to what can they ever be compared? To a dream, but a truthful dream that travels to every corner of the universe. His body does not move at all, but his soul advances over the whole earth, and from the earth to the heavens: crossing every sea, traversing the whole earth, flying up through every region of the air, accompanying the sun and the moon in their orbits, taking its fixed place in the choir of the other stars, and all but joining Zeus in the administration and disposition of reality.<sup>87</sup>

The image of the philosopher traversing all the lands and peoples of the earth occurs elsewhere in his corpus of orations, and we may take it as

<sup>85</sup> On the vexed question of the antiquity and authenticity of Philo's sources, see Albright 1972; Barr 1974–1975.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Schott 2008a: 54 for the application of Bhabha's concept of mimicry to this sort of situation.

<sup>87</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 16.6; trans. Trapp; cf also *Or.* 22.5 (history allows one to travel the world and learn the events of Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Medes, and Greeks); 38.3 (out of body, Aristeas surveyed all lands, customs, laws, etc.).

emblematic of his rhetorical treatment of various national identities.<sup>88</sup> The philosopher is not particularly attached to any one nation or race since he transcends them all. He is able to discern the positive and negative elements in ethnically local character traits, customs, and teachings. Because his soul is only on a sojourn in the body, he accepts the good, rejects the bad, and avoids any local bodily identifications, whether Greek or Phoenician. This philosophical framework explains why we find the Greeks as the objects of both praise and blame at various points, and also why the occurrence of barbarian stereotypes in his corpus (as noted above) are tempered by passages commending those same barbarians.<sup>89</sup>

There is, then, a contrast between Maximus and Philo that is helpful for better appreciating Porphyry's own self-positioning as a rational soul in a world of nations and bodies. Philo, though he may be regarded in modern evaluations as a product of Hellenism, strongly denied such Hellenism and vociferously defended a Phoenician identity. Maximus, on the other hand, was even more clearly a product of Hellenizing processes; he chose to reject (or at least, to neglect) his Phoenician identity; and, even while providing frequently unfavorable remarks on the Greeks, nonetheless came rather close to adopting a Greek identity, since his ethnographic vision of Greeks and barbarians shares many similarities with other philosophers who claimed Greek origins, like Plutarch. Yet, the philosophical orator from Phoenicia sought, most significantly, to escape all such identities by means of a strictly philosophical cosmopolitanism. Though we recognize key features of his oratorical program as Hellenocentric, or at least formed by Hellenism, his ultimate aim was to transcend by philosophical means the local ethnic allegiances and bonds of belonging. The philosopher had embarked on a journey through many lands and peoples, commending the good and pious, while spurning the impious and morally derelict.

To continue the metaphor of the armchair traveler: one cannot help but see the philosopher's armchair, in spite of its flights of philosophical fancy, as still a Greek armchair. Greek and barbarian customs could equally come under the critical gaze of the intellectually well-traveled Platonist; yet the inability, or unwillingness, to address non-Greek customs and teachings on their own terms, the failure to grant the barbarians' textual space to speak in their own voices, marks the limits of Maximus' transcendent aims. The

<sup>88</sup> In this he is similar to Philostratus (in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*), though there remain crucial differences, namely in the particular configuration of cultural centrism; on the importance of travel for the philosopher, see Elsner 1997; for Philostratus' Hellenocentrism, see Chapter 7 below.

<sup>89</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 17.5 (barbarians do not know Homer, yet have virtue); 22.4 (praise for Persian custom of deliberating over drink).

philosopher's universalism remained ineradicably tied to the confines of a Greek interpretive grid. Like a philosophical Icarus, the second-century Platonist's flight has fallen back to earth (or never left the ground).

Maximus' oratorical oeuvre has forced us to move back and forth – first, towards an anti-Greek position, then towards a more Hellenocentric one – and to maintain what might be considered an overly hesitant assessment of Maximus' relationship to the *interpretatio Graeca*. Unlike Philo, Maximus represents a more complicated interaction with Hellenicity. But, in spite of his inability to uproot more completely (or at least, more overtly) the effects of Hellenism, his stated goal of ethnic transcendence through philosophical and historical explorations remains worthy of emphasis. When shorn of its Hellenocentrism (even if this is imperfectly achieved), the universalizing vision of the *interpretatio Graeca* can only misleadingly be given the label Greek (*Graeca*) for the Phoenician authors considered here. It is not that Greek translation (in a linguistic or even an intellectual sense) was not performed by these authors or that they did not “think the things of the Greeks” (however we define this).<sup>90</sup> But we must distinguish between the ways in which we from modern hindsight now understand their works to have functioned within historical cultural processes and the ways in which they identified themselves and articulated the aims of their literary projects.<sup>91</sup>

Both Maximus and Philo were thoroughly Hellenized, in the sense that they spoke Greek (probably even as their first language), worshiped gods with Greek names, were fully immersed in the Greek literary heritage, and thus had been formed to a considerable degree by the visions of that literature; and yet they avoided or vocally eschewed Hellenicity. The Hellenocentrism of a Plutarch or a Diogenes was rejected by both – more quietly by Maximus and more defiantly by Philo. We might summarize schematically their divergence from the Hellenocentric *interpretatio Graeca* by locating their interpretive moves around three nodal points: the dependency theme, the disagreement theme, and the decentering theme.

The dependency theme, which asserted the Greek dependence upon more ancient and more civilized nations for their own acquisition of knowledge, occurs unambiguously only in Philo's fragments, though it figures there as a central aim of his writing. A brief remark in Maximus, that the

<sup>90</sup> I adopt the phrase from Eusebius, *PE* 1.2.1; cf. Aristides, *For peace with Athens* 403.11 Jebb: “those who know how to Hellenize not only in words, but in thought (*gnōmē*).” The passage from Eusebius has been attributed to Porphyry's *c. Christ.* by Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1900; followed by Harnack 1916; for critique of Wilamowitz and Harnack, see Johnson 2010; Morlet 2011b: 121–122.

<sup>91</sup> Richter 2001b: 194–195.

first philosopher, Homer, had been driven out by (Plato's) philosophy, only to be replaced by "sophistical ideas from Thrace and Cilicia,"<sup>92</sup> signifies the theme of Greek dependency on the barbarians, but does not further describe such purported transferences of knowledge.

The disagreement theme, which characterizes the Greeks as fractured by disharmony in the area of knowledge, customs, or political interests, occurs differently in both Philo and Maximus. The author of the *Phoenician History* had declared the Greeks to be at perpetual discord with each other, though the single fragment dealing with this issue provides us with no details about that discord. Maximus had focused on the internecine strife between the various city-states or racial groups (Dorians, Ionians, and so on) as known from classical Greek history;<sup>93</sup> but he had also noted the disagreement among Greek philosophers – a theme most prominent among Christian apologists in their anti-Greek polemics.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, both Philo and Maximus exhibited the decentering theme, in which the Greeks were removed from their central position as exemplars of virtue and knowledge, as the purveyors of culture. Philo performs this move to a lesser degree than Maximus, since his *Phoenician History* allows for multiple centers of theological wisdom (the Phoenicians, Egyptians and Persians), but the pride of place goes to his homeland of Phoenicia. Maximus shows more of an ecumenical vision in the evenness of his criticisms and commendations across the Greek–barbarian divide. Aside from the centrality of Greek literary and philosophical texts (especially Homer and Plato) in his orations, no special privilege is given to the Greeks as a people over against barbarian peoples; and even the primacy of the Greek classics is put in a non-Hellenocentric perspective when he asserts that barbarians have found virtue on their own without Homer's help.<sup>95</sup> His attempted decentralization of cultural and philosophical centrism is thus much clearer than in Philo's fragmentary corpus, and certainly lacks the latter's overt "nationalism." Maximus' universalism is also qualitatively different from that exhibited by Plutarch. For the Phoenician's ethnic vision is an instance of a decentered universalism, while the corpus of Plutarch evinces a universalism masking a Hellenocentric project.

When we turn to Porphyry, we find that Maximus, his compatriot from Tyre, stands closest to the range of cultural strategies employed by him,

<sup>92</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 26.2.

<sup>93</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 35.5, 8; see also *Or.* 17.2, where the artistic and cultural diversity of the Greeks is emphasized.

<sup>94</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 26.2; for the argument from disagreement elsewhere, see Boys-Stones 2001: 123–150; Zambon 2002: 133–134; Johnson 2006a: 142–151.

<sup>95</sup> Max. Tyr. *Or.* 17.5.

though Philonic strategies are also evident (in particular, the appeal to native sources). This is not to claim that Porphyry depended upon either of these two Phoenician thinkers as his models in cultural engagement with Hellenism (indeed, we have no evidence that Porphyry had even read Maximus' works; though he does claim to know Philo).<sup>96</sup> It is the contention of this chapter that Maximus' type of philosophical transcendence from Hellenocentrism converges with Philo's type of historical concern with native sources in the ethnic vision of Porphyry and thus, that the student of Plotinus marks the most pervasive and thorough alternative by a pagan Hellenophone author to the Plutarchan model of the *interpretatio Graeca*.

### *Porphyry and the Greeks*

Despite his explicitly declared Phoenician origins, Porphyry of Tyre has been characterized as so thoroughly Hellenized as to be a great "defender of Hellenism" against barbarous ways of thinking (especially Christianity). Indeed, most recent discussions of Porphyry see him as so fully having adopted a Greek identity that he underwent a full erasure of his Phoenician identity.<sup>97</sup> The most recent work on Porphyry does seem to be treating Bidez's hypothetical chronology with a good deal of skepticism: rather than a transition from an Oriental phase to a Hellenocentric phase, Porphyry is considered to have possessed a consistently Greek outlook throughout his entire corpus, however the individual works might happen to be dated relative to each other. But, to put the question somewhat crassly: have the most recent analyses of Porphyry's ethnic and cultural affiliations thrown out the Phoenician baby with Bidez's Orientalizing bathwater?

The following remarks seek to highlight a number of details within Porphyry's fragmentary corpus that ought to provide us with a fair bit of caution before characterizing him as a spokesman for Hellenism or a proponent of a Hellenocentric cultural program.

First, Porphyry is a self-ascribed Phoenician in his *Life of Plotinus*, bearing from birth the barbarian name Malkos.<sup>98</sup> The circumstances surrounding the creation of his nickname as Basileus deserve emphasis. Though we have only limited evidence, the following point should be made: the initial changing of Porphyry's name from its original Phoenician "Malkos"

<sup>96</sup> Porphyry, *c. Christ.* fr. 41 Harnack (= Eus. *PE* 1.9.21).

<sup>97</sup> Schott 2008a: 62; Millar 1997: 244–247.

<sup>98</sup> Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 7.50–51; 17.7–15; with discussion at Millar 1997: 244–247; Clark 1999. The name Malkus/Malchus/Malchio appears a number of times in the epigraphic remains from Rome; see Noy 2000: 238; see also Bremmer 1981.

occurred due to a dispute with some sophists “from Greece,” while he was at Rome. Porphyry quotes the preface to Amelius’ treatise, which was dedicated to Porphyry, responding to the charges of these Greeks that Plotinus was guilty of plagiarism from Numenius. Here, Numenius’ Apamean identity is clearly asserted. Furthermore, we are told that, as a playful (sarcastic?) gesture against those who made the accusation, Amelius gave his dedicatee a Greek name (Basileus) instead of his original name in imitation of what Numenius had done with a certain Maximus, changing his name to the Greek Megalos. It could be that there had been a certain tone of ethnic superiority in the accusations of the unnamed Greek who claimed that the non-Greek Plotinus had plagiarized from the Apamean Numenius. Amelius, who would himself later reside in Apamea, responded with a touch of his own cultural sarcasm, changing his dedicatee’s name into Greek as a willful act of imitating Numenius, to highlight the cultural nature of the original complaint; apparently the remainder of the treatise outlined only the differences in doctrine between Plotinus and Numenius. In any case, it seems that up until this point, when Porphyry was well into his thirties, he had kept his Phoenician name of Malkos.<sup>99</sup> It was not until this dispute in Rome that his friends began to find Greek names for him – and it was not, so it seems, in order that Porphyry might be seen as somehow progressively more Greek by means of the name change. We cannot place too much weight on the above considerations, however, since Porphyry obviously kept the nickname.

Second, some fragments clearly evince an unfavorable characterization of the Greeks. For instance, in the preface to his rationalizing *Letter to Anebo*, he writes: “The Greek philosophers have said a great many things about [theological matters], but, for the most part, they possess the beginnings of their belief from conjecture (*ek stochasmou*).”<sup>100</sup> The “belief” (or, “faith” *pistis*) of this claim is not necessarily the issue, since, contrary to those who see part of Porphyry’s anti-Christian polemic as an attack on the mere faith of simple-minded Christians, who lacked the reason obtainable by philosophy, faith does play a positive (if limited) role in his conception of philosophical progress.<sup>101</sup> The critical point here is rather the conjectural foundation of Greek theological knowledge: the Greeks do not have a solid

<sup>99</sup> Longinus seems to have continued to call Porphyry “Malkos” (see *V.Plot.* 17.13 – though we cannot date this notice relative to any period of Porphyry’s life, it must at least derive from his adulthood in Athens, if not later). At some point after Porphyry’s move to Rome, Longinus would refer to Porphyry as “Basileus” (see *V.Plot.* 20.91–92, quoting Longinus, *On Ends*).

<sup>100</sup> Porphyry, *Ep.Aneb.* 1, p. 2.12–14 Sodano (= Eus. *PE* 14.10.1); I suggest that this fragment is from the preface or opening remarks, since it begins, “I shall commence my friendship with you from . . .”

<sup>101</sup> e.g., *Ep.Marc.* 8.143–145.



basis for their knowledge of the divine. It is significant that this detraction from Greek superiority in the areas of philosophy and theology is invoked as a first step towards “friendship” with the Egyptian priest to whom the letter is dedicated.<sup>102</sup> His amicable relationship with the Egyptian is, at least in part, based on a purportedly shared theological outlook that is not equally shared with the Greeks, or, if shared with them, nonetheless lacks a common foundation.<sup>103</sup>

In what certainly must be taken as the next fragment in the *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry provides the consequences of the Greeks’ lack of a firmer foundation for their theological doctrines: “For with us there is much verbal wrangling (*logomachia*), because we form a conjecture of the Good from human calculations (*logismoî*).”<sup>104</sup> Intervening material in the original letter between this and the previous fragment may have marked a change in subject from the Greek philosophers to someone else (philosophers in general?); otherwise, the first person pronoun here marks an identification of Porphyry with Greek philosophy. It seems likely that the letter intentionally seeks to foreground ethnic difference as a means of explicating theologically variant schools of thought regarding gods, daemons, and cult. This assumption about the characterization of various theological positions as distinctively ethnic in nature (that is, that Egyptians generally hold one set of ideas and practices regarding divine matters, Greeks another, Persians another, and so on) corresponds to the later criticism of the use of barbarian (i.e., Egyptian) names in religious cult by non-Egyptian worshipers and the dismissal of belief in the ethnically limited identities of the gods themselves.<sup>105</sup> In this later fragment, Porphyry would show the gods as transcendent above local ethnic or cultural divisions; there was a universal approach to the divine that superseded local variation. Nonetheless, the persona and assumptions of the opening of the letter may present an ostensibly Greek letter-writer, dubious of Greek philosophical methods (and conclusions), probing the wisdom of the Egyptians in flattering and initially laudatory remarks. But, without the intervening material that originally existed between the two fragments, both of which I take to come

<sup>102</sup> For a similar connection between friendship and the pursuit of truth, see Maximus (= Methodius) ap. Eus. *PE* 7.22.22.

<sup>103</sup> Porphyry’s theological assumptions will soon become less apparently shared with the Egyptian when his questions become more hostile in tone; see [Chapter 1](#).

<sup>104</sup> Porph. *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 29.19–20 Sodano (= Eus. *PE* 14.10.2). Sodano’s separation of this fragment from the one just discussed (*Ep. Aneb.* 1, p. 2.12–14 Sodano [= Eus. *PE* 14.10.1]) by nearly twenty pages in his edition should be suspect; see [Chapter 1](#); also, Johnson, forthcoming b.

<sup>105</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 22.1–6 Sodano (= Eus. *PE* 5.10). Elsewhere, he assented to the doctrine of national daemons (though not gods); see *Comm. Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano, with discussion in [Chapter 2](#).

from the preface, we cannot be certain if he did, in fact, here identify himself with the Greek philosophers (rather than philosophers in general). What does seem clear is that, even if the target of the criticisms changes as the *Letter* progresses (i.e., from Greeks to Egyptians) or the evaluative scale of ethnic identities eventually collapses, the letter frames itself within, or maps itself upon, an ethnically and culturally varied topography of theological knowledge.

The characterization of the Greeks in the *Letter to Anebo* is a clear instance of the theme of Greek discord similar to the instances of that theme which we identified above in Philo and Maximus. What is distinctive in Porphyry's approach, though our understanding of it remains limited by the fragmentary state of the letter, is the source of Greek discord. Elsewhere, Porphyry had eschewed systems of thinking and acting in the world that were not based on reason or divine revelation (and even in this latter category, the revelation had to be in accord with reason).<sup>106</sup> In the *Letter to Anebo*, the unacceptable basis for thought is identified as guesswork and conjecture, and its consequences lie in hopeless verbal wrangling and disagreement.

A tantalizingly exiguous glimpse of a critical attitude to the Greeks that may resonate with the disagreement theme in the *Letter to Anebo* occurs in a fragment of his *Philosophy from Oracles*, which we have already discussed. Following the citation of an oracle of Apollo that announced the difficulty in finding the road to the gods and then enumerated the various ancient nations who had achieved such divine wisdom (among whom the Greeks were noticeably absent), Porphyry had commented: "The many paths [to the gods] the barbarians found, but the Greeks were misled and the rulers already also destroyed [it]."<sup>107</sup> The remainder of the fragment focused upon the superior wisdom and knowledge of the divine and heavenly spheres of the Chaldeans and Hebrews. It is impossible to determine the extent to which his criticism of the Greeks was given fuller elaboration.

Unfortunately, we do not know if Porphyry considered the Greeks to have once possessed the original wisdom of the Egyptians and others; it seems doubtful from the fragment as it stands that he did. We also do not know if the error of the Greeks was characterized by discord or not. If we allow the fragments from the *Letter to Anebo* to inform our evaluation here, then it would seem so. The fragment raises more questions than it answers; yet, the salient feature of an overtly unfavorable assessment of the Greeks

<sup>106</sup> Reason: *Ep. Marc.* 9.153–157; 11.191–201; revelation: *Phil. Orac.* fr. 303 Smith (only if the "from there," *entauthen*, refers to the oracles).

<sup>107</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324 Smith (= Eus. *PE* 9.10.3–5).

is present in the fragment, and furthermore, it is one that was not elicited by any element of the oracle under consideration. Furthermore, it seems justified to see the fragment as part of an argument directly dealing with the issue of national traditions and theological systems in exploring the connection of sacrifice and salvation. The fragment quoting the Apolline oracle itself had been introduced by Eusebius as contributing to a discussion of sacrifice,<sup>108</sup> and the opening lines of Porphyry's comments on the oracle addressed the difficulty of attaining the salvation of the soul.<sup>109</sup> Then, the inclusion of the supplementary oracles dedicated to the position of the Chaldeans and Hebrews at the origins of divine wisdom pointed to a concern with the identification of those peoples who could justifiably lay claim to such a theologically superior status over other nations. If this was the point of his broader discussion, from which these fragments were excised, then the assertion about Greek error was not a casual aside, but marked a strikingly overt attack on Greek superiority in the area of theological wisdom. Plutarch would scarcely have been pleased.

In his vegetarian treatise, *On Abstinence from Animal Meat*, Porphyry offers a final instance of a Hellenocritical stance. In the ethnographic sketch of the various nations who held customs of abstaining from animals in Book iv, the Greeks started off, since they were "most fitting" (*oikeiotatoi*).<sup>110</sup> This phrase has been translated by some modern translators as those who are "the most closely related to us,"<sup>111</sup> though the addition of "to us" does not occur in the Greek and is not a necessary rendering. If the sense of the superlative adjective here is "most familiar" or "closest," the "to us" could certainly be implied; but the sense may only be "most fitting."<sup>112</sup> It is important to note the ambiguity in this expression since our concern is with the degree to which Porphyry identified himself as a Greek and the nature of his characterization of the Greeks. It might be thought that as a Hellenophone and Hellenized author, he did feel most akin to the Greeks – if this is the case, one would have expected him to add the phrase "to us." Furthermore, given the negative assertions in the *Letter to Anebo* and the *Philosophy from Oracles* that we have seen, there is no reason to see that he is here ascribing a Greek identity to himself in the term *oikeiotatoi*.

<sup>108</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 323.5–6 Smith; see [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>109</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324.2–4 Smith. <sup>110</sup> *Abst.* 4.2.1.

<sup>111</sup> e.g., Clark 2000b: 100; Patillon and Segonds 1995: 1 ("qui nous sont les plus proches").

<sup>112</sup> After all, Porphyry was surely quite familiar with a Socratic way of declaring kinship with the Greeks (or specifically, the Athenians): *mou enguterō este genei* ("you are nearer me by race," *Apol.* 30a5).

The narrative that follows his initial claim pronouncing the Greeks as a “fitting” starting point for his ethnographic doxography is not straightforwardly favorable. In the first place, in spite of their alleged familiarity to Porphyry (and his reader, Firmus Castricius), Greek customs are mediated through two witnesses. Dicaearchus provides material that sketches a series of successive stages of decline in Greek dietary, moral, and philosophical history.<sup>113</sup> The narrative of decline charts the fall from a primal golden age of peaceful coexistence of humans and animals to an iron age of war, violence and meat-eating among the Greeks.<sup>114</sup> While not being the strict equivalent to the theme of discord as seen in the *Letter to Anebo*, it certainly resonates with it. Even more, the decline into an age of violence here provides a picture of Greek discord quite similar to the characterization of ethnic and civil strife described by Maximus of Tyre. Importantly for a defense of vegetarianism, however, the catalyst here for Greek disunity resides in a shift in dietary habits among the ancient Greeks. The theme of discord was something of a cultural trope that could be manipulated and altered within varying rhetorical contexts, whether in oratorical salvos on the nature of true friendship (as in Maximus) or in the unfolding ethnic argumentation supporting vegetarianism (in Porphyry). In neither author was the theme of discord limited to the characterization of Greeks, as an end in itself. Rather, the theme was put to work for different ends, and hence exhibited a cultural move dissimilar from potential nationalizing moves. That is, their representation of Greeks as divisive was not necessarily the result of (latent) Phoenician national identities or allegiances. Its contextually varied use as a trope of argumentation, as turned towards ends beyond itself, marks off the discord of the Greeks depicted in Maximus and Porphyry from the similar depictions elsewhere in imperial Greek literature (such as Philo of Byblos himself, or Eusebius, or Theodoret).<sup>115</sup>

The second half of the Greek segment of Book iv of *On Abstinence* is supported by material from Plutarch’s *Life of Lycurgus* on the Lacedaemonians.<sup>116</sup> This portion of Porphyry’s discussion is more favorable than the narrative of decline, yet it lacks the striking purity and ascetic sublimity of the holy people found in other nations, whose collective lives and customs are delineated throughout the remainder of the ethnographic doxography. The Lacedaemonians are the only group that did not, in

<sup>113</sup> Schutrumpf 2001; Patillon and Segonds 1995: xi–xix.

<sup>114</sup> For the polemical importance of narratives of decline, see Johnson 2006a.

<sup>115</sup> On Eusebius, see Johnson 2006a; on Theodoret, see Johnson 2012.

<sup>116</sup> Plutarch is only explicitly named as a source at *Abst.* 4.3.8. For a tabulation of parallels with the *V.Lycurg.*, see Patillon and Segonds 1995; see also, Clark 2000b: 180–181 n. 554.

fact, practice vegetarianism. At least some Egyptian priests, one of the races of Magi, the Jewish Essenes, and the Indian gymnosophists practiced complete abstinence from meat; the most that could be said of the Lacedaemonian lifestyle was that it was “akin to” (*oikeion*) the vegetarian way of life.<sup>117</sup> Had Porphyry wanted to paint the Greeks in a better light, he could have invoked the Pythagoreans – but he did not.<sup>118</sup>

Even if the best of the Greeks come up short of the higher standards of other nations’ spiritual and philosophical elites, there is no clear hostility in Porphyry’s account. A more caustic aside is found later in the book. When he finally turns to the vegetarian habits of the Indians, Porphyry made the remark that unlike the Samanaean holy men of India, the Greek sophists looked for excuses to avoid practicing ascetic and rational behavior.<sup>119</sup> “Neither among [the Samanaeans] nor among the others I have described has a sophist come forward, ‘such as men now are’<sup>120</sup> among the Greeks, to say, pretending he is at a loss, ‘If everyone imitates you, what will become of us?’”<sup>121</sup> Together with the secondary moral-philosophic status given the Greeks in Book iv (in spite of being first in the order of presentation), this critical declaration on Greek moral sophistry indicates a refusal to align himself with the Greeks.

A third factor contributing to the picture of Porphyry’s conception of the Greeks resides in the fact that the only indisputably positive statements regarding the Greeks occur quite rarely, and are almost entirely limited to the “theologians” among the Greeks. In particular, this epithet denotes Orpheus; by extension, it potentially refers to Homer or Plato as well. In the treatise *On Images*, Porphyry refers to “the wisdom of the Greeks” as residing in the hymns of Orpheus. The fact that the Orphic hymn quoted in this fragment is susceptible only to physiological allegory (that is, the interpretation of the poem as referring to physical elements or forces in the cosmos) rather than to higher levels of spiritual or intellectual allegory, might hint at the possibility of a second-order status to this discussion within the broader argument of the original work.<sup>122</sup> Lack of further context for the fragment allows no more than the suggestion of this possibility. The reference in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* to “those who are most theological among Greeks, who have established initiations and mysteries” probably refers to Orphic thought as well.

<sup>117</sup> *Abst.* 4.5.2.

<sup>118</sup> See [Chapter 5](#) for discussion of this point; it should be noted that he does not seem to notice Orpheus (whom he identified as a Greek, see below) as a model for Greek vegetarianism.

<sup>119</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.4. <sup>120</sup> An allusion to Homer, *Il.* 1.272.

<sup>121</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.4; translation modified from Clark, 114. <sup>122</sup> See [Chapter 4](#).

Unless we are unduly skeptical, “the need (*chreia*) of the Greeks” referred to in the *Letter to Marcella* represents a favorable attitude to the Greeks, though who precisely is meant by this label here is unclear. Following Chadwick’s suggestions that the need of the Greeks referred to the need of the persecuting emperors for intellectual justification for their persecution of Christians, many scholars have seen this passage as a veiled reference to the defense of Greek religion, or paganism.<sup>123</sup> Such an interpretation depends on supplementary evidence taken from Lactantius (whose evidence itself is ambiguous)<sup>124</sup> and from a passage claimed as Fragment 1 of *Against the Christians* by Harnack (following Wilamowitz-Moellendorf) and left unquestioned in the scholarship until very recently.<sup>125</sup> Without fully entering the debate about Porphyry’s relationship to the Great Persecution and the political context for his *Against the Christians*,<sup>126</sup> we must nonetheless address the issue of the “need of the Greeks” in the *Letter to Marcella*.

This much may be affirmed from the passage on its own terms: the need of the Greeks called someone (it is not even clear if it is to Porphyry, rather than Marcella, that it called), and the gods rose together with them (*sunepeigontōn*); Marcella wanted to heed the call, but could not because of her maternal responsibilities; Porphyry himself had supposed the separation of the mother from her children to be lacking in counsel and unjust, and hence may have been the one who forced her to stay behind when he left her at home (in Rome?); since the gods are consistently seen as saviors in this letter, the call of the Greeks to which they concurred must have been a noble matter in Porphyry’s eyes and not one of the many temptations and entanglements of bodily existence eschewed throughout the letter (especially his dismissal of the civic laws of the empire later in the letter).<sup>127</sup> Porphyry, in any case, “was forced to remain here” (wherever that was), and so wrote his hortatory letter to his wife, leaving the precise nature of “the need of the Greeks” in obscurity.

As we have seen, Porphyry certainly saw the Greeks as possessed of distinctive religious customs; the ethnic identification embraced weighty religious elements. The need of the Greeks may have indicated a religiously important situation. But it is doubtful that this would have involved a Roman imperial religious context for the simple reason that the epithet “Greeks” did not, for Porphyry, designate the devotees of polytheist, or

<sup>123</sup> e.g., Wilken 1979; Digeser 1998; Beatrice 1993.

<sup>124</sup> Lactantius, *Div.Inst.* 5.2; Freund 2006.

<sup>125</sup> Morlet, 2010a; Johnson 2010.

<sup>126</sup> See Chapter 7 for discussion of Porphyry’s prioritizing of withdrawal from political concerns.

<sup>127</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 25.384–27.438; see Johnson, forthcoming a.

pagan religion across the empire, regardless of the ethnicity of the particular worshiper.<sup>128</sup> The designation of “Greek” as polytheist would begin to gain wider currency among Christian authors in the fourth century,<sup>129</sup> but we are hard-pressed to find pagans (even Julian) using the label “Greek” in a purely religious sense, stripped of the broader cluster of ethnic markers of Greekness.<sup>130</sup> Beyond this, one does wonder how Porphyry could have justified to himself or others the cult of emperors as a significant religious practice for the soul seeking salvation. Rather, imperial cult seems to falter on deficiencies similar to those of the Christians (at least, as identified in the *Philosophy from Oracles*).<sup>131</sup>

If the need of the Greeks is not necessarily religious in nature (or at least not as an equivalent of “paganism”) then one should consider an educational context to be a more plausible referent for the phrase.<sup>132</sup> A letter of Libanius, albeit from a later generation, would use a similar phrase to indicate the support of cultured, highly educated individuals.<sup>133</sup> There is no firm textual evidence to reject the possibility that Porphyry could have returned to Athens for business involving the Platonic (or another) school there. Alternatively, we might see the Greeks as referring to a specifically Greek city or region; if Marcella were at Rome, for instance, Sicily could well have been described as a place where any necessary visit of Porphyry could readily be named “the need of the Greeks.” Or, the phrase could even refer to a group of Greek-speaking philosophy (or rhetoric) students at Rome (or anywhere else in the empire, for that matter).

The obliquity of the phrase allows for nothing more than speculation. For our current investigation, we may affirm that the passage seems generally favorable to the Greeks, whoever in particular they happen to be and whatever their need may have been. We may conclude from this that, like Maximus, the Greeks were not entirely excluded from favorable mention in Porphyry’s corpus, though these instances are few and ambiguous. Also similar to Maximus, Porphyry allows us to see the Greeks as sometimes torn by internal faction and discord, prone to sophistry and moral laxity, and unable to maintain the pure wisdom of the ancients; but at other times they are portrayed as host to teachers of theological truths and the leading figures of philosophical insight.

<sup>128</sup> Pace Digeser 2006: 57.

<sup>129</sup> Its roots may lie in the second century with Aristides, *Apol.* (Gk.) 2; 8–11. It should be noted, however, that Greeks are one of the polytheistic nations and are not considered an identity coterminous with “polytheist.”

<sup>130</sup> Bouffartigue 1991; Johnson, 2012. <sup>131</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 345 Smith (Eusebius *DE* 3.6.39–3.7.2).

<sup>132</sup> Alt 1996; I am grateful to Jean Bouffartigue for discussion of this possible interpretation.

<sup>133</sup> Libanius, *Epp.* 13 and 15 (Loeb Classical Library numeration); Schouler 1991.

A fourth element of Porphyry's ethnic vision that bears significant weight in our appreciation of the Greeks in his thought is that similar to Philo (and to a lesser degree, Maximus), he exhibits a consistent attempt to privilege barbarian wisdom. Throughout his works numerous non-Greek nations are invoked as exempla, or listed in doxographic style, for the particular argument he is making. As we saw in the previous chapter (and will see more fully in the next chapter), the holy men of many nations are treated in a laudatory manner and presented as models of the philosophic and truth-loving life. The Jews and the Indians have special pride of place as models of piety, wisdom and a morally rigorous lifestyle. Many nations were not portrayed favorably in all aspects of their life, teaching, and traditions, or at all periods of their shared history as a people. Yet, the range and frequency of Porphyry's ethnically universalizing gestures is noteworthy. Though Plutarch, as we have seen, made universalizing claims about truth, the absence in Porphyry of clear Hellenocentric claims, combined with only limited criticism of barbarians, whether in general or of particular barbarian peoples, marks off the latter's universalism from the *interpretatio Graeca* of the Plutarchan model in a definitive way. Porphyry's ethnographic vision exhibits, rather, a recurrent and widespread decentering of Greek cultural centrism.

