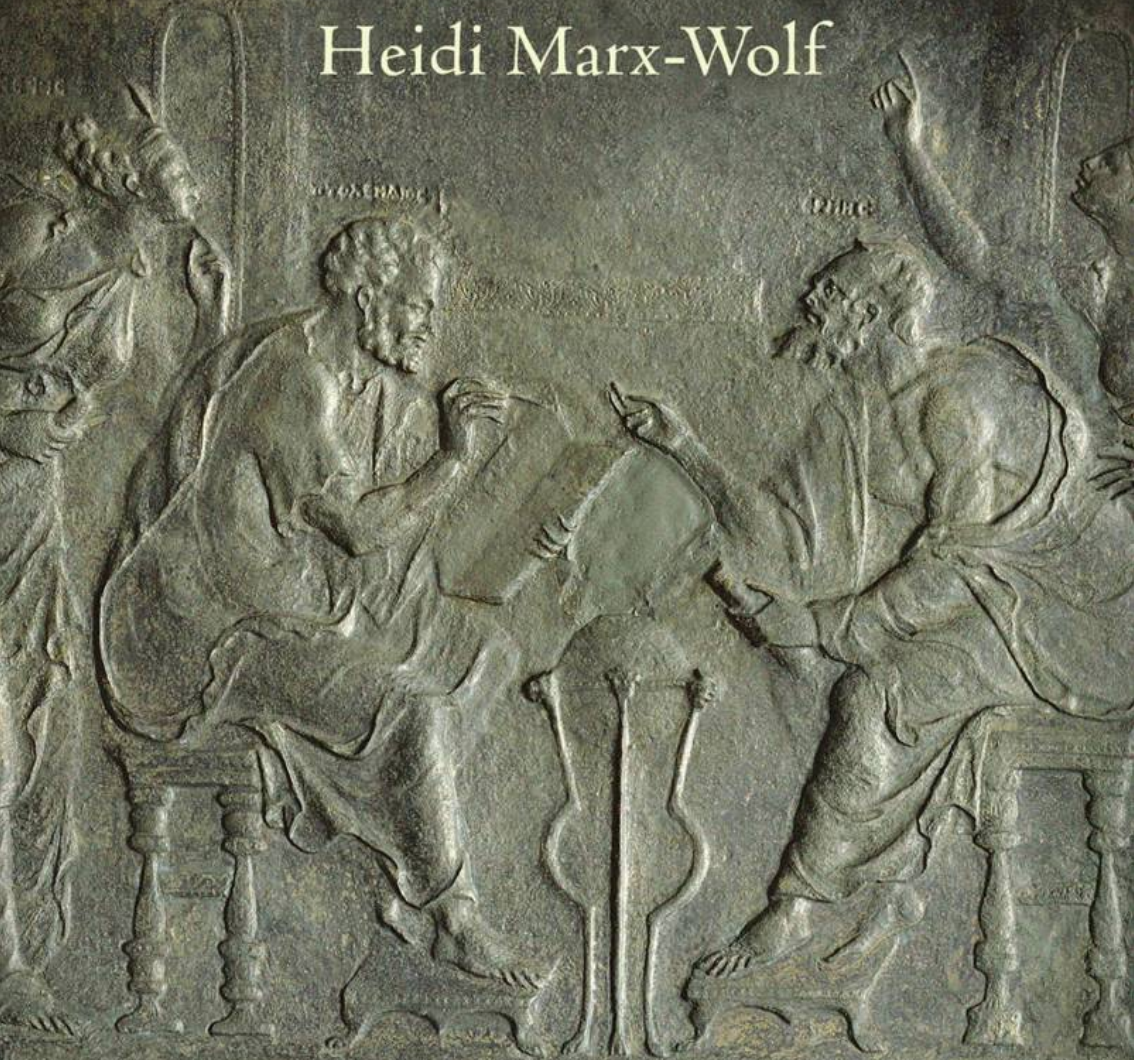


SPIRITUAL TAXONOMIES AND RITUAL AUTHORITY

Platonists, Priests, and Gnostics in the Third Century C.E.

Heidi Marx-Wolf



Spiritual Taxonomies and Ritual Authority

DIVINATIONS: REREADING LATE ANCIENT RELIGION

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*Spiritual Taxonomies
and Ritual Authority*

Platonists, Priests, and Gnostics
in the Third Century C.E.

Heidi Marx-Wolf

PENN

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*For Paul and Alexander
the two best sublunary spirits I know and love*

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Abbreviations

<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>ARG</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
<i>GCS</i>	Griechischen christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastic History</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JLA</i>	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>

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Introduction

THIS BOOK IS about a conversation that took place in the late classical world, a conversation about spirits, both good and malign. At times, this conversation was heated, combative even, but at other moments it was surprisingly pacific given the contentious nature of the subject matter and the temperaments and ideological commitments of those involved. This conversation took place across important sectarian boundaries among a group of intellectuals whom we might loosely categorize as late Roman Platonists of one variety or other. Although this group includes a wide array of intellectuals, from writers of certain Nag Hammadi texts to the producers of Greco-Egyptian ritual (or “magical”) handbooks, the central figures are Origen, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and to a lesser extent, Plotinus.

This book explores a moment in the late second and third centuries C.E. when these philosophers began to produce systematic discourses that ordered the realm of spirits in increasingly more hierarchical ways. These “spiritual taxonomies,” as this book calls them, were part of the overall theological and philosophical writings of these thinkers and were projected onto and ordered more “local” or “popular” understandings of spirits, which, although totalizing in their own right, were less concerned with hierarchy and precise ontological and moral distinctions between different kinds of spirits.¹ Most people in antiquity thought about and encountered gods, angels, daemons, heroes, souls of the dead, and other intermediate spirits as relatively diverse, indeterminate, unclassified, and at times, capricious, ambiguous, and even ambivalent.² Their virtues or detractions tended to map onto whether or not they were helpful or harmful with reference to specific conditions or circumstances. In other words, for most people at the time, these spirits were not ordered according to a clear and stable ontological or moral taxonomy. “Popular” thinking about spirits was “situation-specific, embedded in the world—part of the larger endeavor of an individual, family, or community to negotiate the

immediate environment and its margins.”³ This book argues that it is important for scholars to pay attention to historical moments when intellectuals or experts (whether generally recognized or self-proclaimed) create taxonomies of these sorts. It demonstrates that this philosophical exercise is often one strategy in more global attempts to establish various kinds of authority, garner social capital, and wrest these from other contemporary cultural entrepreneurs and experts.

Generally speaking, taxonomic discourses about spirits are seldom purely academic exercises undertaken by intellectual elites who distinguish themselves in some thorough manner from the rest of society on the basis of education and social class. As David Frankfurter notes, the creation of systematic discourses, in particular discourses that define and situate malign spirits (i.e., demonologies), is a strategy often used by both individuals and religious centers to bolster their authority, prestige, and reputation by establishing themselves as sites of expertise on sacred, ritual, and doctrinal matters.⁴ This is precisely what we find Origen, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus doing in their writing and in their lives. All of these philosophers, with the possible exception of Plotinus, made claims to ritual expertise and called themselves high priests of the highest god.⁵ In other words, in the third century, some philosophers added a new, hieratic dimension to their identity. We find evidence of this in a number of places in the subject matter of their philosophical writings, in their biographies of their predecessors, and in the stories told about them by subsequent biographers.⁶ These philosophers also asserted that they were in a unique position as experts to broker salvation for others. In making these claims, they were completely in earnest, being motivated by deep religious or spiritual experiences. Additionally, they saw themselves as the heirs of a philosophical patrimony that gave them a more universal (i.e., totalizing) perspective than that of anyone else in late Roman society. Hence, part of their dialogue concerned the role of the philosopher-priest in the salvation of the souls of others.

Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were not the only ones making the aforementioned soteriological claims at the time. Given that these writers lived in a highly competitive and uncontrollably diverse world, culturally speaking, in a period when philosophical schools proliferated, opportunities for social mobility were expanding, and the religious landscape was shifting rapidly, it should come as little surprise that these thinkers had to contend with each other and with other intellectuals with diverse backgrounds and training. This study takes a closer look at the individuals or groups that

these late Roman Platonists sought to malign in the course of establishing their own authority over the realm of spirits. Using the lens of spiritual taxonomy, this study explores the precise nature of this competition, demonstrating that the philosophers under consideration were, in fact, competing for the intellectual and social upper hand with two main groups, priestly experts such as those associated with the Greek magical papyri, and so-called Gnostics.⁷ Members of both of these groups were also involved in identifying and ordering the realm of spirits and in providing the ritual means for dealing with this realm. By looking at these groups in tandem with third-century philosophers, this study demonstrates that all of them were much closer—far more interconnected socially, educationally, and intellectually—than previously recognized. Hence, although Origen, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus give the impression that the individuals and groups they critique are clearly distinct from their own circles, these philosophers were, in fact, in direct competition for social and intellectual capital with other priests, ritual experts, and producers of taxonomic discourses.

This intimacy has been difficult to observe not only because of the rhetoric of these ancient writers themselves, but also as a result of the lingering effects of older scholarly models, models that have tended to see both religion and philosophy in a state of decline and devolution in the late Roman world. Although these models have, for the most part, been challenged and replaced, they still continue to influence the terms of a number of scholarly debates regarding late ancient religion and philosophy. The tendency to classify the ritual handbooks and other artifacts published together as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (*PGM*) as “magical” or as some problematic and degenerate subcategory of “religion” has meant that until very recently it has been difficult to entertain, much less trace, concrete connections between the priests behind these texts and contemporary philosophers and other intellectuals.⁸ A similar scholarly framework has tended to view so-called Gnostic myth and theology as either a devolved Christianity or a devolved Platonism, or both.⁹ This study rejects the decline and devolution framework, and in so doing, foregrounds connections that both labels, “magical” and “Gnostic,” have tended to obscure.

It also highlights the fact that in their efforts to establish their authority in theological and ritual matters, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus frequently shared views on the realm of spirits that cut across religious boundaries. For instance, at first glance, the figures under consideration here belong to different ancient “religious groups”: Origen was a Christian, and Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were Greco-Roman polytheists of one sort or another.¹⁰

In the fourth century, one sees increasing tension between these two groups as religious boundaries become more clearly drawn and violently enforced. Yet, one of the key questions this study seeks to answer is whether in the third century, a century punctuated by sporadic, infrequent violence against Christians, religious identity was the primary category determining the positions philosophers and intellectuals took on specific ideological issues. It also asks whether the interactions across this boundary were universally or even predominantly hostile, or whether we find evidence of productive dialogic exchange and shared conceptual categories. Indeed, the spiritual taxonomies of such thinkers as Origen, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus force us to re-think how we conceive of religious identity in late antiquity. As will become clear, the evidence indicates that religious identity, both Christian and non-Christian, was under construction in the third century. Hence, it is impossible to fit thinkers as complex as the ones under consideration here into clearly defined religious groups. This is because there is little evidence that such groups existed in the ways in which we tend to think of religious or ideological affiliation today.¹¹ Hence, efforts to delineate clear, impermeable, and inflexible boundaries between such groups as Christians, Jews, Hellenes, Gnostics, and so forth are, by their nature, problematic and anachronistic.

By engaging this set of questions, this study challenges a model that has informed many late ancient studies for some time and has only recently been called into question by the work of scholars such as Miriam Taylor, Daniel Boyarin, Harold Drake, and Elizabeth DePalma Digeser. Miriam Taylor calls this model “conflict theory,” a model that sees most exchanges over religion in late antiquity through the lens of conflict and hostility between clearly defined confessional groups.¹² Taylor compellingly calls into question the usefulness of this model for understanding late antique Jewish-Christian relations.

Taylor is joined in her views by Daniel Boyarin, who argues that Christian orthodoxy and rabbinic Judaism were born at the same moment in history as a result of a protracted period of exchange and contest.¹³ Harold Drake has demonstrated that a similar delineation of boundaries took place in relations between Christians and others in the fourth century, which obscured earlier Christian efforts to emphasize points of commonality and agreement between Christians and non-Christians.¹⁴

In her book *A Threat to Public Piety*, Digeser illuminates points of contact, influence, and agreement between Christians and non-Christians in the third century. Digeser clearly demonstrates that figures such as Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were in regular and enthusiastic conversation

with each other, in particular, in the informal school settings of Alexandria and Rome. Her careful excavation of evidence for the interconnections and conversations among these philosophers provides much of the important background for my study. Hence, her work serves as one starting point in my efforts to focus on what these writers and teachers had to say to each other on the topic of spiritual taxonomy.¹⁵

Drawing on the insights of these historians, this book demonstrates that third-century intellectuals, including Platonists, “Gnostics,” Manichaeans, Hermetists, and Chaldaeans, wrote and thought using a common cultural coin in answer to a common set of questions and concerns about divinity. The questions shared by philosophically engaged members of these groups coalesce around the following issues: the nature of the highest divinity and how to “protect” God from any possible responsibility for evil; the appropriateness of animal sacrifices as a central component of both traditional Greek and Roman, but also Jewish, cult; the source, nature, and efficacy of divination and prophecy; the difficulty of specifying the soul’s relationship to matter, and the range of acceptable ascetic practices for assuring the soul’s release from matter, that is, its salvation.

If we take the first of these intellectual problems as an example, we can see that thinkers of the third and fourth centuries inherited their questions from common philosophical predecessors. The concern about divinity’s potential responsibility for evil is part and parcel of the question of its relation to the created order, and in particular, to matter. Writers were exercised by the problem of not only the degree to which the most supreme being had contact with the material cosmos, but also how this contact occurred, through what kind of mediation and what sort of mediating entities. Philosophers of various schools were at pains to preserve divine goodness by distinguishing and even distancing the highest god(s) from what most philosophers at the time thought of as a realm of becoming, and therefore a realm characterized by imperfection, corruptibility, and, in some cases, evil.¹⁶

As we will see, even the question of animal sacrifice is related to the problem of divinity’s relationship to this realm of becoming, and in particular to matter. These philosophers asked: why would gods, supremely spiritual beings, desire the blood and burnt flesh of dead animals as part of their worship? If these offerings are not, in fact, appropriate for the highest God/gods, then to whom are they offered? Hence, by focusing on the way in which a small but important group of late Roman intellectuals attempted to answer these sorts of questions, this book opens a window onto a number of

relatively obscured and ignored relationships and conversations across religious and social boundaries.

Although this study doesn't address this point directly, it is important to note that the taxonomic discourses produced in the third century failed to eradicate the local sense of the realm of spirits, and people continued to interact with this realm in the same ways and to the same ends as they always had in the ancient world. Hence, I do point to the places within the spiritual taxonomies produced by these Platonists where this more local understanding reasserts itself despite their best efforts to enforce precise ontological and moral differences. I also argue that the materiality of spirits, the nature of their bodies, and ancient elemental thinking about matter help to account for the failure of these discourses to overcome the ambiguity and ambivalence of intermediate spiritual beings in the late ancient world. In attempting to account for this ambiguity, this book engages work in the area of posthumanist studies that explores various instantiations of embodiment and hybridity in the premodern world.

Although scholars have noted all three late ancient trends mentioned thus far—namely that philosophers produced supernatural discourses with increased frequency, that they emphasized priestly facets of their identity by making claims to saving knowledge and expertise, and that they at times sought to enact their visions of a social order that would facilitate their work as brokers of salvation—no one as yet has attempted to address these trends together.¹⁷ Furthermore, few scholars have undertaken a comparative treatment of Christian and non-Christian taxonomy. Many studies have focused on late ancient demonology, that is, on discourses about evil spirits, possession, and exorcism.¹⁸ Peter Brown has explored facets of early Christian demonology in a number of influential publications.¹⁹ More recently, David Brakke has highlighted the role demons played in shaping the identity of Egyptian monks in the early Christian period.²⁰ Cam Grey has used anthropological studies of spirit cults and psychosomatic illness to interpret episodes in saints' lives as "examples of individuals consciously or subconsciously expressing anger at or anxiety about the world in which they lived and their place in that world."²¹

David Frankfurter's book *Evil Incarnate*, as well as a number of his articles, addresses late ancient demonology.²² And like Brown and Grey, Frankfurter relies on anthropological and ethnographic studies that investigate the construction of evil spirits, possession, and healing in "traditional" societies and complex colonial situations.²³ Frankfurter writes: "as in modern local

religion, so in the village worlds of antiquity: the ‘demonic’ is less a category of supernatural being than a collective reflection on unfortunate occurrences, on the ambivalence of deities, on tensions surrounding social and sexual roles, and on the cultural dangers that arise from liminal or incomprehensible people, places, and activities.”²⁴

Other scholars have focused on more particular facets of late ancient demonology. Gregory Allan Smith has noted that Christian intellectuals inherited key notions from their non-Christian predecessors about the materiality of malign spirits.²⁵ This insight is vital to an understanding of how the philosophers under investigation in this study thought about spirits more generally. Smith’s thinking about demons and embodiment intersects with late Roman ideas on medicine, the body, and matter more generally. The intersections Smith suggests are explored in this book in more detail.

In her recent book, Dayna Kalleres discusses the way urban bishops used their authority over spirits through practices of discernment and expiation such as exorcism to transform the sacred landscape of the late Roman city.²⁶ Kalleres brings into relief the role that ritual activity played in the authority of these bishops, an aspect of their activities that until now has been largely ignored and undertheorized. In many respects, the chapters that follow provide the third-century background for understanding the fourth-century situation Kalleres seeks to illuminate, as they shed light on the way late ancient philosophers and theologians engaged in discerning, locating, and interacting with spirits, including through ritual.²⁷

This scholarship, as indicated, focuses on the meaning of demons and demonology in late antiquity. Recently, Ellen Muehlberger has turned her attention to the other end of the spectrum of late ancient spirits, namely angels. In her book, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*, she demonstrates the great differences among Christian intellectuals writing on the topic.²⁸ Some, for instance Origen, Evagrius, and others in this lineage, affirmed maximal mutability between spirit species. Augustine, on the other hand, argued for a fixed and stable spiritual order. Although Muehlberger’s topic is Christian angels, much of what she has to say about fourth-century theorizing in this area reflects attempts to construct stable spiritual taxonomies in earlier epochs.

This book, while drawing on much of the work of the scholars mentioned above, looks more broadly at the activity of constructing hierarchies of spirits, both good and evil. By discussing the three aforementioned late ancient trends together, namely the production of spiritual taxonomies by a range of Platonically inclined intellectuals, the emphasis on ritual expertise and hieratic

identity, and the soteriological focus among these figures, this study will, I hope, make a significant contribution to the history of ideas in late antiquity.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 explores the close similarities between Porphyry's discourse on evil daemons in *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* and his other fragmentary works, and early Christian precedents, including the works of Origen. It argues that Porphyry developed his ideas about the demonic conspiracy of animal sacrifice in dialogue with these Christian ideas based on his association with Origen. It also demonstrates that his stance on the question of animal sacrifice put him at odds with his fellow non-Christian Platonist, Iamblichus, who felt that even philosophers must sacrifice in order to move along their path to union with the highest gods. Finally, this chapter advances the argument that the close similarities between Porphyry and Origen on evil spirits is only surprising if one assumes that religion and not social or educational milieu was the primary category that these Platonists used to identify themselves. It proves that Porphyry and Origen's participation in a common Greek *paideia*, in particular the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* and Galen's model of humoral medicine, both of which associate blood with embodiment and generation, makes Porphyry's adoption of the Christian demonization of animal sacrifice plausible and consistent with his general Platonic outlook.

Chapter 2 considers the ways in which Porphyry, Origen, and Iamblichus created systematic hierarchies of spirits that could be transposed onto more local understandings of the spiritual landscape. It also demonstrates that in the course of enforcing order and hierarchy, there are moments when these philosophers find their taxonomic discourses getting away from them. This happens in a number of ways. For instance, key distinctions between various orders of spiritual beings are subverted or rendered ambiguous, allowing for slippage and elision between spiritual species. In other cases, the line between good and evil spirits is blurred such that good spirits are characterized by highly ambivalent qualities. And in the case of Origen, evil daemons even become part of his overall soteriological vision. In other words, this chapter demonstrates that the act of creating and enforcing difference leads these thinkers to conclusions that call difference into question in radical and interesting ways. Part of the reason for this was that all three philosophers, in their efforts to provide theological and philosophical rationales for specific ideas

about spirits and particular religious rites, were forced to contend with more “popular” or “traditional” beliefs and practices in ways that limited or resisted their endeavors. Their taxonomic thinking crossed not only religious boundaries, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, but social ones as well. That is to say, these philosophers were attempting to explain and order a preexisting spiritual landscape populated by beings about which the vast majority of people held some beliefs. Many of their own working assumptions reflected “popular” ideas about the realm of spirits. Drawing on work by scholars such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Valerie Allen, and Jane Bennett, this chapter also argues that matter, as it was conceptualized in antiquity, was an even greater force of disruption than the intrusion of “popular beliefs.” The matter in which spirits were embodied had the “agentic capacity” to alter and subvert these philosophical attempts to create orderly taxonomies.

Chapters 3 and 4 explain why these late Platonists undertook to write their taxonomic discourses when they did, in the late second and third centuries, by placing these philosophers within their broader third-century social and intellectual context and by looking for interlocutors and competitors with more tangential and obscure ties to these self-proclaimed heirs of the Platonic patrimony. Chapter 3 explores the possible and actual interactions between Plotinus, Origen, and Porphyry and a group of interlocutors and competitors most often referred to as “Gnostics.” I postpone a discussion of this term until the chapter proper. Suffice it to say that many of the texts found in the Nag Hammadi codices contain very complex cosmological narratives that elaborate systematic, ordered accounts of the emanation, creation, and proliferation of all kinds of spirits. Individuals and groups who read and disseminated these texts at times earned the scorn of figures such as Plotinus, Origen, and Porphyry for a number of reasons. However, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, the narratives found in these texts serve as an important missing link for understanding what motivated these intellectuals to develop their own cosmological and taxonomic discourses and to refine their thinking on the kinds of beings that populated the spiritual realm. This chapter argues that despite their critiques of various facets of the “Gnostic” worldview, Plotinus, Origen, and Porphyry drew much of their inspiration and thinking from texts such as those found in the Nag Hammadi codices and their adherents. By making this argument, this chapter is also involved in rethinking the marginal status of these texts and the groups who used and treasured them, bringing them back into the center of late Roman conversations about spirits in philosophical circles.

Chapter 4 continues to answer the question of why these philosophers created their taxonomies when they did. Part of the answer to this question emerges when we take seriously the concern of these thinkers about proper ritual. The discourses that they constructed were one aspect of their efforts to demote and discredit ordinary priests. The chapter demonstrates that by associating these priests with the worship of lesser and even evil spirits, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were able to reserve the title of high priest for themselves. These thinkers used their ability to discern, locate, and delimit spirits and to interact with them to give weight to their own authority. Even Iamblichus, the champion of blood sacrifice and defender of traditional rites as part of his theurgic system, was involved in minimizing or excluding the importance of certain other ritual experts in order to establish himself as the highest authority on divine and cultic matters. In other words, the taxonomic discourses of these philosophers served as a textual basis for their claims to expertise and authority. This chapter also links their efforts to establish this kind of hieratic identity with their soteriological concerns and commitments around the question of universal salvation.

Conclusion

The third century has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly attention with respect to a few circumscribed topics: economic hardship, political upheaval, Christian expansion and persecution. It has frequently been referred to using the language of crisis. And yet it was a century of intense, rich, and diverse conversations, all of which took place in a highly flexible, mobile, permeable social landscape. This study attempts to illuminate the bold, innovative, and entrepreneurial maneuvers of a small group of philosophers working to carve out a unique niche for themselves and their associates using a rather peculiar strategy, namely, the production of comprehensive discourses, ontological, moral, and sometimes even mythical, that ordered the realm of spirits. The third century has often been treated as a kind of “Middle Age” of the postclassical world, a “Dark Age” mediating between Roman glory and Christian triumph. Putting aside the fact that humans don’t live according to ages and centuries, and focusing on the aforementioned intellectual richness and creativity of the decades during which Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were in dialogue with each other and with a wide range of interlocutors who have tended to fade into the shadows, this study hopes to demonstrate

that their conversations about spirits are critical to understanding what came before and after them. Although when we imagine these figures, we may be inclined to see them whispering quietly among themselves in the sunny rooms or porticos of their patrons' urban homes and extra-urban villas, murmuring about the bodies of angels and the salvation of demons, talking to no one but their most intimate associates, they themselves sought out much greater audiences, placed themselves more squarely in the center of things, and worked very hard to jostle their competitors out of the center and into the periphery, a place where many of them have stayed until rather recently.

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Chapter 1

How to Feed a Daemon: Third-Century Philosophers on Blood Sacrifice

[The theologians] reasonably guarded against feasts on flesh, so that they should not be disturbed by alien souls, violent and impure, drawn towards their kind, and should not be obstructed in their solitary approach to God by the presence of disruptive *daemones*.

ALTHOUGH THIS STATEMENT might well have been made by any Christian writer from the period under consideration in this book, it comes, instead, from Porphyry of Tyre. His work *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* contains one of the most comprehensive and sustained arguments for the polluting nature of blood sacrifices and for why anyone wanting to attain communion with the highest god should avoid them entirely. We start with Porphyry's demonization of blood sacrifice because it is one of the most obvious places where we find late Roman intellectuals attempting to create taxonomies of spirits, mapping ontological differences onto moral ones. Porphyry's stance on this matter often strikes readers as strange and unlikely, given his defense of so many other practices pertaining to traditional ancient polytheism. However, this chapter will argue that, when put into dialogue with his more general views on the nature of matter, blood, spirit, and divinity, Porphyry's interpretation of animal sacrifice is consistent with his broader philosophical emphases and goals.

Unlikely Bedfellows: Porphyry in Eusebius's *Preparation for the Gospel*

One point of entry to this late Platonic conversation on evil spirits is Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparation for the Gospel*.¹ In this work, Eusebius was occupied with the task of constructing a distinct Christian identity out of two lineages—the Jews, on the one hand, and the Greeks and Egyptians, on the other.² In order to distinguish Christians from Greeks, Eusebius spent much of his time demonstrating that the oracles and miracles of traditional Mediterranean cult were not merely frauds, although he points to a number of Greek authorities who say as much (for instance, Lucian of Samosata and Oenomaus); rather they were the work of evil daemons. Eusebius is far from the first Christian to make this identification between traditional deities and malign spirits. In the second and third centuries, one of the most interesting rhetorical moves developed by Christian apologists, philosophers, and polemicists was to demonize the traditional Greek and Roman gods, repeatedly associating these gods with evil spirits. It is difficult to determine when this strategy first developed, but we find it consistently used in the works of writers such as Justin Martyr, Tatian, Minucius Felix, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen to name but a few.³ So when Eusebius chose his sources for the construction of his own demonological conspiracy his options were numerous. But Eusebius chose none of these obvious authorities. Rather he made an unlikely but potent choice—he used the works of Porphyry to make most of his key points on this issue. This is the same Porphyry whom Eusebius identified as Christianity's most rabid critic; the Porphyry who, according to Eusebius, attacked Origen on account of his form of biblical exegesis and who wrote many books against the Christians.⁴ What is even more remarkable is that Eusebius finds so much of use in Porphyry. Indeed, Eusebius has little need to quote anyone else. For Porphyry, at certain junctures in his philosophical writing, had reason to comment on the nature, location, and work of evil daemons in the cosmos, and in particular, on their association with animal sacrifices.

Although Eusebius cites Porphyry to make his own argument associating evil daemons with the rites of traditional Mediterranean polytheism, he also accuses Porphyry of being inconsistent in his views on blood sacrifice. Eusebius presents Porphyry as confused or self-contradictory by contrasting what the Platonist says in two different places, one suggesting that sacrifices are acceptable only to evil daemons, and the other detailing the sacrifices that should be

made to all the gods.⁵ In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry clearly comes out on the side of those who held that blood sacrifices were improper offerings to good daemons and gods and were, instead, the preferred victuals of evil spirits. But in one excerpt from *On Philosophy from Oracles* included in the *Preparation*, Porphyry cites certain divine instructions from a lengthy oracle describing which animals ought to be offered to various deities.⁶ Eusebius appears not to have preserved any of Porphyry's commentary on this oracle, which raises the question of whether Porphyry was in fact confused on the matter of sacrifice, or whether he was doing something else in his interpretation of the oracle in question, something that Eusebius may have found inconvenient to relate. Indeed, there is reason to believe that Porphyry was probably presenting the oracles he had carefully collected as sacred texts in order to interpret them in a figural way. And in the case of the oracle on sacrifice, he did so to "interpret away" the literal blood sacrifice he so vehemently opposed elsewhere.⁷

Blood and Daemons in Porphyry's *On Abstinence*

In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry pursues a wide range of strategies in order to convince his wayward friend, the Roman politician Firmus Castricius, that his recent lapse into carnivorous habits is unhealthy and one with all kinds of dire moral and soteriological consequences for those who wish to live a philosophical life and assimilate themselves to divinity.⁸ He highlights the way eating meat rivets the soul more closely to the body, and to its desires and pleasures, than does a vegetarian diet.⁹ He also argues that killing animals deprives rational beings of their souls.¹⁰ As Gillian Clark points out, the title itself, *Peri apokhes empsukhon*, already accords animals the status of ensouled beings.¹¹ Porphyry also crafts arguments in response to objections he might expect from philosophical contemporaries such as Stoics and Epicureans. But most importantly, he must answer to the key religious objection that a central part of traditional ritual involves the slaughter of animals. After all, even priests and other ritual experts who occasionally abstained from meat ultimately did so in preparation for festivals and their bloody sacrifices. In response to this objection, Porphyry offers his most dramatic argument for why the philosopher should not eat meat. In Book 2, Porphyry reveals a grand conspiracy behind the carnivorous diet, a conspiracy in which humans, greedy for the meat their bodies desire, and evil daemons, likewise rapacious for blood and smoke, are both complicit.

Although it is likely that the popularity of blood sacrifices on a large scale (hecatombs of cattle, for instance) was already on the wane in Porphyry's day, and that there was a general aversion among late ancient intellectuals to eating meat, Porphyry's reinterpretation of the ancient practice that traditionally accompanied key venerations of the gods involved a rather extraordinary reappraisal of ancient ritual.¹² Animal sacrifice was traditionally a key component of city festivals. These communal celebrations, which involved meals of sacrificial meat, were times when the proper relations between humans and gods were affirmed. They were also occasions when human hopes for security, health, well-being, and success were acknowledged and when the society's communal identity and the individual's place within the group were made visible and affirmed.

Porphyry introduces his "conspiracy theory" by presenting a genealogy of sacrifices, which he takes from Theophrastus, a genealogy explaining how a primordial sacrificial order became corrupted over time.¹³ Theophrastus is an interesting choice, because he generally seems to have argued for more philosophical or "rational" approaches to thinking about and venerating the gods.¹⁴ In *Inventing Superstition*, Dale Martin situates Theophrastus among a number of classical Greek writers, including Plato, Aristotle, and the writer of the Hippocratic work *On the Sacred Disease*, who all contributed to the development whereby normative expressions of the fear of the gods were transformed into "superstition" or irrational and excessive fear of the gods.¹⁵ On the issue of sacrifice, Martin notes that although Theophrastus "did not critique sacrifice in general," his work *On Piety* did include a "substantial critique of blood sacrifice."¹⁶ Martin also notes that Theophrastus was generally concerned about excessive expressions of piety, illustrating this point using the Peripatetic's sketch of the "Superstitious Man" (*Deisidaimōn*), which paints this character as an irrational and shameful sort of man.¹⁷ Martin further argues that Theophrastus took his cues from Aristotle's ethics of the mean in order to determine the nature of proper, that is, proportional, piety.¹⁸

According to the genealogy of sacrifice Porphyry adopts from Theophrastus, long before his time "the most learned of all peoples, living in the most holy of lands which was founded by the Nile, began with Hestia to sacrifice first fruits to the gods of heaven."¹⁹ These were foraged items such as leaves and roots. Then these early worshippers began to sacrifice cultivated goods, crops of various legumes and grains. At the point when humans began to sacrifice animals, Porphyry's story takes a dark turn. First he describes the way in which, during times of famine or some other kind of misfortune, humans

killed each other.²⁰ This displeased the gods, and they created a fitting penalty. Some of the offenders were turned into atheists, people who were deluded about divinity such that they thought the gods were bad. The rest were consigned by the gods to the category of “bad sacrificers,” namely those who participate in unlawful offerings.²¹ In other words, animal sacrifices represent the human evil of homicide and the delusion that was engendered by the gods as punishment, namely the thought that such offerings are characteristic of proper worship. But if the highest gods don’t desire the sacrifice of animals, then who does?

Porphyry explains that most people live with a confused conception of whom they worship when they offer such sacrifices. This confusion is coupled with a general misunderstanding that the class of daemons is undifferentiated and will harm humans if neglected and help them if propitiated.²² According to Porphyry, this view confuses two different kinds of spirits. Good daemons are souls that, “having issued from the universal soul, administer large parts of the regions below the moon, resting on their *pneuma* but controlling it by reason.”²³ Their opposite are those souls who are controlled by their *pneuma* and are carried away by anger and appetite associated with it.²⁴ He continues: “It is they who rejoice in the ‘drink-offerings and smoking meat’ on which their pneumatic part (τὸ πνευματικὸν καὶ σωματικὸν) grows fat, for it lives on vapors and exhalations in a complex fashion and from complex sources and it draws power from the smoke that arises from blood and flesh (ταῖς ἐκ τῶν αἱμάτων καὶ σαρκῶν κνίσαις).”²⁵

The word *pneuma* (“breath” or “spirit”) had a wide variety of meanings in antiquity.²⁶ In the context of Porphyry’s discussion, it refers to “an intermediary between the incorporeal soul and the material world.”²⁷ According to Gillian Clark, in the *Timean* tradition, this *pneuma*, or *ochēma* (ὄχημα: “vehicle” or “chariot”),²⁸ is acquired by emanating or descending souls in the celestial realm and “is envisaged as air or fire,” but this vehicle “becomes thicker and heavier as it descends through the ‘regions below the moon,’ where damp air, water and earth predominate.”²⁹ The kinds of air or fire that make up this vehicle are not strictly commensurate with these elements as they are found in their sublunary form, but they are all elemental matter of one sort or another.³⁰

Porphyry locates all daemons in the sublunary region, whether good or evil. Their *pneuma*, although of a more celestial substance than ordinary air and fire, because it mediates between soul and matter and binds the former to the latter in some way, gives rise to passions and desires. The difference

between good and evil daemons, then, seems to arise from the degree to which these souls identify with this pneumatic vessel and its attendant passions. In the case of malign spirits, they have become entangled in or riveted to this material aspect.

Good daemons, on the other hand, “do everything for the benefit of those they rule, whether they are in charge of certain animals, or crops which have been assigned to them, or of what happens for the sake of these—showers of rain, moderate winds, fine weather, and the other things which work with them, and the balance of seasons within the year.”³¹ These good daemons are also in charge of “skills, and of all kinds of education in the liberal arts, or of medicine and physical training and other such things.”³² In other words, they work with matter and mediate between the corporeal and incorporeal in ways that maintain the proper order and well-being of those creatures, plants, animals, and humans who inhabit the sublunary sphere and whose souls are bound to material bodies in a more complex and complete way.³³ They also serve as “transmitters” (ὁι πορθμεύοντες) or messengers between gods and humans.³⁴ Evil daemons, on the other hand, no longer minister to their subjects, but to their own desire to feed their pneumatic vessel. They do so by means of moist vapor and blood.

Christian Precedents and Parallels for the Association of Evil Daemons and Blood Sacrifice

This idea that animal sacrifices actually propitiate evil daemons and are not appropriate offerings for true divinity is prefigured in earlier Christian writings. Origen, in *Contra Celsum*, writes that these spirits occupy images and temples either because they have been invoked by certain magical spells or because they have taken over the place through their own efforts in order to “greedily partake of the portions of the sacrifices and seek for illicit pleasure.”³⁵ In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen notes that if demons are to remain in the lower parts of the sublunary realm, in the “thick atmosphere of earth,” they need to feed on the blood, smoke, and incense of sacrifices, presumably because it keeps their “bodies” sufficiently damp and heavy to remain here.³⁶ As mentioned earlier, these ideas had a long history in Christian apologetic by the time Origen began to write on the topic. In what follows, we will see the ways in which Porphyry’s ideas reflect those of both Origen and his predecessors.

In certain fragments Andrew Smith classifies as belonging to the work *On*

Philosophy from Oracles, namely those preserved in *Preparation for the Gospel* (Smith 314–15), Porphyry further elaborates the reasons why handling and ingestion of meat were more universally problematic. His discussion begins very generally by emphasizing the ubiquity of malign spirits. He embarks in this manner in order to highlight the constant danger these spirits pose to the unsuspecting and nonvigilant. This view accords well with ideas about the ubiquity of evil, or at least capricious, spirits in more general currency in late antique society. For instance, Porphyry claims that every house is full of evil daemons. So too are human bodies, and this possession takes place, predictably, through the ingestion of meat. He writes: “For when we are eating, they approach and sit near the body, and the purifications [rituals associated with meals] are because of this, not because of the gods, so that those ones [the evil daemons] might depart. But they especially delight in blood and impurities and they take enjoyment of these entering into those who use them.”³⁷

Minucius Felix comes very close to this sort of explanation for demonic possession in his *Octavius*.³⁸ There he writes that these evil daemons seek to gorge themselves “on the reek of altars and the sacrifice of beasts.”³⁹ Indeed, they go to great lengths to be propitiated in this way: “being subtle spirits, they secretly creep into our bodies, contriving diseases, terrifying our minds, and wrenching our limbs.”⁴⁰ Minucius Felix calls their disturbed victims “soothsayers . . . though they are in no temple.”⁴¹ On receiving what they desire, namely the fumes and blood of sacrifices, the evil spirits affect a cure by leaving their victims.⁴²

Porphyry also held these beings accountable for human illness and plague.⁴³ Significantly, the idea that evil daemons are responsible for disease runs counter to the contentions of Plotinus, Porphyry’s teacher. In *Enneads* 2.9.14, Plotinus critiques those members of his circle whom Porphyry called “Gnostics” for believing that diseases are caused by daemons.⁴⁴ Plotinus contrasts this “invasion” model of the origin of disease with the medical one, in which disease is the result of excess, deficiency, strain, or decay. Plotinus mocks the “Gnostic” view by inquiring as to how various cures work on these spirits. He asks, “Does the [daemon] starve, and does the drug make it waste away, and does it sometimes come out all at once or stay inside?”⁴⁵ The view that Plotinus mocks seems to be the one Porphyry adopted, namely that evil daemons do enter the body through ingestion and linger there, causing various ailments and digestive complaints. It is also a view represented in many Christian authors. As Dale Martin points out in *The Corinthian Body*, Christian communities, such as the one in Corinth, had a number of different

disease aetiologies they could draw on to explain human suffering, pollution, and illness. He argues that the tensions in the Corinthian community over whether or not one could eat food sacrificed to idols was the result of a misunderstanding between elite and nonelite members of the group over the causes of disease. The model Martin associates with elite members of the Corinthian community reflects the understanding that the human being is hierarchically ordered in a way that reflects cosmic order, and that health is a function of maintaining proper balance. The model he associates with lower-class Christians at Corinth is based on an understanding that the body is permeable and vulnerable, and that its boundaries are in need of protection from pollution, which causes disease and suffering. This pollution was primarily understood to be spiritual. In other words, the body could be possessed by other spirits.⁴⁶

In another fragment from *On Philosophy from Oracles*, Porphyry suggests something similar, namely that the body is permeable to evil daemons who affect it by inciting the human being to partake even more enthusiastically of gustatory pleasures. The presence of these spirits is manifest in terms of the consequences of this indulgence in the form of grunting and breaking wind. Porphyry writes:

For universally, the vehemence of the desire towards anything, and the impulse of the lust of the spirit, is intensified from no other cause than their [the evil daemons'] presence; and they also force men to fall into inarticulate noises and flatulence by sharing the same enjoyment with them. For where there is a drawing in of much breath, either because the stomach has been inflated by indulgence, or because eagerness from the intensity of pleasure breathes out much and draws in much of the outer air, let this be clear proof to you of the presence of such spirits there.⁴⁷

In other words, evil daemons both cause and benefit from human gluttony and desire for pleasure, possibly even sexual pleasure.⁴⁸ And they incite human beings to participate in these more enthusiastically. At the same time, they may physically enter the body in such moments through the breath. Indeed, ingestion and incorporation of one body into another, either through eating or through copulation, is a risky business, one fraught with the dangers of pollution and alteration. Here Porphyry has signaled that danger by positing the presence of wicked daemons as participants in such human acts. These ideas mirror his position in *On Abstinence*, where he tells us that human

alimentary and sacrificial action feeds the pneumatic vessels of these spirits. They also reflect ideas found in earlier and contemporary Christian texts.

Although Porphyry differed from Plotinus, we find parallel ideas in Christian writings. I am not making an argument that Porphyry read any of the works I discuss in what follows, but that he was certainly aware of what Christians were saying about evil daemons, given his connections to and criticism of Origen and other Christian writers and exegetes. Porphyry himself relates in his *Life of Plotinus* that Origen wrote a work entitled *On the Daemons*. He also tells us that he spent time studying with Origen. Until very recently, many scholars have assumed that this could not be the Christian Origen, but the careful work of scholars such as Thomas Böhm, Pier Beatrice, and Elizabeth DePalma Digeser has convinced many to the contrary.⁴⁹

The Christian work that comes closest to Porphyry's assertion that evil daemons enter into the bodies of human beings to enjoy food and sex is the *Pseudo-Clementine Homily 9*. Although this anonymous work is usually dated to the fourth century, scholars contend that it is based on earlier material that would have been contemporary with or earlier than Porphyry's works.⁵⁰ In the *Homily*, the author explains why evil daemons come to inhabit the bodies of the intemperate: "Being spirits, and having desires after meats and drinks and sexual pleasures, but not being able to partake of these by reason of their being spirits, and wanting organs fitted for their enjoyment, they enter into the bodies of men in order that, getting organs to minister to them, they may obtain the things that they wish."⁵¹ The main difference between this homily and Porphyry's views seems to be that in the former, evil daemons need to borrow a human body in order to partake of the pleasures they seek, whereas in Porphyry their pneumatic vessel serves as the means by which they can enjoy smoke and blood. Despite this difference, the parallels are striking.

The parallels between Porphyry and contemporary Christian writers regarding the nature and effects of evil daemons do not end there. In *On Abstinence*, Porphyry accuses these spirits of being the cause of almost every form of natural and human evil.⁵² According to him, they are responsible for plagues, as noted earlier, crop failures, and earthquakes. Furthermore, they incite humans to lust and longing for wealth and power, all of which lead to civil conflicts and wars.⁵³ And they do all of this by deceiving ordinary people into thinking that they are gods, and also that "the same [behavior] applies to the greatest gods, to the extent that even the best god is made liable to these accusations."⁵⁴

In general, then, Porphyry and many Christians shared the view that evil

daemons can and do inhabit the human body and cause disease. And he agreed with them more generally that those traditional rituals requiring the slaughter of animals were part of a grand conspiracy on the part of these spirits to get what they desired and even needed to thrive—the blood and smoke of sacrifices. In this way, they deceived the unwitting about the nature of true divinity. Finally, both Porphyry and his Christian counterparts believed that participation in these sorts of practices was ultimately polluting and could lead to demonic possession. Indeed, the issues of purity and pollution are central in both cases.⁵⁵

Origen's *Concerning Daemons* as a Possible Source for Porphyry

Modern readers may find themselves surprised by the close agreement between Christian writers and Porphyry on these matters, and by Porphyry's demonization of animal sacrifice. But this is only surprising if one assumes that religious identity was the primary category that determined the views third-century intellectuals adopted and developed. As mentioned in the Introduction, the assumption of conflict and strict boundary maintenance between groups with different religious identities in antiquity has been challenged in the case of early Jewish-Christian relations. It has also been overturned in the case of Christian philosophers and "Hellenes" or Greco-Roman intellectuals. Work by Elizabeth DePalma Digeser has done much to contribute to the rethinking of religious identity in the third century in particular.⁵⁶

In the first three chapters of her recent book, *A Threat to Public Piety*, Digeser carefully outlines the many connections between thinkers such as Origen, Plotinus, and Porphyry, by combing through what we know about their lives, their education, and how they fit into the important and contested lineage of the elusive Alexandrian teacher Ammonius Saccas.⁵⁷ By convincingly dismantling the "two Origen hypothesis"—the view that there must have been two students of Ammonius Saccas named Origen, one a Christian, the other a "pagan"—Digeser demonstrates that Porphyry knew Origen well and spent time with him as a student.⁵⁸

Hence, Porphyry's views on evil daemons are less surprising when one begins to consider the likely connections between these third-century Platonists on either side of the very permeable Christian/non-Christian divide. It is not unlikely, for instance, that Porphyry derived some of his thinking about

spirits from Origen. Indeed, Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, tells us as much.⁵⁹ Porphyry himself informs his readers that he was familiar with the contents of Origen's library and was able to identify his teacher's main philosophical influences.⁶⁰ Furthermore, both Porphyry and Longinus tell us that Origen wrote a work called *Concerning Daemons* (περὶ τῶν δαιμόνων).⁶¹ A number of modern authors have argued for Porphyry's dependence on Origen for his views on evil daemons, but most of these have subscribed to the two Origen hypothesis. Hans Lewy, who believed that Origen, the author of the work on daemons, was not the same person as the Christian Origen,⁶² devoted his "Excursus XI" in *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* to establishing that Porphyry's "long description of demonology" in *On Abstinence*, a discourse Porphyry attributes to "some Platonists" (τῶν Πλατωνιχῶν τινες), was, in reality, based on Origen's work *Concerning Daemons*.⁶³ This opinion is not limited to supporters of the two Origen hypothesis. Beatrice, who identifies the two Origenes as one and the same person, agrees with Lewy about the likelihood that Porphyry's demonology was based on this treatise.⁶⁴ This work, as we will see in the next chapter, is not solely devoted to a discussion of evil daemons. Rather, it lays out a more complex hierarchy of spirits in the sublunary realm, both good and evil. But, as we will also see, Porphyry adopted many of Origen's ideas about these good daemons as well.

