

THE MATHESON MONOGRAPHS

Orpheus is known as a mythical tragic lover, the minstrel-hero who made the stones dance, but he is also known as a major figure in ancient Greek religion and philosophy. Indeed, as we learn from this book, Orpheus, "the Theologian" *par excellence*, represents a musical bridge between the earliest Greek mysteries and the latest Hellenistic flourishing of Neoplatonic and Hermetic wisdom as well as between Egyptian initiation, Pythagorean doctrines and Platonic philosophy. Algis Uždavinys has left us in this, his final work, a moving exploration of the subtle thread running through ancient and contemporary literature related to Orpheus. He spares no criticism of the limitations of some current scholarly views, steering the reader towards the conviction that philosophy, if it is not to remain mere escapism, is no less than a "knowledge through madness" entailing self-transformation and ultimately union with the Divine.



DR. ALGIS UŽDAVINYS (1962-2010) was a senior research fellow at the State Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Arts, and Head of Humanities at the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts in his native Lithuania. A prolific author, Prof. Uždavinys' work has been published in Lithuanian, Russian, English and French, including translations of Plotinus, Frithjof Schuon and Ananda Coomaraswamy into Russian and Lithuanian. His hermeneutical corpus on the eternal river of wisdom flowing from Ancient Egypt through Neoplatonism into the monotheistic religions constitutes a treasure trove of comparative studies. The Matheson Trust is committed to the publication of this corpus in English.



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Algis Uždavinys

ORPHEUS AND THE ROOTS OF PLATONISM

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Algis Uždavinys



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The Matheson Trust
PO Box 336
56 Gloucester Road
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PREFACE

The present book is closely related to that famous Pre-Socratic fragment about the bow and the lyre, where their “back-stretched” or “retroflex” harmony (*palintonos harmonia*) is said to depict the tense inner cohesion of a diverging unity. The same authority, Heraclitus of Ephesus, employs a Greek pun to show how in the bow itself, one of whose names is *bios*, both the name of life and the act of death coexist. Orpheus, as a mythical hero—indeed, one of the famed Argonauts—stands right at the centre of these junctions. So it is no wonder that this book shares in that harmonious tension: a tension rooted in the nature of the lyre and the bow, whose products may be piercing sounds or slaying arrows.

Here, we have first a tension within the author, who is intoxicated with his theme and yet committed to carry out his exposition in a discursive and academic manner. We can almost feel his plight: having in mind the “tremendous contemplation of the divine truth and beauty”, which would merit either a *bakchic* outburst or a “supra-noetic metaphysical silence”, he is forcing himself to compose a “scientific” treatise. Having heard the music of Orpheus’ lyre, he is trying to convey as best as he can the unspeakable beauty of those notes in an all too earthly human language.

Second, as a direct consequence of the first, there is tension for the reader as he tries to follow the argument itself: strands of myth and mythic lore mix with dense epistemological and metaphysical discussion; abstruse Egyptian and Babylonian sources stand next to conventional Greek philosophical and 21st century academic references. The thing is

said, yet not fully; inadequately expressed with an almost deliberate disdain for exactitude on a plane which becomes redundant in the light of spiritual vision. This book moves uneasily between the apophatic and the cataphatic: trying to say something, saying something, hinting at something else, then finally keeping silent, finding itself lost for words, leaving the doors thrown open to a different understanding.

Then we find a third sort of tension, springing from the duality at the heart of the subject: Orpheus is a strange hero, one who has music and singing for weapons. He is a seer and tragic lover, yet a crucial figure in the history of philosophy. His place in the history of Greek religion and thought is still, even in specialised circles, something of a riddle, enigmatic and vague.

This book, densely packed with references, challenges, and subtle invitations, is a recapitulation or a critical reassessment of ancient and contemporary literature devoted to Orpheus, the “paradigmatic itinerant seer”, “the Theologian”, “the Saviour”. It gives special attention to his relations with both the Egyptian and the Platonic tradition. At the heart of this book we have a glimpse into the substance, nature and development of the Orphic mysteries, but the reader must be warned: this is not a history of Orphism, and this is no ordinary scholarly monograph. Those who approach this book with respect for the ancient mysteries, humbly trying to understand why our ancestors across cultures unfailingly gave to Plato the epithet of “Divine” (*Divus Plato*, or *Aflaton al-Ilahi*, as the Arabs used to call him), hoping for that “epistemic and hermeneutical illumination mediated by the holy light of myths and symbols,” such will find a treasure here: not a wealth of answers to be sure, but a wealth of mystagogic insights and intimations, sparks perhaps of that “fiery beauty of truth” contemplated by the author.

The brief earthly transit of Algis Uždavinys started in Lithuania in 1962. He completed his studies in Vilnius, graduating from the former State Art Institute of Lithuania, now Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, where he would eventually

become head of the Department of Humanities. Uždavinys was widely respected as a prolific author in Lithuania and abroad. He was renowned as a translator into Russian and Lithuanian of Ancient Egyptian and Greek texts, of Traditionalist works by Frithjof Schuon and Martin Lings, and he was active as well as an art critic and author of numerous articles and monographs (a list of his books can be found at the end of this volume). His interest in traditional doctrines would eventually take him around the world and to Jordan and Egypt, where he met living representatives of the Prophetic chain of wisdom embodied in the Qur’an and the Sunna. These would foster and orient his research projects until his untimely death in 2010. Not long before his passing and after he had completed this, his final book, he told his wife: “I have nothing else to say.” As someone who devoted his life to the understanding and cultivation of the Divine, Algis Uždavinys must surely be taken as evidence of the ancient Greek saying “whom the Gods love, die young.”

Like the Homeric epics, the current work is formed by twenty-four untitled chapters. Given the character of the book, less informative than mystagogic, and less systematic than symphonic, we have preferred to leave the brief chapters as they are, adding titles for ease of reference only in the table of contents.

Five major sections may be discerned in the book: chapters I-III deal with inspired madness in general, and with Socratic mania in particular; IV-VIII with the relations between philosophy, prophecy and priesthood, considering Middle Eastern, Egyptian and Greek traditions in general; chapters IX-XII narrow the scope to the figure of Orpheus as a prophet, considering his place in the Pythagorean tradition and in the development of Greek philosophy; chapters XIII-XVII touch on some of the deepest aspects of Orphic symbolism, considering the Orphic *bakcheia* (initiatic rites) and way of life (the *bios Orphikos*); chapters XVIII-XXII relate all the above to the history of Greek wisdom-philosophy, from Homer down to Hermeticism with special attention to Plato’s theories and

their Egyptian associations. The book concludes with a chapter on the realities beyond the tomb (XXIII), followed by a surrender of all arguments and a moving self-disclosure (XXIV). Silence reigns pregnant with mystical resonance.

Juan Acevedo
Director
The Matheson Trust

ORPHEUS AND THE ROOTS OF PLATONISM

Melancholy and the awakening of one's genius are inseparable, say the texts. Yet for most of us there is much sadness and little genius, little consolation of philosophy, only the melancholic stare—what to do, what to do. . . . Here our melancholy is trying to make knowledge, trying to see through. But the truth is that the melancholy is the knowledge; the poison is the antidote. This would be the senex's most destructive insight: our senex order rests on senex madness. Our order is itself a madness.¹

* * *

To this we may add the conclusion. It seems that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another.²

I

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues paradoxically that "our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness" (*ta megista ton agathon hemin gignetai dia manias: Phaedr. 244a*). The four

1. *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, introduced and edited by Thomas Moore (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 212 & 215.

2. Plato, *Parmenides* 166b. tr. F. M. Cornford, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 956.

kinds of divine inspiration, or madness, are viewed as a divine gift provided by the Muses, Dionysus, Apollo and Aphrodite (or Eros) respectively. In the same dialogue, the "divine banquet" is depicted as a metaphysical place of contemplation and vision. For Plato, the contemplation (*theoria*) of the eternal Ideas transcends our rational ability to comprehend and analyse these Ideas discursively.

The desperate longing for this paradigmatic contemplation is imagined as a yearning for wings and the regained ability to fly to the divine banquet. Accordingly, this pressing desire is the desire for wholeness, for noetic integrity, and for one's true divine identity provided by dialectical searching, philosophical recollection and erotic madness. The hierarchically organized troops of gods are led by Zeus. They lack both jealousy and passion, being involved neither in plots, nor in heavenly wars:

The gods have no need for madness, let alone erotic madness; hence the gods are not philosophers. It is not surprising, then, that the gods seem to have no need for *logos* (let alone for rhetoric). Although there is a certain amount of noise in the heavens, there is no reference whatsoever to there being any discourse among the gods or between gods and men.³

Therefore the Platonic philosopher, as the madman who nurtures wings, is the dialectically transformed "speaker" (the fallen soul enchanted by the magic of *logos*) whose apparently mad desire and *erotike mania* are not so much directly sent from the gods as sparkling from within as a desire for the divine banquet and for wisdom. But the three other kinds of madness discussed in Plato's *Phaedrus*, namely, poetic (*poietike mania*) telestic (*telestike mania*), and prophetic or mantic madness (*mantike mania*) indeed are sent by the gods.

3. Charles L. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 97.

The Muses are specified as the source of the poetic inspiration and of the three forms of madness; "the poetic sort seems to be the closest to Socratic-Platonic philosophizing and hence to be its most complex antagonist," as Charles Griswold remarks.⁴

The telestic madness is anagogic, and leads the soul to its forgotten origins through the theurgic rites of ascent or other sacramental means of purification. The inspired telestic liturgies (*telestike*, *hieratike telesiourgia*, *theophoria*) are not necessarily to be regarded straightforwardly as "operations on the gods", thus deliberately and incorrectly equating the animated cultic statues located in the context of particular ritual communications with the invisible metaphysical principles themselves. Otherwise, tacitly or not, the polemical premises for a certain iconoclastic bias are maintained. And so H.J. Blumenthal puts too much weight on the verb *theourgein*, supposing that one who does *theia erga* is one who operates on the gods, thereby making theurgy a nonsense.⁵

The mantic inspiration, or prophetic madness, which allegedly produces countless benefits, is evoked and evidenced, first of all, by the prophetesses at Delphi, thus recalling the close connection between the Apollonian shrine at Delphi and the philosophical self-knowledge required by Plato's Socrates. According to Griswold, "Socratic prophecy seems to combine the human *techne* of division or dissection with the divinely given *techne* of madness; that is, it somewhat combines . . . madness and *sophrosyne*."⁶

The Apollonian prophecy is inseparable from philosophizing and, hence, from rhetoric in its expanded general sense, showing and leading souls by persuasion or imperative—like a sacrificial priest, using the dialectical art of definition, divi-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

5. H.J. Blumenthal, "From ku-ru-so-wo-ko to theougos: word to ritual," in *Soul and Intellect: Studies in Plotinus and Later Platonism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, Variorum, 1993), XI, p. 6.

6. Charles L. Griswold, *ibid.*, p. 76.

sion and collection. Yet neither is the sacrificer to be viewed as a paradigm of theological understanding, nor the user of the art of rhetoric made subject to his own enchanting power of persuasion. However, they may become types of self-duped “believers” or acquire the ideologically tinctured, and therefore very “orthodox”, ability to talk about “truth”—or virtually any subject—and so become “difficult to be with”. As Griswold correctly observes, Plato’s Socrates

seems to fear the canonization of a *biblos*. That is, the written word lets us *persuade* ourselves too easily that we are in irrefutable possession of the truth, while in fact we are not. It facilitates our tendency to become dogmatists or zealots rather than philosophers. . . . Under these conditions philosophy can have the same corrupting influence that sophistry does or worse.⁷

However, academic paranoia differs from prophetic madness. The so-called prophets (*theomanteis*, *manteis theoi*, or Aristotle’s *sibullai kai bakides kai hoi entheoi pantos*: *Probl.* 954a.36) fall into *enthusiasmos*, the state of a particular “inspired ecstasy”, and utter truths of which they themselves presumably know nothing. Hence, being *entheos* means that the body has a god or a *daimon* within, just as the Egyptian animated statue has a manifestation (*ba*) of a god (*neter*) within. Similarly, *empsychos* means that both the physical human body and the cultic body (the hieratic statue or the entire sanctuary, itself full of images, statues and hieroglyphs) have an animating, life-giving and self-moving principle—namely, a soul (*psuche*)—inside them.

Orpheus is an example of one who has all these four kinds of inspiration or madness according to Hermeias the Alexandrian Neoplatonist, whose commentary on Plato’s *Phaedrus* reflects the views of his master Syrianus.⁸ Since these four *ma-*

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 207 & 208.

8. Anne Sheppard, *The Influence of Hermeias on Marsilio Ficino’s Doctrine*

niai assist the soul in its ascent and return to its noetic fatherland, Hermeias maintains that poetry and music are able to bring the disordered parts of the soul into order. The hieratic rites and sacramental mysteries of Dionysus make the soul whole and noetically active. Subsequently, the prophetic inspiration (*mantike mania*) is provided by Apollo and gathers the soul together into its own unity.

Hermeias regards the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* myth as the noetic part of the soul and the charioteer’s head as the “one within the soul”, or the soul’s ineffable henadic summit which alone may be united with the One. Thus, finally, as Anne Sheppard explains, “the inspiration of love takes the unified soul and joins the one within the soul to the gods and to intelligible beauty.”⁹

II

Perhaps with a certain measure of irony, Socrates was viewed by the majority of Athenians as a chatterer, an idle talker (*alolesches*). But this alleged idle talker obeyed and followed his god Apollo. He philosophized in the streets on the god’s behalf, and preached a kind of “spiritual pederasty” that leads the lovers (*eirastes*) of youths to the ideocentric love of Platonic truth and beauty. In this respect, Socrates is neither a “typical representative of the Greek Enlightenment”, nor the “intellectual leader of Athenian intellectuals”, as influential Western scholars would claim until recently, “. . . nor did he discourse, like most others, about the nature of the universe, investigating what the experts call ‘cosmos’. . . . Those who did so he showed up as idiots,” according to Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.1.11).

of Inspiration, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 43, 1980, p. 105.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Initially acting as a typical idle talker, Socrates realizes himself as a moralist. Strictly speaking, the man who is persuaded by nothing in him except the proposition which appears to him the best when he reasons about it (*Crit.* 46b) is no metaphysician either, though Apollo commanded him (as he “supposed and assumed”) to live philosophizing, examining himself and others (*Ap.* 28e). Socrates saw his own work in “philosophizing”, that is, in summoning all citizens (but especially wealthy youths of aristocratic origins) to perfect their soul, as a sort of socio-political mission following the god’s command and acting on the god’s behalf. Therefore, his performance of thus understood “dialectical” work (*ergon*) can be imagined as a form of piety in service (*latreia*) to the god. Gregory Vlastos argues:

Were it not for that divine command that first reached Socrates through the report Chaerephon brought back from Delphi there is no reason to believe that he would have ever become a street philosopher. If what Socrates wants is partners in elenctic argument, why should he not keep to those in whose company he had sought and found his eudaimonist theory—congenial and accomplished fellow seekers after moral truth? Why should he take to the streets, forcing himself on people who have neither taste nor talent for philosophy, trying to talk them into submitting to a therapy they do not think they need?¹⁰

There is no explanation other than a supposed divine command (be it just literary *topos* or some inner experience) or Socrates’ own wild presumption, keeping in mind that Socrates was no mystic in any conventional religious sense, but rather a zealous social worker and rationalizing moralist serving his god for the benefit of his fellow Athenians. This

10. Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Piety*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 558-59.

“madman’s theatre” is nevertheless regarded as a revolutionary project: “

And it is of the essence of his rationalist programme in theology to assume that the entailment of virtue by wisdom binds gods no less than men. He could not have tolerated a double-standard morality, one for men, another for the gods. . . . Fully supernatural though they are, Socrates’ gods could still strike his pious contemporaries as rationalist fabrications. . . .¹¹

Socrates undoubtedly regarded his own “rationalism” and his leap from epistemological ignorance to public political and moral expertise as devised by the *daimonion*, the supernatural guide. His own front door was adorned, as A.H. Armstrong relates, by “an unshaped stone called Apollo of the Ways and another stone called a Herm with a head at the top and a phallus halfway down, which Socrates would tend at the proper time like every other Athenian householder”.¹²

In this respect he was quite traditional, although his presumably esoteric side (if this curious aspect of Socrates is not invented by Plato’s dramatic imagination) is close to the madness of Orpheus, the divinely inspired mythical singer. In the context of traditional Hellenic culture, Orphism and Pythagoreanism may be viewed as a “small sectarian movement”. Alternatively, Orphism may be presented as a new spiritual programme of radically revised anthropology and of both cosmic and personal soteriology, partly derived from Egyptian and Anatolian sources. In either case, the Orphic doctrines sharply differ from those of early Hellenic (the so-called Homeric and pre-Homeric) spirituality.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 545 & 547.

12. A.H. Armstrong, “The Ancient and Continuing Pieties of the Greek World,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 68.

The main Orphic doctrine follows the pattern already established in the *Pyramid Texts*, asserting that the royal soul has its goal in unity with the divine through ascent and recollection. With considerable modifications, this anagogic scenario became an integral part of Platonism, whose adherents practised rising up to the heights of philosophical contemplation through the anagogic power of *eros*, and were able to reach the noetic Sun by a combination of dialectical and telestic means. In short, Orphism maintained that the human soul is immortal and is subject to divine judgement:

The divine in us is an actual being, a *daimon* or spirit, which has fallen as a result of some primeval sin and is entrapped in a series of earthly bodies, which may be animal and plant as well as human. It can escape from the "sorrowful weary wheel", the cycle of reincarnation, by following the Orphic way of life, which involved, besides rituals and incantations, an absolute prohibition of eating flesh. . . .¹³

The somewhat clumsy Socrates hardly fits the much demanding Orphic ideals, although he nevertheless functions in Plato's *Symposium* as an Orpheus figure, being presented as a literary double of *Phanes*. The self-manifested *Phanes* of the Orphic cosmogonies should be described as *Protogonos* (the first-born, tantamount to the noetic light which appears from the egg of ineffable darkness), whose other name is the demiurgic *Eros*.¹⁴ He carries within himself the seed of the gods and copulates with himself like the Egyptian *Atum*.

Sara Rappe emphasizes "the centrality of Orphic symbolism in the *Symposium* as a whole", arguing that there is good reason to attribute the allegorizing use of Orphic material to

13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

14. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 150.

Plato himself, and not only to Syrianus, Proclus, Damascius or Olympiodorus. She says:

The Orphic mystery purports to be an esoteric tradition, one that liberates people from the petrifying conventions of the mass sex-gender machine. Its purpose is to re-create the subject, to wrench him away from the public fiction in which he has hitherto been schooled. . . . The Orphic myth promises a return to the undifferentiated state before sexual identity arises, promising to deliver us back inside the egg to become in the Lacanian sense, *hommelettes*. But of course, this is a delusional aspiration, as the myth makes clear, and it is in fact a self-destructive delusion. . . . In my reading of the Orphic cosmology in Plato's *Symposium*, I have emphasized its function as an etiology for human consciousness, prior to its regeneration by philosophy. This is the exoteric mind that desperately requires enlightenment but because of its conditioning, all too rarely seeks it.¹⁵

III

The alleged correspondences between Socrates and Orpheus, or rather, between Plato and Orpheus, are explored by Proclus, to whom an esoteric interpretation of Plato's dialogues is tantamount to the initiatory Orphic doctrine. Accordingly, the Orphic *Phanes* (like the Egyptian *Atum-Ra*) shows forth the soul as an image (*eikon*) of the shining divine Intellect. The recognition of the pharaonic *imago dei* (*tut neter* in the Egyptian royal theology) and of its restored Osirian wholeness (the right Eye of Horus made sound) itself constitutes a sort of initiation that enables the soul's access to the divine realm.

Rappe claims that since the time of Syrianus, either Orphism is attached to metaphysics in order to transform the

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 152 & 155.

Neoplatonic doctrine into ritual, or the language of metaphysics is grafted on to a traditional Orphic narrative.¹⁶ However, such theurgic convergency is initially based on Egyptian hermeneutical and cultic patterns. She argues as follows:

The “Rhapsodic Theogony” ends with a famous hymn to Zeus, in which his identity as the *coincidentia oppositorum* is revealed. . . . This vision of the world of Zeus gives us a kind of mirror of the Proclan universe, in which each being is an all, and all beings are in each. . . . The multiple states of being, each level mutually reflecting all of the others, proliferate as a hall of mirrors. It is this great world of mutual interpenetration endlessly expanding as a single drama, that the Orphic theogony captures. And not surprisingly, this vision is exactly the mythic equivalent of Proclus’ central metaphysical views.¹⁷

Proclus’ assertion that all Hellenic theology ultimately derives from Orphic mystagogy (*Plat. Theol.* I.5.25)¹⁸ may be regarded as a normative and paradigmatic claim of his philosophical hermeneutics. Thus, Orpheus constitutes the archetypal mark of his metaphysical topography. In this particular sense, the name and image of Orpheus function more like the theological *arche*, like the canonized philosophical *hupostasis*, than as an unquestioned and factual person of ancient history. This imaginative assertion of Proclus, though belonging to the realm of semi-mythic genealogies, is shared by the countless followers of the ancient Hellenic tradition and constitutes one of its main etiological kernels. Consequently, it is this image of the esoteric Orpheus that counts, not one provided by the modern academic interpretations that present

16. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

18. Algis Uzdavinys, Introduction, *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), pp. XXIV-XXV.

their hypothetical constructions as an ultimate truth about a given tradition in place of the self-representations, theological images and myths used by adherents of the tradition.

For the late Platonic tradition, the “fighters”—those belonging to the “sacred race” (*hiera genea*)—defend, according to Syrianus, “the best and most beautiful of philosophies”, namely, the Kronian way of life (*In Metaph.* 91.8ff).¹⁹ These intellectual defenders of tradition recognized themselves as forming a link in a golden Platonic chain, claiming that inwardly all human beings are divine and, therefore, must become conscious of this inherent divinity. The anagogic tradition of a journey within consists in an unbroken chain of divinely inspired teachers, who both taught and practised the revealed Platonic mysteries. As Polymnia Athanassiadi remarks:

In a society in which political propagandists had raised the principle of imperial legitimacy to a metaphysical level, the Neoplatonists came effortlessly to evolve and spread a dynastic theology. Indeed by the time of Damascius, the history of the caste had acquired its own mythology as well, for the creation of which all sorts of forged genealogies were mobilised.²⁰

The prototypal “winged souls” of the Neoplatonic “golden chain” (*chruse seira*) were Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato. But already by the end of the fourth century AD, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and many others were regarded as divine. Garth Fowden has this to say:

Likewise Hierokles described Ammonios as “divinely possessed (*enthousiasas*) with longing for the true goal of philosophy”. Reflection on theological and philosophical truths was

19. Polymnia Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius,” in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. CXIII, 1993, p. 6.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

indeed widely accepted as a prerequisite of divinisation. Proclus . . . asserts that immersion in the mysteries of Platonic philosophy could result in divine possession, like a “Dionysiac frenzy”; and Olympiodorus listed four Platonic dialogues (*Timaeus*, *Respublica*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*) which in his opinion illustrated these *Platonikoi enthousiasmoi*.²¹

According to this tradition (*paradosis*), Plato himself received the complete science of the gods from Pythagorean and Orphic writings. The science of dialectic advocated by Plato is not found in the Orphico-Pythagorean theology, but both Orphism and Pythagoreanism (whatever these ambivalent terms may mean for different audiences) are viewed as being based on the ancient Egyptian and Babylonian revelations. The divine Plato only gave it scientific form, combining “the revelatory style of Pythagoreanism with the demonstrative method of Socrates”.²²

Hence, in this respect Socrates’ approach is demonstrative (*apodeiktikon*) rather than revelatory. Now Syrianus, the spiritual guide of both Hermeias and Proclus, not only proclaimed the harmony (*sumphonia*) between Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato, but also depicted Socrates as a kind of saviour—the divine avatar sent down to the world of becoming in order to bring the fallen souls back to the divine banquet (Hermeias, *In Phaedr.* I.1-5). This soteriological function of Socrates is modelled on the analogous function of Orpheus, though the initial meaning of the term *soteria* is related to the realm of public sponsorship, social benefits and graces provided by local patrons and divinized heroes. In the Hellenistic Greek world, any benefactor (*euergetes*) may be recognized and honoured as a saviour (*soter*).²³

21. Garth Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. CII, 1982, p. 35.

22. Dominic J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 148.

23. G.W. Bowersock, “The Imperial Cult: Perceptions and Persistence,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Vol.3: Self-Definition in the Graeco-*

However, in a metaphysical sense, the ability to save—the soul’s immortalization or alleged “homecoming”—is the function and privilege of the benevolent gods. For example, the Chaldean Hekate as the “life-giving womb” and “lightning-receiving womb” (or as a formless fire, *aneideon pur*, visible throughout the cosmos) is indispensable for those seeking salvation: “Soteriologically minded philosophers and theurgists, who wished to assure the rising of their own souls, later advanced the idea that Hekate, by controlling the crossing of the boundary between humanity and divinity, either could aid the ascent or could force the descent of the soul.”²⁴

The divine-like souls of true philosophers are not entirely cut off from participation in contemplation of the Ideas. In a certain metaphorical sense, they still follow the heavenly retinue depicted in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. They are “companions of the gods” (*opadous theon andras*), like the idealized and mythologized Socrates of Syrianus and Proclus. In short, Socrates is understood as an instrument of divine will. His system of pedagogy presumably belongs to the soteriological “golden chain” of Homer and Orpheus, and his philosophy is no less than a divinely inspired beneficial madness.

Both Orpheus and Socrates are presented as spiritual guides, that is, as inspired mystagogues able to reveal the ultimate vision of the Ideas, a vision regarded as initiation into the highest mysteries. Before starting his interpretation of the *Phaedrus* myth, Proclus explains: “These things are said by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* when he is clearly inspired (*enthousiazon*) and dealing with mystic matters” (*Plat. Theol.* IV.5, 18.23-25). And the citharist Orpheus, like Chiron the Centaur, half-brother of Zeus, “in a certain way embodies the mythical guide of souls most purely”, as Ilsetraut Hadot says,

Roman World, ed. Ben F. Mayer and E.P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1982), p. 171.

24. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate’s Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 38.

“preparing a direct and material correspondence between music and wisdom.”²⁵

But philosophy is the highest art and highest music, as Plato’s Socrates himself acknowledges (*Phaed.* 61a). Consequently, the exemplary poets and singers are *entheoi*, inspired ones, although feebly translated as “inspired”, the Greek word *entheos* loses its literal force, according to Vlastos.²⁶ And Socrates is god-possessed (*katechomenos*); even more: “I am a seer (*mantis*),” he says (*Phaedr.* 242c), since the Greek term *mantis* may be rendered as “diviner” or “prophet”. In a sense it is “god himself (*ho theos autos*) who speaks to us through them” (*Ion.* 234.d.3-4), since the possessed speakers “know nothing of the things they speak”.

The Greek *entheos* literally means “within is a god” or “in god”. This indwelling *theos* (not unlike the Egyptian *ba* in its simulated sacred receptacle) speaks from the person (or from the animated cultic statue) in a strange voice, sometimes resembling the so-called “language of the birds” or the primordial noise of the creative sound. The most common Greek terms for this or similar states are *mania* (madness, frenzy, inspiration) and *ekstasis* (to stand [or be] outside oneself). Every seer, filled by the ritually ignited and conventionally performed frenzy, stands in a special relationship to the deity, because the words he utters presuppose either the telestic madness of Dionysus, or the prophetic madness of Apollo.

But what about knowledge which is not human in its origin? Strictly speaking, this knowledge presupposes that the speaker himself knows nothing. According to Vlastos:

In Socrates’ view the effect of the god’s entry into the poet is to drive out the poet’s mind: when the god is in him the poet is “out of his mind”, *ekphron*, or “intelligence is no longer

25. Ilsetraut Hadot, “The Spiritual Guide,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 440.

26. Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Piety*, p. 549.

present in him”; so he may find himself saying many things which are admirable (*polla kai kala*) and true without knowing what he is saying . . . it is because he is like the diviner that the inspired poet is “out of his mind”. . . . For Socrates, diviners, seers, oracle-givers and poets are all in the same boat. All of them in his view are know-nothings, or rather, worse: unaware of their sorry epistemic state, they set themselves up as repositories of wisdom emanating from a divine, all-wise source. What they say may be true; but even when it is true, they are in no position to discern what there is in it that is true.²⁷

They convey truth to the extent that they repeat the divine voice which may serve as a truth-speaking *kathegemon*, the one who leads and who shows the way, and may deceive as Agamemnon allegedly was deceived by Zeus, although Proclus is eager to explain this deception *kata ten aporrheton theorian*, that is, according to the esoteric (or secret, unspoken, mysterious) mode of seeing. This is so, because the revealed myths and hieratic customs may be “educational” (*paideutikoi*), or appropriate for the young, and “more divinely inspired” (*entheastikoterai*), that is, “more philosophical” (*philosophoterai*) and appropriate for the initiates (Proclus, *In Remp.* I.79.5-18). As Robert Lamberton points out:

When Proclus discusses the differences between Homer and Plato, he presents Homer as “inspired” and “ecstatic”, an author who offers a direct revelation and is in contact with absolute truth. Plato is seen as coming later to the same information and treating it differently, “establishing it solidly by the irrefutable methods of systematic thought” [*In Remp.* I.171-172].²⁸

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 550 & 551.

28. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 194.

The Greek word for god (*theos*) is itself related to the act of the seer. The divine revelation may be received in the form of myth (*muthos*). Such a myth is to be used properly, because its surface is only a “veil” or “screen” (*parapetasma*), behind which another, metaphysical truth lies awaiting its inspired *hermeneus*. Even Homer’s blindness is regarded as a divinely established symbol that points to the dark and transcendental character of Homer’s vision. In this respect, Proclus argues that Socrates (the literary personage of Plato’s *Republic*), in fact, is deceived regarding “the way in which myths represent the truth”.²⁹

So what does it mean to be a seer—both the teller of myths and the inspired interpreter of the revealed myth? As Walter Burkert explains the Greek terms:

... an interpreted sign is *thesphaton*, the seer is *theoprotos*, and what he does is a *theiazein* or *entheazein*. . . . Insofar as the seer speaks in an abnormal state, he requires in turn someone who formulates his utterances, the *prophetes*. The word for seer itself, *mantis*, is connected with the Indo-European root for mental power, and is also related to *mania*, madness.³⁰

Be that as it may, the Platonic philosophy is viewed by Proclus as divine philosophy, because it “shone forth” (*eklamp-sai*) for the first time “through the good grace of the gods”.³¹ Therefore, its amazing noetic tradition repeats the dazzling appearance of Phanes, the Orphic Atum, whose primaevial “shining forth” from the ineffable darkness constitutes the noetic pleroma, the mound of Heliopolis. Accordingly, the ineffable Night is the Egg from which the solar bird sprang forth on the first morning—in *illo tempore*.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

30. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 112.

31. John Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1978), p. 312.

IV

Proclus presents Socrates’ “celebration” of the realm beyond the heavens (*huperouranios topos*) as a “symbolic description” (*sumbolike apangelia*). He says that “the mode which aims to speak of the divine by means of symbols is Orphic and generally appropriate to those who write about divine myths” (*Plat. Theol.* I.4.10.6ff). Consequently, the myth narrated in Plato’s *Phaedrus* is taken “to be not only inspired but also telestic, which for him means theurgic”.³²

Hence, Proclus interprets the images and events of the *Phaedrus* myth in terms of theurgy, arguing that the realm beyond the heavens where the Ideas are to be contemplated corresponds to the three Orphic Nights. Anne Sheppard considers that Syrianus, the spiritual guide of Proclus, “did not distinguish between the inspired, theurgic mode of discourse on the one hand and the symbolic, Orphic mode on the other”.³³ Even for Proclus (in spite of his advanced technical terminology), the prophetic madness, philosophical frenzy, theurgic rites and their allegorical or symbolic interpretation constitute a single metaphysical set of references related to the way in which the soul ascends to the noetic realm, whence it may be reunited with the highest reality.

In relation to this exposition of the Orphic and Platonic aids to recollection, “which form a continual initiation into the perfect mystic vision” (*Phaedr.* 249c), one may wonder what it means to be possessed by a god, or to be a prophet in the wider context of ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures.

Arguing that the Greek verb *gignosko* (from which derives *gnosis*, knowledge) in early times is often combined with verbs of seeing (though “vision”, in this case, may be understood as

32. Anne Sheppard, “Plato’s *Phaedrus* in the *Theologia Platonica*,” in *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, (Leuven: University Press; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000), p. 419.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 422.

an exceptional supra-normal faculty), J. Gonda attempts to place the oracular soothsayers and poets on the same footing as prophets and philosophers.³⁴ In Greece, the specific sanctuary or holy place where the gods are thought to be present and may offer counsel is called *chresterion* or *manteion*, and rendered as *oraculum* by the Romans. In these places, like in the Syrian and Mesopotamian temples, the god speaks directly from a priest or a prophet who enters the state of possession (*enthousiasmos*).

Hence, a prophet, as an inspired seer, somewhat emptied of himself and “filled with the god” (being a possessed *enthousiastes*), is a representative of the speaking deity. Even if this attribution is sometimes just a literary convention turned into a compelling promise of an act of salvation, the magic power was thought to be inherent in the mighty word of any successful demagogue. Whether or not we would like to describe this mythically determined oracular performer and possessed speaker as an inspired public teacher or as a prophet (the Greek *prophetes* who relates cult legends at festivals),³⁵ the prophecy itself may be defined as a perpetual confirmation of particular cosmological, epistemological and socio-political principles sustained through a ritually performed exegesis. Even the ancient Hebrew “prophet” (*nabi*), in its initial context, may appear simply “as a courier for an important letter passed between two politically interested parties, perhaps co-conspirators of some sort”.³⁶

34. J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1984), pp. 24 & 14.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

36. Joel Sweek, “Inquiring for the State in the Ancient Near East: Delineating Political Location,” in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, ed. Leda Ciraiolo and Jonathan Seidel (Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2002), p. 55.

V

What, then, is prophecy? The use of this very concept is controversial, mainly due to a Judaeo-Christian theological bias and the related “romantic perception of the biblical prophets as tormented individuals of great literary talent”.³⁷

The almost unquestioned dogma of prophetic revelation as an epistemological category embodied in the book is a scribal construct of Mesopotamian origin. The post-exilic religious bureaucrats of Second Temple Judaism decided that the only way in which the divine Patron can speak to His vassals (the Israelites as His contractual slaves and warriors) was through the written text. Karel van der Toorn discusses the rhetoric of prophetic revelation in connection with the legitimizing construction of the prophetic experience, with the increasing emphasis on writing as the primary and privileged vehicle of prophecy. He writes:

When prophecy became primarily a literary genre, the prophets were posthumously transformed into authors. . . . When the Hebrew scribes adopted the revelation paradigm in connection with the prophetic literature, they took the vision (*hazon*) to be the classic mode of prophetic revelation. That is why the rubrics of the prophetic books often use the terminology of the visionary experience as the technical vocabulary for prophecy, even for prophets whose oracles do not refer to any vision. . . . The novelty of the scribal construct of prophecy as a revelation lies in the reference to written texts. The scribes developed the notion of the prophet as a scribe, and of his message as a secret revealed by heavenly figures, to legitimize the fact that the prophets had become books.³⁸

37. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 190.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 231 & 232.

In this case, God (the mighty Patron of the chosen zealots) is presented as speaking only through the written text, itself now attached to the prestigious *taklimtu* category of Babylonian writings. The Akkadian word *taklimtu* (literally meaning “demonstration”) stands for “revelation” and “preserves a reminiscence of the time in which revelation was primarily thought of as a visual experience”.³⁹ The premise of the Babylonian cuneiform literature is that, unless revealed, wisdom (*nemequ*) remains hidden, thus constituting a conception of esoteric knowledge and interest in the “broad understanding” (*uznu rapashu*) and “profound wisdom” (*hasisu palku*) of the Deep, attributed to the *apkallu* sages, which assisted the emergence of the revelation paradigm; a paradigm that asserted the authority of the written tradition perpetuated by the learned expert (*ummanu mudu*) who guarded the secret lore of the great gods (*ummanu mudu nasir pirishti ili rabuti*).⁴⁰

Scribal wisdom itself (along with the broad comprehension of “secret things”) is god-given. The privileged texts “from the mouth of Ea” (*sha pi Ea*) may be witnessed as “the writings of Ea” (*shitrū sha Ea*). It was held that Ea dictated his revelations to Adepa, the legendary *apkallu* sage, one of the “seven brilliant *apkallus*, *puradu*-fish of the sea”.⁴¹ Oannes-Adapa transmitted this wisdom of Ea (*nemeq Ea*) through the subsequent written tradition. Adapa’s patron Ea is called *bel nemeqi*, the Lord of Wisdom. The exceptional value of his wisdom is recognized by the sixteenth century BC text on behalf of the early Kassite ruler: “May Ea, the god of the depths, grant him perfect wisdom” (*Ea bel naghim nemeqam lishklilshu*).⁴²

39. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

40. Ronald F.G. Sweet, “The Sage in Akkadian Literature: A Philological Study,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 60.

41. Shlomo Izre’el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), p. 4.

42. Ronald F.G. Sweet, *ibid.*, p. 52.

Similarly, Marduk provides deep understanding (*uznu*) and intelligence (*hasisu*), and Nabu, the heavenly Scribe who knows everything, brings forth wise teachings (*ihzi nemeqi*). Van der Toorn describes the situation when the written tradition of the Mesopotamian scribes supplanted the oral tradition and, as a consequence, faced the problem of legitimacy and authority. He writes:

The scribes found their new source of authority in the concept of divine revelation. Through the construct of an antediluvian revelation from Ea to the *apkallus*, transmitted in an unbroken chain of sages, scribes, and scholars, the written tradition could claim a legitimacy issuing from the gods. In support of the theory that the revelation paradigm was an answer to a legitimacy problem, one can point to the emergence of the rhetoric of secrecy. At about the same time that the Mesopotamian scribes and scholars began to speak of the tradition as having been revealed, they started to emphasize its secret nature.⁴³

VI

And so, what about the prophets themselves? Are they “prophets” in the sense of seers—the beholders of divine epiphanies at festivals with their splendid processions, portable divine images and barques? Let us remember that the Greek word *theoria* initially meant contemplation of the gods at their festivals, before it started to mean the beholding of the well-ordered Pythagorean cosmos or the Platonic Ideas. Are the prophets “messengers” in the sense of heralds, announcers, ceremonial declaimers in the manner of reciters who perform the traditional poems and myths at the annual festivals? Or

43. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 219.

are they the professional actors on the stage of the Dionysiac theatre?

Modern Western convention tends to emphasize the “inner experience”, “spontaneous inspiration”, and the “moral educational” pedigree of the imagined “prophetic” human-divine communication, though this kind of theologically asserted communication may be simply a matter of cultural definition and classification. The proposed taxonomy engages a division of social and metaphysical roles that may be performed.

There is no single equivalent of the Greek words “prophet” (*prophetes*) and “prophecy” (*propheteia*) in the ancient Near Eastern languages. In addition, the word “prophecy” is liable to a certain semantic confusion, since it is commonly equated with foretelling the future. Nevertheless, prophecy may be defined as a process of communication—not unlike a well-organized royal “postal service”, prominent in the Achaemenid Persian empire, when the conception of angelic messengers started to emerge. According to Martti Nissinen, this consisted of the divine sender of the message, the message (classified as “revelation”) itself, the transmitter of the message (the prophet as postal officer and courier), and the recipient of the message, usually the king.⁴⁴ Nissinen comments:

The Mesopotamian sources include two distinguishable types of texts, both of which have been characterized as “prophecy”: 1) the verbal messages, allegedly sent by a deity and transmitted by a human intermediary to the addressee, and 2) the “Akkadian Prophecies”, also called “apocalypses”, which predict historical events, mostly *ex eventu*.⁴⁵

In a sense, the prophet is the mouthpiece of a deity when the message to be transmitted is not initially a “written document” (or a material cuneiform tablet brought from the divine

44. Martti Nissinen, *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998), p. 6.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

counsel), but an oral command, advice or reproach, later presented to the addressee in the written form of a manifesto-like dispatch. When reference is made to the spoken word (*abutu*, *dibbu*) of a deity in the Neo-Assyrian sources, the speaking deity is either Ishtar or Mallissu, the main goddess of prophecy.⁴⁶

Among the words which imply prophetic activity, two are important: *mahhu*, derived from *mahu*, “to be in a frenzy, to become mad”, and *raggimu*, derived from *ragamu*, “to shout, to proclaim”. Consequently, the Assyrian *raggimu* is the “pronouncer” or “speaker”, and the *muhhum* is a type of madman, like the Hebrew *meshugga*, “a term occasionally used as a synonym for *nabi*”.⁴⁷

All these terms may be used as synonyms and contrasted to the *baru*—the reader of the divine script of the cosmos and interpreter of the signs inscribed on the livers of sacrificial animals. The *baru* (*haruspex*) is viewed as belonging to the “golden chain” of transmission beginning with the Sumerian king Enmeduranki, the ultimate prototype of the Hebrew Enoch. Enmeduranki, the ruler of Sippar, was brought to the assembly (*puhru*) of the gods by Shamash and Adad. There he was seated on a golden throne and the divine secrets were revealed to him. The gods gave (*iddinu*) him the tablet of the gods (*tuppi ilani*, that is, the “divine book”) which contained the “secret science”. As Helge Kvanvig points out: “The tablet emphasizes the esoteric character of the divine wisdom revealed to Enmeduranki.”⁴⁸

The Assyrian prophecies are inseparable from the royal ideology, since the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the “kingdom of heaven” are interconnected through the power of Ishtar, represented by the sacred tree. The cult of Ishtar (the goddess herself viewed as the “breath” of Ashur, analogous to the later

46. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

47. Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 66.

48. Helge S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag), 1988, p. 188.

Gnostic Sophia) constitutes the Assyrian esoteric doctrine of salvation. In the universalized imperial context, prophecy, mysticism and royal ideology are inseparable. Gilgamesh is the prototype of the perfect Assyrian king, and Ishtar is the divine mother who gives birth to him. No wonder, then, that one of the Assyrian prophetesses (*ragintu*) “identifies herself with Gilgamesh roaming the desert in search of eternal life”.⁴⁹ As Simo Parpola relates:

For a spiritually pure person, union with God was believed to be possible not only in death but in life as well. This belief provides the doctrinal basis of Assyrian prophecy: when filled with divine spirit, the prophet not only becomes a seat for the Goddess but actually one with her, and thus can foresee future things. . . . The purpose of the act—which certainly was the culmination of a long process of spiritual preparation—was to turn the devotee into a living image of Ishtar: an androgynous person totally beyond the passions of flesh.⁵⁰

Let us explore the following analogy: both the god-chosen Assyrian king and the devotee of Ishtar play the role of Ashur’s son or of Mullissu’s son. Likewise, the Neoplatonic mystic may seek to be integrated into the universal hypostasis of Hekate Soteira or Athena Soteira. Ishtar as “virgin of light” marks the presence of God (*Ashshur*, the only, universal God, viewed as “the totality of gods”, *gabbu ilani Ashshur*).⁵¹ At the same time, Ishtar is the word of God and the way of salvation. As a rule, the Assyrian prophets belong to the cultic community of Ishtar’s devotees (*assinnu*, *nash pilaqqi*) and share their esoteric mystical lore concerning the ascent and salvation of the soul.⁵²

49. Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), p. L.

50. *Ibid.*, p. XXXIV.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. XXI & LXXXI.

52. *Ibid.*, p. XLVII.

Similarly, theurgic divination in Neoplatonism may be regarded as a means of ascent and unification—“standing outside” of one’s normal state of consciousness, that is, in *ecstasis* and frenzy. This entails an all-consuming presence of the divine as the inspired theurgist is seized by the invading god. This divine invasion may be equated to the active irruption of the dazzling noetic light within the purified recipient, or rather, in his mirror-like *phantasia*. Emma Clarke explains the matter as follows:

Iamblichus argues that the imagination is manipulated by the gods and receives divine *phantasmata* during inspiration. He consistently describes god-sent visions as *phantasmata* or *phantasiai*. . . . Porphyry writes that people themselves “imagine” (*phantazontai*) or “are divinely inspired according to their imaginative faculty” (*kata to phantastikon theiazousin*), whereas Iamblichus insists that the imagination is affected from the outside—divine power “illuminates with a divine light the aetherial and luciform vehicle surrounding the soul, from which divine visions occupy the imaginative faculty in us, driven by the will of the gods. . . .” An inspired individual is not thinking or using his imagination—his imagination is being made use of by the gods. Left to its own devices, untouched by the gods, the imagination produces mere (human) phantasms which have no place in the process of inspiration. . . . The imagination is therefore valued only as a passive receptacle of divine visions.⁵³

VII

The prophetic messages attributed to the accredited Babylonian prophets, including those who served in various temples and those perceived as madmen, Abraham Malamat relates

53. Emma C. Clarke, *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 84 & 85.

to the category of “intuitive prophecy”.⁵⁴ Since the so-called “scientific” Akkadian divination practised by the *barum* is described as both typical and rational, the “intuitive divination” attested at Mari seems to be both atypical and irrational.⁵⁵ But this observation is not entirely correct. In certain cases, prophecy may be described in terms of ceremonial rhetoric—the human calls and divine answers which demand the taking of important political decisions. To categorize this conventional dialectical play as “intuitive” means to be under the spell of an exalted Western romanticism. This influential theory of aesthetics invents and cherishes the “spontaneous inner experiences” of exceptional individuals, deliberately forgetting the ritualized literary background of such “spontaneous” social concerns.

The Neo-Assyrian and Mari texts, however, present the local prophets (*apilum*, *muhhum*, *nabum*, *raggimu*) as those who receive divine messages involuntarily: the messages are not regarded as invented or created by the *muhhum*. Lester Grabbe states: “When prophets speak openly in a temple, this looks like spontaneous spirit possession: the spirit comes upon them, and they become a mouthpiece for the deity.”⁵⁶

Or do they believe this is so and need this belief literally as it stands, along with the “ecstatic testimony” and the subsequent “theatrical performance”? The stereotypical language of this seemingly spontaneous play amounts to a strategically managed language which functions as the hermeneutic of the myth, as the reconfirmation of the temple tradition, of its socio-economic premises, expectations, hopes and dreams. As a rule, the contemporary cosmic geography and its pecu-

54. Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, pp. 59-82. (Ch. 6: “Intuitive Prophecy – A General Survey,” originally published in: A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience*, 1992, pp. 79-86).

55. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

56. Lester L. Grabbe, “Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy from an Anthropological Perspective,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), p. 18.

liarities are involved. Therefore, “it is often difficult to distinguish between actual prophetic oracles and literary prophecies created by scribes.”⁵⁷ No wonder the prophets themselves are sometimes viewed as scribes whose speeches or reports are not performed in public as the standards of the sacred “revelatory theatre” and of epic consciousness would require. Instead, they are composed as oracular collections and royal inscriptions.⁵⁸

In the Mesopotamian city of Mari (eighteenth century BC) the mediators between the heavenly divine assembly (*puhru*) and the earthly royal court bear the titles of *apilum/apiltum* (“answerers”), *muhhum/muhhutum* (“ecstatics”), *assinnum* (“cult singers”), and *nabum* (“ones called”). The messages they bring from the gods (Dagan, Addu of Halab, Shamash, Marduk, Nergal) and the goddesses (Annunitum, Diritum, Hishametum, Ninhursgga, Ishtar) are taken seriously by the political authorities, although these prophetic messages are subordinated to other means of divine communication.⁵⁹

Accordingly, the identity of the prophet cannot be taken as a guarantee for the validity and truth of the prophecy pronounced, or “shouted” (*ragamu*), presumably in a state of real or solemnly feigned frenzy. But a possession cult *par excellence* and the related professionalization of prophecy pertain to the domain and supervision of Ishtar. Van der Toorn writes:

Ishtar was deemed capable to produce, by way of ecstasy, a metamorphosis in her worshipers. Men might be turned into women, and women were made to behave as men. . . . There is

57. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

58. David L. Petersen, “Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), p. 42.

59. Herbert B. Huffmon, “A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), p. 49.

evidence that at least some of the Neo-Assyrian prophetesses were in reality men, or rather self-castrated transvestites. Their outward appearance was interpreted as a display of Ishtar's transforming powers. Possessed by the divine, they were the obvious persons to become mouthpieces of the gods.⁶⁰

Their prophetic utterances were not metaphysical slogans or theological *shahadas*, as the modern esoteric dreamer would tend to imagine, but the utterances of a deity, revealed while standing in the temple before the animated hieratic statue. In the name of a particular god an oracle is delivered by the temple servant, or rather the deity (Dagan, for instance) opens the mouth of and speaks from within his image. Van der Toorn comments on this rite as follows:

The Old Babylonian gods grant prophetic revelations only in the sanctuary. Dreams may occur at other places, but prophecy, properly speaking, is confined to the temple. . . . When a god speaks directly through the mouth of a prophet, the latter utters the prophecy first in the temple. The prophet (*apilum* or *apiltum*) "rises" (*itbi*) or "stands" (*izziz*) to deliver the divine message in the temple. The ecstatic (*muhhum*), too, receives the revelation in a sanctuary; this is the place where he or she gets into a frenzy (*immahi*, *immahu*), utters loud cries (*shitassu*), and gives the oracle. When a prophet delivers an oracle outside the sanctuary, at the residence of the royal deputy for instance, he repeats an oracle revealed to him in the sanctuary. For that reason the prophet presents himself as a messenger of the god (DN *ishpuranni*): he transmits the message (*temum*), which he receives at an earlier stage.⁶¹

60. Karel van der Toorn, "Mesopotamian Prophecy between Immanence and Transcendence: A Comparison of Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Prophecy," in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), p. 79.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

This means that the "house of god" is the most suitable place for these continuing encounters with the divine and the forthcoming revelations. And revelation itself is to a certain extent the standard cultic procedure in the "audience hall" of the Lord. It is performed in the divine palace (since the temple is a deity's household and palace) whose ceremonial patterns follow the established framework of the private and official life of the royalty (although, metaphysically speaking, the opposite is true).

Therefore, in accordance with the rules of cultic etiquette, the prophet is positioned in front of the hieratic statue as the servant or herald stands before the king. He stands—or rather lies in prostration—and listens. The Mesopotamian hieratic statue—that of the enthroned deity in full regalia, seated in the holy of holies—is not a religious picture, but an icon imbued with a god's essential powers and endowed with divine radiance. The divine form (*bunnannu*) or image (*salam*, *salmu*) is not manufactured by human artists, whose hands are symbolically cut off with a tamarisk sword, but ritually conceived by the gods themselves and born in a special workshop, the *bit mummi*.⁶² Yet a clear distinction is maintained between the god and his statue,⁶³ which serves as a means to make the deity visible on earth.

In this respect, the entire temple complex functions, metaphorically speaking, like a "nuclear power station" that provides all material and spiritual sustenance for the surrounding land and its inhabitants, viewed respectively as a deity's private fief and vassals. The animated image is presumed able to perceive what happens in the earthly realm, to reign over the kingdom, communicate through the court messengers

62. Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, *The Mesopotamian God Image, From Womb to Tomb*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, 1, 2003, p. 153.

63. Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), p. 33.

(apostles) and consume victuals. The mouth washing ritual activates the statue's noetic and perceptive functions, as Angelika Berlejung remarks: "The ritual thus enabled it to become the pure epiphany of its god and to be a fully interacting and communicating partner for the king, the priests and the faithful."⁶⁴

When the prophet speaks in the name of a god in the temple, he makes himself an extension of the god whose holy face he contemplates. When he has this privilege, neither is the statue's face veiled, nor the statue itself hidden behind a screen.⁶⁵ In a parallel fashion, the divine Pythagoras used to speak from behind a curtain, thus imitating the oracular statue. It is, therefore, no surprise that Pythagoras "imitated the Orphic mode of writing"⁶⁶ and his disciples looked upon all his utterances as the oracles of God.⁶⁷

This encounter with the divine statue (veiled or otherwise) is the ultimate paradigm for mystical longing, contemplation and union by means of liturgical communications, including sound, smell and vision. To Plato's "madness" corresponds the Orphic "frenzy" (*oistros*), as Peter Kingsley observes;⁶⁸ and, we might add, to the Orphic frenzy corresponds the Mesopotamian prophetic madness (entering into a trance, *immahu*), experienced in the form of ecstasy before the *salmu*.

The cultic scenario of prophetic frenzy apparently explains why traditional skills of divination should be related to this soul-transforming, illuminating and elevating standing in the

64. Angelika Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Karel van der Toorn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997), p. 72.

65. *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy*, compiled and translated by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, ed. David R. Fideler (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1987), p. 74 (Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 17).

66. *Ibid.*, p. 95 (Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 28).

67. *Ibid.*, p. 145 (Diogenes Laertius, *The Life of Pythagoras*).

68. Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 261-62.

place where the divine presence is manifested. For Iamblichus, the Syrian Neoplatonist, divination (*mantike*) and theurgic ascension (*anagoge*) coincide. He argues: "Only divine mantic prediction (*he theia mantike*), therefore, conjoined with the gods, truly imparts to us a share in divine life, partaking as it does in the foreknowledge and the intellections of the gods, and renders us, in truth, divine" (*De myster.* 289.3-5).⁶⁹

Hence, the "emptied" prophet is the theurgic receptacle filled with the divine light and life emanating from the seeing and speaking deity. This real or imagined theophany implies the prophet's annihilation (in the sense of the Sufi *fana*) and God's exaltation. As Van der Toorn observes:

There is no room for misunderstanding as to who is speaking. That is why we never find, in any of the reports describing a prophecy delivered in the temple, a phrase identifying the divine speaker. . . . The only time the prophet finds it necessary to say that god so-and-so has sent him (DN *ishpuranni*) is when the prophecy is transmitted to someone outside the sanctuary.⁷⁰

Eventually, the Neo-Assyrian prophets themselves became like interiorized and portable sanctuaries, and not bound to the presence of the material divine image in order to establish contact with the gods. Although images and statues were their cultic receptacles and symbolic bodies, these gods at the same time permanently resided in heaven, and consequently, they could also be praised inwardly, within the human body-temple. Hence, a message from the god or a revelation may occur outside the sanctuary. In late antiquity, a similar attitude became prominent among the Neoplatonists, namely,

69. Iamblichus *De mysteriis*, tr. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 347.

70. Karel van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Prophecy between Immanence and Transcendence: A Comparison of Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Prophecy*, p. 82.

that "the prophetic spirit cannot be confined to one place only, but is present in the whole cosmos being co-extensive with God."⁷¹

However, sometimes it seems that only the "professional madmen" can receive such messages and afterwards come to the aid of the king to whom all prophecies within the empire presumably are addressed, or at least indirectly concern. These prophecies promise the intervention of the gods and their mighty support from heaven. As Van der Toorn remarks:

Whereas the Old Babylonian gods secure the success of the king by their presence on earth, as auxiliaries of his army, the Neo-Assyrian deities influence the outcome of political and military conflict by an intervention from heaven. In the Old Babylonian prophecies, the battle in which the gods become involved remains within the human horizon; in the Neo-Assyrian texts, however, the battle takes on cosmic dimensions.⁷²

VIII

Let us turn briefly to the Egyptian priestly titles and their functions. In Late Period Egypt, it seems that the rules of purity were imposed upon the population at large, and not only the serving priests and ascetics. Therefore, the Romanized Hermetic description of Egypt as the *templum totius mundi*—the temple of the whole world—is to a certain extent justified.

Cultic purification is a necessary condition for entering the house of the god (*hut-neter*), located in the centre of the divine household (*per-neter*), and becoming the god's prophet—the royal deputy and "deified" performer of sacramental union. In the temple liturgy, the name of the deity is uttered

71. Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Philosophers and Oracles: Shifts of Authority in Late Paganism," *Byzantium: Revue internationale des Etudes byzantines*, Bruxelles, LXII, 1992, p. 58

72. Karel van der Toorn, *ibid.*, p. 84.

loudly and then followed by the self-presentation of the entering priest.

The purified priests play the role of both the king and the gods themselves, thus the temple liturgy is turned into a type of theurgy. But neither the priests nor the animated cult images are the gods as they are in their transcendent metaphysical realm. Rather, they serve as vehicles for the divine irradiation, communication and contextual presence: "In the temple liturgy the self-presentation consists mainly of affirmations of the type 'I am the god such and such,' usually a divine intermediary such as Thot, Shu, Horus, but also Isis and Nephtys, occasionally preceded by the affirmation that the entering priest is indeed pure."⁷³

The Egyptian priests are designated as *hemu-neter*, "servants of the god", like the servants of household staff.⁷⁴ As Ronald Williams remarks, the title *hemu-neter* was applied to a grade of temple priest, and was rendered by the Greek term *prophetes*, "the interpreter of the divine will".⁷⁵ More exactly, the higher priests of the Egyptian temple were divided into the categories of *hem-neter* (prophet) and *uab* (priest, the pure one). Consequently, the term *prophetes* denoted a certain particular liturgical function and also served as a designation of the higher priestly class (*hiereis*), itself divided into five sub-categories.

According to John Gee, during the daily temple liturgy the officiant pronounces two statements of identity. While taking the incense burner, he says: "I am a priest and I am pure," and during the ritual of "undoing the white cloth", he says: "I am

73. Robert Meyer, "Magical Ascesis and Moral Purity in Ancient Egypt," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 59.

74. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 29.

75. Ronald J. Williams, "The Sage in Egyptian Literature," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 26.

a prophet; it is the king who has commanded me to see the god.”⁷⁶

The title *hem-neter* is conventionally expressed in Greek as *prophetes*, and *uab* as *hiereus*. The statements *ink uab* (I am a priest) and *ink hem-neter* (I am a prophet) indicate the two main levels of the temple hierarchy. All priests belonged to the *uab* category because they were the “purified ones”, but some of them were selected or appointed as the prophets—the spokesmen of the gods. As Christiane Zivie-Coche observes:

The clergy of Amun had a “first prophet” who was at the summit of the hierarchy, as well as a second, third, and fourth prophet, each the sole holder of his rank, and then a mass of undifferentiated prophets. In principle, only the first prophet had access to the holy of holies, while the others, accompanied by lector-priests or ritualists, whose specialty was reading the papyrus rolls, stopped at the hall of offerings.⁷⁷

All priests were simply officially appointed substitutes for the pharaoh, or rather, vehicles and instruments that reactivated his delegated powers, like the so-called *ushabty* figures which enabled the deceased Egyptian to participate in the obligatory liturgical work in the afterlife, instead of otherwise missing it. In this respect, the pharaoh is regarded as virtually the sole and omnipresent Priest of the state. He is the chief Mystagogue of his administrative apparatus and the singular Mystic, contemplating (in principle or in fact) the radiant face of his divine Patron-Father. And why? Because the pharaoh symbolizes and represents humanity as a whole: “The king is the sole terrestrial being qualified to communi-

76. John Gee, “Prophets, Initiation and the Egyptian Temple,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 31, 2004, p. 97.

77. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, tr. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 103.

cate with the gods because . . . the sacred communication cannot take place between a god and a merely human being, but only between god and god.”⁷⁸

The pharaoh, as the titular son of Ra, is able to delegate his power of cultic communication to the temple staff. In such circumstances all constitutive elements of the telestic performance must be symbolic, since “everything in this sacred game becomes a kind of hieroglyph,” according to Jan Assmann:

It is in the role of the king that the priest is able to assume the role of a god. He plays the god because a cultic spell is divine utterance. The cultic scene, therefore, implies three levels of symbolization: 1) a priest confronting a statue; 2) the king confronting a god; 3) a god (whose role is played by the king represented by the priest) conversing with another god. . . . This tripartite system of religious symbolization is reminiscent of Greek mystery religions which are reported to imply the same three kinds of symbolic expression: 1) *dromenon* (what is to be done: action); 2) *deiknumenon* (what is to be shown: representation); 3) *legomenon* (what is to be said: language).⁷⁹

To be initiated into royal service and be offered the status of cultic substitute for the son of Ra means to acquire

78. Jan Assmann, “Semiosis and Interpretation in Ancient Egyptian Ritual,” in *Interpretation in Religion*, ed. Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 92.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 94. The tripartite system, in the Egyptian case, has three modes of symbolic expression: 1) an action of the priest offering something; 2) pictorial representation of the pharaoh before the god on temple walls and in ritual papyri; 3) language (liturgical formulae and interpretations). According to Jan Assmann: “The temple reliefs of the Late period reflect a full-fledged tradition of ritual exegesis, a culture of interpretation . . . applied not to texts—as in the more-or-less contemporaneous Alexandrian and Jewish institutions of interpretation—but to pictures. However, this culture of interpretation is anything but a symptom of Hellenistic influence; on the contrary, it is deeply rooted in the Egyptian cult” (*ibid.*, p. 99).

the position and rank of prophet in the sense of the Graeco-Egyptian *prophetes*. Only by being initiated as the servant of god (*hem-neter*) can one enter into the temple as the “living servant of Ra” (*hem ankh en ra*) in order to see all forms of the god and all secret things.

The purpose of this initiation (*bes*) consists in seeing the deity, that is, in gazing at the image (*sekhem, tut*) of the god. The watcher (like the Platonic *theoros*) is to be united with the god’s *ba* (manifestation, godlike radiance) in the tremendous contemplation of the divine truth and beauty.

Likewise in Neoplatonism, the dialectical and telestic becoming like the divine (*homoiosin*) leads to unification (*he arhetos henosis*) with the god through the contemplation of his animated statue, for the telestic art makes the statues in the here below (*ta tede agalmata*) to be like the gods by means of symbols and mysterious theurgic tokens (*dia tinon symbolon kai aporrheton sunthematon*: Proclus, *In Crat.* 51, p.19, 12ff).⁸⁰

For Proclus, the true divine madness is to be equated with (or located in) the “one of the soul”, the henadic summit of one’s psychic and noetic topography by means of which the theurgist is united with the One.⁸¹ Through the divine *maniai*—be it “prophetic madness according to Truth”, “erotic madness according to Beauty”, or “poetical madness according to divine Symmetry”—the philosopher’s soul is linked to the gods, and “this form of life is that of the ultimate mystical experience of the ultimate unification.”⁸²

The threshold of the holy of holies in the Egyptian temple may be equated with that of the *hyperouranios topos* in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, though strictly speaking, the dark inner sanctuary represents the symbolic mound of noetic “creation” in the darkness of Nun. The “prophetic” path leading to liturgic and theurgic unification (later romanticized as a democrat-

80. R.M. van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 81.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

ic and personal *unio mystica*) is closed for ordinary mortals, but open for the living pharaoh and his initiates—both the vindicated and blessed dead (*maa kheru*) and purified living priests, the formal cultic prototypes of the Platonic philosophers and mystics. Lanny Bell states: “The wooden doors of the sanctuary shrine, which enclosed the divine image, were called the ‘doors of heaven’. At their opening, ritual participants were projected into the realm of the divine.”⁸³ Here, in the temple’s “interior” (*khenu*), all the energy of the divine *bau* that animates the hieratic statues, reliefs and the entire temple is concentrated.

Some nineteenth century scholars may be wrong in imagining the prophet (first of all, the Jewish political moralist and inspired demagogue) as “an exceptional individual and a religious genius”,⁸⁴ that is, an extraordinary personality who has miraculous inner experiences. In most cases, however, ancient “prophethood” is more like a job appointment—either by the king, or by the patron deity—for the official temple ritual performance and the royal court service. Be that as it may, the prophet (although *de jure* only a humble servant) had an opportunity (or rather, a job requirement) to visit the divine house and see its amazing beauties, or even encounter and glimpse the face of the god himself.

IX

Just as the ancient Near Eastern conception of “prophecy” and “prophethood” (often presented as an instrumental socio-political construct with distinctive literary genres and soteriological implications) may mean different things in dif-

83. Lanny Bell *The New Kingdom “Divine” Temple: The Example of Luxor, Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 134.

84. Fritz Stolz, “Dimensions and Transformations of Purification Ideas,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 215.

ferent contexts, so Orpheus may be “all things to all men”, according to the deliberately disorienting assertion made by M.L. West, for whom there is only Orphic literature, not Orphism or the Orphics.⁸⁵ Standing as a great academic shaman of an astonishing modern Western inanity as regards the Orphic *bakcheia*, West can speak only about “the fashion for claiming Orpheus as an authority”, since “the history of Orphism is the history of that fashion.”⁸⁶

Although a figure of myth and the preferred name for metaphysical *auctoritas* in teletic and esoteric matters, Orpheus nonetheless appears as a prophet and mystagogue, presumably the “first” to reveal the meaning of the mysteries and rituals of initiation (*teletai*). Since Orphism is an ascetic and teletic way of life, W.K.C. Guthrie surmises that Orpheus did not have a new and entirely distinct species of religion to offer, but rather an esoteric modification and reinterpretation of traditional mythologies, a reformation of Dionysiac energy in the direction of Apollonian sanity: “Those who found it congenial might take him for their prophet, live the Orphic life and call themselves Orphics.”⁸⁷

Famous for his charms and incantations (*pharmaka, epodai*), Orpheus appears in countless legendary stories as the son of the solar Apollo and the muse Calliope or as a devoted worshipper of Apollo. Accordingly, Orpheus makes Helios the same as Apollo and Dionysus, though as a giver of oracles and a prophet he always was “companion of Apollo” (*Apollonos hetairon*).⁸⁸ Subsequently, Dionysus sent the Maenads against him and he was torn to pieces like the Egyptian Osiris.

85. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 2.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

87. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement*, with a new Foreword by Larry J. Alderink, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 9.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

In this respect, however, it needs to be remembered that the “much-labored contrast” between Dionysian and Apollonian dimensions in ancient Mediterranean culture “belongs to German speculation”, as A.H. Armstrong rightly observes, rather than to the actual realm of Hellenic piety.⁸⁹

The philosophical “ecstasy” may be sober and passionless, and the utmost “madness” like a supra-noetic metaphysical silence. In a certain sense, the prophetic and poetic frenzy somewhat resembles the epistemic and hermeneutic illumination mediated by the holy light of myths and symbols. These myths—Orphic, Hesiodic and Homeric—may cause a state of Bacchic ecstasy because of their theurgical quality.⁹⁰ Therefore, Proclus prays to the Muses that they should bring him to ecstasy through the noeric myths of the sages (*noerois me sophon bakcheusate muthois: Hymns 3.11*). And he turns to Athena, the sober patroness of Platonic philosophy, saying: “Give my soul holy light from your sacred myths and wisdom and lore” (*Hymns 7.33f*).⁹¹

As the paradigmatic lyre player and liturgical singer, Orpheus was also a *theologos* and *theourgos* of sorts. According to some versions of his death, Orpheus was a victim of a thunderbolt from Zeus, since, in a similar way as Prometheus, he taught men things unknown to them before, expounding the mysteries of the soul’s descent and ascent.

The lyre and the decapitated head of the murdered Orpheus were thrown into a river and floated across to the island of Lesbos. The temple of Bakchus (the Orphic Dionysus) was built at the spot where the singing and prophesying head of Orpheus was buried. The miraculous lyre had been dedicated at the temple of Apollo, and the singing head became famous as a giver of oracles and prophecies.⁹²

89. A.H. Armstrong, *The Ancient and Continuing Pieties of the Greek World*, p. 87.

90. R.M. van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns*, p. 101.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

92. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, p. 35.

And so, is Orpheus a “prophet” in the trivial sense of a person (or a symbol) who foretells the future, or in the sense of the theological administrator and authority in covenants and treaties of the Israelite politico-military enterprises? In both cases, prophecy is an integral part of the divination whose fundamental cosmological premises and logic are based on the ancient ideology of Near Eastern royalty. Consequently, prophecy is a form of divination along with dreams and visions, as Nissinen indicates: “In the ancient Near East . . . the primary function of all divination was . . . the conviction of the identity, capacity and legitimacy of the ruler and the justification and limitation of his . . . power, based on the communication between the ruler and the god(s).”⁹³

Nissinen argues that any definition of prophecy (not just in the widespread cases of literary manifestos and fictions) is a scholarly construct.⁹⁴ And a written prophecy is always a scribed construct. The very notion of the human being able to function as a substitute for the animated and speaking divine statue or as an autonomous mouthpiece of the deity is the outcome of particular socio-historical forms and versions of the covenantal patronship. Nissinen writes:

According to Liddel and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon, *propheteia* is equivalent to the “gift of interpreting the will of gods” and *propheteuo* to being an “interpreter of the gods”, whereas *prophetes* is “one who speaks for a God and interprets his will to man”, or, generally, an “interpreter”. . . . If the word “prophecy”, then, can be agreed to denote primarily the activity of transmitting and interpreting the divine will, it can be used as a general concept of related activities in the ancient

93. Martti Nissinen, “What is Prophecy? An Ancient Near Eastern Perspective,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. John Kaltner and Louis Stulman (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 21.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

and the modern worlds, independently of its biblical roots and religious affiliations.⁹⁵

X

According to the Hellenic tradition, Pythagoras published his writings in the name of Orpheus. Moreover, like the Orphic initiate, Pythagoras has descended to Hades and returned, coming back through the Delphic sanctuary. Therefore Kingsley surmises that Orpheus, as the inspired mystagogue, “would seem originally to have had the power to fetch the dead back to life”,⁹⁶ or rather, to lead the dead (meaning the transformed initiates) “into the day of the noetic life of Atum-Ra”, or even to “the primeval time before there was any duality”.⁹⁷ This is a state where Atum, instead of having two eyes (like the paradigmatic Pythagorean dyad), is one-eyed. But the prevailing religious and moral attitudes of the Greeks presumably suppressed Orpheus’ initial success and turned it into failure.

Likewise, the (*elletu*) Ishtar, the prototype of the Orphic Persephone, elevates the soul and reintegrates it into the “Pythagorean” decad of the Assyrian sacred tree. This reintegration is analogous to the *baqa* of the Sufis. Being the image of God (like the macrocosmic fullness of the noetic cosmos, the collective of demiurgic archetypes) and the image of the perfect man (*etlu gitmalu*, the microcosmic fullness of the king-initiate-philosopher as a son of God), it is the noetic constellation of divine attributes. The descent and ascent of Ishtar

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 19 & 20.

96. Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, p. 226.

97. H. te Velde, “Relations and Conflicts between Egyptian Gods, particularly in the Divine Ennead of Heliopolis,” in *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, ed. H.G. Kippenberg in association with H.J.W. Drijvers and Y. Kuiper (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984), p. 250.

had outlined the way for salvation, depicted in terms of the body-like royal tree and the seven-stepped ziggurat tower.⁹⁸ And the “numerical” sacred tree of Ishtar itself can be viewed as a graphic representation of both the divine council (*ilani rabuti*) and “cosmic man” as “the human incarnation of the almighty God, Ashur”.⁹⁹

According to the ritualized requirement of archetypal *authoritas*, the early Pythagoreans used to attribute to the prophet Orpheus their own works on the soul’s *soteria* (salvation), focused on the figure and fate of Persephone, analogous to the Babylonian and Assyrian Ishtar. And Plato allegedly paraphrased Orpheus and the Orphic literature throughout, according to Olympiodorus’ remark: *pantachou gar ho Platon paroidei ta Orpheos*, “Plato paraphrases Orpheus everywhere” (*In Phaed.* 10.3.13). In this respect, Plato simply reshapes and rationalizes the mythical and religious ideas of esoteric Orphism and its Bacchic mysteries of Dionysus. Therefore, Proclus is not so much exaggerating when he claims that Plato received his knowledge of divine matters from Pythagorean and Orphic writings: *ek te ton Puthagoreion kai ton Orphikon grammaton* (*Plat. Theol.* 1.5; *In Tim.* III.160.17-161.6).¹⁰⁰

Like Orpheus, Plato’s Socrates is a servant of Apollo, maintaining that the best music is philosophy. Hence, philosophical talk is analogous to the prophetic song of Orpheus or the theological hymn of “Apollo’s philosophical swan who sings that this life is a prelude to a disincarnate afterlife”.¹⁰¹

The Orphic myth (or the philosophical Platonic myth) can serve us if we obey it, following the upper road, and if we regard it as a model for present behaviour in accordance

98. Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, p. XCV.

99. Simo Parpola, “Monotheism in Ancient Assyria,” in *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, ed. Barbara Nevling Porter (Chebeague, ME: Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000), p. 190.

100. Peter Kingsley, *ibid.*, p. 131.

101. Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 196.

with the revealed knowledge of the afterlife. This knowledge is about the soul’s judgement and the very depths of Duat, the Osirian netherworld, where Ra and Osiris unite at the deepest point in the nocturnal journey of the Egyptian solar barque. Thoth is seated in front of the barque, attending to the Eye of Horus and healing it. And the solar barque itself is transformed into a holy serpent “whose fiery breath pierces a pathway through the otherwise impenetrable gloom”.¹⁰² As Kathryn Morgan relates: “The myth teaches us that we must try to retain as much memory of the world beyond as possible.”¹⁰³

Accordingly, Pythagoras worships Apollo-Helios (the Sun as an icon of the divine Intellect) because of knowledge acquired in the dark Osirian underworld. Pythagoras emerged from Persephone’s realm as an immortalized hierophant of Orpheus, the revealer of the Pythagorean “holy sacraments”. In sum, he is like Dionysus restored and Osiris united with Ra in the netherworld, because the true philosopher (and the Egyptian royal initiate) is the “deceased” who “sees the god and knows his secret”.¹⁰⁴ He is “dead” to the illusory world of impermanence, corruption and ignorance. Hence, the Orphico-Platonic philosopher contemplates the eternal Ideas and is himself mingled with the gods. As Erik Hornung observes:

Having become a god, the deceased resides where the gods reside and may encounter them face to face. While still on earth the gods are approached only indirectly, through images and symbols. One such symbol is the sun, but only in

102. Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, tr. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 36-37.

103. Kathryn A. Morgan, *ibid.*, p. 209.

104. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, tr. Elizabeth Bredeck (New York: Timken Publishers, 1992), p. 112.

the depths of the underworld can humans actually meet the sun in person.¹⁰⁵

XI

In certain traditional accounts, Orpheus is depicted as the grandson of the king Charops, to whom Dionysus—when invading Europe from Asia—has given the kingdom and has taught the mystic rites of initiation related to the later mysteries of Eleusis. Orpheus himself almost merged with the lyre-playing god Apollo, and consequently he was able to charm all nature and tame the wildest of beasts with his playing and singing—his “sacred incantations” (*hieron epaoidon*) and prayers (*euchai*). Birds and animals came to hear Orpheus’ music, and even trees were calmed.

One should remember that dancing and flute or lyre music were traditional parts of the sacrificial cult of Apollo, and these Apollonian musical rituals held a privileged place in ancient Hellenic religion. According to Johannes Quasten:

Orpheus was considered by the ancient world to be the representative of cultic music. . . . Music had the same character of epiclesis. It was supposed to “call down” the good gods . . . because song and music increased the efficacy of the epiclesis the words of epiclesis were nearly always sung to instrumental accompaniment. Thus the Dionysian fellowship used the so-called *humnoi kletikoi* of women in order to obtain the appearance of their god.¹⁰⁶

The practice of Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is itself tantamount to the singing of rationally composed ana-

105. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

106. Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, tr. Boniface Ramsey (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983), pp. 10 & 17.

gogic hymns, thus imitating Apollo, the Leader of the Muses. The Muses sometimes are equated with the *anagogion phos*, the elevating light that kindles the soul with *anagogion pur*, the upward-leading fire. For Proclus, the prayer-like hymns are “theurgical instruments”,¹⁰⁷ and “human philosophy is an imitation of Apollo’s hymns.”¹⁰⁸

Orpheus, as the paradigmatic itinerant seer, is credited for the ability to pacify through his music, to heal, to foretell the future and interpret the past, as well as shape the traditions of the gods—theology in the form of myths, spells and epic songs. Arguing that both Thales’ and Orpheus’ music worked magic, Neta Ronen attributes special healing powers to the song of Orpheus as it is described by Apollonius Rhodius. Presumably, the theogony which he performed itself had the power to restore cosmic and social harmony.¹⁰⁹

Plato’s dialogues themselves may be viewed as a product of “musical madness”, constructed following the rules of dialectical reasoning and logic. Hence, philosophy, as an artful strategy of recollection and restoration of vision, “is related to the performance arts of dancing and love poetry”.¹¹⁰

Both philosophical dialectic and esoterically interpreted myth produce the *logos* which is an image of the higher noetic and henadic reality. This reality itself is beyond the adequate capture either by *muthos* or by *logos*, each of which are by degrees representations—plausible (*eikos*) perhaps, but ultimately open to the risk of deception or misinterpretation. Likewise, and with a similar imaginative splendour, the ineffable essence of wisdom (if not of being) may be revealed by the cosmic choreography and theurgic music of the calendrical festivals and seasons. This kind of telestic dance-theatre

107. R.M. van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns*, p. 33.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

109. Neta Ronen, “Who Practiced Purification in Archaic Greece? A Cultural Profile,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 284.

110. Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, p. 235.

is established for the sake of the circular descent and ascent, manifestation and the return to the source. According to Gregory Shaw:

Musical theurgy was a form of anamnesis that awakened the soul to its celestial identity with the gods. . . . Musical theurgy came from the gods and gave the soul direct contact with them. . . . According to Iamblichus, Pythagoras was the first composer of this anagogic music. . . . The sacred names and incantations used in theurgic invocations also originated from the gods, and Iamblichus says the Egyptian prophet Bitys revealed “the name of the god that pervades the entire cosmos” (*De myster.* 268.2-3). . . . For Iamblichus the god whose “name” pervaded the cosmos was Helios. . . . Man’s prayers must therefore be presented to Helios through the many zodiacal schemata that the god assumes. Iamblichus says: “The Egyptians employ these sorts of prayers to Helios not only in their visions but also in their more ordinary prayers that have this same kind of meaning, and they are offered to God according to this symbolic mystagogy” (*De myster.* 254.6-10).¹¹¹

In the later Pythagorean milieu, the seven strings of Orpheus’ lyre are connected with the seven circles of heaven, suggesting that “the souls need the cithara in order to ascend.”¹¹² The theory of the seven vowels and the seven-string cosmic lyre, related to the different planets, colours, sounds and the seasonal rotation of the year, is perhaps of Babylonian origin. It is also related to Egypt as the ultimate source of the main (or least initial) esoteric principles of esoteric Orphic lore.

The use of lyre or cithara music during the rites of ascension is attested along with the mantric intoning of the seven vowels that allegedly enabled the soul to escape the darkness of the irrational lower existence and return to the divine

111. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 175-77.

112. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 30.

realm from which it initially descended. The theurgic way of the Orphic *bakcheia* (initiation, recollection, reintegration, elevation to the solar noetic realm) is provided for the Orphic and Bacchic initiates (*orphikoi, bakchoi*), those who looked to Orpheus as their prophet and practised *bios Orphikos* or *bios Puthagorikos*.

The Egyptian provenance of this purificatory way of life (*bios*)—and here it is only the archetypal ideal, not the actual transmission that matters—is affirmed by Herodotus when he speaks about the Egyptian custom of wearing linen tunics: “They agree in this with the observances which are called Orphic and Bacchic, but are in fact Egyptian and Pythagorean” (*Hist.* 2.81).¹¹³

Burkert also recognized that although Orpheus wove together and melded different Near Eastern traditions (Akkadian, Hurrite-Hittite), the Egyptian metaphysical and cultic tradition is used most of all.¹¹⁴ It is evident that not only Egyptian cosmogonies, but also the royal paths of salvation—popularized through the temple initiations, hermeneutical instructions and educational programmes related to the Egyptian Book of the Dead—are reshaped and reused, though for the Greek audience the Egyptian illustrations “seem to be even more suggestive than the Egyptian formulas”.¹¹⁵

XII

The so-called Orphic and Pythagorean spiritual revolution consists in a reversion of the traditional Greek view, namely, that *psyche* is a simulacrum (*eidolon*) of the mortal body. The Orphic and pro-Egyptian Dionysical-Osirian esoterism now regards the living body as an illusory and transitory (al-

113. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

114. Walter Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 98.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

beit complex and complicated) image of the immortal soul, whose purification may be described as separation from the body (*soma*, corpse) by recollection (*anamnesis*), asceticism (turning away from the flux of becoming, *ta genomena*, and from its unreliable images), and philosophical contemplation (*theoria*) of intelligible principles.

In short, the prospect of personal immortality in the Egyptian fashion and promotion of “scientific knowledge” (*episteme*) as the chief soteriological power are inseparable from their initial Orphico-Pythagorean context. Though “the idea of proof is introduced as a rhetorical device,”¹¹⁶ not related with *theoria* as a spectacle of the divine epiphany, science and logic can claim to constitute the salvation of its practitioners only when based on the premise of the mathematical nature of the demiurgic world-construction.

The “scientific” soteriology of Plato, itself based on the Pythagorean and Sophistic *episteme*, is a domain of a small elite group whose critical reflections and ironic speculations in relation to the central body of political orthodoxy and the Sophistic style of education are regarded as an almost gnostic-like means of “dialectical salvation”. Yehuda Elkana explains:

For instance, the road to the Pythagorean heaven leads through the well-defined corpus of the geometrical proof. This is the Pythagorean soteriology. . . . The carriers of the transcendental vision are small groups of intellectuals, often marginal to society, who contemplate the alternative views of the world. . . . The moment when the logos—which is not bestowed upon every person in the same degree . . . —is becoming the main source of knowledge, then the source of knowledge becomes elitist and authoritarian by nature. Consequently, it is not surprising that the fields that were built upon the Parmenidean method, that is, by strict deductions—

116. Yehuda Elkana, “The Emergence of Second Order Thinking in Classical Greece,” in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 61.

namely mathematics and theoretical physics—became strictly authoritarian, and their practitioners began to organize themselves into exclusive groups like the Academy, the Lyceum, and some monastic orders: all these are characterized by equality among the members and authoritarian separatism towards the outside world.¹¹⁷

Since the Homeric values of body-life and shadow- or simulacrum-like soul are radically inverted by their esoteric opponents, what survives now is the soul understood as a manifestation (*ba* in the Egyptian Ramesside theology)¹¹⁸ of the divine spirit—be it called *daimon* or *theos*. The soul as the winged *ba* (the breath and living image of Amun) alone is from the gods. Therefore, “what survives is an image of life (*eidolon aionos*), which sleeps during normal bodily consciousness but wakes up while the body sleeps and foresees future events in prophetic dreams.”¹¹⁹

The soul as a sort of fallen *daimon*, or as a Dionysian divine spark, is buried in a tomb-like material body, thus entering the cosmic cycle of elemental transformation. Hence, the soul is the pre-existing and immortal knowing subject. It passes through a number of incarnations in a cyclical pattern, and these bodily incarnations may be regarded as a sort of punishment, ordeal, or simply viewed as a result of forgetfulness, ignorance and play.

Therefore, the ultimate aim of the soul is freedom from the wheel of terrestrial punishment following the soteriological formula *bios-thanatos-bios* (life-death-life), which shows the way of entering the eternal and noetic “day” of Ra or Helios. This freedom implies the restoration of one’s initial divine

117. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 47 & 55.

118. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 197-206.

119. K. Corrigan, “Body and Soul in Ancient Religious Experience,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 364.

identity. The deliverance (*lusi*) is performed by Dionysus Bakchios through specific cathartic rituals; and Persephone must decide whether those purified souls that have paid the penalty for their wrongful deeds may be sent to the "seats of the blessed" (*hedras eis euhageon*).¹²⁰ The soul's ultimate goal is its final liberation from the painful cycle of reincarnation, thus arriving "at the victor's crown with swift feet" and ending as god instead of mortal.¹²¹

As Bartel Poortman observes, it is the Orphico-Pythagorean tradition that Socrates has in mind when he introduces the theory of recollection (*anamnesis*), experienced by certain divinely inspired seers and poets, and based on the clear separation of the immortal soul and mortal body:

This ontological dualism goes hand in hand with epistemological dualism. There are two different states of knowing: having the Forms for its objects, *psuche's* state is *episteme*; having the *aistheta* for its objects, the senses' state of knowing is *doxa*. The fact of having the Forms as objects of knowledge implies that *psuche* is immortal. This is in line with the principle known from the Presocratic "theory of knowledge" *similia similibus (cognoscuntur)*: the Forms are imperishable, therefore the subject knowing them must be imperishable.¹²²

This subject contemplates the Forms like the temple *prophetes* contemplates the animated hieratic statues of the Egyptian gods. His own eye (*iret*) is awakened to light and related to the active aspect (*iru*, "that which acts") of the visible

120. Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions," in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 253.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

122. Bartel Poortman, "Death and Immortality in Greek Philosophy: From the Presocratics to the Hellenistic Era," in *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World*, ed. J.M. Bremer, Theo. P.J. van den Hout and Rudolph Peters (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pp. 209-10.

manifestation of the deity through the shining light. So the ability of the cult statue (the *tut* of Amun, for example) to act (*iri*) is a response to the ritual action, equated with the Eye of Horus and performed by the priest. The cobra-like *uraeus* of the animated statue is identified with the solar Eye of the divine self-consciousness and with *maat* (truth, right proportion and justice). Even the officiant "refers to himself as a *ba* and as the goddess Sekhmet" at the point when he is ready to embrace the statue.¹²³

The Platonic subject imagines the vision of these Forms by himself when he is unrestricted by a mortal body, that is, either after physical death, or whilst living in the body and "separation" is accomplished by the Osirian initiation or by a kind of philosophical contemplation (*theoria*). This telestic or dialectical "separation" is regarded as essentially an intellectual (*noeric*) passage. It is like one's entering the solar barque of Ra, based on the ontological and epistemological premise that embodied cognition mirrors disembodied cognition, or rather divine intellection. Consequently, only when separated from our mortal bodies and elevated to the stars (the henadic archetypes) do we regain our true divine identity, our real being and "gnostic immortality", being in an ideal cognitional (or rather contemplative) state of knowledge (*episteme*).

Since the ideal Platonic knower is the disembodied soul, analogous to the Egyptian *ba* turned into the noetic *akh*, Plato's Socrates elaborates an eschatological Orphic myth of the blessed afterlife after separation of body and soul and "the identification of the person with the latter", for "it is the state of the latter that is judged by the gods."¹²⁴ Therefore, Lloyd Gerson argues: "For Plato, embodied persons are the only

123. David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), p. 141.

124. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 26.

sorts of images that can reflexively recognize their own relatively inferior states as images and strive to transform themselves into their own ideal."¹²⁵

Hence, philosophers "long to die" and strive to transform themselves into the *akh*—the noetic spirits of light that participate in the Sun god's resurrection and share "the triumph of Ra".¹²⁶ They stipulate this metaphorical and literal "separation" by means of a certain epistemological initiation, since the philosopher's soul "attains truth" by "reasoning" (*to logizesthai*: *Phaed.* 65b.9).

XIII

The impure cannot conjoin with the pure, since the latter is without impurity. Accordingly, either wisdom (*phronesis*) and knowledge (*episteme*) are nowhere to be gained, or else it is for the dead, for the Egyptian *maa kheru* who sees the god (Osiris-Ra) and knows his secret by undergoing a symbolic death: "He becomes an initiate, as in the later mystery cults that derive many of their notions from ancient Egyptian concepts of death and the hereafter."¹²⁷

In addition, all his members (like the parts of the restored Eye of Horus) are equated with divinities and thereby constructed as an ideal icon, as an ideal statue-like image of Osiris, thus becoming entirely a god. According to Hornung, although the term *akh* is written with the hieroglyph of a crested ibis (*ibis comata*, the sign of Thoth, whose telestic wisdom includes the ability to use the transformative *heka* power, *heka*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁶ Henk Milde, "'Going out into the Day': Ancient Egyptian Beliefs and Practices concerning Death," in *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World*, ed. J.M. Bremer, Theo. P.J. van den Hout and Rudolph Peters (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), p. 34.

¹²⁷ Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought*, p. 112.

being the *ba* of Ra), the *akh* is usually depicted not as a bird, but as a mummy, the ideal *sah*-body, tantamount to one's archetypal *eidos* made visible. Hornung states:

A person can become an *akh* only after death, and descriptions of the afterlife differentiate clearly between *akhs*, the blessed dead and those dead persons who have been judged and condemned. Related to the Egyptian verb meaning "to illuminate", the term *akh* is usually translated as "transfigured one", for it is through a process of ritual transfigurations that the deceased becomes an *akh*.¹²⁸

In this way the knower becomes what he knows, and is transformed into the noetic light whose idealized bodily image (the statue-sanctuary) adequately reflects a particular divine Form. The body of the transformed initiate, even before his physical passing away, is tantamount to the Osirian *sah*-body (mummy), to the *sunthema*-like tomb, and able to serve as a receptacle for the divine *ba*. Understood in this sense, the tomb is analogous to the womb-like primaeval mound of Heliopolis, and the philosopher inside this alchemical tomb (like Phanes inside the cosmic egg) is the vehicle of transformation, of one's own turning into the god-like *akh*. Eventually, it means becoming not what one is not, but rather restoring one's real noetic identity by moving from image to reality, from the sensible things that are "unlike" (*anomoion*) to their paradigmatic spiritual "likeness". Therefore, Gerson writes:

Paradoxically, renunciation of worldly concerns—the practice and the goal of philosophy—is literally metaphorical dying. It will turn out that what differentiates embodied persons from other images is that they are able to be self-conscious of their status as images. As one "dies to the body", one comes to recognize oneself as a living metaphor for what is really real. The

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

recognition is identical to the construction of an ideal self in so far as that is possible for the embodied person.¹²⁹

According to Plato, only the rational part of the soul (*logistikón*) sees the Ideas, and as a result, only this part of the soul is immortal. In the *Phaedrus* myth it is represented by the charioteer able to contemplate and be nourished by the Parmenidean noetic world which alone “really and truly is”.

Plato’s theory of the soul’s immortality, of its reincarnation through the cosmic cycle of becoming and its ultimate salvation by the means of recollection and dialectical ascent, is an inseparable part of his erotic *philosophia*. The “lover of wisdom” tries to imitate (*mimēsthai*) the Forms, thus making himself a likeness of them, “realizing one’s nature by actually identifying with the immaterial”.¹³⁰ By becoming like the noetic *eidos*, he becomes one out of the many. For Plato, this process consequently:

... generally takes 10,000 years before *psuche* has regrown its wings and may return to its heavenly home. The philosopher, however, is in an exceptional position: in his case it takes 3,000 years. After every thousand years there is to be a new reincarnation, partly determined by lot, partly by choice. The period between a life and a new incarnation is the time to be punished or rewarded. The first incarnation will be in a human body; subsequent incarnations may be in animal bodies. The philosopher’s cycle is completed sooner because his life is dominated by a constant devotion to the Forms; ... only the philosopher’s *psuche* regrows its wings.¹³¹

This Platonic “science” of transmigration (*metoikēsis*) and metempsychosis is typically out of favour with modern schol-

129. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato*, pp. 57-58.

130. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

131. Bartel Poortman, *Death and Immortality in Greek Philosophy: From the Presocratics to the Hellenistic Era*, p. 213.

ars and discounted as an exotic curiosity. Its presumably Egyptian links are uncertain. Hornung argues with considerable persuasion that the writers of antiquity, when presented with the so-called *ba*-theology and its role in all kinds of miraculous transformations, “mistakenly thought that the Egyptians believed in metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul”.¹³²

However, in its Platonic form this theory is based on the entirely new soteriological perspective that amalgamated the ancient Egyptian royal concept of noetic (astral and solar) immortality with Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian astronomy, and perhaps the Indian Shramanic (Jainic, Upanishadic) path of perfection. Neither the traditional Greek religion nor Homer teach the tripartite cosmological doctrine of reincarnation, wandering “far from the blessed company of gods”, and release. The theories of reincarnation appeared in Greece around the seventh or sixth centuries BC as the Orphic myth of the soul as an exiled god wandering through the four elements—or through all the forms of nature (*pantoia eidea thneton*, according to Empedocles, fr. 115.7). This soul seeks to return to the company of the gods through asceticism, telestic sacraments and philosophy, in the hope of an early release from the wheel of birth and death. As Thomas McEvelley observes, regarding the Orphico-Pythagorean milieu of Ameinias the Pythagorean and his disciple Parmenides:

The Goddess Dike Polypoinos, “Justice with Many Punishments,” adopted by Parmenides, is otherwise known only as an Orphic goddess (who may have had to do with enforcing karmic consequences in the arrangement of rebirths). If Parmenides held a variant of the tripartite doctrine of reincarnation, then the “peace” for which he thanked Ameinias could only be release from reincarnation—the state of *jivan-mukta*.¹³³

132. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 183.

133. Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), p. 111.

The mystic opportunity to reach the interior divine presence—directly and immediately—is tantamount to the miraculous leap beyond the macrocosmic circle of *ouranos*. This is an exceptional release before the ending of the cosmic cycle and in spite of the rules of necessity. According to Peter Manchester:

The question shifted from that of one's status among the dead, in an afterlife that was real in the same way as successive cycles of Eternal Return, to that of whether one had awakened, in *this* life, to a transcending spiritual and interior life that knows its own eternity already and in death is released from the cycle of birth and death and from worldly existence altogether.¹³⁴

The Orphic cult (*telete*), with all its prominent purifications and initiations, was far more private and esoteric than the Hellenic public festivals and mysteries, politically and spiritually centred around the Delphic sanctuary. The new model of post-Homeric political culture sharply distinguished public life from private life, viewing public life as superior, more rational and more important.¹³⁵ Since the cosmos, and likewise ordered human society, were both rationalized in various ways, the inner religious life (suddenly discovered as a path of release) became associated with the private sphere and marginal esoteric movements. Orpheus and Pythagoras in varying degrees responded to the demand for logical thought. Both these mystagogues became much more sym-

134. Peter Manchester, "The Religious Experience of Time and Eternity," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 392.

135. S.C. Humphreys, "Dynamics of the Greek Breakthrough: The Dialogue Between Philosophy and Religion," in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 95.

bols of *auctoritas* than persons of reliable historical biography:

But both offered a new kind of knowledge about the after-life and new theories about the nature of the universe, which had a more "scientific" tone than the traditional cosmologies. Both emphasized in their teaching, and in the dietary rules which accompanied it, the separation between the believers and the rest of the world, the uninitiated. Both rejected animal sacrifice, the major rite of traditional religion.¹³⁶

Hence, the deeper religious life comes to be associated with the private and non-political realm, beyond the socially demanding framework of the *polis*. Both telestic activities and theological beliefs became a matter of personal choice, and an interiorized "spiritual" existence started to be wholly devoted to religious purification or particular philosophical practises. Likewise, an innovative Parmenidean and Platonic philosophy was practiced and developed by a tiny esoteric minority of Apollo's devotees, dissidents and reformers. In this case, both the way of ritual elevation and that of dialectical ascent were aspiring to the same *telos*: to a transcendent and immanent presence of the divine self-identity. In addition, according to K. Corrigan, Plato inherited and reused:

1) the Pythagorean theory that there is an eternal order underlying sensible reality which is expressible in number, harmony, and geometrical pattern; and 2) the Orphic-Pythagorean idea that the soul is a fallen god, imprisoned in the body, which existed before birth and which can after death realize its divinity.¹³⁷

136. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

137. K. Corrigan, *Body and Soul in Ancient Religious Experience*, p. 374.

XIV

Those initiates (*mustai*) who called themselves *bakchoi* looked to Orpheus as their prophet, depicting him as sent by the deity as a revealer of truth about the soul, life after death, and salvation. Hence, Orpheus was viewed as the founder of the soteriological rites (*teletai*) of Dionysus Bakchois (who sends his telestic *mania* and unhinges the supplicants into madness) and Dionysus Lusios (who frees from madness and transmiration). These *lusioi teletai* of Bakchios are centred on purification as an art of "separation".¹³⁸

West assumes that the Bacchic and Pythagorean Orphica probably represent two parallel developments from a common field of origin. At the same time he presupposes a conceptual link between Pherecydes of Syros (the famous seer who promulgated the theory of metempsychosis and, allegedly, brought together the poems of Orpheus) and Pythagoras.¹³⁹

The Orphic doctrines are fragmentarily attested by the golden leaves and plates that bear testimony of the Orphic preparation for death, analogous to the *paideia* provided by the Egyptian officiants of the House of Life (*per ankh*), those who composed, recited and ritually performed the Book of the Dead (*pert em hru*). In Egypt, death is regarded as a way to real life in the realm of *akhu*.

Like the nocturnal Ra, the deceased "philosopher-king" is transformed into a scarab and a child encircled by the ouroboric serpent "who burns millions". The Egyptian-Hermetic illumination-regeneration "appears as the mystery which saves", and its central motif consists in the noetic vision, "fol-

138. Walter Burkert, "Bacchic Teletai in the Hellenistic Age," in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Pharaone (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 273.

139. M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, pp. 18-20.

lowing an ancient model of cosmic journey which is, actually, an interior journey".¹⁴⁰

According to the Egyptians, both humans and gods originate in the all-embracing deity, the One Alone, though the gods issue from Atum's sweat and humans from his tears. As Assmann observes, these primaevial "humans" are probably referred to in a way that means "clients", that is, those who at the beginning appear as the community of the noetic flock, the primordial "saints" (the Sufi *awliya*). In this sense, they are "contemplators", "knowers", "philosophers" here below as Atum-Ra is above, after heaven is raised up on high (at the end of a golden age) and the gods are separated from fallen humanity.¹⁴¹

As the embodied beings whose *telos* is to restore the perfect state of solar contemplation, humans are "oracular creatures"¹⁴² for whose sake the world was created as the theurgic theatre of the divine Eye. The creation is accomplished (or rather constantly "performed") by the thinking heart (intellect), and then by the speaking tongue (logos) and by writing or drawing (*ta hieragrammata*, the writing of divine speech: *sesj en medu neter*). According to Assmann:

Writing only carries out what is already implicit in the structure of reality. This structure is "hieroglyphic". It is a kind of Platonism. Plato interprets the visible world as the infinite material impression of a finite set of immaterial ideas. The Egyptians interpreted the visible world as a kind of infinitely ongoing series production which very faithfully follows an

140. Giovanni Filoramo, *The Transfiguration of the Inner Self in Gnostic and Hermetic Texts: Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 143 & 145.

141. Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1995), p. 165.

142. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

original finite set of types or models. And this same set is also represented by the hieroglyphic system.¹⁴³

To be restored as the hieroglyph of the Eye means to enter the solar barque of Ra and join his all-embracing noetic contemplation by means of the life-giving rays. The Orphic text on the golden tablet from the grave of Thessalian Petroporos conveys the similar claim: "Now you have died and now you have come into being, O thrice happy one, on this same day. Tell Persephone that Bakchios himself has set you free."¹⁴⁴

The blessed deceased emerges into the realm of divine being when his mortal body passes away. He is invited to the holy symposium of the gods in order to enjoy "eternal drunkenness", according to a mocking remark made by Plato (*Rep.* 363cd).¹⁴⁵ This "drunkenness" in the company of the re-divinised "Orphic saints" is, in fact, tantamount to the noetic bliss of the Osirian *olbioi* (the "blessed ones"), those who received "a gift of Memory" (*Mnemosunes doron*). The blessed ones appear in the form of *akh* in the court of Ra, where Setne's *ba* is going in hope "to see the future" and "get information from the gods".¹⁴⁶

The Egyptian goddess Hathor initiates the ascent to heaven and is depicted as "rising in turquoise from the eastern horizon" (CT 486).¹⁴⁷ Hathor (the "House of Horus") is the goddess of ecstatic drunkenness, dance and music. But her essential hypostasis is the fiery Eye of Ra. She is the *Iret*-Eye that "acts as the agent of the god's activity".¹⁴⁸ The deceased

143. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

144. Fritz Graf, *Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions*, p. 241.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

146. John Gee, "Oracle by Image: Coffin Text 103 in Context," in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, ed. Leda Ciruolo and Jonathan Seidel (Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2002), p. 84.

147. Alison Roberts, *Hathor Rising: The Serpent Power of Ancient Egypt* (Rottingdean: Northgate Publishers, 2001), p. 10.

148. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

or the initiate—the "one who knows things" (*rekh (a)khet*), the sage (*remet-rekh*)—is equated not only with Osiris, but also with Hathor, thus immortalised as the "solar gaze" and the fiery beauty (*nefer*) of truth (*maat*).

XV

In Greece, Orpheus, Linus, Musaeus and other "revealers of mysteries" proclaim the programme of salvation, presenting Persephone-Kore and Dionysus, for instance, as saviours of mankind. This "Greece" of Orpheus is not the scholarly construct that depicts the eulogised tiny city-state of Athens—incomparable with either the highly bureaucratised state of Late Period Egypt¹⁴⁹ or with the Neo-Assyrian cosmopolis and its Persian imitations. Rather, Orpheus belonged to the world of wandering *demiourgoi*—the performers of purifications (*katharmoi*) and initiations (*teletai*), the seers, singers and healers able to discover the "ancient guilt" (*palaion menima*). As Burkert relates:

Orphic anthropogony . . . has the story of the most ancient and most general kind of *menima* inherent in man as such, the "ancient grief of Persephone" in the words of Pindar. . . . The myth, especially when combined with the doctrine of transmigration and the ensuing ascetic life-style, could have been the basis for a religion of salvation.¹⁵⁰

The seers and magicians claimed to be able to restore the imagined ideal state of *harmonia*, governed by the "universal

149. Tom Hare, *Remembering Osiris: Number, Gender, and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 289.

150. Walter Burkert, "Craft Versus Sect: The Problem of Orphics and Pythagoreans," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, Vol. 3: Self-Definition in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Ben F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1982), pp. 8-9.

law”, the Vedic *rta*, as “the unifying principle which animates the parts into a single cosmic machine”,¹⁵¹ like the animated “chariot of truth” (*harma dikes*; Sanskrit *ratham rtasya*) drawn by a pair of horses—the divine twins.

Similarly, Parmenides speaks about the axle of the chariot on which he rides. He mentions the “rounded wheels” (*kuk-loi*), or the “whirling wheels” that can bring him to the great open threshold where the *Heliades kourai*, daughters of the Sun, hasten to the light revealed through the Eye’s rounded pupil. Hence, the symbol of *helios* (of the Egyptian *aten*, viewed as egg of the primaeval fire) is the rounded sound-like image of *kosmos noetos*, the object of contemplation and theurgic glorification for the Thothian apes of the Sun, the Eastern *bau*: “Their importance lies in the fact that they represent the divine community of worshippers of the sun god, whose ranks the sun priest joins with his hymn. By praying to the sun he becomes one of them.”¹⁵²

Orpheus, as the archetypal singer, prophet, priest and healer, reconciles the one and the many with his “prophetic lyre” and through the song of harmony (*tes harmonias te ode*). The later Byzantine tradition describes the divine Logos as producing a kind of miraculous music which, by means of “the *iunx* of resonance” (*iunx* meaning both the *iunx*-bird and the magic *iunx*-wheel),¹⁵³ has the ability to charm (*katakelon*) and attract (*methelkomenos*) the human soul.¹⁵⁴ These *iunges* (plural of *iunx*), sometimes referred to as “tongues of the gods”,

151. John Curtis Franklin, “Harmony in Greek and Indo-Iranian Cosmology,” in *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 30, nos 1 & 2, Spring/Summer 2002, p. 8.

152. Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, p. 24.

153. See Algis Uždavinys, *Philosophy and Theurgy in Late Antiquity* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2010), pp. 107-18; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate’s Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 90-110 (ch. VII: “Hekate’s Top and the Iynx-Wheel”).

154. Sarah Iles Johnston, “The Song of the Iynx: Magic and Rhetoric in Pythian 4,” in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 125, 1995, p. 183.

are the four-spoked wheels of brass, iron or gold, hanging from the ceilings of temples and capable of producing a seductive sound like that of the Sirens. As a result, they functioned as instruments of the divine voice, an important aspect in theurgy (viewed by Sarah Johnston as “a form of Platonic mysticism”): “The sounds produced by *iunges* whirled by the theurgists were understood to affect and influence not only individuals and objects on earth, but the heavenly bodies as well.”¹⁵⁵

Likewise, Orpheus’ music and voice may stir human beings, animals, trees, stones, and even the gods—Persephone herself is charmed, and therefore allows him to bring up his dead wife from Hades. The enchanting Orphic song is somewhat analogous to the wind sound produced by an *iunx*-wheel: its *peitho dolia*—the charmed power of persuasion and seduction that tricks¹⁵⁶—belongs to Orpheus’ divine instrument, his lyre. Nicomachus of Gerasa, the Neopythagorean scholar, describes it as follows:

Hermes invented the lyre from the tortoise-shell, and providing it with seven strings, handed down the art of lyre-playing to Orpheus. And Orpheus taught Thamyris and Linus. Linus taught Heracles, by whom he was killed. He also taught Amphion, the Theban, who built Thebes with seven gates after the seven strings of the lyre. When Orpheus was killed by the Thracian women, his lyre was thrown into the sea and was cast up in the city of Antissa in Lesbos. Fishermen found it and carried it to Terpander and he took it to Egypt.¹⁵⁷

In the Orphico-Pythagorean milieu, *mousike*, *mantike* and *iatrike* (music, divination and medicine) are united in the contemplative harmony of the “yoking” and “joining” succession

155. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

156. *The Manual of Harmonics of Nicomachus the Pythagorean*, tr. Flora R. Levin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1994), p. 189.

157. *Ibid.*

of order—in Sanskrit terms, *yoga* and *yuj*—that “describe the harmonic connection of string to instrument” and “the weapon’s changing harmonic states”.¹⁵⁸

XVI

The extension of Ananke’s arms throughout the entire universe is like the vastness of Nut-Hathor’s cosmic body. In one of the numerous late Orphic cosmogonies, the golden chain derived from an allegorical interpretation of *Iliad* 8.19 illustrates the divine unity of the cosmos. Zeus himself suffuses all things and makes them one. As a short but impressive verse of the Orphic theological hymn testifies: “One Zeus, one Hades, one Helios, one Dionysus.”¹⁵⁹

Damascius cites Linus (the mythical singer and hierophant, presumed to be the son of the Muse Ourania) and Pythagoras “for the doctrine that everything is one”.¹⁶⁰ The lament of Linus’ poem, as it is quoted by Stobaeus, runs as follows:

So through discord all things are steered through all.
 The whole are all things, all things from a whole, all things
 are one, each part of all, all in one;
 For from a single whole all these things came,
 And from them in due time will one return,
 That’s ever one and many. . . .
 Often the same will be again, no end will limit them, ever
 limited. . . .
 For so undying death invests all things,
 All dies that’s mortal, but the substrate was
 And is immortal ever, fashioned thus,

158. John Curtis Franklin, *Harmony in Greek and Indo-Iranian Cosmology*, p. 8.

159. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 253.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Yet with strange images and varied form
 Will change and vanish from the sight of all.¹⁶¹

Some Orphic theological narratives and “holy oracles” of Night provide a mythical prototype for the philosophical vision of Parmenides and Empedocles. But Plato is scarcely concerned to do justice to Orpheus and other ancient “theologians”, such as Musaeus and Epimenides, “who derive everything from Night”.¹⁶²

Since the ultimate limit is akin to limitless transcendence, the darkness of the Orphic Night and the primaeval ocean of the Heliopolitan theogony are symbolic descriptions of what is supra-noetic, ineffable, formless and unstructured, out of which the light-like noetic structure appears as the archetypal triad of Atum, Shu and Tefnut. According to Egyptian traditional accounts, “the world emerges from a primeval darkness (*keku semau*) and a primeval flood (*nun*). . . . In sum, the monotheism of the Egyptians consists in the belief that in the beginning the divine was one, and that in the cosmogony that was the work of the one, the one became many.”¹⁶³

It seems that Plato, as the dialectician of the one and the many, is just taking what he wants from Orpheus and certain limited Egyptian sources. Although Plato’s dependence on the Night’s prophets and Phanes’ “logicians” is deliberately concealed, Plato’s main philosophical doctrine is based on that of Parmenides; and Parmenides himself, in fact, depends on the Orphic myth. Even more, Parmenides (as a priest involved in the service of Apollo) and also the entire Velian school of philosophy, which is “plainly rooted in mysticism—it is rooted, in fact, in Parmenides’ own chariot-experience, which leads . . . to the great Goddess’ epiphany.”¹⁶⁴

161. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

162. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

163. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, pp. 40 & 45.

164. Carl Levenson, *Socrates among the Coribantes: Being, Reality, and the Gods* (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1999), p. 69.

The chariot journey may be a literary and telestic *topos*, of course, but this kind of metaphysical ascent (*anagoge*) is, moreover, the powerful symbol of a real dialectical alchemy, and serves as a paradigm of the divine revelation genre. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Parmenides' description of Being as one and continuous is analogous to the Orphic theological myth, according to which the entire universe is united in the body of Zeus, "the only one", in the sense of the Theban Amun, the invisible solitary One who manifests "millions of visible embodiments" by his breath of life.

Likewise, Empedocles has his poetic, prophetic and theological precursor in Parmenides, the sky-walker whose chariot journey takes him into the House of Night. This *nuktos oikia* is the ineffable darkness from which Phanes emerges as a chariot-driving Sun, flying on its noetic wings. At the same time, it is the oracular sanctum, because Phanes himself bestowed the power of prophecy upon the primaeval Night.¹⁶⁵

However, Night remains a source of wisdom and knowledge for all the universal rulers who follow her in the genealogical chain of theogony. In fact, this mythology of succession and violence is crowned by the episode in which Zeus swallows Phanes (the totality of the noetic archetypes) and thereby becomes the "beginning, middle and end of all". This myth is turned into "the philosophic basis for a monistic account of the genesis and governance of the world".¹⁶⁶

In this particular context "Titanic" means "manifold", according to Velvet Yates, because it is precisely the Titans, as the principle of separation, who are made responsible for the world of plurality, for "creating the Many from the One".¹⁶⁷ Yates writes:

165. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 235.

166. Larry J. Alderink, *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 53.

167. Velvet Yates, "The Titanic Origin of Humans: The Melian Nymphs and Zagreus," in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 44, 2004, p. 191.

On the cosmic level, the devouring of Dionysus' limbs by the Titans represents the generation of the material Many from the immaterial One. Proclus equates the division of Dionysus' body into seven parts by the Titans with the Timaeus' division of the world-soul into seven parts. At the human level, the Zagreus myth explains the fragmented nature of human thought. The Titans can also represent the forces of separation and fragmentation on the level of the individual soul. . . .¹⁶⁸

This fragmentation and the subsequent forgetfulness only increase as the cosmic cycle evolves. Similarly in Egypt, Atum as the undifferentiated One in the transcendent darkness of Nun "comes into being by himself" (*kheper djesejef*) and is turned (while essentially remaining the same) first into the Triad and then into the Ennead. In this way, the Egyptian scribes, like the later Neoplatonic dialecticians, unfolded a series of entities (at once numbers, symbols and iconographically fixed figures) that illustrates the unfolding of the paradigmatic structure of reality (conceived in the form of the decad) from its ultimate source in the One. According to the Pythagorean manual produced in the school of Iamblichus:

Both Orpheus and Pythagoras made a particular point of describing the ennead as "pertaining to the Curetes", on the grounds that the rites sacred to the Curetes are tripartite, with three rites in each part, or as "Kore": both of these titles are appropriate to the triad, and the ennead contains the triad three times.¹⁶⁹

The number nine thus expresses the paradigmatic, all-encompassing and still noetic totality. Put otherwise, the One

168. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-93.

169. *The Theology of Arithmetic: On the Mystical, Mathematical and Cosmological Symbolism of the First Ten Numbers, Attributed to Iamblichus*, tr. Robin Waterfield (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1988), p. 107.

still belongs to the realm of the ineffable supra-noetic transcendence, but the goddess Neith (equated by the Platonists to Athena, the mistress of philosophy) calls the world of manifestation (*kheperu*) into being “through seven statements, which in a later magic text become the sevenfold laugh of the creator god”.¹⁷⁰

Mankind originated from Atum-Ra’s tears, “in a temporary blurring” of Atum’s vision, though the period of the golden age is still regarded as the solar kingdom of Ra, where gods and humans inhabit the stage of the extended sacred mound of Heliopolis together. During this blessed time (*paaut*)—before the human revolt against Ra—the divine *maat* (truth, perfect harmonious order) reigns.

XVII

In Platonic parlance, the main “initiatory” and “philosophical” goal of fallen humanity consists in the recollection of an ideal beginning and in solar contemplation of the enneadic totality of the Ideas. In order to do so, and achieve the desired goal, writing is established by Thoth and Sesheta as the instrument of revelation which provides access to the world of the gods; this is simply because it is, at the same time, the instrument of theophany and creation. In fact, the hieroglyphs (*medu neter*) are viewed as traces of noetic being, as archetypes and metaphysical symbols, even epiphanies of the gods themselves. They constitute the revealed body of divine knowledge necessary for salvation.¹⁷¹

After Ra’s departure and the subsequent end of the direct divine rule, the distorted human race lives in a state of punishment and blindness. Hornung describes this as follows:

170. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 44.

171. Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, tr. G. M. Goshgarian (London: John Murray, 1997), pp. 5-7.

Henceforth war and violence shape the lives of human beings. Having lost the paradisiacal innocence of their beginnings, they can regain access to the world of the gods only in death. Moreover, their rebellion suggests a dangerous threat to the continued existence of creation itself, insofar as it hints at the existence of destructive forces that seek to bring the normal course of events on earth to a halt.¹⁷²

The memory of the divine presence is maintained by means of the Horus-like pharaoh whose rites enacted in the temple recall the initial foundation of the world as “revelation of the divine Face”. The ritual act of unveiling and adoration of the Face establishes the royal paradigm of pious contemplation.

The Egyptians, in order to become a “holy people” once again, needed to walk “on the water of God”, that is, follow the path of the deity (be it Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra, Ptah, Khnum or Sobek), proclaiming God’s power even to the fish and the birds. This manifestation of divine power is to be regarded as a kind of revelation, as a miracle to be proclaimed, according to Assmann, so that the whole universe is told of the power of God.¹⁷³

This all-encompassing proclamation of social *maat* practice, recollection and revelation, means that the ideal person is one who “is able to remember”.¹⁷⁴ Accordingly, the ritual of the judgement of the dead assumes a kind of manual for the life-style and education of the living. The Egyptian initiate hopes “to go forth” and “to see Ra”, ritually maintaining the metaphysical memory that conveys the pattern of alchemical transformation as well as rational calculability, responsibility and accountability. In this context the “initiate” simply means the official member of the pharaonic state who is able

172. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 48.

173. Jan Assmann, “Confession in Ancient Egypt,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 236.

174. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

to manage and present himself as a substitute (albeit inwardly and mystically) for the king—either ideally patterned as Horus' image, or as the "mummified" and reanimated Osiris image. Finally, through the restored *akh*-identity, he hopes to be like a living god and stand in the sun barque.

Although the standard New Kingdom Egyptian is a politically responsible devotee of Amun and does not feel like a gnostic stranger in this world, death (*mut*) and initiation through the Osirian suffering and rebirth seems to be his only gateway to the noetic realm of Ra. Assmann argues that the gods are to be confronted "only by priests, indirectly in a statue ritual or directly after death",¹⁷⁵ when the Egyptian in the form of his *ba* appeals to the court of Osiris for justice:

He does not accuse the gods for his misfortune, nor does he perceive his sufferings as unjust punishments for crimes he did not commit. He knows that the gods do not interfere in human affairs, and that a human being is exposed to all kinds of misfortunes that have nothing to do with the gods and have no religious significance whatsoever. They just occur. The only way to address the gods and to enter into forms of belonging and connectivity that bind him to the gods is to die and to present himself to the judgement of the dead.¹⁷⁶

Proclus provides the following account, which presents an analogous but different story of royal succession and cyclic regression, based on the myth of the Titanic act of violence. Here the dismemberment of Dionysus (that partly follows the Osirian pattern) represents the proceeding of the One into the Many. Proclus says:

175. Jan Assmann, "A Dialogue Between Self and Soul: Papyrus Berlin 3024," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten with Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 388.

176. *Ibid.*, pp. 400-01.

Orpheus the theologian had handed down three races of man: first the golden, which he says Phanes governed; second the silver, which he says the mighty Kronos ruled; third the Titanic, which he says Zeus assembled from the Titanic limbs; thinking that in these three categories every form of human life was included (*In Remp.* II.74-75; *Orph.frag.* 140).¹⁷⁷

Yet another version is presented in the so-called *Rhapsodic Theogony* (the *Hieroi Logoi in 24 Rhapsodies*). In a related prayer to Apollo-Helios (at the beginning of the Orphic Rhapsodies) this poem is described as the twelfth revelation of Orpheus.¹⁷⁸ According to this Orphic theogony, current among the late Neoplatonists (especially Proclus, Damascius and Olympiodorus), there were six successive divine kingdoms ruled by Phanes, Night, Uranos, Kronos, Zeus and Dionysus respectively. Phanes reigns before Night in this account, and his reign (understood both metaphysically and as a pedagogical myth of perfect *politeia*) is somewhat analogous to the reign of Ra. Dionysus corresponds to Osiris, who comes back to life at the level of *anima mundi*—not only as the ruler of Duat (the Netherworld, tantamount to his own, or Nut-Hathor's, body-temple), but also as a model for the deceased, that is, for the "initiate" and "philosopher".

The main difference between the Egyptian and the Hellenic models is that the attainment of life (*ankh*) in the noetic Heliopolis depends not only upon knowledge and piety, but (first of all) upon service to the Egyptian holy state and to the pharaoh, the son of Ra, suckled by the goddess Hathor.¹⁷⁹ In the form of the *ka*-statue, located within the special mansions (wrongly designated as "mortuary temples" by modern scholars), he is expected to spend "millions of years" in

177. Velvet Yates, *The Titanic Origin of Humans: The Melian Nymphs and Zagreus*, p. 194.

178. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 227.

179. Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 20.

mystic union with the deity.¹⁸⁰ His mummy (the symbolic image of Osiris) is the exemplary receiver of life (*shesep rankh*), of the reviving solar rays, thus becoming “his hieroglyphic spell generating his immortality”,¹⁸¹ and showing the theurgic way to his “initiates”—the bureaucratic and priestly staff. In this respect, he is the death-conquering immortal Horus, the golden Falcon. As Alan Segal remarks: “Eventually, ordinary Egyptians understood themselves and the transcendent part of their lives, by imitating the Pharaoh’s path through the underworld. The afterlife became the mirror of the self.”¹⁸²

Since “the true and eternal life” begins (or rather, is regained) only with death, the term *ankhu*, “the living ones”, as Gerhard Haeny aptly surmises, is used in a double sense: “of those alive on earth as well as of those living in the hereafter”.¹⁸³

XVIII

The language of Plato describing the Forms is reminiscent of the Parmenidean and Orphic revelations. This is not presumably an anachronistic “Platonic” reading of Parmenides, as certain modern historians of Hellenic philosophy would claim. Parmenides’ otherworldly journey to the point where all the opposites meet, or are transcended, repeats that of Heracles and Orpheus. According to Kingsley: “Everyone runs from death so everyone runs away from wisdom. . . . Parmenides’ journey takes him in exactly the opposite direction. . . . To

180. Gerhard Haeny, “New Kingdom ‘Mortuary Temples’ and ‘Mansions of Millions of Years,’” in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 86.

181. Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 50.

182. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

183. Gerhard Haeny, *ibid.*, p. 92.

die before you die, no longer to live on the surface of yourself: this is what Parmenides is pointing to.”¹⁸⁴

It is no surprise that Parmenides articulated the epistemological and ontological categories fundamental to Platonism. The deliberately pro-Platonic understanding of Parmenides’ “unmoving heart of well-rounded Truth” (*aletheies eukukleios atremes etor*: I.29)¹⁸⁵ was common among later Platonists. Therefore, Plato’s actual reception of Parmenides must itself be important for an historically relevant interpretation of the Parmenides poem, a reception indicated by the *Phaedrus* myth and Plato’s comparison of the soul to a charioteer with a pair of winged horses, not unlike the horses of Phanes “conveyed here and there by golden wings” (Hermeias, *In Phaedr.* 142.13 ff; *Orph. Frag.* 78). According to John Palmer, Hermeias properly connected Plato’s image of the chariot with analogous images used by Orpheus and Parmenides. He criticises Leonardo Taran’s assertion, namely, that in Parmenides nothing suggests the comparison of the chariot with the soul, as absurd, saying: “Suggests to whom? Certainly not to one who would have recognized, for example, the parallels between the proem and Orphic accounts of the initiate’s experience of the afterlife.”¹⁸⁶

Regarding Plato’s description of the Forms in Parmenidean language, Palmer argues that both the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* myths incorporate certain Parmenidean and Orphic elements into the context of a revelation of pure Being that repeats the revelation received in Parmenides’s *anabasis*:

Each revelation in the *Republic* takes place only after the soul’s journey to an ouranian (possibly hyperouranian) re-

184. Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 1999), pp. 64-65.

185. Raymond Adolph Prier, *Archaic Logic: Symbol and Structure in Heraklitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 97.

186. John A. Palmer, *Plato’s Reception of Parmenides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 18.

gion. If either is supposed to have a Parmenidean analogue—that is, if the myth of Er does indeed draw upon Parmenides—then . . . it implies an interpretation of the proem as ascent. . . . Because of the presence in the proem of imagery of the Orphic initiate's post-mortem experience as described in the verses on the gold lamellae . . . it would be straightforward for Plato to interpret the proem as Parmenides' account of his own afterlife experience (or something analogous to it such as a dream). The connections between Parmenides' proem and Plato's myths are unlikely to be merely a function of their having a common source in Orphic and Pythagorean eschatology. . . . Parmenides would have seemed unique in providing a model for both the content and the conditions of the unfettered soul's vision of Being. The theoretical component of this post-mortem vision is . . . Plato's view that learning essentially involves a process of recollection. The symbiosis between the recollection theory and the revelation theme is clearest at *Phaedrus* 249b6-c4. . . .¹⁸⁷

Indeed, for Plato, "learning is nothing but recollection" (*mathesis ouk allo ti e anamnesis*. . . . *Phaed.* 72e5-6), and this recollection constitutes a non-propositional and non-representational knowledge of the Forms. Presumably, this knowledge is infallible, and belongs to the ideal knowers, likened to gods. Such knowers enter the "divine constellation" either by means of dialectic, the performance of ritual, or after death. The process of mystagogy (education imagined as recollection) is like a dialogue between "the-one-who-loves-knowledge" and a deity, "He-who-praises-knowledge" (and, in fact, reveals knowledge), namely, Thoth in the Late Period Egyptian *Book of Thoth*.¹⁸⁸

187. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

188. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica. Volume 1: Text* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), p. 3.

The Parmenidean and Platonic lover of knowledge is akin to the divine and immortal Being, thus reaffirming the "truest nature of the soul". Only the qualified Platonic *philosophos* is purified to such a degree that he achieves what others do not, namely, the realisation of his affinity (*sungenes*) with the divine. Consequently, by becoming real knowers—that is, by imitating (*mimeisthai*) the Forms and making themselves likenesses of them—philosophers become akin to the noetic Forms.¹⁸⁹ Or put otherwise, they become like the eternal hieroglyphs in the form of *akhu*.

As Gerson explains, "the person achieves his true nature in knowing Forms"; and this person is not a human being, because the human body does not belong ideally to one's identity. Only by acquiring knowledge does the righteous "dead man" acquire a new identity, because knowledge entails self-transformation.¹⁹⁰ And this desired identity is a noetic or divine identity of sorts.

However, if philosophy is nothing but a practice for dying and being dead (*Phaed.* 64a.5-6; 67d.7-10), then philosophy, in its initial purificatory phase at least, is the Osirian way of life, in spite of any reluctance to acknowledge the theological identity of Osiris and Dionysus. And Orpheus may be called "the first philosopher" (as Diogenes Laertius asserts and questions: *Vitae* I.5), but only in the same metaphorical and thoroughly "sloganised" sense in which Imhotep, the son of Ptah, "successful in his actions, great in miracles", is "the first philosopher" of the Egyptians.

The Platonic myth (*muthos*) which, presumably, "represents philosophy's culmination",¹⁹¹ is the Orphico-Pythagorean soteriological manifesto. For according to Plato, the souls of pious philosopher-gnostics (the knowers of Ideas, or Forms) are purified of the mortal body and thereby join the

189. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato*, pp. 128-29.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

191. Kathryn A. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato*, p. 185.

immortal gods. Philosophers are destined for the Isles of the Blest, therefore Socrates considers it most fitting for those who are about to make the otherworldly journey "to examine and mythologise" (*diaskopein te kai muthologein*) about it (*Phaedr.* 61e1-3).¹⁹²

XIX

Human learning may be contrasted to the divine omniscience as discursive reasoning is to Neoplatonic intellection (*noesis*). The first is a sort of dialectic which uses classifying division and collection, and strives for rational "scientific knowledge"; the second a kind of non-discursive dialectic which rules out not only transition from subject to predicate, but even language itself, and which noetically contemplates and apprehends all that is as a *totum simul*.¹⁹³

This *noesis* is something more than the type of rational or intellectual activity capable of producing coherent texts, systems and interpretations, because it implies the soul's identity (or affinity with) *ta noeta* (the Forms). Such identity at the level of *Nous* may be designated as salvation achieved either by the unity of soul and intellect, or by "the reflection in the logical soul of *noeseis* in the form of *ennoiai*",¹⁹⁴ that is, in the form of illuminating thoughts and mystical insights.

The main driving force of Platonic *paideia* is not simply a one-sided *logos*, but the god-given *eros*, that is, one's striving for unification with the supreme *arche* and the desire of noetic immortality through the *daimon* that God has given to each of us. Plato says: "And so far as it is possible for human nature to have a share in immortality, he will not in any degree lack

192. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

193. A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 165.

194. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 53.

this. And because he always takes care of that which is divine, and has the *daimon* that lives with him well ordered (*eu kekosmemenon*), he will be supremely happy (*eudaimon*)" (*Theaet.* 90c). Gregory Vlastos therefore connects Plato's theory of love with his "religious mysticism", arguing that the convergence of *mania* and *nous* in love shows Plato's affinity to the "orgiastic Dionysian rites".¹⁹⁵

Since the embodied soul is "dismembered" and "scattered" like Osiris, its recollection, restoration and ascent to the One by means of *Nous* is related to the soul's going "out of its mind drunk with the nectar", as Plotinus would say (*Enn.* VI.7.35.25-26), that is, out of its discursive *logismos*. Therefore Shaw concludes that rational thinking for Plato "has a purely cathartic function", because the soul's purification and the subsequent restoration of its lost divinity "was the way of Platonic *paideia*, and while a well-exercised skill in rational analysis was necessary to strip the soul of false beliefs, it could never awaken it to its innate dignity."¹⁹⁶

This teaching of philosophical *katharsis* as a way of release from the wheel of rebirth and entry to everlasting noetic bliss—the privilege of ruling the whole cosmos with the gods (moving in the barque of Ra or following the chariot of Zeus)—is based on "a religious doctrine, which Plato took over from Orphics or Pythagoreans, a doctrine of sin, purgatory, reincarnation, and eventual purification", according to David Bostock.¹⁹⁷

Therefore, the Platonic learning itinerary follows the eternal standards (*paradeigmata*) established in divine reality, and consequently associates the ideal of contemplating (*theorein*) with that of serving or "caring for" (*therapeuein*) the divini-

195. Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato," in *Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 638-39.

196. Gregory Shaw, "After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Platonism," in *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. V, no.1, Fall 1996, pp. 5-6.

197. David Bostock, "The Soul and Immortality in Plato's *Phaedo*," in *Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 893.

ty.¹⁹⁸ Since God is the measure of all things and the standard for justice, to become like God, for Plato, means to become just, holy (*hosiotēs*) and wise, for he says: "And that is why we should also try to escape from here to there as quickly as we can. To escape is to become like god so far as it is possible (*phuge de homoiosis theoi kata to dunaton*), and to become like god is to become just and holy, together with wisdom" (*Theaet.* 176a).¹⁹⁹

The erotic pathway to wisdom is presented by the priestess Diotima (whose name means "honour of god") of Mantinea (related to *mantis*, "prophet" or "seer").²⁰⁰ Her task as the ideal Platonic mystagogue is to destroy the initiate's constructed "old self" following the Orphic spiritual method: "No ideology could survive Diotima's scrutiny," as Rappe observes: "mind and body arise together as mutually conditioned constructions. Self-identity ebbs away in the flow of memory while consciousness disappears without a trace of its previous contents."²⁰¹ The lover of wisdom in his upward movement hopes to participate in the absolute Beauty (*metechei ekeinou tou kalou*), and not simply arrive at a "clear definition" by using division (*diairesis*) and collection (*sunagoge*) in the manner of a priest dissecting a sacrificial animal (*hoion hierion*): *Soph.* 287c3).²⁰²

The soul of the dialectician is able "to see the truth" (*aletheia horatai*: *Rep.* 527c3) only when it reaches the "limit of the intelligible" (*tou noetou telei*: *Rep.* 532b2). However, the dialectical procedure of "exhaustive classification" carried out by tortuous division, collection and definition is viewed

198. David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in *Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 810.

199. *Ibid.*, p. 794.

200. Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 108.

201. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, p. 152.

202. Kenneth M. Sayre, *ibid.*, p. 149.

as a divinely revealed path (*hodos*), that is, as a "gift from the gods to men" (*Phileb.* 16c5; 16b5; 16a8).²⁰³ According to Plato, one can never gain knowledge (*epistēmē*, not merely opinion) by simply reasoning about something, because one needs to be "enamoured" by the "godly method". In short, one needs some kind of inducement in order to turn "the eye of the soul" (*Rep.* 540a7) upward towards the final revelation of the Beautiful and the Good.

Kenneth Sayre argues that the philosophical goal to be achieved cannot be reached simply by taking certain steps in that direction, because the Platonic *methodos* has nothing to do with "a routine procedure for cranking out certain results, like the method of long division in arithmetic".²⁰⁴ He explains:

The Greek term *methodos* comes from *hodos* (way) plus *meta* (in the sense of "according to"), so that a *methodos* literally is a path or a way that one might pursue to a given goal. . . . Plato's term *dialektikē*, after all, is a derivative of the verb *di-alegōmai*, meaning to converse with another person. And the manner of conversation in question is one in which the master philosopher directs the steps of the relative neophyte.²⁰⁵

XX

The Egyptian term *sia* is difficult to render. However, Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks maintain that it designates the special noetic faculty "that enabled the gods to perceive an event the instant it occurred, together with the reason for its occurrence".²⁰⁶ Being thus equivalent to noetic il-

203. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

204. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

205. *Ibid.*, pp. 160 & 161.

206. Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptians Gods*, p. 95.

lumination and all-embracing *gnosis*, *sia* presumably includes all possible knowledge, and is found in Atum-Ra's shining Eye as its universal irradiation. In a pair with Hu (the creative utterance), the personified Sia (sometimes interpreted as meaning "perception") stands in the solar barque of Ra:

This capacity, which every god possessed in some measure, was a dormant kind of knowledge that became active in the presence of the event that brought it out; it enabled a god to grasp, in the fullest sense of the word, what was going on. It made it possible for already existing knowledge, reactivated by a signal, to emerge at the conscious level. "Sign of recognition", that is the basic meaning of the word *sia* in Egyptian. . . . Thus was established a rather clear-cut distinction between *sia*, or synthetic knowledge, and knowledge as technique and praxis, called *rekh*. *Sia* operated like an absolute intuition irreducible to logical knowledge. *Rekh* implied a way of defining concepts that necessarily entailed the use of speech, and, later, writing; they endowed it with . . . the capacity to be transmitted.²⁰⁷

However, one cannot be sure that the term *rekh* simply means something like discursive or scientific-encyclopaedic knowledge. In many contexts, *rekh* is an equivalent of the initiatory *gnosis* necessary for the successful arrival at "the shore of the great island", namely, the divine realm, and for appearing as a god.

The disciple to whom the god of wisdom reveals different types of useful scribal, theological and scholarly knowledge in the Egyptian demotic *Book of Thoth* is the "lover of wisdom" (*mer-rekh*), that is, the "philosopher" in its original Pythagorean sense.

Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich argue that the role of the *mer-rekh* "raises the problem of initiation and mysticism", because among the goals of the *mer-rekh* are partici-

207. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

pation in alchemical transformations (liturgies, rituals, hermeneutical events) in the Duat and eventually joining Ra in his solar barque. They say:

We know of no examples of this striking Egyptian parallel to Greek *Philosophos* outside of the Book of Thoth. . . . *Mer-rekh* designates the aspiring student or scholar who desires to be initiated into the wisdom of Thoth. . . . His relationship with the deities is a close one; Thoth treats him virtually as a son. . . .²⁰⁸

The dialogue between the The-one-of-Hesret (Thoth) and the *mer-rekh* is modelled on an initiatory underworld dialogue employed in the literature of the New Kingdom. The Platonic dialogues follow this pattern. Though the demotic Book of Thoth itself is perhaps later than Plato, its patterns and ideas are based on the Ramesside theological *rekh*.

In the context of priestly mystagogy, Imhotep (the chief lector-priest of Heliopolis) was regarded as an ideal sage or bearer of knowledge (*rekh-ikhet*). He is a paradigm for every subsequent Egyptian *philosophos*, since, though designated as the son of Ptah, he was a mortal man whose *ba* ascended to heaven and became a god. Consequently, Imhotep is the model for the initiatory death and transformation which every *mer-rekh* hopes to accomplish.²⁰⁹ As Hornung plainly states, there is a constant "gnostic" stress on knowledge (most frequently secret knowledge), "through which alone, in good Egyptian tradition, salvation and redemption is achieved".²¹⁰

The dialectical action of the Book of Thoth (which survives in damaged fragments) probably is set in the mandala-like

208. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica. Volume 1: Text*, p. 13.

209. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

210. Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*, tr. David Lorton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 44.

House of Life (*per ankh*) and dramatised in connection with divine festivals (a connection also suggested by the dramatic setting of certain Platonic dialogues). Jasnow and Zauzich write:

There is little doubt that the constituent elements of the House of Life could be imbued with symbolic force; the author may conceive this institution as reflecting the underworld or, perhaps better, the divine world. Similarly, the author of the Book of Thoth may sometimes employ metaphorical language. The process of attaining mastery of scribal knowledge, for example, may mirror the deceased's striving to attain rebirth. . . . Thereupon the *mer-rekh* praises Thoth for his advice, and expresses his own hopes for what amounts almost to a spiritual rebirth. . . . The *mer-rekh* offers a recitation of praise to Thoth or Imhotep at the festival of Imhotep. He expresses the wish to join his entourage, become a seer, and worship Seshat. The *mer-rekh* further proclaims personal experience and knowledge of such events as Thoth's defeat of the enemies of Ra in the underworld. . . . He introduces himself, answering the question: "Who are you?" with the words: "I am the *mer-rekh*."²¹¹

Hence, he is the "lover of wisdom", and wisdom is embodied by Thoth to whom he avows his loyalty, showing desire to worship this god, partake in his rituals and processions, and understand their hidden symbolic meaning. It seems that the ideal *mer-rekh* is a pious scribe or scholar, sometimes functioning as the lector priest, like Imhotep. In accordance with the chief theological paradigm, he enters the barque of Ra, thus being like the transfigured *akh*, and not the material corpse (*mut*). He is both "prophet" and "craftsman", the servant of Thoth and other gods, including Ptah.

211. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *ibid.*, pp. 3, 6 & 8. (The transliteration of some Egyptian words is slightly altered, for example *mrh* became *mer-rekh* in order to make it more readable.)

In this respect, "the-one-who-loves-knowledge" (*mer-rekh*) is analogous to the great Imhotep or Amenhotep, Son-of-Hapu. The Egyptian scribes and religious scholars, those concerned with the sacred books—"manifestations of Ra" (*bau Ra*)—hope "to be united with Amenhotep and Imhotep in the afterlife".²¹²

The holy "books" (the hieroglyphic and hieratic compositions of texts and symbolic pictures, as well as statues, reliefs, sanctuaries and tombs) are solar in their essential nature. Therefore, the "souls of Ra" (*bau Ra*) may be depicted as constituting the crew in the barque of Ra. Thereby the close relationship between prophecy and writing is assumed and emphasised.

The Egyptian verb *ser* means to show, to announce, hence, to prophesy. When the *mer-rekh* receives instructions from "He-who-praises-knowledge" (Thoth), the "prophecy" virtually becomes revelation and reception of "philosophy" (using this word in its strictly etymological sense as the "love of wisdom").

The lord of the *bau* of Ra is the messenger of prophecy, and the servant of Thoth is a receiver of prophecy brought by Thoth. Therefore, the *mer-rekh* is also the writer and the reciter, following the standard request for revelation and the divine command to recite (somewhat resembling the Quranic command): "Come you, O one who lives as the craftsman of Isten. O praised one of the heart of Ra, may he cause that you recite."²¹³

The Book of Thoth speaks of the chamber of Darkness, and mentions "a lamp of prophecy". Moreover, its dialogues may be staged as an initiatory drama, performed by priestly actors. The *mer-rekh* is frequently designated as a "youth" (*nekhen*), analogous to the Hellenic Apollonian *kouros* or the Arabic *fata*. He hopes to participate in rituals of the divine

212. Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt*, p. 105.

213. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *ibid.*, p. 32.

realm, to become the “blessed deceased” in the entourage of Thoth and other gods, thereby stressing the secrets of his patron Thoth and the related knowledge of the Osirian Duat. Accordingly, the *mer-rekh* strives for spiritual rebirth.²¹⁴ Jasnow and Zauzich comment as follows:

It does seem fair to say that in the Book of Thoth the *mer-rekh*, be he priest or student, undergoes a type of initiation and spiritual rebirth. The knowledge imparted is strongly, but not solely, underworldly in character. We believe that the process takes place while the *mer-rekh* is alive, within the context of the temple House of Life, and probably in connection with festivals. It is quite likely that in entering the sacred space of the temple and House of Life the participant was simultaneously conceived to be entering the underworld or, at least, the divine otherworld. . . . The disciple achieves a sort of rebirth, perhaps through the equivalent of the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, which then results in his recitation of a hymn to Imhotep/Thoth. . . . *Rekh* prepares one's way into the Beyond.²¹⁵

XXI

Robert Lambertson states that the inspired Orphic poetry had a privileged religious position from the time of Socrates and before, to the time of Damascius and holy Serapion, who “possessed and read almost nothing except the writings of Orpheus” (Damascius *Phil. Hist.* 111).²¹⁶ No wonder Orpheus

214. In this respect, see *Algis Uzdevinys, Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (Westbury: The Prometheus Trust, 2008).

215. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *ibid.*, pp. 58, 59 & 62.

216. Robert Lambertson, “The Neoplatonists and their Books,” in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 207 & 208; *Damascius: The Philosophical History*, text with translation and notes by Polymnia Athanassiadi (Athens: Apamea, 1999), p. 267.

was designated simply as “the Theologian”, in much the same way as Homer was named “the Poet”.²¹⁷

Homer, as a privileged mythical *auctoritas*, supplied the Hellenes with the highly selective and largely spurious “sacred map” of Heroic Greece, thus deliberately shaping their collective memory and using a language “never spoken by any living person”.²¹⁸ This modified picture of the heroic past and a shadowy afterlife, codified in sixth century BC Athens, provided the pattern of the initially aristocratic pan-Hellenic unity and the alleged “theological” continuity of their world view.

Of course, the Homeric poems were read as Pythagorean or Stoic philosophical allegories, and Proclus defended Homer by linking his poetry with the god Apollo and claiming that the Homeric poems remind us of transcendent things. In this case, “a symbolic mode of representation becomes a necessity.”²¹⁹ Likewise, in the Egyptian tradition of ritual exegesis (followed by the Orphic “paradoxical and implausible interpretive strategies”²²⁰) everything related with cultic communication and mystagogy must be symbolic. According to Assmann:

For nothing in the Egyptian cult is just what it appears to be. The priest is not a priest; the statue is not a statue; the sacrificial substances and requisites are not what they are usually. In the context of the ritual performance all acquire a special “mythical” meaning that points to something else in “yonder world”. . . . Everything in this sacred game becomes a kind of hieroglyph. . . . The more there was to interpret, the more mysterious the rite became. The dialectics of interpreta-

217. Robert Lambertson, *ibid.*, p. 207.

218. Margalit Finkelberg, “Homer as a Foundation Text,” in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 207.

219. Oiva Kuisma, *Proclus' Defence of Homer* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), p. 106.

220. Robert Lambertson, *The Neoplatonists and their Books*, p. 207.

tion and arcanization led to a cultural split between a surface structure of religious practices of sometimes appealing absurdity . . . and a deep structure of religious philosophy, which finally developed into hermetism, where the sacerdotal science of Egyptian paganism and the philosophical religion of neo-Platonism met to form the last stage of Egyptian religion.²²¹

After the so-called Homeric age (or even simultaneous with it), a radical shift had occurred in the ancient Greek mentality as regards the understanding of the soul and its relation to the body. This shift coincides with the so-called Saite renaissance in Egypt and the Egyptian “holy war”—using Greek mercenaries—with Assyria. Precisely at this time, Egypt systematically turned to the models of the past, and this pious codification of cultural standards according to the “eternal” schemata is later reflected and made programmatic in Plato’s Laws. Assmann writes:

Much more comprehensively than in the Ramesside age, Egypt now discovered its own antiquity and elevated it to the rank of a normative past. Almost the entire literate upper stratum—above all, the kings themselves—now began to emulate Prince Khaemwaset by visiting and copying the monuments of their forefathers. This wholesale return to the models of the past was tantamount to a cultural revolution and it spread into every aspect of Egyptian life.²²²

It therefore cannot be assumed that the people of Greece suddenly and rather spontaneously started to question the reliability of their traditional cosmology and anthropology,

221. Jan Assmann, *Semiosis and Interpretation in Ancient Egyptian Ritual*, pp. 104 & 106.

222. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, tr. Andrew Jenkins (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), p. 341.

making inquiries into “the metaphysical background of physical phenomena” and eventually discovering “a difference between the corporeal and the spiritual aspects of life”, as Rein Ferwerda supposes.²²³ However, all kinds of cultic associations were incorporated into the ritualised and interiorised procedures of salvation in the attempt to release that part of the person now called the “immortal soul” (*psuche*), following (with the enthusiasm of recent converts) Egyptian theological and soteriological paradigms.