A fifth and final observation about Porphyry's understanding of the Greeks is that there remains a further significant distinction between Plutarch's and Porphyry's interpretive frameworks of national knowledges, customs, and histories. Like Philo of Byblos, Porphyry's works show a firm attempt to present barbarian wisdom in the words of the barbarians themselves. Plutarch and Maximus had retold barbarian stories in their own Greek intellectual idiom, even as they differed in their relationship to the development and defense of an ethnically and culturally centrist vision. Porphyry, on the contrary, quoted verbatim from the barbarian sources themselves, in all their differing degrees of exoticism or familiarity.<sup>134</sup> In the extensive ethnographic doxography of the *On Abstinence*, he had presented the dietary practices of the Greeks by a quotation from Dicaearchus the Peripatetic; the Egyptian practices from Chaeremon, the Egyptian priest; the Jewish practices from their own Josephus; and the Indian practices through Bardaisan the Babylonian, who received his information directly from a group of Indian ambassadors.<sup>135</sup> Even if we may recognize

<sup>134</sup> For illuminating discussion of imperial and authorial strategies in the use of paraphrase and/or quotation in modern ethnographic literature, see Sturge 2007: 67–80.

<sup>135</sup> We do not know enough about Eubulus, who was his source on the Magi (both in the *Abst.* 4.16.2, and in the *Antro nymph.* 6, p. 60.5 Nauck), to include him in our list of native sources here. If he is



Chaeremon and Josephus as products of Hellenization themselves, and even if we identify Bardaisan as only an intermediary source, who was, in any case, known to Porphyry only in Greek,<sup>136</sup> we nonetheless are faced with a sustained attempt by Porphyry to give foreign peoples their own voices within his treatise. Porphyry quoted from them in Greek translation, and there is no firm evidence to believe that Porphyry knew any language but Greek, as Fergus Millar has shown.<sup>137</sup> The near ubiquity of the Greek language in Porphyry and the sources he quoted might detract from our appreciation of the value of those sources as authentic sites of native knowledge or perspectives. It should not, however, diminish our recognition of the seriousness with which Porphyry sought to present ethnically specific knowledge by privileging members of those peoples – even if these were known to Porphyry in translation or at second hand.

The concern with native voices is not limited to *On Abstinence*, though that is its most striking occasion. Sanchouniathon of Berytus (as translated into Greek by Philo of Byblos) was used as a source for Phoenician and Jewish history in Porphyry's *Against the Christians*.<sup>138</sup> And, of course, the Jewish and Christian Scriptures had been closely scrutinized as a source for his entire polemic against the Christians – a fact that had elevated his critique above all previous anti-Christian arguments. The Scriptures of the Jews would be quoted favorably in two other works, as well.<sup>139</sup> Whereas he had critically identified the Gnostic texts as forgeries and not ancient sources, we have no evidence that he drew similar conclusions about one of the more influential forgeries within Neoplatonic circles, namely the *Chaldean Oracles*. He dedicated a treatise to this allegedly foreign oracular collection, but the remains of it are so exiguous as to belie any attempts to designate it a commentary rather than a critical evaluation of its doctrines, style, sources, or provenance.<sup>140</sup>

Chaeremon is invoked in one other work, besides *On Abstinence*. The *Letter to Anebo* presents a less favorable assessment of the Egyptian Stoic's thought since Chaeremon had limited the divine to the visible realm.<sup>141</sup> A lengthy fragment from *On Images* evinces a similar (Stoicizing) view of

the same Eubulus mentioned at *V.Plot.* 15, then he was apparently the head of the Platonic school at Athens (see Clark 2000b: 187–188 n. 634); but this fact tells us nothing of his ethnic or racial identity, however construed. Rejecting the identification of this Eubulus and that of the *V.Plot.* is Turcan 1975: 38–43.

<sup>136</sup> Millar 1997. <sup>137</sup> Millar 1997.

<sup>138</sup> *C.Christ.* fr. 41 Harnack (= Eus. *PE* 1.9.20–21); see Cook 2004: 174–177.

<sup>139</sup> *Antro nymph.* 10, p. 63.12–13 Nauck (qu. Gen. 1:2, prompted by Numenius); *Ad Gaurum* II, p. 48.14–17 Kalbfleisch (qu. Gen. 2:7); see Chapter 7.

<sup>140</sup> See Chapter 7. <sup>141</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 21.1 Sodano.

the divinity when it sketches out the Egyptian theology of images.<sup>142</sup> In all likelihood the fragment derives from Chaeremon, because of its similarity to other fragments of Chaeremon,<sup>143</sup> as well as the fact that Eusebius (our primary source for the fragments of *On Images*) names Chaeremon in his comments after quoting the fragment.<sup>144</sup> Chaeremon is thus a primary source for Porphyry's presentation of Egyptian material, a fact that again may seem to detract from an appreciation of his concern for native voices. However, Porphyry certainly seems to have known other native sources of information about (or by) the Egyptians (e.g., Ptolemy, Petosiris,<sup>145</sup> and Phnaēs the Egyptian<sup>146</sup>). Again, the salient feature of these appeals to Egyptian sources is not their ability to provide a window into what we now might recognize as authentic Egyptian traditions, but rather the significance of Porphyry's appeal itself to sources deemed to be native.

Finally, we recall the exquisite invocation of a native Indian voice in *On the Styx*,<sup>147</sup> as well as its better known sister fragment in *On Abstinence*. Its mediated status in the writings of Bardaisan should not obscure its importance as “deflected autopsy,” in which the source quoting the eye-witness accounts takes on the authority of those accounts themselves and thereby becomes a participant in the autopsy.<sup>148</sup> In his cultural and geographical location at the edges of the Roman–Greek imperial and cultural power, Bardaisan took on an authoritative role as transmitter of accurate first-hand, that is, native, accounts of peoples beyond.

In spite of active trade, the Greco-Roman ethnographic portrayal of India was remarkably entrenched throughout the imperial era.<sup>149</sup> Christian authors have long been recognized as actively accomplishing a shift in Greco-Roman Indography by attaching themselves more closely to accounts derived from trade engagements.<sup>150</sup> Porphyry, too, must receive a central place in the shift in ethnographic portrayals of India. His report of Bardaisan's interview with the Indian ambassadors secured for it an integral place within Greek systems of knowledge (as evidenced by its inclusion within Stobaeus' *Anthology*). Traditional accounts of philosophical encounters with Indians had been largely linear and unidirectional, mapped onto Alexander's travels to India – philosophers (most notably Apollonius of Tyana) traveled to India in search of wisdom rather than vice

<sup>142</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 360 Smith (= fr. 17D dubium Van der Horst).

<sup>143</sup> See Van der Horst 1984: 64–65, where he summarizes Schwyzler's earlier argument for the attribution to Chaeremon and concludes that “it has a rather high degree of probability.”

<sup>144</sup> Eus. *PE* 3.13.8 (= *De simulac.* fr. 353 Smith). <sup>145</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 41, p. 212.14–17.

<sup>146</sup> *Intro.Ptolem.Tetrab.* 51, p. 223.17–20.

<sup>147</sup> *Styx* fr. 376 Smith; see Chapter 5 for discussion; also Appendix 2.

<sup>148</sup> I borrow the term from G. Parker 2008: 104. <sup>149</sup> Reger 2009. <sup>150</sup> G. Parker, 2008.

versa.<sup>151</sup> And, whereas the traditional form of the encounters was stylized and culturally scripted, the report of Bardaisan in Porphyry evinces an unscripted openness to Indian wisdom and marks a reversal of the directionality of information flow. Here the Indians are not only on an embassy to a Roman emperor, but also they are significantly said to have sought out Bardaisan himself for his discourses (*logoî*; whether this referred to oral conversation with the Babylonian sage or written copies of his books, or both, is unclear).

Even if Greek conceptions are insinuated in the fragment (especially the statue as a model, *paradeigma*, of the cosmos for the Demiurge),<sup>152</sup> the Greeks are entirely left out of the encounter. There is no trace of cultural sparring over the superiority of Greek or Indian wisdom and customs, as in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.<sup>153</sup> When Apollonius' letter to the Indians is quoted by Porphyry at the end of the fragment, its purpose is only to emphasize that the pool reported by Bardaisan contained the same netherworldly water mentioned by Apollonius. The confirmation through Apollonius is surely an instance of what we think of by the term *interpretatio Graeca* – Bardaisan's account of the Indians was being located within a Greek topography of the world that saw elements of Greek myth, in this case the River Styx, throughout the inhabited world and its nations. Yet, the purport and apparent dynamics of the Bardaisan material in *On the Styx* was probably not self-identifiably directing itself towards this aim. Rather, insofar as it carried functions similar to the related quotation of Bardaisan in *On Abstinence*, this fragment sought a strong affirmation of native sources and a privileging of barbarian philosophical traditions that established the Indian way of life as a model of the ideal pursuit of truth and closeness to things divine.

Throughout the passages considered here we discover a consistent textual practice of allowing the barbarians to speak in their own voices. Passages from many non-Greek authors (even though presented in Greek) would be lost to us (especially Bardaisan and Chaeremon) were it not for Porphyry's cultural sensibilities. One might wonder why, if Porphyry thought so highly of the native voice, he nowhere shows evidence of having learned languages other than Greek (and some Latin). If our extant evidence provides a reliable basis for our assumption that he did not know other languages (and I see no reason to question Millar's conclusions in this regard), then we shall have to content ourselves with Porphyry's own answer to the issue of learning foreign languages in the *Letter to Anebo*:

<sup>151</sup> G. Parker 2008: 301.

<sup>152</sup> Ramelli 2009b: 95–107.

<sup>153</sup> See Chapter 7.

... Why are barbarian words preferred instead of those of one's own language? For if the one who hears attends to the signification it is clear enough that the concept remains the same, whatever word is used. For the god invoked is not an Egyptian by race; and even if he were an Egyptian, he would never make use of the Egyptian language, nor any human language at all.<sup>154</sup>

Even as the philosopher insistently opened out his horizontal translation and included barbarian wisdom within his conception of truth and sought to offset the privileging of Greek wisdom by other sources of knowledge, he was not merely trading one nation for another. Instead, all local, ethnic embodiments of wisdom pointed to a truth beyond their locality and beyond the particular languages used in those particular embodiments.

#### CONCLUSION

Though every nation must have its own voice, that voice was readily translatable since particular languages were merely systems of signs referring to something beyond and above themselves. And here we are confronted squarely with the overarching *interpretatio* of Porphyry, which would more fittingly be named an *interpretatio philosophica* within the parameters of his own culturally and ethnically decentering project, rather than an *interpretatio Graeca*. Thinking the things of the Greeks, or thinking like a Greek, had its limits. A Hellenized member of an *ethnos* other than that of the Hellenes may have spoken Greek and seen the world through an interpretive framework shaped by Greek literature. Yet, such processes of formation did not always easily carry over to the identities one claimed for oneself, or the attitudes one might express regarding the Greeks. One could be thoroughly Hellenized and yet anti-Hellenic.

Like Maximus before him, Porphyry had sought to transcend, by philosophical means, the Greek cultural centrism of Plutarch, Diogenes, and other Hellenocentric thinkers. His decentering move was more powerful than that of Maximus, however, since, like Philo of Byblos, Porphyry had brought the varied voices of representatives of barbarian nations into the pages of his transcendental philosophical project, or rather showed the vast horizontal extent of the instantiation of philosophical truth among the furthest peoples. Hence, there is a double translational movement in Porphyry: at once moving upwards above the messiness of bodily particularity to seek the universal Truth in which its various glimmers in the material world participated; and simultaneously, moving outward across the ethnic

<sup>154</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 22.1–6 Sodano.

landscape of late antiquity, exploring the richness of the customs, traditions, and exemplary holy men of particular nations, and hearing their own voices insofar as these were amenable to the universal chorus of particular instantiations of the Truth.

We might fittingly consider his approach “ethnic particularism” since his universalizing tendencies are not total. Rather, the philosopher persistently attends to the local variety of ethnic customs, theological expressions, ascetic regimens, and ways of thinking of particular peoples assessed on their own terms. In principle, therefore, each nation may exhibit both virtuous and immoral behavior, true and misleading doctrines, and so on, in regard to different issues or at different times in their history. The philosopher must avoid sweeping assertions (though there may be exceptions), while evaluating the singular character of individual nations, and of individual groups living within each nation. Hence, not all Indian gymnosophists perform the same cultural work, nor do all Magi practice identical dietary restrictions. Somewhat paradoxically, the variety of ethnic distinctiveness provides the catalyst for the soul seeking ascent out of the world and its scattered nations.

The preceding observations leave us with a complicated picture of the cultural moves Porphyry was making. On the one hand, like his fellow-philosopher Maximus, he recognized that the embodied soul was only on vacation from its true origins. Clinging to any one ethnic or regional identity was only to allow the soul to be further entrenched in the confusion and error incumbent upon bodily existence. On the other hand, however, like Philo before him, he highlighted Greek discord and error, while privileging barbarian wisdom and rationality.

In conclusion, our investigation into the ethnographic visions of Greeks and others contained in the very different corpora of these three Phoenician intellectuals cautions us from too quickly seeing the *interpretatio Graeca* as a singularly Hellenocentric interpretive framework for collecting and evaluating the traditions and narratives of non-Greek nations. Though all three were thoroughly Hellenized, their portraits of Greeks and others exhibit a range of interpretive options and cultural moves that were possible as frontiers of knowledge and identity were carefully shifted within historiographical and philosophical discourses of the early years of late antiquity.

## CHAPTER 7

### *The way home* *Transcending particularism*

As a polymath, Porphyry no doubt enjoyed exercising his erudition by appeals to the learned sources of native traditions and impressing his reader with the great variety of detailed ethnographic information that he could casually produce in the form of an ethnic exemplum or in ethnographic doxographies, whether in a brief gesture towards three or four nations or in an extensive tour de force that filled an entire book of a larger treatise (as in Book IV of *On Abstinence*). As a philosopher, however, Porphyry persistently reminded his reader (whether this was his wife or a former friend who had backslidden into the life of the multitude) that the ascent of the soul was the highest aim of the philosophic life.

The tendencies inherent in the polymath and the philosopher came together in the process of putting the ethnographic details and ethnic characterizations to work for larger projects, that is, for the development of philosophical translation and ethnic argumentation. In addition to providing tropes of argument, however, racial conceptions and ethnographic knowledge could be put to the more sublime task of igniting the soul's desire for its true homeland and origins in the higher ontological and theological levels, namely the Intellect and even the One. Porphyry never explicitly expressed it thus, but I think he would find an ethnic adaptation of the teaching on the erotic impulse in Plato's *Phaedrus* felicitous. Whereas in the classical philosophical dialogue the beauty of a body was identified as a potential catalyst for reminding the soul of its origins before the descent into bodies,<sup>1</sup> in Porphyry's corpus, instances of holiness and

<sup>1</sup> Pl. *Phdr.* 250d–256e. We might recall that Bidez had set Porphyry's work off from Plotinus by noting that the former lacked just this aesthetic–erotic emphasis; see Bidez 1913: 107–108 (though dedicated to the *Sent.*); cf. 42. However, Porphyry had composed a poem “On the Sacred Marriage,” which apparently expressed an erotic–mystical tendency; his detractors had accused him of being mad and Plotinus had defended him as “at once a poet, a philosopher and a hierophant” (*V. Plot.* 15.1–6). It seems likely that Porphyry had wanted to portray himself here in terms similar to Plato's identification of inspired ravings with philosophy (see *Symp.* 218b; *Phd.* 69cd; *Phdr.* 244a–245c, and the entire following discussion). Furthermore, the *Letter to Marcella* names eros as one of the four basic elements of the philosophic life; see *Ep. Marc.* 24.376–384.

virtue performed by bodies of men (and sometimes women), who formed holy races in each of the nations, might provide a spark for the memory, in order to recall the descended soul back to its former existence before its birth into a body and into ethnicity. Put this way, there is a certain philosophical beauty to the dizzying array of ethnographic material frequently, but selectively, placed throughout his arguments.

The tendencies of the polymath and philosopher also converge in Porphyry in the broader modality of ethnic particularism, upon which our analysis has led us to remark in the previous chapter. The adaptation of philosophical translation as ethnic argumentation throughout Porphyry's various treatises fostered a universal vision of truth mapped onto the world in variegated forms. An argument depending upon constructions of ethnic identity may equally well have preferred stereotypes and paraphrases working within narrowly delimited parameters of acceptable material, or channeled the diversity of national distinctiveness into carefully circumscribed culturally centrist frameworks. Porphyry's centrism is an intentionally philosophical and spiritual one; and, if the centering strategies of his interpretive method point beyond and above the world of nations, then the impetus was removed for constraining the diversity of ethnographic data into a culturally driven arrangement, that is, the movement of perpetuating a particular culturally hegemonic project. The resort to a "default" cultural center, whether latent or explicit, in one's philosophical project was not only not necessary, but was antithetical to the highest aims of that project. Little could be gained for the soul by masking a cultural centrism behind the veneer of philosophical seriousness. But, at the same time, if one was not to negate completely the value of national customs and traditions, if one was not, in other words, to perform a sort of ethnic suicide that would parallel the suicidal tendencies of one longing to escape one's body (as Porphyry himself had experienced),<sup>2</sup> then the careful observation of the particularities of each people, whether embodying virtue or vice, piety or impiety, truth or confusion, constituted a philosophically viable activity and a spiritually important catalyst for illuminating the soul darkened in the obscurity of the body. Horizontal translation predicated upon an ethnic particularism, then, was a helpful *modus operandi* of the soul seeking salvation – as paradoxical as this might at first seem.

The purpose of this chapter is to find the limits of this approach, which was at once particularist and universal. To what degree were all nations on a

<sup>2</sup> *V. Plot.* 11.11–19; cf. *Eun. VS* 456/4.1.7–8 Giangrande (pp. 354–356 Wright); Bidez 1913: 52–54; Goulet 1982.

“level playing field” within the *interpretatio philosophica* of Porphyry? Even if his *interpretatio* was, by ascribed identity, an *interpretatio non Graeca*, had Porphyry been able effectively to escape from the larger cultural tides of Hellenism of which he was undoubtedly a part, as a Greek-speaking philosopher and literary critic educated in the center of the Greek world? Were his Hellenocritical expressions only a small diversion within a larger, inescapably Hellenocentric discourse? Alternatively, the question might again be raised about the extent of his Eastern Phoenician identity. Had he ever fully disengaged himself from his “Oriental” past? In order to answer these questions, we shall offer a brief sketch of each of the nations that were given more than a passing significance in his corpus, noting the positive and negative features he observed in each in order to determine the extent of his particularism. Following the sketch of Porphyry’s nations on a sliding scale between positive and negative poles, we shall turn to the civic context. If careful observation of national particularities was meant to help, rather than hinder, one’s philosophical pursuits, then one’s civic obligations and entanglements would have to be interpreted philosophically as well. Porphyry’s response to the political life, whether at the civic or imperial levels, will be seen to be largely consistent with the transcendental project evinced in his horizontal translation.

#### NATION BY NATION

Since Porphyry had begun his ethnic doxography in Book IV of his treatise on vegetarianism with the claim that he would look at vegetarian practices “nation by nation” (*kata ethnē*),<sup>3</sup> our examination of his ethnic argumentation under the modality of ethnic particularism (rather than a culturally centrist approach) should likewise attend to the particularities of each nation discussed, characterized, and identified in his works. Since the Greeks constituted the subject of the previous chapter, we may summarize: those designated “theologians” or “most theological” among the Greeks are placed on a high level, along with the holy men of other nations; possibly, they are once referred to with the first person plural; yet, even in these instances, as well as others, the Greeks are characterized as failing in certain key respects (religious–theological, moral–dietary, at least among contemporary Greeks) and inclined towards sophistry and moral laxity. Other nations held a similar range of positive and negative characteristics in Porphyry’s portrayal of them.

<sup>3</sup> *Abst.* 4.2.1; for the historiographic importance and background to this phrase, see Drews 1963 and 1976.



*Egyptians*

The Egyptians are probably mentioned in more works of Porphyry than any other single nation. Yet, at the same time, they are more often identified for their negative character traits, customs, or teachings than any other. Theologically, the Egyptians had limited their view of the divine to the visible material world, according to Chaeremon in the *Letter to Anebo*. For a Platonist, the deficiencies of such a view were obvious, even if we do not have explicit or extended critique in the extant fragments of the *Letter*. After offering a brief delineation of the Egyptian system of astral and planetary divinities, he writes: “They interpret absolutely everything in relation to things of nature and nothing in relation to incorporeal and living beings.”<sup>4</sup> The negative valence to this observation lay in the presumed obviousness of true divinity’s transcendence of the visible and material; indeed, he had already posited the truth that the gods were pure intelligible beings, which were “unmixed with perceptible things.”<sup>5</sup>

Theological weaknesses led to cultic improprieties among the Egyptians. A number of distinctively Egyptian religious paraphernalia and performances were subject to criticism. Central to Porphyry’s critique is the “rather irrational” activity of binding the gods and the use of threats in their invocations.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptian seeking to marshal the power of the gods to his own ephemeral ends would “smash heaven, reveal the secrets of Isis, show off the ineffable [mystery] of Abydos, stand on the sacred boat, scatter the limbs of Osiris for Typhon.” Such religious effrontery is representative of “irrational children.”<sup>7</sup> These impious deeds and “excessively violent acts” are not unfriendly rumor but are found in the report of the Egyptians’ own priest Chaeremon.<sup>8</sup> The polemical edge of this far-from-flattering picture of the Egyptians is thus greatly strengthened by appeal to native sources. This point marks an important caveat to our earlier discussion of Porphyry’s concern for allowing the barbarians their own voice within his texts. While liberating the native voice from the smothering restrictions of Hellenocentric paraphrase, as in Plutarch, the native voices could nonetheless be turned against their own. As pointed out in a discussion of a different literary context, texts could be weapons in the arena of cultural contestation.<sup>9</sup> Not only could native texts bolster barbarian identities against Greek cultural hegemony, but they could also be wielded against

<sup>4</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 25.1–2 Sodano.

<sup>5</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 1, pp. 5.4–6.4 Sodano.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 20.3 Sodano.

<sup>7</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 20.6–11 Sodano; for discussion of this passage, see Van der Horst 1984: 53–54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 21.1–2 Sodano.

<sup>9</sup> Av. Cameron 1994.

those identities when a higher philosophical purpose sought to chastise indigenous absurdity.

Finally, the *Letter to Anebo* joins a chorus of other passages in Porphyry's corpus to question the astral determinism expressed in Egyptian theological and religious conceptions. Not only does astral determinism undermine free will, an important doctrine defended carefully by Porphyry, but the study of the stars was riddled with disagreement among its practitioners.<sup>10</sup> The rules for casting nativities were countless and incomprehensible; Chaeremon himself had admitted that astrological expertise was impossible.<sup>11</sup> In the *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, Porphyry would at one point defend Ptolemy's system against "the Egyptians." But the favorable assessment of Ptolemy's system did not thereby entail a belief in the clarity or full comprehensibility of astrological knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Beyond what were seen as the insurmountable limits of astrological knowledge, the deterministic connection between the orders of the stars and the ordering of human affairs had been denied in the treatise *On Free Will*. There, Porphyry had designated astral determinism a distinctively Egyptian teaching, which was negated as being both untrue and unplatonian.<sup>13</sup>

These negative elements in the Egyptian ethnic portrait are nevertheless countered by positive features developed elsewhere in Porphyry's corpus. Most extensively, the picture of the priestly lifestyle in Egypt presented in the fourth book of *On Abstinence* is held up as a model of ascetic rigor and religious seriousness. The deficiencies of their theological system that were highlighted in the *Letter to Anebo* are here ignored in order to evoke a philosophically commendable way of life. Of course, the needs of his particular argument are largely determinative for the different construals of Egyptians in his various works. An open letter standing within the genre of *problemata* and adopting a gradually more surly and polemical tone would require different ethnic characterizations and ethnographic material than a treatise looking for ethnic embodiments of the vegetarian life. The fact that the Egyptians could be made to fit the requirements of both sorts of texts and their arguments marks clearly the ethnic particularism undergirding Porphyry's racial and philosophical vision of the world.

In addition to spiritual fervor and ascetic rigor, Egyptian theological approaches would find a favorable assessment elsewhere in the fragments.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of such argument among philosophers, see Long 1982.

<sup>11</sup> *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 26.20–22; pp. 26.24–27.6 Sodano; cf. *Phil. Orac.* fr. 332, 340–342 Smith.

<sup>12</sup> *Intro. Ptolem. Tetrab.* 49; cf. *Ptol. Tetrab.* 1.21. Ptolemy himself had shown caution regarding the limits of astrological knowledge in the preliminary discussion to the *Tetrabiblos* (see Chapter 3).

<sup>13</sup> *Free Will* fr. 271.41–57 Smith.

The *Philosophy from Oracles* had quoted the oracle hailing the origins of theological knowledge among the Egyptians.<sup>14</sup> Porphyry's commentary on the oracle had targeted Greeks and "the rulers" (both absent in the words of the oracle), but left the oracular claim to Egyptian superiority intact.<sup>15</sup> If the emphasis of the fragment as we have it is not misleading (and there is no guarantee of this) then Porphyry had felt little need to laud the Egyptian accomplishment beyond the barest summary of the contents of the oracle. Instead, he turned his attention to the Chaldeans (or Assyrians) and Hebrews in the final line of the oracle. What his ultimate purposes in citing the oracle were cannot be determined with any certainty,<sup>16</sup> but he may have wanted to include the oracle in his collection for its mention of Chaldeans alone (or some other reason), rather than for its commendation of Egyptian theology. After all, Eusebius, our source for these fragments, had himself only quoted them for their inclusion of the Hebrews among the ranks of the theologically astute nations (of course, it is this very fact that makes the fragment as we have it unsafe for drawing any firm conclusions about Porphyry's aims).

Even if his intent and emphasis were on other elements or nations listed in the fragment, Porphyry had allowed the Egyptians to be designated a high position in the area of theological knowledge. Elsewhere, a similarly favorable characterization of the Egyptians continues this picture of the nation as possessed of a certain spiritual and theological acumen. The Egyptian doctrine of the West as the residence of wicked daemons had provided confirmation of the teaching of Plato found allegorically behind his narrative of the Atlanteans in the *Timaeus*.<sup>17</sup> The resultant cult acts associated with the Egyptian doctrine of daemons received favorable treatment when noted as confirmation of Porphyry's own daemonology in the *Philosophy from Oracles*.<sup>18</sup>

Egyptian iconography was an especially rich fund of theological knowledge if interpreted correctly. The correctness of the interpretation seems usually to have resided within a Stoicizing allegoresis, in which the different iconographic elements in Egyptian art (or hieroglyphs) signified parts or principles of the visible world. This is the overwhelming interpretive framework for the *On Images*.<sup>19</sup> A hint, however, that Egyptian images could be interpreted Platonically as well occurs in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, where an Egyptian hieroglyphic character is claimed to

<sup>14</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 323 Smith.      <sup>15</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324 Smith.      <sup>16</sup> See [Chapter 6](#) for discussion.

<sup>17</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano; cf. *Antro nymph.* 29, p. 76.11–12 Nauck; for discussion of the Middle Platonic interpretation of Atlantis, see Dillon 2006: 22–24.

<sup>18</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 326 Smith.      <sup>19</sup> *De simulac.* fr. 360 Smith.

represent the World Soul.<sup>20</sup> Though the World Soul could readily be seen in terms of its pervasive extension in the visible world (a point resonant with Stoic theology), the fragment's remark on the "intelligible attentiveness" represented by the circle and its occurrence within an explication of a passage from Plato's *Timaeus*, allow for the possibility of higher allegorical interpretations of Egyptian images in Porphyry's thought.

Finally, *On the Cave of the Nymphs* appealed to Egyptian teachings about the soul in a favorable manner. Indications of the soul's connection to generation were identified in Egyptian representations of daemons embarked on boats.<sup>21</sup> The two gates of Homer's passage on the cave of the nymphs were confirmed by the Egyptian teaching on two psychical gates.<sup>22</sup> Like the Pythagoreans, furthermore, the Egyptians prescribed silence when passing through a gate – an indication of their theological notion of silence as a fitting form of worship for the first principle of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, both the negative and positive features of Egyptian identity arose from their theological and religious distinctiveness. Indeed, the Egyptians were good for little more than as representatives of particular theological doctrines or forms of priestly spirituality. His racial conception of Egyptians was certainly broader than a purely religious identity; however, their value as purveyors of distinctive doctrine and producers of a distinctively religious lifestyle was primary in Porphyry's representations. His particularism found both commendable and disreputable features of the Egyptian identity as useful for thinking through issues and confirming his claims. At the same time, his particularism had a firmly theological focus.

### *Persians*

The Persians are only rarely treated as such. In one case, they are noted only for the foreignness of their language, which is incomprehensible to most speakers of Attic Greek.<sup>24</sup> A discussion of the allegorical significance of features of Persian cult seems to be a reference to Mithraism specifically.<sup>25</sup> The attention to the initiates of "the leonine things" in the sentence just before the explicit naming of "the Persian" is probably a reference to the rank of lion in the mysteries of Mithras;<sup>26</sup> and, furthermore, the cult of

<sup>20</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 70 Sodano. <sup>21</sup> *Antro nymph.* 10, p. 63.13–17 Nauck.

<sup>22</sup> *Antro nymph.* 23–24, pp. 72.2–4; 72.15–73.2 Nauck. <sup>23</sup> *Antro nymph.* 27, pp. 74.20–75.1 Nauck.

<sup>24</sup> *Abst.* 3.3.4; 3.5.3. <sup>25</sup> *Antro nymph.* 16, p. 67.13–15 Nauck.

<sup>26</sup> *Antro nymph.* 15, p. 67.6–12 Nauck; on the leonine rank in Mithraism, see Turcan 1975: 36–38.

Mithras is named two pages later within the same discussion.<sup>27</sup> There thus seems no good reason to doubt that Porphyry is thinking of Mithraism when he refers to Persian cult. One can even go further: “the Persian” is probably Mithras himself, since he is acknowledged “as the guardian of fruit.”<sup>28</sup>

That Mithraism was envisioned as a distinctively Persian cult – even if we now recognize it as fundamentally a product of the Roman Empire<sup>29</sup> – is obvious. But Porphyry allows this widespread assumption of a Persian mystique to the mysteries to provide a basis for including Mithraic material in his ethnographic discussion of Persians in Book IV of *On Abstinence*. There, the importance of restrictions on eating meat among all the races of the Magi was made to depend upon their belief in metempsychosis.<sup>30</sup> This doctrine, furthermore, which presumed a community between humans and animals, was “expressed through riddles (*ainittomenoi*)” in the mysteries of Mithras.<sup>31</sup> Here, not only the rank of lion, but also the other animal ranks were invoked as indicative of higher truths. In all of this, it is doubtful that Porphyry had first-hand knowledge of the Mithraic mysteries;<sup>32</sup> his evidence primarily depends upon Eubulus and Pallas<sup>33</sup> (possibly mediated through Numenius).<sup>34</sup>

Significantly, in both the *On Abstinence* and *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, his discussion of Mithraic cult forms and organization devolves quickly into observations on distinctively Greek mysteries: in the former the mysteries of Demeter,<sup>35</sup> in the latter the Orphic mysteries.<sup>36</sup> These passages, then, evince something of a Hellenocentric recalcitrance in Porphyry’s otherwise persistent decentering of Greek cultural centrism. The discrepancy may merely be the result of his dependence in both instances upon the same sources (though in neither case do the texts show clear evidence of continuing to follow these sources when they turn to the Greek mystery

<sup>27</sup> *Antro nymph.* 17, p. 69.2–3 Nauck.

<sup>28</sup> *Antro nymph.* 16, p. 67.13–14 Nauck; but see Turcan 1975: 70–71. <sup>29</sup> Claus 2000.

<sup>30</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.2. <sup>31</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.3; cf. Origen, *c. Cels.* 6.22, with Turcan 1975: 35.

<sup>32</sup> Turcan 1975: 62–89.