We should not underestimate the significance of Porphyry's likely adoption of some of Origen's theories on evil daemons, especially given the fact that they directly contravene those of his most beloved teacher, Plotinus. Porphyry must have been absolutely convinced of the association of evil daemons with the blood and smoke of animal sacrifices. He must have been thoroughly persuaded that participating in these rites and ingesting meat were polluting practices, and highly compromising for those pursuing a philosophical path in hopes of union with spirits of a higher order. In light of Origen's emphasis on the importance of ascetic practice to the life of the good Christian philosopher, and his belief in the ultimate transformability of the body itself, and, finally, his thorough allegorizing away of Jewish sacrifices in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, it is likely that he made a very strong argument for abstention in this regard.

Porphyry and Ancient Medical and Biological Thinking on Blood and *Pneuma*

Still, one might ask why Porphyry would adopt this view of blood sacrifice, given that it reflects in an almost wholesale manner the Christian consensus on this point. If, however, one considers some of Porphyry's influences, and takes account of ideas in broader circulation in an educated, Greek-speaking, philosophically oriented milieu, this is a consistent and logical position for him to take because of a specific set of associations he makes between blood and embodiment.

For Porphyry, blood was a humor associated with the basest form of human existence, namely the appetitive part of the human soul. In this view, he follows both Plato and Galen.⁶⁵ In the Galenic anthropology, which mirrors the tripartite Platonic one outlined in the *Republic*⁶⁶ and the *Timaeus*,⁶⁷ humans ingest food, which the body turns into blood in the liver. This substance is associated with that part of the human being that concerns itself with nourishment and reproduction. As the body continues to refine this substance, it rises until it reaches the heart, where it becomes a kind of enlivening force associated with what Plato calls the spirited part of the soul, that part that experiences passions of various kinds. Finally, this substance rises to the brain, where it is further distilled into what Galen calls psychic *pneuma*, which circulates in the "ventricles of the brain and throughout the nervous system."⁶⁸ For Galen, this tripartite physiological system helped to link the body and soul. It also served to explain how and why "changes in the body could alter one's mental balance and behavior and vice versa."⁶⁹ A number of Porphyry's works indicate that this model informs his ideas about blood and its connection with embodiment and the appetitive part of the human soul. The connection between body and soul based on the tripartite physiology may help to explain why, for Porphyry, the kind of food one ingests is important, as it directly affects one's mental state.

In *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, a longish allegorical interpretation of ten lines from Homer's *Odyssey*,⁷⁰ Porphyry interprets the cave as a symbol of the descent and re-ascent of the soul into and out of the body. In his interpretation he ties the mistiness of the cave to blood. And he furthermore associates both blood and moisture with desire, pleasure, reproduction, and bodily existence. He writes that "right here in this world the spirit becomes damp or saturated, as a function of its sexual desire, and the soul drags a damp vapor

along with it from its descent toward γένεσις.⁷⁷¹ According to Porphyry, this descent into genesis is accompanied by a certain kind of pleasure for the soul. As a parallel, Porphyry cites other celestial souls, which are, according to the Stoics, nourished by terrestrial vapors: “The sun was nourished by the vapors rising from the sea, the moon by the waters of spring and rivers, and the stars by vapors rising from the earth.”⁷⁷² In this way, “There is a compulsion for souls, whether they are embodied or disembodied but still dragging along some corporeal material—and most of all for those souls that are just about to be bound to blood and moist bodies—to descend to moisture and, once they have been moistened, to become embodied.”⁷⁷³ In other words, for Porphyry, all souls that have descended into the celestial and sublunar regions are associated with some kind of body made up of varying proportions of fire, air, water, and earth. And the bond between their soul and body, that is, their pneumatic vessel, is nourished by moisture.

Porphyry also uses these elemental principles to explain how certain divinatory practices work by using the souls of the dead. These souls are “attracted by pouring out” the moist substances of “blood and bile.”⁷⁷⁴ Additionally, he explains the physical appearance of these ghosts and shades by employing elemental theory and the various characteristics associated with water (namely moistness and coldness). He thereby connects these elements and their characteristics with the humors of the human body (in this case, blood and bile). He writes: “souls in love with the body drag along with them a damp spirit that condenses like a cloud—for moisture in the air when condensed becomes cloud—and when the spirit in them condenses they become visible because of the excess of moisture. From souls of this sort come the apparitions that sometimes confront people, tinting and manifesting their spirits according to their fantasies.”⁷⁷⁵ Those among them who are “body-loving” take on this moisture and become visible. So just as the sun is nourished by the seas’ exhalations, the souls of the dead are, for a time, drawn to and nourished by spilled blood and bile. In *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry does not explicitly mention evil daemons. But as discussed earlier, the same principles apply in the fall of good daemons into vice and a baser form of existence. According to Porphyry, the only difference between good and evil daemons is that the latter are spirits that have identified with their “pneumatic” part and seek to feed it excessively.

A similar sort of reasoning about the association of blood, materiality, and the realm of generation governs a number of things Porphyry says in *On the Styx*.⁷⁷⁶ Fragment 377F is particularly apropos in this regard. *On the Styx*,

like *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, takes its departure from certain Homeric verses, in particular, things the poet said about Hades and its various rivers.⁷⁷ The work exists in fragmentary form, and what remains draws on numerous authorities for its main arguments, from pre-Socratic philosophers such as Empedocles to historians such as Herodotus to the second-century Edessan Christian philosopher Bardaisan, whose accounts of certain Brahmanic water rites Porphyry finds particularly fruitful.

In Fragment 377F, Porphyry creates a map of the afterlife in which he situates various kinds of souls, both human and daemonic. He divides human souls into “buried” and “unburied,” by which he seems to mean those who have been released from the body and those whose souls are still attached to their corporeality in some way. In Homer, the buried and unburied are taken literally. In Porphyry’s case, the “unburied,” those who have not been allowed to cross the river and enter the gates of Hades proper, participate in the memory of the actions of their lives.⁷⁸ This happens to those souls who failed to live justly or to work toward their release from embodiment. The memories they continue to experience serve as punishment and may also have a remedial effect. Porphyry writes, “For they receive appearances (*phantasias*) of all the terrifying things they have done in life and are punished.”⁷⁹ Their earthly misdeeds are avenged in this manner.⁸⁰ But the just, the ones who have sufficiently freed themselves from the bonds of corporeal existence and its attendant desires, passions, and pollutions, are able to pass inside the gates of Hades. There they blissfully forget their life on earth and are known to one another only “by the particular way of thinking which they have obtained in Hades,” and no longer as humans. In other words, they are no longer identifiable by their earthly deeds or by their appearance, which manifests itself in shade-like form for those still dwelling on the other side of the river.⁸¹ Rather, their manner of reflection serves to identify and distinguish them.

As in *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, blood is the substance that calls forth these spirits from their forgetful state in the context of necromantic ritual. Porphyry writes: “Nor would they speak about human things to those humans still living, unless they receive a 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.”⁸² Indeed, if they did not drink blood in this way, the souls of the blessed would remain in their state of happy forgetfulness about “human affairs” and would not prophesy to living beings about their fates.

Porphry associates blood with the remembrance of human life because it is the substance that most clearly represents embodied existence at its basest level, the level of nutrition and reproduction. He explicitly connects what he takes to be Homer's meaning with medical ideas about blood, attributing to the poet the opinion that "for humans the thinking about mortal things is in their blood."⁸³ Porphry further harmonizes the position he attributes to Homer with one he finds in Empedocles, the pre-Socratic who most focused on medicine and the body. He quotes Empedocles as saying, "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."⁸⁴ In other words, when blood reaches the heart, an organ that is naturally fiery, the humor is heated to create a vapor that gives rise to thoughts related to "mortal things"—things pertaining to embodied existence, or thoughts that are connected with passions and images.⁸⁵ This sort of thinking, relying as it does on sense perception and images, is related to the faculty of *phantasia*.

Hence, Porphry draws on specific associations between blood and corporeal existence that he finds in currency in the Greek learning of his day, associations that make his adoption of a predominantly Christian view of blood sacrifice plausible. In fact, it is more than likely that Christian ideas would also have been shaped, to some degree, by the same intellectual currents. For instance, Origen frequently drew on medical ideas in his theological and philosophical works.⁸⁶ Placing Porphry's works within this larger context—namely the Greek intellectual heritage shared by both Christian and non-Christian philosophers, as well as the educational milieu to which both Origen and Porphry belonged—helps explain why Porphry, to all appearances a staunch defender of Greek religion, especially against its detractors, the Christians, would have excised from religious practice a whole set of rituals considered for centuries to be absolutely vital to the well-being of states, communities, families, and individuals.

The allegorizing mode of Porphry's philosophical reasoning in *On the Cave of the Nymphs* and *On the Styx* also presents modern readers with a viable solution to the apparent contradiction in Porphry's stance on the association of evil daemons and sacrifice Eusebius accuses him of in the *Preparation for the Gospel*. As mentioned earlier, when Porphry cites the Apollonian oracle on sacrifice, he is likely doing so in order to deal in figural terms with the literal sacrifices the oracle lists. Each of the sacrifices enumerated in the oracle may have been the subject of a figural interpretation that posited a hidden meaning and explicated it. Porphry himself says that this oracle contains "an

orderly classification of the gods.”⁸⁷ One finds Origen doing something very similar with regard to Hebrew sacrifice in his *Homilies on Leviticus*. In some of these sermons, he carefully and systematically interprets away the need for the literal slaughter of animals for the expiation of sins in ancient Hebrew cult and instead gives them a new allegorical and explicitly Christian meaning.⁸⁸

Hence, both Porphyry and Origen share in a similar culture that makes Porphyry’s adoption of a seemingly Christian position on blood sacrifice plausible, a fact that is obscured by Eusebius’s polemics but also by the assumption of many modern scholars that the positions philosophers tended to take on issues both theological and ritualistic were determined first and foremost by religious identity. The implicit corollary to this problematic approach is that religious identity in the third century was itself clearly articulated, fixed, and static. This assumption has been vigorously challenged in the case of Christian identity for at least the first four centuries C.E. But scholars sometimes treat traditional Mediterranean polytheism as a static monolith, when in fact “Hellenic” or traditional Greco-Roman identity was itself very much in flux and under construction, especially among the non-Christian Platonists under discussion in the current study, as we will see.

By focusing on key points of conceptual parallelism and evidence for dialogic exchange between people such as Porphyry and Origen, this study does not deny that Christians and non-Christians were at odds with each other at certain crucial junctures both in texts and in the world. However, part of the aim of this chapter is to challenge the conflict model, which tends to view this period in terms of predominantly hostile interactions between Christians and so-called pagans, a model that focuses on difference and assumes fixed and static religious identities and group boundaries.⁸⁹ Highlighting moments of shared understanding across religious boundaries, as well as the flexibility and permeability of these boundaries themselves, serves to call the conflict model into question as an appropriate lens through which to view third-century exchanges among intellectuals such as Origen and Porphyry. The rejection of this model, however, does not mean that important points of disagreement are ignored or even deemphasized. Rather, it frequently allows scholars to relocate these points of difference in a more representative and illuminating fashion.

Ritual, Theurgy, and the Status of Matter in Porphyry and Iamblichus

There is one related issue on which Porphyry did differ from Christian writers. That is in his prognosis concerning the chances of the ordinary person for avoiding the pollution associated with evil daemons. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Porphyry held the view that participation in animal sacrifice and the consumption of meat were polluting activities. Given that the vast majority of people at the time would not have shared Porphyry's views on the matter, from his perspective relatively few people lived a life free from demonic influence and pollution. Yet he appears to have been relatively unconcerned about the fate of these people, and focused specifically on the best conduct for those seeking to live a philosophical life. Although Porphyry's position is most starkly opposed to Origen's in this regard, the latter expressing a more universal concern for the spiritual well-being of all ensouled creatures, it would be a mistake to suppose that Christians were the real target of Porphyry's argument in *On Abstinence*.⁹⁰ He himself indicates that he contends with other philosophers.⁹¹ In particular, Porphyry was involved in an ongoing debate with his fellow Platonist and former student, Iamblichus, a debate that, at the very least, seems to have been carried on in a number of their works, from Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* and *On Abstinence* to Iamblichus's *On the Mysteries*.⁹² In fact, Iamblichus wrote his *On the Mysteries* in response to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, and scholars generally agree that the letter was somehow aimed at Iamblichus.⁹³

In particular, Porphyry disagreed with Iamblichus about the role of ritual, and specifically blood sacrifice, in the reunion of the philosopher's soul with the divine. In spite of the fact that Iamblichus thought ritual and theurgy to be more important than Porphyry did, Porphyry's idea of the philosophical life had a clear behavioral dimension and focus. His emphasis on a vegetarian diet and the proper order of appropriate sacrifices to the gods is evidence of such a focus. Furthermore, Porphyry did not discount the importance of ritual for ordinary people. Iamblichus, at times, presents Porphyry as holding the view that philosophers can merely think their way to unity with the god, but it is not unlike Iamblichus to highlight his differences with Porphyry in the starkest terms possible. This has often led scholars to assume that Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* was a kind of attack on Iamblichus. It is difficult to gauge the tone of Porphyry's missive, because it exists only in fragments embedded

in the work of his opponent. But it may very well be that Porphyry was genuinely hoping to query Iamblichus concerning a series of questions about which Porphyry had not entirely determined his own position. Ritual was not unimportant to Porphyry, as we will see in subsequent chapters. And Iamblichus is likely simplifying and overstating Porphyry's view for effect. But what is certain is that Iamblichus set more store by rituals and their efficacy for uniting the soul with divinity than did Porphyry.

Indeed, Iamblichus's response to Porphyry's letter involved a thoroughgoing defense of ritual. He used the term "theurgy" to represent his theorization of sacrifice, emphasizing the importance of theurgy, above theology and philosophy.⁹⁴ The term "theurgy" (θεουργία), meaning "god work," originated with second-century Platonists who used it to refer to the "deifying power of Chaldean rituals."⁹⁵ Porphyry seems to have been the first person to use this term after the Chaldaean Oracles, and Porphyry and Iamblichus were actively defining it in the course of discussing it.⁹⁶ Iamblichus's definition of theurgy was comprehensive and all-encompassing. He argued that the traditional rituals of ancient polytheisms were established and given to human souls by the gods and that these cult practices exemplified divine principles that provided for the deification of the human soul.⁹⁷ The human soul, according to Iamblichus, was the lowest of divine beings (ἔσκατος κόσμος) and the one most entangled with matter. Hence, it needed to be freed from the body to realize its true nature.⁹⁸ Theurgy was, in part, the ritual process of loosening the bonds between the human soul and matter. But Iamblichus also held the view that there were ritual actions appropriate to every stage of the soul's re-ascent.⁹⁹ Furthermore, as Gregory Shaw has noted, one of Iamblichus's primary concerns was to redress the distorted vision of the soul's participation in embodiment depicted in the works of Plotinus and Porphyry, a depiction that their successor felt effaced the vision of embodiment of the *Timaeus* tradition and exported the "demonic" from within the soul out into the cosmos.¹⁰⁰ According to Iamblichus, the Plotinian/Porphyrian vision denied the soul's participation in the demiurgic project of creating the material cosmos. This demiurgic work was mirrored in the work of the theurge, both being forms of "god work."¹⁰¹ Everyone who practiced religion in the proper way and participated in god-ordained rituals practiced theurgy and could attain some measure of communion with the higher gods.

It is not surprising that we find a variety of viewpoints concerning embodiment among followers of Plato. As Dominic O'Meara points out, these philosophers had to contend with an apparent contradiction within the

writings of Plato regarding how and why the soul comes to be embodied. According to O'Meara, the *Timaeus* suggests that the soul "had a constructive mission in the world to vivify, organize, and perfect it."¹⁰² The *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, relates the story of the winged soul, which, "due to some moral failure," has "fallen from the heavenly retinue of the gods and was plunged into a life of misery in the body."¹⁰³ Plotinus resolved this contradiction by positing that the soul "always retained in part its presence in the intelligible world from which it came."¹⁰⁴ Hence, for Plotinus, the soul does not fully descend into matter. Iamblichus, however, supported a view of the soul as fully descended. He resolved the same contradiction by positing different orders of souls. He divides souls between those "that are in close contemplative union with true intelligible being and are companions (*sunapadoi*) and akin to the gods, and those souls who, already before the descent to the material world, are morally corrupt."¹⁰⁵ The former can "preserve their freedom and purity from the body," and as a result they can "purify, perfect, and 'save' the material world."¹⁰⁶ The latter descend for "moral improvement and punishment."¹⁰⁷ For Iamblichus, it was the role of those souls descending for the benefit of others, that is, true theurgists, to know how to lead others along the right path to moral correction and salvation.

Given this soteriological aspect of Iamblichus's theurgic program, it is not surprising that his criticisms of Porphyry's questions and philosophical views are often pointed. He frequently represents his former teacher as naïve and confused. But there was a great deal at stake for both participants in this debate. As already noted, Porphyry was concerned that philosophers avoid demonic pollution, and he considered participation in animal sacrifice to be an impediment to the salvation of the philosopher's soul. Iamblichus, on the other hand, was more generally concerned about the salvation of all souls and the role cultic practices played in the soteriological process. The question of the nature of evil daemons and their association with blood served as a flash point in the disagreement between the two Platonists.

Iamblichus and Porphyry on Evil Daemons and Blood Sacrifice

Throughout significant portions of *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus chides Porphyry for the latter's apparent failure to understand the nature of daemons, both good and evil, as well as that of other kinds of spiritual beings. In Book 1, Iamblichus presents Porphyry as baffled about whether gods and daemons

have bodies and precisely how they relate to their corporeality.¹⁰⁸ But the main bone of contention between the two on the matter of daemons arises in Book 5. There, Iamblichus takes issue with Porphyry's assertion that some spirits "are ensnared by the vapors of, in particular, blood sacrifices."¹⁰⁹ Iamblichus places this statement about evil daemons beside Porphyry's other assertions about the way in which terrestrial vapors nourish heavenly bodies, in order to critique Porphyry's view that deities, and specifically daemons, somehow depend on humans for nourishment. Iamblichus writes:

For it is surely not the case that the creator has set before all living creatures on sea and land copious and readily available sustenance, but for those beings superior to us has contrived a deficiency of this. He would not surely, have provided for all other living things, naturally and from their own resources, an abundance of the daily necessities of life, while to daemons he gave a source of nourishment which was adventitious and dependent on the contributions of us mortals, and thus, it would seem, if we through laziness or some other pretext were to neglect such contributions, the bodies of daemons would suffer deprivation, and would experience disequilibrium and disorder.¹¹⁰

Here Iamblichus appears to misunderstand Porphyry; whether willfully or not, we cannot be certain.¹¹¹ As mentioned earlier, Porphyry held the view that the pneumatic vessel associated with celestial and sublunary spirits is nourished by vapors, but he in no way makes the well-being of the deities and daemons themselves dependent on these vapors or on sacrifices. Evil daemons, in identifying with their material aspect, seek to feed that aspect through blood and smoky vapors. However, this is a perversion of the proper relationship between soul and pneumatic vessel; this is indeed "disequilibrium and disorder." The details of Iamblichus's and Porphyry's respective views on the vehicle of the soul are not of primary importance here, but Iamblichus casts the debate in these terms, taking issue with Porphyry's interpretation of blood sacrifice as polluting and demonic.

Iamblichus himself does not have much to say on the nature of evil daemons and other maleficent spirits. He is generally far less preoccupied with their existence and nature, and unlike Porphyry, he does not have a speech about how they related to good daemons. He also attributes less responsibility to them for cosmic evil than does Porphyry. In general, Iamblichus engages

with questions about evil in the context of discussing proper and improper ritual. Evil arises when a soul attempts to put certain portions of the universe into contact with other parts in such a way that it violates cosmic harmony. In other words, when one uses the natural *sympatheia* and *philia* built into the fabric of the cosmos improperly, phantoms, delusions, false images, and distorted epiphanies can arise. And in the context, in particular, of faulty “theurgic” or divinatory practices of this sort, evil daemons, those who have identified with the realm of generation, are able to deceive human beings and direct them to unjust ends. By this, Iamblichus means those ends that disrupt cosmic harmony, supplanting divine *philia* with the illusion of divine contact, ends that perpetuate the disunity that is part of the realm of generation.

For instance, in Book 3, Iamblichus responds to Porphyry’s assertion that there are some who, by standing on “magical characters,” are “filled with spiritual influence.”¹¹² Iamblichus counters that when these amateur ritualists seek to employ such dubious divinatory techniques for questionable ends, all kinds of things can go awry. Instead of calling forth the presence of the gods, Iamblichus argues, such practices “produce a certain motion of the soul contrary to the gods,” and draw from them “an indistinct and phantom-like appearance which sometimes, because of the feebleness of its power, is likely to be disturbed by evil daemonic influences.”¹¹³ In such instances, the gods, given their generous nature, are inclined to respond out of friendship. But because they have been invoked or petitioned in the wrong fashion, they respond commensurately with a sort of second-rate epiphany. Thus, improper divinatory techniques, faulty theurgy we might say, put the ritualist at risk of falling prey to these spirits. This is the extent to which Iamblichus engages with questions about evil daemons and their cosmic effects and activities. And it is telling that his focus is on proper ritual, the main bone of contention with Porphyry.

To return, then, to the main point, contrary to Porphyry’s view that blood sacrifices propitiate and feed evil spirits, Iamblichus asserts that all sacrifices are divinely ordained.¹¹⁴ And these ordained practices work in such a way as to affirm and strengthen the bonds of *philia* and *sympatheia* established by gods, heroes, daemons and other good spirits with human souls. When humans perform divine rites, they activate relationships already built into the fabric and order of the cosmos. According to Iamblichus, each cosmic level has its appropriate set of rituals.¹¹⁵ In the case of blood sacrifices, these rites do not propitiate evil daemons, rather they are the “perfect sacrifice” for those “material gods” (οἱ ὑλάσιοι) who “embrace matter within themselves and

impose order on it.”¹¹⁶ Iamblichus writes, “And so, in sacrifices, dead bodies deprived of life, the slaughter of animals and the consumption of their bodies, and every sort of change and destruction, and in general processes of dissolution are suitable to those gods who preside over matter.”¹¹⁷

These animal sacrifices help and heal the worshipper who is constrained by the body and suffers accordingly. They also aid in the release of the soul from its attachment to the body. Indeed, Iamblichus argues that human beings are frequently involved with gods and good daemons who watch over the body, “purifying it from long-standing impurities or freeing it from disease and filling it with health, or cutting away from it what is heavy or sluggish.”¹¹⁸

Iamblichus uses fire to explain how sacrifices symbolize the way in which these spirits help human souls to become free: “The offering of sacrifice by means of fire is actually such as to consume and annihilate matter, assimilate it to itself rather than assimilating itself to matter, and elevating it towards the divine and heavenly and immaterial fire.”¹¹⁹ The burning of matter pleases the gods and daemons because it symbolizes the procedures by which souls are liberated from the bonds of generation and become more like the gods.¹²⁰ One sacrifices and burns animals, their flesh and blood, in order to become free from flesh and body. Instead of being a polluting practice, animal sacrifice was a purifying one.

Given the transformative nature of sacrifice, Iamblichus insists that the order in which sacrifices are to be performed could be neither altered nor circumvented. Even the individual dedicating his or her life to philosophical pursuits and theological speculation, if he or she wished to be healed of the suffering associated with embodiment and generation, must perform the proper sacrifices in the correct order and manner.¹²¹ This position runs counter to the one Iamblichus presents as Porphyry’s, namely that one can think one’s way out of the bonds of nature, regardless of one’s ritual participation. Porphyry was of the opinion that the philosopher did not need theurgy or ritual practices involving matter, but could reach God by virtue of the intellect. Iamblichus, however, denied that philosophers could escape such practices in this way.

Sacrifice and Soteriology: Porphyry and Iamblichus on the *Via Universalis*

Porphyry's position raised another concern for Iamblichus. Although he fully recognized that not all human beings could become completely purified or free from the grip of matter and return to the soul's source, and although he reserved this end for the true philosopher, Iamblichus did not wish to consign ordinary people to a polluted existence, laboring under the delusion that the sacrifices they performed benefited them, when in fact the sacrifices contributed to their spiritual demise. He writes: "So if one does not grant some such mode of worship to cities and peoples not freed from the fated processes of generation and from a society dependent on the body, one will continue to fail of both types of good, both the immaterial and the material; for they are not capable of receiving the former, and for the latter they are not making the right offering."¹²² In other words, Iamblichus objected to what he understood to be Porphyry's denial of universal salvation, a path of participation in the gifts of the gods common to both ordinary people and philosophers or theurgists.

Augustine has been a source of confusion when it comes to Porphyry's soteriology. In his *City of God*, Augustine claimed that Porphyry was searching for a universal way, a way to salvation for all souls, not just the souls of a few elite philosophers.¹²³ On Augustine's account, Porphyry failed in his endeavor because he could not overcome his pride and accept that Christianity constituted the answer to his search. It is impossible to determine whether Porphyry ever earnestly sought to find some *via universalis*. But it is obvious from *On Abstinence* that he felt that the salvific regimen he proposed to Firmus Castriicianus was one that very few people could attain.¹²⁴ Hence, Porphyry was making an argument for a form of ritual purity that he openly recognized could be achieved by only a small elite group of specially trained, spiritually devout philosophers. By upbraiding his friend for incontinence where animal food was concerned, he was not prescribing a way of life for everyone. Rather, he highlighted precisely what set him and his peers apart from the ordinary person, namely, his theological knowledge and his ascetic purity.

Despite the fact that Iamblichus expressed a more general concern about the spiritual well-being of people other than members of the philosophical elite and his own theurgic caste, he was equally invested in establishing his own authority as one who could lead others on the path to salvation, as we

shall see in Chapter 4. However, elaborating the universal scope of his soteriological message was precisely the way in which he sought to do this. In this way, Iamblichus placed his own theological and theurgical expertise in a larger context than did Porphyry. He saw himself as providing a means for the salvation of more than just the philosopher. This salvation may have been only partial or truncated. But at the very least, he set the average practitioner of traditional religion on the path to salvation through the latter's participation in rituals that honored different orders of good spirits. Furthermore, the theurgist or priestly philosopher was the one who could broker this salvation effectively for others. So although both Porphyry and Iamblichus admitted that few souls could become completely purified and freed from embodiment, Iamblichus saw purification as a process in which all souls could participate. He disagreed with the idea that most souls were constrained to live a polluted existence, a pollution that afflicted them not only because they were prone to enjoy a good meal and participate enthusiastically in carnal pleasure now and then, but, even more tragically, because they worshipped what they believed were gods, with harmful sacrifices.

Although Iamblichus sought to remedy some of the difficult implications of Porphyry's views on popular religion, and although he sought to put all participants in traditional ritual on the path to purification, he still maintained with Porphyry that it was not possible for everyone to be a philosopher and to achieve complete release from corporeality and generation. One aspect of Christianity that was so offensive to many intellectual elites in the late ancient world was the view that all believers were like philosophers, not only saved and purified, but also in possession of true wisdom.¹²⁵ This was, for those living the philosophical life, an impossibility and an affront. Without rigorous ascetic training and intense contemplation, there was no way that the ordinary person could be on a par with a Plotinus or a Sosipatra. What was equally offensive to some Hellenes was the way in which many average, everyday Christians did take up ascetic practices, and at times, with embarrassing zeal. For Porphyry, the idea that the average person who enjoyed sex or food was at risk of becoming possessed was not troubling in the same way it was for Origen. Because Porphyry followed the Platonic belief in the reincarnation of souls, the average human being who had regular congress with evil daemons in this life, and who lived in a state of pollution, was not eternally doomed as he or she might be in some Christian schemes of things. Rather, although the soul of such an individual might descend into Hades at the end of this life, being too moist and heavy to rise above the earth and ascend to the

supralunary sphere, it might well have a chance in the next life to live a relatively unpolluted existence. This soul could dry out, so to speak, through ascetic and contemplative practices.¹²⁶ It could be strengthened and purified. Furthermore, most Platonists believed that the world was eternal and objected to the Christian view that God would act in the cosmos in a historical way.¹²⁷ Origen was one of the most innovative of early Christian writers in creating a linear, historical narrative for the soul's descent and eventual salvation, one that fundamentally undercut the cyclicity of the Platonic framework. Hence, although Origen and Porphyry shared similar views regarding the polluting effects of blood sacrifices, Origen, like most other Christian thinkers, believed that this demonic pollution should and could be avoided by everyone. The principal means for doing so was to avoid participating in traditional cult.

On the other hand, although Porphyry and Iamblichus believed that ordinary people who participated in polluting practices or those who failed to live as philosophers and theurgists had multiple opportunities to get it right, so to speak, they disagreed violently about the place of ritual in the salvation of human souls.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the positions of a number of third-century Platonists on the ontological status of evil daemons, a first step in exploring their more comprehensive spiritual taxonomies. It has demonstrated that it would be difficult to predict the precise positions of thinkers such as Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus based solely on what we might assume are their religious or ideological affiliations. Reflection on daemons and other spirits in the late ancient cosmic hierarchy results in strange bedfellows, as we have seen. For instance, Porphyry is more akin to Origen and other Christian apologists in his genealogical account of evil daemons and in his estimation of the cosmic damage and destruction wrought by these creatures. Further instances of this phenomenon emerge when we explore the more global taxonomic discourses of these philosophers, their comprehensive efforts to locate and fix spirits in universal taxonomies. These totalizing discourses are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Everything in Its Right Place: Spiritual Taxonomy in Third-Century Platonism

[D]ivine appearances flash forth a beauty almost irresistible, seizing those beholding it with wonder, providing a wondrous cheerfulness, manifesting itself with ineffable symmetry, and transcending in comeliness all other forms. The blessed visions of archangels also have themselves an extremity of beauty, but it is not at all as unspeakable and wonderful as that of the gods' divine beauty, and those of angels already exhibit in a partial and divided manner the beauty that is received from the archangels. The pneumatic spirits of daemons and heroes appearing in direct visions both possess beauty in distinct forms. . . . If we are to give them a common denominator, I declare the following: in the same way that each of the beings of the universe is disposed, and has its own proper nature, so also it participates in beauty according to the allotment granted to it.

THE ENDEAVOR TO assign a moral valence to various cosmic beings by both Christian and non-Christian Platonists in the third century was but one step in a more comprehensive philosophical project, namely the creation of complex discourses that mapped and ordered the realm of spirits in more systematic, universal terms.¹ The most extensive and detailed work we have of this sort is Iamblichus's *On the Mysteries*. But, as this chapter will demonstrate, both Origen in *On First Principles* and Porphyry in a number of his

fragmentary works were likewise involved in this taxonomic enterprise.² Given the shared cultural and educational context of these thinkers highlighted in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that they should all participate in this common undertaking. This chapter will focus on the efforts of these thinkers to emplot spirits in a larger cosmic framework while attending to the sorts of intellectual concerns that drove this project. It will also consider moments in each of their writings where their respective discourses fail to preserve proper order, moments where moral and ontological taxonomy cease to map tidily onto each other and spirits refuse to stay put. For instance, key distinctions between various orders of spiritual beings are at times subverted or rendered ambiguous in the works of these philosophers. In other cases, the line between good and evil spirits is blurred such that good spirits are characterized by rather ambivalent qualities, or evil daemons fulfill important soteriological roles. In other words, this chapter will demonstrate that the act of creating and enforcing difference leads these thinkers to conclusions that at critical junctures call difference into question in radical and interesting ways.

This chapter will offer a number of suggestions for why these taxonomic discourses go astray. First, these philosophers, in their efforts to provide theological and philosophical rationales for specific ideas about spirits and particular religious rites, were engaged with traditional or “popular” beliefs and practices in ways that limited or resisted their endeavors.³ In other words, their taxonomic thinking crossed not only religious boundaries, as the previous chapter demonstrated, but social ones as well. These philosophers were attempting to explain and order a preexisting spiritual landscape populated by beings about which the vast majority of people held some beliefs and with whom they interacted via well-established rites, a tendency already evident in the writings of earlier thinkers such as Plutarch, Numenius, Apuleius, and even, to some extent, Pausanias.⁴ Subsequent chapters will discuss why Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus paid heed to this landscape by situating these thinkers in their third-century social context and its complex of ritual practitioners and intellectuals.

Second, the more crucial factor that accounts for disruption in these discourses is the way in which matter was theorized in antiquity. I will argue that the materiality of spirits, as conceived of in this period, accounts, in part, for some of the resistance encountered by Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus in their attempts to construct a totalizing perspective on the spiritual realm. Drawing on the insights of writers such as Jane Bennett and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, both of whom pay attention to the way in which matter in antiquity

had an agency all its own, including movement and desire, we may be able to better assess the significance of the materiality of spirits, the nature of the matter in which they were embodied, whether they were evil daemons addicted to moist, damp vapors, or the fixed stars inhabiting bodies of ethereal fire. These two explanations for discursive rupture are interrelated insofar as most people in antiquity thought of divine and daemonic beings as material in some key sense. Furthermore, when we speak of a spiritual landscape in this period, we are speaking of space that was not distinguishable from everyday landscapes connecting earthly and heavenly realms.

All the philosophers under consideration here were certainly interested, as Plotinus was, in the nature of the very highest cosmic beings and their interrelations. Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus all engaged in extended reflection and heated debate either among themselves or with others over the relationships between the first three levels of being. All three also used a range of triadic nomenclature to refer to these hypostatic levels.⁵ They also reflected on the precise nature of the relational bond between the first two levels, and whether or not and how this bond was mediated. And the terminology used in some instances was shared or borrowed across religious boundaries. For instance, Origen equated Christ with the Demiurge in his *Commentary on John*.⁶ And both Plotinus and Porphyry seemed to have adopted a number of insights on the first hypostases from those Christian sectaries Porphyry calls “Gnostics,” who attended Plotinus’s school in Rome, as we will see in Chapter 4. Scholars have discussed the similarities and differences between these philosophers on the question of the triadic nature of their hypostatic/emanational visions of the highest orders of the cosmos in great detail.⁷ Hence, it is not necessary to repeat these discussions here. However, the attempts of these third-century Platonists to identify, locate, and define spirits mediating between human souls and the highest gods has received far less scholarly attention.

Origen’s *Concerning Daemons*

We begin with Origen. It is unfortunate that we do not have his *Concerning Daemons* (sometimes translated as *On Spirits*). The closest we get to this work is via some Porphyrian fragments included in Proclus’s *Commentary on the Timaeus*, as well as certain passages in *On Abstinence*. The difficulty with the fragments in Proclus, in addition to the usual problems associated with

fragmentary works, is that in them Porphyry tells us that he has combined the views of Numenius and Origen in order to formulate his own taxonomic schema. Hans Lewy, who thought that the Origen in question was a Neoplatonic philosopher distinct from the Christian theologian, was confident that he could distinguish between the ideas of Numenius and those of Origen adopted by Porphyry. The passage from the *Timaeus* under consideration in the sections of Proclus's commentary in which we find Porphyry's account concerns the battle between Athens and Atlantis.⁸ This battle was the subject of numerous Platonic interpretations. According to Lewy, Numenius "identified the Atlantics with the psychical passions, by which the irrational (hylic) soul is dominated."⁹ Therefore, Numenius was not the source of Porphyry's thinking on different classes of daemons, which is how Porphyry interprets the battle between the two ancient cities. Thus, Porphyry takes his view from Origen that this war was the "combat of a class of demons 'who were better and stronger in number' with another class of demons 'who were worse, but superior in strength.'"¹⁰ And as Ilaria Ramelli has recently pointed out, it is typical of Origen to allegorize cosmological descriptions in reference, not to physical realities, but to spirits. For instance, she notes that Origen interprets the upper and lower waters of Genesis along the same lines as Athens and Atlantis, namely as good and evil spirits.¹¹ We will discuss Porphyry's spiritual taxonomy in *On Abstinence* in more detail shortly, but if his views there, which he says derive from "some Platonists," indeed stem from Origen's *Concerning Daemons* and/or *That the King Is the Only Creator*, we can get some sense of Origen's teachings on cosmic hierarchy, at least in terms of how he classified those beings inhabiting the space between earth and the moon. Although we will discuss these classifications in more detail when we turn to Porphyry directly, it seems that Origen divided good daemons into three species. The first group are guardians of animals and plants who also govern climate and weather, the second govern humans and impart to them knowledge of various arts and sciences, and the third are messengers of the gods in the Platonic sense.¹² We do not hear about other supralunary beings, for example, angels or the fixed stars, in this context. However, we can turn to other works by Origen to fill in these cosmic gaps. Furthermore, in Origen's time there was still a great deal of flexibility and ambiguity regarding terminology with reference to spiritual taxa.¹³

The argument that these views stem from Origen raises a number of rather obvious difficulties for those who affirm a single Origen. The most pressing of these difficulties is that we must figure out how Origen's ideas in

Concerning Daemons relate to his taxonomic discourses in other works, in particular in his *On First Principles*, where daemons are classed as more or less evil and obstructive, those beings that fell farthest from their initial unity with their Creator. The other difficulty is that Origen seems to have, at some point, interpreted Platonic texts, such as the *Timaeus*, without fundamentally challenging their polytheistic framework. The fact that, at some point, he entertained the idea that not all daemons were evil, that some were, in fact, divine messengers, calls for further reflection. This requires us to think further about Origen's teaching activities and his philosophical interactions with Porphyry (and Longinus, who was another student). If, as Elizabeth Depalma Digeser argues, Porphyry went to study philosophy with Origen, as did a number of other non-Christians, it is likely that Origen was presenting himself as a teacher of philosophy, giving lectures on core texts in the ancient philosophical canon, commenting on them, interpreting them, and so forth.

The best place to look when searching for a text that brings the two Origenes together, Origen the teacher of philosophy and Origen the Christian theologian and scriptural commentator, is in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, a work written to a Middle Platonic non-Christian polytheist. As Ramelli points out, it is in this work that Origen refers to Homer more than thirty times, many of his references being entirely positive.¹⁴ Furthermore, given the fact that even within Plato, terminology regarding intermediate spirits is sometimes ambiguous, it should come as no surprise that across Origen's works we encounter imprecision and context-specific usage of names and terms referring to spirits that aid or obstruct humans in their quest to achieve salvation. If Porphyry is using Origen's *Concerning Daemons* in his own *Commentary on the Timaeus*, it may well be that Plato's use of the term "daemon," for instance, in the *Symposium*, is at the basis of Origen's treatise. Porphyry himself uses terminology for intermediate spirits in very context-specific, inconsistent ways.¹⁵ In other words, the fact that Origen may have propounded views on daemons that appear to differ from what he says elsewhere about them does not necessarily involve him in self-contradiction. Rather, he was likely commenting on the various meanings of the term in Plato's works, an activity one could reasonably expect from a teacher of philosophy, Christian or otherwise.¹⁶

Spiritual Taxonomy in Origen's *On First Principles*

Origen makes his most explicit statements concerning cosmic order in *On First Principles*.¹⁷ Likely written sometime between 218 and 225, when Origen was still in Alexandria, *On First Principles* was an experimental work, one of the first sustained attempts at a systematic Christian theology, and one that addressed issues of cosmology and cosmogony, soteriology, Christology, theology, and, of course, what I have been calling spiritual taxonomy.¹⁸ Origen himself describes his purpose in *On First Principles* as an attempt to construct a “single body of doctrine,” discovering the truth about particular points that Christ and the apostles left obscure or unexplained and doing so using “clear and cogent arguments.”¹⁹ One of the main questions left unelaborated in scripture concerned intermediate spiritual beings, good and evil angels, as well as the devil himself. Origen notes, “the Church teaching lays it down that these beings exist, but what they are or how they exist it has not explained very clearly.”²⁰ Origen makes the claim that the apostles left certain doctrines unelaborated in order to “supply the more diligent of those who came after them such as should prove to be lovers of wisdom, with an exercise on which to display the fruit of their ability.”²¹ Origen obviously considered himself to be one of those who were uniquely qualified to participate in this exegetical project, one of those “who train themselves to become worthy and capable of receiving wisdom.”²² Part of what initially incited Origen to address these particular questions was the emergence of “conflicting opinions” among those professing belief in Christ, “not only on small and trivial questions, but also on some that are great and important.”²³ Given his view that much of Christian doctrine remained unelaborated in scripture, it is not surprising that such conflicts developed.

One of these conflicts emerged around the views of a group of early Christian thinkers who, like Origen, came to be labeled “heretics,” writers such as Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides.²⁴ According to Origen, these thinkers held the view that human souls were “in their natures diverse” and hence had different origins and different opportunities for salvation.²⁵ Origen developed his taxonomic framework, in part, in response to this view, a view that, for our purposes, bears relevant similarities to that of Porphyry on the question of universal salvation.²⁶ Furthermore, the debate between Origen and these other Christians bears interesting similarities to the debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus on the soteriological potential of ritual. On Origen's

interpretation of Marcion, Valentinus and Basilides, these different orders of human souls were the direct result of distinct creative agents in the universe—one good, the other deceptive and defective. The main problem that Origen had to address in response to his doctrinal opponents was “how it was consistent with the righteousness of God who made the world” that he should make some souls of higher rank and others of “second and third and many still lower and less worthy degrees,” a problem that, for them, was solved by positing multiple creative agents in the cosmos.²⁷ Origen countered this particular conception of a hierarchy of souls with what some have called his “universalism” or the idea of *apokatastasis*, the idea that all created intelligences, even those that have fallen the furthest away from God, will someday be restored to their original created nature.²⁸ We find his spiritual taxonomy embedded in Origen’s answer to the proponents of the view that there are different spiritual species of human beings.²⁹ And although this takes up most of Chapters 8–10 of Book 2, Origen cautions his reader that he “must not be supposed to put these [ideas] forward as settled doctrines, but as subjects for inquiry and discussion.”³⁰

One of Origen’s main concerns in these three chapters was to explain why some rational souls happen to be angels, others evil daemons, and still others humans. Furthermore, within these general categories, he also notes many finer-grained distinctions. He is also concerned about why some humans have better lives than others, and why nonhuman spirits are ranked according to different orders. He is responding to those who ask “how it is consistent with the righteousness of God who made the world that on some he should bestow a habitation in the heavens, and not only give them a better habitation, but also confer on them a higher and more conspicuous rank, favoring some with a ‘principality,’ others with ‘powers,’ to others again allotting ‘dominions,’ to others presenting the most magnificent seats in the heavenly courts, while others shine with golden light and gleam with starry brilliance.”³¹ On his view, human beings could not hold God responsible for these differences, because that would imply that God either created deficient beings or participated in the fall of good ones.³² In order to resolve this problem of theodicy, Origen asserted that all rational souls were created equal and each made a primordial choice with regard to its Creator that subsequently situated it in the cosmic order.

In Chapter 9 of Book 2, Origen states that in the beginning, “God made as large a number of rational and intelligent beings” as “he saw would be sufficient.”³³ In Chapter 8, Origen called these “minds” and distinguished them

from “souls.”³⁴ He claimed that before these creatures were souls, including the souls of angels, celestial bodies, and humans, they were minds. He uses the designation “soul” to indicate what these intelligences or minds became after they fell from their primordial state. Unfortunately, in all cases but one, namely Christ’s, these intelligences, using their God-given capacity for free and voluntary movement, “began the process of withdrawal from the good,” on account of their “sloth and weariness of taking trouble to preserve the good coupled with disregard and neglect of better things.”³⁵ Origen describes this fall in terms of “becoming lost” and also in terms of a cooling process, drawing on key Platonic ideas that associate divinity with fire. In the cosmos of the *Timaeus* and Heraclitus, for instance, divinity was associated with the element of fire. And as we saw in the previous chapter, cold and moisture are associated with grosser forms of matter, body, and generation.³⁶ In his discussion of this cooling process, Origen identifies God as fire, angels as flames, and saints as “fervent in spirit,” clearly drawing the analogy between divine ardor and elemental thinking.³⁷ According to Origen, the degree to which each created intelligence had cooled determined its subsequent place in the cosmos as a rational soul. Intelligences then acquired some kind of body reflecting the degree to which they had given in to “sloth and weariness,” and they subsequently became subject to both feeling and motion.³⁸ One of Justinian’s anathemas included in the Second Council of Constantinople’s (553) condemnation of Origen summarizes these positions and highlights the taxonomic implications of Origen’s suppositions again in elemental terms. According to this statement, Origen supposedly held the view that as souls cooled to varying degrees, “they took bodies, either fine in substance or grosser, and became possessed of a name,” and this accounts for the difference in both name and embodiment that one finds among “the cherubim,” “the rulers and authorities, the lordships, thrones, angels and all the other heavenly orders.”³⁹ These heavenly orders also include, as they do for so many of Origen’s contemporaries, the stars and planets. Unsurprisingly, he does not refer to them as gods, as Porphyry and Iamblichus will, but they are living, ensouled beings. Origen raises a series of what he refers to as “daring” questions about these creatures. He asks “whether their souls came into existence along with their bodies . . . and further whether we are to understand that after the consummation of this age their souls will be released from their bodies” and whether “they cease from the work of giving light to the world.”⁴⁰ In the end, Origen chooses to include these beings in the larger cosmological story he tells by arguing that their preexistent souls entered their bodies at a later time, and leaves it up to

his reader to conclude that they will also dispense with these bodies after the “consummation of this age.”⁴¹ In other words, the stars and planets are akin to species of angels in certain important respects.