The road leading to Osiris Un-nefer trodden by the initiates in their hope that death is not akin to complete dissolution (leading simply to the lamentable condition of the simulacrum of the body being lost) now became the “mystic road to Rhadamanthus”, marking the release of the soul from the body. This separation from the ultimately devalued mortal body and subsequent transition may be somewhat ritually anticipated, or even performed, by the mystical symbols of the Dionysiac initiations (*ta mustika sumbola ton peri ton Dionuson orgiasmon*). Hence, the Orphic golden tablet addresses the deceased (the one who has died in either the philosophical or the physical sense, or one who is still in the process of learning the eschatological rhetoric) as follows: “Happy and blessed one, you will be a god instead of mortal” (*olbie kai makariste, theos d’esei anti brotoio*).²²⁴

At first this Orphic teaching of *soteria* was a secret teaching which, perhaps, would look too unconvincing and ridiculous for the traditionally minded majority of Hellenes. The rhetoric of the “secrecy” was structured so that any “secret” (be it just a pedagogical fiction) needed to be revealed, whilst

223. Rein Ferwerda, “The Meaning of the Word *σῶμα* (Body) in the Axial Age: An Interpretation of Plato’s CRATYLUS,” in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 112.

224. Susan Guettel Cole, “Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead,” in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Pharaone (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 278.

at the same time maintaining the inadequacy of attempting to communicate in words the mystical essence of the *telete*, which is to be realised only by ritual participation.

In the context of establishing and keeping various practices and orders, the claims of secrecy do not consist in concealing some exclusive or dangerous knowledge, as the romantic Protestant "esoterism" of a nineteenth century Western mentality imagines in its obsession with "secret societies" and "inward experiences" of "genuine initiations". Rather it serves for the formation and maintenance of social boundaries. For the insiders, the established practices, signs of distinction and solemn slogans of "secrecy" must be preserved and transmitted in order for them to survive as a community of privileged truth-bearers.

It goes without saying that these groups which celebrated all sorts of festivals and practised telestic rites (that imitate festivals anyway) were neither the "secret societies" of Masonic fantasy, nor "esoteric centres" in the sense employed by the "universal" post-Hegelian theosophy of those who accept the crazy theory of secret forces of evil operating in history and plotting against the *verus Israel*. Accordingly, Luther Martin analyses the "syndrome of secrecy" in certain "textual communities", especially in relation to the Hermetic distinction between secret (unofficial, underground, forbidden) and public (official) knowledge. Due to this cultural schizophrenia (that unfolded between Athens and Jerusalem), the entire world theatre was transformed (following Egyptian and Babylonian scriptural paradigms) into the esoteric book, open to sectarian readings and rereadings. As Martin explains:

Like secrecy, such literary productions create their alternative world, and such textual societies . . . reviled and rejected the external world which represented, from their perspective, a universe of diminished literacy beyond their own revelatory texts. They did not, however, fear this world like the local associations and oral cultures they replaced. Rather than cowering with the protective embrace of secret enclaves, the goal of such textual societies was nothing less than the militant

mastery and domination of the entire universe. . . . Christians, who had initially demonized a world of adversarial others . . . came to employ . . . exorcism to establish their own catholicity. . . . And when one of these cultic claims to an identifying revelation came to define the dominant and inclusive cultural reality, exclusivistic claims to sacrality became reimagined as the esoteric contents of traditions past. Occluded by a regnant Christianity, it is precisely the Hermetic and Gnostic heritage that produced for Western culture its "syndrome of the secret."²²⁵

XXII

The early Hellenic *teletai* (including the Orphic *bakcheia*) and the mysteries were officially recognised by the Athenian state and rearranged as the politically and socially significant rite of "civic eschatology" performed in Eleusis. According to Jan Bremmer, the Eleusinian Mysteries began to be used "for political aims by stressing their civilising function" and their religio-ideological power: "The First Fruits decree had made the Mysteries into the symbol of Athenian power *par excellence*. The revelation of its contents was a political act. . . ." ²²⁶

Orpheus the Theologian was placed on the same firmly established foundation as Homer the Theologian. However, the mysteries in the form of various unspeakable or ineffable (*arrheta*) and secret or esoteric (*aporrheta*) *teletai*, "aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred" and salva-

225. Luther H. Martin, "Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 116 & 117.

226. Jan N. Bremmer, "Religious Secrets and Secrecy in Classical Greece," in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), p. 75.

tion “through closeness to the divine”,²²⁷ depended on a private and personal decision and a vow.

To make an oath and be initiated into the *thiasos* (a remote antique prototype of the Sufi *tariqah*, likewise based on a relationship between a patron and his clients) is tantamount to making a covenant (or legal treaty) with a deity in the Neo-Assyrian and Biblical contexts. This is so because the divine saviour is regarded as the patron of the client who is to be saved. Consequently, the human royal patron and saviour may be called *theos epiphanes eucharistos*, as Ptolemy V of Egypt is designated (the hieroglyphic equivalents, according to Arthur Nock, being the god “who comes forth” and “lord of beauties”).²²⁸

According to Burkert, charisma and the display of power override all other forms of reverential awe (*sebas*), because the attraction of the royal epiphany (like Amun’s epiphany in New Kingdom Thebes) is overwhelming. Hence:

The experience of “epiphany” came to concentrate on the person of the ruler who had acted as a “savior” and inaugurated an age of bliss and abundance—a process that easily assumed a Dionysiac coloring. . . . The monarch was the victor, the savior, the god, “present” (*epiphanes*) to a degree gods had hardly ever been. Not only the actors followed in his wake, but “all sorts of *thiasoi*”, including those of *mustai* and *bakchoi*.²²⁹

Every professional association (*hetairia*) claimed the patronage of one or more deities, and was made up of the deities’ servants, vassals and cult-worshippers. These societies

227. Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 11-12.

228. Arthur Darby Nock, “Notes on Ruler-Cult, I-IV,” *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World, Selected and edited, with an Introduction, Bibliography of Nock’s writings, and Indexes*, by Zeph Stewart, vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 152 (p. 37).

229. Walter Burkert, *Bacchic Teletai in the Hellenistic Age*, p. 268.

were sometimes called *orgeones*, from *orgiazo*, “to pay ritual service to the gods”, and their ritual practices were *ta orgia*. They usually included a banquet (*sumposion*) where the members of the *hetairia* or initiates sat crowned with garlands on sacred couches. In this way, the *stephanos* (wreath, garland) was worn by the “dead” initiate and the corpse alike. The participant of the earthly drinking party—playing the role of Dionysus restored or Osiris resurrected—imitated the “living one” of the heavenly symposium.

The ceremonial drinking and its established representational hierarchy brings the rulers and the royal initiates to the divine status of bliss, making them close to the gods.²³⁰ Since the gods are no longer in fact *homotrapezoi*, “table companions” of men, and are to be addressed through ritual mediation,²³¹ the ceremonial banquet serves as a means to imitate (or play) the gods and thereby restore (symbolically, at least) perfect heavenly bliss.

According to Rappe, for the late Neoplatonists the dismemberment of Dionysus signified both a phase in the manifestation of the cosmos (in the sense of the Pythagorean numerical progression) and the setting of the stage for the soul’s ultimate liberation and glorification at the noetic symposium. She explains:

For Proclus, the Orphic theology, in offering a vision of the great world encompassed in the pleroma of the human intellect and embodied within the perfect person, Phanes, shows forth the soul as an *imago dei*. It is this recognition that in itself constitutes a form of initiation, making possible the soul’s access to the fullness of reality. . . . Once more, the creative,

230. Walter Burkert, “Oriental Symposia: Contrasts and Parallels,” in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 8.

231. Philippe Borgeaud, “Melampous and Epimenides: Two Greek Paradigms of the Treatment of Mistake,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 288.

divine energy that pours itself through the various stations of being as stages within the theology is initiatory in function.²³²

Presumably, ritual initiation into the early Hellenic *hetairia* implied a pedagogical rather than a hidden or concealed relationship—and, consequently, one's preparation for the *a priori* established role of the "blessed initiate", and not a sort of miraculous transubstantiation.

As Martin emphasises, "initiation into the Eleusinian, as in the other mysteries, was equivalent to adoption by the presiding deity,"²³³ like adoption into an Arab tribe in order to become a *mawla*, a client of the Islamic Arab patron and a member of the "central community" (*ummatan wasatan*) of believers. Martin comments:

The strategy of recruitment for the fictive, as for natural, kinship societies was adoption, a legal fiction that permits kin relations to be created artificially, and which provided the model for the discourse of conversion and the practice of initiation in genealogically articulated systems. The Greek juridical term for adoption, *huiiothesia*, is used in this derivative sense most notably by Paul.²³⁴

The initiate into the Eleusinian Mysteries, for example, is therefore regarded as a kinsman (*gennetes*) of the gods. The "mystery societies" were organised on the constitutional model of municipalities, and were not distinguished by their concealment of particular or extraordinary secrets, but by their pedagogical silence or "secrecy" (*arrhetos*)—even a real or pretended Socratic "ignorance"—as a rhetorical strategy

232. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, p. 164.

233. Luther H. Martin, *Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities*, pp. 106-07.

234. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

for structuring social relations in religious and educational contexts.²³⁵

The families of *telestai* that belonged to the groups (*thiasoi*) called *Orphikoi* viewed Dionysus as their *soter*; the Orphic *mustai* of Dionysus were promised *soteria* (salvation). In short, they were "initiates whom blessed Dionysus saves" (*mustai hous soze makar Dionusos*),²³⁶ and they travelled the divine and royal path of purification, death and rebirth.

XXIII

Several teachings of Plato are based on Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines. It is, then, no wonder that even Socrates is portrayed by Plato as expecting after his death to meet Orpheus in Hades (*Apol.* 41a).

Some contemporary scholars argue that Plato, in certain cases, deliberately distorted, or rather reinterpreted and thus "modernised", the esoteric doctrines of Orpheus and Pythagoras. Ferwerda, for example, doubts that the Orphics (though surely craving for the liberation of the fettered soul) viewed the human body as a prison.²³⁷ In *Cratylus* 400c, Plato states as follows:

Some people maintain that the body (*soma*) is the tomb (*sema*) of the soul because the soul is buried there for this moment. And because, on the other hand, it indicates (*semainei*) by that body whatever the soul indicates, it is also for that reason rightly called sign (*sema*). However, it seems to me that Orpheus and his followers in the first place are the givers of that name (*soma*) because, in their opinion, the soul

235. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

236. Susan Guettel Cole, *Voices from beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead*, p. 293.

237. Rein Ferwerda, *The Meaning of the Word σώμα (Body) in the Axial Age: An Interpretation of Plato's CRATYLUS*, p. 122.

is being punished for something; the soul has the body as its enclosure (*peribolon*) in order to be saved (*hina sozetai*), just as a prison.

The word *soma* stands for the corpse in Homer, and only later acquires the meaning of body. So the following verse is attributed to Euripides by Plato: "Who knows whether living is not being dead, while being dead is living?" Plato's Socrates continues: "Perhaps we too are dead. I at least heard this from the wise men that now we are dead and that for us the body is a tomb" (*soma estin hemin sema: Gorg.* 492e-493a).

In his Commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*, Olympiodorus explains this as follows:

[Socrates] says "Euripides says to live is to die, and to die is to live." For on coming here, the soul, so that it may give life to the body, also gets a share in certain lifelessness. . . . So it is when it is separated that it is really alive. . . . The argument from the Pythagoreans is symbolic. For it employs a short myth, which says "We are dead here and we inhabit a tomb. . . ." (*In Gorg.* 29.4).²³⁸

The word *sema* principally stands for "sign" (*Odyssey* 20.111), therefore the body (*soma*) may be understood as a means by which the soul indicates (*semainei*) its eidetic paradigm and the goal to be achieved. Likewise, *sema* is an enclosure (*peribolos*), the morphic frame of the soul: it keeps the soul within its limits that it may be saved (*hina sozetai*).²³⁹

Microcosmically, this human body imitates the macrocosmic body of the Egyptian goddess Nut (Heaven), understood

238. Olympiodorus' *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*, tr. Robin Jackson, Kimon Lycos and Harold Tarrant (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 206.

239. C.J. de Vogel, "The Soma-Sema Formula: Its Function in Plato and Plotinus Compared to Christian Writers," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in honour of A. H. Armstrong*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), pp. 80-81.

and depicted as the temple-like Duat, *mundus imaginalis*, into whose depths the ram-headed Ra descends as a *ba*-soul. The mummy (the completed and eternalised *sah*-body) inside the sarcophagus is an *imago* of Osiris. Therefore, the entire tomb of Osiris may be regarded as a symbol of spiritual alchemy.²⁴⁰ According to Theodor Abt:

The mummy that remains in the netherworld is called "the image of Osiris". As every deceased, man or woman, became an Osiris through the process of mummification, this mummy at the end of the Amduat is of course also the mummy of the dead person. Out of this "secret of the corpse", namely the unique individual image or structure of the deceased, the blessed immortal part became liberated by this journey through the twelve hours. He or she can now rise in the morning with the Sungod to immortality.²⁴¹

The enclosure (*peribolos*)-like sarcophagus is sometimes protected by Isis and Nephthys at the corners at the head and Selket and Neith at those at the feet. The multi-structured tomb is like the House of Life (*per ankh*) which the goddess Seshat is said to open for the deceased. The sacred writings ("manifestations of Ra", *bau Ra*) are located in the animated House of Life as the recomposed *sah*-body of Osiris. Since in this respect writing and drawing are closely bound up with the dialectical and sacrificial dismembering and subsequent re-collection and resurrection of Osiris, the House of Life is both the sanctuary of the *bau* (*het bau*) and the place to die one's "philosophical death", that is, the Osirian netherworld which opens the road for one's spiritual journey:

240. Alison Roberts, *My Heart My Mother: Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt* (Rottingdean: Northgate Publishers, 2000), p. 203.

241. Theodor Abt and Erik Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife: The Egyptian Amduat – A Quest for Immortality* (Zurich: Living Human Heritage Publications, 2003), p. 143.

In this way, the spiritual journey of the aspiring scribe may be described by images and terms drawn from the journey of the deceased in the underworld. . . . In P. Salt 825 the *per-ankh* of Abydos is said to consist of four parts, dedicated to Isis, Nephthys, Horus, and Thoth, while the interior is Osiris: “the living one.”²⁴²

Consequently, for the ancient Egyptian initiates the “tomb” means an entirely different thing to what the majority of modern scholars imagine. The so-called “tomb”, first of all, is the sanctuary-house by means of which the “living one” (the deceased) remains incorporated in the social net of the theophanic state. It is the *akhet* (a word deriving from the verb meaning “to be radiant”, “to shine”, “to make into a spirit of light”),²⁴³ that is, the pyramid-like gate where the sun rises and the solar rebirth takes place. At the same time, it is the school of mystical pedagogy with its library and animated hieroglyphs—the divine speech fixed and eternalised in stone. As solidified light, the stone itself (as building material) refers to the primaeval *ben-ben* stone of Heliopolis. It is symbolically related with the royal conception of one’s immortalisation through the ascent to heaven and inclusion within the circuit of Ra. The “tomb” is therefore *sema* in the sense of hieroglyph, the effective theurgic *sunthema*, like the Osirian *djed*-pillar or the solar obelisk standing on the primaeval mound. At the same time, it is the womb-like cave from which the restored Eye of Horus—the healed and restored initiate—emerges in the form of the golden Scarab.

242. Richard Jasnow and Karl-Theodor Zauzich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth*, p. 35.

243. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p. 58.

XXIV

It is plausible that various scattered Egyptian notions and images of the soul’s immortality and ascent (through the alchemical descent to the Osirian Duat) were adapted and reused by the Orphics, Pythagoreans and Platonists. The association of heaven (in the sense of solar *kosmos noetos*) with immortality is an Egyptian theological doctrine, “occurring many millennia before it becomes part of Biblical or Greek tradition”, according to Segal.²⁴⁴ The winged *ba* of the pharaoh—the ideal *mer-rekh*, “lover of wisdom”—is transformed into the winged *akh* or the archetypal noetic star.

To indicate the ultimate Egyptian provenance of certain fundamental religious tendencies, patterns and ideas is not the same as to be passionately involved in a kind of “Platonic Orientalism”, as analysed by John Walbridge.²⁴⁵ At the same time, one needs to remember that “an afterlife belief” in its contemporary Western (or late antique) form “is not necessarily the essence of religion.”²⁴⁶ Or rather, it is not the explicit teaching of every ancient religion, including First and Second Temple Judaism (which Jacob Neusner emphasises in the plural).²⁴⁷ “The Bible at first zealously ignores the afterlife.”²⁴⁸

The Platonic Greek (and ultimately Egyptian) notion of the soul’s immortality, its divine nature and its mystical union with the noetic or supra-noetic principle is very problematic even for early Christianity, which was initially a sectarian branch of late Second Temple ideologies and movements

244. Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*, p. 38.

245. John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

246. Alan F. Segal, *ibid.*, p. 17.

247. Jacob Neusner, Preface to *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green and Ernest S. Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. IX.

248. Alan F. Segal, *ibid.*, p. 16.

based on the innovative rhetoric of the glorious resurrection promised for the Maccabean Jewish martyrs. But even this crucial doctrine rests on reshaped Graeco-Egyptian paradigms viewed through Persian lenses and attuned to Enochian apocalyptic expectations.

If all this seems unbelievable, or even offends certain romantic sensibilities, one should turn to W.K.C. Guthrie, L.J. Alderink and E.R. Dodds. But we do not belong to the camp of such respectable scholars as Dodds, whose knowledge “about early Orphism” diminished the more he read about it. He says: “I have lost a great deal of knowledge; for this loss I am indebted to Wilamowitz. . . .”²⁴⁹

This writer must confess to knowing very little as well—about either early Orphism or late Pythagoreanism. But I know that He-of-Heseret benefited my knowledge through madness, by diminishing it to such an extent that I cannot answer his question, “Who are you?” Perhaps I am the mummy-like jackal who has come from the four corners of Nun and wishes to bark among the dogs of Seshat.

M.L. West says that “scholars sometimes choose to believe strange things.”²⁵⁰ And he himself becomes a primary example of this bizarre phenomenon, arguing that “Olympiodorus’ interpretation of the Orphic myth is to be rejected,”²⁵¹ because it is a “merely Neoplatonist interpretation.”²⁵² When the Orphic and Bakchic *sunthemata* are handed down in the rites of the Orphics and the symbolic story of the dismemberment is enacted, for West, all this merely offers “temporary escape from ordinary life into a piquant, romantic, voluptuous fantasy-world.”²⁵³

249. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 147.

250. M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems*, p. 45.

251. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

252. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

253. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.

Finally, Larry Alderink comes up with the last judgement, that any claims about an “alleged Orphic afterlife” or the idea of post-mortem existence as *telos* are obscure, questionable and inconclusive.²⁵⁴

254. Larry J. Alderink, *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism*, p. 3.

The ancient philosophy, in its original Orphico-Pythagorean and Platonic sense, is not simply a way of life in accordance with the divine or human order, but also the way of alchemical transformation and mystical illumination through initiatic 'death' and subsequent restoration at the level of the soul. To use another mythical image, philosophy restores the soul's wandering and purified lover of wisdom to Heaven. As a means of spiritual reintegration and purification, ancient philosophy is inseparable from the hieratic rites and rituals of scholars who themselves follow the anagogic path of Platonic tradition. This tradition, or less firmly convinced that their philosophy ultimately derives from the Egyptian and Mesopotamian temple liturgies and rituals, reinterpreted and transformed by the Neoplatonists under the name of 'theurgy' in late antiquity. The 'theurgy' of the 'creation' of statues appears to be among the main keys for understanding the Neoplatonic royal and priestly practices, related to the daily ritual service and the quest for the divine presence in the temples, developed into the Neoplatonic 'theurgy' in late antiquity. The traditional theory of symbolism still stands on the firm foundation established by Iamblichus, Proclus, and Damascius.

"This book clearly establishes three things: that traditional myth (as the Neoplatonists maintained) is the symbolic expression of metaphysics, as metaphysics is the symbolic expression of Greek philosophy was not an isolated 'miracle' but a reinterpretation of pre-existing traditions common to the ancient Near Eastern, Mesopotamian, Indian, and especially Egyptian traditions; and that Platonic philosophical discourse was but one-half of a whole which included a contemplative practice known as 'theurgy'. It was not merely the ancients' speculative philosophy, but an *askesis*, a *yoga*—a way of realization (though not in the modern tradition) worthy to be included among the great spiritual methods of all major religions."

CHARLES UPTON, *Journal of Religion*



Detail from Villa of Mysteries, Pompeii

"In this most stimulating and wide-ranging work, the author draws on the resources of his enormous learning to bring Platonic theurgy back to its roots in Ancient Egypt and to place Platonic philosophy in a new and wider context. Neoplatonism will find themselves much indebted to this work. All readers will find their outlook on life significantly enriched."

PROF. JOHN F. FINAMORE
Trinity College, Dublin, author of *Theurgy and the Sacred*

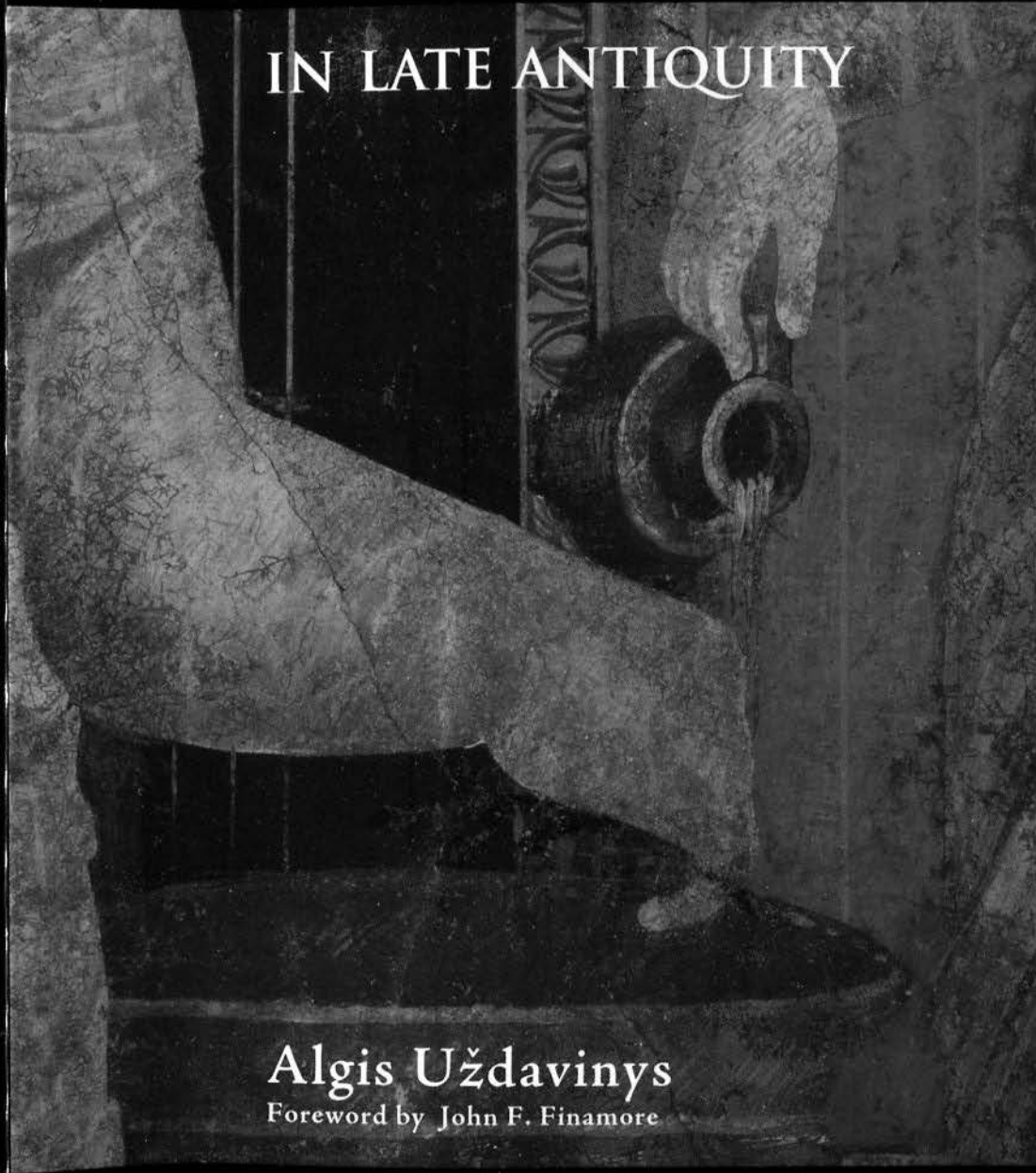
Algis Uždavins is Head of the Department of Humanities at Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, native Lithuania. His research includes work on Hellenic philosophy, especially Platonic philosophy, as well as traditional mythology and metaphysics, Sufism, and traditional art. In 2005 he received a Mellon fellowship to the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan.

SOPHIA PERENNIS



PHILOSOPHY & THEURGY

IN LATE ANTIQUITY



Algis Uždavins
Foreword by John F. Finamore

PHILOSOPHY & THEURGY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

SOPHIA PERENNIS

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For information, address:
Sophia Perennis, P.O. Box 151011
San Rafael, CA 94915
sophiaerennis.com

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FOREWORD

Philosophy, Theurgy, and the Gods

NEAR THE BEGINNING of Ani's *Book of Going Forth by Day*, the soul of Ani (a scribe in ancient Egypt) states what he expects to have gained in the next life after leading a holy life on earth following the path laid down by the gods:

May you grant power in the sky, might on earth, and vindication in the God's Domain, a journeying downstream to Busiris as a living soul and a journeying upstream to Abydos as a heron; to go in and out without hindrance at all the gates of the Duat.¹

This ancient text, beautifully illustrated and written in the second millennium BCE, marks in a very early form the hopes and expectations of the religious elite: a special place in the next world with a right to come and go back to the land of the living at will. It also shows the importance of the gods in the process and—even more especially—the bond between the believer and those gods. In other passages it is clear that Ani has become a god himself, and is in fact Osiris when he joins the god in the underworld. The path to Osiris is not easy, and there is much knowledge that Ani must have attained on earth in order to navigate the underworld safely and eventually come successfully through the weighing of his heart (Plate 3) to the presence of the gods (Plates 4, 30, and 36). The entire process is therefore marked by Ani's wisdom granted him by the gods. The process involved mutually gods and human beings.

Although it is most probably true that the ancient Greeks from

1. O. Goelet, R. Faulkner, and C. Andrews, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, 2nd revised edition (San Francisco, 1998), Plate 2.

the fifth century BCE onwards could not have had access to *The Book of Going Forth by Day*, the so-called Egyptian Books of the Dead, buried as it they were their creators, and that even if they had had such access they could not have deciphered the hieroglyphic writings in them, the fact remains that the ideas contained in this Egyptian text were still available to them. The strange tales related by Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BCE) in book II of his *Histories* show the power that Egypt had for capturing the Greek imagination, and even at that time several works on this ancient nation and its religious beliefs were available. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, his general Ptolemy took control of Egypt, and his family retained control of the country until the Romans took it over after the death of Cleopatra in 30 BCE. During that time, it is clear that even more works about the country and its ways were written, many of which were about their religious beliefs. Thereafter Egypt remained the land known for wisdom and magic.

There is, then, a discernible literary and traditional path from Ani's book to Iamblichus' philosophy. In chapter two, below, Dr. Uzdavinys considers the role and meaning of theurgy in Iamblichean philosophy. He rightly shows that the word *theourgia* is one of many that Iamblichus and his fellow Platonists use for the relationship between gods and mortals. It is also clear that Iamblichus believed that his version of theurgy had ancient roots that extended back to the Egyptians. Indeed, he wrote his most famous work, *On the Mysteries*, under the persona of an Egyptian priest.

Iamblichus (c. 245–c. 325 CE) probably took the term 'theurgy' from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, sacred texts assembled by the father/son team Julian the Chaldaean and Julian the Theurgist in the second century CE.² As Dr. Uzdavinys has argued, the term has been misapplied by scholars for many years, but more recently (thanks especially to the excellent scholarship of J.M. Dillon, G. Shaw, E.C. Clarke, and others) a better understanding of the meaning of the term has emerged along with a new vision of how theurgy and

2. *On the Oracles*, see especially R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden, 1989), pp. 1–46.

philosophy are interconnected in Iamblichean Neoplatonism. Interestingly, what has emerged is a view of theurgy that is very much akin to Ani's Egyptian beliefs.

Dr. Uzdavinys' learned work elucidates many of the connections between Iamblichus and the ancient Egyptians, and I will not belabor them here. I will instead briefly suggest how Iamblichus interpreted the (now lost) writings on ancient Egypt and the *Chaldaean Oracles* and created a brand of Neoplatonism that would stand for centuries after him. I should add too that the founders of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the two Julii, were (like Numenius, a Neopythagorean contemporary with them who also had Platonic leanings) from Apamea. This adds a Syrian connection to theurgical rite, which should not be ignored. Indeed, as Dillon argues,³ Iamblichus likely set up his own Syrian school in Apamea. Thus, Iamblichus is clearly setting himself, his school, and his philosophy in Eastern as well as Egyptian currents of learning.

This desire to attach Platonism to earlier traditions is an important aspect of Iamblichus' philosophical goal: the unity of Pagan teachings. In his *De Mysteriis*, he argues at length against the narrowly Greek and narrowly (skeptical) philosophical beliefs articulated by Porphyry. For Iamblichus, Platonic philosophy is more than Greek texts and what he would see as narrow philosophical eristics. Plato himself, he would argue, knew ancient wisdom and used it, and so it is imperative that Greek philosophers now do the same or risk misunderstanding Plato. Theurgy is the means of bringing ancients and Plato together.

What then is theurgy, and how does it make use of the Greek philosophical tradition along with the Egyptian/Chaldaean/Syrian mysticism? As Dr. Uzdavinys argues throughout this book, the cultures and philosophies are all linked in diverse ways. As he also points out, the meaning of 'theurgy' has been often misunderstood. 'Theurgy' is literally 'gods' work' (from *theoi* = 'gods' and *ergon* = 'work, activity, operation'). In the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus argues that this does not mean that we human beings force the gods to do

3. J. F. Finamore and J.M. Dillon, *Iamblichus, De Anima: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden 2002), pp. 5–6.

work for us. The gods, as Plato had laid out in the *Symposium* (202b–203a), do not interact directly with human beings. They are separate and superior, and interaction is accomplished via daemons, intermediary demigods that carry our prayers to the gods and the gods' gifts to us. So we mortals would have been cut-off from the gods except for the intermediaries, which Iamblichus identifies with angels, daemons, and heroes. These exist below the Moon and on earth and can range as high as the ethereal bodies of the visible gods above (planets and stars). Thus, one way that theurgic rituals work is via these intermediaries.

Iamblichus, however, did not remove this earthly realm from interactions with the gods. Also in the *De Mysteriis*, especially in book III, he lays out his theory of illumination (*ellampsis*). The gods shine a light from their ethereal bodies, and though they themselves stay separate from the material realm here on earth, they nonetheless can illuminate objects and persons and interact with them in that way.

This in turn brings up a third essential ingredient of theurgic rites: the person involved, the theurgist, initiate, or sacred object/person, must be adapted to receive the divine rays. For us human beings, this means that we must be appropriately purified. To take the lowest exemplum, if the theurgist wishes to use a child as a medium in a rite, then the theurgist must prepare the child for reception by purifying the child-recipient's ethereal body. The ritual purifying renders the child fit for receiving the divine rays.

On a higher level, if theurgists wish to channel the divine through their own body, then they will have more preparation to do. Certainly they will have to purify themselves via ascetic living, etc., but there is more involved because, in the case of children, the child's intellect is not being engaged in the rite. Indeed, the child is unaware of what is happening when the god's light surrounds him. For theurgists, however, the intellect must be engaged, which in turn means that they must purify not only their bodies and lower souls but also their minds. This would involve a regimen of study that includes not only philosophy but also sacred ritual. As we saw in Ani's case, the two sorts of study, though separate, coalesce in meetings with the gods.

If these three ingredients are present—a god working through intermediaries and emitting a light down below to a person or object adapted for its receipt—then the presiding theurgist will establish contact with the divine. At the lowest level, this means that the child or object receives the divine illumination. When it is the theurgist that is involved or one of the theurgist's advanced initiates through the theurgist, when (that is) the mind of the recipient is engaged and the recipient has done the appropriate study and preparation, the divine rays lift the soul of the theurgist or initiate out of the body and up to the heavens, where it joins with the god.⁴ In this way, Iamblichus has preserved Plato's requirement in the *Symposium* that the god does not descend and yet has assured that our ascent is possible.

Thus, Iamblichus can conclude that this is no base magical rite of the sort we encounter in the *Greek Magical Papyri*. This is a philosophical/theurgical ritual in which the soul ascends to the gods not by forcing the gods but by submitting to the divine will and dictates. In the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus is careful to distinguish base magic, which leaves everything to chance and may lead its practitioners to consort with falsity and evil daemons, and higher magic or theurgy. The latter is a guarantor of truth and happiness, combined as it is with the life of the gods.

And so in ritual as after death, theurgy—'god's work' performed willingly by the gods for those who prepare themselves appropriately—brings the philosopher/theurgist to the gods and perfects our divine, rational selves. We are reminded again of Ani facing Osiris. His prayer was for vindication and the ability to move freely between realms. The goal of Iamblichus is not entirely dissimilar. The knowledge we gain on earth guarantees us a place in heaven (and we are 'divine' in that sense, though not literally gods), and

4. Since we human beings have an ethereal 'vehicle', that is an ethereal substance that houses the rational and irrational souls, the ethereal light of the god mixes with the ethereal body and lifts it (together with the two souls) heavenward until our ethereal vehicle unites with the god's ethereal body. Further, our rational soul unites with that of the god, and this in turn would allow further ascent so that the rational soul could encounter Divine Intellect and even the One itself.

that place means that our rational souls are united to the universal powers and thus we, qua minds, can 'travel' between realms: ethereal, Intelligible, and that of the One. Theurgy brings peace, contentment, power, vindication, and a divine-like status.

JOHN F. FINAMORE
University of Iowa

INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORICALLY UNCONTEXTUALIZED use of philosophy, mysticism, or ritual practice is problematic in many respects, because it presupposes various self-evident and uncontested categories of thought and culture which, far from being 'universal' (at least in the popular positivistic sense), are in fact contextually conditioned, and may thus be constructed as idealized and fabulous castles based upon normative socio-religious fantasies.

This crucial insight, however, and the subsequent critical approach towards all sorts of cultural constructions, or towards certain discursive veils, textual tricks, and rhetorical devices which are now taken as 'tradition', can neither dismiss nor compromise the ineffable divine transcendence, nor that set of metaphysical principles which is truly archetypal. There is no question that human thought is inevitably inclined toward culturally determined and ideologically shaped generalizations (or simply toward certain sweet illusions), and it has a 'legal' right to do so, because manifested reality ('constructed' or manifested in the sense of Neoplatonic *ellampsis*, irradiation) is itself a sort of Myth, a Myth of the 'Divine Play'.

This ontological conviction, expressed in the terms of mythical and theological images, is neither an obligatory article of faith nor a solemn assertion of 'perennial wisdom'; far from it. The Socratic irony and Shaivic laughter, dancing on the deconstructed corpses of the past, is not a hindrance 'to behold the secret and ineffable figures in the inaccessible places', as Proclus used to say (*In Euclid*. 141.22).

We remain attentive to historical contexts (to the extent that they are actually 'historical'); nonetheless, we suspect that these contexts themselves are hermeneutically constructed so as to function as organizing teleological visions and selective sets of memories, or rather as text-like *mandalas* of interrelated social and metaphysical fields. In a sense, all texts, all signs and symbols, and all phenomena are spurious and may be likened to a drunken hallucination, a

mirage. This mirage, however, is rooted in the mystery of the immanent divine self-disclosure, which resembles an endless arabesque reflecting the image of archetypal Ouroboros. Therefore our investigation, though being sensitive to all available historical testimonies and details, cannot exclude or avoid certain metaphysical premises, more or less a-historical comparisons, 'unprovable' noetic intuitions and even (sometimes pretended) 'creative misunderstandings' (as Pierre Hadot perhaps would say).

This 'holy myth-making' in the widest cultural and ecological sense (including the perennial presence of error and self-delusion) is not simply a heavenly sanctioned 'human norm', but the only means of survival for our teleologically 'constructed' civilization, the only thing that allows it to bear its heavy burden of *paideia*. This is so because our whole life and its rhythmic pattern increasingly consists of inherited, constructed, determined, and always creatively (hermeneutically) re-constructed myths and dialectically performed rites of being.

Bearing in mind all these reservations, we try to avoid thoroughly dogmatic assertions while presenting an integral but nonetheless selective picture of ancient philosophy and related ritual practices in the Hellenic, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian contexts. While revealing striking parallels and analogies, we are not inclined to the often too naïve theories of 'influences', 'borrowings', and 'diffusions'. Such theories may be correct or not, but by themselves they are unable to explain neither the meaning of current ideas and images (not to say the meaning of life), nor their role in the metaphysical and social economies of human existence.

The present monograph is devoted to the philosophy of late antiquity (especially, to Neoplatonism) understood as a way of life and as a path of inner transformation in one's search for spiritual rebirth and unity with the divine principles. When regarded as a science of purification and restoration of unity, philosophy is no less than a rite of becoming like God, and in this respect it is inseparable from the traditional sacred rituals, now partly or entirely interiorized.

The religious ideas and practices of the Mediterranean, Egypt and the Near East serve as a background for both philosophy (*philo-*

sophia) and theurgy (*theourgia*). They equally include contemplation and action (sometimes described as an ascent to Heaven), conceived of as a way of living perfectly—that is, in accordance with the divine patterns and archetypes—thereby fulfilling man's last end (*telos*) which is to subsist at the level of *Nous* (the divine Intellect), to return to the One.

This monograph consists of five chapters, all of them written in 2007, except the last one, *Divine Rites and Philosophy in Neoplatonism*, which was first delivered as a paper at the conference *Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Literature*, presented by the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies in Orono, Maine, USA, 28 June–1 July, 2002. The short version of the first chapter was presented as a key-note lecture at the conference *Philosophy: Its Essence, Power and Energy*, organized by The Prometheus Trust in Glastonbury, UK, 28 June–1 July, 2007. I am grateful to Tim Addey who invited me to present a key-note lecture at this conference and published my another monograph, namely, *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth, From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* in 2008.

The three remaining chapters (2, 3, and 4) were written at the La Trobe University in Bendigo, Australia. *The Limits of Speculation in Neoplatonism*, an article which appears as an appendix, was initially a paper presented at the Third Annual Conference of the Prometheus Trust (2008, Glastonbury, Somerset, UK).

The present monograph is the result of prolonged studies which started long before my Ph.D. dissertation on Proclus (in Lithuanian) was defended in 2000; consequently I must express my gratitude to the late Professor A. Hillary Armstrong (though he was a bit skeptical regarding my growing interest in Egyptian matters), and the late Professor Henry J. Blumenthal, my supervisor at the University of Liverpool, which I visited as an Honorary Research Fellow of the British Academy. Due to the kind attention of Ilsetraut Hadot and Pierre Hadot, I was also able to spend six months at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris in 1997–1998.

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ALGIS UZDAVINYS
Kaunas (Lithuania)
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1

THE ORIGINS AND MEANING OF PHILOSOPHY

Really there can only be one kind of knowledge. And rationality is simply mysticism misunderstood.¹

Truth itself is in danger of being extinguished. Men will experience its sunset since they are unable to endure its divine dawn (*ten theian anatolen*).²

EIDOTHEA AND PROTEUS: THE VEILED IMAGES OF PHILOSOPHY

There are numerous definitions of philosophy and many different interpretations of what it really is: either the art of living (in response to the fundamental question: *pos bioteon*, 'how should we live?') or an epistemological project serving a certain demonic will to power and the increasing madness of positivism—a contradictory and fruitless occupation which has nothing in common with genuine wisdom, 'since its basic principle of exhaustive verbal adequacy is opposed to any liberating finality, to any transcending of the sphere of words.'³

But if the sphere of words must be transcended (because philosophy's concern with language and logic is only preliminary to more important tasks), the term *philosophia* itself must not be improperly idolized. Just as the same term may designate different things in

1. Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, Inverness, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2003, p. 148.

2. Damascius *Phil. Hist.* 36 BC.

3. Frithjof Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, tr. Peter N. Townsend, London: Perennial Books, 1984, p. 27.

different historical and ideological contexts, so the same reality may be alluded by different terms as well, and the term 'philosophy' is no exception, especially when it denotes an introduction to the 'unified silence' which is ineffable and superior to all knowledge.

Ancient Hellenic and modern European 'philosophy' have nothing in common but the name. Ch. C. Evangeliou therefore contests the uncritical assumption that ancient Hellenic philosophy is the origin of Western or European 'philosophy', arguing instead that the Socratic tradition, to which Plato and Aristotle belong, has more affinity with the Egyptian wisdom and the 'remote philosophies of India and China'.⁴

However, though the Orphico-Pythagorean and Platonic spiritual traditions practice philosophy as a means for escaping from reincarnation by detachment from that 'barbaric dirt' (*pelon*) where the soul's eye is buried (as if lying in the 'karmic dirt', *karma varana*, of the Jains) and then returning to one's native star, the place beyond the heavens, it would be incorrect to suppose that all Eastern philosophical schools are concerned with liberation, *moksha*. To take at face value their claim that they possess an exceptional spirituality would be naïve; likewise, to imagine (in accordance with a common fiction) that Western philosophy from Aristotle onwards is deficient in its orientation and, being mere a shallow mental plaything, does not lead to a spiritual disciple and liberation, in whatever sense this 'liberation' may be understood, would be equally naïve.

Orphism and Pythagoreanism, which may be safely regarded as the font of the whole Greek philosophical tradition, were perhaps partly related to contemporary Indian speculations, medical theories and spiritual practices (especially, those of Ajivikism and Jainism), but they depended more directly on a re-shaping of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultural heritage. As regards 'philosophy's' allegedly Egyptian origins, Ch. E. Evangeliou says:

4. Christos C. Evangeliou, *The Hellenic Philosophy: Between Europe, Asia and Africa*, Binghamton: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 1997, pp. II–III.

Evidently, by the channel of the Pythagorean tradition, some seeds and certain roots of Egyptian wisdom reached Hellas where they grew into the magnificent tree of Platonism.⁵

In order not to be entirely deceived by the names and rhetorical devices which sometimes function as veiled images and spectacular masks in the cosmic theatre, we should turn our attention to the hidden kernel of what is called philosophy, be it a chariot for traveling into another world; a mighty method, 'stolen from the gods' and subsequently corrupted, turned upside down; a crafty stratagem; or a means of achieving and experiencing indivisible objects—that is, of living 'another life' where the self is assimilated to Dionysus, the god both of tragedy and of comedy. Accordingly, we intend to describe the chief goals (*skopoi*) of this method—a method that constitutes only one particular form of mediation between the transcendent divine wisdom and our human existence, one of the various ways based on certain archetypal patterns, and our intellectual powers as shaped according to these patterns, as well as on our historically determined visions and metaphysical hopes, of dealing with reality.

In this respect, philosophy resembles the dynamic interchange between Proteus, Eidothea and Menelaus, as it is depicted by Proclus. Proteus, being an angelic intellect (*nous*) in the 'chain' (*seira*) of Poseidon, 'contains in himself the forms of all things in the world' (*ta eide panta ton genneton: In Remp.* 1.112.28–29). His name seems a variant of *protistos* (*primus*, first) but more probably Proteus is another form of Hapy, the shape-shifting Nile god, an 'old man of the sea', who symbolizes the permanent transformation and continuity of theophanies, immersed in the immanent stream of becoming; his name is related to Egyptian *prouti*, a biform of *per-aa*, 'great house' (in the sense of cosmic temple, household of truth, *maat*)—that is, 'pharaoh'.⁶

5. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

6. R. Drew Griffith, *Sailing to Elysium: Menelaus' Afterlife (Odyssey 4.561–569) and Egyptian Religion*.—*Phoenix*, vol. 55, 2001, 3–4, p. 213.

We should remember that Proteus (who is *Ra sa*, son of Ra, or *anthropos teleios*, the royal *axis mundi* in this respect) tells Menelaus that he will not die: the gods will put him in Elysium instead. The name Elysium (*Elusion*), which represents the ultimate reward of the human hero and, undoubtedly, of the philosopher, derives from the Egyptian *sekhet iaru*, the Osirian 'Field of Reeds'. Likewise the word *makares* (blessed), an epithet of the Elysian plain (*Elusion pedion*), comes from the Egyptian *maa-kheru*, the righteous dead, one who has successfully passed the Netherworld judgement and now possesses the magical ability to create his own psychic reality by using the words of power, *hekau*, thereby participating in the demiurgic activities of the Osirian (or Hathorian) *mundus imaginalis*.

According to Proclus, Eidothea, who contemplates the Forms through Proteus, functions as mediator between the fragmented, embodied soul of Menelaus and the angelic *nous*.⁷ As a daimonic soul she participates in Menelaus' imperfect mode of perception, but as a soul of the highest order, equal to the angelic *nous*, she is able to grasp the whole of Proteus' identity, the integral pleroma of the Forms represented by the *Logos*-like pharaoh, the royal paradigm and prototype of the perfect philosopher.

When Proteus is perceived by a fragmentary soul immersed in time and therefore unable to see these Forms simultaneously, he appears to pass from one shape to another, though simultaneously containing all possible shapes. Therefore Eidothea's instruction consists of a method as to how to shift one's consciousness from the screen of ever-changing fragmentary images to the true Protean identity at the noetic level of being—that is, to reduce the phenomenal plurality into the intelligible unity or divine oneness, as if leading Odysseus through the great wanderings of life towards 'the mystical harbor of the soul' (*ho mustikos hormos tes psuches*: Proclus *In Parm.* 1025A, 32ff).

7. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian. Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 227.

Only the life according to intellect (*he kata noun zoë*) has stability, and this is precisely the philosophical life which represents a path to one's true noetic essence, accomplished through the intervention of divine grace—for instance, in the form of Hermes' gift (*dosis*), liberating Odysseus' understanding from the chains of the Poseidonian imagination. Following the paradigm of Homeric Odysseus, philosophy generally denotes a work of transition involving the transformation of one's very existence. Regarded as 'much-wandering' or 'very cunning' (*polutropos*), Odysseus, in this respect, is figuratively sailing to the 'beautiful west' (*Amentet*), as if returning from darkness to the intelligible light. No wonder that the Greek word *noös*, mind, is related to the verb *neomai*, 'to return home', indicating a return from death, a release from the sweet prison of Calypso's arms—the verb *kalupto*, to hide, to veil, suggesting both darkness and death.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE AND PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

The philosophical transformation leads to the 'better lot', be it considered as supreme wisdom, virtue, spiritual understanding, one's noetic identity, or mystical union, and this transition (identifiable with the constant exercise of *metis*, skillfulness and practical intelligence, renewed at every instant) may be accomplished by different means and at different levels of consciousness. These means of integral training and psychagogy, aimed at one's spiritual equilibrium and purity, may include not only the inner struggle with oneself for truth, goodness and beauty, but also the exercise of logic, physics and ethics.

In addition to the sacrificial rites and acts of devotion directed to the gods and goddesses of wisdom, at certain historical point various scientific activities and related hermeneutical attitudes developed, which consisted of speculative commentaries on the divine names, attributes, myths, texts, liturgies and life strategies. Consequently the Egyptians, renowned both for their piety and their practical wisdom (*eusebeia kai phronesis*), introduced, according to Isocrates, the practice of philosophy for the cultivation of the soul,

'a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe'. Pythagoras, on a visit to Egypt, 'became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy' (*Busiris* 21–23).

It appears that liturgy gradually became transformed into philosophical discourse, which began, essentially, as a description of divine names and qualities, thus making philosophy (in a sense of a striving for wisdom, a conformity to the archetypal models and the sacred iconography) a kind of pious life that includes, as its integral part, a particular mode of discourse. This discourse may consist of magic spells or gnostic formulas, theurgic hymns, aretologies, and/or hieratic assertions, all related to the realm of *symbolike theoria* (symbolic understanding, or contemplation). The contemplation of symbols and interpretation of the paradigmatic mythologems sooner or later developed into the more general form of theoretical discourse.

But the life aimed at proximity to the gods and the realization of truth (the Egyptian *maat*), must not be *reduced* to such discourse, be it simply liturgical—that is, limited to certain sacred formulas—or physical, as when speculative cosmology is more or less 'emancipated' or 'naturalized', and transformed into a rational exegesis of the traditional world order. Therefore a distinction between philosophy and philosophical discourse, explicitly formulated in Hellenistic philosophy and recently reformulated by P. Hadot, is crucial for understanding that philosophical discourse is analogous to *ta legomena*, 'things recited' or sacred accounts (*hieroi logoi*), in the Eleusinian mysteries.

However, such recitations or interpretations of hieratic stories (which may sometimes include the questions of the mystagogue and the responses of the initiate, a form that can be regarded as one prototype of the philosophical dialogue, or the philosophical contest, the *agon*) are not the same as *ta dromena*, 'things performed'. Eventually, neither *legomena* nor *dromena* can replace or be equivalent to *epopteia*, the mystical vision, which is both the highest stage of initiation and the goal of Platonic contemplative philosophy. As P. Hadot insists, while emphasizing the central role that discourse plays in the philosophical life:

In Antiquity the philosopher regards himself a philosopher not because he develops a philosophical discourse, but because he lives philosophically.⁸

Those, according to Damascius, who are truly in love with philosophy have to be tested like gold in the fire (*Phil.Hist.* 66F).⁹ The true lover of wisdom must be 'full of truth in his behavior and speech', and thus a living example 'in piety and overall philosophy of life' (*epi eusebeia te kai hole biou philosophia: Phil.Hist.* 111). Damascius clearly distinguishes between being a philosopher in one's way of life and being one in the realm of knowledge (*episteme, dialektike: ibid.*, 71b).

However, the simple distinction between philosophical discourse and philosophical way of life is not enough. It is necessary to emphasize that this way is in fact the way of purification and actualization of the divine in the human, leading the soul to a living, concrete union with the divine Intellect and the Good, or the Neoplatonic One, which is *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond Being and Intellect. Understood as an ascent (*anabasis*) which follows a descent (*katabasis*), philosophical life is tantamount to an esoteric rite of transformation.

Philosophical discourse may in fact be linked to personal *askesis*, to a concrete *praxis*, and in this sense it is the true spiritual *ergon*: both incorporeal and corporeal work. Likewise, hermeneutical interpretation should be regarded as an integral part of contemplative practice—analogue to the contemplation of hieratic statues (*agalmata*) and geometric diagrams (*schemata*), which possesses an anagogic function. The discourse considered abstractly, as a written and formally structured text, is one of philosophy's semi-political tools, sometimes used in contests of rhetoric as a magical instrument. In modern times, however, what was originally a tool serving the kind of philosophical education that requires, in the context of the rivalry between schools (*haireseis*), that dogma be fixed in the

8. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, tr. Michael Chase, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p. 27.

9. Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, text with translation and notes, ed. and tr. Polymnia Athanassiadi, Athens: Apameia, 1999.

mind, becomes the only object of professional study, thereby reducing philosophy to philosophical discourse, and discourse itself to one particular type of demythologized and desacralized prose. To quote Damascius once again:

I have indeed chanced upon some who are outwardly splendid philosophers in their rich memory of a multitude of theories; in the shrewd flexibility of their countless syllogisms; in the constant power of their extraordinary perceptiveness. Yet within they are poor in matters of the soul and destitute of true knowledge. (*Phil.Hist.* 14).

One who dedicates his labor to things mortal and human may have a sharp intelligence and an incredible amount of contradictory or systematic discursive knowledge, but 'would never go far towards the acquisition of the great divine wisdom' (*ten theoprepe kai megalen sophian*: *ibid.*, 34d) or far in approaching 'the truly hieratic truth which lies hidden in the depths' (*ten en butho kekrummenes hos alethos hieras aletheias*: *ibid.*, 35b). This truth is almost imperceptible within the impious and hypnotic context of the technical language reserved for specialists in the modern university, a set which reinforces the tendency to take refuge in the comfortable universe of concepts. According to the aptly remark of Simplicius:

Chrysippus did not write on this subject (the nature of man) with the goal of being interpreted and understood, but so that one makes of his writings in life. If therefore I make use of his writings in life, at that very moment I participate in the good they contain. But if I admire the exegete because he provides good explanations, and if I can understand and myself interpret the text, and if, quite frankly, everything falls to my lot except the fact of making use of these writings in life, would I have become anything other than a grammarian instead of a philosopher?¹⁰

10. From Simplicius' *Commentary on Epictetus' Manual* cited by Arnold I. Davidson "Introduction: Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy".—Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 27.

It is fairly evident that whatever Damascius and his remote *kathegemon*, Plato, mean by 'philosophy', it radically differs from what contemporary textbooks mean by this now rather devalued term, though ancient Platonists and especially Peripatetics sometimes did pursue their secondary activity of explaining the world too vigorously, and that indeed led to a too theoretical and abstract view of things. The modern scholarly pursuit also too often resembles a sort of self-confident obsession enacted by a host of hypercritical and angry 'grammarians'. The emancipated philosophical discourse—their object of torture—is treated in accordance with certain language games and an imagined history which, paradoxically, ends by rejecting as 'irrational' the love of wisdom itself.

The postmodern battle against philosophy (understood, first of all, as a kind of 'writing', as a heap of idolized and scrutinized texts) is a sheer parody of the true deconstruction of error by means of the *elenchus*. Being thoroughly parasitic, it involves an element of ruse and dissimulation in an attempt to shake the philosopher's confidence in reason—but instead of leading to the reason-transcending noetic unity, it invokes a Typhonian fragmentation, partiality, dissolution, alienation, simulation, 'otherness' (*heterotes*, as the opposite of the Platonic 'sameness', *tautotes*), and nonbeing. As Ch. Griswold says, 'it is Socraticism without the Good,'¹¹ i.e., without the One or any other metaphysical principle.

Though Plato's Socrates asserts in *Symposium* that the mediative daimonic *eros* is a 'philosopher through all of life (*philosophon dia pantos tou biou*), a clever sorcerer and enchanter and sophist' (*goes kai pharmakeus kai sophistes*: *Symp.* 203d 7–8), the postmodern pseudo-philosophical writings are devoid of that elevating erotic power which leads to the realm of the divine. As N. Garver concludes:

In the end . . . we find no metaphysics, no logic, no linguistics, no semantics, and no grammatology left to carry on, but only the brilliant scholarly mischievousness.¹²

11. Ch. Griswold, *Plato's Metaphilosophy*.—*Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985, p.18.

12. N. Garver, *Derrida on Rousseau on Writing*.—*Journal of Philosophy* 74, 1977, p.673, cited by Ch. Griswold, *ibid.*, p.17.

STANDING FACE TO FACE WITH IMMORTALITY

If philosophy for the ancients is a comprehensive and extremely demanding art of living which cures human illness and purifies souls (thus presupposing that the present human condition is corrupted and deviated from the archetypal standards), why modern representation of ancient philosophy depicts it as an exclusively conceptual edifice, that is, as a system-building and system-demolishing activity? I. Hadot rightly observes that philosophy in Graeco-Roman antiquity is not in the first instance a systematic thought-structure *a la* Hegel intended to serve as the theoretical explanation of the world and the events of the world, [but is] above all an education towards a happy life.¹³

However, I. Hadot is not entirely correct when she considers that this happy life essentially means 'life here and not only in some hypothetical life after death', because the initial task of *philosophia* in its Orphico-Pythagorean and Platonic sense (which is not, primarily, a theoretical explanation of the world, but a rite of rebirth) consists in transcending the realm of so-called Calypsonian happiness in the 'cave', the corporeal prison. Therefore A.H. Armstrong reflects the modern sensibilities when he argues that 'the primary purpose of the intense meditation on the last things practiced and commended by the philosophers is not to prepare us for any sort of life after death.'¹⁴

The aim of philosophical life includes an ability to live well here and now, because the noetic background of one's very being is everywhere and the ineffable One is always immediately present. Nevertheless, it culminates in transition—in Egyptian terms—to the Osirian realm (*Duat*), the alchemical body of the goddess Nut (Heaven), sometimes represented as the macrocosmic temple in the form of a cow. Damascius emphasizes this solemn point of departure when he describes the physical death of Hermias, the Alexandrian philosopher and disciple of Syrianus:

13. Ilsetraut Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide"—*Classical Mediterranean Spirituality. Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 444.

14. A. Hilary Armstrong, *Expectations of Immortality in Late Antiquity*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1987, pp. 23–24.

It is said that as he was dying he swore to Aegyptus that the soul is immortal and imperishable (*athanaton einai kai anolethron ten psuchen*). What gave him this courage was his virtuous life disowning the bodily nature, turning to the inner self and experiencing the detachment [from the mortal body] as it already stood face to face with immortality (*Phil. Hist.* 54).

Hence, 'learning to live' presupposes 'learning to die', and this philosophical *paideia* is analogous to the building of one's own 'royal tomb', that is, the symbolic and text-like *mandala* of theurgic words (*hekau*) and animated hieroglyphs (*medu neter*)—the visual embodiment of the Platonic Forms. Such 'philosophical tomb' serves for one's own initiation and post-mortem alchemical transformation in the Osirian temple-like *Duat*. In this respect, we are not concerned with those agnostic philosophical traditions in Greece which, while dogmatically denying any life after death, nevertheless, regarded learning to die and detachment from the greedy pursuit of worldly goods as important for one's happy existence. We are dealing instead with that philosophical perspective from which the term itself initially stems. The Greek word *philosophos* is an equivalent or even an exact translation of the Egyptian *mer rekh*, 'lover of knowledge', that is, one who is in pious pursuit of *gnosis*, liberating wisdom, provided by Thoth and other gods for the accomplishment of transformation and spiritual resurrection in the realm of Osiris-Ra.

This perspective is based on the Egyptian doctrine of the intelligible solar life at the level of *Atum-Ra* and the immortality of the winged soul (itself a sort of solar manifestation, *ba*), subsequently modernized and adapted for the Hellenic culture during the so-called Pythagorean-Platonic intellectual revolution. As a substitute for the Horus-like pharaoh, the real *theios aner*, the Platonic philosopher is, in this respect, a remote inheritor of the interiorized Egyptian temple mysteries. Accordingly, he hopes after death for disembodied immortality, for vision of the noetic pantheon and union with the divine principles (*neteru*), as if entering the solar barque of *Ra*. The solar *Atum-Ra* is tantamount to the divine Intellect, or to the entire noetic cosmos (*kosmos noetos*) of spiritual lights.

Since early Christianity presented itself as a *philosophia*, a sacramental way of life in conformity with the divine *Logos*, it vehemently rejected all those rival aspects of ancient Hellenic philosophy which pursued the same goals but by different dialectical and theurgic means. Porphyry divided the Christians into two groups: the *polloi kai alloi* (the unlearned many, the 'many other', other than the learned minority) and the *hairesetikoi* (the learned few, namely, Gnostics) who had a *hairesis* derived from the ancient philosophy.¹⁵

The so-called Gnostics were exterminated by the Christians themselves, and the later *ekklesia* predominately turned away from Plato's *verissima philosophia* towards the less demanding 'lesser mysteries' (to say it in Neoplatonic terms) of Peripatetic sensualism. The mainly logical and physico-cosmological aspects of philosophy were consequently accepted, while at the same time all 'pagan' spirituality was furiously rejected, especially in those cases where it resisted being tacitly Christianized and integrated into the fabric of Christian mythology and mysticism. The Iamblichean-Procline metaphysics and theurgy, for example, were transformed into the mystical theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, but the sacramental and theurgic dimension of the Neoplatonism proper¹⁶ was utterly demonized and demolished.

Since Christianity had annexed the privileged path to immortality, philosophy was able to survive only in the form of auxiliary rational discourse which is separated from any independent soteriological claims and spiritual practices. As A.I. Davidson aptly remarks, ancient spiritual exercises were no longer considered a part of philosophy, but were integrated into Christian spirituality, and every Christian thinker, even if still called a 'philosopher, was in fact an initiate of the anti-Hellenic ecclesiastic mysteries:

15. J. Igal, "The Gnostics and 'the Ancient Philosophy' in Porphyry and Plotinus".—*Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought, Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, London: Variorum Publications, 1981, p. 139.

16. Algis Uzdavinys, "Putting on the Form of the Gods: Sacramental Theurgy in Neoplatonism".—*Sacred Web. A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, vol. 5, 2000, pp. 107–120.

Philosophical speculation thus became a purely abstract and theoretical activity, which was set strictly apart from theological thought and religious practice and spirituality.¹⁷

The Islamic civilization has its own Quranic paradigms, spiritual practices and methods to approach God as well. Therefore the assiduous acceptance and assimilation of the considerably Christianized Hellenic heritage during the Abbasid period was highly selective, and 'philosophy' (*falsafah*) came to be identified with the particular Neoaristotelian trend of thought whose logic and cosmology to some extent served Islamic theology. Thereby philosophy as such became synonymous with the discursive Peripatetic philosophy, and when Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, the Persian mystic from the Syrian city of Aleppo, introduced his philosophy of illumination (*hikmat al-ishraq*),¹⁸ partly based on Sufi esoterism, this philosophy was largely a new version of the Athenian Neoplatonism and the Egyptian Hermetic wisdom.

Since the word *ishraq* means either 'the rising of the Sun' or 'illumination', ultimately we are referred back to the remote roots of Platonism—as far back as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (*per em hru*), the original title of which means 'coming forth by the [noetic] day', with the rising Sun, *Ra*. In the Egyptian metaphysical thought, *Ra* (*Re, Phre, Pre*) is called by many different names. Along with his attendants in the solar barque, he generally functions as the noetic Creator and stands for the divine Intellect.¹⁹

17. Arnold I. Davidson, "Introduction": *Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy*, p. 32.

18. Suhrawardi, *The Philosophy of Illumination: A New Critical Edition of the Text of Hikmat al-Ishraq*, tr. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999; Algis Uzdavinys, "Divine Light in Plotinus and al-Suhrawardi".—*Sacred Web. A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, vol. 10, 2003, pp. 73–89.

19. Algis Uzdavinys, "The Egyptian Book of the Dead and Neoplatonic Philosophy".—*History of Platonism: Plato Redivivus*, ed. Robert Berchman and John Finamore, New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2005, pp. 163–180.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE HIERATIC RITES OF ASCENT

For Proclus, the Athenian Neoplatonist, full access to the noetic cosmos can be achieved only by a revelation and theophany which transcends our discursive knowledge of the Forms. Only an illumination from the intellectual gods renders us capable of being connected to the intelligible Forms; therefore Proclus, following Plato's Socrates (*Phaedr.* 249d) compares their contemplation to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and noetic visions (*epopteias*: *In Parm.* IV.949). It means that discursive philosophical accounts and symbolic descriptions of the higher divine orders (*taxeis*), as well as meditations and interpretations of the privileged sacred texts, prepare the soul for spiritual vision. As J. Bussanich remarks,

the soul ascends to the noetic or henadic realm by relying both on philosophy and theology, on reason and revelation.²⁰

However, the assistance of gods in one's attempt to ascend to the divine *gnosis* through the 'knowledge in us', which is different from the divine sort, is of crucial importance. Since, as A. C. Lloyd argues, Neoplatonic hypostases are experiences and types of consciousness, the content of personal experience (or mystical vision) cannot be derived from the philosophical system itself: it is an unpredictable gift from the gods.²¹

Proclus insists that Plato's divinely inspired (*entheastikos*) and at the same time strictly scientific theology is in accord with the mystic traditions of Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, as well as the Assyrian and ancient Egyptian sages, though Plato mainly delivers his teachings about the gods and first principles in a scientific manner, rejecting the dramatic element (*tragikon*) of mythic discourse. Proclus subordinates philosophical reasoning to theology, understood as a metaphysics confirmed by the revelations of the gods themselves, since theology ('talk about the gods') is concerned with

20. John Bussanich, "Mystical Theology and Spiritual Experience in Proclus' Platonic Theology".- *Proclus et la Theologie Platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, Leuven: University Press, 2000, p.298

21. A. C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p.126.

the One and the whole henadic realm with which the primary gods are to be identified, and which transcends both discursive reason and intellection.²² Hence, philosophy in its deepest essence is analogous to the hieratic rite of ascent. As Proclus says:

We must demonstrate that each of these doctrines is in accord (*sumphonos*) with the first principles of Plato and with the mystic traditions of the theologians; for the whole of Hellenic theology is the offspring of Orpheus mystagogy, Pythagoras being the first to have learned the initiation rites (*orgia*) of the gods from Aglaophamus, while Plato in turn received from the Pythagorean and Orphic writings the complete science of these matters (*Plat. Theol.* 1.5, pp.25–26 Saffrey-Westerink).

Similarly, the revelatory and soteriological nature of philosophy (if it remains faithful to the perennial theurgic standards) is asserted by Iamblichus. He sees a unity between the theologies of the Egyptians, the Chaldeans (sometimes called Assyrians), and of Pythagoras and Plato, at the same time stressing the dependence of Hellenic philosophers on the Egyptian priests. All the sciences are conveyed by the gods. The divine philosophy of Pythagoras, being inseparable from cultic practices, is rather composite in its historical development:

... some things being learnt from the Orphics, some from the Egyptian priests, some from the Chaldean mages, some from the Eleusinian rites. . . . (*Vita Pyth.* 84.14–18)

For Iamblichus, the highest purpose of the cultic practices and hieratic rites is to ascend to the One (*De myster.* 230.12–13), 'a useful statement of the purpose of theurgy . . . even as it is that of theoretical philosophy', according to his modern commentators.²³ This

22. John Dillon, "Philosophy and Theology in Proclus. Some Remarks on the 'Philosophical' and 'Theological' Modes of Exegesis in Proclus' Platonic Commentaries".- *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara*, ed. F. X. Martin et alii, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991, p.76.

23. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries/De mysteriis*, tr. with an Introduction and Notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hersbell, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, p.265.

ascension is pursued by 'those who love to contemplate theurgic truth' (*tes theourgikes aletheias*: *ibid.*, 228.12). The theurgic operation (*he telesourgia tes hieratikes*: *ibid.*, 230.2) purifies and liberates from the bonds of generation, making us like to the gods and rendering us worthy to enjoy their friendship (*philia*). This sacrificial *hierourgia* is able to

assimilate what is in us to the gods, even as the fire assimilates all that is solid and resistant to luminous and subtle bodies, and leads us up by means of sacrifices and sacrificial fire towards the fire of the gods' (*pros to ton theon pur*: *ibid.*, 215.1–4).

Hence, it is not thought (*ennoia*) or philosophy (in the sense of philosophical discourse or discursive thinking, rational human speculation), but the ritual accomplishment (*telesourgia*) of ineffable acts (*erga*), the hieratic mystagogy (*hieratike mustagogia*) or hierurgy (*hierourgia*, holy work) that is a method of salvation for the soul. Otherwise, Iamblichus asks, 'what would hinder those who engage in contemplative philosophy (*tous theoretikos philosophounta*) from having theurgic union with the gods?' (*ibid.*, 96.11–12). For Iamblichus—the Syrian aristocrat with the indigenous Arabic racial background—as J.F. Finamore remarks: 'The world of philosophy has moved from the armchair to the altar.'²⁴ Or rather, philosophy has been translated back to hierurgy, as if regaining its initial Egyptian (that is, theurgic) form and function. 'By means of this divine philosophy, the soul in the contemplation of the blessed visions' (*ta makaria theamata*, cf. *Plat. Phaedr.* 247a4) exchanges one life for another and, having abandoned its own life, it gains the most blessed activity (*energeia*) of the gods (*ibid.*, 41.12–13). Therefore Iamblichus, while maintaining an ambiguity of the term *philosophia*, categorically asserts as follows:

Yet if you put forward a philosophical question, we will settle this also for you by recourse to the ancient stelae of Hermes (*kata tas Hermou palaias stelas*), to which Plato before us, and

24. John F. Finamore, "Plotinus and Iamblichus on Magic and Theurgy",—*Dionysius*, vol. XVII, December 1999, p.85.

Pythagoras too, gave careful study in the establishment of their philosophy (*ibid.*, 5.12–6.4).

However, according to the popular Western myth which is partly of Peripatetic origin, philosophy begins with the appearance of books written in Greek prose at a time when political power in Miletus passed from Lydians to Persians and the local wise men (*sophoi* or *sophistai*) started to speak about *phusis* of 'everything' and especially of the genesis and structure of the world. This incredible tale stands as a foundational dogma of the deliberately constructed self-image of contemporary rationalism.

THE TASK OF 'EGYPTIAN PHILOSOPHY': TO CONNECT THE END TO THE BEGINNING

Sometimes it is supposed that since the term *philosophia* in its 'true' sense was coined by Pythagoras or even later by Plato, philosophy itself is the original achievement of the Greeks who suddenly decided to replace witnessing the festivals of the gods with witnessing the well ordered cosmos of 'things that are' (*ta onta*), still calling this latter enterprise by the same word, *theoria*.²⁵ Thus thinking posits itself as autonomous: its proofs and arguments are to be strictly correlated with rational comprehension, speaking, and being, even though tradition ('ancient custom' aided with *logos*: *Plat. Leg.* 890d) and philosophy, in this context, still form two aspects of a single cult. In reality, however, there is a continuity of *eusebeia* (integral religious devotion, now allied with mathematical formulae), and Plato's Academy itself is a sanctuary of the Muses, the angelic beings who provide revelations. As W. Burkert pointed out:

What mystery priests had sought to make credible in ritual thus becomes the certainty of the highest rationality... The word which in the epic tradition distinguished the gods from men becomes the ineradicable seal of the essential personality,

25. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. John Raffan, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.311.

athanatos . . . the soul can no longer be abandoned by the gods: on the contrary, it is called on to ascend.²⁶

Damascius, being well versed in questions of 'Egyptian philosophy' (*en tois Aiguptiois philosophemasi*), maintains, nevertheless, that hieratic art (*hieratike*) and philosophy stem from different principles. He argues that to certain Platonists philosophy is primary (as to Plotinus and Porphyry), while to others (as to Iamblichus, Syrianus, and Proclus), hieratic practice is Philosophy, according to Damascius, descends from the one cause of all things to the lowest level of being. Hieratic art, instead, has its roots in the pericosmic causes: its subject is, as he says, 'the immortality of the soul (*psuchon peri athanasias*), on which the philosophy of the Egyptians is the same' (*hoti kata auta kai Aiguptiois philosophheitai: Phil.Hist.* 4a).

Hence Egyptian philosophy is regarded as partly, at least, identical with theurgy, namely, the worship (*therapeia*) of the gods which 'ties the ropes of heavenbound salvation (*tes anagogou soterias*) on the third, pericosmic level, that of generation' (*ibid.*, 4A). Damascius argues that Plato has united these two sides of meta-philosophy by calling the philosopher a 'Bacchus':

. . . for by using the notion of a man who has detached himself from genesis as an intermediate term, we can identify the one with the other. Still, it remains evident that he intends to honor the philosopher by the title of Bacchus, as we honor the Intelligence by calling it God, or profane light by giving it the same name as mystic light (*In Phaed.* 1.172.5-7).

Just before conditionally dividing all Platonists into the categories of *philosophoi* and *hieratikoi*, Damascius (himself being a ferocious researcher—*aner zetetikotatos*, a superb logician, as P. Athanassiadi remarks)²⁷ describes philosophy as the initiatory rites (*hai teletai*) and explains what it means to call the philosopher a Bacchus, as

26. *Ibid.*, p.323.

27. Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Introduction".—Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, p.55.

the Egyptian philosopher and theurgist Heraiscus, is called, for example:

The first Bacchus is Dionysus, whose ecstasy manifests itself in dancing (*basis*) and shouting (*iache*), that is, in every form of movement of which he is the cause according to the *Laws* (II. 672a5-d4); but one who has dedicated himself to Dionysus, having become his image, shares his name also. And when a man leads a Dionysian life (*ho de zon Dionusiakos*), his troubles are already ended and he is free from his bonds and released from custody, or rather from the confined form of life; such a man is the philosopher in the stage of purification (*In Phaed.* 1.171.1-6).

L.G. Westerink supposes that Damascius, in spite of his attempt at impartiality, evidently prefers the 'hieratic school' (*hoi hieratikoi*)²⁸ and, consequently, 'the theosophy which comes from the gods' (*ten apo ton theon . . . theosophian: Phil.Hist.* 46d). Damascius indeed maintains that the higher wisdom, namely, the Orphic and Chaldean lore (*ten Orphiken te kai Chaldaiken ten hupseloteran sophian*) transcends philosophical common sense (*ton koinon philosophias: ibid.*, 85a). However, sometimes he seems to straightforwardly equate philosophy with the hieratic rites and with their esoteric interpretation. Consequently, to divulge *tes philosophias aporrheta*, the esoteric mysteries of philosophy, means to expose the hieratic statues and symbols from the secret temple of Isis at Menuthis (destroyed by the Christians in AD 488/9) and to describe the iconographic characteristics of those images in the presence of the Alexandrian ecclesiastical authorities (*ibid.*, 58a).

Be that as it may, Damascius emphasizes that nothing is exclusive in the Greek philosophy itself, since philosophy, contrary to B. Russell's dogmatic claims, is not to be regarded as a miraculous Greek invention for the sake of B. Russell's future glory:

28. *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, vol. II: Damascius, ed. and tr. L.G. Westerink, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1977, p.104.

So that it is easy, if one wishes, to adapt Hellenic notions to conform with Egyptian ones. The Egyptians were the first men to philosophize on these things (*Aiguptioi de tauta eisin hoi protoi philosophountes*). Indeed it is from the Egyptians that the Pythagoreans introduced all these matters to the Greeks (*Phil. Hist.* 4a).

'All these things' include the Egyptian soteriology, centered on the immortality of the soul, on one's reassembling after multiple division or after being rent asunder and having taken an earthly body, as well as the idea of the fusion with the divine (*theokrasia*), of the perfect union (*henosis*) and 'the return of our souls to God' (*epanodos ton hemeteron psuchon pros to theion*: *ibid.*, 4a). The soul (*psuche*) is no longer regarded as the phantom (*phasma*), or the ghostly double (*eidolon*), as it is depicted in Homer, but rather viewed as the immortal soul (like the Egyptian *ba*, destined to be transformed into the pure noetic light, *akh*) which constitutes one's real being, one's immaterial and divine essence to be delivered from the illusory prison-like body and reintegrated into the divine realm of eternal archetypes.

This initially esoteric Orphico-Pythagorean perspective, accepted and rationalized by Plato, places its emphasis—contrary to the earlier Homeric practices—on purification, concentration, unification, remembrance, separation of the soul and spiritual ascent, aimed at the mystic (*aporrhotos*) union with Dionysus (*Osiris*) and Apollo (*Horus-Ra*). Therefore to be a philosopher in the Egyptian-Pythagorean-Platonic manner would mean, as J.-P. Vernant has pointed out, to turn oneself away from the perishable body-simulacrum of the soul in order to return to that of which the soul itself is the simulacrum, namely, the divine Intellect and the One:

In the *Phaedo*, before explaining his theory of *anamnesis*, Plato defines philosophy in a way that conforms to what he calls an ancient tradition, naming it a *melete thanatou*. By this he means a discipline or a rehearsal for death which consists in purifying the soul through a process of concentration that, starting from all the points of the body where it has been dispersed, gathers the soul back to itself so that, reassembled and

unified, it can unbind itself from the body and escape from it (*Phaed.* 67c3ff, 80e2ff).²⁹

The philosopher tries to make his soul as pure, justified, illuminated, emancipated and separated in his life as it will be after death, thus following the paradigm of the Egyptian temple initiations and attempting 'to connect the end to the beginning', since the gnostic Osirian initiations in the Egyptian temples anticipated, prepared for and prefigured the ultimate initiation into the mysteries of the Duat, the Osirian realm of the dead. No wonder that philosophy, as an enterprise of raising (*anagein*) the soul to the level of the divine *eidōs* and uniting (*sunagein*) it to the divine, is, according to Isidore, the master of Damascius, tantamount to prayer:

He used to say that when the soul is in holy prayer (*en tais hierais euchais*) facing the mighty ocean of the divine, at first, disengaged from the body, it concentrates on itself; then it abandons its own habits, withdrawing from logical into intuitive thinking (*apo ton logikon ennoion epi tas to no sungeneis*); finally, at a third stage, it is possessed by the divine and drifts into an extraordinary serenity befitting gods rather than men' (*Phil. Hist.* 22).

THE KRONIAN LIFE OF SPECTATOR: 'TO FOLLOW ONE'S HEART IN THE TOMB'

The Greek verb *theorein* means 'to look at, behold, observe, perceive, speculate', therefore *theorema* refers both to a sight or spectacle and to an object of speculation. As G. A. Press pointed out:

While *theasthai* before Plato seems always to refer to a looking or viewing with the eyes, *theoria* can also mean a viewing with the mind or contemplation, being a spectator at the games or the theater, or being a *theoros*, a state ambassador.³⁰

29. Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals. Collected Essays*, ed., Froma I. Zeitlin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 191.

30. Gerald A. Press, "Knowledge as Vision in Plato's Dialogues".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. III, no. 2, Spring 1995, p. 75.

Theoros is not only the official title of state ambassador to sacred festivals (where divine epiphanies or cultic icons are contemplated); it also signifies the envoy sent to consult an oracle and thereby is related with the concept of revelation. Since knowledge is regarded as spectacle, a philosopher as *theoros* is spectator at the cosmic games, the play of the gods (*paidia ton theon*), one who simply comes to look on (*theorein*) while attuning his ears to the undying divine laughter (*asbestos gelos*). From his love of knowledge (*philosophon*), he may travel to Egypt, like Solon, for the purpose of seeing *ta thaumata*, wonders what are to be contemplated, for example, the animated statues (*agalmata*) and hieroglyphs, themselves tantamount to the miraculous embodiment of the gods.

In this respect, the spectator and traveler is *philothoros*, 'lover of contemplation', since contemplation of the hieratic symbols and icons reveals that 'every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom' (*episteme kai sophia hekaston estin agalma: Enn. V.8.6.8-9*), as Plotinus maintains. To him the true wisdom is ontological substance, or noetic being, and the true substance is wisdom (*he ara alethine sophia ousia, kai he alethine ousia sophia: Enn. v.8.5.15-16*).

Therefore J. Assmann rightly observes that for those Egyptians who regarded their land as a holy of holies, as the *templum mundi*, the temple of the world, and a sort of sacred 'otherworldly realm' in the world of the living,

the festival was the medium of an advantage in the next life that was already acquired on earth, as was also the case later with the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries. Here, for the first time, we are able to grasp a central point in the connection between Egyptian festivals and Greek mysteries that the Greek writers constantly stressed. During life, the festival already opened up a next-worldly space where the deceased could hope to return after death.³¹

What the Egyptian initiate seeks is the proximity to the gods: both in the temple cult and in the Osirian Netherworld (Duat) the

31. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005, pp. 232-233.

goal is to 'gaze upon the face of the gods'. This is exactly the goal of Plato's philosophy: to gaze upon and contemplate the noetic Forms, or Ideas. This 'embalming glance' with which the Egyptians beheld the world (seeing it as a set of heliophanies, of living images that reflect their intelligible archetypes and function as cultic vehicles for the *bau* of the gods, the *neteru*) was not dissecting and separating, but integrative and anagogic.

Therefore theoretical knowledge, concerned with what exists, is an essential constituent of true wisdom, and all those substances (*ousiai*) which do not possess wisdom in themselves, are not true substances, according to Plotinus. But the Ideas in Intellect are concrete living realities and true substances, not mental abstractions, and these noetic realities (*akhu* in the Egyptian theology) are the objects of Platonic *theoria*. This *theoria* or vision (analogous to the Eleusinian *epopteia*) refers to something inner, immediate, comprehensive, experiential and supra-rational: it will not take the form of an argument or proposition in their usual technical sense. Platonic *theoria* is more related to the realm of sacred liturgies and mysticism, because its gaze is synthetic rather than analytic, inclusive and integrative rather than exclusive and scattering. As Plotinus observes:

One must not then suppose that the gods or the 'exceedingly blessed spectators' (*hupereudaimonas*) in the higher world contemplate propositions, but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images (*kala agalmata*) in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real (*agalmata de ou gegrammena, alla onta*). This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances (*Enn. v.8.5.20-24, Armstrong*).

Likewise, a general theory of knowledge for Plato is a vision which one has to experience in a manner of the Sufi 'unveiling' (*kashf*) rather than a doctrine of what knowledge is at the level of discursive propositions. Even Aristotle's theoretical knowledge retains the sense of *theoria* as the observation of festival, statue, or spectacle, since this knowledge is not merely belief about the first principles of movement, and manipulation of the related mental puzzles, but also a self-moved way of life which involves a sort of

'Osirification'—not for the sake of profane advantage but of certain holy *eudaimonia*, the godlike status which (as Aristotle supposes) depends on the leisure necessary for the concentration that allows one to philosophize.

The true aim of philosophy is not to produce discursive accounts but rather to re-ignite the ever-present inner spark of the divine within us and to raise the soul to the noetic cosmos either by the theurgic 'ropes' of worship (analogous to the rays of the Sun), or by means of contemplation and dialectical ascent. Thus Serapion, the Alexandrian philosopher and Damascius' spiritual grandfather, is regarded by the contemporary Platonists as a model (*paradeigma*) of sainthood characteristic of the golden age of Kronos. Since Kronos is identified with the divine Intellect, the Kronian life is the true philosophical life in obedience to the immortal element within us, the life ruled by *nous*.³² And this Kronian *bios* is equivalent to the way leading to the golden tower of Kronos: 'There winds sweep from the Ocean across the Island of the Blessed' (Pindar *Olymp.* 11.70–73). As Damascius relates about Serapion:

But most of the time he spent at home, leading a life which was not that of a man, but quite simply a god-like existence, constantly addressing prayers and hymns to himself or to the divine (*pros heauton e pros to theion*), or rather meditating in silence. A seeker of the Truth and a man with a theoretical cast of mind (*theoretikos*), he could not bear to occupy himself with the technicalities of philosophy (*ta technikotera tes philosophias*), but immersed himself in those vigorous concepts (or inspired intellections) which feel one with God. For this reason he possessed and read almost nothing except the writings of Orpheus. . . . (*Phil. Hist.* 111 Athanassiadi).

Serapion is here depicted as being *theoretikos*, the theoretical philosopher, in spite of his complete lack of interest in dialectical inquiry (*zetesis*) or in discursive theological games, and his rather monastic Orphic *askesis*, close to that of the later Sufi saints (*awliya*).

32. John Dillon, "Plato and the Golden Age"—*Hermathena*. A *Trinity College Dublin Review*, no. CLIII, winter 1992, p. 32.

Therefore let us see what it means to be a theoretical philosopher, according to Opypmiodorus, another Alexandrian Neo-platonist:

The contemplative philosopher (*ho theoretikos*) knows sensible things insofar as he reduces them from their own plurality to the unity of the intelligible; but since in the intelligible there is not only unity but also plurality, he reduces the unity in the intelligible to the unity that is in God (*anagei to hen to en to noeto epi to hen to en to theo*), which is unity proper without multiplicity, for God is nothing but a monad without multiplicity' (*In Phaed.* 4.3.7–10 Westerink).

Wisdom, being the most finished of the forms of knowledge, is loved and aimed at by those who regard contemplation and contemplative dialectic as the art of purification (*katharsis*), and who have already had started the journey of the great return whose end is the full grasp of the noetic unity of all reality. This theoretical wisdom is concealed in the shrine of that truth which initially is expressed in myth and only slowly revealed to the man who can lift up to God the sacred light of his soul, according to Damascius (*Phil. Hist.* 2a). For such a man, involved in contemplation (*theoria*) of the overwhelming noetic beauty (which gods themselves continuously contemplate), partly reflected in earthly images, in ways of life and the soul's restored inward purity, being is not a dead thing, devoid of life and intelligence, but 'Intellect and Being are one and the same thing' (*nous de kai on tauton*: Plotinus *Enn.* v.4.2.44).

The *bios theoretikos* of Hellenic philosophers is directly related to what is called 'following one's heart' (*shemes-ib*) by the Egyptians. In the Late Period Egypt, religious and contemplative persons (regarded as 'philosophers' by Chaeremon), while still alive, used to seek meditative seclusion in the temples or in the gardened rock-tombs, thereby following their heart-intellect—that is, retiring into the alchemical tomb-temple. W. Federn argues that *shemes-ib* (*sms-ib*) might be rendered in Greek as *scholazein*, 'to have leisure'.³³ Now to be at leisure means 'to follow one's heart in the tomb' or 'in the

33. Walter Federn, The "'Transformations' in the Coffin Texts: A New Approach".—*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. XIX, no. 4, Oct. 1960, p. 248.

garden', to experience certain blissful Protean transformations and become a 'silent man'. Consequently, it means to concentrate one's spiritual eye on divine objects, eternal archetypes and intelligible lights, as if embalming oneself at the 'holy ground' (*kheret-neter*) of divine Presence.

THAUMA IDESTHAI: 'A WONDER TO BEHOLD'

Proclus reminds us that wonder is the beginning of philosophy, and for this reason Iris is called the daughter of Wonder (*In Alcib.* 42). This passage is based on Plato's discussion of the problem of incommensurability in geometry and 'our power to render successively rational what at each lower dimension is still irrational, thus bringing about ever more comprehensive rational order.'³⁴ Plato's text runs as follows:

Theaetetus: By the gods, Socrates, I am lost in wonder (*thaumazo*) when I think of all these things, and sometimes when I regard them it really makes my head swim. *Socrates*: . . . this sense of wonder (*to thaumazein*) is the mark of the philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris the daughter of Thau-mas (*Thaetet.* 155d).

This amazement and philosophical wonder may be understood in different senses, because epistemological, mathematical or metaphysical puzzles are not the only genuine causes for wonder. It may also be caused by the cultic masks of God, while facing the external play of multiple theophanies and inwardly contemplating the undivided noetic lights. The greatest wonder, for the ancient Egyptian initiate 'like unto the dead', is to 'find the gods dancing before your gaze, the Ennead bidding you welcome,' when 'your hand will be taken by Ra himself' among the crew of his barque, and 'when they see you, making your appearance as a god' at the side of Ra, so 'that you may see the god, and the god see you.'³⁵

34. Rosemary Desjardins, *The Rational Enterprise: Logos in Plato's Theaetetus*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, p. 189.

35. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 62.

Iris is the messenger of the gods, and the seven-fold rainbow. In Akkadian myth, the rainbow is likened to a *gamlu* weapon, the divine curved scythe which is the weapon of the gods: the rainbow surrounds the Sun like a *gamlu*, being Ishtar's cosmic jewelry, symbolically depicted as a chain of flies.³⁶ It appears after the *abubu*, the Great Flood, signifying the restored covenant of peace and *philia* between the gods and human beings, that is, the reconstructed bridge of 'philosophy' which connects two different ontological realms, like the smoke-pillar of the sacrifice. This necklace of Ishtar, the celestial omen that causes an awful and joyous amazement, confirms that the irrational powers, plotting against the life of intellect, are now pacified.

In this respect, Ishtar is similar to Athena Soteria, the mistress of philosophy, whose function is to preserve the heart of Dionysus undivided. This heart stands for the unparticipated Intellect (*Nous*). The Orphic Dionysus is torn asunder into seven pieces (like a rainbow) by the Titans, an action that indicates a seven-fold division of the Soul. Ishtar (who may in another aspect be equated to Persephone) is analogous to God's Presence, *Shekhinah*, 'virgin of light', with whom the Jewish mystic seeks to be united, following considerably older Assyrian paradigms. As S. Parpola rightly observes:

This notion of the *Shekhinah* agrees perfectly with the role played by Ishtar in Assyrian ecstatic prophecy, where she represents the Word of God manifested through prophetic spirit (*to pneuma*, 'spiritus sanctus').³⁷

When the solar disk of Ashur (*Assur*) is turned into the eight-pointed star, it becomes the symbol of Ashur's daughter, Ishtar, the Beauty of God. Her birth-process, conceived almost as a constructive flow of Pythagorean numbers, is to be likened to the divine

36. Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, "The Symbolism of the Flies in the Mesopotamian Flood Myth and Some Future Implications".—*Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reimer*, ed. Francesca Rochberg-Halton, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987, p. 179.

37. Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy".—*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1993, p. 181.

stream emanating from the winged disk above the sacred Assyrian Tree of Life, the prototype of the later Sephirothic Tree in Jewish esotericism. The star of Ishtar represents the divine *pleroma* in the form of a four-spoked wheel.³⁸ It refers to the rotation of the macrocosmic wheel, moved by her erotic power and imitated by the theurgic instruments, such as the top of Hekate (*Hekatikos strophalos*), namely, the golden *sphaira*, in Chaldean Platonism.

The manifested wheel of Ishtar's noetic fire—or the beautiful cosmic *agalma*, to say it in Plato's own terms—is a wonder to behold (*thauma idesthai*). This Greek expression is used mostly in the demiurgic contexts, and one should remember that the function of the philosophers in the cosmic state of the gods, in which wisdom (*sophia*, namely, order, measure, right proportion, like the Egyptian *maat*) is maintained, is to be the crafters, or *demiourgoi*. Their 'royal' task is to determine the functions of the rest of the body-like state, fixing their gaze upon the things of the eternal and unchanging order.

All cosmic (or rather *cosmetic*) arrangements, divine orders (*taxeis*), theophanies and creations are *thauma idesthai*, 'a wonder to behold'. They are like *daidaleia*, the works of Daidalos, that is, the Near Eastern and Egyptian artifacts, the animated cultic statues, things endowed with life. They display autokinetic powers like the tripods of Hephaistos, or imaginary golden maidens endowed with mind, voice, and strength.³⁹

For Plato, human beings are precisely such animated puppets, made by the gods, 'possibly as a plaything, or possibly with some more serious purpose' (*Leg.* 644d), whose existential show is *thauma idesthai*: it causes perplexity and marks the beginning of philosophy, the path of remembrance. This attempt to recover the original memory and comprehend the truth through remembering the origins and meaning of the puppet-play is focused not merely upon how things are, but upon why they are the way they are.

For Platonists, the word *aletheia* (truth) itself indicates that this

38. *Ibid.*, p.189.

39. Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 226.

knowledge is a dispelling of oblivion (*lethe*). This philosophical recollection of the 'great light of Apsu', the wisdom-gushing fountain of *kosmos noetos*, is like Etana's ascent to heaven in order 'to disclose concealed things'. (Etana is the legendary Sumerian king of Kish, 'a shepherd who ascended to heaven'.) Every lover of wisdom (*nemequ* in Akkadian) follows the paradigm of Etana and the other mythical *apkallus*, that is, the archetypal avatars and sages whose spiritual legacy, albeit tacitly, is 'still very much alive in Jewish, Christian, and Oriental mysticism and philosophies.'⁴⁰

Aristotle says that it is owing to their wonder that men

both now begin and at first began to philosophize. . . . And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant: whence even the lover of myths is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders (*Metaph.*982b).

Aristotle equates the lovers of myths and the philosophers, arguing that philosophy should be distinguished from the science of production (*poietike*), because theoretical or philosophical knowledge transcends the specificities of time and place. Being the study of first principles, it is pursued for no earthly purpose. The philosopher tries to reach a kind of *apotheosis* which takes place at the end of the Peripatetic road. Accordingly, *logos* must yield to non-discursive *nous*, to seeing the entire cosmos noetically. This noetic accomplishment is regarded as a change into 'a better state', since God is in 'a better state', and life belongs to God. For Aristotle, God is identical to the divine Intellect. As Ch. C. Evangelidou remarks:

Following along the path suggested by Aristotelian dialectic, we can see that the eternally energized Divine Intellect and the dialectically perfected, and thus noetically transformed, mind of the true philosopher are identified as being essentially the same. . . . In this new noetic light, Aristotle's philosophy, and the Platonic tradition to which he belongs, would appear to be closer to the Eastern ways of thinking. . . . than to the narrowly defined 'Western rationality', if by this expression is meant the

40. Simo Parpola, *ibid.*, p.199.

kind of calculative and manipulative *ratio*, in the service of utilitarian, technological and ideological goals.⁴¹

THE INVINCIBLE WARRIORS
AS MODELS OF PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

In a sense, philosophy is the *via dialectica*, dialectic way, following the paradigmatic Orphic formula: *bios-thanatos-bios* (life-death-life). In a *makarismos* of the golden lamellae (from a tomb in Pelinna), themselves shaped as two stylized heart-form ivy leaves, this formula is explained as follows:

Now you have died and now you have come into being, O thrice happy one, on the same day. Tell Persephone that Bakchios himself has set you free.⁴²

This sacred way of liberation, opened to the Orphic initiates (*mustai kai bakchoi*) is the 'mystic road to Rhadamanthus' (*mustikon oimon epi Rhadamanthum*),⁴³ Rhadamanthus meaning 'man of Amenta' (*r(w)d-Imntt*), of the Osirian Netherworld.⁴⁴ The Orphic eschatology, which regards death as the way to real life, promises the vindicated gnostic (analogous to the Egyptian *maakheru*, from which derives the Greek word *makarios*, 'blessed') that he may be a god instead of a mortal. This immortalization is achieved after one's transformation and acceptance into the Elysian Fields. The word *Elysium* (gr. *Elusion pedion*) itself derives from the Egyptian word *ealu* (or *iaru*), 'reeds', referring to the Osirian Field of Reeds.⁴⁵

41. Christos C. Evangelou, *The Hellenic Philosophy: Between Europe, Asia and Africa*, pp. 50–51.

42. Fritz Graf, "Dionysian and Orphic Eschatology: New Texts and Old Questions".—*Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 241.

43. Susan Guettel Cole, "Voices from Beyond the Grave: Dionysus and the Dead".—*Masks of Dionysus*, p. 278.

44. R. Drew Griffith, *Sailing to Elysium: Menelaus' Afterlife (Odyssey 4.561–569) and Egyptian Religion*, p. 220.

45. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 392.

At the level of individual human choice (or *metanastasis*, a change of address), the image of a journey with stages and stations along the road became a schema for the moral life, especially in the Hellenistic period. Heracles, the paradigmatic embodiment of the true philosopher, is depicted as sitting and looking down two roads, that of Vice and Virtue, laid out before him.⁴⁶ The road which marks advances in moral, intellectual, and spiritual development (for example, those leading from the realm of images to the realm of archetypes, and from knowledge of the self to knowledge of God) requires a mystagogue, the guide upon the road.

Philo of Alexandria, at once the Jewish *hermeneus* and Middle Platonist (labeled *ho Puthagoreios* by Clement of Alexandria) speaks of the 'royal' road which the Hebrews traveled on their way to the 'promised land' as the way leading to God. This road itself is curiously called *philosophia* (philosophy being understood as a means by which a mortal human being is immortalized) and Moses regarded as *pansophos* and *philosophos*, the greatest of philosophers,⁴⁷ who 'had both reached the apex of philosophy (*philosophias ep' auten pthasas akroteta*) and had been taught by oracles the most significant and essential aspects of nature' (*De opificio mundi* 8). Philo outlines the progress leading to the contemplative life as follows:

after relinquishing mortal things, the soul is to receive a vision of things immortal and the ability to contemplate them (*epideixin kai theorian ton athanaton*)⁴⁸

For the Homeric Greeks, this road of 'migration' is the road of 'homecoming'. It is traveled by means of toil and suffering, a performance of the Twelve Labors, a passing through the Twelve Night Hours of the Egyptian Duat. Therefore Heracles (sometimes

46. Herold Weiss, "A Schema of 'the Road' in Philo and Lucan".—*The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 1, ed. David T. Runia, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989, p. 43.

47. Gregory E. Sterling, "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism".—*The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. v, ed. David T. Runia, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993, p. 99.

48. Herold Weiss, *ibid.*, p. 51.

identified as the Egyptian god Khonsu, the Phoenician Melqart) is considered as the greatest example (*paradeigma*) of the philosophical life, demonstrating how a human being can become a god. Those who have been educated after the pattern of Heracles are called 'sons of Zeus' (*Dios paidas*), transferred (*methastasthai*) into the company of the gods, since Heracles, pictured as the ideal warrior, king, and philosopher, is viewed by Dio Chrysostom as 'the savior of the world and humanity' (*tes ges kai ton anthropon soter*).⁴⁹

Heracles is designated as a *heros theos*, a hero-god, to be imitated by philosophers and ascetics. He is regarded as skilled in prophecy, dialectic, and logic, like Philo's Moses, who was not a Hebrew Moses, but rather a Middle Platonist,⁵⁰ a 'divine man' (*theios aner*), or even a god (*theos*), whose divinity is understood as a reflection of the divine ruling power (*basilike dunamis*). According to W.E. Helleman:

Philo indicates that in receiving the vision Moses, being divinely inspired, becomes divine, for the prophetic mind becomes like the monad, leaving behind its mortal and dual nature to become pure *nous*, a unity.⁵¹

The Heracleian paradigm makes it clear that for one's immortalization both philosophical *paideia* and hieratic initiation are required. Initiation is the starting-point of stepping into another world for those lovers of wisdom who are 'men of knowledge', who travel the sacred road and descend while alive into the Underworld (like mythical Heracles and Orpheus), following the example of Persephone and her Akkadian prototype, the goddess Ishtar, or Inanna.

Ishtar represents the descending and ascending soul, both *anima mundi* and the individual *psuche*, by whatever term we may call it. The personal salvation of the initiate may be symbolized by Ishtar's

49. David E. Aune, "Heracles and Christ: Heracles Imagery in the Christology of Early Christianity"—*Greeks, Romans, and Christians. Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch et alii, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990, p. 9.

50. Gregory E. Sterling, *ibid.*, p. 111.

51. Wendy E. Helleman, *Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God.—The Studia Philonica Annual. Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 11, ed. David T. Runia, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, p. 69.

release from the Netherworld, accomplished (as an inward alchemical work) by the devotees of Nabu (the Babylonian equivalent of Thoth, the Egyptian divine scribe, regarded as Hermes by the Greeks) through intensive philosophical study, philosophical meditation, exegesis of *hieroi logoi*, and esoteric cult practices related to the Heracleian figure of Ninurta, a son of Enlil, whose spiritual perfection (like that of Philonian *Logos*) is symbolized by the sacred Tree of Life.

Both Nabu and Ninurta are viewed as God's weapons, as powers of Marduk. The Tree itself (the prototype of the Pythagorean *tetractys* and Sephirothic *pleroma*, or the Garden of Knowledge, *kosmos noetos*) represents a royal mystical path of spiritual growth and ascent, starting from its roots (the realm of Nergal) and leading towards the winged disk, the crown of divine Light ('the apex of philosophy'), the symbol of both Anu and Enlil, or Marduk, but in Assyria a symbol of Ashur by virtue of his equation with Anu and Enlil. As S. Parpola relates:

In a Neo-Assyrian hymn glorifying Ninurta, his body is described as encompassing the whole universe, with different gods equated with his limbs, his face being the sun. . . . It should be stressed that just as Christ and the Father are one, so is triumphant Ninurta/Nabu one with his Father: both Marduk and Enlil are included among Ninurta's limbs. . . . Ninurta's triumphal chariot is identified with what is called Marduk's chariot. . . . Against this background, it is not accidental that the throne of God in Ezek. 1 and Dan. 77 is known as the Chariot in Jewish tradition; the aspect of God seated upon it is that of God triumphing over evil and sin. . . . According to the doctrine of the Tree, the power to combat evil also resided in man: the man who succeeded in conquering sin would become the Son of God himself and eventually triumph in Heaven.⁵²

Being a son of the king of the gods, Ninurta in some respect is analogous to the Egyptian Horus acting through the ruling human

52. Simo Parpola, *ibid.*, pp. 204–205.

king. Horus-like pharaoh maintains truth and cosmic order in the heliophanic state, keeping equilibrium between opposing forces through the mediation of Thoth (an aspect of universal intelligence, namely articulating creative Sound—that is, the light-like *Logos*). Likewise, the heart of a human being who is the lover of *Maat* (*Maat* being Thoth's feminine counterpart, his *dunamis*, or *shakti*) is the heart in which Horus dwells. This truth-loving heart is attuned to *maat* and lives on *maat*, because to 'do *maat*' and to 'speak *maat*' is the same as 'to philosophize', 'to make bright *maat* which Ra loves'. Since truth (*maat*) is bread by which Ra, the solar divine Intellect, lives, the true philosopher (the imitator of deity) is fed on its brightness too in order to move in an orderly and harmonious way, being theurgically united with the goddess *Maat*. As J. Naydler says:

She is literally the bread by which Ra lives, and so by implication she is the food of all the gods, who are but the limbs of Ra. What better substance than truth could there be for the gods to feed on?⁵³

Ninurta, the invincible divine warrior, also fights for truth against disorder and error. His triumphal return to the celestial home, Ekur, after his victory against a terrible monster, Asakku, the symbol of the fallen material existence, death, and sickness, is a model for the spiritual combat and *askesis*, directed against irrational and evil forces. In addition, Ninurta is the perfect king (*sharru gitmalu*) or perfect man/hero (*etlu/qarradu gitmalu*, that is, *anthropos teleios*, like *al-insan al-kamil* in Sufism). The perfect man is the paradigmatic sage, or philosopher (in the initial archetypal sense), the provider of light and wisdom, dispensing the medicine of life (*shammu sha balati*). Ninurta holds the book of life, the tablet of destinies. In Mesopotamian gnosis, by imitation of Ninurta's deeds and qualities the initiate is resurrected from the dead and glorified in Heaven. According to S. Parpola:

This idea certainly was central to the myth of Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld, which provided the Mesopotamian para-

53. Jeremy Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1996, p. 94.

digm par excellence for the salvation of man. Since the motif of the 'jewel-studded garment' in the *Hymn of the Pearl* clearly derives from Ishtar's Descent, its integration with motifs from Ninurta mythology suggests that the idea of personal salvation was inherent in the Ninurta myths as well. Thus interpreted, these myths had relevance to any individual who, having 'vanquished' the material world, had attained divine perfection, symbolized by the 'jewel-studded garment'. Personal salvation indeed appears to have been the essential goal of the cult of Nabu, the son of Marduk who since the late second millennium BCE was syncretized with Ninurta. The devotees of Nabu appear to have striven for salvation through intensive study and exegesis of canonical scripture; the cult itself was esoteric and, like the cult of Ishtar, has affinities with Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Mithraism.⁵⁴

THE INWARD JOURNEY TO THE PLACE OF TRUTH

Parmenides, a priest and a 'son' of Apollo, in his journey to meet the goddess (presumably Persephone, that is, Ishtar), travels to the *peirata* of universe, the ultimate boundaries of existence. After receiving paradoxical revelations, he becomes a messenger of the goddess, the founder of logic which itself initially had a rather soteriological function. As P. Kingsley relates:

That was the job of the hero who manages to touch the borderline between the human and divine; to reach the realm of Persephone. Most typically of all, though, it described the daily route followed by the sun as it makes its way to the other side of the ocean surrounding the known world and arrives in the Mansions of Night.⁵⁵

54. Simo Parpola, "Mesopotamian Precursors of the Hymn of the Pearl"—*Melammu Symposia II: Mythology and Mythologies. Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*, ed. R. M. Whiting, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001, p. 192.

55. Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, p. 279.

This route is followed by all spiritual heroes, those who imitate the Sun's voyage around a circular cosmos of heliophanies, the perfect cultic paradigm and icon of the ouroboros-like *Nous* in his external cyclic epiphany. In Egypt, the *Book of Amduat*, in which the centrality of knowledge (*rekh*) is emphasized, seems to be 'the first religious treatise to insert the king consistently into the daily course of the sun.'⁵⁶

During this paradigmatic journey, at the very depths of the Duat, the Sun (the *ba* of Ra) reaches the water hole filled with *Nun*, the ineffable primeval substance, where Ra (as *ba*, the self-revealing noetic *eidōs*) and Osiris (as the ideal *sah*-form of Ra, his corpse depicted as *Sokar*) are united. Thereby the Eye of Horus is healed by Thoth and the rebirth of Ra occurs, moving through the body of the cosmic Serpent (the World-encircler) backward, from tail to mouth. Likewise, the resurrection of the 'dead' philosopher, the follower of Ra, restored like the solar Eye, conforms to the same pattern.

The Egyptian journey of Ra's *ba*, known as 'the path of the two ways', is followed both by the soul of the dead and that of the hero, the initiate-philosopher who 'dies' before his actual physical death. N. Marinatos shows that both Gilgamesh and Odysseus perform this cosmic journey at the edges of the earth (*perata ges*).⁵⁷

In Egypt, the *ba*'s journey (performed by the deceased or the initiate) is to 'yonder shore, upon which the gods stand' (*Book of the Dead* 98). The lover of truth and wisdom wishes to reach the place 'where Maat is' (*Coffin Texts* III.143)—to settle there, beneath the holy sycamore, which is like the Assyrian Tree of Life. Though his journey has the character of an official trip, imitation into the solar course is granted only to the righteous (to the *siddiq*, in Aramaic and Arabic Sufi terms) who is to be rejuvenated in the goddess' womb and united with Ra in that 'primeval place' where he first 'came into being (*kheper*) out of Ra.'⁵⁸

56. Erik Hornung, *The Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 34.

57. Nanno Marinatos, "The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus".—*Numen*, vol. 48, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001, p. 381.

58. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 180.

The Sun God is not only the life-giving demiurgic Intellect (whose *ba* unites with the cultic body of Osiris in the Duat), but also the supreme *hermeneus*, that is, translator or interpreter. Whoever wishes to enter the Osirian Duat needs to be helped by the knowledge of Ra himself. This is why, according to the *Book of Amduat*, it is necessary for the initiate on earth to follow Ra (the solar *Nous*) on his journey to noetic rebirth.⁵⁹ Hence, he must practice theurgic rites and philosophy in a sense of 'living on Maat' and 'sitting in the hand of Amun-Ra' or 'putting the god in one's heart'. This attitude stands in strict accord with Plato's definition of philosophy as training for death and preparation for the spiritual journey through the Netherworld, ultimately aimed at the return to the all-encompassing One.

The inward journey requires the traveler to withstand a series of examinations which include knowledge of the secret divine names, and of one's true identity and destination. The philosopher, as a traveler striking out towards the throne of Osiris, beyond the 'horizon' (*akhet*), is identified to Horus. The path of *bau* (souls, manifestations, psychic entities) is opened to his *ba* by *Upawet* (or *Wepwawet*, a manifestation of the 'victorious Horus'), the Opener of the Ways and the chief Mystagogue, sometimes identified with Anubis.

The jackal-headed god Anubis is the master of mummification, 'He who is over the mystery'; he is able to re-unite *membra disiecta* of the dead body and turn it into an image of Osiris, his eternal *eidōs* and visible theurgic hieroglyph. The embalmer produces the 'head of mystery' (*tep sheta*) which is the 'head of a god' that enables the deceased or the initiate to see and act as a god.

Maat is the permanent driving force, the assistant, and the directed *telos* of this ritualized esoteric journey, each stage of which is equivalent to an iconographic constellation of particular keywords, symbols, and the related divine powers, experienced as an externalized psychic environment. The voyage itself is only possible

59. Theodor Abt and Erik Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife. The Egyptian Amduat—A Quest for Immortality*, Zurich: Living Human Heritage Publication, 2003, p. 28.

when a 'mystical ship' is built by the sole means of theurgic language. Thereby the dismembered ship (like the *ochema*, the shining vehicle of the soul in Neoplatonism) is reconstructed and animated. Simultaneously one's bodily limbs are 'sacramentally interpreted' (to use J. Assmann's term) by equating each part of the initiate's body with a particular deity.

This initiatory journey through a deliberately-constructed, text-like reality, by means of a particular transformative knowledge (*gnosis*) and a powerful theurgic language, consists of relating all roles and events back to their archetypes in the divine realm of *akh*. The initiate wards off any threat by recognizing it and by calling it by name, thereby confirming its place within the textual *mandala*.

By knowing the metaphysical structure and iconography of the *mundus imaginalis* related to the particular noetic principles (*neteru*), the initiate is certain that he knows everything (*panta ta onta*, to say it in Greek philosophical language). Philosophy itself is sometimes defined as *gnosis ton onton he onta esti*, that is, as the knowledge of those noetic realities that really exist, though such realities (tantamount to the Egyptian divine Ennead, the noetic *pleroma* of principles and their subsequent articulation) are not easily grasped by the impoverished modern mind.

TO BE LIKE OSIRIS

The philosopher is willing to die, according to Olympiodorus, and he is striving for death, namely the separation of the soul from the body. However, as the Alexandrian Neoplatonist says:

Preparation for death is not an end in itself . . . for the real end is being dead. For the same reason 'dying' is distinct from 'being dead'; one in search of purification, who is training himself for death, is 'dying', that is to say, purifying himself of affects, while the contemplative is already 'dead', because he is free from affects, and therefore he will not make dying his object (*In Phaed.* 3.3.2-6).

To be dead is to be like Osiris who waits to be united with the *ba* of Ra, and this union in the Duat belongs to one's integral

philosophical life. To philosophize in the Osirian Netherworld entails using the knowledge necessary to effect the alchemical transformation required in order to be vindicated and become *maakheru*. J. Assmann says:

The accumulation of such an enormous body of knowledge based on pure speculation and meant to insure individual salvation (i.e. in the sense of overcoming death) reminds one of the Gnosis and must surely represent one of its roots. Purity, in the sense of deliverance from the burdens of earthly existence, may only be attained through knowledge. Purity and knowledge, these two concepts are closely interwoven; does not the deceased assert: 'I know the names. . . I am pure'?⁶⁰

Through his purity and knowledge the deceased (the initiate 'philosopher') steps face to face with the gods, or the noetic Forms. In the inscription from the tomb of Djehutiemheb (the reign of Ramesses II), the owner of the tomb prays to Hathor:

Give me your countenance, let me praise it, grant your beauty, that I may gaze upon your form. . . .⁶¹

The deceased declares himself to be truly a servant of Hathor, the Serpent goddess from the eastern horizon, Lady of the Sycamore Tree, who initiates ascent to Heaven for those who love her as the paradigm of integrity and the source of joyous inspiration, or 'sober drunkenness'. Being regarded as the Eye of Ra (or *Wedjat-eye*, the whole and re-assembled eye which like an active mirror irradiates and expresses Ra's intelligible beauty), she acts as the theurgic power of divine Intellect. In this respect, Hathor is the *Iret-eye*, *iret* meaning 'doer'.⁶² The Eye's work may be understood both as creative contemplation (as in later Plotinian sense of that word) and as theurgic accomplishment, *ergon*, by means of which the initiate is integrated

60. Jan Assmann, "Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt"—*Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. J. P. Allen et alii, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 144.

61. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 199.

62. Alison Roberts, *Hathor Rising. The Serpent Power of Ancient Egypt*, Rottingdean: Northgate Publishers, 2001, p. 9.

into the Golden Cow (Hathor), and placed in the womb-like tomb for the noetic rebirth.

The above mentioned servant of Hathor (the name Hathor meaning 'the house of Horus') receives certain revelations or philosophical instructions from the goddess. As he says, she spoke to him with her own mouth and came to instruct; so the servant declares:

I do not reject the speech of your mouth,
I do not disregard your teaching.
I am on the way that you yourself have ordained,
On the path that you yourself have prepared.
Blessed be he who knows you!
He who beholds you is blessed.
How happy is he who rests at your side,
Who enters into your shadow.
It is you who prophesied my tomb at the beginning,
When it was first planned.⁶³

This revealed path of gnosis and vision, understood as an initiation into the mysteries of the realm of the dead, constitutes the essential core of the historically much later Platonic philosophy. The Hellenic *philosophoi*, regarded as solar heroes, formally replaced the Egyptian solar initiates whose chief spiritual master (*telesiourgos*) was the Horus-like king, son of Ra, able to receive revelations and ascend to his father Atum-Ra in order to be united in His embrace. The solar hierophanies, viewed as faces of the noetic fire, were rationalized and turned into the Ideas.

In any case, the solar heroes traveling the sacred Apollonian road of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Parmenides (the road which 'carries the wise man through all cities' and which is the same as that of Odysseus) have an exclusive knowledge of how to pass through darkness to light, through death to life. This great intelligence enabled Sisyphus (sometimes regarded as the father of Odysseus) to persuade Persephone with wily words and 'return from death.'⁶⁴

63. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p.199.

64. Douglas Frame, *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978, p.36.

This transition may be imagined as a ceremonial movement through the temple gates and halls which the initiate must cross in order to reach the place of justification, in the innermost part of the temple, where Osiris sits enthroned. According to J. Assmann:

The path of the deceased to Osiris corresponds to the path of the priest on his way to the innermost sanctuary of the god. The path of the priest is furthermore sacramentally explained as an ascent to the heavens.⁶⁵

THE DEATH WHICH DETACHES FROM THE INFERIOR

In the context of Egyptian journey to the Field of Reeds (or the Field of Offerings, *sekhet hetep*) and the noetic Isle of Flame, purification and initiation are inseparable, like the purification (*katharsis*) and separation (*chorismos*) in Plotinus' philosophy. Since *ta noeta*, the noetic realities, are completely free (*katharotaton*) from body, the soul must separate (*choriai*) itself from body also, thereby becoming form (*eidosis*) and formative power (*Enn.* 1v.7.8.14-24; 1.6.6.14-16). Being completely purified is a stripping (*aphairesis*) of anything alien (*Enn.* 1.2.4.6) and restoring one's true identity: in this way, Plotinus says, 'it becomes clear what we are made to be like and with what god we are identified' (*Enn.* 1.2.5.1-3).

Plato himself argues that death is a release (*lisis*) and separation from the body (in the sense of the Egyptian *khat*, or *shat*: the disanimated corpse, the *soma*), thus linking purification with the life of the philosopher who seeks wisdom and knowledge.⁶⁶ However, death from above and death from below are not the same, according to Damascius: death as such is not identical with purification, only that death which detaches from the inferior (*In Phaed.* 1.127.1-2)—that is, the death which corresponds to initiation and ascent (*anagoge*).

65. Jan Assmann, *Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt*, p.149.

66. Robert Musser, "Notes on Plotinian Purification".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. v, no.1, fall 1996, p.79.

In the *Pyramid Texts*, the ultimate primeval hieratic model of all subsequent 'anagogic philosophy' (or rather, an esoteric paradigm of the 'theurgic Platonism', established at least two thousand years before Plato), it is proclaimed:

Akh (light-like intellect, spirit) belongs to the Heaven, *khat* (corpse, physical body) to the Earth (*PT* 305).

Plato's *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* are, in fact, only the distant and marginal post-scriptum commentaries to this Heliopolitan metaphysics, adapted to the noisy Athenian market-place.

When the pharaoh sheds all his impurities and all accretions of physical plurality, the Heaven opens to him and he joins Ra in his solar barque where the daughters of Ra, namely Maat and Hathor, stand erect at the prow. The pharaoh, son of Ra whose noetic identity is to be re-actualized, in his prayer states the epistemological *telos* of his 'cosmic dialectic' aimed at reintegration and return to the divine *Nous*:

See me, Ra, recognize me, Ra. I belong to those that know you, so know me (*PT* 311).

W. Burkert is perhaps unaware of this *Pyramid Texts* tradition when he describes as a 'bold assertion' an epigram to those Hellenes who fell in war in 432 BC, running as follows:

The aither has received the souls, earth the bodies.⁶⁷

At death, the body returns to the earth, as earth to earth, but the immortal *psyche* returns to the *aither*. Even if Homeric religion 'had not an inkling' that there is in man an immortal divine element, his *nous*, which is part of the universal *Nous*, this claim cannot be taken as a proof that the doctrine itself is a 'revolutionary' discovery or some 'fascinating' invention of early Pre-Socratic thinkers. W. Burkert perhaps understands this himself when he says:

67. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. John Raffan, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.320.

The Mysteries had taught comparable ideas in secret: the divine origin of man and his goal of unity with the divine. This now becomes explicit through natural philosophy, with a claim to objective truth.⁶⁸

For Plotinus, it is dialectic which constitutes the contemplative path upward to Intellect, the path by which the Forms (*eide*) descend from, and ascend to, the throne of the King.⁶⁹ Since wisdom (*sophia*) is an intellectual, purificatory, and anagogic activity which turns away from the things below, the dialectical wisdom (or the science of dialectic) enables the soul, when it is purified, to become an *eidōs* belonging to the plenitude of God. In order to turn away from shadowy multiplicity and attain union with the Intellect, and finally with the One, the Soul must strip off what she put on in her descent:

just as for those who go up to the celebrations of sacred rites (*ta hagia ton hieron*) there are purifications, and strippings off of the clothes they wore before. . . . (*Enn.* 1.6.7.3-4).

ENTERING THE SOLAR BARQUE OF ATUM-RA

The target (*skopos*) of the initiatory rites, according to Damascius, is to elevate (*anagagein*) souls back to their final destination which is the same starting-point from which they first set out on their downward journey and where the undivided Dionysus gave them being, seated on his father's throne (*In Phaed.* I.168.1-5). Hence the philosopher wishes to identify his fate with that of Dionysus, who is the cause of soul's deliverance (and is therefore named *Luseos*), like the Egyptian initiate identified his with that of Osiris. The Neoplatonists belonging to Iamblichus' school maintain that the soul is a single and uncomposite essence which, nonetheless, undergoes various changes when it enters the body. However, the rational and

68. Walter Burkert, *ibid.*, p.320.

69. Peter A. Kay, "Dialectic as the Science of Wisdom in Plotinus"—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. iv, no. 1, fall 1995, p.32.

irrational powers, which include imagination (*phantasia*), perception, opinion, discursive thought, desire, and intellection, survive death. These powers are present to both the disembodied and embodied soul, though in different ways. As Proclus explains, discussing why the *agalma*-like cosmos as a whole does not require sense-organs:

In this passage he (i.e., Plato in *Timaeus* 33c) is obviously doing nothing else than freeing the universe from the mode of life proper to individuals and the organs appropriate to this [life], which are attached to us when we descend into generation; for when we remain above we have no need of such multifarious life-modes and the particular organs that go with them, but there the luminous vehicle (*ochema augoeides*) suffices for us, which contains in a unified mode all the senses. So seeing that we ourselves, when we have dispensed with generation, are free from all life of that sort, what are we to assume in the case of the universe? (*In Tim.* 2.81.21ff).

Both Numenius and Iamblichus argue that there are two souls, rational and irrational, presenting this distinction as the doctrine of the Egyptians. The soul which is rational (able to practice intellection, *noesis*, and noetic union with its source) belongs to the intelligible cosmos (the realm of *akhu*), being created by the Demiurge (the Ra or Ptah of the Egyptians). The irrational soul, instead, is received from the circuit of the heavens and is created by the younger gods of Plato's *Timaeus*.

Iamblichus possibly thought that the rational soul, when embodied, itself develops irrational powers that it activates through the irrational soul (also regarded as being immortal, but only at the level of lower cosmic existence, like the Egyptian *ka* which returns to the vital realm of the 'ancestors'). Therefore there is an innate weakness even in the pure rational soul (like the Osirian 'weakness', since Osiris is called the 'weary of heart' when dissolved into a disparate multiplicity and unable to realize his centralizing function as the monadic heart-intellect) which cannot prevent the irrational Sethian powers to be actualized in human life. According to J.F. Finamore and J.M. Dillon:

This, it would seem, is in keeping with the *Phaedrus* myth, where the disembodied soul slips and falls.⁷⁰

Hence the perpetual contest and battle between Horus and Seth, the opposite psychic forces which are to be reconciled at the higher level of Osirian re-integration: just as Osiris triumphed over death, so every deceased person or initiate would triumph over death, irrationality, impurity, and disorder, though in the Field of Reeds he is given both 'the Horian places and the Sethian places'. The inscription from the Theban tomb of Neferhotep states as follows:

There is none who does not arrive there.
The time one spends on earth is but a dream.
But 'Welcome, safe and sound!' is said to the one who has reached the West.⁷¹

The arrival of the deceased in the West (*Amentet*), being the first stage of the transformative path to the barque of Ra which transcends the psychic Osirian domain, assumes the character of a homecoming: 'he becomes a divine *ba* like the Ennead',⁷² that is, like the archetypal totality of the noetic gods. But before 'going forth by day from the earth as a living *ba* to behold the Sun disk', one must first descend into the realm of psycho-physical genesis, and this descent (down from the Isle of Fire) is compared to the fall into the realm of death. As an oft-used hieratic formula declares:

May your *ba* ascend, may your *khat* descend.

The *khat* (corpse), which stands in this context for the irrational soul (her bodily vehicle), is equivalent in a certain respect to the psychosomatic realm of the 'underworld' which constitutes the basis for (or the inner side of) the external visible set of phenomena.

The downward journey (*katabasis*) is repeated as a ritual descent into the underworld, or rather *Amentet*, the realm of *anima mundi*, equivalent to the inner cosmic body of the goddess Nut (Heaven),

70. John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon, "Commentary to the De Anima".—*Iamblichus, De Anima*, text, translation, and commentary by John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon, Leiden: J. E. Brill, 2002, p. 117.

71. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 119.

72. Jan Assmann, *ibid.*, p. 177.

of Hathor, or of Osiris-Sokar himself. The Egyptian royal tombs are designed to represent this otherworldly temple (which may be likened to the third hypostasis in Plotinus' philosophy), thereby equating the entombment of the pharaoh to a *descensus ad inferos* on the path of the Sun god Ra, sailing in his barque.

The *descensus* (like the spiritual death through initiation and gnosis) is necessary for the subsequent *ascensio*, the ascent to the noetic realm—that is, the act of entering the solar barque and being united with Atum-Ra. Atum, being the god of preexistence, floating in *Nun* (like the One-Being, *hen on*, in the ineffable One, *to hen*, of the Neoplatonists), symbolizes both nonbeing and all-being, that is, the whole noetic meta-structure in its archetypal fullness. As the Lord of All (*neb tem*), he says:

I am Atum when alone in the primeval waters, I am Ra when he appears in glory and begins ruling what he has created.⁷³

Atum, being the henadic source of the Ennead (in the sense of the nine-fold divine *Paradeigma*), and father of the gods (first of all—father of Shu and Tefnut, that is, of Life, *ankh*, and Order, *maat*, analogous to the Pythagorean pair of *Apeiria* and *Peras* respectively), is 'lord of noetic totality'. According to J.P. Allen:

The name Atum (*j.tmw*) is a form of the verb *tm*—probably a 'noun of action' of the same type as *j.qdw* 'builder' from the verb *qd*. *Tm* means both 'complete, finish' and 'not be'. Both connotations are associated with Atum.⁷⁴

Since Atum is the 'complete one', the initiate strives to be 'complete as Atum' (*PT* 1298b), to be integrated into the realm of Ra, and describes his spiritual homecoming in following terms:

Ra has extended his arms to me, and his crew will not drive me back.⁷⁵

73. Erik Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1984, p. 14.

74. James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, New Haven: Yale University, 1988, p. 9.

75. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 397.

According to Damascius, who cites the Chaldean oracle in this respect, those realized philosophers who live with the gods and belong to their community, at the same time sharing in their theurgic government, 'rest in God, breathing the midday rays' (*In Phaed.* 1.169.3; fr.130.2).

The initiate Platonist lives with the gods in accordance with the design of the gods of initiation (*ton teleounton theon*: *ibid.*, 1.168.5). To say it in another terms, the soul dies to the body (corpse, *soma*, or *khat*, symbolized by a fish, the Sethian creature which swims in the lower Nile of genesis) and is reborn to intelligent life in communion with the gods and, finally, with the Good (the hyper-noetic ineffable Nile) itself. To the extent of her purity, self-knowledge, and recollection (*anamnesis*, which 'is the practice of death')⁷⁶ the soul restores her own unchanging nature—that is, her immortality—at the level of the luminous solar *ochema* of Ra.

PHILOSOPHICAL INITIATIONS IN THE NETHERWORLD

Damascius regards initiatory rites (*hai teletai*) as being twofold: those here below, which are a kind of preparation for the Netherworld mysteries, and those in the hereafter. This important distinction implies that the soul continues to philosophize in the hereafter and that the main philosophical *ergon* begins only after one enters into the realm of Persephone. These two levels of philosophical activity are analogous to the Egyptian model of initiatory practice.

According to the *Book of Amduat*, the knowledge of the mysterious *bau* (*rekh ba shetau*) and of the secret names (*renu-sen-shetau*) is acquired by a living person upon earth, the 'philosopher' who voluntarily becomes 'dead' still in his earthly tomb-like body. Therefore the gnostic inwardly approaches the places where Osiris is enthroned (initiation itself being an altered rite of coronation) by the means of spiritual exercises—namely, sacramental interpretations, meditations, and creative iconographic visualizations.

76. J. C. Marler, "Proclus on Causal Reasoning: I Alcibiades and the Doctrine of Anamnesis".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 11, Spring 1993, p. 33.

Only he who already knows Ra in his innermost heart is prevented from entering the place of annihilation: instead he hears Ra's voice in the Netherworld, sees the animating divine light, ties the golden rope in the noetic barque, and is transformed into an excellent *akhu*. However, the main alchemical transformation of the soul, albeit based on her purity and already acquired knowledge, in most of cases occurs within the macrocosmic cycle of solar journey (into which the microcosmic cycle of earthly life is integrated) after one's physical death.

Both initiations involve 'two ways', that of gnosis and that of praxis, as it is revealed in the *Book of Amduat* and the *Book of Gates*, analogous to *philosophia* and *hierourgia* respectively.

The two need not be mutually exclusive. The ultimate end would be to become 'the likeness of the great god himself.'⁷⁷

In the *Book of Two Ways* of the Middle Kingdom, two zigzag paths are depicted that form a kind of map for the deceased (or the initiate of Thoth). Thoth, equated to the 'Great Name who made his light', 'the Eye of Horus, excellent in the night, which makes flame with its beauty' (*CT* 1053), leads the initiate to the house of Maat. Among the destinations of the deceased gnostic in the *Book of Two Ways*, as L.H. Lesko observes, are not only the Field of Reeds (or Offerings, *hetep*), but also the palace of Osiris and the solar barque of Ra.⁷⁸ The transformed initiate as Ra (by virtue of being united with the divine *Nous*) rides in the solar barque in the companionship of Thoth, standing before Hu (the creative divine Word) and Sia (Perception, Wisdom).

Damascius maintains that the initiatory rites performed in the hereafter also are twofold: 1) those which purify the pneumatic vehicle (*peri ton pneumatikon chitona*), as rites here below purify the shell-like (*peri ton ostreinon*) body; 2) those which purify the luminous, solar vehicle (*peri ton augoeide*):

77. Edward F. Wente, "Mysticism in Pharaonic Egypt?"—*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1982, p. 178.

78. Leonard H. Lesko, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Two Ways*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 6.

In other words, the way upward through initiation has three degrees, as the way through philosophy also has: the philosopher's way to perfection takes three thousand years, as it is said in the *Phaedrus* (249a3–5), the number one-thousand representing a full life and a complete period. Therefore the "uninitiated" (*atelestos*), because farthest remote from his destination, "lies in slime", both here and even more hereafter, where his place is in the "dregs of creation" (*en gar te trugi tes geneseos*), Tartarus itself. Of course the text (*ho logos*) mentions only the extremes, but there is also a wide range of intermediate states. The way by which philosophy leads us upwards can be thought of in analogous terms, though the communion achieved through them is not perfect nor equal to the mystic union (*kata ten aporrheton henosin poiountai ten sunaphen*). If it is true that a man who pursues philosophy without eagerness will not have the benefit of its results, it is no less true that a man who follows the way of initiation (*telestike*) without total commitment will not reap its fruits (*In Phaed.* 1.168.7–16)

Damascius complains that those who are lifted to the upper Earth (depicted in Plato's *Phaedo* as a *sphaira* made of an ether-like substance and containing, like the Osirian Field of Reeds, long-lived pneumatic bodies) are not always seekers for wisdom, that is, they are not eager to 'philosophize' (*ou pantes philosophousin*). This means that they do not seek for the final release and union with Ra, the divine Intellect, being content instead with the paradisaal existence within the upper regions of *anima mundi* and its imaginal abodes, analogous to the '*alam al-khayal*' in the Ishraqi and Sufi mysticism. These inhabitants of the Osirian paradise are carried up by Justice, because they led a life of habitual virtue without philosophy (*In Phaed.* 1.529.1–5).

Hence, the true philosopher, like the Upanishadic sage, is not content with an ancestral way (*pitryana*), but rather pursues a divine way (*devayana*), and seeks to become aware of his imperishable solar self-identity, his noetic Atum-Ra-nature in union with the supreme Seer who emerges from the ineffable depths of Nun, the boundless Good of Platonic theology.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND RETURN
TO ONE'S INNERMOST SELF

For Proclus and other Neoplatonists, the knowledge of ourselves (*he heauton gnosis*) is the beginning (*arche*) of all philosophy, based on *anamnesis*, or recollection, understood as an ordering of knowledge toward the causes of human nature—that is, a reversion (*epistrophe*) and withdrawal from unlikeness to likeness, from image to its archetype, from diversity to unity. The concept of *epistrophe pros heauton* as return to one's innermost self-identity may be regarded as concentration at the level of intellect.

Nous is identical with the Forms and knows itself by knowing them, though this divine self-knowledge is the knowledge of noetic being, 'not the knowledge of a mysterious private self.'⁷⁹

For Neoplatonists, whatever is self-reflective has an existence separable (*choristen ousian*) from the body. Through self-reflectivity the soul 'philosophizes'—that is, she realizes her immortal essence, following the exhortation of the Delphic Apollo. Though the Delphic *gnothi seauton* may be interpreted and understood as meaning 'know yourself as a man and not a god' by those uninitiated who, like A.D. Nock, are content to indulge in their own concepts of life,⁸⁰ the realization of one's mortality (in the sense of the Sufi *fana*, namely, 'annihilation', the Plotinian 'putting off' of everything) paradoxically reveals one's subsistence in the reaffirmed divine *eidōs* (the Sufi *baqa*).

As Hermeias of Alexandria, the disciple of Syrianus says, commenting Plato's passage (*Phaedrus* 229c–230a), it is clear that he who knows himself knows everything (*delon gar hoti ho heauton gnous ta panta oiden: In Phaedr* 31.15c). Philoponus even maintains that when the philosopher turns to himself and studies the nature

79. Lloyd P. Gerson, *Επιστροφή προς εαυτόν*: "History and Meaning"—*Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica Medievale: An International Journal on the Philosophical Tradition from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages*, vol. viii, 1997, p. 16.

80. Arthur Darby Nock, "Notes on Ruler-Cult I–IV"—*Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, vol. I, Selected and edited, with an Introduction, Bibliography of Nock's writings and indexes, by Zeph Stewart, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 145.

of the soul he is being active in a purificatory mode, *kathartikos energei*.⁸¹ According to L. P. Gerson:

Self-knowledge is knowledge of what is above because in general the effect is contained within the cause and in knowing the latter one must know the former.⁸²

This 'return to one's innermost self' means traveling on the path of purification and discerning the truth in oneself through recollection awakened either by prayers, rites, and initiations (*teletai*) or by philosophical exercises understood as the science of dialectic. In the context of discursive dialectic, *anamnesis* means unification of cause and effect, a self-knowledge according to the reversion of man upon himself.⁸³ In the realm of metaphysics and theological myth, the sequence of dialectical reasoning depicts the release of the 'imprisoned' divinity, or rather its projective manifestation (*ba*) which was once a god (*neter*) among the other gods (divine archetypes, noeric intellects, spiritual lights, *akhu*), now descended into a body. However, being purified and reborn as a pharaoh (*anthropos teleios*, the paradigm of perfect *philosophos*, lover of Maat), means being ready to return to the company of the gods in Heaven, as depicted in Plato's *Phaedrus* and in countless Egyptian texts.

This reversion towards our intelligible causes, first through discursive *episteme* and then through non-discursive self-knowledge, is accomplished by the elevating power of Athena, a 'lover of war and wisdom', who establishes us in the 'harbor of the Father' (*to hormo tou patros*: Proclus *In Crat.* CLXXXV, p. 113.2)—that is, in the divine *Nous*, the noetic plenitude of Atum-Ra. These purificatory and 'intellect-awakening rites' (*egersinoōisi teletesi*) lead up to wisdom (*sophia*), the final goal of philosophy. The ascent itself is an impossible task without the providential care and help provided by Atum's own intelligible rays, his *bau*-like powers, 'the leaders to bright-shining wisdom' (*sophies erilampeos hegemonēs*) who 'bring to light

81. Henry J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity. Interpretations of the De anima*, London: Duckworth, 1996, p. 4.

82. Lloyd P. Gerson, *ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

83. J. C. Marler, *ibid.*, p. 44.

the rites and initiations of the holy myths' (*orgia kai teletas hieron anaphainete muthon*), as Proclus sings in his fourth hymn.⁸⁴

This position of the particular soul (*ba*), viewed as an image (*tut*) of the luminous divine *Ba*, means that 'all processions and all conversions are accomplished through likeness' (*dia ten tes homoiotetos aitian*: Proclus *Plat. Theol.* v1.3.17.1–22). Since only the divine *Nous*, the miraculous Eye of Heka ('one whom the Sole Lord made before two things had developed... when He sent his Sole Eye': *Coffin Texts* 261), is capable of contemplating its own noetic Forms, it is necessary to attain pure unification with the divine *Nous* and its intelligible-intellective totality.

Nous in us (the microcosmic *ba* of Ra-intelligence, as an *imago dei*, reflected in the mirror of one's scarab-like heart) 'ascends' to his father Atum 'on the road of the followers of Ra' in order to be taken into His embrace, to 'moor' the soul in the Father of the universe, the Lord of All (*neb tem*, that is, Atum), who is therefore regarded by Proclus as 'the paternal harbor' (*ho patrikos hormos*). As P.M. Van der Berg remarks:

This is what Proclus means when he says that our light is linked with a light that is more beautiful, more noeric and simpler than the light of *episteme*.⁸⁵

Through *anamnesis*, the soul (transformed into *akh*, luminous intellect) realizes one single bond of friendship (*philia*) which embraces the totality of manifestations (the *kheperu* of Atum-Ra, himself likened to the golden noetic Scarab, Khepera or Khepri), 'effecting this bond', as Iamblichus says, 'through an ineffable process of communion', (*ton sundesmon touton dia tinos arrhetou koinonias*: *De myster.* 211.12–13).

Being 'dead' and detached from her myth-like life story, like Hercules is detached from his *eidolon*, the lower image, himself (*autos*)

84. Robert M. Van den Berg, "Towards the Paternal Harbour: Proclean Theurgy and the Contemplation of the Forms".—*Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, Leuven: University Press, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000, p.434.

85. Robert M. Van der Berg, *ibid.*, p.428.

rejoicing in abundance with the immortal gods (*Odyssey* XI. 601–604), the soul is able to recollect her identity as a god. In a sense, however, this is not her identity at all, if she is not separated from the lower soul, from the impure psychic residues, and translated to the solar barque of Ra, to the Plotinian *Nous*, where every divine intelligence is rapt in eternal contemplation of the Father's Face and has no earthly memories.

The soul-intellect is integrated into the glory of *pantheos* which contains all gods. It thereby contains the entire universe in its archetypal unity, like the Lord of All (*neb tem*), the One Existent (*hen on*), to put it in Neoplatonic terms. Atum, regarded as Heka (miraculous power of creation, the supreme Magic), from His own mouth irradiates all that exists (*netet un*), producing 'repeated millions'. According to this point of view, the entire multi-leveled creation is a theophany, Atum's self-disclosure, through the miraculous force of Heka which finally brings all manifestations (*kheperu*) back to their ultimate source. As Th. McEvelley says:

The Orphics held that release is obtained through recollection of one's own god-nature, and Plato's doctrine of recollection implies that for him this means that one must, in effect, become omniscient. In Platonic passages which preserve the Orphic strain it is said (as it is so often said in the Upanishads) that the knowledge in question is non-discursive and cannot be communicated by words. As in India, ethical emphasis is on loss of the ordinary desire habits. In the *Cratylus* (493), speaking in Orphic terms, Plato says that it is desire which turns the soul 'upside down' for its downward plunge into matter; it is the soul's forgetful desire which keeps it embodied, and this desire must be corrected by recollection of its true nature. . . .⁸⁶

86. Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*, New York: Allworth Press, 2002, p.101.

THE RECOVERED UNITY OF DIONYSUS IN OURSELVES

According to Damascius, the one who practice philosophy in the right way (*philosophountes orthos*), perfects the God that is within him (*ton en heauto theon teleioi*: *In Phaed.* 1.30.3). L.G. Westerink, however, argues that *ton en heauto theon* is not to be understood that the human soul could be called God in the strict sense, that is, a divine henad, since the 'one of the soul' is only a 'one-like' faculty which enables us to know the divine:

The human soul shares in the divine only through the God to whose 'retinue' it belongs, and only in this restricted sense can Damascius speak of the 'Dionysus' in ourselves.⁸⁷

However, following the Orphic myth which is the central metaphysical axis of all Platonic theology and dialectic, Damascius equates the Titanic mode of life (*he titanike zoë*) with the irrational mode, by which rational life, that is, the Dionysus (or Osiris) in ourselves is torn asunder:

While in this condition, we are Titans, but when we recover that lost unity, we become Dionysus and we attain what can be truly called completeness (*In Phaed.* 1.9.6–8).

This Osirian paradigm stands as the chief model for all Platonic logic and dialectic, following the central Orphic doctrine of an esoteric monism, namely, that 'all things are born from the One and all things are resolved back into it.'⁸⁸ The One's light is 'as it were' (*hospes*) broken into fragments by *Nous*, according to Plotinus, thus producing the multiple noetic unities which are the Forms and contemplative noetic intellects, constituting the radiant and luminous totality of *kosmos noetos*, likened to a living *sphaira*, 'to a globe radiant with faces all living' (*Enn.* vi.7.15.24ff). This radiant and living globe is equivalent to the noetic Heliopolis, the place of dazzling illumination where the primordial Lotus emerges.

The articulated *archetypus mundus* may be depicted as the pure

87. *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, vol. 11: Damascius, p. 41.

88. Thomas McEvilley, *ibid.*, p. 27.

primordial Lotus, as the Isle (*iu*) of the Egg, or the Isle of Fire which contains Heka, namely, the hidden magical forces of all subsequent demiurgy. It is the solar *ben-ben*, the tomb-like stone of Heliopolis, and 'stone' or 'tomb' in this respect is the same as 'egg' in the Orphic cosmogony. *Ben-ben* emerges from the abyss of the ineffable One. This supreme pyramid-like Stone, on the top of which rests the Egyptian Phoenix, the *bennu* bird (the original *Logos*—and in Middle Kingdom terms, the *ba* of Osiris),⁸⁹ is both a symbol of eternal life and a prototype of the 'philosophical stone' in alchemy.

This Stone, or the High Sand, represents the supreme threshold (*akhet*) of intelligible light, symbolized by the pyramid (*akhet*) here below and serving as the theurgic instrument for the king's immortalization. For this reason, the 'road of philosophy' and the 'avenue to salvation' in Egypt are cast in stone. Stone stands for the noetic fire, stability, and immortality. Inside the stony *akhet*, the images of contained noetic Forms are made visible. They are hieroglyphs (*medu neter*), eternalized as the ritually 'animated' inscriptions, namely, the *Pyramid Texts*. J. Assmann explains:

The central topic of these texts is the idea of ascent to heaven. Their recitation and the accompanying rites aided the king in his ascent to heaven and incorporation in the circuit of the sun. The Egyptian word for this ritual function, like the word *akhet*, derives from the root meaning 'blaze, be radiant'; it is the causative form that signifies 'to make into a spirit of light'. This function of the Pyramid Texts replicate[s] the architectural form of the pyramids, which are themselves the symbolic realization of the king's ascent to heaven and inclusion within the circuit of the sun.⁹⁰

The soul's return to this shining noetic 'barque' is not a temporal event in one's personal history of life: when consciousness returns to the stage of pure intellection (*noesis*), simplification (*haplosis*),

89. R.T. Rundle-Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p. 246.

90. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, tr. Andrew Jenkins, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, pp. 58–59.

presence (*parousia*), and union (*henosis*), where 'the two become one' (*ta duo hen ginetai*), it is no longer 'soul', no longer 'man', but rather the divine *Nous* itself. P. Mamo rightly argues that since 'soul', for Plotinus, is a label for a variety of psychic and intellectual activities, not for a stable and permanent nature, neither the human soul, much less 'this ordinary man, this pitiful fragment of the cosmos' can ever be called 'God'. This means that

the individuality of the soul comes close to being an illusion, an addition of non-being, clearly something to be overcome before a higher stage in the expansion towards totality (*pas*) can be reached.⁹¹

Within the multi-dimensional hierarchy of theophanies, inside the differentiated body of Ptah (to say it in accordance with the Egyptian Ramesside concept of divine transcendence and immanence, the declaration that 'All is One'), Dionysus is both the cause of individual life and the cause of deliverance. He appoints the term of the imprisonment for

as long as it is better for embodied souls to be under restraint, in view of the final goal, which is deliverance by Dionysus (Damascius *In Phaed.* 1.12.1–3).