<sup>33</sup> This Eubulus may not be the Athenian Platonist contemporary with Porphyry, on which see Clark 2000b: 187–188 n.634; Brisson 1982a: 1.80–81. Turcan 1975: 38–43, has argued for a first century date, and possible identification with the little-known Pythagorean Eubulus of Messina.

<sup>34</sup> Buffière 1973: 419–420; Turcan 1975: 62–89 (though his suggestions, at 63–64, that Porphyry wrote the work in the Plotinian period after possibly acquiring the works of Numenius and Cronius from the library at Caesarea Palestine, goes well beyond the evidence).

<sup>35</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.6. The Magi are also brought into association with Demeter in the Derveni Papyrus; see G. Clark 2000b: 189.

<sup>36</sup> *Antro nymph.* 16, pp. 67.21–68.22.

material).<sup>37</sup> Of course, the discrepancy should not be overstated. Porphyry was not an anti-Greek *tout court*, but had allowed for positive as well as negative evaluations of various aspects of Greek identity and thought. We may have here, in the passages on Persian Mithras worship, an extension of the same universalizing approach that had produced the brief ethnographic doxographies, e.g., of those nations known for seriousness in the performance of prayer, or in certain dietary habits.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Magi among the Persians had been included in the doxography on peoples of prayer in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*.<sup>39</sup>

Though the remarks on Persian language in Book III of *On Abstinence* are neutral, we may draw from these other references to Persians (or Magi, or Mithraism) a consistently favorable portrait of Persians in Porphyry. Their detractors might have seen the Magi as practitioners of the dark arts (*goēteia*), but, according to Porphyry, such slander only arose from those who were making progress in wickedness.<sup>40</sup> And, even if all races of Magi did not practice total abstinence from meat all the time, the philosopher found in them fellow-travelers at various stages along the road of piety and the pursuit of truth.

### Chaldeans

If John Lydus, writing in the first half of the sixth century, is to be trusted, Porphyry wrote “a commentary (*hupomnēma*) on the [Chaldean]<sup>41</sup> *Oracles*, a pseudepigraphic collection of oracles allegedly of Chaldean origin, apparently written by a father and son team, both of whom bore the name Julian.<sup>42</sup> Aeneas of Gaza, on the other hand, claimed the title of Porphyry’s work was *The Oracles of the Chaldeans*,<sup>43</sup> while the Suda provides us with an

<sup>37</sup> In the case of the *Abst.* passage, Patillon and Segonds (1995: xxxv–xxxvii) argue that Porphyry is offering his own interpretation when he brings in the Eleusinian mysteries.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 5. <sup>39</sup> *Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano. <sup>40</sup> *Abst.* 4.16.8; cf. *Regr. anim.* fr. 286 Smith.

<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, one could suppose that Lydus is thinking of Porphyry’s *Phil. Orac.*, which commented on oracles of various provenance. The fact that Lydus then goes on to paraphrase Porphyry using clearly the language of the *Chald. Orac.* (e.g., the Once-Beyond and the Twice-Beyond), however, lead one to believe that it was, indeed, a commentary on the *Chald. Orac.* – but could not such commentary constitute a section of the *Phil. Orac.*? For the position that the *Chald. Orac.* were included in the *Phil. Orac.*, see Lewy 1956; Hadot 1960. For criticism of Lewy, see Dodds 1961; followed by Busine 2005: 200–202, 247. I must register in this note a suspicion that Porphyry did not deal with the *Chald. Orac.* at all, but that later Neoplatonists, who knew the *Chald. Orac.*, presumed that Porphyry was treating of them when he referred to the Chaldeans generally or discussed oracles referring to the Chaldeans. I confine my suspicion to this note because of the language of the *Chald. Orac.* that occurs in the testimony of Lydus mentioned here; I hope to return to this problem in the future.

<sup>42</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 365 Smith; on the Julians, see Lewy 1956: 3–5; Majercik 1989: 1–2.

<sup>43</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 368 Smith.

even less informative title, *On the Writings of Julian the Chaldean*.<sup>44</sup> If the fragments presented in the Teubner edition as deriving from that work are correctly attributed, the work dealt with the highest points of Neoplatonic metaphysics and theology: the identity of the First Principle was the Father of the intelligible triad,<sup>45</sup> the material world had come into being (or, was in a state of eternal coming-to-be),<sup>46</sup> the Jewish Demiurge could be located within the triadic hypostases,<sup>47</sup> and there were various gradations of the ontological descent into matter.<sup>48</sup> There is no hint in our fragments of any disagreement with the *Oracles* themselves; but there is no sure evidence by which we can ascertain even that he supposed them to be legitimate oracles from a divine source or to be genuinely Chaldean in provenance at all.<sup>49</sup> It is probable that he treated them as genuine, since, had he argued otherwise, it no doubt would have been reported by our sources (especially our Christian ones, such as Aeneas of Gaza). As they stand, the fragments leave the impression that he viewed the *Oracles* favorably (or at least neutrally) in his commentary on them. Whether he had anything to say about Chaldeans as a people or race in this work is entirely unknown.

We have firmer evidence of a felicitous approach to Chaldeans in his *Philosophy from Oracles*, which is best seen as a distinct work from the commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles* given our current state of knowledge on all three works (that is, the *Philosophy from Oracles*, the commentary work *On the Chaldean Oracles*, and the *Chaldean Oracles* themselves).<sup>50</sup> The comments on the Apolline oracle listing the ancient nations who had discovered the path to the gods have been discussed in earlier chapters. We need only repeat our conclusion: there seems to be a particular concern to elucidate the role of Chaldeans (and Hebrews) in the progress of human knowledge about the divine in the fragment.<sup>51</sup> The ethnonym Assyrians occurred in the oracle itself and it seems that Porphyry was going to great lengths to confirm his interpretation that the Assyrians were the Chaldeans under a different name. In addition to the fortunate inclusion of the Chaldeans (= Assyrians) in the first quoted oracle, the two supplementary oracles that Porphyry provided in his comments offered flattering references

<sup>44</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* test. 362 Smith.

<sup>45</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 367 (incertum) Smith.

<sup>46</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 368 Smith.

<sup>47</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 365 Smith.

<sup>48</sup> *De Chald. Orac.* fr. 364a–b Smith.

<sup>49</sup> In any case, their origins certainly belong to a Middle Platonic context; Zambon 2002: 251–268.

<sup>50</sup> Dodds 1961; Busine 2005: 200–202, 247.

<sup>51</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324 Smith; see Appendix 2. It might be that Porphyry saw the Hebrews as originally Chaldeans and hence placed oracles about each of them together to affirm this connection (cf. Philo *V. Moys.* 1.5–6, where Moses is declared “a Chaldean by birth”). This possibility is enticing but hypothetical.

to the Chaldeans as those who “alone obtained wisdom” and as those who first arrived at accurate knowledge about the cosmic spheres.<sup>52</sup> Each of the three oracles were attributed to Apollo and may have functioned (at least to some degree) as a sort of oracular cross-referencing, in which the oracles from one divine source were invoked to confirm the authority of oracles from another divine source. The Greek Apollo authenticated the barbarian oracles.

In the *Commentary on the Timaeus*, as a sort of trajectory of the ethnographic doxography enumerating the peoples known for spiritual seriousness with respect to prayer, the Chaldeans were characterized as superseding the efforts of holy men from other nations. “The Chaldeans also served the divinity in general and worshiped the very virtue of the gods, saying that it was a god, being far from over-proud in their sacred worship because of their virtue.”<sup>53</sup> The Chaldeans thus appeared to trump the piety of other nations, since they worshiped not only the gods, but the very virtue of the gods, and in this way exhibited their proper (moral–philosophical) understanding of the cult acts themselves. Porphyry elsewhere had been keen to emphasize the necessity of virtue for proper worship,<sup>54</sup> and hence, the fragment from the commentary (difficult though the Greek may be) is clearly an attempt to highlight the philosophic value of Chaldean practices.

Porphyry, like Neoplatonists after him (beginning with Iamblichus and culminating in Proclus) saw the Chaldeans and possibly the *Chaldean Oracles* as a rich repository of philosophical truth. Yet there were apparently limits to the positive portrait so far noted. In the very problematic preservation of Porphyrian fragments in Augustine’s *City of God*, we find evidence of a more critical reception of the *Chaldean Oracles*. In a hostile and probably inaccurate portrayal of the treatise *On the Return of the Soul*,<sup>55</sup> Augustine had accused Porphyry of being more indebted to the Chaldeans (probably to the *Chaldean Oracles* in particular)<sup>56</sup> than to Plato.<sup>57</sup> The “fragments” that are collected under the title *On the Return of the Soul* are rarely more than polemically distorted paraphrases of Porphyry’s original work,<sup>58</sup> which Augustine may, in any case, have known only at second

<sup>52</sup> *Phil.Orac.* fr. 324.11–12, 15–18 Smith.

<sup>53</sup> *Comm.Tim.* fr. 28 Sodano. For an alternative (but overly loose) translation, see Runia and Share 2008: 44–45.

<sup>54</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 291 Smith. <sup>55</sup> For discussion, see [Chapter 1](#).

<sup>56</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 302a Smith: “. . . those things which he had learned from the Chaldeans – and he certainly cannot keep quiet about the fact that *he has taken divine oracles from the Chaldeans*, of whom he makes persistent mention” (italics in Smith, which seek to identify wording of Porphyry).

<sup>57</sup> *Regr.anim.* fr. 287 Smith. <sup>58</sup> Clark 2007.



hand. However, one fragment, which seems to come a bit closer to something of a quotation, evinces Porphyry's response to the limits of Chaldean theurgy. A certain man "trained in the Chaldean arts" had lacked the spiritual power to overcome theurgical opponents.<sup>59</sup> If theurgy can be seen as a distinctively Chaldean practice in Porphyry's works,<sup>60</sup> then the fragment is clearly hostile to this people: "By this token, [Porphyry] said, it seems that theurgy is a discipline of destroying the good to such a degree, rather than the bad, among both gods and humans."<sup>61</sup>

If we could trust Augustine to render faithfully the thought, if not the wording, of Porphyry then this fragment would count towards a more balanced view of Chaldeans as possessing a combination of positive and negative features in their religious system. Yet, we can only trust Augustine for preserving a polemical smokescreen from some phrases (probably taken out of context and of a hypothetical nature), which placed limits on the value and benefits of material religious cult (something Porphyry is otherwise known for in his other works, e.g., the *Letter to Anebo* and *On Abstinence*).<sup>62</sup> Augustine may have encountered this Porphyrian material in a Latin pagan intermediary,<sup>63</sup> itself of a probably polemical nature and possibly heightening the role of Chaldean theurgy beyond what Porphyry himself may have deemed appropriate in the original work (whatever its original name and identity).<sup>64</sup> Given the problematic status of this and the other "fragments" going under the name *On the Return of the Soul*, an assessment of Porphyry's approach to the Chaldeans here may seem impossible. We nonetheless would like to venture the following cautious remarks.

Augustine's assertion that Porphyry often mentioned the Chaldeans in this work is a fairly reliable indication that they appeared a number of times in the intermediary's version of *On the Return of the Soul* that he had at his disposal, whether this was a Latin translation or paraphrase of the whole work, or only a portion of a larger pagan Neoplatonist work that claimed to

<sup>59</sup> Hadot 1960: 227 (cf. Lewy 1956: 286), suggested this theurgist was none other than Julian the author of the *Chald. Orac.*; unfortunately, such a possibility is unverifiable.

<sup>60</sup> At least, Augustine would have us believe this; see *Regr. anim.* fr. 287 Smith (where "theurgic purifications" are the preserve of Chaldeans, not Plato); cf. frs. 295, 302 Smith.

<sup>61</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 294.10–12 Smith. <sup>62</sup> See Chapter 3 for discussion.

<sup>63</sup> Firmicus Maternus, Marius Victorinus, and Macrobius are all likely candidates, though there may have been any number of pagan Neoplatonists at Rome (or Milan) who are unknown to us. Cf. De Labriolle 1934; Hadot 1968: 1.79–86.

<sup>64</sup> I presume a polemical side to the Latin intermediary only because of Augustine's (and Jerome's) characterization of them as hostile to Christianity; cf. De Labriolle, 1934: 348–353. Courcelle 1969: 134–141, 182, however, claims Victorinus as translator and Manlius Theodorus as promoter of Porphyry's writings to Augustine.

be presenting the argument of Porphyry's treatise. There is otherwise little polemical point to Augustine's remark (though he could be exaggerating somewhat). Secondly, because the point is made in very similar wording in different places of the *City of God*,<sup>65</sup> it is fairly safe to suppose that Porphyry had a limited view of the salvific effects of the theurgic purifications of the Chaldean cultic system. Such a claim would not be out of keeping with what we know of Porphyry's thinking on sacrifice and salvation.<sup>66</sup> Finally, the episode itself of the theurgical attacks on the man trained in the Chaldean arts would seem to confirm the problematic and limited status granted to Chaldean cult.<sup>67</sup> The weakness of the Chaldean's spirituality in warding off the (probably daemonic) attacks would also resonate with similar accounts in the *Life of Plotinus*, as well as remarks made in the *On Abstinence*.<sup>68</sup>

We may conclude that Porphyry took the Chaldeans seriously as embodying a philosophical way of life. Their attitude to prayer, as well as the theology informing that attitude, was commendable. The general cultic system, however, had clear limits placed upon its ultimate efficacy in the salvation of the higher part of the soul, which was the primary aim of the philosopher. Hence, though they found their place in ethnographic doxographies alongside other nations known for various elements of piety and wisdom, Porphyry attended to distinctive features of the Chaldean practices and found them wanting. This variegated attunement to the contours of Chaldean identity and way of living in the world thus mark well Porphyry's basic interpretive movements from an ethnically particularist approach. The truth about souls, the ontological grades of being, and appropriate or salvific cult performances may have been universally scattered in the lives of holy men of each nation, but the particular ethnic embodiment of those truths, which obscured to varying degrees the clarity of their expression, was always contingent and grounded within the distinctiveness of particular peoples.

### *Syrians and Phoenicians*

Positive renderings of Syrian identity and religious performance are scarce in Porphyry's works. In the *On Abstinence*, they are somewhat awkwardly included in the doxography of holy men and women dwelling among the nations in Book iv, since the Syrians possessed no identifiable priestly or

<sup>65</sup> Frs. 302, 302a, 302b Smith.

<sup>67</sup> *Regr. anim.* fr. 294 Smith.

<sup>66</sup> For discussion, see [Chapter 3](#).

<sup>68</sup> *V. Plot.* 10.1–15; *Abst.* 2.42.3; cf. 2.39.2.

philosophic race of piety and wisdom. On the contrary, their only glory lay in their past, before animals came to be added to the diet of Syrians as a result of priestly weakness and the inability of the ancient king Pygmalion to curb the dietary excesses of his people. Not only is it significant that the Syrians break the general trend in Porphyry's presentation of national dietary practices by exhibiting a narrative of decline (shared only by the Greeks), but the sources invoked and the regional particularities of the material sit oddly as representative of Syrian practices at all. Rather, he identified Pygmalion (whose identity with the king of Tyre, known from other Greek and Latin sources, is apparently being presumed)<sup>69</sup> as a king of Cyprus.<sup>70</sup> One of Porphyry's sources for Pygmalion, Asclepiades of Cyprus, may have been Phoenician himself (though we are only told that he had written a book entitled *Cyprus and Phoenicia*).<sup>71</sup> Instead, the Syrians are only named in a quotation from the comic poet Menander at the end of the section. The inclusion of material on Pygmalion leads us to conclude that Porphyry considered Syrians to be or to include Phoenicians – Pygmalion was, after all, “a Phoenician by race,” even if not noted as living or ruling in Phoenicia proper.<sup>72</sup> The opaque nature of the entire section remains a bit baffling.

Confirmation of Porphyry's identification of Syrians with Phoenicians comes from the *Life of Pythagoras*, but here we encounter a more favorable depiction of them. Neanthes of Cyzicus, a named source of the *On Abstinence* as well, is Porphyry's primary source for the claim that Pythagoras himself was “a Syrian from the city of Tyre.”<sup>73</sup> While Neanthes' claim for Pythagoras' Syrian origins is the first testimony given in the *Life* and thus might seem to take pride of place, Porphyry appears rather uncommitted to any one identification of the sage (Tyrrhenian and Samian origins are also presented as possibilities by other sources).<sup>74</sup> His education is, in any case, placed among the Phoenicians and other barbarian nations. The Phoenicians were “highly-trained in numbers and proportions.”<sup>75</sup> This characterization is certainly favorable, but one would scarcely recognize

<sup>69</sup> Best known from the reference in Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.346–347. Pygmalion (*Pu' mayyaton* in Phoenician) was apparently a historical king; see Cross, 1972: 18–19; cf. Josephus *C. Apion.* 1.18.

<sup>70</sup> Ovid, *Metam.* 10.238–297; Ps.-Apollodorus *Bibl.* 3.14.3; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.2; this is the single fragment and testimony to this Asclepiades, see Clark 2000b: 187, n. 630; Patillon and Segonds 1995: 3.79.

<sup>72</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.1; for Cypriot–Phoenician connections in the late classical and Hellenistic periods, see Maier 1994; cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.621–622.

<sup>73</sup> *V. Pythag.* 1.

<sup>74</sup> We see here Porphyry's typical pluralism in citing sources; see Pépin 1966.

<sup>75</sup> *V. Pythag.* 6.

the author of the *Life of Pythagoras* as a Phoenician from any evidence internal to that work.

His Phoenician origins are declared only in the *Life of Plotinus*, where he notes the change of his name, which was Malchus “in the language of my forefathers,” to a Greek one.<sup>76</sup> *Basileus* had been an adequate translation into Greek of the Phoenician name *Malchus* (or, “King”); but *Porphyry* (“purple”) drew a connection between the meaning of his name (whether in the Greek or Phoenician rendering) and his fatherland: Phoenicia was known for its purple dye production and purple was, of course, the color of royalty.<sup>77</sup> Porphyry’s self-positioning within the narrative of the *Life of Plotinus* consistently presents his identity and role in carefully scripted ways.<sup>78</sup> The passage on the name change is no exception. As we suggested in the previous chapter, beyond Porphyry’s insinuation of himself into an authoritative position in the biography through the quotation of others’ texts referring to himself, the precise context of his name change, namely Amelius’ tongue-in-cheek polemic against charges of Plotinus’ plagiarizing Numenius by adopting a Numenian practice (giving a non-Greek addressee a Greek nickname), was a conflict that seems to have had cultural and ethnic valences. But even with such valences, it does not exhibit a concern to diminish or strengthen Porphyry’s Phoenician identity. He is certainly unabashed in providing the information of his Phoenician origins, but the tenor of the passage conveys no sense of Phoenician “nationalism,” heightened emotion, or indication of allegiance to a Phoenician identity.

The general characterization of Syrians and Phoenicians in Porphyry is mixed. They practiced human sacrifice<sup>79</sup> and cannibalism,<sup>80</sup> and their history was marked by decline;<sup>81</sup> yet, their expertise in numbers made them good teachers of Pythagoras, who may have been a Syrian from Tyre in Phoenicia anyway,<sup>82</sup> and they had the honor of appearing in an oracle distinguishing those nations known for wisdom in divine matters.<sup>83</sup> Porphyry himself was not ashamed (though not overly proud either) of his Phoenician heritage.<sup>84</sup> Again we see Porphyry’s ethnic particularism at work in his portraits of Phoenicians in his various works. Depending upon the contextual needs or limits of his argument, or the constraints of the source he sought to work with, the Phoenician national character, religious customs, and ways of thinking were highlighted for elements judged to be good or deleterious in nature by the philosopher’s transcendent criterion of truth and piety. He may have adopted strategies of decentering

<sup>76</sup> *V.Plot.* 17.6–15; for discussion, see [Chapter 6](#). <sup>77</sup> See Clark 1999. <sup>78</sup> See Finamore 2005.

<sup>79</sup> *Abst.* 2.56.1, 4–5. <sup>80</sup> *Abst.* 2.57.1. <sup>81</sup> *Abst.* 4.15.

<sup>82</sup> *V.Pythag.* 1, 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Phil.Orac.* frs. 323–324 Smith. <sup>84</sup> *V.Plot.* 17.

Hellenocentrism similar to those of Philo of Byblos (especially in the quotation of native sources), but the latter's Phoenician "patriotism" is noticeably lacking in Porphyry's vision of the nations.

### *Jews*

It is impossible to find a pagan intellectual before the age of Constantine<sup>85</sup> with as consistent and overt sympathies for the Jews and their way of life as Porphyry. In every reference but one (to which we shall turn below), Porphyry exhibits a high view of the Jewish nation.<sup>86</sup> Jews (or Hebrews) are invoked in *On Abstinence*, *Philosophy from Oracles*, the commentary *On the Chaldean Oracles*, *To Gaurus*, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, and *Against the Christians*. Only in *Philosophy from Oracles* are the Jews given the appellation Hebrews. In imperial Greek literature the latter is frequently used to refer to the ancient people, while the ethnonym of Jews applied to contemporary members of the people.<sup>87</sup> This distinction in usage is largely true even in polemical texts where a moral and spiritual valence was attached to the two.<sup>88</sup> The use of the appellation of Hebrew in the *Philosophy from Oracles* is due in most cases to the precedent set by the oracle being commented on by Porphyry. Even in Fragment 346 Smith, where we lack the oracle(s), his remarks on "Hebrew" teaching seem to proceed from comments he had made in an earlier fragment that discussed an oracle which had named the Hebrews.<sup>89</sup> In the same fragment, Jesus was said to have been one of "the wise men of the Hebrews" – an assertion that would nullify any temporal distinction between ancient Hebrews and contemporary Jews that Porphyry or his readers might otherwise have adopted. There is, therefore, insufficient evidence to suppose that Porphyry made any clear distinction between the two ethnyms.

<sup>85</sup> After Constantine, there is of course Julian (though he might be deemed a special case because of his Christian background); Themistius cites the Hebrew Scriptures, but as a rhetorical move to gain the adherence of his largely Christian audience (cf. Downey 1957); Libanius evinces a friendship with the patriarch of the Jews, but did not extend his personal goodwill to a broader inclusion of Jewish exempla or anecdotes in the rest of his corpus (*Epp.* 914, 917, 1084, 1105; Cribiore 2007: 76).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Leveils 2007: 152–153. See now the important study of Pieter Van der Horst 2010, which came to my attention after the final submission of the present chapter.

<sup>87</sup> Arazy 1977; Harvey 1996.

<sup>88</sup> Esp. Eus. *PE* 7.7–8; for discussion, see variously, Ulrich 1999: 57–131; Jacobs 2004; Johnson 2006a: 109–124.

<sup>89</sup> This possibility is only valid insofar as we take the words to be Porphyry's ("as you heard the divine [oracles] of Apollo, which were spoken above"); they may, however, be Augustine's interjection. If Porphyrian, the previous oracles may have included the material at fr. 344 Smith, which derives from the same chapter as fr. 346 (Aug. *CD* 19.23).

The positive aspects of the Jewish identity drawn out in *Philosophy from Oracles* revolve around their emphasis on worship of the Father, who was the Creator of the universe, and their rejection of cult to lower spirits or daemons. An oracle given apparently by the Apollo at Miletus (that is, at Didyma)<sup>90</sup> declared the Hebrews as examples of those who worshiped the Creator. We have part of the oracle in Greek verse, quoted by Lactantius (who does not mention Porphyry as a source for the oracle); the line that names the Hebrews is only found in Augustine's *City of God* and it claims to be selectively paraphrasing<sup>91</sup> the oracle in Latin (and Augustine admits in an earlier fragment to be working with a Latin translation of Porphyry's work).<sup>92</sup> As presented by Augustine, the oracle runs: "To God the creator, indeed," [the oracles] say, "and to the king over all, at whom heaven trembles, and earth and sea and the secrets of the Underworld and the divinities (*numina*) themselves dread;<sup>93</sup> their law is the Father, whom especially the Hebrew holy men honor."<sup>94</sup>

The notion that Hebrews were representatives of devotion to the higher levels of a theological hierarchy seems to have been a prominent feature of their appearance elsewhere in *Philosophy from Oracles*, as well as the single reference in the work *On the Chaldean Oracles*. A fragment attributing such sublime religious performance to "the wise men of the Hebrews – one of whom was that Jesus, as you heard in the divine [oracles] of Apollo, which were spoken above,"<sup>95</sup> declares the nation to have rejected worship of "earthly spirits and wicked daemons" in favor of the worship of "the heavenly gods and moreover of the worship more fully of God the Father."<sup>96</sup> The Father who received the worship of the Jews may not have been the One, or the "Once and for all Beyond – that is, the Good" (in Chaldean, and then in Platonic parlance), as Porphyry's *On the Chaldean Oracles* remarks;<sup>97</sup> but the high place of the Jews and their worship within the schema of cultic and theological hierarchies remains emphatically positive.

<sup>90</sup> See the parallel witness for this fragment at Lact. *De ira* 23.12.

<sup>91</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 344.4 Smith: *ut quantum satis est inde decerpam*. <sup>92</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 343.7–8 Smith.

<sup>93</sup> Lact. *de ira* 23.12, gives the Greek of these lines, and attributes the oracle to the Apollo of Miletus, i.e., Didyma; see also Smith's note, ad loc.

<sup>94</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 344 Smith (= Augustine *Civ. Dei* 19.23.30–37); cf. Porph. *de Chald. Orac.* fr. 365 Smith.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Phil. Orac.* fr. 343 Smith; cf. Levieils 2007: 157.

<sup>96</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 346 (= Augustine *Civ. Dei* 19.23.107–133); see Cook 2004: 155–157.

<sup>97</sup> *De Chald. orac.* fr. 365 (= Lydus *mens.* 110.18–25): "Nevertheless Porphyry in his commentary (*hypomnēma*) on the oracles claims that the 'Twice-removed' (or: 'that which is Doubly Beyond') – that is, the Demiurge of all things – is the [God] honored by the Jews, whom the Chaldean theologizes as second from the 'Once and for all Beyond' – that is, the Good." See Cook 2004: 157–159.

The oracles and commentary found in the fragment on the nations who had discovered the road to the gods fit within this trend of interpretive focus on Jewish theological wisdom. There, as we have already noted, the Hebrews were included in the original list of wise barbarian nations, and then were given two supplementary oracles that noted their worship of “the self-begotten King” and their recognition of the heavenly spheres.<sup>98</sup> A similarly favorable report on Jewish astral knowledge occurs in *On Abstinence*: “They talk to each other about the divine, and at night they contemplate the stars, gazing at them and calling on God in their prayers.”<sup>99</sup> How precisely Porphyry would have understood the connection between knowledge of heavenly spheres and Hebrew theological wisdom remains impossible to determine. An astral reference occurs already in the first chapter of Genesis in the Hebrew Scriptures;<sup>100</sup> possibly Porphyry sought to link this reference to his own conception of the ascent of the soul through the spheres on its return to its divine source.

Jewish dietary practices were well-known in antiquity and became an important feature of Porphyry’s ethnic argumentation in the treatise *On Abstinence*.<sup>101</sup> Aside from the discussion of the Essenes in the ethnographic doxography of Book IV, the Jews as a nation are noted elsewhere for their dietary scruples.<sup>102</sup> A description of Jewish whole burnt offerings, mediated (at least in part) by Theophrastus, exonerates the nation from any taint of immorality in the performance of the ritual: it was performed at night, so as to avoid the gaze of God; it was not eaten but burned entirely, was preceded by fasting, and was accompanied by prayer and contemplation of the heavenly bodies.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to Porphyry’s approval of ritual and doctrinal elements belonging to the Jewish people, salutary quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures occur at key points in some of his arguments. In the treatise *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, he quotes from Genesis 1:2 (“the spirit of God

<sup>98</sup> *Phil. Orac.* fr. 324 Smith; see Cook 2004: 152–155.

<sup>99</sup> *Abst.* 2.26.3; trans. Clark 65. The passage may still be a synopsis of Theophrastean material (as noted at 2.26.1), though none of the editors directly address the issue of where Theophrastus stops and Porphyry begins. The chapter heading in Eus. *PE* 9.2.1, which quotes the entirety of *Abst.* 2.26.1–4, as well as the introductory comment at *PE* 9.1.4, attributes it to Theophrastus.

<sup>100</sup> Gen. 1:14–19; its importance for understanding astrology was already well-noted by Origen, *Comm. Genes.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.

<sup>101</sup> See Isaac 2004: 441–491.

<sup>102</sup> *Abst.* 1.14.4; 4.11.1; 4.14.1–2.

<sup>103</sup> *Abst.* 2.26.1–4; for discussion, see Patillon and Segonds 1995: 58–67. Cook 2004: 181–183, unnecessarily sees this passage as a negative portrayal of Jewish sacrifice. This is, in part, due to reading it in conjunction with *c. Christ.* fr. 79 Harnack; this fragment, however, is not criticizing Jewish sacrifices but is, rather, an attempt to catch the Christians at their own contradiction in attacking Greek sacrificial practices while defending a corpus of Scriptures that advocates sacrifice. The fragment tells us nothing of Porphyry’s attitude to the biblical sacrificial ordinances as such.

moved on the waters”) as confirmation that Naiads allegorically signified souls entering the watery flow of generation, which was “God-breathed.”<sup>104</sup> Admittedly the quotation is prompted by, and set within, an indirect quotation of Numenius, who attributed the biblical lines to “the prophet.”<sup>105</sup> If *Against the Christians* provides sufficient evidence, however, Porphyry knew the Hebrew Scriptures quite well and probably recognized the identity of the “prophet.”<sup>106</sup> Yet, the Hebrews are not named as the source, and so, even if Porphyry recognized the origins of the line, it is immaterial for any identity construction of the Jews in his thought.

A further quotation from Genesis in his *To Gaurus, on the Ensoulment of Embryos* is more promising in this regard. In a discussion of the precise time and nature of the soul’s penetration into the body, where Porphyry rejects the notion that the soul is compelled to enter the body before the time of birth, he invokes “the theologian of the Hebrews” and quotes Genesis 2:7, which said “that, after the human body had been formed (*peplasménou*) and received all its bodily creation (*dēmiourgian*), ‘God breathed the spirit into it [and turned it] into a living soul.’ The self-moved soul, therefore, without being forced, enters into bodies.”<sup>107</sup> In a text dominated by the invocation and explication of Plato’s doctrine of the ensoulment of bodies,<sup>108</sup> the explicit use of the Hebrew Scriptures to confirm his own claims about this matter is striking. Of barbarian nations, only the Chaldeans were granted similar authority in defending his position in the *To Gaurus*, though in their case, direct quotation of a particular Chaldean source was not provided.<sup>109</sup> While references to Aristotle, Hippocrates, Numenius, other Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Stoics occur in the text, only Plato, and “the theologian of the Hebrews” are presented in anything approaching a verbatim quotation. Admittedly, the line from Genesis is something of an abbreviation of the biblical text (at least as we have it in the Septuagint) and is given in *oratio obliqua*; but the phrasing is nearly identical.<sup>110</sup> Though brief, the appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures is thus arresting for its special status as an authoritative source in Porphyry’s treatise.

<sup>104</sup> *Antro nymph.* 10, p. 63.10–13 Nauck. “God-breathed” (*theopnōon*) apparently appears here for the first time in Greek literature; incidentally, an earlier variant occurs in the New Testament at 2 Tim. 3:16 (*theopneustos*).

<sup>105</sup> *Antro nymph.* 10, p. 63.12 Nauck. <sup>106</sup> Cook 2004: 167–168; cf. Bidez 1913: 77.

<sup>107</sup> *Ad Gaurum* 11.1–2, p. 48.15 Kalbfleisch; see Cook 2004: 169–170.

<sup>108</sup> See Kalbfleisch’s index of names, 79. <sup>109</sup> *Ad Gaurum* 16.5, p. 57.3–18 Kalbfleisch.

<sup>110</sup> A comparison of the LXX of Gen. 2:7 and the text of Porphyry exhibit only two significant differences: the LXX’s *pnōēn* is replaced by *pneuma* (most likely to mark off the “spirit” as a distinct entity, something impossible with the “breath of life” of the LXX); and Porphyry omits the LXX’s “face” of the human body (most likely because of his rejection of the claim of “certain Platonists” that the soul entered through the mouth and nose; see *Ad Gaurum* 11.2, p. 48.17–20 Kalbfleisch).