Origen extends the logic that informed his systematic ordering of different kinds of spiritual beings to specific differences between the characters and circumstances of individual humans. He discusses how humans as both larger groups, such as Greeks and “barbarians” (*ethnoi*), and as individuals partake of very different fates, many living in diminished and difficult circumstances, some “from the very moment of their birth” being in a “humble position, brought up in subjection and slavery,” while others “are brought up with more freedom and under rational influences.”⁴² Origen once again bases these distinctions on the degree to which, as created intelligences, the ardor of these individual beings for the contemplation of their Creator was cooled prior to embodiment.⁴³ He uses as his case study the tension between Jacob and Esau over their birthright, asking how God’s justice is preserved in the case where “the elder should serve the younger” and God should say, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Romans 9:11–13).⁴⁴ According to Origen, Jacob’s supplanting of Esau in the womb was only just, “provided we believe that by his merits in some previous life Jacob had deserved to be loved by God to such an extent as to be worthy of being preferred to his brother.”⁴⁵ And this situation mirrors the more general order of spirits prevailing in the cosmos: “so also it is in regard to the heavenly creatures, provided we note that their diversity is not the original condition of their creation.”⁴⁶

As mentioned earlier, Origen constructed his framework in response to his interpretation of the cosmologies of individuals such as Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides. Origen rejected the implications of the view that differences in character and circumstance could be accounted for in terms of multiple creative agents and distinct orders of human souls, and he felt compelled to provide an alternate theodicy. In contrast to the explanation that posited multiple parallel *cosmoi*, Origen provided a single narrative that encompassed all spiritual beings—various classes of angels, humans, and evil daemons—and in important respects, he elided the differences between them by positing a single primordial ontological equality. Thus humans, angels, and evil daemons all share in the same cosmogenesis. And the difference between them is one of degree and not ontology in some important sense. Furthermore, this framework not only encompassed their original state and disintegration into diversity; it also had important soteriological implications.

Although scholars continue to debate whether Origen definitively held

the view that all souls, including those of evil daemons, would eventually be restored to their original, created condition, a state of union with and contemplation of God, there is strong evidence that Origen entertained this idea seriously at a number of junctures, *On First Principles* being the main place where he alludes to this notion.⁴⁷ In Book 3, Chapter 6, for instance, Origen interprets the destruction of the “last enemy,” “not in the sense of ceasing to exist (*non ut non sit*), but of being no longer an enemy and no longer death (*sed ut inimicus et mors non sit*),” and that the “hostile purpose and will which proceeded not from God but from itself will come to an end.”⁴⁸ Butterworth notes that at this juncture in the text, Rufinus appears to have omitted some of Origen’s statements about “the final unity of all spiritual beings,” and directs the reader to the last four anathemas of the Second Council of Constantinople to fill in the lacunae.⁴⁹ According to these anathemas, Origen was supposed to have taught that the devil and the spiritual hosts of wickedness “were as unchangeably united to the Word of God as the Mind itself” (i.e., Christ).⁵⁰ In other words, despite the tragic choices of the primordial intelligences, the connection between the fallen souls and their Creator was never permanently severed.⁵¹ Furthermore, the anathemas accuse Origen of holding the view that “all rational creatures will form one unity” once again when these intelligences abandon their bodies and their names, ostensibly as the result of a purificatory process, making the beginning the same as the end, and the end “the measure of the beginning,” such that “the life of spirits will be the same as it formerly was.”⁵²

This process of restoration is, in fact, how Origen conceives of the afterlife, the resurrection and judgment in *On First Principles*. In Book 2, Chapter 10, Origen outlines a universal path of salvation for all souls. He does this by turning to the question of the “contents of the Church’s teaching to the effect that at the time of judgment ‘eternal fire’ and ‘outer darkness’ and a ‘prison’ and a ‘furnace’ and other similar things have been prepared for sinners.”⁵³ Using Isaiah 50:11 as the basis for explaining the idea of eternal fire, Origen interprets this fire as purgative and restorative, part of a purifying process commensurate in intensity and duration with both the original fall and subsequent actions of each rational soul. It is interesting that the element Origen associates with divinity is also part of the curative process whereby souls are purified. The verse itself reads, “walk in the light of your own fire, and in the flame which you have kindled for yourselves.” Origen argues that these words mean “that every sinner kindles for himself the flame of his own fire, and is not plunged into a fire which has been previously kindled by someone else or

which existed before him.”⁵⁴ This interpretation, of course, helps to mitigate the problem of theodicy in that it absolves God of any responsibility for tormenting souls. For a mere infliction of pain without remedial effect would be unworthy of God.⁵⁵ According to Origen, the soul’s sin, “the history of its evil deeds, of every foul and disgraceful act and all unholy conduct,” will be exposed to each soul, and the conscience, “harassed and pricked by its own stings,” will become “an accuser and witness against itself.”⁵⁶ Origen explains to his reader the way in which these torments already accompany evil deeds almost like shadows: “The soul is burnt up with the flames of love, or tormented by the fires of jealousy or envy, or tossed about with furious anger, or consumed with intense sadness.”⁵⁷ In other words, the motions and feelings that accompany such deeds already prefigure and indicate the sorts of punishments that will work to purge the soul of the effects of these deeds after death. Their pain signals their harmfulness.

Origen also uses bodily metaphors to illustrate why the soul experiences the pain of punishment. He compares its state of separation from God to a limb of the body torn from its joint: so “when the soul is found apart from that order and connexion and harmony in which it was created by God,” it experiences the “torture of its own want of cohesion.”⁵⁸ And he compares this punishment to the bitter medicine that cures certain bodily conditions. The end result for Origen is that all souls will be purified of their sins; the fire having been kindled will burn itself out. For some, the blaze will be of significantly greater magnitude and duration. But he does seem to think that it will eventually end. Furthermore, he does not specify that this is the case for human souls only, and given his assertion that all souls have one primordial nature and shared in the same kind of fall, it would be surprising if he did assert different ends for the various orders of spiritual beings. In a Greek fragment preserved in Leontius of Byzantium that Koetschau includes in his edition of *On First Principles*, Origen was supposed to have stated that “there is a resurrection of the dead, and there is punishment, but not everlasting. For when the body is punished the soul is gradually purified, and so is restored to its ancient rank.”⁵⁹ The most controversial implication, however, is the possibility that even evil daemons might be restored. Origen never denies it in *On First Principles*, and may have even stated this position explicitly. For instance, Koetschau also includes in his edition a fragment from Justinian’s *Epistola ad Mennam*, which states, “For all wicked men, and for daemons, too, punishment has an end, and both wicked men and daemons shall be restored to their former rank.”⁶⁰

This is, in part, because souls, in particular human ones, were not entirely left to their own devices, neither in this life nor in the next. In this life, according to Origen, some angels had the mandate to guard and encourage human souls, while evil daemons tested them. Hence, each human soul was the site of a battle between angels and daemons.⁶¹ And in the afterlife, the site of the soul's purgation and remediation, the soul was also not without aid and encouragement.

Spiritual Taxonomy in Origen's *Homily 5 on 1 Kingdoms 28*

Where Origen focused on the role of the purgative and purificatory fire in the soul's restoration in *On First Principles*, in his *Homily 5 on 1 Kingdoms 28* (ca. 240s C.E.), he adds a further dimension to his soteriological schema.⁶² The homily concerns a most intriguing episode in Hebrew scripture, namely the story of Saul conjuring Samuel through the help of a medium (literally a "belly-myther" or ἐγγαστρίμυθος) in Endor. Origen does not directly address the issue of necromantic practice itself and does not criticize Saul for engaging in the practice. Indeed, Origen is nonplussed about the necromantic activity of the king. Origen, rather, is at pains to explain why Samuel, a prophet of God, is in Hades. The implications for Origen's audience are obvious. After musing about whether the episode is one of those cases where the literal level is of negligible importance, he concludes that it is a story with universal implications and must be taken literally as well as figurally. He writes: "But since the narrative about Samuel and the belly-myther touches all people, then its truth is necessary in accordance with the word. For who, once delivered from this life, wishes to be subject to the authority of a petty demon (ἐξουσίαν δαιμονίου) so that the belly-myther might bring up not just any chance believer but Samuel the prophet?"⁶³ Origen implies, then, that mediums generally work necromantic rites using "petty demons." But he denies that this could be so in Samuel's case. Nor will Origen concede that the rite may have been performed by an evil daemon posing as Samuel, because no evil daemon could have known God's plan for the lives of Saul and David.⁶⁴ Hence, Origen insists that Samuel must have been in Hades and that it was his soul the medium summoned.⁶⁵ But what was the soul of a prophet doing in Hades? For earlier Christian writers, this question would not have arisen. All souls of the dead went to Hades to await final judgment. However, as Rowan Greer and Margaret M. Mitchell note, it is clear that for Origen "hell is no longer a

waiting room established for the time before the general resurrection,” a waiting room for all souls.⁶⁶ Rather, Origen holds the view that souls, after death, can go to a number of places, Hades being one, a “paradise” situated on earth being another, and the bosom of Abraham being the “final destiny of rational beings.”⁶⁷ According to Origen, Abraham’s death “enlarged his bosom to such a degree that saints coming from the four corners of the earth will be escorted there by the angels.”⁶⁸ As Greer and Mitchell aptly point out, Origen’s main interest in all of these speculations is in creating a “large setting” for the soul’s journey toward God, a journey that takes place both in this life and in the afterlife.⁶⁹ Thus, one would not expect to find Samuel, other Hebrew prophets, or New Testament saints in Hades.

However, this is precisely where Origen insists that Samuel is found in 1 Kings 28. His purpose in being there, as it turns out, was to prophesy and proclaim Christ’s eventual arrival, not on earth, but in Hades itself. Samuel was not the only one continuing his life’s work in the afterlife. According to Origen, John the Baptist also went to Hades. This is somehow fitting seeing as his prophetic vocation began even before birth when he bore witness to Jesus’s presence in Mary’s womb. This also accords with Origen’s views on the life of the soul prior to its embodied existence. John the Baptist’s choices as primordial intelligence already fitted him for a life of prophecy, a life that manifested itself even prior to birth. According to Sarah Iles Johnston, Iamblichus also held the view that the truly virtuous would become angels after death, but then they would redescend to earth, and in a new incarnation, teach and participate in the demiurgic recreation and reordering of the cosmos. As Johnston sees it, “the opportunity to spend one life putting into effect what he [the theurgist] had spent all the last one learning constituted Paradise indeed.”⁷⁰ In other words, like Origen’s prophets in Hades, Iamblichus’s reincarnated angelic souls continue their pursuit of a sort of universal, albeit circumscribed, salvation.⁷¹

For Origen, then, the soul undergoes a process of salvation that far outstrips its earthly tenure. And although each rational soul must be purified by the fire it kindles, it is not without resources—prophets, healers, and angels—to help it along. In fact, in their capacity as post mortem ministers of God, the blessed bear a very close resemblance to angels. And, as already noted, based on the single cosmological/soteriological framework in which Origen placed all spiritual beings, the differences between angelic, daemonic, and human souls are difficult to enforce in such instances. In other words,

although Origen was involved in constructing a taxonomic edifice and a cosmogonical/teleological discourse into which he could emplot the souls of angels, humans, and evil daemons, in the end, the story he tells undermines any essential distinctions between these spiritual creatures at the ontological level.⁷² This edifice leads to very interesting scenarios where one finds souls battling for their proper birthright in the wombs of women, and saints and prophets wandering in the underworld ministering to other souls undergoing the punishments they had “kindled” for themselves in life, including, perhaps, the souls of evil daemons. But this elision between types of spirits, this difficulty in fixing ontological difference in Origen’s schema, does not map onto the sort of cognitive flexibility about spirits that one witnesses at the level of local religion, that is, the lack of concern to map moral valence onto ontological status. In fact, Origen’s urgent need to explain Samuel’s presence in Hades is an example of the philosophical tendency to fix orders and explain what for him could only be *apparent* amorphousness in the realm of the spiritual, an amorphousness that seems not to have troubled the writer of 1 Kings in the first place.

Origen’s need to provide an explanation for the events in 1 Kings is also illuminating with respect to questions of spiritual taxonomy. He does not, as he often does when he meets with textual resistance, provide a figural resolution. In the case of Samuel in Hades, his exegesis is literal. He explains how a great prophet could be in a position to participate in necromantic rites. In this regard, he resembles Porphyry and Iamblichus, who take account of certain traditional ritual practices. By doing so, these thinkers engage with religious ideas, beliefs, and practices that appear to belong to different social milieus than those of the educated elite philosopher and that open up their respective spiritual taxonomies to inversion and slippage, amorphousness and ambiguity.

Amorphousness and taxonomic slippage in Origen are also the result of his conception of the body. As a necessary soteriological partner for the soul, by which the soul is able to undergo the remedial effects of punishment and purification, whether in this life through ascetic discipline, or in the next, the body is itself a marker of transformation. As Peter Brown notes in *The Body and Society*, Origen “conveyed, above all, a profound sense of the fluidity of the body.” Brown writes, “Basic aspects of human beings, such as sexuality, sexual differences, and other seemingly indestructible attributes of the person associated with the physical body, struck Origen as no more than provisional.”⁷³ Implicit

in his view, then, is the idea that as souls change registers along the hierarchy he outlines, their bodies, the type of materiality associated with each register, also changes.

Spiritual Taxonomy in the Works of Porphyry

We turn next to Porphyry, who, as noted earlier, adopted a number of his ideas about intermediate spirits from Origen. This is not surprising, seeing as his long-time teacher, Plotinus, had so little to say about them. Porphyry does not thereby abandon a Plotinian worldview. As Aaron Johnson notes, Porphyry's discussions of various intermediate spirits can be classified under the category of Cosmic Soul, the third figure in Plotinus's hypostatic triad, One-Intellect-Soul. In other words, Porphyry may have "considered the Soul to embrace all the theological space below the intelligible gods, both divine and daemonic."⁷⁴

So how does Porphyry parse the domain of the Cosmic Soul? We have already seen how he follows Origen in distinguishing between daemonic classes both in *On Abstinence* and in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. In the latter work, he divides daemons into three classes. According to Proclus, Porphyry thought that these included "a divine type of *daemon*, a type now in that condition (*kata schesin*) which is made up of individual souls who have received a daemonic lot, and the other corrupt kind—the soul polluters" who strike up "war with souls on their descent into generation."⁷⁵

The second class of daemons here is of particular interest, as we have already met the other two in *On Abstinence*. These creatures are only temporarily daemons, while they pass through "the daemonic (sublunary) regions on their descent into, or ascent out of, bodies."⁷⁶ This idea that souls can change their status based on their place in the cycle of incarnation, death, and reincarnation is also reflected in Porphyry's embryological work, *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled*, and in his astrological treatise, *On What Is in Our Power*.⁷⁷ As with both Origen and Iamblichus, the possibility that souls might be defined as daemons on a temporary basis introduces a good measure of ambiguity into discourses that seek to establish spiritual hierarchies.

Porphyry also talks about a number of spirits other than daemons in many of his extant works and fragments. One key passage comes from *On Abstinence* in the context of a discussion concerning the proper ritual practices of philosophers. In this passage, he differentiates between what the philosopher offers

to the “god who rules all” and the offerings he makes to the offspring of this god, “the intelligible gods.”⁷⁸ Implicit in this sacrificial order, then, is a spiritual order differentiating between the highest god and the intelligible gods.⁷⁹ In another section of *On Abstinence*, Porphyry divides the gods up between visible gods in the heavens (i.e., the Olympian gods or the planets and other heavenly bodies) and invisible gods; these latter are likely identifiable with the intelligible gods just mentioned.⁸⁰ In his discussion of the Olympian gods in fragments of *On Images*, he considers them divine powers that control “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.”⁸¹ Many of these characteristics overlap with what Porphyry has to say about good daemons in *On Abstinence*. According to Johnson, this slippage or ambiguity between spiritual species “clearly exhibits Porphyry’s attempt to maintain the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the line between divine and demonic.”⁸² Johnson argues that in “an emanational conception of being and divinity we should expect nothing less.”⁸³ And yet elsewhere he does note that part of this confusion is due to the fact that Porphyry is involved in a translational project in which he attempts to engage theologically with more popular ideas about the traditional gods of the Greek pantheon. In this context, Johnson admits that this engagement could only be so flexible before translation ultimately failed.⁸⁴ The elision between gods and daemons across Porphyry’s work is one example.

Porphyry also addressed different orders of spirits in other places. For instance, in a fragment from *On the Philosophy from Oracles* listing all the various sacrifices appropriate to different deities, a fragment Porphyry likely subjected to figural exegesis, the realm of spirits is divided up between celestial divinities and chthonic ones—a very standard division maintained in both belief and practice in antiquity.⁸⁵ And it may have been that Porphyry reflected at some length on this distinction in the portions of commentary that Eusebius failed to preserve in his *Preparation for the Gospel*.⁸⁶ Thus far, then, we see that despite a general tendency to discuss spiritual taxonomy in the majority of his works, Porphyry does not seem to have developed a single, consistent vision of the spiritual cosmos that one can glean from reading across his works. His thinking tends to be situational, flexible, and somewhat ad hoc. We see something similar in his attempts to grapple with angels.

Porphyry includes angels in a number of passages listing various spirits. One occurs in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* where he addresses *Timaeus* 24a4–5, a section that orders various classes of Egyptians. Porphyry interprets

the passage in a figural way such that these orders represent various kinds of angelic and daemonic beings. Proclus reports the following about Porphyry's interpretation:

The priests correspond to the archangels in heaven which are turned towards the gods whose messengers they are. The military [soldiers] correspond to the daemons who come down into bodies. The pastors [herdsmen] correspond to those stationed over the flocks of "animals," which they secretly explain as being souls that have missed out on human intelligence and have a condition similar to animals—for of humans too there is a particular "protector" of their flock and certain particular [powers] some of whom watch over tribes, some cities, and some individual persons. The hunters correspond to those that hunt down souls and confine them in the body—for there are some who also enjoy the pursuit of animals, the type that they suppose both Artemis to be and another host of hunt-oriented daemons with her. The cultivators correspond to those stationed over fruits.⁸⁷

Here again, although Porphyry obviously endeavors to impose order, it is unclear in the end which beings are daemons, which are angels, which are good and which are evil.

Porphyry also mentions angels and archangels in a question he poses in his *Letter to Anebo*, a question that, in addition, exemplifies his more general interest in spiritual taxonomy. His question inspired Iamblichus to supply such a thoroughgoing response that it took up most of Book 2 of *On the Mysteries*. And it points to the philosophers' shared interest in spiritual taxonomy. Porphyry asks, "what is the sign of the presence of a god, an angel, an archangel, a daemon, or of some archon, or a soul?"⁸⁸ Here Porphyry populates the cosmos with even more beings than in *On Abstinence*. This is similar to the way in which Origen fills in some of the spaces in his celestial hierarchy with species of angels such as principalities, powers, dominions, and so forth.⁸⁹ Iamblichus takes over Porphyry's categories with rigor and consistency. He also interprets the word "sign" (τὸ γνῶρισμα, "token," "mark") in a multiplicity of ways such that there end up being many different criteria according to which one can identify specific cosmic beings. Hence, Porphyry provides Iamblichus with a framework or set of categories on the basis of which he is able to create the most systematic and totalizing taxonomies of them all. It is not

surprising that Iamblichus would take up this task with such enthusiasm, given the fact that he believed that these orders also served as a kind of soteriological map, a path the theurge could traverse in pursuit of union with the highest gods. However, as with both Porphyry's and Origen's attempts to locate spirits in fixed cosmic regions, Iamblichus's discourse also gets away from him at times. Before turning to Iamblichus, then, we can conclude that despite the fragmentary nature of much of Porphyry's extant works, we have plenty of evidence that he was interested in spiritual taxonomy and was frequently involved in drawing fine-grained, if at times ambiguous and shifting, distinctions between divine, angelic, and daemonic beings.

Spiritual Taxonomy in Iamblichus's *On the Mysteries*

Unlike Origen, whose cosmogonical rationale for the various spiritual orders is based on moral differences, Iamblichus presents his reader with what might be called "descriptive ontology." He takes for granted an emanational framework in which distance from the original One translates into distinct orders of being. Taxonomic amorphousness shows up in this Iamblichean framework in two ways. First, given the fact that Iamblichus's overriding goal in *On the Mysteries* is a defense of theurgy, and theurgy is the set of practices whereby very special human souls can attain union with the highest gods, some human souls tend not to stay put in their proper place in the order Iamblichus is attempting to map out.⁹⁰ Second, on the basis of Iamblichus's definitions and comparisons of various cosmic taxa, certain good beings exhibit rather ambivalent characteristics, playing problematic and obstructive roles in relation to other spirits, in particular, human souls. This moral ambiguity is most pronounced in his descriptions of good daemons.

Regarding the possibility that human souls can exceed their proper place in the cosmos, Iamblichus notes that although the human soul "has to a lesser degree the eternity of the unchanging life and full actuality," it can, by the good will of the gods, be "elevated to a greater rank, even to that of the angelic order," being "perfected into an angelic soul and an immaculate life."⁹¹ In Book 1, Chapter 12, he identifies the theurgist as the primary beneficiary of the divine good will that brings about this state of affairs, the gods "shedding their light upon theurgists, summoning up their souls to themselves and orchestrating their union with them," "accustoming them, even while still in the body, to detach themselves from their bodies, and to turn themselves towards

their eternal and intelligible first principle.”⁹² Iamblichus calls this a “method of salvation for the soul” (τῆς ψυχῆς σωτήριον).⁹³ According to Gregory Shaw, the theurgist’s soul becomes “universal and divine, yet particular and mortal.”⁹⁴ Through this process, the embodied soul is “freed from its particularity and established in its starry vehicle, the *augoeides ochema*.”⁹⁵ Although Iamblichus is primarily focused on the soteriological possibilities of the theurgist in this particular passage, it is important to keep in mind that the theurgic system as a whole, a system of rites reflecting in key ways the order of spirits, was a “method of salvation” for all human souls. They might not all achieve the dizzying reaches of the angelic soul, but they were on the right path, so to speak. Iamblichus seems to accord human souls alone the ability to unite with the highest divinity in this manner. However, by doing so, he at times appears to subvert the very order he is establishing in the first place. On the other hand, the anomalous nature of the theurge’s soul is not significant enough to disrupt Iamblichus’s project in any profound manner. There are other moments where discursive ruptures threaten to call his totalizing endeavor into question in more dramatic ways.

As noted earlier, Iamblichus takes a question from Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo* as his point of departure for discussing the various kinds of spirits that inhabit the cosmos. Porphyry asked, “what is the sign of the presence of a god, an angel, an archangel, a daemon, or some archon or a soul?”⁹⁶ Iamblichus takes Porphyry’s list as definitive but does not restrict himself to a discussion of the sign of the presence of these beings. He expands his answer to Porphyry’s query to encompass a wide set of criteria for distinguishing between genera. These include the appearance or manifestation (φάσματα) of various spirits, their motion or swiftness (i.e., the degree of immediacy with which their will is accomplished), the magnitude of their epiphanies, the vividness of their “self-revelatory images” (αὐτοφάνεις), their fire, their ability to purify the soul, the thoroughness with which they consume matter, the fineness of their light, and the disposition received by souls who invoke them.⁹⁷ One can see how the elaboration of all these distinctions would yield a complex, thorough taxonomic discourse. One of Iamblichus’s central aims in undertaking this project was to elucidate how these various orders of spirits mediate between the highest god and the human soul in ways that aid (or impede, as we will see) the progress of the theurgist to rise above the ranks of other spirits and unite with the highest divinity.

It is not necessary for our purposes to review all of Iamblichus’s distinctions between angels, archangels, daemons, heroes, archons, and human souls

on the basis of the criteria listed above. Instead we need only focus on one genus, daemons, in order to grasp the crux of Iamblichus's project and the larger point this chapter is making, namely that despite their best efforts to fix difference and create totalizing discourses, the spirits these philosophers seek to order at times refuse to stay put. Daemons are an apt choice in this instance, not only because they have been the main focus of previous discussion, but also because they appear to be Iamblichus's main focus as well. This is likely the case because he was in stark disagreement with Porphyry over the question of the relation of the daemoniac soul to its pneumatic vehicle, as well as over the issue of blood sacrifice and the propitiation of evil spirits (see Chapter 1). This daemoniac focus makes further sense if Shaw is correct in his assessment that Iamblichus was motivated by a desire to reestablish the positive ontological status of the material within the demiurgic making and re-making of the world.⁹⁸ According to Iamblichus, daemons were the "generative and creative powers of the gods in the furthest extremity of their emanations and in its last stages of division."⁹⁹ In other words, daemons were the spiritual beings that represented the extension of divinity into the realm of the material.

Iamblichus's description of daemons proceeds as follows. Unlike the gods whose appearances (*φάσματα*) are uniform, those of daemons are varied (*ποικίλα*) as opposed to simple, and they are also frightening (*ήμερώτερα*).¹⁰⁰ "Tumult" and "disorder" (*ταρακή* and *ἀταξία*) accompany the appearances of daemons.¹⁰¹ As for the manner in which they accomplish deeds, "the appearance of swiftness" is more than the reality.¹⁰² In other words, daemons put on a good show, but their deeds are characterized by a degree of mediacy.¹⁰³ By contrast, the deeds of heroes, although less swift than those of daemons, are accompanied by a "certain magnificence."¹⁰⁴ They are perhaps more inspiring of magnificent deeds for human souls on this account.¹⁰⁵

By this point in Iamblichus's description a pattern begins to emerge. Where he describes the gods in universally positive terms, and distinguishes archangels and angels from the gods in terms of degree and not in terms of qualitative difference, he characterizes daemons in more ambivalent, even explicitly negative ways. This is especially obvious when he compares them to the spiritual beings directly below them, namely heroes, but also to the sublunary archons. Heroes, although they appear to be less powerful than daemons, are generally more helpful to human souls. This pattern is equally manifest in the remainder of Iamblichus's elaboration. For instance, in the case of epiphanies, those of the gods are at times of such great magnitude as to

hide the heavens, “and earth is no longer able to stand firm as they make their descent.”¹⁰⁶ But the epiphanies of daemons are significantly smaller and not always equal.¹⁰⁷ The epiphanies of heroes are smaller still, but “exhibit a greatness of spirit,” one greater than their condition.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the images of daemons are obscure (*ἀμυδρά*).¹⁰⁹ Their fire is a smoldering glow, divided and unstable. It can be expressed in speech, and it does not “exceed the power of vision of those who are capable of viewing superior beings.”¹¹⁰

Their most ambivalent characteristic arises in the context of Iamblichus’s discussion of the roles various spirits play in the purification of the soul. Where angels loosen the bonds of matter, daemons draw the soul down toward nature. Iamblichus writes that the gift arising from the advent (*παρουσία*) or manifestations of daemons “weighs down the body, and afflicts it with diseases, and drags the soul down to the realm of nature, and does not remove from bodies their innate sense perception (*αἰσθησεως*), detains here in this region those who are hastening towards the divine fire, and does not free them from the chains of fate.”¹¹¹

For a Platonist who asserts in the same treatise that the human soul is capable of rising up to join the angelic orders, one can hardly conceive of a more ambivalent “gift.” The gods, by contrast, “give to us health of body, virtue of soul, purity of intellect”; they remove the “cold and destructive element in us,” increasing “vital heat” and making “our light shine with intelligible harmony.”¹¹² Even the advent of heroes, who are below daemons, arouses us to “noble and great deeds.”¹¹³ What, then, are we to make of Iamblichus’s description of daemons, of beings whom he characterizes in terms that appear to counter, resist, and thwart the human soul in its advance toward a better form of existence?

Gregory Shaw explains this ambivalence in terms of the daemons’ dual function in the cosmos both as “agents of the Demiurge and as powers that defiled the soul by tying it to matter.”¹¹⁴ He writes: “This ambivalence was due to the centrifugal activity: in being agents of the demiurge in the “procession” of the gods, it was [the daemons’] task to exteriorize specific aspects of the divine, and in disseminating the divine presence into matter, daimons also led the attention of particular souls into a centrifugal and extroverted attitude. This was what bound them to their bodies and caused them to suffer.”¹¹⁵ Iamblichus himself elucidates the connection between the human soul’s involvement with matter and its subsequent involvement with daemons. He writes: “the soul that tends downward drags in its train signs of chains and punishments, is weighed down by concretions of material spirits, and held fast by the

disorderly qualities of matter, and is seen submitting itself to the authority of daimons concerned with generation.”¹¹⁶ Shaw argues that despite the negative or ambivalent language Iamblichus used to describe daemons, their role in the cosmos was useful and necessary. They played a key role in the rehabilitation of the status of matter, which Shaw argues was part of Iamblichus’s goal in *On the Mysteries*. And they were the means by which the divine was able to order matter without touching it, without compromising divinity itself.¹¹⁷ On Shaw’s interpretation, then, matter was an impediment only for individual souls, “not for the World Soul or celestial souls (stars).”¹¹⁸ In other words, according to Shaw, Iamblichus sought to rehabilitate matter in general, countering the views of philosophers such as Numenius, Plutarch, Plotinus, and Porphyry. But he also had to account for aspects of Plato’s own thought that occasionally cast the material in negative terms, most notably with reference to the soul’s embodiment and the nature of the pneumatic vessel that accompanied sublunary spirits such as daemons.

Shaw’s explanations serve to mitigate some of the ambivalent aspects of Iamblichus’s description of good daemons. And Shaw’s insights into both Iamblichus’s philosophical motivations and presuppositions and his faithfulness to the Platonic corpus, as well as Shaw’s successful efforts to see *On the Mysteries* as a philosophically consistent, systematic whole, need to be recognized and lauded. However, I would argue that Shaw’s approach comparing Iamblichus directly with Plato and harmonizing the Iamblichean corpus itself cannot entirely account for all the influences and intellectual and religious currents to which this third-century proponent of theurgy was responding. In other words, certain aspects of Iamblichus’s spiritual taxonomy “exceed” the Platonic framework set out by Shaw. In order to make my argument on this point, it is necessary to step back for a moment and review some of the history of scholarship on Iamblichus.

Rehabilitating Iamblichus After E. R. Dodds

Shaw was involved in a rehabilitation of Iamblichus in response to a strong current in mid-twentieth-century scholarship on late Roman thought that tended to see the Platonism of the third century through the lens of decline and decadence.¹¹⁹ In his article “Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism,” E. R. Dodds accused Platonists from Porphyry through Proclus of succumbing to the irrationality and superstition of their age.¹²⁰ The theurgical

focus of these figures, according to Dodds, was proof of a “retrogression to the spineless syncretism” from which Plotinus had supposedly tried to escape.¹²¹ Dodds also contended that late antique intellectuals, in response to the sense that Christianity was “sucking the lifeblood out of Hellenism,” turned to “vulgar magic.”¹²² According to Dodds, this move “is commonly the last resort of the personally desperate, of those whom man and God have alike failed.”¹²³ As a result theurgy became “the refuge of a despairing intelligentsia which already felt *la fascination de l’abîme*.”¹²⁴ Some scholars, including Shaw, have come to the defense of these philosophers against Dodds and others by focusing on their philosophical contributions, as well as on the complexity and systematicity of their ideas.¹²⁵ For instance, in her article “Dreams, Theurgy and Free-lance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus,” Polymnia Athanassiadi argues that theurgy, at least on the interpretation of Iamblichus, was about personal virtue and wisdom. This interpretation leads her to conclude that Iamblichus would have been “horrified by the claim in modern scholarship,” that is, in Dodds’s writing, that “theurgy and magic are disciplines resting on the same presuppositions and using some of the same methods.”¹²⁶ In order to divorce theurgy from magic, while still acknowledging the importance of prayer and sacrifice to the Iamblichean program, that is, to the life of one who seeks union with god, Athanassiadi recasts theurgy in terms that downplay the importance of ritual.¹²⁷ She also blames modern distortions concerning Iamblichus on the excesses and enthusiasms of post-Iamblichean Platonists who misunderstood their master.¹²⁸ In other words, the trend in studies that have sought to redress the skewed vision of late antique Platonism found in the writings of earlier historians such as Wilhelm Kroll (in the nineteenth century) and Dodds (in the twentieth) has been to distinguish these philosophers from their contexts and the supposed superstitions and propensities for magical practices exhibited in the population at large. But the work of Athanassiadi and Shaw can and should be taken further, because, although it may spare the reputation of specific philosophers, in the case of Athanassiadi at least, it relocates the irrationalism Dodds attributed to them in equally problematic directions—either upon their followers or upon everyday people in late antique society. More recently, Emma Clarke has raised similar misgivings about attempts of this sort to rescue Iamblichus from the charge of irrationalism. She writes:

Iamblichus did not see his treatise as predominantly philosophical, indeed his main point was to reject this method of approach and

take a wholly new tack. While I do not deny that there is “philosophy” in the *De Mysteriis*, and that some considerable reward lies in digging it out, I would query the tendency to keep our reading of the treatise within these confines; to assess the *De Mysteriis* in philosophical terms, to squeeze this square peg into a round, intellectual hole, seems to me an extraordinary oversight. Iamblichus viewed philosophy as a worthwhile but fundamentally limited method of understanding.¹²⁹

Although Shaw addresses the philosophical motivations Iamblichus may have had for providing a systematic, universalizing alternative to Porphyry’s predominantly conspiratorial demonology, he does not account for the origin of those elements of his spiritual taxonomy that exceed the framework of the *Timaeus*. Iamblichus used this framework to account for aspects of the daemonic that were not present in Plato’s cosmology. Plato did not discuss daemons in the *Timaeus*. And where he did talk about them, namely in the *Symposium*, he placed them between gods and humans as intermediaries, but he mentioned nothing about their role in tying the soul to the material. In Middle Platonism, one finds an increasing focus on “daemonology” (the study of daemons, their nature, and roles in the cosmos), as demonstrated by John Dillon’s important work on this philosophical epoch.¹³⁰ But all of these philosophers, from Numenius to Plutarch to Porphyry to Iamblichus, were not just in dialogue with other Platonists, their predecessors, and contemporaries; they were also thinking within a lived social, cultural, and religious context. They were responding to certain seemingly consistent structures and practices, namely traditional religion, but also to cultural, social, and political changes.¹³¹ Ideas about daemons were also changing in this period in a number of different social milieus. For instance, Sarah Iles Johnston sees the first and second centuries as a time of important changes in terms of how people were thinking about spirits, as well as a period in which the relationship between philosophy and religion was changing dramatically.¹³² So although scholars have gotten very far by defending Iamblichus as a philosophically sophisticated and complex thinker, and although they have managed to explain many aspects of *On the Mysteries* using a Platonic cosmology, this strategy is ultimately limited in its ability to account for a number of unique and important aspects of Iamblichean theurgy.

In addition to some of the contradictory and ambivalent aspects of Iamblichus’s account of good daemons, two other aspects of *On the Mysteries*

point to the fact that his taxonomic thinking outstrips a strictly philosophical framework. First, his inclusion of archons in his taxonomy and their strange division between cosmic and material “species” point to an engagement or dialogue with religious thought and belief in more general currency in late Roman society. Second, throughout *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus feels compelled to pronounce definitively on a wide range of rites and practices, such as oracles and divination, statue making and animation, the use of special words and characters and so forth, activities we might think were beyond the normative nexus of religious praxis for most philosophers in antiquity. His discussion of these practices will serve as our point of departure in Chapter 4. His inclusion and elaboration of the characteristics of archons serve as the basis for exploring slippage and elision in his otherwise totalizing vision of spiritual species.

Archons in Iamblichus’s Taxonomy: Thinking About Spirits Across Social Boundaries

As spiritual beings, Iamblichus depicts archons as rather second-rate. Sometimes Iamblichus discusses them between angels and daemons, sometimes between daemons and heroes; hence, not even their specific place is fixed in his order. Furthermore, he divides them between cosmic and material species, the former governing things in the sublunary sphere, the latter presiding over matter.¹³³ But he does not explain the difference, which is especially curious, because in the Aristotelian cosmology, the sublunary sphere is the realm of the grosser, less refined forms of materiality. In other words, the real difference between them is not elucidated by Iamblichus’s definition. The other strange thing about Iamblichus’s account of archons is that they do not seem to play a philosophically necessary role in the emanational schema. They don’t differ from other species of spirits in terms of degree, nor do they represent an otherwise unaccounted for hypostatic moment or stage. In other words, archons, whether cosmic or material, do not really add anything to Iamblichus’s system. They seem to be indistinguishable from daemons in terms of their domains of governance and administration. But if Iamblichus did not distinguish the two kinds of spirits based on these criteria, one would expect he would do so by explicating the difference between their activities, something he does not do in any clear way either. With regard to the role various spirits play in

the story of the human soul, between angels, daemons, and heroes, he has covered the “human condition,” namely the predicament of the soul being trapped in matter and its desire to escape this condition when it becomes aware of its true nature. Archons do not appear to play a role in this case. They also do not seem to play a starring role in other contemporary spiritual taxonomies with two important exceptions.

Archons make regular appearances in many so-called magical handbooks and in “Gnostic” texts, texts that often contain elaborate accounts of cosmic order. In certain works included in the Nag Hammadi codices, archons are often ambivalent or even evil figures. Specific archons from these texts, such as Sabaoth, are spirits frequently cited and invoked on amulets and in ritual formulas in the aforementioned handbooks.¹³⁴ And although it is impossible to determine where Iamblichus took his inspiration for their inclusion, this inclusion signals important changes in Platonic thinking since the fifth century B.C.E. However, these are not merely changes that arise within philosophical schools and among intellectual elites in dialogue with each other. The point is that Iamblichus’s categories of spirits are not the outcome of some philosophical derivation, some rational process of reflection on the kinds of spirits that must populate the cosmos between the highest god and the human soul based on a kind of ontological calculus.¹³⁵ Rather, they arise from reflection on the kinds of spirits already inhabiting the cosmos for most, or at least many, people. The case of his inclusion of archons suggests a cross-pollination of ideas between various philosophically inclined groups, as well as a hybrid understanding of more local ritual practices.¹³⁶ We often suppose that this influence runs in one direction only, namely from the more purist philosophical schools, such as the Platonist one, to other less philosophically rigorous ones. But scholars are beginning to question this assumption.¹³⁷ These schools themselves contained a wide variety of students from diverse walks of life with very different reasons for being present and varying levels of commitment to the philosophical life.¹³⁸ The importance of this realization is that we cannot maintain the view that intellectuals such as Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were thinking and developing their taxonomic discourses in some isolated milieu apart from the society in which they lived. They were not only in dialogue across porous and flexible religious lines, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, but they were also engaged in dialogue across social boundaries. This is signaled by the fact that all three attempted to provide rationales for traditional religious practices and beliefs in one way or another, aspects of religion that

had been for the most part local and collective or communal.¹³⁹ And this rationale, despite its attempts to subsume the local within a universal system, necessarily had to take account of key aspects of the local construction of spirits. What this implies is that even philosophers, who in the ancient Greek world had a reputation for being contemptuous of many “mainstream” or “popular” conceptions and expressions of piety, drew on the local understanding of spirits to fill out their discourses about daemons and other intermediate spirits. They drew on a common pool of cultural references and representations. They were not merely creating systems of their own liking, but trying to make sense of what people already believed. This was not, however, based primarily on a desire to understand the religious and cultic world of these people. Rather, it was part and parcel of what I will argue was a move to establish themselves as religious experts. It was integrally connected to their efforts to establish a broader, more popular form of authority. Like earlier Platonists, such as Apuleius, who may have given popular, public lectures on the subject of intermediary spirits (*De Deo Socratis*), part of their efforts involved presenting their ideas in ways that made sense to a broad range of less-educated, less philosophically attuned individuals.¹⁴⁰ Accommodating and explicating some of the beliefs their audience already held was one way to do this. In the case of both Apuleius and Iamblichus, however, their totalizing tendency to include discussion of a wide array of cosmic entities often compromised the coherence and internal logic of their taxonomic discourses. For Apuleius, his discourse gets away from him when he attempts to bring spirits such as *lemures*, *lares*, and *larvae* into the picture.¹⁴¹ For Iamblichus, his untethered archons signal both his attempt to speak across social lines and the difficulty of doing so. Chapters 3 and 4 will consider the possible context for this cross-fertilization in the case of ritual practices.

Agentic Matter and Taxonomic Ambiguity

Hence, one of the reasons for the slippage, elision, and ambiguity encountered in these spiritual taxonomies is that these philosophers were involved in a process of translation across social boundaries. However, there is another and more crucial way in which the disruptions in these philosophers’ discourses can and should be accounted for. A number of the discursive ruptures discussed thus far can be explained by considering the role that matter has to

play in these texts, in particular at the level of the embodiment of spirits. In order to approach this topic, it is helpful to circle back to Porphyry and his account of evil daemons in the previous chapter, namely daemons who have succumbed to the seductive allure of certain kinds of matter.

In two fragments that seem to be referring to the same passage in Porphyry, one found in Michael Psellus, the other in Proclus's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the third-century philosopher describes the body of a certain species of Etruscan daemon.¹⁴² These nocturnal daemons were “detected not only by sowing and getting worms from their seed (i.e., semen), but also by being burned and leaving behind ash.”¹⁴³ According to Psellus, these daemons' bodies were burned as part of an exorcistic rite, and the ash resembled “faint bodies like the threads of a spider's web.”¹⁴⁴ Porphyry leaves unanswered, so far as we can tell, the question concerning how or why a daemon would be ejaculating semen. And according to Proclus, Porphyry introduced discussion of this species in the context of distinguishing between daemons whose bodies were characterized by visibility because they were composed of a mixture in which the fiery element predominated and other daemons characterized by tactility as a result of a predominance of earth in their bodily make-up. The Etruscan daemons served as examples of the latter.

Porphyry seems to have found this daemonical subspecies quite fascinating, given the lengths to which he goes to describe it. Furthermore, what interested him most appears to have been this daemon's materiality, the sorts of things that its body could do, produce, and become under various circumstances, the material transformations it could experience and undergo. These fragments are remarkable because they contain some of the most specific and detailed discussions from this period regarding a daemon's body. They serve to focus our attention on the main point of Gregory Smith's article, “How Thin Is a Demon?”—namely that ancient daemons had bodies and that when theorizing the daemonical, we ought to bear this in mind.¹⁴⁵ But it was not only daemons that had bodies; all spirits did. As Dale Martin noted almost two decades ago in *The Corinthian Body*, in the ancient world incorporeality is not the same thing as immateriality.¹⁴⁶ Hence, daemons had bodies, referred to by some philosophers as pneumatic vessels or their *ochēma*, as did angels, archangels, the fixed and wandering celestial beings, the invisible gods, all the way up to the World Soul itself. Origen remarks on the nature of daemonical bodies in his Preface to *On First Principles* in a passage where he explains what the author of *The Teaching of Peter* meant when he reported that Jesus said to his

disciples, “I am not an incorporeal daemon.”¹⁴⁷ He explains that Jesus was not declaring that daemons were without bodies, but rather that their bodies were “by nature a fine substance and thin like air.”¹⁴⁸

But it is not enough, I would argue, to note that ancient spirits had bodies. We also need to take account of the kind of matter that made up these bodies. For instance, in the pseudo-Platonic work *Epinomis*, a work to which *On Abstinence* bears a number of relevant similarities, the bodies of spirits are parsed elementally. The highest creatures in the cosmos (i.e., the gods) are fiery, the lowest (i.e., humans) are earthy, and between are three classes of beings that might be identified as daemonic. These are associated with air, aether, and water respectively.¹⁴⁹ This elemental understanding of matter helps to make sense of some of the disruptions noted thus far in the taxonomic discourses of the Platonists under discussion. These disruptions include the possibility for slippage and elision between spiritual species in both Origen’s and Iamblichus’s schemas. Recall that although Origen endeavors to account for spiritual difference at the level of genus and species, the terms of his discourse allow for a rather alarming degree of mobility between various taxa, based, in large part, on the mutability of bodies at the level of material composition, a mutability that mapped onto changes in what we might call a creature’s moral status. These disruptions also include the aforementioned characterizations of good spirits in Iamblichus’s schema in highly ambivalent terms. Furthermore, they include the phenomenon discussed in Chapter 1 whereby good daemons turn bad in Porphyry’s *On Abstinence*.

As noted, in this work, Porphyry describes a process whereby good daemons all of a sudden lose control of themselves and start to gorge themselves on blood and smoke from animal sacrifices. This makes them heavy and moist and drags them into lower regions of the sublunary sphere. In other words, they are seduced by matter, and like gluttonous humans, they seek opportunities that bind them more closely with matter. Furthermore, their gluttonous activities change the very matter associated with their body—they become damp and cool. The question we should ask is how a good daemon could be seduced by matter in the first place. What is it about matter that draws these souls downward? We certainly have a precedent for this sort of fall in Plato’s *Phaedrus*; however, Plato was creating a mythological account, whereas Porphyry is describing what he believes is an actual process—the seduction by matter, the consumption of blood and smoke, and a concomitant transformation of the very body of the daemon itself. What powers or capacities does matter possess such that it can draw spirits to itself and force beings to inhabit

spaces and roles in the cosmos that are out of keeping with their original nature?

As “new materialists” such as Jane Bennett, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and Valerie Allen have recently reminded us, ancient matter was characterized by a robust vitalism.¹⁵⁰ Bennett invokes this understanding of matter in order to argue for a new relationship to the material world in the present. In this respect, Bennett’s work has pronounced political and environmental dimensions, as does Cohen’s. Bennett argues that a shift from conceiving of matter as inert, dead, passive, objective, and out there to conceiving of material things as actants (a term she adopts from Bruno Latour) and as machinic assemblages (a concept she adopts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) is one approach to challenging and possibly remedying the devastating effects of our contemporary “human hubris” and our “earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption.”¹⁵¹ By “actant” Bennett means “a source of action whether human or non-human,” “that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.”¹⁵² Although Bennett has a very particular present-day political goal in mind, she reminds us that premodern ideas of matter presupposed a kind of vitalism absent from modern theorizations.¹⁵³ By vitality, Bennett means “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities or tendencies of their own.”¹⁵⁴ Bennett’s aim is to allow us to perceive that this “agentic capacity” is “differentially distributed across a wider range of ontological types.”¹⁵⁵ She is searching for a “materialism in which matter is figured as a vitality at work both inside and outside of ourselves and is a force to be reckoned with without being purposive in any strong sense.”¹⁵⁶ She finds important precursors for her theorization of matter in the premodern world. She writes, “In that tradition, the distinction between life and matter, or organic and inorganic, or human and non-human, or man and god, is not always the most important or salient difference to recognize.”¹⁵⁷ Her characterization of matter as vibrant, and her invocation of earlier understandings of the material world, both help explain aspects of the bodies of ancient spirits.¹⁵⁸

In antiquity, matter had its own movements, forces, desires even. The elements that made up all bodies were restless if out of place, fire desiring to rise above air above water above earth. This order did not map tidily onto spiritual taxonomy. Bodies certainly fit the sort of being with which they were conjoined, but the body was not merely a passive implement of the spirit

animating it. It was already in some sense animated by other forces. As Cohen writes, “To each element belongs movement, intensity, vector, affect and duration, as well as ardors to combine and pull apart.”¹⁵⁹ Cohen invokes Empedocles to fill in the picture, his principles of “love” and “strife” being both “cosmic glue and guarantors of change.”¹⁶⁰ Cohen continues: “Fire, water, earth, [air], love, and strife become six divinities to intermingle and leave a part of themselves in every material thing.”¹⁶¹

Although Platonist philosophers, including the founder of this intellectual lineage, prioritized soul or spirit over matter and often associated the latter with the principle of evil, they all took account of it in some way or other, and there was little disagreement about the fact that matter was enlivened or animated by forces that limited the way in which intellect could express itself in embodied form. This limitation is called “Necessity” in the *Timaeus*. Ancient matter stubbornly resists form, not because it is passive, dull, inert; rather it is up to something else, or many other things.