The final goal for the contemplative philosopher is to remember and rediscover Dionysus in himself, the Monad united with the superior principles. Through this monadic purity one hopes to touch the purity of the transcendent One, of the unspeakable and hidden Amun, *deus ineffabilis*. The supreme Amun of the late Theban theology surpasses all human and divine knowledge, veiling himself even before the gods, so that his essence is not known. This ineffable One, however, 'makes himself into millions', thus playing the dialectical game of unity and diversity. According to J. Assmann:

This god transcended the world not only with respect to the mysterious hiddenness of his 'ba-ness', in which no name could

91. Plato Mamo, "Is Plotinian Mysticism Monistic?"—*The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris, Norfolk: ISNS, Old Dominion University, 1976, p. 210.

name him and no representation could depict him, but also with respect to the human heart, which was filled with him. He was the hidden god who 'came from afar' yet was always present to the individual in the omniscience and omnipotence of his all-encompassing essence. He was not only the cosmos—in Egyptian, the totality of the 'millions', and also *neheh* and *djet*, 'plenitude of time' and 'unalterable duration' into which he unfolded himself—but also history.⁹²

Ultimately, the searcher for God and lover of Wisdom is God himself, secretly involved both into 1) a self-disclosure (which actually appears as a magical self-veiling), creative irradiation, manifestation, descent of the soul, and 2) reintegration, redemption, deconstructive unveiling, liberation. As Damascius relates:

When Dionysus had projected his reflection into the mirror, he followed it and was thus scattered over the universe. Apollo gathers him and brings him back to heaven, for he is the purifying God and truly the savior of Dionysus (*kathartikos on theos kai tou Dionusou soter hos alethos*: *In Phaed.* 1.129.1–4).

However, the soul is never united with the gods as an individual: through awareness and recollection it moves from particularity to universality, from plurality to unity, and, strictly speaking, this is not the individual's journey but the journey of Dionysus, the cosmic drama of Osiris, imitated at all levels of being.

PHILOSOPHICAL MUMMIFICATION INSIDE THE COSMIC TOMB

The Egyptian tomb is a temple of Osiris, inside of which the mummy (*sah*) functions as a symbol of Osiris, as his restored and visible *eidos*, the re-collected and healed Eye of Horus. In this sense, mummification is a sort of initiation and 'Osirification', making one's *imago* cultically accessible and mythically valid. As R. Bjerre

92. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 241–242.

Finnestad pointed out:

The mummification is a divinization, a transmutation of the human body to a god's body. From a religious point of view the mummification is no conservation of the human body but rather the opposite: the mummification is a ritual transformation of the human and mortal to the divine and eternal.⁹³

The gathering of the Osirian *membra disiecta* is equivalent to transformation, as if collecting the scattered elements of one's being into the single text which establishes a community with the gods. Through the binding power of symbols (themselves regarded like *bau* of the gods, like the Neoplatonic *sunthemata*) the parts of the *sah*-body are identified with different deities, limb by limb, thereby asserting that no limb of the deceased is without its god (*neter*): he is entirely a god. With the help of symbolic forms, related to *eros* and *logos*, love and theurgic speech, what was torn apart is gathered together again, as in the process of philosophical dialectic.

The eidetic completion and perfection (*neferu*) necessarily imply life (*ankh*), beauty, imperishability, virtue, moral righteousness and ability to conform to the norms of truth and to the noetic standard, *maat*. Through the transfiguring power of *medu neter*—'divine language', that is, written and animated hieroglyphs which are not to be 'read' but rather 'recited' (like the *Qur'an*)—the initiate is transformed into an *akh*, since he cannot approach the gods as a man. The deceased in the Duat (which is the hidden dimension of bodies, 'located' here and now) recollects those *logoi* which construct his unitary divine identity ('I recollect what I have forgotten'), as in the Orphic mysteries where the initiate (or *philosophos*) is to recollect what he has learned about the afterlife through the mysteries or during his philosophical training.

The Egyptian word *sakhu* ('making an *akh*') indicates the spiritual transformations produced by theurgic recitations, liturgies, and a sort of anagogic hermeneutics (interpretation itself being an esoteric rite), which are 'demonstrations of the power of Ra' of the

93. R. Bjerre Finnestad, "The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts".—*Numen*, vol. xxv, 2, p.128.

solar intelligence. The sacred texts themselves possess a transfiguring and awakening *dunamis*, but the basic principle of these rites of separation, purification, recollection, interpretation, and unification (so as to restore the miraculous Eye) is the theurgic principle. Accordingly, the cultic actions, recitations, and initiations

are not carried out in the sense of a communication between man and god, but as the enacting of a drama in the divine world, between god and gods. . . . When the priest spoke, one god spoke to another, and the words manifested their transforming, performative, theurgic power, that is, their power to create divine presence.⁹⁴

Knowledge of this mystery was the royal path to immortality, the royal tombs being repositories of the 'philosophical knowledge' that brought deliverance. As J. Assmann remarks, 'philosophy and practice were mutually dependent',⁹⁵ since one's tomb is built through remembrance, virtue, and righteousness, the building process itself being equivalent to the realization of truth (*maat*). This means that, in a strict sense, neither descent, nor ascent of the soul (*ba*) are her own activities but rather the ritual-like activities (*energeiai*) of the One, accomplished through the plurality of the gods, 'who reveal themselves in the bodily appearance of souls', as G. Shaw says,⁹⁶ and in the orderly arrangements of the cosmic state which includes landscapes and all meaningful sacred phenomena.

Therefore the sharp distinction between 'soul' (the whole complicated psychic spectrum of *ka*, *ba*, and *akh*) and 'body' (both *khat* and *sah*) seems to be a grave simplification. In addition, both the heart (*ib*, or *ab*, the center of one's intelligence and feelings) and the name (*ren*, which reveals a person's true nature or essence) may be related to the overwhelming realm of 'soul' and its individualized ('named') articulations. How this ambiguous 'soul' corresponds

94. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 245–246.

95. Jan Assmann, *ibid.*, p. 38.

96. Gregory Shaw, "The Mortality and Anonymity of the Iamblichean Soul".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8: Iamblichus: the Philosopher, The University of Iowa, 1997, p.180.

with one's 'shadow' (*shuyt*) is unclear. As L. Bell mysteriously pointed out:

The shade was both an emanation from a deity and a reflection of divine power (light); it was drawn as a silhouette of the body, and it symbolized divinity's indwelling of an object or being (roughly speaking, incarnation).⁹⁷

In Egypt, the cosmic life itself was understood as the constant interaction of Osiris and Ra, of corpse-like *hupodoche* and active light-like *eidōs*, thus joining, uniting, and knotting together the different divine limbs, or rather the countless *bau* of the One. As Olympiodorus says:

Because the soul is a 'sacred image (*agalma*) that takes all forms', since it possesses the principles of all that is (*panton ton onton*), it can be aroused by sensible things to recollection of the principles that it has within itself and produce them: having observed a thing in this world, the soul realizes its absolute essence (*In Phaed.* 11.7.1–6).

Even for Plotinus, *psuche* and *soma* tend to have a relative meaning with respect to each other, because the physical universe is immersed within the great domain of *anima mundi* (or the hypostasis of divine *Psuche*, which is an image of *Nous*, active in the sense-perceived universe and animating its parts),⁹⁸ so that all bodies, as final external crystallizations of psychic activities, are already placed in the Duat, inside the cosmic body of Nut, or Osiris. As H. Oosthout argues:

When one tries to determine what 'body' means in its strictest sense—what properties a body can have that should not be ascribed to the activity of the soul—then one is left with almost

97. Lanny Bell, "The New Kingdom 'Divine' Temple: The Example of Luxor"—*Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron A. Shafer, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 130.

98. Hilary Armstrong, "Aristotle in Plotinus: The Continuity and Discontinuity of Psyche and Nous"—*Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, ed. Henry Blumenthal and Howard Robinson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 119.

nothing. 'Bodies' that are completely without a 'soul', and that do not partake in any *energeia* whatsoever, are reduced to sheer indeterminacy.⁹⁹

PLATONIC DIALECTIC: THE SCIENCE OF PURIFICATION AND RESTORATION OF UNITY

Both Plato and Plotinus identify *dialektike*, which imitates the Osirian dismemberment and reintegration, as the proper method of philosophy for attainment of wisdom and truth through death (called supernatural, *huperhues*, death by Damascius, since the lower human 'soul' must die anyway) in order to recognize the greater life that this 'death' sustains.

The necessary separation from the mortal body does not mean that philosophy despises body as such which, in fact, constitutes an image of the higher realities, though the puppet-like body is turned into a living *agalma* only by the binding and animating power of 'soul' and 'intellect', of *ba* and *akh* respectively. Therefore the Egyptian mummy, as a symbolic form or hieroglyph, makes visible one's *eidōs*, the image of regained integrity and identity in the 'golden' realm of archetypes.

Hence, justification through the alchemical transformation in the Duat (spiritually accessible here and now) is like a 'noetic mummification', since the word for the eidetic Osirian body, that is, for mummy, *sah*, also means 'noble', 'worthy', 'belonging to the realm of light'. The process of mummification is analogous to dialectic which cannot create realities but makes them evident for the human *nous* to contemplate. The dialectician rediscovers his true self which means a return to Intellect, the restoration of the damaged Eye of Horus through the healing wisdom of Thoth.

Therefore the purpose of dialectic is not *techne* (art) but *sophia* (wisdom): its aim is not production but the realization of noetic wholeness, and this recreative return may be described as a solar

99. Henri Oosthout, *Modes of Knowledge and the Transcendental. An Introduction to Plotinus Ennead 5.3 (49) with a Commentary and Translation*, Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner, 1991, p. 48.

rebirth. This attainment of intellectual and spiritual perfection through *noesis* is modeled on the divine contemplation of *Nous* itself, for itself. Hence, as J.P. Anton remarks, the dialectician gains access to the invisible realm of *Nous* and *ta noeta*, the intelligible realities, since dialectic's domain is Intellect, not the One.¹⁰⁰

Olympiodorus explains the difference between the contemplative (theoric, rational) philosophy and theurgy by saying that our soul is at first illuminated by *Nous* and its actions are directed by the contemplative virtues (and dialectic), but afterwards it becomes identical with the source of illumination (*ellampsis*) and acts in union with the One by the paradigmatic virtues. Therefore:

The object of philosophy is to make us *nous* (*philosophias men ergon nous hemas poietai*), that of theurgy to unite us with the noetic principles (*theourgias de henosai hemas tois noetois*) and conform our activity to the paradigms (*In Phaed.* 8.2.19–20).

Thus dialectic ensures the completion of the preparatory work, reintegration, and ascent needed to make transition from the wholeness of *Nous* to the ineffable transcendence of the One, that is, from the solar Atum-Ra to the primordial Flood, Nun (or the hidden Amun, *deus absconditus et ineffabilis*). But dialectic, like the 'magic mourning', awakens and accomplishes reintegration of the 'justified' and 'vindicated' Osirian limbs after their division (*diaire-sis*), lifting up the synthesizing intellectual *djed*-pillar. Eventually it provides transition from the realm of Osiris to that of Ra. In this sense, dialectic is 'the method of attaining assimilation to God (*homoiosis theo*) through consciousness of the ultimate One-in-the-many, prior to the return to the One itself.'¹⁰¹

Understood in this sense, dialectic is not the art of refutation in the Aristotelian manner, but the science (*episteme*) of purification (*katharsis*), which transcends the domain of *dianoia* and *logismos*, the discursive reasoning, being aimed at the full grasp of the unity of *mundus intelligibilis*. Since it is the most valuable part of philosophy,

100. John P. Anton, "Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Conception of Dialectic".—*Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, fall 1992, pp. 15–16.

101. John P. Anton, *ibid.*, p. 13.

dialectic is sometimes equated with the purest part of *nous* which stands for that wisdom which is concerned with real being. Philosophy as a whole covers the skills of logic and the investigation of the entire cosmic order, but through the science of Platonic dialectic it also prepares the 'lover of wisdom' to contemplate *nous* as unity and causes the soul to turn to itself. Consequently, the potentiality of human heart-intellect, as an *imago dei*, is translated into the actuality of divine *Nous*.

Dialectic, itself regarded as a gift of the gods (*dedosthai para theon*: Damascius *In Phileb.* 56), consists of division (*diairetike*), analysis (*analutike*), definition (*horistike*), and deduction (*apodeiktike*, *sullogistike*). The Platonic dialectic is based on the model of sacrifice (albeit interiorized and abstracted) which imitates the traditional cosmogony. Therefore the method of division (tantamount to dismemberment of Osiris, Dionysus, or the Vedic Purusha) is related to demiurgy, manifestation, ontological pluralization, and that of analysis to reversion, return, restoration of unity. Definition and deduction are intermediate, falling under the species of both division and analysis (or collection, *sunagoge*). Deduction produces effects from causes (thus representing the path of manifestation) and definition reduces a plurality of elements to a complex unity (thus standing for reversion, spiritual ascent).

Damascius, in this respect following the Pythagoreans rather than Plato's *Protagoras*, associates Prometheus with procession (*proodos*) and Epimetheus with reversion (*epistrophe*). The latter name, Epimetheus, is explained by Iamblichus as *epistrophe eis to noeton*, return to the noetic reality:

Prometheus reveals the ways in which the gods proceed down into nature, Epimetheus the modes of their reversion to the intelligible realm. Iamblichus is stated to have said so on the authority of Pythagoras (*Damascius In Phileb.* 57).

PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF BECOMING LIKE GOD

This dialectical science of measurement and elevation, leading to the tower of Kronos, the disembodied realm of pure *Nous*, is the sacred way (*hodos*) traveled by *philosophos* (lover of wisdom) who

stands in sharp contrast to *philodoxos* (lover of opinion).¹⁰² Understood in this way, philosophy is not a case of mental gymnastics or a training in oratory and social management (as Isocrates supposes), but the process of becoming like God, in accord to Plato's axiomatic advice to 'flee this world and become like God as much as one can' (*phuge de homoiosis theo kata to dunaton: Theaet.* 176.6). Therefore W.E. Helleman says:

As Socrates contrasts the evils which adhere to our mortal nature with the goodness characteristic of that other world where the gods dwell, *en theois . . . ekeise*, flight from this world is as it were equated with the process of becoming as much as possible like the divine.¹⁰³

To realize this goal (*telos*) is to achieve the perfect wisdom (*sophia*) by cultivating that which is highest in the soul and already akin to the divine. It means to partake of or participate in (*metechein*) the immortal divine nature, exercising one's intellectual capacities by focusing on that which is eternal and unchanging. For Olympiodorus, the life beyond, in the realm of eternal noetic light, is to be called a temple (*hieron gar ho ekeise bios: In Phaed.* 1.3.9). Therefore the philosopher as imitator of God is on the way to this temple, on the way to the Father, being elevated to the temple by the gracious and death-bringing lightning of the Father, by his dialectico-erotic and telestic 'thunderbolt'. This is the fire of reversion, by which God reverts to Himself.

The process of becoming like God, linked to an ontological and epistemological reversion (*epistrophe*), covers the entire hierarchy of beings and their activities, culminating in the noetic unification (through the hieratic virtues, which belong to the godlike, *theoideas*, part of the soul) and mystical union (*henosis*). Arguing that for rational beings (*logikois*) the goal is the Good and for irrational beings (*alogoi*), pleasure (*In Phileb.* 258), Damascius equates philo-

102. Janet M. Atwill, *Rhetoric Reclaimed. Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, p.136.

103. Wendy E. Helleman, *Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God*, p.53.

sophy with the 'de-Titanizing' dialectical enterprise, moving from the irrational differentiation to the noetic completeness—to Osiris *Unun-nefer*, 'who exists in completion' or 'in perfect beauty':

Union (*he sunaphe*) is brought about by similarity (*homoiotetos*); therefore the wise (*ho sophos*) and good man, that is the philosopher, ennobled by virtue and knowledge, is united to the goodness and wisdom of the Gods. Goodness in the Gods is the activity (*energeia*) by which they provide for all things, wisdom that by which they know all things (*In Phaed.* 1. 40.1–4).

For Damascius, there are three kinds of hope: that of the crowd (*pandemos*), that of the philosopher (*philosophos*), and that of the theurgist (*hieratike: In Phaed.* 1.48.1–2). In this arrangement philosophy is given an intermediate place, like that of *eros* in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates is purified and united to the divine through the daimonic realm of philosophy, which is concerned with separation of soul from body, refutation (*ho elenchos*), and leaving behind the *regio dissimilitudinis* where the soul, fallen into forgetfulness, suffers exile and defilement. Proclus says:

Socrates looks toward the daimon and the daimon's forethought, and the daimon toward the god whose follower he is; Socrates is united to the divine (*sunaptetai to theio*) through the daimonic order, and he too exercises all his activity in accordance with God, since the daimon reveals to him the divine will (*In Alcib.* 159.6ff).

This daimonic and erotic philosophy is the rite of learning to die before one dies, accomplished through *anamnesis*, by which the soul is opened to union with its causes. This is like the 'loosening of the bond' (*luein ton desmon*) through which the dialectician can break the impasse, deal with pathlessness (*aporia*) and be united with the divine Beauty. The philosopher's soul alone recovers her wings, being ever initiated into the perfect mystery (*teleous aei tele-tas teleomenos: Plato Phaedr.* 249c).

THE ANCIENT LOGOS
AND ITS SACRAMENTAL FUNCTION

Since the standard definition of philosophy is *homoiosis gar theo he philosophia* (philosophy is assimilation to God), it seems that the Hellenic philosophy (or at least its dominating Pythagoreo-Platonic *hairesis*) is a late and 'modernized' version of that immemorial wisdom tradition which can be traced back not simply to the mythical theologies of ancient Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, but ultimately to the forgotten dreams and visions of the Stone (if not the Golden) Age, whose 'holy silence' is impenetrable to our modern consciousness.

Therefore Celsus, the Middle Platonist, speaks about the 'ancient logos' which is 'true wisdom' (*alethes logos*), according to J.C.M. Van Widen's translation.¹⁰⁴ This ancient wisdom 'has existed from the beginning and has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men' (Origen *Contra Celsum*. 1.14), namely, Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, Persians, Odrysians, Samothracians, and Eleusinians. Evidently, both philosophy and the mysteries constitute this 'true logos' which modern commentators would rather describe as *muthos*.

However, if philosophy is defined as knowledge of the being (*episteme tou ontos*) or knowledge of the truth, sent down to men in order to bring them to God, then 'myth' may be regarded simply as a sort of symbolic *logos* whose sacramental function is to deal with transcendence. So understood, philosophy itself is a myth of liberation, of the ascending solar path for those who hope to become rational 'rulers', inward 'kings', to be assimilated to the demiurgic *Nous*, or God. As W.E. Helleman remarks:

Just as the one universal mind rules the entire world, so also the human mind functions like a ruler (*hegemon*), and god (*theos*) within man. It is in using this divine faculty, the *nous*, that man is able to pursue his love of wisdom and contemplate

104. J.C.M. Van Winden, "True Philosophy—Ancient Philosophy"—ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ 'Chercheurs de sagesse'. *Hommage a Jean Pepin*, ed. Marie-Odile Goulet-Caze et alii, Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1992, p. 198.

the heavens and the regions beyond, namely the intelligible cosmos and its patterns (*paradeigmata*) of all that is found in this world.¹⁰⁵

Philosophy's 'post-scriptum' accretions, additions, and prolongations, that is, the agnostic philosophical discourse of Western modernity, instead of pursuing *demiourgike sophia* and *alethes logos*, adhere to the charms of material objects and mental passions.

J.M. Rist's ironic and factual denial of the possibility of success in the life of the philosopher-king is symptomatic:

Plato's model for the action of the Guardians is that of the inspired lover. But the more cynical, or wise, may ask: how long will the strength of love endure?¹⁰⁶

As regards modern philosophical discourse, it has entirely forgotten, derided, misunderstood, and neglected philosophy's initial purpose, viewing its *telos* as a religious fancy that belongs to the realm of irrational and despotic.

The ultimately Egyptian and Phoenician-Assyrian lineage of the Greek philosophical discourse which partly emerged under the Persian rule, perhaps inspired by the intellectual culture of the Lydian court at Sardis and the so-called Egyptian 'Saite Renaissance',¹⁰⁷ hardly can be disputed, in spite of the possible objection that different traditions may express the same reality, even without any direct influence upon one another. In an attempt to reveal the very core of Mesopotamian culture (in the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid empires), S. Parpola argues:

As we have seen, Plato's teachings of the metaphysical world of ideas, of matter as the prison of the soul, and of the soul's divine origin, immortality and gradual ascent towards perfec-

105. W. E. Hellman, *Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God*, p. 57.

106. John M. Rist, *Plato Says That We Have Tripartite Souls. If He Is Right, What Can We Do About It?*—ΣΟΦΙΗΣ ΜΑΙΗΤΟΡΕΣ 'Chercheurs de sagesse', p. 123.

107. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, pp. 335–338.

tion, were also fundamental to the path of salvation encoded in the Assyrian sacred tree.¹⁰⁸

Orpheus, the mythical founder of philosophical initiations in the form of mysteries, 'brings together a host of older Eastern traditions, Akkadian, Hurrute-Hittite, and Egyptian most of all,' as W. Burkert observes.¹⁰⁹ Parmenides is partly dependent on the Egyptian and Orphic theological paradigms, and Plato paraphrases Orpheus everywhere, as Olympiodorus asserts:

Is it not evident, further, that Plato is adapting elements from the well-known Orphic myth (fr.211)? The myth tells how Dionysus is torn to pieces by the Titans and is made whole by Apollo; so 'assembling and gathering itself together' means passing from the Titanic life to the unitary (*henoeide*) life. And there is Kore, too, who has to descend into Hades, but is brought up again by Demeter to dwell in her ancient home, which accounts for the 'dwelling'. Plato, indeed, borrows from Orpheus everywhere (*parodei gar pantachou ta Orpheos*). In the sequel (*Phaed.* 69c8-d1), he even quotes a line by him (fr. 235): 'Many carry the thyrsus, few become Bacchus' (*polloi men narthekophoroi, pauroi de te Bakchoi*). Those who carry the thyrsus without becoming Bacchus are philosophers still involved in civic life, while the thyrsus-bearers and Bacchantes are those on the way to purification. This is why Dionysus, as we said already, is the cause both of life and of death: of death as the patron of prophecy, which excludes imagination. . . . (*In Phaed.* 7.10.3-15).

The late Hellenic Neoplatonists are aware that both the philosopher (who trains himself for death by means of dialectic, purification, and contemplation) and the theurgist are imitators of God, though sometimes they employ different methods in order to achieve the same or similar goals, even if theurgy may be regarded as

108. Simo Parpola, "The Mesopotamian Soul of Western Culture".—*Bulletin of Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 35, 2000, p. 34.

109. Walter Burkert, *Babylon. Memphis. Persepolis. Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 98.

transcending philosophy when the latter is understood as being merely *anthropine episteme*, a human science. For Proclus maintains that everything is to be saved and joined to the original causes, either through erotic madness (*dia tes erotikes manias*), through divine philosophy (*dia tes theias philosophias*), or again through theurgic power (*dia tes theourgikes dunameos*), which transcends human *episteme* (*Plat. Theol.* 1.25.112.25-113.10 Saffrey-Westerink). However, as A. Sheppard concludes, '*erotike mania*, *theia philosophia* and *theourgike dunamis* here really mean the same thing. They all refer to mystical union.'¹¹⁰

RIDDLES OF THE COSMIC MYTH

The arguments of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* may be divided into two categories: one mythical and Orphic (*muthikou kai Orphikou*), the other dialectical and philosophical (*dialektikou kai philosophou*), according to Olympiodorus (*In Phaed.* 1.1.5-6). The Orphic and mythical approach is viewed as being esoteric (*aporrhetos*), and the philosophical and dialectical as being demonstrative (*apodeiktikos*). However, this distinction is not that as between *logos* and *muthos*, when *logos* is viewed in the sense of 'true account' and *muthos* regarded as a 'childish fiction'. All mythical assertions belong to the category of *logos*, because they are expressed in human language and may be understood by reason and intellect, even if presented in riddles (*ainigmata*). Certain privileged myths are treated as *theioi logoi*, 'divine accounts'. According to the Derveni papyrus:

Orpheus did not mean to say in it (his poem) riddles that are contestable, but rather great things in riddles.¹¹¹

Philosophical dialectic, in most of cases, is a sort of hermeneutical enterprise which enjoys in wrestling with riddles and logical puzzles within an accepted *a priori* framework of the constructed and therefore 'mythical' world picture. In this sense, philosophy's

110. Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy".—*Classical Quarterly* 32, 1, 1982, p. 220.

111. Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol. Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 31.

goal, as Aristotle supposes, is the extraction of truth from common opinions.¹¹² As regards literary myths proper, Plutarch, in his address to Clea, a priestess of both Dionysus and Osiris, declares that one must not use the myths as if they were entirely factual, but using the reason that comes from philosophy, take what is fitting (*prosporon*) and in accord with truth (*kata ten homoioteta: De Iside et Osiride* 374c).

The entire manifested reality, or the *agalma*-like cosmos, may be regarded as a Myth, because its outer shell veils the inner realities and because myths themselves are divine (*theioi*), as Sallustius asserts, following Iamblichus in this respect:

Myths represent the active operations (*energeias*) of the gods. The universe itself can be called a myth (*exesti gar kai ton kosmon muthon eipein*), since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and intellects are concealed. Furthermore, to wish to teach all men the truth about the gods causes the foolish to despise, because they cannot learn, and the good to be slothful, whereas to conceal the truth by myths prevents the former from despising philosophy and compels the later to study it (*De diis*, III. 8–15).

The myth-like universe may be likened to the *kheperu*, the ontological emanations and developments of the primeval Golden Scarab, Khepera, equivalent to Atum's miraculous self-disclosure through Heka, divine creative Magic, called Heikton by Iamblichus (*proton mageuma*, the first act or product of magic: *De myster.* 263.4). This conception is analogous to the Hindu doctrine of Maya, which far from being simply deception may be equated with the divine wisdom or the supreme measure (*maat*), working both by 'magic' and by 'logic', that disclose the demiurgic energies.

The demiurgic *Logos* creates the universe of theophanies which is a wonder to behold, *thauma idesthai*, and which may be designated as a Myth in the deepest metaphysical and ontological sense. A similar eidetic understanding of *muthos* is maintained by A. Losev, to

112. John J. Cleary, "Working Through Puzzles with Aristotle".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 11, Spring 1993, p. 123.

whom the universal Myth is an ontological category on the noetic level, and to whom the Symbol is the outwardly-manifested face of the Myth.¹¹³

Why may the manifested universe be called both *muthos* and *logos*? Because the totality of creation, 'all things and all hieroglyphs', to use the terms of so-called Memphite theology, uttered by Thoth, by the Tongue of Ptah, is able to transform the thoughts of the Heart into spoken and written language, namely, the universe. J. Assmann, in this respect, observes:

If the distinction between a sphere of original Forms (Ideas) and a world of infinitely reproduced Images is a principle of Plato's philosophy, then the Egyptian division of creation expresses a primal, pretheoretical Platonism.¹¹⁴

Since myth is essentially an image of reality, of the noetic paradigms in the sequence of eidetic manifestation, any section of the Line in Plato's *Republic* (vi. 509d1–511e5) may be called a 'myth' in relation to the preceding one, according to L.G. Westerink.¹¹⁵ As Olympiodorus rather enigmatically explains:

The word *muthos* is applied to ratiocinative knowledge (*ten dia sullogismou gnosin*) inasmuch as it is attained by means of the middle term and is not a direct vision of reality, just as intellection (or thinking, *he noera*) could be called knowledge from images (*ex eikonon estin gnosis*) and is only a myth as compared to archetypal knowledge; and thus we see that the syllogistic method, of which the Peripatos is so proud, is called *muthos* by Plato (*In Phaed.* 10.3.2–6).

113. Oleg Bychkov, "Alexej Losev: A Neoplatonic View of the Dialectic of Absence and Presence in the Nature of Artistic Form".—*Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, part II, ed. R. Baine Harris, Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, p. 169. See A. Losev's writings in Russian, for example: *Bytije, imia, kosmos*, Moscow: Myslj, 1993.

114. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p. 354.

115. *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, vol. 1: Olympiodorus, p. 140.

PHILOSOPHY, MAGIC, AND LAUGHTER

Gazing at this myth-like manifested reality (*kheperu* in the Egyptian sense) marks the start of philosophy, that is, a striving for knowledge and a dialectical climbing from images to their noetic archetypes, to the divine Intellect, which is a limit and a standard of all things (*ta pragmata*). Philosophy (in whatever form it might be conceived) stands on the side of Horus, of the solar Ra, working to maintain cosmic order and restore the initial 'golden' purity. As Damascius has pointed out:

Philosophy invisibly weaves the soul together and unifies it, while ignorance undoes it and tears it apart openly, that is, in this world of becoming (*In Phaed.* 1.358.1–3).

Therefore the Apollonian philosophy dispels ignorance both by gnosis and by magic. Philosophical discourse (written text), in this respect, is analogous to the magic *pharmakon*, the *Ephesia grammata* incised on the cult statue or tablet and containing 'evil-averting spells' (*alexipharmaka*). It is remarkable that the healing charms and incantations (*epodai*), as well as *voces magicae* (mantric sequences of vowels), are regarded as magical *logoi*. These *logoi* serve both for earthly protection and for eternal salvation.¹¹⁶

This talismanic function is tacitly inherited by the philosophical text, also containing *logoi*, sometimes appearing 'meaningless' to the uninitiated, as for example the famous *Ephesia grammata*, the mystic letters allegedly incised on the statue of Artemis of Ephesus. *Logos* is the usual term for the spoken part of magical action, as F. Graf observes.¹¹⁷ The philosopher, in certain sense, resembles a crafty magician, who like the primal hunter roams after the realm of ideas and eats the still living flesh of his prey in the dialectical contest. Eventually, transcendence requires self-sacrifice and death.

P. Kingsley argues that 'those who know logic love to laugh,'

116. Roy Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets".—*Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone, Dirk Obbink, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 122.

117. Fritz Graf, "Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual".—*Magika Hiera*, p. 189.

because being an impossibility to our minds, logic has laws but no fixed rules: 'Rules exist to trap us, but logic exists to set us free.'¹¹⁸

Now we could add that those who know philosophy also love to laugh. Why? Because real knowledge means that we know nothing, and this nothingness (*oudeneia*) is both the initial silence and silence as *telos*, as the final goal of philosophy. This holy silence may be interrupted only by the holy laughter of the gods. But for those of us who are neither perfect, nor wise, the love of endlessly talking and arguing about what is philosophy is not simply a waste of time, in spite of the paradoxical truth that 'the more learned we are, the worse things become.'¹¹⁹

The pious folk, according to Platonists, live on the heights of the upper pneumatic Earth, provided by the fruits of that region, fruits intermediate in character between those here below and the heavenly ones which the Hesperides proffer to those who have come to the end of their journey' (Damascius, *In Phaed.* 1.530.2–4).

The journey to the solar noetic realm is accomplished by philosophy which follows, in this respect, the hieratic models of Orphico-Dionysian initiation and those of the ancient Egyptian cultic practices. Therefore philosophy is aimed at the noetic *apotheosis* and *apokatastasis*: those who are purified by philosophy live in the spiritual realm of *akhu*, the Plotinian *kosmos noetos*, without bodies and without either earthly memories or their previous Titanic identities. Those who are ready to die 'in religious silence' (*en euphemia teleutan*), as Pythagoras used to say, are completely purified and return to the hypercosmic realm (*eis tou huperkosmion topon*) without bodies (Damascius *In Phaed.* 1.551.4–5). For those who perceive the real measure of the human tragedy, this return constitutes the sole meaning of philosophy.

118. Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, p. 192.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

2

VOICES OF THE FIRE: ANCIENT THEURGY AND ITS TOOLS

It is a sacrilege not to preserve the immortality of the soul, raising it to the level of the holy and uniting it to the divine with bonds which cannot be broken or loosened, but by contrast to pull and drag downwards the divine which is within us, confining it to the earthly, sinful and Giant- or Titan-like prison.¹

Let us become fire, let us travel through fire. We have a free way to the ascent. The Father will guide us, unfolding the ways of fire; let us not flow with the lowly stream from forgetfulness.²

DEFINITIONS OF THEURGY IN ANTIQUITY

Contemporary Western scholars habitually repeat the standard assumption that the term *theourgia* was coined in the exotic circles of those misguided semi-Oriental (and, therefore, 'marginal') miracle-workers who imagined that the road to salvation lies not in the bright palace of 'reason' *a la* Sextus Empiricus, but in the pious hieratic rites. Consequently, on analogy with the term *theologia*, speaking of the divine things, they invented *theourgia*, namely, doing divine things, performing sacramental works.

The modern scholars affirm this rather artificial dichotomy too straightforwardly. They are, perhaps, unaware that rites also 'speak' and that they may include all kinds of *logoi*. For example, in ancient

1. Damascius *Phil.Hist.*19 Athanassiadi.

2. Proclus *De philosophia Chaldaica*, fr. 2.

Egyptian ritual, speech not only makes the archetypal realm of noetic realities manifest in the liturgical realm of visible symbolic tokens and actions, but also performatively accomplishes the theurgical transition and transposition of the cultic events into the divine realm, thereby establishing a relationship between the domain of noetic (*akhu*) Forms and the sequences of manifestation (*kheperu, bau*). In this hieratic context, the term *akhu* means 'radiant power', 'noetic light', 'solar intelligence', and is closely related to the conception of the eidetic and demiurgic name (*ran, or ren*). Only the gods (*neteru*) at the level of intelligible and intellective principles, iconographically depicted by the great Ennead (*pesedjet*), are able to use the 'radiant power of words' (*akhu tpyw-ra*) in their truly creative ontological sense. Therefore,

Sacred, radiantly powerful words report an otherworldly, divine sphere of meaning that is imposed on the reality of this world in a manner that explains and thus makes sense of it. Instead of supplying definitions, Egyptians would pronounce names, that is, the sacred and secret names of the things and actions that the priests had to know to exercise the radiant power of the words.³

We should wonder if the Greek term *theourgia* is not simply a rendering of some now forgotten Egyptian, Akkadian, or Aramaic term related to the complicated vocabulary of temple rites, festivals, and hermeneutical performances that follow the paradigms of cosmogony and serve as a vehicle of ascent conducted by the divine powers (*sekhemu, bau*) themselves. Accordingly, it would be incorrect to think that the Chaldean Platonists of Roman Syria, those who allegedly created and promoted this term *theourgia*, also invented the thing itself, that is, the tradition of hieratic arts and of their secret, theurgical understanding. Assuming the latter case, it would follow that this tradition, somewhat related to the solar metaphysics, royal cult, and reascension of the soul through the seven Babylonian planetary spheres (or through the branches and

3. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, p.92.

fruits of the Assyrian Sacred Tree) to the noetic Fire, is a dubious creation of those Chaldean philosophers who 'forged' (as modern positivists regard it) the so-called *Chaldean Oracles*, thereby forcing us to believe that the gods themselves, along with the luminous ghost of Plato, suddenly decided to reveal the final version of the Stoicized Middle Platonist metaphysics in the form of seductive 'manifestos of irrationalism'.

This is the ideological dogma established by E. R. Dodds and his countless predecessors. All of them feel an incredible pleasure in ridiculing the Ephesian theurgist Maximus and in mocking those who, instead of talking about the distant transcendent gods, allegedly 'create' them, following 'the superstitions of the time'.⁴ This almost scandalous 'creation of gods' through the methods provided by certain telestic science (*he telestike episteme*) is often deliberately misunderstood. For E. R. Dodds, it is an 'animation of magic statues in order to obtain oracles from them'.⁵ That sounds like a reinterpretation (employing 'magic' in a derogatory sense) of Proclus, who says that the telestic art, by the use of certain symbols (*dia tinon symbolon*), establishes on earth places fitted for oracles and statues of the gods (*kai chresteria kai agalmata theon hidrusthai epi ges: In Tim. III.155.18*).

Telestike (the term derived from the verb *telein*, to consecrate, to initiate, to make perfect) is not a kind of rustic sorcery (*goeteia*). Rather it is a means to share or participate in the creative energies of the gods by constructing and consecrating their material receptacles, their cultic vehicles, which then function as anagogic tokens, as *symbola* and *sunthemata*.

However, one should be careful not to fall into the trap of an improper one-sidedness when approaching the realm of ancient metaphysical concepts and related terms. The word 'theurgy' is not the term most frequently used by the ancient Neoplatonists when they discuss cosmological, soteriological or liturgical issues. As A. Louth openly states:

4. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 286.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

In Iamblichus, *theourgia* refers to the religious rituals—prayers, sacrifices, divinations—performed by the theurgist: it is one of a number of words—*theourgia*, *mustagogia*, *hiera hagisteia*, *threskeia*, *hieratike techne*, *theosophia*, *he theia episteme*—which have all more or less the same meaning and which are frequently simply translated *theurgy* by E. des Places. . . .⁶

Damascius often prefers the terms *hiera hagisteia*, *hierourgia* (hierurgy, holy work, cultic operation) instead, or speaks of 'theosophy which comes from the gods' (*Phil. Hist.* 46d) and of the ancient traditions (*ta archaia nomina*) which contain the rules of divine worship (*ibid.*, 42f). The Greek terms *hieratike* and *hieratike techne* (hieratic art, sacred method) are also rendered simply as 'theurgy' by the modern scholars.

For Damascius, *hieratike* is 'the worship of the gods' (*theon therapia*) which 'ties the ropes of heavenbound salvation' (*Phil. Hist.* 4a), that is, raises the soul to the noetic cosmos by means of the ropes of worship, as in the Vedic and ancient Egyptian hieratic rites or the anagogic recitations of the Qur'an. This *hieratike techne* is designated as the 'Egyptian philosophy' which deals with certain spiritual alchemy consisting in gnostic *paideia* as well as in transformation, elevation, and immortalization of the soul (the winged *ba* of the true philosopher or the initiate).

The return of our souls to God presupposes either a fusion with the divine (*theokrasia*), or a perfect union (*henosis panteles: ibid.*, 4a–c). This hieratic method of spiritual 'homecoming' is praised as the higher wisdom, namely, the Orphic and Chaldean lore which transcends philosophical common sense (*ten orphiken te kai chaldaiken ten hupseloteran sophian: ibid.*, 85a).

For the late Neoplatonists, theurgy (including all traditional liturgies, rites, and sacrifices which are ordained, revealed, and, in fact, performed by the gods themselves) is essential if the initiate priest is to attain the divine through the ineffable acts which transcend all

6. Andrew Louth, "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denys the Areopagite",—*The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 37, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 434.

intellection (*he ton ergon ton arrheton kai huper pasan noesin*: Iamblichus *De mysteriis* 96.43–14). Thus, a theurgic union with the gods is the accomplishment (*telesiourgia*) of the gods themselves acting through their sacramental tokens, *ta sunthemata*. The awakened divine symbols by themselves perform their holy work, thereby elevating the initiate to the gods whose ineffable power (*dunamis*) recognizes by itself its own images (*eikones*).

Dionysius the Areopagite borrows the term *theourgia* from Iamblichus and Proclus, but uses it not in the sense of religious rituals which have the purificatory, elevating, and unifying divine force. Now this term designates certain divine works or actions, such as the divine activity of Jesus Christ (*andrikes tou Iesou theourgias*: CH 181B). Dionysius the Areopagite also speaks of one's deification and *koinonia* (communion, participation) with God or an assimilation to God (CH 161 D 1–5) effected through participation in the sacraments. That means *henosis* (union) accomplished by partaking the most sacred symbols of the thearchic communion and of 'divine birth' achieved through the hermeneutical *anagoge* (ascent) and *epistrophe* (return to the Cause of All). However, as P.E. Rorem remarks,

the uplifting does not occur by virtue of rites and symbols by themselves but rather by their interpretation, in the upward movement through the perceptible to the intelligible.⁷

Arguing that theurgical action directed by the gods and aimed at *theourgike henosis*, theurgical union, has nothing to do with wonder-working (*thaumatourgia*), Iamblichus regards theurgy as the cultic working of the gods (*theon erga*) or as divine acts (*theia erga*) in the metaphysical and ontological sense, which reveal the hidden henadic foundation of all manifested sequences of being, thereby re-affirming or re-collecting the ultimate divine presence in everything. As G. Shaw observes:

That presence was ineffable, but what lay beyond man's intellectual grasp could nevertheless be entered and achieved

7. P.E. Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbolism within the Ps-Dionysian Synthesis*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984, p. 116.

through ritual action, which is why Iamblichus argued that theurgy transcended all intellectual endeavors.⁸

If regarded as a term designating divine actions performed at different levels of manifested reality (which itself is nothing but the multi-dimensional fabric of *theon erga*, disclosed following the noetic paradigms of procession and reversion, *proödos* and *epistrophe*), then theurgy cannot be viewed simply as a ritualistic appendix to Platonism, but must rather be seen as its innermost core and its hidden essence. Consequently, not only may the Neoplatonic-Chaldean hieratic mystagogy be designated as 'theurgy', but also all hierurgical procedures (liturgies, invocations, visualizations, contemplations, prayers, sacramental actions, textual investigations, interpretations of symbols) which involve the direct assistance of the superior classes of beings (angels and semi-mythic teachers) and which activate the self-revelatory illumination in one's re-ascend from the inferior to the prior. All of them may be regarded as 'theurgical'.

Hence the *theurgical*, as universal and divine, is the opposite of anything particular and individualistic, anything based on one's subjective whims and egocentric drives. Without the fundamental realization of our own nothingness (*sunaisthesis ten peri heauton oudeneias*: *De myster.* 47.13–14), no one can be saved, because in theurgical union gods are united only with gods, or rather 'the divine is literally united with itself' (*auto to theion pros heauto sunesti*: *ibid.*, 47.7–8). This should in no way be conceived as communication between the mortal man and the immortal divinity (as one person addressing another), but rather communication of the divine in us with the divine in the universe. According to Iamblichus:

It is plain, indeed, from the rites (*ergon*) themselves, that what we are speaking of just now is a method of salvation for the soul; for in the contemplation of the 'blessed visions' (*ta makaria theamata*) the soul exchanges one life for another and

8. Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus".—*Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion*, vol. xli, New York: Fordham University Press, 1985, p. 1.

exerts a different activity, and considers itself then to be no longer human—and quite rightly so: for often, having abandoned its own life, it has gained in exchange the most blessed activity of the gods. If, then, it is purification from passions and freedom from the toils of generation and unification with the divine first principle that the ascent through invocations procures for the priests (*henosin te pros ten theian archen he dia ton kleseon anodos parechei tois hiereusi*), how on earth one can attach the notion of passions to this process? (*De myster.* 41.9–42.1).

DESCENDING LIGHTS AND ANIMATED CULT IMAGES

The Egyptian temple rites, from which the Neoplatonic *hieratike* at least partly stems, may be called theurgical in the etymological sense of this word, because the Egyptian cult activity (itself staged as an interplay of divine masks) is based on a genuine encounter with the divine presence, with the immanent 'indwelling' of God's transcendent energies. The gods (*neteru*) do not literally dwell on earth in their cultic receptacles (statues, temples, human bodies, animals, plants), but rather install themselves there, thereby 'animating' images and symbols. A deity's *ba* (manifestation, noetic and life-giving power, descending 'soul') is to a degree united with the cult statues, processional barques, shrines, reliefs on the walls, sacred texts and the entire temple or the temple-like tomb.

The statue as a proper receptacle (*hupodoche*) for the divine irradiation is analogous to the purified human body of the royal person or of the 'dead' initiate, and the descent of a deity's *ba* resembles the approach of an active Platonic Form which informs the passive womb of matter and, consequently, establishes the manifested theatre of articulated and animated shapes. So the divine *ba* descends from the sky (or rather appears from the a-temporal inwardness, since theophanies *a priori* constitute all manifested reality) into his cult images (*sekhemu*) and the god's heart is united with these images.

Sekhem usually means 'power', but in this context it designates

sign or symbol of power, as well as image or sacred icon. As Iamblichus remarks, 'the light of the gods illuminates its subject transcendently' (*kai ton theon to phos ellampeï choristos: De myster.* 31.4), since even visible light (or the heliophany of Ra at the level of his shining Disk, *Aten*) proceeds throughout the visible cosmos:

On the same principle, then, the world as a whole, spatially divided as it is, brings about division throughout itself of the single, indivisible light of the gods (*to hen kai ameriston ton theon phos*). This light is one and the same in its entirety everywhere, is present indivisibly to all things that are capable of participating in it, and has filled everything with its perfect power; by virtue of its unlimited causal superiority it brings to completion all things within itself, and, while remaining everywhere united to itself, brings together extremities with starting points. It is, indeed, in imitation of it that the whole heaven and cosmos performs its circular revolution, is united with itself, and leads the elements round in their cyclic dance. . . . (*De myster.* 31.9–32.2).

When the animating *ba* comes from the sky and descends (*hai*) on his image (*sekhem*), this metaphysical action (or divine work, *ergon*) simply indicates the special ritualistic re-actualization, re-affirmation, and re-petition of the cosmogonic scenario at the level of both cult images and purified human bodies who need to be re-assembled by the unifying divine spirit. This accomplishment (*tele-siourgia*) is tantamount to the restoration of the Eye of Horus which is equated with 'offering' (*hetep*, or *hotep*), simultaneously defined as the harmonious reintegration of parts (parts of the scattered Osirian *eidos*, restored in accordance to the whole truth, *maat*), and as noetic satisfaction.

The cult statues presumably have two natures, one divine (when permeated by the *bau* of the gods, like the house of Ra is irradiated by his miraculous unifying rays) and one inanimate and material which must be consecrated in order to reveal the inner divine presence both in its perennial theophanic and its specialized cultic sense. Therefore J. Assmann says:

As creators of these statues, humans are reminded of their own divine origin, and by piously tending and worshiping them, they make the divine at home on earth.⁹

However, the daily rituals which consist in awakening, greeting, purifying, anointing, dressing, feeding, and worshiping the cult statue, as well as the process of sacrificial offerings (which are symbolically designated as the restored Eye of Horus and around which the ritual revolves), are not to be conceived 'as a communication between the human and the divine, but rather as an interaction between deities',¹⁰ that is, as a real divine *ergon*, the holy work performed by the gods and all superior classes of beings.

According to the late Neoplatonists, the gods (like the Egyptian *neteru*) are present immaterially in the material things, therefore *sunthemata* (the theurgic seats of elevating power) are regarded as receptacles for the invisible divine irradiations (*ellampseis*) involved in the cosmic liturgy of descent and ascent. Since the body is an integral part of demiurgic work, in its perfect primordial form serving as an image (*eikon*) of divine self-disclosure, the condition and quality of embodied matter indicate the soul's internal condition.

The human body as a fixed eidetic statue or as an iconographically established sequence of dynamic hieroglyphic script (analogous to a series of Tantric *mudras*) is an instrument of divine presence, because this presence may be either concealed, or revealed. Therefore *telestike* is not to be thought as inducing the presence of a god (or of his representative daimon) in the artificially constructed receptacle (*hupodoche*) only. The divine *ba* can permeate the human body as well, thereby confirming the latter's ability to participate in the superior principles. When such 'incarnation' becomes permanent, the human body itself is transformed and turned into the spiritual 'golden statue'.

The incantations (*epodai*) are also to be viewed as the anagogic *sunthemata* which function as a means of maintaining the providential link between the ineffable henadic essences and their symbolic

9. Jan Assmann, *ibid.*, p. 41.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

expressions, or between the noetic archetypes and their existential images, in order to complete the soul's divine measures and reveal its re-assembled immortal body (*sah*, which is symbolized by the Egyptian royal mummy). Since the body is an index (*deigma*) of the soul's capacity to receive a divine presence, separation from the lower somatic identifications and false identities requires us, as G. Shaw constantly argues,

to determine the appropriate measures for that soul to engage the powers bestowed upon it by the Demiurge, and then to accelerate its growth into those measures by means of theurgic rites.¹¹

It seems that the above mentioned measures are the ratios of the soul described in Plato's *Timaeus* (35b–36b; 43d–e). Therefore, through the correct performance of measured theurgic rites, the initiate imitates the activity of the Demiurge, conjoining parts to wholes and integrating the psychosomatic multiplicity into the presiding noetic unity.

FIGURES, NAMES, AND TOKENS OF THE DIVINE SPEECH

Arguing that as the soul's descent took place through many intermediary levels, so its ascent happens in an analogous manner, which includes dispensing with thinking through images, and dissolving 'the structure of life which it has compounded for itself'. Proclus compares *phantasia* (imagination) with

those Stymphalian birds which fly about within us, inasmuch as they present to us evils of form and shape, not being able at all to grasp the non-figurative and partless Form (*In Parm.* 1025).

The Platonic philosopher, like the bird-shaped *ba* of the Egyptian initiate, indeed must re-grow his wings in order to fly up to the stars (visible symbols of the eternal noetic archetypes) and, standing on the back of the ouroboric universe, as on the back of the Egyptian

11. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus' Solution to the Problem of Embodiment*.—Dionysius, vol. xii, Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 1988, p. 51.

goddess Nut, to contemplate what lies beyond and what is, therefore, formless and colorless.

However, in spite of this deconstructive rhetoric which makes a sharp division between the things divine, directly perceived through intellection (*noesis*), and those presented through verbally expressed imagination (*lektike phantasia*), Proclus recognizes that the one living on the level of intellect (*nous*) has a task appointed for him to act by means of discursive reason and imagination. This is so partly because all manifested realities, being merely playthings of the gods (as Plato explicitly states: *Leg. VII.803*) appear as the demiurgic dream of the Creator. The entire animated cosmos is like the miraculous ship constructed by the Egyptian initiate in the Duat, using the secret names and words of demiurgic (and, therefore, 'magic') power (*hekau*).

In this way both the Egyptian initiate, one who enters Duat before his physical death, and the Platonic philosopher, follow the divine Intellect (the solar Atum-Ra) who produces all things and 'in his bottomless thoughts' contains causally and in single simplicity the unified knowledge of all things and all divine works (*theia erga*), which are accomplished by the very fact of his conceiving and noetically beholding them. It is, as Proclus says,

as if by the very fact of imagining all these things in this way, he were to produce the external existence of all the things which he possessed within himself in his imagination. It is obvious that he himself, then, would be the cause of all those things which would befall the ship by reason of the winds on the sea, and thus, by contemplating his own thoughts, he would both create and know what is external, not requiring any effort of attention towards them (*In Parm. 959*).

Though the gods are without any visible shape or figure, they may be viewed as possessing figures in the psychic realm of the imagination (in the microcosmic Duat, let us say, the Hathorian or Osirian Netherworld of the soul), since each soul is the *pleroma* of reality (*panton pleroma esti ton eidon: In Parm. 896*). So within the soul, as on a magic screen, all things are contained inwardly in a psychic mode. As S. Rappe reminds us:

At the borderland between the material world and the purely immaterial world of intellect, this space of imagination offers a transitional domain that the mind can come to inhabit. This visionary space does not contain external objects nor illusions nor hallucinations. Rather, it is above all a realm of self-illumination. . . .¹²

Therefore the soul is capable of seeing and knowing all things, including figures of the gods who essentially are without any shape and figure, in this 'Osirian' mode by entering into itself and awakening the inner powers which reveal the images (*eikones*) and symbols of the universal reality. Neither the outward nor the inward psychic seer is capable of seeing without images. Thus the nature of the things seen corresponds in each case to the nature and preparedness of the seer himself, that is, to the particular archetypal measures or configurations (those initially written on by *Nous*, the demiurgic Intellect) and to the actual contents of his existential and culturally shaped consciousness.

The Demiurge is the first and the only real seer and real speaker, whose 'speech' is tantamount to creative contemplation in the transcendent mirrors of imagination. Hence, his seeing and his speaking constitute manifestation itself. Therefore the creation of all things and the naming of them are one and the same.

The theurgic ascent (the reversion of creation, now assuming the form of sacramental deconstruction) is also regarded as a rite of divine invocation. In a certain sense, invocation, incantation, and psalmody show the sacred road (*hodos*) to the divine world, leading the initiated singer into the Netherworld. This knowledge of incantation constitutes the theurgic core of the Orphic way and provides the cosmological setting for the Egyptian temple liturgies, based on the luminous interplay of *heka* powers.

Likewise, in the context of ancient Greek epic poetry, the poet's song itself (the poet being simultaneously regarded as an inspired

12. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.173.

prophet-like *theologos*) is 'quite simply a journey into another world: a world where the past and future are as accessible and real as the present'.¹³ The journey of these divinely inspired poets is their song. As P. Kingsley says:

The poems they sing don't only describe their journeys; they're what makes the journey happen.¹⁴

For the late Hellenic Neoplatonists, even to read the philosophical or hieratic text (somewhat analogous to the cosmic text of stars and celestial omens, regarded as a display of divine hieroglyphs) is to take part in a theurgic ritual. S. Rape explains this as follows:

The soul, as the channel of cosmic manifestation, reads the world under one of two signs: the world is 'other' than or outside the soul when it is engaged in the process of descent, whereas it is 'the same' as and within the ascending or returning soul. Both of these great names are thus pronounced and understood by the soul, while in the moment of its pronouncement, the world itself is expressed. In fact, the world as a whole is just such a system of signs, due again to the activity of the Demiurge.¹⁵

Hence, in the Neoplatonic view, all manifested reality consists of different modes of divine speech, or different levels of a revelation which operates with a system of signs and symbols that simultaneously manifest and conceal the One:

Heaven and Earth are therefore signifiers, the one signifies the procession from there and other the return (Proclus *In Tim.* I.273).

The name is an image (*eikon*) of a *paradeigma*, a copy of a model which is established at the noetic level. The Greek *onomata* means both 'names' and 'words', and these *onomata* are viewed as *agalмата* by Proclus. The cosmos as an *agalma*, an image, shrine, or statue of

13. Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, Inverness, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 1999, p. 122.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

15. Sara Rappe, *ibid.*, p. 181.

the everlasting gods (*ton aidion theon gigonos agalma*: Plato *Tim.* 37c), consists in the mysterious circularity of the great divine Name. Consequently, procession (*proodos*) and return (*epistrophe*) are the great names of the unspeakable Principle.

The ouroboric cosmos (ouroboric, because it resembles the circle-like body of the noetic Snake whose beginning and end are tied together) is to be viewed as the ontologically displayed divine text, the luminous golden globe filled with animated hieroglyphs. To say it in the Egyptian terms, the hieroglyphs are *medu neter*, 'divine words' (or modes of divine speech). This living *agalma*, or rather the entire constellation of *onomata*, *agalmata*, and *sunthemata*, is like a macrocosmic cult statue, a living embodiment of the divine Ideas, of the archetypal contents which constitute the plenitude of Atum.

While maintaining that *agalma* contains no implication of likeness and, therefore, is not a synonym of *eikon*, F.M. Cornford describes Proclus' attitude towards the cosmos as the holiest of shrines in following way. Plato, according to Proclus,

speaks of the cosmos as an *agalma* of the everlasting gods because it is filled with the divinity of the intelligible gods, although it does not receive those gods themselves into itself any more than cult images (*agalmata*) receive the transcendent essences of the gods. The gods in the cosmos (the heavenly bodies) are, as it were, channels conveying a radiance emanating from the intelligible gods. Proclus calls the Demiurge the *agalmatopios tou kosmou*, who makes the cosmos as an *agalma* and sets up within it the *agalmata* of the individual gods.¹⁶

The names of the gods are an objective eidetic expression of their henadic essence; therefore the deity is actually present in its name. The supreme Principle is likewise in his great names which constitute the manifested cosmos, since the One is the name of the procession of the universe, and the Good is the name of its reversion. This means that the universe, *to pan*, is a set of demiurgic and theurgic

16. Francis MacDonald Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology. The Timaeus of Plato*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, p. 101.

tokens, like a hieratic statue with its body animated by soul. The stars, for example, are *agal mata* made by gods for their own habitation, and

the cosmos with its eight moving circles is thought of as an *agalma* which awaits the presence of the divine beings who are to possess the motion symbolized.¹⁷

In Neoplatonism, names are likened to 'divine images' that are essentially symbolic and theurgic. They function within the metaphysical triad of remaining, procession, and reversion (*mone, proodos, epistrophe*), leading to the first principles and causes through their effects and traces. In addition, according to the otherwise unknown Democritus the Platonist (Damascius *In Phileb.* 24.3), the divine names are regarded as 'vocal images' or 'spoken statues' (*agal mata phoneenta*) of the gods.

Within the frame of the eternal demiurgic and theurgic work (*ergon*), there is no difference whether names are treated as being natural or conventional, *phusei* or *thesei*, because this opposition is too human, discursive, and partly illusory. For Proclus, at the level of human perception, things are 'natural' in four senses: like animals and their parts, like the faculties and activities of natural things, like shadows and reflections in mirrors, and like images fashioned by art (*technetai eikones*), those which resemble their archetypes. Names are regarded as being 'natural' in the fourth sense. Therefore A. Sheppard says:

The view that names are naturally appropriate, like images fashioned by the painter's art which reflect the form of the object, accords with the Neoplatonist view that artistic images reflect the Platonic Forms rather than objects of the sensible world. It is also quite consistent with the view that names are *agal mata* espoused by Proclus in the *In Crat.* and also in the Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hierocles.¹⁸

17. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

18. Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' Philosophical Method of Exegesis: The Use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the Commentary on the Cratylus"—*Proclus lecteur et interprete des anciens*, ed. Jean Pepin and H. D. Saffrey, Paris: CNRS, 1987, p. 149.

THE PROPHET BITYS AND THE OVERWHELMING NAME OF GOD

The notion of theurgy as a divine work performed through the creative demiurgic Word and then through the ritual imitation of cosmogony is somewhat related to Bitys, the mysterious Egyptian prophet, sometimes described as the king. He is not attested, at least by this curious name, in the traditional Egyptian sources which constantly praise other divine sages instead, for example, Imhotep the Great. This divinized sage (Imhotep, sometimes forming a triad with Ptah and Hathor) is described as 'the lector priest, the servant of Thoth . . . who fixes the plans of the god's temples,' 'by whom everyone lives' and 'who revivifies people in the state of death, who brings up the egg in the belly.'¹⁹

Iamblichus in *De mysteriis* describes certain aspects of the late Egyptian metaphysics and theurgy, arguing that

Hermes also has set out this path (*ten hodon*); and the prophet Bitys (*Bitus prophetes*) has given an interpretation of it to King Ammon, having discovered it inscribed in hieroglyphic characters in a sanctuary in Sais in Egypt. He has handed down the Name of God, which extends throughout the whole cosmos (*to te tou theou onoma paredoke to diekon di' holou tou kosmou*); and there are many other treatises on the same subject. . . . (*De myster.* 267.11–268.4).

What sort of doctrine is attributed to Bitys by Iamblichus? It is a teaching about the supracosmic powers (*huperkosmioi te dunameis*), those which are worshiped by means of hieratic ritual (*tes hieratikes hagisteias*), thereby implying a clear distinction between the life of the soul and the intellectual realm on the one side, and that of nature on the other. Hence the Egyptians (the followers of Thoth and Bitys) postulate intellect and reason (*noun te kai logon*) as the highest principles, subsisting on their own, and maintain that all

19. Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints. Deification in Pharaonic Egypt*, New York: New York University Press, 1977, p. 63 and p. 72.

things generated (in the sense of *kheperu*, manifested by Atum, 'lord of *kheperu*') are created by their means.

Iamblichus affirms that the ancient Egyptians recognized the highest Demiurge as forefather of all manifestations, attributing *he zotike dunamis*, the animating power, not only in the heavens but also prior to the heavens, since above the generated cosmos they postulate a pure Intellect (*katharon te noun huper ton kosmon protitheasi: De myster. 267.4–5*). This Intellect is indivisible in the universe as a whole, but divided at the level of the heavenly spheres.

The theory of the noetic cosmos involves conversion to the ungenerated principles and ascent to the noetic gods in order to unite ourselves to them, and thus, transcending the cosmic order, to 'partake in eternal life and in the activity of the supercelestial gods' (*aidiou te zoes kai ton huperouranion theon ten energeias metechein: ibid., 271.8–9*). Therefore, for the Egyptian followers of Thoth and Bitys, this is not merely a matter of doctrinal exposition of metaphysics, since

they recommended that we ascend (*anabainein*) through the practice of hieratic theurgy (*dia tes hieratikes theourgias*) to the regions that are higher, more universal and superior to fate, towards the God who is the Demiurge (*pros ton theon kai demiourgon*), without calling in the aid of matter. . . . (*ibid., 267.6–9*).

The teaching of the legendary Bitys is ingeniously related to that of Plato by those Graeco-Egyptian alchemists who regarded philosophy as a way of inner transformation, speaking of the alchemical process as 'Osirification', as bringing Osiris back to life. Zosimus of Panopolis mentions the mysterious tablet (*pinax*), which presumably refers not so much to the concrete text, but rather represents the late Egyptian metaphysical tradition related to that proto-Hermetic cosmology, theology, and soteriology from which the Orphico-Platonic redemptive path of the immortal soul partly derives its initial patterns, namely, the paradigm of soul's ascent to the *huperouranios topos* in order to be united with Atum-Ra.

The tablet 'that Bitos (i.e., Bitys) wrote, and Plato the trice-great (*trismegas*) and Hermes the infinitely great (*muriomegas*)' allegedly

contains the teaching about the inner man of light who is formed by the divine Intellect in its own image, like the Egyptian pharaoh who is the central image (*tut*) of God and, therefore, represents the theurgic axis of ascent. In this sense, the pharaoh, as a living Horus, is a son of Ra, of the solar demiurgic Intellect whose heliophanies constitute the *agalma*-like (or hieroglyph-resembling) cosmos. Consequently, J. Naydler regards Platonism as a re-expression (in accordance with Greek cultural norms) of Egyptian spiritual perspective, and says:

It may be that Plato's contribution to Western philosophy, like that of other early Greek philosophers, was that he put into terms understandable to his contemporaries, and thereby made accessible, teachings that were essentially esoteric and hitherto had been wrapped in secrecy, under the protection of the Egyptian priesthood.²⁰

The Byzantine scholars still maintained that Plato followed the teachings of Hermes and Bitys. In this context, Hermes is to be viewed as the Hellenistic mask of Thoth, or Djehuti, the 'measurer' of all things, the god of wisdom, sacred rites, and hieroglyphic script (*medu neter*). The script itself, ontologically displayed, represents the Platonic Forms made visible by transferring the thoughts of Ra's (or Ptah's) heart into spoken and written language, that is, the articulated and visible universe, understood as a beautiful (*nefer*) symbolic text to be read, interpreted, and contemplated. As the universal Demiurge, Djehuti in the form of the sacred ibis hatched the world Egg at Hermopolis on the 'first occasion', *tep sepi*, that is, *in illo tempore*. This Egg is analogous to the noetic Egg of the Orphic myth.

According to the Hermopolitan theology, Djehuti (now tantamount to the Heliopolitan Atum) sends forth the primordial creative Sound still within the abyss of Nun (the ineffable One), thereby articulating the archetypal Ogdoad. This Ogdoad is not manifested and, therefore, it is pre-noetic. In other versions of theological account, Shu or Heka assumes the role of the creative Word, instead of Thoth,

20. Jeremy Naydler, "Plato, Shamanism and Ancient Egypt".—*Temenos Academy Review*, vol. 9, London, 2006, p. 91.

who is depicted as being either the heart or the tongue of Atum-Ra, that is, either the active demiurgic intelligence, or its power of expression, irradiation, manifestation, regulation, and ordering.

Since Thoth's feminine counterpart (his *shakti*) is Maat (truth, order, justice, proper limit, right proportion, canon), Thoth himself is to be viewed as a mediator of the noetic lights, of the divine Ideas, directing their ordered manifestation and revelation. In this respect, as a principle of gnostic revelations, magic incantations, symbolic representations, and initiatory mystagogies, he may be thought of, according to J. Naydler, as 'the universal principle that the Greeks were to call the *Logos*.'²¹

Consequently Bitys, who revealed the overwhelming Name of God, may be regarded as either Ra's, or Thoth's messenger or *avatara*. In Sanskrit, *avatarana* means a 'descent' (*katabasis*) of the immortal soul or of the All-Worker, Vishvakarman. The Doer of All Things, Vishvakarman, as the supreme monadic principle of all theurgies, gives names to the gods, thereby establishing their 'individual' being, since all gods function merely as the names of the nameless Father who in his ineffable unity is 'all things'. The countless names (which constitute the supreme Name revealed by Bitys) are given to God's 'presences' and 'powers' which thereby order the chains (*seirai* in post-Iamblichean Neoplatonism), streams, breaths, or rivers of manifestation. The original and inexhaustible Name (like the Vedic *Om̐kara*) is the noetic Sun which 'proceeds' as ever sounding light.

According to one of the Amun-Ra hymns, a late version of which survives in the Hibis temple:

Hail, the One who makes himself into millions,
Whose length and breadth are limitless!
Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
Uraeus with great flame;
Great of magic (*heka*) with secret form,
Secret *ba*, to whom respect is shown.²²

21. Jeremy Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1996, p. 46.

The *ba* of God (Amun) are understood not as the visible cosmos in itself but as an archetypal decad of animating powers (among them the royal *ka* as the divine institution of kingship, which is a sort of metaphysical power embodied by the Horus-like pharaoh) that animate, sustain, keep, and govern the world. God is both one and many, both transcendent and immanent:

There can scarcely be a clearer expression of the fact that the name too is only an aspect of the god which he uses when he exercises his rule over the world. As a nameless and secret *ba* the god is unlimited and omnipresent. The forms in which his power manifests itself are the millionfold totality.²³

The Thothian tradition of Bitys (be this royal *hermeneus* a real or imagined person) is surely one of those maintained by scribes of the House of Life (*per ankh*). These Houses (depicted in the form of *mandala* with the figure of Osiris standing within a mummy case and gazing at the *ankh* hieroglyph, meaning both 'life' and 'mirror') were the initiatory centers in which the rite of death and rebirth was conducted for those attuned to *maat* and endowed with *heka*. This tradition (partly described by Zosimus of Panopolis at the turn of the fourth century) speaks about the inner man, the man of light (presumably, analogous to the ancient Egyptian *akh*), whose Greek name Phos means both 'light' and 'man'. When this *anthropos teleios* is imprisoned in the body, like Prometheus, his name is changed into Epimetheus, or Adam. The imprisoned Epimetheus should be rescued by the Son of God, that is, the royal Falcon, the son of Ra, whose pure 'rational' (or rather 'solar' and 'noetic', *akhu*) state is achieved when one's immortal *eidōs* is germinated within the alchemical tomb. When the statue-like body is 'mortified', purified, and transformed by the descending divine rays, the spiritual illumination takes place.

Arguing that Bitys and Iamblichus provide a vital link between the Egyptian Hermetic lore and late Platonism, G. Fowden says:

22. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 204.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

To sum up, the *pinax* of Bitys, purportedly a translation of texts composed by Thoth-Hermes, and associated in some way with Plato too, discussed the theurgical ascent of the soul, and in doing so invoked two doctrines highly germane to theurgy, namely that of the *Anthropos*, which explains why Man can aspire to become—indeed already is—divine, and the theory of the two souls, which explains how the theurgist is purified from the taint of matter.²⁴

THE DESCENDING AND ASCENDING PATHS OF HEKA

The so-called Greek Magical Papyri from Egypt give us a few scanty indications of the priest Bitys' realm of expertise—i.e., providing the spell of attraction over skull cups, attributed to the mythical king Pitys, and his prayer to Helios (Ra or Horus) to be delivered at sunset. The prayer contains the following cosmological and theological assertions:

Borne on the breezes of the wand'ring winds,
Golden-haired Helios, who wields the flame's
Unresting fire, who turns in lofty paths
Around the great pole, who creates all things
Yourself, which you again reduce to nothing.
From you, indeed, come elements which are
Arranged to suit your laws which nourish all
The world with its four yearly turning points
(PGM IV.1955–1963)

... Because I call upon your four-part name:
CHTHETHO NI LAILAM IAO ZOUCHE PIPTOE.
I call upon your name, Horus, which is
In number equal to the Moirai's names
ACHAI PHOTHOTHO AIE IAE AI IAE AIE
IAO THOTHO PHIACHA (36 letters).
Be gracious unto me, O primal God,

24. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 153.

O father of the world, self-generated one
(PGM IV.1981–1989).²⁵

The spurious letter of Pitys to King Ostanos mentions 'the holy god Osiris Kmephi Sro ('Osiris, Good Daimon, great prince', according to R.K. Ritner)²⁶ and contains the instructions on how the figure of Hekate is to be written, on a leaf of flax:

Hekate with three heads and six hands, holding torches in her hands, on the right sides of her face having the head of a cow; and on the left sides the head of a dog; and in the middle the head of a maiden with sandals bound on her feet.²⁷

The name Bitys, Bitos, Bithus itself may be related (at least, as one of possible puns and associative word-plays) with the Greek *buthos*, 'abyss', meaning the ineffable Silence (*sige*) of Nun and Nautnet, the supreme syzygy, from which Atum-Kheperer-Ra emerges. For the Indian sages, this emergence of the intelligible light is an act of primordial sacrifice in the sense of contemplative *hieropoia* or 'making sacred'—that is, revealed, articulated, and divided in order to be re-integrated, re-united and 'put together' (*samdha* in Sanskrit). This act implies moving from darkness to light in both self-disclosure and self-sacrifice, a bringing to birth (or to death and rebirth) by means of the Word.

Thereby the lower Maya is born from the intelligible Maya, since *kha* and *purna*, void and plenum, to say it in Sanskrit, are identical, like nonbeing and plenitude of being in Atum's self-disclosure within the blind darkness of Nun. In Sanskrit, the words *maya* (magical means, creative power, matrix), *matr* (mother) and *matra* (measure) are closely related, because the first constituent part of all these words, namely, *ma*, to 'measure' (like the Egyptian *maat*) is constantly used in the contexts of creation, manifestation, giving birth to something, conferring form and definition.

25. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. Hans Pieter Betz, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 72–73.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

In a sense, the 'measured' birth is a sort of sacrifice (*yajna* in Sanskrit), like Indra's slaying of the dragon Vritra who lies in the long darkness beneath the Waters. The solar Indra here means 'the most excellent incantation' (*mantra*) by which Prajapati, like the primordial Serpent, creeps forth from the darkness and becomes the Sun, the manifested and noetically articulated *Logos*. The Sun's shining is as much an utterance as a radiance, and this 'shining sound' (the great and hidden Name, *nama guhyam*) sets in motion the rounded Wheel of the Year. As A. K. Coomaraswamy relates:

The Sacrifice is a spreading out, a making a tissue or web of the Truth (*satyam tanavamaha: SB IX.5.1.18*), a metaphor commonly employed elsewhere in connection with the raying of the fontal light, which forms the texture of the worlds. Just as the kindling of Agni is the making perceptible and evident of a hidden light, so the utterance of the chants is the making perceptible of a silent principle of sound. The spoken Word is a revelation of the Silence, that measures the trace of what is in itself immeasurable.²⁸

If we return to the Egyptian Heliopolitan cosmogony, displayed in terms of *kheper* ('coming into being', 'making developments'), we should realize that Atum's singularity is articulated before his emergence from the ineffable Waters and, simultaneously, established as a unity-in-diversity at the level of manifested *kosmos noetos*. In the form of the golden Scarab (Kheprer, Khepera), Atum appears as the 'completed one', 'lord of totality' (*neb tem*).

There is a distinction made between the primordial Monad and the noetic Creator who bore all through his own mouth. Atum's self-disclosure begins as an Idea which is noetically expressed by means of Heka. The word Heka is usually translated as 'Magic', but, in fact, it is the all-sustaining noetic power that underlies all measured creation, that is, Atum's proceeding in a plurality of aspects, as many rays proceed from the one Sun. Therefore Heka is intimately connected with Maat, truth, justice, and right order.

28. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Vedic Doctrine of 'Silence'".—2. *Selected Papers. Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 207.

Since Heka constitutes the primeval creative utterance of Atum-Kheprer through which all gods (*neteru*), as luminous names, came into being (*kheper*), Heka is frequently viewed as Father of all the gods and of all subsequent manifestations (*kheperu*), both spiritual and material. As the demiurgic Word and Power, Heka serves as the connecting link between Atum (the *pleroma* of noetic archetypes) and all that proceeds from Atum. In the *Coffin Texts*, Heka describes himself as a principle by which Atum gives life to the intelligible Ennead and produces everything from the primordial Monad:

I am he whom the Sole Lord made
 Before two things had developed in this world,
 When he sent his Sole Eye,
 When he was alone.
 When something came from his mouth,
 When his million-fold *ka* was in the protection of
 his associates,
 When he spoke with the One who developed with him,
 Than whom he is mightier,
 When he took Hu (Annunciation, Word) in his mouth.
 Truly, I am that son of the One who bore all,
 Being in protection of that which the Sole Lord commanded.
 I am he who gave life to the Ennead.
 I am Acts-As-He-Likes, Father of the gods
 (CT 261.5–17).

Heka is subordinated to Atum, though Atum himself, when he 'uses his own mouth' in Heliopolis, is Heka, both created and creator simultaneously. In short, Atum (or Ptah in other theological accounts) is the intelligible paradigm, the mediating power, and manifestation itself. When identified as Heka, 'Ptah is the joint principle of creative thought and utterance through which the Creator first operated. This is the same principle that continues to operate in the created world, in the Lord to the Limit's rule of nature and the pharaoh's rule of humanity.'²⁹

29. James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, New Haven: Yale University, 1988, p. 41.

The king and the initiate themselves must be united with Heka or 'become' Heka in order to conduct the theurgic ascent, because the mortal human personality cannot command the gods or be united with them. Only Heka, as Father or the gods and all-pervasive power of manifested being (Maya as the principle of both demiurgy and theurgy, of procession and reversion) can command the gods as his own hypercosmic and cosmic limbs, or his own 'words' (*hekau*).

Sometimes Heka is conflated with Shu, the primordial and infinite breath of life (*ankh*), analogous to the Pythagorean *apeiron*, whose counterpart Tefnut stands for *peras*, the 'fiery' limit and order (*maat*). Shu and Tefnut are the primeval diad which emerges from the ithyphallic Atum in the eternal Heliopolis:

O Atum-Kheprer, when you became high, as the high ground, when you rose up as the *ben-ben* Stone in the Enclosure of the *Bennu*-bird (Phoenix) in On (Heliopolis), you sneezed Shu, you spat out Tefnut, and you set your arms about them as the arms of *ka*, that your *ka* might be in them. O Atum, set your arms about the Pharaoh, about his construction, and about this pyramid as the arms of *ka*, that the Pharaoh's *ka* may be in it, enduring for ever (*Pyramid Texts*, 600).

In a sense, *heka* is a life-giving essence from the Isle of Fire, the archetypal *topos*—'the place of everlasting light beyond the limits of the world, where the gods were born or revived'³⁰—whose chief messenger is the solar *Bennu*-bird (Phoenix), embodiment of the Word, or the son of Ra 'in whom Atum appeared in the primeval nought, infinity, darkness and nowhere'.³¹

Accordingly, Heka may be viewed from many different sides and regarded as that 'magic force' of Being itself which starts to operate when Atum 'takes' Hu (the divine principle of creative speech, *Logos*, Annunciation, Utterance) in his mouth. Hu is conceived in a pair with Sia, the principle of noetic Perception, or Wisdom. Therefore Heka, as the creative power of Atum, may be equated with Wis-

30. R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p. 247.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

dom, assuming the role of Thoth or Shu, and depicted as the mediating figure standing between Nut and Geb, between Heaven and Earth.

This mediating power, Heka, also represents the divine knowledge transmitted from the monadic plenitude 'down' through the archetypal Ennead. Geb (Earth), the son of Shu and the father of Osiris, contains all 'gnostic' *heka* power, legitimately received from the hands of Thoth. Geb's royal regalia (and, consequently, all esoteric teachings and paths of liberation) are inherited by the human pharaoh, the perfect *imago dei* (*tut neter*). His theurgic ascent, meaning the re-integration of an image (*tut*) into its living noetic archetype, is accomplished by assuming the form of all-embracing Heka.

Therefore the king on his ascending path eats the *heka* of the gods and of all things (putting their *heka* in his belly), and thereby becomes, or rather is able to re-collect, his initial noetic plenitude as *pantheos*, or *neb tem* (the Lord of All). Following this way of sacrificial or rather sacramental consumption (of collecting and eating the *heka* of all beings), the metaphysical *epistrophe* is accomplished and the entire manifested universe is symbolically reduced to the noetic *pleroma* of the initial Monad. Hence, the initiate (one who is 'dead' to all external multiplicity) may pronounce: 'I am Heka'.

THE SILENCE BEFORE THE GODS AND ITS CREATIVE MAGIC

For most modern commentators on dark ancient texts, to say that 'I am Heka' means to be involved in hallucinations produced by the irrational and silly imagination of a sorcerer. A. H. Gardiner goes so far as to declare that there was no such thing as 'religion' in Egypt, but only *heka*, understood by him as a 'magic power'.³² However, it may be labelled as 'magic' only when viewed from the presumably 'demythologized' modern perspective (itself rooted in the Judaeo-Christian mythologies), *a priori* assuming an entirely different onto-cosmology and accepting the 'sound and sterile' puritanism of

32. Jeremy Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, p. 124.

the positivistic sciences, whose tacit premises (if revisited) are even more 'fantastic' than those of sorcery.

If 'magic' is to be understood as denoting the driving force of anything 'coming into being', thereby producing a harmonious and logically arranged (both suprarational and rational) web of interrelations, then we should accept this term, because any intentional mental act which produces certain subsequent effects is 'magical', in a sense. But moderns, as C. R. Phillips pointed out,

have abstracted magic to cover all ancient religious phenomena that do not conform to their notions of 'true' religion and science.³³

Therefore this view of 'magic', based on the tradition of Christian campaigns against the Pagans, as well as the anticlerical heritage of the Enlightenment, is 'the labelling theorist's dream',³⁴ tacitly shaped according to Judaeo-Christian and modern scientific standards. If we still render the word *heka* by 'magic', we should remember that, ultimately, this Magic (like the Hindu *Maya*) is a Magic of a highest order, because it appears as a power (*sekhem*, *dunamis*, *shakti*) of Atum-Kheprer-Ra in the act of creating the cosmos and arranging its hierarchies, as well as establishing the path of descent and the path of ascent.

Since *Heka* appears even before the first Utterance, the Egyptian *Hu*, he is equally related with the primordial Silence. Accordingly, *Heka* stands as the transcendent principle of any theurgy which operates through the creative divine speech, the irradiation of light-like names of power, themselves called *hekau* (in plural) and equivalent to the Hindu *mantras*. Brahman is both silent and audible (*mantram*). It fills up everything, but as the supreme Source remains transcendent and unaffected by whatever is irradiated from it or returned to it. As *Brhad Devata* of Shaunaka relates:

33. C. R. Phillips III, "Nullum Crimen sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic."—*Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 262.

34. Christina Lerner's dictum quoted by C. R. Phillips III, p. 260.

Because of the magnitude of the Spirit (*mahatmyat*) a diversity of names is given (*vidhiyate*) . . . according to the distribution of their spheres (*sthanavibhagena*). It is inasmuch as they are 'differentiations', 'presences' (*vibhuti*), that the names are innumerable. But the shapers (*kavayah*) in their incantations (*mantresu*) say that the godhoods (*devatas*) have a common source; they are called by different names according to the spheres in which they established (*BD I. 70–74*).³⁵

Iamblichus discusses some aspects of the Egyptian Hermetic (Thothian) theology, arguing that prior to the true beings (*ton ontos onton*) and to the universal principles (*ton holon archon*), The Egyptians posit one God (*theos heis*). Iamblichus also describes five Egyptian gods in descending order: 1) Heikton (reading Heikton instead of Eikton), 2) Kmeph (tantamount to the noetic Serpent, manifestation of Atum as the Creator of multiplicity), 3) Amon, 4) Ptah, and 5) Osiris. Heikton is described as 'the indivisible One' (*to hen ameres*) and as the 'first operation of magic' (*proton mageuma*):

It is in him that there resides the primal intelligising element and the primal object of intellection (*to proton noeton*), which, it must be specified, is worshiped by means of silence alone (*De myster. 263.4–5*).

Now it is clear that the Iamblichean Heikton is the same as *Heka*. And the Egyptian *Heka* is viewed, we should remember, both as a god, *neter* (iconographically depicted with a frog on the top of his head, holding crossed serpents in his hands) and as an intrinsic cosmogonic force, equated with the divine 'magic'. *Heka* appeared within the totality of Atum before the initial duality, that is, before the emergence of Shu and Tefnut by means of Atum's masturbation or by means of his dynamic self-contemplation—by sending forth his Eye, the supreme *dunamis*, or the primeval *heka* power which establishes a certain proto-ontological 'horizon' for further creation. Within the ouroboric frame of this initial procession (*proödos*) and

35. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Vedic 'Monotheism'".—2. *Selected Papers. Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 166–167.

return (*epistrophe*), which the miraculous gaze of Atum's Eye provides, all subsequent acts of creative 'magic' take place. Heka power, here revealed as the initial *ka* power of Atum, establishes the first metaphysical triad of Atum-Shu-Tefnut. Consequently, Atum's putting arms about Shu and Tefnut is regarded as a paradigm for the hieratic rite of 'animating' a cult statue through the intimate embrace.

Atum, in his mythic role of 'masturbator' (*iusau*) is sometimes regarded as androgynous Creator whose hand is personified as the goddess Nebet Hetepet. The Hand of Atum—also treated as Lady of the Vagina (*Hetepet*) or Lady of Offerings (*Hetepet*)—and another goddess, Iusaas (the force of growing and coming), are associated with Hathor. To certain extent, Hathor may be regarded as a counterpart of Heka at the level of Horus. But her 'true' name, in this case, should be something like 'Hekat'. Therefore we wonder if the goddess Hekate (viewed both as the supreme noetic Rhea and as the universal World Soul, Hathor proper) of the Neoplatonic-Chaldean metaphysics is not somewhat related to Heka. In spite of imagined or true Greek etymologies of the name Hekate, her role as the patroness of theurgy and magic conforms well to the theological horizon of Heka's competencies. It is worthy of mention that the frog goddess Heqet presides over birth and helps Khnum, her ram-headed divine husband, to shape the body of the human being along with its *ka*.

In the theological system presented by Iamblichus, Heka is tantamount to the One-Existent (*hen on*) of late Neoplatonic metaphysics. Being regarded as Silence previous to the gods, he is like a *huparxis* before the manifested noetic duality. J. Assmann maintains that the Heliopolitan theology which describes how Atum came into being (*kheper*) by himself and how everything else came into being (or assumed form) from him, is 'less a mythology than a germ of a philosophy.'³⁶

Thus, the first truly manifested noetic triad (Atum-Shu-Tefnut) may be interpreted in many different ways. Mythologically, Atum himself emerges from the transcendent darkness of Nun. He appears

36. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 120.

(*kheper*) as the primeval mound (the metaphysical city of the Sun, Heliopolis) or as the lotus-like pillar of light. This vertical pillar, like the archetypal *axis mundi*, may be imagined as Atum's *lingam*, symbolically combined with a *naos* sistrum, the theurgic musical instrument of the golden Hathor, curiously regarded as the Hand of Atum.

Therefore creation starts both as a sexual act and as divine music. At the level of noetic *pleroma*, the ejaculated semen of creation appears as a miraculous Stone of light, as a pyramid-like Temple of *lux intelligibilis*, the womb-like tomb of all things. This is the shining *ben-ben* Stone of Heliopolis—the ultimate prototype of all subsequent sacred stones (symbols of noetic immortality) and all animated hieratic statues. Like a golden Egg, the Stone of Atum contains all subsequent demiurgic seeds, all the Platonic Ideas.

Since both Maat and Hathor are regarded as daughters of Ra and stand at the prow of the solar barque, they may be viewed together as a single figure of Hathor-Maat and equated to the noetic Eye of Ra. Now, as we remember, Heka is intimately related to Maat. Therefore Hathor, as the whole Uedjat-Eye, the Eye of Ra, initiates not only descent from, but also ascent to, Heaven, to the realm of divine Intellect. In this respect, A. Roberts aptly remarks:

But as the *Iret*-eye, she also acts as the agent of the god's activity, since *iret* in Egyptian means 'doer'. The solar gaze becomes an activity as the eye—the instrument of divine energy and power—is projected out into the world.³⁷

HEKATE'S GOLDEN BALL AS A ROTATING 'VOCAL IMAGE' OF THE FATHER

The holy teaching attributed to Bitys concerning 'the Name of God, which extends throughout the whole cosmos' seems to be basic to the Iamblichean understanding of theurgic practice. The whole cosmos is permeated and constituted by this Name whose creative expansion and contraction is maintained through the supreme Heka

37. Alison Roberts, *Hathor Rising: The Serpent Power of Ancient Egypt*, Rottingdean: Northgate Publishers, 1995, p. 9.

power, thereby establishing the revolving noetic sphere and, consequently, the celestial and terrestrial spheres. These cosmic manifestations include the Sun's course viewed in ritual terms, the visible Sun being an image of the 'Lord of *maat*', Atum-Ra, or Amun-Ra.

In the hymn that discloses the Egyptian theological doctrines maintained during the reign of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, Amun-Ra is described as one 'who grants a clear road to every eye that was created in Nun'.³⁸ Amun is simultaneously Lord of *maat* (truth) and Lord of the gods. He is identified as Atum, creator of both the gods and humankind, and as Ra-Kheprer, standing in his solar barque. He pours out his *bau* (manifestations, souls) in millions of forms: the light of the Sun is the *ba* of Ra, and the entire visible world may be called his *ba* as well.

Since Amun's cosmic body is the universe itself, this heliophanic body is permeated by the life-giving forces or eidetic essences which are his *bau*. These *bau* are experienced in the ordered world as the manifold ways in which God works. However, though being rich in marvelous manifestations, Amun keeps himself concealed as the One whose true nature is not revealed:

None of the gods knows his true form;
His image is not unfolded in books;
Nothing certain is testified about him
(*Leiden Amun Hymn 200*).³⁹

In ancient civilizations, the One is symbolically imagined as the Centre or the invisible Pole of the sphere whose two points remain fixed. While discussing the meaning of *swastika* within the context of traditional Indo-European cosmologies, R. Guénon argues as follows:

The Center communicates movement to all things, and, since movement represents life, the *swastika* becomes thereby a symbol of life, or, more exactly, the vivifying role of the Principle in relation to the cosmic order.⁴⁰

38. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 196.

39. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, p. 196.

40. René Guénon, *Symbols of Sacred Science*, Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004, p. 64.

As a symbol of life, *swastika* is analogous to the *ankh* hieroglyph, or rather it depicts the descending and ascending streams of life, related to the southern celestial gates of Seth, leading to genesis, ontological differentiation, reincarnation, dispersion, and to the northern gates of Horus, leading to the Circumpolars. These stars never disappear below the horizon and therefore stand for the eternal *archetypus mundus*, immortality, and liberation. Ultimately, this is the descent and ascent of the all-embracing Name of God whose spiral paths (which constitute the universe as a sort of *mahamantra*, as a dynamic display of *hekau*) are imitated by various theurgic instruments or *yantras*, to say it in Sanskrit terms. One of such instruments is the Chaldean top of Hekate (*Hekatikos strophalos*), described by Psellus, the Byzantine writer, as follows:

Hekate's top is a golden ball (*Hekatikos strophalos sphaira esti chruse*), formed around a sapphire (or with lapis lazuli enclosed at the sphere's centre, according to S. Ronan),⁴¹ whirled around by means of a rawhide thong, with characters [engraved] all over it. Whirling it, [the theurgist] used to make invocations (*epikleseis*). And they were accustomed to call these [tops] 'iunges', whether they were spherical or triangular or of some other shape. Whirling them, [the whirlers] gave forth indiscriminate sounds, or sounds like a beast, laughing and whipping the air. [The Oracle] teaches that the movement of the top, having an ineffable power (*dunamin aporrheton*), works the rite (*ten teleten energein*). It is called 'Hekate's top' because it is consecrated to Hekate.⁴²

This Chaldean and Neoplatonic *yantra*, regarded as a vehicle for descending and ascending divine powers, is called Iynx (this is an English spelling, but in standard Greek transliteration: sg. *iunx*, pl. *iunges*), that literally means the wryneck bird. The Egyptian term *ba* (pl. *bau*) fits well this cosmological schema, because *ba*, depicted as

41. Stephen Ronan, "Hekate's Iynx: An Ancient Theurgical Tool"—*Alexandria*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991, p. 322.

42. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Role in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, p. 90.

a human-headed bird, both descends and ascends. In the Ramesside theology, the ten *bau* of Amun constitute something like the proto-Pythagorean decad of noetic archetypes. Five of these archetypal *bau* are related to the five life-giving cosmic elements and the five classes of life-endowed creatures. According to J. Assmann:

This theology understands the *bau* of God not as the visible world itself, but as a decad of mediating powers that animate and sustain the world.⁴³

The pharaoh belongs to the decad of *bau* and is equivalent to the central axis of the Chaldean *strophalos* (turbine), thereby mediating a divine energy of kingship endowed with soteriological and theurgical functions. As regards the symbolic meaning of the Chaldean Iynges (equated with the Thoughts of God, the Platonic Forms, themselves likened to a swarm of bees), Proclus describes them together with *teletarchai* (Masters of Initiation) and *sunocheis* (Connectors) as the gods that (at one particular level of manifestation) guard the poles, assembling the separate and unifying the manifold members of the whole. Proclus says:

Other doctrines of a more secret kind assert that the Demiurge who presides over the cosmos rides upon the poles and through his divine love turns the whole towards himself. The Pythagoreans claimed that the pole should be called 'the seal of Rhea', as the place through which the life-giving goddess dispenses her mysterious and effective power to the All. . . . And if I may add my own conceit, the centers and the poles of all the spheres symbolize the wry-necked gods (*ton iungikon theon*) by limiting the mysterious union and synthesis which they effect; the axes represent the mainstays of all the cosmic orders, since they hold together the unities and revolutions in the visible cosmos, as the intelligible centers hold together the cosmos of the intelligibles; and the very spheres are likenesses of the perfect divinities (*autai de kai sphairai ton telesourgon theon eikones eisin*), joining end to beginning (*archen telei sunaptousai*) and surpassing

43. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, p. 201.

all other figures in simplicity, uniformity, and perfection (*In Euclid*. 11.90–91).⁴⁴

Hence, the theurgic *strophalos* imitates the universe as a rotating vocal *agalma* of the Creator, by means of which the divine names, or powers, are both invoked and released, revealed and concealed. Strictly speaking, the work of this turbine represents the way in which the Platonic Forms proceed downward and the way all manifested realities return to their ultimate Source. Thereby end is joined to beginning 'under the tent-poles of the divine realm', to say it in the Egyptian terms. S. Ronan provides the following commentary on these Neoplatonic doctrines, indicating the equivalence between the Chaldean Iynges, the Platonic Forms, and the unspeakable divine names or symbols (*asema onomata, symbola, sunthemata*):

Essentially, this teaching holds that each god or goddess has an expression at every level of creation so that there are, for instance, solar human souls, solar animals, plants and minerals, etc. Expressing this in terms of Iynx equivalences, the sacred names are verbal Iynges, the symbols and sigils are visual Iynges, and the turbine (*strophalos*) is the Iynx as a ritual instrument. In each case, the Iynx serves to 'work the ritual' as Psellus puts it. We can see from our survey that the Iynx works at the hub of theurgy; it is a turbine which both generates and bears the divine power which alone, as Iamblichus tells us, makes ritual effective. As a force which vivifies and empowers ritual, the Iynx is dedicated to Hekate who is preeminently the vivifying power of the Chaldean universe.⁴⁵

The Iynx was spun by means of cords passed through it, alternately pulling and relaxing the tension and thereby causing the Hekate's turbine to spin alternately one way (setting into motion the demiurgic thoughts of the Father, the noetic realities which think by themselves) and then the other (speeding back to the Father). The

44. Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, tr. Glenn R. Morrow, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 74–75.

45. Stephen Ronan, *ibid.*, p. 329.

ascending movement back to the One is tantamount to 'prayer', understood as reversion (*epistrophe*) to God at any ontological level of manifested reality. Hence, the movement of this turbine itself may be viewed as a sum of all prayers. 'All things pray except the First', according to Theodorus of Asine (Proclus *In Tim.* 1.213.2-3).

For R.T. Wallis, this means that everything reverts upon its cause, and thereby upon the One, the cause of all. Therefore 'even inanimate objects aspire to imitate the Good . . . and it is the likeness to gods that they acquire by this reversion that for the later Neoplatonists justifies their use in theurgy.'⁴⁶

THE SOUNDING BREATHS OF THE ALL-WORKING FIRE

The noise of the spinning (when the Chaldean Lynx is moved) imitates the noise of the divine Utterance, the Light-like Name of God. This noise is described by using the Greek verb *rhoizeo* ('whirl or spin with a whistling noise'). It is attested to in the Graeco-Egyptian Magical papyri as well. For example, the ritualist invites the Mistress of the entire world to heed her sacred symbols and give a whirring sound (*rhoizon*). In this case, whirring refers to the sistrum (*sesheset*) of Hathor (PGM VII.883-884). The Mistress Selene the Egyptian, whose image is to be made in the form of the universe, is Hekate, lady of night, here described as Aphrodite Urania (Celestial Hathor). The spell itself belongs to certain rites of Heaven and the North Star.⁴⁷

The Greek verb *rhoizeo* is frequently used to describe the cosmogonic noise of creation, imitated in the Oriental temple liturgies and festivals. In the Egyptian Sed-festival, aimed at the mystical rebirth of a pharaoh, the sacred music of Hathor (the Cow of Gold) was regarded as a means of cosmic deconstruction and subsequent re-creation of all *kheperu*.

As a fiery serpent goddess, Hathor is called Ueret-Hekau (the Great of Heka), sometimes depicted as a leonine-headed figure

46. R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, second ed. with a Foreword and Bibliography by Lloyd P. Gerson, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1995, p. 155.

47. *The Greek Magical Papyri*, ed. H.D. Betz, p. 141.

with a Sun disk and uraeus. Ueret-Hekau serves as an elevating force in the process of pharaoh's deification, that is, his ascent and union with Amun-Ra. Her elevating whistling music may be regarded as analogous to the whirring sound (*rhoizon*) of the Hekate's theurgic instrument which imitates both the harmony of the spheres and the rotation of the Platonic Ideas (the Chaldean Iynges, moving like the descending and ascending *bau* in the Egyptian Ramesside theology).

The word *iunx* (pl. *iunges*) is presumably derived from the verb *iuzo*, 'shout, cry out'. The *iunx*-wheel (like the macrocosmic wheel of creation) is moved by the erotic *heka* power. The sound made by the whirling wheel should be accompanied by invocations. In the Hellenic milieu, these invocations are based on the correct pronunciation of the seven Greek vowels, related with the seven planetary spheres of Babylonian-Hellenic cosmology, themselves belonging to one or another chain (*seira*) of manifestation. As S.I. Johnston remarks:

The invocations of deities by pronunciation of the seven vowels is akin to the use of 'secret words' (*sumbola*, *sunthemata*), with which . . . the iynges were connected or even identified.⁴⁸

Here we see an analogy (or even identity) between the fundamental noetic principles and the sounding elements (*phoneenta stoiceia*) of the theophanic universe: 'The heavens sing, and the sound is that of the vowels.'⁴⁹

This 'singing' stems from the silent One and shows the way back to Him. The roaring 'sounds' of divine irradiation (*ellampsis*) may be described as rays of light, as winds of spirit, or as the life-bringing breaths, rotating like the spokes of a wheel. According to the Vedic tradition, Vayu 'puts the inhalation and exhalation' (*pranapanau dadhati*) into man, like into the Egyptian statue-like body which receives the vital essence, *ka*.

The Sanskrit *pranah* (breath, vital spirit) is roughly equivalent to

48. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 98.

49. Patricia Cox Miller, "In Praise of Nonsense".—*Classical Mediterranean Spirituality. Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 498.

the Greek *pneuma*. A.K. Coomaraswamy argues that these vital breaths of Brahma, Agni, or Vishvakarman (All-Worker) are imagined of as streams or torrents of light, sound, and life: they are the very waters (comparable to the Osirian Nile) that are released when Vritra is slain by Indra (*in illo tempore*, where the beginning and the end meet). These streams

are called *nadyah* 'because they sounded (*anadata*)' as they went their way . . . and in the same way 'the Breath is a noise (*prano vai nadah*)', and when it sounds, all else resounds. . . .⁵⁰

Agni, like the Chaldean noetic and paternal Fire, himself is the Breath, the ever-living Fire from which creative Speech is flowing down through the fiery channels, sometimes compared to the Seven Rays of the Sun. These Seven Rays may be identified to the Seven Rishis (*rsis*, divine seers, sages), or streams of wisdom, since the word *rsi* itself contains the root meaning 'rush, flow, shine'. Hence, the solar Vishvakarman, the supreme Agni, is the principle which transcends the seven lights (or rays) of manifestation. He is comparable to Atum-Ra, or Amun-Ra, that is, the divine Intellect. Essentially, Agni is beyond the seven *pneumata*, the pneumatic threads or wind-cords (*vata-rajjuh*) tied to the hypercosmic Sun, namely, Agni himself, or to the supercelestial Pole Star.

The fiery breaths or channels of Agni (the All-Working Fire) are analogous to the ethereal rays (*ochetai*) in the Neoplatonic cosmology and related soteriological rites. The luminous solar vehicle (*augoeides ochema*) of the immortal soul was thought to be able to inhale the Sun's rays and thereby return to the Sun, the visible *agalma* or *sunthema* of the Paternal Fire. The later Neoplatonists 'were firm believers in the theurgic rites of elevation', as J.F. Finamore pointed out.⁵¹ They maintained that the soul (riding upon its purified solar vehicle) can be raised up by the rays of

50. A.K. Coomaraswamy, "On the Indian and Traditional Psychology, or Rather Pneumatology".—2: *Selected Papers. Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 353.

51. John F. Finamore, "Julian and the Descent of Asclepius".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2.

Helios, the noetic Sun shining through the visible Sun. The ascent of Heracles symbolized for them the soul's homecoming to the noetic realm; therefore Julian the Emperor said that Zeus elevated Heracles to himself

through the thunderbolt (*dia tou kerauniou*), having ordered his son to come to his side by the divine *sunthema* of the ethereal ray (*hupo to theio sunthemati tes aitherias auge*: *Or.* VII.220a).

THE ELEVATING RAYS OF THE RESOUNDING LIGHT

The Chaldean-Neoplatonic theurgist, 'guiding the works of fire' (*puros erga kubernon*: *Orac. Chald.* fr. 133), raises his soul upwards to the fiery noetic realm and even to the First Transcendent Fire (*pur epekeina to proton*) itself. He ascends by means of the mediating solar rays (the *bau* of Amun-Ra), or through the channels of fire equated to the ropes of worship.

All things are generated from One Fire (*henos puros*), or the Paternal Monad (*patrike monas*). From this monadic Fire, the Implacable Thunders (that is, the Platonic Ideas) leap forth along with the lightning-receiving womb of the shining ray of Hekate, and 'from there, all things begin to extend wonderful rays down below' (fr. 35). According to the *Chaldean Oracles*, 'from the gods themselves', as Proclus emphasizes, 'the Holy Name (*onoma semnon*) leaps with eternal circular motion into the *kosmoi* at the mighty order of the Father' (*In Crat.* 20.26–30; fr. 87).

The Holy Name which extends throughout the entire manifested universe and, in fact, creates or develops it, may be likened to the whole solar Eye constituted by many parts—many 'names', 'signs', and 'symbols'. All of them are the shining and whirring thunderbolts of the Father, that is, the intelligible archetypes irradiated and projected into the womb of the life-dispensing goddess, one who is an 'image' of the All. Thus, the *Chaldean Oracles* argue as follows:

For the Paternal Intellect has sown the symbols throughout the cosmos, [the Paternal Intellect] which perceives the noetic realities. And [these noetic realities or their symbols] are called

ineffable beauties (*sumbola gar patrikos noos espeiren kata kosmon, hos ta noeta noei; kai kalle aphrasta kaleitai*: Proclus *In Crat.* 20.31–21.2; fr.108).

The Chaldean Iynges, identified with the Platonic Ideas and the mystic solar rays, function as wheels binding together the noetic realm (the Seven-Rayed God, *ho heptaktis theos*: fr. 194) and the sensible world. R. Majercik maintains that they are not only the mediators of messages, but the message itself (or the revelation itself):

For example, as the 'thoughts' or Ideas of the Father, the Iynges are actually magical names (*voces mysticae*) sent forth by the Father as 'couriers' in order to communicate with the theurgist. At this end, the magic wheel spun by the theurgist attracts these celestial Iynges and enables the theurgist (who alone is privy to the divine language of the gods) to communicate with the Father. But the message communicated by the Iynges is none other than their own magical names which, when uttered, enabled the theurgist to acquire certain divine powers.⁵²

The cosmological extension of Iynges may be regarded as the sum of the wheel-like limbs which constitute the Gnostic *anthropos teleios* (Perfect Man and Son of God) coming out of the heart of the primeval Sea, that is, Ninurta, whose weapon is his 'Word'. This warlike Sumerian god, whose principal cult center was the temple E-shu-mesha at Nippur, was especially worshipped by the Neo-Assyrian kings, and their particular devotion to Ninurta had an esoteric dimension, related to the long-standing tradition of Mesopotamian gnosis.

When the monstrous lion-like bird, Anzu (or Imdugud), steals the archetypal tablets of destiny from Enki or from Enlil, this bird is killed by Ninurta and eventually reintegrated into Ninurta's own field of spiritual *energeia*. The Ninurta's chariot is drawn by the spirit of the Thunderbird Anzu, Donkey of Heaven (*imeru shami*,

52. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989, p. 9.

like the Prophet's Buraq in Islamic mythology). In the Akkadian Anzu Epic, the feathers of Anzu, carried by the wind, 'convey the good news (like the *evangelium*) to the father Enlil.'⁵³

The four whirling winds of Heaven are four winds created by Anu, those which disturbed Tiamat (the inert primordial Sea) in the dramatic Babylonian cosmogony of *Enuma elish*. In certain respect, these winds are to be equated with Anzu, envisioned as a thunder cloud or as an enormous bird, sometimes depicted as a lion-headed bird, sometimes as a winged lion with bird's tail. Ninurta (the divine archetype of the perfect warrior-king, the Mes-siah) is equated with the conquered Anzu. This rotating and whirling lion-headed bird becomes both his symbol and his loudly rumbling war chariot (the fiery, winged vehicle of the descending Ideas conceived of as Thunderbolts). As A. Annus remarks, himself following S. Parpola's suggestion, in Assyrian iconography

the thunderbird Anzu is represented as a winged horse, based on the 'philological equation ANSU.KUR.RA = ANZU.KUR., donkey of the mountain/of the Netherworld = Anzu of the mountain/of the Netherworld.⁵⁴

The Chaldean Connectors (*sunocheis*), another class of entities that issue from the Father (like the expanding rays of the Holy Name, transformed into the thunder, the lightning and the fiery channels), both establish true measure and harmony throughout the cosmos and function as the connective solar rays which conduct the initiate's soul upward to the fiery noetic realm. The theurgist acts like the Ninurta's or Ishtar's warrior of light. As the *Chaldean Oracles* say:

Being dressed in the full-armored force of the resounding light (*photos keladontos*), And equipping the soul and the intellect with the weaponry of three-barbed strength, You must cast into your mind the complete *sunthema* of the Triad and wander

53. Amar Annus, "Ninurta and the Son of Man".—*Melammu Symposia II. Myth-ology and Mythologies. Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*, ed. R.M. Whiting, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001, p. 10.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Amongst the fiery rays not in a scattered manner but with concentration (Damascius *De princip.* 1.155.11–14; fr. 2, Johnston).

The elevating rays through which the soul (the holy warrior of Ninurta and of Ishtar-Hekate, guided by the Chaldean Teletarchs, 'Masters of Initiation') flies upward, carried by the re-collected paternal *sunthema* and the restored 'wing of fire', may be likened to chains of mantric names, the anagogic sounds of the sacred chants accompanied by inner visualizations and resulting in divine epiphanies. By their power the soul returns from images to their noetic archetypes. Therefore, as the Oracles say, the ascending souls 'sing a hymn to Paeon' (fr. 131) and admonish us:

You must hasten toward the light (*pros to phaos*) and toward the rays of the Father (*pros patros augas*), from where the soul, clothed in the mighty intellect, has been sent to you (fr. 115).

The ascent may be conducted only by those who 'listen to the voice of the Fire' (that is, those who accept the ineffable and intellectual revelations from above) and travel the theurgic path of the noetic fire, represented by the upward movement of the Hekate's (or Ishtar's) *strophalos*.

The Iynges of the Chaldean-Neoplatonic cosmology are the Paternal Ideas dispensed throughout the cosmos and thereby constituting many different levels of *sumbola* and *sunthemata*: from the *sunthema* of the Sun (whose rays are to be inhaled with one's *augoeides soma*, the luminous vehicle of the immortal soul) to various divine numbers and geometric shapes, secret names (*arrheta onomata*) and material objects, all of them serving as theurgic tokens and means of elevation.

THE RITES OF HIERATIC INVOCATION AND ASCENT

According to Demetrius, the Egyptian priests employed the seven vowels (*phonetai*), uttering them in due succession when singing hymns (*On Style* 71). These 'words of power' (*hekau*) are uttered by the priest (playing the actual role of a god, *neter*) or by the *maakheru*, the 'dead' and vindicated initiate, one who already reached 'the nome of truth' or 'the land of silence', carried by a ferryman,

and thereby equated to 'a divine *ba* like the Ennead' (*Pap. Leiden* 1.350b 9–10).

The Egyptian hieroglyphs (*medu neter*, 'divine speech') perfectly correspond with music and are not to be 'read' but rather recited, sung, and contemplated. The sacred texts themselves have an anagogic function and are called *bau Rau*, 'demonstrations of the power of Ra', since by reciting them the elevating power of solar (that is, noetic) rays is re-actualized and brought into play.

To use an apt remark made by G. Shaw, in theurgy the sacred names are 'bodies' of the gods, because the names of the gods are 'individual theophanies in the same way that the cosmos was the universal theophany'.⁵⁵ The cosmos is a sounding *agalma* of Amun-Ra, echoed and imitated by all 'vocal constellations' that constitute the world and keep it in motion, through both the macrocosmic divine rites and the microcosmic liturgies of the Egyptian temples. Within the cosmos, conceived as a sacred drama of the miraculous creative Utterance (Hu), as a play of Heka's invisible rays,

Cult was thus not carried out in the sense of a communication between man and god but as the enacting of a drama in the divine world, between gods and gods. If we do not shy away from an anachronistic usage first coined in late classical antiquity, we can call this principle of enacting events in the divine realm through the medium of cultic action and recitation 'theurgic'. What the most important advocate of theurgy, the Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus, wrote about these matters in his *On the Egyptian Mysteries* rests on deep insights into the meaning and function of cultic language, insights that are, *mutatis mutandis*, entirely appropriate to ancient Egypt.⁵⁶

The Chaldean Iynges may be regarded as ferrymen (*diaporthmioi*) in many different ways, including that which concerns the transformative and salvatory rites. The Mesopotamian incantation-

55. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1995, p. 182.

56. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 245.

priest (*ashipu*), for example, imagined himself able to journey to both the noetic realm and the netherworld in the guise of a star. While standing on a rooftop of the temple, he invoked the gods of the night sky in order himself to be incorporated into the court of these gods, the heavenly retinue of Anu and Antu (like the divine retinue depicted in Plato's *Phaedrus*), and afterwards serve as their messenger. T. Abusch says:

The speaker invoked the stars and other heavenly bodies in order to identify himself with these inhabitants of the night sky. . . . On a topographical level, this transformation is possible because he is in a locale that is not only terrestrial but also heavenly and that draws together the human and heavenly communities. . . . the identification allows him to become a messenger of the gods. He imagined himself to be one of the stars and ascends into the sky and journeys through it to the netherworld. The identification has other purposes as well. Most of all, it serves to allow the ritual actor to take on the quality of wakefulness or sleeplessness associated with the stars.⁵⁷

Damascius describes the Chaldean Iynges as 'magical fathers' (*mageion pateres: De princip. II.201.3-4*). They have an ability to transport all things from the noetic, demiurgical Monad to the material realm and back again (Proclus, *In Parm. 1199.31-35*). They are thought by the Father and also think themselves, like the intelligible lightnings turned into mysterious images, ineffable names, and world-ordering mantras. Thereby these Iynges lead 'the invisible into visibility and the visible into invisibility, causing one to mimic the other.'⁵⁸

In both Vedic rituals and Tantric practices, *mantra* is regarded as a 'tool for thought' by which the initiate is identified with various divine powers that reveal themselves through the primeval, cosmogonic vibration and lead to the conscious realization of one's

57. Tzvi Abusch, "Ascent to the Stars in a Mesopotamian Ritual: Social Metaphor and Religious Experience".—*Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. J.J. Collins and M. Fishbane, Albany: SUNY Press, 1995, p. 25.

58. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 92.

transcendent Self, to identification and union, similar to the Egyptian immortalization and union with Atum-Ra, or with Amun-Ra. In Egypt, all temple rituals are based on the performative *heka* power, able to create divine presence and re-open the sound Eye of Horus through liturgies and recitations.

According to the Trika-Kaula traditions of Kashmiri Shaivism, the primordial Sound (*nada*) is arising eternally within the body of the initiate as a result of the movement of *pranah* in conjunction with the permanent vibration of the divine Shakti (the Serpent Power of Hathor-Sekhmet, the Solar Eye of Ra, the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, analogous to the Neoplatonic-Chaldean Hekate). The uncreated Sound (*anahata dhvani*) arises from within and reveals the unmanifest Absolute Reality (*avyakta*, the hidden Amun of the Ramesside theology) in the form of Sound. Therefore the ultimate Reality reveals itself in the form of the ever-vibrating Maya-Shakti that is continually creating the universe (*vishva*, the All) appearing as a mode of Parama Shiva's self-revelation via radiant demiurgic sounds and sacred mantras.

When the Parama Shiva reveals himself as the universe, he does not cease to have his integral self-experience as *Aham* (the supreme noetic self-identity). Therefore the initiate, in order to accomplish the rite of ascent and thereby to realize his integral nature (*svarupa*, like the re-collected and healed Eye of Horus),

should repeatedly utter and meditate on the significance of *Aham*, which is to be constituted by a combination of the seed *varna* (*bija-varna*) 'A', penultimate vowel AM, and the last vowel, HA (which is also a seed *varna*) in the order of A-HA-M. This *Aham* is not only a symbolic representation of the Supreme Self, it also represents the Essence of Paravak (Supreme Speech or Sound). The repeated *japa* (utterance) of *Aham*, followed by meditation on its significance, reveals to the *sadhaka* his integral *svarupa*, and also opens the path to its perfect realization.⁵⁹

59. Deba Brata SenSharma, *The Philosophy of Sadhana, With Special Reference to the Trika Philosophy of Kashmir*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, p. 149.

In Egypt, the ascent conducted by the recitation of the divine names (themselves equivalent to the pneumatic solar rays) implies a sort of an *unio liturgica*. Ra extends his luminous, noetic arms towards the initiate, one who already is 'dead' before his physical death and who knows the liturgies of *archetypus mundus*, having the redemptive solar knowledge (*rekh*). Thus, it is said in the *Book of the Dead* (Papyrus Nu 133):

Ra has led (the initiate speaker, the purified and vindicated reciter) into his barque: he (the initiate) has seen the sacredness of He-in-his-ouroboros. He has beheld Ra, namely, the free forms he assumes in the extension of his blaze of light... How good [it] is to gaze with the eyes, how good [it] is to hear truth with the ears! . . . Osiris N. (the 'dead' initiate turned into Osiris) has not told what he has heard in the House of the Mysteries: the jubilation of Ra and the divine body of Ra crossing Nun among those who satisfy the divine *ka* with what it desires.

For Proclus, the theurgic ascent is also comparable to the rite of hieratic invocation, since, at the level of divine Intellect (to which the Neoplatonic philosopher aspires), creation and the act of naming are identical. Therefore the ascent to the noetic realm (and to the all-transcending Silence) is conducted by certain dialectical, contemplative, and theurgic use of names (*onomata*), appropriate for each level of theophany and equated to the divine images. There are many different levels and modes of theurgy. As L. Siorvanes observes:

Manipulating the 'symbols' gives way to working with the Real Thing. Likewise, incantation gives way to pure invocation and ultimately to theurgic prayer. At the pinnacle of the operation, the priest-theurgist entrusts the soul's 'one' to the One itself. Through this leap of Faith, the 'one' unites cognitively with the One.⁶⁰

60. Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus. Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, p.197.

THE TANTRIC ALCHEMY AND THE OSIRIAN MUMMIFICATION

All Tantric worship assumes an identification of self (*ba*, in the case of Egyptian cult) with the divine, therefore the imposition of *mantras* upon the initiate's body effects its transformation, or 'Osirification', to say it in the Egyptian terms. Each *mantra* is identified with one or another deity and with the different parts of one's body. The 'acoustic images' (*mantramurtim*) of the Tantric gods are analogous to the Platonic *agalmeta phoneenta*, the divine names regarded as 'vocal images' or 'vocal statues'.

Likewise, the different limbs of the Egyptian initiate's body are identified with different deities, and the 'cultic body' of the embalmed deceased is arranged not as a 'corpse', but as an *agalma* of a body or, to be more precise, an *agalma* of the separated soul (*ba*). The term *djet*, in fact, erased the distinction between symbolic representation and actual body. This *agalma* is constructed as an eidetic display of hieroglyphs (visible figures of divine speech), tantamount to the hieratic arrangement of Chaldean *sunthemata*.

Therefore the mummy (*sah*) symbolically represents one's real *djet*-body, the body of light (*sah*). It is the Osirian cult image located inside the book-and-sanctuary-like tomb. Being comparable to the alchemical egg 'that brought you forth', the mummy is an eidetic mirror for the separate *ba* to gaze upon. Thereby the winged *ba* comes to realize it as a divine statue whose golden mask is viewed as a 'head of a god'. Functioning as a sort of *yantra*, this head enables one to see and act as a god.

The initiate, transformed into the *sah*-body—that is, the Osirian mummy (gathered together out of its dismemberment and then awakened)—is divinized like a hieratic statue by means of sacramental rites, contemplative visualizations, and theological interpretations that imply knowledge (*rekh*, *gnosis*). The mummy is regarded as an animated statue and the statue is regarded as a mummy; both of them are transfigured 'forms' and instruments of divine *heka* powers.

In a recitation for the 'head of mystery' (*Book of the Dead*, 151), dedicated to the golden mummy mask, this 'head' is described as

beautiful 'lord of vision' whom Ptah-Sokar has gathered and whom Shu has supported. The right eye of this head through which the dead initiate sees is identified with the solar night barque, the left eye with the solar day barque, the eyebrows with the divine Ennead, the crown with Anubis, the lock of hair with Ptah-Sokar and so on. Therefore J. Assmann rightly assumes that the mummy is not one's real body of the noetic light, but only the cultic instrument. He says:

Cultic act and divine explanation are related to one another after the fashion of the *sensus literalis* and the *sensus mysticus* of medieval and early modern hermeneutics. Thus, an act such as purification (*sensus literalis*) is explained as rebirth (*sensus mysticus*), or provisioning (*sensus literalis*) as ascent to the sky (*sensus mysticus*). . . . It is not only a matter of explanation, however, but of a genuine transformation. . . Transformation is achieved through the establishment of a relationship between the cultic realm and the realm of the gods: something that happens in the cult is transformed into an event in the divine realm. This transformative function of spells is expressed by the word *sakh*. The recitation of spells with their sacramental explanation has a transformative power that rests on the interlocking of the two spheres of meaning. What belongs to this realm is transparent to the realm of the gods, and what is in the realm of the gods is visible to what is in this realm.⁶¹

In the Indian Tantric alchemy (*rasayana*), each part of the alchemist's body (like each part of the sanctuary) is consecrated with a particular *mantra*. By rites of consecration, all cultic instruments (including certain minerals, herbs, symbolic tokens, analogous to the Neoplatonic *sunthemata*) are transformed into so many *yantras* with which the universal energy that permeates both the cosmos and the initiate's body is awakened and re-activated. This re-activation is a part of the alchemical rites (understood as theurgy in etymological

61. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 351–352.

sense, that is, as the real work of the gods) that will ultimately render the initiate a second Shiva.

To attain the state of Shiva (partly analogous to the state of Osiris-Ra) is to attain the state of gold reached through initiation (*diksha*) and alchemical transmutation (*vedha*). This path of one's immortalization consists in the generation of an immortal body, symbolized by the Osirian cultic body inside the *mandala*-like alchemical tomb which (being an icon of truth and righteousness, *maat*) served life, not death, and the construction of which (both in the architectural and the inner spiritual sense) was the goal of one's whole life, regarded as the royal path of gold-making.

The rites and techniques of this spiritual *rasayana* are ultimately based on the traditional metaphysical and cosmological doctrines. The Tantric universe, for example, is described as a rhythmical cosmic play between withdrawal (*nivritti*) and return (*pravritti*). This is like procession (*proödos*) and return (*epistrophe*) in Neoplatonism.

Therefore the yogic body (*yoga* indicating a binding connection or union) of the initiate is thought of as a microcosmic stage for God's (in the sense of *Ishvara*, like the personified Neoplatonic *Nous*) self-reversion and the re-interiorization of all his external cosmic projections. This path of return leads the initiate from images to their noetic archetypes. To say it another way, this is the descending and ascending path of *kundalini*, the miraculous power of both imprisoning and liberating Maya. The Serpent Kundalini in the Tantric mythology is analogous to the Hathorian 'serpent power', the fiery *dunamis* of the Paternal Intellect.

GOLDEN SEEDS OF THE NOETIC FIRE

In the pharaonic Egypt, gold symbolizes the bodies of the gods (*neteru*) and the immortal noetic substance. Gold (*nebu*) is regarded as a divine and imperishable metal related to the solar realm of Atum-Ra which includes the Golden Horus, that is, the official title of the pharaoh whose burial chamber is also described as the House of Gold. The sign for gold, *nebu*, is used in the same contexts as the festival sign *heb*, therefore these 'two images seem to

be quite interchangeable, with deities and deceased persons being depicted on either sign.⁶²

Likewise, in the context of the Indian brahmanic sacrifice, the living substance of gold represents immortality and Vishvarupa's *eidos*. Vishvarupa ('omniform') is the name of Agni, the noetic Purusha: from his seed (like from Atum's seed) all distributive 'breaths' are emanating and one particular form (*rupa*) becomes gold.

The terrestrial gold germinates within the womb of the Earth: the gold mines are thought to be wombs of the Egyptian goddess Hathor. But the pure noetic gold constitutes the primeval Egg of Atum, or the Golden Egg (*hiranyagarbha*) of archetypes, viewed as a treasury of Agni's seed. Like the winged Orphic Phanes, the Vedic Prajapati (Brahma) himself is born *in illo tempore* from a primeval union of ineffable waters and the seed of Agni, that is, the supreme noetic Fire or *lux intelligibilis*, which emerges from the unspeakable Darkness.

One sort of gold (*prakrita-svarna*), the one belonging to the realm of phenomena, arose from that divine power which set the universe in motion. But another form of gold (*svahaja-svarna*) constitutes the noetic Egg at the top of Mount Meru (*huperouranios topos*), that is, the archetypal embryo from which the god Brahma emerges, like the Egyptian Atum-Kheprer-Ra is born in 'the first occasion' (*tep sepi*), understood as an 'interior time' of the spiritual archetypes, or as the 'ageless age' of the gods. As D. Gordon White remarks:

Here, it is the emanatory dynamic of the proto-Vedanta metaphysics of the Upanishads—a system that is very similar to the emanation and participation of Neoplatonist thought—that facilitates such analogies between the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. The universe in all its parts is a single organic entity, with all that exists on the great chain of being, the internal flux of a divinely constituted whole, to which all emanated form necessarily returns in the fullness of time. As such, all in the universe is shot through, 'like the scent in a

62. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 171.

flower', with the divine essence. Moreover, since all exists on the same continuum of this divine outpouring, all is comparable, even identifiable.⁶³

THEURGIC SPEECH OF THE BIRDS AND SOLAR KNOWLEDGE

From Philostratus' passage about the golden Iynges in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* it is clear that these theurgic instruments (a sort of *yantras*, to say it in Indian Tantric terms) are compared to birds, and birds stand for angels, or divine messengers, in many of ancient traditions. The 'language of the birds' (sometimes equated with the oracular utterances), which Apollonius, the Neopythagorean sage, allegedly learned traveling among the Arabs (*Vita* 1.20), is called *mantiq at-tayr* or *lughah suryaniyyah* ('Syrian language') by the Arabs themselves. According to R. Guénon, it is related to the 'solar and angelic illumination', achieved through rhythmic sacred speech, the theurgic language of the gods:

The same idea is contained in the word *dhikr*, which in Islamic esoterism is applied to rhythmic formulas corresponding exactly to Hindu *mantras*, formulas the repetition of which aims at producing a harmonization of the various elements of the being, and at determining vibrations which, by their repercussions through the series of states in their indefinite hierarchy, are capable of opening communication with the higher states; in a general way this is after all the essential and primordial purpose of all rites.⁶⁴

This rhythmic speech, in a sense, imitates the whirring and whistling noise (*rhoizon*) of the demiurgic Word. To imitate the bird's motions and sounds implies that one assumes inwardly the bird-like (or angelic-like) status. Philosophically speaking, the initiate regrows the soul's wings lost in the process of descent,

63. David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body. Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 189–190.

64. René Guénon, *Symbols of Sacred Science*, p. 52.

thereby separating his soul from body before body has separated itself from soul.

This separation means 'living the life of the inner man . . . vested in the higher or intellective part of soul and eventually in *Nous*',⁶⁵ like the Horus Falcon in the paternal light of Ra. Proclus, for example, explains the myth of Plato's *Phaedrus* as a journey upon which the soul encounters the divine *sunthemata* of the intelligible realm and accomplishes both the noetic union with the intelligible plenitude (or the Demiurge himself) and mystical union that occurs by unspeakable and unthinkable theurgic means.

Hence, the ascent (*anabasis, anagoge*) is conducted by initiation (*muesis*), contemplation (*theoria*), and esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*), or by the erotically energized *iunx*-wheel accompanied by invocation of the Holy Name. By restoring one's spiritual wings, the initiate is able to come back to the marvelous noetic womb of Rhea-Hekate, the font of all blessed substances that emanate from her with a whirling noise. For the Great Hekate, according to Damascius, 'sends forth a lifegiving whir' (*zoogonon rhoizema proiesi: De princip. 11.154.18*). She sends forth the life-giving and divine (or angelic) speech (constituted by the noetic *lynges*, equated with mysterious divine names, *onomata aporrheta*), afterwards to be imitated by the theurgists. Damascius, to whom the Orphic and Chaldean lore transcends 'philosophical common sense' (*Phil. Hist. 85*), says:

Proclus was bemused by Isidore's imitation of the cries and noises produced by birds. Sometimes during the Chaldean rituals (*en tois Chaldaikois epitedeumasin*) he gave a display of his imitation of sparrows and hens and other birds fluttering their wings as they rouse themselves for flight (*Phil. Hist. 59f*).

These cries are analogous to the cries of the Egyptian Eastern *Bau*, a class of angelic beings who greet and worship the rising solar orb (*aten*). The Eastern *Bau* are depicted as apes (manifestations and symbols of Thoth, the god of hieroglyphs, scribal wisdom, rituals, and magic), frequently shown as holding the restored Uedjat

65. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 23.

Eye or seated with Ra in his solar barque. Ra himself is sometimes represented as the Thothian ape within the Sun disk or as a migratory bird that enters the Netherworld (*Duat*) every night. Therefore the initiate's invocation to the nocturnal Sun is aimed at the direct equation of the 'deceased' (his winged soul, *ba*) with the *ba* of Ra or with Amun-Ra himself.

In the so-called *Litany of Ra*, the 'dead' initiate declares 'that he has a thorough knowledge of Ra's nocturnal forms of manifestation and their names; he adds his hope that they will open the netherworld for him and his *ba*, since he is indeed the image of the sun god and his *ba*. . . 'I am one of you', he emphasizes, after which he again identifies himself with the sun god, with whom he shares the triumph 'over all his enemies in the sky and on earth', and thus in the afterlife as a whole.⁶⁶

The vindicated dead or the initiate becomes one with the Eastern *Bau* through the divine knowledge, *gnosis*: he knows those words that the Eastern *Bau* speak and therefore enters into the crew of Ra. As the Sun priest, he joins the solar apes and becomes one of them by means of the theurgic *heka* power of Isis, that is, by singing hymns to the Sun. To know the language of the gods means to be transfigured already during one's lifetime, to join the Ennead and be united with Ra, the solar *Nous*. When this miraculous rebirth is accomplished,

The god of Light-land extends his hands to you,
 You receive offerings on the altar of Ra.
 Your hands are grasped by the primeval ones.
 The god conducts you to the barque.
 You take your place in it, wherever you desire.
 You sit down, your legs unhindered.
 You fly up as Horus falcon,
 You roam (i.e., glide down) as a goose,
 A star that cannot set.
 Yours is *neheh*-eternity, your sustenance is *djet*-eternity.

66. Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 143-144.

A place has been granted you at the side of the Sole Lord,
You are his companion in the fields of Light-land⁶⁷

TONGUES OF THE GODS AND THEIR SONGS

According to Philostratus (*Vita* 1.25), in a great judgement hall within the palace of the Babylonian king, the four golden Iynges are hung suspended from the ceiling, thus reminding the king of Adrasteia, goddess of Justice (analogous to the Egyptian Maat, the feminine counterpart of Thoth). The palace itself, whose roof tiles are gemstones of celestial blue, imitates the entire manifested cosmos, thus serving as a sacred *mandala* and as a theurgic *yantra*.

The suspended figures of Iynges, called 'the tongues of the gods' by Babylonian (Parthian) priests, are attuned in such way as to transmit the noetic energies up and down, carrying them between the divine realm and the king on his throne. The palace itself may be viewed as the royal theurgic instrument which unites political and spiritual power, both received from the gods like the shining *melammu*, the real noetic substance of the sacred kingship.

Likewise, in Indian Tantric Buddhism, a king is thought of as being magically emanated from the different limbs of the divinity and is re-divinized (or consecrated like a statue) by the coronation rites, rites that become a paradigm to be imitated by all subsequent esoteric rites and initiations. The *mandala*-like palace (*kutagara*) is an articulation of a political horizon with the *mantras* appropriate to the eight cosmic directions. Therefore the construction details, symbols, and technical vocabulary of *mandalas* are related to the architectural arrangement of palaces and temples, directed by Vajrapani, the Lord of the Mysteries and the commander of mysterious (*guhya*) yakshas (*yaksasenadhipati*). These yakshas, in some respect, function like the Chaldean Iynges and Teletarchs. As R.M. Davidson observes:

Vajrapani is also the guardian of the vehicle of secret spells, so he protects those possessing secret spells (*mantrin*). In this

67. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 62–63.

role, the yaksha general uses his secret spells as a king employs secret counsel (*mantra*), and it is noteworthy that the king's counselors are identified as mantrins in Indian political nomenclature. Thus the secretaries associated with peace and war, the counselors of state, and many of the royal inner circle were designated mantrins.⁶⁸

S.I. Johnston supposes that the Babylonian Iynges, described by Philostratus as 'tongues of the gods', are transmitters of divine knowledge and oracles to men, at the same time harmonizing the immortal and mortal elements of the universe.⁶⁹ The golden Iynges were hung up in one of the temples of Apollo at Delphi as well, being related to the hypercosmic and cosmic Sound of creation and revelation. They are described as 'having some of the persuasiveness (*peitho*) of the Sirens' (*Vita* 6.11), because the power of mantric sound is able to establish a theurgic bond between the invoker (or caller, *kletor*) and the attracted noetic fire.

However, the solar Apollo himself attracts the worshiper through 'persuasion' and through his sounding rays of *lux intelligibilis*. Since the Apollonian Iynges have the Sirenic power to attract and bind various realities by their miraculous sound, S.I. Johnston assumes that these golden wheels were intended to control 'individual celestial spheres by imitating not only the sphere's motion but also the specific tones that they contributed to the music of the spheres.'⁷⁰

In this particular context, it is useful to remember the Pythagorean dictum which includes the question 'What is the Oracle of Delphi?' and the following answer: 'The Tetractys; that is, the harmony under which the Sirens sing' (Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 85).

This is so because for the Pythagoreans the song of the Homeric Sirens is not destructive as for the later Platonists to whom to be attracted by the Sirens means to be bewitched (*katakouloumenoi*) and

68. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: Social History of the Tantric Movement*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 2004, p. 143.

69. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 97.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

forget one's fatherland and one's ascent to the noetic realm (*tes eis to noeton anagoges*). Only after sailing past the Sirens, Odysseus is able to escape all the obstacles in the way of ascent of the soul, leaving them for his fatherland (Hermeias, *In Phaedr.* 259a).

But the Pythagoreans, as J. Pepin shows, regarded the song of the Homeric Sirens as representing the planetary music that not only enthralls souls after death but also in this life agitates to ascent, on the condition that their ears are not sealed by irrational passions as those of Odysseus' companions, blocked by wax.⁷¹

BACK TO THE LIFE-GIVING WOMBS AND THE INEFFABLE SILENCE

If the Sirens are regarded as the evil daemons, those who hold back souls in the proximity of genesis, then Odysseus symbolizes one who passes through all stages of genesis and thereby 'returns to those beyond every wave who have no knowledge of the sea' (Porphyry, *De antro nympharum* 34). Here the Sirens represent the lures of pleasure and 'sweet irrationality' related with the world of becoming.

Therefore Odysseus, tied to the mast of his ship, may be viewed as one who has for pilot the Word (*Logos*) of God. To follow Odysseus in this respect means to be aided by a heavenly wind, or spiritual breath (*pneuma ouranion*, the animating and elevating power of Shu). According to Clement of Alexandria, the Christian writer, thereby one is initiated into the sacred mysteries and enjoys the hidden realities. For Clement, however, the wood to which Odysseus chains himself prefigures that of the Cross.⁷²

But to stand upright tied up to the ship's mast, like the Osirian *djed* pillar or the cosmic *axis mundi* (depicted as the paradigmatic Sacred Tree by the Assyrian priests), is to be immobilized, to be turned into a mummy-like divine statue. This immobilization of body (like the Tantric *asana*) simultaneously presupposes the ascent of one's breath and one's mind by the ropes of the 'magic sound'

71. Jean Pepin, "The Platonic and Christian Ulysses"—*Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara, Norfolk: ISNS, 1982, p. 4.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

that produces cosmic harmony, closely related to the musical and mathematical function of the universal Soul (Hekate, Hathor, Neith, Nut, Ishtar).

The manifested Chaldean lynges or sounding symbols are situated within this *Anima Mundi*. They are in the life-giving womb of the goddess (a womb imitated by the chambers of initiation, burial places, tombs), thereby creating the revolving circuit, or the rhythmically weaving net, of all-embracing sympathy, the interplay of miraculous voices in the cosmic shrine of the everlasting gods.

The universal Soul may be regarded as the mother goddess who is 'pregnant' with the mummy, or the 'dead' initiate, 'nursing his beauty' (*nefer*). Therefore the Egyptian coffin is tantamount to the alchemical body of the goddess Nut (Heaven), Neith, or Hathor, manifesting herself as a sycamore, the tree of life, who dispenses eternal noetic nourishment. In fact, this body encloses an entire divine realm (the womb of the noetic homeland) into whose 'beauty' the initiate or the deceased returns for the mysterious transmutation, in order to be delivered as Ra. The great goddess, 'the looser of bonds', whom no one knows and 'whose mummy wrappings are not loosened', says in the form of Neith.

When you enter me, I embrace your image, I am the coffin that shelters your mysterious form (Sarcophagi of King Menephtah).

For the Platonists, the visible world is a shrine (*hieron*) or a statue (*agalma*), therefore the Demiurge is a telestic priest who breaths into this statue life and intelligence. Proclus compares the theurgic consecration of *agalmata* to the act of naming: the words themselves may be likened to hieratic statues, because 'words', as divine images (*eikones*) and reason principles (*logoi*), proceed from *Nous* 'like statues of the Forms, as if the names imitated the intellectual Forms' (*In Crat.* 6.13). According to S.I. Johnston:

Proclus goes on to say that the Demiurge enveloped his statue (i.e., the visible cosmos) in the *character* (or visual symbol) of the Soul and its revolutions (*periphorai*). Within the Soul's revolutions he placed names (*onomata*). He surrounded the Soul with phylacteries and in the middle of her womb inserted

noetic entities that Proclus calls the *sumbola* of the *iynges*. Proclus suggests that those who find the name 'iynges' a little strange may think of them instead as divine causes.⁷³

Proclus compares theurgic ascent (*anagoge*) to the process of invocation, implying that each name recited or invoked is tantamount to the sounding statue or to the secret divine *sunthema* of the Father. Therefore the intellectual and theurgic hymns lead the initiate to the *hyperouranios topos* (supercelestial place), described in Plato's *Phaedrus*, and even to the ineffable One, because the working of theurgy in Proclus is based on the theory of henads (divine unities) by which the omnipresence of the One is established and affirmed at all levels of manifested reality.

As R. M. Van Den Berg pointed out, Proclus maintains that 'Nous in us "moors" (*hormizon*) the soul in the Demiurge, the Maker and Father of the universe.'⁷⁴ This Father of the universe is divine *Nous*, capable of contemplating the Forms themselves, and is described as the Paternal Fire and Paternal Harbour (*ho patrikos hormos*). Proclus says:

For after the wanderings in the world of becoming and the purification and the light of knowledge, the noetic activity (*to noeron energema*) finally shines out and so does *nous* in us, which moors the soul in the Father and establishes it in a pure way in the demiurgical intellections and links light with light (*phos photi sunapton*); this is not a thing like the light of knowledge but an even more beautiful, more noeric and simpler light than that. For this is the paternal harbour, the finding of the Father, the pure unification (*henosis*) with him (*In Tim.* 1.302.17–25).

The anagogic invocations are inseparable from those mystic numbers and proportions that constitute an important part of theurgical *paideia*. G. Shaw says:

By coordinating his soul with the divine numbers revealed in nature the theurgist recovers the soul's original immortal

73. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, p. 109.

74. Robert M. Van Den Berg, "Toward the Paternal Harbour. Proclean Theurgy and the Contemplation of the Forms"—*Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds & C. Steel, Leuven: Univ. Press; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000, p. 428.

body, shaped by the Demiurge according to the proportions of the celestial gods.⁷⁵

What the soul encounters in the hypercelestial realm are the noetic *sunthemata* which stand as the henadic symbols of the primordial Silence, of Atum's Heka that is established before the first duality (Shu and Tefnut) comes into being. The ascent to the ultimate source of all *heka* powers, of all *kheperu*-rays, is tantamount to the divine initiation which takes place not by means of intellection but by virtue of the holy silence that surpasses all gnostic (epistemic, magic, demiurgic) enterprises: only faith (understood in the Chaldean sense) 'seats us in the ineffable class of gods' (Proclus, *Plat. Theol.* iv.9.193). S. Rappe provides the following comment on Damascius' non-dual approach to metaphysics:

As a consequence, all statements about lower hypostases or about an ontology situated outside of the first principle are subject to the caveat that 'the One dissolves all things by means of its own simplicity'. All things, including Being itself, fall short of the One; their reality is merely provisional. . . . Damascius recognizes that the language of metaphysics functions to signify something beyond itself. It is best thought of as a mnemonic device; its purpose is to deliver human beings from their own ignorant determinations about the nature of reality, without thereby imprisoning them in a metaphysical system that displaces reality itself.⁷⁶

CHANTING OUT THE UNIVERSE

BY THE NAME OF EVERYTHING

One may be a 'theurgist' in the true sense of this word even without knowing the Greek term *theourgia*, presumably coined by the father and son Juliani, the legendary 'Chaldeans' of the second century. All servants of God (*hemu neter*) in the Egyptian temple are involved in what the Neoplatonists would call 'holy work', *hierourgia*. The High

75. Gregory Shaw, "Embodying the Stars: Iamblichus and the Transformation of Platonic Paideia"—*Alexandria*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991, p. 101.

76. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, p. 203 and p. 208.

Priest of Karnak, whose distinctive title is the 'Opener of the Gate of Heaven', opens not only the doors of the holy shrine (where the animated divine statue is seated) but also the invisible doors of spiritual *akhet*. It seems that those persons who may be regarded as an Egyptian equivalent of the Neoplatonic-Chaldean *theourgoi* are also called *hekau*. Ch. Zivie-Coche says:

These were the *hekau*, those who were guardians of *heka*, and *sau*, dispensers of *sa*, magical protection. . . . Rather often, we find mention of 'lector priests', ritualists with their rolls of papyrus, who staffed the 'houses of life' attached to temples, where contemporary knowledge was elaborated in all its forms, knowledge that could be used outside as well as inside the sacred enclosure.⁷⁷

By realizing their essential identity with Heka or with Thoth, these priests were able to ascend into the archetypal realm of Ennead (*pesedjet*). The Enneadic paradigms (like those of the Assyrian Sacred Tree, later turned into the Sephirothic Tree of Jewish mysticism) are symbolically depicted as the noetic plenitude and interplay between the different members of the divine family. They stand behind every cosmic event and every human action, thereby establishing a link between various demiurgic and theurgic *heka* powers, between the paths of descent (*katabasis*) and ascent (*anabasis*).

In the Memphite theology, centered on the god Ptah, 'he who manifested himself as heart, he who manifested himself as tongue, under the appearance of Atum', the Ennead is described as follows:

His Ennead was before him like teeth and lips, that is, his semen and these hands of Atum, for the Ennead of Atum issued from his seed and his fingers, but the Ennead was also the teeth and the lips in his mouth that conceived the name of everything, from which Shu and Tefnut issued, and which gave birth to the Ennead.⁷⁸

77. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 127.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

The 'name of everything' is the Holy Word that transmits the light from the One. But Heka, like the One-Existent (*hen on*) of Iamblichus, though manifesting, revealing, and transforming all things, is essentially beyond (*epekeina*) all being. At the microcosmic level, this *Logos*-transmitting Heka is analogous to the 'one' which gathers together all the soul's faculties. The 'flower of intellect' (*anthos nou*) unites the transformed and elevated soul with the divine *Nous* and *ta noeta*, the intelligible realities (the Ennead of Atum, or the realm of *akhu*). Likewise, the *ba* of Osiris is united with the *ba* of Ra. But the 'flower of the whole soul' (analogous to the whole Eye) unites the whole human being (as a pure eidetic *imago dei*) to the ineffable One. A. Smith observes that Proclus likes to talk about the immanence of the henads as *sunthemata*:

Thus it is likely that at the higher level of theurgy the *sunthema* concerned with ascent will be that token of the One's presence in us which is itself an *ellampsis* of a henad. . . . Of vital importance in Proclus' philosophical exposition of theurgy is its connection with unity. Theurgy depends ultimately on the One through the henads represented at different levels by *sunthemata*.⁷⁹

In the Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgy, the important means of conducting the initiate's ascent (whose ultimate prototype is the Horus-falcon-like pharaoh) and of effecting conjunction (*sustasis*) with the gods are the rites of invocation. They include the special 'calls' (*kleseis*) that re-sound the initial creative Word and thereby are integrated into its descending and ascending rhythms. The ascent of the soul is inseparable from the demiurgic descent of divine powers (sounds, breaths, fires, rays, *bau*). Therefore G. Shaw argues:

Because the names were divinizing the soul ascended, yet insofar as the soul chanted the names, it descended with them into the sensible world. Since these sounds were the *agalmata* of the gods, when the soul chanted them, it imitated the activity and the will of the Demiurge in creation. . . . Since the soul itself could never grasp or initiate theurgy, the incantation, strictly

79. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*, pp. 120-121.

speaking, was accomplished by the god, yet it freed the soul by allowing it to actively experience what it could never conceptually understand.⁸⁰

Therefore by chanting these mysterious sounds which are tokens (*sunthemata*) and symbols (*sumbola*) of the gods, the caller (*kletor*) himself is turned into the perfect (*teleia*) and godlike (*theoeide*) receptacle for the god's *ba*, like the hieratic statue (*agalma, sekhem*), which is to be permeated by the divine rays. Proclus argues that

if the Word (*Logos*) which comes-unto-light is named [by the Chaldean Oracle] as more ineffable, it is necessary that prior to the Word there should be Silence (*sigen*) which substantiates the Word, and prior to everything holy comes the cause which makes them divine. . . . As the beings posterior to the intelligibles are the words of the intelligibles, so the Word which is in them, hypostasized from another more ineffable unity, is the Word prior to the silence of the intelligibles, that is, the silence of the silent intelligibles (*De philosophia Chaldaica*, fr. 4).⁸¹

The illumination derived from the invoked deity, whose energies are necessary in order to accomplish all 'theurgic labours' (*theourgika energemata*), purifies the soul and its luminous vehicle (*ochema*), thereby elevating the soul on the rays of the noetic Sun. This way of ascent by invocations and hieratic rites is inseparable from contemplation (*theoria*) of the noetic lights (the Platonic Forms) that reveal themselves to the initiate's eye. 'All things are revealed in lightning' (*blepetai de [te]panta keraunois*), as the Oracle says (*Chald. Or.*, fr. 147). The epiphanies that accompany the gods are manifested in such a way that the sacred fire (whirring around in a spiral, flashing more brightly than physical light or appearing without any form) seems to cover the whole horizon of one's consciousness and consume everything.

As R. Majercik observes, the theurgist is advised by the gods to 'extend an empty intellect' (*teinai keneon noon*) towards the Highest God in order to 'perceive' (*noein*) him. This intuitive perception is

80. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, p. 187.
81. Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus. Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*, p. 198.

achieved through that part of one's intellect or thoroughly integrated soul (called the 'flower', *anthos*) which is akin to the fiery, noetic (or even supra-noetic) essence of the Father. And 'this kind of language is strikingly reminiscent of Plotinus' *via negativa* approach to the One.'⁸² According to Proclus, the 'flower' of the soul unifies all that is in us and takes us to that which is beyond (*epekeina*) all being. Therefore Plato's Parmenides (the character of the *Parmenides* dialogue, himself symbolizing a henad presiding over a chain of causes) brings to completion the study of the One 'with silence' (*In Parm.* 76, Klibansky).

To say it in the terms of Heliopolitan theology, the realization of one's identity with Heka, the silent source and power of all *theourgika energemata*, means realization of nonduality at the level of Atum (or at the level of the Being-transcending Nun), before the appearance of Shu and Tefnut. The Twin Children of Atum (Shu and Tefnut, the first intelligible diad) say to the 'ontologically deconstructed' pharaoh (the sacred image of the Great One, the solar son of Atum-Ra, the paradigm of every ascending royal official, later re-named as a 'theurgist' or as a 'mystic'):

Raise yourself . . . in your name of God, and come into being, an Atum to every god (*PT* 215).