The knowledge, use, and interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in Porphyry's *Against the Christians* require a thorough treatment of their own, and, in any case, have been performed by others.<sup>111</sup> The following conclusion may be baldly stated: in spite of a general perception that Porphyry was a critic of both the Old and the New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures, there is only one piece of evidence that might indicate a critical attitude to the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) in the securely attributed fragments of *Against the Christians*.<sup>112</sup> In spite of the fact that Harnack's section heading for fragments 38–47 of his edition carried the title "Criticism of the Old Testament," the securely attributed fragments (that is, those fragments that claim to be reporting, or quoting, Porphyry – not those that gesture towards anti-Christian critics who are like Porphyry in being hostile to Christianity)<sup>113</sup> convey a surprisingly favorable or neutral position towards the Hebrew Scriptures. Some of these fragments come from Christian authors drawing on Porphyry as confirmation of their own claims and allege that Porphyry borrowed his own teaching from the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>114</sup> The twenty-three fragments collected as Fragment 43, as well as Fragment 44, all of which come from Jerome (and none of which come close to being verbatim quotations),<sup>115</sup> indicate that the fundamental differences between Porphyry and Jerome involve the date of the book and the issue of whether certain prophetic elements in its pages ought to be applied to Christ and the Church.<sup>116</sup> These latter elements are explicitly stated by Jerome as exhibiting an interpretive approach shared by Porphyry and the Jews at one point;<sup>117</sup> but even more significantly, at another point, Porphyry is said to have denied that the Jews treated Daniel as Scripture at all.<sup>118</sup> If this is the case, any criticism of the book

<sup>111</sup> Cook 2004: 150–247.

<sup>112</sup> For nuanced defense of the Porphyrian provenance of the Macarian fragments though at one remove, see Goulet 2003: 1.126–136. For a strong case that the anonymous pagan in Macarius is Hierocles, see Digeser 2002.

<sup>113</sup> e.g., *c.Christ.* fr. 42 Harnack: "Many say – and especially those who follow after the God-forsaken Porphyry who wrote against the Christians and rejected much of the divine teaching – indeed, they say . . ." This hardly evinces clear evidence that Severian (our source) had ever read Porphyry's treatise or even summaries of it; it only marks the infamous reputation of Porphyry among Christians. *c.Christ.* fr. 46 Harnack, even claims to be citing pagans who ridicule Scripture *not* like Porphyry. For criticisms, of Harnack, see Barnes 1973: 424–442; Magny 2010; and the relevant essays in Morlet 2011a.

<sup>114</sup> *c.Christ.* fr. 38 Harnack (= Theodore, *Graec.affect.cur.* 7.36), which almost certainly should be taken as a testimony of the *Abst.* rather than the *c.Christ.* Also, *c.Christ.* frs. 40–41 (= Eus. *Chron.* praef.; *PE* 1.9.20f.).

<sup>115</sup> It has been suggested (probably correctly) that Jerome only knew Porphyry at second hand; see Harnack 1916: 7; Barnes 1973; Cook 2004: 196–197; Magny 2010 and 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Cook 2004: 187–247. <sup>117</sup> e.g., *c.Christ.* fr. 43D Harnack. <sup>118</sup> *C.Christ.* fr. 43B Harnack.

cannot be understood as an attack against the Hebrew Scriptures or the Jews themselves but rather the Christian appropriation and supplementation of those Scriptures. It should be noted that other fragments express Jerome's attempt to delineate the agreement between Porphyry and his own Christian interpretation of the book of Daniel.<sup>119</sup> Of course, in spite of the limited agreement between Jerome and Porphyry, the latter's primary aim seems to have been the dismantling of Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures such as Jerome himself was producing.

The critique of Christian exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures is at the heart of the single fragment that appears to bear a negative reference to the Jews. Fortunately, it is one of the few preserved in a verbatim quotation (even if the commentary on either side of the quotation was carefully attempting to misconstrue Porphyry's position).<sup>120</sup> Eusebius reports that Porphyry, unable to develop an argument against the Christian Old Testament had resorted to criticizing the Christian interpreters of Old Testament texts. Allegorical approaches, in particular that of Origen, became the target of Porphyry's attack. "Because he was entirely unable to make a base accusation against the teachings [of the Old Testament], at a loss for arguments (*aporia logōn*) he turned to the slander and disparagement of the exegetes, and among them Origen most of all."<sup>121</sup> Eusebius then offers the following apparently verbatim quotation from *Against the Christians*:

When certain ones wanted to find a solution rather than apostatize from the wickedness of the Jewish Scriptures,<sup>122</sup> they turned to exegeses which were disjointed (*asunklōstous*)<sup>123</sup> and inappropriate to what was written, and brought not so much a defense (*apologia*) of the foreign [writings], but an approval and praise (*epainos*) of their own.<sup>124</sup> For, they brought on their interpretations, boasting that the things said openly by Moses were riddles (*ainigmata*) and invoking them as oracles full of hidden mysteries, and through their vanity enchanting (*katagoēteusantes*)<sup>125</sup> the critical faculty of the soul.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> *C. Christ.* fr. 43P Harnack; also frs. 43C, R–T, U *passim*.

<sup>120</sup> For differing discussions of Eusebius' manipulation of the fragment, see Schott 2008b; Beatrice, 1992a; Zambon 2003; Cook 2008; Johnson, forthcoming a.

<sup>121</sup> *C. Christ.* fr. 39 Harnack (= Eus. *HE* 6.19.2).

<sup>122</sup> Since Porphyry otherwise has a favorable attitude to the Jews throughout his corpus, it may be best to suppose here that he is adopting the language of Origen; cf. *Or. c. Cels.* 2.4–5; 3.64 (on the Pharisee's wicked supposition); 4.47 ("but he [Celsus], not presenting with reason what he supposes is the wickedness of our Scriptures. . ."). See below.

<sup>123</sup> Porphyry also uses this term at *Abst.* 3.18; cf. Hermeias in *Phdr.* p.187A.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. *On the Styx*, fr. 372 Smith (on Cronius).

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *On the Styx*, fr. 382.40 Smith (on the bewitching, *thelgein*, of the soul); cf. *Abst.* 1.27. For discussion, see Zambon 2003: 555.

<sup>126</sup> *C. Christ.* fr. 39 Harnack (= Eus. *HE* 6.19.4).

While there is much of interest in this quotation as well as in the larger fragment as a whole,<sup>127</sup> our concern here is limited to Porphyry's tag "the wickedness of the Jewish Scriptures."

Given the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the Jews in Porphyry's corpus, it may seem justified to look for an explanation that absolves Porphyry from the critical remark here. There are two possibilities. First, it might be suggested that Eusebius tampered with the text. The exact phrase *mochthēria tōn Ioudaikōn graphōn* (or simply, *mochthēria tōn Ioudaion*) occurs very rarely in Greek literature before Eusebius; but in his corpus it suddenly appears with some frequency. The difficulty with supposing that the phrase is Eusebius' own insertion, however, lies in the fact that there is no clear motivational purpose for his doing so. Performing slight alterations on Plato's text so as to make the Greek philosopher amenable to Christian doctrine is understandable;<sup>128</sup> but there would be no reason for Eusebius to alter Porphyry's text to make him seem anti-Jewish if he was not – especially when Eusebius had just claimed that Porphyry had not found any grounds for criticizing the Hebrew Scriptures on their own terms.

A second and more likely suggestion is that the phrase did occur in Porphyry's original treatise, but that he is using a tag of Origen (or another Christian) to highlight the Christian's misconceived project. If a Christian deems the Jewish texts to comprise "wickedness," whether pertaining to morality or doctrine, then the Christian exegete ought to reject them outright rather than attempting a form of allegorical special pleading.<sup>129</sup> In a passage from *Contra Celsum* that comes closest to our fragment of Porphyry in wording, Origen gestures towards something Celsus had said in his original polemic: "... Celsus, not presenting with reason what he supposes is the wickedness of our Scriptures (*mochthēron tēs graphēs hēmōn*)."<sup>130</sup> This instance certainly exhibits a strong parallel to Porphyry's phrase. It is,

<sup>127</sup> Johnson 2011b and forthcoming a.

<sup>128</sup> Eusebius is known to be remarkably careful in his preservation of texts (Des Places 1952; Diels 1929: 5–7); though some have argued that he is at points cleverly invasive in his quotations (Inowlocki 2006: 86–90; Favrelle 1982: 315–316, 382–385; Bounoure 1982). The most (and possibly the only) significant Eusebian variant of a text is the quotation of Pl. *Phd.* 114c at *PE* 11.38.6, where "without bodies" (which certainly would have posed a problem for the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection) becomes the innocuous "without troubles" (see Inowlocki 2006: 87). The other variants of Plato's works in Eusebius' *PE* may well be the work of a middle Platonic copyist rather than the Christian bishop. For an "inventory of [Platonic] citations and allusions," see Des Places 1982: 17–37.

<sup>129</sup> Ultimately, both Porphyry and Origen seem generally to agree on the necessity and nature of allegory in cases where a text "abounded with obscurities" (*Antro nymph.* 4, p. 57.17 Nauck), or was "inappropriate" (*aprepēs*) or "unhelpful" (*asumphoros*)" (*Quaest. hom. ad Iliad.* 20.67ff. Schrader); cf. Origen, *De princ.* 4.15–16; *C. Cels.* 2.4–5.

<sup>130</sup> Origen, *C. Cels.* 4.47; cf. 3.64 (the wicked idea of the Pharisee).

therefore, possible that Porphyry was rhetorically adapting Origen's own words – or, if he is in fact thinking of this very passage from the *Contra Celsum*, restoring Celsus' critique against the Christians and redirecting it now against Origen himself.

The limits of our evidence constrain us to the mere suggestion of this possibility. Given the apparent contradiction between the attitude expressed in the phrase, “the wickedness of the Jewish Scriptures,” and everything else we have seen in Porphyry's formulation of Jewish identity, some such possibility seems fitting. Of course, if Porphyry was working within a conceptual framework of ethnic particularism, as I have been arguing, then it would not be incongruous with such a framework for Porphyry to have at least one negative point to make about the Jews. The difficulty with this particular instance of an unfavorable attitude to the Jews is that it is a sweeping remark about a scriptural tradition that he apparently admired a great deal elsewhere in his writings. Possibly, the remark is not so general in its scope and only refers to a particular, philosophically unsavory, passage, book, or theme in the Hebrew Scriptures – the *Song of Songs* would perhaps make a likely candidate (especially since Origen had written so much on it).<sup>131</sup> Porphyry's ethnic particularism would identify the offending element and name it for its “wickedness” within an interpretive framework governed by rational and philosophical criteria. Though this is well within the bounds of his interpretive project, as I have sketched it here, I nonetheless prefer to see the fragment from *Against the Christians* as playing with, and against, the Christians' own interpretive evaluations of the Hebrew Scriptures. Within a controversy over the appropriateness of allegory for certain sets of texts between rival interpretive frameworks, the declaration that those who assume immorality in those texts should abandon them, rather than adopting methods of reading alien to them, seems most apt.

We are left with a generally favorable characterization of the Jews and Jewish traditions, ways of life, and ways of thinking throughout the diverse works that make up Porphyry's oeuvre. As a result of his clearly affirmative attitude towards the Jews, his wife Marcella was identified as a Jew already in late antiquity.<sup>132</sup> But, aside from the high regard shown Jews in his extant corpus and a vague reference to troubles from Marcella's “fellow citizens” in his letter to her, we have no firm evidence to prove or disprove

<sup>131</sup> A Platonist, however, should have had little trouble with an erotic text of this sort, since Plato's *Symp.* and *Phdr.* offered similar interpretive parallels.

<sup>132</sup> *Tüb. Theos.* 85, p. 55.1 Erbse.

the claim. We cannot resort to marital connections to explain Porphyry's positive characterization of Jewish identity.<sup>133</sup> Nor can his anti-Christian stance be considered the primary cause – even if it may have contributed further relevance and urgency to his interpretation of Jewish traditions. On the contrary, his position on the Jews and the various elements of their identity can adequately be explained by purely philosophical and theological concerns and criteria. The emphasis in the Hebrew Scriptures on the oneness of God, as well as the building blocks (if not systematically elaborated) of a theological hierarchy of beings below God, including gods, angels, and daemons, would have presented an obvious opportunity for his philosophical vision to incorporate this barbarian wisdom into a universal picture of truth. The critique of bodily religious observances in the prophetic literature, furthermore, and its impulse towards a notion of spiritual sacrifice would have resonated strongly with his critique in *On Abstinence*, the *Letter to Marcella* and the *Letter to Anebo*. Finally, the existence of the Essene sages, with their ascetic rigor and spiritual seriousness, offered a profoundly moving image of the life of true piety for the philosopher. The sublimity of their way of life echoed the aspirations of the Pythagorean sages themselves.<sup>134</sup>

These considerations are sufficient to caution our assumption that his anti-Christian sentiment drove him to formulate a one-sidedly felicitous image of the Jews. His animosity towards Christians was limited to a few treatises; the picture painted by his Christian opponents in succeeding generations of a “barking dog,” who was a “friend of daemons” and “enemy of God,”<sup>135</sup> obscures the relatively minor space allotted to Christianity in his corpus (that is, relative to his concern with “pagan” cult acts and doctrines).<sup>136</sup> It is doubtful that his hostility to Christianity would be limited to a handful of works while his adoption of a positive stance towards Jews, if only the result of his anti-Christian sentiment, would have spread so widely throughout his corpus. The remarks above, while brief, clearly indicate significant areas of resonance between Porphyry's thought and the scriptural tradition of the Jews, without any need to suppose some sort of

<sup>133</sup> It has also been suggested that his teacher Longinus was a Jew; see Kalligas 2001.

<sup>134</sup> The parallels between depictions of Pythagoreans and Essenes has been amply discussed; see e.g., Taylor 2004.

<sup>135</sup> Barking dog: Jerome, ap. *c.Christ.* fr. 70 Harnack (cf. fr. 3 Harnack); cf. Gildas, *de Excidio* 4.3 (“Porphyry, the mad dog of the East”), not included in Harnack's edition. Friend of daemons: Eusebius, ap. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 329 Smith. Enemy of God: Firmicus Maternus, ap. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 306 Smith.

<sup>136</sup> Busine 2005: 290–291; Goulet 2004: 67 n. 15; Riedweg 2005: 165.

triangulating dynamic between the pagan philosopher and his Jewish and Christian contemporaries.<sup>137</sup>

We are left with a stunning picture of a pagan philosopher who had made no little progress towards disengaging himself from the more hostile prejudice against Jews that prevailed in Greek and Roman literature before and after him. One is hard pressed to find another pagan author in the span from classical to late antiquity who treated the Jews with as much respect as Porphyry of Tyre.

### *Indians*

Because of the two extended discussions of Indians in *On Abstinence* and *On the Styx*, both of which rely on Bardaisan of Mesopotamia, we receive a good impression of the depth to which Porphyry fostered his decentering cultural and philosophical project. In light of our findings on Porphyry's representation of the Jews, the Indians mark a further instance of a clearly favorable overall approach to a particular nation. While earlier philosophers and historians had characterized India in admiring, even utopianizing, literary depictions, Porphyry once more seems to extend previous attempts at favorably evaluating the Indians within the scope of envisioning barbarian wisdom.

A brief outline of the distinctive features of Porphyry's portrait of Indian philosophic races against the background of Philostratus' well-known representation in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* proves fruitful for appreciating the cultural moves performed by Porphyry. According to the earlier third-century sophist, Apollonius had conducted a tour of the various barbarian lands who were claimants to ancient wisdom. In his travels to Eastern lands he had visited Persia, India, Egypt and Ethiopia. If evaluated for their exemplification of higher grades of virtue and wisdom, the Indians of Philostratus' narrative would certainly come out at the top of these barbarian nations.<sup>138</sup> Certain salient features stand out, however, which show the persistent presence of a broadly Hellenocentric view.<sup>139</sup>

Philostratus' travels to the Indians were only modeled upon the earlier ones of Dionysus. The identity of the latter was a matter of dispute,

<sup>137</sup> Though something like triangulation is not entirely excluded either; see e.g., *Phil. Orac.* fr. 343 Smith (= Aug. *Civ. Dei* 19.22.17–19.23.17): "In these [verses], he has explicitly manifested the irremediable [nature] of their [i.e., the Christians'] opinion, since the Jews acknowledge God more than they do."

<sup>138</sup> For his visit among the Indians, see *V. Apoll.* 2.6–3.58; for the explicit claim that the Indians were superior to the other barbarian nations, see *V. Apoll.* 6.11.

<sup>139</sup> Swain 1999; Elsner 1997; Reger 2009; Flinterman 1995: 90–106.

however, since the Greeks were said to disagree with the Indians, and the Indians with each other: for the Greeks Dionysus was a Greek; for the Caucasian Indians he was an Assyrian; for the further Indians he was an Indian, with an eponymous disciple from Thebes.<sup>140</sup> The disagreement among the Indians seemed to have ultimately disqualified their claims about his true identity. The racial diversity of the Indians raised further possibilities for unfavorable characterizations. Of the various groups of Indians met or mentioned in the *Life of Apollonius*, only one exhibited a wisdom that might rival that of the Greeks. The others range from cannibals, on the one hand, to somewhat hostile and disrespectful, on the other. The single community of good Indians had no need to have their wisdom translated into Greek, since they already spoke fluent Greek and showed themselves to be conversant about philosophical matters within a thoroughly Greek frame of reference.<sup>141</sup> They furthermore had built their city on Attic patterns<sup>142</sup> and performed their exercises in the Greek manner.<sup>143</sup>

For his part, Apollonius was “a wise man and a Hellene,”<sup>144</sup> and, though it was in the nation (*ethnos*) of the Cappadocians, he was born at the Greek city of Tyana.<sup>145</sup> While he did not “hyper-Atticize” in his speech,<sup>146</sup> he nonetheless spoke “in Attic style” and was not hindered by the surrounding nation in which he grew up.<sup>147</sup> His most persistent disciple, Damis the Babylonian, followed Apollonius and sought to “become Greek” by association with him.<sup>148</sup> Apollonius’ activity within the Greek world can be represented as the reform of Hellenism – in its ethnic, cultural, and religious senses.<sup>149</sup> He sought to restore temples and civic institutions to their ancient dignity and usage, both in language and in religious rite.

The brief sketch of Philostratus’ narrative given here has emphasized the more obviously Hellenocentric aspects. A number of declarations on the nobility or wisdom of particular barbarians occur in the *Life of Apollonius* as well – as we should expect in a work that clearly uses the philosopher’s travels among barbarian peoples as a utopian critique of the perceived laxity of Philostratus’ contemporary Greeks. Indeed, it was one of the primary uses of utopian literature to provide a moralizing lens to evaluate contemporary conditions by picturing a fictive society, which embodies the values of the cultural center even as it lies purportedly beyond the

<sup>140</sup> *V.Apoll.* 2.9. For similar disagreement on the ethnic origins of Dionysus, see Diod. Sicul. 1.22.6–7; 1.23.2–4.

<sup>141</sup> *V.Apoll.* 2.27, 29; Reger 2009: 253–254. <sup>142</sup> *V.Apoll.* 2.23. <sup>143</sup> *V.Apoll.* 2.27.

<sup>144</sup> *V.Apoll.* 1.28, 29; cf. 2.17. <sup>145</sup> *V.Apoll.* 1.4. <sup>146</sup> *V.Apoll.* 1.17. <sup>147</sup> *V.Apoll.* 1.7.

<sup>148</sup> *V.Apoll.* 3.43; cf. Flinterman 1995: 90. <sup>149</sup> Elsner 1997: 25–28.

periphery at the very edges of the earth.<sup>150</sup> The above sketch only seeks to highlight the sorts of material that are noticeably missing from Porphyry's images of the Indians.

The picture provided by the fragments of Porphyry as we have them admits of different races of Indians; but only two are discussed (the Brachmans and Samaneans), and these only in the most laudatory of terms.<sup>151</sup> The relevance or extent of Indian ability in speaking Greek is never raised, though ambassadors to Rome may likely have had in their number at least one person who knew Greek.<sup>152</sup> And, indeed, Bardaisan's report of the Indians was probably first rendered in a Syriac work (even if Porphyry most likely knew this only in a Greek translation). At no point in his entire corpus does Porphyry claim that the Indians possess any Greek (or Attic) customs or traits.<sup>153</sup> On the contrary, the single instance in which the Indians are juxtaposed with Greeks occurs in order to highlight a negative trait of the Greeks.<sup>154</sup> While this could be just another instance of the sort of utopianizing use of Indians that occurred in Philostratus, the fact that Porphyry attempted to draw his picture of Indians from their own native voices (even if deflected through Bardaisan) tells against his attempting any manner of this sort of cultural activity.

Yet, what should be made of the final claim in the Indian segment from *On the Styx*, in which Porphyry asserts that the pool reported via Bardaisan is the same as that mentioned in a letter of Apollonius to the Indians? A couple observations are in order. First, there is no clear evidence that Porphyry even knew Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*<sup>155</sup> and so, whatever the literary linkage or cultural affect being performed here, it may only be limited to Apollonius' letter, which maintained a less emphatically Hellenocentric vision than that of his biographer.<sup>156</sup> Secondly, as the fragment now stands, the place of privilege is not given to the Greek Apollonius but to the barbarian Indians. The ethnic vision of the fragment is clearly off-center; the Greek anecdote only enters belatedly and briefly as a

<sup>150</sup> Parker 2008: 105–110.

<sup>151</sup> For discussion, see J. J. O'Meara 1982 (who neglects any mention, however, of the *Styx* fragment).

<sup>152</sup> There was a history of Indian embassies to Rome; see e.g., Strabo 15.1.73 (on the distinctiveness of Strabo's account of the Indians, see Clarke 1999: 326–327; for historical reconstruction, see Priaux 1873: 65–87; more generally on Indian embassies, see *ibid.*, 65–253).

<sup>153</sup> Of course, Bardaisan's account sounds very much like a Platonizing (even Christianizing) version of what he heard from the Indians; see e.g., *baptizein* (at fr. 376.20 Smith) and *stauros* (at fr. 376.33 Smith), as well as reference to “the son of God” (at fr. 376.46 Smith); cf. Ramelli 2009b: 95–107.

<sup>154</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.4.

<sup>155</sup> The narrative at Philostr. *V. Apoll.* 3.2, 14 is certainly comparable to Porphyry's material, but any allusions, if there are any, are not sufficiently clear.

<sup>156</sup> *Apoll. Ep.* 78 (LCL 458, p. 74 Jones).



parallel or confirmatory instance of the material provided through barbarian voices.

Had we more material from *On the Styx*, the place of the Indians within the larger work as well as the cultural valences afforded by the Indian segment might require alteration from the picture offered here. Given our current evidence, however, the above sketch seems to fit well within the sorts of decentering cultural moves performed by Porphyry throughout his work. Yet, in terms of ethnic particularism, in which good and bad features are both identified and attended to with at least an attempted suppression of ethnocentric bias on the part of the philosopher, the Indians appear in a singularly positive light.<sup>157</sup> Like the Jews and Chaldeans, we have a largely admiring portrait of Indian philosophers as the embodiment of philosophical ideals. The positive characterization of Indians in Porphyry's corpus is more consistently favorable than that of the Jews; and it is provided in greater detail and in a broader range of expression than the Chaldeans. That is, the Indians are depicted as exemplary both in their doctrine (cosmological, theological, and psychological) and their lifestyle (asceticism and purity), whereas the Chaldean representation was more limited to their theological system. In a world of nations, Porphyry's Indians mark the high watermark of ethnically specific virtue, piety, and wisdom. Furthermore, even if many of Porphyry's remarks about particular nations specify only elite groups, which are all above the multitude in their holy living or rational spirituality, the Indian elite, that is, the best of the Indians, evince a superiority over the best of many of the other nations (the best of the Indians are better than the best of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and so on). Both races of Indian holy men, those based on birth (Brachmans) and those based on election who chose the austerities of an ascetic lifestyle (Samanaeans), marked a particular form of piety and truth-seeking matched probably only by the Essenes in its depth of philosophical seriousness and in its breadth of interest to Porphyry.

Because of his refusal to neglect or silence native voices, Porphyry's approach to the nations and the philosophical elite of each nation exhibits a strikingly wide range of possible expressions of philosophical truth, rational spirituality, and theological wisdom. No one race of holy sages is quite like the others. The philosophical Essenes live different lives and conceive of the Divine in ways distinctive from the lives and theological conceptions of Egyptian priests or Indian Brachmans. What unites them is a criterion deemed philosophically sound and rationally ordered by Porphyry as the

<sup>157</sup> J. J. O'Meara 1982; Gamlath forthcoming.

master translator of his ethnographic and religious data. The philosopher has turned ethnographer, and the devotee of a universal Truth has become the careful investigator of ethnic particulars. Even while maintaining a grand interpretive framework, a metanarrative of sorts, he has refused to violate the diverse expressions of ethnic-specific conceptions and performances of that universal Truth. His ethnic argumentation is far from being crudely centrist, for his transcendental philosophy required a decentering approach. If the world of nations and bodies was all a foreign country in which the soul was on holiday, so to speak, then any form of cultural centrism marked a threat to the perspicacity of the soul's vision in its embodied state. Decentering interpretive moves were required to shake the soul loose from its bodily moorings and remind it of its true nature and origins.

#### ETHNIC PARTICULARISM UNDER EMPIRE

Recent reflection on the diverse expressions of what may be termed the postcolonial predicament has sought to emphasize the role of the mechanisms of imperializing forces in the production of knowledge, especially ethnographic knowledge.<sup>158</sup> This sort of theoretical questioning of cosmopolitan stances, in particular, seems quite appropriate for our inquiry into the horizontal translation of Porphyry. Put simply, his universalism-through-particularism should be seen as a product of empire. Examination of earlier Greek ethnographic writings reveals authors like Diodorus Siculus and Strabo to be developing the intellectual extensions of the military and political hegemony of Rome's empire.<sup>159</sup> Even as Roman soldiers and governors sought to constrain and order the diversity of the conflicting social and ethnic forces of their empire, so intellectuals under that empire were attempting to delimit, classify, and bring order to the unruly diversity of indigenous knowledge in a culturally and scientifically imperializing project.<sup>160</sup> The hegemonic forces behind such research and investigation need not have been explicitly articulated or even consciously accepted by its performers. A tacit collaboration could be maintained without the overt acceptance of those seeking to make sense of their worlds and to codify its peoples within their textual labors.

If all this is true our analysis of Porphyry's ethnic particularism might run up against the limits of that particularism, if not in the adoption of Hellenocentrism, then in a latent imperial cosmopolitanism. And, indeed, this

<sup>158</sup> e.g., Webster and Cooper 1996; Schott 2008a.

<sup>159</sup> e.g., Sacks 1990; Clarke 2001; Dueck et al. 2006.

<sup>160</sup> Schott, 2008a.

is most likely a fruitful way to consider Porphyry's literary output. His ethnic particularism may be seen as an imperially produced cosmopolitanism, which becomes all the more powerful the more it is not acknowledged. It becomes important, then, to turn our inquiry to Porphyry's explicit attitude towards and use of, the city and idea of Rome in order to determine the extent to which he conceived or recognized his project as connected to empire.<sup>161</sup> Living for at least one very significant period of his career in Rome itself had its privileges for a cosmopolitan intellectual whose philosophical endeavors had a worldwide scope. But, did Porphyry recognize the benefits of empire for a universalist philosopher?<sup>162</sup>

The question has special relevance given the alleged link between Porphyry and the Great Persecution in the earlier years of the fourth century. The present discussion will not attempt to deal with the convoluted issue of Porphyry's whereabouts on the eve of the Great Persecution or the nature and extent of his involvement in providing intellectual stimulus to the imperial crackdown on Christians under the Tetrarchs. Though I have registered my suspicions about his connection to the Great Persecution in an earlier chapter, I would prefer to leave *Against the Christians* to one side here in order to avoid the obfuscation that would quickly arise for our present inquiry into Porphyry's ethnic conceptions under Rome, frequently motivated by our modern proclivity to find a *Sitz im Leben* for that polemical work.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, the problems attendant on locating *Against the Christians* within a particular context and set of relations to other texts and to the machinery of empire itself has taxed the ingenuity of historians and become a site rich with hypothetical reconstructions. It is hoped that the present study will go a good way towards establishing a coherent literary and conceptual framework that can provide a basis for understanding the fragments of *Against the Christians* rather than attempting to situate them prematurely in the religious politics of the Tetrarchy (or of the emperor Aurelian, depending on how one dates the work).<sup>164</sup>

<sup>161</sup> For general discussion of the idea of Rome as a world city, see Edwards and Woolf 2003; for Rome as an imperial city, see Woolf 2001.

<sup>162</sup> We may conclude from the fragment of a rhetorical work (fr. 2a Heath) that Porphyry recognized the benefits of good emperors for the flourishing of rhetoric: rhetoric flourished under Demosthenes and was suppressed under Antipater, but was revived "when the Roman Empire reached its peak and sound political order took control of the cities, especially under Hadrian and Antoninus, who were given to rhetoric and literary scholarship" (trans. Heath). As will be seen below, a philosopher could recognize the benefits of empire for various fields of inquiry or activity, without thereby lessening an aloof stance towards the political sphere.

<sup>163</sup> T. D. Barnes 1994.

<sup>164</sup> In any case, of the undisputed fragments of the *c. Christ.*, only frs. 39 and 80 Harnack might be (and have been) argued to advocate the empire. But the first, which refers to the "lawless" living

The question is not, then, whether we can plausibly date *Against the Christians* to the early years of the fourth century instead of the 270s. The more important question, rather, is whether Porphyry would have found sufficient philosophical motivation for participating in such intellectual–imperial collaboration at all, regardless of the precise circumstances for such collaboration. This question can only be answered from an inclusive analysis of all the material in his corpus that articulates the role of Rome, imperial rule, and civic obligation within his philosophical framework. First, therefore, we shall survey his explicit discussions of Rome; then, we shall make some observations on the status of civic responsibility and allegiance within Porphyry’s thought. It should not surprise the reader that the philosophical avoidance of ethnic entanglements and forms of cultural centrism corresponded with a severance from civic connections as well.<sup>165</sup> We shall address, furthermore, the issue of Porphyry’s production and exploration of ethnically specific knowledge as itself a product of Rome’s empire.

### *Images of the Romans*

Given his residence in the metropolis of the empire itself, it is an arresting feature of his corpus that, aside from the autobiographical notes in the *Life of Plotinus* and passing references to acquaintances in the Roman aristocracy, there is surprisingly little evidence in Porphyry’s works that Rome was even an imperial power at all, or that it was a dominating force of any magnitude in the philosopher’s world.<sup>166</sup> The following remarks seek to identify briefly all the relevant material on Rome in Porphyry’s extant works. Because the Romans were a people, and their kingdom was an empire, while Rome itself was also a city, we must recognize, more fully than we have thus far, the convergence of civic and ethnic elements in his picture of Rome.<sup>167</sup>

We had noticed, in considering Porphyry’s ethnic terminology, that *ethnē* were often placed alongside *poleis* in *On Abstinence* in a generic formula that

of Origen, can plausibly be understood in terms of natural or metaphysical laws and not civic or imperial legislation; see Johnson forthcoming a. The second (fr. 80 Harnack), which refers to the gods abandoning Rome (“the city”) because of the advent of Christianity, is too brief to gain an adequate sense of how his observation might have functioned in an argument and what precisely that argument was.

<sup>165</sup> e.g., Hadot 1995: 102–104; Fowden 1982.

<sup>166</sup> As we shall see, this fact alone does not entail that Porphyry was uninfluenced by empire or that he was anti-Roman; banal identities or contexts are often the most powerful (see Billig 1995). We must examine his explicit invocations of Rome before drawing our conclusions.

<sup>167</sup> Woolf 2001: 313–317.

embraced all the peoples of the *oikoumenē* according to narrow or broader classifications. This inclusion of both cities and nations within the same vision of ethnographic difference allowed Porphyry to place cities like Rome or Athens unproblematically beside nations like Egyptians or Phoenicians in accumulating dietary data for the confirmation of his arguments. He was not performing some classificatory sleight of hand in this formula: a polis could be considered an *ethnos* at least as early as Aristotle.<sup>168</sup> The importance of this consideration for Porphyry was that Rome, even if never explicitly named an *ethnos*, could be placed in a series consisting of certain nations, depending on the aims of his argument or the limits of his information on the dietary practices of various peoples, conceived either as ethnic or as civic communities.