How, then, does this help to explain the moments when Origen’s or Porphyry’s or Iamblichus’s efforts at imposing systematic and totalizing taxonomic structures on a more ad hoc, flexible sacred landscape go astray? Because in each of these moments, it is quite clear that agentic matter is the disruptive force. It limits what can happen; it changes the usual course of events; it determines, at least in part, possible and desirable outcomes. For instance, in Porphyry, matter is seductive; it incites desire in good daemons and has the ability to change their very nature—and presumably, unlike in Origen’s soteriology—this change is permanent. The ability of matter to draw souls downward, its gravitational pull, its magnetism, is mirrored in Porphyry’s embryology. In *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled*, Porphyry argues that the fetus must be akin to a mere plant until the moment of its birth because only when the body is fully formed, all its perceptive capacities intact, can it draw down to it the appropriate soul, the soul that fits it.¹⁶²

Iamblichus too reflects on the power of matter to draw souls downward and bind them. But he also focuses a good deal of attention on how interactions between humans and higher souls are determined, limited, and transacted through matter. Good daemons, for instance, would like to put on a good show, produce grand epiphanies, but their ability to work with matter, and the very matter of which their *ochēma* is composed, keep them honest, so to speak. Some humans may be deceived by their flash and glitz, but not the true theurge.

Finally, in the case of Origen, once primordial minds become embodied,

their bodies, transformable as they may be, are essential to their existence, remediation, and salvation. But because matter itself is mutable, changeable, in constant flux, these bodies, and the nature of the souls that inhabit them, are not fixed and static.

Matter's capacity to disrupt philosophical and theological discourse, attempts to tidy up the cosmos and stabilize difference, continues to play a role in taxonomic discourses well beyond the third century. For instance, Augustine is able to exploit the way in which matter, on account of its own forces and desires, introduces ambiguity into systematic taxonomies in his own account of daemons in *City of God*. In a rather strange passage, Augustine attempts to demonize daemons and call into question human worship of them by deconstructing explanations of Apuleius concerning their place in the cosmos.¹⁶³ Apuleius defines daemons as follows: species—animal, soul—subject to passions, mind—rational, body—composed of air, life span—eternal. Augustine fastens on their association with air and compares them to birds. He argues, somewhat disingenuously, that just because daemons inhabit a higher realm than us, and are associated with a superior element, namely air, does not mean we ought to pay them homage, just as we do not worship birds. He briefly acknowledges that he is not equating birds with daemons, but indicates that the difference is, in the end, immaterial.¹⁶⁴ Augustine plays with daemonic materiality in such a way that he discredits its ability to mark superiority of soul. He recognizes and exploits its ability to introduce ambiguity into taxonomy and to disrupt spiritual order. In this respect, Augustine follows earlier Platonists in attempting to grapple with the bodies of daemons and failing to keep those bodies in their proper place.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were all engaged in the production of comprehensive and totalizing spiritual taxonomies over and above their discussions of the genesis and nature of evil daemons. They were not merely attempting to account for the range of beings already enumerated by earlier Platonists, nor were they merely grappling with the theological questions and perspectives of these earlier Platonists. They were also incorporating popular views of spirits in addition to grappling with tenets of traditional religion. This openness to explaining ideas and practices in currency among a larger cross-section of ancient society accounts for some of the

moments of rupture and ambiguity noted in this chapter. I have also argued that the taxonomic discourses of all three thinkers get away from them at times, devolving into a messiness that threatens tidy order, because of the way ancient matter was conceptualized in elemental and “vibrant” terms. The bodies of the spirits that these thinkers sought to locate were, as a result, subject to a source of independent, disruptive, and even contrary motions. Our next task will be to consider why these philosophers undertook their taxonomic enterprises in the first place. The next two chapters will discuss the larger cultural and intellectual currents they were participating in, who their main interlocutors, dialogic partners, and contenders were, and what they stood to gain or lose by producing and disseminating these taxonomies of the divine and daemonic.

Chapter 3

The Missing Link: Third-Century Platonists and “Gnostics” on Daemons and Other Spirits

This is the number of the angels (ἄγγελος): together (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό) they are three hundred sixty-five. They all worked on it [Adam’s body] until, limb for limb (κατὰ μέλος), the psychic (ψυχικόν) and the material (ὕλικό) body (σῶμα) were completed by them.

CHAPTER 2 DEMONSTRATED both that Platonists were keen on developing elaborate and detailed spiritual taxonomies and that they did so in dialogue with more widespread contemporary religious and scientific currents. The question this study has yet to answer is why third-century intellectuals such as Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were focused on this exercise in particular, that is, on defining, delimiting, and ordering the realm of spirits. Part of this enterprise was certainly a continuation of Middle Platonic efforts to grapple with the place of lesser spirits in a philosophical framework that situated a supreme divinity above all other beings.¹ Furthermore, some of these figures, such as Plutarch, were also thinking about how the nature of these lesser spirits intersected with questions of traditional cult. For instance, Plutarch reflected at length about how oracles work and why they decline and disappear at certain sites. Porphyry and Iamblichus were also thinking about questions of cultic praxis, as we have seen. However, this study is arguing for more than just continuity between Middle and late Platonism on the question

of spiritual taxonomy. It is arguing that there is something unique about these later figures, namely their concern to account for and locate all spirits within much more complex philosophical and theological discourses than we find in earlier epochs. This chapter will begin to supply an answer to why this happens when it does and why it takes place in this particular milieu. It will do so by placing these philosophers within a broader third-century social and cultural context.

Any book on discourses about spirits in late antiquity would be incomplete without including some discussion of the rich cosmological and cosmogonical narratives found in the Nag Hammadi corpus and other related extracanonical works produced by a variety of groups in the second and third centuries who claimed Jesus or the Christ as some kind of savior figure. But the argument of this chapter is driven by far more than a desire for completeness. Rather, it makes the claim that the narratives found in these texts serve as an important missing link for understanding what motivated intellectuals such as the Platonists discussed in previous chapters to develop their own cosmologies and spiritual taxonomies and to refine their thinking on the kinds of beings that populate the spiritual realm. In order to make this argument, this chapter will bring together a wide variety of recent scholarship on various late antique conversations and contests to create a larger picture of the close interconnections between intellectuals of various stripes on the question of spirits. For instance, some studies have focused on the way in which the language of certain ritual practices found in the Nag Hammadi texts resonates with and resembles understandings of names, words, *voces magicæ*, and ritual acts found in the Greek and Coptic ritual papyri.² Other studies have demonstrated that the Platonism of Plotinus and his school was in close dialogue with many of the ideas found in works preserved in the Nag Hammadi corpus.³ Indeed, John Turner argues that a number of key Plotinian concepts are directly attributable to the philosopher's engagement with these "Gnostic" texts.⁴ Finally, both Karen King and David Brakke have recently argued that instead of thinking of "Gnostic Christianity" as "a reaction to or rebellion against some 'mainstream' Christian thought," we ought to understand works such as the *Secret Revelation of John* as setting "the agenda for subsequent Christian theology," an agenda that we see someone such as Origen taking up.⁵ For instance, just as dialogic interaction with "Gnostics" in his circle at Rome forced Plotinus and his followers to refine and develop their ideas on a number of key issues, including the nature and order of spirits populating the cosmos, Origen was compelled to produce alternative

cosmological and hermeneutical accounts to those of certain members of his circle in Alexandria, and to include in those accounts clear refutations of what he saw as the more problematic aspects of their mythology. In other words, in addition to inciting and inspiring non-Christian philosophers, the producers and users of many of the cosmologies found in the Nag Hammadi corpus “were lively participants in an ongoing process of inventing and reinventing Christianity.”⁶

These cosmologies operate in narrative and mythologizing modes, which may give the initial impression that they are also importantly different, in terms of content, from the philosophical discourses on spirits discussed in previous chapters. But their similarities are, in reality, greater than their apparent differences. As Karen King observes, we see that like their philosophical counterparts, the writers who crafted and redacted these mythological narratives were engaged in a totalizing project that shared a number of basic presuppositions with contemporary late Platonism. King writes: “Those who wrote the *Secret Revelation of John* did exactly what they say Christ does. They read a wide variety of the most prestigious intellectual and literary materials of antiquity as fragments and partial perceptions, none of which contain the whole story, but all of which are at once construed as part of the same story . . . as the accumulated wisdom of the human race.”⁷ This wide variety of materials included “Hebrew scriptures, Jewish apocalyptic and wisdom traditions, Platonizing philosophy, Stoicism, astrological treatises, Johannine literature and more.”⁸ The final aim was to produce a harmonized and totalizing vision of all respected ancient wisdom. This is similar to what Porphyry does with Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, the Hippocratic works, Hebrew scripture, Homer, the Chaldaean Oracles, and other collections of oracular pronouncements. Origen works in similar ways with texts. This is not surprising, seeing that both Origen and Porphyry’s teacher, Plotinus, were schooled in the synthetic wisdom of Ammonius Saccas, who seems to have favored a “philosophy without conflicts.”⁹ Some of the texts under consideration in this chapter may also have been written in the Alexandria of Ammonius Saccas.

In general, then, this chapter will argue that despite the fate of the texts discussed here, that is, their eventual relegation to the margins of Christian and Platonist intellectual traditions by both heresiologists of antiquity and modern scholars, they are in fact central to our understanding of early Christian apologetic, Neoplatonic philosophy, and the production of spiritual taxonomies in late antiquity. The chapter will further demonstrate, using a number of case studies, that despite the impulse to hierarchically order the

realm of spirits, an impulse expressed more intensely in these texts than those encountered thus far, in terms of the sheer proliferation of hypostases and generations of spiritual beings, ambiguity often characterizes these beings in the spaces where narrators attempt to bring moral taxonomy and ontological order together. This phenomenon of taxonomic slippage and ambiguity represents another respect in which these cosmologies resemble their philosophical counterparts.

Problems of Definition

Texts of the sort to be discussed in this chapter have been the subject of a number of heated debates that began when they were discovered in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continue to this day. The central debate is over how to categorize these texts.¹⁰ In particular, the question has been whether these texts represent a distinct religion in antiquity that many have been inclined to label “Gnosticism,” a religion with its own communities or churches, its own ritual personnel, and its own self-understanding as importantly different from other groups such as Jews, Christians, Platonists, Hermetists, traditional Greco-Roman polytheists, and so forth. Debate on this question serves as an interesting point of entry for observing the changing landscape of scholarship on religion and philosophy in late antiquity and early Christianity. The general trend has been increasingly to reject the assertion that these texts represent a distinct and unique, albeit marginal or fringe, ancient religion called “Gnosticism,” and instead to include these texts among those demanding scholarly attention when considering the full spectrum of ideas and beliefs categorized under the headings “early Christianity” and “Middle” and “Neoplatonism.”

While it is not my aim to enter the fray on this issue, it is important to state where I stand regarding the spiritual taxonomies under discussion in this chapter. Furthermore, the matter of identifying and classifying these texts is one that speaks to discussions in other parts of this book, namely those that attempt to highlight the inextricability of religion and philosophy in late antiquity as well as to emphasize the provisional and flexible nature of the very permeable boundaries between schools of thought being constructed in this period. Scholars such as Elaine Pagels, Michael Williams, Karen King, David Brakke, and Nicola Denzey Lewis have effectively argued for bringing these texts into the center of scholarly discussion on early Christianity despite the

general tendency to leave them on the margins, a tendency based on a naïve reading of certain early Christian heresiologists and polemicists. I would also argue that given the intense level of dialogic interaction already demonstrated in this book between Christian and other philosophical schools, these texts also have something important to offer scholars of late ancient philosophy. As noted already, religious or philosophical identity was not an either/or matter. Everyone attended everyone else's schools and study circles. And this is also the case for those people whom the ancient sources identify with the texts under consideration in this chapter. For instance, Origen warns his readers about the opinions of "some even of our own people" concerning a number of key cosmological matters, as we will see, thereby implying that those "people" are part of his congregation or school.¹¹ Additionally, people with similar ideologies also frequented the circle of Plotinus, forcing the philosopher and his pupils, Porphyry and Amelius, to refute their views.

Thus, if hybridity was the religious norm in the early centuries C.E., and if clear and consistent boundary creation, policing, and maintenance were the exception, then positing the existence of a distinct religious identity or religion such as "Gnosticism" is a problematic and misleading undertaking. Instead, the more fruitful approach is likely to be the one that looks for instances of dialogue within and between texts in order to determine who was in conversation and disagreement with whom, when, and about what.

In general, then, I find myself in agreement with those scholars listed above who jettison the use of the term "Gnosticism" as anachronistic and misleading, and who read the texts found in the Nag Hammadi codices and other similar extant documents as ones that were in circulation among various Christian groups in the early centuries C.E., that is, those scholars who reject the understanding of Christian origins that posits an original, primordial, pure, or orthodox version of Christianity from which these texts represent some kind of devolution or distortion, and instead see Christianity from its earliest moments as diverse, hybrid, and encompassing a rich variety of interpretations of the figure of Jesus Christ and Hebrew scripture.¹² As with all early Christian thought, we find a deep engagement in these texts with Jewish myth, cosmology, and morality, as well as an earnest attempt to grapple with ancient philosophical traditions, especially with certain lineages within the Platonic tradition, in particular those stemming from the *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to argue from mythical narrative cosmologies to social reality, despite the fact that so many scholars make the attempt. What we can say, based on the papyrological

record and contemporary accounts, is that many of the texts within the Nag Hammadi codices, and in particular those that contain a two-tiered creation myth, had wide circulation in antiquity and were used, read, and treasured as sources of knowledge by many Christians and wisdom seekers in the first four centuries C.E.

The question then arises, how can we best read the texts usually labeled “Gnostic”? One approach that is important and useful for those studying Christianity in the fourth century is to consider the Nag Hammadi texts as a kind of corpus, asking questions about the nature of individual codices, the collection as a whole, and so forth.¹³ This approach is not as useful for scholarship on earlier epochs of Christianity and late ancient thought, such as those under consideration here. Instead, I follow Karen King’s injunction that “rather than generalize about what Gnostics believe or what Sethians believe—especially as opposed to what Christians believe—I think it best to think about particular texts,” and not insofar as they deviate from the “posited purity of Christian origins, but rather as an example of one kind of early Christian theologizing.”¹⁴

Connections Between Nag Hammadi Texts and Origen’s Cosmology

The texts this chapter will focus on as case studies that reveal connections, lines of influence, and active competition between late Platonists and “Gnostics” are the *Secret Revelation of John* and *Zostrianos*. Before considering taxonomic and demonological thinking in these so-called Gnostic texts, it is necessary to highlight the possible connections between them and the philosophers under discussion in this book. This involves giving an overview of the scholarship that demonstrates the influence of ideas found in certain of these texts on both Christian theology and Platonic philosophy in the late second and third centuries.

For a long time, as noted, scholars tended to see the more complex and controversial Nag Hammadi cosmologies as derivative of an original orthodox Christian theology.¹⁵ We now know that no such thing existed in the first four centuries. Thus these texts have been reconsidered in light of their place within the development of what we might call a “systematic Christian theology.” King describes the way in which the *Secret Revelation of John* weaves

“themes and images from ancient philosophy and religion” together in order to construct what she calls “the work’s totalizing vision of reality.”¹⁶ It is this totalizing vision that is of interest here, because the work exhibits the same kind of mandate as many of the other taxonomic works discussed thus far, including Origen’s *On First Principles*, Porphyry’s corpus in general, and Iamblichus’s *On the Mysteries*, as each grapples simultaneously with problems of metaphysics, ontology, theodicy, cosmology, ethics, soteriology, and hermeneutics, this mandate being to locate, order, and provide a rationale for spiritual diversity in the cosmos. The remarkable point implicit in King’s evaluation of the *Secret Revelation of John*, its primacy as a theological discourse, is that rather than devolving from some original, proto-orthodox Christianity, this text likely drove theologizing in the early church, inciting others to respond, hone, refine, and grapple with the problems of interpretation it posed. In other words, King’s analysis rightly inverts the order of influence presupposed by earlier scholars. Given that works such as the *Secret Revelation of John* were likely written in the second century, in large urban centers, in the context of small philosophical schools or circles, it should come as no surprise that they influenced Christian theologizing in the ways King implies.¹⁷ Indeed, we need look no further than Origen’s writings to see that many of the problems he addresses in his works arise from a desire to resolve issues posed in the cosmologies of works such as the *Secret Revelation of John* and its close textual relations.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Origen is compelled to give an account of the preexistence of souls in *On First Principles* in order to account for differences both in terms of orders of spiritual existence (i.e., between angels, daemons, and humans) and in terms of the varied circumstances of individual human lives in response to “those who come from the schools of Marcion, Valentinus, and Basilides and who assert that souls are in their nature diverse.”¹⁸ Some of these people are in his circle, and they believe, much to Origen’s dismay, that the sun, moon, and stars are fixed and unchangeable. And some believe the same even of the holy angels.¹⁹ He is also at great pains to preserve the goodness of the creator of this cosmos and of the primordial state of all created souls, including those of evil daemons.²⁰ Indeed, we might well ask whether or not Origen would have developed as extreme a position as his *apokatastasis* had he not been incited to emphasize a primordial equality and common *telos* for all souls by those who insisted on distinct origins and different ends.

Although we do not know whether Origen knew the *Secret Revelation of*

John in any form, he was familiar with and critical of ideas represented by this text, ideas that many scholars associate with a strain of early Christianity they call “Sethian Gnosticism.” I am wary of this designation in general and of many of the ways scholars have used it as a placeholder.²¹ However, there are important intertextual connections that can and have been drawn between ideas Origen critiques in his works and texts grouped under this heading, including the *Secret Revelation of John*. Tuomas Rasimus argues that the Ophite diagram Origen cites from firsthand experience in *Contra Celsum* (i.e., he has managed to get his hands on this artifact) seems to be a source for thinking on the various aeonic and archontic realms in the *Secret Revelation of John*, and hence Ophitism is some sort of precursor to “Sethian” Christianity.²² Ritual dimensions of this form of Christianity as found in the same work also seem to be prefigured in Ophite practice, rituals that Origen found bothersome, such as multiple baptisms, anointings, sealings, and the use of passwords for heavenly ascent.²³ For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that Origen’s main objections to Ophite cosmology in *Contra Celsum* and to the ideas in circulation among members of his church or school are ones clearly represented in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Origen also criticizes these kinds of works on hermeneutic grounds. In *On First Principles*, he accuses their authors of reading scripture too literally.²⁴ Presumably he would have these writers engage in a more figural analysis of problematic passages in Genesis and other Hebrew scripture. And yet, these works are not lacking in figural exegesis. As King points out, their authors had deeply imbibed Middle Platonism, which was beginning to interpret Greek myth allegorically.

Hence, it remains a vital question whether Origen would have produced his systematic theological work, *On First Principles*, had he not recognized the totalizing nature and intellectual subtlety and potency of works such as the cosmological narratives found in the Nag Hammadi codices, produced in the second century in an urban school setting much like his own catechetical school and continuing in circulation to his day and well beyond in Alexandria and the East. If his detailed and comprehensive response to the perceived threat of a long dead enemy such as Celsus is any indication, one can assume that perceived enemies from within the ranks of his own circle would warrant as much, if not more, systematic theological attention. His arguments against Celsus involve attempts to distinguish his vision of Christian cosmology and spiritual taxonomy from that of other Christians whom he refers to as Ophites, but whom Celsus certainly considered part of the larger group.

The Influence of Nag Hammadi Texts on Plotinus and His Circle

In order to understand how Porphyry's ideas on spiritual taxonomy were likely shaped and influenced by his encounters with so-called Gnostic Christians, we must step back for a moment and consider Plotinus's engagement with certain members of his circle and the texts they brought with them to discussions with this famous teacher. Although Plotinus wrote an entire treatise against these individuals, a treatise to which Porphyry gave the title "Against the Gnostics or Against Those That Affirm the Creator of the Cosmos and the Cosmos Itself to Be Evil," Jean-Marc Narbonne has recently argued that Plotinus's conversations and disagreements with these sectaries and their ideas extended across much of his philosophical career.²⁵ In other words, Narbonne challenges the scholarly consensus that "what could be called the 'Gnostic file' or 'the Gnostic disagreement' actually occupied a clearly delimited space in the Plotinian corpus" (i.e., *Enneads* 30–33).²⁶ Instead, Narbonne demonstrates that "Plotinus was familiar with Gnostic doctrines from very early on, even in Alexandria, where these were already flourishing, and certainly later in Rome, from the very first moments after he made it the home of his teaching."²⁷ In other words, Plotinus's ongoing conversations with these "Platonizing Gnostics," despite "the usual high points and low points" and despite being "woven in with other important theoretical debates" were ones that Plotinus "never lost sight of."²⁸

Narbonne does think that at some point in their relationship, Plotinus's "Gnostics" lost their status as friends and became philosophical rivals. This would help to explain the shift in tone from Plotinus's writings to Porphyry's description of these people in his biography of his teacher, an account that no longer describes these individuals as friends, nor as members of the circle. Instead Porphyry describes them as some "Christian sectaries" who had abandoned Platonic philosophy. Michel Tardieu sees evidence of this more hostile rivalry in Porphyry's work as editor of Plotinus's teachings. He claims that Porphyry's choice to publish the *Enneads* in the form of codices, which was a novel format at the time, was part of Porphyry's efforts to set his teacher on equal footing with these rivals. Plotinus's text was thereby "raised to the rank of sacred writing: its material aspects made it blend in with Christian bibles and Gnostic writings."²⁹

These writings are enumerated by Porphyry in his *Life of Plotinus*. He

writes that these Christian sectaries had “possessed themselves of works by Alexander of Libya, by Philocomus, by Demonstratus, and by Lydus, and exhibited also Revelations bearing the names of Zoroaster, Zostrianos, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Mesus, and others of that order.”³⁰ A number of texts with names similar to or the same as those listed by Porphyry appear in the Nag Hammadi codices. Many scholars believe that the Nag Hammadi texts are in fact the same or later redactions with relevantly similar content to those circulating in Plotinus’s school.³¹ It is therefore very likely that Porphyry read some of these works, including *Zostrianos*, a work against which one of Plotinus’s other students, Amelius, wrote a forty-book refutation. Porphyry brought his own expertise as a text critic to bear on the Zoroastrian volume, showing it to be “spurious and modern, concocted by the sectaries in order to pretend that the doctrines they had embraced were those of the ancient sage.”³² When we consider the efforts of Amelius and Porphyry in light of Narbonne’s argument regarding Plotinus’s long-standing preoccupation with the philosophical positions of his so-called Gnostic interlocutors, a new picture of the third-century intellectual landscape emerges, a landscape whose contours we will continue to trace in Chapter 4. What we begin to see when considering the engagement of late Roman Platonists with their “Gnostic” peers is that this landscape is both more expansive and more complex than is often recognized.

The aforementioned references in the *Life of Plotinus* and in the *Enneads* to the engagement and interaction between Plotinus (and his students) and these Christians in Rome have elicited a great deal of scholarly attention since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices and the surprising appearance therein of texts attributed to Allogenes (“the Foreigner” or “Alien,” a title of Seth) and Zostrianos. Mention is also made of Messos (or Mesus) and Zoroaster in other works. Initially, attention focused on Plotinus’s criticism of their ideas. This criticism was mainly directed at the wild proliferation of hypostases and emanations of spiritual beings found in the “Gnostic” cosmologies, their apparent obsession with problems of theodicy and related questions of human suffering and injustice in this world, and the place of ritual in purifying the body and soul from daemonic influence and preparing it for union with divinity. Furthermore, Plotinus registered his disagreement with the view that this world was fashioned by a deficient or evil demiurge.³³ The problem for Plotinus, however, was that he himself often presented the material realm in terms of deficiency because of the impossibility of perfectly expressing form in matter, which he considered to be the principle of evil. Indeed, Plotinus

appears to have struggled with the problem of evil, not in relation to questions of theodicy, but rather in ontological terms, that is, in terms of the link he endeavored to make between evil as nonbeing and matter as the principle of evil. This struggle is evident when one reads a number of his treatises side by side.³⁴ These sorts of differences have inspired other scholars to look for development and change in Plotinus's positions on key philosophical questions across the *Enneads*, and to ask what might have inspired Plotinus to rethink and fine-tune his ideas on certain issues. Because Plotinus's discourse in reference to the "Christian sectaries" in his circle is critical and polemical, it took scholars some time to entertain the possibility that Plotinus and members of his school may have been influenced by the cosmological and metaphysical ideas of their interlocutors. But over the past two decades this is precisely the avenue of research that people such as Turner, Rasimus, Narbonne, Zeke Mazur, and Mark Edwards have pursued and with interesting results.³⁵

Turner has argued that the preponderance of philosophical and technical terminology in many of the Nag Hammadi texts is due to "an interaction between Gnostic Sethians and a presumably well-established fund of metaphysical speculation deriving from NeoPythagorean and Middle Platonic circles of the first three centuries of our era."³⁶ In particular, a number of these texts reveal familiarity with Numenius of Apamea, whom Plotinus also drew on so heavily he was accused of appropriating this thinker's ideas.³⁷ The participation in this common philosophical *koine* by Plotinus's "Gnostics," as well as their claims to have surpassed Plato, likely left Plotinus few options but to deal directly with their core philosophical assumptions. The fact that Plotinus likely contended his entire career with these figures also means his works need to be reconsidered in light of the kind of impact this dialogue may have had on his thought.

Turner's main thesis is about the possible influence the ideas in texts such as *Allogenes* may have had on Plotinus's own thinking. Turner writes, "the fact that revelations under the names of 'Allogenes,' 'Zostrianos,' and 'Zoroaster' circulated in Plotinus's seminars, coupled with the fact that doctrines refuted by Plotinus in *Enneads* 2.9 are so close to those of the 'Allogenes group,' seems to suggest that the Neoplatonists are more likely dependent on the Sethian 'Platonists' than the reverse."³⁸ The editors of the critical edition of *Zostrianos*, of whom Turner is one, lend further support to this view: "One may therefore consider the possibility that the shift from the comparatively static metaphysics typical of Middleplatonists of the first two centuries CE towards the more

dynamic emanative metaphysics of the Neoplatonists in the third century and beyond was inspired not only by Neopythagorean speculation on the arithmological derivation of ideal numbers from first principles, but also by the sort of dynamic theogonies, cosmogonical events, and the living, personified, transcendental beings that form the mythical theogonic and cosmogonic narratives of many gnostic systems.³⁹ Turner is also convinced that the *Allogenes* treatise mentioned in the *Enneads* is relevantly similar to, if not the same as, the *Allogenes* found in the Nag Hammadi codices.⁴⁰ This means that this text was written prior to Plotinus's works. The philosophical concept that, to Turner's mind, had the greatest influence on Plotinus, Porphyry, Amelius, and their successors is the structure of the Being-Life-Mind/Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad, that is, the Triple Power, which defines the first emanation from the Unknowable One or Invisible Spirit. Turner writes: "as apparently the first witness to the triads Being-Life-Mind and Existence-Vitality-Mentality, the author of *Allogenes* may have been an important contributor to the development of the Middle Platonic exegesis of passages from Plato's writings on the relation of intelligence to life and being such as *Timaeus* 395 and *Sophist* 248 C–E. . . . It very well may be that *Allogenes* was the source of Plotinus's use of these triads."⁴¹ Hence, Turner concludes that "while the philosophical roots of Plotinus have been recognized to lie certainly in Plato but also in later Platonists such as Moderatus, Numenius, Ammonius and perhaps the author of the Chaldean Oracles, among others, his debt to the Gnostic metaphysicians ought also to be recognized."⁴²

Although I am convinced by Turner's arguments regarding the likelihood that the texts he calls the "Allogenes group," some of which show up in the Nag Hammadi codices, are an important link between Middle and Neo-Platonism, I am less convinced by the chronological schema he proposes for categorizing the various extant Nag Hammadi texts he classifies as "Sethian." Turner accounts for the differences between texts such as the *Secret Revelation of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and those he calls the "Allogenes group," the largest difference being a lack of overt Christian or biblical references in the latter, by sketching a history of the "Sethian movement as reflected in their literature."⁴³ Based solely on internal textual differences, Turner plots a series of stages in the "Sethian" movement. He claims the "Sethians" started as a pre-Christian baptismal sect, became Christianized, experienced alienation, rejection, and expulsion by proto-orthodox and orthodox Christians, attached themselves to

Platonic groups, and were subsequently rejected by them.⁴⁴ He relies on what he sees as evidence within the texts themselves to construct his chronology, without any reference to historical and social context. This strikes me as a form of circular reasoning. One of his criteria for categorizing texts into stages is whether or not biblical figures such as Christ, Seth, or Adam feature prominently or at all. However, I would point out that the absence of these figures from texts does not indicate that the text was not used by Christians; the Nag Hammadi codices themselves speak against such an assumption. Finally, well into the third century, Porphyry himself is referring to the people associated with this “Allogenes group” as Christians.

In general, Turner appears to make the same mistake as many other scholars in assuming a robust Christian orthodoxy with the institutional means to alienate its perceived internecine enemies long before any such thing actually existed. This critique of Turner’s genealogy does not, however, detract from his points about the interaction between Plotinus’s circle and these Christians. Rather, by jettisoning the problematic genealogy, we again affirm the intense dialogic exchange across ideological boundaries noted so often in this book thus far. It is likely that the *Secret Revelation of John* is an earlier text than the texts of the “Allogenes group,” but there are a number of possible explanations for the differences we find among them. The most obvious of these is that the texts may well have been produced by writers working in distinct, albeit possibly related school settings. If we look, for instance, at the writings that emerge from the school setting of Ammonius Saccas in roughly the same century, the variety and volume are remarkable. It is also the case that internecine debates account for differences of opinion far more effectively than pressure from outside groups (recall the heated debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus on animal sacrifice). Given the fact that our extant copies of these texts come from later periods, we have evidence that they continued to have widespread appeal among the philosophically and theologically inclined. Finally, urban philosophical schools were rather informal, open, and fluid places where students and adherents would come and go, some remaining for years, even decades, while others attended only sporadically and for shorter periods of time. Although many of the teachers in these schools could wield considerable social and political power, as Edward Watts has recently demonstrated,⁴⁵ it is difficult to imagine, given what we know of various contemporary philosophical disagreements, between Origen and Porphyry, or between Porphyry and Iamblichus, for example, that those who read and used texts such as the

Secret Revelation of John and *Zostrianos* would have felt compelled to change or soften their philosophical positions for any reasons other than intellectual conviction.

Zeke Mazur, drawing on the work of John Turner, provides further evidence of the influence of ideas found in the Nag Hammadi texts on late Platonic thought. He argues that Plotinus's idea of *unio mystica* derives not from earlier Platonic sources but from "contemporaneous ritual practices that were thought to enable the practitioner to 'conjoin' him or herself with a god."⁴⁶ Mazur uses the term "magic" to refer to these ritual practices without really addressing the scholarly baggage this term carries with it. He also does not deal with the issue of the genre and dating of his sources precisely, drawing as he does on the so-called Greek magical papyri (published in *PGM*), the Chaldaean Oracles, Hermetic texts, and the Nag Hammadi works without explaining their differences, connections, and provenances. Despite these shortcomings, however, Mazur convincingly argues that there are no real philosophical precedents for Plotinus's unique form of *unio mystica*, and that we are forced to look elsewhere for influence.⁴⁷

The value of Mazur's study for our purposes is twofold. First, he presents us with one more instance where Plotinus's "Gnostic" interlocutors appear to have had a significant impact on the thought of the philosophical master. Second, he confirms what Gregory Shaw has likewise demonstrated in a number of important studies, namely that the interest among later post-Plotinian Platonists in rituals that lead to union with higher cosmic beings is a key component of Plotinus's life and thought as well.⁴⁸ Plotinus is often treated as anomalous in terms of his apparent lack of interest in theurgy compared with subsequent Platonists such as Iamblichus. Part of the reason for this assessment is Plotinus's own critical evaluation of "Gnostic" ritual.⁴⁹ But as Mazur argues, "the contemplative praxis Plotinus used to attain the ultimate phase of union with the one shared precise structural features with theurgy," and Plotinus "derived his own methods from contemporaneous ritual techniques which were thought to enable the practitioner to 'conjoin' his or her self with a god," which Mazur further argues are alluded to or explicitly described in Nag Hammadi texts from around the same period.⁵⁰

Using examples of mystical ascent from texts such as the Hermetic *Asclepius* (also found in the Nag Hammadi codices), *Zostrianos*, *Thought of Norea*, *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Second Treatise on the Great Seth*, *Gospel of Philip*, and *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Mazur concludes that "intimate conjunction with a deity was considered a desirable soteriological

goal in Plotinus's broader intellectual milieu."⁵¹ Although Mazur could have been more attentive to questions of chronology and provenance, his further discussion of the Greek ritual papyri materials confirms points that will be made in the next chapter, namely that we find evidence that philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, Origen, and Iamblichus were closer in terms of social class and intellectual milieu to the ritual practitioners and priests behind these papyri materials than originally assumed. The current focus on the Nag Hammadi materials brings another set of intellectuals into the picture. Given this fact, and the conclusion that the cosmological and philosophical ideas found in some of the Nag Hammadi texts were in fact influential on a number of third-century philosophers, we turn to the texts themselves to explore some of the salient ways in which a number of these works grapple with cosmic order and the nature of daemons and other intermediate spiritual beings.

We will begin with Origen, the Ophites in *Contra Celsum*, and the morally ambiguous nature of angels and daemons in the *Secret Revelation of John* before turning to a discussion of spiritual taxonomy and eschatology in a number of Porphyry's works and in the Nag Hammadi version of *Zostrianos*.

Origen and the "Gnostics"

In *Contra Celsum*, Origen devotes more than ten chapters of Book 6 to Celsus's apparent confusion between Christians and those whom Origen identifies as Ophites. In the course of his efforts to distinguish Ophites from Christians, Origen notes a number of the former's objectionable beliefs and practices. One of his main objections to the Ophites is that they misuse Hebrew terms, such as Leviathan, Behemoth, and Gehenna, in ways that do not relate to their original context—that is, his argument is in part hermeneutical. In the case of the first two, these creatures are made to represent cosmic realms.⁵² In the case of Gehenna, the Ophites neglect to take account of its significance as a place of purification via the remedial punishment of souls.⁵³ This is important for our purposes, because Origen uses similar language to describe the process of purification here to that found in *On First Principles* where he lays out his views on the return of all souls to their Creator. In other words, what likely undergirds Origen's criticism of the Ophite invocation of Gehenna is his concern that souls be able to move between orders of being, that they not be confined to static and fixed ontological and moral places in

the cosmos, a concern that informed much of his thinking on taxonomic order in *On First Principles*. And it comes as little surprise that Origen also objects to Ophite references to an accursed God.⁵⁴

In Chapter 30 of Book 6, Origen recounts Celsus's description of the "seven ruling daemons" accepted by the Ophites but whom Celsus attributes to Christian mythology. These are ordered according to theriomorphic descriptions of angelic/daemonic beings: the lion-like Michael, the bull-like Suriel, the serpent-like Raphael, the eagle-like Gabriel, the bear-like Thathabaoth, the dog-like Erataoth, and the asinine Thaphabaoth.⁵⁵ Origen states that he thought it best "to be exact in stating these matters, that we might not appear to be ignorant of those things which Celsus professed to know," but that these are clearly not "Christian" ideas.⁵⁶ It is unclear whether he objects to the theriomorphic associations of these beings, or whether he objects to the way they are used in the diagram. Given that they are seven in number, that Origen objected earlier in *Contra Celsum* to the idea that dividing the cosmos up into seven heavenly realms is a Christian conceptualization of the universe,⁵⁷ and that he then goes on in Chapter 31 to recount an Ophite ritual for ascent through various levels of the heavens, his objections seem to be focused on ritual aspects of Ophitism at this juncture.

In general, then, Origen is involved in drawing fine-grained distinctions between Ophite cosmology and rituals for divine union and what he considers to be true Christian belief and practice. Celsus's inability to see any clear differences between Ophites and Christians forced Origen to theologize on these matters in more explicit terms than he may otherwise have done. On the other hand, Origen was likely quite indebted, despite his polemic, to ideas found in writings such as the Ophite diagram and other similar sectarian texts. They posed a series of questions that Origen himself felt the need to address, and they drove him to clarify his own positions on spiritual taxonomy, perhaps even pushing him to a more extreme position than he might otherwise have adopted. What seems to have troubled Origen most about the ideas found in artifacts such as the Ophite diagram or texts in the vein of the *Secret Revelation of John*, to which we turn next, is first the idea that all spiritual creatures, for instance, humans, daemons, and angels, did not share in some sort of unitary and primordial created nature, and second that they will not all share in the same end. But it is unlikely that Origen would have stated his case as emphatically or developed so global an eschatology had he not been forced to engage with these ideas circulating among many second- and third-century Christians and their detractors. The intersection between spiritual

taxonomy and eschatology at the heart of this engagement will also serve as the basis for the conversation between Porphyry and a text such as *Zostrianos*.

It is the mention of ruling daemons, the idea of an accursed god, and problematic rituals of ascent that bring us to a more direct discussion of the taxonomic dimensions of the related text, the *Secret Revelation of John*.

Daemons and Angels in the *Secret Revelation of John*

As noted earlier, many cosmogonies found in the Nag Hammadi codices, especially those that attribute the genesis of this world to an evil or degenerate demiurge, are rich in discussions concerning a wide range of intermediate spiritual beings, including evil and morally ambiguous ones. Daemons and angels play a particularly important role in the *Secret Revelation of John*. For our purposes, we will focus on those beings that populate the Codex II version, 15 to 19. These passages contain the enumeration of those spirits that created and governed the pneumatic vessel of the spirit of Adam. This psychic body can be understood in Platonic terms as that intermediary between the incorporeal spirit and the material body that allows for the indwelling of the latter by the former. It is sometimes called the luminous body or the pneumatic vessel or vehicle.

In her book on the *Secret Revelation of John*, Karen King elaborates a rich reading of Adam's body, in terms of both its creation and its function in the soteriological drama of the text. She writes: "To say that the *Secret Revelation of John* considers the body to be evil by nature misses the complexity of the text's presentation of the human body as both map and territory, as both revelation and battleground, as the soul's ally and the demiurgic weapon against which it must struggle."⁵⁸ The creation of this body, in both its psychic and its material aspects, is the work of beings that endeavor to imprison the spirit received from the pleromic realm. As such they are usually portrayed as evil. However, by extending a number of King's insights on the pneumatic and material bodies of Adam to the spirits who create them, and by placing the *Secret Revelation of John* into dialogue with other roughly contemporary spiritual taxonomies, it may not be as easy as many scholars have thought to locate these spirits within a clearly bipolar moral taxonomy. Rather, they may in fact be characterized by a significant degree of moral ambiguity, not only playing a role in the imprisonment of the spirit in pneumatic and material corporeality,

but also providing this spirit, at least in part, with the means for its release. In this respect, the *Secret Revelation of John* resembles its Platonic counterparts discussed in Chapter 2.

In order to make this argument it is not necessary to outline the entire cosmology of the *Secret Revelation of John*. Succinctly put, the work is a reinterpretation of the Genesis myth (as well as of important elements of the Platonic cosmology found in the *Timaeus*). In this reinterpretation, the creation of this cosmos is the work of a deficient and self-deceived spirit called Yaldabaoth, himself the son of Sophia. She, as a hypostasis of the true and highest God, creates Yaldabaoth without the permission or knowledge of her fellow pleromic spirits, and predictably things go terribly wrong.⁵⁹ Yaldabaoth thinks he is the only God, and creates a vast number of archons, angels, and daemons with whom he further forms this cosmos.⁶⁰ Sophia appeals to the highest God to help remedy her disastrous blunder, and the pleromic spirits send an image to this realm.⁶¹ Upon seeing it hovering above the waters, Yaldabaoth and his minions decide to create the first man Adam “in its image” and “in their likeness.”⁶² It is at this point that they create Adam’s pneumatic body, presumably because their own basic substance is pneumatic.⁶³ In other words, they have fashioned a pneumatic vessel. When this creation fails to exhibit life because it lacks a spirit, Sophia tricks Yaldabaoth into imparting some of the spirit she gave to him to Adam’s pneumatic body.⁶⁴ Subsequently, upon recognizing this creature as their superior, the archons and rulers of this cosmos become jealous and imprison the Adamic spark in a material body.⁶⁵

The version of the *Secret Revelation of John* contained in Codex II of the Nag Hammadi corpus dwells considerably longer than the other extant versions on the creation of the pneumatic body of Adam. Indeed, as the editors of the synoptic edition of the text, Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, note, the long list of psychic parts of Adam’s body and the 365 spirits that are associated with these body parts is one of two major interpolations into the text, the other being the monologue of Providence at Codex II 30, 11–31, 25.⁶⁶

Just prior to the interpolated section containing the long list of psychic body parts and the angelic beings that create them, all versions with the exception of Codex IV contain a description of the creation of seven souls or psychic substances: a bone soul, a sinew soul, a flesh soul, a marrow soul, a blood soul, a skin soul, and a hair soul.⁶⁷ Readers of Plato’s *Timaeus* will recognize these souls. However, in the *Timaeus*, they seem to function as the pneumatic vessel itself, linking the material body with the spirit. In the Codex II version, however, they are just a preliminary step in the elaborate creation

of the psychic body. Whereas in the *Timaeus* the creation of these seven souls is a positive moment in that they will serve to order the matter that will make up the body, the *Secret Revelation of John* reinterprets the Platonic demiurgic mythology in a more ambivalent way.

The interpolated passage itself consists of a long list of spirits, specifically angels, who create and govern all the parts of Adam's pneumatic body, from his head down to his feet. It also enumerates those spirits that govern matter (*hule*), the properties that characterize it (hot, cold, moist, dry) and the passions that arise from it (grief, pleasure, desire, and fear).⁶⁸ Members of this latter group of spirits, namely the ones directly associated with matter and its properties, are called daemons. One might ask why the redactor of the version found in Codex II felt compelled to interpolate such a long and repetitive passage, especially the portions devoted to enumerating body parts. In order to answer this question, we must consider similar listing practices that we know of from antiquity. And we must ask how these lists function. First, as King notes, the Egyptians in particular seem to have held the view that human body parts were under the control or governance of various divinities or daemons.⁶⁹ Although the number of these spirits varies from source to source, there are parallels in *PGM* for conceiving of the human body as being made up of 365 parts.⁷⁰ The question remains, however, as to how this long list might be functioning in the context of this particular mythic narrative. As David Frankfurter notes, lists of daemons "represent both an abstraction of local supernatural beings—from their immediate environments and associations to a speculative arrangement . . . and a method of centralized ritual control."⁷¹ Frankfurter argues further that lists of spirits of this sort would have been used by a ritual expert who claimed the authority to "expel and protect" by pronouncing the names of multiple spirits, ambiguous and malign.⁷² This expert would do so "not to be exhaustive, but in order to demonstrate total power against the demonic in a ritual performance."⁷³ Frankfurter gives multiple examples of these kinds of lists from various extant ritual artifacts in order to show the way in which the ritual expert would demonstrate this power by using these lists as the basis for creating apotropaic devices, such as amulets, to ward off hostile powers. Frankfurter's suggestions shed possible light on the interpolated list we are considering in the *Secret Revelation of John*.

In antiquity, to know the name of a spirit was either to have some measure of power over it or to have some share in its power. This view was held in common by religious and ritual personnel across religious boundaries as well

as by many philosophers and theologians.⁷⁴ We find this view implicit in *Zostrianos* where the narrator is baptized at 7.1.6 and then sealed by a long list of “powerful helpers.” Origen also makes an argument based on this principle in *Contra Celsum* where he counters Celsus’s accusation that Christians perform miracles by incanting the names of certain daemons by explaining that Christians prevail by using the name of Jesus, which possesses great power over evil spirits.⁷⁵ Similarly, Iamblichus expresses dismay at “Hellenes” who think that they can translate divine names willy-nilly.⁷⁶ For Iamblichus, names have ritual power, in particular the names of various spirits that control and govern the cosmos and the creatures that inhabit it. This power is manifest as the ability to correct, heal, and order matter, and to release and raise up the human soul from its embeddedness in matter. Iamblichus thereby implies that the power of words, names, and religious formulas can cleanse the pneumatic vessel, the luminous or psychic body.

Perhaps for the ancient reader of the *Secret Revelation of John*, the list of spirits included in Codex II not only served an apotropaic function, but also indicated a necessary congress with these spirits in the salutary process of releasing the pleromic spirit from the material body. After all, the human being is a hybrid creature made not just in the image of the pleromic One, but also in the likeness of the world rulers.

Here again Iamblichus proves helpful in fleshing out this suggestion. First, he notes that angels are involved in freeing the spirit from matter. Second, although in *On the Mysteries* good daemons, as mentioned earlier, are rather ambivalent spirits who reinforce the bonds that tie the spirit to the body, elsewhere he writes that these spirits can also help to heal us of bodily ills. He writes “that often it is by reason of bodily necessity that we are involved in some relationship with the gods and good daemons that watch over the body; as for instance when we are purifying it from long-standing impurities or freeing it from diseases and filling it with health, or cutting away from it what is heavy and sluggish and providing it with what is light and active, or furnishing it with some other among all the goods.”⁷⁷ Thus it may be that the angels in the *Secret Revelation of John* may help in the process of purifying the body and providing for its rarefaction and for the eventual release of the spirit, but only in the event their names are known. After all, binding and loosening are two sides of the same coin. They are related ritual operations.