As R. O. Faulkner interprets this utterance from the *Pyramid Texts*: 'the king assumes the rank of the supreme deity and is not like Atum but *is* Atum.'⁸³ Therefore the pharaoh who accomplished his home-coming rites (not as an individual person, but as the re-collected and re-affirmed *pantheos*) says:

I was conceived in the night, I was born in the night, I belong to those who are in the suite of Ra, who are before the Morning Star. I was conceived in the Abyss, I was born in the Abyss; I have come and I have brought to you the bread which I found there (*PT* 211).

82. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, p. 33.

83. R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 43.

And the king's (who is restored as *pantheos*) 'bread' is the creative cultic utterance: 'Bel' (*unun*; PT 663), this imperative being like the Biblical *fiat* and the Quranic *kun*. It means that the liberated souls ('annihilated' as separate, individual entities and restored in the form of the whole solar Eye) participate in the activity (*energeia*) of the Demiurge. They 'chant out the universe', participating in the demiurgy, the eternal play of procession and return that completes the All-plenitude, namely, Atum himself. As G. Shaw explains:

In Platonic terms this meant taking an active part in the demiurgy of the cosmos and becoming a co-creator with the god of creation. The power and authority of Egyptian rites derived from the cooperative mimesis: according to Iamblichus they embodied the eternal ratios (*metra aidia*: *De myster.* 65.6) which were the guiding powers of the cosmos.⁸⁴

WHEN ORONTES FLOWED INTO TIBER: THE REVIVED TRADITION

All these theurgic techniques of recollection, reintegration, purification, ascent, assimilation, unification, and union are based on various metaphysical and cosmological teachings of the ancients. These archaic theological doctrines appear dressed in the mythical garb of those countless cosmogonies and sacred tales that emphasize the descent of the soul from its true noetic home and its subsequent return (in the form of royal *anthropos teleios*, the re-collected and re-affirmed hypostasis of *Purusha*) to the divine Intellect or to the ineffable Abyss, the One which is Beyond-Being. Therefore the ritual practices and invocations, allegedly revealed by the gods themselves, are intended to effect the transformation of one's body and soul (to use these quite ambivalent and rather incorrect terms) by revealing the immanent presence of the divine powers that lead, ultimately, to the highest realization of the noetic unity and transcendent nonduality.

The Platonic-Chaldean (that is, the Hellenized Neo-Assyrian)

84. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, p. 22.

system of theurgy in its Graeco-Roman and Middle-Platonic philosophical form appeared, presumably, only at the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Likewise, the first Indian Tantric texts are currently being dated to the third-sixth centuries. However, both the Platonic *theourgia* and Hindu *tantra* represent merely the revival and reinterpretation of those ancient practices which already existed (in one form or another) and were employed from pharaonic Egypt to Mesopotamia and India. As T. McEvilley suggests:

But it is not necessary to posit influence. It is possible that there were such deep inherent linkages between Greek and Indian thought from an early date that the two traditions went on producing like forms to the end of antiquity. . . . The survival of this earlier (pre-Indo-European?) substrate in Greece as in India, and its revival under the impact of similarly ancient Near Eastern practices at the time when, as Juvenal said, 'Orontes flowed into Tiber', seems more than likely.

[Theurgy] involves the devotional worship of a chosen deity which the worshiper is in a sense to become. In tantric practice also an *ishtadevata*, or personal deity, is the center of each worshiper's devotional practice. In both cases the goal is to incorporate the personal deity, to become it in some sense.⁸⁵

The Platonic philosophy itself is rooted in the ancient Egyptian metaphysical and cultic patterns, partly veiled by a new type of dialectical reasoning which, nevertheless, tacitly imitates the hieratic rites of Osiris' dismembering and restoration, dispersion and reintegration, aimed at the initiate's (the philosopher's) ascent and his entry into the solar barque of Ra.

It is not necessary to think that 'Iamblichus revolutionized Neoplatonic methods of exegesis through his assimilation of Plato to the Orphic/Chaldean traditions,' as S. Rappe argues,⁸⁶ because this assimilation (or affinity) has much deeper historical and metaphysical roots.

85. Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*, New York: Allworth Press, 2002, pp. 591-592.

86. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, p. 171.

3

SACRED IMAGES AND
ANIMATED STATUES IN
ANTIQUITY

His face was almost square, his divine model being that of Logios Hermes (*Hermou logiou tupos hieros*). As for his eyes, how can I describe the true charm of Aphrodite herself that resided in them, how can I express the very wisdom of Athena that was contained in them? . . . To put it simply, those eyes were the true *agalmata* of his soul, and not of the soul alone, but of the divine emanation (*theias aporroes*) dwelling in it.¹

While Plotinus says that the gods are present to the complex of temples and statues, it is really they that are in the gods, i.e., the gods are their place. The divine is the place which contains both the art and ourselves, and our experience of the art is one in which the angle of vision and distance are measured from the divine and not ourselves.²

MYTH AND SYMBOL:

WHAT MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPEN?

Olympiodorus, the sixth-century Alexandrian Neoplatonist, argues that since a myth is nothing other than an image of truth (*eikon estin aletheias*)—and the human soul itself is an image of the higher noetic realities—the surface meaning is only a screen for certain metaphysical teachings concealed in the depths of the myth. Hence, the invisible is to be inferred from the visible, the incorporeal from the bodily.³

1. Damascius describing Isidore's appearance, *Phil. Hist.* 13 Athanassiadi.

2. Frederic M. Schroeder, *The Vigil of the One and Plotinian Iconoclasm: Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, ed. A. Alexandrakis, Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, p. 68.

3. Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*, tr. Robin Jackson, Kimon Lycos, and Harold Tarrant, Leiden: Brill, 1998, p. 290.

After all, a myth is . . . a false *logos* imaging truth' (*allos te kai muthos ouden heteron estin e logos pseudes eikonizon aletheian*: In *Gorg.* 46.3).

All myths speak riddlingly of something else, conveying 'certain other things' in symbolic terms. In this respect the question may be raised, what does it mean means to speak symbolically? In the context of the Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgy, the symbol (*sumbolon*, *sunthema*) is viewed as the central link between the divine realm and human world. As P.T. Struck remarks:

The symbol makes the impossible happen; it becomes the node on which the transcendent can meet the mundane. . . . Symbols (in daytime) along with dreams (at night) are the means by which the gods communicate with humans . . . they do the impossible: they give voice to (*ekphoneitai*) things which cannot be voiced (*aphthegta*, *aporrheta*, *arrheta*); they represent that which is above representation and put that which is beyond reason into terms accessible to humans.⁴

The unspeakable symbols (*ta aporrheta sumbola*) are in a sense analogous to 'forms of the formless': they are demiurgic traces that constitute a sacred dimension of the material world. Every such trace (*ichnos*) is endowed with the capacity to point us back to the noetic realm and the One. Thus symbols possess in themselves a transformative and elevating (anagogic) power, and thereby connect us with the divine principles through invocation, interpretation, contemplation (*sumbolike theoria*), and theurgic union (*theourgike henosis*). F. Schuon says:

What is the role of the Symbol in the economy of spiritual life? We have shown that the object of concentration is not necessarily an Idea, but that it can also be a symbolic sign, a sound, an image or an activity: the monosyllable *Om*, mystical diagrams—*mandalas*—and images of the Divinities are in their

4. Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol. Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 213, 217, 219.

way vehicles of consciousness of the Absolute, without the intervention of a doctrinal element. . . .⁵

Olympiodorus thinks it is reasonable that the soul, itself being an image (*eikon*) of the noetic realities (*ta noeta*), enjoys myths as visible images (*eikones*) of the invisible. Consequently, the soul has a natural inclination for myths.⁶ But Olympiodorus argues that if 'we were entirely without reason (*alogoi*) and lived in accordance with imagination (*kata phantasia*) and this was our only protection, it would be necessary for us to live all our life as if in a myth' (*edei hemas hapanta ton bion muthode echein: In Gorg. 46.6.28–29*).

Being firmly rooted in the Hellenic rationalism, Olympiodorus argues that usually 'we should not accept the mythical accounts', these 'Phoenician falsehoods', but turn instead our attention to the demonstrative arguments ('entrapped in bonds of adamant') and the best constitution (*politeia: In Gorg. 44.7*). Olympiodorus is far from suspecting that even our life in accordance with intellect is a life 'as if in a myth'. The visible world itself is a sort of miraculous 'myth', produced by the Demiurge or the divine Word.

However, this all-embracing Myth is not a human invention, but the divine dream of existence *per se*, that is, of the entire manifested reality that appears to be the magic body of *pantheos*. A human body comes 'from the Isle of Fire' (from the noetic realm), but 'the time one spends on earth is but a dream' (Neferhotep's tomb, Theban tomb 50). The cosmos itself is a myth, the play of miraculous *heka* powers irradiating from the ineffable Silence of Heka, to say it in the Egyptian terms.

THE METAPHYSICS OF CREATION AND ITS IMAGES IN PHARAONIC EGYPT

In *The Book of Knowing the Kheperu of Ra* (*Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*), Atum appears as the primeval noetic Monad, the lord of all

5. Frithjof Schuon, *The Eye of the Heart. Metaphysics, Cosmology, Spiritual Life*, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1997, p. 141.

6. Jean Pepin, "Le plaisir du mythe (Damascius, In Phaedonem I. 525–526, II.129–30)." — *Neoplatonisme: Melanges offerts a Jean Trouillard*. Les cahiers de Fontenay, nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, Fontenay aux Roses, 1981, p. 276.

kheperu (manifestations, irradiations, levels). He emerges from the ineffable darkness of Nun and presents himself as a creator of every noetic reality by means of Heka, his own transcendent *dunamis*:

It was alone that I knotted my hand, before they were born, without having spat out Shu, without having expectorated Tefnut. It was my own mouth that I made us of, and my name was Heka. . . .⁷

The Egyptian verb *kheper* (come into being, manifest, develop, change, evolve) and its derivative *kheperu* (manifestations, developments) refer to any stage in the cosmogonic and demiurgic process, designating various stages, modes, and series of manifestation. The universe as the self-disclosure of Atum is the *kheperu* of the primeval transcendent Principle and of its noetic plenitude. The main constituents of human microcosm (*ka, ba, akh, sah, ren*, and so on) are regarded as *kheperu*, the immanent developments and manifestations of Atum. At the level of *kosmos noetos*, the infinite range of all *kheperu* (of all existence) is summarized in the form of the divine Ennead. According to J.P. Allen:

The concept of *hpr* implies an ending state different from that which existed before the process began. In Egyptian, this state is expressed by means of the locative preposition *m* 'in'.⁸

The wordplay *kheper, kheperu, and Kheperer* conveys the metaphysical exposition of the essential unity and reciprocity between the Creator (the divine Intellect, Atum-Ra) and his names, theophanies, projections, and irradiations. The underlying conception of unity and diversity is analogous to the Anaxagorean formula adapted by Proclus and other Neoplatonists to describe the domain of *Nous* and the Platonic Forms: 'everything is in everything but in a manner appropriate to each' (*panta en pasin, all 'oikeios en hekastoi*)

7. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 58 (Zivie-Coche translates Hekau instead of Heka).

8. James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, New Haven: Yale University, 1988, p. 29.

and 'everything is everywhere existing in proportion' (*panta panta-chou ana logon esti*). As L. Siorvanes observes:

everything that exists in some definable way is in every thing, in the epistemological and metaphysical sense. Although everything is 'in' everything, they are so in the manner distinctive to their household (*oikeios*): their level of consciousness and being.⁹

The creation itself signifies a transition from the hidden state into the intelligible visibility, and then from the intelligible invisibility (since the divine things, though being the brightest in their own activity, 'are invisible to us creatures of the night': Olympiodorus *In Gorg.* 30.3) to the sensible visibility. Therefore this revelatory cosmogony is effected through invocation, that is, through the uttering of names that constitute the single Holy Name at the level of Heka—the Word (Hu) in Atum's mouth. Atum, the intelligible plenitude concealed within the initial 'nothingness' and appearing in the form of the Scarab (Kheprer, Khopri, Khepera) says:

When I came into being, Being came into being, Being came into being. I came into being in the form of Khopri who came into being on the First Occasion. . . . I came into being in the form of Khopri when I came into being, and that is how Being came into being. . . . (*Pap. Bremner-Rhind*).¹⁰

J. A. Allen provides different translation of the same passage:

For my part, the fact is that I developed as Developer. When I developed, development developed. All development developed

9. Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus. Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, p. 54.

10. R. Faulkner, "Translation of Papyrus Bremner-Rhind."—*JEA*, 24, 1938, p. 41ff. The transliteration of the Egyptian text is as follows: *nuk pu kheper em Khepera kheper-na kheper kheperu kheper kheperu neb em-khut kheper-a asht kheperu em per em re-a* (E. A. Wallis Budge *The Gods of the Egyptians or Studies in Egyptian Mythology*, vol. 1, New York: Dover Publications, 1969 (first ed. 1904), pp. 308–309). Wallis Budge translates this passage as follows: 'I am he who came into being in the form of Khepera, I was (or, became) the creator of what came into being, the creator of what came into all being; after my coming into being many [were] the things which came into being coming forth from my mouth.'

after I developed, developments becoming many in emerging from my mouth.¹¹

The *pleroma* which is hidden (*amun*) contains all components of the noetic heliophanies that are to appear in the form of the divine cultic body (the articulated cosmic body, *ta panta*), comparable to the hieratic statue. The universe is a display of the hieroglyphic script—the Platonic Forms made visible. And the shapes of cult statues in the Egyptian temples also imitate various hieroglyphs, that is, the divine words (*medu neter*) crystallized and revealed from the hidden (*sheta*) state.

In the Ramesside theology, God is conceived as a trinity: 'His Name is hidden as Amun, He is Ra in countenance, His body is Ptah' (*Pap. Leiden*. 1.350, IV.21–22). Ptah stands for the world as a cult statue, or as the entire cultic dimension of the divine realm through which the *ba*, the hidden power of God, can be experienced and conceived of in the plenitude of bodies, images, and symbols (like the Neoplatonic *sunthemata*). All these symbols of *deus ineffabilis* (the hidden Amun who surpasses all human and divine knowledge, but 'whose body is the millions') affirm that 'All is One' (*hen to pan*):

The classical concept of the 'all' and the 'whole', *to pan, ta panta, omnia*, appears in Egyptian as 'millions'. It is not, however, connected with the concept of an all-embracing but closed totality, but rather with one of an endless, uncontainable plenitude. In Egyptian, 'millions' also means 'endless'... the plenitude of living beings that incessantly stream from the god's transcendent unity. . . .¹²

The cosmic hierarchy of being is constituted by *neteru* (gods, divine names, powers): it consists of living gods whose *bau* appear as the cosmic phenomena. This cosmic dimension of divine presence, initiated by the Amunian metaphysics and its solar (noetic)

11. James P. Allen, *ibid.*, p. 28.

12. Jann Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 240.

discourse and maintained by the hieratic rites, is what made the manifested totality of *kheperu* intelligible and readable, or rather 'recitable'. In the Egyptian solar theology, language assumes the highly important role of symbolic mediation, though the true, secret names of the gods are never divulged. In spite of the permanent divine presence, the transcendent gods themselves and the cosmic or cultic domain, which symbolically represents and embodies them, are never entirely identical. However, R. B. Finnestad says:

The image of the cosmos-constituting gods formulates the theogenetic implication of the cosmogony from a henotheistic point of view. . . . The creator and the gods arise together, constituting an entity: the cosmos. Again, it should be noted that cosmos is not conceived as a material body enlivened by a spiritual soul of god. The body consists of living gods. . . . There is nothing in man's world that is not a form of god; there exists no 'mere' material. In the presentation of this cosmos there is an accent on the divine side of life: it all starts with god. . . . *Being* is subordinated to *divine being*.¹³

According to the Heliopolitan myth, humankind (*remeti*) was born from Atum's tears when he cried (*remi*). Therefore man is either Atum's image, 'issued from his body', or is made in Atum's image (*tut*) in the same way as a divine statue is made. To put it otherwise, human beings are modelled by Khnum on his wheel, using silt drawn from Nun and breathing the breath of life (*ankh*) into them, that is, animating them in the same way as statues are animated. At first, gods and men inhabited the same noetic cosmos, but under present conditions the gods are remote and manifest themselves only through the sacred images and symbols:

The present state (in both senses of the word) is both the healing of a breach and a compensation for a loss, the loss of corporeal closeness to the gods. Real presence is replaced by

13. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator. On the Cosmological and Iconological Values of the Temple of Edfu*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985, p. 119 and p. 145.

representation. By virtue of their symbolic power, state and cult, temples, rites, statues, and images make present the divine and establish an irremediably indirect contact with the gods. . . . [D]ivine presence now depends upon the culturally formed possibilities of symbolic mediation and representation. The state is the institution of this closeness. The pharaoh rules as the representative of the creator god.¹⁴

In Egypt, a difference is made between the *rekhyet*-people, depicted as migratory birds, partly theriomorphic, partly anthropomorphic, and the *pa'et*-people, those who belong to the esoteric circle of royal initiates (or officials, whose status is thought as ontologically determined). Only the consecrated pharaoh, as *anthropos teleios* (*al-insan al-kamil* of the Sufis), both the chief mystagogue and the exemplary initiate, is an integral *imago dei* (that to some degree covers the entire state and its landscape), or the restored Eye of Horus in its true sense. Therefore the horns of the ram (*ba*) symbolizes pharaoh's sonship to Amun-Ra (the Neoplatonic *Nous*) and his union, through his royal *ka*, with the Demiurge. Only to the king (as an actualized *tut* of God) and to the righteous is granted the theurgic mimesis of the solar course, only they join the Ennead in the Place of Truth, thereby returning to the all-encompassing One. As it is related in a New Kingdom recitation which ultimately goes back to the *Pyramid Texts* (222):

May you be born like Ra

And carried in pregnancy like Thoth.

Purify yourself for yourself in the western nome,

Receive your purification in the Heliopolitan nome with Atum.

Come into being for yourself, come on high for yourself,

May it be well with you, may it be pure for you

In the embrace of your father Ra-Atum.

O Atum, take him

14. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 187.

In your embrace, together with your *ka*.
He is the son of your body, forever (*Tomb of Senenmut*).¹⁵

THEOGONIC APPEARANCES AND ANIMATED STONES

The Platonists faithfully followed the doctrine established in Plato's *Timaeus*, namely, that the cosmos, patterned on the eternal Living Being (or the plenitude of the noetic Forms, the Ennead of Heliopolis), itself is alive, like 'a statue (*agalma*) brought into being for the everlasting gods' (*Tim.* 37c). Hence, the Demiurge may be compared to the telestic priest who creates and consecrates the cosmos as a sacred statue. In a sense, the Creator (*Nous*), as the first Speaker, contains the archetypal realities that emanate (or are revealed and transmitted from the hidden state to the state of cultic theophany) like 'sounding statues' (*phoneenta agalmata*) of the noetic Forms.

The utterance of the Name is equivalent to a theogonic appearance, the construction of the cosmic Shrine in which the countless *agalmata* are revealed through the divine rites of demiurgy. So even if God is He-who-hides-His-Name (*amun-renf*), His face (*hra*) comes into light through the solar *sunthema* (the visible Sun disk) and through the cult statue. Therefore the revelation of the statue has a metaphysical and cosmological meaning which goes beyond the dwelling imagery of the temple: the revelation of the face of God (*unhra hra neter*) is a cultic epiphany paralleling the cosmic theophany, according to R. B. Finnestad:

The candle contains perfume emitted while it burns, signaling the presence of the god. When the dark room is illuminated by the candlelight, this means that the god of Edfu has appeared—both as creator and as created: he is the revealing light, and he is the god of the statue upon which his light falls: he is himself the creator of his Horus-form. . . . Another ritual expression of the theogonic aspect of the theophany is the embracing of the statue performed by the priest who, by this act, transfer the *ka*-life to the god. The mythical image behind

15. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, tr. David Lorton, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 322.

this rite is that of the creator who creates the gods by embracing them and thereby transferring to them capacity to live. The priest plays the role of the theogon.¹⁶

In the context of Hellenic cultic practice, partly borrowed from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and Anatolia, the statue (*agalma*) is regarded as a vessel and container for the divine powers that take up residence inside it. The awakening of these powers is sometimes achieved by the practice of putting *pharmaka* (remedies, drugs, herbs, magical means of power, charms, enchantments, symbols) into hollow statues and thereby animating them. This act is conducted by the telestic 'craftsman' (*demiourgos*). The physician is also designated as *demiourgos*, because

early Greek medicine and pharmacy combine theurgy (in its widest sense of supernatural or divine agencies in both diseases and their treatments) with the practical application of drugs, foreshadowing later abstractions so common in medico-philosophical thought in later Greek medicine. Theurgy remained fundamental throughout Greek history even after the accession of Christianity, and theurgy continued to exist side by side with other 'medical intervention' systems.¹⁷

'Animation' in its root sense implies putting *anima* (Greek *psuche*, Egyptian *ba* or *ka*) into something. Consequently, 'animation' of images and temples consists in the rite of installation and consecration, for which the terms *hidruo*, *anatithemi*, *hieroo*, and *teleo* are used, though the Hellenic sources do not reveal details of these rituals.¹⁸ Thereby images are turned into the living *telesmata* (consecrated hieratic objects, talismans) and *agalmata* of the gods.

As the Indian *shaiva* priest would say, only when Shiva's image is fully transformed into a state of *shivata* (Shiva-ness), may the appropriate *puja* (the external ritual worship) to the image be

16. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *ibid.*, p. 97 and pp. 100–101.

17. John Scarborough, "The Pharmacology of Sacred Plants, Herbs, and Roots".—*Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone, Dirk Obbink, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 142.

18. Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001, p. 115.

performed. The animated image aids one's anagogic ritual life (in spite of the fact that all human actions are considered to be forms of ritual) and helps one to attain liberation through union with a chosen deity (*ishta-devata*). 'As he is worshiped, so he becomes', according to the *Mudgala Upanishad* (3.3), because man becomes what he worships. Those who worship gods (both externally and internally, by purifications, consecrations of the different parts of their bodies to the deities with the help of seed-*mantras*, by breath control and contemplation, *dhyana*) become gods (*Bhagavadgita* 9.25).

The Greek word *telesma* derives from the verb *telein* (to initiate, to consecrate, to complete, as the Eye of Horus is made complete and alive). The practice of putting *pharmaka* and *sunthemata* (theurgic tokens) inside the statues is linked with the Chaldean talismanic lore, that is, with the Assyrian and Babylonian *hierourgia*. The animated *lamassu* and *shedu* figures, or those designated as *kuribu* (the ultimate prototype of Jewish cherubim, *al-karrubiyyun* in Arabic) and standing at the threshold of the Assyrian royal palace, are both the guardian angels of the king and external prolongations of his vital 'soul' (in the Egyptian sense of *ka*) or of his 'breaths', which are identical to the luminous and terrifying substance of the divine 'kingship'.

The Syrian and Phoenician baetyls (*baituloi*) are aniconic 'images' (not *eikones*, strictly speaking, but rather cultic instruments and vehicles of theophanies) of the same order as the Greek *xoana*—archaic cult images, carved from wood) and *daidala* (miraculous products of Daidalos, the Greek equivalent of Khotarwa-Hasis, the Ugaritic craftsman-god). Pausanias describes the curious ritual whereby trees are selected to provide wood for statues, a ritual related to the cosmological image of birds (descending souls or divine epiphanies) sitting on sacred trees:

Wherever [the birds] may alight, cutting that tree they make the *daidalon* from it and they call by 'daidalon' the statue (*xoanon*) itself.¹⁹

19. Cited in Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 56.

The Near Eastern baetyls, however, are even more supernatural and miraculous habitations for divine powers. The term 'baetyl' itself derives from the Greek *baitulia*, and these baetyls are connected with Apollo, himself depicted as a bird, like the Horus-Falcon. *Beth-el* in Semitic languages means 'dwelling of the god', and this designation reminds us that the name of the golden Hathor Bethel means 'the dwelling of Horus', though the Phoenician-Aramaic god Bethel is more directly connected with the oaths and treaties of kings written on standing stones and commemorative stelae. Philo of Byblos, the second century writer, 'explains that *baitulia* were invented by the god Ouranos when he managed to create *lithoi emp-suchoi*, animated stones, which fell from heaven and possessed magical power.'²⁰

Damascius, the Neoplatonic philosopher from Damascus, describes the baetyl moving in air (*ton baitulon dia tou aeros kinoumenon: Phil. Hist.* 138). The guardian of this baetyl was certain Eusebius who met it while wandering away from the Syrian town Emesa, inspired by mysterious intuition, in the middle of the night, close to the mountain on which the ancient temple of Athena stood:

He then suddenly saw a ball of fire (*sphairan de puros*) leaping down from above and a huge lion standing beside it, which instantly vanished. He ran up to the ball as the fire was dying down and understood that this was indeed the baetyl; picking it up, he asked it which god possessed it, and the baetyl answered that it belonged to Gennaios (the Heliopolitans honour Gennaios in the temple of Zeus in the shape of a lion). . . . Eusebius was not the master of the baetyl's movement, as is the case with others, but he begged and prayed and the baetyl listened to his incantations (*Phil. Hist.* 138).²¹

The moving baetyls may be regarded as the aetherical weapons of

20. Robert Wenning, "The Betyls of Petra".—*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 324, 2001, p. 80.

21. Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, text with translation and notes by Polymnia Athanassiadi, Athens: Apameia, 1999, p.309. The Syrian Heliopolis is Baalbek in modern Lebanon.

Zeus used in his struggle against Kronos (in the Phoenician cosmology, Hellenized by Philo of Byblos), perhaps equivalent to the fiery thunderbolts of the Chaldean Paternal Intellect. In this respect, the Implacable Thunders (*ameiliktoi te keraunoi*: *Chald. Or.* fr.35) are the Thoughts of the Father, the multiformed Platonic Ideas that leap forth from one Source like bees and are divided by the noeric Fire. As we have seen, these Paternal Thoughts are called Iynges, the demiurgic and theurgic 'wheels'. It is remarkable that the *iunx* (literally, the wryneck bird, but esoterically a sort of *yantra*) was brought for the first time to humankind by Aphrodite, according to Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.217–219). And Aphrodite, in this particular context, is an exact Graeco-Phoenician equivalent of the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar and of the Egyptian Hathor. Therefore the Iynges (when equated with the theurgic *sunthemata*: ineffable names and secret mantras) function as fiery 'birds' mediating between the noetic and sensible realms.

The divine presence may be symbolized or revealed by any thing (or by any *kheperu*), since this presence can be perceived in all things. For those capable of such vision, all physical, psychic, and intellectual functions themselves become a ritual that repeats the all-embracing cosmic rites of the Demiurge and his blessed choir. For the members of ancient Israelite cultic confederation (Yahweh's warriors) and other *habiru*, who tacitly imitated but openly hated Egyptian practices, the divine presence was adequately symbolized by the cloud, the ark and certain cult-objects.²²

But the sacred stone (like the *ben-ben* Stone in the Egyptian Heliopolitan temple, representing the immortal *mundus intelligibilis*, the noetic 'house' of Atum-Ra) is the ultimate archaic prototype of articulated anthropomorphic statues made of stone. In the Stone Age metaphysics, if such expression is permissible, the stone stands for the perfect noetic substance which is re-collected and re-actualized as *imago dei* in the stone-like 'perfect man', *anthropos teleios*. Just as the stone may be regarded as *theos* (god in the sense of fiery

22. William W. Hallo, "Cult Statue and Divine Image: A Preliminary Study"—*Scripture in Context II. More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. William W. Hallo et alii, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983, p. 2.

'name' or intelligible principle), so the animated statue of a god is *theos*. Therefore Ch. A. Faraone argues that

the Greeks did not clearly distinguish between the image and the thing represented.²³

This distinction is required in a discursive theory, but it is less important in immediate devotional practice and in the esoteric rites of unification with a deity (like the Tantric *ishta-devata*) where an image, contemplated 'face to face', functions as a sort of theurgic *yantra* that reveals the supreme metaphysical identity (*tad ekam*) without duality (*advaita*): everything is the One who makes himself many. This realization of Brahman is regarded by A.K. Coomaraswamy as an ineffable initiation which transcends the distinction between utterance and silence:

The secret of initiation remains inviolable by its very nature; it cannot be betrayed because it cannot be expressed—it is inexplicable (*aniruktam*), but the inexplicable is everything, at the same time all that can and all that cannot be expressed.²⁴

THE THEOLOGY OF IMAGES AND ITS ESOTERIC DIMENSION

The Hellenic worshipers of images (*eikones*), though hated and assaulted by the Christian and Jewish zealots, were perfectly aware that images of the gods are merely receptacles and symbols, not divine realities *per se*. These images are not altogether adequate representations of the gods, but the anagogic instruments that help in one's devotional, intellectual, and imaginative ascent or function as 'windows of transcendence' irradiating divine powers and graces.

Following the Egyptian cult practices, certain *xoana* were regularly carried in processions beyond the confines of the temple for

23. Christopher A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses. Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1992, p. 10.

24. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Vedic Doctrine of 'Silence'".—2: *Selected Papers. Metaphysics*, ed. Roger Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 202.

the benefit of the whole environment. Likewise, Amun-Ra opens up the world: every road is filled with his light and every face lives on the sight of his beauty. The processions of his barque are regarded as real epiphanies that repeat the cosmogonic course. Normally, the statue is hidden in the dark *mesen*-chapel, and the shrine containing the statue of a deity is called *sheta* (mysterious, hidden)—for example, ‘his hidden and grand *naos* of black stone.’²⁵ So even the opening of the temple doors is a ritual event initiating the grace-bringing divine epiphany.

The honour given to the image is transmitted to its noetic archetype, therefore the Hellenic practice of setting up images in human form is based on the premise ‘that because man is godlike in his virtue and intelligence, his outward form is the best possible symbol of divinity.’²⁶ Olympiodorus defends the use of sacred images following the established tradition of argumentation, at first employed by Platonists themselves against the Stoic pantheists (those who rejected the cult images by saying that God is the living intelligent universe) and later borrowed by the Christian Iconodules in their apologetic defense against the Jews and the Byzantine Iconoclasts. Olympiodorus says:

And do not think that philosophers honour representations (*ta eidola*) in stone as divine (*hos theia*). It is because we live in the sensory world, and are not able to reach up to the bodiless and immaterial power, that we devise representations as a reminder of those things, so that by seeing and respecting them we might arrive at a notion of those bodiless and immaterial powers (*In Gorg.* 47.5).

In the context of Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgy, this theology of images acquires an esoteric dimension, because the initiate’s soul (or rather its hidden *sunthema*) is awakened by means of the telestic work (*dia ton telestikon ergon*) that consists in combination of ritual activity and sacred word (*hieroglyphon henosas: Chald.Or. fr.110*).

25. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *ibid.*, p. 105.

26. A.H. Armstrong, ‘Some Comments on the Development of the Theology of Images’—*Studia Patristica*, vol. 1x Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966, p. 122.

The awakened soul is raised up by the seven rays (or seven vowels) of the solar Intellect to the Chaldean Paradise (*Paradeisos Chaldaikos*, as Psellus designated it: *Expositio in oracula chaldaica*, P.G. 122.1137d 5–8). This Paradise is described as the Court Open to All (*pandektike aule*), that is, the paternal order of the Father containing all the souls which have returned to the noetic realm. According to R. Majercik’s remark:

it is the ‘meadow’ (*leimona*) of the Father where Synesius yearns to go in order to join the ‘kingly choir’ (*sun anakti choro*) in ‘intellectual hymns’ (*noerous humnous*). . . . In light of this evidence, it is probable that the Chaldean ‘paradise’ was understood in Psellus’ sense; i.e., as a ‘choir of divine powers’ which praise the Father with hymns.²⁷

PRIVILEGED HABITATIONS FOR THE IMMORTAL GODS

According to Proclus, ‘philosophizing about being in the manner of geometry’, one has not only ideas but pictures, and these pictures might be regarded as figures (*schemata*) pertaining to all levels of manifested reality. The perfect, uniform, and ineffable figures of the gods transcend even the intelligible figures that shine everywhere with indivisible and noetic light. The ineffable divine figures impose limits upon the whole ontological hierarchy of figures. Their symbolic images are employed in the telestic operations which constitute the contemplative and sacramental path to the One. Proclus says:

Their properties have been represented for us by the theurgic art in its statues of the gods, whom it clothes in the most varied figures. Some of them it portrays by means of mystic signs that express the unknowable divine potencies; others it represents through forms and shapes, making some standing, others sitting, some heart-shaped, some spherical, and some fashioned still otherwise; some simple, others composed of several

27. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, text, translation, and commentary by Ruth Majercik, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989, p. 203.

shapes; some stern, others mild and expressing the benignity of the gods; and others still fearful in shape (*In Euclid.* 138).²⁸

These figures may be understood in relation to the Procline conception of the Platonic Forms: the One is analogous to the Sun, and the Forms, to its rays. The irradiating and descending Forms appear as the inferior limit of *ta noeta*, the intelligibles. Therefore each primary noetic Form is 'one', 'being', and a 'whole', and 'as such can be identically present to many different things at the same time, but transcendentally; so that a Form is both everywhere and nowhere, and being present to all its instances in a non-temporal fashion is unmixed with them' (*In Parm.* 861).²⁹

However, though the sensible things simultaneously partake of noeric Forms as immanently present in them, being their images in a sense—that is, resembling these archetypal Forms—one may speak of three modes of participation. Accordingly, things are likenesses of the intellective Forms, reflections of the soul-forms, and imprints or impressions of the physical forms:

The animated statue, for example, participates by way of impression in the art which turns it on a lathe or polishes and shapes it in such and such a fashion; while from the universe it has received reflections of vitality which even cause us to say that it is alive; and as a whole it has been made like the god whose image it is. For a theurgist who sets up a statue as a likeness of a certain divine order fabricates the tokens of its identity with reference to that order, acting as does the craftsman when he makes a likeness by looking to its proper model (*In Parm.* 847).³⁰

Just as the statue contains within it the divine powers that make accessible the immortal presence of the gods without directly reproducing them, so the human body functions as a vessel equipped

28. Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, tr. Glen R. Morrow, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 110–111.

29. Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, tr. Glen R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 228.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 217–218.

with external surfaces. This 'corpse' (*soma*), being a firm enclosure (*peribolos*) that keeps the soul within its limits,³¹ conceals the hidden divine spark that needs to be recollected, rekindled, and revealed. To say it in Orphico-Platonic terms, the body is a tomb (*sema*) of the soul and its immortal or divine part in us.

When the world's shape is regarded as a cosmic body, this body may be imagined as a skull deprived of the remaining bodily parts. It resembles a human head (or rather, the human skull resembles the universe which is an *agalma* created by the Demiurge), being the living creature (*zoön*) whose structure is isomorphic to the human structure. Therefore R. Brague argues:

What is to be read in the *Laws* is still more likely to be present in the *Timaeus*: if the soul, and first of all the world soul, is constructed out of some numerical ratios, the same must be true for the body that houses the soul. . . . Moreover, we are justified in believing that Plato conceived of the possibility of a precise and numerical determination of this beauty. We may elicit this assertion from a passage in the *Laws* in which the proportions of the body that define the animals reproduced by painting or sculpture are called 'numbers' (*arithmoi*).³²

Both the cult statue and the human body may be regarded as privileged habitations for the god (or the immortal *nous*). Therefore, just as the priest fills the interior of an *agalma* with *sumbola*, *sunthemata*, and *pharmaka*, while uttering verbal formulas and thereby animating the statue (making it *empnoös*), so the spiritual path of inner transformation, followed by the initiate, results in the awakening of those *sunthemata* which the Demiurge concealed within his soul and body. These secret symbols are to be re-awakened in the process of one's spiritual homecoming which opens the

31. C. J. de Vogel, "The Soma-Sema Formula: Its Function in Plato and Plotinus Compared to Christian Writers".—*Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in honour of A. H. Armstrong*, ed. H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Marcus, London: Variorum, 1981, p. 80.

32. Remi Brague, *The Body of the Speech: "A New Hypothesis on the Compositional Structure of Timaeus' Monologue"*.—*Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985, p. 64.

immortal depth of the soul (*psuches bathos ambroton*). Through the perfect anagogic life (*dia tes anagogou zoes*) one is led to the union with the gods and the One. According to the *Chaldean Oracles*: 'Those who, by inhaling [the rays of the Father], drive out the soul, are free' (fr.124). Hence, the theurgist should not reject matter, but only that which is alien to the gods, because even stones, plants, and aromatic substances may be sacred, perfect, and godlike (*hiera kai telea kai theoeide*), according to Iamblichus. They are used

as being capable of harmonizing with the construction of dwellings for the gods, the consecration of statues (*kai kathidruzeis agalmaton*), and indeed for the performance of sacred rites (*tas ton thusioon hierougias*) in general. For there is no other way in which the terrestrial realm or the men who dwell here could enjoy participation in the existence that is the lot of the higher beings, if some such foundation be not laid down in advance (*De myster.* 234.2–6).³³

In the same way, a crudely fashioned Silenus *eikon* reveals the golden *agalmata* concealed within the satyr-like shape of Socrates: his outer appearance (*schema*) is like a curtain behind which the divine essence (or the golden Osirian *eidos*) is hidden (Plato *Symp.* 216c). As D. T. Steiner relates:

Just as the loftiest gods concealed themselves within statue-vessels that can be crude and uncouth, so, too, Socrates has taken on an external, fashioned covering that radically belies the nature of the inner person, that warns against assuming homology between visible appearance and the reality within. . . .³⁴

BEHOLDING THE INEFFABLE BEAUTIES

Iamblichus, however, insists that whether we are talking of cosmic regions, cities consecrated to various gods, or of sacred statues (*hiera agalmata*), 'divinity illuminates everything from without (*exothen epilampein*), even as the sun lights everything from without

33. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis/On the Mysteries*, tr. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, p. 269.

34. Deborah Tarn Steiner, *ibid.*, p. 89.

with its rays' (*De myster.* 30.13–14). In this context, 'from without' means 'from the transcendent dimension', therefore one equally may interpret it as meaning 'from within'—not from within the mortal domain of psychic residues (a sort of Jungian unconscious), but as if from 'nowhere'. This is so, because 'the light of the gods illuminates its subject transcendently (*choristos*)', and this single, indivisible light 'is one and the same in its entirety everywhere' (*De myster.* 31.10–11).

The practice of beholding the visible images of the gods and uttering the sacred names of the gods (or other types of *sunthemata*) has the power to raise us up to the gods and unite us with them. Thus the completely incorporeal gods are united to the visible gods who have bodies and whom the initiate contemplates, in an attempt to become assimilated to their essence by virtue of sacred liturgy (*dia tes hieras hagisteias*), consecration, and 'annihilation' of his mortal Titanic nature.

This theurgic rite implies the realization of human nothingness (*oudeneia*), because only the divine may be united with the divine. In this case, then, 'the divine is literally united with itself' (*auto to theion pros heauto sunesti*: *De myster.* 47.6–7). The noetic gods, by reason of their infinite unity (*dia ten apeiron auton henosin*: *ibid.*, 60.9–10), embrace within themselves the visible gods who reside, in reality, outside their bodies, being rooted essentially in the noetic domain already. To be united with the divinity housed inside the statue is to be mounted on the divine falcon which would carry you (not as a mortal individuality or human *eidolon*, but in the form of the immortal light, as the divine falcon himself) to the land of *lux intelligibilis*.

Isidorus, the master of Damascius, however, maintained that 'the truly sacred truth . . . lies hidden in the depths.' For this reason, he did not like 'to worship the statues of the gods, but he was fast moving towards the gods themselves, not in sanctuaries but in the very mystery (*en auto to aporrheto*)—whatever this may be—of the completely unknowable' (Damascius *Phil. Hist.* 36a).

In spite of all sophisticated techniques of the Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgic activities (*theurgika energemata*), neither the contemplation of images and epiphanies, nor invocations and liturgies, could be properly understood without the sacred dimension of

beauty. For Plotinus already, the degree of participation in being directly corresponds to the degree of participation in beauty. And the *Chaldean Oracles* maintain that the theurgic *sumbola*, which the Paternal Intellect, Craftsman of the Fiery Universe (*kosmou technites puriou*), has sown throughout the cosmos, are called 'ineffable beauties' (*kalle aphrasta*: fr. 108). The Holy Name (*onoma semnon*) that leaps into the cosmoi with eternal circular motion (fr. 87) must be beautiful and carry beauty by its sounding rays.

Since the theurgist who invokes the god to appear in the form of a visionary self-manifested 'statue' (*autopton agalma*) is designated as 'caller' (*kletor*), Proclus relates the word 'beauty' (*kalon*) to the verb meaning 'to call' (*kalein*). According to

W. Beierwaltes:

The beautiful itself contains an uplifting power and thereby becomes the moving force for the conversion and return through eros. Echoing Plato, Proclus derives the word *kalon* from *kalein* or *kelein*, 'to call', and from the word draws conclusions about the object. Accordingly, the effect of the beautiful is to 'call to itself what exists and thinks', to 'captivate', and to 'enchant' (*In Alc.* 328.12ff). At the same time, what 'calls' and 'enchants' distances thought from the beautiful appearance by becoming a 'mean' that conveys or reduces the manifestation of the beautiful to its being and essence.³⁵

For Proclus, Beauty itself is a life-possessing noetic Form of which each beautiful thing partakes: though intelligence is not present to everything that is beautiful, but only to ensouled things, the light of beauty is present even in stones (*In Parm.* 859). This manifested beauty is like an epiphanic beauty of the goddess Hathor (the golden house of Horus-Falcon), known as the Eye of Ra, or the whole (*uedjat*) Eye. She is the instrument of divine energy and the power (*sekhem*) of Ra, projected out into the world which is both created, animated, and illuminated by the intelligible beauty of the divine Face.

35. Werner Beierwaltes, "The Love of Beauty and the Love of God"—*Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. H.A. Armstrong, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 307.

DIVINE BODIES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN INDIAN TANTRISM

The Indian Tantric practices that represent the prolongation and development of the archaic spiritualities (or the so-called Bronze Age metaphysics of the post-Middle Kingdom Egypt, of Akkadian Mesopotamia and Central Asia, including Punjab) may shed more light into the purely documented areas of Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgy. For example, the Pythagorean equation of *agalma* (statue, image) with *onoma* (name) appears to be analogous to the *rupa* (form, shape) and *nama* (name) relationship in Indian thought.

Name and form are the two fundamental aspects of divine manifestation, since the primordial unity is differentiated by name and form. Therefore 'everything has a name and a form' (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.7). A.K. Coomaraswamy regards *nama* as an equivalent of the Idea, the Platonic Form, and *rupa* as an image, be it the inwardly known form (*jnana-sattva-rupa*) or the external shape, like a *pratima* (anthropomorphic icon).

Like the Greek *agalma*, *pratima* represents the formless (*arupa*) deity and is 'of the same kind as a *yantra*, that is, a geometrical representation of a deity, or a *mantra*, that is, an auditory representation of a deity.'³⁶ The Tantric universe is constituted by the basic divine powers, or theophanies, themselves regarded as deities (*devata*) that can be approached and perceived through words, images, and symbols. The representations of deities through *mantras* (thought-forms, vocal *sunthemata* of the Chaldean theology) and *yantras* (anagogic diagrams, instruments of contemplation and unification) are viewed as more accurate than those executed in the anthropomorphic fashion. As A. Danielou remarks:

Mantras and *yantras* are therefore the abstract symbols, *mudra* (gesture) and *svara* (musical notes) are the subtle representations, and image and myth are the gross representations of the principles known as deities.³⁷

36. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p. 28.

37. Alain Danielou, *The Myths and Gods of India*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991, p. 333.

However, the Indian cult statue (though inwardly conceived as a metaphysical formula) is a full-bodied representation (*murti*) of the god that is made for worship and adoration so that the worshiper may concentrate on the deity in its concrete visible or epiphanic form. At first, the worshiper contemplates the divine attributes manifested in their dispositional forms (*bhava-rupa*), in *asanas* (fixed and semiotically meaningful 'hieroglyphic' postures), in *mudras*, visible shapes, and symbols of the deity within the boundaries of the *yantra* or the cult statue. Then he mediates all these attributes as situated in the various *cakras* (wheels, formally analogous to the Chaldean *iunges*) of his own recollected and reintegrated body, like the tokens (*sunthemata*) of the Mediterranean hierurgy (*hierourgia*). These *sunthemata* need to be reawakened and reactivated (to be rotated by the erotic *shakti* like the wheels of Ishtar's or Hekate's elevating energy) in order to accomplish the theurgic *energemata*.

This is achieved partly by invocation and partly by visualization (which accompanies, to certain degree, the noetic concentration), since the power of the *yantra* resides in the *mantra*, regarded as the very body of the deity. The deity presents itself in contemplation together with the special *mantra*, the vocal-image of the particular noetic principle.

The statues and figural compositions (*pratimas*) are based on underlying but hidden *yantras* (like the *schemata* of Egyptian hieroglyphs, viewed as 'divine speech', *medu neter*). Therefore the *Vastu-Sutra-Upanishad* argues that the principles of sacred geometry (as a means of theurgy and anagogic life) are indispensable for any sculptor who tries through his symbolic construct (*pratika*) to show immaterial (*amurta*) as material (*murta*):

The first step in image-making is said to be the drawing of a compositional diagram or cage (*khilapanjara*) on the stone surface, the diagram consisting of an outer circle and a square or a rhombus within, and the whole surface then being divided into a number of straight lines—vertical, horizontal, diagonal and oblique. The limbs of the deities with their attending gods

and worshippers have to be set along the lines, according to their hierarchical status, and fitted into the geometrical pattern. The resulting panel is supposed to represent the cosmos in miniature—representing in its upper, middle and lower planes, the deity, the attending gods, and the deities' vehicles and worshippers, respectively.³⁸

At first, the artist visualizes an image in his contemplative vision (*dhyana*) and then constructs it in accordance with the noetic archetype. After the ritual of animation or establishment (*pratishtha*), the image is brought to life and is regarded as an efficacious *yantra* able to reveal the subtle spiritual essence (*sukshma sharira*, like the Egyptian luminous *sah*-body, the Neoplatonic ethereal vehicle of the immortal soul) through its gross material body (*sthula sharira*). Hence, the *pratishtha* ritual is thought to accomplish an actual transformation in the character of the hieratic statue.

Be that as it may, the deity can be perceived only by means of crystallization in the form of holy bodies, sacred sounds, images, and myths. The myths have the same sacramental dimension and function as consecrated images. Remember Olympiodorus, who also says that myths are produced so that we may proceed from the apparent to the invisible (*In Gorg.* 46.2).

Sharira, one of Sanskrit words for 'body', derives from the verbal root *shri* ('to rest upon', 'to support'). Hence, the body serves as a framework (like the Greek *peribolos*) by means of which the All-Worker can experience the world, though *deha*, another word for body, hints of its dark and defiled nature, similar to the Orphic conception of the body as 'prison'. However, as G. Feuerstein remarks:

If the world is in essence divine, so must be the body. If we must honor the world as a creation or an aspect of the divine Power (*shakti*), we must likewise honor the body. The body is a piece of the world and . . . the world is a piece of body. Or,

38. V.K. Chari, "Representation in India's Sacred Images: Objective vs. Metaphysical Reference".—*Bulletin of SOAS* (School of Oriental and African Studies), vol. 1, 2002, p. 66.

rather, when we truly understand the body, we discover that it is the world, which in essence is divine.³⁹

SENSE PERCEPTION AND INTELLECTION
IN NEOPLATONISM

In this respect, we should indicate that the meaning of *aisthesis* (sense perception) in Neoplatonism is problematic, because even the supra-intelligent henadic perception which transcends *noesis* (intellection) and operates through the 'flower of intellect' (*anthos tou nou*) is called *aisthesis* by Proclus. Plotinus discusses a sort of *aisthesis* which belongs to *Nous*. This divine Intellect is like 'a living richly varied sphere' (*sphaira zoë poikile: Enn. VI.7.15.25-26*). Plotinus says:

those sense-objects (*ta aistheta*), which we called so because they are bodies, are apprehended in a different way; and this sense perception here below is dimmer than the apprehension there in the intelligible, which we called sense-perception because it is of bodies and which is clearer. And for this reason this man here has sense-perception, because he has a lesser apprehension of lesser things, images (*eikonon*) of those intelligible realities; so that these sense perceptions here are dim intellections, but the intellections there are clear sense-perceptions' (*hoste einai tas aistheseis tautas amudras noeseis, tas de ekei noeseis enargeis aistheseis: Enn. VI.7.7.24-32* Armstrong).

So, as H. J. Blumenthal explains, the noetic *aisthesis* imitates *Nous* and contains its own objects:

It does not proceed from one set of objects to another because that is a characteristic of the divided power . . . and does not 'go outside', that is operate externally. It contains in itself the

39. Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra, The Path of Ecstasy*, Boston and London: Shambhala, 1998, p. 53.

whole of what is perceptible and so is rather a form of reflexive consciousness.⁴⁰

This internal noetic sense-perception is more or less identical to *noesis* (intellection), because 'true self-knowledge is a function of intellect'.⁴¹ For Plotinus, *noesis* implies the real knowledge which is the goal of our life 'according to intellect' (human intellect being considered as a merely irradiation, *ellampsis*, of the divine *Nous*) and consists in identity of knowing subject and knowing object, analogous to the conjunction (*sustasis*) of the Chaldean 'caller' (*kleitor*) and the object of his invocation.

This ontological identity is real *gnosis*, because knowledge below the level of *Nous* is only by representation. Therefore the unifying *noesis* also belongs to the theurgical activity and is considered as being superhuman and divine. *Noesis* of this type (in which subject and object are identical) is above human *noesis* and human *episteme* (rational scientific knowledge). According to A. Smith:

The same is true for Proclus who stresses the role of *nous* at the highest levels of union. A fact which further supports this is the way in which Proclus sometimes sees theurgy as a means not merely to union with the One but as a means of achieving the unified thought of real *noesis*.⁴²

However, Proclus paradoxically describes four levels of *aisthesis*, of which only the last kind is dim, passive (*pathos*) and close to natural sympathy. But the noetic *aisthesis*, which grasps the objects of its cognition as a whole and in an unchanging way (like the Sufi *dhawq*, spiritual tasting) is described by Proclus as follows:

There is another kind of perception (*aisthesis*) prior to the one residing in the soul's vehicle (*en to ochemati tes psuches*): compared with this one it is immaterial, pure and a kind of

40. Henry J. Blumenthal, "Proclus on Perception".—*BICS* (Bulletin of Institute of Classical Studies, University of London), vol. 29, 1982, p. 2.

41. Henry J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the De Anima*, London: Duckworth, 1996, p. 166.

42. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, pp. 114-115.

cognition (*gnosis*) not involving affection, but it is not free from form (*morphes*) because it is itself like bodies as it acquires its existence in a body (*In Tim.* 3.286.19ff).

As H. J. Blumenthal explains, this sense-perception 'has the same nature as *phantasia*, imagination, but is called *aisthesis* when it operates externally and *phantasia* when it remains internal and contemplates forms and shapes in the *pneuma*'.⁴³

By this sort of 'anagogic' *aisthesis*, the Neoplatonic philosopher or the initiate may perceive the noetic realities and through contemplation (*dhyana*, to say it in Sanskrit terms) of the hieratic image (like one's *ishta-devata*, tantamount to one's real noetic *eidos* and divine *paradeigma*) to be united with the archetypal *pleroma* of Intellect. Hence, one's chosen deity (its animated icon) is to be contemplated as one's very Self. On this level of practice, the philosophical distinction between *aisthesis* and *noesis* seems quite irrelevant. G. Feuerstein says:

It is within the microcosm (body-mind) that, according to the *Tantras*, we find the doorway to the outer cosmos. The entire architecture of the universe is faithfully mirrored in our own body-mind. . . . We can access the cosmos by going within ourselves because objective and subjective realities coevolve from and always subsist in the same Reality. In the transcendental dimension, they are absolutely identical. In the subtle realms, they are barely distinct, and they manifest as seemingly separate lines of evolution only in the visible material dimension.⁴⁴

DIVINE LIGHT AND LUMINOUS VEHICLE OF THE SOUL

For Proclus, the divine light irradiates from the One God (the Platonic Good, *to agathon*) and penetrates to all levels of the manifested reality, ensuring a goodness and theurgic salvation for everything. Therefore there are many different modes of light—noetic, psychical, hypercosmic, and physical:

43. Henry J. Blumenthal, *Proclus on Perception*, p. 3.

44. Georg Feuerstein, *ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

Behind the visible sun lie the metaphysical, invisible suns, which give it power and sustenance.⁴⁵

The Neoplatonists regarded light as an incorporeal activity: the corporeal forms of light (the visible Sun and fire) only house this incorporeal light which really does not travel but is simultaneously everywhere. Julian the Emperor says:

Accordingly, the doctrine of the Phoenicians, who are wise and knowledgeable about divine matters, states that the sunlight that proceeds in all directions is the undefiled *energeia* of pure Intellect. Our theory is not inconsistent with theirs since light itself is incorporeal, if one should consider that its source is not a body but the undefiled *energeia* of intellect irradiating into its proper abode (*Or.* iv.134ab–b7).

All forms of divine inspiration, revelation, and true divination are possible owing to illumination by the incorporeal light of the One, the pure activity (*energeia*) of Helios (Amun-Ra), which at first 'irradiates into' (*ellampomene eis*) the noeric ('noeric' denotes the 'thinking intelligibles', *ta noeta*) realm and then shines through Apollo, the separated and transcendent monad of the visible realm. However, Iamblichus curiously maintains (in accordance to the general Platonic devaluation of images) that the image-making art (*he eidolopoietike techne*) is able to utilize only a very obscure element in these descending immaterial lights. For Iamblichus, as J. F. Finamore observes:

This so-called art does not derive externally and separately from the gods but arises from the material and corporeal powers around matter and in bodies. . . . Far from using the revolving stars, the image-maker uses these final effluences of nature artificially (*technikos*), not theurgically (*theourgikos*).⁴⁶

Proclus, however, insists that light, being a 'participation in the

45. Lucas Siorvanes, *ibid.*, p. 242.

46. John F. Finamore, "Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent"—*The Divine Iamblichus, Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H. J. Blumenthal and E. G. Clark, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993, p. 59.

divine existence' (*metousia tes theias huparxeos*), is a sort of body. The supra-celestial light is identical with the *place* of the cosmos, and this 'place', as well as the cosmos itself, is a body. Thus 'we have a case of two bodies interpenetrating', as R. Sorabji observes.⁴⁷ But Proclus, and his master Syrianus, speak about *immaterial bodies*: both 'place' and the vehicles of our souls are immaterial. According to Syrianus,

immaterial bodies resemble the light emitted from different lamps which goes right through the whole of the same building, the light of each lamp passing through that of the other without being obliterated or divided (*In Metaph.* 85.15).

'Place' as a supra-celestial light, a sphere of light equal in volume to the cosmos (understood as an *agalma*), 'is visible not to the eyes, but only through the luminous vehicles of our rational soul. It is not affected, therefore, when visible light goes out.'⁴⁸ This vehicle (*ochema*) of the soul is ethereal and eternal. When the soul and its *augoeide ochema* revolve together, the soul enjoys perfect intellection (*noesis*), moving in a circle like the solar barque of Ra, which carries those immortal *bau* which are saved and transformed into *akhu* (intellects, noetic lights, spirits). Likewise, the chariots in the myth of Plato's *Phaedrus* (248a1–b5) are moving in a circle, thereby imitating the ouroboric nature of *Nous*. So the spherical vehicle of the human soul revolves in conjunction with the vehicles of the gods. However, as J.F. Finamore remarks, 'the relationship between a soul and its vehicle deteriorates as the soul participates less fully in the One.'⁴⁹

Although regarded by Plotinus as merely an illumination of what is below *ta noeta*, the descent (*kathodos*) into generation and involvement with material elements results in real incarnation. The subtle material covering of the soul becomes its gross corporeal

47. Richard Sorabji, "Proclus on Place and the Interpenetration of Bodies".—*Proclus lecteur et interprete des anciens*, ed. Jean Pepin and H.D. Saffrey, Paris: CNRS, 1987, p. 297.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

49. John F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985, p. 48.

body. Thereby the human soul (which is not strictly 'human' at the noetic level, but rather supernatural, *huperphues*) descends in order that theogony and all the tasks of demiurgy may be fulfilled. The soul accepts the unique task of becoming mortal, of realizing its own nothingness, as G. Shaw argues:

Only then might it experience the supernatural death of the theurgists, a death not of the body but of the individual self. Only then may the soul's *eros* carry it to fulfillment, a journey that is necessarily anonymous.⁵⁰

Therefore the main task of all theurgical practices is to remove the material pollution from the soul's immortal ethereal vehicle and re-unite the soul with its noetic principles and the One itself through the ascending hierarchy of intermediaries.

DIVINE PRESENCE IN IMAGES

In India, the metaphysical Principle is regarded as both transcendent and immanent, being simultaneously supreme (*paratva*) and accessible (*saualabhya*). Therefore the hieratic icons, imbued with the mysterious presence of God, are likened to the deep pools where water is always available. The god Vishnu, who manifests and incarnates himself in many different ways, instructs his devotees that he, Vishnu, can be worshiped in embodied form only. So, allegedly, this mode of worship is revealed by Vishnu himself. There is no worship without the manifest forms and icons, 'therefore humans should construct the Imperishable One in human form and worship him with utmost devotion' (*Paramasamhita* 3.6–8).⁵¹

In certain cases, these images are viewed as the actual incarnations of Vishnu or Shiva, being infused by the divine presence in the same manner as a soul enters and animates a human body. Therefore there is the direct analogy of a soul entering a human body

50. Gregory Shaw, "The Mortality and Anonymity of the Iamblican Soul".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8, The University of Iowa, 1997, p. 190.

51. Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 30.

(whose 'inner controller', *antaryamin*, is the transcendent All-Worker, concealed within the heart) and a deity (or its *ba*, as Egyptians would say) entering a statue—sometimes by the spontaneous self-manifestation (*svayambhu*), sometimes through the hieratic rites of animation (*pratishtha*).

In any case, the fashioned or constructed sacred image is a body (*vigraha*). Without losing its essential transcendence, the god enters this body in the form of *atman*, life breath (*prana*), noetic consciousness (*cetana*), or divine power (*shakti*), and inwardly infuses it with divine presence. This mysterious infusion is called 'animation'. Likewise, a soul or animating principle (*jiva*) enters a human body, which serves as a receptacle in the same manner as material *hupodoche* receives the Platonic Forms, poured into the womb (*kolpos*) of Hekate.

The Chaldean theology likens the Forms that enter the *kolpoi* to 'thunderbolts', 'lightnings', and 'fires' of the Father. Hekate as the noetic Life (Rhea) and the World Soul performs the role of 'nurturing' (that is, dividing and measuring) these Forms, or Ideas, also called *Iunges*. Then Hekate herself pours forth the great *alke* (strength) of the vivifying fire. On the way back to the noetic source, this *alke* assists the theurgist's soul in its ascension and liberation, guiding the works of fire (*puros erga*). This is so because 'theurgy and its goal—the unification of man's soul with the divine—were activated by the divine alone; the soul's role was strictly preparatory.'⁵²

Damascius tells us that Heraiscus, the Egyptian Neoplatonist, who is credited with becoming a Bacchus (tantamount to Osiris, the vindicated 'dead', *maa-kheru*) even before his physical death, had the natural gift of distinguishing between animate and inanimate hieratic statues (*ton te zonton kai ton me zonton hieron agalmaton*) by means of certain *eumoria*, the inborn ability of noetic perception:

He had but to look at one of them and immediately his heart was afflicted by divine frenzy while both his body and soul

52. Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, p. 85.

leapt up as if possessed by the god. But if he was not moved in such a way, the statue (*agalma*) was inanimate (*apsuchon*) and devoid of divine inspiration (*theias epipnoias*). It was in this way that he recognized that the ineffable statue (*to arrheton agalma*) of Aion was possessed by the god who was worshipped by the Alexandrians, being at the same time Osiris and Adonis as a result of a truly mystical act of union (*Phil. Hist.* 7E).

The Neoplatonists maintained that the first name-giver revealed the attributes of the gods by means of sounds (the divine names, regarded as images) in the same way as the statue-maker embodied these sounds in stone. In this respect the model of human artists is both Apollo (the Egyptian Horus), who is in charge of cosmic harmonies, and Hephaestus (Ptah), the maker of the visible universe filled of signs (*semeion*) that the wise man can read. According to Proclus, the cosmic 'Poet' (*poietes*) works 'mythologically' (*muthologikos: In Remp.* 1.68.15 ff). Therefore the cosmos itself is both a statue (*agalma*) and a myth—a single animated body, all of whose parts are related to one another, bearing a symbolic and semiotic function: 'Texts and bodies are visible objects, meanings and souls, invisible.'⁵³ And 'since human beings cannot participate perfectly in the gods, they look at them through imaginary figures.'⁵⁴

Contemplating the statue of a deity and uttering the divine names, regarded as *agalmata phoneenta* (vocal images of the gods), the initiate is granted access to the invisible and ineffable reality that resides both within the statue and within the initiate's own tomb-and-temple-like body.

Since all manifested reality is established as theophany, a deity (as an aspect or *kheperu* of the Creator) is *a priori* present in the raw materials gathered to create the image, as it is already present in landscapes, animals, and human beings. Likewise, fire is regarded as being latent in the dry wood, therefore hieratic rites and spiritual practices (or contemplative life itself, which consists in a series of

53. Oiva Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996, p. 68.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

transformative rituals) only make this fire manifest in one way or another. The *Chaldean Oracles* inform us that the world-forming Ideas of the demiurgic *Nous* (fiery principles projected like bolts of lightning) not only perceived the noetic works of the Father (*patros erga*), but concealed them by means of sense-perceptible works (*aisthetois ergois*) and bodies (fr. 40).

According to the Shaiva ritual texts, Shiva's general (*samanya*) presence is everywhere, therefore the consecration of certain places, images, or things simply marks the special re-actualization of divine presence. This 'marked' (*vishista*) divine presence in the image is achieved by the ritual of awakening which has many phases but concentrates on the opening of the statue's eyes (*netronmilana*) by a golden or a diamond needle. As R. H. Davis relates:

By rendering God physically present in a particular fixed location, icons enable the whole liturgical system of temple transactions between God and his human worshippers⁵⁵... the divine image is both means (*upaya*) and end (*upeya*). It leads the devotee towards God, and it also *is* God, the devotee's object of enjoyment. Rather than simply reminding its audience of the 'mystery of the Incarnation', the Vaishnava image serves as the base within which Vishnu mysteriously does incarnate himself.⁵⁶

This incarnation may be viewed as a central 'root manifestation' (*mulamurti*) of divinity (like the Shiva's *lingam* or the stone pedestal-throne), which becomes the animating source of *lux intelligibilis* for all other anthropomorphic images and statues in the confines of the temple. The fabricated bodies can be filled with hidden noetic light (or rather reveal it 'from within', 'from nowhere') only through the theurgic installation. All these divine works (*theia erga*) are really done by Vishvakarman, the All-Worker, who 'has painted' all the forms of all the bodies *in illo tempore*. As H. Zimmer says:

55. Richard H. Davis, *ibid.*, p. 31.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

This teaching of Vishvakarman is, then, nothing less than the knowledge of the god's true manifestation, converted into norms and axioms.⁵⁷

Since Shiva (like the All-Worker) acts in the manifested cosmos only with a 'body of *mantras*', the main task of ritual consecration is 'to impose a mantric body onto the physical body of the fabricated image.'⁵⁸ Thereby the statue becomes a 'divine body' (*divyadeha*) composed of the demiurgic *mantra*-powers. These powers are symbolically 'poured out' in the form of holy water from the ritual waterpots, like the water of celestial Nile (Osiris), whose stream carries the archetypal potencies of Nun, the ineffable One of the Heliopolitan solar theology.

LIVING IMAGES OF THE EGYPTIAN GODS

In the Ramesside theology, God as One is called *Ba sheta* (the hidden *Ba*). He is unnameable and ineffable, though a decad of his primeval noetic manifestations (*bau*) constitute the archetypal background of the visible world. These are the ten *bau* of Amun that animate and sustain the manifold universe of all *kheperu*. Being decisively transcendent, Amun is simultaneously the illustrious *Ba* of gods and humans.

From one point of view, Amun's transcendent 'body' is Nun (the ineffable Water, Inundation, which brings forth *ta noeta*). From another point of view, the visible cosmos is his immanent 'body' animated from within. Amun's breath is the 'fire of life' (*ankhet*) and the 'breath of life to all nostrils'. He is 'great of *heka* with secret form', 'his *ba* is Shu, his heart is Tefnut' (*Pap. Leiden* 1.350). J. Assmann says:

The Ramesside theologians develop the idea of light, air and water as three elements in which the life-giving power of the

57. Heinrich Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, tr. and ed. Gerald Chapple and James B. Lawson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 186.

58. Richard H. Davis, *ibid.*, p. 36.

hidden God is manifest in the world. In the ritual of ten *Ba*'s, the first pair of *Ba*'s are the sun and the moon, which can also be explained as the right and the left eyes of god. Then come the *Ba*'s of Shu and Osiris for air and water. The fifth is that of Tefnut, the goddess of the flaming uraeus snake. . . . Sun and moon represent not light, but time, which also appears here as a cosmic life-giving energy. Light is attributed to the *Ba* of Tefnut. . . . She is the 'flaming one', the fire-spitting Cobra at the head of the sun god, the lioness. . . . Her creation at the beginning of the world, together with her twin brother Shu, refers to the primordality of light which is also the meaning of the Biblical creation account where the creation of light comes first.⁵⁹

Since the earth is an image of heaven (of *archetypus mundus*), the totality of deities embody the spiritual, cosmic, and political unity (*sema*) of the Two Lands, of Upper and Lower Egypt, of Seth and Horus. The Egyptian gods (*neteru*) are owners of the temple estates and houses, residing in their manors (that reproduce the entire universe in miniature) either as a cult statues located in the most sacred chambers, or as a portable processional barques and pavilion-like shrines containing animated symbols. The god's appearance in procession, his 'turning outward', is tantamount to the cosmogonic act of luminous manifestation (the *proödos* of later Neoplatonists).

The whole temple itself is invoked as the form of god and represents his living cultic 'body'. All sacred carvings, reliefs, and paintings belong to the manifest form of a deity (lord of temple) as pictorial representations of archetypal realities and theological concepts. Therefore the carved words denote the ideas and, at the same time, are images to be contemplated in an anagogic way. The painted signs (hieroglyphic images) themselves are 'bodies' for the living gods. They are awakened by the ritual invocation (not simply reading, but reciting and singing) that effects a *kheper*-creation through the re-activated *heka* power and produces divine epiphany.

59. Jan Assmann, "Mono-, Pan-, and Cosmotheism: Thinking the 'One' in Egyptian Theology".—*Orient. Report of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*, vol. xxxiii, 1998, p. 140.

In the Iamblichean version of Platonism, which established the direct correlation between hierurgy, musical harmony, and mathematical disciplines, the proper arrangement of images (or even of the privileged philosophical texts, the *hieroi logoi* of the Neoplatonic *paideia*) is able to re-establish the psycho-somatic energies of the soul and reveal their underlying archetypal patterns. Likewise, the sacred chants and mantric invocations make audible the noetic principles, 'sounding' through the theurgic *sunthemata* in imitation of cosmogenesis and its whirring noise (*rhoizon*). As G. Shaw pointed out:

Chanting ineffable names or singing theurgic hymns . . . were sensible activities and therefore tied to the material gods, yet their underlying structures were arithmetic, hence immaterial.⁶⁰

R. B. Finnestad argues that the creation texts carved in the Egyptian temples do not merely relate, but represent (we would say, re-enact) creation:

They are their own version of the creative words of the Heavy Flood which are seen, partaking in the theophany of the creator of the cosmos; they are meant to *appear*.⁶¹ Not only the statues in the chapels are seen during the morning ritual. When the interior of the temple is illuminated by the opening of the doors and the lighting of candles, the entire place reveals what is hidden in it: the colourful world of gods: the illumination of the building brings into light the figures of the gods carved on it, i.e., it is a coming into being of the pantheon.⁶²

Truly speaking, the Egyptian gods do not dwell on earth but rather install their *bau* in images and symbols, descending from the

60. Gregory Shaw, "The Geometry of Grace: A Pythagorean Approach to Theurgy".—*The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H. J. Blumenthal and E. G. Clark, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993, p. 124.

61. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator*, p. 122.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

noetic realm (mythically represented by the sky) on their *sekhemu* (temples, statues, reliefs, texts, ritual instruments). Thereby the divine *bau* in the form of these in-dwelled images (*sekhem* meaning both 'image' and 'power') participate in the temple liturgies.

The cult statue itself could be called the *ba*, *sekhem*, or *tut* (image) of the god whose divine *energeia* has entered and empowered the purified receptacle. The *naos* where the statue lives hidden (*amun*, *sheta*) in darkness is called *bu djoser*, 'the sacred place', where the priests invoke the primeval *bau* of Heliopolis. In the form of his solar barque the god's *ba* rests on the High Seat (*set uret*), the primeval isle (*iu*) of the Egg (or the primordial stone pillar of Heliopolis that serves as a pedestal for the *bennu* bird), with which the god's *ba* is united. Likewise, his *ba* is united with the entire temple.

The effect of this cultic union is theophany, a coming out from the hidden *sheta*-state, like a coming out from the tomb. When the divine face (*hra*) of the hieratic statue comes to light, this appearance is viewed as revelation which coincides with creation. The intelligible pantheon appears as the universe of *kheperu* and, simultaneously, the temple appears as cosmos *qua* pantheon. J. Assmann emphasizes that the cult statue, strictly speaking,

is not the image of the deity's body, but the body itself. It does not represent his form, but rather gives him form. The deity takes form in the statue, just as in sacred animal or a natural phenomenon.⁶³

Therefore the statue is not 'made' by the sculptor ('one who makes to live'), but 'born'. The verb *mesi* ('to give birth') is used for the crafting of a statue that resembles a living creature. The birthing ritual results in the statue's 'animation'. It is based on priestly knowledge that deals with the divine names (*renu*), manifestations (*bau*), and powers (*sekhemu*).

In Mesopotamia, this craft, regarded as an esoteric art, was attributed to the antediluvian sages (*apkallus*), the avatars of divine wisdom (*nemequ*). This hieratic art (*hieratike techne*) allegedly

63. Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 46.

passed into the state of occultation when these *apkallus* returned to the Apsu, the mysterious realm of their lord Ea.⁶⁴

The rite of the Opening of the Mouth (*uper-ra*), whose full title is 'Performing the Opening of the Mouth in the workshop for the *tut* of N', constitutes only the last stage in the preparation of the hieratic statue, an image (*tut*) for the divine *bau* (whose image it is) to enter it. In fact, the god's *ba* alights on his images (*akhemu*) in the monuments which the god himself (through the pure human servant) has made as instruments of the *heka* power (analogous to the theurgic *sunthemata*).

TO BE MADE INTO A SPIRIT OF LIGHT

Any one of the Egyptian gods may have many *bau*, many names, many holy *kheperu*, and many mysterious images in the temples that constitute his text-like body. But the *bau* of the Demiurge (the Administrator, who oversees and governs the universe together with the fiery choir of his *akhu*) are concentrated in the noetic realm of *akhu*. The word *akh* may designate something radiant, intellectual, made into a spirit of light, belonging to the noetic domain. Other words related with *akh* designate both the ritual ascension and the instrument of this ascent to the supercelestial region (the *huperouranios topos* of Plato's *Phaedrus*), namely, *akhet*, the place of transformation and rebirth, of ascent and re-union, represented by the stony pyramid (*akhet*). According to J. Naydler:

The connotation of the word *akh* is that of inner illumination as well as primordial creative power. Used in its initiatory sense, an *akh* might best be translated as 'an enlightened being'—one whose consciousness has become open to the reality of the spiritual world.⁶⁵

Being in the state of *akh* means to be like a 'lord of wisdom' (*neb*

64. Mehmet-Ali Atac, "The 'Underworld Vision' of the Ninevite Intellectual Milieu".—*Iraq*, vol. LXVI, London: British School of Archeology in Iraq, 2004, p. 68.

65. Jeremy Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts. The Mystical Tradition of Ancient Egypt*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2005, p. 254.

*sai*but), or like 'one who transcends wisdom' (*her sai*) and who may pronounce:

My death (*aret*) is at my own wish;

My spiritualization (*imakhu*) is at my own will (*PT* 315).⁶⁶

This spiritualization (one's turning into the *akh iker*, 'the glorified excellent one', like into the noetic gold) is achieved by joining the Eastern *Bau* and participating in their vocal liturgies—homage to the rising Sun, the supreme *sunthema* of *Nous*. Thereby the opening of the double Sundoor at the limit of Akhet occurs. As A. K. Coomaraswamy asserts:

It is through the Sun, and only through the Sun, as Truth (*satyam*), and by the way of the Well at the World's End, that there runs the road leading from this defined Order (*rta, kosmos*) to an undefined Empyrean. It is 'through the hub of the wheel, the midst of the Sun, the cleft in heaven, that is all covered over by rays, that one is altogether liberated' (*Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana* 1.3.5–6).⁶⁷

Although 'liberation' may be understood in many different senses (so that even Porphyry and Iamblichus would disagree), this inner 'solar' transfiguration from *ba* to *akh* (from soul to spirit, from *psuche* to *nous*), symbolized by the embrace of Osiris and Horus, presupposes the mystical ascent through the *djed* pillar of Osiris. Microcosmically, this royal column (or the mantric body of the deity), sometimes equated with Ptah, is analogous to the *sushumna-nadi* channel of the initiate's subtle (*sukshma*) body in Tantric practices. By opening this channel, the re-awakened Sarasvati, or *kundalini-shakti* (the serpent power, like the fiery *sekhem* of the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet-Hathor that bestows liberation on the wise and bondage on the ignorant), raises up the life force, the agency of transformation and enlightenment, to the *sahasrara-cakra*

66. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

67. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Symbolism of the Dome"—1: *Selected Papers. Traditional Art and Symbolism*, ed. Roger Lipsey, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 448.

(thousand spoked wheel) where the goddess Shakti is re-united with Shiva. This esoteric process of *shakti*'s ascension through the statue-like fixed Osirian body is related with the mantric initiation, contemplation of images and *yantras*, visualization of one's chosen deity (*ishta-devata*) and other ritual actions.

The noetic sphere of *akhu* is represented by the visible Sun, from which the rays of light enter the cult statues and human bodies. The Demiurge illuminates with light the 'souls' and the statues that house these 'souls' (*bau*). The light of the Sun disk (*aten*) is filled with the noetic energy of the demiurgic Intellect (Atum-Ra) as *pantheos*. At the Dendera temple of Hathor even Osiris is drawn into this solar theology of intelligible light:

Osiris . . . the glorious serpent, he comes as *akher* to unite with his form in his sanctuary; he comes flying from the sky as the falcon with shining feathers, and the *bau* of the gods follow him. He flies as falcon to his chapel in Dendera.⁶⁸

In the Neoplatonic-Chaldean theology, the reception of the Sun rays effects the final purification of the soul's vehicle and lifts it upward to union with Helios (Ra), the invisible Creator of the pharaoh (son of Ra): it is depicted over the pharaoh's head, shining forth through him. The Horus-like king, regarded as a saviour (*shed*), is really divine, however, only to the extent of being an *imago dei* and acting *in loco dei*. The archetypal *Ba* of all human beings, as one of the ten primeval *Bau* of Amun, is equated with royal *ka*, the inherited life force of the *mandala*-like state. The *ka* is viewed as generic, not individual, vital force. As L. Bell explains:

Just as a god's *ka* took up transitory residence in a statue-body, endowing it with life, so an ancestor *ka* temporally occupied and animated the body of an ordinary person, and the royal *ka* transiently inhabited and empowered the body of an individual king. . . . The royal *ka* was the divine aspect of a mortal

68. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient Traditions in New Contexts".—*Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer, London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 308.

king, the divine principle in humankind. A ruler could legitimately be worshiped in his own cultus only as an incarnation of the royal *ka*, as a manifestation of divine kingship.⁶⁹

Since the pharaoh is adored not in his human form, but only in his immortal divine form (the noetic archetype of *anthropos teleios*), we find some really amazing things: 'the human Ramesses II worshipping the divine Ramesses II.'⁷⁰ Ra himself acts through the king as a pilot, the one 'who guides men on all the paths.' The pharaoh is considered to have certain divine being (participating in a divine *ousia*) and holy qualities only when he performed official ceremonies⁷¹ (though his entire life was arranged as a permanent ritual and official ceremony), or when he, like the cult statue, was illuminated by the supernatural divine light.

In a sense, the pharaoh is the main or central animated Statue of the theophanic state. He is the chief mystagogue and the cultic leader (lord of the rituals, *neb irit akhet*), involved into theogenetic and theurgic activities. His architectural and liturgical acts converge and paradoxically coincide. As a principal builder, whose programmatic works imitate and repeat theogony, the king creates the 'radiant place' (*akhet*), which represents and reveals the place of origins (*kerehet*). The same metaphysical and cosmic Heliopolis is the place where liturgical *energēmata* transform the human and mortal pharaoh (or the initiate) into an immortal and divine being.

Since Maat (Truth), as a gift of Atum's own inner essence, manifest through the series of *kheperu*, is an image of offerings (the whole Eye of Horus) and of order's circular flow, the pharaoh, offering the statuette of Maat to the Creator's image 'offers part of his self, which is also part of god's self, in a reciprocal act of creation.'⁷²

69. Lanny Bell, "The New Kingdom 'Divine' Temple: The Example of Luxor".—*Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 131 and p. 140.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

71. Dietrich Wildung, *Egyptian Saints. Deification in Pharaonic Egypt*, New York: New York University Press, 1977, p. 3.

72. Byron E. Shafer, "Temples, Priests, and Rituals: An Overview".—*Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 25.

RITES OF ALCHEMICAL TRANSFORMATION

The Opening of the Mouth ritual was performed not only on statues and mummies, but also on names, Apis bulls, sarcophagi, *ushabti* figures, amulets (such as the green heart-scarabs that functioned as powerful *sunthemata*), painted images and texts, solar barques and the entire temples. Thereby hieratic rites transformed the statues of gods (or those of vindicated dead, viewed as royal initiates and knowers of the mysteries) from the potential receptacles made by human artists (servants of Ptah) into the cultic bodies within which divine powers may dwell. In this way even names and symbols were made theurgically effective.

This ritual was performed either on reassembled body-shapes in the embalming workshop (*per nefer*, the 'house of beauty') or on the vertically standing mummies (roughly equivalent to *djed* columns) set up in front of the tomb. Thereby the mummy is turned into the cultic image that reveals divine *eidōs*. In other words, it is transformed into the statue-like divine *sunthema* related with the *ba*-life of the dead man—or of the initiate, if one's Osirification is achieved 'philosophically' before the mortal *khat*-body passed away.

By pointing towards the transcendent dimension, the animated mummy (*sah*) both symbolizes and reveals the noetically fixed *sah*-body of the inner alchemical gold. Its face mask, in the case of royal mummies, is also made of gold, because the noetic and supra-celestial bodies of the gods, or their *ochēmata* (vehicles), are held to be of pure spiritual gold. Therefore the statues of the gods represent the golden nature of their bodies, and gold (*nebu*) is regarded as the proper material for the construction of divine images, 'as much from a symbolic perspective as from considerations of the inherent worth of the precious substance.'⁷³ Ra himself is called the Mountain of Gold.

Both the transformed initiate's body and the mummy prepared by the gods themselves under the guidance of Anubis (the priest performing his role) may be likened to the alchemical apparatus

73. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, p. 108.

(homologous to the universe itself which includes the alchemical passage through the mouth and womb of the goddess), employed in ritual manipulations of elements to be purified and transformed, dispersed and re-united. All sacred incantations (analogous to the Tantric *mantras*, vocal images of the gods) as well as various craft instruments, minerals, herbs, and hieroglyphic tokens are to be regarded as manifold hieratic tools (*yantras*),

with which the alchemist may master the one divine energy that surges through both the universe and his own body. He is now prepared to embark upon the alchemical life-cycle rites (*samskaras*) that will ultimately render him a second Shiva.⁷⁴

The *Kularnava Tantra*, a seminal text of the Kaula tradition, says: 'just as iron, penetrated by mercury, attains the state of gold, so the soul, penetrated by initiation (*diksha*), attains the state of Shiva.'⁷⁵ Shiva is the Tantric equivalent of the Egyptian god Osiris, whose dismembered and then restored and animated body (restored and re-awakened in the psychic realm of Duat, within the *Anima Mundi*) here below constitutes the very 'black soil' (*khem*) of Egypt. Therefore R. B. Finnestad rightly argues:

The mummification is a divinization, a transmutation of the human body to a god's body. From a religious point of view the mummification is no conservation of the human body but rather the opposite: the mummification is a ritual transformation of the human and mortal to the divine and eternal. The cultic significance of the mummy thus lies in its function as a symbol of Osiris... Hidden in the burial chamber the mummy represents the divine being who is met in the shrine in the statue. Thus the tomb is like a temple of Osiris.⁷⁶

The ritual of the Opening makes this symbol of Osiris operative.

74. David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body. Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 181–182.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183.

76. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts".—*Numen*, vol. xxv, fasc.2, p. 128.

The tomb itself functions as a vehicle for regeneration where the deceased is to be 'justified with Osiris' (*maa kheru kher Usir*) in order to follow all the phases of Osirian transformation and to be reborn. In the case of the dead queen Nefertari, the great royal wife of Ramesses II, she is depicted as experiencing the mysteries of noetic rebirth and union with the solar *Nous* within the Akhet. The equation of her with Ra is made and 'the appearance of Ra' is granted to her 'through the speech of various gods and goddesses.'⁷⁷ One of the gods gives her 'the kingship of Atum'.⁷⁸

The Apis (Hapi) bull, like other privileged sacred receptacles of divine powers, was equated with a living statue which incarnates the solar (noetic) *ba* of Ra (Ra's *ba* being called Apis-Osiris). And the ritually embalmed mummy of Apis (known as Osiris-Apis) is regarded as the transfigured and immortalized image of his noetic *sah* form.

Among the prime salvific deeds ritually performed by every pharaoh was the temple (*het neter*) construction, followed by the opening of the temple for the onto-genetic divine epiphany. This included the bringing of divine offerings in the form of the restored Eye of Horus, as well as union with the gods, resulting in a sojourn of 'a million years' in a mystic embrace of Ra. At first, the pyramid (*akhet*) functioned as a site for the theurgic activity of *heka* powers (that is, of transformation, ascent, and noetic rebirth of the ruler). Later on, the specific mansions that each pharaoh built for himself as *djeser akhet* (sacred *akhet*) were places of *unio mystica* where he and his initiates ('followers of Horus', *shemsu her*) could become *ankhu*, 'the living ones'.

Amun-United-with-Eternity (*nenmet-neheh*) and the transformed pharaoh are seen as one; therefore the king may address Amun as follows:

77. Heather Lee McCarthy, "The Osiris Nefertari: A Case Study of Decorum, Gender, and Regeneration".—*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, vol. xxxix, 2002, p. 191.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

I am your son, O Lord of Gods, Amun-Ra, the primeval one of the Two Lands. Make divine my image (*seshemu*). Protect (*khu*) my temple. Make it festive with your *ka* every day.⁷⁹

Since the pharaohs themselves were tantamount to animated statues that incarnated the *ba* of Ra, they occupied the same theological category as the sacred animals.⁸⁰ In the so-called *Demotic Chronicle* (Pap. 215 of the Bibliothèque National de Paris), the Apis bull is described as the triune god in whom merge Ptah, Ra, and Horus, all these gods being related to the conception of sacred kingship.

THE OPENING OF THE STATUE'S MOUTH

There are seventy-five scenes that illustrate the *upet-ra* ritual, collected by the scholars from different sources. Our task is not to reconstruct and present its coherent version, but simply to indicate and emphasize certain theological truths related with ritual actions.

The 'opening of the mouth and eyes' is performed by the lector priest (*kher heb*, one who holds the papyrus on which the *heka* words of the hieratic rite are written), the *sem*-priest wearing the leopard-skin garment, and other officials, by touching the mouth of the statue with various instruments or by embracing it. The purifying and animating instruments include an adze called *neterty* (formed from the same root as *neter*, god), a chisel called *medjedfet* made of iron, an ostrich feather, a *pesesh-kef* (*pesesh* meaning 'dividing instrument', and *kef*, 'flint'), the *sem*-priest's finger, and other items. The *pesesh-kef* instrument is also used in cutting the umbilical cord, because death means a return to the divine womb, and rebirth is the antithesis of joining with the *ka* and implies a division or separation from the *ka*.⁸¹

79. Gerhard Haeny, "New Kingdom 'Mortuary Temples' and 'Mansions of Million of Years'".—*Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 107.

80. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, tr. Andrew Jenkins, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 375.

81. Ann Macy Roth, "The *ps-kf* and the 'Opening of the Mouth' Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth".—*The Journal of Egyptian Archeology*, vol. 78, 1992, p. 127.

The core of the long solemn version of the ritual is the opening of the statue's or *sah*-body's mouth with the leg of a freshly-slaughtered sacrificial bull. With the presentation of the foreleg (*khepesh*) and the heart (*haty*, meaning the same as the more common *ib*) the statue is endowed with vital strength (*khepesh*) and divine consciousness. The anointing of the statue symbolizes the uniting of its limbs. The *sem*-priest anoints the statue by touching its mouth with the index finger of his right hand:

The entire effect of the embalming ritual is contained in this single gesture that the *sem*-priest carries out with his index finger . . . the conclusion is a censing in front of the uraeus-serpent.⁸²

Only when animated is the statue enabled to breath, to see, to hear, and to speak in a subtle way (at the level of meditative consciousness and imagination of worshiper's *sukshma sharira*, to say it in Sanskrit), as a living image of a deity. By unveiling the face (*unhra*) of this image, the god comes into manifestation (in the form of visionary epiphany), and by embracing the statue the initiate worshiper is united with his archetypal lord.

The animated statue may eat sacramentally, therefore offerings made to it (repeatedly called *maat* or regarded as the whole Eye of Horus, the restored *imago dei* of one's inner being) represented the life (*ankh*) and order (*maat*) that were consubstantial with the divinity. To present the god with the *ankh* and *ib*-heart hieroglyphs meant to transfer the force of life from the food substance to the god, and vice versa, in a sacramental manner. The large *ankh*-bouquets were regarded as a means of transmitting Amun-Ra's power of life. Likewise, Osiris' *uah ny maa-kheru* (floral garland of justification) transferred a royal power from Osiris to Horus. Sometimes even the carved hieroglyphs and images were designated as gods (*neteru*), related to the metaphysical character and meaning of stone:

The symbols are gods because they are visible, durable, eternalized forms, and at the same time refer to something invisible.

82. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 317.

They bridge the gap between here and not-here, now and not-now.⁸³

The ability of the divine statue to act (*iri*), that is, to reveal its world-creating *heka* power and beauty, to manifest luminous graces, to speak (in a subtle manner that resembles the *rhoizon* of the Pythagoreo-Chaldean cosmic spheres and the noise of *sistrum*, *sesheshet*, depicted in the form of life sign, *ankh*) and respond to the cultic act (the offering of the Eye, *iret*, by the priest) depends on the properly performed rite of animation. In this context, the word for 'eye' (*iret*) is related to the noun *iru* (that which acts), thereby indicating the active manifestation of the god's *ba* through the awakened cult image.

MYSTICAL UNION WITH THE NOETIC SUN

In all hieratic rites of animation, consecration, and divinization, the constant stress is upon the statue's contact (while standing before Ra as the mummy stands at the entrance of the tomb) with the vivifying sunlight, with the 'breaths' and 'sounds' of the demiurgic Intellect. When the Opening of the Mouth ritual is performed 'at the House of Gold', the face of a statue or a mummy is to be turned southward and bathed in the rays of the Sun.

Likewise, the initiate (equated with the statue in his Osirian posture, or *asana*, to say it in Sanskrit) stands facing the Sun (while inwardly facing *Nous*), as if standing on the primeval mound from which Atum and his archetypal City, Heliopolis, emerged. Thereby the theurgic transformation is conducted when the deceased (not only in the form of a statue, coffin, or mummy, but as a living mystic, an official of the pharaonic state) stands face to face with the Sun in order to be united through the Sun with Atum-Ra, his real metaphysical Father. Consequently he is noetically born like Ra in Atum's embrace, because

83. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p. 57.

The sun's light not only shines in the sky, but can be contacted inwardly, and in uniting with it inwardly the soul undergoes apotheosis.⁸⁴

This ritual of 'Unity with the Sun Disk' (*henem aten*) stands as a divine prototype and as a means of one's *unio mystica* through that solar theurgy which is enacted in the *akhet*. It is enacted both externally and inwardly. The illumination by the sunlight even may replace the Opening rite itself, which is described as performed in the sunlight as follows:

May you stand erect on the sand of Rasetau,
May you be greeted when the sun shines on you
So as to carry out your purification.

Your mouth will be opened, your limbs will be purified
Before Ra when he rises!
May he transfigure you, may he grant that you be rejuvenated,
Living among the gods!⁸⁵

The Mesopotamian *pit-pi* and *mis-pi* rituals of mouth-opening and mouth-washing, performed with incantations on the statue (*salmu*) in order that it may be reborn as a god, is conducted by setting the statue's eyes toward sunrise. Thereby the material form of the statue is inwardly animated and enabled to manifest the actual presence of the god. The Babylonians and Assyrians clearly maintained a distinction between the god as such and his receptacle produced by Ea through the human artisans. However, all enlivened images, both in Egypt and Mesopotamia, are regarded as cultic bodies not in certain illusory and metaphorical manner, but as really invested with divinity. Ch. Zivie-Coche says:

Each icon was linked to a function, or perhaps to an aspect, of the divine person. The Egyptians attempted to clarify their deities as closely as possible by means of a network of combinations that were not mutually exclusive, and a god could thus

84. Jeremy Naydler, *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts*, p. 240.

85. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 320.

be presented under many aspects, each of which was considered as a facet, not as a global vision. Conversely, a single icon could serve to represent various deities, each of whom would keep his or her own name, or perhaps associate that name with another, though in a non-exclusive manner.⁸⁶

Once or several times a year, the statue of the temple's lord and images of other deities are removed from the stone or wooden shrines which stand in the darkness of the 'interior' (*khenu*), carried out to the *uabet* ('pure place') where the divine statues are clothed and adorned with jewelry, and then put on the roof of the temple. The ritual of Unity with the Sun Disk (*aten*), aimed at statue's union with the rays of the Sun, is performed on the roof. Thereby the *ba* of Ra can alight (*khen*) upon his statue (*bes*) and unite (*sema*) with his image (*sekhem*). The golden statue (made of Sun's own substance) is united with the Sun's *energeia*, with the original and pure noetic gold of Ra. This ritual serves as a model for the initiate's spiritual ascent and union (*sema*) with the solar *Nous* as well.

After the awakening to light at dawn the cult statue is regarded as 'the living *ba*' of the god. Then it descends into the dark temple's *naos* again, as into the tomb. The *ba* (viewed as a 'spiritual body' by L. Bell)⁸⁷ is like the descending divine Form (*eidos*) which needs a certain noetic, psychic, or physical receptacle. However, the 'shadow' (*shuyt*) is also regarded as an irradiation from the noetic plenitude of Amun-Ra and as a reflection of his incarnating light-power. The god's *ka* also takes up transitory residence in a statue-body, endowing it with life, as the royal *ka* of the ancestors (of the lower World Soul) temporarily occupies and animates the mortal body of an ordinary human being. The term *ba* designates not only the divine emanations and hypostases, but the bird-like human 'soul' as well, which likewise descends on the rays of the noetic Sun (Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra).

According to the Neoplatonists, the first genesis (*genesis prote*: Plato *Tim.* 41e3) of the souls is their descend from the noetic realm

86. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *ibid.*, p. 15.

87. Lanny Bell, *The New Kingdom 'Divine' Temple: The Example of Luxor*, p. 131.

(*ten apo tou noetou kathodon*: Proclus *In Tim.* III.278.31–32) and the 'sowing' of their luminous vehicles around the visible gods as patrons and saviours, that the souls might call upon them as their appropriate leaders in the cosmic rite of salvation. These saviours may be conceived as the connective rays in the particular descending and ascending chain (*seira*) of manifestations, *bau*.

The gods send souls (manifestations, emanations, and powers, in the sense of *kheperu*, *bau*, and *sekhemu*) for the completion (*teleiosis*) of the cosmos. Certain exceptionally pure souls (those who belong to the royal category of 'perfect man', *anthropos teleios*) descend voluntarily and turn down toward bodies in order to reveal the divine attributes, qualities, and activities (*energemata*, or *erga*, as practical manifestations of the *energeiai*). In this case

the gods come forth (*proerchontai*) into the open and show (*epideiknuntai*) themselves through the pure and immaculate lives of souls (Iamblichus *In De anima* 27).⁸⁸

So the gods show themselves as gods through the pure Osirian souls of the royal initiates and through the cult statues and images in the temples. One may restore one's 'likeness to god' (*homoiosis pros theon*) by participating in cultic activities and their supernatural powers, that is, as if kneeling in the *henu*-posture and undergoing inner transfiguration (*sakhu*) in the presence of his Lord, shining out through the image:

The deceased is initiated into the afterlife as into a temple, and the divine presence in which he shares has the character of cultic service.⁸⁹

Every god is without form (*amorphotos*), even if he is envisioned in images and shapes (*morphotikos*), as Proclus maintains:

For there is no form in him, but rather from him, since he who envisions is not able to see the formless (*amorphoton*) without

88. Iamblichus, *De Anima*, text, translation, and commentary by John E. Finamore and John M. Dillon, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 55 and p. 156.

89. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 200–201.

an image (*amorphotos*) but sees according to its own nature with images (*In Remp.* 1.39.28–40.4)

Therefore the Egyptians say that the Eastern *Ba* of the transcendent, unknowable, and invisible Amun (the Only One, *ua*) descends in order to unite with his image (*sekhem, tut*), as his cultic body, that thereby the king then might 'lift things' (make offerings, presenting his own spiritual integrity as the restored Eye of Horus, as the mirror-like *tut* of Amun) in the presence of God's *sah*. As the theological text in the Hathor's temple in Dendera relates:

He (the pharaoh) has built the House-of-Uniter-of-the-Two-Lands for He-who-shines-as-gold, the Serpent in the House-of-the-Serpent, to guard the image (*semen*) of his body (*djet*) in his sanctuary and to protect his 'majesty' (*hem*) in his shrine, the image (*seshem*) of his mysteriousness carved in his chapel as beautiful expressions of Isden (i.e., Thoth, Djehuti, the tongue of Ra, the god of rituals and hieroglyphs), so that when he has seen his court and embraced his images (*sekhem*), he might alight (*khen*) upon his statue (*bes*) in his chapel and praise Ra for his city in sweetness of heart, his body enveloped in joy, and give great kingship to the pharaoh.⁹⁰

The solar divine intelligence is active in the entire dynamic hypercosmic and cosmic hierarchy of *kheperu*: all levels of being, including the sensible realm and its creatures, are dependent on the constant influx of the breath of life (*suh en ankh*), analogous to the Greek *pneuma* and Indian *prana*. Eusebius, the Christian writer, in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, informs us that the Egyptians somewhat identified Horus, Osiris-Helios (that is, Osiris-Ra) and Zeus-Amon (the Father of all living beings) with the all-pervading *pneuma*.⁹¹ This all-pervading breath of Shu, being immanent in all things,

90. Slightly altered translation from: David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt"—*Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick, Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999, p. 198.

91. Erik Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1984, p. 19.

emanates from Amun-Ra, because all created worlds (even what the Greeks conceived as *physis*, nature) consists of heliophanies, of Ra's solar *kheperu*.

The Eye of Horus symbolizes this life force in its integrity and unity, realized as *henosis* in Neoplatonism. Therefore those gnostics who know the words and actions of the Eastern *Bau*, who sing hymns to the Sun Disk and mingle with the solar apes of Thoth, become one with Amun-Ra as His own recollected, unified, and uplifted *bau*. Thereby the initiate (one who is perfect in knowledge of God's great images and able to meet every *neter* face to face) acquires a noetic quality of *akh* and becomes spiritually effective. He becomes a living *ba* endowed with divine powers (*sekhemu*). Hence, his initiatic 'mummification' is necessary for his subsequent union with the Ra's *ba* in the form of Osiris.

REVELATION OF THE DIVINE FACE

The so-called Mansions of Millions of Years, such as the *Akhmenu* (the Festival Hall of Thutmose III) were constructed as theurgic *yantras* (instruments of power) and holy places for the union of the pharaoh (as an *imago dei*) with God (in the form of his archetypal *Ba*). In this way, Amun-Ra's powers were legitimately transferred to the ruling king.

An efficacious royal offering also functions as a model for the spiritual ascent of the initiate gnostic, one who is ready to be 're-created'. By ascending the throne and coming to embody the divine 'kingship', the pharaoh (as the symbolic *persona mystica*) becomes 'immortal'. This rite of immortalization is variously reinterpreted and repeated by his followers, those who attend the royal state mysteries in order to pass through the 'doors of heaven'.

Rebirth means 'repeating birth' (*uhem mesiut*) in the sense of restoring one's primordial 'golden' state. Gold-dust is a symbol of sunlight, since the light becomes visible by lighting on the golden image and by image's participation (*metexis*) in the pervasive 'golden luminosity' of divine light. As L. Bell pointed out:

Thus luminosity, brilliance, and radiance possessed creative power and signaled deity's presence. The king's accession to

the throne and mounting of his chariot were likened to the sun's rising; and the king's public manifestation at the Window of Appearance was compared to the sun's appearance on the eastern horizon.⁹²

When the *ba* of Amun-Ra (in the form of one or another iconographic member of the Egyptian Ennead) unites with the temple, he unites simultaneously with all images and hieroglyphs in which his *Logos* is to be seen. The statue of the temple's lord is hidden in the dark *set-amun*, which, like the mysterious tomb, symbolizes and represents the ineffable transcendence. The ritually enacted sequences of going into and coming out of the temple as *imago caeli* are analogous to the going into the body of Nut (the Netherworld, Duat, as the intermediate *mundus imaginalis* and the Osirian temple) and emerging from her womb into the radiance of the manifest noetic 'day'.

While discussing the two forms of theophany (cosmic and cultic), R. B. Finnestad describes the ritual of the opening of the doors that initiates the epiphany of God as follows:

The temple is constructed in such a way as to lead the light in a straight line into the *St-wrt*-sanctuary which lies axially at the beginning of the processional road through the temple from its innermost localities. When the doors of the temple and the sanctuary are opened the light travels along this road and hits the solar boat resting on the representation of the mythical first mound emerging from the water and uplifting the god who creates the world with his rays. The ingoing light has a double function in that it both represents the uniting of the god with his seat and also effects the appearance of the creator from the place of darkness.⁹³

Thereby the divine face is revealed every morning and the world itself re-created. When the doors of the *mesen* chapel in the Edfu

92. Lanny Bell, *ibid.*, p. 129.

93. Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator*, p. 95.

temple are opened, light travels along the temple's axial road and is 'united with' (*henem*) the image of the Falcon-of-Gold. This means that Horus himself comes to see his image (*bes*) in the sanctuary of the High Seat (*set uret*), and consequently descends to his chief image (*sekhem*) and all other images (*akhemu*). The act of seeing god (*maa neter*) or rather the appearance (*khau*) of god when he is coming out of darkness, constitutes the most significant aspect of the morning ritual.

Ra himself is the divine interpreter of his own actions, deeds, and revelations: of the solar course, granted to the righteous persons, and of the priestly books, regarded as 'manifestations of Ra'. The process of interpretation, therefore, is tantamount to transfiguration (*sakhu*), which opens one's 'embalming' noetic gaze (the royal path to immortality) and 'makes one an *akh*' by showing the beautiful and mysterious divine face shining through the image of Osiris and Ra in a single shape.

Since justification is no less than 'moral mummification', and the word for mummy, *sah*, also means 'worthy' and 'aristocrat'⁹⁴ (like the Sanskrit term *brahman*), the initiate is both equated with Osiris and regarded as the follower of Horus, one who is carried in pregnancy like Thoth and is reborn like Ra. His mouth is opened by the chisel of Ptah, so that his body may be transfigured and he himself may emerge as a living *ba* of Ra.

DIVINE STATUES AND THEIR SACRED GIFTS

Essentially, the divine statues functioned in the same way as sacred trees, stones, rough-kewn blocks, columns, pillars, and other objects. These stones were sometimes believed to be 'fallen from Zeus' (*diopetes*) and, therefore, regarded as inherently animated with the noetic breath (*empnoös*) or the psychic substance (*empsuchos*) within them.

In this respect, we should remember that not only is the consecrated statue called *seshem* or *sekhem* in Egypt, but all of creation is equally viewed as an image (*sekhemu*, used in plural) of the solar

94. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 75.

Nous, namely, Amun-Ra. The Two Lands (Egypt) bear God's *sekh-emu*, and His breath is in everything. Amun-Ra himself is called an image (*tut*, in the sense of a noetically visible Statue—*Ishvara*, to say it in Sanskrit terms). He appeared when neither gods, nor names (*renu*) yet existed, and produced the *kau* of all *neteru*. Therefore Amun-Ra is described in terms that also apply to every kind of body as well as to the hieratic statues in which the gods (*neteru*) reveal themselves. D. Lorton says that in a papyrus from the reign of Ramesses II,

Amun is described as 'fashioning (*hem*) himself, none knowing his shape (*qi*), goodly nature who came into being as the sacred, secret image (*bes*) who built (*qed*) his images (*seshemu*), who himself created (*qema*) himself, goodly power (*sekhem*) who made good his desire (*ib*), who joined his seed with his body to bring his egg into being within his secret self, being (*kheper*) who came into being (*kheper*), image (or model, *tut*) of what is fashioned (*mesut*).⁹⁵

The cult of statues is regarded as being of divine origin, initiated and revealed by Amun-Ra himself through the hierarchy of the gods who are Amun's own *kheperu* and *bau*.

The natural unworked stones (*aergoi lithoi*) and meteors called *baituloi*, or *lithoi empsuchoi*, served as images, dwellings, and altars of the gods in ancient Phoenicia and Arabia. The Greeks, partly following the example of Eastern people, used to consecrate and set up the animated stones at the gates of their cities and temples in connection with Apollo. They maintained that not only cultic and talismanic statues, but even rocks can be consecrated (*tetelesmenos*) by anointing them with oil and decorating with flowers, wreaths, and garlands.

The story related by Psellus (*Script. Min.* 1.446.28) that Julian the Theurgist created a human mask (or head) of clay that shot thunderbolts at the enemy during a battle of Marcus Aurelius against the Dacians, is not a curious and exotic example of certain 'Chaldean *telestike*', but simply an illustration of old-standing Near Eastern and Mediterranean practices. Laiios, the telestic priest and philosopher,

95. David Lorton, *The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 185–186.

during the reign of Antiochus I (280–261 BC) protected the city of Antioch-on-the-Orontes from a plague by similar means:

this Laiios commanded the city to carve a great mask of Charon (*charonion prosopon*) into the slope of a mountain that overlooked the city, and then by inscribing some special words on it brought an end to the pest. This monument was called the *charonion* or in later Greek *charoneion* (a formation much like the *gorgoneion*), and it has actually survived intact, although its present battered condition makes it impossible to see any distinguishing features that might mark it out as a dangerous death-dealing divinity (for example, the glaring or extraordinary eyes associated with words of the stem *char-*).⁹⁶

A legendary talismanic statue of Athena, consecrated by a telestic priest (*telestes*) at the founding of Troy and called the Palladium, was of the same sort. The animated Trojan Palladium, usually regarded as fallen from heaven (*diopetes*), protected the city like the Assyrian guardians of the temples and palaces, namely, the statues of *lamassu* and *shedû*.⁹⁷

For the Greeks, seeing necessarily involves being seen, therefore to see or contemplate the cult stones and sacred images, *xoana* and *agalmata*, that are usually hidden, means to cause a sort of divine epiphany and experience an inward vision or revelation. The radiance of the gilded, painted, adored, and perfumed statues themselves was quite literally dazzling. D. T. Steiner argues:

The use of precious stones for the eyes and of objects inlaid with enamel, glass, silver, and gold for the attributes, the gilding of the hair, and the adornment with vestments and jewels must have turned the images into an ever-shifting play of sparkling light. . . . That a peerless beauty belonged to these statues, as it did to the immortals when they showed themselves to man, needs little demonstration.⁹⁸

96. Christopher A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses*, p. 57.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

98. Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind*, pp. 101–102.

This cultic *theoria* (a contemplation full of *thauma*, awe and wonder) serves as a foundation for the esoteric techniques of theurgic dealing with *theoptike psuche* ('the soul that sees god') and its union with true being (*to on*) and the divine (*to theion*). The worshiper might be granted an inward and unifying vision of the god that he is worshiping in the shape of cult image, and thereby not only partake in his transcendent, super-celestial, and cosmic order (*taxis*), but gain release or liberation (*he apolusis*) from the generative process. This liberation is re-actualized through the hieratic modes of ascent (*dia tinon hieratikon anodon*: *De myster.* 271.11–12), related to the cultic *theoptike dunamis*, the contemplative power that lets us see the gods.

Divination by means of animated divine statues (sometimes removed from their original cultic settings in the temples) is based on the same theological premises and hieratic techniques. It is therefore no wonder that in the context of the Neoplatonic theurgy, 'divination' as a prediction of future in the popular and exoteric sense is not highly esteemed. Divination here functions primarily as a means of mystagogy and union with the divine through mystical and ineffable images of the gods (*ten mustiken kai aporrheton eikona ton theon*), in the soul and in the temple. Iamblichus says:

Only divine mantic prediction (*he theia mantike*), therefore, conjoined with the gods, truly imparts to us a share in divine life (*tes theias zoes*), partaking as it does in the foreknowledge and the intellections of the gods, and renders us, in truth, divine (*hemas theious hos alethos apergazetai*). And this genuinely furnishes the good for us, because the most blessed intellection of the gods (*ton theon noesis*) is filled with all goods (*De myster.* 289.3–7).

Accordingly, along with this foreknowledge (*prognosis*), the theurgists receive Beauty itself, as well as order, since both the divine *mantike* and *telestike* are aimed at the knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Father, which leads the souls upwards. Thereby the theurgist, who was previously united to the contemplation of the gods, is conceived of as 'divinized' (*ho theotos*). The sacred and theurgic gift of well-being (*eudaimonia*), received by the means of anagogic 'divination',

is called 'the gateway to the Demiurge of all things', according to Iamblichus (*De myster.* 291.10–11).

The sacred gift of *eudaimonia* (the blessed daimonic state of being, like *ananda* in Hinduism) is like the 'embrace' (*sekhen*) that culminates the animation rite in pharaonic Egypt. This 'embrace' might consist in the ritual placement of a headdress adorned with a royal uraeus snake (equivalent to the noetic Eye and truth, *maat*) on the head of the statue or on the head of the initiate. In the case of a royal initiate, this theurgic coronation awakens him to the divine light, archetypal self-consciousness, and trans-personal integrity, thus transforming him into the empowered and living *ba* of Sekhmet-Hathor and, consequently, of Ra himself.

By the means of the anagogic powers that shine through the animated divine images and those that emanate from the *sunthemata* awakened within the soul itself, the initiate is raised upwards toward the gods. The Neoplatonic-Chaldean ritual of 'evoking the light' (*photos agoge, photagogia*) may initially be related to various meditations and invocations practiced while facing the animated stones and statues considered as receptacles for the presence of a deity. This contemplation and re-unification of wholeness (the restored Eye of Horus) turns one's imagination inward, but without thereby ignoring the ideal external beauty of the divine face. To say it in J.P. Anton's words: 'Imagination, hence, is a case of spiritual sight.'⁹⁹

The divine light, revealed both inwardly and through the sunlight, 'illuminates the aether-like and luminous vehicle surrounding the soul with the divine light (*epilampeo theio photi*), from which vehicle the divine appearances (*phantasiai theiai*), set in motion by the god's will, take possession of the imaginative power (*phantastiken dunamin*) in us. For the entire life of the soul and all the powers in it move subject to the gods. . . .' (*De myster.* 132.10–14).

In the context of Hellenic philosophy and metaphysics, *dunamis* (like the Egyptian *sekhem*) is a power that causes change and transformation. When understood in the active, anagogic sense, it unifies the separated members of Osiris' body, thereby bringing multiplic-

⁹⁹ John P. Anton, "Plotinus and Augustine on Cosmic Alienation: Proodos and Epistrophe".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. IV, no. 2, 1996, p. 21.

ity back to psycho-somatic and noetic unity. Plotinus designates the first overflow (*proödos*) from the ineffable One as 'indefinite intellect' (*nous aoristos*), which immediately desires to turn back (*epistrophein*) and return to the One, thereby becoming an Intellect contemplating the Forms, that is, the demiurgic *Nous* proper. D. Rehm says:

From the perspective of the indefinite intellect which looks toward the One, the One becomes an intelligible object (*noeton*). Yet the One as perceived is not identical with the One as it is.¹⁰⁰

Just as *nous aoristos* (referred as *opsis*, 'sight', by Plotinus) seeks the One, so the awakened *nous* of the initiate seeks to contemplate the hidden essence (*ba sheta*) of the noetic *ba*, as revealed through the image. And just as the *nous aoristos*, being unable to see or think the ineffable One, is himself actualized as the demiurgic *Nous* (referred as *horasis*, 'sight seeing', by Plotinus), so the initiate, unable to see the hidden essence of Amun, is transformed into the integral, sacrificial, noetic Eye of Horus. Thus, just as the primeval Eye of Atum at first leaves him and then returns in order to be embraced, so the soul of the initiate *theoros* returns to the noetic plenitude of Atum, carried up by the *dunamis* of his contemplative Eye.

SALVATION AS RETURN TO THE DIVINE

The Neoplatonic-Chaldean theurgists used various symbols and sacramental objects that were akin to the specific gods invoked to appear in cultic epiphanies and inward visions or dreams. In Egypt, regarded as a 'temple of the whole world' (*mundi totius templum*) by the followers of Thoth-Hermes (*Asclepius* 24), these sacred objects are hieroglyphs (*medu neter*) and images (*sekhemu, akhemu*). The images are united with the descending divine *ba* and thereby reveal the dazzling radiance and beauty of the solar *Nous*. Consequently, the worshiper's imagination is inspired and possessed by the divine

100. David Rehm, Plotinus' "Treatment of Aristotelian $\delta\nu\nu\alpha\mu\iota\sigma$ in Emanation".—*The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, vol. II, no. 1, 1993, pp. 13–14.

light. The royal initiate (one who has already passed through the spiritual stations of death, dismemberment and inward mummification, having being transformed into the *ba* of 'living Osiris') hopes to see a certain unifying vision in his inner *akh*, and for himself to be transformed into a flash of lightning, 'a flame moving before the wind to the end of the sky and of the earth' (*PT* 261).

Apart from the telestic statues, the theurgists alternatively used incantations (*epodai*) in order to evoke the uniform *phasmata ta ton theon*, the appearances of the gods in self-revelatory images (*ton autophanon agalmaton*) that shine forth distinctly and whose 'visions (*ta theamata*) are seen more clearly than the truth itself' (*De myster.* 77.1). Iamblichus says:

Sometimes, moreover, they also conduct the light through water, since this, being transparent, is naturally well suited for the light's reception. At other times they cause it to shine on a wall, having expertly prepared in advance a place on the wall for the light, with sacred inscriptions of magical symbols (*tais hierais ton charakton*). . . . There might be many other ways for conducting the light (*tes tou photos agoges*), but all are reduced to one, i.e. the shining of the bright light in whatever way and through whatever instruments it may shine forth (*De myster.* 134.2–10).

All these prescribed rituals and exercises are intended to effect the transformation that enables the theurgic soul (*theourgike psuche*) to understand the God (who himself is beyond being and transcends intellection) as the ultimate principle of all manifested life and well-being, because 'in all things an image of the Good carries God in it' (*eikon tagathou ton theon empheretai: De myster.* 164.11). By connecting all things to all, one may be perfectly established in the activities (*energeiai*) and intellections (*noeseis*) of the demiurgic powers. This kind of salvation means 'bringing Egypt (in the sense of the entire creation as an *imago*) to its Father Amun.' The initiate is to be saved through union with the 'eternal *Logos*', not as a particular individual, but as a priest of the solar *Nous* (*Amun-Ra*), now become the *akh*-intellect.

To say it in the Plotinian terms, by adoring and contemplating

the divine image, made 'true and beautiful' by the animating force of the noetic Form, the soul discovers its own divine nature and essential inner beauty:

And in its own self-recognition it is lightened, because it now can aspire to its own inner harmony and seek to re-ascend to that principle inside itself which regulates, unifies and appeases.¹⁰¹

The enlightened bodies and images manifest the radiance and splendor of the divine beauty (*nefer*) which belongs to the Solar realms of *Nous* (Atum-Kheprer-Ra, Amun-Ra, or Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum) and shows itself as the life-bearing light. Hence, every true life (*ankh*) belongs to the realm of *akhu* (lights, intellects, spirits). As Plotinus would say, 'every life is an intellection' (*noesis: Enn. III.8.8.16-17*) and 'living contemplation' (*theoria zosa: ibid., III.8.8.11*), because being, truth, noetic perception (*noesis*), and beauty at the level of *Nous* coincide.

The metaphysical conception of *sekhem* or *tut* (*eikon*), to which the rays of deity descend in order that this image itself may ascend to the divine as a vehicle of the soul intended to reach the domain of archetypes, is inherited by the Christian mysticism of Dionysius the Areopagite, a tacit follower of Proclus:

The visible icon in Dionysius is the presence of the divine light. The light ray which originates in the divine is present in the icon. The divine itself is within the icon and the icon is the manifestation (*ekphansis*) of the divine. The icon is possessed by the divine light. The divine is entirely present in the icon, its stamp is on each impression. . . . The icon is a representation of divine light, of divine beauty. It appears through its light. Without light there can be no appearance. . . . As a figure which reveals the divine the icon refers to it in the same way as oral speech refers to internal thoughts. . . . In reality the icon with its beauty constitutes the principle of ascending return to

101. Jean-Marc Narbonne, "Action, Contemplation and Interiority in the Thinking of Beauty in Plotinus".—*Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, ed. Aphrodite Alexandrakis, Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, p. 5.

the divine. The ascending function of the icon is due to God's illumination through the process of emanation. Again, the emanation of light from God constitutes for the icon a real ascent (*anagoge*) which is analogous to the actualized reception of light by it.¹⁰²

As in the later Indian Tantric practices of divine worship and spiritual alchemy, the animated images in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures served multiform theurgic purposes. They were related to the royal path of divinization and noetic rebirth. This path employed various esoteric rites of the soul's descent and ascent, aimed at one's spiritual recollection, reintegration, illumination, and union with the gods. However, for the modern mentality, shaped by the Biblical iconoclastic tradition and post-Enlightenment positivism, it is difficult if not impossible to comprehend all these divine self-disclosures, theophanies, and theurgic activities related to sacramental images and animated statues.

102. Dimitrios N. Koutras, "The Beautiful According to Dionysius".—*Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, ed. Aphrodite Alexandrakis, Albany: SUNY Press, 2002, p. 36.

4

METAPHYSICAL SYMBOLS & THEIR FUNCTION IN THEURGY

Thus the universe and its contents were created in order to make known the Creator, and to make known the good is to praise it; the means of making it known is to reflect it or shadow it; and a symbol is the reflection or shadow of a higher reality. . . . Therefore, in respect of our having said that a symbol worthy of the name is that in which the Archetype's radiation predominates over its projection, it is necessary to add that the sacramental symbol proceeds from its Source, relatively speaking, by pure radiation.¹

SYMBOLS AS ONTOLOGICAL TRACES OF THE DIVINE

The contemporary metaphysical understanding of symbol, as opposed to the neoclassical conception of *mimesis*, is inherited from the Neoplatonic theory of symbolic language which represents that which by definition is beyond every representation but, nevertheless, shows the bodiless by means of bodies and serves as a ladder for ascent to the divine.

F.W. Schelling and other Romantic writers, those who invented the modern distinction between the mysterious symbol and allegory, followed Proclus in this respect, borrowing his theory of the theurgic symbol, partly transmitted in the Christianized form through Dionysius the Areopagite. But the term *allegoria* meant rather different things for Proclus and for those Romantic thinkers who rejected the 'classical' genre of writing related to Aristotelian

1. Martin Lings, *Symbol and Archetype. A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1991, p. 1 and p. 11.

poetics, labelling it as 'allegorical' and futile. However, our present task is not to investigate certain modern developments and misplacements of ancient terms, concepts, or theories, but rather to reveal the Neoplatonic notion of the symbolic in the context of theurgy and in relation to the ancient Egyptian theological doctrines—to certain extent, at least, inherited by the later Pythagorean and Platonic tradition.

In Neoplatonism, the divine symbols have a transformative and elevating power, like the noetic rays, because they are regarded as the things demiurgically woven into the very fabric of being and therefore directly attached to, and united with, the gods themselves, the principles of being. One should not be deceived by the Greek term *symbolon*, which has so many different meanings, sometimes far removed from the realm of metaphysics. What is important is the underlying theological and cosmological conception of the divine principles and powers that appear and become visible through certain images, objects, numbers, sounds, omens, or other traces of presence.

Even in the iconoclastic Amarna theology (established in the reign of Akhenaten, 1352–1338 BC), that is theology which abolishes the mythical imagery, Aten is the One in whom million lives: the light creates everything and by seeing this light, the eye is created. J. Assmann says:

God creates the eyes in order that they might look on him as he looks on them, and that his look might be returned and that light might assume a communicative meaning, uniting everything existing in a common space of intervision. God and men commune in light.²

In a sense, symbols are tantamount to the divine names that constitute the whole 'cultic' universe and ensure its cyclic dynamics: procession and return, descent and ascent. The Neoplatonic theory of the symbolic is only the late conceptualization (within the Hellenic philosophical tradition of onto-semiotics) of those ancient

2. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 185.

metaphysical doctrines (such as the Ramesside theology of *bau* powers) which constitute the theurgic foundation of ancient civilizations and mythically express the dialectic of the One and the

Many. Therefore those hieratic realities, entities, and things that are described as the ineffable (or esoteric) symbols and tokens (*ta aporrheta symbola kai sunthemata*) of the gods might equally well be designated by many other terms, unrelated to the specific Hellenic conception of the symbolic and equated, for example, with the Egyptian 'divine words' (*medu neter*, hieroglyphs) which constitute the entire visible world. If the universe is a manifestation (as the Egyptian term *kheperu* indicates), then all manifested noetic and material entities are nothing but the multiform images, symbols, and traces of the ineffable One shining through the intellective rays of *deus revelatus*, the demiurgic Intellect.

The gods create everything by means of representations (images which reflect their noetic archetypes) and establish the hidden 'thoughts' of the Father through the symbolic traces or tokens (*dia sunthematon*) that are intelligible only to the gods themselves and possess the uplifting *heka* power, to say it in the Egyptian terms. As P. Struck pointed out:

Here the material world is fabricated by representations, but it is meaningful (that is, has a semantic dimension) through its being a *sunthema/symbolon*. The image (*eikon*) marks the material world in its status as a fainter reproduction of a higher principle, but the world seen as symbol indicates its status as a manifestation—that is, something that works according to the logic of the trace, with the capacity to point us back up to the higher orders that produced it.³

Symbola and *sunthemata*, understood in this particular metaphysical sense, are not arbitrary signs, but ontological traces of the divine, inseparable from the entire body of manifestation (*ellampsis*): the cosmos, as the revealed divine *agalma* (statue, shrine), itself is the Symbol *par excellence* of the noetic realm and the Creator. It

3. Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol. Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 221.

represents that which is above representation and is an immanent receptacle of the transcendent principles.

Therefore the demiurgic *Logos* is both the sower and distributor of all ontological symbols (or rather, symbols constituting its own manifested totality), and these symbols (when gathered, awakened, re-kindled) lead up to the noetic and supra-noetic unity. As J.F. Finamore observes, 'the *symbola* become passwords or tokens in the soul's ritual ascent.'⁴ This is so, not because of our thinking (if thoughts, *ennoiai*, themselves are not regarded as a special sort of *sunthemata*), but by virtue of the ritual accomplishment (*tele-siourgia*) of ineffable acts and the mysterious power of the unspeakable symbols that allow us to re-establish theurgic union with the gods (Iamblichus *De mysteriis* 96.13 ff).

Hence, through the proper actualization (and recollection) of these divine symbols, the hypercosmic life of the soul is re-actualized. The ascent (*anodos*) through invocations (*kleseis*), symbolic contemplations, and rites (*erga*), results in revelation of the blessed sights (*makaria theamata*) and the activity (*energeia*) which is no longer human.

THE ANAGOGIC POWER OF SECRET NAMES AND TOKENS

The Greek term *symbolon* (derived from the verb *symballein*, meaning 'to join') initially denoted a half of a whole object, such as *tessera hospitalis*, which could be joined with the other half in order that two contracting parties (or members of certain secret, esoteric brotherhoods) might have proof of their identity. Therefore the symbol appears and becomes significant only when two parties make an intentional rupture of the whole, or when the One manifests itself as plurality, that is, when Osiris or Dionysus is rent asunder. In this original sense, the symbol 'reveals its meaning by the fact that one of its halves fits in with or corresponds to the other.'⁵

4. John F. Finamore, "Plotinus and Iamblichus on Magic and Theurgy".—*Dionysius*, vol. xvii, 1999, p. 83.

5. James A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976, p. 61.

When viewed in accordance with the 'vertical' metaphysical asymmetry, one half of the imagined *tessera hospitalis* represents the visible thing (the symbol proper) and another half stands for the invisible noetic or supra-noetic reality symbolized by the lower visible part. The initiation and spiritual ascent consists in joining these two separate parts. That means re-uniting the manifested *symbolon* (as a trace) and the hidden principle which is 'symbolized' by it. In this way Osiris (or Dionysus) is re-assembled, and the symbol itself is dissolved in the symbol-transcending unity (*henosis*). According to Damascius:

The object of the initiatory rites (*ton teleton*) is to take souls back to a final destination (*eis telos anagein*), which was also the starting point from which they first set out on their downward journey, and where Dionysus gave them being, seated on his Father's throne, that is to say, firmly established in the integral Zeusian life (*In Phaed.* 1.168.1-4).

When symbols are reassembled into a completed whole, this means both that the microcosmic Eye of Horus (or *imago dei*) is restored and that the macrocosmic theophany of *pantheos* (the Lord of All, *neb tem*, the All-Worker) is reaffirmed as the transcendent unity. Within this kind of ancient cosmology, the descending and ascending rays of manifestation are considered as a multi-leveled hierarchy of *symbola* and *sunthemata* that constitute the universal 'language' of Being and its existential body. R. Lambertson says:

Just as there are various modes of perception that correspond to the successive modes of being, extending from the total, unified perception exercised by a god down to the passivity of our sense-impressions in this world, so there are different levels of language that correspond to these modes of perception—a hierarchy of systems of meaning, of kinds of utterances—that extend from a creative, divine 'language' (not, presumably, recognizable as such by us) down to the 'language' that exists on the final fragmented level of the senses. . . . Each lower language is actually the 'interpreter' (*hermeneus*) of the

higher one, in that it renders it comprehensible at a lower level, at the expense of its (opaque, inaccessible) coherence.⁶

The secret names of the gods are the anagogic symbols: they function both as *epodai* (recitations, elevating spells) and as the gnostic passwords for entry into the other-worldly realm, the subsequent transformation, and noetic rebirth. Therefore the 'symbolic life' is the life of knowledge which enables one's recollection, reintegration, and return to the *archetypus mundus*. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* says:

As for him who knows this spell (or symbolic utterance), he will be a worthy spirit in the realm of the dead, and he will not die again in the realm of the dead, and he will eat in the presence of Osiris. As for him who knows it on earth, he will be like Thoth. . . . (*BD* 135).⁷

By knowing the proper words of power (*hekau, sunthemata*), the Osiris-like initiate or the 'deceased' might proceed to the throne of the integral archetypal Osiris and be united (as the *ba* of Osiris) with the *ba* of Ra. The process of transformation, *sakhu*, literally means 'making an *akh*' (the shining noetic spirit, divine *nous*). This ritualized transformation is designated as 'going forth by (or into) day' (*per em hru*), that is, ascending to the noetic realm and 'going out' from the Duat (the alchemical body of Osiris or Nut) into the intelligible 'day' of Ra and appearing as Ra. So in the *Pyramid Texts* the paradigmatic royal initiate ascends on the wing of Thoth, flying up as a falcon and alighting on the divine throne like a scarab, saying:

My seat is with you, O Ra. . . . I will ascend to the sky to you, Ra, for my face is that of falcons, my wings are those of ducks. . . . O men, I fly away from you (*PT* 302).⁸

6. Robert Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 167 and p. 169.

7. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, tr. Raymond O. Faulkner, ed. Carol Andrews, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001, p. 123.

8. *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, tr. R.O. Faulkner, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1969, p. 92.

Thereby one's *ba* (as a symbol) is made *akh*-effective in the Isle of Fire (the solar realm of Platonic Forms). The theurgic texts to be ritually recited as a means of ascent themselves are regarded as *akhu* that are 'pleasing to the heart of Ra.' The Egyptian initiatory rite is based on the mutual *akh*-effectiveness of father and son, as of the Greek *symbolon*: '*akh* is a son for his father, *akh* is a father for his son', both appearing in the presence of Thoth, the lord of hieroglyphs (*medu neter*) and wisdom.

The ultimate goal (*telos*) of this 'symbolic wisdom' is to make the Eye of Horus sound and whole, that is, to restore one's primordial 'golden' nature, like the pure mirror (*ankh*) which reflects the intelligible light of Ra and is 'sacrificially' reintegrated into the realm of the *akhu*. This involves one's spiritual and alchemical transmutation in the 'tomb' built (in the ideal archetypal sense) by the gods themselves, including Seshat, the goddess of writing.

Everything has two designations, one in the realm of terrestrial *symbola*, another in the realm of the gods whose names are viewed as anagogic passwords known only to the initiate. At the same time, every element in the domain of the temple liturgy, be it a priest, a thing, or a place, becomes the 'name' (*ren*) of a deity whom it reveals or interprets. Likewise, every offering (designated as the Eye of Horus) represents a substance that restores truth (*maat*) and unity (*sema*) or reassembles something that had fallen apart. As J. Assmann says, it is the symbol of a reversibility that might heal everything, even death:

There is a close connection between cultic commentaries, with their principle of sacramental explanation, and initiatory examinations, with their principle of secret passwords that relate to the divine realm. . . . In the initiatory examinations, there is a secret language, and the initiate demonstrates his mastery of it. He who knows the secret language belongs to the secret world to which it refers, and he may enter it. In the cultic commentaries, there is a sacramental explanation of the ritual by means of which the cultic acts are transposed into the context of the divine realm.⁹

9. Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, p. 353.

In the context of the Hellenic Mysteries and Orphico-Pythagorean tradition, the symbol may be a deity's secret name, an omen or a cultic formula (that may include the divine cultic epithets, themselves regarded as *sunthemata*). These symbols allow the initiate to pass into the realm of the gods, the Netherworld, doing this like the Egyptian pharaoh who takes the night-journey 'as the representative of all human beings'¹⁰ and sails with the *Ba* of Ra in the solar barque. The acquired Apollonian wisdom enables one to perceive the hidden divine 'thoughts', the immaterial archetypes, or Ideas.

The Pythagorean *symbola* are also *ainigmata* (riddles, obscure hieratic sayings). The prophetic utterances and sneezes, related to Demeter of Eleusis, are called 'symbols' as well. Since an understanding of the symbols as a sort of secret code of both demiurgy and theurgy stems from the Orphico-Pythagorean tradition, inherited and conceptualized by the Neoplatonists, P. Struck rightly emphasizes that 'the power of the symbol is born out of the power of the secret.'¹¹ He says:

In both the mysteries and esoteric philosophy, symbols are passwords of authentication that just happen to be enigmatic, interpretable speech.¹²

ANIMATED THEURGIC HIEROGLYPHS OF THE HIDDEN AMUN

The Greeks themselves, contrary to the modern scholarly tastes and prejudices, related the Pythagorean symbolism to the Egyptian theory of 'divine speech.' The symbol as hieroglyph (the visible shape of the invisible Platonic Form), as gnostic password and word of power (*heka*), is inseparable from the Egyptian ways of thought. Therefore the ancient Hellenic writers correctly maintained that

10. Theodor Abt and Erik Hornung, *Knowledge for the Afterlife. The Egyptian Amduat—A Quest for Immortality*, Zurich: Living Human Heritage Publications, 2003, p. 24.

11. Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, p. 103.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

symbols (or secret names of the gods that work 'symbolically', *sumbolikos*, and ensure union, *henosis*) are a particularly Egyptian mode of imitating the demiurgic activity of the gods. According to Plutarch's trustworthy remark:

Pythagoras, as it seems, was greatly admired, and he also greatly admired the Egyptian priests, and, copying their symbolism (*to sumbolikon auton*) and esoteric teachings (*musteriodes*), incorporated his doctrines in riddles (*ainigmata*). As a matter of fact most of the Pythagorean precepts do not at all fall short of the writings that are called hieroglyphs (*De Iside et Osiride*, 354ef).

The majority of contemporary classicists (following the erroneous suggestions of positivistic Egyptology) misunderstood Porphyry's claim regarding the symbolic (*sumbolike*) aspect of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Porphyry the Phoenician says:

In Egypt he (Pythagoras) lived among the priests and learned the wisdom and language of the Egyptians, and three kinds of writing, epistolographic, hieroglyphic, and symbolic, of which some is ordinary speech according to *mimesis*, and some allegorizes according to certain riddles' (*kata tinas ainigmous: Vita Pyth.* 11–12).

J. Assmann ensures us that Porphyry was right in describing a variant of the Egyptian script as symbolic, because, in fact, there are four distinct forms of writing in Egypt: demotic, hieratic, hieroglyphic, and cryptographic (or symbolic). The latter was a secret code accessible only to the initiate and based on the priestly notion that this symbolic script (whose signs are laden with the symbolic knowledge) is an imitation of divine demiurgy: here the hieroglyphs are regarded as tokens of creation conceived by Ptah, the Memphite Demiurge, and recorded by Thoth. Consequently, they are imbued with the theurgic function as well. In addition, both script and sacred images in their unity are designated as 'gods' (*neteru*). The symbols are gods made visible in stone, the manifest substance of immortality. J. Assmann says:

Iamblichus perfectly expresses the principle of 'direct signification' that underlies the cryptography of the late temple inscriptions. . . . This specifically Egyptian view is the foundation of the Greek's mythical vision of hieroglyphs. The mistake of the Greeks was not that they interpreted hieroglyphic script as a secret code rather than a normal writing system. The Egyptians had in fact transformed it into a secret code and so described it to the Greeks. The real misunderstanding of the Greeks was to have failed to identify the aesthetic significance of cryptography as calligraphy. The question then arises whether their misunderstanding might not also have been encouraged by the Egyptian priests. It surely cannot be pure chance that the systematic complication of hieroglyphic script coincided with the Greek invasion and Ptolemaic foreign rule.¹³

The members (*hau*) of the animated body may be regarded as symbols that are to be spiritually reassembled into the image (*tut*) of Osiris, itself constituted by the *sunthemata*, which modern scholars conventionally designate by the word 'amulet', not forgetting to add (almost mechanically) the label 'magical'. These alleged 'amulets' might be viewed as the fundamental theurgic tokens or metaphysical symbols that appear in the form of certain basic hieroglyphs, such as *ib* (heart), *pet* (sky), *kheper* (scarab beetle), *sema* (union), *ta-uer* (the symbol of Abydos and its lord Osiris), *bik* (falcon of Horus), *tiet* (Isis knot), *sesheh* (lotus), *ankh* (life, mirror), the *djed* column of Osiris, *shen* (ring, symbol of eternity, also mirrored in the shape of *ouroboros*), *djeneh* (wing), *shut* (feather), *mehyt* (the papyrus scepter), *uedjat* (the restored Eye of Horus), *sekhem* scepter, *uas* scepter, *menit* necklace and so on.

By putting these hieroglyphs on the eidetic *sah*-body (now habitually called 'mummy'), a sort of the alchemical Osirian statue is constructed and the symbolic composition of *heka* powers is arranged. The divinized royal initiate, who is theurgically united with the gods (symbolically identified as hieroglyphs and members

13. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, tr. Andrew Jenkins, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p. 419.

of his metaphysical body) and turned into the reestablished *tut netet*, the overwhelming image of the ineffable God, revealed as a Statue of the reassembled pantheon, speaks as follows:

I am Ra, continually praised; I am the knot of the god within the tamarisk. . . . My hair is Nun; my face is Ra; my eyes are Hathor; my ears are Upuat; my nose is She who presides over her lotus-leaf; my lips are Anubis; my molars are Selket; my incisors are Isis the goddess; my arms are the Ram (*Ba*), the Lord of Mendes; my breast is Neith, Lady of Sais; my phallus is Osiris; my muscles are the Lords of Kheraha; my chest is He who is greatly majestic; my belly and my spine are Sekhmet; my buttocks are the Eye of Horus; my thighs and my calves are Nut; my feet are Ptah, my toes are living falcons; there is no member of mine devoid of a god, and Thoth is the protection of all my flesh. . . . I am the Lord of Eternity; may I be recognized as Kheperer, for I am the Lord of the Uereret-crown. I am he in whom is the Sacred Eye, and who is in the Egg, and it is granted to me to live by them. I am he in whom is the Sacred Eye, namely the Closed Eye, I am under its protection. I have gone out, I have risen up, I have gone in, I am alive. I am he in whom is the Sacred Eye, my seat is on my throne, I dwell in my abode with it, for I am Horus who treads down millions, my throne is ordered for me, and I will rule from it (*BD* 42).

Regarding the claim that there is no member of the divinized initiate devoid of god (when he is transformed into *pantheos*), Iamblichus says almost the same thing. Raising the problem as to how the gods may receive the allotment of certain places—for example, how Athena (Neith) may be allotted both Athens and Sais in Egypt—Iamblichus inquires:

How would any part of the All be completely devoid of God? And how would any place survive entirely unprotected by the superior ones? (Proclus *In Tim.* 1.145.5).¹⁴

14. *Iamblichi Chalcedensis in Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*, ed. and tr. John M. Dillon, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973, p. 119.

Consequently, everything is theophany, and all manifested reality is 'full of gods' (*panta plere theon*). The *Logos* which is in the Soul of All (*ho logos ho en te psuche pantos*: Proclus *In Tim.* 11.309.11) knows everything and rules everything. The liberated *ba* of the theurgist is the *Ba* of the All.

Words and tokens give life to the realities by drawing into manifest existence the powers that are named or revealed in images. The human figure (as a living statue) itself is a hieroglyph: its different positions (like Tantric *asanas* and *mudras*) represent the dynamic ritual of 'writing', which is tantamount to the manifestation of life (*ankh*). The written word might be imbued with the life of the thing represented, like the animated hieratic statue or the human body, itself being viewed as a sort of 'written word'.

As the demiurgic and theurgic tokens, able to embody the powers (*sekhemu*) and 'textual' epiphanies of the gods, the hieroglyphs were regarded virtually as living things. They are receptacles of the divine rays, like the statues (whose shapes imitate the forms of hieroglyphs), or even these very powers themselves, possessing 'a magical life of their own'.¹⁵ They can function theurgically: not only within the written text, but within the text-like universe as a whole.

Though symbols by definition stand for something other than what they depict, or something other than they are as the manifested *kheperu*, the Egyptian hieroglyphic script hardly emphasizes any division between 'inner' and 'outer'. However, the Egyptian symbols clearly presuppose the hidden (*sheta*) dimension, or the hidden meaning (*huponoia*, to say it in the terms of Hellenic hermeneutical tradition).

Therefore symbolism is aptly described as 'a primary form of ancient Egyptian thought', which is symbolically oriented to 'a degree rarely equaled by other cultures'.¹⁶ The Egyptian universe of symbols simultaneously exhibits different meanings and shows different hermeneutical perspectives, even consciously encouraging the ambiguity and theological polysemy of their symbolism.

15. Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, p. 150.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

When we translate this metaphysical language of *medu neter* (the language that constitutes millions of *kheperu*: images, signs, symbols, breaths of life, heliophanies) into the language of Neoplatonic philosophical discourse, we can say, along with Plotinus, that 'all things are filled full of signs' (*semeion: Enn.* 11.3.7.12), or rather that all things *are* signs and images of the vast ontological Text. The multiplicity of gods (*neteru*) is the multiplicity of symbols, images, and names of the hidden God (Amun), the One who is One-in-the-many, the *Ba* that assumes form in the many gods and, simultaneously, remains concealed from them. As O. Kuisma remarks:

Since all things are ultimately dependent on the One, each and every thing can be thought of as hinting at it either directly or via mediating stages. Every particular thing in the hierarchy of being is in this sense a sign, which points towards its causes, either because of similarity or because of analogy.¹⁷

Like the Neoplatonic term *to hen*, the Egyptian name Amun (meaning 'hidden', 'invisible', 'transcendent') is merely an epithet which, nevertheless, might be regarded as the supreme *sunthema* of the ineffable Principle, simply because every divine name is a name of this hidden God. He is called *Ba*, the paradigm of all life-bearing *bau* that constitute millions of forms (*kheperu*), millions of symbols, but really there is no name for him:

His hidden all-embracing abundance of essence cannot be apprehended.¹⁸

To say it in late Neoplatonic terms, the ineffable One, regarded as pure unity, is above *dunamis*, power, be it creative or revealing, because it is above division and above the first noetic duality (like Atum's Heka, *hen on*, is above Shu and Tefnut in the Egyptian theology). But the One is also the source of manifestation (*ellampsis*) and the source of the duality of *dunamis*, which results in Being, regarded as 'mixture' (*mikton*) that is posterior to the principles of

17. Oiva Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996, p. 54.

18. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, p. 197.

Limit and the Unlimited. This triad is approximately analogous to the Memphite theological triad of Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum. Being as procession and return is the totality of *kheperu*, which affirm both the divine transcendence and immanence. As J. M. P. Lowry relates:

On the side of division *qua* division, being would turn out to be simply nothing, or matter: the pure *dunamis* as possibility. On the side of unity *qua* unity being would turn out to be everything, simply, or the One: the pure *dunamis* as *energeia*. Accordingly, Being can be neither the one nor the other but is the procession and return of the One.¹⁹

NEOPLATONIC RITES OF METAPHYSICAL REVERSION

For Proclus, the terms theurgy (*theourgia*), hieratic art (*hieratike techne*), and theosophy (*theosophia*, literally: 'divine wisdom', 'wisdom of the gods') are synonymous. They designate the spiritual path and method of ascent, revealed and established by the gods themselves.

By means of this *theourgike techne*, the soul is purified, transformed, and conducted to the divine realm, as if carried 'on the wing of Thoth'. Thereby the vindicated soul is separated from the mortal receptacle and re-united with the noetic principles. Symbolically ('in the most mystic of all initiations': *en te mustikotate ton teleton*: Proclus *Plat. Theol.* iv.9, p.193, 38) this separation from the gross body is represented by burying the initiate's body with the exception of the head:

The head is not buried, because the soul which abides in it does not undergo 'death'. This sacramental act has an additional peculiar feature: it is the initiate who at the binding of the theurgists buries his own body.²⁰

19. J. M. P. Lowry, *The Logical Principles of Proclus' ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ* as *Systematic Ground of the Cosmos*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980, pp. 66–67.

20. Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, Nouvelle edition par Michael Tardieu, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1978, p. 205.

This separation, purification, and elevation to the realm of eternal, noetic 'day' (as well as subsequent return to the ineffable One) is regarded as the existential and metaphysical rite of 'homecoming'.

The Neoplatonists maintained that the lowest things are in the highest and the highest things in the lowest (*en te tois protois ta eschata kai en tois eschatois ta protista*: Proclus *Hier. Art.* 148). In the depths of its own nature, each manifested thing keeps the mysterious and hidden 'symbol of the universal Father' (*to symbolon tou panton patros*), the secret hieroglyph of Atum, like the unspeakable (*aporrhotos*) token of one's essential apophatic identity with the One.

The initiatory priests and the practitioners of the telestic science (*he telestike episteme*), those who deal with the divine *sunthemata*, are called *telestai*. They purify both the body as material receptacle of the divine rays and the soul as the immortal divine seed or the winged bird, detached from the inanimate body and the related psychosomatic self-consciousness. As the *Pyramid Texts* say:

[Ba] to heaven, *shat* (body in the sense of corpse, *khat*) to earth (PT 474).

Similarly, the priests consecrate (*telein*) cult statues of the gods. Thereby the statues are animated, illuminated, and imbued with the divine powers (*sekhemu*). In both cases, the *telestai* call forth the gods, or rather their *bau* (to say it in the Egyptian parlance), that 'fill' the purified and properly prepared receptacles, either statues, or the divinized bodies, themselves transformed into hieroglyphs.

Eventually, by his own eidetic and henadic nature, the *telestes* worships the Lord of All (*neb tem*), being unified with Him by the soul's mystic *sunthema* (or hieroglyph), *in illo tempore* inserted by the Father Himself. This unification is possible, because the Father himself has sown the secret symbols (*sumbolois arrhetois ton theon*) in the soul, according to Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.211.1). And these symbols are explicitly designated as *ta arrheta onomata ton theon*, the unspeakable divine names (*In Alcib.* 441.27). In this respect Proclus follows the Chaldean theurgists, namely, the famous fragment of the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr. 108 = Proclus *In Crat.* 21.1-2).