It is significant, then, that the Romans are invoked within the pages of *On Abstinence* as an invariably negative example of sacrificial, dietary, or religious practices. The nadir of sacrificial decline for the defender of vegetarianism was human sacrifice. The Romans found a noteworthy place in an ethnographic doxography reporting the different peoples known to have practiced the abominable custom. Phoenicians, Cretans, Syrians, Carthaginians, Arabians, and “all the Greeks,” including the Athenians, are among the perpetrators. Significantly, however, only the Romans are said to perform human sacrifices “even now” at the festival of Jupiter Latarius.<sup>169</sup> If accurate (our only corroborating evidence is found in Christian authors), Porphyry’s report may refer to gladiatorial executions at the *Feriae Latinae*, which probably lasted until the reign of Constantine.<sup>170</sup> Whatever the case may be, human sacrifice was hardly a flattering feature to have on one’s ethnic or civic record in contrast to other Eastern nations who exhibited an ordered rationality in the area of sacrifice. To be the sole example of the continuation of the practice into the times of Porphyry would place the Romans near the bottom of his moral–dietary hierarchy of national ways of life.

The second appearance of the Romans in *On Abstinence* occurs in the fourth book, in his treatment of the Jews. There, the Romans are said to have followed Antiochus Epiphanes in committing “intolerable outrage” against the customs of the Jews.<sup>171</sup> Porphyry doubtless refers to Pompey’s violation of the Temple’s sanctity in 63 BC, though later Roman

<sup>168</sup> Cohen, 2000: 22–29.

<sup>169</sup> *Abst.* 2.56.9. The “even now” may only be repeating what was said in his source, a certain Pallas; yet Porphyry exhibits no concern to correct or update his source. For general discussion, see Hughes 1991.

<sup>170</sup> Patillon and Segonds 1995: 228 n. 7.

<sup>171</sup> *Abst.* 4.11.1; trans. Clark.

maltreatment of the Temple (especially with its destruction under Titus in AD 70) might be included in the reference.

Later in his discussion of the Jews, Porphyry admiringly relates the fortitude of the Essenes against Roman aggression. Their training in ascetic discipline had prepared them so well that, “they would not grovel to their torturers or shed tears, but smiled in the midst of pain and mocked those who applied the tortures, and cheerfully let go their souls in the expectation of receiving them again.”<sup>172</sup> The morally exemplary Jews are here shown pitted against the immoral ravages of the Romans. The Romans’ cruelty as aggressors against the pious lives of the heroic Essenes, combined with their earlier reported perpetration of human sacrifice, leave a singularly negative portrait of the Romans in *On Abstinence*. The philosopher who stood as a beneficiary of Rome’s empire nonetheless refused to show a favorable attitude for, or any self-identification with, the Romans. The five years in Rome under Plotinus, which included regular engagement with members of the senatorial class as well as the wife of an emperor, made little impact on forming a positive idea of Rome in Porphyry’s mind.<sup>173</sup> The *On Abstinence* was clearly written after his stay in Rome and was, furthermore, addressed to Castricius, a person who was likely of the senatorial class himself. None of this bore any noticeably favorable impact upon his characterization of the capital city or its empire.

If we turn to his *Life of Plotinus*, in which we are provided with numerous anecdotal details about the Platonist philosophical school in Rome, an aloof, though not hostile, attitude towards the city is conveyed. In spite of the fact that Plotinus accompanied the emperor Gordian to the Persian front<sup>174</sup> and though he was on friendly terms with the emperor Gallienus<sup>175</sup> and had managed to make no enemies among the officials of Rome (aside from certain courtiers of Gallienus who thwarted his attempt to found Platonopolis),<sup>176</sup> Plotinus’ school was marked by a clear and persistent rejection of political life by those pursuing philosophy.<sup>177</sup> If the philosophers could not be given their own city, which would be modeled on Plato’s *Laws*, then they were to have little to do with the workings of any other city.

<sup>172</sup> *Abst.* 4.13.7; cf. Josephus, *BJ* 2.152.

<sup>173</sup> For senators who participated in Plotinus’ school, see Bidez 1913: 67 n. 2; Brisson 1982b: 11. Porphyry himself claims that “not a few” of the senators attended Plotinus’ lectures (*V.Plot.* 7.29–32).

<sup>174</sup> *V.Plot.* 3.17–23. <sup>175</sup> *V.Plot.* 12.1–13.

<sup>176</sup> *V.Plot.* 9.24; on Gallienus’ courtiers, see *V.Plot.* 12.10–13.

<sup>177</sup> Edwards 1994; De Blois 1989 and 1998. For a different emphasis than that offered here, see D. O’Meara 2003: 44–46.

Of the political figures (*politikoi*) among the “hearers” of Plotinus, the model (*paradeigma*) of how philosophy was to impact one’s engagement in political affairs was Rogatianus.<sup>178</sup> This senator, convinced of the otherworldly vision taught by Plotinus, manumitted his slaves, turned from his wealth, and renounced political office, even though he was at the point of assuming his duties as praetor. Porphyry’s description of this senator’s turn to philosophy is emphatic: such was his “renunciation (*apostrophē*) of [the political] life” that he “rejected” (*apostēnai*) his wealth, “turned away” (*apopempsasthai*) his slaves, and “rejected” (*apostēnai*) political office.<sup>179</sup> The repetition of *apo*- compound verbs here marked the separation of the philosopher from the duties and activities deemed worthy of the great men of the empire. Rogatianus was only the most remarkable example of the sort of shift in priorities and transformation of life that Plotinus invited other politically active hearers to adopt; he had earlier attempted to turn (*anastellein*) another statesman from political affairs, though apparently with less success.<sup>180</sup>

The picture of Rome in the *Life of Plotinus* is not especially negative. But, the place of Rome’s affairs in the life of the philosopher was firmly demarcated and insistently recalled. The life of the mind and the pursuit of the path of the gods had little time for the affairs of worldly rule and civic obligation. Rogatianus’ rejection of such affairs, even at the point of undertaking them, was admirable and an act to be imitated by those who would take the calling of philosophy seriously. Since that calling was about nothing less than the salvation of the soul and the discovery of truth, it was a matter of the highest import. Rome, as an idea, a city, a set of obligations and priorities, was a hindrance to the true philosopher’s way of life. When Rome could benefit the philosopher – for instance, in granting safe passage to lands known for their wisdom like Persia, or in opening the possibilities of reclaiming a city dedicated to philosophy – then Rome’s emperor himself was not to be avoided. But, using the worldly powers possessed by others for philosophical means did not, for Plotinus or his biographer, entail the attempt or concern to possess such power oneself.<sup>181</sup> The seeds of the more negative attitude to Rome in *On Abstinence* are present in the *Life*, but they have not received full expression. The different emphasis in Porphyry’s presentation of Rome in the two works is not due to a development of thought, but rather to a shift in the content and aims of the two works.

<sup>178</sup> *V.Plot.* 7.45–47; see Brisson 1982a: 109.

<sup>180</sup> *V.Plot.* 7.20–22.

<sup>181</sup> Edwards 1994.

<sup>179</sup> *V.Plot.* 7.32–36; cf. 7.41; 7.48–50.

“WHAT IS THAT TO US?” CIVIC OBLIGATION IN PORPHYRY

One point of deep consistency between these two works is the separation or rift between the philosophical and the political lives. Like the *Life*, the *On Abstinence* sought to remind its reader of the great difference that philosophy should make to one's conception and valuation of the civic sphere. While the picture is not entirely simple (either in the *On Abstinence* or in other works, which we shall discuss shortly), the basic parameters of civic engagement and philosophical pursuits are clearly resonant with the aloof stance of the *Life*.

A number of passages in Porphyry's treatise on vegetarianism remind his reader that his unwavering defense of abstinence from eating meat is not for the many but for the few.<sup>182</sup> The multitude has no concern for wisdom and lacks understanding in what is truly advantageous,<sup>183</sup> and so, the philosopher should stand above the general opinion of the masses.<sup>184</sup> Significantly, the stated audience of the book was Firmus Castriicius, who had given in to the majority opinion about eating meat according to *On Abstinence*,<sup>185</sup> and who, furthermore, had turned to pursue political affairs according to the *Life*.<sup>186</sup> A statesman might naturally be concerned for the proper ordering of civic affairs and the maintenance of the laws. Porphyry tartly responded that, if a city deemed it necessary to sacrifice, “This is nothing to us. In cities, riches and external and corporeal things are thought to be good and their opposites bad, and the soul is the least of their concerns.”<sup>187</sup> The philosopher had the opposite view of those bodily matters that were central to the life of the city.

Porphyry's position is not starkly anti-civic or anti-political, however, since he claims the ancient laws were consistent with the philosophical life. In a line that almost seems to echo that of Jesus in the New Testament, he avers, “I have not come to destroy the laws,”<sup>188</sup> since the laws allowed for the simplest and inanimate forms of sacrifice. A significant part of Porphyry's argument had been that, in conjunction with the sacrificial hierarchy (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)), historical investigation showed that all nations originally had vegetal sacrificial practices and that it was only through moral and religious decline that animals came to be sacrificed.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>182</sup> *Abst.* 1.27.1; 2.3.1–2; 2.36.6.

<sup>183</sup> *Abst.* 1.52.3–4.

<sup>184</sup> *Abst.* 2.40.5; 4.9.10.

<sup>185</sup> *Abst.* 1.1.1–1.3.1.

<sup>186</sup> *V. Plot.* 7.28–29.

<sup>187</sup> *Abst.* 2.43.2; trans. Clark, modified. For a rather different emphasis than that raised here, see Goldin 2001.

<sup>188</sup> *Abst.* 2.33.1 (*nomima lusōn ouk erchomai*); cf. Matth. 5:17 (*ouk êlthon katalusai ton nomon*).

<sup>189</sup> e.g., *Abst.* 2.7.1–3, where animal sacrifice is labeled *paranomia*; cf. 2.28.3; 3.18.5.



Apollo's advice to follow "ancestral tradition" in the area of sacrifice,<sup>190</sup> therefore, had to be interpreted through the appropriate historical lens. Contemporary civic cult did not necessarily reflect the ancient laws uncovered by the philosopher.

Even with this partially conciliatory tone towards civic customs, the difference between Porphyry's distance from the city's concerns and Apollonius of Tyana's reform efforts in civic order and religion is striking. For the third-century philosopher, the realization that cities had once functioned by more austere customs carried no consequent attempt at restoring those customs within the current public sphere. Instead, the philosopher recognized the weakness of his opponents' arguments based on the laws and concerns of the city, even as he expressed the philosopher's place in the world as one who was on a sojourn in a foreign country.<sup>191</sup> The laws of that country were to be understood appropriately, but there was no impulse to involve oneself in the business, duties, and concerns of that foreign country.<sup>192</sup> Because of his deeper awareness of the nature of civic laws and the higher truths of the nature of the world, the philosopher could even be said to be above the law: the law leaves philosophers "autonomous, respecting them as greater than itself."<sup>193</sup>

This attitude towards the laws of cities and the articulation of a concept of a higher law that was to govern the sage's life recurs in the *Letter to Marcella*. Porphyry there identifies three types of law: the law of God, the law of nature, and the law "posited (*thetos*) in nations and cities."<sup>194</sup> The latter, "which is written in different ways at different times, is laid down for a particular situation, depending on the forcefulness (*to biaion*) of the ruler's power (*dunasteia*); it leads the apprehended criminal away for punishment, but it is unable to affect the unapprehended criminal or the intention (*prohairesis*) of the individual."<sup>195</sup> The inability of civic and national laws for the development of a person's character was a concern of long standing for philosophers. Porphyry's solution in the *Letter* is to emphasize the way in which the divine law and the natural law negate the relevance of the posited laws for the philosopher. Most fundamentally, the divine law was not subject to change and was "stronger than any force (*bias*)," a point that was in direct contrast

<sup>190</sup> *Abst.* 2.59.1; cf. 1.3.1. <sup>191</sup> *Abst.* 1.30.2–4; 1.33.5; see Clark 1999.

<sup>192</sup> This is even true when considering Porphyry's rhetorical works, e.g., frs. 13a and 13b Heath, which deal with cases of conflict of law, but do not seem to go beyond the aim of precisely understanding classical orations.

<sup>193</sup> *Abst.* 4.18.5; trans. Clark. <sup>194</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 25.384–27.438; Johnson forthcoming a.

<sup>195</sup> *Ep.Marc.* 25.398–402; trans. O'Brien Wicker, modified.

to the necessity of force (*to biaion*) in the maintenance of the posited laws.<sup>196</sup>

Porphyry's final prescription ignored the posited laws of cities and nations altogether: "First you must grasp the law of Nature and from it ascend to the divine law which also established the law of Nature. With these laws as your point of reference, you need never be concerned about the written law."<sup>197</sup> There follows a pastiche of Pythagorean sayings centered on the need to avoid false opinions. The connection between these sayings and the previous discussion of the laws lies apparently in the occurrence of false opinions in the written, posited laws of civic and national contexts. The unwritten laws, on the contrary, were natural and divine, and, therefore, not prone to false opinions and ephemeral conditions.<sup>198</sup>

The discussion of the laws from the *Letter to Marcella* provides the proper conceptual framework for making sense of Porphyry's discussion of the civic virtues in his *Sentences*. Offering commentary on Plotinus' treatment of the different levels of virtue,<sup>199</sup> Porphyry explains the various levels of a hierarchy of virtue: the civic, the purificatory, the contemplative, and the exemplary virtues. His remarks on the civic virtues are generally positive. They moderate the passions and produce benevolence towards humans.<sup>200</sup> The severely limited place of civic virtues within the overall conception of the virtues must be emphasized, however;<sup>201</sup> they are concerned only with the basic forms of bodily existence and "adorn the mortal person."<sup>202</sup> Civic virtue is only supposed to be a propaedeutic (*prodromoi*) to the next level of virtues, whose object is the assimilation of the soul to the divinity.<sup>203</sup>

It is misleading to see the civic virtues as playing an important part in Porphyry's understanding and attitude, or as comprising a strong political component of his philosophical thought. While the civic virtues have their place in the *Sentences*, it is at the very lowest level of the pursuit of reality and truth – indeed, they belong to the "life of the herd." In line with the formulations of *On Abstinence* and *Letter to Marcella*, the *Sentences* sees the civic sphere as delimited in its importance to the many and the mundane. The philosopher has risen above the mere moderation of passions and the inculcation of civic ordering to the pursuit and contemplation of the divine in the silence of thought.

<sup>196</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 26.408–409.

<sup>197</sup> *Ep. Marc.* 27.420–423, trans. O'Brien Wicker.

<sup>198</sup> Johnson, forthcoming a.

<sup>199</sup> *Plot. Enn.* 1.2.

<sup>200</sup> *Sent.* 32 Lamberz.

<sup>201</sup> Pace D. O'Meara, 2003: 44–46, whose overly brief account fails to contextualize the *Sent.* passage within Porphyry's thought.

<sup>202</sup> *Sent.* 32 p. 24.5–6 Lamberz.

<sup>203</sup> *Sent.* 32 p. 24.6–25.9 Lamberz.

The consistent picture of the political life and civic obligations and concerns within the works so far discussed might seem to be in need of nuance if we consider a fascinating passage from the little-known and little-studied treatise *Against Nemertius*. This work, the fragments of which survive solely in Cyril of Alexandria's *Against Julian*, seems to have been wholly dedicated to the defense of the doctrine of Providence against the book of Nemertius who had "dared to become a teacher of justice to God."<sup>204</sup> In order to defend his position that "the protector of all things is a divine mind, ordering and administering everything by an exceeding magnitude of wisdom and power and by an incomparable quality,"<sup>205</sup> Porphyry adopted a Pythagorean model of divine activity in the world.<sup>206</sup> The God over all governed the affairs of the world in a manner similar to a human ruler: various acts were performed differently in various circumstances, but the general purpose of maintaining the good of the whole motivated each act.

For unless it is [possible] to sketch out (*hupograpσαι*) an administration better than that of God, we must entirely believe with respect to everything that happens that it is better for them to be as they are. For surely, on the one hand, when you obtained the oversight (literally, "the providence," *pronoein*) of the rule of some part of humanity from the king here,<sup>207</sup> obeying the laws of the constitution (*politeia*) for what is beneficial (or, insofar as it is beneficial), it was not possible to preserve the constitution lawfully (*nomimon*) in another way than [for you] to send some of your subjects as colonists (*metoikizonti*), and to confiscate the property (*dēmeuonti*) of others, and even to condemn others to death; you did not preserve everyone's life since it was not beneficial for everyone. But, on the other hand, shall we not entrust the blameless administration of his own affairs to the one who administers so great a world, since all things are justified by him as being good, even when he draws back (*chōrounti*) for the sake of [a person's] death, both through changes [of fortune] and through the indefinite number of one's years?<sup>208</sup>

Apparently having received a governorship from the emperor ("the king here"), Nemertius would have understood the kind of involvement in human affairs that God performed in his administration of the world. The fragment evinces no negative attitude to Nemertius' political and imperial engagements, and even seems to legitimize capital punishment. The concessions to his target audience are significant. Yet, this rhetorical appeal to a governmental model does not unsettle our picture of Porphyry's characterization of the place of the political sphere in the philosophical

<sup>204</sup> *C.Nemert.* fr. 278 Smith; see [Chapter 1](#). <sup>205</sup> *C.Nemert.* fr. 281 Smith incertum.

<sup>206</sup> Goodenough 1928; Baynes 1933; Chesnut 1978.

<sup>207</sup> Is this a reference to Nemertius' holding a governorship? The PLRE entry (1.621) only states that he was "probably a senator," following Bidez 1913: 67n.2.

<sup>208</sup> *C.Nemert.* fr. 282 Smith incertum.

life.<sup>209</sup> In a work defending Providence addressed to a member of the empire's administrative machinery, the adoption of the divine ruler–human ruler model would have carried persuasive weight.

The shift of focus in content and audience adequately accounts for the difference between *Against Nemertius* and the other works discussed above. The fragment is, nevertheless, a salutary caveat against too readily seeing Porphyry as hostile to Rome or unduly averse to civic affairs. The contextual limitations of his diverse aims and arguments exhibit a general, though not restrictive, emphasis on the renunciation of civic obligations and entanglements for the philosopher. In texts not addressed to individuals who had shown sufficient interest in pursuing the salvation of the soul, Porphyry did not neglect his sense of responsibility to defend truth and refute falsehood, even through arguments supplied more by his audiences' own assumptions than his own loftier ideals.

We may conclude that, for Porphyry, the world of the polis represented a set of concerns, values, and obligations that was rooted in, and limited to, the material world. At its worst, the civic sphere was a hindrance to the liberation of the soul and the pursuit of wisdom; at its best, it might seem to offer some inadvertent benefits for those living philosophically (though in the two attempts to obtain those benefits in the *Life of Plotinus*, namely, travel to Persia and the establishment of Platonopolis, they both ended in failure).

#### PORPHYRY THE COSMOPOLITAN

The greatest benefits of empire for the philosopher were, however, the result of the military conquest and control of native peoples and the consequent proliferation, classification, and control of knowledge about those peoples. Porphyry had grown up in a city that had been granted privileged status as a Roman colony,<sup>210</sup> had moved freely across the empire, and lived and taught in the imperial capital. The movement of texts (such as that of Bardaisan) and letters (such as those of Longinus, writing to Porphyry from the Palmyrene empire – and eventually executed for his connections to the Palmyrene court)<sup>211</sup> created the cosmopolitan context for the construction of Porphyry's vision of the world and its nations.

<sup>209</sup> The assumption that a philosopher's use of examples taken from politics is tantamount to an acceptance of those political situations or forms of government (as claimed by Romano 1979: 59–61) is misplaced.

<sup>210</sup> Millar 1993: 123–124, 294–295. <sup>211</sup> *V.Plot.* 19–20.

Even if his true homeland was repeatedly averred to be beyond the material world in the contemplation of God, Porphyry was nonetheless very much at home in the empire. He had moved with ease across the empire and rubbed shoulders with the very power-brokers of that empire in the privileged leisure of Plotinus' seminars. Intellectual pursuits, even of a Platonic or Pythagorean flavor, had long before been made a commodity for Roman cultural taste. Cicero, the great statesman of Rome and model of Roman virtue and literary expression, had translated Plato into Latin and created for Greek philosophy an intellectual and cultural space that would last until the end of antiquity (and beyond).<sup>212</sup> The opportunity to live in Rome, attempting to dissuade well-born Romans from their duties to the city and its empire, was itself a gift of that empire.<sup>213</sup> Albeit uncomfortably so, Porphyry was very much a product of Rome's empire.

The mobility (of people, ideas, and texts) furnished by the empire had, to a significant extent, created the very cognitive foundations for the philosophical shift away from the identities and entanglements of local civic allegiances. If everywhere was the city, as Aristides had declared in the previous century,<sup>214</sup> it was only a small step for the philosophically minded to see no place as one's own city. If, furthermore, the world was a city (*cosmopolis*) for an earlier generation of philosophers – all products of empire themselves – then it was only a small step for one with a Platonic ontological sensibility to seek the renunciation of the bonds of any city.<sup>215</sup> It was, therefore, the cities of Rome's empire that created plausibility structures for a system of thought seeking to transcend city and empire.

The persistence and ubiquity of empire can be discovered at the roots of Porphyry's philosophical project and vision. Yet his thoroughgoing interpretive shift away from Hellenocentrism (even while he was so deeply Hellenized) and his open exploration of native knowledges through native sources is impressive for its depth and carefulness. The distance drawn up between the soul seeking salvation and civic and imperial worldliness (even if created by the very conditions of empire) was, in its intent, a dynamic force in the malaise of late antiquity. His conceptual framework of the world of nations strikingly resonates more with the ethnic visions and decentering narratives of Christian apologists than with the cultural centrism and circumscribed narratives of Plutarch. Bidez was certainly right

<sup>212</sup> For Cicero's importance in the late third and early fourth centuries, see variously Gawlick 1966; Gigon 1973; Greer 1998.

<sup>213</sup> I adapt the final phrase here from the ongoing book project of Michael Maas, entitled *The Conqueror's Gift: Ethnography, Identity, and Roman Imperial Power at the End of Antiquity*.

<sup>214</sup> Aristides, *Rome* 36, with Swain 1996: 274–284; see also Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.20bc.

<sup>215</sup> E. Brown 2009.

to see Porphyry as a transitional figure; he was, however, intellectually, religiously, and culturally pivotal in more ways than the early-twentieth-century biographer realized.

#### CONCLUSION

Particularly in the areas of Greek cultic practice and daemonology, Porphyry had been concerned to map out the territory, both ethnically and metaphysically, with the double movement of horizontal and vertical translation. He does not, however, intend or advise his readers to settle there: the territory of the world is foreign and dangerous. Exile and travel, rather than settling in an ethnic or civic abode, were the primary metaphors for a soul seeking its origins. If it is appropriate to speak of a cartography of religion in Porphyry, that is, a habit of seeing religious and theological phenomena in spacial terms (horizontally, religious practices and methods of accessing the divine world are located in particular nations; vertically, a hierarchy of divine beings is located in determinate cosmic regions), then his map-making enterprise has a distinctive goal: the way home.

While modern historians may recognize Porphyry as a hybrid product of Phoenician racial identity, Greek cultural hegemony and Roman imperialism, Porphyry characterized neither himself nor his world within the parameters of this schema. On the contrary, he envisioned his world in terms of a topography of wisdom and piety in which some peoples, or some races among those peoples, glowed more or less brightly in the greater or lesser intensity of their spirituality and philosophical acumen. The mental mapping of his world did not demarcate Roman imperial control (though it sometimes exhibited the routes of access to that empire) or the effects of a civilizing Greek culture (though it might follow certain Greek philosophers on their travels to barbarian lands). There was no center culturally or ethnically locatable in a single people or geographical homeland. The center, the true home for Porphyry, had to be approached in silence, in a shearing off of ethnically embodied accoutrements that clung tenaciously to the soul while on sojourn in the material world. There were many paths to that center, as the oracle of Apollo had revealed, and none of them received privileged status in the philosopher's ethnographic vision.

Not all philosophers during late antiquity would follow Porphyry's cultural and philosophical moves. The approach offered in the foregoing pages, which has sought to trace out the contours of his vertical and horizontal translational activities, hopefully provides a model sufficiently appropriate

and elastic for appreciating the ways in which later philosophers made sense of their world in both transcendental philosophical and culturally centering or decentering ways. Far from cutting the philosopher off from the embodied world, late antique Platonism and its seemingly austere metaphysical hierarchy prompted an impulse to translate the world, especially along the borders of the (overlapping) levels of that hierarchy.

## EPILOGUE

### *Translation after Porphyry*

There is a pointed irony in the fact that the years surrounding Porphyry's death were the same that saw Constantine's rise to power. Even before Constantine banned Porphyry's *Against the Christians* in 325, Methodius and Eusebius had written lengthy responses *Against Porphyry*. His fellow Platonist Iamblichus likewise turned against him (though it is unclear when we should date his response to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, or his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, which contained criticism of many of Porphyry's readings). While Porphyry's works fared somewhat better in the Western half of the empire (productive interactions with his thought occurring in Macrobius, Marius Victorinus, Augustine, Boethius, and others), one might suspect that his mixed reception in the generations following his death was in large part due to a cataclysmic historical, religious, and cultural transformation (whose foundations lay substantially in the third century) marking off the classical past from a new medieval or Byzantine age.<sup>1</sup> Hellenism might be thought of as having run its tired course and was now being overtaken by new cultural and religious forces. Yet Platonism had already been in need of translation, introduction, and commentary in the first centuries of our era – and most certainly in the third, with Porphyry and other thinkers both pagan and Christian – and so the brave new world of late antiquity would not be so new as long as Plato and other Greeks continued to find willing translators into new linguistic and conceptual frames of reference. Along with the visible changes seen in ecumenical ecclesiastical councils hosted by emperors, the construction of dazzling churches, imperial attempts (unsuccessfully) to manage “rogue” bishops, and unruly or violent Christian mobs, Platonic philosophers and other intellectuals would persist in locating and categorizing truth and falsehood along vertical and horizontal axes – though not always to the same degrees or in the same ways.

<sup>1</sup> This is the guiding theme of Romano 1979.



Porphry himself received two translational responses from younger contemporaries, only one of which he might have expected: Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* and Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. As serious intellectuals committed to metaphysical visions broadly resonant of Porphyry's, their accounts are strikingly divergent from each other as well as from Porphyry. Iamblichus was a fellow pagan and a fellow Platonist. The aloof vertical moves that Porphyry called for, however, went too far for him: his response to the *Letter to Anebo* developed an account much more wedded to the particular than that of his one-time teacher. While he never defends the sort of exciting theurgical exhibitionism we find in reports of later philosophers like Maximus of Ephesus, Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* diligently sought to categorize cultic activity within strictly maintained boundaries of the theological, the theurgical, and the philosophical. In so doing, he shows the limits of a dual translational approach to late antique philosophers in that he developed mechanisms to ameliorate the austerity of the vertical, especially in his emphasis on *sympatheia*, or rather *philia*. Through a heightened awareness of the participatory interconnectedness of lower with higher ontological levels he became a defender of theurgy rather than its skeptic.

In addition, like Porphyry he sought to decenter Hellenocentrism. He exhibited a critical posture towards the Greeks<sup>2</sup> and became a great promoter of barbarian wisdom (especially Chaldean and Egyptian). For Iamblichus, one could provide a proper and sufficient account of theological, theurgical, and philosophical truth from a distinctively Egyptian standpoint. But the Egyptian identity adopted by Iamblichus under the guise of the pseudonym Abammon in the *On the Mysteries* was occasional. He explicitly incorporated the wisdom of the Chaldeans (or Assyrians) in his Egyptian account and even hinted at the superiority of the former over the latter. His approach appears to have remained largely decentered, though, since words and objects were grounded in their particularity (even while being woven into a larger cosmic fabric of *sumpatheia*). His adoption of a form of ethnic particularism thus restrained translation: the Egyptian words that Porphyry had complained of were, for Iamblichus, untranslatable.

Amidst the world of material symbols and those nodes of interconnectedness between material objects and immaterial powers, there remained plenty of opportunity for confusion and deception. And so, as Porphyry had done, the philosopher developed an educational curriculum to guide

<sup>2</sup> *De myst.* 7.5 (p. 259 Parthey).

students in right ways of engaging in cultic activity and understanding the ideas of inadequate rivals. It may be that we know more about Iamblichus' curriculum because it was more highly formalized than that of Porphyry. Iamblichus composed the clearly titled *Protreptic* as sequel to his *Pythagorean Life*, itself a biographical invitation and introduction to the philosophic life and the first installment of his pedagogical output. Motivated by these first two works, a student could then proceed to the more involved treatises of his curriculum, as well as entering into the well-ordered reading program of Plato's dialogues themselves. Pedagogical manuals and primers were thus supplemented by commentaries on Plato.

At the same time that Iamblichus flourished in Syria as a teacher – that is, during Licinius' tenure as emperor of the eastern half of the Roman Empire before his demise at the hands of Constantine in late AD 324 – Eusebius became one of the foremost bishops of Palestine and began composing one of the greatest Christian apologies of antiquity. The only work to contain block quotations of Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* presented Porphyry as at once the greatest enemy of the faith and as a man who could inadvertently be used as a powerful friend of the faith against his own fellow pagans. In other words, Porphyry was translated both in his ideas and words, and in his role and reputation as an acute philosopher and severe critic of traditional religious customs. The voice of the *Letter to Anebo* was made to ring in harmony with the voices of other pagan and Christian critics of the Greek and Egyptian theologies and cult.

Eusebius effectively "poached" quotations from Porphyry's works, misappropriating them for his own apologetic ends. Many oracles were quoted from the *Philosophy from Oracles*, though with little of Porphyry's own commentary. Such selectivity in quoting allowed the impression that Porphyry was a "friend of daemons" and was at odds with his own ascetic withdrawal in this treatise. The philosopher's translation of the traditional gods into the Platonic category of daemons was pushed even further by the bishop, for whom all the gods were daemons, while any good ones were allocated to the ranks of angels (another move that Porphyry had already commenced partially). In this conceptual transfer, we may see the powerful impact of the biblical vision that functioned as a theological grid that orchestrated the many voices of pagan philosophers within the *Praeparatio*. The Scriptures had declared that the stars were God's messengers (*angeloi*), that "all the gods of the nations are daemons," and that in opposition to all these powers, "the Lord God is One." The writings of contemporary philosophers, the invocations and rituals performed before temples, and the possessions

of human bodies by spiritual beings of fearful aspect received their theological coherency and ritual explanation no longer from the literary visions expressed in the poems of Homer or the dialogues of Plato, as they had for Porphyry. Now, such phenomena all found their rational place within the ancient and true writings of the Hebrews. The literature of a holy race thus provided the translational schema and organizational grid for all knowledge.

Neither the writings of the ancient Hebrews nor those of the philosophers, however, were transparent to the understanding of the uneducated. Countering the sort of elitist philosophical pedagogy apparent in Porphyry's work, Eusebius developed a thoroughgoing pedagogy for the Christian "lover of truth," which was purportedly open to all comers, men and women, cultured and rustic, Greek and barbarian, adult and child. During the so-called Great Persecution, Eusebius had penned the *General Elementary Introduction*, a textbook on how to read the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) with a proper theological understanding (i.e., in terms of the Logos). Significantly, the *Praeparatio* itself would claim to be an "introduction" for Christian students, while also being an "apologetic" against anti-Christian accusations from the Greeks (Jewish criticisms would be answered in the *Praeparatio's* sequel, the *Demonstratio Evangelica*).

Through this pedagogical literature Eusebius framed the Old Testament in terms amenable to Platonic concerns (the Logos held the place of the Intellect or second hypostasis, distinguished from the first which was beyond being), while at the same time situating Plato and Platonic doctrine within a biblical historiographical frame. Plato was translated into a narrative where his truths were deemed to be themselves merely translations of a more ancient Hebrew wisdom into a Greek idiom. Unfortunately, not all of the primal wisdom survived the Greek translational process, according to Eusebius; important features were "lost in translation" under the distorting affects of Greek polytheism and immorality.<sup>3</sup> Implicit in all this was the assumption that Eusebius' own translation of the Greek philosophers within the biblical frame of reference was both in complete harmony with the ancient wisdom of the Hebrews and truly rendered Greek, Egyptian, Phoenician, and Roman thought and history.