More generally, among many philosophical and religious intellectuals of the second through fourth centuries, the pneumatic body or luminous/etheral body bore many positive associations. In the tradition of the *Timaeus*, this

ochema (“vehicle” or “chariot”) was acquired by emanating or descending souls in the celestial realm and was envisaged as aether, air, or fire. As noted in Chapter 1, as this vehicle descended through the atmosphere of the sublunary realm, it became thicker and heavier in this sphere, where damp air, water, and earth predominate. In contemporary medical models, the pneumatic or psychic body was the force that spread throughout and enlivened the material body, circulating through the respiratory, nervous, and venal systems, allowing, in its most refined, ethereal form, for higher-order levels of reasoning. For someone such as Iamblichus, it was this Phaedrian chariot that, if properly cared for, allowed for communication with divinity both by raising up the soul and by calling down the gods. As mentioned earlier, Origen suggests in his cosmology that over time our gross materiality could be transformed into a form more appropriate to our original state as primordial spirits. The human creature could slowly come to inhabit a more angelic body, just as for Iamblichus the human soul could dwell with increasing frequency at the level of its luminous or pneumatic vessel.

For ancients working within this model, then, associations with the pneumatic or psychic body were almost universally positive. One cannot, of course, make a similar claim for either the psychic body or the spirits that create and govern it in the *Secret Revelation of John*. But neither can one say that the associations are entirely negative. Although a work such as the *Secret Revelation of John* is, in certain respects, a radically countercultural interpretation of both Genesis cosmology and Platonic demiurgy, it still relies on and indeed participates in a shared framework of conceptual categories and philosophical and ritual assumptions with these other cosmological and taxonomic discourses. The 365 spirits that map onto body parts were not likely included for either daemonological or anatomical completeness. (If the latter were the case, Adam appears to be missing his left buttock and the right side of his penis.) Rather, this list likely functioned, at least in its original state, as so many other lists of its kind, namely ritually—whether apotropaically or perhaps more positively for purposes of invocation. Indeed the line between protecting oneself from malign spirits and invoking the powers of good spirits is a difficult one to draw in ancient thinking about supernatural beings. Extant spells at times both invoke a spirit and include a formula for protection in case it turns on the one who calls it forth. Thus the presence of this list as an interpolation in Codex II carried some, if not most, of these ritual resonances.

But how might these particular spirits have served a positive end for the

adherent of the *Secret Revelation of John*? If, as Karen King has argued, the body itself (and presumably here she means both the psychic and the material bodies) serves as both “revelation and battleground,” “ally and demiurgic weapon against which it must struggle,”⁷⁸ surely the spirits involved in the ensoulment/imprisonment process will be instrumental somehow in its release.

Thus, if we read the *Secret Revelation of John* in tandem with a broader spectrum of contemporary spiritual taxonomies, we find interesting parallels with its representations of both the body (pneumatic and material) and the spirits that govern it. Although many of these philosophical discourses endeavored to demarcate clear orders of spirits and map them onto a definitive moral taxonomy of good and evil, as we’ve seen in earlier chapters, most of these systematic discourses belie a significant degree of moral ambiguity. I would argue that the spirits creating and governing the pneumatic vessel, the luminous body, of Adam in the *Secret Revelation of John* are likewise morally ambiguous. And they may have represented not only the negative cosmological moment when the Adamic spirit became disjoined from its pleromic origin but also the positive moment of its purification and release. So, at the very least, I would argue, we must suspend final judgment about the moral nature and role of the spirits who create the psychic body in the *Secret Revelation of John*, and allow for the possibility that these angels might bear some positive resemblance to their counterparts in other philosophical and ritual texts.

Furthermore, although the spirits that create Adam’s psychic body are not conceived of in clearly good moral terms, the bipolar categories of good and evil may not be the main ones at play in this text. Salvation in the *Secret Revelation of John* may be more about knowledge than about remedying sin.⁷⁹ The true end of this text, like *Zostrianos*, as we will see shortly, and contemporary Platonic philosophy, is receptivity to God or the gods—this is a goal that is, in important respects, distinct from “being good” in order to deserve salvation. Certainly the aim is to control one’s passions, which are daemonically produced or at least influenced—but controlling these emotions is less about avoiding sin than about preparing the soul and purifying it to receive divine contact.⁸⁰

We have discussed the ways in which Origen reacted to ideas represented in the Ophite diagram and the *Secret Revelation of John*. But, I would argue, we can also observe the possible influence these sorts of artifacts and texts had on his thinking. We have already noted the importance to Origen of the potential of the human being for transformation, both at the level of the soul

and at the corporeal level. Origen's emphasis on the importance of knowledge regarding one's primordial form of life, and his interpretation of the fall in Genesis in highly figural terms, may also be places where he was influenced by "Gnostic" cosmology. Furthermore, Origen conceived of angels and demons as cosmic beings battling for influence over the individual human soul.⁸¹

Spirits in *Zostrianos*

As mentioned earlier, a great deal of recent scholarly attention has been focused on the influence of various "Sethian" Christian metaphysical innovations on the thought of Plotinus and his school, including the influence this group may have had on Porphyry. Most of this work has concentrated on similarities between the two groups at the highest levels of their respective spiritual hierarchies, namely on the transcendent One and the first few hypostatic levels below it.⁸² The scholars pursuing this line of research have not focused much if any attention on shared ideas concerning lower spiritual beings, such as daemons or human souls. And yet here too we find evidence of an ongoing exchange. We have already entertained the possibility that while Porphyry likely got many of his ideas on evil daemons from Origen, he may have taken his position that they cause disease and illness from the so-called Gnostics whom Plotinus mocks for holding this view. We also find evidence of exchange when we look at *Zostrianos*, one of the works Porphyry mentions in his *Life of Plotinus*, in tandem with some of his own writings.

The figure of *Zostrianos* was considered by many late Roman readers of Plato's *Republic* to be the grandfather of Er the Pamphylian, who, by the third century, was assimilated to Zoroaster.⁸³ Turner suggests that by invoking this lineage, the author "implicitly claimed an authority more ancient than Plato himself for his version of Platonic metaphysics and approach to the knowledge of transcendent reality."⁸⁴ The use of the figure of *Zostrianos* is interesting in its own right, because part of the text is concerned with a discussion of the fates of various kinds of souls and their chances for salvation. These passages are reminiscent of passages found in the *Secret Revelation of John*, Codex II, which also enumerates types of souls, and whether they will undergo reincarnation, punishment, reformation, and so forth. It is not a stretch to assume that these passages take their cues not just from Judeo-Christian eschatology, but also from Platonic passages such as the Myth of Er in the *Republic*.⁸⁵ The interpretive approach of the text and its claims to be an authoritative

discourse penned by a figure in the lineage of Er may have been what incited Amelius to respond at such great length. It may also, however, have been what incited Porphyry to write a number of works devoted to the same questions. In fact, my argument in what follows is that Porphyry was compelled to address this topic on at least three different occasions precisely because it figures so prominently in *Zostrianos*. This argument is strengthened by the fact that the topic of reincarnation is barely addressed by Plotinus, despite its significant prominence in mythologizing passages in the works of Plato (*Phaedo* 113d–114c, *Gorgias* 523a–526c, *Phaedrus* 248c–249c, *Republic* X 614b–621b). Furthermore, in *Zostrianos*, the topic is linked with the general soteriological vision of the text, a vision that involves a robust ritual or theurgical program. In other words, Porphyry's apparent need to address questions regarding the moral dimensions of the process of reincarnation, its cosmic "geography," and spiritual taxonomy is likely a direct result of the fact that theologizing on this particular aspect of Platonic tradition is central to a work such as *Zostrianos*.

In the introduction to his translation of Porphyry's *On What Is in Our Power*, James Wilberding advances the view that Porphyry's lost commentary on the *Republic* was in fact "limited to the Myth of Er," and that this work was one and the same with the work *On What Is in Our Power*, a treatise devoted to the question of whether or not reincarnating souls have any choice in the kind of embodied existence they will lead next.⁸⁶ Although Porphyry does not mention the Myth of Er in his other work on philosophical questions pertaining to the afterlife, *On the River Styx*, and although Robert Lambertson admits that it is impossible to say whether reflecting on the Myth of Er was important to Porphyry at the time of writing this text, the significant degree of overlap, at least in terms of types of questions raised and taxonomic answers given, in conjunction with the relative infrequency with which Plotinus focused on these topics, suggests that Porphyry may have been inspired to write on these subjects as a result of both his own reading of *Zostrianos* and exchanges with the members of Plotinus's circle who brought this text to his attention.⁸⁷ Additionally, other aspects of *Zostrianos*, namely its recurring baptisms, invocations, and other ritual prescriptions, may have incited Porphyry to engage in reflection on the use of ritual in the philosophical pursuit of salvation. In other words, his strong reaction to Iamblichus's theurgic soteriology may have been the result of an earlier attunement to the problem of the place of ritual in the philosophical life following upon his readings of texts such as *Zostrianos*. Both Iamblichus and the author of *Zostrianos* imply that ritual can get

one all the way to communion with the highest god(s), when used in conjunction with contemplation and moral self-discipline.

Zostrianos is the story of a spiritual journey through the cosmos. In it, the narrator describes his ascent from his earthbound existence to the very edge of the Aeon of Barbelo. At each level, he receives a “transcendental baptism” along with instruction about the kinds of souls one encounters in each of the cosmic realms he traverses. In many respects, the text bears most immediate resemblance to the so-called Mithras Liturgy.⁸⁸ For instance, *Zostrianos* must pass unnoticed through the sublunar aeons and does so by being hidden in a luminous cloud, itself a “vitalizing spirit and an intelligent reason.”⁸⁹ He is taught prayers and invocations appropriate to the various celestial and supra-celestial regions he travels through, and so forth. In other respects, however, the text belies interest in questions closely resembling those of the philosophers encountered in earlier chapters. Like *On the Mysteries*, the text is concerned about enumerating the various spiritual beings that populate the universe. It also describes their natures, modes of participation in various ontological states, and their relations with the highest beings. Furthermore, like Iamblichus, the author of *Zostrianos* creates a narrative about the interconnections between philosophical striving, ritual purity and efficacy, and the possibility that a select few can attain visionary experience of the highest orders by becoming akin to, in *Zostrianos*’s case, an angel, in Iamblichus’s, a god.⁹⁰ The author of *Zostrianos* is also exercised by questions that drive much of Origen’s and Porphyry’s thinking about their fellow ensouled incarnate beings of various kinds (keeping in mind that for all of these thinkers, angels and daemons have bodies). At 7.22–8.7, *Zostrianos* asks his guide the following questions: “Does soul differ from soul? Why are human beings different from one another? How and to what extent are they human?”⁹¹ As we know from earlier discussions, these questions are related to concerns about the highest god’s providential care and human free will, in other words, some of the most important concerns of later Platonism.

We immediately see a resemblance to Origen’s questioning in *On First Principles* where he expresses concern regarding the different kinds of circumstances into which humans are born. We observed in Chapter 2 that his explanation for these differences extended to all spiritual beings: angels, daemons, humans, and even the soul of Jesus Christ, and possibly Satan himself.

As we have seen repeatedly, discourses focused on spiritual taxonomy were inextricably bound up with theorizing about salvation for late Roman

intellectuals working in a Platonic lineage. The similarities between the questions posed and answered by a work such as *Zostrianos* and, for instance, Origen's *On First Principles* or a number of Porphyry's treatises are striking and important. And it is clear that both Porphyry and the author of *Zostrianos* were drawing on the same Platonic texts, especially the *Republic* and *Phaedo*, and interpreting them figurally.

Although it is likely the case that Porphyry felt compelled to write on these topics in part because he wished to provide a corrective to some of the thinking he found in the texts that Christian sectaries were bringing into Plotinus's school, there is also evidence that he was influenced by them. This influence is most clearly manifest in his discussion of the highest levels of his cosmic hierarchy. This is not surprising, as this is also where we find the most influence in his teacher's writings. However, it is also apparent at lower levels, including at the point where different types of human souls are enumerated. This usually occurs in the context of discussing what happens to souls when they are in transition, in some sort of liminal state, whether descending for the first time, or on their way to some other form of afterlife existence.

As mentioned earlier, Porphyry addresses these questions in a number of different works: *On What Is in Our Power*, *On the River Styx*, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, and *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled*. This latter work was, for some time, attributed to Galen. Although the confusion is understandable, as the work displays considerable familiarity with contemporary medical theory in general and embryology in particular, its main argument that the embryo is essentially a plant until the moment of birth, when the animal or rational soul descends into the body, is essentially philosophical or even theological.⁹² In this work, Porphyry is attempting to fill in key details about the process of reincarnation and its relationship to astrology and spiritual taxonomy. Hence, although it does not display overt influence from a work such as *Zostrianos*, it can be read as part of a Porphyrian corpus of texts devoted to setting the record straight on the problem of the fate of souls. *On the River Styx*, however, does seem to have borrowed from *Zostrianos*.

Zostrianos devotes a number of passages to the question of the fate of different kinds of souls. Two related passages (26, 19–28, 30 and 42, 6–44, 22) focus on types of incarnate souls and their prospects for salvation. In the first of these, the author(s) describes the realms souls may inhabit, whereas the second outlines the “character and conduct of candidates for membership in these aeons and the need for salvation.”⁹³ These aeons are named Sojourn, Repentance, and Self-Generated Aeon. Souls in the Sojourn category “do not

have self-generated power” and merely “follow the way of others.”⁹⁴ They are neither very good nor very bad. Those in the category of Repentance are aware of sin, and although they still may sin, they strive to live moral lives. This class is further divided into three: “those who have sinned,” “those who have repented,” and “those who intend to repent.”⁹⁵ Finally, souls in the Self-Generated Aeon have an “ineffable knowledgeable, rational account of the truth, as well as self-generated [power] and eternal [life].”⁹⁶ They are further subdivided into those who “have the forms of angels, those who love the truth, those who hope, and those who believe.”⁹⁷ The author returns to these various categories later in the text when he describes these souls in embodied form, living with what is dead, that is, matter. Those who sojourn and repent can attain salvation. Others are described as “dead,” that is, completely involved with the material. These persons will not be saved and are possibly described as “daemons that the fire consumes.”⁹⁸

Hence, salvation in this text, the ordering of spirits according to their soteriological journey from preincarnate, incarnate, and postincarnate existence, is a function of the recognition of wrongdoing, repentance, and rational knowledge. In this respect, the text appears to combine a Platonic understanding of evil as a function of ignorance and involvement with matter with a Christian one that identifies evil with sin. But unlike the spiritual taxonomies that Origen and other philosophers criticized for insisting on the existence of distinct, fixed, and static orders of soul, *Zostrianos* seems to subscribe to the view that souls are in control of their own cosmic fate in terms of both their preexistence and their embodied life. In this respect, he is very close to both Origen and Porphyry. In his work *On What Is in Our Power*, Porphyry affirms that souls have a considerable amount of choice in determining the kind of life they will live when reincarnated. Furthermore, the author of *Zostrianos* also resembles the philosophers under consideration in this book in that he seems to maintain that this flexibility allows souls to become more and other than human: they can become either daemonic, as is the case of materialistic persons with “dead souls,” or angelic, as is the case of the souls in the Self-Generated Aeon and higher reaches of the spiritual cosmos.

The question remains, however, how the taxonomy of human souls in *Zostrianos* bears some relation to Porphyry’s and may, in fact, have incited Porphyry to reflect on this precise issue more deeply than he otherwise might have. The fact that Porphyry also subdivides souls into three general classes, based on the kind of earthly existence they have led, in terms of both their pursuit of knowledge and their moral actions, seems to signal some form of

influence. *On the River Styx*, as we know from Chapter 2, is concerned about what happens to souls after they die. Taking his point of departure from certain verses of Homer, Porphyry divides souls into three different groups. First, some souls inhabit the terrestrial realm. These souls are still embodied in either human bodies or those of other animals. The remaining souls are no longer incarnate.⁹⁹ Of these, some retain memories of life in the body, while others are freed from these memories. Memory here serves as a kind of punishment and corrective.¹⁰⁰ We have already noted the ways in which this form of punishment and correction bears important resemblances to the way in which the deeds of one's life serve to punish and purify one in Origen's account of the afterlife. But they also resemble souls in *Zostrianos's* realm of Repentance. Finally, the truly blessed souls who now longer remember their life on earth resemble souls in the Self-Generated Aeon.

The similarities between *Zostrianos* and Porphyry's own reflections on pneumatic taxonomy with regard to the preexistence and afterlife of souls suggest that like Plotinus, Porphyry not only vehemently opposed certain "Gnostic" views, but was also influenced by them. Just as Plotinus incorporated and refined ideas he encountered among certain members of his circle about the triadic first emanation, that is, the highest levels of his spiritual hierarchy, it seems that Porphyry was likewise influenced by the texts these members were reading and circulating on questions of lower emanational strata. Although Porphyry is dismissive of these "Gnostics" in his biography of Plotinus, his scholarly activities belie the degree to which he took seriously their claims to be in possession of the true philosophical and ritual path, namely his own written response to the book of Zoroaster, as well as his numerous works on questions about the fate of souls and its relation to spiritual taxonomy.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that in addition to the competitive interactions philosophers such as Origen, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were having with each other, they were also in dialogue with other intellectuals often mislabeled by contemporary heresiologists and modern scholars as "Gnostics." The polemic of these late ancient philosophers has obscured the fact that in many cases they were profoundly influenced by these encounters. They were inspired to adopt certain innovations from their interlocutors.

They were also incited to develop more extreme positions than they might otherwise have done and to fine-tune their thinking where they might have left certain ideas unelaborated. Focusing on the taxonomic thinking in a number of these so-called Gnostic texts has allowed us to see these intertextual connections more clearly. The next chapter will consider another category of interlocutors for these late Platonists, namely the experts who produced ritual handbooks such as those found collected in the Greek magical papyri and related artifacts. I will argue that these exchanges were competitive, and like the exchanges between late Platonists and the authors, redactors, and users of certain Nag Hammadi texts, a good deal of scholarship from the late nineteenth century to the present has obscured these exchanges by categorizing the producers and users of these handbooks as “magicians.” By tracking the respective social locations of our philosophers and these ritual experts, we can see that the two “groups” were far closer in terms of milieu, and likely in greater dialogue and competition, than most scholars have heretofore considered.

Chapter 4

High Priests of the Highest God: Third-Century Platonists as Ritual Experts

The real philosopher has knowledge of many things: he notes signs, he understands the facts of nature, he is intelligent and orderly and moderate, protecting himself in all respects. And just as a priest of one of the particular gods is expert in setting up cult-statues of this god, and in his rites and initiations and purifications and the like, so the priest of the god who rules all is expert in the making of his cult statue and in purifications and the other rites by which he is linked to the god.

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER addressed the interactions between intellectuals such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Origen and one set of theological competitors, namely the writers, redactors, and users of certain so-called Gnostic cosmologies. This chapter turns to another group of competitors, equally mysterious, equally misunderstood, namely the priestly figures behind the writing, redaction, preservation, and use of certain so-called magical handbooks. It is in the context of this competition that the Platonists under discussion in this book take on a hieratic status in addition to advancing their claims to be able to pronounce on theological matters.

From Plato, perhaps even Pythagoras onward, philosophers reflected on their relation to and role in the contemporary social and political order. They frequently argued that their pursuit of wisdom and the insight it yielded

served as the basis for their ability to advise rulers and weigh in on matters pertaining to the ideal governance of cities and states.¹ In the third century, figures such as Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus refashioned the identity of the philosopher to include another facet, namely ritual expertise and the access it yielded to divinity.² This access could be put to use on behalf of both individual souls and states.³ All three philosophers used hieratic terms to construct this new identity. Furthermore, they did not merely identify themselves with ordinary priests, but as “priests of the god who rules all” (θεοῦ τοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἱερεῦς).⁴ And they did so, as this chapter will demonstrate, at the expense of the reputation of other hieratic figures. The discourses these three philosophers constructed were one aspect of their efforts to demote and discredit other ritual experts who were attempting to overcome marginalization under Roman rule, and who, like our philosophers, were endeavoring to carve out new areas of influence and authority for themselves. Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus associated ordinary priests with the worship of lesser spirits within this hierarchy and reserved the title of high priest for themselves. We have already seen the way in which both Porphyry and Origen associated practices of traditional priests, namely animal sacrifices, with the worship of evil daemons. These thinkers also used their ability to discern and delimit demonic actions to give weight to their own authority. But even Iamblichus, the champion of blood sacrifice and defender of traditional rites as part of his theurgic system, was involved in minimizing or excluding the importance of other ritual experts in order to establish himself and other theurges like him as the highest authority on divine and cultic matters.

The taxonomic discourses produced by these philosophers served as a textual basis for their claims to expertise and authority. As David Frankfurter notes, such claims are often grounded in this sort of discourse about spirits. Writers and ritual experts working in a taxonomic mode seek to impose an order on the amorphous realm of spirits. These self-defined spiritual experts then show “the evil system behind inchoate misfortune,” offering their audience “the tangible hope of purifying it.”⁵ Before establishing that this is the case among third-century Platonists, we need to do two things. First, we need to address what we mean by the term “priest” or “ritual expert” in this context, and second we need to consider how Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus incorporate the figure of the high priest into their identity as philosophers. We also need to see how their hieratic status intersects with their expertise with regard to spiritual taxonomy.

What Is a “Priest”?

The term “priest” is a highly problematic one, as Albert Henrichs points out in his article “What Is a Greek Priest?”⁶ In general, this Christian term is used to refer to any and all “cult-related public and private offices known from antiquity.”⁷ Henrichs points out that this understanding is very different from the connotations associated with the term in a Christian context, “connotations of a personal religious vocation or sanctity.”⁸ Children, adolescents, women, and men of varying social classes could all be “priests” in traditional Greco-Roman cult. Henrichs identifies and critiques two hundred years of scholarly attempts to grapple with the problems of classifying ancient non-Christian ritual personnel.⁹

When we turn to Greek terminology for ritual offices and expertise, for instance, we often find it difficult to puzzle out the key differences between positions, differences that would have been apparent to ancient people, differences between titles such as *hierēus*, *hieropoios*, *hierothutēs*, *arētēr*, *theopropos*, and *mantis*.¹⁰ The problem of terminology is further complicated in this study, because we are dealing with intellectuals from different “religious backgrounds.” Origen, for instance, would have been thinking about hieratic authority along both Jewish and Greco-Roman lines, depending on whether he was involved in interpreting Hebrew scripture or arguing against someone such as Celsus.

Although I am unable to completely follow Henrichs’s recommendation that scholars banish the misleading term “priest” altogether and use emic nomenclature instead, I do take seriously his cautionary note that the “anachronistic misnomer” needs to be “queried and guarded against.”¹¹ That being said, I do think that, based on scholarship discussed later in this chapter, the experts that stand behind many of the ritual papyrus handbooks known as the Greek magical papyri can legitimately be thought of as priests, in the sense that they belonged to a traditional hereditary class. I follow the insights of David Frankfurter and Jacco Dieleman, in particular, in pointing to disenfranchised Egyptian priests under Roman rule.

When it comes to our philosophers taking on a hieratic status, we are dealing with something far more ad hoc and informal. This can even be said of Origen, who spent part of his life as a Christian priest. As we will see, his case reveals that even Christian authority and ritual expertise were still under construction in the third century. Porphyry and Iamblichus use the term

hiericus in its ideal sense to refer to someone with knowledge of the “hieratic arts” as a set of practices aimed at the salvation of the soul, that is, knowledge of salvific actions. These actions are god-given, as we saw in Chapter 2, woven into the very fabric of the cosmos and the relations between various ontological orders. For these philosophers, a ritual expert or priestly figure seems to be an individual working with these cosmic connections for some specific aim, whether it be self-serving, such as avoiding fate or achieving some personal end, or for the benefit of the entire cosmos (e.g., Iamblichus’s ideal theurge).

Origen and Priestly Authority

Origen discusses priestly authority in many places in his works, but the topic figures most prominently in his *Homilies on Leviticus*, where he reflects on the meanings of the high priest in Hebrew scripture. In these sermons, he employs a number of different levels of interpretation.¹² Sometimes he discusses the Israelite priests and the prescriptions that pertain to them in very literal terms, marking the difference between the conditions that obtained in earlier epochs and conditions in the post-Resurrection age. He also figurally interprets the priestly role and the Levitical laws in great detail. In this context, priests come to stand for a wide range of different things. At times, Origen’s interpretive focus is on Christian priests. In other instances, the Israelite priests stand for any true Christian. In other homilies, Christ is the high priest, the ideal intercessor on behalf of the sinful community, because he spilled not the blood of animals but his own blood. Origen moves between these levels, deploying a wide range of interpretive strategies. And at times his maneuvers are difficult to follow. However, he is very clear in this corpus of sermons about certain connections he wishes to draw between the high priests he interpreted allegorically and the real priests of the Christian church, an order to which he himself belonged.

Origen’s status as a presbyter was not, however, uncontested—a fact that may have contributed to his eagerness to associate himself with the high priests of the ancient Hebrews. Origen’s troubles seem to have begun even before he was ordained. In spite of the fact that the patriarch of Alexandria, Demetrius, had put Origen in charge of teaching catechumens, he objected to Origen’s teaching in church, something Origen did when he visited Bishops Alexander of Jerusalem and Theoctistus of Caesarea in Palestine around 215. Demetrius, hearing word of Origen’s preaching in Caesarea at the enthusiastic

behest of the two bishops, ordered the philosopher back to Alexandria.¹³ The tensions between the two continued over the next decade. Jerome's Letter XXXIII *ad Paulam* suggests that the enmity was fueled by jealousy on the part of Demetrius because of Origen's popularity as a teacher.¹⁴ It likely didn't help that Origen did not see bishops "per se as guardians of true doctrine."¹⁵ The situation reached a crisis when Origen made a second trip through Palestine en route to Athens. On this journey, the same bishops who had earlier asked him to preach ordained him by laying their hands on him. When Origen returned to Alexandria, he found his presence wholly unwelcome and decided to move permanently to Caesarea around 231. Demetrius called a synod of Egyptian bishops in order to bar Origen from ever teaching in Alexandria again, and shortly thereafter he also had Origen excommunicated. This decision was affirmed by the bishop of Rome.¹⁶

Origen lived and worked as a priest and teacher in Caesarea until 251 when he was imprisoned and tortured during the Decian persecution. But even during this period, as Pier Franco Beatrice argues, he was involved in actively trying to rehabilitate his status and reputation as a priest beyond Palestine. According to Beatrice, Origen went back to Alexandria after the death of Ammonius Saccas (242), his philosophy teacher of ten years.¹⁷ He may have been trying to reestablish himself as a teacher in Alexandria under the patriarchate of his former student and friend Heraclas. But the new bishop also had Origen expelled (243–44).¹⁸ On Beatrice's account, Origen proceeded to travel to Rome, via Athens, perhaps to appeal directly to Emperor Philip the Arab and his wife Severa (244–49).¹⁹ Whether or not Beatrice is correct in his chronology and his evaluation of Origen's actions and intentions, Origen's status as a presbyter was in question in a number of places outside Palestine, including in his homeland of Egypt, for at least the last two decades of his life.

Hence, the struggle between Origen and various Alexandrian bishops, both before and after his ordination, signals that Christian priests and bishops are also a key part of the picture this book is sketching when it comes to addressing questions of the relation between the production of spiritual taxonomies and the exercise of ritual expertise, especially of the kind focused on locating and controlling spirits. For instance, we should never forget the centrality of exorcism to the preparation of catechumens for baptism. Priests and bishops had been in the business of exorcising and ritually interacting with the realm of spirits as experts for a long time already.²⁰ Hence, as philosophers began to take on the persona of the priest, they increasingly moved into competition with Christian priests, bishops, and exorcists. Although Christian

priests are not the main focus of this chapter's argument, Origen's biography puts them on the map, and they must be taken account of as part of the overall landscape of ritual expertise in late antiquity.

We have a number of indications that Origen's thinking was directed toward these concerns about priestly authority. As David Brakke notes, Origen articulated a model of authority in which the "ideal Christian leader received the gift (*charisma*) of insight into the higher meaning of the Scriptures."²¹ Origen agreed with Clement that "ordination as a bishop or presbyter did not coincide with teaching authority," and he held the view that "the spiritually gifted person, the real bishop, was not always the visible bishop."²² Rather, for Origen, true priests are known by their dedication to the divine word and to the worship of God.²³

Hence, these concerns about Origen's ordination and priestly standing should be placed alongside his statements about the priesthood in his *Homilies on Leviticus* if one is to understand how these sermons may have functioned to legitimate the Christian priesthood in general and Origen's own position as a presbyter in particular.

Origen's High Priests

In *Homily 2*, Origen identified the high priest as the one "who was anointed; he who kindles fires on divine altars; who sacrifices to God gifts and salutary offerings; he who intervenes between God and men as a propitiator."²⁴ One might be inclined to think that here Origen was speaking of Christ, but in fact he was not. For Origen qualifies this otherwise positive portrait of the high priest with the proviso that he cannot be entirely free from sin. Given Origen's definition of Christ in *On First Principles* as the one primordial soul that did not turn away from God in any measure, Origen cannot be referring to him here. What sets the priest apart from other sinners, however, is that "he knows and understands his own sin."²⁵ Hence, the high priest is characterized by self-knowledge. In *Homily 6*, while reviewing the process by which a high priest is chosen, Origen once again affirms that insight and wisdom distinguish the priest from the rest of the congregation: "For in ordaining a priest, the presence of the people is also required that all may know and be certain that from all the people one is chosen for the priesthood who is more excellent, who is more wise, who is more holy, who is more eminent in every virtue."²⁶

As indicated in the Preface to *On First Principles*, the wisdom of the philosopher-priest includes “profound doctrines” about the origin, nature, and fate of all rational souls, all spiritual beings, both good and evil. In other words, the kind of knowledge set out by Origen in his systematic spiritual taxonomy, his cosmology and soteriology, which encompass humans, angels, and evil spirits, as discussed in Chapter 2. Understanding of these doctrines, which in *Contra Celsum* he called “esoteric and mysterious” (ἔσωπεριχῶν καὶ ἔσποπτιχῶν), was not granted to everyone in apostolic teachings.²⁷ Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, the realm of spirits was, for the most part, left unexplained in apostolic teachings and provided “lovers of wisdom” with “an exercise on which to display the fruit of their ability.”²⁸ In the beginning of his *Commentary on John*, Origen associates this order of wise exegetes and philosophers with the high priests of the order of Aaron and distinguishes them from run-of-the-mill believers, a distinction we have seen him make in both *Contra Celsum* and *On First Principles*.²⁹ He writes:

Most of us who approach the teachings of Christ, since we have much time for the activities of life and offer a few acts to God, would perhaps be those from the tribes who have a little fellowship with the priests and support the service of God in a few things. But those who devote themselves to the divine Word and truly exist by the service of God alone will properly be said to be Levites and priests in accordance with the excellence of their activities in this work. And, perhaps, those who excel all others and who hold, as it were, the first places of their generation will be high priests in the order of Aaron.³⁰

So the priest, the one who exceeds all others in wisdom, knows all about the various spiritual beings that inhabit the cosmos, as well as the specific roles they play in the salvation of the human soul. According to Origen’s sixth homily on Leviticus, this priest also knows about the hidden meaning of rituals, in particular, the ritual of sacrifice.³¹

Origen carefully performs his own identity as one of these high priests in the course of interpreting various aspects of Levitical sacrificial rites in his sermons. For instance, in *Homily 6*, he carefully translates each piece of the priestly vestments in minute detail.³² In *Homily 1*, he figurally interprets every step of a traditional sacrifice of a calf. And in *Homily 2*, he explains the hidden meanings of different kinds of sacrificial animals. When discussing the

sacrifice of a calf in *Homily 1*, Origen explains that this animal is the flesh that must be sacrificed and the priest “is in you the mind which is also its understanding in you who are rightly called a priest and ‘sons of a priest’.”³³ Here the Platonic faculty of mind, traditionally associated with the philosopher and the wise ruler, is transposed into a religious mode and becomes the priest.

In different places, Origen gave accounts of both Hebrew and Greek ritual. In the case of the former, he interpreted the Levitical prescriptions regarding blood sacrifice in figural terms in such a way as to preclude the necessity of actually performing such sacrifices. The only ritual he claimed was necessary and efficacious after Christ’s resurrection was baptism, a process involving extensive teaching and multiple exorcisms.³⁴ When it came to interpreting Greek sacrifice, his main contention, like that of so many other Christian thinkers before him (but also like Porphyry), was that all blood sacrifices were made to evil daemons posing as gods and good spirits. As noted in Chapter 1, implicit in Origen’s association of evil daemons with blood sacrifices was the understanding that the personnel who perform them, namely priests of traditional cult, were in service to spiritual beings other than the highest god or gods. Rather, they offered worship to evil spirits. Chapter 1 also noted the ways in which Porphyry agreed with Origen’s assessment in these matters.

Porphyry’s Priest of the “God Who Rules over All”

Porphyry not only used the demonization of blood sacrifice to demote ordinary priests of local and civic cult; he also implicitly downgraded their other less polluting ritual activities, thereby demarcating the significant chasm that separated the philosopher-priest from other ritual experts. In a passage already discussed in the previous chapter (*On Abstinence* 2.34.1–6), Porphyry associates his philosopher-priest with the imageless, immaterial, silent, unmediated worship of the highest god. The philosopher may also worship this god’s offspring, the intelligible gods, with hymn singing. He concludes, “So, as the farmer offers corn-ears and fruits, so we offer them fine thoughts about them, giving thanks for what they have given us to contemplate, for feeding us with the true food of seeing them, present with us, manifesting themselves, shining out to save us.”³⁵ The juxtaposition of the philosopher-priest with the farmer offering even bloodless sacrifices, although subtle, would have had a certain resonance for fellow readers of Plato’s works, especially the *Republic*. Although Porphyry does not directly associate ordinary priests with these farmers, the

offerings in each instance do the work for him. In other words, even if priests abstain from blood sacrifice, any material offering (with the exception of fire, which philosophers offer to the visible gods—the sun, moon, planets, and stars) relegates them to the worship of lower, albeit still morally good, spiritual beings in Porphyry’s cosmic hierarchy.

His next statement serves to confirm this view by further distinguishing the true philosopher from even those people who study philosophy and still frequent sites of worship. He writes, “But as it is, people, even many of those who are committed to philosophy, hesitate to do this [i.e., offer the gods fine thoughts alone]. Concerned for reputation rather than for honoring the gods, they circulate round the shrines, not even considering how or whether the approach should be made, nor committed enough to ask those who are wise about the gods, how far and to what extent one should venture in this area.”³⁶ Presumably the personnel administering the worship at these shrines are not the wise persons of whom he is speaking. On the other hand, the priest of the highest god would possess this sort of insight.³⁷

On this point, namely that the high priest is the one who serves the highest god, and that one becomes a priest of this kind by living a philosophical sort of life, Porphyry and Origen were in agreement. On the characterization of Origen, this high priest is the one who is most eminent in knowledge and wisdom by having made a study of things mysterious and esoteric. Porphyry also refers to the true philosopher as a high priest, or as the “priest of the god who rules all,” and as the “priest of the father.”³⁸ Porphyry’s endeavors to cast the philosopher in the role of high priest is in keeping with his more general philosophical elitism. As Aaron Johnson notes, in contrast to Joseph Bidez’s attempts to represent Porphyry as a popularizer, the philosopher’s “pedagogy perpetuated a strongly elitist sensibility whose rejection of popular needs and concerns is markedly recurrent throughout most of his writings.”³⁹ Porphyry consistently presents himself as “an expert in discerning and expounding metaphysical and theological truth.”⁴⁰ Johnson continues: “The religious *koiné* required translation if it was to be rightly understood by the student since the truth behind or beyond that *koiné* was hardly common. 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.”⁴¹

Although Porphyry and Iamblichus disagreed about the soteriological scope of the priestly activities of the philosopher, as demonstrated in the earlier discussion of their debate over the meaning and efficacy of animal sacrifice, both were insistent that philosopher-priests such as themselves were superior ritual experts. Indeed, traditional rites were at the very center of their exchange in the *Letter to Anebo* and *On the Mysteries*.

Iamblichus's Theurgists as High Priests

As mentioned earlier, *On the Mysteries* was a response to a series of questions Porphyry asked in his *Letter to Anebo*. In addition to asking about animal sacrifice, Porphyry submitted many more related queries. He asked about oracles and divination, about the use of *charakteres* and special words, and about statue making and statue animation (the telestic arts). Each of these questions gave Iamblichus the opportunity to draw a key distinction between true theurgical practice and what he called *technē*. Scholars have often translated this word as “magic.”⁴² But Iamblichus does not use the word *γοητεία* in this context, and hence this translation is misleading. It leads readers to think that Iamblichus is distinguishing theurgists from some putative class of “magicians” practicing outside the limits of normative religion. This assumption has prevented scholars from attempting to identify and socially locate the “technicians” against whom Iamblichus juxtaposes his ideas of proper ritual practice.

Polymnia Athanassiadi, one of the scholars who interprets *technē* in terms of “magic,” rightly argues that Iamblichus sought to distinguish his own theurgical enterprise from the practices of others whom *she* identifies as “magicians.”⁴³ But her assumption is that he did so because what he was doing was, in reality, very different from the technicians about whom he speaks. She does not, however, ask after the identity of these “magicians,” or who they might be in relation to Iamblichus and other intellectuals. She also uses the so-called magical papyri to represent the kinds of practices she argues Iamblichus eschewed.⁴⁴ But as we will see shortly, when one inquires after the source of these artifacts, who created and used them and whether they actually represent “magical practices,” one finds that at least some of these artifacts were created and/or used by ordinary, local priests. If so, it may be that Iamblichus was eager to distinguish his theurgy from their rituals because from the outside the differences may not have been as apparent as Athanassiadi supposes or

Iamblichus might have wished. Furthermore, he may have even perceived some priests as rivals for certain kinds of social goods, such as authority and prestige. As Athanassiadi herself notes, *On the Mysteries* “contains an apology for traditional cult while playing down the importance of sacred places as compared with the authority of holy men, the theurgists who are repeatedly contrasted with mere craftsmen of spirituality.”⁴⁵ Iamblichus was doing this in a period when other holy men, for instance, members of traditional priesthoods, were moving outside temple precincts and offering their ritual services to a broader clientele, people who were also downplaying the importance of sacred places. The reasons for this shift will be discussed presently.

The first indication Iamblichus gives that he may be defining himself with reference to and in distinction to these other contemporary ritual experts is his choice to write under the guise of an Egyptian priest, Abamon.⁴⁶ He elaborates this identity in more detail as he proceeds, by highlighting all the things a true theurgist, a philosopher-priest, must know. In Book 5, Iamblichus asserts that sacrifices have a proper order that reflect cosmic order.⁴⁷ The law of cult (ὁ τῆς θρησκευτικῆς νόμος), he writes, “assigns like to like, and extends their principle from highest to the lowest levels.”⁴⁸ This implies that in order to follow the laws of cult, one must have an extensive knowledge of the god to whom one sacrifices and all the appropriate connections—from highest to lowest—that obtain within the physical cosmos to each particular deity. And if one wished to make contact with what Iamblichus called “the gods of theurgy” (οἱ θεουργικῶν θεοί), this required considerable knowledge and preparation.⁴⁹ In order to emphasize just how rare such an individual is, that is, one who knows the laws of cult, Iamblichus writes: “One should not therefore take a feature that manifests itself in the case of a particular individual, as the result of great effort and long preparation, as the consummation of the hieratic art, and present it as something common to all men, but not even as something immediately available to those beginning theurgy, and not yet those who have reached a middling degree of proficiency in it; for even these latter endow their performance of cult with some degree of corporeal influence.”⁵⁰ But who is the individual sufficiently trained in the hieratic art to be able to perform the proper ceremony, a ceremony not simple, but “multi-form” (πολύτροπον) and “panharmonic” (παναρμόνιον) and composed of everything contained in the world (ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ συγκεκροτημένον)?⁵¹ His answer: the theurgist, “[since] only the theurgist knows these things exactly through having made trial of them in practice, then only [he] can know what is the proper method of performing the hieratic

art.”⁵² Only these theurgists “realize that any elements omitted, even minor ones, can subvert the whole performance of cult.”⁵³ And only such an individual is able to ascend to the One, “which is supreme master of the whole multiplicity (of divisions) and in concert with that, at the same time, to pay court to all the other essences and principles.”⁵⁴

The reader of these passages must certainly wonder about the identity of these ritual experts, these high priests of the hieratic arts. Undoubtedly, Iamblichus would have us count his pseudonymous Abamon, and thereby himself, among this elite group. But we might ask whether he was making a similar claim for all Egyptian priests. In fact, it seems he was not. Unlike Origen and Porphyry, however, who both claimed the priest offering blood sacrifices to the gods was, in reality, worshipping evil daemons, Iamblichus granted these practitioners a role in proper cult. These priests made offerings to material spirits (δι υλάιοι), that is, good daemons or material archons.⁵⁵ But such priests did not offer worship to the higher gods. In other words, they fell short of the expertise of the true theurgist. Hence, like Origen and Porphyry, Iamblichus was positioning himself in such a way as to supplant other religious experts and to claim the highest priesthood for himself.

Elsewhere in *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus addressed the status of certain religious personnel in a more explicitly negative fashion while at the same time refuting another claim of Porphyry’s. In his *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry had asserted that “there are generators of effective images” and that they make these images “with the aid of the stars in their revolutions.”⁵⁶ An effective image of this sort would have been one that incited the god to take up some sort of residence in it. It seems that some Platonic theurgists practiced this telestic art, seeing it as a kind of demiurgical work, an ensouling of matter.⁵⁷ Porphyry himself made explicit reference to the practice of making cult statues when he discussed the philosopher as priest in *On Abstinence*. He notes that the “priest of the god who rules all” was an expert in the making of this god’s cult image.⁵⁸ Furthermore, if Todd Krulak is correct in his assessment of the purpose and argument of Porphyry’s fragmentary work *On Images*, that Porphyry believed statues could serve as pedagogical aids for the philosophically inclined, much like inspired texts of poets and oracles of gods, because they were initially the work of ancient sages inspired directly by the gods themselves, then Porphyry’s philosopher-priest, in creating cult images of the highest gods, was participating in this most ancient form of worship.⁵⁹ Furthermore, given his close adherence to the views of Plotinus on the nature of soul, it is also likely Porphyry anticipated that, if made

properly, these statues would incite the gods to inhabit them, for, as Plotinus states at *Enneads* 4.3.1,

the wise men of old, who made temples and statues, in the wish that the gods should be present to them, looking to the nature of the All, had in mind that the nature of soul is everywhere easy to attract, but that if someone were to construct something strongly attracted to it and able to receive a part of it, it would of all things receive soul most easily. This is because [t]hat which is strongly attracted to it is what imitates it in some way, like a mirror able to catch [the reflection of] a form.⁶⁰

In reality, we see how close Porphyry and Iamblichus were in their understanding of philosophers as priests and theurgists. This is likely part of the reason why Iamblichus marked their differences so dramatically.

In the case of statue making, Iamblichus wanted to disabuse his readers of the impression that ordinary image makers might be able to invoke divinities. Other works of Porphyry indicate that he would have agreed. Iamblichus would have us think Porphyry is implying everyday craftsmen could indeed produce effective images. Iamblichus states his views as follows: “Then, in accordance with the truth, we must demonstrate that the image-maker does not use the astral revolutions or the powers inherent in them, or the powers found naturally around them, nor is he at all able to control them; rather he operates with those emanating last from nature in the visible (realm) about the extreme part of the universe, and does so purely by technical skill, and not by theurgic skill.”⁶¹ Presumably, then, by theurgic skill, one can participate in the demiurgic activity of ensouling matter. But this is the purview of specialists, not ordinary “craftsmen.”

Priests of Lesser Gods and Other Ritual Experts

Who, then, were the image makers at the center of this apparent disagreement between Porphyry and Iamblichus? The artifacts extant from this period that describe the actual ritual of making a cult statue and animating it are grouped together as a “collection” under the title “Greek Magical Papyri” (*Papyri Graecae Magicae, PGM*).⁶² These artifacts, preserved on papyrus and found mainly in Egypt⁶³—a matter in this case of the vicissitudes of climate—are complete

and fragmentary handbooks of ritual descriptions and formulas, or they are all that remain of rituals already completed.⁶⁴ As such, they present the modern reader with a concrete picture of many of the everyday fears, concerns, needs, hopes, and desires concerning which people in late antiquity sought divine and daemonic assistance. They also represent the way in which a class of ritual experts constructed and experienced the realm of spirits and sought to interact with and direct these spirits.

Over the past few decades these objects have begun to receive a great deal of attention from scholars interested in late Roman religion and its “syncretistic” character, as well as from scholars interested in social history and how these artifacts represent the concerns and ambitions of a broad cross-section of late ancient society.⁶⁵ Unfortunately the early classification of these texts as “magical” has skewed the kinds of questions scholars have put to the materials, a problem that has only recently begun to be redressed.

The grouping together of these artifacts and their designation as “magical” arose early on in the development of the discipline of papyrology and its classificatory system. Unable to fit these artifacts into categories that at the time seemed clear and useful, categories such as literary, documentary, religious, and liturgical papyri, scholars eventually developed the convention of calling them “magical” and putting them into collections with other similar sorts of papyri. The designation “magical” reflects a certain set of scholarly presuppositions prevalent in the late nineteenth century and persisting well into the twentieth (even into the twenty-first) century, that these sorts of artifacts represented the “shadow” of true religion.⁶⁶ This perspective was based in part on a developmental model in religious anthropology that posited that societies progressed from “magic” and “superstition” to “religion” and finally to “science.”⁶⁷ For scholars of this ilk, the prevalence of the ritual papyri signaled the decline of religion in late antiquity, the devolution from a more rational form of religion into superstition and decadence. According to E. R. Dodds, for instance, this decadence infected even the most educated echelons of society, including the late Platonists of the period under consideration. For Dodds and others, the abundance of this sort of papyri signaled the supposed “loss of nerve” that affected the adherents of traditional polytheism in the face of the “inevitable” encroachment of Christianity and its nontraditional values deeper and deeper into the society of the late antique Mediterranean.⁶⁸ The Gibbonesque presuppositions that inform this model as well as its teleological bent make it highly problematic.