In a sense, the paternal symbols, or the unspeakable divine

names, are identical with the thoughts of the Paternal Intellect. These demiurgic thoughts are the noetic Forms, manifested as the Chaldean *Iynges*, as *vores mysticae*, or the hieroglyphic 'building-blocks' that constitute the very textual fabric of our existence. Because of its noetic origins, the soul has an inborn (albeit temporarily forgotten) knowledge of these world-creating, world-ruling, and, simultaneously, elevating names.

As Proclus argues, everything is unified by means of its own mystic *sunthema*. By becoming one with this re-activated divine *sunthema*, the telestic priest is theurgically united with the unknowable Source of all good.²¹ When the essential hidden *sunthema* is remembered, re-awakened, and re-sounded, the soul, mythically speaking, returns through the fiery ray to its noetic and supra-noetic Principle. But, esoterically speaking, we might say that God returns to God, even if, ultimately, this 'return' is only a sort of the divine dream, or illusion, when viewed from the point of the all-embracing, ineffable God himself.

H. Lewy argues that a *sunthema* which is uttered in prayers, supplications, and invocations (*entuchia kai kleseis*) disposes the Paternal Intellect in favour of the soul's wish to be elevated, and this *sunthema* is identical with the one of the symbols which the demiurgic *Nous* has sown throughout the universe and which are laden with the ineffable beauty of the Ideas.²² These *sunthemata*, like the divine sparks of the soul, or the internal fiery seeds, enable the rite of *anagoge* (ascent) and *apathanatismos* (immortalization). Thereby the soul is lifted upwards by means of the solar (noetic) rays of Apollo or the Egyptian Amun-Ra. This ascent is regarded by H. Lewy as 'the chief mystery of the Chaldean sacramental community.'²³

According to Proclus, every soul is composed of *noeroi logoi* (intellective reason principles) and *theia symbola* (divine symbols). The former are related to the intelligible Forms, reflected or manifested at the level of the soul, and, consequently, with *Nous*; the

21. Laurence Jay Rosan, *The Philosophy of Proclus. The Final Phase of Ancient Thought*, New York: Cosmos, 1949, pp. 213-214.

22. Hans Lewy, *ibid.*, p. 191.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

latter is related to the divine henads (the fundamental supra-noetic unities) and the One itself.

For Proclus, the One (*to hen*) is God, and the multiplicity of gods is the multiplicity of self-complete henads (*henades eisin outoteleis hoi theoi*: ET 114). He argues that there are two orders of henads, one consisting of self-complete principles, the other of irradiations (*ellampseis*) from them. These irradiations are like the Egyptian *bau* that constitute the descending divine series whose members (*bau*) appear at different levels of reality. They may be designated as symbols that function as a means of transformative ascent and re-union of the soul (itself regarded as the *ba* in the multiple sequence of divine *bau*).

In this sense, the word *ba* means any noetic and psychic 'manifestation' (as an image or a symbol of some higher principle), imbued with being, life, and intelligence, albeit in different degrees and proportions. In the descending chain (analogous to the Neoplatonic *seira*) of theogony, cosmogony, and demiurgic irradiation, Ra, for instance, is the manifested *ba* of the ineffable Principle; Sekhmet, the *ba* of Ra; Bastet, the *ba* of Sekhmet, and every living cat (or rather its hidden *sunthema*, which may dwell within the statuette or mummy of the sacred cat), the *ba* of Bastet.

There are 'millions' of such descending and ascending chains, the rays or 'sounding breaths' of the intelligible Sun. The 'horizontal' levels of these 'vertical' rays constitute both the theophanic being itself (its eidetic orders, *taxeis*) and the hierarchy of divine *sunthemata*. However, the range of possible theological perspectives and possible meanings for any given symbol is very wide. So one may equally say that God's *ba* is Ra 'in the sky' (in the noetic realm), his body is Osiris 'in the West' (in the psychic Netherworld, *Anima Mundi*), and his cult image is in southern Heliopolis (Thebes, the City of Amun, here standing for the entire terrestrial world).

The rite of metaphysical reversion (*epistrophe*) consists in the soul's ability to identify itself with its hidden *sunthema*, and through it with the higher cause.²⁴ However, the telestic priest uses

24. E. R. Dodds, in Proclus *The Elements of Theology*, tr. E. R. Dodds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 223.

many different visible, audible, and tangible symbols in his rites, including various metals, minerals, stones, plants, and animals, since all of them belong to one or another particular chain of manifestation and, therefore, may lead back to the initial monad.

Accordingly, the theurgic *sumbola* and *sunthemata* do not merely stand for invisible and divine things, but are inherently connected with them: in a sense, they are 'gods', as the being-constructing hieroglyphs are 'gods', and for this reason manifest

reality is sacred both in principle and *de facto*. The *sumbola* of the noetic realm are immanently woven into the very fabric of the material world and constitute its unifying divine foundation.

Proclus compares the animated statues which contain both visible and invisible *sunthemata* (also regarded as *pharmaka*—drugs, charms, secret means) of the gods to the entire sensible universe which is constructed like a statue by the Demiurge and contains all kinds of visible and invisible *sumbola* of the noetic and supra-noetic realms.

For Proclus, not only are words *sumbola*, but even myths are *sumbola*, and consequently serve as a means of esoteric mystagogy (*arrhetos mustagogia*). All these symbols are the constituent parts of the manifested cosmos, itself regarded as a divine statue (*agalma*), the well-ordered *sphaira* of light, having many different eidetic faces, levels of being, and chains of irradiation. As A. Sheppard pointed out:

Thinking of it diagrammatically, we may say that the world was conceived as organized into both horizontal and vertical lines. The heliotrope, on the low level of plant life, is a *sumbolon* of the sun which is in the same *seira*, the same 'vertical line', but on a higher level of being, a higher 'horizontal' line. The sun in turn is a *sumbolon* of higher realities in the same *seira* such as the god Apollo, and ultimately, as in Plato *Rep.* VI, of the transcendent Good which is the Neoplatonic One. The belief that such 'vertical line' relationships hold between the natural world and the intelligible world, is equally essential both to theurgy and to Proclus' metaphysics.²⁵

25. Anne D. R. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1980, p. 152.

The symbol of the transcendent One, hidden in the soul, is regarded as the essential henadic aspect of the soul (called the 'one of the soul') by which the mystical union with the One is realized. In this sense, the soul-complex must be deconstructed and reduced to this essential *sunthema*, the hidden and ineffable 'flower' (*anthos*), which is tantamount to the self-subsisting unity beyond being and substance.

Hence, to be unified and to be divinized are the same, insofar as all gods, according to Iamblichus, Syrianus, and Proclus, are 'self-subsistent hypostases' or *huparxeis* (pure supra-noetic entities) beyond being and substance.²⁶ At the lower levels of reality, the *sunthemata* function as receptacles for the gods (for their *bau*, to say it in Egyptian terms), because 'the gods illuminate matter and are present immaterially in material things.'²⁷

Even spices, aromatics, sounds, and numbers may serve as the proper receptacles for the anagogic divine powers. The Demiurge and his assistant *neteru* themselves determine and conduct the theurgic rites that put the soul into correspondence and *sustasis* (conjunction) with the gods. H. Lewy argues that the term *sustasis* is often applied to the prayer (*logos*) which effects conjunction. He says:

Proclus reports that the Chaldeans communicated in their Oracles the 'divine names' of the night, of the day, of the month and of the year which effected the 'conjunction'. Thus we learn that 'conjunction' was brought about by a recital of the 'divine names' (that is, the *voces mysticae*) of the gods who were called upon to participate in it.²⁸

26. Carlos G. Steel, "Iamblichus and the Theological Interpretation of the Parmenides".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8: Iamblichus: The Philosopher, The University of Iowa, 1997, p. 18.

27. Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus' Solution to the Problem of Embodiment".—*Dionysius*, vol. xii, Dalhousie University Press, 1988, p. 53 (cf. Iamblichus *De mysteriis* 232.14–16).

28. Hans Lewy, *ibid.*, p. 229.

THE INEFFABLE STATUES OF TRANSCENDENT LIGHT

Though the Greek terms *eikon* (image) and *sumbolon* may be used interchangeably in Neoplatonism, their more technically articulated distinction is based on the assumption that *eikon* is to be regarded as a mirror-image (a direct reflection or representation of its archetype), whereas a *sumbolon* has no such direct resemblance, even if it mystically 'fits together' with the corresponding divine reality or serves as its proper vehicle.

According to Proclus, 'symbols are not imitations of that which they symbolize' (*In Remp.* 1.198.15–16). However, neither are images plain imitations, because any image (related to its archetype as an effect is related to its cause) 'by its very nature embodies simultaneously the characteristics of similarity and dissimilarity.'²⁹

Proclus (or perhaps Iamblichus, paraphrased in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*) argues that the Pythagoreans, before their *epistemonike didaskalia* (strictly scientific instruction) usually reveal the subjects under consideration through similitudes and images (*dia ton homoion kai ton eikonon*). Then they introduced the same subjects through the esoteric symbols (*dia ton sumbolon aporrheton*). Thereby the soul's ability to comprehend the noetic realm is reactivated (*In Tim.* 1.30.2 ff). In addition, certain causal principles of creation are represented 'in images through symbols' (*en eikosi dia tinon sumbolon*).

J.M. Dillon confesses as being unable to draw any clear distinction between *eikon* and *sumbolon* in Proclus' metaphysics or 'system of allegory'. He says:

If one takes the most obvious Platonic example, the comparison of the Sun as *eikon* with the Good as *paradeigma*, we have arrived at the point of difficulty. Why is the Sun an *eikon* (*Rep.* 509a9), and not a *sumbolon*?³⁰

29. S.E. Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ, A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973, p. 85.

30. John Dillon, "Image, Symbol and Analogy: Three Basic Concepts of Neoplatonic Allegorical Exegesis".—*The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris, Norfolk: ISNS, Old Dominion University, 1976, p. 250.

In fact, the Sun indeed is the supreme visible *sunthema* of both the One and the Demiurge. In these matters of metaphysical designation, we should avoid of any one-sided rigidity in our classifications. As Proclus says, certain things may be understood 'in some such symbolic sense . . . without reading too much into them' (*In Tim.* 1.200.2–3).

Since the language of metaphysics is at its best allusive (in both its symbolic and iconic mode), we can speak of the divine things only provisionally (*kata endeixin*). Neither the ineffable One, nor the henads (or *ta aporrheta sumbola*) can be the subject of a discursive philosophical argument. The theurgic symbolism of 'divine names' is initially bound to a radical reversion (*peritrope*) of human language. S. Rappe asserts:

Thus Proclus and Simplicius both allow that any teaching about realities such as intellect and soul must take place by means of *endeixis*, by means of coded language. . . . In Neoplatonic texts, the word *endeixis* is linked to Pythagorean symbolism and conveys the sense of allusive or enigmatic language. . . . As used by Damascius, the word *endeixis* suggests that the language of metaphysics must be acknowledged to be at most a prompting toward inquiry into something that exceeds its own domain as descriptive. The result of this inquiry tells us more about our own states of ignorance than about the goal of our search.³¹

However, as a symbol of the unspeakable noetic fire, the *sunthema* of the Sun is 'the central mystery of Neoplatonic theurgy.'³² In a threefold classification of reality, established by Proclus, the notion of an image is employed in connection with relationship within the noetic realm, though 'the spiritual world contains images in a strictly relative sense, whereas images proper are confined to

31. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 210–211.

32. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p. 227.

the sensible and mathematical realm.³³ In short, the lower reality is present in the higher which relates to it 'archetypally as a cause' (*kat'aitian archoeidos*), and is manifested at its own level 'accordingly to its *huparxis*' (existential essence). But the higher reality is present in the lower 'by participation in a manner of an image' (*kata methexin eikonikos*: ET 62).

The realities of any higher level of being constitute the metalanguage (regarded as an esoteric *theoria*) by means of which the realities of the immediately lower level are to be interpreted or contemplated. Likewise, in the hierarchy of poetic art, the highest poetry proceeds either by pure *sumbola*, which are antithetical and dissimilar to their metaphysical referents, or it proceeds 'by employing *eikones* to refer to transcendent *paradeigmata*'.³⁴

When viewed in accordance with the schematic duality between 'here' (*entautha*) and 'there' (*eikei*), the contents of the lower reality are to be viewed 'according to the esoteric (or unspeakable) doctrine (or contemplative vision)'—*kata ten aporrheton theorian*. This point of view implies a mode of understanding related to the 'first-working causes' (*en tois protourgois aitiaais*), in contrast to the category of understanding known as *kata to phainomenon*, 'according to the apparent sense'.

Consequently, the apparent sense of the cosmic text, and the written philosophical, mythological, and liturgical text, is to be regarded as a symbolic 'screen' (*parapetasma*) which simultaneously reveals and conceals the underlying hidden meaning (*huponnoia*). This is because the image of ultimate reality, constructed using tools of language (whose polysemous structure is analogous to the polysemous world it mirrors), inevitably distorts and fragments that reality. These limitations are partly resolved and transcended by ascent to a higher level of unity, that is, by restoring the fragmented Eye of Horus, the unified *imago dei*. As R. Lambertson says:

The highest and most perfect 'life' of the soul is on the level of the gods: the soul utterly abandons its own identity, transcends

33. S. E. Gersh, *ibid.*, p. 85.

34. Robert Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, p. 215.

its individual *nous* and attaches 'its light to the transcendent light, and the most unified element of its own being and life to the One beyond all being and all life' (Proclus *In Remp.* 1.177.20–23). Poetry that corresponds to this condition is characterized by the absolute fusion of subject and object. It is divine madness (*mania*), which is a greater thing even than reasonableness (*sophrosune*) and fills the soul with symmetry.³⁵

In Neoplatonism, the gods themselves are beyond all representation. However, the divine names are both images and symbols of the invisible gods. H.D. Saffrey assumes that the equation of the divine names with the statues (*agalmata*), which became an important feature of late Neoplatonic metaphysics, is due to specific historical circumstances. The Platonists of Athens (the school of Syrianus and Proclus) presumably developed this theory of divine names as spiritual substitutes for the cult statues of the gods that began at that time to disappear from their temples.³⁶ Since the Neoplatonic philosophers started to celebrate divinity through the systematic metaphysical interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* and the creation of scientific theology, worship was allegedly reduced to the *religio mentis*, an entirely intellectual process.³⁷

However, it seems that H.D. Saffrey is subtly incorrect in this respect, because even in pharaonic Egypt hieroglyphs functioned as the 'divine names' in the form of *agalmata*, be it visualized mental figures, written pictures or the divine statues made of stone and precious metals. The divine names are objects of adoration like the statues of the gods, because, according to Proclus, the demiurgic Intellect produces each name as a statue of the gods:

35. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

36. H.D. Saffrey, "Nouveaux liens objectifs entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus".—*Recherches sur le Neoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1990, p. 241.

37. H.D. Saffrey, "From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius".—*Classical Mediterranean Spirituality. Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 253.

And just as theurgy by certain symbols (*dia de tinon sumbolon*) invokes the generous goodness of the gods with a view to the illumination of statues artificially constructed (*ten ton techneton agalmaton ellampsin*), so also intellectual knowledge related to divine beings, by composition and divisions of articulated sounds, reveals the hidden being (*ten apoekrummenen ousian*) of the gods (*Plat. Theol.* 1.29.124.12–125.2 Saffrey-Westerink).

In his *Commentary to Plato's Cratylus*, Proclus speaks about the *eikastike dunamis*, a certain power by which the soul has the capacity to make images and assimilate itself to the gods, angels, and daemons. For this reason the soul makes statues (*agalmata... demiourgei*) of the gods and superior beings. Likewise, it produces out of itself (with the help of *lektike phantasia*, linguistic imagination) the substance (*ousia*) of the names. Proclus says:

And just as the telestic art by means of certain symbols and ineffable tokens (*dia de tinon sumbolon kai aporrheton sunthematon*) makes the statues (*agalmata*) here below like the gods and ready to receive the divine illuminations (*ellampseon*), in the same way the art of the regular formation of words, by that same power of assimilation, brings into existence names like statues of the [metaphysical] realities (*agalmata ton pragmaton*: *In Crat.* 19.12–16).

Accordingly, the names are images and symbols of the gods as well as intellectual statues (*agalmata*) of divine realities: primarily they are the names of the noetic Forms and secondarily the names of sensible forms. As the 'vocal statues' (*agalmata phoneēnta*), these names are identical with the theurgic *sumbola* and *sunthemata*. As G. Shaw pointed out:

Neither Iamblichus nor any of his Platonic successors provide concrete examples of how names, sounds, or musical incantations were used in theurgic rites. There is a great wealth of evidence from non-theurgical circles, however, to suggest that theurgists used the *asema onomata* according to Pythagorean cosmological theories and a spiritualization of the rules of grammar.³⁸

38. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, p. 183.

By these incantations and contemplations constituting the complex set of the hieratic 'work' (*ergon*), the theurgist tried to join the gods through his inner ascension and assimilation to the Demiurge, thereby (by means of the ineffable symbols) entering the solar barque of Ra.

5

DIVINE RITES AND PHILOSOPHY IN NEOPLATONISM

Human existence is nothing but the divine life unlived.¹

We should always have philosophy as our patron, since it is she who performs the task of Homer's Athena scattering mist.²

RITUAL AND COSMIC ORDER

The contemporary spokesman of archetypal psychology, J. Hillman, argues that 'we can imagine nothing or perform nothing that is not already formally given by the archetypal imagination of the gods'.³ Thus he turns (though maintaining, paradoxically, that one of the most available paths of the *imitatio dei* is through 'infirmity') to the main Neoplatonic theme of philosophy as an imitation of the gods and a striving for the 'golden' life. But life, as the Hellenic myths and dramas tell us, is trouble, and it is never going to be any better. In contrast to the lofty dreams of grandeur, 'humankind is weak and small, it sees but little and has nothingness in its nature', according to Iamblichus. Therefore the only cure for this congenital nothingness (*oudeneia*), confusion and unceasing change is 'its sharing to the extent possible in divine light' (*metousian theiou photos kata to dunaton metalaboi: De myster. 144.13*).

1. Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, p.340.

2. Olympiodorus, *In Gorg.* 26.13.

3. *The Essential James Hillman: A Blue Fire*, ed. by Thomas Moore, Routledge, London, 1994, p.150.

For Neoplatonists, everything—despite different levels, ranks, and orders—is an irradiation of the One. The task of every being is not only to follow his own noetic archetypes, but to come back, as far as possible, to the supreme and ineffable source of light. This is accomplished by rejecting the ontological multiplicity through a sacrificial death. Therefore we can ask whether philosophy itself is not a sort of ‘modernized’ theurgy. Would it be possible to propose that *theoria* and *theourgia*, or *telesiourgia*, are somewhat convertible terms, if regarded as means of ascent in the grand cosmic theatre—in the world which reveals the power of unspeakable symbols known only to the gods, the world that is itself a Myth? Indeed, for Sallustius, ‘the cosmos itself can be called a myth, since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and intellects are concealed’ (*De diis*, III.8–10).

It is almost impossible to reveal the exact meaning of such crucial but rather Proteian terms as ‘philosophy’, ‘myth’, ‘ritual’, ‘theurgy’. Any attempt to produce a firmly established solution raises more questions than answers. However, our humble task is not to solve the fundamental riddles of human civilization, but simply to show that, in the context of Neoplatonism and Hellenic culture, theurgy cannot be regarded as a strange misunderstanding incompatible with rational philosophizing. This is because theurgy follows certain universal patterns—universal in a historically determined sense of spiritual ‘genre’—and philosophy itself is partly based on ritual transformed into discursive and rational ‘ceremonies’ of thought. Similarly, one can see the analogy between ritual and grammar. The grammarian undertakes the same operations with respect to the text as the priest undertakes with respect to the sacrifice: both of them decompose the primal unity, then identify the separated parts according to a new set of relationships, and finally produce or confirm the unity on a higher level of synthesis. The Neoplatonic science of dialectic follows a similar course which clearly resembles the divine manifestation and the gradual integration of the manifested parts into their single archetypal source. Ritual is both work, deed, enterprise (*to ergon*, Sanskrit *kriya*) and order, rule, law (*telete* as an accomplishment of perfect revolution while moving in a circle, Sanskrit *rta*).

As Proclus says in his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* VII.1161:

the Intellect, through its unchanging reversion towards the intelligible, anticipates causally circular motion; and not only the Intellect, but every divine soul, by reason of its ‘dance’ round Intellect, takes on incorporeal circular motion. . . . The theologians also know of incorporeal circular motion, seeing that the theologian of the Hellenes (sc. Orpheus) declares about the primary and hidden god, who is prior to Phanes, ‘And he was borne unceasingly about/ In an endless circle’ (fr. 71). And the Oracles lay down that ‘all the founts and the beginnings whirl, and yet always remain fixed in an unwearying eddy’ (fr. 49).

Therefore ritual and cosmic order, including order of seasons and order of *logos*, are inseparable. The cosmos itself is *ton aidion theon gegonos agalma*—‘a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods’ (*Tim.* 37c). In its outward aspect, ritual is a program of demonstrative acts and patterns which try to establish the identity and solidarity of the closed group and determine its *skopos* and *telos*.

THE AIM OF PHILOSOPHY

Ancient Hellenic philosophy intended to transform souls through various ‘spiritual exercises’, because the task of the philosopher was not primarily to communicate ‘an encyclopedic knowledge in the form of a system,’⁴ but to live the philosophical life. In Neoplatonism, psychagogy is tantamount to mystagogy, and the Delphic maxim ‘know thyself’ means ‘return to the source, the first principle of all’. This ‘reversion’ (*epistrophe*) is both *epistrophe pros heauton* (a return to one’s immortal self through self-reflexivity) and elevation through the ontological symbols accomplished by the divine energies.

Although humans are not able to attain knowledge of the gods by their discursive reason, according to Iamblichus, philosophy in the

4. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. A. I. Davidson, Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p. 21.

Pythagorean manner is a road to wisdom in which one will propound, not contradictions, but firm and unchanging truths strengthened by scientific demonstration through sciences (*mathematon*) and contemplations (*theorias*). He is wise who contemplates the One, the goal of all contemplation and is able to see from here, as if from a watch-tower, god (who presides over all truth, happiness, all being, causes, principles) and all in the train of god.

The goal of the Platonic philosophy is wisdom and immortality achieved through the ascent (*anagoge*) of the soul. It is coming to be like a god (*homoiosis theo*) and union with the divine at the level of noetic theophanies or the ineffable source itself. Therefore philosophy as a rational discourse is the hermeneutically developed substitute for the ancient rituals which were viewed as an integral part of the cosmic events. Philosophical games and contests for truth themselves could be regarded as special and partly individualized cases of ritualized cosmogony which is an imitation of the gods and a sort of divine service.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF DIVINE ACTS

We know little about the Neoplatonic hieratic art as such, and different scholars present different pictures of it. According to H. Lewy, theurgy and philosophy were two parallel methods aimed at the same goal, union with the gods.⁵ L. J. Rosan was able to distinguish between a lower and a higher theurgy.⁶ A. Sheppard divided the Procline theurgy (as attested by Hermeias) into three types, claiming that 'Proclus still thinks of the final union as a Plotinian mystical experience, not as some magically induced trance',⁷ as if the so-called lower theurgy was nothing but a silly striving for hallucinations. Arguing that Proclus re-interpreted the Plotinian mys-

5. Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, ed. Michel Tardieu, Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris, 1978, pp. 462-463.

6. Laurence Jay Rosan, *The Philosophy of Proclus. The Final Phase of Ancient Thought*, Cosmos, New York, 1949, p. 213.

7. Anne Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy".—*Classical Quarterly* 32, 1982, p. 224.

tical experience in terms of the theory behind theurgy, A. Sheppard describes mystical union as 'a lofty kind of theurgy because turning the 'one in the soul' towards the supreme One was thought of as activating a *sumbolon* in the direction of what is symbolized'.⁸ Therefore the supreme theurgy is also a *theia philosophia* (divine philosophy).

G. Shaw discerns material, intermediate and noetic theurgies, because *theia erga*, divine acts, in the last analysis constitute the whole path of *proödos* and *epistrophe*. They are the manifested reality as such, or rather a set of *sumbola* and *sunthemata* which reveal both the demiurgic and the anagogic power of the Forms and their henadic background. Therefore, as G. Shaw pointed out:

The law of theurgy was the law of cosmogony in ritual expression; hence one could never ascend to the gods by favouring one 'part' of the soul over another, however transcendently the soul was imagined. . . . In this sense, Neoplatonic theurgy was profoundly anti-gnostic, for it never allowed the disoriented condition of the embodied soul to be projected on the cosmos as an 'ontological' conflict.⁹

Despite the different classifications derived from the painstaking analysis of the extant texts¹⁰ and the widely disseminated myth of Plotinus' exceptional and purely intellectual mysticism—which stands behind various approaches tending to ridicule *le mirage de la theurgie* (as H. D. Saffrey did in fact)¹¹, or to defend it as no more than a material basis for one's philosophical development—it should be clear that it is one thing to dispute endlessly about details, and quite another to explore the metaphysical principles that

8. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

9. Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus".—*Traditio*, vol. xli, 1985, p. 27.

10. See, for example, Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1974; John F. Finamore, "Plotinus and Iamblichus on Magic and Theurgy".—*Dionysius*, vol. xvii, Dec. 1999.

11. H. D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le neoplatonisme apres Plotin*, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1990, p. 48.

provide the foundation for the whole super-structure of ancient hieratic life and thought.

As A. H. Armstrong has emphasized, the later Neoplatonists simply 'give strong and carefully worked out arguments for the importance of sacred rites and ceremonies and the use of material symbols in our approach to the Divine and the Divine's approach to us. And the principles upon which they base these arguments are by no means always non-Hellenic or altogether incompatible with the thought of Plotinus, or even of Plato'.¹²

THEURGY AND SPIRITUAL HERMENEUTICS

The Neoplatonic *telestike* (which includes purifications, *katharmoi*, and rites, *teletai*) can be hermeneutically deduced from the several texts of Plato, especially from the *Laws*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. However, it seems that in a certain sense the philosophy of Plato himself is the disguised reinterpretation of Orphic and Homeric myths and motifs, or those of Parmenides, the initiated healer and priest of Apollo, as P. Kingsley tries to persuade us.¹³ But there is actually much more to it. According to Ch. Evangelou, the Platonic tradition is closer to the Eastern ways of thinking (especially the Indian), than to a narrowly defined 'Western rationality'.¹⁴ And the genesis of the entire Hellenic philosophy corresponds precisely to the time when *Hellas* met *Aiguptos*.¹⁵

It means that Hellenic philosophy, albeit in a radically emancipated manner, still appears as the direct prolongation of an ancient wisdom. Neoplatonism simply tries to restore the supposed primordial and sacred unity of the cosmos, regarded as a cultic body of the divinity. Therefore it is no wonder that theurgy, viewed in Platonic terms, fulfilled the goal of philosophy understood as a *homoiosis*

12. A. Hilary Armstrong, "Iamblichus and Egypt".—*Les Etudes philosophiques*, no. 2–3, 1987, p. 181.

13. Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, The Golden Sufi Center, Inverness, California, 1999, p. 44; p. 140.

14. Christos C. Evangelou, *The Hellenic Philosophy: Between Europe, Asia, and Africa*, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 1997, p. 51.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

theo. As G. Shaw pointed out, 'both cultic acts and philosophic *paid-eia* were rooted in one source: the ineffable power of the gods'.¹⁶ For Iamblichus and Proclus, the idea of the sacred tradition, received from the gods themselves and transmitted through the *Hermai* *seira* (a sort of *silsilah*, to say it in the Sufi parlance, though regarded more in vertical than in horizontal sense), becomes the central issue.

Although Iamblichus insists that theurgy must be exalted above discursive philosophy and exempt from philosophical criticism considered as merely human reasoning, he also emphasizes the necessity of proceeding in short steps, i.e. starting with material gods as a step toward elevation (*anabasis*) to the immaterial gods (*De myster.* 217.8–11). Instead of saying that Iamblichus fully harmonized (1) the Chaldean rites of soteriological elevation in terms of a divinely guided spiritual journey and (2) the late Neoplatonic doctrine of procession and return, we prefer to assert that instead he made explicit the initial harmony of divine rites and divinely inspired sacred knowledge which only gradually, and due to the physiological, cosmological, ethical, and metaphysical interpretations, was turned into a sort of philosophical discourse. The structure of the syllogistic procedures and the ancient logic itself is still bound to the ritualistic patterns of order as represented by the traditional cosmogonies, and this scientific logic still functions in the cosmos which is the 'most sacred temple of the Demiurge' (Procl. *In Tim.* 1.124.16–22).

Iamblichus harmonized Platonic epistemology with the notion of the anagogical force residing within rituals as such (be they corporeal rites and sacrifices or rituals of thought and noetic liturgies), claiming that the *sunthemata* accomplish the work by their own power. An ascent to the truth which is accomplished by contemplations, noetic sacrifices and inspired interpretations of symbols assists in establishing the hermeneutical meta-structure of philosophy as a discourse based on systematic reasoning and logic. Such philosophy is coextensive with the sacred rites. Iamblichus says:

16. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p. 5.

Listen therefore to the intellectual interpretation of symbols according to the mind of the Egyptians (*kata ton Aiguption noun ten ton symbolon noeran diermeneusin*), at the same time removing from your imagination (*tes phantasias*) and your ears the image (*eidolon*) of things symbolical (*ton symbolikon*), but elevating yourself to the intellectual truth (*ten noeran aletheian*: *De myster.* 250.13–18).

Phantasia, like a mirror, can reproduce images of higher principles, and by its image-making power (*eikastike dunamis*) the soul can make itself like beings superior to it. Therefore Proclus argues that 'by the same power it also makes its inferior products like itself and even like things greater than itself because it fashions statues of gods and daemons' (*theon te agalmata kai daimonon demiourgei*: *In Crat.* 19.6f).

The hermeneutical elevation, aimed at intellectual truth, follows the same anagogic call to participation in the perfection of the One, directed by the 'calling power' (*he anakletike dunamis*). With the help of this all-pervading power, some of the divinely inspired philosophers and theurgists (*hoi hieratikoi*) can achieve union with the divine. According to Pythagoras, as recounted by Aristides Quintilianus, 'Souls cannot ascend without music'. But neither can they ascend without the exegesis, or *symbolike theoria*, of sacred rites (*teletai*), myths, and fundamental metaphysical texts, such as the *Parmenides* of Plato. In the Islamic Sufi tradition, which is partly based on the Neoplatonic intellectual heritage, *ta'wil*, or the exegesis of soul, leads the soul back to its truth (*haqiqat*)—and, according to H. Corbin, 'transmutes all cosmic realities and relations and restores them to symbols; each becomes an Event of the soul, which, in its ascent, its *Mi'raj*, passes beyond them and makes them interior to itself.'¹⁷

By asserting that every soul and every intellect has a twofold activity—(1) the unitary activities (*tas men henoeideis*) which are better than the intellectual, and (2) the intelligible activities (*tas de*

17. Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, tr. W. R. Trask, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 34.

noetikas)—Proclus makes a sort of division between rational philosophy and the ultimate knowledge which is higher than science (*In Parm.* vii.63k). According to Proclus, the 'dialectical operations are the preparation for the struggle towards the One, but are not themselves the struggle' (*In Parm.* vii.75k). Therefore 'after going through all the negations, one ought to set aside this dialectical method also' (*ibid.*).

HIERATIC RITES OF ASCENT

In the extant fragments of his *Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles*, Proclus discusses the 'theurgic race' (*to theourgon phulon*) which is beneficent and devoted to a zealous imitation of the goodness of God (*tes tou theou agathotetos*: *De phil. Chald.* 27–28, p.208 des Places) and elevation by means of the anagogic life (*dia tes anagogou zoes*: *ibid.*, A 14, p. 206).

The end of all spiritual elevation is participation in divine fruits and filling the soul with divine fire, which allows the contemplation of God. The soul is placed in the presence of the Father (*ibid.*, A 17–19, p.206). The sacred rites of ascent are equated

with the intellectual and invisible hymns of the ascending soul (*kai noeroi kai apaneis humnoi tes anagomenes psuches*), awakening the memory of the 'harmonic reasons' (*ton harmonikon logon*), which bear the inexpressible images of the divine powers (*aporrhethous eikonas ton theion en ante dunameon*: *ibid.*, A 25–26, p.206–207).

Despite the splendid images of the Chaldean rhetoric, this fiery elevation is at the same time understood as a Platonic *anamnesis* of the ultimate truth and a way to the pure noetic contemplation, and thus as an escape from the transient nature of *genesis*. But the true end of the Father-loving soul, argues Proclus—that soul which obeys the call to 'run to the hot (since the spirit is elevated by heat) and fly from the cold'—is the all-receptive temple of the Father who receives and unites the ascending souls (*ibid.*, A 3–6, p.206). 'Let us become fire, let us travel through fire' (*pur genometha, dia puros hodeusomen*: *ibid.*, B 2, p.208) he says, and explains the two integral sides of this 'hymn', consecrated to God as an act of assimilation to him, as a laying aside of all multiplicity and union with the hypernoetic *huparxis*:

Philosophy says that to forget the eternal reasons (*ton aidion logon*) is the cause of the departure of the soul from the Gods, and to recall the knowledge of the eternal reasons or Ideas is the cause of the return to them, but the Oracles assert that the forgetfulness and remembering of the paternal synthemns (*ton patrikon sunthematon*) are respectively the causes of the departure and return. Both statements are in harmony. For the soul is constituted from sacred reasons and divine symbols (*apo ton hieron logon kai ton theion sumbolon*), of which the former proceed from the intellectual forms (*apo ton noeron eidon*), but the latter from the divine henads (*apo ton theoin henadon*); and we are images of the intellectual essences, but statues of the unknown synthemns (*kai esmen eikones men ton noeron ousion, agalmata [ta] de ton agnoston sunthematon*). And just as every soul is a fullness (*pleroma*) of forms, but subsists wholly or simply according to one cause, thus also it indeed participates in all synthemns, through which it is united to divine things (*De phil. Chald.* E 18–26, p. 211, 1–4, p. 212).

Here we have the famous distinction made between an *eikon* and a *sumbolon*. In the later Neoplatonism, higher realities may be revealed either through *eikones* (related to their respective *paradeigmata*), or through *sumbola* which cannot resemble the objects symbolized. However, ‘similarity’ (*homoiotetes*) is a key term in both cases, because everywhere the similar is naturally united to the similar, according to Proclus. Therefore just as noetic objects are known by *noesis*, so that which is prior to intellect is related to the so-called ‘flower’ of the intellect.

It would be rather incorrect to restrict philosophy to that limited faculty of the soul which knows true and divine beings *kata to dianoetikon* or investigates cosmos through *eikones* (in a Procline sense, for instance, regarding the recapitulation of the *Republic* at the beginning of Plato’s *Timaeus* as an *eikon*, in contrast to the Atlantis myth understood as a *sumbolon*). Likewise, to think that there is such a thing as an ‘empty ritual’, somewhat detached from the fundamental noetic structure of being and intellect, is too naïve. The Neoplatonic philosophy itself is a homecoming rite, *nostos*,

paradigmatically accomplished by the Homeric hero Odysseus. The path of return is the path of an archetypal hero in conjunction with a corresponding god. There are thematic connections between the conception of the ‘ancestor’ (or sage, *sophos*) and that of the ‘hero’, related to the ‘seasonal eschatology’.

THE COMMON METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND

It would be incorrect to relate the Neoplatonic telestic art exclusively to the *Chaldean Oracles* and regard this cosmological and soteriological poem as the single mysterious source of all theurgy. Rather we should accept as a fruitful hypothesis that the Neoplatonic theurgy is only a hellenized branch of various ancient beliefs that prevailed in the Middle East and Egypt in the form of ‘theurgic’ kingship and the ideologies of the all-embracing cosmic state. These sacred ontologies and their entirely pragmatic technologies of the temple magic, related to the supernatural cosmic bureaucracy for the purpose of ensuring a harmonious flow of energy between the different levels of being, were transformed into, and survived as, the efficacious means of personal gnostic ‘salvation’—the task which constitutes *raison d’être* of Platonism as well.

Regarding Near Eastern parallelisms, we ought to remember that even the most striking convergences in detail may turn out to be nothing more than a typological analogue. However, the common metaphysical background of the various paths of rebirth and solar immortality, including those of the Pythagoreans, Orphics, Chaldeans, Egyptians and the Neo-Vedic initiates of the ‘five fires’ and the ‘two ways’, is quite evident, notwithstanding considerable differences in detail. According to the assertion made by H. Zimmer:

The late Vedic-Gnostic reincarnation doctrine of the ‘knower’ who through his gnosis escapes from the sublunar world and its cycle of death and rebirth, must have had its ultimate roots in Mesopotamia . . . a Sumerian-Babylonian spiritual heritage, diffused to the Orient and there creatively transformed, also travelled westward to become the Greek Orphism, and finally,

nourished anew by the old energies of its Near Eastern mother soil, celebrated its resurrection in Gnosticism.¹⁸

Perhaps a picture of the ideal theurgic cosmos is always the result of reconstruction, even if we understand the term *theourgia* not in a strictly Neoplatonic sense (as a Chaldean neologism, coined in the third century AD), but simply as a working of the gods (*theon erga*) and their theophanies, including:

- (1) the creative or magical divine power that underpins and pervades all that exists in the spiritual, psychic and material world (since spirit and matter are woven out of the same substance);
- (2) the whole eidetic meta-structure of the cosmic state and the hieratic (ontogenetic and eschatological) institute of kingship, supported by certain myths and daily rituals, and thus following the macrocosmic and microcosmic 'rhythms'.

PHILOSOPHERS AS SACRED STATUES

In the world of real hierophanies, the gods are not to be distinguished from their statues or images, since the image, by invoking the name (or the essence) of the substance imaged, is itself animated, i.e. magically transformed from a mere image to an image infused with the spiritual (or noetic) substance it portrays. This world is a manifestation of the life-giving and sounding noetic Light, of sound made substantial. The sacred images (seasons, landscapes, temples, statues, animals, trees, human beings as *dramatis personae*, or their body-members as identified part by part with a number of different deities) are vehicles of an indwelling divine presence.

In the Egyptian theology (revered by theurgical Platonism for its ability to imitate the nature of the universe and the creative energy of the gods), the sacred action is the action performed ritually, and

18. Heinrich Zimmer, "Death and Rebirth in the Light of India".—*Man and Transformation: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. By J. Campbell, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 341.

such action is no longer personal. And self-identification with a god is common also in the magical papyri. Similarly, the Hermetic philosopher or the Chaldean sage (representative of the sacred philosophy, *maghdim*) are not self-determined individual 'authors', but rather divine masks and symbols, ranks and archetypal functions. This attitude partly survived into the late Neoplatonism and Neopythagoreanism.

Regarding the animating of statues, we should draw certain parallels from both the Hindu and the Egyptian worlds. According to the Tantric view, purification of the elements and *nyasa* is the ritual infusion of life force into an object, including one's own body, by which it is divinized, transformed into a divine body, externally symbolized by the *asanas*—the 'postures' which make the practitioner immune against the onslaught of the pairs of opposites. An action or a state of consciousness that is not ritualized is merely human, but through the ritualized action or the ritualized mental (eidetic) pattern, the initiate becomes a mediator of the divine light. Therefore, as J. Naydler observes, for the Egyptians:

Ritual action is invocatory; by means of it the magician invokes spiritual powers. The ritual act thus takes place as much in the spiritual dimension as in the physical. Rituals occur in the realm of the gods; the gods are necessarily witnesses of and participants in the sacred rites—for this is precisely what makes them sacred.¹⁹

Whatever external rituals may be performed, the noetic component is never absent, and the intense visualization (as in the case of visualizing oneself as one's chosen deity, *ishta-devata*, in the Tantric ascent) is always the crucial step. Here the material body is also regarded as a temple of the divinity, an *agalma*, or a living statue, raised up in accordance with the sacred iconography. And certain Hellenic philosophers (Syrianus, for instance) indeed were regarded as divine statues. In a sense, the philosopher is analogous to the *agathos aner* who is build up like a solid and stable statue, or *kouros*-like

19. Jeremy Naydler, *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 1996, p.144.

hero, fixed forever in the brilliance of an unchanging youth where *panta kala*, 'everything is beautiful'.

TO BE REBORN INTO THE SOLAR WORLD

Syrianus, the famous master of Proclus and Hermeias, conceived the rites of the sacrifice, offered by the Homeric Achilles at the funeral pyre of Patroklos (*Iliad*, XXIII.192f), as an imitation of the soul's immortalization, performed by the theurgists (Procl. *In Remp.* 1.152.7). This analogy cannot be regarded as entirely fabulous, because the funeral of Patroklos in *Iliad* are strikingly close to the royal funerary rituals that are recorded in official Hittite documents.²⁰ The Vedic god Agni as the supreme model and guide of rebirth himself is a psychopomp, by virtue of cremation of the dead. In his aspect of terrestrial fire, he provides the dead hero with a direct link to Agni as celestial fire: the divine Sun.

In various parts of the ancient world, the initiatory or real death was conceived as the ritualized contest for immortality in bliss, as a prize to be won by those who had wished to live in accordance with virtue and to be reborn into the solar world of Agni, Ra, or Apollo-Helios. The statue-like body of Osiris is awakened by the solar rays issuing from the falcon head of Horus. And Horus himself is reborn through Osiris, thus becoming a shining spirit, or *akh*.

Such texts as the Egyptian *Book of Coming Forth into the Day* (*pert em hru*), known as the *Book of the Dead*, should not be regarded simply as funerary texts. There is a firm correspondence between the temple rituals, performed by and for living, and the night journey of the Sun. The temple rituals served the purpose of achieving rebirth and bringing the soul back to its solar origins. However, they were performed for the benefit of the world as a whole (for the Beloved Land, *ta-meri*, which is *mundi totius templum* and *imago caeli*) and regarded as the actual return (or ascent) to the First Time (*tep sepi*), the realm of metaphysical realities conceived in terms of certain symbolic images that are comparable to

20. Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1992, p. 128.

the realm of the Platonic Ideas, understood as the beautiful, intelligent and everlasting gods, and their hieroglyphs (*medu neter*).

The same task, albeit on the level of individualized and rationalized discursive thought, is performed by philosophy and, especially, by various branches of Platonism. According to D. Frame, in ancient times the worship of the Sun normally ends by rationalizing itself and becoming the secret possession of the initiates and philosophers.²¹ Therefore there is a close relationship between solar theologies and the elite—be they kings, magicians, initiates, heroes, or philosophers. The philosophers represent the last link in the chain of those elect, who completed the secularization of the solar hierophanies by turning them into ideas. The *Chaldean Oracles* simply re-mythologized these philosophical ideas (as the Persian theosopher al-Suhrawardi, the Shaykh of Ishraq, who moved in the same direction) by turning them back into the living mythical beings of the pious hieratic imagination: the *Iynges*, Connectors (*sunocheis*), Teletarchs, angels, and daemons.

THE COSMIC THEATRE OF SACRIFICIAL FIRES

The Chaldean cosmology as a whole is also informed by a heliocentrism in which the Sun represents the hearth or centre of the cosmos. The three worlds (Empyrean, Ethereal, and Material: cf. Procl., *In Tim.* II. 57. 10–14) can be regarded as fiery circles dominated by the visible Sun and Moon. The architecture of the cosmic spheres constituted the theatre for the soul's journey, both down and up. Descent and ascent are each conducted by the use of different vehicles (*ochemata*) in the course of embodiment and disembodiment. Thus there are two cosmological vectors: (1) the descent and appearance on the stage of the world (Sanskrit *avatarana*), comparable to that of the actor who emerges from the green room, and, (2) the heroic ascent through the cosmic spheres, which in Platonism is partly accomplished by dialectical reasoning.

The cosmic theatre with its puppets (*thaumata*), suspended by

21. Douglas Frame, *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1978, p. 32.

golden threads or solar rays from above and exciting a sort of wonder (*to thaumazein*) that, according to Plato, is the source of philosophy, has a well-ordered structure. The Year is the great symbol of the whole. As the Sun belongs to the Year, so the Moon belongs to the months. Therefore the idealized cosmology (today regarded merely as a symbol of the noetic and psychic functions) reveals the energies of the gods in action and embodies the path (*hodos*) along which not only mythical heroes are led to Olympus, but even that by which Parmenides is driven by the goddess—perhaps the same 'right road to truth' that was mentioned by Pindar (*III Pythian* 103).

In the all-embracing cosmic structure, *aion* is visualized as the synthesis of the finite and the infinite in the form of a circle. The seasons (*rtu*) are the doorkeepers of the spheres in the late Vedic tradition of sacrifice. The sacrifice itself is tantamount to a theurgic elevation. Among the five sacrificial fires that constitute the Vedic cosmos, the first is that through which the gods make their offerings in the upper noetic world. Its fuel is the Sun, whose rays are the smoke; the day is its flame; the four cardinal points are its coals, and the intermediate directions its sparks. In this fire the gods offer up faith (Sanskrit *sraddha*, Greek *pistis*) as unconditional certainty. According to the Upanishads:

Those who know all this, and those, too, who in forest solitude revere Faith (*sraddha*) in their mind and concentration as the truly real, pass into the flame of the [cremation] fire; and from the flame, into the day, from the day, into the half-month of the waxing moon; from the half-month of the waxing Moon into the six months (the half-year) during which the Sun moves northward [i.e., into the rising year between winter solstice and summer solstice]. From those months they pass to the realm of the gods (*deva-loka*), and from the realm of the gods to the Sun; from the Sun to the sphere of lighting.(...) That is the Way of the Gods (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 6.2.15).²²

22. Heinrich Zimmer, *ibid.*, p. 346.

THE GOLDEN CORDS OF APOLLO

According to the *Chaldean Oracles*, the soul hastens towards the streams of light. Thus the soul is drawn upward and mingles with the solar rays (fr.66). Proclus explains that 'in the callings and self-manifestations (*en tais klesesi kai autophaneiais*) it seems as if the gods would approach men, whereas in fact the latter are drawn upwards by the former. For in reality the mystes is moved, while the godhead does not leave its place' (*In Alcib.* 398.14).

Moving away from concrete, sensible images through the fiery flower or flame of intellect, the soul extends an empty mind (*teinai kenon noon*) towards the highest God. As R. Majercik observes, the emphasis here lies on sameness, not difference.²³ But it is paradoxical that the one-sided Platonic anthropology, with its 'immortal soul' which outlasts the 'philosophically' rejected body, is built upon much older and more 'materialistic' (or rather magic) cosmology and the member-based psychology where qualities of the soul are regarded as parts of the body. Understood both symbolically and literally, fire is here of the utmost importance. It is related to the ancient conceptions of a transcendent and universal Fire of which our fires are only pale reflections.

The *Jaiminiya Brahmana* speaks of man's twofold possibility of rebirth:

- (1) in the sublunar world of mortal beings, through the womb of a woman;
- (2) in the imperishable transcendent world (the *kosmos noetos* of the Hellenic tradition), through the womb of the sacred votive fire, whose flame is a messenger and intermediary between men and the gods.²⁴

The initiate is aware of his solar self and is certain of his imperishable solar nature. As H. Zimmer pointed out:

23. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*. Text, translation, and commentary, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1988, p. 24.

24. Heinrich Zimmer, *ibid.*, p. 335.

In the closing period of Vedic thought the dominant features of the ritual—the sacrificial fire and the burnt offering—still give symbolic form and structure to this secret doctrine: a man comes into being on earth through a transformation and rebirth, brought about by a fivefold burnt offering of the gods.²⁵

According to the *Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana* (I.28.29), whoever speaks, hears, or thinks, does so by the ray of the solar Indra to whom all names belong, but who in fact has no name. The functional powers of Brahma (compared to a sparkling fiery wheel in *Maitri Upanishad* vi.24) are the solar rays or reins by which the one and only Seer and Thinker sees, hears, thinks and eats within us (ibid., II.6; vi.31). The active powers of speech, vision and thought are only the names of His acts.

Similarly, Apollo binds all things to himself, and orders them. A.K. Coomaraswamy argues that this bond, activated and controlled by *sutra-dhara* as a stage manager of Hindu tradition, is precisely Plato's 'golden cord' by which the puppet should be guided if it is to play its proper part.²⁶ Since we are God's toys, we ought 'to dance' accordingly, and this cosmic dance includes, (1) irradiation, the demiurgical descent, and, (2) elevation (measured by the eternal ratios, *metra aidia*: *De myster.* 65.6), the theurgical ascent. And these are merely the two sides of the same divine rite, the same cosmic game.

This doctrine of the supernal Sun implies the equivalence of life-creating light and sound, since to shine (*bha*) means to speak (*bhan*), and 'utterance' is 'raying'. The divine Sun speaks and what he has to say is the great and hidden name (*nama guhyam*). A similar doctrine is attributed to the Egyptian prophet Bitys by Iamblichus (*De myster.* 268.2–3).

Therefore the theurgist himself—as an animated divine statue (*agalma*)—is tantamount to a solar ray or the microcosmic *axis*

25. Ibid., p. 344.

26. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Bugbear of Literacy*, Denis Dorson, London, 1947, p. 106.

mundi: the channel of the fiery light in the chain (*seira*) of descent and ascent, *proodos* and *epistrophe*. According to the *Chaldean Oracles*, the theurgist stands as a warrior whose battle cry echoes the primordial sound of creation. He stands as a hero 'arrayed from head to toe with a clamorous light (the all-armed vigor of sounding light, according to H. Lewy),²⁷ armed in intellect and soul with a triple-barbed strength'. He must cast into his imagination *pan triados sunthema* and approach the empyrean channels in a state of recollection (fr. 2).

The initiate must rush to centre of the sounding light: to the Sun (which is the supreme Death as well) and the central hearth of fiery transformation and rebirth. Like the supreme *sunthema* itself, he stands in the centre of the primordial *mandala* of the cosmos, equivalent to the shining sphere of light.

SHINING FORTH LIKE A GOD

This position is similar to that of the god Horus-Ra, the Egyptian king as an ogre who eats men and lives on gods. He eats their *heka* (magic power of being, life, and intelligence) and devours their glory (*Pyramid Texts*, 393–404). Placing himself at the hub of theophanies and assimilating their powers, he is the ritual model and prototype not only of the magician, but the philosopher as well, the only difference being that for the Hellenic philosopher the distinction between the 'subjective' inner world and the 'objective' outer world is more or less firmly established.

In Egypt, the *ka* of the solar and lunar king permeated the whole country and was the focus of the collective consciousness. 'He was the *ka* of Egypt, and he was the personification of *ka* as experienced in each individual', according to J. Naydler.²⁸ *Ka*, sometimes translated as 'double', is the principle symbolizing physical, social, moral and spiritual appetites and tendencies, such as subsistence, creative power of food, nutrition, force, splendor, magic, illumination and so on.

27. Hans Lewy, *ibid.*, p. 192.

28. Jeremy Naydler, *ibid.*, p. 197.

The rudiments of the Plotinian metaphysics in mythological form can be seen already in the Egyptian conception of

- (1) *ka* energy of the god Horus, whom the king embodied;
- (2) *ba* as the vehicle of ascent, depicted as human-headed falcon, which exists in relation to both the physical and the spiritual worlds; literally it means 'manifestation', but is rendered 'soul' (and therefore can be related to the *Phaedrus* myth);
- (3) *akh* as a state of radiance and inner illumination, connected with the solar Ra and representing the king's (who is the paradigmatic initiate and the supreme philosopher) transcendent identity with Ra, who himself emerged from the ineffable transcendence of Nun.

The appearance of the king, his shining forth, is equivalent to the theophany of Ra on the primordial hill *in illo tempore*. The Neoplatonic philosopher is dramatically striving to reach this ineffable glory as well, but, at the same time, he likes to leave this world only after it is fully 'catalogized' according to the rules of the post-Aristotelian logic, and hymned in terms of the scientific enthusiasm—not in the same manner as it was done by his predecessors from the Middle East and Egypt, but nonetheless with the same practical and theoretical zeal.

Philosophy as a sort of rational and critical discourse, a set of *problemata*, or as an interrogation and *torture* of reality, was born out of the ritualized combat (*agon*) for wisdom, initially related to the art of solving riddles and to cosmological contests for the purpose of winning knowledge of the principles. Only after the sharp separation of inner and outer reality was made did philosophy become a mistress of the newly-discovered and personalized inner world. Owing to this transformation, spiritual and psychic events were no longer experienced by the collective imagination as outer events.

The introduction of the ancient hieratic theurgy into the one-sided and therefore excessively ambitious Greek philosophy was an attempt to re-create the sacred ways of thinking in accordance with the new scientific thought of the Hellenistic period. Perhaps it is theoretically possible—through sophisticated metaphysical exegesis—

to deduce theurgy directly from the dialogues of Plato, such as the *Timaeus*, the *Phaedrus*, or the *Laws*. However, the writings of Plato himself cannot be explained without references to the transmutation of archaic symbols into his own patterns of thought.

Contemplation of the wondrous works (*thaumata erga*) of the gods and interpretation of the mysterious cosmic order marked the start of philosophy both as physiology and as metaphysics. However, despite early attempts to reject the traditional myths as such, philosophy (still determined by the old patterns of thought, hidden beneath the screens, *parapetasmata*, of scepticism and rationalism) inevitably turned towards the 'divine light', claiming that we cannot become happy unless, by the aid of philosophy we acquire and contemplate the wisdom of truly existing beings.

Philosophy is the science of living perfectly, according to Iamblichus. But if the summit of perfection is achieved only through the union with the divine principles themselves and, if they are called 'gods', the traditional means of ascent should be rehabilitated and reused. Therefore, both historically and metaphysically, the marriage of philosophy and the Platonized branch of theurgy was determined and destined *a priori* by the soteriological attitude, prevailing among contemporary philosophers, towards *telos*, man's last end.

APPENDIX

THE LIMITS OF SPECULATION IN NEOPLATONISM

But even denial is a form of discourse, and that makes what is denied an object of discourse, but the transcendent is nothing, not even something to be denied, in no way expressible, not knowable at all, so that one can not even negate its negation. Rather the only way of revealing that of which we speak is simply the deferral of language and of conceptions about it.¹

THE HERMENEUTICAL PROGRAM OF READING NEOPLATONISM

While trying to understand the Neoplatonic notion about the limits of thinking and human understanding (realized at the threshold of the Ineffable whose 'nothingness', *oudeneia*, constitutes and penetrates being itself), one should remember that discursive (especially academic) interpretation of ancient philosophies and religions does not transcend questions of ultimate truth, as it boldly claims. Such presumably innocent interpretation still maintains its own standards of reason and its own hidden premises of truth, raised in accordance to its ideologically determined and culturally constructed sense of the real.

Following this hermeneutical program of modern positivistic study, the universe that the Neoplatonic philosophers and theurgists believed themselves to inhabit, contemplate, and describe, is regarded as being fictitious, illusory, and unfit for inclusion in the 'objective' model of reality. This model (itself not 'natural', but learned and imposed by training and socio-political magic) *a priori* rejects metaphysical categories, entities, or things, such as gods,

1. Damascius *De Principiis* 1.21.14–18.

henads, divine principles, noetic lights, angels, and daimons. However, certain contemporary scholars surmise that this so-called 'objective reality' (idolized in its unholy materialistic hypostasis by modern science) is not reality *per se*, but merely that which presently possesses mythical, onto-theological, ideological, social or simply pragmatic consensus. As J.D. BeDuhn remarks:

When consensus changes, the old objective reality is displaced to the realm of the subjective.²

Leaving aside the deceptive task of defining what is 'objective' and what is 'subjective', or how history is shaped 'objectively' by the myths, theological doctrines, and ideological dreams assented to, we simply wish to remind of the fact that each historically attested tradition and metaphysical perspective may be viewed as real in itself. It is not necessary in every case to search behind these traditions, theories, and rituals for that kind of 'real' meaning which makes sense only to the profane contemporary student, and only according to modern standards of coherence and social benefit. As J.D. BeDuhn says about the cultures of the past:

Whether or not they prove to be true according to our standards—in isolation, divorced from their operative context or displaced to another—is entirely trivial to the role they played in past human behavior. We understand nothing of religious behavior by grappling over whether gods, mystical experiences, possessions, visions, even healings, are true by some supposed objective or empirically verifiable standard.³

Therefore we cannot produce any 'better' reading of Neoplatonism than the ancient Neoplatonists themselves. However, by trying to make sense of their philosophical practice according to our own philosophical *askesis* (which involves hermeneutical construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of metaphysical *mandalas*

2. Jason David BeDuhn, *The Manichean Body in Discipline and Ritual*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 269

3. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

as traditionally established gates towards the Ineffable), we can share the same field of philosophical knowledge (*episteme*) and participate in the salvific divine activity (*theourgia*) related to it.

NON-DISCURSIVE DIVINE PRESENCE
AND RELATIONAL TRANSCENDENCE

According to Proclus, both ancient Hellenic theology and Pythagorean philosophy stem from the Orphic mystagogy. Consequently, the doctrines of Plato may be regarded as the revelations of Apollo translated into the discursive language of rational dialectic.

Since the One is exempt from all things (*exeremenon panton*), it is ineffable. But if everything (*ta panta*) is a manifestation or revelation of the Ineffable, this means that, in a certain fundamental respect, being itself is ineffable, in spite of its noetic articulation, sensible crystallization, and visibility.

The inevitable conclusion is that the entire hierarchy of being (which includes the graded hierarchy of transcendence and immanence), when regarded as a display of the One, is equivalent to a kind of miraculous divine 'myth'. This 'myth', revealed in the form of the all-embracing and dynamic cosmic *agalma* (hieratic statue, image, shrine) is analogous to the obscuring power of *maya* which (in the Trika philosophy of Kashmir), though being an aspect of *Parama Shiva*, acts as a veil thrown over the supreme ineffable Principle.⁴

Thereby the *Parama Shiva* presumably does not 'experience' (to use this rather misleading term) the whole of the manifested universe (*vishva*) as the transcendent oneness, but as the noetic multiplicity. This multiplicity shows itself as the Dionysian fragmentation reflected in the countless mirrors of divine Imagination. The entire hierarchy of paradigms and images shines within the unspeakable unity of the One, this hierarchy itself being nothing but a single unity, unified by Apollo whose full multitude of powers is 'incom-

4. Deba Brata SenSharma, *The Philosophy of Sadhana with Special Reference to the Trika Philosophy of Kashmir*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, p. 37

prehensible to us and indescribable' (*aperilepton hemin kai aperiegeton*: Proclus *In Crat.* 97.2-3).⁵ As Proclus says:

Indeed, how could human reason ever become able to grasp all the properties together, not only of Apollo, but of any God at all? (*ibid.*, 97.4-6)

Aristotle has defined wisdom as the knowledge of *ousia* (being, essence), but the Neoplatonic conception of knowledge includes both privation (*steresis*) and negation (*apophasis*), thereby contemplating not only that which can be spoken, but the speakable and the unspeakable simultaneously. For the late Neoplatonists, both kathaphatic and apophatic assertions apply to being, but the *hyperousios* (beyond-being) is beyond both affirmation and negation. Only silence is appropriate to the realm of that which lies beyond *ousia*, and which consequently transcends affirmations and negations, which may be comprehended only in their reciprocal relationship.

Now the Neoplatonists maintained that knowledge is both an archetypal ideal and actual presence, in varying forms, at all levels of divine irradiation (*ellampsis*) or theophany. The real knowledge consists, however, in 'the identity of a *nous* with the content of its thought'.⁶

Since the One is the unspeakable ground of everything, it is not beyond (*ouk epekeina*) those things of which it is a measure (Proclus *In Parm.* 1209.24). Rather the manifested reality itself constitutes the gradable scale of transcendence (*to exeremenon*), because the *exeremenon* is relational and always implies being transcendent with respect to something else. Accordingly, transcendence as exemption is relational, not absolute. In Neoplatonism, as L. Siorvanes argues:

5. Proclus, *On Plato's Cratylus*, tr. Brian Duick, ed. Harold Tarrant, London: Duckworth, 2007, p. 96; *Proclo Lezioni sul 'Cratilo' di Platone*, tr. Francesco Romano, Catania/Roma, 1989, p. 97

6. A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 141

Transcendence may mean a going beyond or above what is given (normally in experience and sense-perception), but the transcendent is relative to the base which it transcends.⁷

The divine *Nous*, which (in its unparticipated and transcendent dimension) cannot be attributed to the individual proper, is the source of intellectual intuition (*noesis*). This Neoplatonic intellection is understood in a sense of noetic immediacy and self-presence. In this respect, it transcends all kinds of discursive reasoning.

Therefore the Neoplatonic wisdom does not consist of propositions. Being non-representational, it reveals the limitations of discursive thinking and establishes the philosophical *askesis* related to *apophasis* (that which involves the indefinite and indicates the absence of something without any kathaphatic implications), described as 'practice of non-discursive mode of awareness' by S. Rappe.⁸ She argues that non-discursive truth is the foundation of entire Neoplatonic philosophical enterprise:

The discursive strategies that inform Neoplatonic texts are a configuration of non-discursive truth, just as the tradition as a whole is a record of its own appeal to what can only be called an unwritten tradition.⁹

MASKS AND TONGUES OF THE INEFFABLE

Proclus himself speaks of the human weakness that restricts us to probabilities and unreliable descriptions based on sensible phenomena. Thereby he makes a clear distinction between different ontological levels of being and thinking:

7. Lucas Siorvanes, "Proclus on Transcendence".—*Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica Medievale*. An International Journal on the Philosophical Tradition from Late Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages of the Societa Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino, vol. IX, Sismel: Edizione del Galluzzo, 1998, p. 6.

8. Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. xvi.

9. *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Speaking generally, just as what we say about intelligible objects does not fit the objects of discursive thinking, so what we say about the objects of scientific knowledge does not fit perceptible objects. For the intelligible objects are the models of those of discursive thinking and these in turn of the perceptible (*In Tim.* 1.349.25–28).

But since Intellect makes its own contents known to itself alone, what kind of language is to be used to convey noetic (or even hypernoetic) truths?¹⁰ The answer may be paradoxical indeed, if we put aside for a while our suspicion regarding metaphors and literary tropes, and simply confirm reality as an henadic theophany of theurgic symbols and tokens (*sumbola kai sunthemata*). Since any manifested 'mask' of the Ineffable itself may be described as a sort of ineffable symbol displayed within the Ineffable (which is nowhere and everywhere), it makes little difference what kind of language we choose to use, in spite of the ontological and hermeneutical hierarchy of *ta aporrheta sumbola* and *ta pragmata*.

These divine symbols (and every created thing plays this paradoxical role), sowed by the demiurgic *Nous* through the cosmos, do in fact (throughout the invisible *huparxis* of the One, themselves equivalent to its miraculous 'faces' and 'mouths') accomplish the impossible: 'They give voice to things which cannot be voiced . . . they represent that which is above representation and put that which is beyond reason into terms accessible to humans.'¹¹ Or rather, they constitute human beings themselves; they *are* human beings, and all manifested things, images, and veils, revealed as the unspeakable symbols of the One.

Consequently, the Orphic myths and the elaborated abstract metaphysical constructions of the Neoplatonists are equally based on the Ineffable—and equally aimed at *epopteia* and *henosis*, mystical vision and mystical union—which alone provides the non-discursive anagogic foundation for discursive reasoning itself, thereby

10. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

11. Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol. Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 219.

turning it into a sort of theurgic *yantra*, to say it in Sanskrit. Therefore both Neoplatonic scholasticism (the Platonic theology of Proclus, for instance) and the ritualized visionary flights reveal the same divine Presence: the Ineffable, not capable of receiving a name and, at the same time, possessing all names.

The multiplicity of names (irradiations, manifestations, things) derives from the single noetic Name that reveals the divine *Nous* in the act of reverting to the One in its perennial contemplation of itself and its ineffable Source. Therefore 'Nous as it exists in the divine can be apprehended when we have purified the intellect in ourselves' (Plotinus *Enn.* v.8.3), and the soul, being the 'image of *Nous*', attains to identification with *Nous* (which is universal) through the practice of concentration, hermeneutical reading, and ascent.

The cosmos (constituted by the circle of the Same and the circle of the Other that enclose the soul within the *agalma* of manifested being) is a symbol for God, the One which shows itself through the *Nous*, the 'divine name' as the principle of metaphysical translation, creative articulation, and revelation. According to Proclus:

Yet this name is ineffable and unutterable and is made known to the gods alone. For there are names appropriate to each level of reality: divine names for the gods, discursive names for the discursive intellect, and names rooted in appearances for the sensible faculty (*Plat. Theol.* II.6.92).

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN LOOKING UP AT THE SUN AND LOOKING DOWN AT REFLECTIONS

Plato already distinguished reason from intellection, though for him both (albeit at different levels) are aimed at and depends on the Forms. For Plato, geometry music theory are related to reflections and images (*eikones*) of the eternal Forms (*eide*), thereby exercising *dianoia* (rational discursive thought) and leading towards dialectic.

The process of dialectic is analogous to looking up at the stars and at the Sun itself, as described in Plato's *Republic* 516 bc, and thus recognizing the first cause of all Being, the Form of the Good, which is *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond Being. In this respect, *episteme* (direct

metaphysical knowledge, science) is contrasted with *dianoia* as looking up at the Sun is contrasted with looking down at reflections of the Sun.¹²

According to the famous myth of the Cave (*Rep.* 514 ff), noetic realities may be comprehended only outside the Cave (outside the tomb-like corporeal cosmos), thereby drawing a contrast between *doxa* (opinion) and *noesis* (intellection), between intelligible light and psycho-somatic darkness.

J. Ferguson maintains that the figure of the Cave is Orphic in origin. Likewise, Plato's notion that the Good is *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond Being, may be traced back to the Parmenidean metaphysics.¹³ In this context, as J. Ferguson aptly remarks, truth (*aletheia*) is coupled with intellect (*nous*). Both these terms are key-words for Parmenides, to whom 'the way of truth is continually associated with the verb *noein*.'¹⁴

All followers of Platonic and Aristotelian traditions (*haireseis*) usually made a distinction between discursive reason and intellect. This distinction is emphasized by Aristotle himself in *De anima*, 3.5, and elaborated by the commentators (including Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus) in different ways.

The Neoplatonists always maintained this crucial classificatory distinction (forgotten, neglected, or rejected as artificial and unreal by the majority of modern thinkers) between *dianoia* and *nous*. Discursive reason (*dianoia*) operates with material either derived from the *nous* above, or from the sensible world below, and presented to it by imagination (*phantasia*).

Intellect (the second divine hypostasis of Plotinus) perceives its objects (its own noetic contents) instantly, directly, and permanently, thereby recognizing and confirming its own noetic identity with them. In contrast, *dianoia* may be described as reasoning moving from one object, premise, or argument to another, thus involv-

12. R.G. Tanner, "Διάνοια and Plato's Cave".—*The Classical Quarterly* 20, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, p.86.

13. John Ferguson, "Sun, Line, and Cave Again".—*The Classical Quarterly* 13, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 193.

14. *Ibid.*, p.191.

ing transition, division, and fragmentation. Therefore reason stands as an intermediate between the indivisible *nous* (either macrocosmic, or microcosmic) and the divided irrational soul which is involved with the body and its passions.¹⁵ Proclus says:

The intellect in us is Dionysian and truly an image (or hieratic statue: *agalma*) of Dionysus. Therefore, anyone that transgress against it and, like the Titans, scatters its undivided nature (*ten amere autou phusin*) by fragmented falsehood, this person clearly sins against Dionysus himself, even more than those who transgress against external statues of God (*ta ektos tou theou agalmata*), to the extent that the intellect more than other things is akin (*sungenes*) to the God' (*In Crat.* 77.25–78.4).

MODES OF INTELLECTION AND UNION

According to Porphyry, the soul is consubstantial with *nous* insofar as it is pre-existent in *nous* which acts as its metaphysical principle (*arche*) and demiurgic source, though the soul itself cannot become *nous*.¹⁶ However, the 'inner man' is somewhat identical with *nous* (ultimately with the divine hypostasis, *Nous* as the universal Demiurge), and individual minds are inevitably related to *Nous* which encompasses all of them. Therefore Porphyry

clearly puts *nous* as the fourth goal of the ascent of the soul. The third stage is that of the soul acting intelligently. . . . At this stage soul is directed towards and filled by *nous*. It receives, then, only images of the *noeta*. . . .¹⁷

As regards the supreme union with *nous* (which implies certain degree of identity of one's real self and *nous*), A. Smith argues as follows:

15. Henry J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the De Anima*, London: Duckworth, 1996, p. 165.

16. Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Platonic Neoplatonism*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, pp. 48–49.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

This is something permanent and the floating self must now make contact and become identified in some way with this higher self. But Porphyry does not seem to make any definite identification of an ego with the higher self.¹⁸

This is so because when the soul is united to the gods in contemplation or in theurgic prayer, it is not united as an individual or an ego. The later Neoplatonists are much more radical in this respect: they speak about supernatural (*hyperhues*) death of those theurgists whose souls are transformed from individuality to universality, even though the soul's self-alienation and descent into the realm of mortality are activities of the gods themselves.¹⁹

A. Smith argues that the supreme union with *Nous*, as well as a stage higher than the contemplation of the noetic realities (*ta noeta*), are both attested in Porphyry. While asking what sort of union might be meant by the identification of one's real self with *nous*, he says:

Plotinus, too, seems to consider the normal constitutive *epistrophe* of a hypostasis towards its prior as different from its spiritual *epistrophe* or union. This is particularly clear in his treatment of the relationship of *Nous* and the One. *Nous* is formed by a constitutive *epistrophe*, and its turning in mystical contemplation towards the One, by which it indulges in an activity whose scope lies outside its mere existence as *Nous*, is a further type of *epistrophe*. Porphyry would appear to be making a similar distinction here and it is an important distinction, for by it the metaphysical structure in virtue of which soul exists and is related to *nous* (and thus to *Nous*) in the realm of existence is distinguished from the spiritual ascent or mystical relationship. . . . Salvation is achieved not through the unity of soul and *nous* but by the reflection in the logical soul of *noeseis* in the form of *ennoiai*.²⁰

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

19. Gregory Shaw, "The Mortality and Anonymity of the Iamblican Soul".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8, The University of Iowa, 1997, p. 189.

20. Andrew Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

A. Smith further argues that the late Neoplatonists tend to separate unity with the *noeton* (intelligible realities, paradigms, archetypal Forms), or with the highest member of the noetic realm (which is 'beyond' *nous*, when *nous* is depicted as the noeric, that is 'thinking', agent of cosmic demiurgy), from unity with the contemplating *nous* proper. Thereby different modes of intellection at different levels of being are established.²¹

Therefore even theurgy may be viewed in conjunction with *noesis*, though Iamblichus, contrary to Porphyry and Plotinus, relates *noesis* to the elevating and transforming powers of the gods which are, strictly speaking, *huper pasan noesin*, transcending all intellection. The ascending philosopher must return (in co-operation with the divine *dunameis*) to the realm of pure *noesis* and pure *theoria* (mystical contemplation which results in *epopteia*).

Such *noesis* 'is attainable only through the workings of theurgy',²² that is, by the grace of God and the mysterious activity of the ineffable divine *sunthemata*. Therefore *noesis* of this higher divine order is 'an aspect of the actual union with the gods which Iamblichus calls theurgic union (*ten theourgiken henosin*).'²³

For Proclus, the essential unity of the soul lies in its inward depths, because in its depths the soul coincides to a degree with the henadic *huparxis* and the ineffable One itself. It follows, accordingly, that the union (*henosis*) of soul with the One underpins the entire Procline thesis 'that everything can be known, and that Platonism can offer a comprehensive Theology.'²⁴

All the gods, according to Proclus, are henads above being (*huperousioi*), or rather they transcend the multiplicity of beings and are the summits of beings (*kai tou plethous ton onton huperanecousai kai akrotetes ton ousion*: Proclus *In Parm.* 1066.27–28). However, the series of self-subsistent henads (or 'ones'), posited after the One, are specified 'through the diverse classes of beings depending

21. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

24. Lucas Siorvanes, "The Problem of Truth in the Platonic Theology".—*Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, Leuven: University Press; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000, p. 55.

upon them,²⁵ and, in a certain sense, are identical with the *sumbola* and *sunthemata* that constitute the entire manifested reality.

In one respect, henads are beyond being, perhaps even beyond *peras* and *apeiria*, the Limit and the Unlimited, that is, the two metaphysical principles which determine all subsequent manifestation of multiplicity. In another respect, henads proceed on all levels of being-life-intelligence, from the *noeton* proper to the angelic and daimonic orders (*taxeis*) to all divinized souls and bodies, reaching as far as the realm of plants and minerals.

Although Being (*to on*) extends wider than Life (*zoë*) and Intelligence (*nous*), for the philosopher aimed at the dialectical ascent, *nous* as *theoria* (contemplation) proves to be the most important. This is so because he tries to achieve the union of all activities in one *energeia* (or the union of subject, predicate, and object), thereby accomplishing the union of the divine and human. 'The human soul, as particular, is never saved, however', as G. Shaw aptly remarks, because the soul's unity with the *Nous*, the gods, and the One, is not an individual or personal experience:²⁶ 'It is impossible to participate as an individual in the universal orders of existence', as Iamblichus declares, paraphrased by Damascius (*In Phileb.* 227.4–5).²⁷

The same is true regarding real metaphysical knowledge and 'divine speculation'.

Nous may be described as the union of *ousia* (being, essence) and *energeia* (activity, act), which contemplates itself, but 'for *nous* to be *nous* it must look beyond itself'.²⁸ Likewise, the soul elevated to the level of *nous*, or rather re-established as *nous*, contemplates the Ineffable (the One which is beyond Intellect and, at the same time, is the ultimate *dunamis* of everything) through the contemplative gaze of the divine Intellect itself. As M. Sells explains:

25. Carlos G. Steel, "Iamblichus and the Theological Interpretation of the *Parmenides*".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8, The University of Iowa, 1997, p. 18.

26. Gregory Shaw, *ibid.*, p. 189.

27. Damascius' *Lectures on the Philebus*, wrongly attributed to Olympiodorus, text and tr. L. G. Westerink, Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, Publisher, 1982, pp. 106–107; also cited by G. Shaw, *ibid.*, p. 190.

28. Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 23.

Nous is contemplation, but the 'object' of its contemplation is constantly being pulled away through apophatic abstraction (*aphairesis*). . . . Plotinus called this *apophasis* a symbolic use of language. . . . It 'proceeds' out into delimited language reference, only to 'return' back towards a referential openness.²⁹

TO LIVE MEANS TO READ

For the Neoplatonists, *Nous* is in the One, not the One in *Nous*, and likewise *Psuche* is in *Nous*, not vice versa. And the first Hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* indicates that the One under consideration is not really one at all (*to hen oute hen estin oute estin: Parm. 141e12*).

According to the Neopythagorean tradition, this ineffable Principle was named Apollo not just to indicate its unity (the name Apollo is interpreted as constituted of *a-*, the privative, and *polla*, 'multiplicity', 'many'), but rather to show the First Principle's 'transcendence of all qualities, even that of unity, as J. Whittaker pointed out.³⁰

Consequently, awareness (*sunesis*) of the One is provided not by intellection (*noesis*), but by a presence that surpasses knowledge itself, given that the very possibility of knowledge is based on the noetic articulation of *peras* and *apeiria* at the level of the Platonic Forms and below—down to the level of discursive principles (*dianoetikoi logoi*). The discursive thinking, *dianoia*, related to the mathematical method (*logismos*), operates by means of the reasoning process, whereas a non-discursive *noesis* grasps its objects (the intelligible Forms) as if 'by touch' (*kat' epaphen*).³¹

But this awareness of the One is itself hyper-noetic, though related to the One's *parousia*—Its mysterious presence in the *Nous*. Therefore J. Rist argues:

29. Ibid., p. 31.

30. John Whittaker, "Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute".—*Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1984, ch. XI, p. 79 (reprinted from *Symbolae Osloenses* XLVIII, 1973, pp. 77–86).

31. Dominic J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 47.

We may conclude that there is within *nous* a kind of unity derived from the One's presence, but not damaging to the One's transcendence, which is actualized at the moment of the return to the One in the mystical union. . . . We should not regard it as an indication that *nous* has in its own nature the means of transcending itself. *Nous* can transcend itself only in virtue of what is not itself, but is in itself. . . .³²

The limits of speculation and, ultimately, the limits of noetic contemplation, reflection, and vision, are established as the limits of the fundamental power of *Nous*, derived from the Ineffable and aimed at a return to the same Ineffable. M. J. Edwards says:

And, since the mind acquires its formal being by a process which necessitates reversion, the life which is implied in that reversion is as much the cause of mind as its effect.³³

Thereby the ouroboric archetypal circle of being-life-intelligence is established, within which all manifested reality is revealed through the *dunamis* of Hekate, to say it in terms of the *Chaldean Oracles*.

Philosophical discourse imitates the contemplative gaze of *Nous* at the discursive level of images and syllogistic reasoning. Therefore it reflects, paradoxically, the ambiguity of the relationship between the Ineffable (though the term 'ineffable', in this metaphysical context, does not possess an ordinary meaning: since it has absolutely no reality, according to Damascius, it is not even a term)³⁴ and the intelligible splendor of *Nous* as *deus revelatus*.

Consequently, the limit of philosophical speculation (which may be labeled as 'inspired' or not) is silence that frees the dialectician (as any other 'inspired' speaker) both from his own production and from the revealed divine mythology translated into the human fables. At the same time, any image and any symbol, when under-

32. John M. Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism".—*Platonism and its Christian Heritage*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1985, ch. xv, p. 214.

33. Mark J. Edwards, "Being, Life and Mind: a Brief Inquiry".—*Syllecta Classica*, vol. 8, The University of Iowa, 1997, p. 197.

34. Sara Rappe, *ibid.*, p. 209.

stood as a veil (*parapetasma*) thrown over the unspeakable Transcendence, may serve as a limit of philosophical speculation, inviting one to accept the miraculous presence revealed by silence. In this second sense, a sophisticated philosophical system, as well as a particular doctrine, may be regarded as an *upaya* (an effective soteriological 'mirage') and *yantra* (the theurgic vehicle of concentration, re-integration, and union), to say it in Sanskrit.

Likewise, the term *endeixis*, used by Damascius, suggests

that the language of metaphysics must be acknowledged to be at most a prompting towards inquiry into something that exceeds its own domain as descriptive. The result of this inquiry tells us more about our own states of ignorance than about the goal of the search... To describe philosophical discourse as *endeixis* is to limit its ambitions. *Endeixis* in this sense is not a descriptive use of language, but encompasses a number of different linguistic devices.³⁵

However, in spite of the fact that all speech is only provisional, *kata endeixin*, discursive reasoning is not to be despised or rejected. It is perfectly valid in the same sense as any *sunthema* (anagogic token, sign, symbol) and any archetypally based *muthos* (myth, narrative, hermeneutical story) are valid, because all of them are direct or indirect self-disclosures, testimonies, traces, faces, playthings, or even tricks, of the One. And the One embraces everything: even deviation from the noetic standard and manifestation of the absurd cannot fall outside the Ineffable, because no such 'outsideness' can exist. Nonetheless the noetic gaze establishes its own 'inner' hierarchy of paradigms and images that constitute the 'mirage' of transcendence revealed as the immanent text of being.

To live means to read and interpret the countless chapters of this divine text, though every chapter has its own limits and its own existential logic. They are revealed in time and concealed again in the chain (*seira*) of births and deaths that constitute the ouroboric crown of the One (or *Aion*), miraculously displayed through the contemplative gaze (or rather, through the creative Imagination) of

35. Ibid., p. 211.

Nous. Ultimately, silence is the harbour of 'salvation' (*soteria*) where every thought and every discourse find their ineffable repose, their metaphysical limit. As S. Rappe says:

Language turns back upon itself because its purpose is to negate its own function. Damascius' chosen name for this style of metaphysics is *peritrope*, and this word too has a history in the annals of Scepticism... If the Sceptics embrace *epoche*, suspension of beliefs, as their solution to the impending dangers of *peritrope*, one could argue that, in a parallel way, Damascius embraces silence or ineffability... The 'limit of philosophical discourse' (*peras tou logou*) refers to the complete removal of any proposition or any statement about reality. This limit is 'silence without recourse'... (C-W 1.22)³⁶

36. Ibid., pp. 212–213; C-W, *Damascius' Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, 3 volumes, ed. J. Combes and L.G. Westerink, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986–1991 (Greek text and French translation).

PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH



FROM
ANCIENT
EGYPT TO
NEOPLATONISM

Algis Uždavinys



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Prometheus
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PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH

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Preface

This book issues a serious challenge to the orthodox view of philosophy, and its accompanying narrative of development.

Ancient understanding viewed reality as a series of descending steps, starting with the most ineffable and most simple which is first unfolded through divinity and then moves down through varying conditions of existence – the highest of which are closest to the originating simplicity and are purely intelligible, but the lower being increasingly complex and changeable, ultimately becoming perceptible to the senses. These lower conditions of existence were not rejected as evil or illusive, but they were seen as deriving their worth and trustworthiness from their relation to the highest. Each plane of reality had its answering correspondence in the nature of the human being. Since the highest levels possessed the greatest intelligibility and stability, it was here that philosophers sought to centre the art and science of philosophy. For this reason philosophy was seen as an interior discipline which allowed a conscious and active participation in a divine and intellectual drama – in more modern terms it was considered to be a spiritual path, or a yoga of enlightenment.

But at some point in the passage between the ancient and modern era, this view of philosophy and its purpose was largely lost, and today we find that that what is still called philosophy has allowed its centre to slip down the levels of reality. And, of course, the human faculties upon which modern philosophy is based are necessarily at the lower levels of thought: where philosophy was meditative, contemplative and even unitive, it is now confined to a narrow form of logical reason – forever stuck in the temporal world. Reason, once valued as a launching point to the realm of eternal intellect and thence super-eternal divinity, is now an end in itself. Modern philosophy has lost its nerve: like a pilot who no longer trusts his aircraft the forward thrust of reason races us along the ground but is never transferred to an upward movement into the free air.

We now have the worst of both two possible worldviews: modern philosophy, generally speaking, no longer values metaphysics and theology (it considers both to be purely constructs of the human mind, with no basis in reality) and yet since the material world is no longer thought to be a manifestation of providential divinity, modernism cannot rid itself of a deep suspicion that body and matter are ultimately empty of goodness and meaning.

We do not need to accept the present errors: what has been diminished by centuries of neglect can be restored.

This book is not the start of a radical reappraisal of western philosophy and its origins, but it is by far the most coherent and strongest call to this task that has been written in recent times. Once we step back with its author and examine the external and internal evidence for European (in other words Greek) philosophy having grown out of that of the Egyptians, the unbiased reader must conclude that it is incredible that any other possibility should have been entertained. Why should the

writers of antiquity have so consistently claimed that the best of their wise men had visited and learnt from the priests of Egypt unless there was a widespread and deeply held reverence for that land and its teachings?

To appreciate how philosophy's origins have been so thoroughly misrepresented, we need to follow Algis Uzdavyns' exposition of the way in which the true and original nature and purpose of philosophy has fallen from both the scholarly and the common view over these many centuries past. And while ultimately the failure to recognise the Egyptian roots of western philosophy may be considered as a problem largely confined to historical accuracy, the failure to understand its nature and purpose has had – and still has – the most profound, extensive and worrying consequences for the whole of humankind. This is why *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* is such a welcome contribution to the thought life of today.

As with every radical change of position in any subject, there are likely to be details which will need to be readjusted once the dust has settled, so to speak, and other thinkers have added their own efforts to the task of exploring this new vista. Clearly the challenge this book lays down to the philosophers of today is to consider the very essence of philosophy as a participation in divine reality and, therefore, its activities as being primarily those of inner vision rather than mere logic. Once this position is seen as valid – and this may take time, as inner vision is itself a discipline which requires gradual development – we can then move back across the writings of the tradition dating from between its Egyptian and Neoplatonic phases in order to consider them in this light. At present several writers, for example, see Plato himself as part of the movement away from divine vision towards the limitations of purely logical reason. We need to ask whether this is really so, or whether modern rationalistic schools have so thoroughly misrepresented him as a sceptical logician that this has been accepted too readily by those who are moving towards this radical revision of philosophy: if this questioning is approached with an open mind, we may well find that Plato's dialogues, replete as they are with passages of mythic images, with descriptions of Socrates in meditative states, and with their constant references to traditional myth and initiation, are in reality central to philosophy as rebirth. This is an exciting exploration awaiting further research and deep thought.

Leaving this aside, we can see in *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* that a sympathetic exploration of Ancient Egyptian high culture so clearly connects with the last flowering of Greek philosophy in the teachings of the late Platonists as well as with Eastern doctrines that we must again consider the now unfashionable concept of the existence of a perennial and universal philosophy. The truths of this philosophy, as Thomas Taylor says, "which though they have been concealed for ages in oblivion, have a subsistence coeval with the universe, and will again be restored, and flourish, for very extended periods, through all the infinite revolutions of time."

The title of our monograph may appear rather strange and paradoxical to those who are uncritically tied to the prevailing modern systems of classification and presentation of "reality". Since philosophy now is irremediably reduced to an abstract philosophical discourse, itself frequently viewed as "an illness of language" by academic would-be-therapists, it is often very difficult to realize that an essential aspect of all ancient philosophy consists in the living *praxis* which faithfully follows the course of already established spiritual exercises and imitates archetypal patterns. The art of living demanded by the spiritual and material economy of the ancient theocratic state (itself regarded as an image of the celestial kingdom) and, eventually, by philosophy, understood as "love of wisdom", was not only a lived exercise, but, first and foremost, a lived and correctly performed sacred ritual of the great divine Mysteries, that is, the Mysteries of existence as played out by Being, Life, and Intellect themselves.

It would be unwise to pay too much attention to certain particular terms, for example, to argue that "philosophy" is exactly that term which should be applied to every manifestation of coherent human thought at all costs, or that it needs to be saved from the modern abomination by all means. However, a consistent logic allows us to use this term in different historical and cultural contexts, in spite of the conventionally accepted usage restricted, as a rule, to certain exceptional methods of investigation or to particular fields of knowledge. This scholarly freedom of interpretation is not to be viewed as a frivolous voluntarism, for the simple reason, at least, that so-called philosophical rationalism can itself be traced back to the hieratic systems of ancient semiotics which are logically coherent meta-structures of metaphysical knowledge.

In this respect, one should remember that even empirical and positivistic studies may be regarded as "fantasies elaborated in the genre of objective science and technical formula".¹ By extension, one can speak of the *genres* and *topoi* not only in literature, but also in all aspects of human social and individual life, including philosophical reasoning, creative imagination, and any kind of "experience". Even so-called scientific research and, as a consequence, contemporary technologies have their own "literary style" and contain hidden ontological premises that are utterly mythical, if not fantastic. Therefore James Hillman argues:

"Our lives are the enactment of our dreams; our case histories are from the very beginning, archetypally, dramas; we are masks (*personae*) through which the gods sound (*personare*)... All ways of speaking of archetypes are translations from one metaphor to another. Even sober operational definitions in the language of science and logic are no less metaphorical than an image which presents the archetypes as root ideas,

psychic organs, figures of myth, typical styles of existence, or dominant fantasies that govern consciousness".²

Instead of asking "what is philosophy?"³, one should perhaps ask what kind of contents, i.e., what kind of mental activities, spiritual dimensions, methods, attitudes, practices, or even behavioural and ritual patterns may be subscribed under the name of "philosophy" when understood in the ancient sense of the way leading to wisdom. Therefore our present intention is to show that *philosophia* in its Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neoplatonic form is structurally, thematically, and even genetically related to the ancient traditions of the Middle East, and especially those of Egypt.

The main distinction which characterizes Hellenic philosophy is not rationality as such (because the mythological world-views and related philological or hermeneutical strategies are even more rational, systematic and coherent wholes), but its, partial at least, devaluation of images and adherence to the reasoning in abstract categories and "naked facts" of logic. However, the main task of this philosophy remains essentially the same: to change perverted human nature, to transform it, eventually leading it to happiness and to a restored divine identity. This task is in fact directly inherited from the ancient "philosophies", that is, from the mysteries of death, transformation, and spiritual rebirth, and the related cosmogonical theories, systems of archetypal symbolism, and ritualized exercises of the "normative divine life".

The conventional story of "Western philosophy", established and canonized in the 18th and 19th centuries, tells us that philosophy consists in replacing myth by reason and thereby raising a rational society with rational laws. For the European Enlightenment, it means the elimination of religion and of all irrational superstitions. Here "philosophy" is identified as a secular and rationalistic enterprise, directed against the "idols" of religious imagination and faith, or, if a compromise should be involved, as a rational apology for Christian sentiments, morality, and the "natural" right of world dominion. This very compelling post-Kantian identification of philosophy with an abstract philosophical discourse still dominates both scholarly and popular consciousness and provokes different reactions, especially those raised by Traditionalists from one side and by Postmodernists from another.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, one of the leading expositors of contemporary Traditionalist thought, nonetheless defines philosophy as "a wisdom about knowledge", maintaining that "the problems of philosophy are evidently those of rationalisation", aimed at correlating the data provided by empirical experience through a reduction of particulars to universals. He says:

"Beyond this, however, philosophy has been held to mean a wisdom not so much about particular kinds of thought, as a wisdom about thinking, and an analysis of what it means to think, and an enquiry as to what may be the nature of the ultimate reference of thought. In this sense the problems of philosophy are with respect to the ultimate nature of

reality, actuality or experience; meaning by reality whatever is in act and not merely potential... Knowledge is not then of individual presentations, but of types of presentation; in other words, of things in their intelligible aspect, i.e., of the being that things have in the mind of the knower, as principles, genera and species. Insofar as knowledge is directed to the attainment of ends it is called practical; in so far as it remains in the knower, theoretical or speculative".⁴

In addition to being abstract, philosophy must be systematic so as to make one logical whole.⁵ Now it is fairly clear that any of the great mythological and religious systems constitutes a closed logical whole, based on strictly metaphysical premises. Therefore A. K. Coomaraswamy, partly following the Peripatetic example, actually speaks of two philosophies. The First Philosophy, which stands in accord with "revealed truth" (or simply serves as its rational vehicle), is "no longer in the first place deductive and secondarily inductive, but inductive from first to last, its logic proceeding invariably from the transcendental to the universal, and thence as before to the particular. This First Philosophy, indeed, taking for granted the principle 'as above, so below' and vice versa, is able to find in every microcosmic fact the trace or symbol of a macrocosmic actuality, and accordingly resorts to 'proof' by analogy; but this apparently deductive procedure is here employed by way of demonstration, and not by way of proof, where logical proof is out of the question, and its place is taken either by faith (Augustine's *credo ut intelligam*) or by the evidence of immediate experience (*alaukikapratyaksā*)".⁶

Accordingly, the subject of metaphysics is described as being that "of the Supreme Identity as an indissectable unity of potentiality and act, darkness and light..."⁷

The definition of metaphysics as invariably related to the monistic concept of an absolute Supreme Identity is not self-evident without a considerable hermeneutical attempt to explain it or construct such universal meta-theory which would be able to satisfy one's "philosophical mind" in accord with particular speculative premises. Those premises include certain specific notions of immortality and eternity, death and rebirth, as well as an elaborated (often mythologized) hierarchy of being and a more or less explicit theory of divine archetypes.

All these philosophical concepts, albeit expressed in a language of myth, symbol, and ritual, are attested in the ancient Egyptian civilization and stand at the roots of Hellenic modernization of that ancient "philosophy" which is based on identifications with the divine names and qualities that imply alchemical transformations within the officially established frame of the theurgic semiotics and royal iconology. In this respect, Franz Rosenthal speaks about "a common variation of the I-am-you concept" which (as the paradigmatic mystical assertion "I am you") is widespread in the ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Indian spiritual milieu. F. Rosenthal, being a faithful modernist, attributes its origins to "the murky world of magical longings" and argues as follows:

“Magic identification was a kind of standard procedure for solving the mysteries of both the natural and supernatural worlds. It was stated that this god *is* that god, a *is* b, and immediately, power was gained and difficulties were removed. The Sanskrit Brahmanas are replete with statements of this sort: ‘All the deities are Agni; all the deities are Vishnu...’ The newcomer who is examined by the Brahman with the question ‘Who are you?’ is supposed to answer ‘I am myself...’ Gnostic religions, in particular, are characterized by the fact that they reconstruct the power system that holds the world together or may tear it apart by means of an intricate series of mutual identifications of all known physical and historical data and metaphysical abstractions. The understanding of the system is the first and decisive step toward salvation”.⁸

Knowledge of the divine becomes possible only through identification with it, and this identification (or gradual transformation and moving through the series of identities), culminating in union, is the ultimate goal of the Egyptian philosophical way of life. This is a path which implies purification, correct performance of hieratic rites, moral perfection, contemplation, and knowledge which proved to be the main driving force of illumination, alchemical transformation and restoration of one’s true divine identity.

Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy, though operating on a different level of epistemology and dialectic, reveals the same hidden patterns. Therefore our aim is to explore these patterns and (as far as possible) indicate the ways of esoteric transmission, although the latter question is always secondary and rather marginal, mostly important for those naïve enthusiasts of historical research whose scope is limited to supposed empirical or mechanical “influences”. In short, certain aspects of Hellenic (especially Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic) metaphysics consist in designation and philosophical description of the same divine principles and cosmogonical manifestations (the same in a universal sense of *philosophia perennis*, not of exact coincidence in the realm of historical facts) which are already explicitly or implicitly presented in the hieroglyphic images and symbols employed by the Egyptian priests.

The Greek philosophers themselves traced the seeds of their *haireseis* back to the Egyptian hieratic tradition. The Neoplatonists recognized the divine origin of *philosophia* and compared it to metaphysical rites, or mysteries, aimed at the ascent of the soul and its final reunion with the demiurgic Intellect (*Nous*) and the One. This mystical task (the pathway of gods, *devayana*, in Upanishadic terms) implied just such an ontological, cosmological, and imaginal context of human existence which was inseparable from the overwhelming noetic network of divine energies. The word and image, or any other theurgic symbol, were taken as essential to the process of joining the human soul to its paradigms. The universe itself was regarded as a kind of multi-dimensional text written by the divine *sophia*. Therefore “to philosophize” means to be in accord with this world-governing providence and employ certain sacramental esoteric

hermeneutics for the correct reading of the ontological hieroglyphs. As Pierre Lory says:

“By naming a thing of the world, the human being awakens because the name brings forth the internal reality which corresponds to what exists in himself”.⁹

Since human languages, in certain ideal respects, are taken in traditional societies to be the refraction in the human mind of the noetic cosmos and its organization, the correct creative and ritualized cultic use of sacred language itself (along with all possible riddles, puns, metaphysical etymologies, associations, and exegetical twists) may be regarded as tantamount to “philosophizing”. The end of this transforming speech and this “reading” is one’s transformation, awakening, and rebirth.

Accordingly, even moving across the qualitative and symbolic days of a sacred calendar is no less than following the “philosophical way” towards the desired integration by imitating the circumambulation of the Year. This both demiurgic and theurgic circle of the Year not only represents the individual’s pilgrimage to the archetypal principles (and his dramatic experience of the sacred), but serves as an actual model of one’s philosophy in all its mystical, social, political, economical, ethical, and aesthetic aspects. If this traditional way of participation, of direct mythical experience and “surrender” (which, nonetheless, may involve the heroic aspect of initiation and trial) should be called “philosophy”, then to philosophize means not to belong to the case of an extraordinary exception, but to follow one’s own “predestined” path – as if moving through the archetypal Text of theophanies, masks, and changing ranks of identities to the polarities (those of Horus and Seth, of *deva* and *asura*) which transcend all duality.

When radically formulated in terms of metaphysical “identities”, this final goal of philosophy – like the final goal of the ascent accomplished by the golden Horus in the *Pyramid Texts* – may be regarded as the building up of the tomb or the altar of sacrifice. Thus A. K. Coomaraswamy says:

“What metaphysics understands by immortality and by eternity implies and demands of every man a total and uncompromising denial of himself and a final mortification, to be dead and buried in the Godhead... For the Supreme Identity is no less a Death and a Darkness than a Life and a Light, no less Asura than Deva... And this is what we understand to be the final purport of the First Philosophy.”¹⁰

To call this hieratic enterprise – initially related to the particular trends of ancient thought – by the term of the “First Philosophy” is a matter of mere convention inherited from the tradition of Western scholasticism. However, the same idea of spiritual rebirth and final union dominated both Egyptian cultic practices and sophisticated Neoplatonic thought.

It is no wonder that Modernism (partly based on the Protestant legacy) rejects altogether this kind of sacramental philosophy and, instead, presents as philosophy its own way of explaining things and of imposing reductionist ideological fantasies. It is even more interesting, however,

that so-called Postmodernism enjoys breaking with the entire philosophical tradition (classified, idolized, and cherished by Modernism) which, presumably, runs from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Hegel.

Certain critics of modern social institutions describe this breaking as a rebellion against the totalitarian tendency in Western philosophy, thereby affirming as salutary the mind's powerlessness to "think" the so-called Other and, consequently, instead of negative theology promoting all kinds of sheer irrationalism and stupidity. Michel Foucault argues:

"The death of God sent all the stable forms of previous thought up in flames and used their charred remains to draw strange and perhaps impossible faces."¹¹

Richard Rorty, another influential writer, speaks of the utter bankruptcy of traditional philosophizing and of what he calls "epistemologically centred philosophy".¹² His ruthless criticism is mainly directed against the whole epistemological project of modernity, initiated by the followers of Descartes and Kant. However, at the same time and by the same stroke, the Postmodern relativists ridicule all traditional metaphysical systems (especially those belonging to the Neoplatonic stream), viewing their claims for divine truth and beauty as being utterly groundless ideological fictions. Philosophy itself is said to be coming to its unglorious end, since the "post-philosophical" attitude finds its solipsistic pleasure in rejecting any form of universal theory.

The world is turned upside down. Therefore it would be rather incorrect to think that one of the main characteristics of Postmodern thought consists of its insistence on the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. The *praxis* of self-indulgence, forgetfulness, deviation, and sin (if not an actual crime in the name of pseudo-humanism and democracy) is surely not the same as the spiritual *praxis* of purification, *askesis*, contemplation, self-sacrifice, remembrance, and virtue. The Postmodern fighters against the metaphysical order of things and against any *shari'ah* (that is, the sacred law) think that the dragon represents the values of the modern administrated and disciplinary world; therefore "these values must be destroyed if the spirit is to become the value-creating, life-affirming child".¹³

When spiritual sanity itself is turned into a fantasy, one thing is forgotten and neglected, namely, that, as Frithjof Schuon pointed out:

"Intelligence has, on the one hand, no effective worth unless its contents are the fundamental and saving truths; on the other, intelligence must be in balance with virtue and faith".¹⁴

Accordingly, the philosophical relativism of the "life-affirming child" (to whom wisdom is tantamount to a seductive and wild public woman) is capable only of laughter and irony with their compelling logic of theatre. And the crazy Postmodern theatre is not that which presents the mysterious story of al-Khidr and Moses (even if seen through the eyes of Mulla Nasreddin), but that which shows the ugly traits of a trivial sado-

masochist play. This is because "an intelligence devoid of truth remains beneath itself", according to the apt remark made by F. Schuon.¹⁵ As Gary B. Madison says:

"We are inevitably condemned to relativism when, rejecting like Rorty the metaphysical notion of Truth, we reject also all metanarratives, when, that is, we reject the legitimacy of theory, which always seeks some form of *universal* validity. And, similarly, we find ourselves in a state of nihilism when, rejecting the metaphysical notion of Reality, we go on to assert as well that everyone's 'truths' are merely their own private 'fictions', when, that is, we equate fiction with mere semblance (*simulacrum*) and deny it the power to recreate or refigure, and thus enhance, what is called 'reality'."¹⁶

Our present task is not to argue against the mental acrobatics of those who follow R. Rorty or to claim that we are in possession of certain exclusive "formal" truth, whatever this word may mean for different audiences. On the contrary, our purpose is quite humble: to discuss certain parallels between ancient Egyptian and Hellenic thought, and to show that *philosophia* (apart of other important aspects) is directly or indirectly based on the hieratic patterns of ancient cults and may itself be regarded as a rite of transformation and noetic rebirth. This hermeneutical rite of "philosophizing" (which partly consists in moving through the ontological text, that is, through the cosmic maze of ideas, thoughts, words, images, symbols, and deeds) is not simply a playful metaphorical enterprise that belongs to the realm of rhetoric, but involves the restoration of one's right mind and promises the final reunion with divine principles. The metaphysical discourse thereby produced is based on noetic intuitions, ambivalent terms, and paradoxical images, thus constituting the closed "hermeneutical circle" of its own. It cannot be simply rendered into the positivistic language of "facts" or turned into the "merely dead fiction" of the contemporary historical museum, without losing its hidden theurgic dimension, imaginative appeal and transformative *barakah*.

Although every hermeneutical perspective constructs and reconstructs more or less coherent and meaningful pictures of the past, always based on the particular spiritual needs and expectations of their real or imagined audiences, it would be unwise and incorrect to disregard most of them or to neglect them altogether simply because one's mental horizon is ruled by learned "scientific" tales of a different kind. Always keeping in mind the larger metaphysical picture and accepting that different variations of hierarchy, far from being simply Platonic or Neoplatonic "inventions", are valid for their wider ontological contexts, one can equate *par analogiam*, for example, the solar Atum-Ra to the Neoplatonic *Nous*, or one can use the terms *sekbem*, *shakti*, and *dunamis* as being, in certain cases, interchangeable. However, such rather loose comparisons are not meant to claim the strict coincidence of their objects (figures of thought, literary

forms, underlying symbols, myths, and philosophical categories) in every respect or to “prove” that, historically speaking, any particular concept of a certain tradition straightforwardly “derives” from another one which is similar but belongs to a foreign culture.

To quote J. Hillman again (despite his persistent wish to reduce and transfer noetic realities to the level of psychic imagination):

“The mind from the beginning must be based in the blue firmament, like the lazuli stone and sapphire throne of mysticism, the azure heaven of Boehme, *philos sophia*. ...it is a mythical place that gives metaphorical support to metaphysical thinking. It is the presentation of metaphysics in image and form.”¹⁷

The present monograph consists of seven parts which are unequal in length and subdivided into chapters. Parts IV and VI were initially written as separate essays, then revised and integrated into the book. This project would never have been accomplished without the kind support of the Matheson Trust. For their considerable assistance I am grateful to Reza Shah-Kazemi, Khalid Naqib, and my wife Virginia.

1 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire*, ed. by Thomas Moore, London: Routledge, 1994, p.3

2 *Ibid.*, p.82; p.83

3 See: Pierre Hadot *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1995

4 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy *On the Pertinence of Philosophy.- What is Civilization? And Other Essays*, Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1989, p.14; p.13

5 *Ibid.*, p.15

6 *Ibid.*, p.17

7 *Ibid.*, p.18

8 Franz Rosenthal “*I am you*” – *Individual Piety and Society in Islam.- Muslim Intellectual and Social History. A Collection of Essays*, London: Variorum, 1990, ch. IX, p.34; p.36

9 Pierre Lory *Know the World to Know Yourself.- The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn et al., Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2001, p.721

10 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, p.28

11 Michel Foucault *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1973, p.263

12 Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p.357

13 Deborah Cook *Amor Fati and Spirit of the Lion.- Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy*, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, p.101

14 Frithjof Schuon *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, tr. by J. Peter Hobson, London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976, p.72

15 *Ibid.*, p.86

16 Gary B. Madison *Coping with Nietzsche's Legacy: Rorty, Derrida, Gadamer.- Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy*, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, pp.74-75

17 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire*, pp.34-35

UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

1. Philosophy and Eternal Wonder

One must be careful in thinking that *philosophia* first appeared with Pythagoras (who visited all the Egyptian priests, acquiring all the wisdom each possessed, according to Iamblichus in *De vita Pythagorica* 4)¹, simply because he invented this term, according to the ancient Hellenic tradition. For Pythagoras, philosophy, associated with the way of Apollo, consists in a purification, in becoming aware of the divine principles and in assimilation to God. This Pythagorean way of life (*bios Puthagorikos: Rep.600ab*) cannot be opposed to sacred rites, because the true and immortal divine nature is achieved not only by means of *theoria*, or contemplation of the universal principles of harmony, but through *praxis* which is both *askesis* and *therapeia*. Pythagoras himself conducted the hieratic rituals behind a veil, but only those who had passed all five-year tests, initiations and necessary purifications were privileged to see the face of the Philosopher, their divine *hegemon* (spiritual guide and leader). Thus, with certain subtle reservations, we should accept the claim made by David R. Fidler:

“Yet while Pythagoreanism remains closely related to the Orphic thought of the period, the clearly distinguishing factor between the two is that for the Pythagoreans liberation from the wheel is obtained not through religious rite, but through philosophy, the contemplation of first principles. Hence, *philosophia* is a form of purification, a way to immortality. As others have observed, whereas the Eleusinian mysteries offered a single revelation, and Orphism a religious way of life, Pythagoras offered a way of life based on philosophy”.²

However, *philosophia*, or rather philosophizing – understood in the ancient sense as a special way of life and *paideia*, as seeking of truth – is modelled on the inner theurgic patterns and cosmic rhythms. It is a grave mistake to regard “ritual” (*telete*, or *ritus*, the last word being closely connected with the Vedic concept of *rita*, the universal order maintained by the constant *theia erga*, divine works) merely as an external ceremony which injures the Protestant and Modern iconoclastic sensibilities.

Perhaps the “wonder” which, according to the ancients, provokes the “birth of philosophy” has nothing arbitrary and “spontaneous” as understood in the Modern liberal sense, because this secondary wonder repeats the primeval cosmogonical wonder. In Pharaonic Egypt, the wonder hymned by the Eastern *Bau* (the spiritual manifestations of Thoth) at the rise, or rebirth, of the Sun reflects the eternal wonder which constitutes the blissful divine Self-consciousness at the appearance of the noetic Sun, of Atum-Ra, who stems from the abyss of ineffable waters. And this wonder at sunrise is not complete without the wonder at sunset

when the mystery of death is revealed and Anubis leads to the tomb and the inner Osirian temple of alchemical transformation.

If human wonder (*thaumazein*), when facing life and death, divine glories and terrestrial miseries, is the true origin of philosophizing, then we should agree with Ch. Evangeliou that philosophical speculation can go as far back as the appearance of *Anthropos*.³ But the related passage from the *Theaetetus* of Plato proves that this wonder is discussed along with the concept of initiation:

“This sense of wonder is the mark of the Philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris daughter of Thauimas... Then just take a look around and make sure that none of the uninitiated overhears us. I mean by uninitiated the people who believe that nothing is real save what they can grasp with their hands and do not admit that actions and processes or anything invisible can count as real” (*Theaet.*155dc).

Plato clearly states that philosophical wonder is wonder raised by things real and invisible, i.e., the Forms, or noetic realities, and this “miraculous” philosophical knowledge regarding the ascent to the Intelligible realm is not arrived at or learned at random, but constitutes the essence of initiation.

In addition to initiation and guides, philosophy requires leisure, understood as a necessary condition for the contemplative life, as long as this “leisure” does not consist of the regular toil of the “liturgic life”, conducted in the Egyptian temples nor, by extension, the daily life dictated by pious ascetic attitudes. According to the testimony provided by Aristotle:

“That philosophy is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize... And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders” (*Metaph.*982b11-19).

“Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which aim neither to give pleasure nor to procure the necessities of life were discovered, and discovered first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure” (*ibid.*, 981b 19-24).

Those contemporary scholars who have a strong ideological bias (especially when the academic scepticism itself becomes a sort of sinister ideology), a bias based on the Modern and Postmodern “scientific” mythology, are condemned to blindness and may quickly dismiss the following claim of Isocrates about Pythagoras:

“On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy, and more

conspicuously than others he seriously interested himself in sacrifices and in ceremonial purity...” (*Bousiris* 28).

According to Isocrates, the ancient Egyptians, who are strong in their piety and in practical wisdom (*eusebeia kai phronesis*), introduced the practice of philosophy (*philosophias askesis*) for the soul, “a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe” (*ibid.*21ff). This perspective shows Pythagoras as merely the inspired and gifted imitator who played a role of philosophical avatar for the young Hellenic civilization and built up his philosophy on the already firmly established tradition.

To assert that philosophy (and it has many different forms beyond that of discursive Western rationalism) begins with wonder means to trace it back to the *tep sepi* (the Egyptian “first time”), to the noetic revelations and the archetypal Ancestor of humanity itself. In fact, philosophy deals with just a few essential questions: (1) Who we are, and (2) What we ought to do, in order to improve our being and escape the threat of perdition. Knowledge of our identities and relations to the archetypal realm is not necessarily produced by fluctuating human opinions and fancies: more frequently it is regarded as God-sent from the beyond, revealed from above or from within. It is therefore no wonder that for Arabs and Muslims in general Adam is the first among prophets.

This theme is elaborated and developed by the eminent Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabi (sometimes called Ibn Aflatun, Son of Plato) who regards Adam as the very first principle of reflection and the spirit of the reflected form. For the *shaykh al-akbar*, Adam is equivalent to the archetype of humankind, the principle of the creative process, close to the Plotinian Intellect (*Nous*) or, perhaps, its image at the level of the universal Soul. Adam integrates in himself all cosmic realities and their individual manifestations, and all the Names of God; therefore he is an agent of eidetic knowledge. Ibn al-‘Arabi says:

“Were it not that the Reality permeates all beings as form [in His qualitative form], and were it not for the intelligible realities, no [essential] determination would be manifest in individual beings. Thus, the dependence of the Cosmos on the Reality for its existence is an essential factor... You are now acquainted with the Wisdom involved in the corporeal formation of Adam, his outer form, as you have become acquainted with the spiritual formation of Adam, his inner form, namely, that he is the Reality [as regards the latter] and that he is creature [as regards the former]. You have also learned to know his rank as the all-synthesizing [form] by which he merits the [divine] Regency”.⁴

According to Neoplatonic philosophy, the divine Intellect thinks of the totality of the universe of Forms to which it itself has given rise. He is the eternal creator and sustainer of all subsequent ontological manifestation, therefore at any specific time and any place one by necessity can glimpse

the same truths and construct similar metaphysical doctrines, though expressed in different terms, styles, and images. Such perspective provides a firm foundation for the “perennial philosophy” in its countless outflows. The boundless noetic world (*kosmos noetos*) consists in complete non-spatiality and contains in itself the principles of any possible wisdom, regardless of their sometimes distorted earthly reflections and historical trajectories.

The only problem is that most of the so-called Modern thinkers cannot accept the “hypothesis” of the Forms or the divine Intellect. According to their presumption, any philosophy that approaches or claims to approach the divine presence, unity, or wisdom, ends in the struggle of absolute truths and confronts only its own deadly violence. Positivist optimism gives promise for salvation through ever increasing information, sometimes worthless and even harmful for spiritual integrity. In a certain sense J. Derrida may be correct in describing violence as the ideological dominance exercised by metaphysics (in the Modern distorted sense of this term), but his own linguistic grammatology exercises a similar, if not greater violence.⁵ With permanent cynicism and laughter one cannot cope with contradictions which are present at the level of discursive thought, and so eventually one may depart from “philosophy” altogether. However, our present task is to analyse ancient ways of thought which are inseparable from noetic certainty, revelation and ascent to the divine.

2. Learning to Live and Learning to Die

The traditional Egyptian *paideia* (education) consisted in energizing superior and integral wisdom for the good of the entire body-like state (permeated and sustained by the royal *ka*, the vital principle) and for the soul (*ba*), both governed by the sacred principle of *maat* (truth, right measure, justice). This *paideia* had been under the rulership of the priests, or philosophers, as Isocrates maintained, because the priests had a leisure (*scholē*), which allowed learning (*scholē*), aimed at producing the contemplative man (*aner theoretikos*). If we accept the fact that the ancient Hellenes (not only the Pythagoreans) revered the Egyptian form of government and imitated their teachings regarding the soul and their spiritual exercises, there is no reason to doubt that *philosophia* (at least in a certain special sense) is indeed a product of Egypt. The term itself (Isocrates is among the first of those who started to use it) may simply be a rendering of an analogous Egyptian term, now unknown, but probably related to some compound of *meri* (love) and *rekh* (knowledge).

It is not necessary to be a cultural hero to understand that the term “philosophy” may cover and include different ways of thought which cannot be reduced to the “monomythic” Hellenic rationalism, praised by

those who thereby try to conceal their own intellectual crimes and excuse some Modern superstitions. As John P. Anton observes, while discussing the philosophical trust in *eros* and in the power of *logos* (which cannot endure without the divine language of Being and sacred Mythology):

“I feel certain that the right to philosophize, to gain access to this intellectual virtue is not something one secures by paying annual dues to the American Philosophical Association”.⁶

It is difficult to decide whether the Greek term *nous* (intellect, intuition, perceiving, essential and non-discursive understanding) may really be derived from the Egyptian verb *nu, nua* (see, look), related to the Greek *noeo* (see, perceive, observe), or the Greek *sophia* (wisdom) – from the Egyptian *seba* (teaching, learning, star), as Martin Bernal boldly asserts.⁷ However, such philological uncertainty cannot prevent us from recognizing the Egyptian “philosophy”, or love of wisdom and learning. The term *sebayt*, teaching, employed by the Egyptians themselves, was used to designate various texts of instructions, complaints and praises, including those belonging to the wisdom-literature. Such ancient sages (sometimes turned into the archetypal authorities) as Hardjedet, Imhotep, Neferty, Khety, Ptahemdjehuty, Khakheperresonbe, Ptahhotpe and Kaires, mentioned by the Papyrus Chester Beatty IV of Ramesside date, may be regarded as spiritual guides and philosophers. Also we suspect that some kind of “philosophy” may be deduced from the symbolism of sacred art and the temple rites, because the later Platonic philosophy is consciously or unconsciously modelled according to the hidden ritualistic patterns.

The wisdom-literature as such constitutes only a small and perhaps “modernized” part of the abundant writings produced in ancient Egypt. It assigned the central position to Neter (“God” as an anonymous term), regarded as Creator and Sustainer of all things, the sovereign Lord, supreme Judge and ever-present Helper, the invisible and omnipotent Shepherd of mankind. Man’s responsibilities towards Him consist of worship, obedience and trust, especially emphasized in the Ramesside age, when personal piety becomes an exemplary virtue. The ideal of the truly silent man (*ger maad*), first found in early wisdom-literature and developed by the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.) theologies, is really the Pythagorean ideal. This concept of silence is not only the prerogative of initiates who face the ineffable Principle, but includes the proper attitude before a deity in the temple and in the worshipper’s heart, good manners in the presence of teacher, higher official and friend, self-control (*ger*) and subduing of passions, exercised by the “rational soul”, to put it into the later Hellenic terms. Sometimes this ruling principle is understood and represented as the overwhelming *ka* of the Pharaoh, who himself is the Son of Ra.

The ancient Egyptian texts not only deal with the fate of the soul (*ba*) in the Netherworld, but provide the motivation for the good life here and now by doing the will of God (*sekheru en neter*). The admonitions inscribed in the tomb of Petosiris, the renowned sage and priest of Thoth (around 4th century B.C.), appeal to the living:

“O you who come afterwards, O every man who reads writing, come and read these inscriptions which are in this tomb that I may guide you to the path of life and tell you your conduct, [in order that you may moor at the harbour of the city of generations. Should you hold firm to my sayings, you will discover their value and will thank me for them.”⁸

This one and other similar texts (*sebtyt*) advise the reader to follow truth and wisdom in every pursuit, i.e., to live and depart to the beautiful West (to die) according to the established patterns of a pious and righteous servant of God.

A student of ancient civilizations must remember constantly that even in Graeco-Roman antiquity philosophy was regarded as spiritual guidance toward a happy life as well as initiation, successful transformation and integration into the “divine chorus” after death.

I. Hadot describes it briefly as characterized by two paradigmatic formulas: learning to live and learning to die, where the latter formula can be regarded as the logical presupposition of the former.⁹

Seen in this light, *philosophia* is a method aimed at the elimination of irrational fears, ambitions, and passions, at transformation and recovering of our essential identity. It requires the aspirant to act in a pious and holy fashion (*eusebos kai hosios*), realizing that all initiations and visions are conferred on intellect by the hidden powers within the immense temple of the gods, which is the universe itself. “Everything is full of gods”, according to Thales of Miletus (fr.22DK); therefore in order to philosophize it is necessary to be pious.

Since a parallel is established between (1) a temple of initiation like that of Eleusis and (2) the cosmos, the most holy of temples, human beings observe many wonders and initiatory spectacles (*mustika theamata*) in both of them. For this reason, the ancient Egyptians present the image of the stability of principles in “the holiest of temples which is the world” (Proclus *In Tim.* I.124.16-19). The time between birth and death is an uninterrupted feast and liturgy which must be properly performed:

“For the world is a very holy temple and most worthy of God; man is introduced into it by birth and there he does not contemplate statues (*agalmaton*) made by the hand of man and deprived of movement, but the sensible realities which the divine Intellect has brought into being in imitation of the intelligible realities, as Plato says... Our life which is an absolutely perfect admission and initiation into these mysteries (*muesin onta kai teleten teleiotaten*) must be full of confidence and joy... But these feasts which God offers to us and in which he is the mystagogue are profaned if we spend the best part of our lives in lamentation, recriminations and exhausting anxieties” (Plutarch *De tranquillitate animi* 20.477cd).

In antiquity, the theoretical side of philosophy, if this specific side existed at all apart from the general theological and mythical outlook, was subordinated to the practical side. This practical side (which included contemplation) was regarded as “philosophizing” proper, and applied to all aspects of life - political, ethical, liturgical and mystical. Being considered as spiritual guidance and education toward all goodness, beauty, and wisdom, ancient philosophy was only secondarily seen as a theoretical explanation of the world. And this explanation itself, along with the knowledge of epistemology and logic, served as an icon in order to provide the necessary intellectual conditions for a happy life, and for spiritual transformation and ascent (*anagoge*), or return (*epistrophē*), to the first Principle, the source of all being, life, and intelligence. However, the philosophical schools which emerged in the 4th to 3rd centuries B.C. and introduced a new type of spiritual guidance (“an organized work of love”, aimed at rationalization of thought and conduct) considered that moral and ontological self-knowledge must precede all spiritual progress in the philosophical discovery of the hidden truth (*aletheia*).

But every philosophical tradition expected to teach its adherents how to die. This aim was achieved through the critical analysis of phenomena, self-examination, and *askesis*, largely derived from Egyptian and Pythagorean sources. The different kinds of commentary, allegorical explanation and symbolic interpretation were used - some found in the privileged texts written by the founders of *haireseis*, others in divine oracles and sacred rites. Such hermeneutical practices were thought to lead to inner transformation and spiritual rebirth. Nevertheless, the written texts and logical systems of thought, constructed using powers of discursive reasoning, were regarded only as a temporary measure in place of personal instructions of the spiritual guide (*kathegemon, hegemon*). He shows the way and therefore must be trusted and treated as a godlike father. Thus, according to this line of traditional thinking, the Stoic Epictetus presents an acute and revealing question:

“Do I go to my teacher prepared to obey him like an oracle? Or am I not also one of those, who in their folly only go to school in order to learn the history of philosophy, to understand books which they did not understand before and to explain them to others should the occasion arise?” (*Discourses* 2.21.10).

3. Ancient Practices of Wisdom

Contrary to current opinion, expressed as rationalistic dogma which holds ancient philosophy (or philosophy as such) to be an exclusively intellectual, theoretical, system-building or system-demolishing activity, recent investigations are able to show that it consists primarily in

contemplation of cosmic beauties and noetic archetypes of being as well as in fulfillment of the *telos* which is present in the human soul. As Ch. Evangeliou emphasizes, for Plato and Aristotle, the genuine Hellenic philosopher is most beloved of the Hellenic gods (*theophilestatos*). This author cites the assertion made by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan that “the Upanishads speak to us of the way in which the individual self gets at the ultimate reality by an inward journey, an inner ascent” and adds: the same goal pervades the Hellenic philosophical tradition from Pythagoras to Proclus, if correctly understood.¹⁰

A. H. Armstrong also insists that, for ancient philosophers, philosophy as preparation for death was an extremely demanding way of life requiring the intense study of the whole of reality, not simply “scientific” understanding of things.¹¹ Philosophy is concerned not only with human well-being, but with the search for soul-transforming wisdom. For Plotinus, this means to recover the soul’s “ancient state” (*archaia katastasin: Enn. IV.7.9.31*; cf. Plato *Rep.*547b 6-7). It is the same as to be illuminated by the truth from the Good, which radiates truth over all the intelligibles. The soul, purified and cleansed by philosophy, resembles the “living gold” (*chrysolos empsuchos: ibid., IV.7.10.48*):

“This soul does make it clear that its evils are external accretions to the soul and come from elsewhere, but that when it is purified the best things are present in it, wisdom and all the rest of virtue, and are its own. If, then, the soul is something of this kind when it goes up again to itself, it must surely belong to that nature which we assert is that of all the divine and eternal. For wisdom and true virtue are divine things (*phronesis gar kai arete alethes theia onta*), and could not occur in some trivial mortal being, but something of such a kind [as to possess them] must be divine (*theion*), since it has a share in divine things through its kinship and consubstantiality (*dia sungeneian kai to homousion: Enn. IV.7.10.11-20*).

Having ascended to the divine the philosopher-sage can pronounce, following Empedocles: “Greetings, I am for you an immortal god” (*chairet, ego d’ humin theos ambrotos*). The great Sufi masters, such as Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.874) and al-Hallaj ibn Mansur (d.922) clearly follow the same stream of “spiritual drunkenness” (*sukr*) and ecstatic outbursts (*shatahat*).

According to Pierre Hadot, who thoroughly investigated the very nature of ancient *philosophia*, its literary genres, rhetorical rules, exegetical strategies, and spiritual exercises, an implicit distinction between philosophy and philosophical discourse is already evident in Plato’s definition of philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.*67cd). It means that philosophy consists in liberating the soul from passions. This liberation is achieved through the practice of the virtues and knowledge, that is through a lived concrete exercise, stripping away everything that is not truly itself. The ancient philosophy, which cures the soul’s illness by teaching a radically new way of life, removes forgetfulness and is not

simply “a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the Intellect and the Good”.¹² Therefore *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom, is an art of loving, seeing, understanding, and living, not simply of constructing a technical jargon reserved for specialists. It is a method of purification and spiritual ascent which demands a radical transformation of one’s thought and existence in order to reach the *telos* described as “wisdom”. And the real wisdom does not merely cause us to know discursively: it makes us “be” in a different way¹³ by uniting knowledge (*gnosis*) and being (*ousia*).

Although this wisdom is regarded as the knowledge of causes and principles, i.e., as *prote philosophia*, “first philosophy”, by Aristotle (*Metaph.*981b 25-982 ab), some of the ancient philosophers viewed it as ineffable and unspeakable. Thus, in order to be a lover of wisdom, to live a philosophical life, to “philosophize”, it is not necessary to develop a philosophical discourse in the sense of an elaborate scientific system and to carry out academic research. Rather, every person who lives according to the rules of intellect (*nous*) or to the precepts left by the founder of any particular school (*hairesis*) is considered a philosopher.

But what about those who consciously lived according to the revealed divine patterns, mythical paradigms and sacramental rituals? May they be regarded as philosophers and why? Of course, if the definitions of *philosophia* and philosophizing are restricted to certain historical forms of rationalism and logic, the attitude of *philosophia perennis* may rightly be labelled as uncritical and even silly. Why must one be captured by the term *philosophia* and try to expand its meaning in order to cover so many different forms of religious thought, devotional and cultic practice?

However, our position, which recognizes the universality (but not uniformity) of human love and longing for wisdom, itself constitutes one of many possible philosophical perspectives, which are not limited to spurious postmodern fiction. Therefore the widened application of the term “philosophy” is approved, despite the negative attitude and scorn of those modern thinkers who themselves usurped the right meaning of this term, claiming it exclusively for their narrow one-sided use. And in many cases the opinions of the ancients (especially of those who followed the Pythagorean tradition) provide considerable support for our perspective. So now let us turn to the numerous historical testimonies.

The spiritual and intellectual traditionalism of the late Roman world made no distinction between the truth revealed by oracles and those stated by divinely possessed or inspired philosophers. The only reservation regarding an unequal validity of different “philosophies” is made by the emperor Julian in the following assertion:

“Only philosophy is suitable for us (priests), and of philosophers only those who acknowledge the gods as the guides of their *paideia*, for example, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and those who follow Chrysippus

and Zeno. For we should not occupy ourselves with all philosophers, or with all doctrines, but only with those philosophies that imbue us with piety and teach us about the gods..." (Ep.89b).¹⁴

According to Julian and other Neoplatonists, famous for their cultic preoccupations, Plato is the authoritative expositor of the divine mysteries, but even his doctrines must be read, interpreted and followed only in the proper esoteric manner. They need to be harmonized with the oracles and revelations granted by the gods to different nations. In his letter to the philosopher Theodorus, the high-priest "of all temples in Asia", Julian says:

"For I certainly am not one of those who believe that the soul perishes before the body or along with it, nor do I believe any human being but only the gods (*tois theois de monon*); since it is likely that they alone have the most perfect knowledge of these matters, if indeed we ought to use the word 'likely' of what is inevitably true; since it is fitting for men to conjecture about such matters, but the gods must have complete knowledge" (Ep.20).

Real knowledge about divine matters cannot stem from discursive human reasonings. It may only be sent "from above", from the realm of Ideas, or revealed by the divine Intellect to the human intellect, as long as it is purified (this is the aim of philosophical exercises) and able to receive a glimpse of the supreme Light. Therefore for the true philosopher, as Damascius maintains, it is not enough to be skilled in the externals of philosophy, concerned with a multitude of theories and brilliant syllogisms. If a person is "inwardly barren of soul and lacking in true knowledge (*Isid.33*), he cannot be reckoned among those who belong to the holy race (*hiera genea*) and cannot be regarded as a true philosopher. Hence, not only Sceptics or Epicureans, but even those Platonists who are characterized merely by external learning (which may be very impressive indeed) are excluded from the circle of true philosophers. They are not "divine men" (*theioi andres*), since true divine philosophers are the winged souls who have accomplished (or at least started) their ascent and dwell in "the plain of truth".

The philosophers belonging to the holy race are described as possessing intrinsic sanctity: they live apart, "leading the blissful life which is pleasing to the gods, devoted to philosophy and worship of divine beings" (*Isid.95*). Against this lofty ideal merely accurate discursive learning and human culture are not regarded as sufficient: divine possession (*enthousiasmos*), separation of the soul from the body (*ekstasis*) and the ascent (*anagoge*) into the realm of the divine are required:

"Those who apply themselves to things perishable and human, or who seek too hastily to gain understanding, or who are too eager for knowledge (*philomatheis*), obtain little of the wisdom that is great and divine. Among the ancients, Aristotle and Chrysippus were immensely

gifted, but they were extremely avid for knowledge and hard-working, so they did not complete the whole ascent" (*Isid.36*)

The "knowledge" mentioned in this excerpt by Damascius is not something such as the Hermetic *gnosis* or Plato's *episteme*, but rather a passion for learning without practising the spiritual elevation, equally characteristic of contemporary Western philosophers and scientists. The Neoplatonists made a distinction between (1) conventional philosophy concerned with abstract philosophical contemplation and ordinary *paideia* and (2) priestly, or divine, philosophy, practised "by certain true priests (*hupo de tinon hieron alethinon*) who had adopted the manner of life appropriate to initiation into the mysteries" (Proclus *Plat. Theol. I.1*), and this philosophy leads to union with the gods. The priestly philosophy is partly inherited from the ancient Oriental civilizations and related to pious sacramental actions, theurgic initiations and divine names.

Therefore the emperor Julian praises the ancients as "not possessed of a wisdom acquired and fabricated like ours, but philosophizing in a natural manner" (*all' autophuos philosophountes: Or. III.82b*). In this case, the "natural" means closer to the divine origin, to the Golden Age, "naturally" revealed, not acquired through discursive training and system-building. It is almost certain that these "ancients" are not the "first Greek philosophers", known to us from the current Western histories of philosophy, but more probably the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Phoenician, or Indian sages.

4. True Ancient Philosophy and the Way of Pious Living

The Platonic philosopher Celsus around AD 180 wrote a book against Christians entitled *Alethes Logos* which did not survive. However, Origen's *Contra Celsum* preserved certain fragments, one of which runs as follows:

"There is an ancient doctrine which has existed from the beginning, which has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men" (*Contra Celsum I.14*).

The wisest nations are those famous for their philosophy or mysteries, i.e., Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, Persians, Odrysians, Samothracians, and Eleusinians. J. C. M. Van Winden argues that *alethes logos* really means "true wisdom", instead of "true doctrine" as it is held by H. Chadwick and other scholars.¹⁵ But this academic controversy is not very important for our subject. Celsus simply states the common belief of his time that religious and philosophical truth shines more brightly at the beginning. In other words, he speaks about the primordial tradition, be it a tradition of "wisdom" or "philosophy". He even makes no distinction between the philosophy proper and the mystery cults, because he speaks in the same breath of Eleusinians (who are not a "nation" in any normal sense) and

the Assyrians (who built a huge empire and whose name in Roman times was used rather loosely).

Clement of Alexandria also affirmed the existence of an ancient philosophy which may be found all over the civilized world, because every nation had its own philosophers and sages. Therefore he argues:

“I think that it was in the realization of the great benefit accruing from the sages that all the Brahmans, the Odrysae, the Getae, and the people of Egypt honoured these men and made philosophy a public institution and examined their words as sacred texts, together with the Chaldeans and the inhabitants of Arabia Felix (as it is called), and of Palestine, and a considerable section of the Persian people, and countless other peoples in addition” (*Stromateis* I.68.1).

For the modern scholar it is quite uncomfortable to find some “ancient philosophy” even in the south of Arabia; therefore he is happy to dismiss this and other similar accounts as crazy tales. But it is well attested that early Christianity, for instance, regarded itself as a prolongation and fulfillment of an ancient philosophy. Therefore let us see how the true philosophy is described by the early Christians themselves. According to Justin the Martyr who wrote the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* at about AD 160:

“Philosophy is really the greatest and most honourable thing man can possess. It alone brings us to God and unites us with Him and truly holy are those who apply themselves to philosophy. What philosophy really is and why it was sent down to men has escaped the masses. Otherwise there would be no Platonists, Stoics, etc.” (*Dialogue* 2.1).

It follows that philosophy is sent down to men and ultimately based on a divine authority, because true philosophy “alone brings us to God and unites us with Him”. Being the knowledge of being (*episteme tou ontos*), philosophy is knowledge of God, of what is true and truly exists. To see God is the aim of Plato’s philosophy (*ibid.*, 2.6). So, Platonism is viewed as being close to revelation: surely “sent down” to Plato. In Justin’s *Dialogue Trypho the Jew* raises the following question:

“Do not all philosophers in all their discussions discuss God? Do they not investigate His sovereignty and providence on every occasion? And is inquiring about the divine not the task of philosophy?” (*ibid.*).

For Clement of Alexandria, philosophy is a form of the practice of wisdom, and wisdom is the scientific understanding of things divine, human, and their causes (*Stromateis* I.30.1). Since the Lord himself says, “I am the truth” (John 14.6), philosophy, being a direct gift of God, includes questions concerning truth and the nature of the universe. Those philosophers who receive their knowledge from the supreme Truth, God himself, are the true initiates (*ibid.* I.32.4). Clement of Alexandria says that

“there is only one way of truth, but different paths from different places join it, just like tributaries flowing into a perennial river” (*ibid.*, I.29.1).

He is not very impressed by Hellenic philosophy which, in his opinion, shows a skill in sophistry and in many cases seems to him to be simply a power operating on the imagination, using arguments to implant false opinions. Therefore, along with Hellenic philosophy, likened to a little fire (stolen as it were by Prometheus) which blazes up helpfully into a useful light, a trace of wisdom, Clement discerns a non-Hellenic philosophy which comes directly from God and is based on divine knowledge and faith. Following already established tradition, he argues that the Hellenes themselves borrowed much of their wisdom. With great satisfaction Clement quotes Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus I to India (about 350-290 B.C.) who wrote in the third volume of his *History of India*:

“However, all that has been said by the ancients about nature is also said by philosophers outside Greece, the Brahmans in India, and the people called the Jews in Syria” (*ibid.*, I.72.5).

Drawing necessary information from Alexander Polihystor’s book *On Pythagorean Symbols* and other unknown Hellenistic sources, Clement also claims that Pythagoras was the disciple of Sonchis, the “highest prophet” of the Egyptians, Plato of Sechnupis of Heliopolis, and Eudoxus the Cnidian of Chonupis (*Strom.* I.69.1). In addition, Pythagoras is claimed to be a pupil of the Assyrian Zaratus and even of the Brahmans (*ibid.*, I.70.1).

For Clement, truth is one and under the sole charge of Wisdom. But the philosophic schools, whether Hellenic or not, “are like the Maenads scattering the limbs of Pentheus, each boasting their own limited claim as the whole truth” (*ibid.*, I.57.1). Clement cannot deny that the term “wise” is applied to “sophists” in the Scripture, so as to describe their excessive concern for language and technique: “they labour throughout their lives over distinctions between words and the appropriate combination and grouping of expressions” (*ibid.*, I.22.4). Are they real bearers of wisdom? Clement cannot provide a clear response. Perhaps they are, if they belong to Clement’s party and if wisdom is regarded as the inherited property of Jews and Christians only. For “the truth vouchsafed to the Greeks is not the same as ours, even if it does share the same name” (*ibid.*, I.98.4).

The Christians’ attempts to present themselves as adherents of true ancient philosophy (supposedly deviated from and partly corrupted by the Greeks) were caused by concrete historical and theological circumstances. This early dialogue and contest with Hellenism was a prolongation of the Hellenized Jewish tradition which tried at all costs to show its superiority over Hellenism proper. All possible rhetorical and mythological tricks were used in order to demonstrate that Plato is simply a thief and imitator of Moses.

Since Christianity stands between Hellenism and Judaism, it is not too surprising that the followers of Christ-Logos sometimes described Socrates and Heraclitus as "Christians" (Justin I *Apol.*46.3). The seeds of truth which they cultivated are owed to the sowing *Logos*, the *Logos spermatikos*, to whom all truth found in mankind should be ascribed.¹⁶ The *Logos* doctrine itself has Egyptian roots, as is attested by the so-called *Memphite Theology* and other texts.

According to the Christian writer Eusebius, every nation has a guardian-angel who is responsible for sending down certain knowledge, which is not, however, always complete or correct, because some of those guardian-angels can neither see the invisible, nor ascend to the supreme Truth. Thus, for example, the Phoenicians and Egyptians were taught to worship the heavenly elements, the visible heavenly bodies.

For Eusebius, religion (or devotion, *eusebeia*) and philosophy are not separated but constitute a unity. Christianity is simply the restoration of the true ancient philosophy, because even before Moses' time human beings had their pious philosophy. Therefore Christianity is, in fact, a very ancient way of pious living (*palaiotaton eusebeias politeuma*), and a very ancient form of philosophy (*archaiotate tis philosophia: Demonstratio Evangelica* I.2).¹⁷

However, Eusebius cannot refrain from exoteric particularism in his assertions about the deficiency of "pagan" philosophy and religion: wherever it contains the truth, it has been stolen from the holy books of the Jews. This widespread opinion is a sheer fantasy, but it stems from the mythical belief in the exceptional status of Jews. Thus, their holy Scripture becomes the only source of wisdom and the very handbook of philosophy. Neither Egyptians or Assyrians, nor Persians or Indians could share such an extremist claim and opinion.

The Greeks had their own political and cultural myth which consists in asserting the superiority of Hellenism: once the Hellenes were pupils of the ancient civilizations in matters of science, religion and mysticism, but they were also able to give a rational foundation to the doctrines of ancient nations (e.g., those of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians), so as to transform and develop them. Origen expresses this idea as follows:

"Celsus praises the barbarians for being capable of discovering doctrines; but he adds to this that the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered and to establish the doctrines and to put them into practice by virtue" (*askesai pros areten: Contra Celsum* I.20).

5. Understanding of Ancient Philosophy by Porphyry and Augustine

Porphyry the Phoenician, that is, the 3rd century Neoplatonist Malchus from Tyre, provides us with further testimonies that *philosophia* and analogous forms of spiritual life and wisdom were not confined to the Graeco-Roman world. Though Plato is the exemplar spokesman of philosophy, Porphyry also speaks of "the ancient philosophy" which includes Persian and Indian thought. The widespread and long-standing opinion that Zoroaster was a precursor of Hellenic philosophy seems to be acceptable to Porphyry, although he ardently fights the anti-cosmic Gnosticism which consciously subverted the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* and relied upon forgeries on Zoroaster. The hypothetical relationship between Hellenic and Persian philosophy J. Igal describes as groundless and adds:

"Plotinus too had in his schooldays been fascinated by the Persian mirage."¹⁸

Used in a rather loose sense, which is normal practice in antiquity, the term *philosophia*, as we have said, covers all forms of religious thought and hermeneutics, all theological attitudes and related ways of life. Therefore the "Persian philosophy" might mean religious, political and moral wisdom.

Talking about "the Persian mirage", J. Igal follows A. J. Festugiere who in the first volume of his fundamental research work *La Revelation d'Hermes Trismegiste* says (perhaps following F. Cumont) that the Graeco-Roman world in Porphyry's own time was smitten by the *mirage oriental*.¹⁹ This assertion means that the Romans and Greeks were wrong when they viewed Oriental forms of wisdom as older and better, more suitable for spiritual realization and containing purer ideas of the deity, based on direct revelations which transcend the narrow rationalism and pragmatism of their own attitudes. Thus being under the sway of some irrational dreams and in a weakened state of mind, flooded by the seductive imagination, they turned to the East in their search for the ancient ways of life and divine wisdom. It is more likely that A. J. Festugiere himself is wrong in his judgement, because otherwise we would be forced to regard the Hellenic philosophers and men of aristocratic culture as idiots who cannot know what they really want and what is worthy of pursuit. However, our concern is not to criticize the brilliant Catholic scholar, but to show that for the Graeco-Romans the existence of ancient or simply foreign philosophies (albeit different from their own) was a self-evident fact.

Relying on the testimonies collected by the Babylonian Bardesanes, i.e., Bar Daisan of Edessa, Porphyry in *De abstinentia* depicts Indian philosophers who worship the deity with pious reverence, setting apart the whole day and most of the night for hymns and prayers to the gods. They are the theosophists, or gymnosophists, divided into Brahmans and

Samaeans. Both are concerned with divine wisdom. According to Porphyry:

“Of these philosophers, some live on the mountains, and others on the banks of the river Ganges... And neither among those Samaeans nor among the Brahmans whom I have already mentioned, has any sophist come forward, as have so many among the Greeks, to perplex with doubts by asking where would we be if every one should copy their example” (*De abst.* IV.16-18).

From the Hellenistic age onwards the constant view prevailed that Indian gymnosophists “philosophized”, and “philosophizing” here means to live in silent solitude and devotion, engaged in prayer and trying to free the soul from the body. The aim of this philosophy, also called the *mores ac disciplina Indorum* by Porphyry, consists in achieving immortality. The Indian gymnosophists had philosophical doctrines about the immortality of the soul, righteousness and purification, the duty of worshipping Deity and the possibility of the soul’s deliverance from the cycle of existence. As Megasthenes already claimed, some Indian Brahmans held that:

“God was light, but not such light as we see with the eye, nor such as the sun or fire, but God is with them the Word – by which they mean... the discourse of intellect, whereby the hidden mysteries of knowledge are discerned by the wise. (fr. LIV).

“On many points their opinions coincide with those of the Greeks, for like them they say that the world had a beginning, and is liable to destruction, and is in shape spherical, and that the Deity who made it, and who governs it, is diffused through all its parts. They hold that various first principles operate in the universe, and that water was the principle employed in the making of the world. In addition to the four elements there is a fifth agency, from which the heaven and the stars were produced. The earth is placed in the centre of the universe. Concerning generation, and the nature of the soul, and many other subjects, they express views like those maintained by the Greeks. They wrap up their doctrines about immortality and future judgement, and kindred topics, in allegories, after the manner of Plato” (fr. XLI).

Thus nobody in the Graeco-Roman world would doubt the existence of Indian philosophy as such. But the problem, posed by Porphyry, arises from the awareness that only a tiny minority is able to follow the way of philosophy seriously. Porphyry (who partly misunderstood the soteriological functions of any integral sacred tradition which has both exoteric and esoteric dimensions) is in search of some universal way of liberation, following which every soul could escape from the cycle of existence.

Permanent escape with no return was not the right Platonic ideal, but Augustine perfectly understood Porphyry’s dream, thinking that Christianity is that single universal way which Porphyry did not find.

According to Augustine’s reports, Porphyry held that only the Principles (*principia, archai*), i.e., (1) the One, or the Father, and (2) the Father’s Intellect (*Patrikos Nous*) are able to purify souls to such an extent that they could escape rebirth (*palingenesis*) within the cycle of transmigration and abide forever with the Father.²⁰

According to Augustine, Porphyry maintained that an exclusively philosophical ascent is reserved just for a few. Therefore this pupil of Plotinus, not always faithful to the doctrines of his master, tried to find “a universal way for the liberation of the soul, deriving from some true philosophy, or the *mores* and *disciplina* of the Indians, or the ascent of the Chaldeans, or any other way”.²¹ At this point Augustine becomes angry and reproaches Porphyry (who admitted the use of theurgy only for the minor pneumatic ascent, contrary to Iamblichus and other later Neoplatonists) with ardent Christian zeal:

“You did not get this doctrine from Plato. It was your Chaldean teachers who persuaded you to bring human weakness up into the exalted heights of universe, into the ether and empyrean, up to the heavenly firmaments, so your gods might be able to give supernatural revelations to the theurgists. Yet you consider yourself superior to such supernatural knowledge, in virtue of your intellectual life. You, of course, feel that, as a philosopher, you have not the slightest need of the purifications of theurgic art. Yet as a kind of repayment of your debt to those masters of yours, you prescribe such purgations to others... The result is, naturally, that since the vast majority have no taste for philosophy, you collect far more clients for those secret and illegal masters of yours than candidates for the Platonic schools. You have made yourself the preacher and the angel of those unclean spirits who pretend to be gods of the ether; they have promised you that those who have been purified in their pneumatic soul, by theurgic art, although they cannot, indeed, return to the Father, will have their dwelling among the gods of the ether, above the levels of the air” (*Civ. Dei* X.27).