Many later Platonists would follow Iamblichus' mode of reading the world philosophically, and many Christians would follow Eusebius' mode of reading the world and Plato's place in the world biblically. Significantly for the present study, both Iamblichus and Eusebius would translate

<sup>3</sup> See *PE* 13.14–21.

Porphyry himself into their divergent interpretive frames. For the theurgist, Porphyry's misconceived and disordered approach to theological and ritual knowledge had to be disentangled in the light of a gentler and more gradual ontology, with a more central place granted to cosmic *philia* as the guiding translational mechanism. Eusebius and later Christian readers, on the other hand, magnified Porphyry's studied examination of the lower rungs of the ontological ladder and thereby obscured his keen concerns to look beyond the material phenomena and the daemonic masquerade to the higher hypostases. However, by turning the "friend of the wicked daemons" against the Greeks, the Bishop of Caesarea (in a way similar to that of Augustine in the next century) manipulated Porphyry into a powerful partnership within the Christian apologetic enterprise.

Philosophers on both the Latin and Greek sides of the Mediterranean (as well as the Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic worlds) would perform a myriad of translational moves resituating and reframing Platonism into new constellations of meaning and in turn allowing it to shape in various ways their own intellectual projects. From Boethius in the sixth century, whose entire philosophical system has been claimed as dependent on the philosopher from Tyre and who translated Porphyry's Greek texts into Latin, to Abelard in the eleventh century, whose construction of nominalism was the product of sustained engagements with Porphyry, the third-century intellectual was translated in powerful and fruitful ways as philosophers perennially sought to make sense of their worlds and their intellectual heritages. Such translational acts could be performed through interlingual translations, commentary, marginal glosses, or even outright plagiarism (as in the case of Jerome's unacknowledged translations into Latin of passages of *On Abstinence*).<sup>4</sup>

After the early fifth century, Porphyry's acts of theological and ritual translation, which had been such central concerns for his immediate interlocutors Eusebius and Iamblichus, seem to have remained in abeyance until the daring and industrious work of Marsilio Ficino in the Quattrocento Florentine Academy. Importantly, the Renaissance thinker chose to translate Iamblichus' response to Porphyry, assigning it the now standard designation *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* in the process. On the one hand, the Latin translation of Iamblichus was only a single segment of a massive transference of Greek texts into Latin, which Ficino performed under the patronage of the Medici's, including the Hermetic Corpus, Plato, and Plotinus. The creation of the Platonic Academy at Florence lay

<sup>4</sup> Courcelle 1969: 72–77 (Jerome's is a "quite flagrant . . . plagiarism," 74).

at the intersection of courtly patronage and translational industry. The latter comprised not only the translation of Greek into Latin, but also the formulation of a Platonism that was at once Neoplatonist and Christian (without entirely conflating the two). The Neoplatonists (or *Platonici*) could, Ficino supposed, aptly be identified with heterodox (Arian) Christianity. Like Augustine, whose encounter with the “books of the Platonists” (memorably recorded in the seventh book of the *Confessions*) had elaborated a near identity between Platonism and Christianity while sharply and repeatedly marking off difference between the two, Ficino formulated a cosmological and theological system that closely commingled the philosophy of Plato and the teachings of Scriptures and the Fathers while maintaining some recalcitrant degree of difference.

Unlike Augustine’s more polemical criticisms of Platonism (especially of Porphyry in the tenth book of the *City of God*), Ficino followed a more irenic embrace of what Augustine had considered to be the seedy underside of late antique Platonism, namely theurgy (see especially, the third book of his *De Vita*). Here, significantly, Ficino’s transfer made an odd convergence. Porphyry was invoked alongside Iamblichus as testifying to a positive role for theurgy with its daemons, statues, and stones. A thorough study of Ficino’s knowledge of Porphyry remains a desideratum of Renaissance scholarship. We may note that aside from his own direct engagement with some of the key pagan interlocutors of Porphyry (especially Iamblichus and Proclus) Ficino’s work was performed within the context of the exciting translational activity of scholars such as Traversari and George of Trebizond (whose Latin translations of Aeneas’ *Theophrastus* and Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*, respectively, provided complex refractions of Porphyry’s thought and writings).

These brief and somewhat simplistic gestures at later engagements with Porphyry indicate the ways in which Porphyry and late antique Platonism generally could be translated into new contexts. They also suggest the continued richness of Hellenism in its various significations. Iamblichus addressed Porphyry as a fellow devotee of Eastern wisdom (maintaining somewhat loosely the persona of author and addressee as Egyptian) while leveling harsh words against the Greeks. Eusebius, in contrast, identified Porphyry as a Greek – though not because (as is too often assumed) he sought to transform the label “Hellene” into a religious designation for paganism, but for the purpose of playing Porphyry off against other philosophers and historians whom Eusebius had brought forward as Greeks. His polemic against Greek discord carried a sharper edge with the deployment of such identity constructions. The Latin tradition from Victorinus and

Augustine to Ficino carried a more complicated range of engagements with Hellenism, since not only could “Hellenes” be directly translated into Latin as *pagani* but the Greek language became a porous membrane across which the monumental expressions of literature and thought were conveyed with more or less difficulty and with a myriad of varying cultural effects (in the “Golden Age” of patristic Latin literature, in medieval scholasticism, or in the Renaissance). In spite of the suggested limits of Hellenism that this study of Porphyry has been seeking to trace out, its varied articulations, counter movements and disjointed, sporadic recurrences remained richly persistent.

APPENDIX I

*Annotated table of select fragments*

1. *Commentary on Plato's Republic*
2. *Philosophic History*
3. *On Free Will*
4. *On the [inscription] "Know Thyself"*
5. *Against Nemertius*
6. *On the Return of the Soul*
7. *On the Philosophy from Oracles*
8. *On Images*
9. *On the Writings of Julian the Chaldean*
10. *On the Styx*
11. *Commentary on the Timaeus*

I. COMMENTARY ON PLATO'S REPUBLIC

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 182 (Proclus *in Remp.* II 105, 23–107, 14) following a summary of the criticisms against Plato of the Epicurean Colotes,<sup>1</sup> Porphyry's interpretation of the Myth of Er in the *Rep.* 10 is given in paraphrase; he offered proofs of the immortality of the soul and an account of the various places allotted different kinds of souls in Hades; on the edifying nature of Plato's use of mythology; the use of fiction to conceal truths; example of daemons who conceal truths in oracles, temples, and ritual actions
- 182a–d parallels to 182 drawn from Macrobius, *in Somn.Scip.*

<sup>1</sup> It is uncertain whether Porphyry himself sought to formulate a sustained answer to Colotes or not (or whether that was the purpose of the work from which our fragments derive). The only evidence that Porphyry even had Colotes in mind occurs in fr. 183, where Proclus claims that Porphyry "attacked him well."

- 183 (Proclus *in Remp.* II III, 6–13) ad hominem attack on Colotes for lacking literary taste and misunderstanding Epicurus’ nickname for him (Colotarios – “little salamander”)
- 184 (Proclus *in Remp.* II 120, 15–24 [Plato resp. 614b/616b]) Porphyry stole ideas from other exegetes, who introduced much nonsense into their interpretation of the number twelve; some referred to the signs of the zodiac, others to months, others to the twelve gods
- 185 (Proclus *in Remp.* II 196, 22–197, 16 [Plato resp. 616b–c]) on the light mentioned in the *Rep.*; light is the vehicle for the cosmic Soul; light is the bond of heaven and earth (citing *Phaedo* 109e)
- 185a (Simplicius *in Arist. Phys.* 615, 32–35 [Plat. resp. 616b–c]) light is the vehicle for the cosmic Soul
- 186 (Proclus *in Remp.* II 255, 4–9; 256, 9–14 [Plat. resp. 617d2ff.]) the prophet of the *Rep.* passage designated the lunar mind
- 187 (Proclus *in Remp.* II 318, 4–27 [Plato resp. 620b1ff.]) Plato, learning from the Egyptians, indicates the ascendant times (or equatorial degrees), which define lives; the souls are ranked in a series based on their horoscope<sup>2</sup>

## 2. PHILOSOPHIC HISTORY

(fragments according to Smith’s numbering)

BOOK I (= FRs. 200–206 SMITH, = FRs. 1–6 NAUCK)

- 200 (*Anec. Graec.* II 140; = Nauck 1) chronology from the fall of Troy to the first Olympiad, noting the entrance into Greece of the Heraclids, the foundation of Ionia, and the time of Lycurgus
- 200a–c parallels drawn from Eus. *Chron.* (Armenian translation), *Anec. Graec.*, *Excerpta Lat. Barb.*
- 201 (Suda, “Homer;” = fr. 2 Nauck) date of Homer relative to the fall of Troy and the first Olympiad
- 202 (Suda, “Hesiod;” = fr. 3 Nauck) date of Hesiod relative to Homer and the first Olympiad

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to determine how much of the material given in this fragment is Porphyrian; it is probable that only the claim that Plato was indicating astral phenomena derives from Porphyry, while Proclus elaborates on the theme in non-Porphyrian ways. The fragment finds an obvious parallel in *On Free Will*, fr. 271 Smith, which allows for at least two possible explanations: a) Proclus is drawing on that treatise rather than an independent commentary on the tenth book of the *Rep.* (see Wilberding, 2011, 123–124); b) Porphyry made similar claims in different works, possibly using his commentary when formulating treatises on discrete philosophical problems.



- 203 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 1 28a–c; = fr. 4 Nauck) on the Seven Sages; narrative of the fisherman and the golden tripod as an account for there being seven in number
- 203a parallel drawn from Abū al-Wafā' al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik
- 204 (al-Shahrastānī, *K. al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, p. 302 Cureton; = fr. 5 Nauck) date of Thales relative to Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian king)
- 205 (al-Shahrastānī, *K. al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, p. 257–8 Cureton) on the cosmology of Anaxagoras
- 206 (Suda, “Pherecydes the Athenian;” = fr. 6 Nauck) Pherecydes the Athenian and Pherecydes the Syrian were contemporaries; the latter was the originator of prose-writing
- 207 test. (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 1.19c 529D–532A; IX 300b 961A; = test. 8 Nauck) because two quotations attributed by Cyril to the first book of the *Phil.Hist.* are identical to two passages of the *V.Pythag.* (48–49, pp. 43.10–44.12 Nauck and 42, pp. 39.6–40.6 Nauck) it seems that the *V.Pythag.* was originally a section of the *Phil.Hist.*<sup>3</sup>
- 207a–b test. brief notes drawn from Ibn Abī Usaybī'a, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fi Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā* and Al-Bīrūnī, *India* remarking that the work included the teachings and stories about prominent philosophers, including Pythagoras, and on the nature of the sphere

## BOOK 2 (= 208–209 SMITH, = FRAGS. 8–9 NAUCK)

- 208 (Suda, “Empedocles;” = fr. 8 Nauck) Empedocles was the student and boyfriend of Parmenides
- 209 (Suda, “Gorgias;” = fr. 9 Nauck) Gorgias lived in the eightieth Olympiad

## BOOK 3 (= 210–218 SMITH, = FRAGS. 10–13 NAUCK)

- 210 (Socrates, *HE* 3.23.14)<sup>4</sup> Porphyry disparaged Socrates and left material worse than Meletus and Anytus said
- 211 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 6.185, 781D7–784A8; = fr. 10 Nauck) citing Aristoxenus on Socrates' persuasive abilities and hot temper

<sup>3</sup> The possibility, however, that Porphyry used the same material in two different works cannot be excluded.

<sup>4</sup> Nauck is more correct to render this passage of Socrates as a testimony rather than a fragment as Smith.

- 212 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 6.208, 817C1–10; = fr. 11a Nauck) on the possibility  
that Socrates was a stone-mason, or a Hermes-carver
- 213 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 6.208, 817C10–D5; fr. 11b Nauck) citation of different  
sources on Socrates as a stone-mason
- 214 (Theod., *Graec.aff.curat.* 1.28–29; = fr. 11c Nauck) on Socrates’ lim-  
ited abilities in reading and writing (though he “was dull about  
nothing”)
- 215 (Theod. *Graec.aff.curat.* 12.64–67; Cyril, *c.Jul.* 6.186, 784D9–785A8;  
= fr. 12a–b Nauck) Socrates was moderate in daily life but excessive  
in love-making; on his two wives; Socrates was quarrelsome in con-  
versation; as a child he was disobedient; became a lover and student  
of Archelaus
- 215a a parallel passage from the Suda (= fr. 12d Nauck) noting Socrates’  
relationship to Archelaus and his sexual behavior
- 216 (Theod. *Graec.aff.curat.* 4.2; = fr. 12e Nauck) Socrates curbed his  
youthful lack of restraint and pursued philosophy later in life
- 217 (Theod. *Graec.aff.curat.* 12.68; fr. 12c Nauck) Socrates’ coarse behav-  
ior in public
- 218 (Stephanus Byz. p. 193, 17 Meineke) the ethnic name for one from  
Gadra, the city in Palestine, is “Gadrenus”

BOOK 4 (= 219–223 SMITH, = FRAGS. 14–18 NAUCK)

- 219 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 6.208, 820A2–6; = fr. 14 Nauck) on Plato’s education
- 220 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 1.31a–b, 549A5–B6; = fr. 15 Nauck) Plato on the one  
God, who should be named the One or the Good; God’s character
- 221 (Cyril, *c.Jul.* 8.271a, 916B3–15; = fr. 16 Nauck) for Plato, God’s *ousia*  
goes forth unto three hypostases: the Good, the Demiurge, World-  
Soul
- 222 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 1.34c, 553C9–D8; = fr. 17 Nauck) Plato speaks in riddles  
in *Ep.* 2.312e1–4
- 223 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 1.32cd, 552B1–C8; = fr. 18 Nauck) for Plato, Mind arose  
as a “turning” from the Good; it proceeded from the One “pre-  
eternally;” the Mind is atemporal, yet is the source of time

INCERTAE (= FR. 224 SMITH, = FR. 20 NAUCK)<sup>5</sup>

- 224 (Tetzes, *Chil.* 11.520–533) the liberal studies comprise grammar,  
rhetoric, philosophy, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy

<sup>5</sup> On the material given as fr. 19 Nauck, see 199T Smith.

## 3. ON FREE WILL

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 268 (Stobaeus 2.8.39) addressed to Chrysaorius, arising upon an earlier conversation; concerned to defend freedom of the will in the face of Plato's mention (in the Myth of Er) of the Fates, the throne of Necessity, and so on; the distinction between classificatory levels of lives: the first is the life of some generic category of being (e.g., a dog or a human), the second is contingent on the first (e.g., a hunting dog or watchdog); Plato allows for freedom to choose one's life (at least of the first category, and even in regard to the second, one chooses whether to live poorly or well); Necessity only confirms one's pre-embodied choice
- 269 (Stobaeus 2.8.40) each kind of life has free will corresponding to it; natural desires and persuasive appearances may lead a person a particular way, but the person has the power to reject these
- 270 (Stobaeus 2.8.41) souls have free will before falling into bodies; even in their embodied state they possess a free will related to the condition of the living thing
- 271 (Stobaeus 2.8.42) on the relative order and speed of souls traversing the cosmic revolution on their descent into bodies; in contrast to the Egyptians, Plato held that the stars indicated but did not cause the things done or suffered in one's life; on Homer on the problem of divine culpability for evils in life (for translation, see Appendix 2)

## 4. ON THE [INSCRIPTION] "KNOW THYSELF"

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

BOOK I<sup>6</sup>

- 273 (Stobaeus 3.21.26) precise origins of the inscription are debatable; more important is the reason of its being set up
- 274 (Stobaeus 3.21.27) the god is commanding us to guard our thinking; some posit that the inscription bids us to know humanity; since a human is a microcosm of the cosmos, knowing oneself leads to knowing the universe, that is, to philosophize; philosophy is not an end in itself, but only a means to true happiness

<sup>6</sup> According to Suda (4.178.21), this treatise contained four books; Stobaeus specifies the book from which each of our fragments derive.

## BOOK 4

- 275 (Stobaeus 3.21.28) on ignorance, drawing on Plato's *Philebus* 48c; ignorance is utterly evil when it disparages the divinity in oneself, unaware of its fallen state; we find our existence in knowing our ourselves

## 5. AGAINST NEMERTIUS

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 276 (Cyril *c.Jul.* III 79,621A) God made humans rational so that they would seek truth, and free will so that their beauty would be praised
- 277 (Cyril *c.Jul.* III 79,621B) free will given to humans so that praiseworthiness or blameworthiness might be determined; ability to choose is granted by providence
- 278 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 5.166,753C12–D5) Nemertius seeks to teach justice to God, but his book is full of the greatest injustice; the decision that is in everyone's power is holy and is truly the decision of God
- 279 (Cyril *c.Jul.* V 166,753D6–756B2) God's providence assigns the spans of life for individuals in view of the harmony of the whole; as human doctors cut or cauterize for the good of the whole, so God beneficently allows death to come at different times for different individuals
- 280 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 3.95,645B1–8) based upon foreknowledge, God ends prematurely the lives of some on account of their piety, of others on account of the harm they would cause, of still others the misfortunes that they would undergo
- ?281 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 3.85,629D12–632A11) everything is governed by a divine Mind; but even if our minds do not comprehend the reason for problematic occurrences, we dare not blaspheme for so great a Mind would not act unlawfully<sup>7</sup>
- ?282 (Cyril *c.Jul.* 3.95,645B8–D1) we must believe that the way things are is the best; just as a human governor uses exile, confiscation of property, or even the death penalty for the good of all, so seemingly harsh events in the world are performed by the good Governor

<sup>7</sup> That frs. 281–282 should be attributed to the *c.Nemert.* has been argued in [Chapter 1](#) above.

## 6. ON THE RETURN OF THE SOUL

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 284 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.23.1–19) according to an oracle, only the first principles can purify, not the rites of moon or sun; God is a Father and a Son, who is the Mind of the Father; Porphyry might say there is something between these two
- 284a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.29.1–3) there is a Father and a Son, who is the Mind of the Father, and something between these
- 285 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.26.1–11) though embarrassed of theurgy, Porphyry said there were angels who descended and gave revelations to theurgists; there are others who declared the teachings (or even the will) of the Father; they are to be imitated rather than invoked
- 286 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.1–12) distinction between magic (*magia*), wizardry (*goētia*), and theurgy (*theurgia*), the latter of which is presumed to be praiseworthy (Porphyry not mentioned until following paragraph [=288F])
- 287 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.8–25) gods proclaim divine things by theurgical acts; the purgations of theurgy are useless to the philosopher since they pertain only to the spiritual soul not the intellectual soul (P not mentioned, but the reference is secure because of his earlier mention in 10.26)
- 288 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.13–16) theurgy provides a quasi-purgation of soul, not the return to God
- 288a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.25–29; 52–55) the ethereal gods promise that those purified in their spiritual souls by the theurgical art do not return to the Father, but remain in the ethereal regions; the daemons pretend to be gods
- 289 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.16–20) caution against theurgy as deceptive, dangerous, and unlawful
- 289a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.28.14–16) theurgy is to be feared because of its dangers, either arising from the laws or from its very performance
- 289b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.66–73) humans err and are deceitful in practice of theurgy
- 290 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.20–35) theurgy can cleanse a part of the soul, though not the intellectual but only the spiritual part, by which bodily images are received; the intellectual part can be saved

- on its own, even if the spiritual part has received no theurgical  
purgation
- 290a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.10.30–34) theurgical initiates see beautiful images  
of angels or gods
- 290b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.59–61) the intellectual soul cannot be purged  
by theurgy
- 290c (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.32.123–127) theurgical purgation is not needed  
for the intellectual part
- 291 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.28.6–8; 18–21) spiritual soul can be purged by  
temperance, without theurgy; no initiations can purge ignorance  
or many vices, only the Mind of the Father can do so
- 292 (Aug., *Civ. Dei* 10.9.35–37) the spiritual part cannot be purged to  
the point of achieving immortality
- 292a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.61.64) the spiritual part can be purged by  
theurgy, but not become immortal
- 293 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.37–45) daemons are aerial, angels are aethe-  
real/empyrean; through friendship with a certain daemon one can  
be elevated after death a little above the earth, though there is  
another way towards partnership with angels; upon death a soul is  
horrified by the cult of encircling daemons
- 293a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.28.8–11) initiations do not elevate the soul after  
death
- 294 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.9.45–60) theurgy is commended as a conciliation  
of angels and gods; report of a man trained in Chaldean arts who  
was overcome by the theurgic arts of another; theurgy is a discipline  
of destroying the good among both gods and humans; the gods  
allow themselves to be pulled down
- 294a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.57) the gods are bound by enchantments
- 294b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.26.28–10.27.12) reference to the failed Chaldean  
of fr. 294
- 295 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.10.1–8; 12–19) through theurgy, the very gods are  
hindered by passions and perturbations
- 296 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.21.31–37) a good god or daemon does not come  
to a person unless they commit an evil act
- 297 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.29.11–20; 43–46; 55–75) it is granted to a few to  
come to God by means of intellect, though in this life one cannot  
achieve perfection of wisdom; the intellectual soul can become  
consubstantial with the Mind of the Father; all body is to be fled  
from

- ?297a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.26.1–2) all body is to be fled from for the soul to be blessed
- ?297b (Aug. *Retract.* 1.4.7) all body is to be fled from
- ?297c (Aug. *Serm.* 241.7) all body is to be fled from for the soul to be blessed
- ?297d (Claud. Mamert. *Anim.* 2.7) all body is to be fled from for the soul to be blessed
- 298 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.30.20–53) God sends souls into the world so they might learn the evils of matter and return to the Father; the soul cleansed from evils and returned to the Father does not return to the world
- 298a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.31.22–24) after the experience of evils, the soul's beatitude will be permanent
- 298b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 12.21.61–68) the soul is sent to the world to recognize evils, so that having returned to the Father it will endure nothing else
- 298c (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.27.6–7) upon return to the Father, the soul will never go back to the evils of the world
- 298d (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.28.33–37) the soul will not return to evils
- ?299 (Aug. *Serm.* 241.6) philosophers like Pythagoras, Plato, and Porphyry say that souls purged of love for bodies return to bodies
- 300 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.30.1–10; 16–20) human souls do not return to the same bodies but to new bodies; human souls can be cast down only into human bodies, not those of animals
- 300a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 12.27.1–12) all body must be fled from; those who live wrongly return to bodies to pay the penalty, but only to human bodies
- 300b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 13.19.39–41) Porphyry removes the bodies of beasts from human souls
- 301 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.12.56–64) the soul ceases from miseries and never returns from them, but only by fleeing all body
- 301a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 13.19.41–49) the souls fleeing all body are held eternally blessed with the Father
- 302 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.32.5–16) a universal way of freeing the soul has not been recovered by any one sect, either some truest philosophy, the discipline of the Indians, or the initiation of the Chaldeans; this way has not yet reached Porphyry's attention through historic investigation

- 302a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.32.16–21; 24–31) parallel of fr. 302; assertion that he has taken divine oracles from Chaldeans
- 302b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.32.31–37) parallel of fr. 302

## 7. ON THE PHILOSOPHY FROM ORACLES

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

### BOOK I

Preface (frs. 303–306)

- 303 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.6.2–4.7.2) only minimal necessary alterations have been made to the oracles; philosophical purpose of the collection of oracles
- 304 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.7.2–4.8.1) commendation to silence regarding the teachings of the treatise; readership should be limited to the philosophically serious
- 305F (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.8.2) oracular truths concealed in riddles
- 306F (Firmic. Mater. *De errore Prof. Relig.* 13. 4–5) Serapis invoked

On the gods (307F–313F)

- 307 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.5.7–5.6.2) the servants of gods have appeared to humans; an oracle from Branchidae regarding the deaths of nine woodcutters
- 308 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.6.2–5.7.2) an oracle stating that Hecate descends from her Father, the sovereign Mind, and ensouls the cosmos; Porphyry comments: the soul is tripartite
- 309 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.7.4–5) areas of specialty of various divinities; oracle on Rhea, Pallas Athena, Artemis, Hera, Deo, and Isis
- 310 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.14.3–4) oracle on Apollo's birth; no comments of Porphyry
- 311 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.14.5) oracle on Apollo's birth (a continuation of fr. 310's oracle)
- 312 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.14.6) oracle of Asclepius identifying himself; no comments of Porphyry
- 313 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.14.7) oracle of Hermes identifying himself; no comments of Porphyry



## On sacrifice (314F–315F)

- 314 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.8.4–4.9.2) introduction of a section containing oracles on worship; on the divisions of the gods; long oracle of Apollo commanding various forms of animal sacrifice
- 315 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.9.3–7) exposition of oracle from fr. 314; various levels of gods signified through symbols in the oracle

## On images (316F–321F)

- 316 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.10.13–5.11.1) oracles have revealed not only the *politeia* of the gods (i.e., the divisions of the gods in frs. 314–315?), but also what they govern, how they are bound, and what sacrifices and images are appropriate to them
- 317 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.12.1–2) oracle of Hecate describing the proper construction of her image and necessary rituals
- 318 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.13.1–2) oracles of Sarapis and Pan describing their appearance
- 319 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.13.3–4) oracle of Hecate describing her cult statue
- 320 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.14.2–3) the symbols of Hecate and Uranus; an oracle of Pan describing attributes of Hecate
- 321 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.14.4–5.15.4) on divine preference for fashioned images; oracle of Hecate on desire for images; Porphyry comments that the oracle has also revealed that they can be enclosed in their images

## On the oracles (322F)

- 322 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.15.6–5.16.1) oracle of Apollo on the various Apolline oracle centers, and on the decline in oracles

## On barbarian wisdom (323F–324F)

- 323 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 9.10.1–2) oracle on the discovery of divine path by Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Lydians, and Hebrews
- 324 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 9.10.3–5 [= 14.10.5]) Porphyry's commentary on oracle of fr. 323; the Assyrians designates Chaldeans; quotation of additional oracular lines on theological wisdom of Chaldeans and Hebrews

## BOOK 2

## On the highest God (325F)

- 325 (Fragmente Griechischer Theosophien 173.17–174.22 Erbse) oracle addressed to the Father of immortals, who administers everything through Mind and is surrounded by ranks of “rulers;” Porphyry comments on the three orders of angels
- 325a (Fragmente griechischer Theosophien 30, p.174.23–25 Erbse) oracle commanding to turn to the divine king and avoid lesser spirits

## On daemons (326F–329F)

- 326 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.22.15–4.23.6) analysis of their symbols and rites shows that wicked daemons are under the rule of Sarapis; in addition, he has revealed (apparently in an oracle no longer extant among our fragments) that daemons approach humans; apotropaic practices conducted to scare off daemons; houses and bodies are full of daemons; they are attracted by blood; their presence is indicated by wind going in/out of a person’s body
- 327 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.23.6) Sarapis and Hecate govern daemons
- 328 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.23.7–9) oracle of Hecate on her representation and abode
- 329 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 4.19.8–4.20.1) oracles on proper rituals delivered to a person wanting to see Apollo

## On astrology (330F–342F)

- 330 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.14.1) oracles often depend on astrology in formulating predictions, so that the oracle-giving deities prove to be “excellent Magi and astrologers”
- 330a (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 200.2–7) an oracle on days proper for worship of various deities, and on the proper invocations that were found by “the most excellent of the Magi,” i.e., Ostanes
- 331 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.1.1) oracular predication based on knowledge of the stars
- 332 (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 200.7–13) precise knowledge of the stars is incomprehensible to humans, daemons, and gods
- 333 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.1.2–3) oracle of Apollo on the sex of a pregnant woman’s child, admitting that he has learned this from the stars; they also foretell plagues based on the stars
- 334 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.1.4) an oracle foretelling strife; no comments of Porphyry

- 335 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.1.5–7) an oracle foretelling plague and death; no comments of Porphyry
- 336 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.2.1) an oracle on a person's warlike disposition, which was based on his horoscope
- 337 (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 200.13–20) everything, even gods, that descends below the stars is under the fates
- 338 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.2.2–6.3.1) even temples are under fates; oracle of Apollo on temples struck by lightning
- 339 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.3.5–6.4.3) the bonds of Fate can be dissolved by magic; an oracle commending the use of magical rites to escape a daemonic attack
- 340 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.4.3–6.5.1) because knowledge of the stars is inconceivable to humans and daemons, the daemons lie about many things
- 340a (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 200.20–26) “active theosophy” is difficult and precise knowledge of stars is incomprehensible; hence, they lie about many things

## BOOK 3

- 341 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 6.5.2–4) the surrounding atmosphere forces prophecies to be false, though the prophetic deities do not willingly lie; they are forced to speak by humans; oracles admitting lying and dependence on stars
- 341a (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 201.1–17) parallel to fr. 341, with quotation of same oracles
- 342 (Philoponus *Op. Mundi* 201.18–202.16) an oracle of Hecate expressing desire for silence because of the unsuitability of the stars; an oracle of Hecate forbidding the human to question further; as if forced by humans, the gods descend and utter oracles

## On Christians and Hebrews (343F–346F)

- 343 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 19.22.17–19.23.17) in answer to a human consultant regarding his Christian wife, Apollo disparages Christian falsehoods and their worship of a “dead god;” Porphyry comments that the Jews know God more than Christians do
- 344 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 19.23.30–37) oracle of Apollo on the gods' fearing of God the creator; the law (of the gods?) is the Father whom the Hebrews honor

- 344a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 20.24.8–26) a polemical paraphrase of Porphyry: he praises the piety of the Hebrews but attacks the foolishness of Christians
- 344b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.3.22–25) a polemical paraphrase of Porphyry: the pagan deities fear God
- 344c (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 22.25.1–15) a polemical paraphrase of Porphyry: he is eager to show from the oracles that the pagan deities fear God
- 345 (Eus. *Dem. Ev.* 3.6.39–3.7.2) the gods declared Christ to be pious, but the Christians worship him out of ignorance; oracles of Hecate on Christ
- 345a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 19.23.43–73) the gods declared Christ to be pious, but the Christians are polluted and blaspheme the gods; oracle of Hecate on piety of Christ; ascent to the heavens of Christ's soul
- 345b (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 10.27.37–39) polemical allusion: the oracles confessed Christ to be holy and immortal
- 345c (Aug. *Const. Evang.* 1.15.23) polemical allusion: Porphyry was compelled by the oracles to praise Christ
- 346 (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 19.23.107–133) small earthly spirits are subject to evil daemons; the Hebrews (among whom was Jesus as the oracles declared) opposed the evil daemons and spirits, and instead commanded to worship the heavenly gods and God the Father; but the gods commanded this same thing, advising us to turn our minds to God; virtuous living and imitation of the divine as true worship

On binding the gods (347F–350F)

- 347 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.7.6–5.8.7) according to Pythagoras of Rhodes, gods do not desire to approach humans; those who do are those who want to do some harm; oracles of Hecate remarking on forceful invocation of gods
- 348 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.8.8–10) means of binding the gods has been revealed by them; oracles declaring bindings
- 349 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.8.11–12) oracle on Apollo filling the medium's body; Porphyry's commentary: nothing could be more divine; the body serves as an instrument of the god
- 350 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 5.8.13–5.9.12) the gods are eager to withdraw when they are invoked; oracles to that effect

## 8. ON IMAGES

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 351 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.6.7–3.7.1) prohibition of uninitiated readers; promise to expound theological wisdom revealed to physical perception through images
- 352 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.7.2–4) artistic media, shapes, colors appropriate for representing the divine
- 353 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.13.5, 8–9, 22) (not a fragment) Eusebius criticizes Porphyry for transferring the myths of the Egyptians to incorporeal powers (in contradiction to the *Ep.Aneb.* quoted at *Praep. Ev.* 3.4)
- 354 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.8.2–3.9.9) quotation of Orphic hymn on Zeus as Mind of the world; Zeus represented as seated human; exegesis of various attributes
- 354a (Stobaeus 1.31.7–10) Zeus as Mind of the world
- 355 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.10.26–3.11.1) Hera represents aetherial power
- 356 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.5) Hera represents air; Leto sublunar air
- 357 (Lydus *de Mens.* 138.18–139.15) Hestia as ruling principle of the divine power
- 357a (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.6–7) Hestia as ruling principle of the earthy<sup>8</sup> power; related significations of Rhea, Demeter, and Kore
- 358 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.9–17) Demeter, Kore and Dionysus, Pluto, Attis, Adonis, et al. as representative of reproductive powers
- ?358a (Aug. *Civ. Dei* 7.25.1–12) Attis signifies flowers
- 359 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.21–44) aquatic, solar, and lunar powers; significations of Aphrodite, Hermes, et al.
- 360 (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 3.11.45–3.13.3) significations of Egyptian gods
- 360a (Stobaeus 1.25.2) parallel on the sun's revolution

## 9. ON THE WRITINGS OF JULIAN THE CHALDEAN

(fragments according to Smith's numbering)

- 364a (Basil. Min. Scholia in Greg. *Orationem* 31.19 [PG 36.90A8-B6]) Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus claim that everything descends on strings from the first cause as far as their terminations in non-being

<sup>8</sup> Note the variance from Lydus' version of the fragment (= fr. 357).