Hence, over the past few decades scholars have begun to question the

utility of this decline and decadence model for investigating the rich and varied landscape of late antique religion. Indeed, this model has, for the most part, been overturned by one that is less informed by Enlightenment ideals of rationality and Protestant understandings of confessional religion. The new model that scholars are still in the process of constructing sees this period as one in which there was a rich flowering of religious and ritual forms, innovative reinterpretations of religious traditions, intense cultural entrepreneurship, and enthusiastic exchange—both cooperative and combative—across religious boundaries that were themselves flexible and permeable.

Furthermore, work in ritual theory, whether in history or in other disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology, has helped to redirect the focus of the study of ancient religion in new and exciting ways, with important consequences for those who study the ancient papyri.⁶⁹ Increasingly, historians of late antique religion are rejecting the long-standing assumption that these ritual handbooks, amulets, *defixiones* (curse tablets), oracular and divinatory apparatuses, and healing formulas are representative of illicit, marginal practices performed by a putative class of professional, but equally marginal, “magicians.” Instead, scholarship is beginning to consider the place of these artifacts and the people who made, used and benefited from them in light of changes in the religious landscape of the later Roman Empire. Increasingly, following Jonathan Z. Smith, scholars now recognize that these artifacts represent the way a majority of people at the time both viewed and approached their interactions with divinity and the realm of spirits.⁷⁰ They also represent the way many people thought about spiritual beings more generally. Hence, they serve as important historical artifacts for scholars of late antique religion and conceptualizations of the realm of spirits in this period.

As mentioned earlier, the biggest hurdle that scholars face in reinscribing the papyri under discussion here within the realm of religion and ritual in the late antique world is the modern assumption that the practices represented in them were perceived by the majority of people as illicit, subversive, harmful, and dangerous.⁷¹ This assumption is usually accompanied by the corollary that these actions were performed by a class of specialists who inhabited the margins of society and who were also seen as illicit, subversive, harmful, and dangerous. The significance of the task of reinscribing these practices, however, cannot be overestimated. As Jonathan Z. Smith aptly notes, “the corpus, even as it now stands, represents something quite precious: one of the largest collections of functioning ritual texts, largely in Greek, produced by specialists that has survived from late antiquity.”⁷² As such, it also represents

important shifts in the space of religion in this period from what Smith calls the “here” and “there” of religion to the “anywhere”—to religious and ritual space other than the sphere of domestic and temple praxis.⁷³ In late antiquity, this interstitial space gained increasing importance and was exemplified by the miniaturization of ritual, as well as improvisation on ritual themes from both “here” and “there.” In other words, these papyri may well represent the complex of religious practice, and the assumptions about how one ought to interact with the realm of spirits for a good number of people in the late Roman period.

Who, then, created and used the majority of these artifacts? As indicated earlier, recent scholarship has abandoned the idea that there existed in late antiquity a class of professional “magicians” apart from and in competition with other ritual experts such as priests and healers. Rather, the experts represented by the papyri have been increasingly associated with the traditional priests of Egyptian religion, who began to innovate and adopt different approaches to cultic and ritual activity in an attempt to retain and expand their clientele.⁷⁴ According to Frankfurter, they were forced to do so in response to Roman imperial legislation and changes in provincial administrative organization that eroded the traditional privileges and structures for economic well-being accorded these priesthoods in earlier Pharaonic and Ptolemaic epochs.⁷⁵

Already under Augustus, Roman policy had subordinated and marginalized the Egyptian priesthood.⁷⁶ Augustus installed a Roman civil servant as head of the priesthood and abolished the system of temple-owned estates that had previously provided for the income of the priesthood and the maintenance of temple complexes. Hence, priests were forced to seek out new avenues for generating revenue. Some pursued new occupations such as teaching to make up for the decline in their fortunes.⁷⁷ Others took up small-scale ritualizing, using their cachet as priests to cater to a broad clientele.⁷⁸ But these changes meant that in the Roman period the native priestly class had become a more marginalized community lacking in civic duties.⁷⁹ The access to wealth from temple estates in the Pharaonic period had afforded the priests a good deal of political clout, as they not only mediated between the divine and their local community, but also served in the capacity of local power brokers between the pharaoh, and later the Ptolemies, and the Egyptian people as well. With the steady erosion of their revenues and influence in the political arena, the priests’ authority became primarily charismatic. By focusing on ritualizing, they both played into the stereotypes of their new rulers, something they

had already been doing during the Ptolemaic period, and used them to carve out new spheres of influence.

Frankfurter was the first to discuss this stereotype appropriation, in his book *Religion in Roman Egypt*. He defines this sociocultural phenomenon as the “manifold ways indigenous cultures embrace and act out the stereotypes woven by a colonizing or otherwise dominant alien culture.”⁸⁰ He continues: “While the latter [the colonizing culture] creates its images of the exotic out of its own needs, aspirations and insufficiencies (and only to some degree the realia of the indigenous culture), the indigenous cultures appropriate those same images as a means of gaining political and economic status in a broader culture now dominated by, in this case, Rome.”⁸¹ In the case of Egypt, Frankfurter sees priests gaining power and prestige through their assimilation of the “broader Mediterranean image of the *magos*.” Furthermore, he sees the ritual papyri as the best evidence we have for these priests’ entry into this “Hellenistic cultural role of *magos* within Egypt.”⁸²

Jacco Dieleman has gone further than most other scholars in terms of carefully analyzing select ritual papyri for evidence of both innovation and stereotype appropriation among the class of ritual experts under discussion.⁸³ In a number of studies, he focuses on the bilingual—Greek and Demotic—London-Leiden papyrus handbook of ritual descriptions in order to demonstrate that the ability to use both languages indicates a priestly milieu and that members of this group were not merely carrying forth traditions of Pharaonic “magic” but were involved in actively creating new ritual forms based on ancient sources of an international variety.⁸⁴ Dieleman writes: “the Demotic spells did not develop organically from pharaonic magic over a long stretch of time, the stages of which cannot be followed due to a complete lack of preserved sources. Instead, they were written against the background of the Greek spells, which were composed by Egyptian priests anyway and circulated throughout the country starting in the Hellenistic period.”⁸⁵ Dieleman’s attention to the bilingual character of the handbook is what is most convincing about his argument both for a priestly milieu and for stereotype appropriation. Demotic became a priestly language over time and by the third century it would have been preserved as such. However, it would not have been the everyday language priests used.⁸⁶ Spoken Egyptian was an amalgamation of Greek and Egyptian words, such that “Demotic preserved texts of the Roman era in a state of sacred isolation from a common tongue that was steeped in Greek loan words.”⁸⁷ Frankfurter argues that “to preserve or compose a text in Demotic rather than Greek was essentially scribal conceit.”⁸⁸ Following W. J.

Tait, he notes that there is “abundant evidence that by the second century C.E., even the most insular, conservative priesthoods commonly used and conversed in Greek.”⁸⁹

Keeping in mind the status and cultural resonance of Demotic in this period, Dieleman looks carefully at its use in the Theban ritual collection. He notes that the Demotic sections of the handbook preserve Greek incantations as well as Greek glosses. He argues that this means both that the copyist was translating from Greek into Demotic (“a scribal conceit”) and that he could no longer take it for granted that those using the handbook would understand the Demotic, hence the Greek glosses of certain words. The reason the bilingual nature of the handbook signals a priestly setting, however, is the aforementioned fact that Demotic had become a language of “sacred isolation,” a priestly language. In light of the manifold textuality of the handbook, Dieleman concludes that the Greek texts on which some of the Demotic translations were based could have been composed by an Egyptian priest as well.⁹⁰ Thus, the handbook of the Theban priests behind the London-Leiden collection is a “testament to a multicultural society,” but also to the creative attempt of these priests to “manipulate various cultural and religious traditions to create an identity appropriate and meaningful within their time.”⁹¹ Dieleman further nuances his study, however, by pointing out important differences in the content of the Greek and Demotic portions of the handbook. In the case of the latter, the Demotic sections, he notes a marked absence of stereotype appropriation—that is, in these sections the authors or scribes do not present the ritual practitioner in terms that mirror Greek or Roman expectations. Dieleman surmises this is because these texts would have only been accessible to Egyptian priests in the Roman period. So although the *use* of Demotic may have contributed to their cachet as Egyptian *magoi*, what these priests *said* in Demotic was in some sense intracommunal.

One telling example of the aforementioned stereotype appropriation is the inclusion of astrological divination in the scope of priestly activities starting in the Hellenistic period and continuing into Roman imperial times, eventually incorporating horoscopic astrology in the range of ritual services the priests could offer to their communities and clientele.⁹² As Dieleman points out, Hellenistic astronomy was based on a geocentric model that bore little resemblance to the “traditional Egyptian subdivision between heaven, earth and underworld.”⁹³ Yet because Egypt had a reputation beyond its borders for being the cradle of the esoteric and mysterious, it also got the reputation over time for being a place steeped in astrological wisdom. Dieleman

traces the way in which, over time, priests adopted this stereotype for themselves and began both to practice astrology and to claim knowledge of this art for themselves on monuments and in texts. For instance, Dieleman uses the example of the inscribed biography of the priest Harkhebi from the Ptolemaic period, whose areas of expertise are identified as knowledge of the stars in heaven and knowledge of snakes on earth (and in particular, knowledge of how to heal snake bites).⁹⁴ As Dieleman points out, the latter is not surprising given the close association between medical and other healing practices and the priestly milieu in ancient Egypt. In fact, many priestly positions involved the preservation and practice of specific medical and healing specializations, from eye diseases to stomach and bowel complaints to, as in the case of Harkhebi, the typology and treatment of snake bites.⁹⁵ The adoption of horoscopy is, however, new and innovative, and is a strong example of the stereotype appropriation and cultural assimilation and entrepreneurship both Frankfurter and Dieleman attribute to late Roman Egyptian priests.

However, Hellenistic and Roman stereotypes were not the only thing these priests appropriated from their colonial masters. They also availed themselves enthusiastically of the intellectual currents and educational opportunities on offer. These experts were not only drawing on Egyptian ritual techniques and traditions; they were also tapping into the rich panoply of Hellenistic sources of philosophical and religious thinking. Even at a cursory glance, one finds evidence of Hermetic, Platonic, “Gnostic,” Syrian, and Hebrew influence. In fact, as Garth Fowden has argued, the Hermetic corpus may also have been produced in this priestly milieu.⁹⁶ This corpus was a mix of practical and philosophical texts attributed to the god Hermes Trismegistus and other deities of his circle, such as Asclepius.⁹⁷ Thus Fowden’s suggestion about the social and education milieu of the authors of the Hermetic corpus can be pressed into the service of describing the ritualists responsible for the *PGM* handbooks and the priests whom Iamblichus seeks to discredit.

Priestly Competition in the Third Century

By participating in and drawing on a broad range of textual and ritual traditions, the experts who produced, collected, and used the formulas in the *PGM* handbooks engaged in intellectual currents in late antiquity that could have served many as an alternative to the more insular, although by no means exclusionary, philosophical schools of the late Platonists.⁹⁸ Indeed, Fowden finds

evidence that members of the traditional Egyptian priesthood were mingling with philosophers and other groups with various intellectual affiliations. He notes: “As the old priestly culture, and especially its languages and literature, fell increasingly into desuetude, clerics of a learned bent found it natural to frequent the schools of the Greeks. We quite often encounter representatives of the native clergy teaching grammar or philosophy in late antique Alexandria.” Hermetism, according to Fowden, associated the ritual traditions of the priesthood and its esoteric knowledge with the fashionable Platonism of the age.⁹⁹ Hence, priestly participation in the Greek philosophical patrimony and in a broader Mediterranean-wide *paideia* was one avenue by which members of the traditional Egyptian priesthood could advance their interests and secure a living. Indeed, it may have been the combination of their appropriation of Platonic forms of thought and their self-fashioning as experts in small-scale ritualizing that brought these priests to the attention of people such as Porphyry and Iamblichus. As Hans Lewy notes, of the kinds of rituals practiced by theurgic experts, all are represented in the *PGM* artifacts, rituals such as lustrations, conjunctions, supplications, invocations, the telestic arts, and other practices aimed at producing epiphanies and *autophanes*.¹⁰⁰

Hence, Iamblichus is likely keen to discredit ordinary priests not because he fundamentally objects to what they are doing. Rather, the differences between his vision of theurgy and their vision of philosophically informed ritualizing were far from apparent. He marks these differences by discrediting everyday priests as creators and purveyors of religious products that engaged nothing more than the lowest of all natural forces, using mere *technē*. This is peculiar, because at the same time he was posing as one of them. In other words, while he wrote as an illustrious and authoritative Egyptian priest, Abamon, and garnered cultural capital based on this image, he undermined everyday priests. Because the religious landscape of Egypt (and much of the Mediterranean) was in flux and priests were purveying their services, expertise, and products to broader clientele with new applications, Iamblichus was able to take on this malleable identity and use it for his own ends.¹⁰¹ One might ask why he would then choose to denigrate real Egyptian priests if he was at the same time using their identity in some way. Here we need only think of what we might call the other side of the coin of stereotype appropriation, namely the phenomenon where consumers of exotic cultural images and products both venerate the stereotypes on offer and deride actual individual purveyors for not truly understanding the cultural treasures they possess.

One possible objection to the position argued for here—namely that

Iamblichus was in closer proximity to, and even in rivalry with, the priest-ritualists who created, preserved, and used artifacts like the papyri handbooks, amulets, curses, spells, and so forth than many scholars have been inclined to think—is that he himself came from a very important family of the highest standing in Syrian society. For instance, Eunapius tells us that Iamblichus was of “illustrious ancestry,” and he belonged to an “opulent and prosperous family.”¹⁰² In other words, one might wonder why Iamblichus would even bother with these “craftsmen of spirituality” at all, being from the social class he was. But another aspect of his ancestry complicates the picture further. One of Iamblichus’s ancestors, Sampsigeramos, was a founder of the line of priest-kings of Emesa, a group active in governing the area well into the imperial period.¹⁰³ This means that Iamblichus’s own identity as a member of the Syrian elite had a hieratic dimension he seems to have taken rather seriously, given the topics to which he devoted some of his most important thinking. He is not the only Syrian to have taken this aspect of his ancestry and identity seriously. We need only look at the way in which the emperor Elagabalus both came to power and conducted himself during his reign to find a compelling example of just how far a member of the Syrian provincial elite from a priestly family could go in the third century.

Although many of his Roman contemporaries saw his behavior as bizarre and offensive, there are other possible perspectives that make sense of some of Elagabalus’s actions and choices. For instance, he may have been performing his role as *pontifex maximus* in a Syrian idiom. And he may have seen this role as the most important facet of what it meant to be emperor and to rule. The reign of Elagabalus makes the point that in a time of increased social mobility, such as the third century, someone like Iamblichus may have had even more at stake as a provincial elite than in earlier periods, and hence situated his own social standing in this more fluid late Roman arena. Further support is lent to this interpretation when we consider that members of traditional priesthoods with philosophical predilections in both Syria and Egypt were actively engaged in the production of theological texts, such as the Chaldaean Oracles and the Hermetic writings.

In fact, a certain irony emerges when one asks what Iamblichus’s sources might have been for his understanding of Egyptian myth, ritual, and hieratic practice. It is unlikely that he would have known the Egyptian language. Native Egyptians who wished to better their situation in life learned Greek under both the Ptolemies and the Romans. But it was rare that Greek speakers perceived any advantage in learning Egyptian. Although it is unlikely that

Iamblichus learned Egyptian, he probably spent time in Egypt. Both Bent Dalsgaard Larsen and Polymnia Athanassiadi argue compellingly that Iamblichus spent considerable time in Alexandria as a young man.¹⁰⁴ It may have been in Alexandria that he studied with Anatolius, the future bishop of Laodicea. Scholars generally accept that Iamblichus was born around 240 and that Anatolius left Alexandria after the destruction of the Brucheon quarter around 270, the area of the city where most of the teachers and philosophers were known to have resided.¹⁰⁵ Thus, because Iamblichus studied with Anatolius before going to Porphyry's school in Rome in his early thirties, Alexandria seems the most likely place for his studies with the former.¹⁰⁶ So although Iamblichus was a descendant of an important family of priest-kings in Emesa, he chose to assume the identity of an Egyptian priest. Iamblichus may also have drawn on this Egyptian identity because of the importance of Alexandria to the Platonic lineage of Ammonius Saccas, a lineage that, Beatrice notes, was not uncontested.¹⁰⁷

Based on the foregoing considerations, one can understand why Iamblichus may have chosen to fashion his priestly identity in an Egyptian idiom. The question remains as to the textual sources of Iamblichus's knowledge of Egyptian religion. Garth Fowden suggests that Iamblichus relied on Hermetic writings in this regard. We find evidence of this Hermetic focus in *On the Mysteries*, Book 8, where Iamblichus provides his reader with an account of Egyptian theology. Here he interprets Egyptian cosmology in terms of Platonic emanation, from an original triadic unity mediated by the heavenly gods through Hermes and the leader of the heavenly Kneph, working down to the demiurgic Nous and beyond to Amun, Ptah, and Osiris. Fowden notes that scholars have found this account puzzling: "there is some traditional Egyptian material (though not such as was unavailable in the Greek literature on the subject), jumbled together with relatively late Greek philosophical speculation and little clue to how it all fits together."¹⁰⁸ Fowden claims that we can only really understand what is going on in Book 8 if we look back to Plutarch to determine what Iamblichus may have been reading. In *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch refers to the "so-called books of Hermes" and explains what can be learned from them regarding Egyptian religion. Fowden concludes that Iamblichus must have compiled his account of Egyptian doctrines concerning the gods based on these Hermetic works, texts that already mediated Egyptian religion through a Hellenic/Platonic lens.¹⁰⁹

Fowden also notes that Iamblichus would have thought of the *Hermetica* as essentially Egyptian and hence representative.¹¹⁰ But Hermetism was

already a hybrid religious movement. Like the Chaldaean Oracles, which mediated Eastern religion through a Greek philosophical lens, Hermetism did something very similar for Egyptian religion. As noted earlier, scholars now believe that the Hermetic corpus was produced in an Egyptian clerical milieu. For instance, Fowden believes that the authors of these works would have been Egyptian priests of a learned bent. He bases his hypothesis on a number of observations regarding this priestly class in late antiquity: their tendency to assimilate to the “politically dominant culture,” and their attendance at schools of philosophy and rhetoric.¹¹¹ As Fowden notes, “Such men will naturally have been well disposed toward a doctrine which associated the traditions.”¹¹²

Priestly Philosophers and Social Context

These observations and hypotheses bring the milieu of the elite Platonic philosopher, represented here by intellectuals such as Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and that of everyday priests of traditional religion(s) into much closer proximity than might be expected. One certainly finds evidence for cross-fertilization in both the conceptual and ritual realms. But one also finds indications of competition between these groups for the same kinds of social goods.

The philosophers under investigation here, in particular Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, presented themselves as priests. Their claims to be priests were not merely symbolic or metaphoric. Each of them claimed to know about proper and improper ritual, about sacrifices, and about salvific actions. And each of them made claims that their ritual knowledge and priestly status were founded upon deep philosophical contemplation and the esoteric, mysterious, and divine insight it yielded. Finally, all three argued that other everyday priests, that is, local priests, were priests of lesser spirits. In other words, they made the claim that ordinary priests dealt only with lower spiritual orders, even evil ones, and failed to engage with higher beings, not to mention the highest god of all. For Origen, these ordinary priests were priests of evil daemons with no exception, and Christian priests such as himself served the highest God. Similarly, Porphyry stated in his *Philosophy from Oracles* that there were some priests, Egyptians and Phoenicians, who used bloody animals to sate and then chase off evil daemons prior to real worship.¹¹³ He also claimed that the priest of the god who rules all was the philosopher and

none other, while priests who offered blood sacrifices to gods were mistakenly worshipping evil spirits. For Iamblichus, the priest/image maker accomplished his work using the lowest powers to emanate from the divine, those spirits involved with matter and generation. Theurgists, like himself, were the only ones who had sufficient ritual knowledge to save their own souls and those of others.

The question remains as to why these Platonist philosophers felt the need to adopt this hieratic identity and to present themselves as priestly figures at this particular moment. In addition to answering this question, we also need to explore the way in which the production of spiritual taxonomies fits into the picture. In some respects, when third-century Platonists penned their spiritual taxonomies, they were picking up where their Middle Platonic predecessors had left off. Figures such as Plutarch, Apuleius, and Numenius were all thinking about questions of theology, ritual, and demonology, as both John Dillon and Andrei Timotin have amply demonstrated. Some of these figures, for instance, Apuleius, were involved in giving public lectures on these topics.¹¹⁴ The need to engage in philosophical speculation on these themes, I would argue, only intensified in the third century, a century of significant upheaval and disruption, a time when reflection on the relationship between human, even political, order and divine order became even more pressing. Furthermore, philosophers felt the need to respond to Christian criticisms of “heterodoxy” and “heteropraxy.” As Fowden notes, intellectuals who subscribed to some form of traditional religion “sought to explain themselves and rationalize their uncontrollably complex heritage.”¹¹⁵ One approach they took was to create ordered spiritual hierarchies and universal, totalizing taxonomies, in a manner similar to their Christian counterparts. Attilio Mastrocinque writes, “Neoplatonism took increasingly the form of theological speculation. Porphyry and, even more, Iamblichus were engaged in the study of the gods, the cosmos, and the existing religions of the empire.”¹¹⁶

To return to the issue of Middle Platonic precedents, however, none of these earlier figures were also presenting themselves as “high priests of the highest god,” experts on rituals that would connect followers to divinity and save their souls. Hence, in addition to the Middle Platonic tradition of philosophizing about matters pertaining to oracles, divination, sacrifice, Egyptian and Homeric myth, and the various beings inhabiting the supra- and sublunary realms, our third-century priestly philosophers were likely responding to something new, something they experienced as rather urgent and pressing. I would argue, given the connections this book has already traced between

these philosophers and a number of other Platonically influenced groups, that these thinkers felt the need to assert their authority and expertise in idioms represented by their competitors, namely “Gnostics” and other experts offering salvific rituals, in particular disenfranchised Egyptian priests. The situation in the respective cases of Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus was undoubtedly different based on their particular interactions with certain individuals, groups, texts, and ideas. But in each case, they were contending with philosophically inclined and educated individuals who were offering knowledge and expertise that encroached upon the knowledge and expertise of the late Roman philosopher, a totalizing sort of knowledge that claimed to both guide adherents through their daily life and to lead them to their ultimate salvation.¹¹⁷

Outside of texts, however, what was the social setting for the competitive interactions between more traditional philosophers and their aforementioned rivals? I would argue that the most logical answer would be schools in large urban centers such as Alexandria and Rome. We know, as previous sections of this book have demonstrated, that members of all of these “groups” attended philosophical schools.¹¹⁸ We also know that these schools were informally structured around more or less charismatic teachers whose success depended on their ability to inspire and influence not merely a small group of devoted, long-term students, but larger groups of curious “hearers,” as Porphyry calls them, that is, members of the general public, some of whom were very elite with varying levels of commitment. It can be safely assumed, based on the autobiographical reports of individuals such as Justin Martyr and the biographical accounts written by people such as Porphyry and Eusebius that there was a great deal of “shopping around” and educational itinerancy, sight-seeing, and even pilgrimage. All of this supports the view being advanced here that these third-century Platonists were conducting their philosophical lives and pedagogical enterprises in a highly competitive, highly dialogic context. If some of their competitors were offering ritual expertise directed at achieving the same soteriological goals as these thinkers, it would have certainly been something to either challenge or incorporate or both. This is, in fact, what Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus appear to have done—namely both. This strategy was not, I would argue, a cynical, opportunistic move on their part. The adoption of a hieratic, ritualizing focus was more likely inspired by the deep conviction that these individuals had superior knowledge about salvation and connection with divinity based on exceptional education, stricter ascetic practice, and greater access to the mysteries of the cosmos based on a

more totalizing model of the philosophical life, a life that was lived in a very public way in antiquity in close proximity to and interaction with a number of others endeavoring to do precisely the same thing. All three of these philosophers, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, along with Plotinus, at one time or another indicated that they were gravely concerned about other thinkers and ritual experts bungling things because of a lack of sufficient knowledge, and leading people astray to the detriment of their souls. Each of them felt a profound responsibility for at least some, if not all, of their fellow human beings.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus all presented themselves as “high priests of the highest god.” It has made the further point that in the course of doing so, they actively derided the ritual expertise of other hieratic figures offering their services on the margins of more traditional philosophical and cult centers. These figures at times participated in philosophical education, and subsequently pressed certain Platonic concepts and interpretations into service in their own practices. Finally, this chapter has argued that Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus likely adopted this hieratic status in the first place because of the competition they felt with these figures and also with the “Gnostics” discussed in the previous chapter, given their proximity to these “groups” in the school settings of large urban centers such as Alexandria and Rome. In the Conclusion to this book, we will entertain some suggestions about where this trend, namely the adoption by philosophers of a hieratic facet to their identity, leads in later generations.

Conclusion

AT THE BEGINNING of this book, I noted that the third century is often depicted as a kind of “Middle Age” for antiquity, even a kind of “Dark Age” between the “Golden Age” of the second century and the political and religious “Renaissance” of Constantine’s empire. The big questions with which historians have interrogated the sources for this period have often been concerned with determining degrees of various negative characteristics: how much economic crisis, how frequent the political upheaval, how often the persecution of Christians, to what extent the decline of rationality and the devolution into superstition, and so on. This study has endeavored to reconsider some of this scholarship by focusing on the novel, inspired, and creative interventions in the realms of cosmology, soteriology, and spiritual taxonomy of a small handful of closely interconnected cultural entrepreneurs on the relative margins of late Roman society, namely philosophers, “Gnostics,” and disenfranchised priests of traditional cult. It has also emphasized that influence among these groups ran in more than one direction. The connections between these groups and their mutual influence on each other have, I argue, often been overlooked because of a number of factors: the assumption that clear and impermeable boundaries existed between groups of different confessional and ideological worldviews, the tendency to view identity as monolithic instead of hybrid and heterogeneous, the interpretation of the theological and ritual interests of late Roman philosophers as a sign of decline, and a textual focus that doesn’t take account of information about educational and social context. This book has attempted to map a partial cross-section of the third-century intellectual and religious landscape by taking account of all of these factors. The landscape that emerges is rich, exciting, and novel, and calls for further study.

Although the intellectuals under investigation in this study were, in some sense, marginal, their innovations and influence provide an important key to

understanding the ways in which religious and political authority came to be constituted and performed in subsequent epochs. In fact, I would argue that without recognizing the efforts of these third-century thinkers to establish themselves not only as philosophical, but also as ritual experts with theoretical and practical knowledge of the realm of spirits and how to negotiate and mediate it in daily life, we will have some difficulty understanding the ways in which fourth- and fifth-century Christian bishops and priests sought to ground and exercise their own authority.

There is a vast literature on the “rise of the Christian bishop,” as both a religious and a political actor.¹ What is often missed in these discussions, however, is the role that ritual expertise played in the fashioning of clerical authority, namely expertise directed at the control of and negotiation with spirits, whether angels, demons, the souls of the saintly dead, or the souls of the damned. There is a general recognition that from the late first century to the fourth, two models of authority existed within the early church: a more charismatic model based on the understanding that all followers of Jesus shared equally in the gifts of the spirit, and an institutional model that emphasized the authority of individuals who filled roles of increasingly hierarchical and well-defined positions, such as bishops, priests, deacons, readers, exorcists, widows, virgins, and so forth.² But it is very easy to overlook the importance of charismatic authority to most early Christians, even after institutional authority had become the dominant model. And although over time charismatic authority became less widely distributed and more concentrated in the hands of institutional experts, it is important to remember that identifying, locating, controlling, and exorcising spirits was one of the most important facets of Christian clerical expertise. It is only recently that scholars, such as Dayna Kalleres and Ellen Muehlberger, have begun to focus on this facet. In order to illustrate the point I am making, we need only briefly consider two examples of bishops who used their expertise in locating, identifying, binding, and exorcising spirits, in particular evil ones, to reinforce their authority. The first example is Ambrose, bishop of Milan (339–397), and his discovery of the bodies of Saints Gervasius and Protasius. The second is John Chrysostom, bishop of Antioch (ca. 347–407) and his anti-Judaizing sermons, in which he attempts to convince his congregation of the dangers of attending the local synagogue and of participating in Jewish festivals. Both of these examples involve bishops working to change the urban social landscape by mapping its sacred landscape, and to create a new kind of polity therein.³

In a letter to his sister Marcellina, Ambrose recounts the events

surrounding the consecration of the basilica that the bishop had recently finished and in which he was to be buried upon his death.⁴ At the time, Ambrose was in the midst of a series of ongoing conflicts with the emperor Valentinian II, and his mother, Justina, both Arian Christians, and the Arian bishop Auxentius.⁵ Ambrose's congregation asked him to consecrate the basilica in the same way that he had consecrated the Roman one—with the relics of martyrs. He replied that he would if he could find some. Shortly thereafter, he was seized "with a great presentiment of some sort of divine sign."⁶ Following the sign, he had a number of demoniacs brought to the spot, and the "martyrs began driving away [the evil spirits]," and "one woman was seized and thrown forward at the holy burial place."⁷ Upon digging there, they found "two men of wondrous stature, such as ancient ages bore."⁸ Ambrose continues, "The bones were all intact and there was much blood."⁹ The rest of the letter recounts the miracles that continued to be wrought by the bodies of the martyrs, as well as the objections of the Arians to the veracity of these miracles. The letter ends by contrasting the unrelenting arrogance of these Arians with confessions made by the devils and demons regarding the authenticity of the martyrs' remains, these being made under duress, of course. Ambrose writes, "The devils said today and yesterday and last night: 'We know that you are martyrs.' And the Arians say: 'We do not know, we do not want to know, we do not want to believe.'"¹⁰ In this episode, Ambrose displays an expert virtuosity in the location, discernment, harnessing, and deployment of spiritual powers, of both demonic and saintly varieties. He does so in the midst of his ongoing battle with the emperor and his mother, as well as a rival bishop, a battle in which his own authority as bishop is at stake.

John Chrysostom's sermons against Christians who attend synagogue or participate in Jewish festivals are some of the most hostile anti-Jewish texts we have from late antiquity.¹¹ It seems his aim was to use every means available to convince his parishioners of the grave danger these activities posed to their souls and their salvation. One of his strategies involved highlighting his ability to read the urban landscape through the lens of spiritual discernment. People and places were demonically possessed. Apparently innocuous social interactions and exchanges were shot through with malign forces. In his first homily, after equating the synagogue with the theater and the brothel, Chrysostom describes an episode in which he witnessed a Christian man drag a Christian woman into a synagogue in order to swear an oath. After the bishop had "set upon him vigorously, charging him with lack of feeling and the worst stupidity," the man confessed that he had been told that oaths sworn in the

synagogue were “more to be feared.”¹² Chrysostom’s dismay at this revelation arose not only from the fact that Christians were not supposed to take oaths, but also from the fact, as he relates, that the synagogue was inhabited by demons, as were the souls of the Jews who worshipped there.¹³ In other words, we see in this episode a bishop who claims not only authority over the ritual life of Christians under his care (in this instance, the ritual is the oath taken by a baptized Christian), but also expertise in discerning spirits (the location of demons in the synagogue and souls of Jews).

Both these examples highlight important continuities between our third-century Platonist priests and later Christian bishops. They all founded their authority to guide the daily lives of people in their care and to lead the souls of these people to union with divinity and ultimate salvation based, in large part, on their knowledge of spiritual taxonomy and salvific ritual acts. When it came to guidance for everyday life, bishops, like philosophical “coaches” of earlier and contemporary epochs, enjoined people to follow more or less strict ascetic practices pertaining to a vast array of daily activities: food, sleep, sex, dress, entertainment, education, and many other aspects of thought and behavior. And bishops, like their philosophical predecessors, were frequently in enthusiastic contest with internecine rivals and extramural enemies.

One might object, however, that there is a significant difference between our third-century Platonists, Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and later bishops, such as Ambrose and John Chrysostom, a difference that potentially calls into question the former’s status as missing link, and that difference is the latter’s regular and direct involvement in imperial politics. I would argue that here again we may find interesting continuities when we press the evidence a bit further. Although third-century Platonists were arguably marginal figures, and although they competed with other Platonically influenced intellectuals over a rather limited pool of “social goods,” and a rather circumscribed domain of influence, it would be a mistake to assume that they were neither politically connected nor politically ambitious. Much of the evidence for the political connections and ambitions of these philosophers is embedded in biographical accounts of them, in works such as Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, Eusebius’s *Church History*, and in Eunapius’s *Lives of the Philosophers*. More tangential evidence is also found in the biographies of Pythagoras penned by both Porphyry and Iamblichus, in which their hero plays the role of political adviser to a number of tyrants on the Italian Peninsula and founds communities wherein citizens live according to Pythagorean principles. Pythagoras’s students continue this work as political advisers, at

times losing their lives as reward for their conviction and ambition.¹⁴ Both Porphyry and Iamblichus also focus on Pythagoras's knowledge of effective rituals and on his priestly status. In his *Life of Pythagoras*, Porphyry relates that Pythagoras lived with and learned from Egyptian priests for long periods during his life. He was also initiated into a Cretan priesthood during one of his travels.¹⁵ Iamblichus writes extensively about Pythagoras's ritual knowledge and, in particular, his insights concerning proper sacrifices.¹⁶

In the case of Plotinus, Porphyry tells the story that his teacher once approached the emperor Gallienus to "rebuild" a city of philosophers in Campania, where Plotinus and his associates would then live according to Plato's *Laws*, a city they would call Platonopolis. Although, according to Porphyry, Gallienus was all for it, the plan failed to go forward on account of jealousy-driven opposition at court.¹⁷ It is not surprising, however, that a Roman emperor might have felt uncomfortable about allowing a philosopher to found an alternate polity in proximity to the imperial capital!

Origen had his own imperial connections. At one time he was called to Antioch to consult with Julia Mamaea on divine matters.¹⁸ This formidable woman was a member of an important family of priests to the Syrian god Baal.¹⁹ She was also the niece of Julia Domna, daughter of Julia Maesa, aunt to the emperor Elagabalus, and mother of and regent for the emperor Alexander Severus. Eusebius also claims that Origen wrote a letter to the emperor Philip the Arab and his wife.²⁰

Although it is a controversial position, Elizabeth DePalma Digeser has argued that Porphyry of Tyre is likely to have been the anonymous philosopher whom Makarios Magnes locates at the court of Diocletian, a philosopher who was arguing that something had to be done about the Christians in the empire along with Hierokles.²¹ In his accounts of philosophers, including Porphyry and Iamblichus, Eunapius frequently emphasizes their imperial connections and even courtly offices. Eunapius also frequently depicts his heroes advising political rulers and spending time at court.²² Finally, he emphasizes their ability to perform various wonders, some of which involved the control and discernment of spirits. For instance, Porphyry is supposed to have cast out and expelled a certain daemon from a bath, and Iamblichus once produced a theophany of two hot spring spirits, Eros and Anteros, for his followers.²³

My main point in emphasizing these biographical vignettes is not to argue that third-century Platonists were important political actors on the imperial stage. They clearly were not in any significant sense, unlike many of the

bishops who came after them. Rather, my point is that many of them were comfortable with, and even felt a moral responsibility to seek out, opportunities to act in advisory roles to people in positions of political authority. I would also argue that their claim to have expertise pertaining to the ritual means to interact effectively with spirits of various kinds was part of their claim to be able to fulfill these kinds of roles, whether or not they were ever invited to. This expertise served, in part, as the basis of their claim to be able to guide others in their daily lives in the search for truth, goodness, insight, and salvation. But their reflection on cosmic order, their ability to parse the realm of spirits, was also the basis of their ability to deliberate on social order. Iamblichus and Porphyry disagreed on the kinds of ritual acts that were necessary for both souls and states. Origen used his cosmology to explain disparities within and between different social groups, for instance, ethnic groups as well as the poor, disadvantaged, and disabled.

By highlighting the continuities between individuals such as Plotinus, Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus and later bishops such as Ambrose and John Chrysostom, my aim is to emphasize that the image of the philosopher as high priest, the image that third-century Platonists sought to construct for themselves in dialogue and rivalry with other philosophically educated hierophants at the time, was one that met with considerable success in the long run. It is certainly the case that we can no longer think of these third-century figures as thinkers of limited importance and influence in the history of ideas and institutions, or as marginal figures living in an age of decline, superstition, and retrogression. They found new ways to reinvigorate the role of the ancient philosopher and to direct the appeal of this figure to a much broader clientele than most philosophers can hope to reach in any epoch. And they did so by offering a more totalizing interpretation of the “care of the soul,” one that included life saving rituals and protection from malign cosmic forces.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Finding appropriate terminology for these discourses has been difficult. In earlier works, I referred to them as “daemonologies,” but this term was unfortunately confusing and limiting. I thank David Frankfurter for helping me think through these terminological issues.

2. In this book, I use the terms “daemon” and “demon” to refer to different conceptions of intermediary spirits. The term “demon” always refers to an evil spirit, whereas “daemon” is used to reflect the moral neutrality or ambiguity of intermediary spirits in their ancient non-Christian, Greco-Roman sense. At times, it is necessary to talk about “good” versus “evil daemons” when the distinction is made in the ancient sources themselves. The terms “daemon” and “daimon” are interchangeable transliterations of the Greek, but I only use “daimon” when quoting other authors who choose this spelling.

3. David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 30. Here Frankfurter is speaking specifically about demonological thinking, but his point is applicable to “popular” thinking on the whole realm of spirits in antiquity.

4. *Ibid.*, 31–32, 69–72.

5. Even Plotinus can be seen in this light if we take Porphyry’s account of him at all seriously. Porphyry certainly accorded his teacher some sort of hieratic identity. In his biography of Plotinus, Porphyry records numerous episodes in which his teacher is cast in the light of a hierophant or priestly figure. For example, Plotinus was able to detect the spell of a rival, Olympius, and turn it back on him; an Egyptian priest visiting Rome revealed that Plotinus’s indwelling spirit was that of a divine being of the highest sort; and when Amelius, another pupil, asked Plotinus to join in the celebrations of the New Moon, his teacher replied that it was not for him to go to the gods, but for them to come to him (*Plot.*, 10). We cannot know what Plotinus might have made of the stories Porphyry told about him in this respect, but his own philosophical work provides sufficient evidence of an interest in the divinization of the soul through various ritual practices. Both Gregory Shaw and Zeke Mazur have argued for this reading of Plotinus’s philosophy. Gregory Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos: Pythagorean Theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus,” *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999):

121–43; Zeke Mazur, “*Unio Magica*, Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual,” *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 29–56.

6. Matthias Haake has noted that we have plenty of inscriptional evidence that demonstrates that some philosophers, both male and female, were also at one time or other religious personnel in various contexts, “imperial cult, oracular cult, and a wide range of polis cults.” Matthias Haake, “Philosopher and Priest: The Image of the Intellectual and the Social Practice of the Elites in the Eastern Roman Empire,” in *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliiodorus*, ed. Beate Dignas and Kai Trampedach (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 161. But this book is arguing for something different, namely that, for a number of late Roman intellectuals, to be a philosopher meant one was also a ritual expert, a hierophant. Haake emphasizes that “members of the upper classes in the eastern Roman Empire were characterized by multiple identities” (165). I am arguing for a shift in the direction of close integration between the identities of philosopher and priest.

7. More will be said in the course of subsequent chapters about both categorizations, “priests” and “Gnostics,” and the problems with these terms.

8. In my opinion, the most lucid discussion of the problems with attempting to distinguish “magic” and “religion” is still Jonathan Z. Smith, “Trading Places,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 13–27, republished in Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215–29.

9. For discussion about the development of the category “Gnostic,” see Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Nicola Denzey Lewis also addresses the history of methodological approaches to “Gnostic” texts and the tendency to map a cosmic pessimism onto the cosmological narratives found in some of them in her *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity: Under Pitiless Skies* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 13–28. It is not surprising that some of the scholars who tended to imagine religion in decline and the emergence of a class of late antique magicians (here I have someone such as E. R. Dodds in mind) also tended to see philosophy devolving in late antiquity. In other words, the categories of both late ancient “magic” and “Gnosticism” were, in part, constructed by the same group of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars.

10. I avoid the term “pagan” wherever possible, because it is a pejorative and anachronistic term that none of the non-Christian philosophers this study considers would have used in reference to themselves or others like them. “Hellene” is a term that is often used in this milieu. It sometimes refers to individuals who saw themselves as participants in the ancient Greek intellectual patrimony. Origen would certainly fit this description, but he did not adopt the title “Hellene” for himself. It is also important to note that at times Iamblichus criticized people he calls “Hellenes” for religious innovation. Recent work by Douglas Boin has indicated that “Hellene” may have been an even more pejorative term than “pagan.” See Douglas Boin, “Hellenistic ‘Judaism’ and the Origins of the ‘Christian-Pagan’ Debate,” *J ECS* 22, 2 (2014): 167–96. Hence, one sees that it is difficult to find

appropriate terminology to replace the problematic “pagan.” However, I believe it is important to grapple with the problem. To refer to nonelite non-Christians and non-Jews, I use phrases such as “participants in traditional Mediterranean religion” or “traditional polytheists.” Although at times this may appear awkward, I would prefer not to sacrifice accuracy to a misleading succinctness.

11. See James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 13–53, for a helpful introduction to the problems of using modern understandings of “religion” based on a “world religions model” for understanding ancient religion.

12. Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Judith Lieu addresses similar issues in *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a discussion of the difficulty of distinguishing between Christians and Jews based on iconography and epigraphic conventions, see Ross S. Kraemer, “Jewish Tuna and Christian Fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources,” *HTR* 84, 2 (1991): 141–62.

13. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

14. Harold Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

15. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012).

16. The main exception to this understanding of the material world were the Stoics.

17. For instance, Aaron Johnson discusses Porphyry’s taxonomic tendencies in Chapter 2 of his book *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Andrei Timotin’s excellent book, *La démonologie platonicienne: Histoire de la notion de daimōn de Platon aux derniers néoplatoniciens* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), gives a thoroughgoing overview of Platonic thinking about intermediate spirits. But he does not include Christian Platonists. Stephen Anthony Maiullo focuses on Iamblichus’s role in recasting the identity of philosophers in hieratic terms. He also notes that this tendency begins in Middle Platonism with figures such as Plutarch and Numenius. See his dissertation, “From Philosopher to Priest: The Transformation of the Persona of the Platonic Philosopher” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 2010). See Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, for discussion of philosophers and their reflections on social order.

18. B. G. Bucur, “Demons: The Demonology of Israelite-Jewish and Early Christian Literature Within the Context of Their Environment,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 630–31; A. Monaci Castagno, “The Devil and His Ancestors: Some Recent Studies of Jewish and Early Christian Demonology,” *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 29 (1993): 383–413; Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984); Gary B. Ferngren, “Early Christian Views on the Demonic Etiology of Disease,” in *From Athens to Jerusalem*, ed. S. Kottek and M. Horstmannshoff (Rotterdam: Erasmus, 2000), 195–213; Dayna Kalleres, “‘Oh, Lord Give This One a *Daimon* So That He May No Longer Sin’: The Holy Man and His *Daimones* in Hagiography,” *ARG* 14 (2012): 205–35; H.

A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Armin Lange, ed., *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 2003); Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John Christopher Thomas, *The Devil, Disease, and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

19. Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *JRS* 61 (1971): 80–101; Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in *Witchcraft, Confessions, and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 119–46.

20. David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

21. Cam Grey, “Demoniacs, Dissent, and Disempowerment in the Late Roman West: Some Case Studies from Hagiographical Literature,” *J ECS* 13, 1 (2005): 40.

22. See also David Frankfurter, “Master-Demons, Local Spirits, and Demonology in the Roman Mediterranean World: An Afterword to Rita Lucarelli,” *JANER* 11 (2011): 126–31.

23. For instance, see Janice Boddy, “Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 407–34; Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*, 2nd ed. (Providence, R.I.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World, 1999); Charles Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Paul Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

24. Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*, 13.

25. Gregory A. Smith, “How Thin Is a Demon?” *J ECS* 16, 4 (2008): 479–512.

26. Dayna S. Kalleres, *City of Demons: Violence, Ritual, and Christian Power in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

27. It is not surprising that so much scholarly attention has been given to demonology in late antiquity. Malign spirits inhabited the spiritual landscape of this period with surprising density. They tended to congregate in certain areas in particular—around tombs, near brackish water and sewage, and in baths, to name a few places. In her work on Roman toilets, Gemma Janson argues that depictions of the goddess Fortuna on the wall paintings of public latrines from Pompeii and Rome may have been there to protect visitors against the demonic at the particularly vulnerable moment of evacuation. Her paper “Divine Help on a Roman Toilet” was delivered at the conference “Dirt, Disease, and Hygiene in Rome from Antiquity to Modernity” at the British School at Rome, June 21–22, 2007. Jansen

gave a more recent version of this paper, “How to Chase Demons out of a (Roman) Toilet,” at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting, Baltimore, November 25, 2013.

28. Ellen Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

CHAPTER I. HOW TO FEED A DAEMON

Epigraph: Porph., Abst. 2.47.3; Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 75; Porphyre, *De l'abstinence*, ed. and trans. Jean Bouffartigue and Michel Patillon, 3 vols. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1977–1995).

1. Critical edition: Karl Mras, ed., *Eusebius' Werke*, vol. 8, GCS 43.1–2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1954–1956).

2. See both Aaron P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) for two importantly different discussions of the way Eusebius constructs Christian identity in this work.

3. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity,” *ANRW* 2.16.1 (1978): 426–27.

4. Eus., *HE* 6.19.1. See Mark Edwards, “Porphyry and the Christians,” in *Studies on Porphyry*, ed. George E. Karamanolis and Anne D. R. Sheppard (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), 111–26 for a careful and nuanced discussion of the limited scope of Porphyry's writings against the Christians. See also Ariane Magny, *Porphyry in Fragments: Transmission of an Anti-Christian Text in Late Antiquity* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2012); and Magny, “Porphyry in Fragments: Jerome, Harnack, and the Problem of Reconstruction,” *J ECS* 18, 4 (2010): 515–55.