Despite the negative attitude towards the Chaldean theurgy and its “fantastic illusions”, as well as “all the baseless opinions of all the philosophers” (*ibid.*, VIII.1), Augustine is quite sympathetic to his former teachers, the Platonists and their master Plato, “who went to Egypt to acquire all the highly prized teachings given there” (*ibid.* VIII.4). He argues as follows:

“If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows and loves God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists” (*ibid.* VIII.5).

“The same concepts may have been held also by Italian philosophers, because of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, and perhaps by some others of the same way of thinking and from the same part of the world. There

may be others to be found who perceived and taught this truth among those who were esteemed as sages or philosophers in other nations: Libyans of Atlas, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, Gauls, Spaniards. Whoever they may have been, we rank such thinkers above all others and acknowledge them as representing the closest approximation to our Christian position" (ibid. VIII.9).

A long time before Augustine, Diogenes Laertius stated that philosophy was diffused among the nations of North Africa, the gymnosophists of India, the Magi of Anatolia, the Druids and so on. But for Augustine only those are true philosophers whose teachings are close to those of Plato and the Platonic tradition. The list of them (which includes Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, etc.) is really impressive. The true philosophers have conceived of the supreme God as the Creator of all things. They argue that we are created in His image and derive from this one God all goodness and knowledge.

Philosophy understood in this way leads to the light of knowledge (knowledge of God and of ourselves), happiness and the blessedness of life. Therefore forgetting for a while all reservations regarding "polytheism" and the "daemonic intermediaries between men and gods", Augustine approves Plato's definition of the Sovereign Good and the life in accord with virtue which is possible only for those who strive to imitate God:

"Plato has no hesitation in asserting that to be a philosopher is to love God, whose nature is immaterial. It immediately follows that the seeker after wisdom (which is the meaning of *philo-sophos*) will only attain to happiness when he has begun to enjoy God" (ibid. VIII.8).

6. From Egyptian Soil to Hellas

Isocrates insisted that philosophy is a product of Egypt brought to Greece and Italy by Pythagoras, and one of the earliest attested uses of the term *philosophia* comes from *Bousiris* of Isocrates. Contrary to the convictions maintained by the ancient Hellenes themselves and regarded by them as a self-evident truth, modern scholars dismissed Egypt as the initial cradle of philosophy. This opinion was established during recent centuries and can be viewed as a consequence of the sustained attack on the "wisdom" of Egypt pursued by certain radically disposed Christians and modern positivists. The denial that Egyptians were capable of developing any kind of philosophical thought is a result of the grave ideological errors and superstitions which have prevailed in the modern Western world since the Enlightenment and have almost destroyed (or grossly deformed) the Christian tradition itself.

Though the Hellenic philosophers and scientists credited the Egyptians with achievements in all sciences and practical wisdom, regarding them as the model to be imitated and surpassed in almost every field of learning and art, modern scholars reject all these testimonies as groundless. The Egyptians could not have influenced Solon, Thales, Pythagoras and Plato, they say, simply because they did not have philosophy. Why? Because they are morbid and lifeless, not sufficiently rational and creative; because the Aryan Model (to use M. Bernal's term) "better" explains the "progress of civilization"; because they are pleasure-loving people, lacking all deep religious feeling, idealism and spirituality (in sharp contrast with Winckelmann's and Wilamovitz-Moellendorf's Greeks, who have all possible positive qualities, creative energies and virtues in abundance). In short, because the Egyptians belong to the undeveloped, lower and exotic race and represent by themselves the so-called "mytho-poetical" level of thought. A. Gardiner's sentence delivered in 1927 is almost generally accepted as axiomatic:

"Despite the reputation for philosophic wisdom attributed to the Egyptians by the Greeks, no people has ever shown itself more averse from speculations or more wholeheartedly devoted to material interests; and if they paid an exaggerated attention to funerary observances, it was because the continuance of earthly pursuits and pleasures was felt to be at stake, assuredly not out of any curiosity as to the why and whither of human life".²²

Similarly W. K. C. Guthrie in *A History of Greek Philosophy* says:

"Yet the torch of philosophy was not lit in Egypt, for they lacked the necessary spark which the Greeks possessed so strongly and embodied in their word *philosophia*".²³

Another influential modern thinker and scientist, B. Russel, gives an equally dogmatic and superficial assertion:

"Philosophy begins when someone asks a general question, and so does science. The first people to evince this kind of activity were the Greeks. Philosophy and science, as we know them, are Greek inventions... Philosophy and science begin with Thales of Miletus in the early sixth century B.C."²⁴

M. Bernal, despite his shortcomings and sometimes eccentric "afro-mythology" (which is disputable in many respects) raises the opposite point of view arguing that:

"After the crushing of Neoplatonism, the Hellenic, pagan descendants of Egyptian religion, and Gnosticism, its Judaeo-Christian counterpart, Christian thinkers tamed Egyptian religion by turning it into philosophy".²⁵ "The three schools of thought that emerged from the debris of Egyptian religion were Hermeticism, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. The Hermeticists remained defiantly Egyptian, the Neoplatonists were more Hellenized and focussed their devotion on the

'divine Plato', while the Gnostics saw themselves as Christians... There is little doubt that Hermeticism was the earliest of the three and had a critical influence on the formation of the other two movements."²⁶

The question regarding the origins of Hermeticism, Platonism, and Gnosticism is not as simple as this schematic picture would like to suggest. But in certain respects this straightforward perspective is a reinterpretation and reestablishment of the ancient views firmly held, among others, by Plutarch, the Middle Platonist and Delphic priest, who, following Herodotus and other Hellenic historians, argued that much of Hellenic philosophy had been introduced from Egypt. Plutarch believed in an essential unity between Egyptian and Hellenic religion, despite their different styles of expression:

"Nor do we think of the gods as different gods among different peoples, nor as barbarian gods and Hellenic gods, nor as southern and northern gods" (*De Iside et Osiride* 67).

At the same time he maintained that the Egyptian religion is older, purer and more profound, because when "men make use of consecrated symbols", some employed symbols that are obscure, but others those that are clear, "in guiding the intelligence toward things divine". Further discussing this subject Plutarch adds:

"Therefore in these matters above all we should take as a guide into mysteries the understanding which philosophy gives (*logon ek philosophias mustagogon*)... The fact that everything is to be referred to understanding (*epi ton logon*) we may gather from the Egyptians themselves" (*ibid.*68).

In short, Egyptian hermeneutics (which explains religious myths and rites) itself constitutes a part of philosophy. It is not by accident that this assertion is followed by the remark about the festival in honour of Hermes (Thoth) during which the Egyptians eat honey and figs, saying the while "sweet is truth" (*gluku be aletheia*: *ibid.*68).

"Truth" is a key word here, because evidently it is the Egyptian *maat*, related to the divine scribe Thoth, god of all wisdom, philosophy, mysteries, sacred rites and creative "magic" (*heka*). The sensible and noetic parts of philosophy, guided by Thoth, may be likened to the robes of Isis and Osiris respectively. The robes of Isis are variegated in their colours, "for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end. But the robe of Osiris has no shading or variety in its colour, but only one single colour like to light" (*ibid.*77). Therefore the noetic understanding, or the Osirian intellection (when Osiris and Ra constitute the unity, because without the intelligible light of Ra Osiris lies in the psychic darkness) is pure and simple, "shining through the soul like a flash of lightning", and it affords an opportunity to touch and see at once.

In order to show a relationship between the Egyptian symbols and philosophical exegesis we should provide another excerpt from *De Iside et Osiride*. Plutarchus writes:

"For this reason Plato and Aristotle call this part of philosophy the eopotic or mystic part, inasmuch as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of reason (*to logon*) proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple, and immaterial principle; and when they have somehow attained contact with the pure truth abiding about it, they think that they have the whole philosophy completely, as it were, within their grasp.

"This idea at the present time the priests intimate with great circumspection in acquitting themselves of this religious secret and in trying to conceal it: that this god Osiris is the ruler and king of the dead... But he himself is far removed from the earth, uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death; but for the souls of men here, which are compassed about by bodies and emotions, there is no association with this god except in so far as they may attain to a dim vision of his presence by means of the apperception which philosophy affords (*plen boson oneiratos amaurou thigein noesei dia philosophias*). But when these souls are set free and migrate into the realm of the invisible and the unseen, the dispassionate and the pure, then this god becomes their leader and king, since it is on him that they are bound to be dependent in their insatiate contemplation and yearning for that beauty which is for men unutterable and indescribable. With this beauty Isis, as the ancient story declares, is for ever enamoured and pursues it and consorts with it and fills our earth here with all things fair and good that partake of generation" (*ibid.*77-78).

This text is no less than a clear example of the Egyptian "Platonism" – not just a reading of Plutarch. Isis, the mistress of "transformative magic" (or rather of blissful theurgy) itself stands as a Lady Philosophy, enamoured of the immaterial Principle.

Modern scholars, deprived of all theurgic imagination and grace, may still insist on their rejection of Egyptian philosophy, but the fact remains that Pythagoras and Plato brought something important from Egypt, connected with the theory of Ideas, the divine Archetypes and their images or symbols, the mathematical sciences, regarded in a mystical sense, and the conception of the immortal winged soul (*ba*) wandering in search of her true identity and thereby following the precept of Horus-Ra (Apollo): Know Thyself. The soul seeks to know truth (*maat*) and live by it. When her ascent is completed, the soul, turned into the luminous intellect (*akh*), contemplates the Forms in the solar barque of Ra. It is not too difficult to find the prototypes of images used in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Most probably the *Republic* is also based on the Egyptian models. According to Krantor (as related by Proclus) "Plato's contemporaries

mocked him, saying that he was not inventor of his *politeia*, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions".²⁷ The Egyptian form of government was imitated by the Pythagoreans, along with the methods of philosophical askesis, aimed at purifying the human soul and harmonizing with the perfectly arranged state regarded as an *imago* of the divine cosmos, both sensible and noetic.

Ch. Evangeliou maintains that the Pythagorean pursuit of mathematical sciences and care of the soul are brought from Egypt:

"Through Plato and the Platonic tradition this type of philosophy more than any other contributed to shaping the Hellenic view of man, as an ignorant captive whose true liberator is Lady Philosophy".²⁸

However, we must remember that certain selected ideas and elements, brought from Egyptian soil to Hellas, were removed from the context of integral sacred civilization and put into the foreign "barbaric" environment where these elements (though synthesized and artificially united in the new compound) inevitably stood outside of the main stream of life. They could function only as a sort of Pythagorean "esoterism", as a clearly defined "philosophy", rationalistic exceptionalism, quite strange and even dangerous for the rest of society. Maybe this is the reason why Pythagoreans were persecuted and Socrates sentenced to death. It was quite different in Egypt, where every "philosopher" belonged to the state-staff and had no need to define himself as an exceptional case. It is possible that the nickname *philosophos* itself betrays this tension between the distant wisdom (still the possession of Egypt) and the local socio-political and psychological climate in Greece and Italy, the mental structures of which were organized according to the different value patterns. Perhaps this radical tension "revolutionized" the Hellenic thought and, partly at least, can explain the rise of independent philosophical discourses, aimed at the fundamental questioning of everything.

In a sense, this unnaturally mutated "beast", a hybrid fuelled by the powerful enthusiasm of sophists, physiologists, and rationalists, betrayed both Egypt and the archaic past of Greece. For this or some similar reason P. Kingsley claims that Plato had killed his "father" Parmenides, arguing as follows:

"What would soon be covered over and rationalized in Greece was preserved and developed in India. What in the West had been an aspect of mystery, of initiation, became classified and formalized in the East".²⁹

The great Traditionalist writer F. Schuon makes an acute observation in the same vein:

"On the whole, Plato expressed sacred truths in a language that had already become profane – profane because rational and discursive rather than intuitive and symbolist, or because it followed too closely the contingences and humours of the mirror that is the mind – whereas

Aristotle placed truth itself, and not merely its expression, on a profane and 'humanistic' plane."³⁰

Neither P. Kingsley's, nor F. Schuon's claims can be accepted straightforwardly – they require further discussion, because Plato's language may be regarded not as "profane" but simply as "different", more suited to the contemporary milieu of Hellenic thought which required rational argumentation and definition. In a sense, we can speak of Plato as Parmenides *redivivus*: the vehicle of pedagogical persuasion was transformed (and thereby Parmenides, like the archetypal Osiris, was ritually "killed"). However, the Parmenidean spirit "resurrected" was reinforced and strengthened by the divine Plato.

7. Translatability of Divine Names in Ancient Civilizations

The question why so many distinct forms of spirituality and intellectual life may be named and understood as "philosophy", should perhaps be answered by involving the so-called "principle of translatability", discussed by Jan Assmann in respect to Egyptian and Near Eastern religions.³¹ The conviction that God or the gods are universal led to the semantic dimension that makes names translatable. This means that every nation has essentially the same gods. Therefore the basic structure of the spiritual path leading to first principles everywhere must be analogous, though different in style and details. According to Aristotle (*De philosoph.*, fr.8), wisdom (*sophia*) covers any ingenious invention and conception (all of which ultimately are gifts, sent down by the gods); therefore to do any thing well, skillfully, according to the divine paradigms and models, is to follow the way of "wisdom" which finally leads to the highest metaphysical goals, to the noetic realm where Wisdom itself, the graceful goddess, dwells. No wonder that every nation loves wisdom and has certain "lovers of wisdom", be they goldsmiths, artists, healers, singers, priests, or magicians.

The practice of translating and interpreting foreign divine names is found already established in the Sumerian and Akkadian glossaries dated from the third millennium B.C. In ancient Mesopotamia one can find countless lists of gods in two or three languages. For example, the explanatory list *Anu sha Ameli* gives not only the Sumerian and Akkadian names of the gods, but also the functional definitions of every deity, i.e. those attributes which serve as the main criteria for equation and translation. In the Kassite period (about 1730-1155 B.C.) such explanatory lists are expanded to include the divine names in Amorite, Hurrite, Elamite and Kassite languages. This theological interpretation, aimed at making explicit the underlying "meaning" of divine names, is based on

universal metaphysics (covered by the mythical images, qualities, symbols) and international law. According to Jan Assmann:

“The names, iconographies, and rites – in short, the cultures – differ, but the gods are the same. This concept of religion as the common background of cultural diversity and the principle of cultural translatability eventually led to the late Hellenistic mentality for which the names of the gods mattered little in view of the overwhelming natural evidence of their existence”.³²

This kind of comparative hermeneutics is not explicitly developed in the early pharaonic Egypt due to its closed and self-sufficient character, but Egyptian metaphysics are even more overwhelmingly based upon evident reality and can serve as a firm theological ground for such practices as flourished especially in Hellenistic times. In the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.) it is unequivocally stated: all names are those of one God (CT 4.10). God is both transcendent and immanent. In his immanent aspect of the creative theophany, God is “million” (or infinity, *heb*) into which he has transformed himself. Therefore the intelligible solar Deity is *hehu* whose limits are not known, scarab (*keheper*) whose body is not known, for he is like the boundless Light (*Leiden stela* V.70). The One who transforms himself into the totality of manifestations (*keheperu*), divine forces (*sekhemu*), all of the gods (*neteru*) and levels of being, nonetheless remains intact in his transcendence.

All gods are comprised in the One, “the One Alone who created what is, the illustrious *bau* of gods and humans” (*Pap. Berlin* 3030.8-9). Therefore this One God, who became two “at the beginning” of noetic creation, is praised in a Ramesside magical papyrus of the XIX Dynasty (1295-1188 B.C.) as follows:

“Hail, the One who makes himself into millions,
 Whose length and breath are limitless.
 Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
 Uraeus with great flame;
 Great of magic with secret form,
 Secret *ba*, to whom respect is shown...
 Amun, who remains in possession of all things,
 This God who established the earth by his providence”.

The later Neoplatonists could easily find Pythagorean and Platonic principles in the Egyptian theologies, because these theologies operated within the same system of religious and philosophical translatability, in addition to the plausible premise that Platonism itself (in its rather concealed essential form) directly or indirectly derived from Egyptian lore.

One is tempted to argue that so-called “ancient polytheisms” functioned as a technique of translation, but ought to be careful when dealing with terms. Derogatory terms, such as the Latin *paganus* (peasant,

rustic, unlearned, along with additional connotations of idolatry and *superstitio*), ironically become the opposites of supposedly “learned”, “advanced” and therefore “progressive” Jewish or Christian zealotry, or such concepts as Greek “polytheism” (*polutheia*) and “idolatry” (*eidolatria*), used to describe Graeco-Roman religion and even highly articulated mystical philosophy, are very inaccurate, pejorative and simplifying slogans, if not merely ideological stamps.

From the third millennium B.C. onwards the ancient theologies held that the Principle of all there is, is one, or that the One God may wear different ontological “masks” and have multiple hidden and revealed powers. The plurality of gods is not supposed to affect the unity of God from which all the noetic and psychic manifestations come forth. However, the Christian Apologists established a superficially simple model, according to which mankind had progressed from heavily demonized polytheism to the highly idealized monotheism under the aegis of Christianity. This seductive idea of straightforward progress (from which the modern idea of progress derives) is rather anachronistic, but still captures the Christian and secular Western mentality. And this is despite the fact that “not only philosophers, but a very substantial portion of late antique pagans was consciously monotheistic”.³³ According to P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede:

“Far from arising as a reaction to Christianity, pagan monotheism was a deeply rooted trend in ancient philosophy which developed under its own momentum, broadening sufficiently to embrace a good part of the population. Indeed we are inclined to believe that Christian monotheism is, historically speaking, part of this broader development. Christianity did not convince because it was monotheistic, rather it would appear that in order to convince, it had to be monotheistic...”³⁴

The Jewish and Christian religions (labelled as counter-religions by J. Assmann, because they reject and repudiate everything that went before and what is outside themselves as “paganism”³¹) act as a means of intercultural estrangement and untranslatability. They are “exclusive” monotheisms, according to the classification provided by J. P. Kenney.³⁶ Their exclusiveness is built more on the mythical dissociation from *ethnikos*, those who are not God’s chosen people, than on the affirming oneness of God. Therefore they were in need of a special esoteric dimension which would at least allow them to accept elements of Hellenic mysticism and philosophy. One cannot claim that esoterism is simply constituted by the “remains of translatability” (i.e., by the remains of certain *philosophia perennis*) put into the underground, due to the general intolerance in the name of revelation. However, one ought to remember that most of the Christian thinkers, who tried to introduce a translatability (albeit with great reservations), themselves sooner or later felt under suspicion of their co-religionists. Therefore Dionysius the Areopagite was

forced to perform a magnificent trick by using clever deception in order to integrate the Procline metaphysics and theurgy into Christian theology and then to create the Neoplatonic sacramental mysticism within Christian civilization.

When Christian “monotheists”, who articulated their theology in Platonic terms, accused somebody as being “polytheist” or *paganus*, it was because they would not tolerate any other version of truth. Therefore Olympiodorus, the Alexandrian philosopher of 6th century A.D., applied to the Christians as follows:

“We too are aware that the first cause is one, namely God; for there cannot be many first causes. Indeed that first does not even have a name” (*In Gorg.*32).

For those Christians who emerged from the radicalized Jewish tradition and suddenly acquired a huge power it was difficult to accept that “the God is no less a philosopher than a prophet” (Plutarch *Moral.*385b). According to the apt remark made by Frithjof Schuon:

“Those who champion an unreserved hostility to Hellenism and a reduction of all wisdom to a voluntarist and emotional perspective strangely lose sight of the overwhelmingly obvious fact that conceptualizing and speculative metaphysical thought is in the theomorphic nature of man, and that such thought cannot therefore by definition be ‘carnal’ and ‘vain’, as opposed to the penitential and mystically experimental ‘wisdom’ which they themselves advocate.

“History and experience teach us that there is one thing human nature finds particularly difficult, and that is that to be just; to be perfectly objective is, in a way to die... Religious zealots are the first to know the meaning of spiritual death, and one of the motives for their zeal is precisely their ignorance of the presence of this mystery among their adversaries; but there are different ways of dying and different degrees of death...”³⁷

8. Heracles and Philosophical Ascent

The Pythagoreans kept their doctrines secret. However, as is often the case, true esoteric teachings are not intended to “teach” some fascinating secret theories and ideas, but to provide a spiritual method and guidance in order to actualize these ideas. They are designed to heal and transform the soul. If Pythagoras was coming not to teach but to heal, according to the ancient account (Ael. *VH.*4.17), thus playing the role of Asclepius, or Asgelatas (Gula of Isin, the “great physician”, *azugallatu*), or of the Egyptian Imhotep, adopted son of Ptah, then he stands in the long tradition of divine avatars, spiritual masters and healers who not only provide a means for purifying the soul, but show the way to regain one’s

true identity and immortality. This is the ultimate aim of Pythagorean philosophy, not simply doing science and studying mathematics.

In this regard Plotinus clearly states:

“Our concern is not to be free of sin, but to be god” (*Enn.* I.2.6.2-3).

Thereby he repeats the ancient Egyptian theurgic ideal of becoming “like a god”, assuming the role of one of *neteru* (since all *neteru* are aspects, functions, masks, and names of the supreme Principle), and sharing in the demiurgic activity and care of the world. Like the idea of becoming a god (similar to the Platonic admonition found in the *Theaetetus* 176b), an *imago dei* doctrine is held in the *Instruction for King Merikare* which belongs to the Middle Kingdom wisdom-literature. This text describes the established link between God and humanity through *maat*, sacred kingship, and cultic activities:

“Well provided are the humans, the herd of God.

For their sake He created heaven and earth...

They are his images (*snm*), they have come forth from his body.

For their sake he rises in the heavens,

For them he created the plants and the animals,

Fowl and fish, so that they might eat...

He created for them rulers “in the egg”

[i.e., still in the archetypal realm]...

He created for them *beka* as a weapon...

God knows every name.”³⁸

For the image to be returned to its archetype, certain theurgic rites or their philosophical counterparts are required. Therefore the early Pythagorean philosophy (which appeared more than 1500 years after the *Instruction for King Merikare* was composed) aims at restoring the human being as an *imago dei* through the philosophical mysteries which consist in (1) ritual purification (*katharmos*), including purification through virtues and reason, (2) initiation, or transmission of *paradosis* (“tradition”, an esoteric doctrine) and power from the spiritual “father” to his “son”, and (3) the opening of the spiritual eye (due to the inner alchemical transformation of the soul) and mystical vision (*epopteia*) of truth, or union with the deity.

The *epopteia* is tantamount to the seeing of the true “form of a god” (*aru en neter: jr w n ntr*), or contemplating the Forms, speaking in Platonic terms. The Forms, or Ideas, are the archetypal Stars, and “stars” in the hieroglyphic script may stand for *neteru*, “gods” (Horapollon *Hier.* I.13). The word which means a star, *seba*, is phonetically the same as that which stands for teaching, learning, wisdom, consequently an “idea”, something that belongs to the realm of Intellect, to the supervision of Thoth. Like the knowledge of Thoth, Pythagorean knowledge is carefully and silently guarded in the breast (Porph. *Vita Pyth.*57). This knowledge concerns the

doctrine of intelligibles, world order, right living, punishment, purification, and rebirth which means attaining immortality at the level of Osiris-Ra, i.e., in the noetic realm of the gods, numbers, or divine lights.

The main Pythagorean hero in this pursuit of immortality and divine status is Heracles, the Phoenician Melqart. Therefore the imitation of Heracles stands as a paradigm for becoming like a god through initiation, spiritual labours, death and final *apotheosis*. For this reason Apollonius of Tyana modelled himself on the ideal image of Heracles, and Milo of Croton (according to the testimony of Diodorus: *Bibl. hist.*12.9.2-6), who himself belonged to the first generation of the Pythagorean school, is portrayed as dressed in the costume of Heracles and leading the people of Croton against their enemies in 510 B.C.

Heracles initially is the Babylonian Nergal, usually regarded as the husband of Ereskigal, queen of the underworld, and identified with Erra, Erragal, the god of pestilences and plagues. If he causes an ill, he may equally avert it, be it physical or spiritual illness. Therefore the amulets of Heracles *alexikakos*, the averter of evil, are used in everyday life. The Pythagorean hero Heracles no less trusts in his own strength, thus being an exemplar Philosopher, the paradigm of spiritual *askesis* and combat with passions. The mythical motifs and images, such as the combat with the lion and with the seven-headed snake clearly are of the Mesopotamian origin. The slayings of various monsters are modelled on (1) the slaying of Humbaba by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and (2) the motifs from the Babylonian cosmogonical epic *Enuma elish*.

The widespread iconographic image of the club-bearer Heracles, who is not only the paradigmatic hero of Pythagoreans, but (along with Socrates) the first teacher and archegete of the Cynic tradition, may be related to the Indian Pasupata teacher Lakulisa, the Lord of the Club. Heracles' lion skin recalls Shiva's leopard skin and similar skins of the Egyptian sem-priests. Like the Sumero-Akkadian Gilgamesh (*Bilga-mes*, "youth-old-man", a ruler of Uruk at circa 2600 B.C. (later divinized as a form of dying god Dumuzi and made a judge in the realm of the dead) he seeks to overcome the structures of destiny and death by force. Gilgamesh fails in overcoming his humanity, but finally becomes a model for sage and philosopher, a man with the task of harmonizing himself with the great rhythms of cosmic destiny and order, for he builds the wall of Uruk, the sacred enclosure of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse. This *temenos* and sacred building constitutes a well measured *mandala* which reflects the divine prototypes, "a measure of immortality" man can seek.

The walled city is a symbol of the universe and its microcosmic counterpart, Perfect Man. The seven wise men laid its foundations. It has a defensive magic circle for the seeds of life, thus preserving the cosmic order, holiness, and wisdom. In its role as an exemplar *politeia* this semi-imaginary city may symbolize the Pythagorean political philosophy.

As a ruler of Uruk Gilgamesh had the title *en* which united in his person (paradigmatic mask) two aspects of that office: magical and martial. The magical powers of the *en* are not limited to his ritual role, but continued to be effective after his death: from them emanate powers which sustain "tradition" (*paradosis*) and even make orchards, fields and pastures grow green and thrive. The same *ka*-power is attributed to the dead Egyptian pharaoh who becomes Osiris and repeats his divine destiny.

The Middle Platonist Plutarch (despite his conviction of the essential identity of Egyptian and Hellenic religions) did not accept the idea about the foreign origins of the Hellenic hero, Heracles, because neither Homer nor Hesiod ever mentioned an Egyptian or a Phoenician Heracles. Therefore Plutarch attacks the claim of Herodotus:

"He says that the Greeks learned about processions and national festivals from the Egyptians as well as the worship of the twelve gods; the very name of Dionysus, he says, was learnt from the Egyptians by Melampus, and he taught the rest of the Greeks; and the mysteries and secret rituals connected with Demeter were brought from Egypt by the daughters of Danaos... Nor is this the worst. He traces the ancestry of Heracles to Perseus and says Perseus, according to the Persian account, was an Assyrian; 'and the chiefs of the Dorians' he says, 'would be established as pure-blooded Egyptians...'; not only is he anxious to establish an Egyptian and a Phoenician Heracles; he says that our own Heracles was born after the other two..." (*De malig.*13-14).

Recent investigations have proved that Plutarch was wrong about Heracles. Even worse: Homer and Hesiod themselves faithfully followed the Eastern poetical, mythological, and generic paradigms, also incorporating the related ideas. Those who are the most challenging among the contemporary writers even try to establish as plausible the Egyptian derivation of Homer's name (or title), linking it with *hemuter* (*hmwt-t*), later Coptic *hmr*, meaning spell, act or actor of speech.³⁰ According to the Hellenic tradition itself, the so-called Dorian invasion was simply "the return of the Heraclids": the Dorian kings regarded themselves as divine descendants from Heracles through the Egyptian and Phoenician ancestors. The Egyptian "Heracles" is Montu (*Mntw*), the god of archery and war, pictured as a falcon-bull, or perhaps also Horus in his hypostasis of the avenger-warrior and hero who restores *maat*, the world order.

Like the Hellenic club-bearer Heracles, the Indian god Shiva of the Pashupatas has both the feline skin and the club. Therefore it is easy to see why on the Kushan coins the figure of Heracles is replaced by the similar figure of Shiva. On the other hand, Heracles is identified with Dionysus. For this reason to imitate Heracles is tantamount to imitating Dionysus and Shiva – to seek the divine identity through the Dionysian

frenzy, behaving like madmen or animals (for animals are wise: not only the ancient hunters, but even Ibn al-'Arabi talk about a certain "animal wisdom") often seeking after dishonour in the same manner as the Muslim dervishes and malamatis have sought.

According to Herodotus, "the so-called Orphic or Bacchic rites... are really Egyptian and Pythagorean" (*Hist.* II.81). In both cases the attaining of wisdom, salvation, and enlightenment is accomplished not through discursive reasoning and cultivation of sciences, but through the inner passage (philosophical ascent) leading upwards to the royal crown mounted on the sacred pillar, that is the central cosmic column or *axis mundi*. This essentially invisible macrocosmic and microcosmic axis is represented by the sacred tree, the spinal column of Osiris (*djed* erect pillar), the body of the goddess Nut (Heaven) or the theurgic ladder constructed by the rays of divine light. This ladder constitutes the way towards union (*henosis*).

G. Zuntz rejected such unity with a god, thinking it may have been acceptable in Egypt, but not in Greece: "no Greek cult of any kind ever aimed to achieve identity of god and worshipper, alive or dead".⁴⁰ E. Hornung rejected this aspiration for the Egyptians as well, claiming that they "never experienced a longing for union with the deity."⁴⁰ Such blind assertions stand contrary to the evidence provided by the texts and the sound metaphysics itself, showing how brilliant modern scholars try to project into the ancient mysteries their own prejudices and states of mind. They are adherents of a persistent mythology, so dear to all sorts of rationalists and functioning as if it were their main magic talisman – a mythology which holds that the ancient philosophy and the world itself are moving from so-called "irrationality", monkey-like backwardness, to "rationality" (which by now is elevated to the status of the scientific, schizophrenia, terrorism, and tyranny), i.e., from *mythos* to *logos*.

9. From Akhenaten to Thales

At the beginning of the second millenium B.C., under the influence of the increasing unification and organization of the Near Eastern states, every one of which was regarded as the mirror-image of the macrocosmic state of the gods or its prolongation, the priests and sages became increasingly concerned with questions of universal order and its ruling principle, of divine archetypes and their images, of the One and the Many. It would be incorrect to think that all these questions and subjects were not explored much earlier, but at that time they provoked and suggested slightly different answers, due to the monistic tendency of thought. The approached problems were investigated and dealt with by mythological

and theological means, taking mythology to the limits of its expressiveness. According to Thomas McEvelley:

"What would emerge from the dissolution of myth was the birth of philosophy – and its first great topic was Oneness".⁴²

The author is incorrect in speaking about "the dissolution of myth": it is more likely that myth simply changed the imaginal form of presentation. In a certain sense, *logos* (a rational discourse, speech, discursive reason) is only one particular instance of the great ontological Meta-myth (close to the Hindu *Maya*, the Egyptian *Heka*) which governs the whole realm of becoming, that of moving images and reflections. Within this overwhelmingly magic frame, which introduces something like a mythical fundament of ontology, *logos* simply means significant and meaningful speech (that which is in accord with the archetypal Ideas), the multi-dimensional human mind with all of its images, concepts, thoughts, feelings, and visions which can be symbolically expressed orally or in writing and has an open or hidden coherence. Therefore, as Ch. Evangelidou pointed out:

"In this broad sense, not only great Hellenic philosophers, but every human being, who is unimpaired and prepared to make careful and meaningful use of the innate *logos*, is naturally a logical and rational being, peripatetically speaking".⁴³

The Hellenic tradition insists that almost all of the first Greek philosophers, mystagogues, and scientists were pupils of the Egyptian priests. As Diodorus Siculus says, not only Orpheus took part in the feasts of the Dionysian (i.e., Osirian) mysteries in Egypt (*Bibl. hist.* I.23.2), but also Homer himself visited the country (*ibid.* I.69). Behind the Greek obsession with geometry (which Thales is said to have brought from Egypt) stand the Egyptian methods of measurement along with the mystical theory of forms and numbers which grounds the use of geometry in the demiurgic cosmogony, repeated after the annual flood, when the primordial hill, the noetic "stone" of light, emerges from the waters of Nun. Geometry and astronomy are the two disciplines to which the Greek authors most often refer, though Hellenic astronomy derives from Mesopotamia. Be that as it may, geometry and astronomy (both understood in the ancient sense of divine sciences) became pillars of an emerging cultural synthesis in Greece which marked the appearance of a distinct rational, philosophical and scientific discourse.

Theology is also mentioned among the things learned abroad, though the Egyptian priests were reluctant to reveal the mysteries to their guests. For example, Plato is credited with having learned geometry, theology and priestly knowledge in general during his stay in Egypt probably around 390 B.C. In his later works Plato praised Egyptian art and music, arguing for their adoption in Greece. For Plato, the return to the ideal ancient institutions means return to Egypt, as if the deeper one goes towards the

true and primordial Hellenic roots, the closer one approaches the sacred pharaonic Egypt. The tradition of Plato's theological studies in Egypt was so persistent through the whole of antiquity that it cannot be spurious. According to the geographer Strabo (about 64 B.C.-A.D.23):

"We saw there the buildings dedicated formerly to the lodging of priests; but this is not all: we were shown also the dwelling of Plato and Eudoxus, for Eudoxus accompanied Plato to this place [Heliopolis], and they established themselves here and both resided there 13 years in the society of the priests: the fact is affirmed by several authors. These priests, so profoundly versed in the knowledge of celestial phenomena, were at the same time mysterious people, seldom communicative, and it was only due to time and adroit management that Eudoxus and Plato were able to be initiated by them into several of their theoretical speculations. But these barbarians retained the best part in their own possession" (*Geogr.* XVII. I.29).

Some may argue that if "these barbarians" were really so lavish as to reveal "the best part" of their wisdom, Plato would have been a Neoplatonist more like Plotinus and Iamblichus than like Socrates, the insatiable seeker of quarrel. The Socratic attitude, however, may be regarded as an external veil (in accordance to the ancient traditions of "ritual quarrel" and dramatic performances of tricksters which conceal the inner layers of esoteric wisdom). Therefore it is not clear to what extent Plato is either "Egyptian", or "Neoplatonic", though one should remember that Platonism cannot be viewed as entirely "ahistorical." The different historical contexts dictate different rules of the game and reflect different kinds of mentalities, while the underlying metaphysical principles remain the same.

The undeserved philosophical hero of all modern histories, whose reputation of the "first philosopher" is largely based on rather distorted or misinterpreted records of Aristotle, is Thales of Miletus, also credited with visiting the priests and astronomers of Egypt. He learned geometry from the Egyptians, according to Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosoph.*43-24). Before approaching Thales and his controversial teachings, as they are attested to by later and not always credible writers, we should discuss the particular theological perspective which started the "disenchantment of the world" by rejecting sacramental symbolism (labelled as "idolatry"), theurgy and traditional mythological imagery.

In the 18th Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.) of the New Kingdom in Egypt, two "antipolytheistic", or rather monistically oriented, but essentially different movements appeared: (1) the so-called New Solar theology which was attested before Amenophis IV and continued after his fall into the Late Period, and (2) the Amarna theology of Amenophis IV (Akhenaten) who ruled 1352-1338 B.C.

The solar monotheism, suddenly introduced by Akhenaten, the heretic pharaoh, restructured the world and reduced it to a restricted human point of view. In traditional Egyptian imagery both macrocosm and microcosm were regarded from the divine point of view: the observing human eye was almost excluded and the magnificent sacred spectacles of the cosmic state along with its permanent archetypes and unending dynamic processes were viewed not from below, but from above and from within. The reality was depicted as the sum (diversity in unity) of divine actions which constitute metaphysical constellations at different levels of being. Not the visible phenomena (separated from the sacred prototypes), but their inner meaning was the main concern of the Egyptian priests. Their texts describe certain imaginal and noetic topographies which no average human observer has ever seen here below, because "it is not just the visible, but the intelligible world that counts as reality".⁴⁴

During the short revolutionary period introduced by Akhenaten everything was turned upside down. The multi-dimensional theophany (the pantheon of *neteru*) and mythical imagery which emphasized transcendence were replaced by visible reality. At the same time metaphysical concepts of hidden meaning and the archetypal picture of divine semiotics were replaced by physical concepts of function and causality. Akhenaten's monotheism, centred on the optics of Aten, the visible solar body, eliminated the metaphysical notion of the "first time" (*tep sepi*), crucial for theurgic rites, temple liturgies, and mystical ascent. The Egyptian concept of *tep sepi*, to which corresponds the later Hebrew *be-re-shit*, "in the beginning", means the principal beginning, the emergence of the divine Intellect, Atum-Ra, along with *kosmos noetos*, and this beginning transcends the sensible realm, being "everywhere and nowhere". As the eternal presence it constitutes the vertical henadic axis of return to the source and liberation.

Instead, Akhenaten's world-view is based on the sensual apprehension of time. Spatial visibility is regarded as the dimension of physical light. When the eternal presence (usually touched through the hieratic rites and intellection) is replaced by past and future, then cosmogony becomes embryology and God himself begins to be equated with time which unfolds everything. This is the exact inversion of traditional Egyptian doctrines.

In the new established monotheism, God is revealed to the physical eye as the visible sun disk, but hidden from the heart, except the heart of Akhenaten, who becomes the sole intermediary between his Aten and disenchanted reality here below. Contrary to this innovation, the theology of the New Kingdom emphasized the necessity of "taking God into one's heart": the possibility of mystical knowledge is open to every pious man and woman. Although this knowledge is carried in the depths of the heart, God himself is invisible. Therefore seeing God is possible only for those

transformed souls who are “dead” both in the literal and the initiatory sense. Only the soul (*ba*) who passed through the Osirian transformations in the Duat and is turned into the luminous spirit (*akh*) can meet the gods face to face and itself become a god.

In Amarna religion, however, although knowledge of God is reserved for the pharaoh only, the ability to see God is granted to everybody. But this God is no longer the transcendent Amun, the hidden God, whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods, but the visible body of the sun, the One as the rational cause of material generation. Claiming that the meaning of the world (or its “scientific truth”) is only accessible to the heart of the sole expert, Akhenaten himself (the prototype of the modern scientific experts who promote the same claims), is virtually saying that reality has no mysterious divine meaning at all. Therefore, as J. Assmann pointed out, in the Amarna period explanation (scientific search for causality) replaced interpretation (symbolic hermeneutics):

“The more there is that can be explained, the less there is to interpret. Thus we may perhaps say that, instead of founding a new religion, Akhenaten was the first to find a way out of religion”.⁴⁵

Though he did away with Osiris and the ritualized and temple-like Osirian Netherworld (which functioned as an alchemical vessel of transformation), the concept of the immortality of the soul remained intact. However, Akhenaten rejected the traditional pantheon, and destroyed or damaged temples, statues, and images of the Egyptian gods in the name of Aten who is not even a personal God in the theistic sense, but represents Nature. Therefore the visible world is nothing but an endless becoming, a transformation (*keheperu*) of God-Nature himself. The term *keheper* usually means manifestation, coming forth from the hidden dimension, something invisible becoming visible. But in the Amarna texts the meaning of this term is altered, because Akhenaten did away with any idea of invisibility or hiddenness. There is nothing but nature, and this nature ought to be investigated, held in wonder, praised and lived in. In sharp contrast to this monotheistic doctrine, the traditional Egyptian world is not “nature”, because it is not natural.⁴⁶

In the Amarna religion, God is not regarded as a jealous lord who requires total loyalty as in the early Biblical tradition which in many respects is the heir and rather indirect prolongation of Akhenaten’s monotheism. Though the new theological and physiological perspective, introduced with the utmost compulsion and terror, was experienced by the pharaoh as a religious revelation, it is not, strictly speaking, a theology of will. Instead of pious servanthood, knowledge and truth are emphasized, though they are privileges of the king. The clear-cut distinction between true and false in matters of religion (inseparable from state policies) marked the idea of orthodoxy with its intolerance of any

beliefs which deviated from or opposed the single doctrine regarded as unquestionably true.

In the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, all theologies, cosmogonies and their related divine names were translatable. They were not absolute at the level of myth and polysemantic hermeneutics. Therefore not the question of orthodoxy, but that of orthopraxis, the correct performance of sacred rites, based on the distinction between right and wrong in human action was thought to be important. If the Amarna religion had existed for longer, it would surely have produced a corpus of canonical sacred texts. The fall of Akhenaten’s rule prevented a shift from rites and “idols” to scriptures, as happened in the later Semitic monotheisms. However, Akhenaten’s revolution (though not long-lasting) marks a period which is described by modern scholarship as the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

It is no mere accident that both Homer’s epics (which probably belong to the late Assyrian period, 8th century B.C.) and the Biblical Exodus (the mythical and symbolic narration of Moses, who is the Egyptian priest Osarseph in Manetho’s account of the departure from Egypt), are traditionally set in the 13th century B.C. After the end of the Egyptian New Kingdom (the XX Dynasty lasted until about 1069 B.C.) and the collapse of political unity, the theology of will and personal piety accelerated in Egypt, officially proclaimed by Herihor. This high priest of Amun pronounced the age of “rebirth” and established a new representative theocracy, based on the oracles of Amun.

However, the unifying idea in this period of ancient history was that of a world-state, programmatically embodied by the neo-Assyrian empire, followed by the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. In such complicated conditions the Biblical tradition of the Chosen People (the tribal myth of promised success and world dominion) is developed. According to J. Assmann:

“The report of the Exodus stems from an authentic account of a sojourn in and departure from Egypt, but those events were experienced not by the Hebrews but by the Hyksos, whose traditions the Hebrews inherited. Israel elevated these transmissions to the rank of a normative past and made them an integral part of its cultural memory only at a time when the Hebrews as a people needed to draw on this past to master their present. That ‘present’, however, could not have predated the first appearance of the prophets. Hence, the literary version of the Joseph legend, the Exodus, and all other biblical references to Egypt are derived from Late Period Egypt, not the Egypt of the Bronze Age, in which the version known to us sets the Exodus”.⁴⁷

The transformed and reinterpreted legacy of Akhenaten is also partly inherited by the Hebrews who regarded Egypt as a sort of mythological monster and a depository of the hated idolatry. The Egyptians’ and

Hebrews' abhorrence of each other was intense and permanent, perhaps due to the legacy of ideas and memories inherited by the Hebrews from the expelled Hyksos and the banished Akhenaten's rebels. Even in the time of the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno, the partisan of the spurious "Egyptian religion", regarded the Jews with contempt.⁴⁸

The religion of the enlightener-iconoclast Akhenaten was a puritanical cult devoid of theurgy and metaphysical symbolism, restricting the knowable universe to the world accessible to the senses. Therefore J. Assmann argues that "as a thinker, Akhenaten stands at the head of a line of inquiry that was taken up seven hundred years later by the Milesian philosophers of nature with their search for the one all-informing principle..."⁴⁹

Of course, this line of inquiry differs considerably from the Biblical theology of the divine will which arranges and plots world history (centred on the moral and political adventures of his chosen tribe) according to the unpredictable intentions, plans, and wishes of Yahweh, the jealous personal God of Israel.

10. Thales and the Egyptian Myths

Being partly of Phoenician background, Thales lived in Miletus from 624 to 545 B.C. Until his middle age, Miletus was a part of the Lydian empire, ruled from the court at Sardes, and Thales himself was a member of this "Oriental" power structure, living with the ruler of Miletus at his court and visiting Egypt, presumably under the royal wardship. His assertions recall many Egyptian texts and his main ideas are no more than the Egyptian mythological and theological motifs released from their initial theological contexts for the purpose of philosophical *paideia* among the less educated Milesians.

Ever since the Enlightenment modern scholars have tried to convince us that mythology does not satisfy the desire to know the causes of things. They suppose that the only positive function of myths and traditional tales is to make us feel at home in the world, as if sacred myths were devoid of any metaphysical content and serve simply as a pleasant intoxicant. However, it is incorrect to maintain that myth is related to the demythologized rationalistic account as opinion (*doxa*) is related to scientific knowledge (*episteme*). To regard "wonder", from which philosophy begins, as ignorance and as the confusion which arises when the mythical world-view is radically questioned, is to fail completely in the understanding of myth and its symbolic and transformative power. The variety of world-representations found in different religious-mythological traditions are providential veils, not arbitrary fictions which would compel poor Thales to reject all of them in the name of one single "physiological"

world-picture, naively held to be the only one which was both true and adequate. The many different world-representations cannot prevent the apprehension (through direct intellectual intuition or contemplation of symbols) of the invisible realm beyond all representations.

To say that Thales moves "beyond representations to the underlying, intelligible reality",⁵⁰ amounts to saying that the creators of mythological world pictures were extremely ignorant and unable to comprehend pure noetic reality which transcends all words and images. However, the symbolism of ancient hieratic myths and rituals shows this opinion to be both shaky and ungrounded. If Thales really tried to strip away the stage and see the playwright, he was doing such deconstruction either in search of the transcendent ruling principle (say, Amun or Zeus), or for desacralized and impersonal "nature", as it is understood by the moderns. Since the trivial concept of "nature" (and the related "ontology of death", to use the term coined by Hans Jonas, for if matter is the primary reality then life itself could only be a "disease of matter"⁵¹) is rather a recent invention, it seems that Thales ultimately regarded reality as theophany, the fabric of the ordered and beautiful cosmic unity, that is, the magnificent divine mask through which shines the essential light of first principles, namely, the gods.

According to Thales, "the world is the most beautiful (*kalliston kosmos*), for it is God's making (*poiema gar theon*). Something intangible that permeates all things is operating within or through the visible cosmos, and this principle cannot be reduced to a simple material substratum. Hence, a plenitude of gods (*theoi*) is hidden behind the cosmic veils. But in this respect Thales says nothing new, nothing that had not been already and better said by the Egyptians and other ancient nations a long time before. The world is a living being, a divine body (like a statue) in need of the animating principle, the soul and the spirit which appear as the descending and ascending life-giving forces. According to Aristotle:

"And some say that it (soul) is intermingled in the universe, for which reason, perhaps, Thales also thought that all things are full of gods" (*pantaplere theon einai: De anima* 411a7).

This doctrine is the same as the Egyptian one: the gods (*neteri*), who bring life (*ankh*) and animate all bodies, are manifestations (*keheperu*) of the supreme transcendent Principle and constitute the different levels of reality. For Greeks, the gods (*theoi*) are ever-living and everlasting principles. Though supporting evidence is insufficient, W. K. C. Guthrie boldly asserts that Thales "rejected the anthropomorphic deities of popular religion" while retaining its language to the extent of saying that the whole world is filled with gods.⁵² It is a commonly held modern mistake to assume that the ancient Hellenes really worshipped the "anthropomorphic gods" conceived in the image of human beings. As J. P. Vernant clearly demonstrated, rather the opposite is true:

"In all its active aspects, in all the compounds of its physical and psychological dynamism, the human body reflects the divine models as the inexhaustible source of a vital energy when, for an instant, the brilliance of divinity happens to fall on a mortal creature, illuminating him, as in a fleeting glow, with a little of that splendor that always clothes the body of a god".⁵³

To think that Hesiodic genealogies or Homeric accounts were accepted at face value by the Hellenes, even by the initiates and the educated minority, would be to indulge oneself in rationalistic naiveté instead of trying to explore the metaphysical exegesis and symbolism of the sacred. Despite the supposed shift of traditional thought, inaugurated by Thales, it is evident that the gods retained their force. Perhaps his interpretation of unity and nature (if one is ready to believe poor testimonies) in certain respects followed Akhenaten's line of inquiry, but it is difficult to accept, as W. K. C. Guthrie argues, that "at the conscious level, he (Thales) had made a deliberate break with mythology and was seeking a rational account".⁵⁴

Due to this "deliberate break" Thales is regarded as the "first philosopher" in the contemporary Western sense, though, unlike the modern "research fellow", the genuine ancient philosopher is a noetically enlightened person who follows his lived *philosophia* as a model way of living and dying, or of becoming "like a god". For him there is not any sharp division between the inspired sacred myth (which requires an esoteric interpretation) and logical accounts or discursive reasonings (*logos*), between *sophia* (revealed or inherited wisdom) and *theoria* (contemplation), or between philosophy as a commentary on certain privileged canonical texts and philosophy as an individual dialectical inquiry.

However, most contemporary Western scholars, shaped by the reality-distorting and tendentious modern *paideia*, insist that Thales wished to speak according to reason (*logos*), and his choice of reason over imagination marks the turning point in the history of thought. Such a point of view itself constitutes a "mythology" of sorts.

When Aristotle mentioned Thales, "the founder of this type of philosophy" (*alla Thales men ho tes toiautes archegos philosophias: Metaph.983b6*), arguing that water is the original source of all things, he actually means not of all philosophy, but only of "this type" and does not say that Thales' principle (*arche*) or natural substance, namely water, is some material fluid brought from the neighbouring lake. This water may equally be understood as the ineffable primordial "water" (symbol of the One) which transcends even the noetic realm of Intellect. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven have already raised a doubt regarding the Aristotelian interpretation:

"Are we justified in inferring from the Peripatetic identification of Thales' water as 'material principle' that he believed the visible, developed

world to be water in some way? This is the normal interpretation of Thales; but it is important to realize that it rests ultimately on the Aristotelian formulation, and that Aristotle, knowing little about Thales, and that indirectly, would surely have found the mere information that the world originated from water sufficient justification for saying that water was Thales' material principle or *arche*, with the implication that water is a persistent substrate".⁵⁵

It is more likely that Thales had in mind the Egyptian Nun, trying to translate the ancient metaphysics into the slightly different, but no less "mythical" language of the universal and divine *phusis* which is not necessarily a material substrate. According to F. Schuon, "when Thales saw in 'water' the origin of all things, it is as certain as can be that Universal Substance - the Prakriti of the Hindus - is in question and not the sensible element".⁵⁶ But if Thales himself was partly neglected and misunderstood by subsequent generations, can one boldly assert (as the contemporary scholar does) the following statement:

"With Thales we are encountering, possibly for the first time in Western thought, a theology divested of provincial beliefs and poetic fabrications. Thales does not speak of the cultic god of the Milesians among whom he lived, the pantheon of the Egyptians whom he visited, or the splendid fictions of Hesiod which he had very likely heard at celebrations".⁵⁷

Putting aside the disturbing question in what sense Thales is a representative of "Western" thought, or to what extent modern Westerners (moulded by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and by Romanticism) have an exclusive right to the inheritance of ancient Mediterranean traditions, it is not necessary to speak of the Egyptian pantheon (*psdt: Ennead, the gods*) in order to follow one or another line of an esoteric exegesis, reading the meaning beyond the iconographical structure of images and symbols. The only danger is to misunderstand the essence of cosmogonical myth and to view the "ineffable" (the first Principle) as the "natural" (the substantial ground of all material manifestation) and thus to "mythologize" in a crude and opaque "scientific" manner.

The concept of the primordial Waters (Nun as the ineffable God, the Neoplatonic One) reflects the Egyptian cosmogonical picture of the noetic universe as a sphere of the divine light or the life-giving air (which stands for the spirit of Shu). Nun, or Nu, may also mean "inert" in the sense of a certain unspeakable condition existing before the manifestation of Being represented as the rising of the noetic Sun (Atum-Ra), i.e., before an appearance (*keheper*) of the archetypal pleroma and all subsequent irradiations. The hidden, dark, and inert state of the ultimate divine transcendence is described in the *Coffin Texts*.

“I am the Waters (*nm*)
 I am inert” (*njn*: CT V.312)
 “I am a baby (*nm*) of his mother.
 I am a child, son of Hathor.
 I am an inert one (*njn*) in the Waters” (*nm*: CT IV.182)

In the ordered universe, understood as theophany and the interplay of different divine forces, Waters are represented by the Osirian Netherworld, Duat, and the Nile: the psychic “waters” flow through the Duat inside the goddess Nut’s body (her name, *nwt*, being a feminine adjective meaning “of the Waters”) and the Sun god Ra (equivalent to *Nous*) is pictured travelling on them at night.

Since Thales studied philosophy in Egypt, his doctrines surely reflected the Egyptian prototypes. According to the Hellenic tradition:

“Thales came to Miletus an old man having spent a long time studying philosophy in Egypt” (Aetius 1.3.1).

“They (Egyptians) say that the sun and moon do not use chariots, but boats in which to sail round in their courses; and by this they intimate that the nourishment and origin of these heavenly bodies is from moisture. They think also that Homer, like Thales, had gained his knowledge from the Egyptians, when he postulated water as the source and origin of all things (*budor archen hapanton kai genesin titbesthai*); for, according to them, Oceanus is Osiris, and Tethys is Isis, since she is the kindly nurse and provider for all things. In fact, the Greeks call emission *apousia* and coition *sunousia*, and the son (*huios*) from water (*budor*) and rain (*busai*); Dionysus also they call Hues since he is lord of the nature of moisture; and he is no other than Osiris.

“... They call him up out of the water by the sound of trumpets, at the same time casting into the depths a lamb as an offering to the Keeper of the Gate. The trumpets they conceal in Bacchic wands, as Socrates has stated in his treatise on *The Holy Ones*. Furthermore, the tales regarding the Titans and rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regeneration (*tais anabiosesi kai palingenesiais*)...”

“Not only the Nile, but every form of moisture they call simply the effusion of Osiris; and in their holy rites the water jar in honour of the god heads the procession. And by the picture of a rush they represent a king and the southern region of the world, and the rush is interpreted to mean the watering and fructifying of all things, and in its nature it seems to bear some resemblance to the generative member” (*De Iside et Osiride* 34-36).

The Hellenic philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle, constantly refer to the Iliad of Homer where Ocean is called the father of Gods (*Il. XIV.201*) and the source of all beings (*Okeanou hos per genesis, pantesi tetuknai*: *ibid. XIV.246*). Julian even equated Helios, the father of the

seasons (who, being “the genuine son of the Good”, “is One and proceeds from one God, even from the noetic cosmos which is itself One”: *Or. IV*, p.386), with Oceanus, “the lord of two-fold substance”, saying as follows:

“My meaning here is not obscure, is it, seeing that before my time Homer said the same things? ‘Oceanus who is the father of all things’: yes, for mortals and for the blessed gods too, as he himself would say; and what he says is true. For there is no single thing in the whole of existence that is not the offspring of the substance of Oceanus (*tes Okenou pepbuken onsias ekgonon*: *Or. IV*, pp.404-405 Wright).

It seems, as Julian himself suggests, that such doctrines (or their proper interpretations) are kept in silence, because ultimately they have been “taught by the gods or mighty daimons” to “the priests of the mysteries” (*ibid.*).

Perhaps the only difference between Homer and Thales is that while Thales, like other so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers, regarded his own dogmatic assertions about the ultimate nature of the universe as an accurate (but no less “mythical”) account approved by reason (though even in this respect we cannot be sure), Homer (or several singers who partly followed examples of the Akkadian and Ugaritic epic traditions) playfully presented the same teaching using poetical and mythological images. Therefore Ch. Evangeliou rightly remarks that “Homer’s poetry would have the advantage over the dryness of philosophic prose”.⁵⁸ And the Egyptian myths, used in the sacred rites, would have a clear advantage over Homeric “literature” which provoked such a turmoil in the minds of those purists and “enlighteners” who were unable either to understand the logic of a sacred myth, or to delight in epic poetry, i.e., to enjoy its conventional and heroic aesthetics.

11. Water as Metaphysical Principle and Divine Substance

Aristotle’s attempt to explain why Thales chose *budros* (water) as the first principle (*Metaph.983b ff*) is incorrect, because this principle is not regarded by Thales in the manner of Aristotelian prime matter, but represents a certain permeating and ineffable identity that unites all instances of theophany. This is the permanent essence of divinity along with the Spirit, or Life, that is diffused through all created or manifested things. It is more likely that Thales is not a materialist who stands at the beginning of natural philosophy (as Aristotle and his ancient and modern followers understand it), but may be regarded as a metaphysician who used symbolic language to show that divine Life, as a genuine creative force, is diffused through the ordered cosmos which is ensouled and “full of gods”. In fact, this perspective is close to the Egyptian doctrine of

Water, Life, and Order, already attested in the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.):

“O you Eight Infinite Ones – an infinite number of Infinite Ones (*behen beh*),

Who encircle the Sky with your arms,
Who draw together the Sky and Horizon of Geb.
Shu has given you birth out of the Flood, out of the Waters,
Out of *tenemu*, out of the Darkness,
That he might allot you to Geb and Nut,
While Shu is Eternal Recurrence (*nebeh*) and Tefnut is Eternal
Sameness (*djet*).

I am the *ba* of Shu who is at the Great Flood,
Who goes up to the sky as he wishes,
Who goes down to the earth as his heart decides.
Come in excitement to greet the god in me.
I am Shu, child of Atum.
My clothing is the air of life” (CT 80.1-13)

“Then said Atum: My living daughter is Tefnut.
She will exist with her brother Shu.
Life (*ankh*) is his identity,
Order (*maat*) is her identity,
I shall live with my twins, my fledglings,
With me in their midst –
One of them at my back,
One of them in my belly...
It is my son who shall live,
He whom I begot in my identity,
For he has learned how to enliven the one in the egg, in the respective
womb,

As mankind, that emerged from my Eye –
[the Eye] that I sent forth when I
was alone with the Waters, in inertness,
Not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,
Before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist;
Before the Lotus has been tied together, on which I could sit”
(CT 80.30-50)

“I am Life (*ankh*), for whom the length of the Sky
and the breath of Geb were made:
It is from me that presented offerings emerge for the god”
(CT 80.91-92 Allen).

Shu, identified as the noetic Life (Atum’s Light and Spirit), is the son of Atum who emerges from the Waters (Nun), or the Flood (*behu*). Hence, Atum, Shu, and Tefnut constitute the first intelligible triad. The Life is diffused at different ontological levels of reality: Shu lives in the transcendent realm of Atum, but when sent down “to the Isle of Fires”, his identity becomes Osiris, son of Geb. Finally, he reaches the material world and his function here is to “make firm his flesh every day”, to enliven all creatures through his mouth, putting life in their nostrils: falcons, jackals, pigs, crocodiles, fish and “the crawling things on Geb’s back”. The initiate (the “dead” person, *ba* separated from *kebat*) identifies himself with Shu in his animating and life-giving aspect. Shu’s sister Tefnut stands for the archetypal intelligence, order, truth, and justice, the right measure for the Life’s emanation.

As the above quoted texts clearly show, the archetypal Ogdoad (constituted by the eight proto-noetic and ineffable principles) is already contained “without place” in the potentiality of the hidden Monad. And since Atum (*j.tmw*) is a form of the verb *tem* (*tm*), meaning both “not be” and “complete, finish”, Atum means both “non-being” (which transcends being as the Beyond-Being, Nun-Atum) and “plenitude of noetic being”, the overwhelming fullness, *pleroma* of divine lights and intellects (Atum-Ra). He emerges from the depths of Nun as the primordial Lotus, the Holy City of Ra (Heliopolis), i.e., as the supreme intelligible principle (the Parmenidian and Neoplatonic One-Many) which “gave birth to Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis, when he was one and developed into three” (CT 80.75-76).

In the light of Egyptian theological accounts, it seems that Thales, far from being a materialist reductionist, posited Water as the first principle from which stems the increasing multiplicity of the gods whose invisible presence sustains the measured arrangement of visible things under the aegis of unity. Thus the Water produces living Forms, and this Water, far from being lifeless “matter”, is the unspeakable *theos*, the Father of the gods who transcends all Forms and all noetic Lights, and is therefore symbolized by the dark and inert Water.

The ineffable principle of manifestation, or the living divine substance, having its immanent aspect and called *hudros* by Thales, is surely not a “material” cause. Likewise the ancient Egyptian theologies, while using material symbols for the immaterial realities, discuss not a “material” causality (as some contemporary scholars maintain) when they speak about the Waters, the Primeval Mound, Heliopolis, the First Sunrise, Atum and his archetypal Ennead which developed from the initial Monad. Instead, their sophisticated and paradoxical accounts, using carefully selected symbols and images, conceptualize the ultimate Cause of all creation which lies outside creation and is “hidden from the gods”, since “no god knows His (i.e., Amun’s who is hidden in the depths of Nun) true

appearance". Hence, "water" is an adequate symbol for the supreme One, the transcendent and infinite source of Being, envisaged as a swampy mire which contains the eight initial proto-noetic paradigms of the intelligible cosmos (*kosmos noetos* of the later Platonic tradition).

Aristotle was very hasty and without scruples in his attempt to reduce the "divine substances" of the early Hellenic theologians into the low status of mere material causes, though these "substances" are metaphysical symbols which stand for the supreme gods and the initial principles, both transcendent and immanent. When this unjust and intended misinterpretation is accomplished, the theologians (including Thales), labelled as the "Pre-socratics" by modern rationalists (who are lovers of historical fictions and rigid classifications), are criticized as incapable of making the correct use of these "material causes" which they have proclaimed as the material substratum and the ultimate source of reality. Therefore one should agree with the assertion made by R. K. Hack:

"If we bear in mind that the so-called physical doctrines of the Ionian philosophers were really to a great extent metaphysical – that is to say, these Greek philosophers believed that they were investigating, and had discovered, the nature of ultimate divine reality, and not of mere outer appearances – we shall be able to understand why the Ionians named one substance after another as the divine source of the universe".⁵⁹

R. K. Hack argues that when Thales proclaimed Water as the living and divine substance of the universe (we should add: the manifestation of Shu, the son of Atum, who himself stems from the Waters in more sophisticated Egyptian accounts), his main novelty lies in identifying the supreme divine power with the cosmogenetic divine substance, while introducing a non-anthropomorphic divinity.⁶⁰ This assertion cannot be accepted without reservations and is not correct, if viewed not against the traditional Hellenic "literature" – the poetic accounts of the Olympian gods – but in the light of Egyptian theology and metaphysics which cannot be accused of a lush anthropomorphism at all.

It operated with a strictly coherent system of symbolism open to several meanings at different levels of interpretation. The ambivalent Egyptian symbolism cannot be properly understood without considering all aspects of the divine iconography. This includes visible forms and the entire field of semantic associations. Also the countless puns and their magic function must always be taken into consideration. To see here something like the sadly famous "anthropomorphism" of the Hellenic epics (which are inspired poetry, anyway) is to be surprisingly naïve and contemptuous of the ancient myths and all symbolic modes of thought.

12. Metaphysical Meaning of Ancient Mythologies

The new wave of metaphysical, cosmological, and physiological inquiry which started in the 6th century B.C. among philosophers and sophists (at first there was no real difference between them) strengthened the intriguing opinion that the myths and hieratic accounts were unable to deal with reality without introducing certain fatal distortions and deformations. Being unable to understand the deeper symbolic meaning of ancient mythologies or to put the acquired fragments of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom into an integral and meaningful unity, they turned against their own lavish poetic tradition (also regarded at its face value) and argued for the need of a pure "scientific" theology and for a genuine worship of the invisible principles based on a proper comprehension of the divine order.

So it seems that "irrational" and often scandalous myths must be neglected in favour of the "semi-esoteric" *logos* which belongs to a few specialists in scientific knowledge. However, it may be that, as the remark made by Socrates at the end of Plato's *Theaetetus* suggests, knowledge as a rational account (*logos*) is also unattainable. Socrates says to *Theaetetus*, the young pupil of the distinguished mathematician Theodorus:

"So, *Theaetetus*, neither perception, nor true belief, nor the addition of an 'account' to true belief can be knowledge" (*Theaet.*210b).

But, as a consequence of dialectical scrutiny, even if *Theaetetus* remains barren, he cannot any more fancy he knows what he does not know:

"For that, and no more, is all that my art can effect; nor have I any of that knowledge possessed by all the great and admirable men of our own day or of the past. But this midwife's art is a gift from heaven; my mother had it for women, and I for young men of a generous spirit and for all in whom beauty dwells" (*ibid.*, 210c).

Though Rosemary Desjardin argues that *Theaetetus*' amazement is philosophical wonder "because such reflection opens him up to the philosophical issues" in searching for a solution to problems of irrationality (the incompatibility of incommensurables),⁶¹ one may suspect that this "feeling of wonder" (*to thaumazein*) which shows "that you are a philosopher" (*Theaet.*155d), is really a wonder induced by facing the mystery of the divine intelligence and the ineffable Waters.

Accordingly, "true knowledge" is not a property of human beings as mortals, be they scientists or rationalists, and cannot be acquired by discursive thought, because it concerns the intelligible realm and objects of the divine order which can only be grasped by the transformed soul through noetic insight and epoptic vision akin to revelation or mystical union with the divine.

Contrary to the ancient traditions of wisdom, many contemporary thinkers in their unending quest for certainty turn not to the sacred myths, revelations, and symbols which lead to integral piety, illumination, and inner vision, but to trivialized mathematics and epistemology which cannot transcend the realm of discursive reasoning and secular pragmatism. Therefore the main area of philosophy (by this term meaning an academic discourse) is that of epistemology: the pursuit of *scientia* (instead of *sapientia*) “turned out to be a major pastime for the modern philosophers” who “regard Plato’s *Theaetetus* (perhaps along with the *Meno* and Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*), as containing the primal sacred doctrines (*dissoi logoi*) revered by the devotees of modern epistemology”.⁶² This rather ironical remark made by Daryl L. Hale is aimed at the endemic failure of contemporary thinkers to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. They take their only task to be that of elucidating the conditions of human knowledge, classifying countless opinions and instigating sceptical attacks on those who disagree with their premises based on barren secular rationalism and humanism.

Seeing from this special standpoint, the earliest Greek philosophers (starting with Thales) divorced philosophy from mythology, poetry, and traditional genealogies. Since “reason sought and found truth that was universal”, the earlier age of “mythology and superstition” was replaced by the age of science, according to F. M. Cornford.⁶³ This discovery of Nature is accompanied by the tacit denial of the distinction between experience and revelation:

“The conception of Nature is extended to incorporate what had been the domain of the supernatural. The supernatural, as fashioned by mythology, simply disappears; and all that really exists is natural.”⁶⁴

At present we are not so sure about such straightforward conclusions. And even if the essence of Ionian philosophy and science (which is credited with denying the spiritual, as distinct from the material) is not misconceived and misunderstood, i.e., if Thales really introduced something new – the so-called “Western science” as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – nevertheless, this idea of the crucial turning-point is fabricated and maintained with some infantile enthusiasm and magic hyperbolism.

According to Rene Guenon, in the 6th century B.C., commonly viewed as the starting point of “classical” civilization, something of which there had been no previous example appeared: that special form of thought which acquired and retained the name of “philosophy”.⁶⁵ R. Guenon recognizes that this word can be regarded in a quite legitimate sense, because it is simply an initial disposition required for the attainment of wisdom. Only the perversions which substitute “philosophy” for “wisdom”, taking the transitional stage for the end itself and introducing a “pretended wisdom” which is purely human and entirely of the rational order, should be neglected.⁶⁶

However, R. Guenon follows too closely the assumptions of those whom he is ready to criticize, thus assuming that *philosophia* really begins with Thales. It is more likely that Thales simply readapted and reinterpreted (perhaps, in a one-sided fashion) some aspects of the Egyptian *mere rekhu* (*mre rhu*), the “love of knowledge”, “striving for wisdom”, i.e., “philosophy” in its etymological and anagogic sense whose archetypal guide and divine patron was Thoth (*dhwtj*: Djehuty). This divine scribe and demiurgic *Logos*, the heart and tongue of Ra, himself represents and embodies the beginning, the middle, and the end of the way towards the noetic identity of *ba* (the winged soul), since every wise man ultimately is united with Thoth and his energies.

The Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists inherited and accepted the tradition which presented Plato as a disciple of Hermes Trismegistus – that means not as a historical person but as an archetype which stands for all wisdom preserved and practised in the Thothian Houses of Life. So, if certain Platonic doctrines are the same as those of Hermes, it is obviously because Plato had copied Hermes, not the other way round. As Zosimus of Panopolis asserted in his alchemical work *On apparatus and furnaces*, the Egyptian priest Bitys (or Bitos), the thrice-great (*trismegas*) Plato and the infinitely great (*meriomegas*) Hermes are the authors of the mysterious tablet (*pinax*) which views Thouthos (Thoth) as “the first man, the interpreter of all that exists and the giver of names to all corporeal beings”.⁶⁷

It follows that Bitys, Hermes and Plato stand on the same spiritual level, represent the same tradition, and profess the same philosophical and theurgical teachings. Such opinion was firmly maintained by the hellenized Egyptians and late Hellenic philosophers themselves. Hence, according to Proclus, Plato derived some of his doctrines from the Egyptian Hermes, for example, the teaching about matter:

“Orpheus produces matter from the first hypostasis of intelligibles. For there perpetual darkness and the infinite subsist. And these indeed, subsist there in a way more excellent than the successive orders of being. In matter however, the unilluminated and the infinite are inherent, through indigence, and not according to a transcendency, but a deficiency of power. Moreover, the tradition of the Egyptians (*be ton Aiguption paradosis*) asserts the same thing concerning it. For the divine Iamblichus relates that according to Hermes materiality is produced from essentiality (*ek tes ousiotetos ten buloteta paragesthai bouletai*). It is probable therefore, that Plato derived from Hermes an opinion of this kind concerning matter” (*In Tim.* I.386 Taylor).

Since philosophy is a pursuit of *ba*, inseparable from its destiny, namely, descent and ascent, manifestation and reintegration (through the *paideia* of cosmic life: embodiment and disembodiment), Proclus in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* (III.298.27-29/330) discusses three *ochemata*, or vehicles, of the soul: (1) the first *ochema* which is natural to the soul and puts it inside the manifested reality; (2) the second one which

makes the soul a citizen of the world of becoming; (3) the third one that is like a shell and makes the soul an inhabitant of the material world.

This division is analogous to the hierarchy of *akh*, *ba* (in a narrow sense of the soul separated from the mortal body, *khat*), and *ka* of the Egyptians. In the ontological hierarchy of being and the related esoteric path of ascent, *ka* represents the source of a person's vital energy connected with the ancestral spirits and the pharaoh whose *ka*, as the vital power of Horus, permeates the whole country and is felt as a presence in every heart. The concept of *ba* goes beyond the level of life energy, fertility, and well-being. *Ba* (the after-death consciousness, also revealed for the initiates) is the "soul" (or manifestation) moving between Earth and Heaven, though its real home is the intelligible realm, *kosmos noetos*. According to the Old Kingdom sage Ptahotep: "The wise feed their *ba* with what endures".⁶⁸ As the vehicle of ascent, it is depicted as the human-headed falcon or the jabiru bird.

The awakening of *ba* is a consequence of becoming aware of the physical body as a corpse. It means the soul must be "philosophically" (through initiation, contemplation, and death) separated from the body. When the ascending *ba* "comes to the places it knows, it does not miss its former path".⁶⁹ The realm through which *ba* moves belongs to Osiris (it is the intermediate *mundus imaginalis*, Duat, the body of Nut-Hathor, or the World Soul), while the realm of *akh* is that of Ra. Therefore *akh* means intelligence, spiritual light, "the shining one", represented by the crested ibis, the symbol of Thoth. The references to the *akh* are associated with the soul's homecoming, return to the divine source, the end of philosophical ascent, i.e., reaching the intelligible realm, *hyperouranios topos* of Plato's *Phaedrus*. When *ba* is transformed and its ascent is accomplished, it becomes an imperishable and immortal *akh*, a "shining spirit", a star irradiating intelligible light, a son of Ra. Thus the *akh* is the *ba* divinized, realizing the ultimate precept of self-knowledge: to become like a god.

If we compare this teaching with certain passages of Plato's *Phaedrus*, we should see that (1) *akh* (or the related body of light, *sah*) corresponds to *ochema* for the soul outside the cycles of material existence, (2) *ba* – to the winged soul when it is involved in a series of descents and ascents, (3) *ka* – with the vegetative or nutritive soul which is needed when the higher soul is actually embodied and which serves as an intermediary between the immortal immaterial soul and the material mortal body.

The upper vehicle is usually called *augoeides* by the Neoplatonists and clearly relates the substance this term describes to light, though at the same time distinguishes it from light as such. Most of the Neoplatonists regarded light as closest to the immaterial and purely noetic entities. In the *De anima* commentary, attributed to Simplicius, we have only one soul vehicle as a single substance described by three terms: *aitherodes* (aether-like), *augoeides* (light-like), and *pneumatikos* (being made of *pneuma*).⁷⁰

The Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hermeias used the term *augoeides* to describe not the soul, but the upper Heavens (*hyperouranios topos*) to which

the divinely led procession of the *Phaedrus* myth aspires (In *Phaedr.*:144.26-28). This is the realm of *akh* described as being like light. The procession led by the royal boat of Ra is analogous to that depicted in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

It seems as if the early Hellenic philosophers (or rather "physiologists") who encountered traditional Egyptian thought were somehow unhappy with its symbols and images when they started to search for an unconditioned unifying ground of reality. However, this unifying ground cannot be simply reduced to "nature" understood in the banal modern sense. Being the cause of Intellect, the first Principle transcends the noetic realm of Ra, therefore it is unknown even to the gods and *akh*. It is "nowhere", though figuratively described by such names as Waters (*mw*), Flood (*bbw*), Darkness (*kkw*), and Chaos (*ttmw*). This Flood is tantamount to the ineffable "substance" of the universe that enveloped the primordial Monad, along with Shu, "the begetter to repeated millions, out of the Flood, out of the Waters" (CT 76.33-34). Therefore Atum, in the depths of the Flood prefigured as Nun-Atum, may proclaim as follows:

"I am the Waters, unique, without second.
That is where I developed (*hpr.n.j.jm*)...
So, the Flood is subtracted from me:
See, I am the remainder...
I am the one who made me" (CT 714).

13. Pythagorean Numbers and their Paradigms

P. A. Kwasniewski regards the disciples of Pythagoras as "bringing to completion the programme adumbrated in Thales and developed by the *phusiologoi* after him",⁷¹ though this "programme", far from being simply a physiological pursuit, is the creative adaptation and prolongation of Egyptian theological ideas of divine unity, order and harmony. According to Iamblichus, that "truly godlike (*ho theios alethos*) man, who ranks next to Pythagoras and Plato" (Julian *Ep.*2), Pythagoras, after going to Pherecydes and Anaximander, visited Thales of Miletus who

"laying stress on his advanced age and the infirmities of his body, advised him to go to Egypt, to get in touch with the priests of Memphis and Zeus (i.e., Ammun). Thales confessed that the instruction of these priests was the source of his own reputation for wisdom... Thales insisted that, in view of all this, if Pythagoras should study with those priests, he was certain of becoming the wisest and most divine of men" (*Vita Pyth.*2).⁷²

Iamblichus tells us that Pythagoras spent many years in the Egyptian sanctuaries of temples, studying astronomy and geometry, and being initiated in all the mysteries of the gods. Later Pythagoras introduced the

symbolical method of teaching, in a manner similar to that in which he had been instructed in Egypt.

The Pythagorean excessive concern with numbers (claiming that all is number at the level of principles) reflects their seeking for the ultimate source and eidetic structure of material forms through mathematical theology. By revealing a formal structure underlying all outward appearances, a hidden unity behind multiplicity, they turned towards the archetypes (*paradeigmata*) which transcend material things and function as intelligible and animating principles. The Syrian Neoplatonist Iamblichus, who in his doctrines followed "true philosophical tradition" that included not only Pythagoras, Plato and to certain extent Aristotle, but also Orpheus, Egyptians, and Chaldeans, introduced the Pythagorean *paideia* in his philosophical school (probably in Apamea by the 290's A.D.). He sometimes identified the gods with *arithmoi* (numbers) arguing that arithmology, which is inseparable both from contemplation and hieratic ritual, serves the purification of the soul. Arguing that for Iamblichus the gods themselves were the administrators of theurgic rites, Gregory Shaw says:

"From the monad through the decad numbers were deities, each revealing specific characteristics and functions in manifestation. Since theurgy ritually imitated the laws of cosmogony, it necessarily imitated the laws of arithmogony... Thus to account for the differences in theurgy while retaining its universal transcendent effects as unification, the Pythagorean notion of distribution referred to in Plato's *Gorgias* may be suggestive. Socrates mentions the 'great power of geometric equality amongst gods and men': that to each there was an appropriate measure, and that this proportionality was the law of justice and friendship, which gave order to the world and made it a 'cosmos' (508bc). Applied to theurgic experiences, this principle retains the transcendent sameness of the rites while taking into account their contextual difference. We may, then, speak of geometrically equivalent theurgies, bestowing proportionately the same degree of unification in each ritual. Such unifications could be represented arithmetically, using quantitative 'differences' to represent the degrees of involvement in multiplicity, while following a law of proportionate 'sameness' and thus preserving a geometric equality".⁷³

In certain respects, the Pythagorean numbers and figures are the species of things: if not the Forms and the gods themselves, then their manifestations and symbols at the level of mathematical reality. As the first principles and their constructive irradiations, they are *neteru* and *bau* of the Egyptians. The word *neter* (*ntr*), feminine *neteret* (*ntrt*), plural *neteru* and *neterut* respectively, is often pictured by the sign of "staff wrapped with cloth", or "cult flag", perhaps originally related to (1) the practice of embalming (the process of becoming like a god), (2) the wrappings of a mummy which itself represents an ideal *sab* body turned into divine *eidōs*, and (3) the idea of unity. The *neteru* are the causes of phenomena and

preside over their forms, qualities and the modes which are revealed by number. Hieroglyphic writing used *rekhet* for "number". In this sense, number is the paradigm of the universe exemplified by the mystery of the One becoming Two and Three, thus constituting Unity in Trinity as Atum-Shu-Tefnut or Amun-Ra-Ptah.

The mathematical principle permits the derivation of forms of inequality from equality thus illustrating the divine process of manifestation from and return to the source. The paradigmatic relation between the arranged cosmos and numbers makes certain that what is true of numbers and their properties is also true of the structure of the cosmos. According to the Pythagorean tradition, initially based on the Egyptian hieratic teachings and sciences practised in the temples, the virtuous life consists in organizing the irrational, sensible, material by the rational, intelligible, immaterial thus producing perfect order. D. J. O'Meara summarizes the discussion on the formal properties of numbers, the Platonic Forms (the models of universe), and philosophical life, launched by Nicomachus of Gerasa, as follows:

"This ethical cosmology echoes in the soul that achieved by the divine demiurge in the universe. Not only do numbers then hold the keys to understanding the organization of the world; they also contain principles which constitute standards for the ethical life".⁷⁴

Pythagorean and Platonic mathematics deal with realities that are intermediary between (1) immaterial and indivisible intelligibles and (2) material and divisible sensibles (the realm of *khat* which constitutes the visible body of Ptah, or Geb). Thus occupying the intermediate Osirian kingdom, mathematical objects are immaterial and divisible, higher than sensibles and lower than noetic lights, or demiurgic Forms. According to this tripartite ontological structure, the Platonic sciences are divided into (1) dialectic which leads to the noetic realities, (2) mathematics which investigates mathematical objects regarded as dim images of intelligibles, (3) physics that is concerned with sensibles which are images of mathematical. Therefore what is true in mathematics of the intermediate ontological level in a proper manner reflects what is true in the noetic cosmos; and what is true in mathematics is paradigmatically true in the sensible realm.

It follows that arithmology and geometry are related to discursive thinking (*dianoia*) and imagination (*phantasia*): they are inferior to non-discursive intellectual intuition (*noesis*), because *nous* surpasses *dianoia*, being its source and paradigm. Iamblichus argues that noetic realities are apprehended "by touch" (*kat' epaphen*, perhaps analogous to *dhawq* in Sufism), whereas mathematical science is approached by reasoning (*dia logou*. *De communi mathematica scientia* 33.19-25). However, the syllogistic logic and mathematical method can lead up to non-discursive intuition thus preparing for union with divine Intellect.

For the Neoplatonists, the soul is the generatrix of mathematical forms and ideas. Therefore mathematical forms are projections (*probolai*) of

forms previously existing in the soul according to noetic patterns. The divine Intellect (*Nous*) is the ultimate source of knowledge, whereas *dianoia*, human understanding, is located at the same level as mathematical objects and images of *phantasia*. Though geometry (a gift of Hermes-Thoth) is coextensive with all existing things, this middle realm, as Proclus pointed out in his Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's *Elements*:

“contains likeness of all intelligible kinds and paradigms of sensible ones; but the forms of the understanding constitute its essence, and through this middle region it (the science of geometry) ranges upwards and downwards to everything that is or comes to be. Always philosophizing about being in the manner of geometry, it has not only ideas but pictures of all the virtues – intellectual, moral, and physical – and presents in due order all the forms of political constitution, showing from its own nature the variety of the revolutions they undergo. In these areas its activity is immaterial and theoretical, but when it touches on the material world it delivers out of itself a variety of sciences – such as geodesy, mechanics, and optics – by which it benefits the life of mortals” (*In Euclid*. II.62-63).

Therefore *Nous* measures the revolutions of soul as the One measures the life of *Nous* itself, for the One is the measure of all things. When the soul reverts to *Nous*, she is said to move in a circle, according to Proclus, because the first and simplest and most perfect of figures is the circle which corresponds to the Pythagorean Limit (*peras*), the number one and all the things in the column of the better, odd, right, light, good, square and so on (*ibid.*147.8-19). The main metaphysical concepts are depicted using geometrical imagination and the language of geometry: the circular form is assigned to the Heavens (*Nut*) and the straight line to the world of generation. Thus, through the geometrical exercises one can move towards the circle and its centre, since the centre (being at rest) is more honourable than any other non-central position, according to the Pythagoreans. The closer to the Intellect (the Sun god Ra moving round in a circle through the body of Nut, or the celestial Nile) the soul attains, the more it dances (*perichoreueian*) around it. Likewise, Intellect dances around the One (*Procl. In Parm.*1072.12). The One is beyond (*epekeina*) all intellectual substances, as the intellectual principle (or nature, *noera phusis*) is beyond all souls, and the soul's essence (*he psuches ousia*) is beyond all bodies.

Since the soul proceeds from *Nous* (Atum-Ra), she also returns to *Nous* through the intermediate levels of being governed by the Osirian rhythms. Just as Nature stands above her visible figures and shapes, so the Soul projects onto the macrocosmic and microcosmic Imagination, as onto a mirror, the Ideas of the noetic figures, thus offering to the human soul (the down and up moving *ba* which belongs to the Osirian realm of *mundus imaginalis*) an opportunity for transformation and turning inward to the kingdom of intelligible light.

14. Standing on the Solar Barque

Mathematics prepares the soul for the study of intelligibles; therefore Iamblichus provides the following interpretation of the Pythagorean cryptic utterance (*sumbolon*) “Do not cut in two what is on the road”:

“Philosophy indeed, it seems, is a road. [The utterance] means then: choose that philosophy and that road to wisdom in which you will not ‘cut in two’, in which you will propound, not contradictions, but firm and unchanging truths strengthened by scientific demonstrations through sciences (*mathematon*) and contemplation (*theorias*), that is, philosophize in the Pythagorean manner (*Pathagorikos*)... That philosophy which travels through corporeal things and sense-objects, which more recent thinkers immoderately adopt (thinking god and the qualities and soul and the virtues and simply all prime causes in reality are body), is slippery and easily reversible – witness the very different accounts of it – whereas the philosophy which progresses through immaterial eternal intelligible objects that always remain the same and do not admit in themselves of destruction or change, [this philosophy], like its subject-matter, is unerring and firm...” (*Protripticus* 118.7-26).

The aim of this firm and perennial philosophy consists in contemplating the One, the goal of all contemplation, thus being able to see “from here, as if from a watch-tower, God and all in this train of God” (*ibid.*23.21ff). This train of God is analogous to the train of Ra who moves standing on the solar barque with his “entourage of flame”. The gods who are on the prow of the solar barque include Isis, Seth, and Horus, and those on the stern – Hu (creative Word, *Logos*), Sia (Wisdom, Perception), and Ra, or solar Intellect, himself. They are the models of imitation and objects of contemplation for those who approach the solar barque, moving in a circle, i.e., for those who are in a sense “philosophers”. The Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus describes philosophers (including the Egyptians, who “reckon up the names of not a few wise men among themselves”, the successors of Hermes, as well as the Chaldeans and Assyrians, the successors of Oannes and Belos, and Hellenes, the successors of Cheiron, the Centaur who taught Achilles and is a prototype of the true spiritual master) as follows:

“The philosophers bid us imitate the gods so far as we can (*mimeisthai keleuousin hemas hoi philosophoi kata dunamin tous theous*), and they teach us that this imitation consists in the contemplation of realities (*en theoria ton onton*). And that this sort of study is remote from passion and is indeed based on freedom from passion, is, I suppose, evident, even without my saying it. In proportion then as we, having been assigned to the contemplation of realities, attain to freedom from passion, in so far do we become like God” (*kata tosouton exomoioumetha to theo: Kata Galilaion logos* I.171 de).

To become like God, for the Egyptian priests, is to become sun-like, to be transformed into *akh* and eventually to be identified with Ra himself. According to the *Book of Two Ways*, produced in the early Middle Kingdom by the XII Dynasty (c.1994-1781 B.C.) priests of the temple of Thoth in Hermopolis, at least 1400 years before Pythagoras, "this is the true mystery of Ra", namely, to arrive at "the place of a perfect spirit who shall be a god himself" (CT 1116/87). The perfect sage, or rather his transformed *ba* which is analogous to the winged soul of the philosopher in Plato's *Phaedrus*, is "a spirit who knows how to enter the flame" (ibid.), i.e., the intelligible realm. Such is the soul of one "who knows" and therefore is "a holy god in the suite of Thoth" (CT 1035/6): his is "the clear way" (CT 1135/5) and "his is light" (CT 1137/11).

The lover of Wisdom (of Sia, who stands on the prow of the solar barque) is a follower of Thoth, and the way of Thoth leads towards the house of *maat*. When the initiate restores his primordial noetic nature and is united with the archetypal source, he can proclaim: "I have inherited the horizon of Ra. I am Atum" (CT 1063/34). The deceased or the initiate (who is "dead" in relation to passions and his lower human self, including the fish-like material body) is united with Ra and now appears not as a separate individuality (which is "annihilated" by the spiritual flames during his ascent), but as the immortal solar Intellect, Ra, "the companion of Thoth". As the traditional iconography depicts, he (as the universal hypostasis of the King, Son of Ra, who integrates and unites all multiplicities) stands before Hu and Sia, and other gods at the back of the solar barque. Being in the "entourage of flame", he helps to guide the solar barque and "conducts the sacred writings to the god, Ra" (CT 1067/38).

The true gnostic, who knows truth and his own real identity, may also be designated as belonging to the entourage of Thoth which consists of *rhyt* (*rekhyt*) or *rhbywt* (*rekbhkywt*), rendered by Leonard H. Lesko as "common folk" and "celebrated ones" respectively.⁷⁵ However, the term *rekh* means "knowledge", and Thoth is no less than the supreme master and cause of any knowledge, especially that which concerns the liberation and elevation of the soul, thus putting her in the train of Thoth himself. The dark and mysterious text runs as follows:

"You have made the entourage from your common folk. I cause that they reach you. The one who shines in the night is Ra. As for any person who is in his train, he lives forever among the followers of Thoth. It is in the night that he is made to appear and Osiris is gladdened since he is the unique one who suffered more than he did, after having been placed among his followers in the entourage" (CT 1098/69). Another version is slightly different: "This is the great one from whom the sky came to be. As for any person who will be in his followers, he will live in the entourage of Thoth and he will be made to appear in the night in the joy

of Osiris. You are the son of the one who suffers alone. His father has been given to him in his entourage" (ibid.).

In Julian's version of Neoplatonism, inherited from Iamblichus and his school, the undefiled and pure soul, that of Heracles for instance, is regarded as superior to the purest aether. It was in this perfect condition before the Demiurge sent it to the earth and again after its philosophical and theurgic return to the Father. Of Heracles, who serves as a model for the philosophical life and ascent, it is said that he "has returned, one and indivisible, to his Father one and indivisible" (*Or. V.*, p.467 Wright).

In the Egyptian *Book of Two Ways*, the All-lord (the Creator Atum-Ra who sets up the king on the earth as his living image, Tut) asserts that whereas the gods are created from his sweat (divine perfume), human beings are from the weeping of his Eye: like tears they fall down into the material bodies of flesh. However, after "making their hearts to cease forgetting the West", i.e., introducing "philosophy" as a way of remembrance and homecoming, he opened the path of return leading upwards. Those who travel this path are able "to lift up their names to the rays of his face", i.e., to be (1) like Osiris in the midst of the Duat and (2) like Ra in the sky. Since the epistrophic movement to the noetic realm presupposes appeasing, harmonizing, and transcending of all opposites, the initiate says:

"I come into the presence of the All-lord. I made the two warriors (i.e., Horus and Seth, the Pythagorean Table of Opposites) content" (CT 1125/96).

This harmonization, accomplished through the guidance of Thoth, corresponds to reaching the house of truth and justice (*maat*). The Pythagoreans and Plato inherited this idea of "setting one's house in order" by self-mastery and bringing into tune all parts of the psychosomatic entity or dismembered Osiris who must be restored and attuned "like the proportion of a musical scale, the highest and lowest notes and the mean between them, with all the intermediate intervals" (*Rep.*443df). When all dismembered parts are united in a well-tempered harmony and animated by the theurgic power of Isis and Thoth, the initiate becomes like a living image of the temple-like "universal man", instead of many scattered fragments (a "house-divided"). The knowledge which presides over such transformation is wisdom, accompanied by justice which ensures (according to geometrical proportion) that each part of the whole receives what it is due.

At the level of *anima mundi* the initiate, who died already before his actual death, i.e. who discovered, awakened, and separated his *ba* from the gross mortal body, is united with Osiris, the king of an intermediate realm:

"I stand with Osiris when he stands. O Osiris, your *ba* comes to you. Open your throat. Take Osiris to Osiris" (CT 1120/91).

He identifies himself with one of the gods who support the sky and announce the arrival of the solar barque of Ra. Finally he pronounces:

"I am a follower of Ra who receives his iron, who replaces (or adorns) the god in the shrine, Horus who ascends to his lord. The seat was hidden in the purification of the chapel of the messenger of the God to her whom he loved. I am the one who rescued Maat after he caused his image to ascend. I am the one who knotted the rope and bound his chapel. The storm was my abomination... I have not been opposed by Ra. I have not been repulsed by him who acts with his hands. I have not walked in the valley of darkness. I have not entered into the lake of criminals. I have not been in the heat of the striking force [of God]... The holiness of God is secret. The arms of Geb rise early in the morning. Who will lead the great ones and count children at his proper time? Thoth is inside the secrets that he may make offerings to the one who counted millions and who is counted, who opened the firmament and dispelled bleariness from him after I reached him in his seat... I adore Ra that he may listen to me and that he may remove an obstacle for me. I was not turned back from the horizon. I am Ra. I was not boatless in the great crossing. It is 'He-whose-face-is-on-his-knees' who extended his arm, since the name of Ra was in my belly and his rank was in my mouth. I say it to him and I am the one who hears his words. Adoration to you, O Ra, lord of the horizon. O Ra, hail to you for whom the sun-folk purify themselves and for whom the sky acts as controller rather than the great striking force [of God] which the courses of the rebellious pass. I have come among those who herald Maat..." (CT 1099/70).

Hearing this dark and inspiring account, one should remember, first, that the mythical discourse is woven by images and symbols which might be subjugated to different exoteric and esoteric interpretations and are regarded as being "revealed", because "the gods wished to teach us in symbolic fashion (*didaskonton hemas oimai ton theon symbolikos*), that we must pluck the fairest fruits from the earth, namely, virtue and piety" (Julian *Or. V*, p.473 Wright).

Second, that it is inseparable from the ritual which serves as a necessary means of elevation for those who "by nature belong to the heavens but have fallen to earth, to reap the harvest of our constitution here on earth, namely, virtue and piety, and then strive upwards to the goddess [i.e., the Phrygian Mother of the gods who may be equated also to Hathor, Nut, Neith or Isis of the Egyptians] of our forefathers, to her who is the principle of all life" (*Or. V*, p.473).

Third, that the noetic Ra is not identical with the visible Ra, the sun disk (*aten*) adored by Akhenaten. For Julian, who follows the ancient traditions of solar theologies, the visible disk of the sun is only third in rank, surpassed, as it is, by the second sun (Helios-Mithras, ruler of the intellectual gods), and the first intelligible sun which is often identified

with the Good, or the One, as it shows itself in the intelligible realm. The middle and intellectual Helios is regarded (Julian in this respect cites the divine Plato, *Rep.*508b) as "the offspring of the Good which the Good begat in his own likeness, and that what the Good is in relation to pure *Noûs* and its objects in the noetic world, such is the sun in the visible world in relation to sight and its objects". Therefore "his light has the same relation to the visible world as truth has to the noetic world" (*pros to noeton aletheia: Or. IV*, p.361).

The third or visible Helios, nonetheless, is the cause for the visible gods of just as many blessings as the second Helios bestows on the intellectual gods and serves as an anagogic force leading upwards to the invisible principles symbolized by the visible divine form and light. According to the Egyptian New Kingdom theologies, the visible world is heliophany or manifestation (*kheperu*) of the solar God himself, whose name is substituted by the term *neheb* in the Amarna texts. Initially, *neheb* is the inexhaustible noetic plenitude out of which the sun allots individual portions of time to everything existing. By seeing the light (both intelligible and sensible), that is God, the eye (including the inner eye of the soul) is created which is, therefore, sunlike (*helio-eides*).

For the theologians of the XVIII Dynasty, as for Plotinus, the solarly of the eye (or the illuminated human intellect which is "light out of light", *phos ek photos*) guarantees and reveals the inward presence of the divine, because seeing and knowing are one and the same. Seeing is to be understood in the sense of an intelligible vision, *epopteia*, as well. This possibility of proceeding from inward solarly to inward divinity, of reaching Ra through the solar *gnosis* is denied by Akhenaten for all except the king himself who, however, reduces the intelligible dimension of Ra to the visible *aten*.

As the Emperor Julian explains, light itself is a sort of incorporeal and divine form (*eidos estin asomaton ti theion*), a form coextensive with the heavenly bodies. He says:

"And of light, itself incorporeal, the culmination and flower, so to speak, is the sun's rays. Now the doctrine of the Phoenicians, who were wise and learned in sacred lore (*ton Phoinikon doxa, sophon ta theia kai epistemonon*), declared that the rays of light everywhere diffused are the undefiled incarnation of pure Intellect. And in harmony with this is our theory, seeing that light itself is incorporeal, if one should regard its fountainhead, not as corporeal, but as the undefiled activity of Intellect (i.e., Helios) pouring light into its own abode..." (*Or. IV*, p.363).

While maintaining that the uplifting rays of the sun "are nearly akin to those who yearn to be set free from generation", we ought then "to make these visible things proofs of his unseen powers" (*Or. V*, p.481). Since the souls of the blessed philosophers are led upwards by the agency of the invisible, wholly immaterial, divine and pure substance which resides in

the rays of Helios, we can speak of the “solar philosophy” (presided over and directed by Helios-Apollo, Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra, or Horus, along with the great consort goddess, be it Athena, Neith, Hathor, or Isis). This solar philosophy is the same as the most holy and secret mysteries of solar rebirth. So, Julian continues as follows:

“It has also been demonstrated that the god’s rays are by nature uplifting; and this is due to his energy, both visible and invisible, by which very many souls have been lifted up out of the region of the senses, because they were guided by that sense which is clearest of all and most nearly like the sun. For when with our eyes we perceive the sun’s light, not only is it welcome and useful for our lives, but also, as the divine Plato said when he sang its praises, it is our guide to wisdom. And if I should also touch on the secret teaching of the Mysteries (*tes arretou mustagogias*) in which the Chaldean, divinely frenzied, celebrated the God of the Seven Rays, that god through whom he lifts up the soul of men, I should be saying what is unintelligible, wholly unintelligible to the common herd, but familiar to the happy theurgists (*theourgois de tois makariois gnorima: Or. V., p.483*).

15. Celestial Nile as the Cause of Geometry

The Pythagorean claim that ten is “complete at four” refers to the Tetraktys, established on the natural sequence of numbers: $1+2+3+4=10$. The Tetraktys, arranged into the sacred triangle, represents both an archetypal unity of all reality and a model for the gradual procession from the indescribable light of unity to the level of sensibles. This means the coming forth from the One (though the One is not diminished and remains intact in its transcendent fullness) to the Many and the final return back to the One.

Since the procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*) are not chronological or temporal events in the usual sense, they constitute a single movement where each thing reverts in its own proper mode. There is no real distinction between procession and reversion, which are descriptions of the ontological status of any determinate being. Procession (descent) is the cause giving itself to the effect as the perfection by which it is; though the One, as universal cause being “everywhere and nowhere”, is both transcendent and causally present to all things. Reversion (ascent) is the effect receiving the cause as the perfection (*telos*) by which it is. To be is to be intelligible, to have the noetic paradigm or divine root. The One is both the beginning and the end, the *arche* and the *telos* of all things. Therefore:

“The entire Neoplatonic pattern of exitus and reditus, the emergence of all things from the One or Good and their return to him, is simply the

expression, in dynamic terms, of their participation in him as ‘measure of all things’.”⁷⁶

The same could be said regarding the manifestations (*keheperu*) of Amun (*jmnw*) who, despite the creative theophanies, himself remains hidden:

“The One who created himself, whose appearance (*qj*) is unknown.

Perfect aspect, which developed into a sacred emanation.

Who built his processional images and created himself by himself.

Perfect icon (*sekbem nefer*), whom his heart made perfect.

Manifestation of manifestation (*keheperu keheperu*), model of birth” (*Pap. Leiden I.350.40.1-8*).

“The Ennead is combined in your body: your image is every god”... (*ibid. I.350.90.1-2*).

This hymn, consecrated to Amun-Ra, is constructed as a series of plays on words and numbers, therefore its inner structure itself reflects the procession from the One to the ordered Manyness. The Pythagorean Tetraktys, whose nine strokes or dots represent the Great Ennead of Heliopolis grouped around the tenth or rather the first dot, the ineffable and incomprehensible One, is also derived from Egypt. In the temple of Amun-Ra in Karnak the Tetraktys is expanded into the Pentactys – from nine to fifteen hypostases of Amun-Ra – “twelve strokes encircling the divine creative triangle, and representing this triangle manifested”.⁷⁷ Amun-Ra emerges from Nun who stands for the hidden side of Amun himself. This noetically manifested Scarab, Amun-Ra, is the supreme paradigm of being and creator of everything. To put it in Procline terms, *Nous* is everything after the manner of intellect, and *Psyche* is everything after the manner of soul:

“If *Nous* is exemplar, soul is copy; if *Nous* is everything in concentration, soul is everything discursively” (*ET 16*).

The hypostasis of Intellect and that of universal Soul constitute the compound of Ra and Osiris, both at the cosmological level of divine macrocosm and the eschatological level of human microcosm.

To move from the sensible world of images and multiplicity of material bodies to the noetic multiplicity in unity is possible through the contemplation of geometrical figures, diagrams, and symbols (analogous to the Hindu *yantras* and *mandalas*), projected in the Imagination which occupies, according to Proclus, the central position in the scale of knowing:

“When it (*phantasia*) draws its objects from the undivided centre of its life, it expresses them in the medium of division, extension, and figure. For this reason everything that it thinks is a picture or shape of its thought” (*In Euclid 52-53*).

Since the geometer wishes to move from divisible figures presented in Imagination (passive *Nous*) to the partless, indivisible, unextended figures of divine *Nous*, he investigates the universal present in the imagined circle

(which is “one and many”, falling short of the purity and perfection of immaterial circles), bearing in mind that the universal is not merely a picture in the Imagination, but an archetypal reality which displays indivisible noetic unity. As the ascending *ba* must be transformed and turned into *akh* (thereby transcending the psychic realm of Osiris), so the geometer, as a follower of Hermes-Thoth, must leave aside the entire sensible realm and the Osirian Netherworld.

Various sciences serve as a means of ascending from the more partial to the more general until the science of being as being is reached, and this science contemplates the single form of being that belongs to all things. Therefore geometry working with the aid of imagination is able to bring about recollection of eternal ideas in the soul. *Mathematike* (or *mathesis*, learning) shows the innate knowledge and purges understanding, taking away forgetfulness and ignorance, setting the soul free from the bonds of unreason by the favour of Hermes-Thoth. This god, according to Proclus, “is truly the patron of this science, who brings our intellectual endowments to light, fills everything with divine reason, moves our souls towards *Nous*, awakens us as it were from our heavy slumber, through our searching turns us back upon ourselves, through our birth-pangs perfects us, and through the discovery of pure *Nous* leads us to the blessed life” (*In Euclid*. I.47).

Proclus does not forget to mention (probably basing his account on a history composed by Eudemus of Rhodes, a pupil of Aristotle) that Thales, traditionally counted as one of the Seven Sages, was the first to bring this science from Egypt to Greece, arguing that every true geometer should move from imagination to pure noetic understanding with each theorem laying the basis for a step upwards and drawing the soul to the higher world. Thus, following the Platonic division of knowing and being to 1) the highest, 2) the intermediate, and 3) the lowest grades of reality, Proclus says:

“But if it should ever be able to roll up its extensions and figures and view their plurality as a unity without figure, then in turning back to itself it would obtain a superior vision of the partless, unextended, and essential geometrical ideas that constitute its equipment. This achievement would itself be a perfect culmination of geometrical inquiry, truly a gift of Hermes, leading geometry out of Calypso’s arms, so to speak, to more perfect intellectual insight and emancipating it from the pictures projected in imagination” (*In Euclid*. II.55).

Proclus regards the Nile as a symbol of the life which is poured on the whole world (*In Tim.* I.96). Accordingly, “the Nile is the cause to the Egyptians of many and all-various goods, viz. of geometry, of the generation of fruits... Its water also preserves their bodies, and the divinity that connectedly contains this body, elevates their souls” (*In Tim.* I.118). If the Nile is the cause of geometry, primarily the celestial Nile is

meant, that which is equivalent to Osiris and, ultimately, to the rejuvenating primordial Waters of Nun. In its immanent aspect, this Water of life, immortality, and regeneration is manifested, in different fashions and manners, through all levels of being. Therefore the Egyptian priests knowing that “there are likewise divine mysteries, some powers initiating, and others being initiated”, regarded the destruction through water and fire as purification, not corruption (*ibid.* I.119). Geometry also serves this aim of purification leading the soul, likened to Odysseus, away from Calypso’s charms and tortures.

16. The Apollonian Road to Rebirth

The ancients held that there is nothing that cannot be cured by philosophy and theurgy. Philosophy serves to purify from all lower modes of life, habits, and desires, providing understanding and strengthening virtues. For the supreme virtue teaches souls to cling to the truth which is “most clearly manifest in the worship of the Divine Being” (*Julian Ep.*82). And the theurgic rites, bestowed by the gods themselves (“since it is evident that the gods gave them to us”: *Ep.*20), benefit both soul and body:

“The gods when they exhort those theurgists who are especially holy, announce to them that their ‘mortal husk of raw matter’ shall be preserved from perishing” (*Or.* V., p.499).

Therefore Julian, who faithfully follows tradition and avoids innovation in all things, but especially in what concerns the gods (*Ep.*20), describes the graceful power of the hieratic rites as follows:

“For when the soul abandons herself wholly to the gods, and entrusts her own concerns absolutely to the higher powers, and then follows the sacred rites – these too being preceded by the divine ordinances – then, I say, since there is nothing to hinder or prevent – for all things reside in the gods, all things subsist in relation to them, all things are filled with the gods (*kai panta ton theon esti plere*) – straightway the divine light illumines our souls” (*Or.* V, p.497).

Since philosophy concerns the contemplation of realities (*ta onta*) and elevating knowledge which prepares the soul for the divine vision and reunion with the archetypal principles, it is not at variance with the Mysteries performed for human perfection and salvation. The end and aim of the rite of purification is “the ascent of our souls” (*Or.* V, p.489), and this is the aim of philosophy as well, though achieved by rather different means and methods. But if philosophy is “knowledge of the things that are”, according to Ammonius, son of Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher of the 5th century, and the world which is (*panta ta onta*) presents itself as the harmonious play of divine powers (*dunamēis*),

mysterious symbols and tokens (*sunthemata*), then the thirst for the marvellous is not incompatible with the strictly rational and logical inquiry.

Sosipatra from Ephesus became a "philosopher" not through conventional learning but because she, as a young girl, was initiated into the Chaldean wisdom by two old men who belonged to some divine race or were "gods disguised as strangers". Eunapius, who exercised a high priestly function of hierophant at the mystery cult of Eleusis and was convinced that the ancient gods were not dead, but still walked on the earth and took care of chosen ones, says about Sosipatra as follows:

"As she reached full maturity, never having any other teachers, the works of the [great] poets, philosophers, and orators were [constantly] on her lips and texts that others had spent a great deal of painstaking trouble over [and] understood only dimly and with difficulty she could interpret casually, effortlessly, and with ease, making meaning clear with her light, swift touch".⁷⁸

If Sosipatra and her son Antoninus, who "reached affinity with the divine, and applied himself to the wisdom that is unknown to the crowd", are regarded as philosophers, what does "philosophy" mean for the ancients? According to Eunapius, Antoninus established himself at the mouth of the Nile, close to Alexandria, and devoted himself completely to Plato's philosophy and the Egyptian rites as they were practised there:

"All the young men who were healthy in mind and thirsted for philosophy studied with him, and the temple was full of candidates of the priesthood".⁷⁹

It is clear that philosophy, as understood by Antoninus (who died A.D.390), radically differs from the modern conception: it includes inner transformation and an approach to the divine. Mediterranean philosophy has developed within the chains of transmission kept by the priests of Apollo and Persephone. In its post-Homeric form, *philosophia* (not designated yet by this late Pythagorean term) reveals itself as the tradition of iatromantis (spiritual healers) and lawgivers, based on continuous revelations received from above, from the world of the *kourotropos*, "nurturer of the *kouros*". The last term means "a young man" in the sense of an initiate, like *fata* in Arabic and *javanmard* in Persian. The *kouros* is not just a human figure, but the representation and reflection (*eikon*) of the divine *kouros*, Apollo. This is the charming glow of youth (*chariestate hebe*), of "eternal youth" proper to the gods. Therefore Athena, touching Odysseus (who is regarded as a model of philosophical life) with the golden wand, "gives him back his handsome bearing and his youth" (*Od.* XVI.173-183).

In certain respects, Apollo (from Akkadian *abullu*), the initiator into philosophy as a "solar way", could be equated to al-Khidr of the Sufis. The Apollonian road is the road of the archetypal Sun, Ra-Osiris, who is the chief Mystagogue of the entire cosmos. Therefore a philosophical

journey is the mimetic and ritual-like journey of the hero, like Heracles and Orpheus, to the Netherworld, the Egyptian Duat, where all the opposites meet. This is the process of 'dying before death' and resurrection. Since Apollo shares his oracular powers with Night, the archaic "philosopher" is a priest and a prophet both of Apollo and Night. He is a spiritual healer who knows the words of power. As the initiate, the "philosopher" approaches the Sun (the symbol of the divine Intellect and the One) and through the Sun he is born again. This man is also a "physician" (*phusikos*), because he is concerned with the basic principles of being. According to P. Kingsley, "philosophy had developed as something all-embracing and intensely practical",⁸⁰ including a sort of *kundalini-yoga* and healing through dreams and oracles. Parmenides, the disciple of the Pythagorean Ameinias, who introduced a logic that questions everything, himself was an Ouliades, a priest of Apollo.

Philosophy should not be restricted to the analysis of language and logic as has happened in modern times. Until the end of the Graeco-Roman world, philosophy was regarded as a mystery into which one may be initiated. Plato himself uses the mystery-language, though in some respects he "betrayed" or at least "re clothed" the true Parmenidean and Orphic tradition. Proclus, who tried to harmonize *logos* and *muthos*, the Hellenic rational metaphysics and ancient mythologies, speaks of Plato's teaching as *mustagogia* (the guidance of the initiates into mysteries) and *epopteia* (the ineffable vision), viewing Plato himself as the leader and hierophant to the truest rites (*teletai*). The Middle Platonist Theon of Smyrna distinguished five stages in philosophical initiation: purification, communication of the ritual, mystical vision (*epopteia*), "adornment with garlands", and "the joy that comes from unity and converse with the gods".⁸¹

According to some modern scholars, the new way of thinking attributed to Thales involved the search for a non-mythical origin for the cosmos and required arguments supporting the conclusions reached. But the picture of Thales himself, stored in the imagination of later generations, stands at variance with the general ancient picture of the sage (*sophos*) who must be an extremely practical servant of the gods: the priest, magician, healer, lawgiver, teacher, and the guide of souls, at one and the same time. If philosophy is regarded as the emancipation of discursive reason (*dianoia*) from the previously integral structure of the whole traditional culture, deeming all things in the city (*polis*) to be trifling and of no value, then philosophy really comes to be equal to the abstract stargazing and discursive reasoning about ghostly principles.

The philosopher Thales is so caught up in contemplation that he takes no notice of the path ahead and falls into a well, making himself the laughing-stock of "a witty and attractive Thracian servant-girl who is said to have mocked Thales for falling into a well while he was observing stars

and gazing upwards, declaring that he was eager to know the things in the sky, but that what was behind him and just by his feet escaped his notice" (Plato *Theaetetus* 174a).

Iamblichus is ready to turn into virtue the ridiculous naivety of the philosopher who gets into all sorts of embarrassments because of his ignorance, and behaves so awkwardly that people look upon him as a madman:

"It is said, for example, that Thales astronomizing and looking intently upward fell into a well, and a bright and lively Thracian girl taunted him about the accident, saying that in his eagerness to know what was in heaven he could not see what was around him and under his feet. Now the same taunt is good for all students of Philosophy. They are indeed ignorant of what their nearest neighbour is about, and almost whether or not he is a human being".⁸²

This view about philosophy is accepted not for the sake of a discursive rationalism. Rather there is a desire to show the anagogic and soteriological nature of philosophical theology: not simply contemplation but eventual "emigration" to the transcendental realm is regarded as the main philosophical task. The Middle Platonists and Plotinus already eliminated politics from philosophy and spiritualized the latter. But despite the unreal political dreams, even for Plato himself the ultimate task of philosophy (which involved all sorts of rational thought and logical argumentation) is not to learn dialectical methods for their own sake but to regain the soul's wings and return to the celestial abode. The Platonic way leading to the archetypal star imitates the Egyptian way of ascent, once restricted to the king, equated with Horus, the son of Ra, and later followed by the initiated philosophers who tried to accomplish this spiritual ascent before actual physical death. This path conforms with the Orphic esoterism and with the archaic belief in the soul's journey through the Milky Way (*kuklos galaxias*).

The aim of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is a return to the habitation of the soul's consort star and an experience of the subsequent bliss (*Tim.*41-42). Those who have devoted themselves to philosophy are able to ascend "to mansions even more beautiful than these" (*Phaed.*114bc) and to join the company of the gods gazing at the world of true Being. They contemplate the region which "belongs to Being as it really is – without colour or shape, untouchable, perceptible only to the soul's pilot, the intellect, which is concerned with the genus of true knowledge" (*Phaedr.*247c). Though intellectual purification and recollection (*anamnesis*) are counted among the most important means to reach the aetherial home-star and the company of the gods, nonetheless, the inspired divine "madness" (*mania*) is regarded as surpassing all purely rational understanding.

Consequently, the hieratic arts cannot be understood as something incompatible with philosophy, when viewed as a stairway to the noetic cosmos constituted by Being, Life, and Intelligence. Since true Being is "visible to nous alone, the pilot of the soul" (*Phaedr.*247c), which is not discursive, dialectic cannot in principle grant the comprehensive understanding of reality (or union with the divine principles themselves), though both Socrates and Plato take the position that only dialectic is an appropriate medium for initial philosophizing. However, by making a distinction between *sophia* and *doxosophia*, between "truly understanding" and "seeming to be much knowing", Plato strongly emphasizes that while the human soul aspires to the divine, its highest achievement is to follow Zeus, not to usurp him. In his most important cosmological speculations, Plato uses mythical accounts, because a myth, unlike a syllogism, has the capacity to act as a complex mirror in which we can recognize not only who we are but also who we might become beyond our restricted earthly existence. As Ch. L. Griswold argues:

"The message of the *Phaedrus* is clear: philosophy is a form of private eros, and it is essentially nobler and higher than the political concerns and the public rhetoric of the polis. Philosophical madness cannot double as political doctrine without losing its divinity."⁸³

Neoplatonic theurgy is also based on the anagogic interpretation of the philosophical myths that provide the background of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Orphic esoterism. The regret of A. Charles-Saget that unlike Ionian philosophers, who moved from myth to philosophy, Iamblichus moves in the opposite direction,⁸⁴ depends on a too narrow and rationalistic apprehension of philosophy. Though the definition of philosophy as a mental activity or as a purely human reasoning process emerged from Hellenic sources, philosophy is part of a complex of much wider religious and aesthetic aspirations. When Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry for using one single method, called *philosophia*, to examine all subjects, including the inspired myths and theurgic arts, he accuses him of approaching divine mysteries by inadequate means. The problems of the soul's embodiment and disembodiment, like those of theurgic unification with the gods, must be approached hieratically, not conceptually. They are not to be solved in a discursive mode.

In Iamblican metaphysics, the human soul, as a particular complex of collected characteristics, is never saved. It can be turned to the gods only as the Egyptian Horus is united to Ra: not as a particular individuality, but as the entire mandala-like structure of irradiations, turned back to their noetic and henadic archetypes, when the divine power (as the immortal microcosmic *eros*) is joined with itself in prayer or theurgic ascent. The soul is only a mean between abiding and proceeding, the ungenerated and the generated. Though our knowledge concerning the gods is both inborn and acquired through the process of education, it

is still divided and cannot actually touch the undivided principles. Iamblichus makes a clear distinction between discursive reasoning (*dianoia*) and intellection (*noesis*), but even *philosophia* and *noesis* do not themselves lead to an actual union with the divine. Along with *noesis*, which acts at different levels of being, something more fundamental and ineffable is required. It is only with the theurgic virtues that the fullest henadic form of the subject-object unity can be achieved.

17. Philosophy as Divine Mystagogy and Beneficial Madness

At the beginning of philosophy as such we do not find a titanic inquiry and a sacrilegious doubt. Philosophy rather begins with 1) the inspired interpretations of divine oracles, epiphanies, and omens, 2) commentaries on the inner meaning of annual cosmogonical and anagogic rites, of sacred calendars, genealogies, and myths of origin. Such primordial “philosophy” is involved in conversation with the community of hieratic forces which permeate the universe. Accordingly, philosophical discourse starts as a mythical *hieros logos* and concerns theophanies and symbols of which the cosmos is woven. Therefore “philosophy” in its purest form is akin to liturgy which enumerates and praises various divine qualities or prototypes of human thought and action. The human being wonders at the face of unspeakable divine manifestations, truths, and beauties that constitute the complex of the visible and invisible worlds, thus proving the harmony between the microcosmic and macrocosmic orders (*taxeis*). This wonder shows the primordial unity of devotion, contemplation, and intentional “erotic” striving for wisdom (*sophia*), able to reveal the countless possibilities in the sphere of skills, arts, technologies, laws, and institutions which are open to different reflections, meditations, and explanations.

“Without philosophy it is impossible to be perfectly pious”, according to the Egyptian Hermetic writer (*Stobaei Hermetica*). In the Hermetic milieu, so inaccurately described as “the underworld of Platonism” by J. Dillon,⁸⁵ philosophy is regarded both as a human science (*episteme*) and divine knowledge (*gnosis*). Thus the successive course from the natural sciences, mathematics, astronomy and music towards the *pura sanctae philosophia* is emphasized. Despite the serious doubts of modern scholars, it is now clear that the so-called Hermetic texts contain authentic versions of the Egyptian theological lore, in agreement with Iamblichus’ assertion that the writings attributed to Hermes (who is the heart and tongue of Ra) contain Hermetic doctrines expressed in philosophical terms, because “they have been translated from Egyptian by scholars versed in philosophy” (*De myster.*265.13-17).

Adherents of different philosophical schools (*baireseis*) regarded philosophy as a mystery into which one may be initiated. This is not just an empty metaphor but rather an indication which reveals the real sources of ancient philosophy understood as a way of purification, interpretation of sacred rites and divine visions. Therefore when Proclus speaks of Plato’s teaching as a *mustagogia* and *epopteia*, he is not introducing a startling innovation but simply following the ancient tradition (*paradosis*). At the time of Syrianus and Proclus, the Orphic, Chaldean and other rituals were a part of philosophical practice. Even if one prefers to regard the mystery-language used by Plato himself (*Symp.*209e, *Gorg.*479c, *Theaet.*156a) merely as an instance of his extolled “irony”, nevertheless, the most influential philosophical insights of Plato reveal the affinity of true philosophical education with *arrhetos telete* – the “unspeakable initiation”. Platonism is modelled on the experience of mysteries. The highest step of philosophy is analogous to *epopteia* – the beatific vision of the Eleusinian mysteries.

Not simply the exegesis of Plato’s *Parmenides* but the actual mystical experience gives foundation for negative theology, and this mystical experience (in its original Hellenic sense) does not consist in learning something but in undergoing the initiation into divine epiphanies and preparation for the blessed afterlife. The traditional Hellenic religion sometimes presented the epiphany, or vision, of a particular god as a goal of mystical experience. The Eleusinian mysteries and, in later times, the mysteries of Isis, Mithras as well as the Chaldean rites of ascent (*anagoge*) and Orphic myths served as the models for philosophy. “The One is God” (*to hen theos*), according to Proclus, “for the Good is identical with God, God being that which is beyond all things and to which all things aspire” (*ET* 113). But if a plurality of gods exist, they must have the character of unity, since by the term “gods” here are understood the supreme archetypes or “the first and self-sufficient principles of being” (*tas protistas archas ton onton kai autarkestatas theois apokalousi: Plat. Theol.* I.3.13.6-7). Consequently, “every god is a self-complete henad” (*ET* 114), and “every god is above Being, above Life, and above Intelligence” (*pas theos hyperousios esti kai hyperzōos kai hypernous: ET* 115). And every god is participate, except the One (*ET* 116). Therefore everything reverts upon its cause and even inanimate objects aspire to imitate the Good: “all things pray except the One”, according to Theodorus of Asine (Procl. *In Tim.* I.213.2-3).

There are different levels in philosophical inquiry, according to Syrianus: 1) first philosophy is concerned with intelligible substance; 2) on a lower level is a philosophical discipline dealing with heavenly bodies; 3) finally, there is the study of the sensible world of coming to be and passing away (*In Metaph.*55.13).

The first philosophy, or metaphysics, here is considered to be a theology, a study of divine substance. But since “mythology is a kind of

theology" (*he gar muthologia theologia tis estin*), as Hermeias pointed out (*In Phaedr.*73.18), mythology is not excluded from philosophy. There is no clear distinction between "theologizing" by writing poetry in which truths about the gods are presented in a veiled form and "theologizing" by interpreting this poetry allegorically.

The aim of philosophy is to rearrange our whole life according to divine prototypes. Therefore philosophy as a "love of wisdom" cannot be reduced to philology – merely a "love of speech". Philosophical discourse is just one (though the most distinct) among other means that justify our choice of a particular way of life and support us on the spiritual path towards the final truth and enlightenment.

In the traditional Hellenic sense, (1) theology deals with the names, genealogies, theogonies, mythical substances, and iconographies of the gods; (2) philosophical exegesis deals with their metaphysical structure at the same time providing the basis for contemplation of truly existing beings and promising a happy life in accord with intellect; (3) theurgy deals with the sacramental means of ascent towards and actual union with the gods. The relationship between theology (understood either as a theology of inspired poets and prophets, or as the "scientific" post-Aristotelian metaphysics) and philosophy is not very clear. Both of them use the multi-dimensional *logos*, rational discursive reasoning and intellectual intuition (*noesis*), though the former stands much closer to the realm of myth and depends on certain divine revelations adapted to the particular human imagination and sensibility. When Porphyry argues that it is not rational knowledge that leads us to happiness and true contemplation, he makes a distinction between *dianoia* and *noesis*. The unifying, or henadic, power of the gods, however, is above all human intellection, according to Iamblichus, although *noesis* is a necessary element in human co-operation with the divine and in some respects may be regarded as a part of union itself.

Plotinus made a distinction between the "civic virtues" and the "purificatory virtues". His famous follower, Porphyry the Phoenician, added two other grades: the "theoretic virtues" and the "paradigmatic virtues", the former being that of the soul of a philosopher which turns to *nous* within itself and contemplates its noetic contents, the latter being the virtue proper to Intellect itself, not the aspiring observer. Iamblichus discerned two additional grades at both ends of the hierarchy: the "natural virtues" at the lowest level and the "hieratic virtues" at the highest. Within this sevenfold hierarchy of virtues, accepted by the later Neoplatonists, theological virtues are the same as the paradigmatic virtues. They are above the theoretic, or properly "philosophical", virtues, if philosophy is regarded as the way from the realm of sense and lower imagination to the realm of *nous*, passing through the intermediate dianoetical and mathematical levels. But only with theurgic, or hieratic, virtues which

crowns the hierarchy and transcend being (*ousia*) as such are we united with the ineffable God which stands at the beginning of one or another particular chain (*seira*) of ontological manifestations.

Porphyry retains an anthropocentric view of human relations with the divine and is convinced that pious actions and reverence for the gods accompanied by virtue and wisdom are enough for the ascent; Iamblichus proves the necessity of synthemata (*sunthemata*) which are *aporrheta sumbola* – the ineffable symbols and attributes of the gods – sown by the Demiurge throughout the cosmos in order to serve as a support for mystical remembrance (*anamnesis*). They are the means (*organa*) which transmit the efficient anagogic and henadic power of the transcendental principles. According to A. C. Lloyd, there is no doubt that Iamblichus put theurgy, as liberation of soul, above philosophy:

"But while his philosophy is full of abstract processions and reversions, philosophy was nothing for him if not itself a reversion, a return to the One, though achieving only an incomplete union. Its place can be seen in an almost fantastically elaborated metaphysical system..."⁸⁶

The achievement of divine union (*henosis*) depends on the entire complex of divine causes and powers. They include the proper use of theurgic synthemata (*sunthemata*) and traditional cosmogonical rites, as well as intellectual intuition (*noesis*), rational education and virtues (*aretai*). Therefore Iamblichus tries to reveal the integral connection between sacred liturgies, rituals of cultic worship, interpretation of oracles and the intellectual disciplines of philosophical *paideia*. As G. Shaw pointed out, such an interpretation had been the goal of Plato himself,⁸⁷ since *theourgia* (the term originated among the Middle Platonists to describe the deifying power of Chaldean and Egyptian rites) fulfilled the goal of philosophy understood as a *homoiosis theo*, restoring the "likeness to God" (Plat. *Theaet.*176b). The "likeness to God" is the *telos* of our life and is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*), since "knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us like to the gods" (Iamb. *Protrep.* ch.3, p.11, 14f).

All Neoplatonic philosophers, including Plotinus, emphasized the ultimate dependence of man on the divine source both ontologically and spiritually, or intellectually. Both cultic practices (invocations, sacrifices, animations of statues) and philosophic education (*paideia*) are rooted in the ineffable power of the gods; therefore the concept of "grace" might be seen even in the Plotinian philosophical concept of *eros*. But whereas traditional Platonic *paideia* had traced an ascent to the gods (or the archetypal stars) through harmonious assimilation to cosmic orders, Plotinus and Porphyry (following the ancient Delphic maxim) transformed the Platonic *homoiosis theo* into a likeness to the inner Self, equated with the divine Intellect. They promoted purely philosophical

rationalism and mysticism, thus threatening to desacralize the traditional cosmos. According to Porphyry:

“In every respect the philosopher is the saviour of himself” (*De abstin.* II.49.2).

For him the philosopher is a priest and not the other way round.⁸⁸ Aristotle considers that self-reflectivity and knowledge of self coincide in God, because in thinking about thinking, God thinks about himself. But the self-knowledge of Intellect (*nous*) is the knowledge of Being (*ousia*), not the knowledge of a private self. For Plotinus and Porphyry our *nous* does not fall into body but ceaselessly operates in the noetic sphere (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1). Therefore by rejecting the Plotinian concept of the undescending noetic summit of our soul – which is always in active contemplation of the divine realities even though “we” (*hemeis*) might have fallen, Iamblichus also rejected the Porphyrian tendency to treat the lower levels of existence as a mere illusion.

Since the cosmos itself should be regarded as paradigmatic theurgy – imitated by the priests in various hieratic rites – *theourgia* is not a mere preparation for the philosophical life, suited to those incapable of philosophical liberation, as Porphyry thought. Rather it may be likened to the multi-levelled trunk of the mythological World Tree which displays theophanies as leaves and reveals the divine powers (*dunameis*) while connecting and uniting the realms of Earth and Heaven. Since Plato himself had acknowledged that his writings are to be regarded merely as a prelude (*propaideia*) to deeper mysteries (*Ep.* VII.341cd), Iamblichus not only argues that Plato’s philosophical teachings are integrally related to the hieratic traditions of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians, but also tries to explain Oriental wisdom using Platonic⁸⁹ and sometimes Aristotelian categories. He believed that Plato himself was initiated into Egyptian and Chaldean mysteries.

The divine origin and mission of Pythagoras (sent down into the material world as a sort of bodhisatva) Iamblichus interpreted in terms of the *Phaedrus* myth (246e-248c). Proclus’ master Syrianus also linked Pythagorean philosophy with the ancient theologians – Orpheus, Homer and the Chaldean sages – not failing to connect the decline in contemporary philosophical insight with the myth of the *Phaedrus* (*In Metaph.* 82.15-20). Since Pythagoras’ revelation with its concern for immaterial realities stands for all that is true in Hellenic philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle (to the extent that the latter remains faithful to the Pythagorean tradition) are regarded as Pythagoreans by Iamblichus. He not only adopted and Pythagoreanized Aristotelian logic, but also mathematized all areas of philosophy.⁹⁰ The traditional conceptions of the gods and the physical universe as well as various sciences (*mathemata*) and methods of contemplation (*theoria*) were mediated by Pythagoras and intended for purification and opening the eye of intellect. This opening

enables the soul to see true principles and the causes of all things. Philosophy is a road, according to Iamblichus, and those are really wise who join effects to their causes and contemplate the truth in all things. The contemplation of the universe must be preferred to all things which seem to be useful:

“To the philosopher alone is there a correct representation of those things which are of and from themselves accurate exemplars, immutable Ideas, for he is a spectator of things themselves but not of imitations of these. ... For he alone who looks to nature and the divine truly lives, just as a good ruler drawing from immortal and stable sources the principles of living advances and lives according to them himself. This science therefore is both theoretic and productive, as we do all things according to it.”⁹¹

While recognizing a unity between the theologies of Egyptians, Chaldeans, Pythagoreans and Plato, Iamblichus emphasizes the dependance of Hellenic philosophers (including Plato and Pythagoras) on the Egyptian priests (*De myster.*: 2.2-3.5). Hellenic philosophy is systematically subordinated to ancient revelations. Iamblichus, according to M. J. Edwards, “did not wish to be a scholar, for the business of the philosopher is not with facts, but lives”.⁹² However, he does not exclude or banish reason. Notwithstanding the fact that we cannot attain knowledge (*gnosis*) of the gods by reason (*logismos*), the role of reasoning is crucial. If correctly used, it provides a clear discrimination of what is possible and impossible, real and unreal. For Iamblichus “there is a distinction between the words science and knowledge: the one signifying the theoretic faculty by which we apprehend real beings, the other the practical faculty by which we acquire phenomenal facts and information”.⁹³ But those who have intellect must philosophize:

“If therefore philosophy alone by reason of its nature causes perfect virtue and purification of the soul, that alone is worthy to be desired and sought. But to the company of the gods none may go who has not sought wisdom and departed in perfect purity; none but the lover of learning. And this is the reason why true philosophers abstain from the indulgence of all corporeal desires or passions...”⁹⁴

“For to cleanse the soul of every taint of generation, and to purify that actuality of it to which the power of reason belongs, is the chief function of Philosophy.”⁹⁵

The *Phaedrus* of Plato exemplifies the mission of a superior soul sent down to save fallen souls and to recall them through philosophy to higher realities. Therefore Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher, whose commentary on *Phaedrus* depends both on Syrianus’ lectures and metaphysical interpretations of Iamblichus, says:

“Socrates has been sent down to the world of becoming to benefit mankind and the souls of the young. Since souls differ greatly in character

and practices, he benefits each in a different way... turning them to philosophy? (*In Phaedr.* I.1-5).

Socrates, who receives his erotic power and anagogic energy from Eros, is referred to as a saviour who seeks to bring back souls who have fallen from the divine company of the gods. Philosophy and poetry are regarded as two different but integrally related forms of divinely-inspired madness (*mania*). Therefore the agreement between theologians (Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus), poets, and philosophers is based on their common divine sources of inspiration and their anagogic function for the benefit of mankind. Hermeias makes clear the revelatory and soteriological nature of philosophy.⁹⁶ True philosophers are divine-like souls who have not cut themselves off from participation in the vision of the heavenly retinue, or army (*stratia*), of the gods, described in the *Phaedrus*.

In this sense philosophy is a sort of divine mystagogy. It is also divinely-inspired beneficial madness. According to A. Sheppard, Hermeias distinguishes seven levels within the soul at which inspiration (*enthousiasmos*) can occur. These correspond to levels of reality in the universe as a whole, and they are: 1) the one within the soul (*hen tes psuches*), 2) intellect (*nous*), 3) discursive reason (*dianoia*), 4) opinion (*doxa*), 5) imagination (*phantasia*), 6) spirit (*thumos*, in the original Platonic sense of the word), 7) desire (*epithumia*).⁹⁷ Hermeias explains anagogically the four types of divinely-inspired madness, mentioned by Plato (*Phaedr.* 244a8-245a8) and integrally exemplified by Orpheus who had all types of inspiration, by drawing the following picture:

- 1) *poetike mania* brings the disordered parts of the soul into order and harmony through heaven-inspired poetry and music;
- 2) *telestike mania* is the state concerned with purifications, theurgic rites, and associated with the mysteries; it makes the soul whole and raises it to the level of Intellect (*nous*);
- 3) *mantike mania*, traditionally exhibited by the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona, is associated with Apollo and gathers the soul together to its own unity;
- 4) *erotike mania* takes the unified soul and joins the one within soul (*to hen tes psuches*), equated with the charioteer's head of the *Phaedrus* myth) to the gods and to noetic beauty (*tois theois kai to noeto kallei sunaptei*: *In Phaedr.* II.1-2).⁹⁸

The last *mania* brings about a mystical union. According to A. Sheppard,⁹⁹ Hermeias follows up Plato's distinction between two kinds of prophecy and two kinds of poetry, the inspired and merely skilled (*technike*), to make a parallel distinction between two kinds of *telestike*: (1) "human and merely skilled *telestike*" (such as priests use in the cults of statues and incantations according to the different local traditions) and (2) divinely-inspired *telestike* which not only makes our soul perfect, but also leads to mystical union.

Iamblichus' concept of inspiration is in agreement with Plato's concept of prophetic, or Apollonian (*Apolloniake*), madness and with traditional Hellenic ideas of divine possession. It proves that Neoplatonic theurgy (though closely connected with Chaldean and Egyptian religious sources) is also modelled on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* when read in the light of traditional soteriological mysteries, post-Aristotelian metaphysics and Hellenistic astronomy. However, theurgy is not simply a fruit of spiritual hermeneutics, but rather a prolongation, or revival, of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian esoteric traditions, framed by cosmological myths and rituals.

Some scholars assume that Iamblichus simply translated the metaphysics and psychology of Plotinus into the terminology of Chaldean theurgy (and thus spoiled the purity of the former), but such a view is too naïve and shows a tendency to regard Plotinus' flight of the solitary soul towards the solitary One in terms of Western Christian mysticism and modern subjectivism, along with the post-Enlightenment hate or fear of any sacramental rites. Therefore we are inclined to think that philosophy and theurgy, in the late Neoplatonic tradition, are not to be regarded as two different ways to the same goal, as H. Lewy once suggested.¹⁰⁰ Rather both *philosophia* and *hieratike technē* are the indispensable elements that constitute an extensive and interlaced spiritual path ("not in space but through one's life", as Olympiodorus explains: *In Gorg.* I.2, p.240.20 Norvin), adapted to different types of men and leading through different heroes, daimons, angels and gods to the mysterious and ineffable One which transcends all things.

As Iamblichus pointed out, each man performs his service to the gods (who grant health of body, virtue of soul, purity of intellect, and elevation to proper principles) according to what he is, not according to what he is not. Therefore the sacrifice must not surpass the proper measure of the worshipper (*to oikeion metron tou therapeuontos*: *De myster.* 220.6-9). Different classes of soul proceed in different and unequal ranks, but in the last regard the soul's descent and self-alienation as well as its ascent and *henosis* are activities of the gods themselves on the stage of divine irradiations. When invocation, or prayer, arises from the realised human nothingness and awakens the divine presence in the soul, "the divine itself quite literally is joined with itself", according to Iamblichus (*De myster.* I.15; 47.9-11).

In the later Hellenic antiquity, disciples of Platonism surrounding their master compared themselves to a chorus. Iamblichus, the head of the Neoplatonic school in Syrian Apamea, is referred to by Libanius as the leader of a chorus of souls gathered to the gods. Hypatia of Alexandria is regarded as "a genuine guide in the mysteries of philosophy" (*gnesia kathegemon ton philosophias orgion*: Synesius *Ep.* 137). The members of her circle participated in the 'philosophical mysteries' open to initiates only.

Their community of *betairoi* was knitted together with strong ties and constituted a microcosm reflecting the laws of the universe.¹⁰¹ The characterization of philosophy as 'the most ineffable of ineffable mysteries' into whose sacred rites initiation is required, shows the close affinity between the Egyptian and Syrian Neoplatonic circles and the later Sufi brotherhoods in Islamic Syria and Egypt. To awaken the "intellectual eye" buried within us (Syn. Ep.137), to put our mind into a state of inspiration and contemplation of the ultimate Beauty and Goodness, is the goal of philosophizing in such communities of philosophers.

18. Philosophy and the Power of Faith: Towards the Final Union

The success of Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists was due to their adaptation of a more erudite and impersonal Platonism to contemporary aspirations for immortality and a blessed afterlife. Plato directed the philosophical vision towards the intelligible Form of the Good and the Beautiful. The Middle Platonists faithfully followed Plato's advice to imitate God as far as it is possible for a soul and to become God (*Theaet.*176 b). This assimilation to God may be understood as following, or imitating, in all respects the divine patterns (*paradeigmata*), thereby restoring the perfect image of God both externally and internally. The Stoics understood it as "life according to nature". But the more esoteric interpretation, related to the Egyptian mysteries, is concerned with actual union.

Early Christianity inherited the ancient *telos* of theurgy, though "assimilation to God" may be explained in many different ways, not always meaning making one closer to God. For Clement of Alexandria, assimilation means deification:

"The Word of God (*tu theou*) speaks, having become man, in order that you may learn from man how man may become god" (*theos*: *Protrep.*8.4).

It is not clear, whether *theos* here means a stage within God himself or an angelic rank. In the Biblical tradition, the sons of God may be called "angels", and "Moses calls the angels gods", according to Julian (*onomazei theous tous angellous: Kata Gallilaion logos* 290B). Perhaps Clement means that the gnostic draws nearer to God than the closest possible proximity, though this transcending never ends:

"The gnostic souls, transcending, by the magnificence of their contemplation, the citizenship (*politeia*) of every holy rank, in accordance with which [ranks] the blessed dwellings of gods, having been delimited, are allotted; having been counted as holy among the holies... arriving at better and better places; no longer cleaving to divine contemplation in mirrors or through mirrors, but hailing the most manifest possible and

absolutely unmixed sight... This is the grasping contemplation (*kataleptike theoria*) of the "pure in heart" (*Stromateis* 7.13.2).

The Middle Platonist Alkinous argues that Plato "made our good the knowledge and contemplation of the first Good which can be called God and the First Intellect" (*Didask.*179.36-37). In order to comprehend such statements we must remember that prior to Plotinus no clear distinction had been established yet between the divine Intellect (or the noetic realm constituted by the triad of Being, Life, Intelligence) and the ineffable One as the first Good which transcends Intellect and Being altogether. The aim (*telos*) of philosophy for the Middle Platonist consists in assimilation to God as far as possible. If the principal activity of God (in this case equated with the Aristotelian first Intellect) is displayed in contemplating Himself, then the human *telos* should be to contemplate God. Alkinous says:

The soul contemplating the divine and the intellections of the divine can be designated as in excellent condition. Such a condition of the soul is called wisdom (*phronesis*) – in fact, one should think of assimilation to the divine as nothing else" (*Didask.*153.4-7).

The fundamental feature of the Middle Platonic metaphysics is the fusion of the Platonic conception of Ideas and the Aristotelian conception of Intellect (*nous*). In their transcendent aspect, the Ideas were considered as thoughts of God and, in the immanent aspect, they were regarded as forms of beings. The Middle Platonists recovered the Platonic dimension of incorporeality and transcendence neglected by the New Academy and posited as the supreme end of man the imitation of God, or assimilation to the divine and to the incorporeal.

Numenius, the Neopythagorean predecessor of Plotinus, upheld the doctrine close to *philosophia perennis*: he tried to show the harmony and inner concord of the Pythagorean philosophy of Plato with various initiations and doctrines (*tas teletas kai dogmata*) shared by the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi, and the Egyptians (fr.1a). The Pythagorean Platonism expounded by Numenius and Ammonius Sakkas "a charismatic purveyor of Numenian Neopythagoreanism", according to J. Dillon,¹⁰² exercised the most powerful influence upon Plotinus and later Platonists.

In the writings of the Alexandrian philosopher Hierocles, Ammonius emerges as having accomplished the main Numenian task (insufficiently conducted much earlier by Antiochus of Ascalon), namely, the purification and restoration of Platonism betrayed by Plato's successors in the Academy. Hierocles follows Iamblichus in regarding true philosophy as a revelation: Plato presents the earthly domain as a sort of "avataric" epiphany. Being the purifier of philosophy, Ammonius is instructed by the divine (*theodidaktos*: Photius *Bibliotheca* III.126, 172a).

According to Hierocles, the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, described as an "educational introduction" (*paidentike stoicheiosis*) written by those who had

already “ascended the divine way” contain the general and basic principles of all philosophy. By establishing the cultivation of virtues and contemplation of truth, they put the student of philosophy on the road to his final goal, namely, assimilation to God and return to the archetypal abode. Therefore repentance is the beginning of philosophy which itself is divided into “practical philosophy”, that is human virtue, and “contemplative philosophy” celebrated under the name of divine virtue.

In order to restore spiritual insight proper to the primordial “golden race”, to conduct the perfect and happy life full of knowledge, and to ascend to divine principles, not only various sciences, such as geometry and mathematics, are needed, but hieratic purifications of the soul’s pneumatic vehicle (*ochema*) are also required. As Hierocles concludes alluding to the *Phaedrus* myth (246a-256c):

“The end of the Pythagorean philosophy is that we may become all over wings to soar aloft to the Divine Good”¹⁰³

This Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is based on oral and written instructions, commandments and exhortations (*parangelmata*) provided by the so-called “daimonic” men who belong to the *bermaike seira* – the Hermetic chain of transmission which is primarily vertical and only secondarily horizontal. This philosophy also is based on an elaborated symbolical exegesis, that is, on the metaphysical interpretation of oracles and certain inspired ancient texts such as the dialogues of the “divine” Plato and the poems of Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus. From the 2nd century A.D. the theological and metaphysical oracles (or “dogmas from Assyria” – *ta Assuria patria dogmata*: Procl. In *Parm.* I.647.7) were accepted as direct utterances and revelations of gods and archangels. These oracles combined with other sacred traditions, provided sufficient ground for the re-established unity of philosophy and religion.

For H. D. Saffrey, who regarded philosophy as “a mental activity which the Greeks had always laboured to render rational”, this turn to the supra-rational authorities, mythical evidences and hieratic arts proves to be a clear decline. “Plotinus alone appears to us as a heroic exception to this general crazy infatuation” – he sadly concludes. However, the Pythagoreans, Neoplatonists and Chaldeans themselves regarded theurgy and other hieratic practices not as the regrettable corruption of rational philosophy, but as the desired culmination of the entire philosophical programme. The acceptance of divine revelations and myths in no way presupposes the rejection of mind, of independent scientific research and logic. Therefore Platonism presented itself as the supreme defender of Hellenic rationality. The characteristic of a philosopher and of any intelligent person was felt to be his ability to explain in logical terms what he believed and he does not indulge in vulgar and irrational abuse of natural things which are, after all, the reflections of eternal archetypes and noetic paradigms.

Despite the confidence of H. D. Saffrey and other scholars who tried to dissociate philosophy (converted into purely mental activity) from any kind of revelation and initiation, the philosophy of Plotinus is not incompatible with hieratic traditions. The Plotinian ascent (*anagoge*) as a contemplative process which brings the soul to greater and greater degrees of noetic purification, follows the model of the mysteries and of cosmogonical scenarios by imitating the rhythms of the main divine Rite – that of creative irradiation and return to the source. Since cosmogony itself is the ritual act of the Demiurge (who directs and orders the overflowing productive power of the One) both theurgy and philosophy at their proper levels constitute the soul’s mimesis of the cosmogonical rite conducted in the cosmos, itself understood as the temple of the eternal gods. The ascending soul, “drunk with nectar” and filled with love for the Good, participates in Intellect’s erotic supra-intellectual aspiration for the Good as pure light. Plotinus says:

“But the soul sees by a kind of confusing and annulling of the intellect which abides within it – but rather its intellect sees first and the vision comes also to it and the two become one (*kai ta duo hen ginetai*). But the Good is spread out over them and fitted in to the union of both; playing upon them and uniting the two it rests upon them and gives them a blessed perception and vision...” (*Enn.* VI.7.35.33-41).