- 364b (Elias Cret. Scholia in Greg. *Or.* 31.19 [PG 36.832C9–833A5]) parallel to fr. 364a
- 365 (Lydus *Mens.* 110.18–25) the Jews worship the “Twice-Beyond” (i.e., the Demiurge), which the Chaldeans place second after the “Once-Beyond (i.e., the Good)
- 366 (Lydus *Mens.* 159.5–8) the number nine is divine, divided into triads, and preserves the highest teachings of the Chaldean theology
- 367 (Damascius *Princ.* 1.86.3–15) the single first principle of all is the Father of the intelligible triad; Iamblichus, on the contrary, claims the first principle is beyond the intelligible triad altogether
- 368 (Aeneas Gazaus *Theophr.* 45.4–9, p. 961A) matter has come into being; one must reject the assertion that matter is unbegotten and the assertion that it should be included among first principles<sup>9</sup>

### 9. ON THE STYX

(fragments according to Smith’s numbering)

- 372 (Stobaeus 2.1.32) Homer’s poetry contains riddles of deeper truths; Cronius misappropriated allegorical method<sup>10</sup>
- 373 (Stobaeus 1.49.50) quotation from Apollodorus on Underworld rivers and their etymologies
- 374 (Stobaeus 1.49.51) the Styx in Arcadia, according to Herodotus and Callimachus
- 375 (Stobaeus 1.49.52) Scythian pack-ass horns indestructible by the waters of Styx, according to Philo of Heraclea and inscription at Delphi
- 376 (Stobaeus 1.3.56) on the Styx in India, according to Bardaisan and Apollonius of Tyana
- 377 (Stobaeus 1.49.53) on the three places of souls in Homer, the third being Hades; Tartarus is reserved for gods, or rather daemons who are subject to passions, who are punished by Styx “the daemon herself”
- 378 (Stobaeus 1.49.54) on the memory of souls in Hades
- 379 (Stobaeus 4.41.57) Plutarch on the poplar (most likely part of a discussion of Homer, *Od.* 10.510)

<sup>9</sup> NB: in regard to the last clause, I am here omitting Smith’s *delenda et addenda*, and instead supposing that a neuter article *to* is to be added before the *agenēmēton* so that the “one must reject” governs both infinitives.

<sup>10</sup> Smith seems to think this is taken from the preface; but, it is not entirely certain that *On the Styx* was even meant to be a treatise dedicated solely to Homer’s accounts of the Underworld and afterlife (frags. 373–376 and 381 [if Porphyrian] do not explicate Homer).

- 380F (Stobaeus 4.36.23) the willow as destructive of fruit (most likely part of a discussion of Homer, *Od.* 10.510)

## 10. COMMENTARY ON THE TIMAEUS

(fragments according to Sodano's numbering)

## BOOK I

- 1 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 5C p. 14.28–15.22, on *Tim.* 17A1–3) against Praxiphanes on the passage's transfer from cardinal to ordinal numbering
- 2 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 6E p. 18.21–19.9, on *Tim.* 17.A4–5) on the absent interlocutor; bodily weakness causes sensible people to give up philosophical dialogue
- 3 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 8D p. 24.12–17, on *Tim.* 17A6–7) on the ethics of a friend enduring all things for another
- 4 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 9D p. 27.22–24, on *Tim.* 17B7–8) the ethical thing is between irony and imposture
- 5 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 10B p. 29.31–30.2, on *Tim.* 17C1–3) the recapitulation of the *Republic* in the *Timaeus* is ethical, showing the necessity of those who are ordered in character to contemplate all things
- 6 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 16E p. 51.9–13, on *Tim.* 18D7–E4) Porphyry begins to follow Longinus in thinking that souls are implanted at conception
- 7 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 18B p. 56.13–24, on *Tim.* 19B3–5) actions bring dispositions to completion; thus, Socrates wants to see the final constitution enacted in waging war, etc.
- 8 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 20CD p. 63.24–64.11, on *Tim.* 19D3–E2) Porphyry noted that Origen spent three days of sweat and tears on the issue of whether Plato included Homer with the poets whom he mentions; Origen had concluded that imitation of Homer was sufficient for virtue; but, while Homer is a great poet in expressing passion and stirring the imagination, he cannot impart intellectual freedom from passion and an active philosophical life
- 9 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 21CD p. 66.29–32, on *Tim.* 19D3–E2) the life of the best republic transcends the ability of the poets
- 10 (Proclus, *in Tim.* 24CD p. 77.6–24, on *Tim.* 20D8–9) mixing the thought of Origen and Numenius, many suppose that daemons attack souls as they attempt to ascend; three classes of daemons; Plato's

- narrative of war between Athenians and Atlantians signifies conflict with daemons; Porphyry shares this opinion and follows Numenius
- 11 (Proclus *in Tim.* 29C p. 94.4–9, on *Tim.* 21D4–7) criticism of Longinus' claim that Plato was speaking elliptically
- 12 (Proclus *in Tim.* 34A–B, p. 109.24–30, on *Tim.* 22C3–8) Plato's reference to Phaethon myth signifies the movement of comets at the time of storms, famine, and so on
- 13 (Proclus *in Tim.* 36C, p. 116.27–117, on *Tim.* 22D3–5) Plato's reference to cataclysmic events signifies the soul (e.g., the appetitive part is "flooded by" the generative moistness)
- 14 (Proclus *in Tim.* 37A, p. 119.16–23, on *Tim.* 22E1–4) ancient report on the source of the Nile's rising from springs
- 15 (Proclus *in Tim.* 45B, p. 146.4–9, on *Tim.* 23E2–4) daemons measure time by thousands
- 16 (Proclus *in Tim.* 45CD, p. 147.6–24) Hephaestus symbolizes the artistic mind; earth symbolizes the lunar sphere; souls that are from God but have a share of the artistic mind are sown into the body of the moon; they receive a nine-thousand-year period
- 17 (Proclus *in Tim.* 47A–B, p. 152.10–28, on *Tim.* 24A4–5) symbolic meanings of Plato's references to priests, soldiers, shepherds, protectors, hunters, and farmers
- 18 (Proclus *in Tim.* 48D, p. 156.26–31, on *Tim.* 24B4–7) the shield and spear in Plato refer to the body and the spirited part of the soul, i.e., that which corrupts the purity of mind destroys the life of reason
- 19 (Proclus *in Tim.* 49B, p. 159.9–12, on *Tim.* 24B7–C3) perfect thought is prior to the cosmic orders, its form is not artistic
- 20 (Proclus *in Tim.* 49C, p. 159.25–27) the medical art comes from Athena; Asclepius is the lunar mind, just as Apollo is the solar mind
- 21 (Proclus *in Tim.* 50C–D, p. 162.27–163, on *Tim.* 24C7–D3) criticizes Longinus' assumption that Plato's use of "mildness" has a bodily sense; the term refers rather to being well-harmonized, since in each part of the cosmos there are different powers (physical, psychical, daemonic, angelic), but they are all united
- 22 (Proclus *in Tim.* 51B, p. 165.16–23, on *Tim.* 24C7–D3) Athena is the moon; lovers of wisdom and war, the mystagogues of Eleusis, descend from there; heralds are beside them since Hermes (i.e., Mercury) too resides near the moon
- 23 (Proclus *in Tim.* 53A, p. 171.17–22, on *Tim.* 24D6–8) Plato's phrase ("great deeds of the city") refers to the deeds of souls with respect to matter and the material characters (*hylikous tropous*), and daemons



are material characters; there are two classes of daemons: souls and characters, i.e., material powers

- 24 (Proclus *in Tim.* 54A, p. 174.24–28, on *Tim.* 24E2–4) the Titanomachy refers to souls and daemons
- 25 (Proclus *in Tim.* 60AB, p. 194.14–20, on *Tim.* 26B3–C4) children have better memories because their souls have not experienced human evils; they have an impressionable imagination, but a lazier reasoning faculty, since experiences make this faculty sharp and agile
- 26 (Proclus *in Tim.* 61E, p. 200.4–6; 62C, p. 202.2–8, on *Tim.* 27A2–B6) on why the *Timaeus* is placed after the *Republic* because one must first have their character nobly formed before turning to knowledge of the truth
- 27 (Proclus *in Tim.* 63B, p. 204.24–29, on *Tim.* 27B7–10) the prooemium of the *Timaeus* is harmonious with the purpose of the dialogue

## BOOK 2

- 28 (Proclus *in Tim.* 64A p. 207.23–209.1) those who accept prayer and those who do not; the primary form of atheism denies benefits of prayer; secondary atheism (which rejects providence for determinism) grants existence of gods, but still denies benefits of prayer; noble people believe in prayer, like children praying to return to their true fathers, the gods; sages of all nations practice prayer
- 29 (Proclus *in Tim.* 66E p. 216.18–25, on *Tim.* 27C1–3) contrary to Epicurean criticism, prayer does not need to be forever, since Plato only says to pray at the commencement of every matter, not forever
- 30 (Proclus *in Tim.* 67C p. 218.28–30, on *Tim.* 27C4–6) the two *ētas* in Plato with smooth breathing so that it is an “either . . . or . . .” construction
- 31 (Proclus *in Tim.* 78F p. 257.2–8, on *Tim.* 28A1–4) in this passage Plato only distinguishes the extremes: that which always is in the first place and that which only becomes; but he passes over intermediate levels of being and becoming
- 32 (Proclus *in Tim.* 83CD p. 271.28–272.6, on *Tim.* 28A6–B3) on what the “always” of the *Timaeus* passage modifies: not as Atticus thought (“the Demiurge always looks at the pattern”), but “the Demiurge looks at what always is”
- 33 (Proclus *in Tim.* 84D p. 275.20–26, on *Tim.* 28B5–6) the phrase “about all” does not refer to every “thing” but to the All itself

- 34 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.25, p. 200.10–23, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
what would be more laughable than to declare that the world came  
to be from some temporal beginning (= a verbatim quotation of  
Porphyry)
- 35 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.10, p. 154.6–19, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
against those who claim that Plato believed the world came to  
be (though not in time) by enumerating different meanings for  
“coming-to-be” (= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)
- 36 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.8, p. 148.25–149.16, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
Plato used “coming-to-be” in the way everyone understands and  
uses it; he did not say that the world came to be (= a paraphrase  
of Porphyry)
- 37 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.8, p. 148.9–23, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
“coming-to-be” can mean that which is not simple but is a com-  
posite of matter and form (= a paraphrase of Porphyry)
- 38 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.10, p. 154.23–155.4, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
Plato meant “coming-to-be” according to the proper way we use it  
(i.e., as a composite of matter and form) (= a verbatim quotation  
of Porphyry)
- 39 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.2, p. 126.10–23, on *Tim.* 28B6–C2)  
since Plato taught that the world was incorruptible, he must  
have also held that it did not come to be (= a paraphrase of  
Porphyry)
- 40 (Proclus in *Tim.* 91F p. 300.1–6, on *Tim.* 28C3–5) distinction  
between Father and maker: a father is one who begets the whole  
from himself; a maker is one who receives material from another
- 41 (Proclus in *Tim.* 94A p. 306.31–307.4) the Demiurge is the hyper-  
cosmic Soul; its Mind, towards which it is turned, is self-living;  
the Mind is the paradigm of the Demiurge
- 42 (Proclus in *Tim.* 98B p. 322.1–7, on *Tim.* 28C5–29A2) unpartici-  
pated Soul is the Demiurge; the Mind is its paradigm
- 43 (Proclus in *Tim.* 98C p. 322.18–26) the paradigms are prior to the  
Demiurge
- 44 (Proclus in *Tim.* 101CB p. 332.9–18, on *Tim.* 29A5–8) the Demi-  
urge who makes beautiful things is the best; even if the Demiurges  
of mortals are daemons, and even if they are not simply the best, as  
the artisans and establishers of mortals they are not prevented from  
being best, and for this reason of being Demiurges of beautiful  
images

- 45 (Proclus *in Tim.* 107B p. 352.11–16, on *Tim.* 29C7–D2) polemical  
paraphrase of Porphyry: let us not suppose, as Porphyry does, that  
what [we] are not endowed with the gods
- 46 (Proclus *in Tim.* 111CD p. 366.13–27, on *Tim.* 29E2–4) the Demi-  
urge eternally creates the world and it is eternally becoming ordered
- 47 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.14, p. 164.18–165.6, on *Tim.* 30A2–  
6) the creation of the world and the making of bodies are not  
the same thing; bodies precede the world; the first principles of  
bodies are God, matter and forms; everything comes to be at once,  
though in order to be more precise one teaches them as temporally  
distinguished (= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)
- 48 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 14.3, p. 546.15–25) against those who posit  
bodies without one who orders them; it would be like a ship  
without a helmsman or a chariot without a driver (= a paraphrase  
of Porphyry)
- 49 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 6.14, p. 165.7–16) a proof that the making  
of body and the world are not the same is that Plato calls that which  
has been received visible; the visible things can only be bodies  
(= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)
- 50 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 14.3, p. 547.7–19) matter should be  
thought of as receiving traces of the forms, since the traces of  
the forms are not yet the forms themselves, just as a pencil-sketch  
of the image of Socrates is not yet the image of Socrates; if matter  
has received only traces then it is still bodiless and indistinct (= a  
paraphrase of Porphyry)
- 51 (Proclus *in Tim.* 119A–120F p. 391.4–396.26) against followers of  
Atticus who suppose many conjoined first principles, i.e., the  
Demiurge and Ideas, and suppose that matter is moved by an  
irrational and maleficent soul; if there are multiple first principles  
then God would not be the cause of all things, but only some;  
Plato refers all things to a single first principle, viz. the Good, both  
in the *Tim.* and in the *Rep.*; in the *Philebus* Plato says that God is  
the pre-existent cause of the Finite and the Infinite, which are first  
principles, as if there is one first principle and many – but these are  
ultimately under the one; in the *Sophist*, it is necessary to have as  
a first principle the One itself; the Demiurge is not the first God,  
for that one is greater than all intelligent existence; every soul is  
the offspring of the gods; the Demiurge does not bring order to  
what is disorderly at a point in time, but is always ordering the

disorderly; according to the theologians there are certain powers greater than us who use active images (*phantasias*) which with their coming to be are productive of whatever they want, and that these powers produce movements of light and show certain divine forms in their movements, showing such visions externally to those capable of seeing them; the demiurgic logos brings forth all things

- 52 (Proclus *in Tim.* 128E p. 422.5–26, on *Tim.* 30C5–7) the reason that parts are beautiful (though its beauty only comes from being in relation to the whole) is that the part is the whole; everything that is in the whole completely is in the parts partially through the unity of intelligible forms
- 53 (Proclus *in Tim.* 131C p. 431.20–23, on *Tim.* 30D2–31A1) the super-celestial Soul is the Demiurge and the Mind is its paradigm
- 54 (Proclus *in Tim.* 131B–C p. 437.25–438.11, on *Tim.* 31A1–3) the passage refers to three things: the One, the Many which are limited, and the limitless; on the use of *poteron* in the passage
- 55 (Proclus *in Tim.* 133F–134A p. 439.29–440.16, on *Tim.* 31A3–4) against those who assert a multiplicity of worlds; the cosmos is one from one, but humans are many from one
- 56 (Proclus *in Tim.* 139A p. 456.31–457.11, on *Tim.* 31B1–3) there is only one first principle of intelligibles; if anyone should say that God and matter are first principles, he would be forced to posit another above these
- 57 (Proclus *in Tim.* 142C–D, II p. 11.8–18, on *Tim.* 35B5–C2) some daemons are composed of the fiery element, others of the earthy element; daemons ejaculated worms in Tuscany and left traces of ash when burnt (for translation, see Appendix 2)
- 58 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 13.15, p. 522.2–9) against those who say that the heavenly beings were not established from the four elements (positing a fifth element instead); according to Plato the first elements are earth and fire (= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)
- 59 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 13.15, p. 522.13–15, on *Tim.* 32B9–C1) Plato speaks of only four bodies since these are all that is found in reality (= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)
- 60 (Philoponus, *Aet.mundi*, 13.15, p. 522.18–22) Plato clearly says the world was established from four elements; he did not believe in the fifth body, which was introduced by Aristotle and Archytus (= a verbatim quotation of Porphyry)

- 61 (Proclus *in Tim.* 171D, II p. 104.30–105.6, on *Tim.* 33B3–4) against those who take “the middle [of the cosmos]” in a locative, spatial manner, since the world Soul is present everywhere
- 62 (Proclus *in Tim.* 172F, II p. 109.3–7, on *Tim.* 34B4–6) on the phrase “circle in a circle;” the circle of the world is peculiar, it rotates in a circle through its passage around the center
- 63 (Proclus *in Tim.* 175C, II p. 117.7–8, on *Tim.* 34C4–35A1) the soul is older than the body in generation and prior in virtue
- 64 (Proclus *in Tim.* 189F–190A, II p. 162.25–163.10, on *Tim.* 35B1–2) were both (the Same and the Different) made in the mixing-bowl, or was one outside while the other was inside the mixingbowl?
- 65–68 it is to be doubted whether this material is Porphyrian (from Macrobius, *in Somn. Scip.*)
- 69 (Proclus *in Tim.* 205E, II p. 214.4–215.5) the Soul fills the cosmos with harmony; it possesses within itself harmonic principles (*logous*) that bind together the various powers of the world
- 70 (Proclus *in Tim.* 216C, II p. 247.18–23, on *Tim.* 36B6–9) among the Egyptians there is a character bearing the symbol of the cosmic Soul (the character was a circle surrounding an X); it probably signified the duality of procession (in the X) and the singularity of Life and the intelligible (in the circle)
- 71 (Proclus *in Tim.* 218B–C, II p. 253.23–30, on *Tim.* 36C4–6) the circles of the *Timaeus* passage may be referred to perceptible things and the material mixtures honeyed-milk and honeyed-wine
- 72 (Macrobius, *in Somn. Scip.* 2.3.12–15, on *Tim.* 36D2–7) the relative distances between the earth, sun, moon, and planets is proportional due to proportionality within the World-Soul.
- 73 (Proclus *in Tim.* 227D, II p. 282.15–18, on *Tim.* 36D8–E1) the “middle” in the *Timaeus* passage corresponds to the plant soul; this is in harmony with the middle of the All
- 74 (Proclus *in Tim.* 233A–B, II p. 300.23–301.2, on *Tim.* 37A3–8) the text should be *legei*, contrary to Amelius’ support of *lēgei* (“stops”), since the Soul moves ceaselessly and does not stop
- 75 (Proclus *in Tim.* 234D–E, II p. 306.1–25, on *Tim.* 37B3–6) the *logos* of the passage designates the charioteer driving the two horses (not the constant power as Atticus supposes, or the whole soul as Iamblichus)
- 76 (Proclus *in Tim.* 235D–E, II p. 309.7–23, on *Tim.* 37B6–9) the straightness (*orthotēs*) mentioned by Plato refers to orthodoxy (*orthodoxia*)

- 77 (Proclus *in Tim.* 236C, II p. 311.30–32) the “of him” in the passage could be interpreted in many ways
- 78 (Proclus *in Tim.* 249A, III p. 33.31–33, on *Tim.* 37D3–8) perceptible things alone participate in those that truly exist<sup>11</sup>
- 79 (Proclus *in Tim.* 258D–E, III p. 64.8–65.7, on *Tim.* 38C9–D6) on the different speeds of minds being brought into existence; the Sun, Venus, and Mercury correspond to Being, Mind, and Life respectively; the first triad of planets goes up to Being, the second triad to Mind, the Moon to Life; but each of the [planetary] gods participates in the three Fathers (Being, Mind, and Life)
- 80 (Proclus *in Tim.* 311A–B, III p. 234.18–30, on *Tim.* 41D1–2) the so-called corruption of the soul-vehicle and the irrational soul scatters [upon death]; these dissolve and are released into the spheres, from which they obtained their composition; these are mixtures from the heavenly spheres and the soul collected them as it descended
- 81 (Proclus *in Tim.* 322E, III p. 272.5–7, 16–17, on *Tim.* 41E2–3) Fate (*heimarmenē*) is simply Nature

[Sodano provides an appendix with material that he numbers 82–93, deriving from Macrobius, Calcidius, Simplicius and Sahrastani; their Porphyrian provenance is of varying levels of plausibility.]

<sup>11</sup> As Sodano notes *ad loc.*, these words are not easily understood and would seem to have been taken out of context by Proclus, who is concerned in this passage with Plato’s claim that time is an “image of eternity” (see the supplemental material provided by Sodano 66–67).

*Translation of select fragments*

1. *On the Styx*, fr. 376 Smith
2. *On the Styx*, fr. 377 Smith
3. *On the Styx*, fr. 378 Smith
4. *Philosophy from Oracles*, fr. 323 Smith
5. *Philosophy from Oracles*, fr. 324 Smith
6. *Philosophy from Oracles*, fr. 325 Smith
7. *Philosophy from Oracles*, fr. 325a Smith
8. *Commentary on the Timaeus 31b5–c2*, fr. 57 Sodano
9. On daemons, of uncertain location, fr. 471 Smith
10. *On Free Will*, fr. 271 Smith

1. *ON THE STYX*, FR. 376 SMITH (= STOBÆUS 1.3.56)<sup>1</sup>

From Porphyry's *On the Styx*:

The Indians<sup>2</sup> who came in the reign of Antoninus (the one from Emesa in Syria)<sup>3</sup> to Bardisan, who is from Mesopotamia, for discussion (or books, or speeches, *logoî*) explained, [5] as Bardisan has recorded, that there is a certain pool that even now is still called “the judgment” among the Indians, to which are led any of the Indians who should deny a crime when blamed. Some of the Brachmans judge him in this way. They ask the man [10] whether he wants the trial to be by water,<sup>4</sup> and if he does not want [this] they send him away as guilty to pay the penalty; but if he agrees, they lead [him] to the testing (*basanon*) along with the accusers; for the latter also go down into the water to be tested in order that they not slander [the accused]. [15] Accordingly, those who enter the water pass through to another part of the pool; the depth is about up to the knees of anyone who enters into it.

<sup>1</sup> Smith misprints (?) the Stobæan reference as 1.3.96. The line numbers of Smith are given in brackets throughout. One wonders why Smith has decided to insert this fragment from 1.3 into the middle of a series of fragments from 1.49 (fr. 373 = 1.49.50; fr. 374 = 1.49.51; fr. 375 = 1.49.52; fr. 377 = 1.49.53; fr. 378 = 1.49.54). For consideration of the ordering of the fragments, see [Chapter 1](#) above.

<sup>2</sup> On this fragment, see Praulx 1873; Winter 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Elagabalus, emperor from AD 218–222.

<sup>4</sup> A similar procedure is found at Ach. Tat. *Leuc. et Clit.* 8.11–14; see Castelletti 2006: 270–274.

When the accused enters, if he is guiltless, he passes through fearlessly, while the water remains about knee-high; [20] but the guilty one, after advancing a little way, is submerged (*baptizetai*) up to his head. The Brachmans drag him out of the water and hand him over alive to those who brought him and deem it fitting that he be taught without capital punishment. It rarely happens, [they say], that anyone dares to deny a sin [25] because of the refutation that is made from the water.

The Indians, therefore, hold this water as a judgment of voluntary sins. There is another one for involuntary as well as voluntary [sins], and for an entirely upright life, about which Bardisan writes the following (for I will put down what he says word for word): “They used to say [30] that there is also a great natural (*automaton*) cave nearly at the middle of the earth in a most lofty mountain.<sup>5</sup> In this cave there is a statue (*andrias*), which they guess [to be] ten or twelve cubits, standing upright and holding its hands outstretched in the figure of a cross. The right side of its face is masculine, [35] while the left is feminine; and similarly the right arm, right foot and entire right side is masculine and the left is feminine, so that someone looking at it is struck by the mixture and how it is [possible] to see without separation the unlikeness of the two sides in a single body.

On [40] this statue, they say that a sun has been carved around the right breast and a moon around the left, and down the two arms \*\*\* has been carved skillfully a number of angels and as many things as are in the world: heaven, mountains, the sea, rivers, ocean, [45] plants, and animals, and simply as many things as exist. They say that God gave this statue to his son, when he was creating the world, in order that he might have a model (*paradeigma*)<sup>6</sup> to look at. And I asked ([Bardisan] says), what sort of material it was, and Sandales firmly declared and the others as well bore witness with him [50] that no one knew what kind of material that statue was made from; for it was neither gold, nor silver, nor bronze, nor stone, nor another material, but rather was like a most firm and incorruptible wood, though it was not wood.

They went on to say that a certain king [55] wanted to take a hair from those around its neck, and blood flowed and that king was afraid so that he scarcely regained himself when the Brachmans prayed.

And they say that upon its head there was an image (*agalma*) of God as though he were seated on a throne. [60] They also say that this entire statue sweated<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Castelletti connects this with the cosmic mountain of Hindu and Buddhist thought, Mount Meru. Strabo 15.1.8, and Arrian, *Indica* 1.6; 5.9, refer to a Mount Meros (“thigh”) in India where Dionysus was claimed to have been born. For a similar primeval mountain that arises from the waters, see Fowden 1986: 13.

<sup>6</sup> See Plato, *Tim.* 31a, which became an important text in late antiquity (quoted at Clement, *Strom.* 5.12.79; Eusebius, *PE* 11.13.2; Stobaeus 1.22.3d [200.1–3 Wachsmuth]; Theodoret, *Curatio* 4.49; Cyril, *C.Jul.* 8 [PG 76.908C–D]).

<sup>7</sup> On sweating statues, see Lucian, *Dea Syr.* 10, 36; for the weeping statue of Niobe, see Paus. 1.21.3 (cf. Habicht 1985: 14–15); the statue’s weeping, however, occurs in the summer, and hence might be “sweating,” see Paus. 8.2.7. For anecdotes reporting perspiring (or crying) pillars, see Holm 1998: 157–159; Lieberman 1939–1944: 400–402.



when it was hot and it was fanned by the Brachmans and the sweat stopped. And if they did not fan it, it broke out in a profuse sweat so that the earth around it was soaked.

Further within the cave [65] a great interval past the statue there was darkness, where those who wish enter with lamps and find a certain gate. Water comes forth from this gate and makes a pool at the end of the cave; and as if testing themselves, they enter through that gate. As many as are purified [70] from the baseness of life enter the gate as it opens wide without hindrance, and they find a very great spring of a most transparent and drinkable water, from which the pool's water comes forth. But those in a bad frame of mind squeeze [themselves] greatly to enter through [75] that gate but are not able since it constricts on them; whichever ones are overcome confess to the others if they have committed any sin, make entreaty that the others should pray on their behalf, and fast a sufficient amount of time.

There he [Bardisan] says that they said the Brachmans gather [80] around Sandales on a certain fixed day; but while there are some who have school (or, spend their time, *diatribēn*)<sup>8</sup> there, others come together from elsewhere in summer and about fall-time when the autumn is long; and during the time of their viewing of the statue and their assembling together they agree to [85] a testing of themselves to see if they are able to enter the aforementioned gate. Inquiries arise, they say, about the engraving on that body. For, it is not easy to stand near to all the etching, and [the inquiries arise] because there are many [details] and because not all the animals and plants [90] exist in every place.

This is what the Indians record about the water of testing among them. But I think Apollonius of Tyana also makes mention of this water – I mean that which is in the cave. For when he writes<sup>9</sup> to the Brachmans he swears a certain oath: “No, by the water [95] of Tantalus, of which you initiated me.” I think he says this is “of Tantalus” because it always checks with foreboding those who have been eager to go to it and draw a drink from it.

## 2. ON THE STYX, FR. 377 SMITH (= STOBÆUS 1.49.53)

In the same:

So now, let so much<sup>10</sup> be said about the gods. But since we made distinctions about the souls in Hades just as Homer ranked them,<sup>11</sup> and since we offered an explanation about those being punished, for the remaining time [5] we may attach a discussion on the Styx, which we have supposed to have been ordained for the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arrian, *Anabasis* 7.2.5.

<sup>9</sup> On Apollonius' letter-writing, see Philostr. *VA* 1.2.3. The letter here is given as 78 in C. P. Jones' collection (LCL 458, p. 74).

<sup>10</sup> The previous fragment in Stobaeus' series of fragments had been about the horns of the Scythian ass (fr. 375 Smith). Obviously, the reference to a discussion about the gods does not refer to that material but to something omitted by Stobaeus.

<sup>11</sup> See *In Remp.* frag. 187.4–8 Smith.

punishment of sinful daemons in Homer's view. For indeed, when he had filled everything full of gods and confined their kingdoms to places, he again supposed that there were three places of the souls which he deemed to be immortal [10]: one is on the earth (*epigeios*)<sup>12</sup> throughout this inhabited world, in which animals and humans spend their time; another is reserved for the righteous beside Oceanus, which he calls the Elysian plain, and he says that they are sent to it while still alive. He reveals this sort of thing [15] in the case of Menelaus, when he says:

But for you it is not appointed, Zeus-nourished Menelaus,  
To die in horse-grazing Argos and pour out your destiny.  
But the immortals will send you to the Elysian plain  
And ends of the earth, where yellow-haired Rhadamantys [dwells].  
[20] Life for mortal men is easiest there by far,  
Neither snow, nor great storm, nor rain is ever there.  
Ocean, on the contrary, ever sends up winds  
Of clear-blowing Zephyr, to revive (*anapsuchēin*) men.<sup>13</sup>

For these, then, [Homer says] bodies also are present. But the third place [25] he says is the one in Hades, which he assumed belonged to the souls who had been released from this body; they depart straightaway to Hades: some, who remain unburied, spend time in the groves and meadow of Persephone outside of Acheron, being prevented from passing inside; but others, the souls [30] of the buried, enter – unless they deserve punishment. Otherwise, even if their bodies were buried, they are equally prevented from entering. The souls, moreover, who have been forgotten [or, without a memorial]<sup>14</sup> have a share with the souls of those who lived with them; and those which cross the river abandon (*metheisas*)<sup>15</sup> and forget their thoughts about human things. [35] For this reason also the prisons of the unjust are outside, having their punishments through thinking and the memory of their life experiences. For they receive appearances (*phantasias*) of all the terrifying things they have done in life and are punished, the sin being present to them in their thinking and punishing them with the punishments which are [40] assigned for their sins. For this reason some souls seem to carry stones and be punished by being squeezed, while others receive sensations of thirst and eternal hunger, and others [are punished] by some other thing that made them shudder in their mortal life. [45] For there is also a judge spending time outside of the river, Minos, who punishes according to the worth of the sins: to some he determines the place outside the river for punishment; he allows others to cross the river, which is a respite for souls from endless [50] evils because of forgetfulness. Heracles also is outside and punishes the unjust, producing fearful appearances of one throwing [a spear] and shooting [an arrow], just as when he was alive he would defend himself, even in Hades he attacks those worthy of punishment; for he is certainly not one of those being punished, as Aristarchus [55] thought, but one

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Styx*, frag. 374.2 Smith. <sup>13</sup> *Od.* 4.561–568.

<sup>14</sup> Smith's *mēmēmēs* is a typographical error for *mnēmēs*.

<sup>15</sup> A form of *methuō* would fit better: they drink from the river and forget.

of those who punishes. Of those who are within the river and have abandoned human reasoning Tiresias alone possesses this too as present to him; but the others recognize each other by the particular way of thinking which they have obtained in Hades, and are no longer humans. [60] Nor would they speak about human things to those humans still living, unless they receive the vapor of blood and thereby think human things, which those outside also think though they do not drink of the blood, since they have the condition of the knowledge that occurs in the souls of mortals from drinking blood. [65] But Tiresias has the reasoning of humans and yet does not himself prophesy about the things fated for the living until he drinks the blood. For Homer too thinks {as a great many of those after him also suppose}<sup>16</sup> that for humans the thinking about mortal things is in their blood, since many of those after him also [70] confirm this, showing that when [the blood] becomes excessively hot by the heat and bile it makes one senseless and unthinking. Empedocles thinks of the blood being a tool of understanding so as to say:

[75] Nourished in the waves of blood opposite the semen,  
Thought there begins especially to circulate in humans,  
For blood around the heart in humans is the thought.<sup>17</sup>

Of those souls who spend time beyond the river, the women have been ranked first (I mean the first who are near to those outside), innermost are the souls of men [80], and finally the gods of Hades. For this reason the women are sent first, then the men and, later than them, the honored ones.