5. Eus., *PE* 4.7; Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 158: “The aforesaid author, then, in his work which he entitled *Of the Philosophy to be derived from Oracles*, gives responses of Apollo enjoining the performance of animal sacrifices, and the offering of animals not to daemons only, nor only to the terrestrial powers, but also to the ethereal and heavenly powers. But in another work the same author, confessing that all, to whom the Greeks used to offer sacrifices by blood and slaughter of senseless animals, are daemons, and not gods, says that it is not right nor pious to offer animal sacrifices to gods.”

6. Porph., *Phil. Orac.* frs. 314–15 Smith (= Eus., *PE* 4.8.4–4.9.7): “Next in order after what has been said concerning piety we shall record the responses given by them concerning their worship, part of which by anticipation we have set forth in the statements concerning piety. Now this is the response of Apollo, containing at the same time an orderly classification of the gods. ‘Friend, who has entered on this heaven-taught path, heed well

thy work; nor to the blessed gods forget to slay thine offerings in due form, whether to gods of earth or gods of heaven, kings of the sky and liquid paths of air and sea, and all who dwell beneath the earth; For in their nature's fullness all is bound. How to devote things living in due form my verse shall tell, thou in thy tablets write. For gods of earth and gods of heaven each three: For heavenly gods pure white; for gods of earth cattle of kindred hue divide in three, on the altar lay thy sacrifice. For gods infernal bury deep, and cast the blood into a trench. For gentle Nymphs honey and gifts of Dionysus pour. For such as flit for ever o'er the earth fill all the blazing altar's trench with blood, and cast the feathered owl into the fire. Then honey mix'd with meal, and frankincense, and grains of barley sprinkle over all. But when thou comest to the sandy shore, pour green sea-water on the victim's head, and cast the body whole into the deep. Then, all things rightly done, return at last to the great company of heavenly gods, for all the powers that in pure ether dwell, and in the stars, let blood in fullest stream flow from the throat o'er all the sacrifice: Make the limbs a banquet for the gods, and give them to the fire; feast on the rest, filling with savours sweet the liquid air. Breathe forth, when all is done, the solemn vows" (trans. Gifford, 158–59).

7. Aaron Johnson suggests that this oracle became a "source for Porphyry in determining the contours of a theological hierarchy." Aaron P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 79. The confusion Eusebius attributes to Porphyry can also be resolved by looking at other extant fragments from *On Philosophy from Oracles*, fragments that Eusebius himself includes in the *Preparation for the Gospel* associating blood sacrifice and evil daemons. See, for instance, frs. 327–28 Smith (= Eus., *PE* 4.23.6–9).

8. Clark writes that "Porphyry and Castricius probably met in Rome, when Porphyry joined (in 263 C.E.) the group which studied with the philosopher Plotinus." Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, trans. Clark, 121.

9. For instance, Porphyry argues that simplicity of lifestyle in general is necessary in order to achieve the highest aims of the philosopher (Porph., *Abst.* 1.57.1–3).

10. Porph., *Abst.* 2.12.3.

11. Porphyry, *Abst.* trans. Clark, 8.

12. Scott Bradbury discusses the waning enthusiasm among fourth-century intellectuals for blood sacrifice in "Julian's Pagan Revival and the Decline of Blood Sacrifice," *Phoenix* 49 (1995): 331–56. However, when Decius instigated his empire-wide "persecution" of Christians, he required that they offer incense, but also taste of the sacrificial meat. See J. B. Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," *JRS* 89 (1999): 135–54, in particular 137. Hence, blood sacrifice must still have been a normal component of important religious celebrations. It is difficult to get a precise sense of what late ancient intellectuals and other elites thought about blood sacrifice in general. For more discussion of non-Christian ambivalence regarding blood sacrifice or the changing meaning of animal offerings in the later ancient world, see Nicole Belayche, "Entre deux éclats de rine: Sacrifice et représentation du divin dans le *De Sacrificiis* de Lucien," in "Nourrir les dieux?": *Sacrifice et représentation du divin; Actes de la VIe rencontre du Groupe de recherche européen "Figura, représentation du divin dans les sociétés grecque et romaine"* (Université de Liège, 23–24

octobre 2009), ed. Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge and Francesca Prescendi, *Kernos Supplément 26* (Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 2011), 165–80; Alberto Complani and Marco Zambon, “Il sacrificio come problema in alcune correnti filosofiche di età imperiale,” *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 19 (2002) 59–99; Fritz Graf, “A Satirist’s Sacrifices: Lucian’s *On Sacrifices* and the Contestation of Religious Traditions,” in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, ed. Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Varhelyi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203–13; Rives, “The Theology of Animal Sacrifice in the Ancient Greek World,” *ibid.*, 187–202. The problem is further complicated by issues of how we theorize ancient sacrifice in modern scholarship. Daniel Ullucci sounds a cautionary note about lumping together all ancient discourses that appear critical of animal sacrifices (Ullucci, “Contesting the Meaning of Animal Sacrifice,” 57–58). Many of these do not prescribe discontinuation of animal sacrifice, but what Ullucci calls the “critique model” tends to see them all as part of an evolutionary trend toward more “rational” or “enlightened” religion in antiquity. Ullucci’s contribution to *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* is a summary of the argument in his monograph, *The Christian Rejection of Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). David Frankfurter’s contribution to the same volume also challenges the usual ways in which animal sacrifice is theorized. He sees that most scholarship on ancient sacrifice has been unable to thoroughly overcome the lens with which earlier scholars such as Walter Burkert and René Girard viewed ancient religion. Frankfurter argues, following Katherine McClymond, that killing is the least important, least deliberate, and least ritualized moment of the act of honoring the gods and seeking their reciprocity. In fact, he expresses severe reservations about using the term “sacrifice” at all. David Frankfurter, “Egyptian Religion and the Problem of the Category ‘Sacrifice,’” 75–76.

13. Porph., *Abst.* 2.5.1–2.7.3. The work Porphyry refers to is Theophrastus’s *On Piety*, which is no longer extant.

14. Dirk Obbink calls into question whether modern scholars, in particular Walter Burkert, can use Theophrastus as evidence of ancient aversion to blood sacrifice, but Porphyry certainly felt free to. Dirk Obbink, “The Origin of Greek Sacrifice: Theophrastus on Religion and Cultural History,” in *Theophrastean Studies*, ed. William W. Fortenbaugh and Robert W. Sharples (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988), 272–95. In this article, Obbink also discusses how much Theophrastus can reasonably be excavated from Porphyry’s account.

15. Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). See, in particular, chaps. 3, 4, 5.

16. *Ibid.*, 25.

17. *Ibid.*, 29.

18. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

19. Porph., *Abst.* 2.5.1.

20. *Ibid.*, 2.7.2.

21. *Ibid.*, 2.7.3. Indeed, Porphyry implies that it is the aim of evil daemons to incite humans to kill each other and spill each other’s blood because this blood is equally, if not more, “nourishing” for these spirits.

22. Porph., *Abst.* 2.37.5. This is the sort of understanding of spirits David Frankfurter has described as “local” or “popular” (*Evil Incarnate*, 30).

23. Porph., *Abst.* 2.38.2.

24. *Ibid.*, 2.38.4.

25. *Ibid.*, 2.42.3.

26. See Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) for a list of the possible meanings. These include blast, wind, breathed air, breath of life, life, divine inspiration, spirit, the spirit of God, spiritual or immaterial being, angel, flatulence.

27. Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, trans. Clark, 155.

28. Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ὄχημα. The term can mean “support,” “carriage,” and “chariot”; “the supposed vehicle consisting of fire and indestructible matter informed by the soul, its spiritual body, Procl., *Inst.* 205, cf. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.12.” Some ancient intellectuals, including thinkers such as Heraclitus and Aristotle, held the view that there were different kinds of fire or fiery substances.

29. Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, trans. Clark, 155. The importance of moisture and its association with blood will become apparent later in this chapter. The “pneumatic vessel” is a kind of daemonic body. For an excellent discussion of the nature of daemonic and demonic bodies in ancient literature, see Gregory A. Smith, “How Thin Is a Demon,” *J ECS* 16, 4 (2008): 479–512.

30. For instance, when describing the nature of semen in his *On the Generation of Animals*, Aristotle contrasts the fire of the sublunary sphere with the fire of the sun and stars. He further claims that it is this sort of generative fire that is present in the male seed. Arist., *De gen. anim.* 2, 736b–737a.

31. Porph., *Abst.* 2.38.2.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Insofar as good daemons are responsible for administering human *technē* in Porphyry’s schema, they bear some resemblance to Watcher angels in the Enochic literature.

34. Porph., *Abst.* 2.38.3.

35. Origen, *Cels.* 7.64; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 448.

36. Origen, *Mart.*, 45; Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979), 74–75.

37. Porph., *Phil. Orac.* fr. 326 Smith; my translation.

38. We have no certain dates for Minucius Felix, his life, or his only extant work, *Octavius*, which was written sometime between 160 and 250. However, my aim is not to prove the influence of specific authors on Porphyry. Rather, my point is to highlight similarities between Porphyry and Christians roughly contemporary with him.

39. Minuc., *Octavius* 27.2, trans. G. W. Clarke, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix* (New York: Newman Press, 1974), 101–2.

40. *Octavius*, trans. Clarke, 101.

41. Ibid.

42. Eusebius holds the same view about the way evil daemons ravage bodies and then release them from suffering in order to “fake” a cure. Eus., *PE* 5.2.

43. Porph., *Abst.* 2.40.1: “One thing especially should be counted among the greatest harm done by the maleficent daimons: they are themselves responsible for the sufferings that occur around the earth (plague, crop failure, earthquake, droughts and the like), but convince us that the responsibility lies with those who are responsible for just the opposite.”

44. The question concerning who precisely these so-called Gnostics are will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 3. Porphyry is the one who gives them the title *gnostikoi*. Plotinus refers to them as Christian sectaries. I will suggest that although Porphyry may have adopted his views of evil daemons from a number of contemporary Christian sources, this particular aspect of his theory is likely due to his association with these Christians in Plotinus’s circle, given the fact that we know he read a number of their writings.

45. Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.14; Plotinus, *Enneads II*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

46. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), xii–xvi.

47. Porph., *Phil. orac.* fr. 326 Smith (= Eus., *PE* 4.22.15–4.23.6); trans. Gifford, 192.

48. The heavy breathing Porphyry alludes to and his general vocabulary of lust and pleasure indicate he may be speaking of more than just eating. A couple of fragments from Porphyry, one in Proclus’s *Commentary on the Timaeus* (fr. 57 Sodano) and one from Michael Psellus (fr. 471 Smith), seem to suggest that a particularly detestable variety of Tuscan daemon participates in sexual intercourse, the semen giving rise to worms. These daemons, when destroyed through exorcistic rites, are reduced to ashes that resemble spider webs. Aaron Johnson argues that the two fragments likely refer to the same passage in a Porphyrian work. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 93–94. For a translation of these fragments, see Johnson, 341–42.

49. See, for instance, Pier Franco Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgement on Origen,” in *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments; Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 15–18 August 1989*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: University Press, 1992), 351–67; Thomas Böhm, “Origenes, Theologe und (Neu-)Platoniker? Oder: Wem soll man misstrauen, Eusebius oder Porphyrius?” *Adamantius* 8 (2002): 7–23; Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012); Digeser, “Origen on the *Limes*: Rhetoric and the Polarization of Identity in the Late Third Century,” in *The Rhetoric of Power in Late Antiquity: Religion and Politics in Byzantium, Europe and the Early Islamic World*, ed. Robert M. Frakes, Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, and Justin Stephens (London: Taurus, 2010), 197–218. For the most careful argument for the two Origen hypothesis, with which the foregoing scholars disagree, see Mark J. Edwards, “Ammonius, Teacher of Origen,” *JEH* 44 (1993): 169–81.

50. H. A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.:

Cornell University Press, 1985), 124. See also Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *The New Testament Apocrypha* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1989), 2: 485–86.

51. *Pseudo-Clementine Homily* 9 10; GCS 42 (1953), 135; Alexander Roberts et al., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols., trans. Robert Ernest Walker (1867–1873; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 8: 277.

52. Porphy., *Abst.* 2.40.1–5.

53. *Ibid.*, 2.40.3.

54. *Ibid.*, 2.40.4.

55. Dayna Kalleres's recent book demonstrates that the centrality of exorcism in the preparation of catechumens for baptism was, in part, motivated by the desire of church officials to purify new members of this pollution, engendered by their former participation in traditional sacrifices. See Kalleres's dissertation, "Exorcising the Devil to Silence Christ's Enemies: Ritualized Speech Practices in Late Antique Christianity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2002).

56. Digeser, "Origen on the *Limes*"; and Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*.

57. The best account of what we know of Ammonius Saccas is found in Digeser, *Threat to Public Piety*, 23–48. Ammonius revitalized Platonism in his day by attempting to harmonize Plato with the writings of Aristotle in what Digeser calls his "philosophy without conflicts" (23). There is also evidence that Ammonius was a Christian of one sort or other, possibly one who denied the divinity of Jesus. He also seems to have focused on the hieratic potential of philosophy. As Digeser argues, Ammonius set out a "framework for understanding the divinization of matter, in animating a statue, engaging in any form of divination, or conceptualizing a place as sacred" (38). According to some accounts, which I accept for reasons that will be given in due course, both Origen and Plotinus were students of Ammonius Saccas. Porphyry was a student of Origen, Plotinus, and Longinus (another student of Ammonius Saccas). And Iamblichus studied with Porphyry for some time. Although we will never know for certain, Ammonius Saccas's reading of Middle Platonist thinkers, with their emphasis on intermediary spirits, may have been the initial impetus for the development of spiritual taxonomies among members of his school and those who could trace their lineage back to this school.

58. Digeser, "Origen on the *Limes*," 204. I am aware that not all scholars will or do find the arguments of Digeser, and with her Beatrice and Böhm, convincing. I myself do, but it is important to note that the core of my argument does not hinge on Origen the theologian having been the teacher of Porphyry. My point is simply that we can no longer assume that he wasn't on the grounds that the two were in different "camps" when it came to the ambiguous category of "religious identity." And given what we know about the diversity of philosophical schools and their attendees in the second and third centuries, Porphyry's association with Origen, despite his later criticism of Origen's followers, is highly plausible.

59. Procl., *In Tim.* 1.77. Proclus states that Porphyry's views are a hybrid of Numenius's and Origen's.

60. Eus., *HE* 6.19.5; Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgement on Origen,” 354–55.

61. Porph., *Plot.* 3. This is one of the most controversial claims of the one Origen theory, since evidence for the text appears only in non-Christian sources, and no work of that title survives. Porphyry also says that Origen wrote nothing except *On the Spirits (Concerning Daemons)* and *That the King Is the Only Maker*. However, as Digeser explains, these are the only works of Origen’s that would have counted as philosophical in the eyes of someone such as Porphyry (Digeser, “Origen on the *Limes*,” 202–4).

62. Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, new ed., ed. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 505.

63. *Ibid.*, 497.

64. Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgement on Origen,” 362.

65. Although it is difficult to determine precisely which works of Galen Porphyry may have been familiar with, he seems to have had a rather comprehensive understanding of contemporary medical views. For instance, *Porphyry’s Work To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled* was attributed to Galen in its only extant copy, a twelfth-century manuscript. See Heidi Marx-Wolf, “Medicine,” in *Late Ancient Knowing*, ed. Catherine Chin and Moulie Vidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

66. See, in particular, Book 4 of the *Republic*.

67. See Plato, *Ti.* 69d–72d.

68. Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 234. Nutton notes that Plato’s description of the human body in the *Timaeus* owes less to his familiarity with the internal anatomy of the body than to his own preconceptions of the soul (117). However, his view held sway with a great number of subsequent medical writers, Galen included. Galen himself was convinced that Plato had studied with Hippocrates (Nutton, 118), and hence highlighted similarities between these two ancient authorities and elided differences. It is likely that Porphyry, following in the lineage of Ammonius Saccas and his “philosophy without conflicts,” would also have looked for similarities among his medical and philosophical sources. On this “philosophy without conflicts,” see Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, 23–48.

69. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 234.

70. These lines come from Homer’s *Odyssey* (*Od.* 13.102–12). They read: “and at the head of the harbor is a slender-leaved olive and near by it a lovely and murky cave sacred to the nymphs called Naiads. Within are kraters and amphoras of stone, where bees lay up stores of honey. Inside, too, are massive stone looms and there the nymphs weave sea-purple cloth, a wonder to see. The water flows unceasingly. The cave has two gates, the one from the north, a path for men to descend, while the other, towards the south is divine. Men do not enter by this one, but it is rather a path for immortals.” Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. Robert Lamberton (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1983), 21.

71. Porph., *Antr.* 11; Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, 28.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid. For Porphyry, *phantasia* (φαντασία) here refers to the capacity of the soul attached to a body to recall material things as well as their deeds and acts performed in their lives on earth. Anne Sheppard notes that Porphyry associates *phantasia* with the “astral body” or “vehicle of the soul.” She notes that in *To Gaurus*, “the idea is put forward that the daemons can transfer shapes from the φαντασία onto their astral body, . . . In *Sententiae* 29, Porphyry claims that the souls in Hades still have their astral bodies onto which an image from the φαντασία has been transferred, presumably as an explanation why εἰδῶλα in Hades look like the people whose ghosts they are.” Anne D. R. Sheppard, “Porphyry’s Views on *Phantasia*,” in Karamanolis and Sheppard, *Studies on Porphyry*, 75.

76. For the best current edition of this work, including an excellent commentary, see Cristiano Castelletti, *Porfirio: Sullo stige; Testo greco a fronte* (Milan: Bompiani Testi, 2006). For the passages under discussion here, see Castelletti, *Porfirio*, 96–107 and 150–94. For an analysis of these fragments, see also Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 31–35, 139–41, 207–10.

77. Castelletti, *Porfirio*, 23. According to Cristiano Castelletti, Pausanias attributes to Homer the first introduction of the name of the river Styx into poetry. Castelletti argues that Porphyry takes an interest in Homer’s characterization of the river because of the poet’s claim that the waters are used to judge the deeds of the gods. Porphyry draws on a number of Homeric references to the river, which Castelletti documents in his study of the fragments. See, in particular, Castelletti, *Porfirio*, 25.

78. Porph., *Styx* fr. 377 Smith; trans. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 334.

79. Ibid.

80. As we will see, this idea closely resembles ideas we find in Origen’s *On First Principles* regarding the punishment of souls after death.

81. Porph., *Styx* fr. 377 Smith.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Empedocles, 31B 105 DK; trans. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 335. See also G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and Malcolm Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 311.

85. Empedocles himself took a much more mechanistic approach to bodily processes. But Porphyry’s harmonizing approach elides the main differences between the pre-Socratic philosopher and Plato and Galen.

86. Gerald Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology in Origen,” in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Henri Crouzel and Richard Hanson (Rome: Ateneo, 1985).

87. Porph., *Phil. orac.* fr. 314 Smith. In other words, it is the taxonomical aspect of this oracle that interests him, not the sacrifices. Although we don’t have an elaborate spiritual taxonomy from among Porphyry’s extant works, this fragment suggests that he was interested in ordering the realm of spirits in addition to assigning moral distinctions. More will be said on this matter in Chapter 3.

88. Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 1 and 2.

89. See the discussion in the Introduction about the problems with “conflict theory”

or the “conflict model” and recent scholarship that challenges it and provides alternative models for approaching questions of religious identity in this period.

90. We should keep in mind, as well, that Origen himself tended to draw a distinction between average, everyday Christians and intellectual and ascetic elites. But he did not connect this distinction to questions of ultimate salvation, given his universalist tendencies. Rather, it meant that this latter group would have less work to do in the afterlife.

91. Porph., *Abst.* 2.40.5.

92. For an extended discussion of the main points of disagreement between Porphyry and Iamblichus, see chapter 4, “Schism in the Ammonian Community: Porphyry v. Iamblichus,” in Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, 98–127.

93. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Leiden: Brill, 2004), xxix. The editors of the recent critical edition of *On the Mysteries* emphasize this in their title: Jamblique, *Réponse à Porphyre (De Mysteriis)*, ed. H. D. Saffrey and A. P. Segonds (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2013).

94. There are a number of important works surveying the use of this term from its origins in the Chaldaean Oracles to late Platonists such as Proclus. See Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013); Carine Van Liefferinge, *La théurgie des Oracles chaldaïques à Proclus*, Kernos Supplément 9 (Liège: Kernos, 1999). Tanaseanu-Döbler is critical of Van Liefferinge’s approach, given that it “focuses mostly on semantic and philosophical issues, trying to present the Neoplatonic ideals of ‘real’ theurgy and its spiritual value as opposed to magic” (12). Tanaseanu-Döbler finds this a problematic approach, given its “inevitably normative character” and the way it neglects the “actual practices and their embeddedness in the late antique Mediterranean religious context” (12).

95. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 4. Although the precise meaning of the term “theurgy” was a matter of debate in the third century, it is clear that many Platonists treated the Chaldaean Oracles as sacred texts. For more on the term, its origins, and its history within and beyond the Chaldaean context, see the following: Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*; Ruth Dorothy Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); G. Luck, “Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism,” in *Religion, Science and Magic in Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 185–228; and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate’s Role in the Chaldaean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

96. Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity*, 45.

97. Van Liefferinge emphasizes that Iamblichus used his conception of theurgy “d’une part pour justifier le culte grec et d’autre part, pour établir une cohérence entre cultes grec et orientaux.” Carine Van Liefferinge, “La théurgie, outil de restructuration dans le *De Mysteriis* de Jamblique,” *Kernos* 7 (1994): 208.

98. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 45.

99. Unlike Plotinus, who held that part of the soul remained undescended,

Iamblichus held the view that the soul was fully descended. For a thorough and nuanced discussion of both Iamblichus's position and his differences with both Plotinus and Porphyry, see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 59–126. See also Carlos Steel, *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Platonism; Iamblichus, Damascius, and Priscianus* (Brussels: Paleis der Academien, 1978), 27.

100. Steel, *The Changing Self*, 15. Shaw blames the exteriorization of the demonic on Numenius and claims that Plotinus and Porphyry followed their predecessor on this point.

101. Steel, *The Changing Self*, 15, 65.

102. Dominic O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*; Iamb., *De anima* B.2.29.385–11.

106. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*, 38.

107. *Ibid.*

108. For an overview of the debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus on the pneumatic vessel of daemonic souls, see John F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 11–32.

109. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.10.

110. *Ibid.*

111. Like Eusebius, Iamblichus likes to point out the absurdity of Porphyry's ideas if taken to what he considers their logical conclusion.

112. Iamb., *Myst.* 3.13.

113. *Ibid.* As we will see in Chapter 3, Iamblichus is also making an argument about who is best fit to perform rites connecting the soul with higher spirits. So not only is he discrediting Porphyry's view; he is also limiting the effectiveness of the practices of those he does not consider true theurgists.

114. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.9.

115. *Ibid.* "Since these relationships are numerous, and some have an immediate source of influence, as in the case of daemonic ones, while others are superior to these, having divine causes, and, higher than these again, there is the one pre-eminent cause, all these levels of cause are activated by the performance of perfect sacrifice; each level of cause is related to the sacrifice in accordance with the rank to which it has been allotted" (trans. Clarke et al., 241).

116. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.14.

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*, 5.16.

119. *Ibid.*, 5.11.

120. *Ibid.*, 5.12.

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*, 5.15. Porphyry made it very clear he was not dealing with the state in *On Abstinence*: "For myself, I am not trying to destroy the customs which prevail among each

people: the state is not my present subject. But the laws by which we are governed allow the divine power to be honored by very simple and inanimate things, so by choosing the simplest we shall sacrifice in accordance with the laws of the city” (Porph., *Abst.* 2.33.1). (This was, of course, all well and good unless emperors, such as Decius, required people to prove their loyalty to the state by tasting the sacrificial meat offered in honor of the emperor’s genius.) Elsewhere, Porphyry indicates that the reason cities sacrifice animals is because, as he has demonstrated, they are being offered to those beings who are involved with inciting human ambition and greed (i.e., evil daemons): “If it is necessary for cities to appease even these beings, 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” (Porph., *Abst.* 2.43.2). For a discussion of Porphyry’s criticism of civic or communal cult, see Philippa Townsend, “Bonds of Flesh and Blood: Porphyry, Animal Sacrifice, and Empire,” in Knust and Varhelyi, *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*, 214–31.

123. Aug., *Civ.* 10.32. Gillian Clark holds the view that Augustine misrepresents Porphyry’s position regarding a *via universalis*. She writes: “It is much more likely that Porphyry denied any claim that there is a single way of liberating the soul.” See Gillian Clark, “Augustine’s Porphyry and the Universal Way of Salvation,” in Karamanolis and Sheppard, *Studies on Porphyry*, 136.

124. Porph., *Abst.* 2.3.1. Here Porphyry says that such abstinence “is not advised for everyone without exception, but for philosophers, and among philosophers chiefly for those who make their happiness depend on God and on the imitation of God.”

125. Eusebius uses this framework throughout his *Preparation for the Gospel*, but in particular, in Book 12. As we will see in Chapter 3, however, Origen does distinguish between different orders of Christians based on their grasp of allegorical and mysterious meanings behind the literal truths of scripture all believers could apprehend. He does, however, hold the view that all believers, indeed all souls, will be saved.

126. Luc Brisson, *Porphyre, Sentences: Études d’introduction, texte grec et traduction française, Commentaire par l’unité proper de recherché no. 76 du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 1: 32.

127. Indeed, Porphyry found the idea of a noncyclical cosmos offensive. Michael Simmons writes: “The idea of God acting in history was ridiculous to Porphyry, who believed in a cyclical pattern of history predetermined by *heimarmenê*. This is the main reason the Christian interpretation of OT prophecy was unacceptable: it was a literary invention *post eventum*, devoid of all historical truth . . . Porphyry describes the eschatological doctrines like the resurrection as absurd because it implies that God interrupts the eternal and logical order of his own universe.” Michael B. Simmons, “Porphyry of Tyre’s Biblical Criticism: A Historical and Theological Appraisal,” in *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays in Antiquity*, ed. Charles A. Bobertz, David Brakke, and Gregory E. Sterling (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 95–96.

CHAPTER 2. EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

Epigraph: Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3; Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

1. Aaron P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53–59.

2. Plotinus is certainly interested in the question of hierarchy and in producing totalizing philosophical discourses. However, he is not as interested as the other philosophers under consideration in locating and defining spirits mediating between human souls and the highest triadic divinities. Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 3, one of his main criticisms of other theologians identified by his editor, Porphyry, as “Gnostics” is that they take too great an interest in these intervening realms.

3. We saw in the previous chapter how Origen, Porphyry, and Iamblichus offered explanations of traditional animal sacrifices, albeit in very different ways. In Iamblichus’s case, he was earnest about defending traditional sacrifices as god-given rites that are an integral part of the theurgic process.

4. Aaron Johnson refers to this as a translation process. Drawing on contemporary studies in cultural translation, he notes that, in the case of Porphyry, “the theological flexibility in speaking about divine beings at the boundaries of each level of theological hierarchy is similar to *mestiza* or hybrid translation.” In practical terms, “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.” Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre*, 56.

5. For instance, One-Intellect/Mind-Soul, Being-Life-Intellect, Ouranos-Kronos-Zeus, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, Father-Power-Son, and so forth.

6. Origen, *Comm. Jn.* 1.22.

7. See, for instance, Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 58–72; Kevin Corrigan, “Amelius, Plotinus, and Porphyry on Being, Intellect and the One,” *ANRW* 2.36.2 (1987): 975–93; Mark J. Edwards, “Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad,” *JHS* 110 (1990): 14–25.

8. Plato, *Ti.* 20d–27b.

9. Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, new ed., ed. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 504.

10. Procl., *In Tim.* 1.171.18–24; fr. 77.11–12 Sodano; trans. Harold Tarrant, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, Volume 1, Book I; Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 270–71. Although Lewy uses the term “demon” in his translation, it is not clear that either Porphyry or Origen was referring to evil spirits. Hence, it would be better to leave the Greek as it stands and preserve the ambiguity.

11. Ilaria Ramelli drew this parallel in a talk at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2013 in Baltimore entitled “Origen’s Allegoresis of Plato’s and Scripture’s Myths.” I thank Professor Ramelli for her willingness to share her insights on these matters with me.

12. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 506.

13. Dale B. Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” *JBL* 129 (2010): 657–77.

14. See note 11.

15. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 83–99.

16. Andrei Timotin discusses the ways in which philosophers of both the Hellenistic and Middle Platonic epochs began to develop rational discourses about intermediate spirits discussed in the works of Homer and Hesiod (for instance, daemons, heroes, geniuses, and divine messengers). He sees this work as an exegetical enterprise that forms an important part of the history of Platonic textual interpretations of the nature and function of daemons. Timotin, *La démonologie platonicienne: Histoire de la notion de daimōn de Platon aux derniers néoplatoniciens* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1–2. As mentioned in the Introduction, his work helps to fill in the gaps between Plato and the philosophers under investigation in this study.

17. We do not have a full Greek version of *On First Principles*. The edition of Rufinus’s Latin translation used throughout is Origen, *Traité des principes*, trans. Manlio Simonetti and Henri Crouzel (Paris: Cerf, 1978–1984). Nearly all Origen’s works perished as a result of doctrinal controversies in the sixth century and the outcome of the Second Council of Constantinople (553 C.E.). Fortunately, many of Rufinus’s Latin translations survived this purge. These translations have been much maligned by scholars, who charge Rufinus with excising or modifying controversial passages in the original text, but according to Henri de Lubac, this criticism has been unjust, and insofar as it has prevented scholars from making use of these translations for studying Origen, it has proved detrimental to our understanding of this key figure in the history of philosophy and Christian thought. De Lubac writes: “Even so, more than one historian has refused to make use of these translations. Such purism would be excessive even if the translations were ten times more suspect than they are: it is too much of an invitation to laziness and simple lack of inquiry . . . In this case, more than elsewhere, the real cure does not lie in abstinence but on the contrary in massive utilization.” G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles: Being Koetschau’s Text of the De principiis* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), ix. Although it is my belief that scholars working with Rufinus’s translations must proceed cautiously and circumspectly, I agree with de Lubac that utilization and not abstinence is the best solution. For an overview of some of the history of the debate about Rufinus’s reliability as a translator, see Alan Scott, “Appendix A: Rufinus as Translator,” in *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 30–39; Henry Chadwick, “Rufinus and the Tura Papyrus of Origen’s *Commentary on Romans*,” *JTS* 10 (1959): 10–52; Franca Ela Consolino, “Le prefazioni di Girolamo e Rufino alle loro traduzioni di Origene,” *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: University Press, 1992), 92–96; Henri Crouzel, “Comparaisons précises entre les fragments du *Peri Archōn* selon la *Philocalie* et la traduction de Rufin,” in *Origeniana*, ed. H. Crouzel, G. Lomiento, and J. Ruis-Camps (Bari: Istituto di letteratura cristiana antica, Università di Bari, 1975), 113–21.

18. On dating, see Henri de Lubac's introduction to Butterworth, *Origen*, xxvii–xxx.

19. Origen, *Princ.* 1.Pref.10; Butterworth, *Origen*, 6.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 1.Pref. 3.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 1.Pref. 2.

24. These figures are also sometimes referred to as “Gnostics.” Both terms, “heretic” and “Gnostic,” are problematic and misleading. At the time Origen was writing, Christianity was extremely heterodox. There were Christians within his own community who held the views he discusses. Later on, the views he represents as theirs were considered heretical, but at the time, they were viable theological alternatives and in need of discussion because their authors were engaged in interpretive activities very similar to those of Origen on precisely the same questions of cosmogony and soteriology.

25. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5.

26. Recall that Iamblichus objected to Porphyry's conspiratorial demonology in part because it condemned large numbers of people to polluting acts and focused only on the soteriological possibilities of elite philosophers.

27. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5. Maria Barbara von Stritzky, “Die Bedeutung der *Phaidros*: Interpretation für die Apokatastasis-lehre des Origenes,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977): 282.

28. What Origen definitively thought on this question has been a matter of considerable scholarly debate, especially insofar as Origen's position on the matter appears to extend even to evil daemons and the devil himself in some fragments and writings attributed to Origen. It is not the purpose of this chapter to weigh in on this debate. I am convinced that Origen was a proponent of universal salvation and refer readers to the following literature on the debate: Henri Crouzel, “The Literature on Origen 1970–1988,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 499–516; John Sachs, “Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 617–40; L. R. Hennessy, “The Place of Saints and Sinners After Death,” in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 295–312; Cheryl Riggs, “Apokatastasis and the Search for Religious Identity in Patristic Salvation History,” in *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Robert M. Frakes and Elizabeth DePalma Digeser (Toronto: Edgar Kent, 2006), 84–102; Stritzky, “Die Bedeutung der *Phaidros*,” 282–97; Ilaria Ramelli, “Origen, Bardaisan, and the Origin of Universal Salvation,” *HTR* 102, 2 (2009): 135–68; and Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

29. This conceptualization of the hierarchy of spiritual beings and its implications with regard to salvation history can also be found in a number of Origen's sermons. Below we will consider, in particular, his *Homily on 1 Kings 28* in this regard.

30. Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.4.

31. *Ibid.*, 2.9.5.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 2.9.1.

34. Ibid., 2.8.3. This distinction is made in Koetschau's GCS edition (1913) using excerpts from Jerome (*Ep. ad Avit.* 6): “νοῦς, id est mens, corruens facta est anima, et rursum anima instructa virtutibus fiet.”

35. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.2. For a discussion of this account of the fall in Origen see Michihiko Kuyama, “Evil and Diversity in Origen's *De Principiis*,” in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition*, ed. L. Perrone (Leuven: University Press, 2003), 489–502.

36. In fact, Origen makes the statement early in Chapter 8 that the blood of living creatures is their soul, a position that mirrors closely ideas one finds in Porphyry's works (see Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.1).

37. Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.3. Origen even supplies an etymological connection between *psyche* and *psychesthai*, stating that the former may have been derived from the latter because “the soul seems to have grown cold by the loss of its first natural and divine warmth.”

38. Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.1. This subsequent moment of receiving a body also resembles the creation account in Plato's *Timaeus*, not in terms of the moral reasons for it, but in terms of process. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge first creates souls, then sows them into the various celestial bodies like seeds. Then the gods create bodies for them. If they live justly in their bodies, souls return to their celestial home, an idea that has a long history extending even to Origen. See Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*. For a more positive interpretation of embodiment in Origen's works, see Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen, “Origen on the Human Body,” in Perrone, *Origeniana Octava*, 642–52.

39. Origen, *Princ.* 2.8.3. These anathemas come from the Second Council of Constantinople (553). Koetschau included them in his critical edition of *On First Principles* because he was attempting to counteract what he saw as the shortcomings of Rufinus's translation, thinking that Rufinus had suppressed and rewritten certain controversial passages. As mentioned earlier, in note 17, some scholars such as Lubac now tend to concede that Rufinus's alterations were far less radical than Koetschau and others thought. In response, however, some scholars such as Crouzel have wanted to call into question other fragments, such as the anathemas or references in Jerome, on the grounds that they may represent later Origenists more than Origen himself. To avoid being sidetracked by this ongoing debate, I use these anathemas with caution and never as the exclusive basis for my interpretation of Origen.

40. Origen, *Princ.* 1.7.3.

41. Ibid., 1.7.4.

42. Ibid., 2.9.3.

43. This is also the way in which Origen accounts for physical differences and disabilities: “Some have healthy bodies, others from their earliest years are invalids; some are defective in sight, others in hearing and speech” (Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.3). Although this position solves Origen's immediate theodical problem, it leads to other moral problems relating to how one ought to respond to the suffering of other human beings. The connection between physical and moral conditions with reference to birth defects and such will continue to be upheld and elaborated throughout the Middle Ages, in part as a result of the

medieval reliance on ancient ideas in the domains of the life sciences, and in particular embryology.

44. *Ibid.*, 2.9.7.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. See note 28 for the literature on Origen's *apokatastasis*.

48. Origen, *Princ.* 3.6.5.

49. These anathemas are used with caution here for the reasons stated in note 39.

50. Butterworth, *Origen*, 3n.

51. Interestingly, this position, namely that the connections between souls and their Creator is never permanently nor completely severed, resembles Plotinus's thinking on the subject.

52. Butterworth, *Origen*, 3n.

53. Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.1.

54. *Ibid.* 2.10.4.

55. Sachs, "Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology," 618.

56. Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.4. Porphyry, in *On the River Styx*, has a similar idea about the way the souls of the unjust dead are punished by torments commensurate in kind and degree with their misdeeds. These are the souls, as we saw, that retain some kind of body and cannot pass over into Hades and into forgetfulness of their embodied existence on earth. Origen also holds the view that the soul retains its body in order that it might go through the punishments it deserves and which will purify it. Porphyry, on the other hand, does not see the afterlife as a place of purgation and restoration, but he likely held the view that the process of reincarnation served this function.

57. *Ibid.*, 2.10.5.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*, 2.10.3.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 3.2.4, 3.3.4. In this latter passage, Origen notes that evil spirits affect the soul, either by taking full possession of it or by depraving it through harmful thoughts and evil inducements.

62. For Origen's interpretations of this passage, see Rowan A. Greer and Margaret M. Mitchell, *The "Belly-Myther" of Endor: Interpretations of 1 Kingdoms 28 in the Early Church* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), cxxv–cxxxiii and 32–61.

63. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 28, 2.3.4; Origen, *Homily 5 on 1 Kingdoms*, trans. Greer and Mitchell, *The "Belly-Myther" of Endor*, 35.

64. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 28, 4.5–5.1.

65. *Ibid.*, 6.1–2.

66. Greer and Mitchell, *The "Belly-Myther" of Endor*, 1.

67. *Ibid.*, liii. Origen writes: "I think that the saints as they depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which the divine scripture calls "paradise." This will be a place of instruction, and so to speak, a lecture room or school for souls, in which

they may be taught about all that they had seen on earth and may also receive some indications of what is to follow in the future, seen indeed ‘through a glass darkly,’ and yet truly seen ‘in part’ (1 Cor. 13:12), which are revealed more clearly and brightly to the saints in their proper times and places” Origen, *Princ.* 2.11.6; trans. Butterworth, *Origen*, 152.

68. Greer and Mitchell, *The ‘Belly-Myther’ of Endor*, liii; Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 2.3.

69. Greer and Mitchell, *The ‘Belly-Myther’ of Endor*, liii.

70. Sarah Iles Johnston, “Working Overtime in the Afterlife; or, No Rest for the Virtuous,” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Annette Yoshiko Reed and Ra’anan S. Boustan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 100.

71. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 28, 7.4–8; Johnston, “Working Overtime in the Afterlife,” 89. Johnston cites Iamb., *De anima* 1.389.525. This idea is also represented in the Chaldaean Oracles and Synesios’s *Hymn* 1.513.

72. Jerome discusses the mobility of spirits across species in *On First Principles* in his *Ep. ad Avitum* 11. Ellen Muehlberger has noted this erasure of ontological difference in Origen’s taxonomy, as well as its continuation in the works of later thinkers within his lineage such as Evagrius. Muehlberger, *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33–35.

73. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 167.

74. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 74.

75. Porph., *In Tim.* fr. 10 Sodano; trans. Tarrant, 170.

76. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 91.

77. James Wilberding, *Porphyry: To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled and On What Is in Our Power* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011).

78. Porph., *Abst.* 2.34; Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 69.

79. There are a number of important precursors for Porphyry’s idea here, the most important being the *Timaeus* itself.

80. Porph., *Abst.* 2.37.1–5.

81. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 74; Porph., *Phil. orac.* frs. 314–45, 346–47, 349 Smith.

82. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 73.

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*, 55–58.

85. Porph., *Phil. orac.* frs. 314–15 Smith (= Eus., *PE* 4.8.4–4.9.7).

86. For other fragments discussing spiritual order, see the following: *Regr. anim.* fr. 293 Smith; *Phil. orac.* frs. 325, 354 Smith; *De lib. arbitr.* fr. 268 Smith. In this latter passage, Porphyry discusses a series of daemons who lead the soul to meet its fate in the afterlife.

87. Porph., *In Tim.* fr. 17 Sodano, 10–11; trans. Tarrant, 249.

88. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3.

89. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.5.

90. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.2. See also 1.12 and 2.6.

91. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.2.

92. *Ibid.*, 1.12.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 51.

95. *Ibid.*, 52. This refers to the celestial body with which the soul was associated at the time of creation by the Demiurge.

96. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3. Early in Book 2, Iamblichus distinguishes between what he calls sublunary archons (those in authority over the cosmos) and material ones (those who are involved with matter), the former being far superior in all respects to the latter. This chapter will address the inclusion of these two species of spirit and the strange differences between them later.

97. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3–9.

98. Shaw writes: “According to the *Timaeus* (41d), each soul was constituted by the same ratios as the World Soul, and so necessarily participated, to some degree, in the entire world. Consequently, there was nothing essentially perverse about material things or embodied existence.” Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 47.

99. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.1.

100. *Ibid.*, 2.3. Strangely, the appearances of heroes, who are below daemons in the cosmic hierarchy, are gentler than those of daemons.

101. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3.

102. *Ibid.*, 2.4.

103. It is interesting that Porphyry in his *Letter to Marcella* talks about how daemons enjoy a good show, or as Gillian Clark put it once in conversation, they enjoy the soap opera of human affairs. Porphyry sees his marriage as a form of sacrifice to them. By entering into the fray of marital and familial relations, he puts on a sort of play for them as an offering. He writes: “It was for none of these motives, therefore, that I have made you a partner of our life, but rather for two laudable reasons. The first was that I decided to appease the guardian deities, following the precedent of the imprisoned Socrates who chose to compose music in the common sense of the term in preference to his customary philosophic activity for the sake of his safe departure from life. For in the same way also I myself, in an attempt to appease the daimons in charge of comitragedy, did not hesitate to contend for the prize in the marriage hymn, cheerfully taking on your large family, the attendant hardship over the necessities, and the wickedness of those who insulted me.” Porph., *Marc.* 2, trans. Kathleen O’Brien Wicker, *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella; Text and Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 44–47.

104. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.4.

105. Material archons are even more disappointing in this regard. They “make a great impression but fall short of fulfillment in their acts.” Iamb., *Myst.* 2.4.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 2.6.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 40.

115. Ibid.

116. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.7.

117. Shaw notes that Plato held both positive and negative views on matter at different junctures in his corpus. According to him, Iamblichus saw these disparate positions as pedagogically useful and ordered Plato's works into a curriculum such that those works that expressed negative views on matter came early on in a student's education and served as a kind of "medicinal shock" to refocus the soul's attention away from earthly affairs. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 37.

118. Ibid., 39.

119. Or as Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler has characterized it, the study of theurgy has been "dominated by the question of rationality versus irrationality" (9). She discusses the history of the scholarship on theurgy in the introduction to her book, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 9–20.

120. Eric Robertson Dodds, "Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *JRS* 37 (1947): 55–69. This article is reprinted with minor changes as Appendix II, "Theurgy," in E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 283–314.

121. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 286. Here Dodds follows the nineteenth-century writer Wilhelm Kroll, who asserted that Plotinus "raised himself by a strong intellectual and moral effort above the fog-ridden atmosphere that surrounded him."

122. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 288.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

125. For instance, in his conclusion Shaw asks, "was Iamblichus' influence due simply to the 'loss of nerve' among late antique intellectuals—as many would have us believe—or did he, perhaps, outline a compelling and comprehensive vision of a world that we no longer understand?" Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 237.

126. Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus," *JRS* 83 (1993): 123.

127. Athanassiadi defines Iamblichean theurgy in the following way: "But of course theurgy is not just a technique (though by a tenuous definition it can be this as well), but rather a dynamic state of mind, varying from individual to individual and additionally undergoing constant change according to the theurgist's state of mind. Attempting a provisional definition based on Iamblichus' understanding of the term, I would describe theurgy as the often involuntary manifestation of an inner state of sanctity deriving from a combination of goodness and knowledge in which the former element prevails."

Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 116. I would argue that Athanassiadi defines theurgy in terms of its effects and not as a set of practices, whether philosophical, ethical, or ritual, that achieve these effects. She also does not tell us where in the Iamblichean corpus she finds evidence for her definition.

128. “As much by their teaching as by their example, men like Maximus of Ephesus and his pupil Julian foisted on Iamblichus the image of the magician. This impression was heightened and further spread by the representatives of the Athenian School, until the diadochus Proclus—or was it Syrianus?—administered to the saint of Apamea the *coup de grace*.” Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 128. Athanassiadi makes similar statements elsewhere. See, for instance, Polymnia Athanassiadi, “The Occumenism of Iamblichus: Latent Knowledge and Its Awakening,” *JRS* 85 (1995): 247.

129. Emma C. Clarke, *Iamblichus’ De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 1–2. After a recent exchange with Gregory Shaw at the Society of Biblical Literature (Baltimore, 2013), I have a feeling that he would not disagree with Clarke on this point. The introduction to Tanaseanu-Döbler’s book, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity*, also emphasizes the problems with attempting to overemphasize differences between “rational theurgy” and popular “magic” or “superstition” (9–20).

130. In John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977), the author discusses the daemonology of all the thinkers he covers in the book in separate subsections, signaling the importance of the topic in the works of the Middle Platonists. Timotin’s book-length study has extended this project in terms of both chronological scope and textual and philosophical detail (Timotin, *La démonologie platonicienne*).

131. Recall that Iamblichus was himself very critical of what he perceived as “Hellenic innovations.”

132. “Even in later contexts when daemons took on a threatening character, they lost none of their intermediary nature. In fact, their unpleasant characteristics were intensified by it. Philosophers such as Plutarch, by putting them between gods and men also made them responsible for all the divine misrepresentations, demands for unpleasant sacrifices, etc., that formerly were blamed on the gods. As the concept of “divinity” became more detached, philosophy and mysticism called for something to fill the roles that the gods . . . no longer were permitted to fill.” Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate’s Role in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 34.