This grasp of the ultimate Good is achieved by the soul (carried on the epistrophic wave of the divine *Nous* itself) through the “prime part of intellect” or “that element in *nous* which is not *nous*” but is akin to the One. This “element” is the same as the “flame of intellect” or “flower of intellect” (*anthous nou*) of the *Chaldean Oracles* – the most mysterious part of the intellect which is akin to the fiery essence of the Father. Sometimes the language of Chaldean theology is strikingly close to the language of Plotinus’ negative theology and dialectic. And when they show certain differences in metaphysical detail, in style of expression and spiritual method, they nonetheless agree regarding the aim of *anagoge* which is the same: mystical vision, illumination, immortality and union with the eternal divine principles or the One which should be described not only as an object of love but also as the lover and the love itself.

Active union with divine principles is accomplished not without intellect and rational abilities. But at the same time this union transcends imagination, discursive thought and even intellect itself. The strength of human intelligence suffices for gaining the vision of Ideas in their noetic union of plurality, but not of their source – the supreme and ineffable God. Therefore immaterial theurgy, regarded as the graceful interference of the henads themselves, at the summit of philosophical ascent provides a supra-rational and supra-intellectual union.

The different kinds of theurgy operate on different levels of reality. Material theurgy employs material objects, because the corporeal world is a field in which the soul’s faculties are developed and tested. Therefore theurgy reveals the sacramental virtues and qualities of phenomena which

serve as the unspeakable symbols and ineffable names of the gods. As G. Shaw pointed out:

“The soul could no more realize its salvation without embracing matter than the Demiurge could have created the cosmos without the formless receptacle”.¹⁰⁴

The aporetic approach to philosophy based on reasoned arguments and logic of the lower stages of ascent is not incompatible with the noetic insights and mystical visions of the higher stages. Though our language and thought are unable to reach the One’s ineffable light, philosophy ultimately attains the truth and is able to assimilate us to the divine realm. A. H. Armstrong, the great Plotinian scholar, says:

“An important reason why there is so little about prayer in the *Enneads* of Plotinus is that so much of what he writes simply is prayer, understood according to its admirable catechism definition as ‘lifting up the head and mind to God’”.¹⁰⁵

Plotinus distinguishes three classes of men: 1) those who do not attempt to rise above the physical realm, 2) those who try but cannot, and 3) those who succeed and arrive at the divine realm, “just as a man arrives in his well-governed land after a long journey” (*Enn.* V.9.1.20-21). Here Odysseus is a symbol of the highest class of humanity – those philosophers and mystics who have reached their spiritual Home. Being faithful to Plato’s definition (*Phaed.*67c), both Plotinus and Porphyry regarded philosophy essentially as a preparation for death and escaping from the physical body.

But whereas Plato describes the process of doing good to one’s beloved as “working on a statue” (*agalma tektainetai*: *Phaedr.*252d7), Plotinus exhorts the searcher for the Good to go on working at his own statue (*tektainon to son agalma*: *Enn.* I.6.9.13). Porphyry also proclaims the necessity of returning to the real Self. Since the real Self for Plotinus and Porphyry is the “undescending intellect”, both as the highest element in us and as a component of the hypostasis of Intellect, the goal of life is to live according to intellect, following the Aristotelian maxim (*Nicom. Eth.*118ab). Porphyry says:

“To the extent to which you approach yourself (and yet you are present to yourself and inseparable from yourself) you approach Being as well” (*Sent.*40).

He indicates four “elements” (*stoicheia*), derived from Chaldean sources, as significant and indispensable for the friend of God, that is, faith, truth, love, and hope (*Ad Marcellam* 24). As Porphyry argues, it is necessary to trust that the only salvation (*soteria*) is conversion to God (*he pros ton theon epistrophe*) and knowing the truth about Him. Through toil and steadfastness philosophy accomplishes the blessed journey to Heaven following the example of the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, and “all other children of the gods” (*Ad Marcellam* 7).

Both Neoplatonists and Hermetists maintain that the only really useful knowledge is that of the way of immortality. Though the idea that one may know God (common in Christian usage) is rare among Hellenic writers, for Iamblichus liberation from fate occurs only through knowledge of the gods (*tau theou gnosis*: *De myster.* 290.16-17). This knowledge is sometimes equated to union with the gods and is viewed as “the first road to happiness”.

In Neoplatonism, a spiritual master is described as the “divine man” (*theios aner*) which may be regarded as a personification of divine Intellect. Within the elaborated hierarchy of virtues, the agent of theoretic virtue (the soul which beholds *nous* within itself and is fulfilled by it) is given the title “god” and that of the paradigmatic virtue (the soul which is united with Intellect) – “father of gods”, according to Porphyry (*Sent.*32). Following another view, more suited to Iamblican and post-Iamblican Platonism, the possessor of philosophical virtue is called “god” (*theos*) and the possessor of theurgical virtue (the liberated soul which is united to the One or resembles it) is called “father of gods” (*Psellus De omnifaria doctrina* 55). Theurgical, or hieratic, virtue is proper to the henadic element of the soul which transcends Intellect and Being.

Each soul, likened to a fruit-producing plant by Iamblichus (*Stob.* I.373.15), must worship the gods in a manner appropriate to its nature and level of understanding. There are various modes (*tropoi*) both of descent and ascent, therefore philosophy (not love of talking but love of wisdom) leads upwards by using all necessary means. For philosophy indeed is the science of living perfectly, according to Iamblichus.

The true philosophical life (*philosophikos bios*) is also the life of loving (*erotikos bios*), for philosophy is the love of wisdom and its goal is the knowledge of all divine things, according to Proclus. Being as it were the benefactor of souls and bringing salvation to mankind, philosophy leads the soul upward by the power of truth – to the unparticipated divine Intellect and eternal Ideas.¹⁰⁶ Platonic dialectic serves this function, namely, to unify the whole realm of human reasoning and proceed from human reason to the divine *Nous* itself. Since the vision of the Ideas (Archetypes, divine Names) is among the most important achievements in the upward journey, the soul of the philosopher is rewarded by that life of contemplation known as the Cronian life (*keronios bios*). Standing at the top of Heaven (on the back of the Egyptian goddess Nut), the soul contemplates the true Being beyond. Philosophy and the power of truth cannot lead further, but only *theourgike techné* and faith. In this respect, which concerns the relationship between philosophy and faith (consisting of being aware of metaphysical depths of reality) F. Schuon asserts as follows:

“One can spend a whole lifetime speculating on the supersensorial and the transcendent, but all that matters is the “leap into the void” which is the fixation of spirit and soul in an unthinkable dimension of the real; this leap, which cuts short and completes in itself the endless chain of

formulations, depends on a direct understanding and on a grace, not on having reached a certain phase in the unfolding of the doctrine, for this unfolding, we repeat, has logically no end. This "leap into the void" we can call "faith"; it is the negation of this reality that is the source of all philosophy of the type that may be described as "art for art's sake", and of all thought that believes it can attain to an absolute contact with Reality by means of analyses, syntheses, arrangements, filtrations, and polishings..."¹⁰⁷

While discussing the power of faith (*pistis*) Proclus argues in the same vein:

"For the theologians call the contact and union with the One faith" (*kai he pros auto sunaphe kai henosis hupo ton theologon pistis pokaleitai*).¹⁰⁸

Paradoxically, this faith may be defined as "illegitimate belief" (*nothe doxa*), being like the Buddhist *upaya*, a kind of "soteriological mirage". Since like is always known by like, the theologians can know the One only by an illegitimate intuition (*nothos nous*). The soul is united with the Good (which is unknowable and unspeakable) through the "flower of the intellect" (*anthos tou nou*) and the "flower of our whole soul" (*pases hemon tes psuches anthos*). The final unity is called the "fire-brand of the soul" (*psuches puros*). Proclus argues that Plato and the theologians before Plato were accustomed to praise a "divine madness" (*mania*) which transcends intellect:

"For the soul must become one in order to see the One, or rather in order not to see the One; for if it saw the One it would do so by intuition and not by that which is above intuition (*videns enim intellectuale videbit et non supra-intellectum*), and it would know a particular unitary thing, but not the One itself" (*Prov. Fato* IV.171-172).

L. J. Rosan distinguishes three stages of this madness: 1) contact (*sunaphe*), 2) approach (*empelasis*), and 3) union (*henosis*). The final union may be described as "becoming Fire" and the road to it as the fiery road, leading to the Father. Those terms reflect not only Chaldean, but also Egyptian images, such as the entourage of flame in the solar barque of Ra. Proclus says:

"Now that we are coming close to the Cause of all things, there must be not only a hush of the opinion, a hush of the imagination, and a cessation of all emotions that prevent us from rising upward to the One, but also a stillness in the air and a stillness of all else. For let all things lead us by the calmness of their power to the presence of the Ineffable. And standing There raised above all that which has being, we kneel to It as to the Rising Sun, blinded in our eyes".¹⁰⁹

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ETERNAL MEASURES AND SYMBOLS OF EGYPTIAN SAGES

1. On the Back of the Heavenly Cow

O man, what should we do? This question is raised by Porphyry the Phoenician, the disciple of Plotinus. The following answer is given:

"We should imitate those that lived in the golden age" (*De abst.* III.27).

This presupposes a fall of humankind from a paradisiacal "golden" condition and separation from the gods. According to the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* which originated in the New Kingdom Egypt (circa 1350 B.C.) and provides a paradigm for later Gnostic and Hermetic teachings about redemption, the rebellion of humankind against the Sun god Ra (the demiurgic Intellect) resulted in its punishment by the fiery Eye of Ra, the goddess Hathor. This fall and subsequent rebellion re-ordered the world which had previously been in a golden age: the original paradise was thus lost, strife and death came into the world, and Ra himself withdrew to the sky on the back of the celestial Cow. This macrocosmic Cow, sometimes regarded as Nut-Hathor, is supported by Shu and the eight Heh-gods, or by the Pharaoh himself who symbolizes the golden Horus, the perfect imago dei.

After this fatal separation had occurred, all aspirations of human beings (at least of those who may be described as lovers of wisdom) were directed back towards the original unity, on the re-establishing of this golden age inwardly through recollection, purification, devotion, love and spiritual knowledge. Since Pharaoh is a son and successor of Ra, he imitates the withdrawal of his Father who, as it were, shows the theurgic way upwards. Therefore the king and every initiate should live and "philosophize" according to the example provided by Ra, that is Intellect. They also must ascend on the back of the heavenly Cow (a sort of *ochema*) and reach the intelligible realm.

Those who ascend to the abode of Ra, lead a blessed life in the "entourage of flames" until the final re-absorption and return to the primeval Waters (Nun) at "the end of time". This is the initial and rather "archaic" version of the Aristotelian maxim to live according to Intellect (*bios kata noun: Nicomach. Eth.*118a6). The human *telos* consists in self-realization and deification: the actualized human intellect grasps that in its very nature the human being is of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the divine Intellect. At the end of his *via dialectica* the perfect philosopher sees noetically the entire *kosmos*, himself being the son of Ra, i.e., the son of the ever-living and eternally active *Nous* which energizes the microcosmic *nous*, potentially hidden in each human soul.

At least from the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.), the Egyptian intellectual milieu developed the proto-Hermetic and proto-Neoplatonic strand (if such a paradoxical statement is permissible), providing

sophisticated and detailed conceptions 1) of the unity of the cosmos, regarded as theophany, 2) of the ontological hierarchy constituting vertical chains of manifestation (theology of *ba*, according to which various deities, sacred animals, and symbols are *ba* of other deities at different levels of being), 3) of a single God whose real name (*ren*) and nature remains secret even from the gods. He is both transcendent and immanent, "one and all" (*hen kai pan*). He takes all forms of the universe, is hidden in the multiplicity of things, yet his own form is inconceivable: "no god knows his true form", "no one knows his essence" (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.200).

Though so-called polytheistic mythologies from the earliest times were only the symbolic veils of the single metaphysical Principle, displayed at the level of cultic imagination and social life (thus constituting the set of precedents, models, examples and ideals for the whole state and its inhabitants, serving for their spiritual education and meaningful conduct), the monistic tendency of thought was reinforced at the beginning of New Kingdom Egypt. This mythological, metaphysical, and hermeneutical monism which reached its culmination in the theology of Amun-Ra, is the direct predecessor of the much later Hellenic metaphysics.

The concept of the divine of the Ramesside period (1295-1069 B.C.) stands at the roots of Hermetic lore which partly moulded the entire Western esoteric tradition. A large majority of the initiation rituals and mystical aspirations have their semi-forgotten or hidden prototype in ancient Egypt. The Ramesside theologians, who laid the foundation for the much later developed Pythagorean and Platonic metaphysics, regarded Amun-Ra as "the only one", "one who has no second", "the solitary sole one". The sacred metaphysics of Amun-Ra, shaped by the iconographically correct divine images, symbols, words of power and abstract conceptions, provides a model and paradigm for the later monistic theologies.

Thomas McEvilley views the transcendent aspect of Amun-Ra which surpasses form, thought, and name as "the direct ancestor of primal philosophical conceptions such as Parmenides' formless Being and the featureless absolute *brahman* of Yajñavalkya. The idea of the immanent-transcendent absolute, which would become a central conception of the early stage of metaphysics in both Greece and India, is first recorded in this late mythological context".¹

Since the term "pantheism" is inaccurate if used without reservations and rather sophisticated explanations, we avoid speaking of "Egyptian pantheism" which supposedly merges the gods and goddesses into a single "cosmic being". It is the common idea of the Egyptian theological texts that all gods are fundamentally manifestations or hypostases of another superior god, and ultimately of the ineffable Principle itself. The unspeakable fullness and transcendence of the one God cannot be diminished, damaged or exhausted by the fact that He reveals himself in millions of forms and names.

A name can express only one aspect of a god's (*ntr*) complex nature and no image shows the true form of god: therefore a variety of iconographies and mythologies is inevitable. Since the gods (sometimes equated to *ba*, initially perhaps meaning fame and glory, and *sekbemu*, powers, symbols of the supreme God) are "rich in manifestations" and characterized by the multiplicity of faces (*hru*), every hieratic image of them is only an imperfect means (though, presumably, introduced by the gods themselves) of making a god visible and distinguishing him from other *netern*.

Hence, divineness or sacredness is regarded as an irradiation produced by the gods, their images, and manifestations. Behind every name and every epithet stand not only certain particular myths and cultic liturgies, directed to individual deities, but also the simultaneously immanent and transcendent *pantheos*, the All-lord. This concept cannot be simply regarded as a transitional stage between mythology and philosophy, or "a mythology undergoing meltdown" which was later encountered by Thales, Pythagoras and other seekers of wisdom who explored and reinterpreted the ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, and Mesopotamian traditions.

However, it is nonetheless evident that the early philosophers in Greece and India continued "the final preoccupation of Bronze Age mythology: the Problem of the One and the Many, with solutions that emphasize the One over the Many, and the investigation of the relationship between immanence and transcendence, or form and formless".²

Egyptian mythical theology concerns the relationship between the One and the Many, the One and the Ennead, the One and different levels of *kosmos noetos*, including all further manifestations. It tries to assert that diversity is contained within a higher unity, that material images are reflections of immaterial archetypes. The symbolic connections between the macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions are also established, since Ptah, as a Cosmic Person, serves as a paradigm to his pious follower who strives to become a "Perfect Man", Macranthropos, and thus "imitates" Ptah, playing the role of his son Nefertum, or the sage Imhotep.

However, we cannot accept the straightforward opinion of certain modern historians that the ideas described above, and others like them, were innovations of New Kingdom solar theologies, since they appeared (or were announced in public) owing to shifts of emphasis and interpretation. The long tradition and inherited scheme of things stand behind them, and the religiously inspired, or revealed, monism complex seems to be the central metaphysical concern of the ancient, otherwise "polytheistic", civilizations. Most of the New Kingdom teachings are based on Old Kingdom doctrines, and some of them are hidden esoteric teachings revealed to a wider audience or put in writing after the Amarna upheaval for fear of their loss. Therefore we can speak of a great new

synthesis and development of the old priestly tradition which reflects and repeats another great synthesis (sometimes regarded as the Sumero-Egyptian syncretic strain of Near Eastern cultural influences) accomplished by the priestly and scholarly community of the early Old Kingdom. According to T. MacEvilley:

“This Bronze Age synthesis cast all the universe in a mathematical-astronomical-musical unity, within which temporal years generate diversity and articulation”.³

He argues that such texts as the Orphic poem which describes the macranthropic Zeus and the macranthropic hymns which describe the universe as a giant human body and appear in the Xth book of the *Rig Veda* (c.1000 B.C.) have parallels in the earlier Akkadian examples, but in their terms and structure go back ultimately to Old Kingdom Egyptian texts. Concerning the Amun-Ra theology of the Ramesside Age, he says:

“Egyptian influences seem to have been flowing into both the Greek and the Indian streams of early philosophical thought. Egyptian mythologems... control the afterlife myth of the Orphics and of an Upanishadic text. Egyptian New Kingdom pantheism is the closest parallel to early Indian monism; the Amun-Ra hymns gave birth ultimately to both the pantheistic Orphic hymns and the *Purusasukta*, and something like reincarnation did in fact exist in Egyptian thought”.⁴

2. Proteus and Egyptian Wisdom

Multi-faceted Egyptian wisdom was likened to Proteus by the Greeks who were able to glimpse only certain sides and aspects of it. Proteus, who could assume any form whatsoever and whose inner essence escapes the curious eye of inquiry, is connected with Egypt in the *Odyssey* of Homer and called an “Egyptian sophist” by Plato. Proclus regarded him as an angelic *nous* in the procession (*seira*) of Poseidon. Proteus “contains” in himself “the forms of all things in the world” (*ta eide panta ton geneton*: *In Remp.* I.112.28-29).

We may extend this interpretation and suppose that countless theological and iconographical varieties employed by the Egyptian mythoplasts (creators of myths) really illustrate the fact that a fragmented embodied soul cannot perceive these forms simultaneously, but only according to one or another *upaya*, one or another hermeneutical perspective. Since apparitions of gods appearing in various forms to different people imply no change in the gods themselves, the differences of receivers (*hupodochai*) and their capacities produce the Protean multiplicity of visions. While defending Homer against the Socratic accusation, Proclus explains the story of Proteus (*Od.* IV.351-582) in a similar vein, arguing:

“But there is also a second mode in which the divine itself, because of its multiple powers and because it is filled with forms of all sorts, extends diverse visions to those who observe it. Here, in effect, the poem is showing the diversity of the powers and again says that that which contains all these powers itself changes into many forms (*eis pollas morphas*), projecting first one then another, though in fact the being in question is always acting according to all its powers, but because of the multiplicity of the powers it encompasses it is constantly changing for the discursive perceptions of souls” (*In Remp.* I.112.14-22).

According to the popular legend related by Heliodorus (*Aethiopica* III.14), Homer himself was a son of Hermes Trismegistus, conceived by the wife of a priest while she slept in a temple of Thebes. Another story tells us that Homer, who described the celestial Nile, Osiris, as “the water of the Egyptian river falling down from Heaven” (*Od.* IV.477), received the manuscript of the *Iliad* in Memphis.

The opinion that Homeric wisdom is related to Egypt was prevalent in late antiquity and Byzantium. The idea is not purely fantastical but reflects the close historical relations between Hellenes and Egyptians, renewed and strengthened from the 7th century B.C. onward, “that is, one hundred years before the conventional beginning of philosophy in the 6th century B.C.”⁵ Close contacts between Egyptians and Phoenicians point to an even older cultural encounter. Through the Phoenician traders, colonists, craftsmen, and sages the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Akkadian concepts were spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

Therefore it seems unsound to think that the Hellenic tradition, which insists on the birth of Greek philosophy as a consequence of the encounter with Egyptian civilization, is utterly wrong. Isocrates, the contemporary of Plato, is not simply “idealizing” Egyptian philosophy as the origin of all philosophy or creating this trustworthy account *ex nihilo* in order to make a surrealist picture and fabricate an incredible fiction against the expected self-estimation of the Hellenes. Diodorus of Sicily (c.80-20 B.C.), partly drawing on the lost work of Hecateus of Abdera (c.300 B.C.), is even more drastic: he says that the gods and goddesses originated in Egypt (*Bibl. hist.* I.9.6).

Among the visitors to and disciples of the Egyptian priests Heliodorus of Halicarnassus (c.484-425 B.C.) enumerates Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer, Lycurgus, followed by Solon, Pythagoras, Plato, Eudoxus, Democritus, Oenopides of Chios (*Hist.* I.96). Plutarch, who describes the Egyptian priests and “their philosophy, which for the most part, is veiled in myths and in words containing dim reflections and adumbrations of the truth”, thus being “an enigmatic sort of wisdom” (*hos ainigmatode sophian*: *De Iside* 354c), relates as follows:

“When they, therefore, address the supreme God (*ton proton theon*), whom they believe to be the same as the Universe (*to panti*), as if he were

invisible and concealed, and implore him to make himself visible and manifest to them, they use the word 'Amun' (*Amoun legousin*); so great, then, was the circumspection of the Egyptians in their wisdom touching all that had to do with the gods (*ta theia sophias*).

"Witness to this also are the wisest of the Hellenes: Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus, Pythagoras, who came to Egypt and consorted with the priests; and in this number some would include Lycurgus also. Eudoxus, they say, received instruction from Chonuphis of Memphis, Solon from Sonchis of Sais, and Pythagoras from Oenuphis of Heliopolis. Pythagoras, as it seems, was greatly admired, and he also greatly admired the Egyptian priests, and, copying their symbolism and mystical teachings (*to symbolikon auton kai musteriodes*), incorporated his doctrines in enigmas (*ainigmata*). As a matter of fact most of the Pythagorean precepts do not at all fall short of the writings that are called hieroglyphs...

"For my part, I think also that their naming unity (*monada*) Apollo, duality (*duada*) Artemis, the hebdomad Athena, and the first cube Poseidon, bears a resemblance to the statues and even to the sculptures and paintings with which their shrines are embellished. For their King and Lord Osiris they portray by means of an eye and a sceptre; there are even some who explain the meaning of the name as 'many-eyed' on the theory that *os* in the Egyptian language means 'many' and *iri* 'eye'; and the heavens, since they are ageless because of their eternity, they portray by a heart with a censer beneath" (*De Iside* 9-10.354d-355a).

The Romans, for example, the prefect Titus Claudius Balbilus, who otherwise showed only contempt for the "vanity" of the Egyptian royal buildings, nonetheless, believed that the obelisks contain a description of the nature of things (*rerum naturae*), "according to the philosophy of the Egyptians" (Pliny *Nat. hist.*71). Putting aside the question regarding formation of these legends and the particular Roman point of view or interpretation of "exotic cultures", we ought to observe that even such a careful and sometimes sceptical writer as E. Hornung is ready to acknowledge that the philosopher Democritus, viewed also as a magus, "borrowed from Egyptians concepts of the afterlife, and the tradition of such compositions as the Books of the Netherworld did in fact extend down into the Ptolemaic Period. Democritus fits in with hermetic tradition, because he viewed man as a microcosm".⁶

3. Allegorical Myths and Philosophy in the Temples

The widespread opinion, which states that when the ancients with the guidance of the gods had discovered the hidden meaning of things they clothed them in paradoxical myths, reflects the rationalist attitude of post-Socratic Hellenism. From the metaphysical point of view, ordinary men

and those uninitiated into the mysteries do not derive most benefit from the sacred myths which instruct through symbols alone, unlike the initiates themselves who use these symbols and images as a tool of contemplation.

The myths and images with their underlying metaphysics are symbolic constructs whereby what is invisible, ineffable, and immaterial is represented as visible, hearable, and material. The images along with the verbal evocations (mantras, divine names, words of power) served as objects of meditation which allowed initiates to invoke the deity's presence during the sacrificial ritual and inner liturgy. The mythical images presented in the imagination should be judged by their correspondence to their noetic models. Therefore, according to Proclus:

"Even more divine than the figures of souls are the intelligible figures; they are in every way superior to divided things, shining everywhere with indivisible and intelligible light, generating, effecting, perfecting all things, being present equally in all of them though themselves steadfast and unmoved, bringing unity to the figures of souls and keeping the aberrations of sensible figures within appropriate bounds. And high above all these are the perfect, uniform, unknowable, and ineffable figures of the gods which, being mounted on the intelligible figures, impose limits upon the whole universe of figures and hold everything together in their unifying boundaries. Their properties have been represented for us by the theurgic art in its statues of the gods, whom it clothes in the most varied figures. Some of them it portrays by means of mystic signs that express the unknowable divine potencies, others it represents through forms and shapes, making some standing, others sitting; some heart-shaped, some spherical, and some fashioned still otherwise; some simple, others composed of several shapes; some stern, others mild and expressing the benignity of the gods; and still others fearful in shape. To these figures it adjoins various symbols for different gods, as they are appropriate to the divinities represented" (*In Euclid.*137-138).

Egyptian thought represents the multi-levelled, but logically coherent system of symbolism to a degree rarely surpassed by other cultures. Therefore it cannot be fully comprehended without knowing how to read and interpret the texts and images – not only a "temple grammar", but also a semiotic structure of the symbolic and emblematic reality itself which includes a complex hierarchy of gods and humans.

Tzetzes, the Byzantine commentator on Homer, maintains that the chief reason why "the most ancient of the sacred scribes (*hoi archaioteroi ton hierogrammateon*) wanted to conceal the theory about the nature of the gods" (*ton peri theon phusikon logon*), is that of the education and instruction of children. This rather incorrect attitude derives from the Hellenistic *paideia*, based on one-sided rationalistic ideas about reality, and from Stoic philosophical hermeneutics which tried to present ancient myths as the deliberate allegories of their "scientific" materialism. Maintaining that the

Egyptians wanted to teach the lofty things to the uninitiated “by means of allegories and myths” (*di’ allegorion kai muthon: Exegesis of the Iliad*. I.193) or “by allegorical symbols and characters” (*ibid.* I.97), Tzetzes follows the Alexandrian *hierogrammateus* Chaeremon, who was both an Egyptian priest and a Stoic philosopher, serving as tutor to the Roman Prince Nero.

According to the usual Stoic interpretation, the ancient myths speak allegorically (*allegorikos*), therefore the aim of philosophical hermeneutics is to find the hidden meaning (*huponoia*). They were correct in admitting that Egyptian theology used symbolic means of expression, but wrong in their supposition that the hidden meaning would necessarily be in accord with their own rather “modern” speculations about the nature of things.

Aristotle also listed “theological philosophy” (*theologike*) among the types of “contemplative philosophy” (*theoretikai: Metaph.* E 1026a19), referring to “those very ancient people who lived long before the present age and were the first to theologize” (*protous theologisantes: ibid.*, A 983b 28-29). By “theologizing” he probably meant not only creating myths and writing poetry in which information about the gods was presented in a veiled form, but also interpreting them, providing commentaries and explanations.

In the 1st century A.D., the geographer Strabo summarizes the Stoic conception of theology and hermeneutics, developed in the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., as follows:

“Every discussion of the gods [i.e., all theology] is built upon the examination of opinions and myths (*exetazei doxas kai muthous*), since the ancients hinted at their physical perceptions about things and always added a mythical element to their discussions (*tois logois ton muthon*). It is not an easy thing to solve all the riddles (*ta ainigmata*) correctly, but when the whole mass of mythically expressed material is placed before you, some of it in agreement and some in contradiction with the rest, then you might more easily be able to form from it an image of the truth” (*Geogr.* 10.3.23).

The Stoics never questioned the existence of Egyptian philosophy as such, i.e., they never doubted that the Egyptian priests were “philosophers” and masters of the early Hellenic sages. Chaeremon the Stoic tells us (though his writings are preserved only in citations of later authors) that the Egyptian priests are considered as philosophers and they chose the temples as the place to philosophize. Those men devoted their life to contemplation and the shrines were regarded as the best places for this task. They were always seen near the statues of the gods, either preceding them in processions or setting them up with order and dignity, so that each act they performed was not an empty gesture, but an indication of some allegorical truth (*phusikon logou*). All people honoured those true philosophers as if they were a sort of sacred animal.

This information, though regularly treated with contempt by modern sceptics, is preserved by Porphyry in his extant treatise *On Abstinence from Animal Food*. Taking these testimonies seriously, we will now provide selected excerpts from this book translated by Thomas Taylor the Platonist (1758-1835).

4. Porphyry *De abstinence* IV. 6-9

“Chaeremon, the Stoic, therefore, in his narration of the Egyptian priests, who, he says, were considered by the Egyptians as philosophers, informs us, that they chose temples, as the places in which they might philosophize. For to dwell with the statues of the Gods is a thing allied to the whole desire, by which the soul tends to the contemplation of their divinities. And from the divine veneration indeed, which was paid to them through dwelling in temples, they obtained security, all men honouring these philosophers, as if they were certain sacred animals. They also led a solitary life, as they only mingled with other men in solemn sacrifices and festivals. But at other times the priests were almost inaccessible to any who wished to converse with them. For it was requisite that he who approached to them should be first purified, and abstain from many things; and this is as it were a common sacred law respecting the Egyptian priests. But these [philosophic priests], having relinquished every other employment, and human labours, gave up the whole of their life to the contemplation and worship of divine natures and to divine inspiration; through the latter, indeed, procuring for themselves, honour, security, and piety; but through contemplation, science; and through both, a certain occult exercise of manners, worthy of antiquity. For to be always conversant with divine knowledge and inspiration, removes those who are so from all avarice, suppresses the passions, and excites to an intellectual life”.

“For the sanctuary was inaccessible to those who were not purified, and they dwelt in holy places for the purpose of performing divine works; but at all other times they associated more freely with those who lived like themselves. They did not, however, associate with any one who was not a religious character. But they were always seen near to the Gods, or the statues of the Gods, the latter of which they were beheld either carrying, or preceding in a sacred procession, or disposing in an orderly manner, with modesty and gravity; each of which operations was not the effect of pride, but an indication of some physical reason.”

“But they always kept their hands within their garments. Each likewise bore about him a symbol indicative of the order which he was allotted in sacred concerns; for there were many orders of priests.”

“When also the time arrived in which they were to perform something pertaining to the sacred rites of religion, they spent some days in preparatory ceremonies, some indeed forty-two, but others a greater, and others a lesser number of days; yet never less than seven days; and during this time they abstained from all animals, and likewise from all pot-herbs and leguminous substances, and, above all, from a venereal connexion with women; for they never at any time had connexion with males. They likewise washed themselves with cold water thrice every day...”

“They bore therefore many burdens in the performance of sacred operations, and accomplished many ministrant works, which required more than common strength. But they divided the night into the observation of the celestial bodies, and sometimes devoted a part of it to offices of purification; and they distributed the day into the worship of the Gods, according to which they celebrated them with hymns thrice or four times, viz. in the morning and evening, when the sun is at his meridian altitude, and when he is declined to the west. The rest of their time they devoted to arithmetical and geometrical speculations, always labouring to effect something, and to make some new discovery, and, in short, continually exercising their skill. In winter nights also they were occupied in the same employments, being vigilantly engaged in literary pursuits...”

“The true method of philosophizing, likewise, was preserved by the prophets, by the *hierostolistae*, and the sacred scribes, and also by the *horologi*, or calculators of nativities. But the rest of the priests, and of the *pastophori*, curators of temples, and ministers of the Gods, were similarly studious of purity, yet not so accurately, and with such great continence, as the priests of whom we have been speaking. And such are the particulars which are narrated of the Egyptians, by a man who was a lover of truth, and an accurate writer, and who among the Stoics strenuously and solidly philosophized.”

“But the Egyptian priests, through the proficiency which they made by this exercise, and similitude to divinity, knew that divinity does not pervade through man alone, and that soul is not enshrined in man alone on the earth, but that it nearly passes through all animals. On this account, in fashioning the images of the Gods, they assumed every animal, and for this purpose mixed together the human form and the forms of wild beasts, and again the bodies of birds with the body of a man”.

“For they venerated the power of God which extends to all things through animals which are nurtured together, and which each of the Gods imparts. They also revered water and fire the most of all elements, as being the principal causes of our safety. And these things are exhibited by them in temples, for even now, on opening the sanctuary of Serapis, the worship is performed through fire and water; he who sings the hymns making a libation with water, and exhibiting fire, when, standing on the

threshold of the temple, he invokes the God in the language of the Egyptians”.

“And farther still, the Egyptian priests, from their transcendent wisdom and association with divinity, discovered what animals are more acceptable to the Gods [when dedicated to them] than man. Thus they found a hawk is dear to the sun, since the whole of its nature consists of blood and spirit”.

“In a similar manner, the Egyptians philosophize about the ram, the crocodile, the vulture, and the ibis, and, in short, about every animal; so that, from their wisdom and transcendent knowledge of divine concerns, they came at length to venerate all animals”.

5. Sacred Animals, Philosophers, and Cosmic Numbers

Speaking about Egyptian philosophy as it is attested by Chaeremon the Stoic, Porphyry emphasizes that the priests on the basis of their wisdom (*phroneseos*) and their profound theosophy (*theosophias*) came to worship even animals, not believing them to be gods but making them the images and symbols of the gods (*eikonas de epoiounto kai simbola tauta theon*). In fact, as noted above, the philosophers themselves, who devoted their whole life to contemplation and vision of the divine (*ton theion theoria kai theaseti*), were regarded as a kind of sacred animals.

Hellenes and Romans rarely understood the real meaning of “honouring sacred animals” and ridiculed such practices. It must be remembered that in spite of the permanent fame as the land of spiritual masters, philosophers, mystagogues of ancient mysteries, and magicians, even the Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt stood a bit aside from the rest of the eastern Mediterranean world. The Egyptian hieratic culture was quite uncharacteristic of the Graeco-Roman world, because it preserved the unbroken, though slightly transformed, tradition from the earliest Dynasties which, in the form of religious practices, liturgies, official ritual expertise, oracles, literary genres, patterns of thought, continued well into the 4th century A.D., proving that the temple cult was not a “sheer formalism”, but a means of transformation, ritualization of the environment, and theurgic ascent, keeping at the same time the dynamic rhythms of the magnificent cosmic order.

Bearing in mind this continuous functioning of the literate temple culture and maintaining religious practices even at the local level with little overall formal change, D. Frankfurter contrasts this constant tradition covering several millennia with “the comparatively briefer or less unilinear histories of Greece, Palestine, and Asia Minor with their great vicissitudes of religious centralization”.⁷

Plutarch, otherwise really an admirer of the Egyptian customs, calls a "sheer superstition" the "silly" Egyptian practices in doing service to animals themselves and treating them as gods. He warns against presumption that having a beard and wearing a coarse cloak makes one a philosopher, or dressing in linen and shaving the hair, an initiate of Isis:

"The true initiate of Isis (*Isiakos*) is he who, when he has legitimately received what is set forth in the rituals connected with these gods, uses reason in philosophizing and in investigating (*logo zeton kai philosophon*) the truth contained therein" (*De Iside* 3.352c).

Since the ritual practices and myths are inseparable from "philosophizing", rational investigation, and exegesis, Plutarch regards the current fable, namely, that the gods in fear of Typhon (Seth) changed themselves into animals, concealing themselves in the bodies of ibises, dogs, and falcons, as an insufficient explanation and a play of fancy. However, he accepts the idea that animals may be viewed from the standpoint of their usefulness and symbolism. In this respect he mentions the asp, the weasel, and the beetle, honoured by the Egyptians and observing in them "certain dim likeness of the power of the gods, like images of the sun in drops of water" (*ibid.*, 74.380f-381a).

The crocodile, for example, is declared to be a living representation (*mimema*) of God. As the only creature without a tongue he resembles the divine Word (*ho theios logos*) who has no need of a voice. The crocodile also symbolizes the First God (*to proto theo sumbebeken*), because he "can see without being seen" and has other marvellous qualities.

However, the most interesting is Plutarch's remark which shows that the Egyptians discerned a certain hidden geometrical structure of manifested reality, occasionally revealed by sacred animals who are the teachers of men in this respect. Plutarch says:

"The most strict of the priests take their lustral water for purification from a place where the ibis has drunk: for she does not drink water if it is unwholesome or tainted, nor will she approach it. By the spreading of her feet, in their relation to each other and to her bill, she makes an equilateral triangle" (*isopleuron poiei trigonon*: *ibid.*, 75.381d).

Then Plutarch straightforwardly turns towards the Pythagoreans who "embellished also numbers and figures (*arithmous kai schemata*) with the appellations of the gods" and this can only mean that such practices were common among the Egyptian priests. Though we cannot actually speak of an advanced quantitative mathematics or certain "positivistic" knowledge, later forgotten, the symbolic numerology or mystical metaphysical use of numbers stand at the roots of their "architectural" civilization.

The Egyptian theologians saw the relationship between similar words or objects not as merely coincidental, but as a reflection of divine order, archetypal design, and hidden meaning in the world produced by God, namely, Ptah, who "always geometrizes", as Plato used to say. According

to R. Guenon, divine activity, conceived as producing and ordering the cosmos, is assimilated to geometry and architecture which are inseparable. He argues that these conceptions have been transmitted by the Pythagoreans (Pythagoreanism itself being only an "adaptation" of earlier initiatic traditions).⁸

For the Egyptians, the number one appears as a symbol of the supreme deity, or deities who are described in terms of their unique importance and "oneness", especially in the sense of cosmogonical Monad. This is a source of the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic concept of the One. Plutarch relates that for the Pythagoreans the number one means Apollo (initially from Akkadian *abullu*, Aramaic *abul*, "city gate"), because of its rejection of plurality and because of the singleness of unity (*plethous apophasei kai di' kaploteta tes monados*). The equilateral triangle they call Athena, born from the head and third-born, because it is divided by three perpendiculars drawn from its three angles (*De Iside* 75.381f).

For the Egyptian priests, just as verbal and visual puns were felt to reflect an important aspect of reality, the relationships between the numbers used in myth, liturgy, sacred art and the surrounding cosmos were seen as meaningful patterns of divine providence, planning, and immanent eidetic order (*maat*). Therefore these underlying patterns are referred to as "mysteries" by the *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*, as R. H. Wilkinson pointed out.⁹

Of course, the divine (*to theion*) is not engendered in colours (*en chroais*), in shapes, or figures (*en schemasin*), or in polished surfaces (*en leiotesin*), as Plutarch states. However, they may serve as qualitative symbols in the hierarchy of "divine semiotics". If the divine represented in animals is not of a lesser order than that in works of bronze and stone, i.e. hieratic statues, and if things alive are more honourable than those that are dead, it seems that a lover of wisdom, becoming like a sacred animal, really becomes the perfect living (*ankh*) image (*tut*) of God: he is in a sense divinized and functions as an intermediary between the two realms – noetic and sensible. He is a son of the solar *Nous*, or Intellect, and, accordingly, contemplates the sensible realities as theophanies, sacred receptacles, and bodies, animated by the noetic rays of the omnipresent Amun-Ra.

To follow "nature" in this context means to restore one's primordial "golden" nature which is spiritual and sun-like. While observing that the number 36 (i.e., the number of the Egyptian decans, divine beings with serpent's bodies and lion's heads, sometimes depicted as 36 stars which appear along with Osiris, Horus, Thoth, Isis, and Nephthys) has been given the name *kosmos* by the Pythagoreans, since 36 is made up of the first four even numbers and the first four odd numbers added together, Plutarch says:

"If, then, the most noted of the philosophers, observing the riddle of the Divine in inanimate and incorporeal objects, have not thought it proper to treat anything with carelessness or disrespect, even more do I think that, in all likelihood, we should welcome those peculiar properties existent in natures which possess the power of perception and have a soul and feeling and character. It is not that we should honour these, but that through these we should honour the Divine, since they are the clearer mirrors of the Divine by their nature also, so that we should regard them as the instrument or device of the God who orders all things" (*De Iside* 76.382ab).

6. Hieratic Powers and Symbols of the Ineffable Father

For Egyptians of the Late period, governed by Assyrians and Persians, i.e., by the followers of Typhon in the traditional scheme of things, represented by the confusing and destructive power of Apep (Apophis), the archetypal enemy of Ra, the king cannot be viewed as a living embodiment of demiurgic power, a living *tut* of Ra or a token of Horus. Therefore the function of embodying the divine had been assumed by sacred animals and animal-like sages.

The god, or his spiritual power (*sekbem, ba*), embodied in a sacred animal is recognizable by its form and colouring, its *eidōs*. However, the god incarnated (as the ram-like Christ in the Christian tradition) is exposed to the hazards and terrors of this world, from which he (in his immanent form, not in his powerful transcendent aspect which remains intact, like the undescended and hegemonic part of the soul in Plotinus) had to be protected by the performance of complicated and extremely precise sacred rites. He is equivalent to the king (protected by the same rites) and, by extension, to the whole mythologized country and its symbolic landscape.

Since pharaohs were regarded as living incarnations of the solar deity, they belonged to the same theological category as sacred animals.¹⁰ The philosopher-priest occupies the same position, being a representative and organon of the Horus-king, and (due to the royal appointment, initiation, or illumination) a receptacle or container of the divine presence. The same divine power animates statues, images, temples, and inhabits sacred animals, though this "incarnation" is aimed at sustaining the world, not redeeming it in a Christian sense. Through sacred rites and images (including servants of God likened to the holy statues) the cosmic order is kept and both the demiurgic and theurgic work of unending descents and ascents goes on.

According to J. Assmann, though animal cults were already an integral feature in New Kingdom Egypt, until the Ptolemaic period they had been

secondary phenomena. Only the Ptolemies, the Macedonian rulers, placed the animal cult at the centre of Egyptian religion, giving it a triangular metaphysical base. The complex of a "sacred animal", as a manifestation of the divine, occupies three different ontological levels: 1) solar manifestation or particular form of Ra (e.g., Apis-Osiris), 2) living incarnation in animal form (e.g., Apis bull), 3) transfigured immortalization, represented by the mummified Osiris figure (e.g., Osiris-Apis).¹¹ This triangular scheme may be regarded as a model of the soul's (*ba*) wandering, that is, its procession along the theophanic rays, *proodos*, and subsequent *epistrophe* through the rite of embalming which restores the integrity of its Osirian *eidōs*. Thus in the Ptolemaic period, "the cult of the sacred animal, the political rule of the king, and the cosmic energy of the sun's circuit are harnessed into a triangle of salvational power".¹²

This salvational power is inseparable from the Egyptian temples, the places of philosophizing, according to Chaeremon, which guaranteed the connection between One and Many, between the divine *ba* and the multitude of things. The holy writings themselves are called "*ba* of Ra", thus being regarded as solar (noetic) manifestations and revelations which codify the universe-sustaining power of Ra. The temple's structure, decoration and ritual practice exactly corresponded to those holy writings, "*ba* of Ra", translating them into earthly practice. Therefore the transforming and elevating power of relational, connective theurgy was wrought through all symbolic forms and their cultic materializations, including architectural forms, words, images, smells and odours. The Byzantine writer Michael Psellus stands on firm ground, not relying on spurious hearsay, when he argues:

"The point of view of the Egyptians... is not wholly clear, but everything is symbolic (*alla panta symbolika*). For they have sphinxes, and ibises, and some special forms stored away in treasures, and some other things of which the outward appearance does not transcend sense-perception, but they claim that by means of these things they are copying the intelligible world" (fr.15D, Paris Gr.1182, fol.277v).

Contrary to the pantheistic (and materialistic) fantasies of the moderns, the Egyptians thought the gods to be hidden and transcendent. Their remoteness (since not everybody is spiritually reborn in order to contemplate the visible world as a set of theophanies) can be overcome either 1) through the pharaoh who is regarded as the last link in the divine chain, representing or embodying Horus, or 2) through divine images, since the *ba* of one or another god descends and enters his cult-likeness in the temple.

Regarding the pharaoh, in some cases he is considered as a divine character only when he is performing sacred rites or when he is in the special state provided by the institution of kingship, i.e., deified with the horn, the sun disk, and the crescent during his coronation. However, in

the New Kingdom, he is often viewed as an earthly manifestation of Amun-Ra and portrayed sitting in the boat of the sun god – the desired goal of all initiates and sages. The Egyptians used certain animals, namely, the bull, lion, dog, and falcon to express the divinity of the pharaoh. Several kings of the New Kingdom are iconographically transformed into sacred animals: they are depicted with a falcon's head and incorporate signs of a sacred bird or are represented as a sphinx, the god Harakhte, i.e. Horus of the horizon (*akhet*).

Since the king is suckled by the goddess Hathor and through her milk, meaning the divine spirit and knowledge, “becomes a god” within the articulated archetypal constellation, he functions as a visible icon and model for all spiritual aspirations, being an interpreter (*hermeneus*) between the noetic and sensible realms. The unification of *ba* and image in the temple is carried out according to the same metaphysical paradigm, though on a different level. The temple cult followed daily rhythms of the sacred calendar, thus every morning repeating the primeval cosmogony, acting along with the cosmic and transcendent forces, active through the entire hierarchy of being. Though the temple is never bereft of the divine presence, liturgically every morning the god comes down and unites with his images, the cultic receptacles, and the entire temple regarded as a single entity.

“Your *ba* in heaven unites with his image so that the one unites with its counterpart”, runs an inscription in the Horus' temple, making clear the relationship between an archetype and its image. The *neter* as a transcendent entity remains intact: only his invisible *ba* (depicted as a visible falcon, ibis, *bennu*-bird or sun-ray) descends by the train of the permanent demiurgy, or procession, in order to show the theurgic way of integrating an image back to its archetype.

The divine *ba* represents the invisible part of *sumbolon*, initially understood as a *tessera hospitalis* broken into two separate parts, while an image represents the visible side at the level of sensibles. Their union is performed in the temple as a complicated sacred drama repeated again and again. Every “day” the One becomes many and restores its initial unity, just as the dismembered divine Eye is restored through the wisdom of Thoth, i.e., through hieroglyphs, rites, and sacrifices.

None of these images shows the true form of a god, since the true form of every god is hidden. This means that though a god can inhabit his cult images, hieroglyphs, sacred animals and priests (who assume the role of the gods outwardly by wearing animal masks and bearing divine signs or inwardly – making their heart-intellects perfect mirrors), none of these images, animals, ritual objects, minerals, plants, words of power, or numbers reveal the true nature of God who transcends both the noetic archetypes and their reflections.

However, images and symbols, functioning in exactly the same manner as the Neoplatonic *sunthemata*, the mysterious and ineffable tokens, serve as tools for the preservation of order, elevation, and divinization. Being visible representations of the noetic archetypes, of the eternal demiurgic Forms, the Egyptian hieroglyphs themselves are frequently called “gods”, different signs of the script standing for different gods, (similar to Pythagorean numbers and geometric figures playing the same role.

Moving through the set of cosmic hieroglyphs (since all shapes of the sacred art – from giant statues to small amulets and household utensils – are extensions and prolongations of this holy script) to the realm of their noetic paradigms constitutes the path towards the true Forms of the gods. However, this path is the path of death and rebirth on different ontological levels. Only the blessed “deceased”, the initiates who have become *akhu*, can contemplate the Forms and Ideas in the realm of Ra. This way demands an *askesis*: purification from any pollution, purity of the heart and inner alchemical transformation. Like the Pythagorean spiritual ideal “to follow god”, it also included the contemplation of the cosmic order and understanding of the rhythmical relations, expressed both in mythical motifs and mathematical proportions, in music, song, and dance which belong to the realm of Hathor. This goddess is identified with *maat*, the chief principle of cosmic harmony and order, with the primordial vibration which emits a creative sound, as well as with an equilibrium of scales and joyful “drunkenness”. The first heartbeat, the first breath, the first dance mark the beginning of ritual which is life itself in all its polarizations, oscillations, and ecstasies.

The Pythagoreans regarded medicine as the right means to purify the body; music, to purify the soul. In the broader sense (having in mind the Egyptian temples), “music” means all the complexity of hymns, dances, and ritual dramas along with their symbolic gestures, perfumes, illuminations, and visions (both sensible and supra-sensible). But the true divine essence transcends all figures. Therefore “the true hymn to the Father is not made up of a combination of words or a ritual of actions”, according to Proclus (*Chald. Phil.* II). It shows the theurgic power of faith, and this faith results in the “musical life” (*mousikos bios*), or the life full of the unitary divine intuition (*noesis*, which transcends human reasoning) and bliss. However, this “musical life” is based on an integral theurgic attitude which uses symbols as a means of support and leads the soul towards its own unity, thus revealing the magnificent unity of all creation. Proclus says:

“For each thing when it enters into the unspeakable depths of its own nature will find there the Symbol of the Universal Father (*to sumbolon tou panton patros*). Everything honours Him by its very nature and is unified by means of this its own mystic Sign (*mustikou sunthematos*), so that it abandons its own nature and seeks only to become one with its Sign

(*sunthema*) and in this way to possess only Him, out of its yearning for the Unknowable and the Source of all good".¹³

"For this reason, those who are skilled in the sacred art (*tes hieratikes hegemonēs*) have found a means of reaching the higher powers from those things which are within our sight, by mixing some of them together and by effacing others properly. The mixture is accomplished by means of looking, one after another, at each of the unmixed things that has a divine characteristic (*idioteta tou theou*), so that by mixing several things in this way these aforementioned images are unified, and the unity that results from all of them is made similar to the Whole Unity that exists prior to all things (*to pro ton panton bolon*). On the other hand, they frequently make figurines (*agalmata*) which are compounded (from several things) and then burned, by which means their divided divine Signs (*sunthemata*) are mingled together and create artificially that which the Divine includes within itself naturally (*kat' ousian*) by its unification (*kath' henosin*) of all these powers; for the division of these powers weakened each one of them, but their mixture is able to lead us back to the Idea of their Model" (*tou paradeigmatos idean: Hier. Art.150*).¹⁴

7. Philosophical Life of the Egyptian Priests

The Egyptian priests were official substitutes for the king who had a very precise role to play in maintaining the actualized divine presence in the sanctuary and the rhythms of the cosmos itself, regarded as a semiotic system of heliophanies. By making the offerings, *hetepu* (the *hetep* hieroglyph shows a loaf of bread placed as an offering on a mat and means offering, altar, plenty, Nile, rest, peace, satisfaction of the heart-intellect) they keep the articulated breath of life flowing, sustain *kau* of the ancestors, preserve the Union of the Two Lands (*sema tawy*), of Horus and Seth, of *Peras* and *Apeiron*.

To maintain the universe in the form in which the gods created and ordered it also means to maintain the purity and integrity of man as an *imago dei*, constantly restoring his spiritual equilibrium and peace through special rites and knowledge, i.e., constantly "philosophizing". If the temple priest is a substitute for the Son of Ra, he himself must become Ra-like as far as possible, that is, to be likened to a pure "mirror" (*ankh*), polished by contemplation, devotion and proper ceremonial conduct. The inscription from the Horus temple in Edfu gives the following admonition:

"You who are men of importance, never let a long time pass without an invocation to Him, when you are away from Him present offerings to Him and praise Him in His temple" (Edfu III.361).

Priests had to prepare themselves for sacred duties by strict purity, avoidance of any misdeeds, and, keeping the hieratic rites and esoteric knowledge from the uninitiated, by serving the gods and the supreme God with a pure heart. The benefits of the spiritual life acquired by these "great and pure priests, guardians of the secrets, pure in the Lord" are described as follows:

"How happy is he who celebrates Thy Majesty, oh great God, and who never ceases to serve Thy temple. He who extols Thy power, who exalts Thy grandeur, who fills his heart with Thee... He who follows Thy path, comes to Thy watering-place, he who is concerned for Thy Majesty's design. He who worships Thy spirit with the reverence due the gods, and who says Thy office... He who conducts the service regularly and the service of the holy days without error... You who tread the path of Ra in His temple; who watch over his dwelling place [occupied] to conduct His holy days, to present His offerings, without cease: enter in peace, leave in peace, go in happiness. For life is in His hand, peace is His grasp, all good things are with Him: there is food for the one who remains at His table; there is nourishment for the one who eats of His offerings. There is no misfortune nor evil for the one who lives on His benefits; there is no damnation for the one who serves Him; for His care reaches to heaven and His security to the earth..." (Edfu V.343-344).¹⁵

The first permanent priestly dwellings inside the temple precincts appeared at the end of the New Kingdom. The strict and rigorous rules observed during the month of service (after which a "servant of God" returned for a while to his normal life) were extended. The priestly way of life, enclosed within temple walls, in certain cases becomes the pursuit of a whole life aimed at the inner Osirian transformation and union with the divine light. The instructions for ritual purity, and moral maxims, were frequently inscribed on the walls of the passageways through which the priests entered the temple, but the oral esoteric teachings were transmitted under strict secrecy. Even the ordinary servants of God were commanded to "reveal nothing that you see in any secret matter of the sanctuaries" (Edfu 361).

The House of Life (*per ankh*), which at the same time functioned as a school of the priests, scriptorium, library, and sanctuary, is sometimes depicted as an archetypal model of the cosmos, composed of four bodies, those of Isis, Nephtys, Horus, and Thoth at the corners with the Great Hidden (Osiris) resting in the interior. This theurgic cube-like mandala is revered as a place of esoteric training that provides knowledge of the invisible Osirian realm (Duat) and the noetic world of *akhu*. As an initiatory centre, *per ankh* is described in the following manner:

"I shall be very, very well concealed.
No one shall know it, no one see it,
Except the disk of the sun, that looks into its secret.

Those officiating... shall enter in silence, their bodies covered,
 So as to be protected against sudden death.
 The Asiatic must not enter, he must see nothing"
 (*Papyrus Salt* 825. VII.1;VII.5).

The scribe of the House of Life (*sesb per ankh*), usually equated to a "magician" in modern scholarship, is regarded as *hermeneus*, an interpreter of the hidden meaning in dreams, oracles, symbols, and sacred texts. Priests, as the keepers of *heka* powers, were able to function effectively in the intermediary psychic and higher noetic realms only because they (through initiations, visions, intellectual intuitions, and illuminations) actually "journeyed into Duat" and realized union with their supreme archetypes.

The power of Heka, as the creative power of Atum-Khepera (rendered incorrectly as "magic", but more resembling the "theurgy" of Hekate) is a mysterious divine force through which the universe becomes manifest and again returns to its source. This power of the creative *maya* serves as the theurgic *dunamis* by means of which the human being and all creation return to the realm of Amun-Ra and, finally, to the Waters of Nun. Therefore it is connected both with 1) *maat*, the right order (in political, social, philosophical, liturgical, and esoteric religious life conceived in unity), and 2) ineffable symbols of the unspeakable Father who contains all that becomes manifest, i.e., with Heka himself.

The rules of purification and moral conduct were only a part of the much more comprehensive body of knowledge guarded by the Egyptian priests. However, to live life according to virtue was of the first importance. Similarly, the later Neoplatonists regarded life according to virtue as a constant desire for, and doing what is, good. Since the good of the rational soul is no other than the return to its causes and the Good itself, in order to contemplate the Forms and be united with *Nous* and the One, the whole of our life is a struggle toward that vision and union. (Proclus *In Parm.* 1015.38-40).

Along with virtue, "love is the cause of the return of all things toward the divine Beauty" (*pasa taxis epistrophes estin aitia tois ousin hapasin pros to theion kallos*: Proclus *In Alcib.*325.10-12). The philosophical life (*philosophikos bios*) is guided by truth (*aletheia*, *maat*) and consists in theoretical and practical spirituality which may be described as an enthusiastic or inspired activity, subdivided into the aspects of goodness, beauty, and justice. *Philosophikos bios* of the Egyptian priests and pious people of civil groups who were making a kind of voluntary retreat also included contemplation of beauty (*nefer*), cultivation of knowledge and morality (since *gnosis* and *praxis* are interchangeable), and a certain divine possession (*mania* in the Platonic sense).

S. Sauneron describes the voluntary retreatants of the Late period as belonging to the category of "visionaries and fakirs", though the last term

perhaps is used not in the initial Sufi sense (*faqir* meaning an ontological poverty in relation to the divine fullness), but in that invented by British Orientalists in the 19th century. S. Sauneron cites F. Cumont in this respect who does not specify the source of his rather extraordinary information about the visitors and "fakirs" of the Roman Egyptian temples:

"The abandonment of all bodily care seemed a testimony to their spiritual perfection, half-nude, clothed in rags, they let their hair grow like horses' tails, and sometimes, as a symbol of their voluntary imprisonment, they weighed down their emaciated bodies with chains. No doubt they also imposed rigorous abstinence on themselves, and discipline, and their asceticism made them appear worthy, in the eyes of the common people, to receive divine revelations".¹⁶

8. Proximity of the Gods and the *Bau* of Amun

Contrary to the earlier emphasis on transcendence, in Late period Egypt (starting at the end of the New Kingdom) a belief in the close proximity and immanence of the gods prevailed. In the wave of the defensive efforts raised by the threat of foreigners (equated to the followers of Seth – those who violate ancient traditions and sacred environments, profane sanctuaries and images, disclose and ridicule mysteries, causing global cosmic disaster), the role of Egypt as a dwelling of the gods is stressed.

Every temple is built according to archetypal divine patterns, representing the entire universe. Therefore Egypt is naturally regarded as the "temple of the gods", symbolically constructed from the dismembered parts of Osiris and animated by his *ba*, the sacred Memphite bull "Apis being the image (*eidolon*) of the soul of Osiris" (*De Iside* 20.359b). Hence, Egypt itself is an alchemical forge of transmutation, of turning the rotten corpse into the shining golden substance which appears when the *ba* of Osiris and Ra meet each other and become the united *ba* (*CT* IV.276-281). In addition, Egypt is the body of Isis, the dark womb of the goddess, the tomb which promises resurrection and spiritual rebirth. Plutarch says:

"Egypt, which is of a black soil in the highest degree as well as the black part of the eye, they call *chemia* and compare to a heart" (*De Iside* 33.364c).

The heart (*ab*, *ib*) is the seat of *gnosis*, *rekh*. The Memphite Demiurge Ptah conceived the universe in his Heart (Intellect) before bringing it forth by his Word. So, the heart-like black (kmt: *kemet*) land is a repository of the Osirian Black Art, ruled by Isis. In the Hermetic treatise *Kore Kosmou*, Kamemphis transmits the *gnosis* to Isis, gratifying her with the gift of the "Perfect Black", *Teleion Melas*.

However, kings, temples, statues, animals, and sages are only vessels of divine forces – they are not the gods themselves. The hymns addressed to Amun explicitly state that his *ba* is in the noetic realm of paradigms (the sky), his corpse or reconstructed *sab*-body in the intermediate realm of Duat, and his *kbenty* (statue, image) in the sensible realm of images (on earth). In this sense, the temple is a sky on earth, the intelligible structure articulated in the sensible dimension. Therefore as the demiurgic Ideas inform matter, so *neteru* appear to human beings through the properly made corporeal receptacle (Platonic *hupodoche*): an animated image of the finest materials, including gold and lapis lazuli, marked with divine attributes and signs.

To certain extent, a human body (when purified and perfected) can function as a sacred receptacle. For theurgists, the so-called visionary matter may serve as a receptacle of the gods resulting in the experience of divine visions and theophanies (which make the material world transparent and holy), and, finally, in a corporeal unification with the gods¹⁷ through the rites and *sunthemata*, that is, the ineffable divine names, hieratic images, incantations, melodies, rhythms, numbers and so on. According to Iamblichus:

“One must be convinced by secret teachings (*tois aporrhetois logois*) that a certain matter is given by the Gods by means of blessed visions (*dia ton makarion thematon hule tis ek theon paradidotai*), and this matter is somehow connatural with the gods who give it. Therefore, the sacrifice of this sort of matter stirs the gods up into manifestation, immediately invokes their appearance, receives them when they come forth, and reveals them perfectly” (*De myster.*234.7-14).

This theurgic perspective regards matter as divinely created, though the god who produced it is not the ineffable One but the Monad from the One, the first god and king (*protos theos kai basileus*), the principle of intelligibles (*ton noeton arche*).¹⁸ Iamblichus, in his explanation of hieratic teachings of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, argues:

“The doctrine of the Egyptians concerning principles, proceeding from on high as far as to the last things, begins from one principle (*benos archetai*) and descends to a multitude which is governed by this one; and everywhere an indefinite nature is under the dominion of a certain definite measure and under the supreme uniform cause of all things” (*De Myster.*264.14-265 b).

The presence of the One and intelligible Monad, or Intellect, “father of essence” (*ousiopator*), is viewed as permeating all levels of manifestation – noetic, psychic, and sensible – this manifestation being based on an unbroken continuity between divine, imaginal, and sensible matter governed by numerical principles. Thus the theurgic efficiency of material symbols, talismans, and images (which constitute the visible body of Ptah or Geb) is established. Iamblichus says that certain “eternal measures”

(*metra ton onton aidia: De myster.*65. b) are preserved in the theurgic symbols of the Egyptians.

In the Ramesside Amun-Ra theology, the world is regarded as a body of Amun, because he is the *ba* of the world, its spiritual-intelligible principle which gives life to the macrocosm and sustains it in the same way as the human *ba*, which also proceeds from the noetic realm and gives life to the human body. Accordingly, the solar Amun-Ra “gives his *bau* in millions of forms” (*Pap. Boulaq* 4.7.15). The light of the sun is called *ba* of Ra, and (as we have seen) the books of sacred wisdom and hieroglyphs themselves are the *bau* of Ra as well. The creative force of light is also the revelatory force, performing a life-and-knowledge-giving function in the world constituted by manifestations, or *bau* of God. The visible world may be called the *keheperu* of God, though the term *keheperu* (manifestation, coming forth) may be understood in many different senses.

The Ramesside theology distinguished the ten *bau* of Amun (like the proto-Pythagorean decad) which may be divided into two pentads. According to J. Assmann, this theology understands the *bau* of Amun “not as the visible world of itself, but as a decad of mediating powers that animate and sustain the world”.¹⁹

The pharaoh, representing humankind in its entirety, is one of the ten *bau* and stands at the head of the second pentad which includes 1) human beings “in His name” of Royal-*ka*, 2) quadrupeds “in His name” of Falcon, 3) birds “in His name” of Harakhty, 4) aquatic creatures “in His name” of *Ba* of those in the water, 5) terrestrial creatures “in His name” of Neheb-kau.

The first pentad represents the life-giving elements, namely, time (twice), air, water, and light which are regarded as functions of 1) *Ba* in the right Eye, 2) *Ba* in the left Eye, 3) *Ba* of Shu, 4) *Ba* of Osiris, 5) *Ba* of Tefnut respectively.²⁰

The pharaoh is one of ten *bau*, or manifestations of Amun, in the form of which the cosmos is animated, organized and sustained, meaning not an individual human being but the royal *ka* as such, the divine kingship (Horus) which is embodied in each pharaoh as the objective noetic power descending from Amun.

This Ramesside *ba* theology is translated into an esoteric cult-activity and initiations in the form of rituals, secretly performed in the hidden crypts of certain temples (e.g., Opet temple in Karnak). As J. Assmann pointed out, here we stand “on the threshold of Hermeticism and the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, which to some extent develop a similar theo-cosmology”.²¹

We should add that we now stand on the threshold of Neoplatonism which, in this respect, represents the culmination of the ancient metaphysical tradition. And this tradition, being multi-faceted (like Amun himself: “of many names, the number of which is not known”) and having

different mythical forms, levels, and historically determined shapes of manifestation, can in fact be traced back to the *Pyramid Texts* which already imply 1) the articulated hierarchy of being constituted by the divine archetypes and their images as well as 2) the royal ascent (*anagoge, epistrophe, mi'raj*) to the supreme Principle.

9. Perfumes, Images, and Contemplations

What can philosophical "contemplation" possibly mean in the context of Amun-Ra theology? It means contemplation of the Amunian *bau*, the immanent aspects of God, i.e., the combination of all different manifestations in which the cosmogonic energy of Amun-Ra is present and which operate in the created world. *Theoria* not only refers to looking with the sensible eyes but also means viewing with the intellect. This is contemplation as if one were a spectator at the games or the theatre. The intellectual kind of *theoria* (something inner, immediate, comprehensive) was not invented by Plato as certain scholars may argue, though Plato actually speaks of the philosophic nature as "a mind habituated to thoughts of grandeur and contemplation (*theoria*) of all time and all existence" (*Rep.*517d).

According to Diogenes Laertius, who is, in this respect, following Sosicrates, when asked who he was, Pythagoras replied, "A philosopher". As a contemplative philosopher, "Pythagoras used to compare life to the Great Games where some people come to contend for the prizes, and others for the purposes of traffic, but the best as spectators" (*Vitae* VIII.8).

Iamblichus explains that Pythagoras was the first to call himself a philosopher, a word which before this precedent had been a description, not an appellation. According to Iamblichus, "the purest and most genuine character is that of the man who devotes himself to the contemplation of the most beautiful things, and may be properly called a philosopher" (*Vita Pyth.*12).

For the New Kingdom Egyptians, this contemplation is a contemplation of the fascinating wonders and all-encompassing presence of God. Amun, as "*Ba*, shining with his two *nadjat* Eyes, *Ba*-like, who incarnates himself in incarnations", is both a principle which enables seeing and the object seen, as He reveals himself in the cosmic creation. However, this revealing or visualizing of the different forms in which the cosmogonic energy of the supreme God is present, is at the same time his concealing, since the Lord of all gods remains transcendent. The oracular decree of the XXI Dynasty pronounces:

"Mysterious in incarnations, he whom one cannot know,
Who has concealed himself from all gods.

Who withdrew as the sun that cannot be recognized,
Who hid himself from what he had created,
Flaming torch with great light,
One sees in the midst of his seeing.
One spends the day contemplating him and is never sated with the sight of him,
When day comes, all faces pray to him.
Sparkling in manifestation in the midst of the Ennead,
His form is the form of each god".²²

The contemplation may culminate in visions (*epiphaneia*) coming in a waking state or dreams received by night. In both cases this experience is related as a "dream" (*rswt*). The mysterious and tremendous quality of the god's manifestations is described by listing his vehicles of power – both visible and invisible symbols.

Like the Holy Spirit in Christianity, Amun visited Hatshepsut (the queen of the XVIII Dynasty who ruled in 1478-1458 B.C.), taking on the form of her husband Tuthmosis I before revealing to her his true "form of a god" (*jrw n ntr*). The divine aroma wakes Hatshepsut indicating that Amun is present, because the scent of perfume, divine fragrance and radiance betray the approaching of deities. Since cosmetics and incense are life-giving substances related to the breath of Shu, or *pneuma*, the realm of *netem* is depicted as drenched in perfumes called "the fragrance of the gods." Therefore the smell of incense accompanied the epiphany of a god and made his presence known.

The texts from the Old and Middle Kingdoms indicate that the bodies of the gods are of the most precious metals and gold. The solar barque of Ra is depicted as golden and radiant: the initiate and the blessed deceased turned into spirit (or intellect, *akb*) seek to partake of this radiant noetic substance and to become "one body" (this "body" being of the so-called intelligible matter, referred to by the Neoplatonists) with Amun-Ra, or Atum-Ra, Khnum-Ra, Sobek-Ra, and so on.

Just as every iconographically correct visible image enhances the reality of the ineffable God, so also does every name or combination of epithets which indicate different theological constellations and metaphysical structures symbolically expressed in myth and cult. It seems that Philo of Alexandria, who allegorically explains the account of *Exodus* XXX.34-35 as a "holy work" (*ergon hagion*) performed by the perfumer, bases his commentary on the ancient Egyptian tradition. The Egyptian name for incense is *seneter*, *seneteri* meaning "to make divine". The fragrance of burning *seneter* was thought to be both an indication of divine presence and the real *epiphaneia* of the god to whom the incense is offered and burnt. The Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria was the great manufacturing centre for cosmetics and perfumes, including all kinds of incense which by the 1st century A.D. are partly replaced by resins from coniferous trees or

terabinth. Philo of Alexandria relates perfumes to the creation of the cosmos, the real cosmogony:

“Now these four, of which the incense is composed, are, I hold, a symbol of the elements (*sumbola ton stoicheion*), out of which the whole world (*ho kosmos*) was brought to its completion. Moses is likening the oil drop to water, the cloves to earth, the galbanum to air, and the clear gum to fire” (*Quis rerum divinarum heres* 196-197).

“And this mixture thus harmoniously compounded proves to be that most venerable and perfect work, a work in very truth holy (*to presbutaton kai teleiotaton ergon bagion hos alethos einai*), even the world which he holds should, under the symbol of incense offering, give thanks to its Maker (*dia symbolon tou thumiamatos oitai dein eucharistein to pepoiekoti*), so that while in outward speech it is the compound formed by the perfumer’s art (*he murepsike technē*) which is burnt as incense, in real fact it is the whole world, wrought by divine wisdom (*ergo de ho theia sophia demiourgetheis kosmos*), which is offered and consumed... in the sacrificial fire” (*ibid.*199).

The perfume-like cosmos is clearly the manifestation of Heka and Shu whose life-giving and miraculous *pneuma* constitutes the earth of theophanies, the body of otherwise immaterial Geb. Arguing that Egyptian theology is to a large extent the product of certain higher type of perception (or *noesis*, we would say) J. Naydler discusses imaginative insights into the invisible realm provided by symbols and images. This insight into the “inner space” of *neteru* is not a mental construct or psychological projection, because the cosmological domains, manifested and sustained by the divine powers (*sekhemu, bau*), “are only marginally physical, and insofar as they are physical they are also symbolic”. He says:

“The image of the earth god is clearly not based simply on sense perception, nor is it based on logical reasoning. It is an imaginative vision that sees through the physical landscape into its interiority”.²³

This *theoria* is a vision rather than a doctrine of what knowledge is, and this vision has to do with both physical and noetic seeing. To a certain degree, not only seeing, but also other senses have their noetic counterparts, i.e., *sensibilia, quae sunt incorporea et intellectualia* in Origen’s sense. According to Origen:

“Anyone who looks into the matter more deeply will say that there is, as the Scripture calls it, a certain generic divine sense (*theia tis genike aisthesis*), which only the man who is blessed finds on this earth” (*Contra Celsum* I.48).

It means that the five senses have their noetic analogues and inspired and alchemically transformed souls can perceive through the spiritual senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch which transcend normal senses. Plotinus asserts the same when he says that “perceptions (*aistheseis*) here are dim intellections (*noeseis*), and intellections there (i.e., in the noetic realm) are vivid perceptions” (*Enn.* VI.7.7.30-32). In the earthly domain

sensibilia are simply dim versions of higher, noetic *sensibilia*. J. Dillon maintains that this is “more revolutionary and peculiar... than simply talking of forms or paradigms of *sensibilia*. He seems to mean, rather, noetic correlates of *sensibilia*”.²⁴

However, this “revolutionary” attitude is the normal attitude of the ancients, to whom the physical universe still was (to a certain extent) transparent to the noetic realm of archetypes. While “mythologizing” and “philosophizing” they did not interpret the physical world or “nature” in some “fantastic” fashion, but rather contemplated the noetic order dimly seen through physical veils. This contemplation is conducted through the power of *symbolike theoria* and certain spiritual or imaginative perception. The sensible realm is thought of as an image of the ideal, carefully ordered and articulated by Maat, the goddess who symbolizes the primordial pristine state of the world, mathematical harmony, proportion, right measure and truth. Therefore we should agree with R. Lawlor when he remarks:

“In ancient Egypt the audial sense – that is the direct response to the proportional laws of sound and form – was considered as the epistemological basis for philosophy and science. This is evoked by the blind harpist, whose proverbial wisdom comes not from the visual world of appearance but from an inner vision of metaphysical law”.²⁵

As has been mentioned already, the true form of a god, his noetic *eidōs*, is revealed to human beings here below only in the most exceptional cases, i.e., to the chosen ones and initiates of the highest rank. Therefore images function as intermediaries for the Egyptian who lives in a state of unsatisfied longing for the contemplation of the beauty, goodness, and perfection (all of them are called *neferu*) of one or another divine face (*bra*) which both conceals and reveals the hidden God, “rich in manifestations”. He cannot be comprehended in the totality of his attributes, except through Atum, or noetic *pleroma* itself.

Since all sacred animals are the *bau* of a deity, being a visible manifestation of an invisible power, “as the wind is the *ba* of the air god Shu and the visible sun is the *ba* of the sun god”, they may play the role of speakers and heralds of the gods, i.e., function as angels. Arguing that individual animals and sacred images are not the gods themselves but their bodies and vessels, E. Hornung says:

“For simple worshippers image and deity may merge, and they may encounter the god Thoth personally in every Ibis, but the theology of the priests always distinguishes carefully in formulations that vary from period to period, between animal and deity. For the priests, the animal remains a symbol in the foreground, an intermediary between man and god”.²⁶

In this respect, the ruling pharaoh differs from the sacred animal or hieratic statue, being an image (*tut*) of Ra, but not his direct manifestation (*keheperu*) in a strict sense, though boundaries between these terms are

frequently blurred and a manifestation “like Ra”, or “likeness of Ra, illuminating this world like the sun disk,” becomes imperceptibly a manifestation “as Ra”, “of the person of Ra”.²⁷

Though almost all Egyptian references to the human being as an *imago dei* are related to the pharaoh, the prime son of Ra (thus being regarded as the Perfect Man in a Sufi sense of *al-insan al-kamil*), by extension such designations are applied to all men who are “likenesses” (*snn*) of God, “who came from His flesh” and may prove by their actions and intellect that they are images of God. This doctrine is explicitly stated circa 2060 B.C. in the wisdom literature texts which emphasize *gnosis*, saying that the man of knowledge is a “likeness” (*mjtj*) of god”, meaning “a fundamental kinship of action, nature, and rank”.²⁸

10. Divine Knowledge and Paradigms for Philosophical Mysteries

For Egyptian priests, from the highest ranks of hierarchy to the ordinary “servants of God” (*hemu neter, hemet neter*), theoretical and practical life were inseparable. Many of them led strictly cloistered and regimented lives – which may be called “ascetic” in the Orphic and Pythagorean sense – thus devoting all their time to purification, worship, contemplation of divine beauties, and meditation. Their activities were centred on the cultivation of hieroglyphic script (*medu neter*), as a form of sacred art, and of various sciences, including geometry and scriptural exegesis. However, they were not a “sect” (*hairesis*), like Orphics, Pythagoreans and Platonists (who in one way or another represented an “esoteric” or “scientific” opposition to the prevailing customs and strategies of thought) in Greece, but belonged to the mainstream of culture.

The Late Egyptian priesthood represented both the core of official religion and its kernel, its very heart, without any tension between them. The priests were not adherents of some other-worldly opposition against a this-worldly state, because in ancient Egypt the distinction between “this” sensible realm and “that” intelligible world never took the form of reaction against this world: “here” and “there” remained completely integrated into a single sphere of belonging.²⁹ In addition, the educated spiritual elite and the powerholding elite were one and the same,³⁰ so that spiritual masters and sages were at the same time royal state officials, administrators, and scribes.

In accord with his rank in the cosmic hierarchy, the king, as the royal *ka*, was the chief Mystagogue and Philosopher of the temple-like state. The *kau* of ordinary men belonged to the king who, in a sense, was everybody’s *ka*, or double, which was pictured as bearing in its hands the *ankh* hieroglyph of life and the feather of *maat* and which formed an exact

replica of the king’s physical body. According to J. Naydler, the pharaoh had authority over *ka* forces, being able to “unite the hearts” of all the people:

“The king therefore lived on earth in a state of consciousness that was attainable for most people only after death; that is, in a state of consciousness infused with *ka* energy, but with the important difference that this state of consciousness was maintained by him as an individual, whereas for most people at death their individual self-consciousness became absorbed into that of the ancestral group. And to the extent that they experienced their *ka* during life, they located it outside themselves either in the ancestor or... in the king or some other powerful figure”.³¹

The priests, as the chief representatives of the king (or his ideal image), were the real spiritual masters and followers of Thoth, the divine Scribe. However, their most important function consisted not in composing and interpreting of sacred texts, elaborating of theological doctrines or cultivating arts (including calligraphy, “the handwork of Thoth”), but in the correct performance of hieratic rites. Similarly, in later Hellenic philosophy the main task of philosophers is not cultivation of written traditions for their own sake, but putting them into *praxis*. Just as the Egyptian sacred texts, hymns, and ritual instructions are indispensable sources for the correct performance of hieratic rites and liturgies, for the construction and decoration of temples, and for proper living according to the heart-intellect, so too the Hellenic philosophical texts, first of all, are instructions for truly living and seeking only the good for the soul, both moral and intellectual.

Egyptian temples of the Late period housed the “philosophizing” communities whose members, apart from the daily cult service, promoted a way of life characterized by asceticism, contemplation, and “Kabbalistic” manipulation with hieroglyphs, i.e., the constant practice of cryptography and metaphysical hermeneutics, understood as a theurgic imitation of demiurgy. They lived in the grammatically and semiotically articulated meta-structure of symbols. The writing system (along with its pursuit of the etymography and hidden connections based on the strictly “geometric” and at the same time mysterious coherence of the *Logos*-made world) constituted only a part of the larger “grammar of the temple” and “grammar of the noetic realm”.

The sacred rites translated the divine knowledge into action, be it 1) a cosmic-order-keeping liturgy, 2) the soul transforming initiations and mysteries (*shetau, sesbeta*) or 3) ritualized daily conduct.

The whole fabric of the Egyptian state was seen as depending on the constant theurgic dynamics of sacred forces. The life-and-order-supporting chant articulated an archetypal structure of ontology, thus following the light-like patterns of the creative Word (Hu) and Wisdom-Perception (Sia), directed by the miraculous power of Heka. Arguing that

sacred hymns and offerings are adorned with music (since the object of music is the love of the beautiful) Aristides Quintilianus says:

“There is also in the body of the universe a palpable paradigm of music. The fourth, again, reveals the material tetractys, the fifth connotes the ethereal body, and the octave the musical motion of the planets” (*De musica* III.20). Therefore “dialectic and its converse (i.e., rhetoric) profited the soul with judgement (*phronesis*) if they employed the soul purified by music, but without this, they not only did not profit, but sometimes even led the soul astray” (ibid., I.1).

Only music is extended through all matter, composing the body with proper rhythm, and “it explains both the nature of numbers and the variety of proportions; it gradually reveals the *harmoniai* that are, through these, in all bodies; and most important and most perfect and concerning a thing difficult for all men to comprehend, it is able to supply the ratios of the soul – the soul of each person separately and, as well, even the soul of the universe” (ibid. I.1).

Ritual efficacy also depends on tuning, sensitive to the exact proper sound (which reflects and prolongs the creative Sound of cosmogony) for the exact nuance of the spiritual and bodily state, seasons, and any event. Since “by different tunings the idea is changed”,³² the sounds, carried by *beka* power and guided by Hathor, can harmonize and elevate the soul, as well as to put into the proper “attuned” order the entire state, its institutions and its sacred environment.

To render *beka* as “magic”, as this Egyptian term is usually understood, is a rather incorrect hermeneutical projection distorted by Christian and modern Western consciousness. Heka is the creative power of Atum-Khepera, his Maya-Shakti beyond which there is no stronger ontological force, because through Heka the entire noetic, psychic, and physical universe is irradiated, established, and arranged according to the laws of *maat*. And by means of Heka all creatures and all divine images return to their archetypes, even to the unmanifest and ineffable Principle itself. Heka, in fact, is the main agent of demiurgy and theurgy, of descent and ascent, of living according to truth (*maat*). As the all-sustaining “Magic” it underlies every construction and deconstruction.

The term *askesis* in Graeco-Roman antiquity is understood as the practice of spiritual exercises. The excerpts from Homer and Hesiod were sung for cathartic purposes by the Pythagoreans who by such ritualistic use of the “sacred books” tried to tranquillize (*kathemeroun*) the soul (Porphyry *Vita Pyth.*32). Since philosophy, like sacred chants, has a therapeutic function, it aims at the profound transformation of human seeing, understanding, and being, thus, in this respect, resembling the methods of Egyptian priests. Philosophical contemplation (*theoria*), according to Porphyry, does not consist in discursive reasoning and accumulation of abstract teachings, even if their subjects are intelligible

realities and true Being. For him the whole Platonic philosophy consists in two fundamental exercises (*meletai*): 1) turning away from all that is mortal and material, 2) coming back to the noetic realm and participating in the activity of Intellect (*De abst.* I.30) which is represented by Amun-Ra for the Egyptian priests.

If the goal of philosophical separation from the body means to liberate the soul, thereby “calming the sea of passions”, or to contemplate and draw nourishment “from the true, the divine” (Plat. *Phaed.*84a), this procedure is the same as separation of the immortal *ba* from the mortal shell, *khat*, in order to attain the realm of light-like Intellect, of the Creator Ra himself. This transformative process may be rendered into the terms of rational philosophical discourse and interpreted as liberation from a partial, passionate point of view, “so as to rise to the universal, normative perspective, to submitting the soul to the demands of the *logos* and the norm of the Good”.³³

According to P. Hadot, who explains the spiritual exercises enumerated by Philo of Alexandria, philosophical therapeutics consist in research (*zetesis*), thorough investigation (*skēpsis*), listening (*akroasis*), attention (*prosoche*), reading (*anagnosis*), meditations (*meletai*), therapies of passions (the word *therapeia* may also mean acts of worship), remembrance of good things (*ton kalon mnemai*), self-mastery (*enkrateia*), and the accomplishment of duties.³⁴

Attention (*prosoche*), or continuous vigilance, also practised by the Egyptian priests, means pure intellectual self-consciousness which never sleeps and constantly remembers God. For Egyptians, writing itself may be regarded as a “spiritual exercise” which surpasses anything that P. Hadot and Plato in his Theuth story about *pharmakon* for the memory (*Phaedr.*274-275) could allow a sober rationalist. Learning to write means learning a particular way of life under the patronage of Sesheta, or Seshat, a lady of books who dwells by the Tree of Heaven and is depicted in the form of a woman wearing a leopard skin and holding a writing-reed and a scribe’s palette in her hands.

Sesheta, *sheta*, *shetau* also stand for mysteries, secrets, hidden things. The word *sehb* (a scribe) and *sehb* (to write) are pronounced in the same way, though depicted in a slightly different manner. Knowledge of how to behave, to administer the city (*niut*) of deity and the divine household (*per neter*), to perform the sacred rites, to interpret “divine words” (*medu neter*) and oracles, and how to transform the soul, is the prerogative of the followers of Thoth and Sesheta. Those who still being alive are able to see the *akh* of Thoth (from which all knowledge is derived) become “gnostics” (*rekhu*), like those called *shemsu Heru* – the ancestral spirits who belong to the train of Horus.

In the Egyptian priestly tradition emphasis is laid on knowledge (*rekh*) and wisdom (*sareh*) through which alone 1) the pious and happy life here

below is possible and 2) transformation, unification, rebirth, and realization of one's true identity in Duat is achieved. Therefore the divine names, epithets, spells, and all that are called *hekau* (theurgic or magic words of power) have crucial roles to play.

However, the ancient Egyptian *gnosis* stands at variance with Graeco-Roman gnosticism which borrowed much from the Egyptian theologies, but neglected their essential message and arrogantly debased the beautifully arranged cosmos, governed by *maat*. The Hermetic circles, which were probably special groups of initiates in the Late Egyptian (Ptolemaic) temples – those who followed the way of Thoth (Hermes) and Imhotep (Asclepius) – maintained that the gods endowed the priests of Egypt with three arts: philosophy, magic, and medicine. These arts, assigned both for the soul and the body, culminate in *gnosis* which leads back to divine *Nous*. Like all knowledge worthy of its name, this elevating and unifying knowledge (inseparable from faith, *pistis*) is obtained through revelation, not discursive reasoning.

11. Priests and Spiritual Guides

The Egyptian priest (*uab*, “a pure one”) is a guardian of the sacred (*uab*) in general and a keeper of all traditional sciences and methods imposed to acquire and preserve knowledge which is divine in its origin. The priesthood (*unut*) served in funerary cults, directed the embalming rituals, presided at festivals where they carried statues of the gods on portable shrines in procession, were employed in the royal service as architects, artists, ritual experts, magicians, and physicians, and sometimes even waged holy war on behalf of the gods.

The recording, interpretation and literary preservation of oracles is regarded as one of the major pursuits of the temple scriptorium in the Late pharaonic and Ptolemaic periods when the archaic priestly ritual for consulting the will of Amun and other deities (*peh neter*) was turned into mystical practice of private illumination and direct encounters with the divine through dreams (evoked by an incubation rite) and visions.

The Middle Kingdom (especially the XII Dynasty: c.1994-1781 B.C.) stands for a cultural “golden age”, because the literature and art of this time were elevated to the rank of the “classical” paradigms and its language remained in use for sacred purposes until the Roman period. During this time the so-called wisdom-literature emerged as an integral part of the attempt to reorganize the state viewed as a representative theocracy based on justice, truth, and wisdom. Therefore the scholarly function of priests as literati and masters of a self-reflective way of life started to be emphasized. But those “philosophers”, nonetheless, were loyal officials, bureaucrats and administrators of the pharaoh (chosen by

the gods himself), thus establishing the close connection between literature, politics, and rhetoric.

The normative ideas of kingship (*ni sut*), vertical solidarity, religious merit and loyalism which constitute the path of salvation were set down in writing and widely disseminated. In the Middle Kingdom, the texts, in which the much older conception of *maat* was discursively developed, explicitly formulated and universalized, are both initiatory and testamentary in character. Thus a sort of *silsilah*, or train of transmission, is clearly implied. This transmission presupposes an initiation into right living and knowing. The oral tradition existed alongside, but the appearance of written “philosophical discourse” – which is self-reflective and consciously maintained – is symptomatic of the period of the XII Dynasty.

This initiatory philosophy mainly consisted in admonitions to be virtuous, i.e., in the ethic of self-effacement, integration, and spiritual perfection, based on the recognition of archetypal origins of order and implications provided by the doctrine of *imago dei*. According with the idea of “doing as you would be done by”, *maat* is considered by God as “the reward of one who does something lying in something being done for him”, i.e., in a kind of “karmic wage”. The instructions are teachings carried from a father to his son. As the Father Atum embraces his intelligible children or the priest embraces a statue, thus transmitting the life-power of *ka*, so the spiritual father embraces his disciples.

This is the idea of the *diadoche*, or succession, familiar in the Hellenic philosophical schools. For example, the Neoplatonist Marinus (5th century A.D.) speaks about “the Golden Chain of philosophers that started with Solon” (*Vita Procli* XXVI). Solon himself supposedly studied with the Egyptian priests. The Hermetic *paideia* is also based on the established chain of *paradosis* (tradition) and proceeds by stages toward the final initiation. The inspired spiritual master, surrounded by a few disciples who sought a philosophical understanding, transformation of the soul and mystical vision, represents the divine Intellect itself, being its “incarnation” or rather a mirror (*ankh*) and an integral image (*tut, eikon*).

In early Hellenic antiquity, the spiritual guide, acting as legislator, statesman, philosopher, musician, and poet, reflects the ideal figure of the Centaur Cheiron, half-brother of Zeus (who is equated with Amun). Cheiron, the son of Kronos (the hypostasis *Nous* in the Neoplatonic hermeneutics), as an archetype of educator, unifies every form of wisdom and knowledge, thus introducing an integral *paideia*, such as the mythical king Osiris in the Egyptian accounts. Celebrated as a sage immersed in the depths of wisdom, Cheiron acts as Achilles' instructor in the art of healing and singing (since *therapeia* and music are inseparable) and as the teacher who taught the god Dionysus (the Egyptian Osiris) as a child the Bacchic

rites and solemnities, according to Ptolemaios Chennos, the author of the 1st century A.D.

As Pindar, the famous Hellenic poet, attested, the Cheironian process of education consists in spending twenty years in a cave under the care of Cheiron's daughters (*Pythian* 4.103 ff). The cave in this context is analogous to the tomb (or coffin, *ankh*), regarded as a "school" and as a place of rebirth in Kemet, the "black land", i.e., Egypt.

The citharist and mystagogue Orpheus is another example of a mythical guide of souls, also regarded as an initiator of mysteries. The Orphic and Pythagorean doctrine of the moral and elevating effect of music – which includes word, rhythm, melody, mode, sound, and gesture, or canonised dance figure – can be fully understood only against the background of Egyptian musical *paideia*, supervised by the goddesses Hathor and Maat. The name "Orpheus" itself may be a translation of the Egyptian title for "hereditary prince"³⁵ given to Geb, the god of earth, who 1) functions as a harmonizer of "nature" (minerals, plants, animals) with the vital psychic principles of the Osirian Underworld and 2) partakes in the metaphysical process of creation, in his form of a Goose laying the cosmogonic Egg which is a prototype of the primeval Egg in the Orphic cosmogonies.

As I. Hadot pointed out, the "literary form of spiritual guidance, consisting of ethical and practical instructions presented in a succinct form and directed from a brother to his brother or from a father to his son, was already widespread in the Near East long before Hesiod."³⁶

Though the models of this literary genre in the sphere of education were explicitly articulated in the Middle Kingdom Egypt, the same or similar instructions were imparted orally in the Old Kingdom – not only in the form of proverbs and sayings, but in the royal and priestly initiations that concerned metaphysical and theurgic matters usually kept in strict secrecy. The conspicuous absence in the XII Dynasty wisdom instructions of what J. Assmann calls "instruction of the heart", (i.e., "a theory of the inner man with a vocabulary of virtues, mentalities, and idealistic values, among which those pertaining to self-effacement were later to play the most important role",³⁷) can only mean that the profound esoteric instructions are not revealed in written texts or that those texts themselves (which survived only in fragments) are not properly understood by modern scholars.

12. Egyptian Scribes and the Way of Imhotep

The Egyptian scribe (*sešb*) is usually depicted as seated at the feet of Thoth, the all knowing Lord of wisdom, rituals, and offerings, shown in the form of a baboon (*ian*), writing down what this deputy of Ra reveals to

him. Typologically, this hieratic figure is equivalent to the angel (*malak*) Gabriel, who speaks from the world of the unseen (*alam al-ghayb*) in the Quranic tradition.

As early as the XI Dynasty (c.2040-1994 B.C.) we encounter the claim that certain sages are instructed by Thoth, the guardian of the Eye of Horus, who unites in himself and transcends all oppositions or contradictory essences. The wings of Thoth assist the initiate or the *ba* of the deceased to accomplish the theurgic ascent to the realm of intelligibles. As E. Hornung pointed out, a unique figure of a winged "angel" of uncertain identity is depicted in a scene of judgement after death in a Ramesside tomb: the flickering lines that surround this figure indicate the radiance of divine presence.³⁸

The deceased, due to his metaphysical *paideia* and already acquired *gnosis*, identifies himself with Thoth and then turns to Osiris so as to legitimise himself through his knowledge of hidden things and true identities. Similarly, Hermes of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri is not only *pantokrator*, the world-ruler, presiding over fate, justice, and wisdom, but may also dwell within the heart of man (*enkardios*), thus representing his higher noetic Self. The pharaoh (*per aa*) is regarded as Thoth in every respect, because he, as a perfect *tut* (*eikon*) of God, or the Perfect Man, unites in himself all names and qualities of Thoth, i.e., all noetic archetypes of Atum-Ra, reflected in the living mirror of Horus.

Sacred writings, ascribed to Thoth, are said to be found inside or at the feet of his statues. In the Middle Kingdom texts we already hear about a "divine Book of Thoth" which may be understood as existing on different ontological levels, from the noetic plenitude and unity of archetypes to the "scattered limbs" of sensible books. According to Plotinus the Egyptian:

"For as the language (*logos*) spoken by voice is an imitation (*mimema*) of that in the soul, in the same way that one in the soul is an imitation of the one in the other [hypostasis, *Nous*]" (*Enn.* I.2.3.27f).

For Neoplatonists, there are different levels of language that correspond to different modes of perception and being, extending from the creative divine Language (Hu, the noetic abundance, plenitude, creative will of God that expressed itself in "words", the demiurgic *logos*) down to the language fragmented and scattered on the level of senses, like the dismembered Osiris. On the statue of the sage Amenhotep son of Hapu, made circa 1360 B.C., it is written:

"I am introduced to the book of the god, I saw the transfigurations of Thoth and was equipped with their mysteries".³⁹

In the demotic *Book of Thoth*, composed probably in the first century B.C., dialogue takes place between Thoth and his disciple, the Lover of Knowledge (*Mer-rekh*), regarding knowledge (*rekh*) which leads to immortality, about the sacred topography of Egypt and the Osirian Netherworld, as well as secret languages and mysteries. Such

philosophical conversations, also involving Osiris and probably based on earlier examples, sometimes allude to Imhotep (Imouthes), one of the central Egyptian sages of the Old Kingdom, who under the name of Asclepius entered the Hermetic literature. Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu are two paradigmatic Egyptian saints, elevated to the rank of gods and patrons of the entire society.

A statue base of the III Dynasty pharaoh Djoser (c.2650 B.C.) is inscribed with the names and titles of Imhotep, maintained by the Egyptian tradition to be the prototype of all sages and philosophers. Belonging to the "priesthood of the Ibis", he is regarded as the author of the earliest examples of stone architecture and of wisdom literature. Imhotep, the high priest of Heliopolis, "the chief of the sculptors, of the masons and of the producers of stone vessels",⁴⁰ performed the highest functions in the cult of Atum-Ra. Perhaps he had already served as an architect during the reign of Hor-Seth Khasekhem when stone was first used as a building material on a considerable scale, and then during the reign of Sanakht-Nebka, the founder of the III Dynasty at about 2670 B.C. Imhotep continued his work for the pharaoh Netjerkhet Djoser planning and building the Step Pyramid complex in Saqqara.

Being the chief lector-priest, Imhotep, son of Ptah, was the chief expert in all theurgic and protective rituals. The lector-priest (*heri heb*) is a master of *heka* forces and sacred books of the temple. He knows all sacramental and divine attributes immanent in the created world, all traditional symbols and their hidden theurgic powers, all healing-spells, safety-spells, curse-spells, and amulets. He may be regarded as a "magician" (although this term is distorted and demonized by subsequent spiritual traditions, especially Christianity) - not as a freelance wizard, of course, but as an orthodox gnostic of the state who deals with divine manifestations (*bau*) and their hidden essences. In contrast to the intellectual practices of a lector-priest - who was a guardian of traditional lore, transmitted both orally and in sacred letters within the temple institutions - the charisma and ritual performance of *ta rekhit*, wise woman, remained oral and restricted to the sacred environment of the local community.

After his death Imhotep gradually became the patron of scribes and lovers of knowledge (*rekht*) - those who in principle were "philosophers", leading their special ritualized way of life, ultimately aimed at noetic immortalization through an imitation of Imhotep, son of Ptah, "successful in his action, great in miracles" (*Brit. Mus.*1027/147). The literary works and wisdom teachings of Imhotep were well known to the Egyptian scribes. They depicted Imhotep in a sitting posture, dressed in the long apron, the tight blue cap of Ptah, with the papyrus unrolled on his lap, bearing the written votive offering:

"Water from the water-pot of every scribe to your *ka*, O Imhotep".

The image of a sitting scribe Imhotep, who is sometimes shown with 1) the *was* sceptre, as a sign of power and dominion, and 2) the hieroglyph *ankh*, as a symbol of the divine breath of life, was itself regarded as a vessel of divine inspiration and wisdom. Under the New Kingdom, Imhotep replaced Nefertum (who rises from the primordial lotus at the nostrils of Ra) in the Memphite triad of Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum. As the great *Heri heb*, Imhotep is the image and likeness of Thoth.

By the time of the XXX Dynasty the divinized Imhotep not only served as a mediator between the community of *neteru* and the human world, acting as a healer and messenger, but was also included in the triad of Ptah, Apis-Osiris, Imhotep. In the Ptolemaic period, Teos, the high priest of Memphis, in his prayer to Imhotep, described him as he "who calculates everything for the library; who restores what is found demolished in the holy books; who knows the secrets of the house of gold" (*Vienna* 154: PM III.214).

The house of gold was the name given both to the workshop where statues of the gods were "given birth" and to the burial chamber of the tomb where spiritual rebirth and entry into the realm of intelligible light take place. The embalmer's workshop and the building in which the coffin and the statue of *ka* are made were also called *per nebu*. In this respect, it is useful to remember that the lector-priest attended an embalming process in the "house of beauty" (*per nefer*) where, under the direction of Anubis (or rather *heri seshet*, a priest who keeps the mysteries) and through the "hieratic art" of Thoth and Isis, the corpse (*kebat*-body) is transformed into the ideal *sab*-body, the icon of its golden archetype.

Therefore, on the first pylon of the main temple of Isis in Philae, the inscription dating from the reign of Tiberius praises Imhotep as "master of life who gives it to everyone who loves him, by whom everyone lives... who vivifies people in the state of death, who brings up the egg, in the belly" (*PM* VI.217). His "philosophy" is that of life and resurrection, since he distributes everything which comes out of Geb and springs into life on the back of earth.

13. Amenhotep and Theology of Amun

Another exemplar sage, as an intermediary with Amun evolved to a god with an established cult, is Amenhotep, Son-of-Hapu, regarded as Imhotep's beloved brother. The Egyptian priests maintained that their "bodies are united completely".

Amenhotep was born about 1450 B.C. in the time of Tuthmosis III. He spent fifty years in his native town Athribis in Lower Egypt where he was the royal scribe and chief of the priests of Horus-Khentikheti. When the reigning pharaoh, Amenhotep III, invited Amenhotep to the royal

court at Thebes (Uast), he became the chief architect and the first scribe, being responsible for building, mining, education, theology, hieratic sciences and cults, the organizer of the pharaoh's jubilees and "calculating everything". In the inscriptions carved on his statues Amenhotep addresses himself as a gnostic and theurgist:

"You go out to the sky and cross the brazen one; you are united with the stars, and one acclaim you in the boat of Ra." Therefore Amenhotep is "one with a hearing heart when he is looking for a plan in some unknown problem, like one whose heart knows it already; who finds a sentence even if it was destroyed; master of wisdom... one who guides the ignorant through the events since the primeval times, who shows their place to everybody who forgot about it; useful in his ideas, when he is looking for monuments to make immortal the name of his lord; who relates the proverb and acts with his fingers; leader of mankind..."⁴¹

Amenhotep, established as a great artist, builder of royal tombs and temples, sage and healer, was venerated by numerous followers during his lifetime as one who had surpassed the realm of mortals even before he died. He is depicted as an old man in large rounded wig and apron going up to his breast. In Ptolemaic times the papyrus roll and the scribe's palette are added to his insignia. The XXII Dynasty priest and supervisor of the doorway of the temple of Amun, named Hor-akh-bit, regards Amenhotep as one who knows "the secret powers in the writings of the past which date from the time of the ancestors" (*PM* II.103). He is credited (along with another later sage and antiquarian, Khaemwaset, son of Ramesses II and one of the high priests of Ptah in Memphis) as a founder of chapter 167 of the *Book of the Dead*.

"The book of one whose appearance is hidden, which was found by the pharaoh's chief lector-priest, Amenhotep, Son-of-Hapu, the justified (*maakheru*), and which he made himself as a protection for his limbs" (*Pap. Louvre* 3248).

The "architectural" wisdom of Amenhotep is related to the oracular revelations of Amun and the so-called eidetic or number-mysticism which provides a system of correspondences of shapes, colours, numbers, musical ratios, astronomical and alchemical processes in the cosmic liturgy of the Year, related to the rhythms of demiurgic descent and theurgic ascent. Within this mythical meta-structure of divine manifestations (*bau, kheperu*), the state is viewed as a temple of life-supporting creative Word, constituted by noetic sound and light, themselves turned into mantric chant and visible shape, thus regarding the manifested reality as a semiotic system where ontology becomes symbology. To a certain degree, musical definitions are theological, in accordance with Dio Cassius' account that the gods in Egypt are tones separated by fourths.⁴²

The macrocosmic and microcosmic relationships are reflected on every level of being: even the coffin takes on the significance of a model of the

cosmos. Therefore the afterlife *sab* body with shining golden skin is regarded as the restored *eikon* of the divine Form, *eidōs*. If like is known only by like, to know the god who infuses the universe with the breath of life one must have something of that god within oneself. The cosmos is to be understood not by merely beholding it, but by tuning ourselves to its turning, to its eternal rhythms and transcendent principles, thereby realizing the hidden archetypal unity of all things at the level of Intellect, "Hidden in Name" (*amun ren-f*).

Ultimately, all things are "annihilated" at the level of Nun or the hidden Amun – the One not witnessed by anyone, because the One is not preceded by any god: "there is no other god with Him, who could say what He looks like". Therefore in the hymn of Amun (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.200) at first 1) the affirmative theology is introduced (declaring that Amun completed himself as Atum, his *ba* being in Heaven, his body in Duat, and his cult-image in Southern Heliopolis) and then 2) the negative theology is exposed (arguing that Amun is absolutely hidden and no statement about Him is possible).

The ineffable God is hidden both from the noetic gods and human beings: scriptures give no information about Him and He cannot be explained by any theory.⁴³ He is called *Ba* because there is no name for him: even "Amun" is not the real name of God. However, from the perspective of divine immanence, every name is a name of the ineffable Principle.

The term *ba*, according to J. Assmann, is used when the divinity (while remaining transcendent in itself) hidden behind the multitude of manifestations is meant, thereby indicating the invisible paradigm of manifestation. Therefore the visible world has the World-Soul (*Ba*, constituted by the multitude of particular souls and their *logoi*) which animates and moves it, the animated world itself being akin to the corporeal cosmic aspect of Ptah or Amun-Ptah, "just as it did for the Neoplatonists, who believed in the *anima mundi*. The parallel is not altogether artificial".⁴⁴ J. Assmann is correct in maintaining that there are strong connections between the Egyptian and Platonic concepts of the World-Soul, though in Plotinus the World-Soul itself derives from the hypostasis Soul which is the source of individual human souls as well.

When Amenhotep is regarded as a manifestation of Amun, it means that his own *ba* is realized as essentially identical with the divine *Ba*, sometimes depicted as a four-headed ram. This solar identity means the reintegration and union with Him who "gives his *bau* in millions (*hebu*) of forms", *hebu* standing for the limbs of his boundless theophanic body, manifested "in His name", i.e., according to the archetypal patterns. In the form of self-disclosing solar Intellect, God is "*hebu* whose limits are not known, Scarab (*kheper*) whose body is not known" (*Leiden stela* V.70). He proceeds like the omnipresent intelligible light of the One Alone who

created the illustrious *bau* of all lower gods and humans (*Pap. Berlin* 3030.8-9).

Amenhotep becomes truly divine as the “follower of Thoth, born by the nobleman Hapu, son of Amun”. Thus, in this sense, he *a priori* belongs to the solar chain (the Neoplatonic *seira*) which descends from the noetic realm. As the royal scribe, “the sage Amenhotep, son of the living herald Apis, priest of Amun, his beloved son, strong in his heart, issued from Seshat, divine offspring of Thoth”, is called to keep the cosmic order (thus performing an avataric function) and to show the purified followers the way back to the solar barque of Amun-Ra.

Amenhotep’s earthly father Hapu is interpreted as the sacred bull Apis and his mother as Hathor-Idit, the justified (*maakheru*), the god’s mother. In addition to Apis and Hathor, Amenhotep has his initiatory spiritual parents, Thoth and Seshat (Sesheta). As a perfect gnostic, who realized his divine Self, Amenhotep is united with the archetypal *pleroma*, assimilated with Thoth, and, according to his divine rank, is portrayed as wearing the crescent and moon disk, thus becoming the “Theban Hermes”. Accepted in the official Theban pantheon, he now delivers oracles himself and irradiates healing *barakah* from the beyond.

According to Porphyry, “Hermes with his golden staff – in reality *logos* – meets the soul and clearly points the way to the goal” (*Stob. Ecl.* I.51). Amenhotep performs the same function, therefore his followers and devotees hope to be united with Amenhotep and Imhotep in the afterlife, in order to move through the Osirian Duat – not as separate and illusory individual souls, but in the forms of their patrons, the *bau* of Amun that are united to God himself.

In the ancient Egyptian inscription on the coffin (*Cairo Catalogue gen.6234*), God, in his “Pythagorean” theological mask of the mathematician Thoth, says as follows:

“I am One which transforms into Two.
I am Two which transforms into Four.
I am Four which transforms into Eight.
After all this, I am One”.

This successive procession starts from the Monad (which holds seminally the principles that are within all numbers), transformed into the infinity of the Dyad, called justice, Rhea and Isis by the Neopythagoreans. According to the Iamblichean *Theologumena of Arithmetic*, by naming the Monad “Proteus”, the Pythagoreans follow the Egyptians, since “he was the demigod in Egypt who could assume any form and contained the properties of everything”.⁴⁵

The Tetrad represents “surface” and “four are the foundation of wisdom – arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy – ordered 1,2,3,4,” according to Pythagoras.⁴⁶ The Octad produces volume, being the first

actual cube, and the eight are called the “fathers and mothers of Ra”, namely, the Ogdoad of Hermopolis hidden in the depths of Nun. This transcendent Ogdoad from its own seed makes a golden germ, putting it in the hidden lotus which flowers into being as the primordial noetic lotus of Ra, the principle of that divine light which constitutes the intelligible cosmos.

Therefore a son and follower of Thoth, being his microcosmic image, meditates upon the metaphysical unity and beholds the formal order which springs forth from the incomprehensible Oneness and which returns back to its supreme Source.

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3 Ibid., p.282

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23 Jeremy Naydler *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1996, p.14

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27 Ibid., p.140

28 Ibid., p.138

29 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.170

30 Ibid., p.446

31 Jeremy Naydler, *ibid.*, p.196

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37 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.126

38 Erik Hornung *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, p.135

39 Erik Hornung *The Secret Lore of Egypt*, p.5

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41 Ibid., pp. 84-87

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43 Jan Assmann *Moses the Egyptian*, p.197

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1. The Ramesside Icon and Three Hypostases of Plotinus

The Egyptian civilization as a semantic universe is based on metaphysical principles. Therefore being is understood in terms of divine irradiations arranged as a semiotic meta-structure of *neteru* and their dynamic forces which are not acting at random but reproduce their spiritual archetypes and cultic paradigms. The mathematics and mythology of heavens translate themselves into the realm of sensible images, establishing an exact correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, as if all things exist by imitation of archetypes, numbers, and divine precedents.

The world of *neteru* and *akhw*, keeping its permanent structure and ideal form, brings structure to language and provides an adequate iconography, thus rendering this world intelligible. "Here" and "there" like *entautha* and *ekei* in the philosophy of Plotinus, are clearly distinct. However, the different ontological realms are completely integrated and governed by the laws of the same noetic patterns and the same *maat*, truth and justice. The course of the sun and its liturgic rhythms, turned into a "sacred text" and "hieratic icon", constitute the immanent mystery of transformation and solar rebirth, functioning as a model of life and its death-transcending philosophy aimed at solar immortalization (*apathanatismos*).

The ritualized process of transfigurations (*sakhu*) is crucial and is supported by *akhw*, the illuminative power of the sacred world. "Who knows this" and "who does this" (i.e., lives according to intellect, *akh*, and its archetypal patterns) "is an image of the great God", proclaim the New Kingdom texts. Knowledge (*gnosis*) includes 1) an esoteric knowledge of one's supreme identity and 2) a knowledge of the sacred rituals that maintain the cosmic order and harmony. This knowledge is turned into a cultic, philosophical, social, and political *praxis*. J. Assmann says:

"The universe is not only interpreted in terms of divine acts, as a ritual celebrated by the gods: this interpretation is itself also staged as ritual".¹

Both the Egyptian theology in its different branches and Neoplatonism (as well as the entire Orphico-Pythagorean tradition) agree that human participation, involving rites (*teletai*) and intellections (*noeseis*), is essential to the divine scheme of sustaining the world which itself is the manifestation of divine energies (*dunameis*, *sekbemu*). The search for the origin and meaning of things (*ta pragmata*), both in philosophy and sacred rites, means the contemplation of the eternal truth of reality and the ascent to the divine, thus recollecting one's primordial archetypal identity.

In the early Ramesside period (c.1290 B.C.) text it is stated that "the god of this land is the sun in the sky. [Only] his symbols (i.e., the divine statues) are on earth." (*Pap. Boulaq* 4.7.15-16). The priests of the New

Kingdom and Late period were already thinking along the same lines as Proclus when he said that “all things are presented in logical order, as being symbols of divine orders of being” (*In Parm.* VI.1062).

According to the solar theology of Amun-Ra and Neoplatonic metaphysics, by means of images the microcosmic eyes of the soul (*hoi tes psuches ophthalmoi*), which at their own ontological level imitate the divine Eyes, are able to see the gods in the luminous (*angoeide*) garments of their souls. The *bau* of the gods not only enter the material images produced in accord with the strict rules of hieratic iconography, but they may appear as visions (depending on the soul’s receptive capacity, *epitedeiotes*, and on the semantics of the already established world-picture) in an interior space of imagination. When the Egyptian priest contemplates the sacred image of the god, he feels the invisible power (*sekhem*) that irradiates from the beautifully decorated and “animated” statue along with aromas of incense and oil. If occasionally the god appears in its epiphanic form as a vision experienced by the initiated, he manifests the same tremendous power and radiance. Therefore Proclus says:

“The gods themselves are incorporeal, but since those who see them possess bodies, the visions which issue from the gods to worthy recipients possess a certain quality from the gods who send them but also have something connatural (*sungenes*) with those who see them... However, because visions emit divine light, possess effectiveness, and portray the powers of the gods through their visible symbols, they remain in contact with the gods who send them. This is why the ineffable symbols of the gods are expressed in images and are projected sometimes in one form, sometimes in another” (*In Remp.* I.39.5-17).

The Ramesside picture from the *Book of Gates* (division 12, tomb of Ramesses VI, c.1143-1136 B.C.) may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of those metaphysical principles which later became the three divine hypostases of Plotinus (A.D.204-270). The icon shows Nun as a personified figure raising in his hands the solar barque. The Egyptians usually depicted the gods, especially Ra in his various forms, as travelling in such boats. The ceremonial barques were used for cultic purposes. Two barques of Ra, namely, *Mandjet* and *Mesket* are frequently depicted upon the sky hieroglyph *pet* and the lake, or pool, hieroglyph *she*. By lifting the barque (*wia*) of Ra, the luminous space (Shu), or initial noetic “place” (symbolized by Heliopolis), is established and manifested within the Ocean which contains in itself the unmanifested primordial Egg of *kosmos noetos*. Due to this theogonic act of lifting the retinue of gods, the whole intelligible cosmos is manifested in its archetypal form. The scarab beetle Ra-Khepera in the sacred barque is the form of Ra, the solar Creator, who comes into being (*keheper*), the term *keheperu* meaning theophanies, irradiations, manifestations.

In the upper part of the same icon from the *Book of Gates* we see the body of Osiris arched round in a circle and also surrounded by the uniform Waters. His arms support the goddess Nut (Heaven), who stands upside down and holds the sun disk (*aten*) – the supreme symbol of the intelligible Light. Two inscriptions run as follows:

“This is Osiris, he encircles the Duat” and “This is Nut, she receives Ra”.

The visible and invisible sun played a central role in the theurgic cult. Therefore G. Shaw argues that “theurgic mysteries were solar mysteries”.² and the sun’s light-giving power “was far more than a conceptual analogue of the noetic Demiurge, it was a *sunthema* of the One itself”.³

Following the Neoplatonic reading, Nun should be regarded as the One (*to hen*), the supreme ineffable source of everything. The solar Ra (or Atum-Ra) is the divine Intellect (*Nous*), and his sacred barque, which carries the standing gods, constitutes and symbolizes the articulated noetic cosmos of divine Ideas, light-like intellects and intelligible principles (*archai, theoi*). Osiris encircles the Duat – the subtle interworld of the divine Soul in her universal and macrocosmic aspect. Thus, the three Plotinian hypostases of the divine reality, as presented, for instance, in *Enn.* V.1, are made complete. Presumably, the physical world should be located inside the Osirian circle.

The same ideas, sometimes involving different metaphysical divisions, may be expressed using a great many different mythical images and theological constructions. Plotinus also argues that the universe lies in Soul which is analogous to Osiris or Isis-Hathor in her form of the celestial Cow. The Soul, *Ba* of Amun, or the breath of Shu on the psychic Osirian level, “bears it (universe) up and nothing is without a share of soul. It is as if a net immersed in the waters was alive, but unable to make its own that in which it is. The sea is already spread out and the net spreads with it, as far as it can; for no one of its parts can be anywhere else than where it lies” (*Enn.* IV.3.9.36-42).

The image of a net reaching from Heaven to Earth is described in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, chapter 153a. Just as the One (the primeval Ocean of Nun) contains the eternal world of Ideas and everything else, so the eternal divine world (the Osirian circle, itself transcended by the circle of Ra) contains the temporal world. According to A. Hilary Armstrong:

“It seems that we are inside that great animal whose tracks we see everywhere in this world. But of course, as we are *psuche*, we also are that animal, and, if we are considering where to look for it in our present circumstances, we can say that it is inside us”.⁴

Like the supreme ineffable One in Neoplatonism, Nun is usually described in negative terms. It is dark, formless, and inert transcendent potentiality for Being, Life, and creative solar Intelligence. Whereas the Osirian Duat and the solar barque of Ra harbour psychic and spiritual

forms, all forms are dissolved in the utterly formless and dark “waters” of Nun, in the abyss of Beyond-Being which transcends all categories of knowledge and can be described only in negative terms. This mode of expression is utilized by both the Ramesside negative theology of Amun (elaborated during the XIX Dynasty: 1295-1188 B.C.) and the Neopythagorean mysticism which flourished more than twelve centuries later in Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria.

2. Back to One's Native Star

For the ancient Egyptian theologians, the fabric of being is woven of *medu neter*, divine words and pictures, manifested on different levels of God's self-disclosure. Regarded as *medu-neter*, the hieroglyphs (in Greek *hieros* meaning sacred, *gluphe* – carving) were not arbitrary signs, but both 1) invisible Ideas and 2) their visible semiotic icons which sprang from the mouth of God and pointed to the archetypal and ontological connections that lay in the nature of things.

In some respects, hieroglyphs constitute the meaningful tapestry of existence and its arranged formal characteristics. Carved and painted hieroglyphs are the sensible reflections and images of the true “hieroglyphs” at the level of divine Forms embraced in the divine Intellect of Atum-Ra. Therefore the God-given script shows the real faces of things, their *eide*, and reveals the play of their interconnections, all of which find their best expression in mystical “etymography” rather than “etymology”, the latter being appreciated by the Greek grammarians and their modern successors in the field of philology. The exclusive emphasis on etymology is based on faith in the revelatory character of spoken language, but not on multi-coloured visual symbols and graphic icons which explicitly constitute the mysterious coherence of the universe.

In this respect, the signs of the Egyptian script were regarded as images of the words of creation, conceived and uttered by Ptah and recorded by Thoth. Since the symbolic script of the priests was viewed as an imitation of divine demiurgy, it also had a theurgic function and sacramental elevating power, revealed, for example, through inscriptions and decorations on the temple walls of the Late period, when the entire body of cultic knowledge was erected in a form of an architectural edifice, equivalent to the archetypal Book with its own symbolic grammar.

The Book of Forms was written by Thoth at the beginning of manifestations and this Book is permanent in the noetic cosmos, while being endlessly repeated in the realm of psychosomatic compositions and their particular destinies. In the *Coffin Texts* the deceased says:

“I am one of the ministrants of the Master of Things, he who keeps the Books of Forms” (CT 335).

R. T. Rundle Clark argues that, in accordance with the Egyptian concept of Forms, this “quasi-philosophical idea” can be expanded to mean stages of development, species and visible signs.⁵ The Platonic doctrine acknowledges “that one kind of being is the form which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything into itself from without, nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only” (*Tim.*51e-52a). This doctrine is already present and elaborated in the Egyptian theological system.

Terrestrial Egypt (which symbolized the entire world as such) and all elements of its topography are regarded as an image of celestial Egypt. The land of Kemet is an image of the divine Paradigm, visualized and represented by the skies where the heavenly Nile flows and divine beings sail the waters.

The Pythagorean and Platonic teaching assuming that stars were souls or their archetypal abodes (if not the shining archetypes themselves) has its Egyptian prototype explicitly evolved from the Pyramid age. For the Platonists, *aither* (skr. *akasha*) is the stuff of which the soul, or rather its stellar vehicle, is made, *aither* being the subtle substance that the animated universe is said to breathe, i.e., the “speech” which emerged from the mouth of Atum as the life-giving breath of Shu. The element of air is the *ba* of Shu. In the *Book of the Dead* (spell 38a for living by air in the realm of the dead) the deceased says:

“I am Atum who ascended from the Abyss to the Celestial Waters. I have taken my seat in the West and I give orders to the spirits whose seats are hidden, for I am the Double Lion, and acclamation is made to me in the barque of Khepera. I eat in it and have become strong thereby, I live in it on air, and I drink in the barque of Ra” (BD 38a).

Stars are the abode of the dead, since the soul has an existence separate from the mortal body. *Ba* is to Heaven, *khat* – to earth. According to the Orphic initiate:

“I am child of earth and of starry heaven, but my real nature is of heaven alone” (OF 32b).

This idea, like so much in early afterlife systems of the Upanishads and in the Orphic teachings, is first attested in Egyptian texts. According to Plato, the fixed stars were created as divine and eternal animals, ever abiding and revolving after the same manner (*Tim.*40b). Therefore every soul returns to its native star. For Egyptians, “to become a star” is a goal of the theurgic ascent modelled on the *mir'aj* of the king, son of Ra. Stars, being visible symbols of the noetic Ideas, are spiritual faces of the transformed souls of the dead and are considered to be gods (*neteru*), because the divinized souls are counted as gods. The soul of a gnostic even takes on the role of the Creator, the Lord of All, by taking hold of His attributes, showing that He is the Lord of Life, and participating in the demiurgic work of the Creator.

The iconography of the gods is built as a system of symbolic allusions to the essential nature and function of metaphysical principles which direct the demiurgic work accomplished through *medu neter*. Therefore the hieroglyphs themselves are called "gods" and individual signs of the script are equated with particular gods. The gods inhabit *medu neter*, that is hieroglyphs, like their cult images which are produced in the same form as hieroglyphs. The semiology of the gods themselves (their classes, ranks, epiphanies, interconnections, functions, separations and unifications) is no less than a way of "writing" reality, of producing the manifested tapestry of divine names and attributes.

The ontological *beka* power of demiurgy and "magic" can operate only through the special names. Every name (*ren*), as a manifested "face" of Atum, the plenitude of noetic realities, has its efficient substance and power to shape certain particular things. Hence, names constitute the essential nature of all living entities, being a sort of "nourishment" and the chief mark of their identity. Therefore every name, epithet, or visible image enhances the real presence of the god or of any particular being designated by that name and depicted by that image. The extent of divine names applied to a god indicates the horizon of his presence and the scope of his influence.

When the realm of names is transcended by the gnostic, he enters the ineffable silence. Similarly, the king at the end of his theurgic ascent is assimilated to the supreme God and this union is confirmed by saying that "his Mother does not know his name" (PT 394c).

3. Archetypal Foundation of Hieroglyphic Signs and Colours

In Egyptian theology, Nun is sometimes equated to the primordial Snake, called Most Ancient One, or Provider of Attributes (*Nehet-kau*), who held all subsequent creation within his folds. This Snake is not originally distinct from Atum, the keeper of a hidden plenitude of the Forms. Insofar as Atum makes a place for himself within the Snake's coils, he begins to define himself as something distinct from Nun, thus coming forth as the intelligible *ben-ben* stone, the condensed Being itself. By "bending right around himself" and "making a place in the midst of his coils" (CT 321), Atum introduces the archetypal foundation for a series of subsequent creative acts.

Damascius, the last "successor" (*diadochos*) of the Neoplatonic Academy in Athens, also speaks about the hypercosmic abyss, or sanctuary of silence (*De princip.* I.84), which summarizes in itself all worlds (ibid. III.91). This Orphic Night is the realm of yet unmanifested birth-pangs of the noetic Form. Below this *apeiron*, not subject to procession and numbering, is located the cause of Being, itself beyond essence (*ousia*) and intellection (*noesis*).

For Damascius, "the archetypal and perennial man" (*ho koinos kai aidios anthropos*) is the paradigm of the species and the goal of all existence. We are images of the noetic entities and effigies of the unknown divine *sunthemata*. However, hyper-ignorance (*hyperagnosia*) is our natural state of mind, according to Damascius (*De princip.* I.84). This metaphysical ignorance is a direct inheritance from the ineffable Beyond-Being which is known through non-intellectual means: through forgetting of all philosophical notions, rejecting all definitions, emptying of the mind and, in a state of complete passivity (being like the corpse of Osiris when the individual self is annihilated), receiving a glimpse of transcendence which promises mystical union.

On its own psychic level of the interworld (*barzakh*, to use the Sufi term), the mummy of Osiris reflects the primordial inertness and is represented as a prone figure without any distinguishing marks. In this state he is called aru, "form" in a general and passive sense, as a "dead shape" which yet needs to be awakened and "informed" by the active and life-giving "form" of Ra. The shapes of things have an immense symbolic importance for the ancient Egyptians, to whom visible form was an image of the invisible *eidōs*.

R. H. Wilkinson even discerned primary and secondary levels of association in the symbolism of form. In primary association, the form of a thing suggests concepts, ideas, or identities with which this thing is directly related, namely, the specific gods and concepts connected with that particular deity. In the secondary association, the form of a thing suggests another different form which has its own symbolic significance.⁶

The form is inseparable from colour and other qualitative properties. Therefore the colour of any object is viewed as an integral part of its nature, its inner and outer being. The term *iven*, signifying colour, is virtually synonymous with substance, nature, being, external appearance, character. Regarded as an immutable aspect of reality, colours (along with shapes, their lines, sounds, and proportions) are used in the Egyptian ritual practice and art to reveal 1) the essential nature of the object portrayed and 2) the close relationship between colour and being itself.

Accordingly, colour has both theurgic and magic significance. For the Egyptian alchemists, the valuable properties of stones and metals are largely ascribed to their colours: they reveal the inner nature of different metals and indicate the states of their transmutation, analogous to those by which the soul is transformed. Since colour was regarded as a form of activity or *pneuma* (the breath of Shu) which could be removed from one substance and infused into another, the conception of "tinctures" (*baphikai*) plays an important role in the process of alchemical work. The colour of plants was viewed as their *pneuma*. According to the famous alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (Akhmim):

"Demokritos has named as substances four bodies: that is, copper, iron, tin, lead... All these substances are employed in the Two Tinctures [of gold and silver]. All the substances have been recognized by the

Egyptians as produced by lead alone. For it is from lead that the other three bodies come".⁷

Taking lead as a sort of primary matter, the first problem in trying to turn it into other metals (as in the attempt to transform the mortal darkness of *khat* into the immortal golden light of *sab*) was to change its colour.

Each hieroglyph is a small symbolic image and has its own colour or combination of colours related to different divine qualities. The connection between written signs (or images) and larger, representational images (which our modern culture identifies as "objects of art") is also very strong. Therefore individual hieroglyphic signs are viewed as the models for parts and whole compositions of art which translate *medu neter* into objects of daily use, furniture, painting, reliefs, sculpture in the round, and architecture. Understood in this sense, all products of sacred art and craft are prolongations of "the god's words". They are ontological and cultic manifestations of Ptah.

This interaction or oscillation between writing and pictorial representation, between image and text, means that they represent the same inner reality, both being *medu neter*. In fact, the same word refers to hieroglyphic writing, drawing and painting. Both images and texts are referred to indiscriminately as a "script" which is revealed by Thoth. Therefore there are no boundaries between written signs and iconic signs. As R. H. Wilkinson pointed out:

"The hieroglyphic signs do form the very basis of Egyptian iconography, which – just like the written inscriptions – is concerned with the practical functions of making a clear and often specific symbolic statement".⁸

In all traditional cultures, the symbolism is viewed as inherent in forms themselves, to the extent that a symbol is in a certain sense that to which it gives expression, namely, the *ba* of the god.

4. Divine Ideas and Symbols

The so-called Platonic theory of Ideas is not Plato's invention; the concept of the relationship between intelligible archetypes and their images has been central to Egyptian and Mesopotamian thought from its early beginnings. What is new is the rationalization of this theory and its separation from the initial mythical frame and "theurgic integrality", thus adapting it to dialectical logocentrism and to the taste of contemporary Sophists. However, if it is reduced merely to the level of an abstract dianoetic reasoning and its mental "universals", this "theory" is impoverished and becomes involved in the endless quarrel about realities that cannot be fully revealed to the discursive mind and therefore appear as logical contradictions. The symbolic "language" of photagogic visions, images, colours, scents and liturgical sounds is diminished or neglected in

favour of monopolistic rational discourse. Although the scope of this discourse is limited, its metaphysical pretensions are absolute. Thus, the whole discussion about Ideas becomes too anthropocentric and restricted to the dimension of human speech.

This passionate belief in the omnipotent power of rationality and its categories is itself irrational, because an intellectual truth is not available for transmission in any discursive form. The structure of spoken language is unsuitable for expressing certain higher truths and realities. Simplicius in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* argues that even if the categories are employed semantically to refer to actual things, it is better to view them not as realities but as conceptual entities (*noemata*) that symbolize, or are images of, genuine substances (*sumbolon ousa tes en tois ousin ousias: In Categ. 11.19*).

Speech is an outermost activity of the soul fallen into embodiment, therefore philosophy, restricted to rational discursive thinking, presents the greatest hindrance to the apprehension of the divine truth and the transcendent Forms. Hieroglyphs, *medu neter*, are symbols and images for contemplation: they function as a means of elevation. In this respect, they are analogous to the Neoplatonic "divine syntheses" (*sunthemata*), that is, the theurgic tokens of the noetic realm.

The Chaldean and Neoplatonic *sunthemata* also signify a symbol used in rituals, because the cosmogenesis itself is staged as a rite performed by the gods. The process of descent and ascent by means of symbols (*sumbola, sunthemata*) and hieroglyphs constitutes the way which *ba* traverses: the soul moves through Duat as if crossing the dynamic semiotic field, or the "Osirian book", made of names and ontological attributes of identity. The manifested reality itself is a construction built up of *medu neter*. It is only at the level of human senses that the "divine words" are crystallized into an iconic script and items of sacred art. According to Proclus, who regarded the soul itself as the special token (like the animated statue or hieroglyph) of the One, aimed at eventual assimilation with God:

"The soul is composed of the intellectual words and from the divine *sumbola*, some of which are from the intellectual ideas, while others are from the divine henads. And we are in fact icons of the intellectual realities, and we are statues of the unknowable *sunthemata*" (*Phil. Chald. 5.8-11*).

While understood as a hieroglyph, as a "word" which comes forth from the mouth of Atum, the *ba* may be viewed as a textual element of the larger ontological "text" which is *kheperu*, the theophanic reality itself. The human *ba* is depicted as a figure of a human-headed bird, usually a falcon, thus becoming a sign-image moving within the initiatory "text", constituted of other figures, symbols, and images, since the ascent takes place through the disclosure of divine names, the elements of divine speech, *medu neter*. As Proclus says:

"Every god is without figure, even though it is viewed with a figure. For the figure is not in it, but it is part of it, since the seer is incapable of

seeing without figure that which is with figure, but that which is seen in a figured way corresponds to the nature of the seer" (*In Remp.* I.40.1-4).

Therefore the soul, seeing the figures depicted in the imagination and being struck by their beauty, is admiring those Ideas from which they are derived. However, the highest initiation (into the transcendence of Amun, or Atum) takes place not by means of rational discrimination or intellection, but by means of all-surpassing silence:

"Initiation (*mnesis*) and revelation (*epopteia*) are themselves symbols (*symbolon*) of the ineffable silence and of the unity with the intelligible by the method of mystic revelations" (*Plat. Theol.* IV.9.193.15-16).

According to S. Rappe, "the highest form of Neoplatonic hermeneutics might posit philosophy as, in the last result, mere fiction".⁹ This radical attitude is established by Damascius, who criticized not only the metaphysical premises of Procline philosophy, but discursivity as such, in his attempt to promote a radical non-dual way to the darkness of Nun, the Ineffable:

"Now knowledge takes place by means of intuitive seeing, or by means of syllogism, or it is just a diluted and obscure sort of vision that sees things from a distance, as it were, but which nevertheless relies on logical necessity, or else, [knowledge is] simply a specious form of reasoning that doesn't even have access from afar, but simply conceives of certain ideas on the basis of other ideas. By means of such thinking, we habitually recognize material order or privation or in general that which has no reality" (*De princip.* I.67).

However, as T. Burckhardt pointed out, even if spirituality (understood both in an apophatic sense and as a perennial wisdom which transcends its formal vehicles) is independent of forms, this in no way implies that it can be expressed and transmitted by any and every sort of form.¹⁰ One should add that without form it cannot be transmitted at all, because the transcendent divine Reality is above any human comprehension and experience. If the style of "sacred art", which sustains the spirituality of every traditional civilization, is perpetuated by the power of the immanent spirit and therefore cannot be imitated from outside, it means that the "theory of Ideas" may be expressed in different ways supported by different revelations. The Egyptian tradition of *medu neter* could not be translated into the rational discourse of the Greeks without losing its essential characteristics and esoteric meanings, imbued in the forms, shapes, colours, and accompanying rituals themselves. T. Burckhardt says:

"Through its qualitative essence form has a place in the sensible order analogous to that of truth in the intellectual order; this is the significance of the Greek notion of *eidōs*. Just as a mental form such as a dogma or a doctrine can be the adequate, albeit limited, reflection of a Divine Truth, so can a sensible form retrace a truth or a reality which transcends both the plane of sensible forms and the plane of thought".¹¹

5. Symbolic Interpretation of Hieroglyphic Script

Modern scholars think that Plotinus utterly misunderstood the function and essence of Egyptian hieroglyphs. However, Plotinus simply reflects the tradition of Egyptians themselves. This tradition, at least from the so-called "Ethiopian-Saite renaissance" (760-525 B.C.), laid foundations for the later Alexandrian schools of philology and elaborated the theory of the symbolic, or cryptographic, aspect of hieroglyphic script which is unrelated to conventional phonetic meanings. Along with the hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic scripts there is the fourth category of script, namely, "symbolic". The rare instances of purposely enigmatic inscriptions date from the Old Kingdom, but only in Ptolemaic times did the boundaries between normal hieroglyphic script and enigmatic and symbolic cryptography become blurred. Plotinus faithfully conveys the priestly theory when he says:

"The true wisdom, then, is substance, and the true substance is wisdom (*he ara alethine sophia ousia, kai he alethine ousia sophia*); and the worth of substance comes from wisdom, and it is because it comes from wisdom that it is true substance. Therefore all the substances which do not possess wisdom, because they have become substance on account of some wisdom but do not possess wisdom in themselves, are not true substances. One must not then suppose that the gods or the 'exceedingly blessed spectators' in the higher world contemplate propositions, but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images (*kala agalmata*) in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real (*agalmata de ou gegrammena, alla ontā*). This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances.

"The wise men of Egypt (*hoi Aiguption sophoi*), I think, also understood this, either by scientific (*episteme*) or innate knowledge, and when they wished to signify something wisely (*dia sophias*), did not use the forms of letters which follow the order of words and propositions and imitate sounds and the enunciations of philosophical statements, but by drawing images (*agalmata*) and inscribing in their temples one particular image (*agalma*) of each particular thing, they manifested the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom (*episteme kai sophia hekaston estin agalma*) and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not of discourse or deliberation. But [only] afterwards [others] discovered, starting from it in its concentrated unity, a representation in something else, already unfolded and speaking it discursively and giving the reasons why things are like this..." (*Enn.* V.8.5.15-6.12).

To read the enigmatic surface of the script which transcends ordinary conventions requires not only an inner calmness and concentration of mind, but also the metaphysical knowledge of analogies and associations.

When a sign is both a script character and a pictorial figure, or divine symbol for contemplation, a certain degree of polysemy is achieved and, as a result of the iconic nature of hieroglyph, the Eye of the soul is opened. Spiritual hermeneutics at their summit become an imaginative pursuit which leads to inner vision and the experience of divine presence. J. Assmann thinks that a similar kind of polysemy characterises arabesque or ornamentalized Arabic script:

“In Egyptian calligraphy, the equivalent to the Arab-Islamic ornament is the figural composition”.¹²

In Late period Egypt, written knowledge, itself inseparable from the rites, is embodied and presented as a complicated system of temple or tomb decoration, and is gradually turned into a secret lore, partly concealed by aesthetic forms of sacred art. The elements of beauty and their metaphysical truth, as well as “the almost magical relationship” between the adequate symbol and the sacramental presence of prototype are thoroughly discussed by F. Schuon. He says:

“Furthermore, as Plotinus remarked, every element of beauty or harmony is a mirror or receptacle which attracts the spiritual presence to its form or colour, if one may so express it; if this applies as directly as possible to sacred symbols, it is also true, in a less direct and more diffuse way, in the case of all things that are harmonious and therefore true. Thus, an artisan ambience made of sober beauty – for there is no question of sumptuousness except in very special cases – attracts or favours *barakah*, “blessing”; not that it creates spirituality any more than pure air creates health, but it is at all events in conformity with it, which is much, and which, humanly, is the normal thing”.¹³

The rich repertory of iconic signs and the number of ways to read and understand them grew immensely in the Late period Egypt. Therefore the esoterically transformed script became accessible only to initiated priests. J. Assmann says:

“The mistake of the Greeks was not that they interpreted hieroglyphic script as a secret code rather than a normal writing system. The Egyptians had in fact transformed it into a secret code and so described it to the Greeks. The real misunderstanding of the Greeks was to have failed to identify the aesthetic significance of cryptography as calligraphy”.¹⁴

This more symbolic than conventional interpretation of script is related to the metaphysical pursuits of XXV-XXVI Dynasty theologians. At that time, the Egyptian version of the so-called theory of Ideas – the theory which naturally stems from the New Kingdom doctrines of the creative *Logos* and *ba* theology – became more explicit. Shabaka, the pharaoh of Ethiopian origin, who ascended the throne in 716 B.C., and his successor Shebiktu made attempts to revive the Old Kingdom Memphite traditions through a comprehensive programme of cultic renewal and theological *paideia*, aimed at a restoration of metaphysical paradigms and holiness of the land. The image of the past “golden age” was raised into the rank of a normative model for the present,

emphasizing the importance of divine archetypes embodied and mirrored in the script itself.

The Ethiopian restoration continued the cosmogonical, or cratogonical, traditions of the Ramesside Ptah theology, making attempts to reveal their hieratic value and inner meaning. The king’s piety is shown as having a paradigmatic value: the “philosophical” purity, devotion, and wisdom of the ruling pharaoh bestows blessings on the whole of Egypt, holiest of lands, as if translating the energy of noetic archetypes into their ritual receptacles, that is, sacred landscapes, cities (which are regarded as holy places able to transcend death), temples and the hearts of men. And these blessings, irradiated by the restorer of the “golden age”, are “interpreted as a return to the primal condition, when the creator himself ruled over creation”.¹⁵

According to J. Assmann, the Memphite paradigms of renewal shaped the theological systems of Late period temples, 1) establishing the metaphysical and semiotic triad of thought, word, and written sign and 2) developing a kind of “thing-script” whose signs are coextensive with the totality of things in the cosmos.¹⁶ These concepts were not invented but only reformulated and re-emphasized, since in the Old and Middle Kingdoms the manifestation of being was already regarded as a set of wordplay coming from the mouth of Atum.

However, until the rise of the new solar theologies of the XVIII Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.), only the gods, i.e., the hierarchy of noetic archetypes themselves, not the entire world, are said to come forth from the mouth of the Creator, and the role of hieroglyphs in the subsequent manifestation is not explicitly emphasized. J. Assmann maintains that elevation of hieroglyphic script, as a purely sacred medium able to exhibit the visual faces of Forms, coextensive with the totality of things, is the most “modern” feature of the Memphite theology which may be compared to the account of *Genesis* (2.20) of the collaboration of God and Adam in Paradise.¹⁷

6. Return to the Golden Age and Paradigms to be Imitated

The Egyptian alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis interpreted Adam as Thouth: “the First Man, who is Thouth among us” is named Adam, “with a name borrowed from the tongue of angels”, by the Chaldeans, Parthians, Medes, and Hebrews. This Thouth of Zosimus is also equated with the Assyrian Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Egyptian Osiris, [the Alexandrian Thoth] and the Hellenic Hermes. The four letters or elements (*stoicheia*), which constitute the name Adam, are explained as follows: 1) A expresses the rising sun, air; 2) D expresses the setting sun, earth; 3) the second A expresses the north, water; 4) M expresses the maturing fire. Zosimus continues:

“Thus it is that the sensual Adam is named Thouth according to the external patterning. As for the man who is inside Adam, the spiritual man, he has simultaneously a personal and a universal name... His universal name is *Pbos* (Light).”¹⁸

Since the world is created by the Word, Adam or Thouth (who is anthropomorphized following the initial pattern of Ptah as Macranthropos, an image inherited by the Gnostic traditions and Zosimus) read from intelligible “things” (the Neoplatonic *ta pragmata*, meaning, first of all, noetic realities). These intelligible things are then uttered in the naming of appropriate objects.

The XXV Dynasty of the Ethiopian pharaohs roughly coincide with the Homeric epoch and the so-called “orientalizing period” in Greece (approximately 750-650 B.C.), when Eastern skills, images, and wisdom teachings were transmitted. The Assyrian expansion to the Mediterranean area along the trade system controlled by the Phoenicians and the Egyptian programme of restoration provided a historical framework for the movement of Oriental craftsmen, the Kadmean alphabet and metaphysical ideas of *Logos* to Greece. As J. Breasted pointed out, the Memphite theological conception of the cosmos

“forms quite a sufficient basis for suggesting that the later notion of *nous* and *logos*, hitherto supposed to have been introduced into Egypt from abroad at a much later date, were present at this early period. Thus the Greek tradition of the origin of their philosophy in Egypt undoubtedly contains more of the truth than has in recent years been conceded... The habit, later so prevalent among the Greeks, of interpreting philosophically the functions of the Egyptian gods... had already begun in Egypt before the earliest Greek philosophers were born; and it is not impossible that Greek practice of the interpretation of their own gods received its first impulse from Egypt.”¹⁹

When the pharaoh Psammetichus I by 663 B.C. was able to shake off the Assyrian yoke and start the XXVI Saite Dynasty (664-525 B.C.), Egypt (instead of the cities of Syria and Phoenicia, partly ruined by the Assyrians) became the most important place for Greek mercenaries and seekers of wisdom. According to W. Burkert, even before the Saite period the Greeks were strongly influenced in their religion, literature, and art by the Eastern models, introduced by the itinerant seers and priests of purification, migrating “craftsmen of the sacred” who transmitted their divinatory skills, mythological motifs, and wisdom.²⁰

These seers and healers are the direct predecessors of the Orphic and Dionysiac “craftsmen” – those who made the sacred their craft (*technai*) and who adhered to the cathartic and “philosophical” way of life, *telestikos kai mantikos bios*, based on ritual therapies and esoteric teachings of liberation. As in the later Hermetic and Hellenic philosophy, the role of spiritual “father” who transmits knowledge to his “son” through initiation is strongly emphasized.

This transmission of the telestic crafts and mysteries is simply a prolongation of the ancient practices (now detached from the temples), both Mesopotamian and Egyptian in their origins. The Codex of Hammurapi already designated the true craftsman as *mar ummani*, “son of the master craftsman”. Likewise the Phoenician seer describes himself as “the knowing one, son of the master craftsman” (*mudu, mar ummami*). The same is true of the craft tradition of Ptah and Imhotep. Their wisdom is esoteric and can be revealed only to the initiates belonging to the same sacred “family” (*genos*).

The Saite period Egypt (664-525 B.C.) became the school for the Greek *sophoi* to the same degree as Islamic Spain for the Medieval European philosophers and scientists. At the same time the pursuit of a codification of ancient memories and the creation of the patterns of a normative past became central: from Assyria, where a comprehensive collection and philological edition of Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian texts took place, to Greece, where the normative Homeric corpus was formed. The mythical Exodus traditions were selected and canonized at the same time, following the Assyrian and Babylonian examples.

The Houses of Life which flourished during the Saite period laid foundations for the later tradition of philology and allegorical exegesis, shaping, in a sense, that image of a mysterious and holy Egypt which prevailed in Ptolemaic and Roman times. This image of an age-old wisdom was supported by the visible and immediately accessible “past” in temples, memorials and books, experienced as the divine presence in the eternal “here and now”.

This thoroughly sacralized, archaized (in a classicist sense), canonized, and ritualized Egypt with its “almost theatrical”²¹ cultural forms – not arbitrarily chosen but consciously related to the ancient prototypes – was encountered by Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato. It is therefore no wonder that Plato’s theory of Forms and intelligible Numbers, along with his respect for the great past recorded by the Saite priests (“O Solon, Solon, you Hellenes are never anything but children”: *Tim.22b*), derived from 1) the ancient Egyptian sources related to the theory of *medu neter* as well as 2) the Mesopotamian doctrine of *me*.

The categories called *me* are the efficacious paradigms of all things and creative symbols of power, possessed by An (Heaven), or Enlil, or Ea (Enki, an equivalent of Ptah). The Sumerian god Enki was the lord of primordial Waters (*apsu*), wisdom, theurgic tokens and incantations, all arts and crafts, poetry and magic. The Sumerian *me* (rendered by Akkadian *parsu*) are attributes or powers of the gods (like Egyptian *bau* and *sekhemu*), acting as articulating, organizing, and educating forces. A related term *gish-bur* (plan, design), denotes how these ideal paradigms are to be imitated and embodied.

7. Hieratic Myths and Symbols

For Plato's Socrates, myths must be subjected to interpretation in a way that assists self-knowledge. This means that, instead of studying the historical traditions of myth-making, one is asked to interpret myths non-literally and regard them as a complex mirror of divine and human realities. This mirror allows the philosopher-exegete (*hermeneus*) or the sacred scribe (*hierogrammateus*) to identify himself with the events narrated in the story – their mythical paradigms, images, and symbols which operate in a non-discursive way and are able to elevate the interpreter to first principles.