In this way, he made the rankings for humans [85]; but he supposed that the cosmic gods, whose races we have enumerated, were not entirely impassible, calling them <gods> according to the ancient practice {whose races we have set forth},<sup>18</sup> since there is, according to him, a great daemon, whom he calls Zeus, and rules those who come first as far as heaven. [90] He supposed, therefore, that they are passible, just as they are said [to be], and for this reason they participate in desire, anger, hatred, enmity, and are under Fate; reasonably he supposes also that they sin, lie, swear oaths, keep oaths, or on the contrary some break their oaths. [95] For this reason also he lays down their punishments, though of course not mixing them up with human punishments; but since those who did wrong were greater they also experienced a greater punishment. For this reason the prisons of human souls are in Hades, while the prisons of those called gods are under Hades in the realm of Kronos [100] down in Tartarus. For this reason also it is called the land of the Titans from the gods in it who pay the penalty (*tisin*) at the hands of the avenging gods. He puts Styx down there, the daemon herself and the spring of her waters. [105] For [he supposes] that the Cocytus and the Titaresion flow forth <from Styx>, but they are not springs. In punishments, she is unmerciful, possessing power and being most fearful. And exactly what a Fury is to unjust souls, this the Styx is to unjust daemons.

<sup>16</sup> Bracketed by Meineke, followed by Smith.

<sup>18</sup> Bracketed by Meineke, followed by Smith.

<sup>17</sup> Empedocles, DK 31B 105.

The following lines should make clear that the [110] unburied spend time outside of the river,<sup>19</sup> bearing an image (*eidōlon*) of their body and their body's clothes:

The soul of wretched Patroclus approached  
Being entirely like him in stature, fair eyes  
[115] And voice; and such did his garments settle about his body.<sup>20</sup>

Then he says:

Bury me, that I may pass the gates of Hades most swiftly.<sup>21</sup>

And he says that he [Patroclus] names the area within the river Hades; and he also calls the area outside the river, as we were showing, [120] the halls {in}<sup>22</sup> of Hades:

But even so, I wander throughout the wide-gated halls of Hades,<sup>23</sup>

Why then do they suffer? He tells us:

<The souls, the images [*eidōla*] of the weary, shut me out, a wretch,>  
Nor do they permit me somehow to mingle beyond the river.<sup>24</sup>

[125] He adds that those having crossed the river neither recognize those who are alive nor have the power to appear to them, unless they have been sent for:

Give me your hand, I weep, for no more  
Shall I return from Hades, when you have granted me a share of the funeral fire.<sup>25</sup>

[130] Therefore, the unburied soul appeared because he was remembered by those in life and was clung to by [Achilles] and therefore was weeping. So fearful is the punishment upon those being thus punished forever; Elpenor also [speaks] thus:

A daemon's evil destiny and an ineffable sleep hurt me.<sup>26</sup>

[135] And saying what things he suffered, he requested burial, supplicating and asking:

And now I implore you by those who shall come later,  
Do not go and leave me behind unwept and unburied,  
Abandoned, lest I become some guilt-cause of the gods."<sup>27</sup>

### 3. ON THE STYX, FR. 378 SMITH (= STOBÆUS 1.49.54)

In the same:

They are ignorant, therefore, of human things and of the living entirely, but they know each other. For if they did not possess this capacity, how would all of those

<sup>19</sup> The order seems to be garbled here; this seems to be more fitting in the context of the material at lines 30ff. of this fragment.

<sup>20</sup> Il. 23.65–67. <sup>21</sup> Il. 23.71. <sup>22</sup> Bracketed by Heeren, followed by Smith.

<sup>23</sup> Il. 23.74. <sup>24</sup> Il. 23.72–73. <sup>25</sup> Il. 23.75–76.

<sup>26</sup> Od. 11.61. <sup>27</sup> Od. 11.66; 72–73.

who perished at the same time have come with Agamemnon? And how would Patroclus, Ajax and Antilochus speak with them? And how would they prevent the unburied from crossing the river? He says:

The souls, the images [*eidōla*] of the weary, shut me out, a wretch.<sup>28</sup>

Together with the memory, tokens [10] of familiar bodily things have also been laid out with them; it is also clear that it shows the bodily features by means of appearance (*phantasia*). For the appearance [occurs] through memory, as Plato says in the *Philebus*,<sup>29</sup> when memory is taken away, the thing imagined is also taken, and when it joins in leaving, the soul's bodily experiences (*pathē*) are also taken away. [15] When they have left these behind, the soul's punishment also has ceased, since there is around it only an intellectual environment and it passes its time with the wise god.

In view of what has been said, someone might perhaps ask why, if they do not recognize each other, he says: [20]

And their shades flit about.<sup>30</sup>

To which it must be replied that shades flit about with respect to those things whose memory they have also lost. With respect to mortal things, therefore, they are shades because of their being incorporeal and lacking memory, so that perhaps the soul [25], in comparison to the thickness of the body, is likened to smoke:

The soul, like smoke,  
Departed screaming.<sup>31</sup>

If indeed, when they meet their friends, they neither see [30] nor converse with them, and are inactive with respect to perceptible activity, then they would resemble shades to them. Anticleia, at least

Silently sits near the blood, and she dare not  
Look in the face or talk with her son.<sup>32</sup>

[35] Homer, as we said, considers the blood capable of drawing the visible and remembered soul, whose reasoning also, being capable of gathering in memory, which is summarily categorized into universal (*katholou*) judgments by means of their appearances. But the intellectual [element], towards which <the> soul that is inside the Acheron runs, is different. [40] The Cocytus and Pyriphlegethon fill the Acheron,<sup>33</sup> pouring from the rock and flowing forth from Stygian fears. [The souls] are sent forth to the vapors of blood by Persephone; for it is impossible to go without being sent by those in authority. For this reason, he prays,

[45] To mighty Hades and dread Persephone.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Il. 23.72.    <sup>29</sup> *Phlb.* 39a.    <sup>30</sup> Od. 10.495.    <sup>31</sup> Il. 23.100–101.  
<sup>32</sup> Od. 11.142–143.    <sup>33</sup> Od. 10.513–515.    <sup>34</sup> Od. 11.47.

And she sends first the women, as they would be dwelling near the Acheron and be weaker than the manly souls. For the souls of men certainly proceed in utter darkness, being far from the river and those who are punished. Though all of this is full of much theosophy, we must hasten on since our subject is not now about these things, and it too has necessarily been taken up for the sake of the interpretation of the Styx.

4. *PHILOSOPHY FROM ORACLES*, FR. 323 SMITH  
(= EUSEBIUS PE 9.10.1–2)

But Porphyry in the first book of his *Philosophy from Oracles* introduces his own god bearing witness to the wisdom of the Hebrew race along with the other nations renowned for understanding. His Apollo speaks through the oracle where he sets forth these things; and<sup>35</sup> after these were laid out, still [talking] about sacrifices, [Apollo] adds what [peoples] one should attend to as being full of all theosophy:<sup>36</sup>

Steep is the road of the blessed ones<sup>37</sup> and quite rough,<sup>38</sup>  
Opening at first with bronze-bound gates;<sup>39</sup>  
The paths within are inexpressible,  
Which to the ignorant condition of mortals those ones first declared  
Who drink the fair water of the land of the Nile;  
The Phoenicians also learned many roads of the blessed ones,<sup>40</sup>  
Assyrians, Lydians and the race of Hebrew men,

And what follows this.

<sup>35</sup> The quotation of the fragment probably begins here. <sup>36</sup> Dactylic hexameter.

<sup>37</sup> The phrase “road of the blessed ones” first occurs in Greek literature here; it is followed only by Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthom.* 6.488; Nonnus, *Dionys.* 20.95.

<sup>38</sup> See Hesiod, *Works* 287–291; Porphyry, *ad Marc.* 6.277–7.278; the metaphor of the road is widespread in poetry and prose, especially of a philosophical nature; see Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 1; Lucr. *de Rerum Nat.*, 1.921–930; for discussion and extensive comparanda, see Knox 1999.

<sup>39</sup> This precise image “bronze-bound gates” occurs elsewhere only in tragedy; see Aesch. *Septem* 160 (“with gates of bronze-bound shields”); Soph. *Oed. Col.* 56–57 (“the bronze-footed path” to the Underworld); Soph. *Antigone* 945 (“with/in bronze-bound courts”); Eur. *Phoen.* 114 (“gates and bronze-bound missiles”). These are the only instances, aside from Porphyry’s oracle, of gates/doors/courts that are bronze-bound. However, “bronze gates” occurs at Psalm 106:16 LXX and receives commentary by Christians (beginning with Origen, *Princ.* 4.3.11; Eus. *Comm. Psalm.* PG23.1324D, where he identifies them as “iron-bound gates” of death which were turned into bronze after Christ’s entry into Hades). For “iron gates and roads of bronze” (in Tartarus), see Homer, *Il.* 8.15 (cf. Eudocia, *Homerocentos* 1.1944; 3.569; 5.651; for “marble gates and roads of bronze” (in Tartarus), see Hesiod, *Theog.* 113. Cf. Iamb. *Myst.* 10.5 (291.12–13); Procl. *Comm. Cratyl.* 94.7; *Chald. Orac.* fr. 202.

<sup>40</sup> This line is quoted at Julian, *Or.* 7.220D.

5. *PHILOSOPHY FROM ORACLES*, FR. 324 SMITH (= EUSEBIUS  
PE 9.10.3–5 (= 14.10.5))

To which the author adds:

Have you heard how much toil there is for someone to offer the purifications for the body – not that he would find the salvation of the soul?<sup>41</sup> For the bronze-bound road to the gods is steep and rough,<sup>42</sup> its many paths the barbarians found, though the Greeks were misled and the rulers<sup>43</sup> already also destroyed [it].<sup>44</sup> The god assigns<sup>45</sup> the discovery to the Egyptians, the Chaldeans (since these are Assyrians),<sup>46</sup> Lydians and Hebrews. Furthermore, Apollo also says in another oracle (*chrēsmos*):<sup>47</sup>

Chaldeans alone obtained wisdom and then the Hebrews,  
Reverencing the self-begotten king<sup>48</sup> in holy manner [as] a god.<sup>49</sup>

And again, when asked why they say there are many heavens, he uttered these things:<sup>50</sup>

In the entire world there is one circle, but it is carried  
With seven belts on the starry roads,  
Which certainly Chaldeans and the enviable Hebrews  
Named heavens, to go on a sevenfold circuit.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This first sentence only in 14.10.5; cf. Iamb. *Myst.* 10.5 (291.12–13): “It [the theurgic gift of happiness] has [as] its first power the purification of the soul, [being] much more perfect than the purification of the body . . .”

<sup>42</sup> Likewise at *Ep. Marc.* 6.277–7.278, Porphyry declares that the ascent of the soul is like climbing a rugged mountain rather than walking on a well-paved road; see also *Ep. Aneb.* 2, p. 28.12–14 Sodano (= Iamb. *Myst.* 10.1). Cf. note on oracle, ad loc.

<sup>43</sup> Alternatively: “those who are strong.” For the possibility that *hoi kratountes* refers to Christians, see Schroeder and Des Places 1991: 219 n. 2; Zambon 2002: 200–201; Cook 2004:154; Busine 2005: 284. While there is no clear evidence for this interpretation, it would be consistent with Porphyry’s view that Christians had gone astray from the ancient wisdom. If taken as I have rendered it in this translation, it may mark a somewhat oblique criticism of Roman religion as a later corrupted form of an earlier primitive wisdom. The term is, after all, used elsewhere in Porphyry’s corpus to refer to earthly rulers; cf. *Ep. Marc.* 25.399–400 (*tēs tou kratountos dunasteias*).

<sup>44</sup> The passive form of this verb (*diaphtheirein*) is applied elsewhere to societies (*politeiai*) that have become corrupted; see *Abst.* 4.5.2.

<sup>45</sup> Gk: *marturein*.

<sup>46</sup> The insertion of Chaldeans here may be an oblique effort to legitimate the *Chald. Orac.* On Chaldean wisdom, cf. Porph., *Comm. Tim.* fr. 28 (Sodano); *V. Pythag.* 1, 11 (Nauck). Porphyry seems in what follows to have a special interest in making a connection between the Jews and Chaldeans in respect to theology and cosmology. It may be suggested that Porphyry could have elsewhere made the claim that the Jews were Chaldeans; cf. Philo, *passim*; Julian, *c. Galil.* 354B (in particular, Julian asserts that Abraham, a Chaldean, practiced astrology; cf. 356C, 356E–357A).

<sup>47</sup> Dactylic hexameter. <sup>48</sup> See Iamb. *Myst.* 10.6.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted also at Ps.-Justin *Cohort.* 11 and 24, where the question to Apollo was what men had ever lived in a godly manner.

<sup>50</sup> Dactylic hexameter. <sup>51</sup> Cf. the Orphic hymn quoted by Aristobulus ap. Eus. PE 13.12.

6. *PHILOSOPHY FROM ORACLES*, FR. 325 SMITH  
 (= FRAGMENTE GRIECHISCHER THEOSOPHIEN  
 173.17–174.22 ERBSE)

Because Porphyry, in the second book of his *Philosophy from Oracles*, presents an oracle about the immortal god, which runs thus:<sup>52</sup>

Unspeakable Father of immortals, eternal one, mystic one,  
 Lord who rides upon the aetherial backs of revolving worlds,  
 Where the strength of might has been established for you  
 Beholding all things and hearing with fair ears,  
 Attend to your children, whom you yourself planted in season.  
 For your strength, great and golden, blankets over  
 The world and starry heaven forever;  
 Beyond which you have raised yourself, stirring with light,  
 Stretching out your well-balanced Intellect in ever-flowing channels,  
 Who [the Intellect] then conceives all of this, fashioning imperishable matter,  
 The birth of which has been supposed, since you bound it with marks (*typoisin*).  
 Thence the generations of sacred rulers (*anaktōn*) flow in  
 Around you, most regal and sole Sovereign of mortals  
 And father of blessed immortals; but those distant [generations]  
 Have arisen from you, and under [your] messages (*angeliaisi*) they pervade  
 Each thing by your elder-born mind and might.  
 And besides, having made another third race of rulers (*anaktōn*)  
 Who daily lead you, praising you with songs,  
 Wanting [to do] your will, they sing hither.

This oracle makes clear that there are three orders (*taxeis*) of angels:<sup>53</sup> those ever present with God,<sup>54</sup> those separate from him and sent for the purpose of bearing messages (*angelias*) or doing acts of service, and those ever bearing his throne. The phrase “Who daily lead you,” means that they continually carry [his throne]. And the phrase, “They sing hither,” [is used] for “They sing until now.” Then the oracle adds this:<sup>55</sup>

You are father and beautiful form of mother  
 And soft flower of children, being a form amid forms,  
 A soul and spirit, harmony and number.

Through these verses it is clear that, in regard to us, God shows a father’s and mother’s affection and he descends [to us] through love for humanity (*philanthrōpia*) and even himself became human even as if he were a child of God, or a created thing.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Dactylic hexameter. <sup>53</sup> Angels are also mentioned at *Regr.* fr. 285 Smith.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Comm. Tim.* 17 Sodano. <sup>55</sup> Dactylic hexameter.

<sup>56</sup> No doubt this comment belongs to the Christian compiler, not Porphyry.



7. *PHILOSOPHY FROM ORACLES*, FR. 325A SMITH  
(= FRAGMENTE GRIECHISCHER THEOSOPHIEN 30,  
P. 174.23–25 ERBSE)

That \*\* according to Porphyry, he brings forth this sort of oracle:<sup>57</sup>

Turn your mind to the divine king, nor converse  
With lesser spirits upon the earth; this I have told you.

8. *COMMENTARY ON THE TIMAEUS* 31B5–C2,  
FR. 57 SODANO

From these [considerations], therefore, let us accept as being most true that visibility is a property (*idion*) of fire and tactility is the special quality of earth. For this reason, Porphyry says some daemons too possessing in their composition the fiery element more and being visible, have nothing in the manner of an imprint (i.e., do not leave an imprint, *antitupōs*);<sup>58</sup> but others who have a share of earth fall under the sense of touch. Those were of the latter kind, as [Porphyry] says, which appeared in Italy in the territory of the Etruscans (*peri tous Touskous*)<sup>59</sup> and were detected not only by sowing and begetting worms (*skōlēkes*)<sup>60</sup> from their seed, but also by being burned and leaving behind ash,<sup>61</sup> from which very fact it is also shown that they share in earth.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Dactylic hexameter.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Abst.* 2.39.1: *ektupoumenai*. In this passage, wicked daemons are said to “take many forms, the shapes which imprint and are stamped upon their pneuma are sometimes manifest and sometimes invisible, and the worse ones sometimes change their shape” (trans. Clark). For a later attempt to formulate an account of daemonic impressions, see Allen 1992.

<sup>59</sup> For Etruscan daemonology, see Bonnefoy and Doniger 1992: 40–42 (Porphyry mentioned on p. 41 as testimony to Etruscan belief that daemons were like shadows during the day that were eclipsed at night though with the capability of being reborn by casting their seed, citing this fragment and Psellus, *de Oper.daemon.* 8); Weinstock 1965: 345–350. Amelius was Tuscan and hence a possible source for Porphyry’s knowledge of this particular exorcism (cf. Edwards 2007: 123, where he discusses a passage from Arnobius, *ad Nat.* 2.62 on the *virī novi* learning from Etruscans).

<sup>60</sup> Note that Baltzly (2007: ad loc.) has opted for *skulakes*, “puppies,” though there does not (in Sodano’s edition at any rate) seem any textual warrant for the change. Of course, “puppies” were associated with daemons, especially in their connection to Hecate; cf. *Phil.Orac.* fr. 328; Faraone 1992: 25–26, 45.

<sup>61</sup> A reference to an exorcism (as the parallel testimony of Psellus has it). One might speculate that Etruscan fulgural arts were involved, i.e., that some Etruscan diviners were called in to invoke lightning to strike the daemons. On Etruscan fulgural arts, see Seneca, *Quaest.Natur.* 2.45; cf. also Cornelius Labeo’s fragments on the fulgural arts, in Mastandrea 1979.

<sup>62</sup> For an alternative (inadequate) translation, see that of Baltzly 2007: 51–52. For comparanda of possibly Porphyrian derivation, see Sodano’s appendix, pp. 77ff.

9. ON DAEMONS, OF UNCERTAIN LOCATION,  
FR. 471 SMITH (=PSELLUS)<sup>63</sup>

The Baboutzikarios corrupted life because of the Hellenic nonsense: for a certain nocturnal daemon named Babo<sup>64</sup> is somewhere [mentioned] in the Orphic poems, its form oblong and its essence (*hyparxis*) shadowy. And Porphyry the philosopher also records that many people had come upon such nightly phasms in the region of the [Tusc]ans (these are a northern and barbarian nation),<sup>65</sup> which they say they burned at night, but by day they found certain burnt remains and faint bodies like the threads of a spider's web.

10. ON FREE WILL (LIT.: ON WHAT IS UP TO US),  
FR. 271 SMITH (= STOBAEUS 2.8.42)

In the same:

It is always fitting to flee from extremes (*hyperbolas*) and to pursue the mean, unless that which is in our power is already a slave bound by irreparable passions of evil and is subordinate [5] to them. It is accepted [by Plato] also that the souls be assigned their lives (*bios*) and receive them in a not disorderly manner,<sup>66</sup> but with order and as the cycle leads them. For the first [soul] ceasing in the first cycle will come first, but the second, being assigned <secondary things,> will come in the second [cycle]; for [the souls], when they are turned [10] by the All and stop, they are led about with its movement as if in order, since the lots indicate the first and the second. For this reason also, the lots (*klēroi*) of Lachesis, who has been named from 'obtaining by lot' (*lanchanein*) and 'being assigned by lot' (*klērousthai*),<sup>67</sup> are taken to the prophet. But [15] many have said that Lachesis is the revolution of the All. It is accepted [by Plato] also that the free will (*autexousion*) in the souls' power is tainted by the prenatal life (*probiotēs*)<sup>68</sup> which is present [to them] here, but that

<sup>63</sup> Because of Psellus' reference to Porphyry's "vagabond books," Kern 1919: 217–219, suggested that it might have been included in the *Phil. Orac.*, the *Simulac.*, or the otherwise entirely lost *On Divine Names* (which, I would suggest, might only be the Suda's designation for a part, or the whole, of Porphyry's *Commentary on the Cratylus*, or even his *Simulac.* itself). The label "vagabond books" could refer to any literary product of the great anti-Christian whose works were at least twice outlawed by imperial decree. Kern's suggestion cannot be too quickly dismissed, however, since Proclus need not have consigned himself only to quoting from Porphyry's commentary in his own *Commentary on the Timaeus*. The anecdote could easily fit within a section of the *Phil. Orac.* on daemons; cf. fr. 307 Smith on a deadly encounter with the daemon Pan. On the other hand, the evidence from Proclus makes it clear that Porphyry had been commenting on a passage from the *Tim.* that mentioned fire and earth (31b5–c2).

<sup>64</sup> This name is possibly a variant of Baubo; see Kern 1919: 219. Cf. Emped., fr. 153 D–K; Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.20; *PMG* 2.33; 4.1257, 2195, 2712; 5.423; 7.681, 692, 886, 896; 13.926. A further variant appears to be Bombo; see Hippol. *Refut.* 4.35; cf. Heitsch 1961: 1.171.

<sup>65</sup> Kern 1919: 219, supposed this aside to be Porphyrian (though he had not emended "[Tusc]ans"); I think Smith is surely correct to follow Bidez here.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Comm. Tim.* frs. 47, 51 Sodano.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. the etymologies of Chrysippus ap. Diogenianus ap. Eus. *PE* 6.8.10.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Porph. *ad Gaur.* 11.4; Plut. frag. 7.9.

the free will in a human being's power [is tainted] by the critical point (*rhope*), which [20] Plato calls the choice, respecting one of the lives here when the soul was still outside [the body]. It is accepted [by Plato] also that Fate (*heimarmenē*) is of such a kind [as to] resemble the declarations of laws, even being itself a law, and

an ancient decree of the gods,  
eternal and sealed by far-reaching oaths,<sup>69</sup>

[25] [as] Empedocles says. For the laws do not force [a person], but they do declare that if you are a robber, you will obey these things; and if you are virtuous, you will obtain those things; and the ordinances (*thesmoi*) of Fate – if you should choose the life of a man, so shall you live – they certainly do not force this particular choice<sup>70</sup> out of all [of them]; and if [30] when you come to be among men you then choose the life of a soldier, it is necessary for you to do and suffer this, surely it is not further necessary that you chose the life of a soldier [in the first place] and of necessity <did> and suffered this. For this reason, the archetypes (*paradeigmata*) belong to both the first and the second [classes of lives]; but it is in the souls' power [35] to choose the first lives and to live, say, a human life, and to choose some life of the second [class of lives]; and to the one choosing and living according to this [life], it is necessary both to do and to suffer the things attendant [on that life].

If, however, it is possible to divine<sup>71</sup> the mind of Plato and make a lucky guess [40] where Plato got these [ideas] from and conversed about them as if they were harmonious with what happens, I suppose I would say that – since<sup>72</sup> the Egyptian<sup>73</sup> sages interpret the lives from the horoscopes<sup>74</sup> and the disposition of the natal stars to the zodiacal stars [45] [claiming that they are] attendant upon the rising of the horoscope – on the one hand, he does not agree with the Egyptians that the kind of disposition of the constellations (*schēmatisēmōn*) compels the lives to be of such a kind for the souls going into birth through the horoscopic degree (*moira*), in the way the constellations are at that time; [50] but rather, when the souls are carried to the horoscopes according to the internal dispositions and when they see the lives, <which> the constellations indicate, inscribed in the heavenly region

<sup>69</sup> Empedocles, DK 31B 115, 1–2.      <sup>70</sup> Lit: “they do not force a ‘you choose’ from all . . .”

<sup>71</sup> On this term in Plato himself, see Collin 1952.

<sup>72</sup> I am reluctant to follow Wachsmuth's emendation (followed by Smith), which adds <para> before the sages, because (a) the given text works well as a genitive absolute construction (“since the Egyptian sages interpret . . .”); (b) the prepositional phrase *para* + dative within the prepositional phrase *para* + genitive seems rather clumsy; and (c) the meaning would seem to contradict the following sentence (“he disagreed with the Egyptians that . . .”). Smith's text would read something like this: “I would say that [Plato takes these things] <from> the Egyptian sages, when they interpret the lives from the horoscopes and from the disposition of the natal stars in relation to the stars in the zodiac, <as> attendant on the rising of the horoscope;” cf. Wilberding 2011: 145.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. *Comm. Remp.* fr. 187 Smith. For the limited importance of Egyptian influence on Greco-Roman astrology, see Fowden 1986: 67–68.

<sup>74</sup> In ancient texts, this word usually refers, not to the entire astral configuration at a nativity, but to the degree of the zodiac ascending at the time of birth in the eastern angle; see Garnett 1899.

as if in a painting,<sup>75</sup> those [souls] having made a choice<sup>76</sup> are also capable [55] of not living this way because of free will; but once they have chosen things which were [otherwise still] interchangeable within the turning at a point of time of the horoscope's rising (*anaphora*),<sup>77</sup> they fulfill by necessity the things inscribed. Why, then, in the same rising are a dog, for instance, and a man, a woman, and many men born, and neither the [60] first life (i.e., the first class of lives) of all of these nor the second is the same? I would say first, therefore, that the passage [of the soul through the stars] is not as quick for all souls, so that the rising of the horoscope does not precede (*phthasai*) their entrance; and since their motion (*phora*) always comes first (*prolambanousēs*) and each variation (*diaphora*) in lot bears a different [65] archetype (*paradeigma*) of life (*biou*), it is necessary that those seeming to burst into the cosmos at the <same> degree of the zodiac (*hōra*)<sup>78</sup> never fully correspond (lit: run together). Then, the lot outside \* \*,<sup>79</sup> before falling into the region below the moon; the passage (*diexodos*) of the first life as it goes through the seven spheres [70] does not make all [the souls] hold to the things inscribed<sup>80</sup> in a similar manner since the different souls are moved differently on their own in accordance with their desires for certain of the second [class] of lives. The soul, therefore, who already has chosen the life of a dog goes to this horoscope; but the soul [who has chosen the life] of a human, at the inclination<sup>81</sup> [75] of the point [of time],<sup>82</sup> [goes] to that [horoscope]; and Dike carries [the soul], in accordance with the particularity (*idioēta*) of its character-formation, to a certain degree (*moiran*) of the cycle (*periphora*), which has a life inscribed corresponding to the [soul's] desires. Dike is called Tyche, since she is a cause undisclosed to human reasoning. And since there are twelve signs of the zodiac, through which Egyptians nearly everywhere believe that there is the [80] path here for souls, the first degrees (*moirai*) of the zodiac, as though they were distributed to the lord of the zodiac himself,<sup>83</sup> were traditionally held to be universal; while the final [degrees] in every [sign of the zodiac] were assigned to the so-called evil-doer stars.<sup>84</sup> [85] For this reason, therefore, the felicitous possession (*eumoiria*) of the first lots was deemed worthy of acceptance and the [possession] of the latter [lots] is said to have been

<sup>75</sup> *Pinax*; similarly, Origen claims that the heavens are "a book (*biblos*) of God," indicating what is about to be (see *Comm. Genes.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.63).

<sup>76</sup> This participle is set within daggers by Smith.

<sup>77</sup> Here, "horoscope" may carry its modern meaning (i.e., of the entire astral configuration at birth), as obliquely noted by Garnett 1899.

<sup>78</sup> I have translated *hōra* here as the degree of the zodiac ascending at any nativity, rather than as the hour (i.e., spatially rather than temporally), following Garnett 1899: 291.

<sup>79</sup> The lacuna might be filled with something like: "the lot is chosen/assigned by the souls outside [the body], before falling . . .".

<sup>80</sup> Smith's *tous gegrammenois* is a typographical error for *tous gegrammenous*.

<sup>81</sup> The term *paraklisis* lacks an entry in LSJ; other possibilities might be a "swerve" or "bend" (in accordance with its cognate *paraklinein*); cf. Wilberding 2011: 152 n. 52.

<sup>82</sup> I assume that the "point" here is a point of time (following line 56 of this fragment above), rather than an astronomic point.

<sup>83</sup> I reject Heeren's emendation (followed by Smith) of "himself" to "good." Cf. Wilberding 2011: 152 n. 57.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Intro. Ptolem. Tetrab.* 49.

constricted. Plato, therefore, posited that the kind of appearances (*schēmata*) [of the stars] indicate the lives (*bious*); but they do not further necessitate them,<sup>85</sup> rather the [souls] who have made their choice live and have [90] the sequence of things inscribed, just as it necessarily indicates. A cause, therefore, of the movement (*phora*) into the horoscope belongs to a woman's, a man's, or some other animal's choosing; the choice of the second [type of] life is a cause also of the [soul] being held down to this horoscope; the arrangement of the stars, which is ordered in accordance with [95] the horoscope, shows the [second life] inscribed. [I suppose this account is plausible,] unless someone should say that the horoscopy at the time of conception (*kata tēn sporan*) indicates that the lot of a man's or dog's [life] was chosen, but that the horoscopy at the time of birth [indicates] the second [kind] of life and shows that the choice was in the power of the one who chose beforehand. [100] But on the contrary, someone might grant that the fashioning (*plasis*) of the myth [of Er] was stolen (*eskeuōrētai*) from the traditions of the Egyptians; but it is difficult to prove whether Plato partly procured (*dieskeuasthē*) [it] according to the ideas themselves.

[105] But since you are a lover and admirer of Homer also,<sup>86</sup> look with me whether he knew the two-fold [classification] of the lives before Plato, that the one is something immoveable, which the soul can choose or not choose, but whenever it should choose, inescapably holding \* \* to change,<sup>87</sup> [the soul] inhabits [life] either with virtue [110] or wickedness; for, when he makes mention of it, he says:

I do not say that any Fate of men can be escaped  
Whether bad or good, whenever it should happen first.<sup>88</sup>

He would be saying this about the first and unchangeable life; but about the second, that it is in [115] our power, what then does Homer say?

In such a way mortals now would blame the gods.  
For they say that evils are from us; but they too  
have grief beyond their portion for their arrogance.<sup>89</sup>

For what reason does he say, "But they too . . ." ? For it is clear that, [120] even if most things are caused by themselves, something also comes to them from the gods; or since the archetypes (*paradeigmata*) of lives are from the gods they<sup>90</sup> are

<sup>85</sup> For the notion that stars have only an indicative, and not a causal, function, see the extensive argument of Origen, *Comm. Genes.*, ap. Eus. *PE* 6.11.13–28, 55–72.

<sup>86</sup> For the use of Homer in debates about Fate, cf. Diogenianus, *c. Chrysipp.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.8.1–6.

<sup>87</sup> Probably something like: "... inescapably holding [its choice, it is unable any longer] to change [its life]."

<sup>88</sup> Homer, *Il.* 6.488–489; the first line of this passage is also invoked at Diogenianus, *c. Chrysipp.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.8.2, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Homer, *Od.* 1.32–34; this passage is also invoked at Diogenianus, *c. Chrysipp.* ap. Eus. *PE* 6.8.2.

<sup>90</sup> I assume that the gods are the referent of the pronoun here: a) because it follows well from the causal clause; and b) it sets up a tension in the text between divine/human culpability for the vicissitudes of human life, which can then be "resolved" in the next clause.

not without fault for the falling into evils, but [their culpability] is resolved by their making the souls free-willed (*autexousious*) and entrusting to them the choice of lives, but, because of an onrush [of souls? of daemons?<sup>91</sup>] and ignorance, [125] they “have grief beyond their portion for their arrogance.”

<sup>91</sup> For attacks of daemons, see *Abst.* 2.39.3; *Comm. Tim.* frag. 10 Sodano, with discussion in [Chapter 2](#) above.

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\* Where possible, the abbreviations of *L'année philologique* have been adopted.

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