133. Iamb., *Myst.* 2.3.

134. The examples are almost too numerous to record here. A couple of examples should suffice. See, for instance, *PGM* II.15, II.116, III.56, III.76.

135. Here I am thinking of the way in which Apuleius categorizes spiritual species according to a limited set of taxonomic criteria that seem to be based on Aristotelian notions. His description of daemons gives a sense of how he proceeds: species—animal; soul—subject to passions; mind—rational; body—composed of air; life span—eternal. See Apul., *De Deo Socr.* 12–14. See also Timotin, *La démonologie platonicienne*, 112–20.

136. As we will see in Chapter 4, although Iamblichus is at pains to distinguish what

he does as a theurgist from the activities of other ritual practitioners, he is interested in a wide variety of practices in currency among other social classes in his day.

137. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of these matters with regard to so-called Gnostic taxonomies and Platonist ones.

138. A good example of this is found in Porphyry's descriptions of Plotinus's students in his *Vita Plotinii*.

139. In his conclusion, Shaw aptly notes that Iamblichus "attempted to uphold the 'old ways' of traditional religions by interpreting them according to a cosmological and arithmetic schema." But he, even more than Plato, "preserved these schemas in their own cultural expressions, believing that the power of these rites could never be explained intellectually; they had to be enacted and embodied." Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 239–40.

140. I thank James Rives for bringing these parallels between Apuleius and Iamblichus to my attention. For indications that this may have been a public lecture, see Stephen Harrison, ed., *Apuleius: Rhetorical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 185–89.

141. Apul., *De Deo Socr.* 152–57.

142. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 93–94.

143. Porph., *Comm. Tim.* fr. 57 Sodano; trans. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 341.

144. Fr. 471 Smith (uncertain); trans. Johnson, *Religion and Identity*, 342.

145. Gregory A. Smith, "How Thin Is a Demon?" *J ECS* 16, 4 (2008): 479–512.

146. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3–37.

147. Origen, *Princ.* 1.Pref.8.

148. *Ibid.*

149. Ps-Pl., *Epinom.* 981b–985a. The association of each creature with a different element also explains how and why certain spiritual beings are visible and others invisible. See Timotin, *La démonologie platonicienne*, 86–93.

150. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Bennett, "Power of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agency," in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, D.C.: Oliphant Books, 2012), 237–69; Cohen, "An Abecedarium for the Elements," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 2 (2011): 291–303; Valerie Allen, "Mineral Virtue," in Cohen, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, 123–52.

151. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, lx.

152. *Ibid.*, viii.

153. Bennett mainly focuses on Lucretius's atomism in particular and Epicurean ideas more generally, but this vitalism is characteristic of elemental thinking across ancient physics and cosmology.

154. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.

155. *Ibid.*, 9.

156. *Ibid.*, 62.

157. *Ibid.*, 62–63.

158. Derek Collins offers further evidence for the agency of what we tend to think of

as “inert objects” in antiquity in his discussion of notions of causality and agency associated with ritual objects such as amulets, *defixiones*, and figurines. He refers to these objects as “social agents” with “moral responsibility.” Derek Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency in Greek Magic,” *TAPA* 133 (2003): 37–44.

159. Cohen, “An Abecedarium for the Elements,” 292.

160. *Ibid.*, 293.

161. *Ibid.*

162. Porph., *Ad Gaur.* 10.4–11.2.

163. Aug., *Civ.* 8.16.

164. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 3. THE MISSING LINK

Epigraph: *Ap. John* II 18, 24–19, 10, *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II, 1; III, 1; and IV 1 with BG 8502, 2*, ed. Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 111 (trans. Waldstein and Wisses).

1. The most thorough study of the history of these efforts by far is Andrei Timotin’s *La démonologie platonicienne: Histoire de la notion de daimôn de Platon aux derniers néoplatoniciens* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Timotin’s work is especially helpful when it comes to Apuleius and Plutarch. See also John Dillon’s earlier work, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth, 1977).

2. In the next chapter we will explore just how close late ancient Platonists were to the priestly milieu of many of those who created and used these rituals. The writers of certain so-called Gnostic texts appear to be equally close. See, for instance, Zeke Mazur, “Unio Magica, Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual,” *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 29–56.

3. Dylan Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Ruth Majercik, “The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism,” *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 475–88; Majercik, “Porphyry and Gnosticism,” *Classical Quarterly* 55 (2005): 277–92; Mazur, “Unio Magica, Part 2.” Tuomas Rasimus, “Porphyry and the Gnostics: Reassessing Pierre Hadot’s Thesis in Light of the Second- and Third-Century Treatises,” in *Plato’s Parmenides and Its Heritage*, vol. 2, *Reception in Patristic, Gnostic, and Christian Neoplatonic Texts*, ed. John D. Turner and Kevin Corrigan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 81–110; John D. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi in Their Relation to Late Platonic Literature,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. Jay Bregman and Richard T. Wallis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 425–59; Turner, “The Setting of the Platonizing Sethian Treatise in Middle Platonism,” in Turner and Majercik, *Gnosticism and Later Platonism*, 179–224.

4. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism,” 430–36.

5. David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 88. Karen King writes, “The importance of the *Secret Revelation of John* can hardly be overestimated. It was the first Christian writing to formulate a comprehensive narrative of the nature of God, the origin of the world, and human salvation. Its fresh and provocative interpretation of some of the most prestigious intellectual traditions of antiquity—from *Genesis* to Plato and beyond—illustrates the extraordinary intellectual labor that was going on during the foundational period of Christianity.” Karen King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), vii.

6. Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 88.

7. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 181. King notes that the project of the *Secret Revelation of John* is similar to that of Numenius, and I would add that of Ammonius Saccas and his followers. She quotes Numenius where he writes: “When one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute bringing forward then rites and doctrines, and their institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brahmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged” (182).

8. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 180.

9. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), 23–48.

10. This is similar to the problem of categorizing the “magical” texts discussed in Chapter 4. Karen King has reviewed the history of the categorizations “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” in helpful and illuminating ways in her book *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Nicola Denzey Lewis also addresses similar questions regarding the “cosmic pessimism” that is supposedly characteristic of “Gnosticism” in her book, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Greco-Roman Antiquity: Under Pitiless Skies* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 13–28. It is interesting to note that many of the scholars Lewis mentions in her discussion of the way in which this characterization was constructed, scholars such as Hans Jonas, André-Jean Festugière, Arthur Darby Nock, E. R. Dodds, and representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, were also involved in classifying the ritual papyri as magical and as a sign of religion in decline in late antiquity. Many of these scholars use the same terms to talk about “Gnosticism” as philosophy in decline in the same period.

11. Origen, *Princ.* 1.7.2. See Brakke, *The Gnostics* (128–32) for a more detailed discussion of Origen’s response to ideas such as those found in *The Secret Revelation of John* and the *Tripartite Tractate*.

12. In his book *The Gnostics*, David Brakke supported the view that there were self-identifying “Gnostics” in the early centuries of Christianity. He argued that they were like a school of thought, initially Christian but increasingly Platonist as they encountered opposition from Christian groups. In this respect, Brakke followed Turner’s genealogy of

Sethian Gnosticism (see note 44). Brakke revisited this genealogy in a keynote lecture he delivered at the North American Patristics Society (Chicago, May 2014), in which he critiqued the narrative he had presented in his book.

13. See Michael Williams, “Interpreting the Nag Hammadi Library as ‘Collection(s)’ in the History of ‘Gnosticism(s)’,” in *Les textes de Nag Hammadi et le problème de leur classification: Actes du colloque tenu à Québec du 15 au 19 septembre 1993*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Anne Pasquier (Quebec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1995), 3–50; Williams, “The Scribes of the Nag Hammadi Library Codices,” in *Actes du IV^e congrès copte, Louvain-la-Neuve, 5–10 septembre 1988: De la linguistique au gnosticisme*, ed. Marguerite Rassart-Debergh and Julien Ries (Louvain-le-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1992), 334–42; Elaine Pagels and Lance Jenott, “Antony’s Letters and Nag Hammadi Codex I: Sources of Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt,” *J ECS* 18, 4 (2010): 557–89.

14. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, ix–x.

15. King’s book *What Is Gnosticism?* deals with the history of this question in great detail by, in part, giving an overview of many of the scholars who defined “Gnosticism” in these derivative terms. For a clear, more general discussion of the theoretical issues pertaining to the study of “Christian Origins,” see William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon, “The Origins of Christianity Within, and Without, ‘Religion’: An Exploration and Application,” chap. 8 in *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of “Religion”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

16. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, vii.

17. *Ibid.*, 9–17.

18. Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.5.

19. *Ibid.*, 1.7.2.

20. King points out that the *Secret Revelation of John* does recognize distinctions between souls, but these are based on how well these souls succeed in mastering passions such as anger, grief, and lust. Hence, she sees the text as anticipating Origen in its affirmation of universal salvation for human souls after undergoing “a period of appropriate instruction or punishment to be purified from wickedness.” King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 142.

21. For discussion regarding why the category “Sethian” is problematic, see Frederik Wisse, “Stalking Those Elusive Sethians,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the Conference at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 2: 563–76; Alan B. Scott, “Churches or Books? Sethian Social Organization,” *J ECS* 3, 2 (1995): 109–22.

22. Tuomas Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking: Rethinking Sethianism in Light of the Ophite Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 15. Rasimus himself argues for a thinning of the Sethian category. By drawing connections between the Ophite cosmology in Origen’s *Contra Celsum* and aspects of *The Secret Revelation of John*, Rasimus is calling for a reevaluation of Schenke’s rather unwieldy and unhelpful categorization under the heading “Sethian” of importantly different and disparate texts.

23. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 278–79.

24. Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.1–2; King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 179.

25. Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1–2.
26. *Ibid.*, 1.
27. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
28. *Ibid.*, 2.
29. Michel Tardieu, “Les gnostiques dans la *Vie de Plotin*: Analyse du chapitre 16,” in *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*. ed. J. Pépin (Paris: Vrin, 1992) 524; trans. in Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue*, 3–4.
30. Porph., *Plot.* 16; *Plotinus: Porphyry on Plotinus, Ennead I*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).
31. Scholars are still debating as to whether or not the texts in the Nag Hammadi library are earlier or later versions of the ones circulating in Plotinus’s circle. Both Majercik and Luise Abramowski have argued that the Nag Hammadi texts were later, post-Plotinian redactions of the texts circulating in Plotinus’s school; see Luise Abramowski, “Marius Victorinus, Porphyrius und die römischen Gnostiker,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 74 (1983): 108–28; Majercik, “Porphyry and Gnosticism.” On the other hand, Dylan Burns has argued convincingly that the Coptic *Zostrianos* of the Nag Hammadi collection is likely a translation of a pre-Plotinian text; Burns, “Apophatic Strategies in *Allogenes* (NHC XI, 3),” *HTR* 103, 1 (2010): 161–79.
32. Porph., *Plot.* 16. Porphyry applied the same text-critical approach to other more canonical Christian texts
33. *Plot.*, *Enn.* 2.9.33.
34. For instance, *Enn.* 1.8, 2.4. See Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue*, 11–53 for a potential resolution to this apparent contradiction.
35. This perspective still meets with considerable resistance, and hence cannot be said to represent a new scholarly consensus. See, for instance, Robbert van den Berg’s comments on Turner’s contribution to the volume, *Religion and Philosophy in the Platonic and Neoplatonic Tradition: From Antiquity to the Early Medieval Period* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2012) in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 8, 6 (2013).
36. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism,” 425.
37. Porph., *Plot.* 17.
38. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism,” 439.
39. Catherine Barry, Wolf-Peter Funk, Paul-Hubert Poirier, and John D. Turner, eds., *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Quebec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2000), 157–58.
40. Turner, “Gnosticism and Platonism,” 439.
41. *Ibid.*, 457.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 429.
44. *Ibid.*, 429–30: “It seems that Sethianism interacted with Christianity in five phases: 1) The Sethians likely originated as one of a number of Palestinian or Syrian baptismal sects in the first centuries BCE and CE; they considered themselves the historical progeny of Seth, their spiritual ancestor by whom (together with Adam) they had been

primordially enlightened, but from whom they expected yet a final saving visitation in the form of the conferral of a new form of spiritual baptism called the Five Seals. 2) In the later first century, Sethianism gradually became Christianized through an emerging identification between the preexistent Christ and Seth (or Adam) that resulted from increasing contact with Christian groups. 3) Toward the end of the second century, Sethianism gradually became estranged from a Christianity increasingly on the road to a polemical orthodoxy which rejected the rather docetic Sethian interpretation of Christ. 4) In the third century Sethianism is rejected by the Great Church, but in the meantime has become strongly attracted by the individualistic contemplative practices of second and third century Platonism, a shift that entailed a gradual loss of interest in their primal origins and sacred history and a corresponding attenuation of their awareness of group or communal identity (i.e. a tendency toward “rootlessness”). 5) In the late third century, Sethianism also became estranged from orthodox (Neo)Platonism under the impetus of attacks and refutations from the circle of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists which were just as effective as those of the Christian heresiologists. At this time, whatever Sethianism was left became increasingly fragmented into various derivative and other sectarian gnostic groups such as the Archonics, Audians, Borborites, Phibionites and others, some of which survived into the Middle Ages.”

45. Edward Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

46. Zeke Mazur, “*Unio Magica*, Part I: On the Magical Origins of Plotinus’ Mysticism,” *Dionysius* 21 (2003): 24.

47. Mazur describes the main characteristics of Plotinus’s conception of *unio mystica* as follows: “Now this striking set of images is apparently without precedent in the philosophical tradition, but I would suggest that it does point toward a possible extra-philosophical antecedent which is both historically and conceptually close to Plotinus. The reintegration of the soul with its divine source was a common goal of late antique soteriology, even in contexts which were not mystical in any strict sense. More specifically, the mention of self-divinization ‘through conjunction’ or ‘union’ with a deity occurs in several roughly contemporaneous mysteriosophic texts, primarily in those from Sethian Gnostic and Hermetic sources” (35).

48. Gregory Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos: Pythagorean Theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus,” *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999): 121–43.

49. Plot., *Enn.* 2.9.14.

50. Mazur, “*Unio Magica*, Part I,” 24, 35–37.

51. *Ibid.*, 37.

52. Origen, *Cels.* 6.25.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 6.27.

55. Rasimus, *Paradise Reconsidered*, 104.

56. Origen, *Cels.* 6.30.

57. *Ibid.*, 6.21.

58. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 124.

59. *Ap. John II*, 10.1–19.

60. *Ibid.*, 11.1–14.4.

61. *Ibid.*, 14.5–28.

62. *Ibid.*, 14.24–15.15.

63. *Ibid.*, 15.16–17.64.

64. *Ibid.*, 18.1–11.

65. *Ibid.*, 18.12–18.

66. Waldstein and Wisse, *The Apocryphon of John*, 7.

67. *Ap. John II*, 15.14–23.

68. The recognition that matter has its own “native” properties and is a unique source of passions when it interacts with the psychic recalls the discussion of matter’s agency in ancient metaphysics in Chapter 2.

69. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 111.

70. *Ibid.*, 113.

71. David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 17.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, 18.

74. John Dillon, “The Magical Power of Names in Origen and Later Platonism,” in *Origeniana Tertia: The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies, University of Manchester, September 7–11, 1981*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Ateneo, 1985), 204–5.

75. Origen, *Cels.* 1.6.

76. Iamb., *Myst.* 7.4–5.

77. *Ibid.*, 5.16.

78. King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 124.

79. For an excellent discussion of this juxtaposition in early Christian approaches to salvation, see Jenott and Pagels, “Antony’s Letters.”

80. I thank Ellen Muehlberger for helping me to think through these points of summation on *The Secret Revelation of John* and spiritual taxonomy.

81. Origen, *Comm. Mt.* 13.5; *Princ.* 2.10.7.

82. See, for instance, Majercik, “The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad”; Rasimus, “Porphyry and the Gnostics.”

83. Clem., *Strom.* 5.14.103.2; Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts Complete in One Volume*, International ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 537; Rasimus, “Porphyry and the Gnostics,” 106.

84. Meyer, *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 542.

85. Pl., *Rep.* 10.614–10.621.

86. James Wilberding, *Porphyry: To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled and on What Is in Our Power* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011).

87. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 115.

88. Hans Dieter Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 18 (Tübingen: Siebeck, 2003). An earlier version of this text translated by Marvin W. Meyer is included in Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

89. *Zostrianos* 4.20–5.17; Meyer, *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 547–48.

90. Zostrianos actually becomes a number of different kinds of angels in the course of his journey: “a contemplative angel,” “an angel of masculine gender,” “a holy angel,” and finally a “perfect angel.” *Zostrianos* 6.7–7.22.

91. *Zostrianos* 7.22–8.7.

92. See Heidi Marx-Wolf, “Medicine,” in *Late Ancient Knowing*, ed. Catherine Chin and Moulie Vidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 80–98.

93. Barry et al., *Zostrien*, 553.

94. *Zostrianos* 27.14–21.

95. *Ibid.*, 27.21–28.10.

96. *Ibid.*, 28.10–30.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 52.20–53.1. The translation is not entirely certain, given lacunae in the text.

99. Porph., *Styx* fr. 377 Smith.

100. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4. HIGH PRIESTS OF THE HIGHEST GOD

Epigraph: Porph., *Abst.* 2.49.2; Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, trans. Gillian Clark (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 75. Sections of this chapter were previously published in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18, 4 (Winter 2010): 481–513.

1. Plato himself gives us two models for how the philosopher should contribute to the political order. In the *Republic*, he argues that the ideal ruler is the philosopher-king. In the *Laws*, however, he presents the philosopher in an advisory role. Both models were invoked in subsequent periods, but later Platonists preferred the model of the philosopher as adviser for the general polity. See Dominic J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), in particular, pt. II, chap. 9.

2. Stephen Anthony Maiullo has argued that philosophers began to represent themselves as priests in the context of Middle Platonism. His focus is on Numenius and Plutarch in particular. See Stephen Anthony Maiullo, “From Philosopher to Priest: The Transformation of the Persona of the Platonic Philosopher” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 2010).

3. Recent work by both Dominic O'Meara and Jeremy Schott has convincingly demonstrated that we find a clearly articulated political philosophy in the works of a number of late Platonists. See O'Meara, *Platonopolis*; also Jeremy M. Schott, "Founding Platonopolis: The Platonic Politeia in Eusebius, Porphyry, and Iamblichus," *J ECS* 11, 4 (2003): 501–31. Although there is some evidence that figures such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Origen were in conversation with local and imperial authorities, and in some cases may have endeavored to act as advisors or realize certain political aims of their own, the focus of this discussion is not on their efforts to achieve political authority, but rather on their efforts to establish themselves as ritual experts, authorities on salvific actions and lifestyles that would lead to the restoration of a primordial unity between soul and divinity.

4. Porph., *Abst.* 2.49.1. Origen uses the phrase "ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων θεός" often in his works. See Serge Cazalais, "L'expression HO EPI PASI THEOS de l'ancienne académie à Origène et dans le *Commentaire* anonyme sur le *Parménide*," *Science et Esprit* 57, 3 (2005): 200. As the important volume edited by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede has demonstrated, it was quite common for intellectuals in this period to believe in some kind of supreme divinity and first principle, a god above all other deities and spirits. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

5. David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 32.

6. Albert Henrichs, "What Is a Greek Priest?," in *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliodorus*, ed. Beate Dignas and Kai Trampedach (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–14.

7. *Ibid.*, 1.

8. *Ibid.* This Christian understanding of priestly authority is in keeping with more general problems of approach to ancient religions. James B. Rives notes that on a "world religions model" we expect religions to have a few consistent features in addition to ritual approaches to divinity. These include "a distinct and broadly coherent system of beliefs and principles"; a set of sacred scriptures; professional, full-time authorities; and a moral code (5). Rives notes the problems of using such a model for studying ancient religion. And there are many reasons to suggest that it is a problematic model for studying any religion. James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 5.

9. Henrichs, "What Is a Greek Priest?," 9–14.

10. *Ibid.*, 5.

11. *Ibid.*, 9.

12. Origen is well known for his extensive use of figural interpretation and for his attempts to distinguish and employ various levels of interpretation more generally. (See Book 4 of *On First Principles* for a basic outline of Origen's method of biblical interpretation.) Porphyry objected strongly to Origen's choice to allegorize Hebrew scripture, stating that Origen took the method of allegorical interpretation from the works of Chaereon, the Stoic, and Cornutus, who had applied it to "the mysteries of the Greeks." Eus., *HE* 6.19.1. For a helpful discussion of Porphyry's objections to the interpretive endeavors of Origen

and his less able followers, see Michael B Simmons, “Porphyry of Tyre’s Biblical Criticism: A Historical and Theological Appraisal,” in *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays on Interpretation in the Early Church*, ed. Charles A. Bobertz and David Brakke (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 90–105. See also Pier Franco Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgment on Origen,” in *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 15–18 August 1989*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 351–67.

13. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), 63–64.

14. The issue may have been that Origen was preaching without Demetrius’s permission at the behest of the Palestinian bishops, whom Demetrius considered his subordinates. I thank Elizabeth DePalma Digeser for sharing this interpretation of the situation with me.

15. Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, 55.

16. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles: Being Koetschau’s Text of the De principiis* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973). The precise chronology of these events is difficult to establish based on any one source. Our main source is Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, but as Pier Franco Beatrice has pointed out, Eusebius is not always forthcoming about certain details of Origen’s life, including his travels and associations with other Platonist philosophers. Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgment on Origen,” 353.

17. Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgment on Origen,” 359. As we know from earlier chapters, Ammonius Saccas was also the teacher of Plotinus. Beatrice argues his lineage was shared by his two most illustrious pupils, Origen and Plotinus, both of whom at some point late in the life of the former contested the other’s claims to represent the true heritage of their teacher (360–62).

18. *Ibid.*, 359.

19. *Ibid.*, 360. Philip the Arab was thought to have been sympathetic to Christians, at least according to Eusebius’s account. Eusebius writes that he was even willing to confess his sins to the bishop of Rome one Passover in order to gain admittance to the church. Eus., *HE* 6.34.1.

20. According to Eusebius, in the mid-third century, the church at Rome had in its employ forty-six priests, seven deacons, seven subdeacons, forty-two acolytes, and fifty-two exorcists, readers, and janitors. The rather large number of exorcists and their identification as a distinct category of religious expert signal the importance of discerning and controlling spirits to Christian priestly identity. Eus., *HE* 6.43.11.

21. David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 131.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.* See also Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety*, 55.

24. Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 2.3.1; Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1–16*, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1990), 44.

25. Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 2.3.1.

26. *Ibid.*, 6.3.1.

27. Origen makes a similar distinction in *Contra Celsum* between those who understand the hidden meaning of sacred texts and sacred acts and the ordinary believer. He writes: “There are some who because of their great simplicity do not know how to explain their actions with arguments which may not be lightly regarded but what are profound and, as a Greek might say, esoteric and mysterious. They believe a profound doctrine about God and about those beings who through the only-begotten divine Logos have been so honored by God that they participate in the divine nature, and for this reason are also granted the name. There is also a profound doctrine about the divine angels and the opponents of the truth who have been deceived, and who because of this call themselves gods, or angels of God, or good daemons, or heroes who come into being through the transformation of a good human soul. Such Christians will also argue that, just as in philosophy many may think that they are in the right, either because they have fallaciously deceived themselves by plausible arguments, or because they have unthinkingly believed in notions suggested and discovered by others, so also there are some among the bodiless souls and angels and daemons who have been led by plausibilities to call themselves gods. But it was because of these doctrines which men have not been able to discover exactly and perfectly that it was not considered safe for a man to entrust himself to any being as a god, except only to Jesus Christ who rules over all like an arbiter” (*Cels.* 3.37); Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 153.

28. Origen, *Princ.* 1.Pref.3; trans. Butterworth, *Origen*, 2.

29. Origen, *Princ.* 1.Pref.3.

30. Origen, *Comm. Jn.* 1.10–11; Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 33.

31. In other words, he can read rituals in figural ways when he needs to.

32. Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 6.3.3–6.6.3.

33. *Ibid.* 1.5.1.

34. See Book 6 of Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel of John* for one of his richest treatments of the ritual of baptism. For a discussion of various exorcistic practices related to early Christian baptism, see H. A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual Theology and Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Dayna Kalleres, “Exorcising the Devil to Silences Christ’s Enemies: Ritualized Speech Practices in Late Antique Christianity” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2002).

35. Porph., *Abst.* 2.34.5.

36. *Ibid.*, 2.35.1.

37. Here Porphyry may have in mind an episode from Plotinus’s life that he recorded in his biography of his teacher. When Amelius, another student, invited Plotinus to attend a religious ceremony, he responded by saying that the objects of veneration, whether daemons or gods, “should come to me rather than I to them” (Porph., *Plot.* 10.33–39).

38. Porph., *Abst.* 2.49.1; 2.50.1.

39. Aaron P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 147.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Polymnia Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus,” *JRS* 83 (1993): 127. In the introduction to their translation of *On the Mysteries*, Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell translate τέχνη as “magic.” Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), xliii.

43. Athanassiadi, “Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination,” 127.

44. Ibid., 120, 122.

45. Ibid., 127.

46. Saffrey has offered an intriguing interpretation of this name. He argues that Iamblichus combined the Syriac/Hebrew word for father (“Aba”) with the Egyptian deity “Amon” (also “Ammon” or “Amoun”), a deity identified by Plutarch with Zeus, the highest god in the Greek pantheon. Thus the name would mean “father of god” (in Greek it would be πατήρ θεοῦ or θεόπατωρ), a phrase Porphyry used in his *Sententiae* to identify the one who has attained the highest level of virtue, namely the level of the paradigmatic virtues. H. D. Saffrey, “Abamon, pseudonyme de Jamblique,” in *Philomathes: Studies and Essays in the Humanities in Memory of Philip Merlan*, ed. R. B. Palmer and R. Hammerton-Kelly (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), 234–38.

47. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.20.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 5.21

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 5.22. The hieratic superiority of the theurgist continued to be affirmed in later Platonists, such as Proclus. Polymnia Athanassiadi puts it well when she writes: “It is within this cosmic logic of unity and union through love that Proclus proclaims his optimistic message that the theurgist’s ascending practice brings salvation to humanity at large: at that moment ‘imitating his own god by whom he is possessed, the divine love breaks away and leads upwards the well-born, perfects the imperfect and provides success to those in need of salvation’ (In Alc. 53, 9–12). In other words, in his sweeping ascent towards the realm of ‘singing light’ the theurgist bolsters the struggle of everyone who strives consciously or unconsciously towards union.” Polymnia Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176–77.

55. Iamb., *Myst.* 5.14.

56. Ibid. 3.28.

57. This is especially the case among Platonist theurgists who come after Iamblichus.

According to Todd Krulak, the teletic arts represented the theurgist's participation in the demiurgic activity of ensouling matter. Krulak argued this point with reference to Proclus in his presentation "‘It's a Small World’: Statue Animation and Platonic Cosmogony in Proclus' Commentary on the *Timaeus*" at the Society of Biblical Literature (San Diego, November 2007). In his abstract for the paper, Krulak argues that it is important to understand that statue animation was a ritual that did not occur in isolation, but rather served as a "communal act in which the Platonic cosmogony is remembered and reproduced." He continues: "Proclus' repeated comparisons between the role of the *telestes*, the ritual expert, and that of the Platonic Demiurge on the one hand, and between the cult image and the Universe on the other, suggest that the practice has implications that extend beyond simply the cultivation of oracular pronouncements. Indeed, . . . the cosmogonic rehearsal found in statue animation can be viewed as a communal reminder both of the authority of Plato's account and of the soteriological power of theurgy." For more on theurgy and the teletic arts in later Platonists, see Krulak, "The Animated Statue and the Ascension of the Soul: Ritual and the Divine Image in Late Platonism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2009).

58. Porph., *Abst.* 2.49.3.

59. Krulak, "‘Invisible Things on Visible Forms’: Pedagogy and Anagogy in Porphyry's *Περὶ ἀγαλλμάτων*," *JLA* 4, 2 (2011): 343–64. Krulak writes: "If Porphyry holds an iconographic theory similar to that of his master, then *PA* can be seen not as an effort meant to hide the embarrassment inherent in anthropomorphic statuary of the gods, but instead as an expression of confidence in the ritual image's ability to speak truly about the divine. The ancient sages' wisdom and their temporal and 'spiritual' proximity to the gods enabled them to fashion the images in a way that was embedded in the statues aspects of the assumed universal philosophy" (363). Presumably, Porphyry, the high priest, was also able to access the intelligible in such a way as to "portray the gods in a manner that best communicated their divine qualities" (363).

60. Krulak, "‘Invisible Things on Visible Forms’," 362. Krulak's translation is a modification of A. H. Armstrong's in the Loeb Classical Library.

61. Iamb., *Myst.* 3.28.

62. This section challenges the idea that these artifacts represent ancient "magical" practices, i.e., practices that would have been considered outside or opposed to normative religion. Hence, it is important at the outset to note a number of points about terminology. The two Greek words most often translated by the word "magic" are *μαγεία* and *γοητεία*. The former often just referred to the wisdom, frequently considered esoteric, of the magi, i.e., Persian sages. The figure of the *μάγος* was frequently employed to refer to wise individuals from the East, even Egypt, who had some sort of special knowledge, often astronomical. Hence, I argue, the translation "magic" insofar as it refers to something that is juxtaposed to religion is misleading in this case. The word *γοητεία*, which is related to *γόησις*, is more akin to what many scholars are referring to when they use the word "magic" for ancient practices. The term was, for the most part, used in a pejorative way to label others or to accuse them of participating in harmful, dubious, or even treasonous activities. It is telling that the word *γοητεία* appears only a couple times in the *PGM*.

63. Although most of these artifacts come from Egypt, there are important reasons why the conclusions we can draw from them have broader applicability. First, we have evidence of similar rites and practices from other places using different media. For instance, we have curse tablets and binding spells on lead and many other materials. We also have evidence of healing amulets and votives from all over the Mediterranean on stone, gems, metal, and so forth. Indeed, it is likely that many materials that ordinary people in late antiquity would have used to interact with spirits and divinities, such as wood, clothe, unbaked clay, and papyri, were too ephemeral to survive until today, the Egyptian papyri being the one remarkable exception. And although we do see regional variation, for instance, in the case of the Aramaic incantation bowls, in terms of both language and format, many of the same kinds of needs, desires, and ritual processes are expressed in these instances. Part of this chapter's argument is specific to Egypt and its native priestly class. However, as will become clear, this class is itself representative of the ways in which local religious experts and traditional elites around the Mediterranean were affected by and interacted with both Greek culture and Roman imperial administration.

64. For a comprehensive discussion of the way these papyri came to be collected and published over time, see the detailed article and annotated bibliography by William M. Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri: An Introduction and Survey; Annotated Bibliography (1928–1994)," *ANRW* 2.18.5 (1995): 3398–412. Initially these artifacts had been passed over by both Egyptologists and classicists. Brashear writes: "Far from attaining any popular acclaim, the first magical papyri were largely ignored even by the scholars of the day. Although they were catalogued among Egyptian acquisitions, Egyptologists ignored them since they were written in Greek, while classicists, whose attention was riveted solely on things Attic, denigrated and derided them as barbaric products of a bastard culture unworthy of their study" (3399). In other words, the papyri did not fit into the research genres, programs, or conceptual framework of scholars at the time they were discovered.

65. This trend is attested to by the important English translation of the vast majority of known papyri of this sort edited by Hans Dieter Betz in 1986. Brashear's 300-page annotated bibliography for the papyri, published in *ANRW* in 1995, is another example of growing interest. In 1992 and 1998, Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki arranged important conferences devoted to the theme "Magic in the Ancient World." The proceedings from these were published in two Brill volumes: Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Allan Mirecki, eds., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); and Meyer and Mirecki, eds., *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). Interest in these artifacts and in questions of ancient "magic" and ritual has not abated since.

66. See Brashear, "Greek Magical Papyri," 3391 n. 4 for bibliography on the relationship between magic and religion.

67. J. Z. Smith has been one of the most vocal critics of this model. In his article "Trading Places," in Meyer and Mirecki, *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 13–27, he notes that the idea that "magic" is an incipient form of "science" or "religion" is an "odd sort of definition" (14). He argues, "Not only does it break the conventional definitory rules (especially those against the use of a negative *deficiens*), but also because it is typically

inconsistent in its application to differentia” (14). Smith also takes issue with Stanley Tambiah, who critiqued the evolutionary hierarchy of earlier writers such as Taylor, Frazer, Malinowski, and Evans-Pritchard and proposed the idea that “religion” encompassed “magic,” defining the latter as essentially “performative utterance” (15). For Smith, this is a difference that “makes no difference.” Smith is also critical of approaches following Victor Turner, which shift to a social understanding of the relations between the accuser (the one who charges another with “magic”) and the accused as the former seeks somehow to marginalize the latter. For an example of this kind of approach applied to the late Roman world, see David E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” *ANRW* 2.23.1 (1980): 1507–57. Aune has recently updated his *ANRW* article; see David E. Aune, “‘Magic’ in Early Christianity and Its Mediterranean Context: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarship,” *Annali di Storia dell’Egesi* 24 (2007): 229–94. In light of his criticism, Smith argues against further use of the term “magic” in “second-order, theoretical, academic discourse” (16). He writes, “For any culture I am familiar with, we can trade places between the corpus of materials conventionally labeled “magical” and corpora designated by other generic terms (e.g. healing, divining, execrative) with no cognitive loss” (16). I follow Smith here and likewise avoid using the term in my discussion of the papyri. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, I do so because in antiquity the term *γοητεία* was used almost exclusively in a pejorative sense and was not a term that people generally used to describe their own activities.

68. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 286–88.

69. See, for example, the following works by Catherine M. Bell: *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); *Teaching Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

70. Smith, “Trading Places.”

71. Ancient cursing usually presents the greatest difficulties for modern readers. For a discussion of why this is the case and the way in which most people, with the exception of a smallish group of elite intellectuals, viewed cursing, see Heidi Marx-Wolf, “Platonists and High Priests: Daemonology, Ritual, and Social Order in the Third Century CE” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 2009), 38–42. See also Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

72. Smith, “Trading Places,” 21.

73. Smith defines religion as the “manifold techniques, both communal and individual, by which men and women . . . sought to gain access to, or avoidance of, culturally imagined divine power by culturally patterned means.” Smith, “Here, There, and Anywhere,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott B. Noegel, Joel Thomas Walker, and Brannon M. Wheeler (University Park: Pennsylvania

State University Press, 2003), 21–22. One sees that on this definition, papyri fit well within the scope of religion. Smith then divides up the realm of religion into three spheres. “Here” refers to “domestic religion located primarily in the home and in burial sites” (23). “There” refers to “public, civic and state religion based on temple constructions” (23), and “anywhere” refers to a “rich diversity of religious formations that occupy an interstitial space between these two loci, including a variety of religious entrepreneurs, and ranging from groups we term ‘associations’ to activities we label ‘magic’” (23). Strangely, Smith uses the term “magic” in this article without qualification, but seems to use it synonymously with the phrase “a religion of anywhere.” He also signals the problems this term introduces by referring to other articles in which he focuses on terminology, for instance, “Trading Places.”

74. David Frankfurter, “Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of ‘Magicians,’” in Meyer and Mirecki, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, 159: “The Greek Magical Papyri, for example, are now more accurately located among innovative members of the Egyptian priesthood during the third-fourth century decline of the Egyptian temple infrastructure than among some putative class of *magoi*, for which we have no documentary evidence.”

75. David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 198–237. See also Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 263–68.

76. Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100–300 CE)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 208–9. Dieleman uses the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* to make this point (BGU 5 1210 and P. Oxy XLII 3014).

77. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 166–68.

78. Smith, “Trading Places,” 24–25.

79. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 205.

80. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 225.

81. Ibid. In his article, “The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors,” *ARG* 2 (2000): 162–94, Frankfurter further defines stereotype appropriation as “a dynamic process of buying into, internalizing, and exploiting the roles offered by a dominant culture” (174).

82. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 225. I here take Frankfurter to be using the term *μάγος* in the sense indicated in note 62, and not in the sense of *γότης*. Dieleman agrees with Frankfurter that one sees stereotype appropriation in the Greek papyri. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 9–10.

83. In particular, he analyzes *PGM* XII, *PDM* xii, *PGM* XIV, and *PDM* xiv, papyri grouped together under the title “the London-Leiden papyrus.” This papyrus has a long and fascinating history. Some time before 1828, a large cache of papyrus rolls and codices was found by villagers in Thebes. The find came to be known as the “Theban Magical Library.” It was acquired by Giovanni Anastasi, an Armenian merchant in Egypt, and

Swedish-Norwegian consul general from 1828 to 1857, when he died. One of his commercial ventures was a vigorous trade in antiquities. From 1828, he sold parts of the Theban cache to various European collections, even dividing individual handbooks in some cases. This has made it particularly difficult for scholars to determine the overall complexion of the “library.” Dieleman’s work has brought together pieces of one handbook scattered between London and Leiden. Brashear, who recounts the history of the Theban materials in his *ANRW* article (3401–6), claims that *PGM* IV, V, XIII, and XIV belong to the original find, and that it may also have included *PGM* I, II, III, VII, XII, and LXI. Dieleman argues for the inclusion of *PGM* XII and that it and *PGM/PPDM* XIV were part of a single handbook. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 14–15.

84. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 285–94.

85. *Ibid.*, 293.

86. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 251.

87. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 249.

88. *Ibid.*, 250.

89. *Ibid.* W. J. Tait, “Demotic Literature and Egyptian Society,” in *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, ed. Janet H. Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1992), 303–10.

90. Jacco Dieleman, “Stars and the Egyptian Priesthood in the Graeco-Roman Period,” in Noegel et al., *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars*, 148.

91. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 294.

92. Dieleman, “Stars and the Egyptian Priesthood,” 140–41.

93. Dieleman, “Claiming the Stars: Egyptian Priests Facing the Sky,” in *Basel Egyptology Prize: Junior Research in Egyptian History, Archaeology, and Philology*, ed. Susanne Bickel and Antonio Loprieno, *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 17 (Basel: Schwabe, 2003), 281.

94. Dieleman, “Stars and the Egyptian Priesthood,” 148.

95. Carole Reeves, *Egyptian Medicine* (Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, 1992), chap. 3.

96. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 166–68. Fowden writes: “Such men [representatives of the native clergy] will naturally have been well-disposed towards a doctrine which associated the traditions of Egypt and the magical and astrological interests of its temple-dwellers with the fashionable Platonism of the age; and we may easily imagine them among the audience and perhaps even the authors of the Hermetic books. Iamblichus may have been mistaken in his belief that the Hermetica had been written by ancient Egyptian priests; but both that belief, and the fact that he saw himself fit to expound the doctrine of Hermes in the guise of a *prophētēs*, are indicative of what seemed probable and reasonable in late antiquity” (167–68).

97. A. D. Nock and A. J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1946–54). For an excellent English translation of this collection, see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

98. In a presentation at the Society for Biblical Literature (Boston, 2008), Lynn

LiDonnici made the point that although the ritual papyri in the *PGM* cannot be used for social history, i.e., they cannot be used to get at the lived reality of everyday people in late antique Egypt, they can be used to study intellectual history.

99. *Ibid.*

100. Hans Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, ed. Michel Tardieu, new ed. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 228.

101. Fowden writes: “Egyptian priests, bereft of their income by economic measures taken by the Roman government, mimic the Hellenistic image of their profession to secure financial gain from the Hellenistic elite, which is interested in personal religious experience and close contact with the divine through the agency of an oriental guru” (*The Egyptian Hermes*, 286). In this respect, Iamblichus is rather like the Egyptian priests whose identity he adopts. We might see Origen’s contested priesthood in a similar light. He claimed to be a high priest of sorts, and yet the institutional apparatus for ordaining priests in the Christian church, including the hierarchy of ecclesiastical sees, was still in flux in his lifetime. This is evident in the tensions we see in this period between Christian bishops in Rome, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, all places where Origen either lived or visited.

102. Eun., *VS* 457–58; Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 363.

103. John M. Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogus Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 5. Dillon writes that the descendants of Samsigeramos “continued to rule Emesa until the reign of Domitian, and even thereafter were dominant in the area” (5).

104. Bent Dalsgaard Larsen, “La place de Jamblique dans la philosophie antique tardive,” in *De Jamblique à Proclus*, ed. H. Dörrie (Geneva: Hardt, 1975), 24; Polymnia Athanassiadi, “The Oecumenism of Iamblichus: Latent Knowledge and Its Awakening,” *JRS* 85 (1995): 246.

105. For the most complete and detailed work on Iamblichus’s biography as a whole, see John M. Dillon, “Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 240–325 AD),” *ANRW* 2.36.2 (1987): 862–909. For a discussion of the events surrounding the destruction of the Bruchion quarter, see Stewart Irvin Oost, “The Alexandrian Seditious under Philip and Gallienus,” *Classical Philology* 56 (1961): 1–20. See also Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 340.

106. Athanassiadi also argues for Hermetic influence on Iamblichus’s writings: “To the present reviewer’s mind, [Iamblichus] drew much more from Egypt in general and the Hermetic milieu in particular than has ever been suspected. . . . Indeed, one of Iamblichus’s primary achievements is to have shown how this contemporary Hermetic literature—so diverse in style and content (DMVIII.4.265, I.260 and VI.5)—had absorbed much that was of Greek and Hellenistic origin without sacrificing its essentially Egyptian character (DMVIII.5; cf VII.5.258).” Athanassiadi, “The Oecumenism of Iamblichus,” 246.

107. Beatrice, “Porphyry’s Judgment on Origen,” 360–61.

108. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 138.

109. “In other words, there existed what may best be called theological Hermetica, which described the gods in the Stoic manner in terms of the powers inherent in physical creation and discussed the names variously assigned them by the Egyptians and the Greeks. There are obvious parallels with the passages just quoted from the *De Mysteriis*; and we may assume that it was at least in part from these theological Hermetica that Iamblichus compiled his account of Egyptian doctrine concerning the gods.” Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 138–39.

110. *Ibid.*, 138.

111. *Ibid.*, 167. Chaeremon was a first-century Egyptian priest (*hierogrammateus*) and Stoic philosopher who became Nero’s tutor before his accession. Athanassiadi notes a similar association of local priests educated in philosophy in second-century Apamea. She cites an inscription that mentions a priest of Bel who was also head of the Epicurean school in the city. She tentatively identifies the sanctuary of Bel and its priesthood as the milieu in which the Chaldaean Oracles were produced and disseminated. Philosophical interest in the oracles could have been transmitted through the Platonist philosopher Numenius whose school was also at Apamea. Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles,” 154–55.

112. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 167–68.

113. Porph., *Phil. orac.* fr. 326 Smith.

114. *Apuleius: Rhetorical Works*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–10.

115. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 38.

116. Attilio Mastrocinque, “Creating One’s Own Religion: Intellectual Choices,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 389.

117. This totalizing “philosophy as a way of life” transposed into this third-century idiom is best represented in the picture Iamblichus paints of Pythagoras’s school in his *On the Pythagorean Life*, trans. Gillian Clark (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989). For a discussion of the role the image of Pythagoras played in the debates between Porphyry and Iamblichus, see Heidi Marx-Wolf, “Pythagoras the Theurgist: Porphyry and Iamblichus on the Role of Ritual in the Philosophical Life,” in *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Jordan D. Rosenblum, Lily C. Vuong, and Nathaniel P. DesRosiers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014), 32–38.

118. I use the word “groups” with caution because, as noted, we don’t know for certain how individuals behind the Nag Hammadi texts or the *PGM* handbooks might have self-identified. And we have also established that identity in this period was shifting, flexible, and multiple. For a discussion of the relationship between texts such as the *Secret Revelation of John* and urban school settings, see Karen King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 9–17.

CONCLUSION

1. See, for instance, Harold A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

2. Bart D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 317–19.

3. I thank Dayna Kalleres for bringing both these examples to my attention, and direct readers to her book *City of Demons: Violence, Ritual, and Christian Power in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

4. Amb., *Ep.* 77 [22]. All quotations are taken from *Saint Ambrose: Letters*, trans. Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 376–84. The events of this letter are also described by both Augustine and Paulinus of Nola. See Aug., *Conf.* 9.7; and Paulin. *V. Amb.* 14.

5. For a detailed discussion of the events of this letter and their larger political and religious context, see Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 209–19.

6. Amb., *Ep.* 77.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. See Robert Wilkin, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) for an extended discussion of these sermons.

12. Chrys., *Jud.* 1.3.4–5. All quotations are taken from *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).

13. Chrys., *Jud.* 1.5.6–7.

14. Porphyry relates that when Pythagoras arrived on the Italian Peninsula, he advised a number of city leaders regarding governance: “During his travels in Italy and Sicily he founded various cities subjected one to another, both of long standing, and recently. By his disciples, some of whom were found in every city, he infused into them an aspiration for liberty; thus restoring to freedom Crotona, Sybaris, Catana, Rhegium, Himera, Agrigentum, Tauromenium, and others, on whom he imposed laws through Charondas the Catanian, and Zaleucus the Locrian, which resulted in a long era of good government, emulated by all their neighbors. Simichus the tyrant of the Centorupini, on hearing Pythagoras’s discourse, abdicated his rule and divided his property between his sister and the citizens.” Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie and David R. Fideler, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Phanes Press, 1987), 123–35.

15. Guthrie and Fideler, *Pythagorean Sourcebook*, 123–35.
16. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life*, ed. and trans. Gillian Clark (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989); see, for instance, chaps. 24 and 28.
17. Porph., *Plot.* 12.
18. Eus., *HE* 6.21.3–4.
19. See Polymnia Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) for an intriguing discussion concerning the possible connections between the priests of this temple and the Chaldaean Oracles.
20. Eus., *HE* 6.36.3.
21. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, “Porphyry, Julian or Hierokles? The Anonymous Helene in Makarios Magnes’ Apokritikos,” *JTS* 53 (2002): 466–502; Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), 180–88.
22. For example, Sopater was a courtier and valued advisor of Emperor Constantine I. Indeed, Eunapius says that Sopater became an imperial assessor. The emperor eventually put him to death, an act Eunapius blames on other jealous courtiers who weren’t as enthusiastic about “a court so lately converted to the study of philosophy” (Eun., *VS* 462).
23. Eun., *VS* 457, 459.

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