According to Hellenic Neoplatonists, there are different kinds of myth. The highest theological myths are those which do not attach themselves to any material object, but regard the actual natures of the gods: they are "divine" (*theioi*) because they are used by the gods (*theoi*). The gods themselves in oracles have employed myths. According to Sallustius, who followed Iamblichus in this respect, the universe itself can be called a myth:

"So the myths represent the gods in respect of that which is speakable and that which is unspeakable (*arrheton*), of that which is obscure and that which is manifest, of that which is clear and that which is hidden, and represent the goodness of the gods; just as the gods have given to all alike the benefits to be drawn from objects perceptible to the senses while restricting to the wise the enjoyment of those received from objects perceptible to the intellect, so the myths proclaim to all that the gods exist, telling who they are and of what sort to those able to know it. Again, myths represent the active operations of the gods (*kai tas energeias de mimountai ton theon*). The universe itself can be called a myth (*exesti gar kai ton kosmon muthon eipein*), since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and intellects are concealed" (*De diis* III.1-15 Nock).

This attitude is analogous to the archaic attitude of the Egyptian theological discourse which, at the level of aesthetic imagination, sometimes abolishes any clear distinction between body (though bodies themselves are of different kinds) and luminous spirit, between corporeality and spirituality. In Egypt, knowledge and language are understood in bodily terms and are symbolized by the semiotic set of concrete corporeal icons. This is because "the body invites to adoration by its very theomorphic form; and that is why it can be the vehicle of a celestial presence and in principle is salvific", according to F. Schuon.²² However, as Iamblichus pointed out, the Egyptians acknowledge 1) a noetic, or spiritual, 2) a psychic, and 3) a natural, or material, realm:

"They distinguish both the life of soul (*psuche*) and that of the intellect (*nous*) from the life of nature, and not just in the cosmic sphere, but as regards us (i.e., human beings) as well" (*De Myster.* VIII.4.266.9-267.1).

In fact, "the body and the soul are two masks superimposed on the spirit".²³ The Egyptians did not regard the doctrine of the ruling Intellect as merely theoretical, but tried to ascend to this noetic realm by means of hieratic theurgy. Since the "name" of God, as the transcendent and immanent unity of all *medu neter*, extends through all manifested reality, a "myth" may be likened to a mysterious token (*sunthema*), both veiled and unveiled. The operative sacred dimension of myth is lost when its contents are translated into the medium of abstract propositions and arguments.

The hieratic myths may function in the same way as rituals for those "who have power to grasp from the symbols of myth with ease, in a secret way, the truth concerning the gods" (Proclus *In Remp.*83.9-10). This is so because there is a mysterious relationship between the symbols of mythic narrative and that divine world these symbols are able to evoke.²⁴ A myth itself may be monstrous and bizarre regarding its external account, however, the seeming unlikeness of the symbol to that at which it secretly hints, is essential to its symbolic function, because "symbols are not representations of those things of which they are symbols" (*In Remp.*198.15).

To teach using inspired mythical accounts means to encounter both 1) the iconic *mimesis* (if *eikon* is regarded as a visible likeness of the invisible structure of the cosmos) and 2) the symbolic mode of representation which is not concerned with a one-to-one likeness between copy and model. As Proclus says in defence of the "bodily" and "symbolic" nature of myth:

"The art, therefore, governing sacred matters (*he ton hieron techne*) distributes, in a fitting way, the whole of ritual among the gods and the attendants of the gods (i.e., the daimons), in order that none of those who attend the gods eternally should be left without a share in the religious service due them. This art calls on the gods with the holiest rites and mystic symbols (*tais hagiotatais teletais kai tois mustikois symbolois*), and invokes the gifts of the daimons through the medium of a secret sympathy by means of visible passions. In the same way, the fathers of such myths as we have been discussing, having gazed on virtually the entire procession of divine reality, and being eager to connect the myths with the whole chain which proceeds from each god, made the surface images of their myths analogous to the lowest races of being which preside over lowest, material sufferings. However, what was hidden and unknown to the many they handed down to those whose passion it is to look upon being, in a form which revealed the transcendent being of the gods concealed in inaccessible places. As a consequence, although every myth is daimonic on its surface, it is divine with respect to its secret doctrine" (*daimonios men estin kata to phainomenon, theios de kata ten aporrheton theorian: In Remp.*78.18-79.4).

8. All Things and All Hieroglyphs

Arguing that modern science is ignorant of a non-quantitative aspect of things, that is, “forms”, because it sees no criterion in the beauty of things (though the beauty of a thing is the sign of its internal unity), T. Burckhardt says:

“Traditional cosmology always comprises an aspect of ‘art’, in the primordial sense of this word: when science goes beyond the horizon of the corporeal world or when the traditional cosmologist gives his attention only to the manifestations, within this very world, of transcendent qualities, it becomes impossible to ‘record’ the object of knowledge as one records the contours and details of a sensory phenomenon. We are not saying that the intellection of realities higher than the corporeal world is imperfect; we are referring only to its mental and verbal ‘fixation’.”²⁵

According to the Memphite theology, the manifested reality consists of “all things and all hieroglyphs”. Ptah, the divine craftsman, who “created all things and caused the gods to originate”, endows things with their immutable patterns, depicted by written symbols. Though, the scribe of the gods and the “tongue” of Atum, transforms the thoughts of the divine “heart” into spoken and written language. The noetic Ideas or the seeds of Atum are articulated and translated through his hands. So, by the hands of Atum and from his own seed, Shu and Tefnut are brought into being. The “seed” and “hands” may be interpreted as “teeth” and “lips” of Ptah, thus providing the frame for the tongue of Thought that creates the manifested orders by naming them. The text of the Memphite theology says as follows:

“His Ennead stood before him
As teeth, that is the seed of Atum,
And as lips, that is the hands of Atum.
Verily, the Ennead of Atum originated
Through his seed and through his fingers.”²⁶

The creation of the first Dyad in order to form the first Triad is depicted as the paradoxical act of masturbation at the summit of the noetic mound of the supreme divine Heliopolis, the solar lotus that emerges from the ineffable darkness of Nun. Thus creation is a luminous hieratic act of articulation – eidetically, iconically, symbolically, and phonetically.²⁷ The written symbol, as an intelligible *eidōs* made visible, originates at the same time as the gods (*neteru*), the archetypal things and the names. The hieroglyphs, regarded as the divine speech (*medu neter*, or *logos* which, at the same time, is *mutbos*), represent the external side of the eternal archetypes, or the Platonic Ideas, and in certain sense – *neteru* themselves:

“But all divine speech (hieroglyphs) originated
From that which was thought up by the heart and commanded by the tongue.
And thus were all *kau* created and the *hemuset* determined.”²⁸

The world is a hierarchy of *medu neter*, i.e., of lights, names, and icons charged with the demiurgic power of *heka* and organized in accord with divine truth (*maat*). When Proclus argues that “names refer primarily to the intelligible Ideas, and that sense-objects get their names, together with their being, from that source” (*In Parm.* IV.852), the Egyptians would add that in some fundamental respect names are tantamount to their immaterial Forms, or the spiritual lights. The gods themselves function as the Forms that bring forth one’s name (*ren*), life (*ankh*), spiritual light, that is, intelligence (*akh*), soul (*ba*), vital energy (*ka*), and power (*sekhem*). There are many grades of names, as of knowledge. Proclus says:

“Since Forms exist primarily, as we learn from the *Timaēus* (31a), at the inferior limit among the intelligibles, clearly each of the primary forms is ‘one’, ‘being’, and a ‘whole’, and as such can be identically present to many different things at the same time, but transcendently; so that a Form is both everywhere and nowhere, and being present to all its instances in a non-temporal fashion is unmixed with them” (*In Parm.* IV.861).

The visible sacred icons immanently stand for the ineffable principles and the noetic lights which (as the divine presence of archetypes) are everywhere within the manifested horizon (*akhet*). They also can descend and penetrate into sacred images (*sekhemu*), be they statues, paintings, reliefs, books, tombs, temples, palaces, landscapes or human bodies. Therefore Proclus says:

“Of the intellectual Forms themselves we see images, both in ourselves and in sense-objects; the essence of the intelligible, however, completely transcends, by reason of its unitary nature, both ourselves and everything else, being unknowable in itself. Gods and Intellects it fills with itself; we must be content with participating in intellectual Forms through our souls. Plato demonstrates this truth when he presents our life as double, having both a political and a theoretical aspect (*Polit.* 272b), and happiness similarly as double, and traces the one life back to the patronymic supervisions of Zeus, and the other to the order of Kronos and pure Intellect. From this it is plain that he refers back our life in its entirety to the realm of the intellectual Kings, for one of these defines the beginning, and the other the end, of this order of being. Such entities as are beyond these he declares to be objects of contemplation for souls that are divinely possessed and are being initiated into a mystical vision of these things” (*In Parm.* IV.931).

Through the intelligible power of Thought, language and sacred script translate the primordial archetypes into theurgic symbols and icons. Therefore *medu neter* play a crucial role in the political and cultic articulation of reality. They are essential tools of priestly hermeneutics, of the anagogic interpretation which reveals the truth (*maat*) and opens the way of ascent. The language itself becomes a sort of commentary. It implies a reading of the “mystical letters” of the book-like universe, using a kind of “sacramental interpretation” in which “divine meaning becomes manifest in cultic act”, according to J. Assmann.²⁹ This both semiotic and

liturgical procedure establishes homology between the different levels of reality: between heavenly and earthly events, between archetypes and images. Such a type of commentary is aimed at keeping eternal truth and order through the salvific knowledge of names and through contemplation of Ideas, that is, the canonized iconographies of *neteru*, their perennial attributes and manifested aspects of being.

The cosmos is not explained in the "naturalistic" fashion, but rather interpreted in terms of divine acts. It is equated with the dynamic animal-like text which breathes, lives and contains the miraculous powers (*hekau*) of the noetic Forms which are irradiated from the archetypal fullness of Atum-Ra. Esoteric knowledge of names, divine masks, and one's true identity is crucial for the alchemical transformation of the soul and understanding of reality as it is. It includes both knowledge of paradigms embodied in mythical precedents of the "first time" (*tep sepi*) and knowledge of the "ontological" rites, because interpretation of reality itself is staged as a ritual. Therefore *gnosis* and *praxis* are inseparable and a necessary means for the continuance of all divine transformations. He who knows one or another particular *neter* and acts according to its eidetic patterns and energies (as if wearing a mask of this god), becomes a living (*ankh*) image (*tut*) of this particular *neter*; i.e., reveals the primordial noetic identity of an image and its archetype. As F. Schuon pointed out:

"It is in the nature of man – since he combines the outward with the inward – to make use of sensory supports towards the progress of his spirit or the equilibrium of his soul. These supports are either artistic, and so symbolistic and aesthetic, or theurgic; in the latter case their function is to act as the vehicle of benefic, protective, and sanctifying forces; the two types can moreover be combined. ...we say theurgy, and not magic, given that the forces that act in this case have their *raison d'être* and their essential source in Divine Grace and not in human art".³⁰

The meaning of Forms and symbols, deciphered by the priest is salvific in many different senses. The hieratic exegesis of names and attributes has no interest in so-called scientific cause and effect, nor in the reductionist and profane logic that explains the cosmogonical process, but rather has interest in its spiritual glory and elevating power which works through the dramatic myths, liturgies, and symbols imbued with theurgic and metaphysical meaning.

9. Ancient Theories of Ideas

Egyptian hieroglyphs are the Forms of the things that constitute all manifested reality, in fact, manifestation itself. Therefore at the microcosmic level hieroglyphic script is regarded as an imitation of divine demiurgy. The relation between thing and written sign is similar to that between thing and concept in Hellenic philosophy:

"When Ptah conceives of the Ideas of things, he at the same time invents the script that Thoth has only to record, in the same way that, taking the form of the tongue, Thoth utters the thoughts of the heart. Thus an onomasticon, a list of words arranged not alphabetically but in order reflecting the structure of reality, is described as a catalogue of 'all things that exist: what Ptah created, what Thoth copied down'. Thoth, the god of script, only has to find, not invent, what is inherent in the structure of things".³¹

The rise of the so-called "theory of Ideas" in one form or another is an inevitable and logical consequence, resulting from dealing with metaphysical problems of One and Many, of unity and diversity, of Heaven and Earth. It is formulated through searching for the mediating forces and analogies between metaphysical monism and sensible pluralism, that is, a world of infinitely reproduced images.

In Mesopotamia, the spiritual world, mythologized and empirically visualized as an iconic sky-realm of stars, is both separated from the sensible earthly realm and closely connected with it both in general schemes of macrocosmic-microcosmic analogies and in particular symbolic networks. The schemes of Heaven-Earth correspondences indicate an archetypal set of causative and analogical relations. The tablet of the Kassite age (c.1730 B.C.) declares:

"The vase *agubbu* is Ninhaburkuddu, queen of incantations... The tamarisk is Anu. The palmtree-head is Tammuz. The plant *mashtakal* is Ea, the reed *salalu* is Ninurta... Silver is the Great Good (moon). Gold is Enmesharra (sun). Copper is Ea. Lead is Ninmah (here a great mother-goddess)... The cypress is Adad. Variegated wool is Lamashtu, daughter of Anu. The aromatic Zu is Ninurta. The censer is the god Urash. The torch is the god Gibil. The pure incense is the god Negun (son of Ninlil, consort of Enlil)... The barley grains, the dining table, the pots *gagx* are Ninurta-Ea (here gods of potters). The weapon with seven laurel-wood heads is the storm, the weapon is Marduk..."³²

As is clearly indicated in the same text, it is addressed only to the initiated: thus, the doctrine of correspondences, symbols, analogies, and paradigmatic relations is regarded as an esoteric teaching. According to the commentary provided by J. Lindsay, for the ancient Mesopotamians, everything on earth has its divine exemplar. The archetypal divine aspect and the earthly aspect of things are both fused together and separated. He says:

"Under the extreme intellectualizing pressure at work in Greek philosophic circles, the divine was cut away and became the transcendent Ideas of Plato".³³

The different concepts of elements mediate between monistic and pluralistic trends of ancient thought, interposing a few basic "paradigmatic" substances between the One and the Many, for instance, four elements, or categories, which elaborated the Mesopotamian and Egyptian image of the four-square universe and that of the pillars

(personified by Shu) of the sky. This is the central metaphysical theme of the III-II millennium mythologies and ritual practices, accepting that the Word (Hu, *medu neter*), or creative Magic (Heka), should mediate between 1) a primal state of invisible mixture of all gods and things and 2) a manifested plurality of corporeal entities, things, and beings.

Following certain Egyptian and Babylonian esoteric traditions (e.g., that of the Heliopolitan priests who emphasized the role of the Ennead in the process of creation), Pythagoras interposed numbers between the One and Many, establishing the triunity of the One-Few-Many. According to T. McEvilley, Empedocles would transpose this triunity "into his theory of elements and Plato would expand it into his theory of Ideas".³⁴ T. McEvilley also maintains that this doctrine is expressed in many different ways (including the popular theory of the Cosmic Person) and indicates the transition from mythology to philosophy.³⁵ So Pythagoras tried to investigate the underlying unity of the cosmos and its knowability, a possibility of scientific knowledge, called *episteme* by Plato, though the Pythagorean wisdom is in part cultic and aimed at practical realization of one's hidden divinity. T. McEvilley says:

"On the one hand, the idea of seeking a manageable number of ultimate roots of things expressed a metaphysical desire to appropriate the world into a knowable domain by capturing it in a net of structural projections. On the other... the materialism with which the concept of the elements was imbued linked it to naturalistic modes of thought and invited empirical investigations. The idea of a limited or family-sized number of roots of things is a partly demythologized version of the Bronze Age cosmology of a few familiarly related gods and goddesses who rule and in a sense constitute universe."³⁶

10. Proclus' Conception of Divine Forms and Unities

In late antiquity, an Idea is regarded as an incorporeal thing which is the cause of those things which are similar to it and is the model for the existence of sensible things. Since there is a hierarchy of intellects from the divine intellects (*theios noes*) to the cosmic intellect (*nous tou kosmou*), participated by the World-Soul, and to ordinary thinking intellects (*noeroi noes*), Ideas, as real and objective entities, cannot be regarded simply as thoughts of individual human minds. Instead, they are *noemata* of the divine Intellect, or Being. Therefore they subsist by their own noetic existence in the realm of Being. Although their effects are found in the sensible world of bodies, by themselves they are immaterial (*asomatos*), simple (*haplous*), eternal (*aidios*), unchangeable (*ametablotos*), and transcendent (*exeremenos*).

According to the Neoplatonic perspective, the so-called "universals" that Aristotle sets against Plato's Ideas either refer to the "immanent

universal" or to the secondary abstraction made by the human mind after it has experienced those immanent forms already placed in sensibles by the Demiurge in the process of *proodos*. However, the pre-existent forms (*eide*) of all characteristics that actually exist in the sensible world are *a priori* contained (as the noetic "sparks" and "traces") in human minds and, if they are hidden, they must be recollected through spiritual exercises, *askesis* and dialectic. Proclus says:

"In sum, then, the Idea in the truest sense is an incorporeal cause, transcending its participants, a motionless Being, exclusively and really a model, intelligible to souls through images, and intelligizing causally the existents modelled upon it. So that from all these problems we have ferreted out the single definition of an Idea in the true sense.

"If, then, any wish to attack the concept of Ideas, let them attack this definition, and not assume them to be either corporeal images (*phantasiai*) of their own minds, or coordinate with the things of this realm, or devoid of being, or correspondent with our conceptions, or let them produce some other sophistic definitions such as these, and then fabricate their arguments on that basis; but let them bear in mind that Parmenides declared the Ideas to be gods, and that they subsist in God, as the Oracle also declares (fr.37 DP):

"The Intellect of the Father whirred, conceiving with his unwearying will Ideas of every form'.

"For the 'fount of the Ideas' is God, and the God in whom it is contained is the Demiurgic Intellect; and if it is the primal Idea, then it is to this that the above definition, assembled from the problems posed by Parmenides, pertains" (*In Parm.* IV.934-935).

Proclus speaks of a complete intermixture of the Ideas which, as a single whole, constitutes a harmony (*sumphnoia*) in the unparticipated divine Intellect, according to the metaphysical principle that "everything is in everything but in a manner appropriate to each" (*panta en pasin, all' oikeios en hekasto*). This principle, originally attributed to Anaxagoras' theory of mixture, by extension may be applied to all manifested reality, functioning as the main method for hermeneutical exegesis and analysis. It faithfully reflects the world of Egyptian gods, symbolically summarized by the great Ennead. All *neteru* are regarded as manifestations (*bau*), faces, or hypostases, of one another, thus constituting countless iconographical combinations, but ultimately deriving from the single Principle, the single God, who reveals himself in millions of forms. However, in such an intelligible compound as Amun-Ra, Ra is not viewed as being lost in Amun, but remains himself just as much as Amun does and both of them can again be manifested separately or appear in other metaphysical combinations.³⁷

Although the power of each *eidos* and each *neter* extends everywhere, in themselves they are nowhere. Not all things participate in them alike. L. Rosan explains the reason why the eternal world is only imperfectly reflected within time: the departure of characteristics from Ideas is

perfect, but the return of things to Ideas is imperfect. This is what “distinguishes one thing from another, namely, the degree to which it returns to its causes”.³⁸

Proclus speaks of descending chains that appear as Forms proceed through successive downward steps, arguing that the series start from “Man Himself”, then, comes to a “heavenly man”, then a “fiery man”, an “airy man”, a “watery man”, and last of all – an “earthly man”. The whole series depends upon the intelligible henad called “Man Himself” (*In Parm.* III.812). Proclus says:

“Thus from the paradigm of the soul of Helios the divine soul of the sun first proceeds and, after it, all the angelic souls in this train, then the souls of daimons associated with the sun, and lastly the particular souls in this procession. All of them are generated on the model of a single Idea, and so exist as orderly arrays of parts to wholes and of followers to leaders, while the one intelligent cause furnishes unity and continuity to their procession. Similarly, the paradigm of the soul of Selene first generates the divine soul belonging to the moon, then the angelic, the daimonic, and the participated souls; and the intellectual monad contains the whole number of them” (*In Parm.* III.818).

The action of Ideas upon things or rather their participation in intellectual Ideas may be likened

1) to reflections in a mirror, when receptive matter, holding itself before the Demiurge and the artifice of his Nous, is filled with Ideas from him;

2) to imprints made by a seal upon wax (for the seal, *emphasis*, meaning the Idea which leaves a trace of itself), but this impression is not the same as the seal that made it, just as the enmattered species is not identical with the divine and immaterial Idea;

3) to the images (*eikones*) made by the art of painting or sculpture, because “it is by divine craftsmanship that things here are shaped into a likeness of the divine Ideas, and this is why the whole sensible cosmos is called a likeness (*eikon*) of the intelligible” (*In Parm.* IV.840; cf. *Tim.* 92c).

Proclus regards this analogy based on the principle of similarity (*homoiosis*) as superior to the former kinds.

Since everything in the huge meta-structure of the universe is in some way (either as a cause, by existence, or as an image) mirrored in everything else, unity is present even to a material thing, but in a fashion proper to it, being not of the same rank as an intelligible unity itself. The universal set of unity, interweaving every portion of manifested reality with every other portion, is constituted of henads (*henades*). The unparticipated independent henads, standing closer to the One in the hierarchy of causation, are themselves called *theoi*, while participated henads are *sumbola* and *sunthemata* – the supernatural theurgic symbols and tokens able to elevate the soul to the level of transcendent union (*henosis*).

If any description of manifested reality, understood as theophany, involves a description of henads, i.e., of the transcendent gods and their

ineffable symbols extended through all levels of being, then rational philosophical and mythological descriptions coincide. For example, the theology of the *Chaldean Oracles* already identified the Chaldean entities *iynges* (*iunges*, maintained as the “thoughts of the Father”) with Platonic Ideas. The *iynges*, that is the living mythical beings playing the role of the Forms, are regarded as purveyors of unity. They produce a multitude of offspring and then swallow them up and integrate them into true noetic synthesis.

The intelligible *iynges* drive the soul upwards and, along with the so-called “maintainers” (likened to the elevating rays of the visible sun) and *teletarchs* (who are initiators and guides at all stages of the soul’s striving towards noetic union), they personify divine grace at all levels of being. The theurgic instrument used by the Chaldean Platonists and also called *iyxn* (*iunx*, pl. *iunges*) consists of a cone which begins in unity and becomes plurality through a vertiginous multiplication of itself.³⁹

The hierarchy of unities is the hierarchy of the traditional gods, their names and attributes. Therefore the divine characters penetrate even to the last terms of the participant series: the henad communicates even to the body an echo of its own quality. In this way the body (*soma*) becomes not only ensouled and intellectual (*empsychon kai noeron*), but also divine (*theion*). According to Proclus:

“All divine bodies (*soma theion*) are such through the mediation of a divinized soul, all divine souls through a divine intelligence, and all divine intelligences by participation in a divine henad: the henad is immediate deity (*autothen theos*), the intelligence most divine (*nous theiotaton*), the soul divine (*psuche theia*), the body deiform.” (*soma theoeides*: ET 129).

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2 Gregory Shaw *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p.228

3 *Ibid.*, p.173

4 A. Hilary Armstrong *Platonic Mirrors*.- Eranos 1986, Jahrbuch, vol.55, Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1988, p.156

5 R. T. Rundle Clark *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p.261

6 Richard H. Wilkinson *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1999, pp.16-17

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10 Titus Burckhardt *Sacred Art in East and West. Its Principles and Methods*, tr. Lord Northbourne, Bedford: Perennial Books, 1986, p.7

11 *Ibid.*, pp.7-8

- 12 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.416
 13 Frithjof Schuon *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, tr. by W. Stoddart, Bedfont: Perennial Books, 1981, p.180
 14 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.419
 15 Ibid., p.359
 16 Ibid., pp.355-356
 17 Ibid., p.354
 18 Jack Lindsay *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, p.331
 19 James Henry Breasted *The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest.*- *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 39, 1901, p.54
 20 Walter Burkert *The Orientalizing Revolution. Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, p.6
 21 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.342
 22 Frithjof Schuon *The Play of Masks*, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1992, p.89
 23 Ibid., p.35
 24 James A. Coulter *The Literary Microcosm. Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976, p.50
 25 Titus Burkhardt *Mirror of the Intellect. Essays on Traditional Science and Sacred Art*, Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987, p.15
 26 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.351
 27 Ibid., p.353
 28 Ibid., p.353
 29 Jan Assmann *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, tr. by David Lorton, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2001, p.90
 30 Frithjof Schuon *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, p.205
 31 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.354
 32 Jack Lindsay *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, pp.210-211
 33 Ibid., p.211
 34 Thomas McEvilley *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Thought*, New York: Allworth Press, 2002, p.46
 35 Ibid., p.46
 36 Ibid., p.301
 37 Erik Hornung *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many*, tr. J. Baines, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982, p.91
 38 Laurence Jay Rosan *The Philosophy of Proclus. The Final Phase of Ancient Thought*, New York: Cosmos, 1949, p.161
 39 Polymnia Athanassiadi *The Chaldean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy.*- *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, p.172

BEING IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND NEOPLATONIC THOUGHT

1. From Eidology to the Metaphysics of Being and Beyond Being

The entire scope of Neoplatonic ontology cannot be explained by a simple division between Being and Becoming. Instead it requires us to face a number of noetic principles, arranged "inside" or "outside" the ineffable One, and to deal with their manifestations or prolongations at different levels of reality. In this particular context, even the term "ontology" may be misleading, since it is too closely bound to modern philosophical concepts and hermeneutical patterns.

As Denis O'Brien pointed out when discussing non-being in Parmenides, Plato and Plotinus:

"There is almost nothing in the history of Greek philosophy which can be taken as a matter of course".¹

This observation is to a much greater extent true when we turn to ancient Egyptian thought, because one cannot simply dismiss the prevailing views of the ancient Hellenic philosophers attesting the Egyptian roots of their philosophy.² The language of myths, sacred rites and theurgic symbols operates at a different level to that of rational philosophical discourse. However, the hermeneutical attitude of Damascius, in his attempt to read Neoplatonic metaphysics into ancient Egyptian cosmogonical accounts (*De principiis* I.316.20-I.324.15), is not to be regarded as altogether groundless. It makes perfect sense because, in some respects at least, it represents the initial stock from which much of the later metaphysical themes and categories are derived directly or indirectly.

We will now try to outline the Neoplatonic and ancient Egyptian theory of being in general and to show that there are some undeniable parallels and analogies which, putting aside the morbid question of historical influences, deserve careful attention. Let us turn, at first, to Neoplatonic ontology.

Most Western scholars are quite comfortable with the dogmatic assertion that by establishing the First Principle which is both beyond Being and Intellect, Plotinus turned so-called Middle Platonism into something rather like "Neoplatonism". To those who are obsessed by one-sided positivist classifications and try to force their own ideological premises into the form of a sort of orthodox history of philosophy, this Neoplatonism (especially in its Post-Iamblichean developments) seems to be no more than a regrettable deviation from sound "classical" rationalism and an inexcusable fall into the sin of ritualism and superstition.

Now it becomes clear that late Hellenic Neoplatonism is far from so-called irrationalism, as it is understood by arrogant modern scholars. Even

theurgy, instead of being regarded as a corruption of rational philosophy, is to be understood as the culmination of philosophy and a return to its divine origins.

According to L. M. de Rijk, rethinking the notion of transcendence and immanence within the Platonic tradition involved the gradual transition from a metaphysics of Forms to a metaphysics of Being (or ontology in the strict sense) and then to a metaphysics of the One (or henology). He argues that such developments were initiated by Plato himself, though the final step of putting one Principle beyond Being was taken by Plotinus.³ However, leaving aside the question of whether Plato's theory of Forms actually presupposes the entire transcendent domain of perfect Being and perfect Good, which is *epekeina tes ousias*, we can raise the following question:

Is this gradual transition from a metaphysics of Forms to the Neoplatonic One only a change of emphasis within the inner semantic body of Platonism, or does it mark a sudden discovery made by Plotinus - a universal discovery with enormous consequences, namely, that the ultimate Principle is beyond both Being and Intellect?

If one is not an irremediable modern nominalist of the worst kind, there is sufficient reason to think that the ineffable Principle, the One beyond Being, is not an "invention", made by Plotinus or by certain anonymous Neopythagoreans, initiates of the oral esoteric tradition, be it a real chain of transmission or a regrettable fiction, as most modern scholars prefer to believe. The Egyptian Father of the gods, symbolized by the primordial Waters, is an exact mythological equivalent of the Neoplatonic One. The same could be said regarding the transcendent and invisible aspect of the Theban Amun. At the very least, if one were brave enough to accept the metaphysical premises of *philosophia perennis* of any type, one would be able to find similar doctrines almost anywhere from Pharaonic Egypt to Vedic India.

It is fairly evident that every ancient metaphysical system was directed at unchanging and eternal principles, or ineffable sources, and approached ontology by establishing what is fundamental and primary in reality and on which all things depend.

2. Hierarchy of Priority and Posteriority

As Werner Beierwaltes pointed out, the Neoplatonists make a clear distinction between Being and the being of an entity, which is always a particular something. Despite various formulations and divergent attitudes, this means that the One itself as the supra-essential (not existing in particularity) is different from Being in the first and true sense, i.e., Intellect.⁴

Being proper is related to the second hypostasis of Plotinus and is the intelligible summit of *kosmos noetos* which emerges from the ineffable One, understood as the *dunamis panton*. Though, according to Dominic J. O'Meara, the expressions "hierarchy" and "chain of being" are too vague and too open to anachronism to be useful in approaching the philosophy of Plotinus,⁵ it is not necessary to substitute for them the priority terminology formulated by Plato and Aristotle and used by Plotinus in articulating the structure of reality, because the meaning remains the same.

Priority may be understood as a logical priority, or priority by nature, and being which involves a hierarchy of perfection, knowledge, value, purity and simplicity. What is prior is more simple, more closely resembles the supreme unity which is the most simple Principle. The posterior is contained in the prior and the prior is contained in the posterior, being its constitutive presence (since every level of creation is a result of contemplation) and, at the same time, transcending it. Therefore the prior is not only in the posterior, but also independent of it (*Enn.* III.8.9.1-10). Thus the hierarchy includes different levels of transcendence and immanence and their coordinated relations according to the metaphysical pattern of abiding, proceeding and returning.

Within the hierarchy of manifested reality, the distinction is made between noetic Being (being-infinite, *to einai*) and determinate being (being - participle, *to on*). This distinction, found in the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides*, attributed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot, is a source of the scholastic distinction between essence and existence, ascribed to the Persian Peripatetic Ibn Sina. The late Neoplatonic distinction between *huparxis* and *ousia*, that is between 1) pre-existence, pure noetic Being in its simplicity, and 2) substance as the determinative subject taken with its accidents, made by Proclus and Damascius, follows the same pattern of thought.⁶

Since all determined being must be limited by its proper form, the first Principle of all determination (*peras*) in the realm of being, the One, is beyond any description. Everything has some form of being, from the noetic *pleroma* to the minimal existence or nonbeing of matter which possesses no attributive being of any formal kind. As Kevin Corrigan rightly observes, by comparison with the intelligible world, "the being" of matter, and of bodies founded upon it, is "the being of things which do not exist" (*Enn.* III.6.6.31-32).⁷

3. Indivisible and Divisible Being

Neoplatonic ontological terms can cause much confusion. As a rule, Plotinus uses the infinitive of the verb "to be" with the neuter article, *to einai*, to denote "the being" which can be attributed to anything.⁸ But the

neuter participial from the verb "to be", *to on*, and the plural, *ta onta* (an equivalent of *ta pragmata*, the Procline term for the things or noetic realities) refers to:

1) the noetic Being as such and all those real beings, intellects, or lights, which constitute *Nous* and are the contents of *kosmos noetos*;

2) being, as a category among the all-pervading greatest kinds (*megista gene*), adapted from Plato's *Sophist*.

The greatest kinds are as follows: Being, Rest, Motion, Identity, Difference. These "Platonic" categories, however, may be easily deduced from different ancient cosmogonies, including the Orphic myths and their Egyptian prototypes. For Plotinus, they mean different faces of the eternal life of *Nous*. As regards the arrangement of the entire noetic cosmos into the order of Being, Life, Intelligence, Being represents the stage *mone* abiding, Life – *proodos* (proceeding), and Intelligence – *epistrophe* (reversion) within the boundaries of the second hypostasis.

The term *ousia*, usually translated as substance, essence, or entity, may be equated to the expression *ho esti* – "what it is". It indicates both the simple noetic substances and composite physical substances of separate individuals. Aristotle calls both form and matter, as well as their composite, by the same term, *ousia*, and recognises the noetic *ousia* also. According to Plotinus, all these *ousiai* are not equally substances (*Enn.* VI.1.2.8-12). He insists that the term *ousia* is not employed in the same sense in all these cases. Therefore different substances must belong to different genera. Dexipus formulates this ontological problem as follows: if there are two *ousiai*, one noetic, the other sensible, how can they be related to a single genus? (*In Categ.*40.14f). Trying to solve this problem, Dexipus asserts:

"Plotinus in fact posits *ousia* as a genus unique among noetic realities because it procures being for incorporeal forms universally and gives being to all the forms which are sensible and blended with matter. If that is so, the principle of *ousia* extends across all things, taking successively the first, second, and third rank insofar as it gives being to one primarily and to others in another manner. This is why, if everything leads to this principle of *ousia* (since everything is suspended from it) Aristotle's description of *ousia* can also provide a glimpse of the first principle of *ousia*, from which the *ousia* has fallen to its lowest degree" (*In Categ.*40.28-41.3).

Accordingly, the single principle must be understood as noetic *ousia*. In Plotinus' own words:

"Noetic *ousia* in this case would be *ousia* in a primary sense, the other in a derivative and lesser sense" (*Enn.* VI.1.3.3-5).

As Pierre Hadot pointed out, Plotinus admitted that the noetic *ousia* is a principle, because it is *ousia* in itself; it grounds being, because it is the supreme idea of *ousia*, a genus in the Platonic sense, that is, an intelligible

reality which exists in and for itself.⁹ Such is the primordial essence or substance of all lower manifestations. Therefore Plotinus equates indivisible *ousia* with noetic reality as such, which may be imagined as the fixed centre of a circle whence the rays of the derived being proceed. Hence, the divisible *ousia* is related to sensible forms, or the moving periphery of a circle. The intermediate *ousia*, which the Demiurge made by blending the indivisible *ousia* and the *ousia* which becomes divisible in the body, is the *ousia* of the soul (*Enn.* IV.2.1.29ff). It resembles the descending and ascending ray, or the isthmus between noetic being and material non-existence.

In the primary and fundamental sense, Being is not sensible, but noetic or rather divine reality in which sensible instances participate and from which they derive their existence. The hierarchy of *ousiai* resembles the hierarchies depicted in the ancient cosmogonies and creation myths, based on the chain of priority and posteriority and on sacred genealogies regarded as family stories. To turn the actors of the cosmogonical ritual, be they gods, daimons, or miraculous forces, into mental categories means to separate the living flesh from the dead bones and present the purified bones as the logical structure of being. This translation is a painful hermeneutical procedure which, at the dawn of Hellenic philosophy, or rather of rational and emancipated philosophical discourse, was a purely esoteric undertaking supported by dreams of power.

According to Plotinus, the principle of *ousia* extends through all things and constitutes the degrees of being in the continuous process of irradiation and creative contemplation, which means the chain of participation and inevitable degradation from the noetic to the sensible realm. All degrees (*taxeis*) of manifested reality have their origin and end in the noetic principle of *ousia*.

The whole metastructure may also be understood in terms of archetypes and their images. The outer *energeia* is an *eidolon* of the inner activity – therefore the relationship of an archetype and its image is connected with the notion of *energeia*. Even soul must serve as matter in relation to *Nous* which enforms and enlightens it, and a human being of this lower corporeal world is the *energeia tes psuches*, not the *ousia* in its real noetic sense, because the sensible *anthropos* (in contrast to archetypal man, placed in the noetic cosmos) is an image of higher noetic *ousia* and *energeia*.¹⁰ The spiritual ascent to first principles is also described in ontological terms.

4. The One as Foundation of Being

Huparxis is another important ontological term which causes a permanent headache to those who try to render it into modern languages. Iamblichus distinguished between an entity's *ousia* and its *huparxis*.

Damascius explained *huparxis* as a composite word made from *hupo* and *archein*. Accordingly, *huparxis* signifies the first principle of every hypostasis - being the primal ontological foundation for the structure of manifested reality as a whole and for each part. In the sense of the simplicity anterior to all things, *huparxis* may be equated to the One itself which is the cause of every *ousia* but is not itself *ousia*.¹¹

Therefore *huparxis* is pre-existence or the pure and unconditioned noetic foundation of Being, rendered by Francesco Romano as *natura profunda, natura essenziale*, instead of *esistenza* (existence).¹² However, the ineffable One in itself must transcend *huparxis* understood as meaning singular natures rather than abstract ones, though (in sharp contrast to modern opinion) first principles and noetic realities are more concrete than their lower manifestations.¹³

The One, or the Good, as the Foremost Principle (*protiste arche*) is the cause of theophany down to the lowest level of *huparxis*. Thus the primordial and all subsequent procession is the transmission (*metadosis*) of Oneness by means of radiation from above (*katalampsis*). According to Proclus:

“All that subsists in any fashion has its being either in its cause, as an originative potency (*kat' aitian estin archeoidos*); or as a substantial predicate (*kath' huparxin*); or by participation, after the manner of an image” (*kata methexin eikonikos*: ET 65 Dodds).

In many cases, the term *ousia* is used by Proclus as equivalent to *huparxis*, because *huparxis* differs from *ousia* only on the level of the One. Being is the universal attribute of all that is and, on its own level, Being is the cause of all that is.¹⁴ The super-abundance of divine power which appears as an immanent irradiation (*ellampsis*) is active through all levels of existence. It keeps the unity (*henosis*) of being through the noetic and sensible cosmos as the constitutive agent of everything's *huparxis*.

When located above the level of Being, this principle of all theophanies and ontological processions is regarded as *apeiria*, the Unlimited and transcendent Infinity, in certain respects equivalent to the Egyptian god Shu before his entering into Being, whereas the power below that level is called *zoe*, noetic Life, or Shu manifested as the noetic Space and Light. Since the One, or the Good, is *dunamis panton* in the highest and ineffable sense, its causation gives rise to all subsequent *hypostaseis* which are *dynameis* of any particular level of being along with their participants.

The noetic *ousia* is inferior to Oneness; therefore the One presumably has *huparxis*, but is *hyperousion*, beyond Being. What appears below the One is a mixture of *peras* and *apeiria*, and the first level of mixtures constitutes the domain of real beings (*ta onta*).

Iamblichus situated *hen on*, the One Being of Plato's *Parmenides*, at the summit of the noetic realm. This Monad of Being, or the *ontos ousia*, directly participates in the One itself. In this sense the One Being is

identical with the *noeton*. However, the problem is as follows: What kind of being, if any, does the First Principle have? Though the One Being, which is called the Unified, *to henomenon*, by Damascius, is closer to the One than to Being, nevertheless it constitutes the first and the highest level of Being. One can wonder whether this search for logical and semantic precision is simply a hermeneutical attempt to establish the scope of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, or is it based on the profound anxiety of the human mind when facing its own fatal limits and its inability to solve the metaphysical puzzle on the level of discursive thought?

Damascius understands this very well in his radical question which runs as follows:

“Either procession is from that which exists, in which case, how could what already exists previously [be able to] proceed? Or else procession comes from something that doesn't exist, yet what kind of being could come from something that doesn't exist? Something actual cannot come from something potential, since the former is superior to the latter, while the effect is always inferior to the cause (*De princip.* I.226.11-16).

When rational philosophical discourse faces the threshold of the Ineffable, which surpasses any attempt of reason to draw a consistent “mechanical” picture of first principles and their relations, sheer paradoxes are unavoidable. The rationalistic approach insists that one point (or instance, entity, category) must necessarily touch another point; otherwise the imagined gap seems to be unsurpassable. One “hand” must touch another “hand” in order to pass some “parcel of reality” or the impulse of power, as in the well known children's game. The mythical cosmogonies do exactly the same, but instead of abstract terms and categories they have divine names or attractive *dramatis personae*: fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, lovers, traitors and gangs.

5. Incomprehensible Divine Unities

What place is allotted to the gods in the Neoplatonic cosmogonical scheme which may differ in detail while preserving essentially the same metastructure? Like the Egyptian *neteru*, the gods in Neoplatonic philosophy constitute and occupy different levels of reality, being in certain respects this reality itself. Therefore Proclus clearly asserts:

“Every god is a self-complete henad or unit, and every self-complete henad is a god” (ET 114).

“Every god is above Being (*hyperousios*), above Life (*hyperzoes*), and above Intelligence” (*hypernous*: ET 115).

“Every god is participable, except the One” (ET 116)

“Every god is a measure of things existent” (ET 117)

“All that is divine has a *huparxis* which is goodness, a power (*dunamis*) which has the character of unity, and a mode of knowledge which is secret and incomprehensible to all secondary beings alike” (ET 121).

“The procession of all things existent and all cosmic orders of existence extends as far as do the orders of gods” (ET 144).

According to Damascius, Iamblichus was the first among the Platonic philosophers to assert that all gods insofar as gods are beyond being and substance. They are no less than self-subsistent *huparxeis* that transcend the noetic *ousia*.¹⁵ In short, the Iamblichean gods are the participated henads, as Syrianus and Proclus would say.

This attitude is rejected by those contemporary scholars who have argued that the gods Iamblichus related to the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* are not transcendent unities, or henads, in the Procline sense, but rather the noetic gods. This philosophical riddle and other similar problems are not as important as they appear to the pedantic minds of those who struggle with “the notorious difficulties” such as where exactly to position the henads of Iamblichus and Proclus: beyond the noetic realm or among the intelligibles, beyond the categories of *peras* and *apeiria* or at the same level? Truly speaking, they are “nowhere” as well as “everywhere”. We can specify even different types of henads, but we cannot say what they are, if they “are” at all, and where they are, except in the imagined metaphysical “icon” which may serve as a means of contemplation and *anagoge* in the same sense as a Tantric or Buddhist *upaya*.

Let us now turn to the assertion of Damascius who says as follows:

“Almost all philosophers before Iamblichus considered that there is only one God beyond being, whereas all other gods are substantial beings (*ousiodesis*), but divinized through illuminations (*ellampseis*) from the One. According to them the multitude of super-substantial henads are not self-subsistent hypostases (*autoteleis hypostaseis*), but illuminations from the only God and deifications given unto the various substances” (*De princip.* III.64.7-14).

The henads “grow up” from the One through different additions (*prostheseis*) to the One. These “additions”, in certain respects parallel to the Divine Names of Islamic Sufi theology, multiply them as both the transcendent and immanent ground-set of the entire manifested reality. This reality possesses all different ontological attributes which ultimately derive their existence from the divine source. However, the negative deductions of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* may be applied to the gods, or henads, considered as pure unities without any discernible character, i.e., incomprehensible to all secondary beings.

Any god as such, be he noetic, noetic-noeric, noeric, hypercosmic or encosmic, insofar as he is *henas* and *theos*, he is not many, not similar, not identical, not different and so on.¹⁶ In other words, all negations of the

first hypothesis of *Parmenides* can be applied to the henads as unities that are above Being. But the noetic Being may be many, similar, identical, different and so on, as the second hypothesis of *Parmenides* implies.

However, if the henads originate through additions, they appear to be somewhat closer to the level of Being, or rather the One Being, and thus belong to the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. As Proclus himself pointed out, all the henads coexist with being, therefore each god “is”, though the One itself is beyond Being (*In Parm.* 499.78). For this reason C. Steel raises the legitimate question:

“But do not all divine henads as *autoteleis hypostaseis* subsist beyond being, even if they are distinguished by different characters that can only be described on the level of the second hypothesis?”¹⁷

Arguing that the gods are *huperousios* like the One itself, Proclus, however, mentions that the gods are participated and this feature establishes the only difference between the One and the henads. The henads as *huperousios* cannot be participated in Being, but they themselves are participated by essence and that which is, i.e., by real beings (*de hupo ousias kai tou ontos*).¹⁸ Therefore the gods are the participated henads able to bind all things to themselves thus “connecting through themselves all that comes after them with the One which transcends all equally” (*Theol. Plat.* III.4.17.19-12).

The mysterious irradiation from the One constitutes the different levels of existence: those which stand close to the super-abundant centre and those which are far removed from it (although the distance is not spatial or temporal, but rather ontological and epistemological, regarded as a veil of ignorance which conceals the real divine identity of things) and resemble reflections, copies, or shadows of their intelligible models. The realm of real beings (*ta onta*) is a mixture of *peras* and *apeiria*, two transcendent metaphysical principles. This domain of real beings is interpreted as the first level of noetic Being, followed by noetic Life and Intellect. The intelligible triad of Being-Life-Intellect determines the inner structure and order within the diacosm of Being.

Every level of the noetic domain has a similar triadic structure which emphasizes one or another element of the triad, and such triads are multiplied in the course of irradiation. The triadic structure of all noetic entities mirrors the primal triad of Limit (*peras*), Unlimited (*apeiron*) and Mixture (*mikton*). The entire manifestation is ordered by descending chain of triads arranged according to the triadic structure of abiding (*monē*), procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*).

Below Intellect proper, equated to the Demiurge of *Timaeus* at the noeric (or thinking intellectual) level, we find the level of Soul. It contains: 1) the Soul which transcends the corporeal cosmos entirely; 2) the World-Soul, and 3) particular souls, i.e., a) the immanent souls of the fixed stars

and planets, and b) the souls of “the gods below the Moon” (Procl. *In Tim.*255.10) to which category human souls also belong. .

The next two levels are that of Nature (*phusis*), understood as an immanent but incorporeal seminal power which gives birth to the material world, and that of Body (*soma*), the material world itself which is an appearance, or shadow, deprived of all productive ability of its own.¹⁹

6. Images of Divine Light

The whole metastructure of being is regarded as an incorporeal as well as corporeal *agalma*, a divine Statue, which is intelligent, alive, and existent. According to Proclus, the henad communicates even to the body an echo of its own quality: in this way the body becomes not only animate and intellectual but also divine.

This divine metastructure is governed by the transcendent light that stems from the Good and is a unifying force. Or rather the manifested reality “is” the transcendent light itself, veiled by the multiplicity of forms, beings, images and reflections. To put it in terms of Neoplatonic analogy, just as sensible things are made sun-like by the light of the visible Sun, so the noetic realities are made god-like by the invisible hypernoetic Sun which is *to agathon*. Following the example of Plato, the Neoplatonists used the language of “participation” (*metexis*) and “imitation” (*mimesis*) to describe the dependance of image on its original. As A. H. Armstrong remarked regarding the doctrine of matter, held by Syrianus and Proclus:

“This ultimate invisible and formless mirror is no longer only a dark negativity which has to be there if the self-diffusion of the Good which is its diffraction in images is to reach its furthest possible limit, and is that ultimate limit. In being this, for the Athenians it is the ultimate manifestation of the Dyad or *Apeiron*, the Infinite, one of the two first principles of all reality proceeding from the One or Good, and by all Pythagorean and Platonic tradition the feminine one, coupled with the masculine *Peras*, the principle of limit and form. ... But this Infinite is also the theophany of that in the ineffable First which makes it impossible to think or image it. She presents through all the levels of mirroring the symbol of the escape of God, of that which makes it ultimately impossible to organize the Good. So at the bottom of the cosmos of mirrors as well as at the top the image of mirroring breaks, as all concepts and images break”.²⁰

For Proclus, to speak about transcendent Light and to speak about the One (*to hen*) is the same. The noetic light shines forth from the One as does the Egyptian Atum-Ra who enters into Being from the ineffable waters of Nun. The One holds together all noetic entities, the intelligible gods and intellects, thus making them one. This is the divine unity in

diversity, since light and divinity have the same function. If light stems from the One (who is the Father of all *neteru*, according to the Egyptians), the gods likewise appear with it. The light unifies the noetic entities making them similar to the Good and constituting their real being through participation in light which is the same as participation in divinity of the Unspeakable One. This is the mystery of divine self-disclosure, the traditional symbolical accounts of which were either received as an “illumination from the gods themselves”, or inherited by the Neoplatonists from the sacred wisdom of ancient civilizations.

7. The One and Many according to Egyptians

When we turn to the ancient Egyptian conception of reality, we encounter considerable difficulties, because Egyptian mythical images, icons, and symbols cannot be regarded simply as equivalents of Greek ontological terms. The Egyptian universe is composed not of things or abstract categories, but of beings, i.e., of distinct archetypal masks and personalities that may be visualized, contemplated and interpreted in many different ways. They constitute various ontological levels of being.

Since the Egyptian universe consists of living beings, the noetic creation, manifestation and cosmic existence are not to be viewed as the product of impersonal forces, dead elements and abstract categories, but as a rich fabric woven by eternal divine thoughts and actions similar to the hieratic rites. In addition, the Egyptian accounts of creation cannot be reduced to a single dogmatic description, though all different perspectives reveal a metaphysical structure which is remarkably consistent.

James P. Allen is wrong in his assertion that “material causality seems to have been the first as well as the central focus” of the Egyptian cosmogonical accounts.²¹ This is a strong prejudice current from the time of Sallustius and dear to those modern Egyptologists who are uncomfortable with metaphysics and symbolism of any kind. But as Iamblichus pointed out, far from considering everything to be of a physical nature the Egyptians did place pure divine intelligence above nature (*katharon te noun huper ton kosmon protitheasi: De myster.*267.4) and made a clear distinction between psychical and noetic life on the one hand and physical nature on the other. This distinction was made on a macrocosmic as well as a microcosmic level. We should agree with E. Iversen who argued that Iamblichus’ translation of the concepts of the Shabaka text (which contains the so-called Memphite theology) into philosophical terms is remarkably correct.²² His statement that the Egyptians did not consider everything to be of a physical nature is confirmed by the number of ancient texts which emphasize the

importance of divine Intelligence and assert the First Principle which is beyond Being.

The basic distinction between noetic and sensible existence as well as that between noetic and hypernoetic levels of reality underlies the entire metaphysical doctrine of the Egyptians and presupposes a corresponding distinction between different kinds of gods and between different theophanies. The ineffable first Principle, the supreme Father of the gods, is the Sole and Only One, unborn and self-created. But divine manifestations, to put it into Hellenic terms, may be henadic, noetic, psychic and physical, though the Egyptian theological discourse employed bodily language to describe both corporeal and incorporeal beings.

Egyptian priests, or "servants of God", envisaged reality as a henocentric cosmological structure constituted by multiple and dynamic divine forces and regarded as the cultic body of the Demiurge, the all-embracing solar Intellect. The ineffable *deus invisibilis* is the ultimate fount of divinity, comprising on the noetic level all other gods which are consubstantial with him and viewed as organs and parts of his immaterial body. The intelligible cosmos is prefigured in the depths of the dark primordial Waters (Nun), and the process of noetic manifestation is performed through the Monad differentiated into male and female principles (Shu and Tefnut). Then the second God turns intelligible into sensible creation.

In different cosmogonical accounts, all these principles may be called by different names. For instance, in Memphite theology the second God is described as Atum - the All, i.e., the noetic and archetypal *pleroma*, but not "the sensible cosmos reflecting the body of the creator, in which at the same time he functioned as heart and tongue", as E. Iversen supposes.²³ As the noetic archetype of the hearts and tongues of all living creatures, he himself cannot be sensible in the modern sense of this word.

Both the noetic and sensible universe, and the Osirian realm between them, depend on the transcendent light of the first Principle. Sometimes we are unable to draw a clear demarcation between these levels, because noetic, psychic and sensible creations are equally dependent on the constant influx of the life-giving force, namely, the breath of life (*sub en ankḥ: swb n 'nh*) which flows from the first Principle and is immanent in all things. This breath, "who gives air to the throat in his name of Amon", is called the *pneuma* of Zeus or Amon by Plutarch (*De Iside* 36.365 d).

Usually Nun is considered as a source from which solar Being, Life, and Intellect appear, but in the Memphite theology Nun is regarded as a member of the hidden Ogdoad, that is, the eight principles which rest beyond Being and constitute the pre-archetypal inner articulation of the *deus invisibilis*, regarded as Ptah-Nun. At the noetic level, he reveals itself as the Creator, or the supreme Craftsman, an exact equivalent of the Platonic Demiurge in its functional and etymological respect. In this particular

sense, Ptah is the second God, different from his own higher hypostasis which is *epekeina tes ousias*, i.e., the unspeakable unity of Nun and Naunet, the father and mother of Atum. As the second God, Ptah is Atum, the entire noetic cosmos called into existence by the divine Word (*medu neter: mdw ntr*) of Ptah. The sensible cosmos as the material body of the Creator, animated (like a hieratic statue) by various divine forces (*sekhemu: dunameis*), is the corporeal image (*tut; eikon*) of the celestial and hypercelestial realm. Therefore the sensible Egypt is a visible cultic body of the gods.

The gods themselves in their sensible forms of appearance are differentiated in nature and *eidōs* according to established sacred iconography. But essentially they are rays of the transcendent divine light which passes through different ontological prisms and keeps the higher unity of all manifested multiplicity. Therefore there are different grades and orders (*taxeis*) of the gods. Some of them are regarded as "unborn" and thus closer to the One, while subsequent generations are regarded as "born".

The highest class of *neteru* are the gods of various Ogdoads located within the transcendent primordial Waters, i.e., beyond Being and before coming into existence. In Memphite theology, besides Nun and Naunet, Tatenen (the primeval hill) and Nefertum (the pre-existent principle which "later" stems from the primeval lotus as a solar deity) are mentioned, but they are united in the depths of supreme and ineffable Ptah. The Hermopolitan and Theban Ogdoads include such pairs as Nun and Naunet (the initial waters and inertia), Heh and Hehet (infinity), Kek and Keket (darkness), Niau and Niauunet (emptiness). The English renderings of these names are very approximate and imperfect. Instead of the last pair the Theban Ogdoad has Amun and Amunet (that which is hidden or invisible).

These eight principles are regarded as the fathers and mothers of Ra who comes forth from the primordial lotus and appears as the intelligible Sun. In this cosmogonical context, Ra is not to be viewed as a physical Sun, because Ra is the noetic *arche* which penetrates the solar globe and causes it to shine. Ra is not the visible sun-light, but that which provokes it, although the visible Sun is called Ra as well.

The lotus has its roots in mud (in the earth-like darkness), its stem in water, its leaves in air, and its flower gives birth to the noetic fire; therefore the primordial lotus symbolizes the archetypes of the four basic elements. According to Lucie Lamie, the Nun cannot be equated to an initial chaos in the Biblical sense.²⁴ As the eternal and infinite source of Being and of all the multi-dimensional universe (both intelligible and sensible), Nun is an equivalent to the Neoplatonic One. Though this most simple principle is beyond Being, it has a certain hidden metaphysical

structure which is scrupulously discussed by such Neoplatonists as Damascius.

8. Levels of Being and Nonbeing

Like the Neoplatonists, the Egyptian priests regarded the cosmos as having originated not from nothingness but from oneness, from the One, viewed as an undifferentiated unity to which all manifested reality would return at the end of time. This oneness, which is analogous to Brahman and Atman of the *Upanishads* and unites the ineffable Source with Being, is Atum, the principle of pre-existence and intelligible totality, according to Heliopolitan theology.

Before coming into Being, Atum is floating in Nun and is identical with this primordial Ocean, the apophatic One itself, sometimes metaphorically described as “nothingness”, “nonexistence”, or “initial inertia”. However, Nun is not a sort of chaos in the sense of a counterforce that threatened the cyclical course of the created cosmos: the threat is posed by the encosmic or inner cosmic nothingness, symbolized by the Sethian snake Apep, which does not belong with the existent.

The ineffable oneness, symbolized by the hypercosmic and hypernoetic Snake, sustains and regenerates the manifested world. This undifferentiated oneness is visualized as the “curled snake” (*mehen: mhn*) or “tail-in-mouth” (*sd-m-r*), the tail-swallower, called Ouroboros, whose body illustrates the beyond Being which encompasses the world continually on all-sides and serves as the invisible silent foundation of all ontological dimensions.

Jan Assmann distinguishes two kinds of chaos. He says:

“This fundamental Egyptian distinction is masked by the terminology of religious historians, with their inflationary use of the term ‘chaos’.”²⁵

The Beyond Being is not “nonexistent” in the same sense as the inner cosmic nonbeing. Erik Hornung is inconsistent when he simply asserts that “the nonexistent is the inexhaustible, unrealized primal matter, the *pleroma*.”²⁶ He confuses the hypernoetic oneness (or rather noetic *pleroma*) with primal matter (the Neoplatonic dyad). Thus, instead of discerning the different levels of the unlimited or those of “nonexistence”, Nun is incorrectly equated to the principle of *apeiron* as an opposite to *peras*:

“One could say that in Egypt ‘the nonexistent’ signified quite generally that which is inchoate, undifferentiated, unarticulated, and unlimited; or, in affirmative form, the entirety of what is possible, the absolute, the definitive. In comparison with nonexistence, the existent is clearly defined, and articulated by boundaries and discriminations.”²⁷

If the existent is in need of constant regeneration from the depths of nonexistent, this nonexistent is to be understood not as a sort of irrational

“chaos”, but as a hidden source, the One in the Neoplatonic sense. The visible Sun, which represents the invisible Sun, Intellect, repeats the cosmogony of the first eternal Moment by rising up from Nut (Heaven, symbolized by the goddess’ body) new every morning, but repeats it at the level of sensible cosmos, and this ceremonial sunrise is again repeated by the temple rites and alchemical initiations.

When in sleep humans dive down into the primordial waters, so as “to put off the old person and put on the new”²⁸, they emerge refreshed and rejuvenated every morning. This presumably “nonexistent” state is not “the unconscious” praised by E. Hornung, but something such as the Upanishadic *turiya*. Such cyclical return (in the realm of *neheh*) is a minor symbolic instance of the real theurgic return (*epistrophe*) performed on every level of existence by the king who is *Ra sa*, son of Ra, like the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) of the Sufis.

As has already been said, the stages of Nun, Atum-Ra and Osiris correspond to the three Plotinian *hupostaseis*: the One, Intellect, and Soul. The animated corporeal world is an image and material receptacle of higher divine forces (*sekhemu*).

Let us explore another analogy. The four-fold structure of reality is described in *Mandukya Upanishad* and related to the syllable AUM, seen as representing Brahman. These cosmogonical levels of reality are repeated as microcosmic stages of consciousness which exactly correspond to the main Plotinian stages of inward ascension to the One.

The letter A signifies the waking state, *vishva*. This is *viraj*, the world of external objects, the material cosmic body of the Egyptian divinity.

The letter U signifies the dreaming state of internal objects, i.e., the realm of *Hiranyagarbha*, the World-Soul, the Osirian kingdom called Duat or Amentet.

The letter M signifies *prajna*, the dreamless state of divine wisdom, the consciousness of Ishwara, the Demiurge. This is the archetypal domain of *Nous*, the creative principle and unity of divine Ideas, represented by Atum-Ra or any other Sun god who emerges from the lotus of transcendent silence.

The fourth stage is *turiya*, the silent source of all, called Brahman. This is the Egyptian Nun (or Ptah-Nun, the invisible Amun) and the Plotinian One, undifferentiated Absolute.

Creation or manifestation is a process through which the One became Many, through which the Monad developed into the Ennead (*psdt*), the archetypal metastructure of gods arranged at different levels of *kosmos noetos*. Therefore sensible reality is a shadow of the great Ennead repeated by other Enneads; it is an image reflection of the noetic and psychic reality of Ra-Osiris. The way of spiritual ascent leads back to the ultimate source. After leaving her mortal material body (*khat*), the soul (*ba*) tries to transcend the Osirian realm of alchemical transformations and restore her

noetic identity, becoming *akh*, the intelligible light of Ra. As Atum-Ra she finally returns to the depths of Nun.

In this respect, the Upanishadic, Neoplatonic and ancient Egyptian metaphysical teachings are essentially the same, though different in articulation, modes of expression and points of emphasis. Therefore as the Orphic cosmogony can be interpreted in the terms of Neoplatonic philosophy, so the Egyptian cosmogonies may be understood in a similar way, without posing questions regarding the original "historical" pattern, though the Egyptian accounts are the oldest and most archaic in respect of their "ritualistic" background.

9. The Lord of Totality and His Magic

The hidden One is not disintegrated in his manifestation, but rather revealed and realized. Atum continues to exist at his own level as "the totality of the god's forms" (CT 75.3). Hence, the Egyptian gods are both transcendent and immanent. The noetic creation within the great Ennead establishes the fixed pattern of existence which remains the same in spite of all cyclic changes and dynamic dichotomies at the level of the sensible cosmos. The genealogy of being is to be equated to the development of diversity from unity. Before the irradiation of noetic, psychic, and sensible realms, all things were hidden potentialities within the primordial oneness, "living in one body, before two things had developed". Through the rising into Being the Monad developed into the Triad and differentiated itself into the infinite diversity of existence, though the One still remained the same pure One.

The name Atum (*j.tmw*) is a form of the verb *tm* and means both "complete, finish" and "not be". Thus Atum is both "complete" and "nonexistent". He is "the lord of totality" (*neb tem*: CT II.27b;353a), "the completed one" (*tnm*: CT II.174e) in the sense of All. As the sole Monad he transcends Being and Becoming (*keheper*: *hpr*). The universe in all its noetic, psychic and physical diversity is the *keheperu* of this source, the infinite modes of being into which the One has immanently developed and has been mirrored, while remaining in itself the hidden lord of all *keheperu*. Thus Atum is equated with the divine Scarab, Khepera, the shining primordial Being which is born from the darkness and appears as the theophanies. The *Pyramid Texts* address him as follows:

"Atum Scarab,
When you became high, as the high ground –
When you rose, as the Ben-ben [stone], in the Phoenix Enclosure, in
Heliopolis –
You sneezed Shu ,
You spat Tefnut ,

And you put your arms about them, as the arms of *ka*,
That your *ka* might be in them" (PT 600).

The primordial embrace (repeated in spiritual initiation) means transmission of the life-force from the first Being to his first realizations and further manifestations. As the Monad from which everything developed, Atum contains within himself all *neteru* and is "the totality of god's forms". All that exists is "his million of *ka*", i.e., his vital energies.

Shu, as the first offspring of Atum, is an intelligible space or air within which the solar Intellect rises up. He is the established *topos* for all theophanies and all grades of being, who "developed (*keheper*) in the body of the self-developing God".²⁸

The entire manifestation is the product of Atum's thought and utterance: "I became effective in my Heart (=Intellect)" and "*keheperu* became many in emergence from my mouth". Thus *keheperu* are his *logoi*, divine words (*medu neter*), as the manifested unity in multiplicity. "I used my own mouth – my identity is Heka", says Atum (*Bremner-Rhind* 28.22). Atum in his role of Heka pronounces:

"I acted as husband with my fist, my Heart came to me in my hand, ejaculation being fallen from my mouth" (*Bremner-Rhind* 28.27).

"After I developed as One God, that was three gods with respect to me" (*ibid.*, 28.29).

The infinite variety of all manifestations can be summarized in the image of the great noetic Ennead (understood as a sum of the main creative paradigms, divine archetypes or gods, *neteru*) and traced back to the single Monad. The cosmic life is the ongoing recurrence of the eternal patterns of Life established *in illo tempore*. Atum's self-disclosure begins as an Idea and is given manifested reality through his utterance, *Logos*, which also means an irradiation of light. Heka is the principle through which a spoken command is translated into being. He "created the names of his parts" and declared:

"All was mine before you developed, gods,
Go down, you who came at the end.
I am Heka" (CT 261.21-23).

Heka is the universal Magic of creation through the archetypal Ideas (names) or words of power (*hekau*). All things came into existence when the lord of totality (Atum) "took Hu in his mouth". Hu is a term derived from the verb *hww* – "to announce" and refers to the divine Word, the principle of miraculous creative speech: "speech which is so effective that it creates".

Hu forms a conceptual pair with the principle Sia, regarded as noetic Perception, *noesis*, or divine Wisdom. Due to this intelligible Perception, the Demiurge first perceives the universe as a collection of Ideas in his Heart. Through his creative Word (Hu), spoken in the darkness, Atum

gives manifested reality to his Sia (CT VII.481g), thus acting as Heka. And Heka now is described as “father of the gods” who gave life to the Ennead. The great Heliopolitan Ennead comprise four levels of divine being: 1) Atum as the leading Monad of all genealogical chains, 2) Shu and Tefnut, 3) Geb and Nut (Earth and Heaven), 4) Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. These members of the Ennead express and represent interdependence and causality at the archetypal level; they show the way of unfolding and handing down rulership from one generation of gods to the next (meaning from one ontological level to the next) until in the fifth generation Horus inherits rule.

10. Cosmogonical and Ontological Principles

Atum describes his pre-manifested state as “when I was one with Nun”, floating in the dark abyss of the transcendent Waters. This hidden and ineffable state (*tnmw*) is without place (the lotus-throne) which is established by the opening of the Eye. The sending forth of the Eye and its coming back (as an archetypal *epistrophe*) are equivalent to the initial act of contemplation which makes the second Plotinian hypostasis (*Nous*). According to the *Coffin Texts*, the Eye is sent forth when Atum is still alone and hidden in the waters:

“Not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,
Before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist;
Before the Lotus had been tied together, on which I could sit” (CT 80 48-50).

Through this shining light of the opened Eye a certain noetic *topos* is established, for the birth of Shu and Tefnut is described as taking place “in Heliopolis”, i.e., at the noetic summit of Being. This primordial sacred drama cannot be understood as a linear sequence of events, because it transcends time altogether. Therefore the Eye is sent forth in search of Shu and Tefnut (sneezed and spat by Atum) whose emergence seems to be a consequence of the same search. As the soul of the initiate asserts in the *Coffin Texts*:

“It is I who am Shu, father of the gods,
In search of whom, together with my sister Tefnut,
Atum had sent his sole Eye.
I am the one who made it possible for it
To give brilliance to the Darkness.
It found me as a man of infinite number (*znbb*, the same as *zn nbh*, a man of *neheb* = one who lives forever).
I am the begetter of repeated millions
Out of the Flood (*bbw*), out of the Waters (*mw*),

Out of the Darkness (*kekw*), out of *tnmw*” (CT 76.30-36).

The ascending human soul identifies herself as the self-disclosure of life-giving Shu:

“I am the *ba* of Shu, the self-developing god:
It is in the body of the self-developing god that I have developed
I am the *ba* of Shu, the god mysterious of form (*sfg jrw*.” CT 75.1-3).

“I have developed” may be understood as “I came into being”. Because the noetic space (sometimes imagined as a cube of light surrounded by the primordial Waters), or Shu, determines the extent of the manifested world, it can be regarded as *huparxis*.

Shu and Tefnut, as the first children of Atum, set in motion the entire chain of being (the Ennead). However, the light of Shu is a part of Atum’s own self-disclosure or self-revelation. The pair of Shu and Tefnut, regarded as the product of Atum’s masturbation, is analogous to the two Neoplatonic principles called the monad and the dyad “infinite in power” by Syrianus. In the metaphysical sequence of entities and categories, they appear immediately after the transcendent One, before even the realm of Being-Life-Intelligence is founded. Their prototypes are the Pythagorean principles of *peras* and *apeiron*, and they are causes of the wholes (*ton holon aitia*) which reappear at every level of reality. According to A. D. R. Sheppard, Syrianus distinguishes between this transcendent monad and dyad, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the *automonas* and the *autoduas* which appear in the realm of intelligible Forms.²⁹ These Forms are the thoughts of Atum-Ra which constitute the Ennead. The pair of Shu and Tefnut also reappears at every level of manifestation. For Syrianus, the Love and Strife of Empedocles are the same as his two fundamental principles of monad and dyad (*In Metaph.* 11.28ff; 93.6ff).

The initial pair of Shu and Tefnut is extended by a similar set of principles that inform the ancient Egyptian universe, for example, the dichotomy of permanence (the notion of manifestation as perfect, ideal and complete) and change (the notion of life as dynamic and recurrent). This pair resembles that of *to on* and *genesis*, and is expressed in two verbs: “exist” (*unun:wnn*) and “develop” (*keheper: hpr*). But instead of the sharp duality between perfect Being and imperfect Becoming, characteristic of Plato’s philosophical thought, this dichotomy is found at every level of reality and is represented by the series of analogous pairs:

Tefnut-Shu
Order (*maat*)-Life (*ankh*)
Djet (Eternal Sameness)-*Neheb* (Eternal Recurrence)
Osiris-Ra
Unun (permanent and static being)-*keheper* (development)

Djet may be understood as an unchanging and permanent eternity, *neheb* – as a cyclic infinitude, eternal recurrence. They are joined by the royal Egyptian “history” as the third aspect of time:

“Your being is in the fullness of time (*neheb*),
Your image is permanence (*djet*),
Your *ka* (a double of soul, representing will, planning, conscience) is all that occurs”.³⁰

Attention should be paid to the fact that, contrary to the Pythagorean scheme, the feminine deity Tefnut is *peras* (limit, order, sameness, wisdom, *nous*) and the masculine deity Shu is *apeiron* (unlimited, life, multiplicity of manifestation). Therefore the first noetic triad is Atum-Shu-Tefnut. Atum is the apex of the triad, parallel to *huparxis*. Shu is Life (*zoe*) and Tefnut is Intellect (*nous*).

According to Ruth Majercik, philosophical speculations on the triad of Being, Life, Intellect ultimately derived from school interpretations of Plato’s *Sophist* (248e). It may be true if we regard the Platonic tradition as a closed self-sufficient system and believe that Plato’s texts are a sort of an archetypal *Qur’an* which contains everything, at least in seed. This attitude has been legitimately accepted by the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic hermeneutes, but the triad of *huparxis*, *zoe*, and *noesis*, attested in the *Chaldean Oracles*, must not be necessarily and exclusively “Platonic”, if understood in a broader metaphysical sense. The members of this triad are related in accord with the axiom that “all is in all, but in each according to its proper nature”. Porphyry equated the One with the Chaldean Father who is “once transcendent” (*hapax epekeina*) and argued that this Father in his simplicity contain three powers. According to John Lydus:

“For as the mystical doctrine (*ho mustikos logos*) says, the Once Transcendent (*hapax epekeina*) is a substantial Intellect (*ousiodes nous*) which remains in its own substance (*ousia*) and is turned toward itself while standing and abiding” (*De mensibus* 21.15-18).

For Porphyry, *huparxis*, *zoe*, and *noesis* are all acts (*energeiai*); therefore according to *huparxis*, *energeia* is standing at rest, according to *noesis*, *energeia* is turned toward itself, according to *zoe*, *energeia* inclines away from *huparxis*.³² The later Neoplatonists separated this triad from the transcendent One as such and placed it at the level immediately beneath the ineffable One.

The paradoxical nature of Atum and his triad may be interpreted in both ways. But the Egyptians, as Erik Hornung pointed out, “did not create an abstract intellectual structure, but retained a pragmatic attitude to their ontology, using concepts they were able to live with”.³³ The only explicit statement about the existent defines it as *neheb* and *djet*. *Neheb* carries solar attributes of Ra and *djet* Osirian attributes – therefore Erik Iversen understands *neheb* as *Aion* in its philosophical definition.³⁴

Nevertheless, we ought to consider different levels of Ra (the archetypal Sun and the visible Sun which maintains the flow of cyclic time) and different levels of *neheb*. The sensible realm is only a mirrored image of the noetic realm. The *Coffin Texts* assert as follows:

“Shu is *neheb* and Tefnut is *djet*” (CT 80.7).

“Life is his identity, Order is her identity” (CT 80.32-33).

“I am Life, Lord of years,
Life of *neheb*, Lord of *djet* –
The eldest that Atum made with his efficacy,
When he gave birth to Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis,
When he was one and developed into three,
When he parted Geb from Nut,
Before the first Corps (*bt*) was born,
Before the two original Enneads developed
And were existing (*wnn.snj*) with me” (CT 80.72-80).

“I am *neheb*, father of an infinite number:
My sister is Tefnut, daughter of Atum, who bore the Ennead.
I am the one who bore repeated millions for Atum:
That is *djet*, that is my sister Tefnut” (CT 78.4-7).

Maat (order, truth, right measure) is the name of Tefnut, and this principle makes the whole of existence possible. The unchanging pattern of the intelligible order derives from Atum, the One-Being which is *hen kai pan*. Things (“that which exist”, *ntt wn*, i.e., *ta onta*) do not just exist (*unun*) as permanent essences, but also develop and change (*keheper*) into forms imbued with life (*ankh*) which coexists with order (*maat*). The lower levels of reality (for instance, the daily creation of new life) follow the fixed patterns established at the Beginning. Their relationship is the same as the relationship between archetypes and images, Platonic Ideas and sensible copies plunged into the ordered and cyclic stream of *genesis*.

For the Egyptians, “everything” means “that which is” (*ntt*) and “that which is not” (*iwtt*). The intelligible Creator, “who pronounces what is and creates what is not”, is said to have “called that which exists into being” (PT 1146) and brought nonbeing into existence (*sekeheper*). In accordance with Heliopolitan theology Atum acts as the supreme Creator and defines his relation to Ra, his Demiurge, in such words:

“I am Atum when alone in the primeval waters, I am Ra when he appears in glory and begins ruling what he has created”.³⁵

The *Coffin Texts* (CT 261.11) imply distinction between the Monad who is made functional and the Demiurge, “he who bore all” and whose command initiated the process of cosmic manifestation. The Monad, understood as the intelligible Creator, is called the Lord of All (*neb tem: nb tm*), the Only One (*ua: w*), the Sole and Only One, or He who gave birth

to that which is and that which is not (*ms ntt iwt*). His indissoluble connection with the Demiurge is expressed as a relation between Atum and Ra (in Heliopolis), Ptah and Atum, or Ptah and Ra (in Memphis), Amun and Ra (in Thebes), Khnum and Ra (in Esnah), Suchos and Ra (in Fayum) and so on.

In the depths of Nun, before creation, things are in the state of *nnj*, which may be translated as “inert state”, symbolized by lameness, weakness. This is the state of the elder Horus in the primeval waters. However, the shadow form of pre-existence seems to be completely different from that of the primordial gods engendering themselves “before existence existed”.³⁶ Regarding the two distinct forms of existence (*ntt* and *iwt*), E. Iversen provides the following commentary:

“The very existence of the two terms and their correlative and antithetic use demonstrates that the Egyptian theologians had already raised and considered the ontological problem of being versus non-being, which was later given great prominence in the controversial debate on being (*on*) and non-being (*me onta*) in the works of, for instance, Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, although the fact that the Egyptians refer to the “making” and “producing” of non-being tends to show, that, contrary to Parmenides and Plato, they considered it to have real existence as an intelligible cosmic entity”.³⁷

However, we must be very careful with the terms presumably meaning “nothingness” and translated into English as “nonexistence”, because they can simply signify the hidden or transcendent in respect to the subsequent lower levels of reality. Therefore J. Assmann, contrary to E. Hornung, maintains that:

“For the Egyptians, the cosmos was not suspended between nothingness and nothingness, nor did it emerge from nothingness. Surprisingly, the Egyptian concept of “nothingness” is not a part of the extracosmic or precosmic sphere but of the “inner cosmic”. In Egyptian thought, the distinction between being and nothingness could only be understood in terms of the existing world, the ongoing process. In fact, this distinction represented the primary cosmogonic condition for a universe to take shape at all”.³⁸

11. Invisible God and His Theophanies

The Egyptian term *keheper* (to become, to develop, to come into being) is an antonym for *unun* (to exist, to persist). The term *keheper* is associated with the god Khepera or the divine Scarab which symbolizes the rising Sun (both noetic and sensible), rebirth and resurrection. By contrast, *unun* is related to Osiris Unun-nefer (*Wnn-nfr*), “who exists in completion”, i.e., is a complete and restored unity of the permanent Form in its perfection,

goodness and beauty. The term *keheperu* refers to any stage in the process of theophany, irradiation, emanation, or development; therefore *keheperu* are understood as the manifested realities, “creatures”, effects of initial causes or any formal modes of being. For example, offerings for a deceased human being are given to his *khat* (corpse), to his *khaibit* (shadow), to his *ka* (double, vital and animating power), to his *ba* (soul), to his *akh* (noetic light, intellect, spirit), i.e., to all his *keheperu*. To make developments (*ara keheperu: jwj hprw*) means to grow up, to take a form. The *Coffin Texts* describe various “developments” as follows:

“Become silent, gods, and I will tell you my development (or manifestation, transformation: *hprw.j*) myself.
Don’t ask of my development from the Waters (Nun).
When the Waters saw me, I was already developed.
He does not know where I developed.
He did not see with his face how I developed.
It is in the body of the great self-developing God that I have developed.
He created me in his Heart,
He made me in his efficacy,
He exhaled me from his nose.
I am exhale-like of form,
Created by that self-developing God
Who strews the Sky with his perfection,
The totality of the God’s forms,
Whose identity the gods who sail him do not know” (*CT* 75.21-34).

According to Theban theology of the New Kingdom, the unknown and invisible God is Amun. In his transcendent mode Amun persists before and apart from the manifested universe. His identity or name (*ren*) is unknown. But as the cause and model (= *Ta-ten*, the primordial hill) of existence Amun is the “manifested one” (*ba*), “glittering of forms” (*tjbt jrjw*), who can be comprehended through his epiphanies, manifestations, creations, and multiplicity of forms. The word “forms” (*aru: jrjw*) originated from the verb “to make” (*ara: jrj*). But the Creator himself must be uncreated, and this is usually expressed by the term “self-created”, i.e., he who created his own egg from his own substance. The hidden process of self-generation applies not only to the invisible Amun “whose appearance is unknown”, but also extends to lower manifestations, sacred icons and processional images. Amun is the hidden God whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods. Hence, he is both transcendent and immanent. On the one hand he is ineffable and independent of his creation, on the other, as a pre-existing Being in whom all existence was inherited, he is the self-developing Creator by whose self-revelation all *keheperu* are evolved. According to the *Leiden Papyrus*:

“The one who created himself, whose appearance is unknown.
 Perfect aspect, which developed into a sacred emanation.
 Who built his processional images and created himself by himself.
 Perfect icon (or beautiful image, *sekbem nefer*), whom his heart made
 perfect.
 Who knit his fluid together with his body
 To bring about his egg in isolation.
 Development of development (*keheperu keheperu*), model of birth
 Who finished himself in proper order” (CT.350.400).

However, in the same *Leiden Papyrus* it is clearly stated:

All the gods are three:
 Amun, Ra, and Ptah, without their seconds.
 His identity is hidden in Amun,
 His is Ra as face,
 His body is Ptah” (ibid.300).

If we take into account that instead of “physical” nature or “nature” understood in the modern and profane sense, all sensible reality of the Egyptians amounted to a number of heliophanies (irradiations of the divine light), when Amun, Ra and Ptah indeed constitute a clear analogy to the Neoplatonic One, Intellect, and Soul, interpreted in the Orphic manner as the Olympian gods Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus. The different divine epithets refer to the multiplicity of “faces” (*bru:bru*) which the gods have at their disposal. The Egyptian Creator reveals himself in his creation, but he is not absorbed into it: Amun, Ra, and Ptah, with their multiplicity of names and epiphanies cannot be without reservations identified with everything that exists here below as images and symbols. Therefore Egyptian ontology is not pantheistic in the modern and rather naïve ordinary sense, but resembles the Neoplatonic hierarchy of different though closely related ontological orders (*taxeis*).

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2 Christos C. Evangelidou *The Hellenic Philosophy: Between Europe, Asia, and Africa*, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton: Binghamton University, 1997, p.95

3 L. M. de Rijk *Causation and Participation in Proclus. The Pivotal Role of Scope Distinction in his Metaphysics.*- On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy, ed. by E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, p.4

4 Werner Beierwaltes *Image and Counterimage? Reflections on Neoplatonic Thought with Respect to its Place Today.*- Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in honour of A. H. Armstrong ed. by H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus, London: Variorum, 1981, p.239

5 Dominic J. O'Meara *The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus.*- The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.78

6 Pierre Hadot *L'être et l'étant dans le neoplatonisme.*- Revue de theologie et philosophie 23, 1973, pp.101-113

7 Kevin Corrigan *Essence and Existence in the Enneads.*- The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.107

8 *ibid.*, p.106

9 Pierre Hadot *The Harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle according to Porphyry.*- Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence, ed. by Richard Sorabji, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.128

10 Andrew Smith *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p.11

11 Gregory Shaw *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p.119

12 *Proclo. Lezioni sul "Cratilo" di Platone*, traduzione di Francesco Romano, Catania/Roma, 1989, pp.133-136

13 On the modern abuse of the ideas of the concrete and the abstract see: Frithjof Schuon *Logic and Transcendence*, London: Perennial Books, 1975, pp.19-32. His arguments run as follows:

“All reality not physically or psychologically tangible, although perfectly accessible to pure intellection, is described as being ‘abstract’ with a more or less disparaging intention, as though it were a matter of distinguishing between dream, or even deception, and reality, or healthiness of mind. Substance, that which exists of itself, is regarded as ‘abstract’, and the accidental as ‘concrete’; it is imagined that an idea of the suprasensible is obtainable exclusively through abstraction, by discounting contingencies, a notion not devoid of meaning on the logical plane, but which is false on the level of intellection. (...) if, on the one hand, Being appears to the mind and in relation to things as an abstraction, it nevertheless constitutes the objective and concrete reality which inspires the abstract notion, or, in other words, it is the most concrete reality possible. The notion of Being is either a relatively direct reflection of Being in pure intelligence, or else it is an indirect trace of Being in the reason; in the latter case one may say that Being is ‘abstract’, because the thinking subject takes as its point of departure things which ‘are’ or, more precisely, which ‘exist’, and that without these things abstraction would be inconceivable; but for direct Intellection, which starts from an innate and prelogical certainty (prelogical in a positive, ‘emanationist’, and not evolutionist sense) consciousness of Being is ‘something of Being itself, inasmuch as it grasps a ray proceeding from it; this Intellection is therefore quite different from a rational operation. From this point of view Being reveals itself as a ‘consciousness’ before appearing as a ‘notion’, and it is not necessarily associated with existing phenomena: in the mirror of the Intellect, Being is dazzlingly evident, comparable at one and the same time to the geometrical point and to limitless space” (pp.19-21).

- 14 L. M. de Rijk, *ibid.*, p.12
 15 Carlos G. Steel *Iamblichus and the Theological Interpretation of the Parmenides.*-
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 16 *ibid.*, p.23
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 18 P. A. Meijer *Participation in Henads and Monads in Proclus' Theologia Platonica*
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 19 L. M. de Rijk, *ibid.*, p.13
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 21 James P. Allen *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation*
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 22 Erik Iversen *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, Copenhagen: Museum
 Tusculanum Press, 1984, p.11
 23 *ibid.*, p.24
 24 Lucie Lamie *Egyptian Mysteries. New Light on Ancient Knowledge*, London:
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 25 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the*
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 26 Erik Hornung *Conception of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many*, tr.
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 27 *ibid.*, p.183
 28 James P. Allen, *ibid.*, p.17
 29 A. Sheppard *Monad and Dyad as Cosmic Principles in Syrianus.*- Soul and the
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 30 Jan Assmann, *ibid.*, p.243
 31 Ruth Majercik *The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.*-
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 32 Pierre Hadot *Porphyre et Victorinus I*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1968,
 pp.132-138
 33 Erik Hornung, *ibid.*, p.184
 34 Erik Iversen, *ibid.*, p.18
 35 *ibid.*, p.14
 36 *ibid.*, p.17
 37 *ibid.*, p.18
 38 Jan Assmann, *ibid.*, p.206

RITUALS OF DEIFICATION AND THEURGIC ASCENT

1. Depreciation of Hieratic Rites

In the modern studies of ritual the transcendent is often confused with the infra-human. Usually ritual is defined as a behavioural pattern deprived of its primary “unritualized” model and functioning as a means of communication. The psychoanalytic approach views sacred ritual in the context of collective neurosis, imagining ritual as a means to flee from a complicated “reality” one cannot accept and therefore negates, thus escaping utter madness.

Those who are educated according to the modern paradigms of an individualistic self-expression and self-indulgence, or rather false “spontaneity”, misunderstand ritual altogether, regarding it as a “mere ceremony”, a matter of surface rather than depth, of outward (dissembling) representation rather than inward transformation. However, by classing ritual with superstition, shallow and thoughtless action, or with an “idolatrous” habit, the Protestants and their modern followers perform their own “ritual of negation”, a rite of “rationalistic exorcism”, unaware of the ontological nature of ritual, namely, that being itself, including our human life, is a sacred rite *par excellence*.

From the perspective of “sacrificial” divine manifestation (*proodos, kheperu*), ritual is similar to the demiurgic rhythm of creation, to the dynamics of the organized cosmos, including all cycles of life and death, evolution and involution, day and night, and so on. In a sense, *Mahashakti*, or Maya (Isis-Hathor), in her ritual play, breathes, dances, or weaves the entire universe as the irradiation of archetypal possibilities of Ishwara, Atman (Atum).

The ritual action is an order-making and structure-giving action which follows divine paradigms or noetic archetypes, thus producing temporal sequences or chains of images. At the human level, where the cosmic duality of Horus and Seth determines all earthly dramas and tragedies, only the “ritualized” conformity to the archetypal patterns of order and truth may help to subdue and control the chaotic tendencies of entropy, thus providing sacred links with rejuvenating spiritual sources. Otherwise only the Post-modern nightmare of “simulation” and certain *froliche wissenschaft* is left, thus equating the whole reality with a simulacrum without any transcendent paradigm.

If the image only masks “the absence of a basic reality” and, being its own pure simulacrum, “bears no relation to any reality whatever”, as J. Baudrillard maintains, then there is no more Truth and no more Reality.¹ This triumph of *isefet* (“lack”, manifested by sickness, disorder, injustice, falsehood, and loss of the meaning of creation) means the death of any traditional philosophy as well, because every sign only redoubles itself behind the empty allusion of what it designates. J. Baudrillard says:

"All the values of a civilization, of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs. Everything becomes undecidable."²

For the Protestants, only "empty" ritual had no purpose; for the Postmodernists, reality itself is a dream within a dream. But since God is proclaimed to be an ideological fancy which should be removed, there is no hope of awakening. In this respect, it is useful to remember the wise assertion of F. Schuon:

"True, the world is a dream, but this dream is not ours since we are contents of it; the absolute Subject escapes us as much as does the absolute Object, hence as much as their supreme indistinction."³

"Ritual" and "spontaneity" may be viewed as reflections of *peras* and *apeiron*, limit and infinity, the ordering force of Maat and the unrestricted breath of Shu. Their interchanging dialectic presents itself on every level of existence, though when their lower images are deviated from the archetypal source, they are turned into 1) an "empty ceremony", an inhuman rationalistic mania, culminating in all kinds of terror and 2) false freedom or pseudo-spontaneity (especially praised by modern artists). As F. Schuon aptly remarks:

"But when divine influences have withdrawn from a religious cult, and only the psychic entity remains, abandoned to itself and its ignorant servants – who are thereby all the more impassioned – it becomes a veritable monster and serves as a dwelling place for tenebrous influences; this explains why hideous apparitions have been seen escaping from shattered idols."⁴

2. Rituals and Sacred Masks

Lacking speech and therefore resisting decipherment, ritual, according to the Protestant perspective, is sheer nonsense. To place the whole of religion in external rites is stupidity, because there is nothing behind the masks of movements and gestures. As J. Z. Smith pointed out:

"The study of ritual was born as an exercise in the 'hermeneutic of suspicion', an explanatory endeavour designed to explain away."⁵

In their attempts to fight Catholicism, the Protestants tried to present the ritual activities of Catholics as "verbal translations" of the Pagan models: "By a change only of Name they have found the means to return to the Thing."⁶ This ugly controversy against rituals and sacred images, jointly held by humanists, reformers, and philosophers, "marked the study of religion as, essentially, a Protestant exercise, a heritage that continues to haunt theorists of religion even to the present day."⁷

J. P. Singh Uberoi, himself partly following Max Weber, insists that the decisive step to the generation of modern Western science is not so much

the disfigured Hermetic pursuits, but the radical change in Christian ritual and liturgy, i.e., in the mode of presence of divinity and interpretation of symbol. Exploring how the rise to a distinctive modern world view became possible, he argues:

"Zwingli insisted that in the utterance 'This is my body' (*Hoc est corpus meum*) the existential word 'is' (*est*) was to be understood, not in a real, literal and corporeal sense, but only in a symbolical, historical or social sense (*significat, symbolum est or figura est*)... Zwingli had discovered or invented the modern concept of time in which every event was either spiritual and mental or corporeal and material but no event was or could be both at once... Spirit, word and sign had finally parted company for man at Marburg in 1529; and myth or ritual... was no longer literally and symbolically real and true."⁸

Since Europe followed Zwingli in this event, symbol was separated from reality and subsequently a new language was brought into being with respect to ritual. Instead of sometimes being "idolatrous" and sometimes "true", now all rituals are regarded as "merely symbolic" and ultimately shallow. This striving for a "pure spirituality", devoid of any sacramental dimension, establishes a sort of dualism between sentimental religious humanism and demonized nature. Quite paradoxically, it ends in an opaque and blind materialism based on the limited standpoint of *ego*, or *persona*, in the sense of a false mask which imprisons rather than liberates. Since human beings consciously or unconsciously identify themselves with their social, psychosomatic, and imaginal roles, these false masks (involved in the pseudo-rituals of profane existence) conceal their true identities. On the contrary, the sacred mask (for example, the golden mask of Horus, Hathor, or Anubis, worn by Egyptian priests) serves as a means of invoking divine presence and symbolising transfiguration. According to T. Burckhardt:

"But to return to the sacred mask as such: it is above all the means of a theophany; the individuality of its wearer is not simply effaced by the symbol assumed, it merges into it to the extent that it becomes the instrument of a superhuman 'presence'. For the ritual use of the mask goes far beyond mere figuration: it is as if the mask, in veiling the face or the outward ego of its wearer, at the same time unveiled a possibility latent within him. Man really becomes the symbol that he has put on, which presupposes both a certain plasticity of soul and a spiritual influence actualized by the form of the mask. In addition, a sacred mask is generally regarded as a real being; it is treated as if it were alive; and it is not put on until certain rites of purification have been performed."⁹

At the end of libations and offerings the Babylonian priest assures that sacrifice ("this deed") was done by all the gods, not by him or any other human being in their mortal aspect. Egyptian temple liturgy and ritual are also understood not as a communication between the human and the

divine, but rather as an interaction of the gods themselves, performed by Horus, Thoth, Anubis and other deities. The priests during the rites are turned into the sacred vessels for the *bau* of these gods. The presentations (*hetep, hotep*), around which the ritual drama is staged, are equated with the Eye of Horus which symbolizes spiritual integration and union (accomplished by the wisdom of Thoth) after disintegration and falling into pieces.

Egyptian cosmography depicts the course of the Sun (Ra) using sacramental interpretation of this both cosmogonical and cultic process. Therefore the temple ritual (which follows archetypal patterns of the solar circuit and rebirth) brings the divine effects down to earth: the god descends (*hau*) on his image (*sekhem*), comes as a spirit (*akh*) to unite with his form in his sanctuary “with glittering feathers and the *bau* of the gods with him”. During the ritual called “uniting with the Sun” (*henem aten*), the divine substance unites with the material receptacle, or image. Likewise the purified human being becomes a vessel of sacred energies and is united with the Sun, or Intellect.

If existence is an expression of Being, that is, manifestation of intelligible light and sound, produced by the creative utterance of Atum, which includes the all-pervasive power of Heka, then, as a result, everything is more or less divine. Therefore to contemplate the sacred (constantly revealed and confirmed by rituals) “means to perceive symbols, archetypes and essences in sensible things, for the beauties perceived by an interiorized soul become factors of interiorization”.¹⁰

Contrary to the “opaque” perspective of contemporary empiricism, those events that the modern man would regard as “inner” psychic or spiritual events, are experienced as “outer” events by the ancients. Therefore J. Naydler, perhaps partly following H. Corbin, coined the term a “public imagination” – a public inner life experienced as an objective vision. He argues, concerning Ancient Egyptian times:

“This means that the experience of what was ‘real’ and what was ‘not real’ was different from our experience. The outer and the inner worlds were not so strictly partitioned, and as a result, the experience of the physical was much richer – it was infused with inner, spiritual qualities that today we would prefer to regard as subjective projections. At the same time, their experience of the spiritual was much more concrete, much more ‘objective’, by which term we should understand ‘shared’”.¹¹

Cultic activities are regarded as a response to ever-present divinity and a genuine encounter with its manifestations in the specific form of their theurgic indwelling. If the liturgy is suspended, the divine powers may withdraw, leaving behind only the inanimate material receptacle.

J. Assmann discusses three main dimensions of contact with the divine and of the divine presence itself, that is 1) cultic, 2) cosmic (understood as a hierophany), and 3) mythic (by which is meant a sacred tradition: myths,

names, genealogies).¹² When Osiris is praised as King of the gods with 1) many names, 2) sacred embodiments, and 3) mysterious cult statues in the temples, name, embodiment, and cult statue refer to the mythic, cosmic, and cultic dimensions respectively. However, this classification is not correct when all three dimensions are regarded as “cultic”, because the creation of the world by the Word is staged as a ritual. In addition, the divine presence manifests itself as mystical inner vision and the “cardial” comprehension (*gnosis*). It may be contemplated through the epiphanic figure of the pharaoh or the sage. Since the world is woven from theophanies and divine traces, the realization of this ontological truth allows one to see God everywhere. He is revealed through the constant play of great (*um*) and small (*nadjesu*) deities and their powers.

Such gnostic vision sees through the physical landscape, itself ultimately constituted by the noetic irradiations of Atum-Ra, into its interiority. F. Schuon describes this sacramental vision as the result of reciprocity: when we withdraw towards the inward, God manifests itself for us in the outward:

“Thus, when man interiorizes himself, God so to speak exteriorizes Himself while enriching man from within; there lies all the mystery of the metaphysical transparency of phenomena and of their immanence in us”.¹³

The gods and their powers (*sekhemu*) may be experienced through purified and transformed human qualities, attributes, and actions which are reflections of divine qualities. The ability to dance and chant joyful sacred hymns means to experience the presence of Hathor. To practise hieroglyphic writing, calligraphy and painting, to contemplate divine images and to act wisely in all circumstances means to experience the archetypal qualities of Thoth and his consort Sesheta.

3. Climbing to the Divine State

Some contemporary scholars argue that religious ritual depends on an antecedent “idea” which, however, is no longer understood and whose deeper meaning remains hidden. Contrary to this belief, W. Burkert maintains that ritual is far older than linguistic communication – therefore there is no justification for regarding the “idea” as anterior or decisive for ritual, though certain ideas may be contained in ritual and communicate “the reality of a hidden, transcendent power or the sacredness of life”.¹⁴

W. Burkert says that ritual has no “purpose” and the ideas that can be extracted by interpreting a ritual cannot explain its origin. The evolutionary approach of this author and his reductionist understanding of an “idea” prevent him from seeing that hieratic rites are established in accord with divine Ideas and follow metaphysical patterns of demiurgy which can only be regarded as a “myth” at the level of expression. The

dependence of myth on ritual cannot be understood as a proof that sacred myths cannot be based on noetic realities and archetypes.

From the traditional point of view, ritual action is no longer personal, because the spiritual power mediated and manifested through the correctly performed ritual (itself regarded as being transmitted by revelation) can be "real" only if the rite is performed by the gods themselves, i.e., if it is "theurgic" in the etymological sense of the word.

It is true that the ways of life of ancient men were determined by rituals which shaped mythic patterns, but to say that ritual is without an intelligible purpose (because by means of interpretation one can attribute ideas to any action) is a sheer nonsense. Since life itself is a kind of ritual which involves birth and death (moreover, *apotheosis* and rebirth are always preceded by death), no wonder that, for the ancient world, hunting, sacrifice, and war were symbolically interchangeable:

"The pharaoh and Heracles could be lord of the hunt, lord of the sacrifice, and warrior".¹⁵

More important is the fact that the pharaoh, as an *imago dei*, should have lived a life whose every detail was ritualized and thereby served as a paradigm of the holy life, or way of life (*bios*), aimed at a theurgic return to the solar Intellect through the sacrifice ("death", which becomes an initiation), participation in divine Forms and re-union with the divine Sun. A. K. Coomaraswamy argues that the ancient Egyptian doctrine of the Sundoor (the way of liberation through the pneumatic rays that proceed and return to the midst of the Sun which is Death itself) is essentially the same as the Indian.¹⁶ The ladder of Horus, himself represented by the king and the initiate, who starts his alchemical journey to the Osirian Netherworld, is the ritual instrument (actually used in Orphic initiation rites as well) and the symbol of ascent. The Egyptian concepts of Amun-Ra, or Atum-Ra, are equivalent to the Indian concepts of Atman, Surya, and Indra-Vayu.¹⁷

Since sacrifice is a symbolic death, meaning return to the Principle and reaffirmation of intelligible Life, one could say that in every sacrifice the Principle is "fed" by the spiritual aspect of the victim, or of its *ba* which is returned to its source as a ray is to the Sun. In a sense, the sacrificer "kills" himself as a particular and separate manifestation. Thereby he returns his life to the universal Source that gave it. The Source itself, as a supreme unity, is Death for any manifested particularity, but this Death does not die and is the chief agent of immortality and rebirth.

According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, the Sun "who slays and quickens", is both Breath and Death, the Person in the Solar Orb, who plants his feet in the heart and when he withdraws them, the creature dies.¹⁸ Those feet are the rays of Ra, the life-breath of Shu, or Amun, the invisible Sun. The initiated sacrificer becomes ritually dead to his mortal self which is sacrificed, or exchanged, for the immortal divine *eidōs*.

Like all metaphysical passages, this "climbing" to the divine state is at the same time a kind of death and rebirth, be it 1) sacrificial and initiatory death which leads to regeneration provided by the hieratic rite, or 2) that real death following which man enters Duat and, as an image of Osiris, is united with the archetypal Osiris. Both cases are prototypes of the philosophical separation of the soul from the mortal body that leads to the divine presence, accessible only to the contemplative soul not dominated by passion and other Sethian qualities.

Since all living beings are sustained by the qualities of *neteru*, by their powers and attributes that constitute an existence as such, the contents of consciousness are not the "subjective" possessions of those who experience them, but are only a temporal identification with the particular divine or daimonic *eidōs*, power, energy, and will, be it blissful to or destructive of the individual receptacle. Therefore the question of one's real identity is crucial, and ritual serves as a regulator and healer of consciousness. Through the ritualized action one becomes a mediator of the divine, identifying oneself part by part with different deities or imbuing oneself with the *ba* and *sekhem* of one particular god. For example, in the *Book for the permanence of Osiris, giving breath to the Inert One in the presence of Thoth, and repelling the enemy of Osiris* (BD 182) the initiate says:

"I am Thoth, the skilled scribe whose hands are pure, a possessor of purity, who drives away evil, who writes what is true, who detests falsehood, whose pen defends the Lord of All; master of law who interprets writings, whose words establish Two Lands... I am Thoth, the favoured of Ra; Lord of strength who ennobles him who made him; great of *beka* in the Barque of Millions of Years... I am Thoth; I have performed the night-ritual in Letopolis".

By identifying each part of the body with a god, the initiate "constructs" his divine body. Likewise the mummy (which represents symbolically an ideal body, *sab*) is "constructed" as a wrapped (*ut*) scarab, a "logogram" for *neteru*. The iconic symbols (so-called amulets) laid out on its bodily parts really are like the Neoplatonic *sunthemata* or the equivalents to the divine names which belong to the noetic semiotics of the Demiurge. Since the sequence of ritual postures and deeds is the sequence of *medu neter*, embodied in the dynamic "irradiation" of gestures, sounds and sacred forms themselves, the rite-performing priest becomes a vehicle of *beka* power which transcends the level of mundane existence. By invoking and identifying himself with the archetypal patterns of *tep sepi*, the priest makes himself into a kind of hieroglyph, or mysterious *sunthema*, which participates in the demiurgic power of Ra.

Similarly, the Duat traveller in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* can perform a series of miraculous transformations, turning at will into a variety of animals that serve as vehicles and symbols of different gods belonging to different chains of manifestations (*ban*). Since the

Netherworld is a kind of *mundus imaginalis*, the transformations are not physical, but rather semiotic. They occur within the text-like body-temple of Osiris, thereby showing the spectre of archetypal possibilities and their related energies. To be turned into a swallow means to become a *sunthema* of Hathor; to be turned into a crocodile means to become a mediator of powers attributed to Sobek. Ultimately, we are dealing here with the *medu neter* – their compositions, interrelations, semantics, creative *heka* powers and their iconography – all of them within the frame of reality similar to a written Text, itself manifested as a rite of existence which strictly follows divine archetypes.

Therefore a ritualized action is not a human action (which by itself tends to disorder, *isefet*), but occurs in the realm of *neteru* and displays the relationship between the gods and their unifying powers. In some respects, Heka may be equated with Maya, understood as “divine art”, and the miraculous power of any creation or transformation (*ma* in Sanskrit means “measure”, like the Egyptian *maat* which is the supreme measure of theophany and all manifested things). According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, it can be rendered as “Magic” with considerable reservations: the world is a product of Maya; however, the *maya-vada* doctrine does not simply regard our phenomenal world as a delusion, but as “...a theophany and epiphany by which we are deluded if we are concerned with nothing but the wonders themselves”, i.e., if we are unable to see the archetypal Thaumaturgus, or Operator-himself, concealed by his art (*mayaya*).²⁰

4. Cosmos and the Sacred Harmony of Strings

The Latin word *sacrum* and its derivations may signify not only a sacred thing, sacred rite, liturgy, but also a hidden or secret thing (like the Greek *musterion*) and sacrifice. *Sacrificium* means “making sacrifice” or “making sacred”, because ritual itself is sacred. It provides the operative rules for all kinds of “sacredness” and establishes sacred attributes of tradition which tries to keep, preserve, and restore the world-order (the semantic meta-structure of myth-like existence, imagined as a dynamic cosmic mandala) by imitating the rite of primeval creation. Therefore ritual is akin to the established cosmic order, the exemplary rules of behaviour and traditional law.

The Latin word *ritus* means not only religious rite or ceremony, but also the paradigmatically established form, order, habit. The same root appears in *reor* – to calculate, think, and *ratio* – reason, meaning, method, way, teaching, system.

The Vedic term *rita* (*rita*) is congeneric to the Latin *ritus* and means the highest principle of manifested being: its order and truth, opposed to disorder (*an-rita*). Both *ritus* and *rita* are related to the Indo-European root

ar- (to join, to bind, to arrange). Like the Egyptian *maat*, *rita* is the cosmos-forming ritual; therefore the universe made by this miraculous rite (*keriya*) is well-built and measured, like a ploughed field (Lithuanian *arimas*, from the verb *arti*, to plough). This manifested (by the moving force of *ratha rtasya*, the wheel of order) cosmos, likened to the beautiful cultic statue (*agalma*), is “harmonious”. The Latin *ars* (art) and the Greek *harmonia* (order, relationship, organized structure) stem from the same root. According to the Pythagorean Philolaus, quoted by Nicomachus of Gerasa:

“Nature in the cosmos is composed of a *harmonia* between the unlimited and the limited and so too is the whole cosmos and everything in it.”²¹

Philolaus explains *harmonia* by equating it to an octave, or *dia pason*, literally, the interval which runs “through all notes”. He continues:

“Things that are alike and of the same race had no need of *harmonia*; but it was necessary for things that are dissimilar and not of the same race and not of equal standing to be locked together by *harmonia* so that they might be held together in a cosmos.”²²

The word *kosmos* itself means a perfect arrangement, from the verb *kosmeo* – to arrange, adorn, dress. Therefore *kosmema* is an ornament, and *kosmetikon* – cosmetics. The cosmos-forming ritual establishes *harmonia*, say, an equilibrium between Horus and Seth which leads to transcendent union (*sema*, or *henosis*). And the cosmic principles of harmony, reciprocity, proportion, and analogy are the means by which the sacred rite is operative.

The Greek word for ritual is *telete*. It means an accomplishment (*telos*) of the full cyclical movement in a perfect intelligible circle (*kuklos*, skr. *cakra*), like the trajectory which the solar barque of Ra traverses. This noetic circle, as a paradigm of cosmic order and ritual, represents an “archetypal iconostasis”, or an “ideal theurgic whole”, as V. N. Toporov used to say.²³ According to the Russian Orthodox writer P. Florensky, this “theurgic plenitude” is to be regarded as containing the fullness of all possible meaning and, therefore, being the supreme aim of human life, as well as the maternal repository of all arts and all sciences, similar to the “intelligible book” of Thoth. According to this view, the birth of myth is regarded as “the first breach in theurgy”. When the theurgic plenitude is lost by separation, differentiation, individualization and “fall”, viewed as a kind of “metaphysical catastrophe”, the primordial unity is damaged and “theurgy” (once meaning all human activities without exception) is reduced to special ritual actions, the “cult” in the narrow sense of this word.²⁴

However, this cult still affords an access to the life-giving noetic fullness of *arche*, the Egyptian *tep sepi*, and it uses all means provided by the hieratic arts and sciences that formerly constituted the theurgic unity but

now are scattered like the limbs of Osiris. The sounds produced by the seven spheres (analogous to the seven Hindu chakras and seven steps of Mesopotamian zikkurat), imitated by the priests, are especially important in the ritual practices of the Graeco-Roman world. Nicomachus of Gerasa argues that the circuit of sounds is said to be twenty-eight in number, "according to the convention of the Egyptians", and regards it as a secret doctrine not to be spoken aloud by the wise. He says:

"Wherefore the note has the same power as the monad has in arithmetic and the point has in geometry. These elements are combined with material substances (as, for example, vowels are combined with consonants), just as the soul is combined with the body and *harmonia* is combined with the strings. When the soul is combined with the body, it produces living things; when *harmonia* is combined with the strings, it produces keys and melodies, these combinations being the active and consummating production of the gods. Wherefore, whenever the initiates pay reverence to such an act, they invoke it symbolically with sigmas and clickings and inarticulate and meaningless sounds."²⁵

The Demiurge is the chief Ritual-Performer whose actions ("rhythms and melodies") are imitated by the pharaoh and the priest who substitutes for the pharaoh in cultic service. Hence, to be liberated, in this theurgic sense, means to join the solar barque of Ra and be involved thereby in the eternal ritual of creation, performed by Ra. The "liberated" ba simply recognizes itself as a ray of Ra, or rather as the intelligible Ra himself, because God (being at once ineffable and named by all names) is Heka, the single hidden Operator.

The one who arranged everything that is here visible by invisible arts and skilfully executed every soul by the proportions of *harmonia*, is the Demiurge, according to Aristides Quintilianus. However, we can call him Pure Form, Proportion, Unit, or Unitary Proportion, "succeeding thereby in showing in the one term that he arranges and sets in order all things and in revealing in the other term that he has made an end of many and disparate things and has through indissoluble bounds gathered them together in one" (*De musica* I.3).

5. On the Wing of Thoth: the Theurgic Way of Ra

Following the patterns of ancient cultic practices, Iamblichus regarded theurgy as being an inverse imitation of cosmogony, arguing that all demiurgic powers engaged in the soul's descent into the body may function as elevating forces. Both descent and ascent consist in ritualized actions of divine powers. Therefore the corporeal dimension itself is constructed by the "geometrizing" descent of *neteru* and their corporeal receptacles or symbols. Since the theurgic symbols are elements of a

hieratic performance held on the universal scale, they give the soul "the ineffable power of the gods" (*he arrbetos dunamis ton theon: De Myster*:96.19-97.2).

This *dunamis* (analogous to Egyptian *sekbemu* and Indian *shakti*) serves as a vehicle of ascent. Sacred chants, or invocations, are imbued with transforming and elevating power, leading to the Sun. According to the Hindu text, cited by A. K. Coomaraswamy, "they made the Sun their goal and ran a race", and this race "is imitated in the rite" (*PB IX.1.35*).²⁶ In order to reach "the Gander seated in the Light", the sacrificer mounts to the celestial realm with the verse, "like a ship", according to the *Aitareya Brahmana* (IV.20-22), using "feet" that are the metrical units of the elevating chant:

"Just as men set sail on the ocean so they set sail to perform a year or a twelve-day rite, just as men desiring to reach the other shore mount a ship well found, so do they mount the Tristubhs (chants)".²⁷

This way is also the theurgic way to Ra, literally meaning "end", according to A. K. Coomaraswamy,²⁸ i.e., the end of the world, of the road, and of the Year, the circle of the cultic Year being the theurgic circle. The sacrificer enters the Year as the archetypal circle of his ontology, because the two ends of Year, when united, constitute an endless Chant which is like the Egyptian Ouroboros, a snake biting its tale (*sed em ra*). By passing through the Year, a ritual of descent and ascent, of death and resurrection, is performed. Thereby the sequence of seasonal and daily rhythms is viewed as a kind of magnificent rite in which men participate. The end of the Year is related to the doors of Heaven, opened for the ascending pharaoh in the *Pyramid Texts*:

"The doors of the firmament are thrown open at dawn for myself.

I go up into the Field of Rushes,

I bathe in the Field of Rushes.

I am pure, I take to myself my iron bones, I stretch out [for myself] my imperishable limbs which are in the womb of my mother Nut. O Ra, give me your hand..." (*PT 325*).

"Hail to you, daughter of Anubis, who is at the windows of the sky, the companion of Thoth, who is at the uprights of the ladder. Open my way that I may pass" (*PT 304*).

"... I will leap up and put myself on the wing of Thoth..." (*PT 270*).

"The face of the god is open to me..." (*PT 271*).

If the word "irrational" is understood in its usual sense, the ineffable theurgic power (*arrbetos dunamis*) cannot be irrational (*alogos*), as G. Shaw maintains.²⁹ A. H. Armstrong is correct in observing that a word which recurs constantly when Iamblichus is speaking of the gods and sacred rites is *huperphues*, "supernatural", understood in a fairly strict theological sense.³⁰ This supernaturalism of Iamblichus sets the divine in a transcendent realm which is normally inaccessible and can be reached only

through God's self-revelation and hieratic practices. This is the very reason why theurgy should be exempt from philosophical criticism and the opinions of mortals. It is not an irrational (*alogos*) power that generated *logos*, but rather that which is *hyperousios*, "above being". Therefore the Pythagorean dealing with an irrational diagonal of a square (which has an irrational value and cannot be defined arithmetically, but may be performed geometrically, thereby turning the irrational into rational) is only using a symbolic demonstration at the level of mathematical realities, which are themselves reflections in the descending series of *peras* and *apeiria*. Arguing that noetic theurgies were mathematical rituals, G. Shaw defends the confluence of mathematics and theurgy:

"Like the irrational diagonal, the ineffable power of the gods was *alogos* with respect to discrete (arithmetic) reasoning yet became the source for a *logos* revealed in embodied (geometric) action".³¹

The profound analysis exercised by G. Shaw convinces us that only flowing into apeiron the theurgist remains *peras*: he embraces the Unlimited in his descent by maintaining the role of the Limit, because only by measuring himself into matter (since the Demiurge is "always doing geometry" and his instruments of "self-disclosure" are theurgists themselves and, in a lesser degree, all *bau* which descend) can one participate directly in the immaterial Forms.³²

Through the *sunthema* of the sun, a symbol of noetic fire, one may reach the hidden sun, passing through the straight gate, door, mouth, "the eye of the needle", "the midst of the sun" which is Death. Because the sun is Death, "his offspring here below are mortal, but the Devas are beyond and therefore undying" (*Sbatapatha Brahmana* VI.3.3.7).

We could agree with G. Shaw who argues that, for Iamblichus, an escape from the cosmos "apart from a more causal and responsible involvement in it" is not only undesirable but impossible,³³ only if the term "cosmos" would mean, first of all, an intelligible and henadic realm of the gods, the archetypal support of existence, symbolized by a lotus flower from which Ra-child (or Agni) himself is born. The descending entities come forth from the rays and return back by means of the rays. In the *Pyramid Texts*, the Egyptian priest admonishes the pharaoh (the prototype of all theurgists and initiates) as follows:

"Provide yourself with the Great of Magic (or Demiurgic-and-Theurgic Ability, *Heka*)... Cast off your impurity for Atum in On (Heliopolis) and go down with him; assign the needs of the Lower Sky and succeed to the thrones of the Abyss (*Niau*, or *Nu*)... Go up, open your ways by means of the bones of Shu, the embrace of your mother Nut will enfold you...

Ascend and descend; descend with Ra, sink into darkness with *Ndi*.

Ascend and descend; ascend with Ra, rise with the Great Float-user.

Ascend and descend; descend with Nephthys, sink into darkness with the Night-barque.

Ascend and descend; ascend with Isis, rise with the Day-barque...

O Atum, raise this pharaoh up to you, enclose him within your embrace, for he is your son of your body for ever" (PT 222).

"Raise yourself... in your name of God, come into being, an Atum to every god" (PT 215).

As R. O. Faulkner remarks, the pharaoh assumes the rank of the supreme deity and is not like Atum but is Atum.³⁴ If God is One and Many, One and All (*ben kai pan*), being both 1) Hidden of Name (*Amun-ren-fj*), with whom "there was no other god", and 2) *enneamorphos*, the one with nine forms. His seven heads (or seven *bau*) mean the divine immanence in the "million" (*beb*) of beings, entities, and things, as the Ramesside theology fairly attested. Therefore one cannot "escape" from the monistic "cosmos", equal to Reality itself, simply because, ultimately, only the supreme God exists – only the Parmenidean Being is real. By His magic powers, the One proceeds in a plurality of aspects, like the distributed parts of sacrifice. Nothing of "us" remains when we realize ourselves as "modalities" of the single ineffable Self and when we understand our powers as the "names" of Amun's activities.

6. Divine Triads in Egyptian and Neoplatonic Thought

According to Proclus, the "divine" (*theios*) Iamblichus praises numbers as containing various remarkable properties and regards them as "symbols of divine and esoteric things" (*tauta de symbola theion esti kai aporrheton pragmaton*: In *Tim.* II.215.5). He describes the Monad as the cause of Sameness and Unity, the Dyad as the organiser of Procession and Division, the Triad as the leader of Return for what has gone forth, the Tetrad as the true embracer of all harmony and *logoi*, the Ennead as the creator of true perfection and similarity (*teleioseos alethines kai homoiotetos poiitiken*). The Ogdoad is called the cause of Procession to all points and the Heptakaieikosad the force stimulating Return even of the lowest elements of the cosmos and so on.

J. Dillon explains this passage as the earliest definite reference where two triadic processes of *monē-proodos-epistrophe* are revealed in a scheme based on the seven numbers of the Soul: the first triad for the noetic realm, the second for the world of becoming, with the Tetrad serving as the mediating point (like the universal Soul) between the first diacosm (*protos diakosmos*) and the second diacosm (*deuteros diakosmos*).³⁵

The triadic arrangements of metaphysical entities are attested in the earliest Egyptian theological schemes. On the first Dynasty ivory comb from Abydos, Horus is already portrayed in three hypostases: 1) as a

falcon on the palace facade (*serekb*); 2) as an image of outstretched wings which curve towards the royal *uas* sceptres at each side, 3) as a falcon sailing in a barque across the sky.

For the Egyptians, the plurality of the noetic deities can be reduced to a triad. The transcendent unity of any *neter* unfolds in the realm of manifestation as a trinity. The ineffable essence unfolds in the immanent dimension by the three constituent elements, namely, 1) the *ba*, 2) image, and 3) body of the god, thereby producing the three-tiered arrangement of the created cosmos.

According to J. Assmann, all these theological forms of divinity are constituents of a higher unity and develop outward from the articulated whole like hypotactic series: 1) *ba*, image, body; 2) sun, cult statue, name; 3) heaven, earth, netherworld; 4) light, air, water; 5) Amun, Ra, Ptah.³⁶ The three divine hypostases (Amun, Ra, Ptah) are represented respectively by the name, the archetypal cosmic image and the cultic body (statue).

The transcendent pre-existence (Amun), the cause of the noetic sun (Ra), and the primeval mound (Ptah-Tatenen) may be compared to the Neoplatonic triple principle which explains and justifies the unfolding of the whole of reality. Plotinus maintained that at every level of reality the work of generating (*poiesis*) results from the contemplation (*theoria*) of higher reality; therefore the sensible world is a consequence of the noetic world in the same way that light is reflected from a source of light. Accordingly, Plotinus interpreted Hesiod's three gods (Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus) as equivalent to the three metaphysical principles, namely, the One, Intellect, and Soul.³⁷

The threefold conception of Amun-Ra dominated Egyptian theology from the reign of Hatshepsut. As Alison Roberts pointed out, the three dimensions of divine existence (depicted as the hidden primordial mystery, the middle sphere of noetic life, and the realm of cultic image), corresponding exactly to "three worlds" in the later Hermetic tradition, are related to the three ascending terraces of Queen Hatshepsut's temple, the Holiest of the Holy (*Djeser-djeseru*), located beneath the cliffs of Deir al-Bahri.³⁸

Even Akhenaten, before he turned to sheer iconoclasm and abandoned the link with tradition, defined his sole divinity as

Ra-Harakhti, i.e., Ra-Horus-of-the-Horizon (name);

Shu (emanation of the sunlight, depicted by arms holding *ankh* hieroglyphs raying down from the sun);

The celestial orb of the sun named Aten (image).³⁹

Here an image sphere is reduced to Aten, the visible orb, instead of being represented by the cultic statues of the gods, or by the body of Ptah.

However, even in Akhenaten's case, being an image (*tut*) entails being distinguished from that which is an archetype. Though characterized by likeness and similarity, an image is inferior to an archetype and depends

on it. An image is continuously attached to the generating hypostasis which sustains an image in its existence, just like the mirror image lasts as long as the object remains in front of the mirror (the word *ankh* means both life, breath of life, and mirror).

The rays which radiate from the sun-like *Nous* (or the Sun's Eye, the uraeus-serpent, whose all-seeing celestial gaze looks down on a radiant world), containing in archetype all of the kinds of things, are life-giving, and are therefore frequently depicted with *ankh* signs at their end.

The pharaoh's face (an image) is like the divine face of Ra (his immediate noetic archetype), and his accession to the throne imitates the sunrise when Ra "appears in glory", coming forth from the fiery furnace of Nut. The Sun god (*Nous*) appears renewed through the "golden" Hathor, the integral and whole *Wedjat* Eye, the Flame of Gold, "whose head is black". Her rituals of transformation and rebirth, performed by the archetypal child of Gold, Ihy, shaking a *naos* sistrum of Hathor, serve for theurgic ascent. The Hathorian musicians and dancers imitate the rhythms of cosmogony.

The concept of the Eye is crucial for ritual activities which carry the paradoxical idea of "sober drunkenness" represented by the union of Maat and Hathor, order and joyful ecstasy. A. Roberts argues that as the *Iret*-Eye, Hathor (Lady of the Sycamore Tree, Cow of Gold) also acts as the agent of Ra's activity. *Iret* means both "eye" and "doer"; therefore "the solar gaze becomes an activity as the eye – the instrument of divine energy and power – is projected out into the world".⁴⁰ In her form of Sekhmet she is the divine *shakti* of Ptah, thereby constituting the triad of Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum (or Imhotep).

The ancient mimetic practices and sacred rites frequently follow the "dramatic" patterns of divine procession and return, dismembering and reintegration, as in the famous rope trick, described in *Jataka* IV.324, where the body of the performer, who climbs up by the thread, is cut to pieces and then put together and animated again. The thread symbolizes the sun ray and the spirit of breath.

In the archetypal realm, light, life, and sound constitute a sort of unity which is revealed by "name" (skr. *nama*, eg. *ren*), an equivalent of the noetic Form. The eternal name as noumenon is related to the sensible form (skr. *rupa*, eg. *dt*; *irv*) as the omniform deity (*imago imaginans*) is related to all created things (*imago imaginata*). The name of a thing constitutes its reality derived from the noumenal content of *nous*, the divine consciousness which is always tantamount to Light, Life, and Sound. Therefore creation, accomplished by the *beka* power, is performed by utterance of names formulated in the heart. And ritual is inseparable from the dynamics of cosmogony based on divine paradigms, names, and powers.

While employing the Avicennian or Scholastic terminology of “substance” and “essence” (with the important reminder that these terms are synonymous inasmuch as they mean the archetypal content of things), F. Schuon distinguishes 1) the discontinuous and static relationship between the symbol and its principal archetype, the Idea, or Paradigm (*eidōs*, viewed in its aspect of initial Norm) and 2) the continuous and dynamic relationship between the rite and its effect. The first relationship is described as “form-Essence”, the second as “accident-Substance”, maintaining that the accident is a “mode” of the Substance whereas the form is a “sign” of the Essence. Following this line of thought, F. Schuon argues that the divine symbol both “is God” and “is not God”: 1) it is “image” because it is manifestation (*proodos* in the Neoplatonic sense) and not Principle (*monē*, unparticipated and transcendent point of any theophany), and 2) it is a participating irradiation and liberating sacrament because it is *Atma* in *Maya* (etymologically, the word *atman* perhaps is connected with breath, spiration, life, hence – spirit). Therefore F. Schuon says:

“Every sacred symbol is an ‘enlightening form’ that invites to a ‘liberating rite’; the ‘form’ reveals the Essence to us, whereas the ‘rite’ leads back to the Substance; to the Substance we are, the only one that is. All this concerns, on the one hand sacred art, ‘liturgy’, and on the other hand the beauties of nature; it also concerns, with all the more reason, the symbolism of concepts and the rites of assimilation. Vision of the Essence is through the form, and return to the Substance by means of the rite. There is the visual symbol and the auditory symbol, then the acted symbol, all of which bring about the passage from the outward to the Inward, from the accident to the Substance, and thereby also the passage from the form to the Essence”.⁴¹

The initial archetypal realm which activates and coordinates all liberating rites of *epistrophe* (return to the source) or *anagoge* (ascent, *mirāj*) is equivalent to Being understood in the Neoplatonic sense. Like the primordial noetic triad of Heliopolitan cosmogony, the Procline intelligible Being and all its subsequent noetic manifestations have a definite triadic structure. Being is characterized by its unity, the power of this unity and the resulting mixture (*mikton*), the noetic existence itself (*autoousia*).

For Proclus, between two extremes there is a third term, an intermediary (*mesos*). The origin of the initial triad and the threefold structure of things lies, or rather stems, according to L. Siorvanes, from the fundamental polarity one and not-one.⁴² However, the threefold structure expresses only a simple mixture; therefore in most other cases there are at least two intermediaries between two extremes, each similar to its proximate end.

This rule of “similarity” is valid for all forms and levels of being, but the unfolding trains of intermediaries partake of unity and their number cannot regress to infinity. Proclus argues that every mixture has three

aspects: symmetry, truth, and beauty, correlated with 1) Being’s unity (Ptah-Atum), 2) its power (Sekhmet, “the powerful one”, depicted as lioness crowned with a cobra, the burning Eye of Ra) and 3) existence of Being itself (Nefertum, Lord of Perfumes and Beauty, coming forth from the primordial lotus, *seshen*).

Hence, the structure of unparticipated Being consists of Being-in-itself (*autoousia*), its power (*dunamis*), and its noetic intellect (*nous noetos*). The three aspects of unparticipated power, in its own respect, represent the transition from unity to plurality; therefore the “feminine” noetic existence of powers is regarded as Number-itself (*autoarithmos*). The nine members (the primordial Ennead) of Number constitute three triads.

The first one is measuring (*metretikos*) and consists of 1) the unity named “one” (*hen*) which is the cause of all unitary numbers (*beniaioi arithmoi*), 2) the power called “otherness” (*beterotes*) which is the cause of all productive numbers (*gennetikoi arithmoi*), 3) the participated characteristic of being (*on*) which is the cause of all real numbers (*ousiodeis arithmoi*). This triad is described as odd (*perissos*).

The second triad, described as even (*arthos*), is productive (*gennetikos*) and consists of 1) multiplying once, 2) multiplying twice, 3) multiplying thrice.

The third triad, described as all Number, is perfective (*teleiotikos*) and consists of 1) the odd multiplied by the odd, 2) the even multiplied by the even, 3) all combinations of odd and even.⁴³

The power of Being is sometimes called Truth-itself (*autoaletheia*) or Wisdom-itself (*autosophia*). The intellect of Being, as the third member of mixture, is called beautiful (*kalos*) or Beauty-itself (*autokallos*). The characteristics of Being (for each of its three members) are taken from the six passages of Platonic dialogues – therefore the whole Procline list of six triads is presented by L. J. Rosan as follows. The being, power, and activity of the unparticipated Being are respectively called:

1) one being (*hen on*), wholeness (*holotes*), one and being (*hen kai on*) on the basis of Plato’s *Parmenides* (142d);

2) being (*on*), whole (*holos*), the all (*pan*) on the basis of Plato’s *Sophist* (244);

3) prior to eternity (*proaionios*), eternity (*aion*), eternal (*aionios*) on the basis of the *Timaeus* (37d);

4) one (*hen*), eternity (*aion*), the paradigm (*paradeigma*) on the basis of the *Timaeus* (38bc);

5) good (*agathos*), wise (*sophos*), beautiful (*kalos*) on the basis of the *Phaedrus* (246e);

6) symmetry (*summetria*), truth (*aletheia*), beauty (*kalos*) on the basis of the *Philebus* (65a).⁴⁴

Most of these characteristics, however, are common to the Egyptian theologies, though they may constitute different triads and describe different gods or their manifestations.

7. Theurgic Assimilation to the Gods

The Neoplatonic cosmos, likened to the shrine (*agalma*) of the gods, is constituted by a series of oppositions – that of “form” and “matter”, analogous to the monad and dyad in numbers – held in harmony by the “rhythmic weaving” of the Demiurge. This Craftsman is equivalent to Neith-Hathor in her aspect of Mehet-urt, the Divine Cow, meaning “great-full” in the sense of the inexhaustible plenitude and totality of the cosmos. Taking the role of the Creator, Neith, the Lady of Sais, is equated to Tanen, “two-thirds masculine and one-third feminine” (*Esna* V.100), who produces seven primordial divine names from his-her mouth.

This cosmos is symbolically embodied in the form of the Egyptian temple which is an “image of the celestial *akhet*”, like the *akhet* (horizon, light-land) of the noetic realm.

Like the Egyptian temple rites and liturgies, the Neoplatonic theurgy consists in the soul’s *mimesis* of the cosmogonical act. Since cosmogony itself is staged as the sacred rite of the Demiurge, the entire manifested world can serve as the temple and receptacle of the gods. The temple is not only “heaven on earth”, a vessel of archetypal realities or the divine omnipresence in the world of phenomena, but at the same time “heaven and earth”, Nut and Geb, actualized in symbolic forms of sacred architecture. Both the cosmos and the temple are regarded as a society of the *theoi sunnaoi*, the hierarchy of deities who were worshipped in the chapels surrounding the holy of holies.

According to Iamblichus, the soul’s descent into the body is similar to an invitation to attend this cosmic liturgy: the theurgists, like the cultic statues of the gods, still living in their corporeal bodies can be united with the gods. Therefore the theurgical *praxis* is related to the descent of the divine into matter, the ritual collaboration with the gods in keeping the eternal cosmic liturgy, and the return to the solar barque of Ra. This “supernatural” mystery transcends all discursive reasoning and human understanding; therefore Iamblichus says:

“Intellectual understanding does not unite theurgists to the gods, for what would then prevent those who philosophize theoretically from having theurgic union with the gods? But this is not true; rather, it is the perfect accomplishment of ineffable acts, religiously performed and beyond all understanding (*he ton ergon arrheton kai huper pasan noesin*), and it is the power of ineffable symbols comprehended by the gods alone, that establishes theurgical union (*tois theois monon symbolon aphtbegketon dunamis epitithesi ten theourgiken henosin*). Thus we do not perform these acts intellectually; for then their efficacy would be intellectual and would depend on us, neither of which is true. In fact, these very syntheses (*ta sunthemata*), by themselves, perform their own work, without our thinking; and the ineffable power of the gods to whom these syntheses elevate us,

recognizes by itself its own images (*eikonas*). It is not awakened to this by our thinking” (*De myster.*96.13-97.9).

Chaldean and Neoplatonic theurgy employed sensible things and natural elements that preserved pure traces of their noetic sources (for instance, Proclus regarded the intellect of Being as a tetrad, consisting of a monad and triad: the former representing the ideal cause of the element fire, the latter – of air, water, and earth). Therefore theurgic rites may be compared to tuning an instrument by putting it into resonance with the singing cosmos itself, already tuned by the Demiurge.⁴⁵

In this sense, the task of the theurgist (as a servant of Hathor) is to remove *isefet*, disorder or imbalance, from the soul and cooperate with the healing, preserving, and elevating forces of truth (*maat*). This is accomplished through the energizing “work” of the *sunthemata* which functioned as receptacles for the divine *bau*.

Since earthly things cannot be deprived of participation in the divine, according to Iamblichus, those who practise the theurgic art (*he theourgike technē*) employ various syntheses, appropriate to different gods, and regard them as perfect receptacles, for example, stones, herbs, animals, aromatics, incantations, concoctions, and ineffable names of the gods. These sacred receptacles are even more numerous in Egyptian cultic practices and include coloured hieroglyphs, royal crowns, weapons, sceptres, thrones, alabaster bowls, baskets, Hathorian symbols such as *menat* and sistrum, papyrus and lotus flowers, reeds, fruits, scarabs, *wedjat* eye, *djed* pillar, jubilee pavilion (*sed*), shrines (such as *per-wer* and *per-nu*), trees (for example, sycamore, tamarisk, acacia, persea, etc.), mirrors, and so on.

The Egyptian texts always specify the kind of wood, metal, stone or perfume to be used for ritual purposes. The stone used for statues is called “sacred” (*djesert*). Aromatic substances and incense (*se-neter*) also function as divine *sunthemata* able to transform one into a divine state (*seneteri* meaning “to make divine”).

The theurgic *apotheosis* means not only union with the gods, but also acquiring a transformed perception and a golden body of light, which imitates the solar orb (*aten*) and may be compared to a star. The goddess Nut (Heaven) says in the *Pyramid Texts*:

“Open up your place in the sky among the stars of the sky, for you are the Lone Star, the companion of Hu; look down upon Osiris when he governs the spirits, for you stand far off from him, you are not among them and you shall not be among them” (*PT* 245).

Another text assures the pharaoh that the doors of the starry sky are opened to him and he is one of the gods:

“Your scent is as their scent, your sweat is as the sweat of the Two Enneads, you appear in the royal hood, your hand grasps the sceptre, your fist grips on the mace... for you belong to the stars who surround Ra, who

are before the Morning Star, you are born in your months as the moon... the Imperishable Stars follow you. Make yourself ready until Ra comes that you may be pure when you ascend to Ra..." (PT 412).

The theurgic immortalization of the soul, realized by the Neoplatonists in hieratic rites (also using immaterial symbols, geometric forms, numbers) and visualized as a sphere, the luminous "starry body" (since the vehicle of the soul in her circular movement is assimilated to *Nous*), is viewed as the recovery of one's original celestial state.

8. Deification through the Eye of Horus

The restoration of the soul's noetic perfection is symbolized by the restoration of the Eye. Therefore the Eye of Ra (from which humankind originated as an image) is one of the main theurgic paradigms and symbols, rich in metaphysical meaning. This is the reason why the pharaoh is "a screeching falcon who flies round the Eye of Horus" (PT 689). His own eyes appear as the Night-barque and the Day-barque of Ra (PT 670).

To provide one with the intact Eye of Horus, great of *heka*, means to divinize and resurrect him in the archetypal realm of Ra. The *Pyramid Texts* argue that the pharaoh (or the initiate) is censed with the Eye of Horus and thus made divine because of this Eye (PT 741) on which Horus has placed a golden collar (PT 742):

"Atum summons me to the sky, and I take the Eye of Horus to him. I am the son of Khnum... Long may this word be in your sight, O Ra; hear it... Open up my road..." (PT 524).

"The Eye of Horus gleams upon the wing of Thoth on the left-hand side of the ladder of the god. O men, a serpent is bound for the sky, but I am the Eye of Horus; this is obstructed in every place where it is, but I take my departure as the Eye of Horus. Desire that I should come among you, O my brethren the gods; rejoice at meeting me, O my brethren the gods, just as Horus rejoiced at meeting his Eye when his Eye was given to him in the presence of his father Geb" (PT 478).

The restoration of the Eye may be described in terms of purification, integration, and union. The restored noetic plenitude is a solar "rebirth" in the realm of *akhu*, therefore Iamblichus regards catharsis as a process which integrates the multiplicity into its intelligible unity and consists of 1) withdrawal (*aphairesis*) from alien things, 2) restoration of one's own essence (*apodosis tes oikeias ousias*), 3) perfection (*teleiotes*), 4) fullness (*apoplerosis*); 5) independence (*autarkeia*) from passion, 6) ascent to the creative cause (*anodos epi ten gennesamenen aitian*), 7) conjunction of parts with wholes (*sunaphe pros ta hola ton meron*), and 8) the contribution from wholes to the parts of power, life, and *energeia* (Stob. I.455.25-456.4). Thus the performance of theurgic ritual follows the rhythms of

manifestation and reintegration, that is, the soul's path to demiurgy and its restoration after it has bathed again with Ra in the Lake of Rushes and uttered:

"See me, O Ra; recognize me, O Ra. I belong to those that know you, so know me" (PT 311).

Hence, by imitating the order of the gods, the soul restores its own Ra-nature by taking on "the shape of the god" (*to ton theon schema: De myster.65.4*).⁴⁶

The whole Eye is anterior to its parts as the wholeness "prior to its parts" (*pro ton meron*), is "made up of parts" (*ex ton meron*), and represents the wholeness "within the part" (*en to meri*). Therefore the theurgic rite ought to embrace all orders of the gods in an appropriate way, thereby restoring the Eye as the corporeal, psychic, and noetic wholeness which leads to the ineffability of the One, the hidden Eye of the Serpent. When this Eye is opened at the dawn of noetic creation, the golden Scarab appears as Atum-Ra.

In the ascending rite, the soul is divinized because the thesiurgic ritual, performed by the initiate, tries to imitate divine "gestures" and celestial "dances". Accordingly, the soul itself becomes the *sunthema* which is filled with a divine presence. The role of matter consists in mirroring the condition of the soul: it reveals itself as purified and transformed when the soul realizes the overwhelming divine presence and is identified with the golden child Nefertum, seated in a lotus flower at the nostrils of Ra. As Iamblichus pointed out, mud symbolizes the material principle which functions as the foundation to nourish the divine lotus (*De myster.250.13-252.11*) Its circular throne can serve as a place where the soul is reborn, becoming like the solar Ra. The Horus-like pharaoh, being at once the chief mystagogue and the initiate, says:

"I appear as Nefertum, as the lotus-bloom which is at the nose of Ra" (PT 249).

"I have grasped your tail (or Ra in bull-shape) for myself, for I am a god and the son of god, I am a flower which has issued from the Nile, a golden flower which has issued from Iseion" (PT 334).

"I live on that whereon Shu lives, I eat of that whereof Tefnut eats" (PT 339).

"O Ra... I am you and you are I... if you shine in me, I will shine in you... for I am that Eye of yours which is on the horns of Hathor, which turns back the years from me; I spend the night and am conceived and born every day" (PT 405).

To be born every day (though a "day" also may be understood as a cycle of all manifestation until it is finally reabsorbed into the depths of Nun, as it is described in the *Book of Two Ways*) means to participate in demiurgic activity, being identical either to the Demiurge himself, or to the members of his solar barque. This claim is not the claim of a separate individual entity, but that of *Logos* (the Pharaoh as an archetype, the son of

Ra, *al-insan al-kamil* of the Sufis) who performs the cosmic rites as the sole Thaumaturgus.

9. Spiritual Teachers and Sacred Masters

The theurgic tradition is by no means restricted to its Neoplatonic branch, that which is largely based on the Chaldean oracles and the metaphysical exegesis of Plato, Orpheus, and Homer. Damascius, for instance, maintained that theurgic practices stem from Egyptian cultic stock.

In late antiquity, the forced decline of Egyptian temples under the Roman administration and Christian intolerance determined the general turning to oracle cults, prophetic figures, and local images that required a minimum of priestly services. The priests themselves shifted their realm of primary authority from temple liturgy to a role as esoteric philosophers and ritual experts. In a sense, they hellenized and, at the same time, continued the ancient tradition of *medu neter*, the writings of Thoth. The chains of initiation were maintained by various religious associations and mortuary guilds.

The lector priests often functioned as embalmers through the early Roman period; therefore temple traditions were maintained by *nekrotophoi*, "corpse-bearers". A mortuary guild in Kysis was still alive in early 4th century A.D., similar to a corporation of ironworkers who were making annual pilgrimages from Hermonthis to the Hatshepsut temple for a ritual banquet and sacrifice, or like associations (*sunodoi, klíneis*) of priests devoted to the Blemmye god Mandulis, that were active in the 5th century A.D., during the lifetime of Proclus. However, under Christian dominion, the miniature models of temples and the hidden domestic altars of the priests replaced the actual temples. According to D. Frankfurter:

"These domestic priests' altars project a secrecy and concentric ritual holiness traditionally associated with established temples; but in their availability to the eyes of devotees and service for special rites the altars carry not only an exoteric familiarity but even a mark of status and authority for the hierophant who assembled the altar".⁴⁷

The oracular function passed to seers and pious philosophers. They became prophetic figures and ritual experts who diminished the scope of sacred rites and shifted the emphasis from temple-based rituals to those concerned with amulets and domestic altars, blessings and curses, healing and protective spells, as well as secret initiations. During Roman times, Egypt already became internationally famous as the land of "magicians" and spiritual masters. It was regarded as "a landscape of gurus ready to teach and initiate Roman youths in all the esoteric mysteries and 'philosophies' they might yearn for or imagine", as D. Frankfurter pointed out.⁴⁸

Owing to changing historical and social circumstances, a great number of Egyptian priests and mystagogues gained independence from particular temples and cultic service, "becoming a kind of extended fraternity of sacred masters under the aegis of Thoth".⁴⁹ They were the bearers of ritual *heka* power (*mageia*) and, in some cases, even joined the Neoplatonic circles of those who continued the Iamblichean and Procline chains of transmission in Egypt.

In Graeco-Egyptian tradition, the pharaoh Nechepso is regarded as a sage, stargazer, and designer of amulets (a kind of traditional *sunthemata*). Galen, discussing the properties of a green jasper stone, says:

"Some also set it in a ring and engrave on it the radiant serpent, just as King Nechepso prescribed in his fourteenth book" (*De simpl.* X.19).

The pharaoh Nechepso is imagined as a recipient of revelatory epistles from the sage and priest Petosiris. Firmicus Maternus claims transcribing "all that Hermes and Anubis have revealed to Asclepius, all that Petosiris and Nechepso have set out in detail, all that Abraham, Orpheus and Kritodemus have written" (*Math.* IV). The text, dated A.D.137-138, speaks of the revelatory chains as follows:

"After examination of many books as they have been handed down to us from ancient wise men, that is, the Chaldeans, and Petosiris, and, especially, king Necheus (Nechepso), just as they themselves consulted with our Lord Hermes and Asclepius, that is, Imouthes, son of Hephaistos" (*Pap. Salt/Louvre* 2342).

Nechepso is credited with knowledge of the affinities of stones and plants with the stars: during a nocturnal *mi'raj*, or *anabasis eis ouranou*, he had ascended through the air (*pros aera*) and heard a heavenly voice (*Nechepsonis et Petosiridis*, fr.1) – a revelatory discourse on the music of the spheres, as W. Burkert maintains.⁵⁰ Petosiris also had journeyed with gods and angels, and a letter from Nephosis to Pharaoh Psammetichus even offers a theurgic procedure for self-divinization by uniting the initiate with the sun (*Pap. Graecae Magicae* IV.155-285). The so-called *Mithras Liturgy* (thus incorrectly labelled by Albrecht Dieterich) deals with the ritual and experience of immortalization (*apathanatismos*), including descriptions of breathing techniques, amulets and ineffable words of power (*hekan*). While depicting a liturgical mystery for the ascent of the soul through seven stages, the text instructs:

"Draw in breath from the rays, drawing up three times as much as you can, and you will see yourself being lifted up and ascending to the height, so that you seem to be in midair. ... you will see all immortal things... will see the divine order of the skies: the presiding gods rising into heaven, courses of the visible gods will appear through the disk of god, my father... you will see many five-pronged stars coming forth from the disk... And when the disk is open, you will see the fireless circle, and the fiery doors shut tight. At once close your eyes and recite the following

prayer... invoke the immortal names... Then open your eyes, and you will see the doors open and the world of the gods which is within the doors... the rays will turn toward you; look at the centre of them... you will see a youthful God, beautiful in appearance, with fiery hair, and in a white tunic and a scarlet cloak, and wearing a fiery crown... Helios, the Lord of heaven and earth, God of Gods..." (*Mithras Liturgy* 540-640).⁵¹

10. Radiant Power of Names and Flight to the Throne

The autobiography of Thessalos (2nd century A.D.), couched in the form of a letter to a king from the magician, describes the communication with the deity in a place, specially prepared by the Theban priest in Upper Egypt. Thessalos asks to see Asclepius (Imhotep) "alone, face to face", sitting on a chair opposite a throne on which the deity, invoked with "powerful mysterious words", manifests itself. According to J. Z. Smith, the formula *monos pros monon* is related to the older formula *monos mono*, meaning "private" or "secret".⁵²

An experience of divine epiphany initially is both an outer and inner experience in the holy of holies of the Egyptian temple, standing before the statue of the deity or contemplating the first rays of the rising sun. Therefore the Plotinian ascent, described as "the flight of the alone to the alone" (*phuge monon pros monon*; *Enn.* IV.9.11), is originally a symbolic and initiatory path through the temple to the hidden chamber where the throne of the deity stands.

The journey through the Netherworld (Duat, the temple of Osiris and the body of Nut) is modelled on the same pattern which may also be depicted as a vertical ascent to the realm of Ra in order to see the divine face and be united with it. The king ascends to Ra's seat because his "face is that of falcons", and the "face of the god is open" to him, where he sits on the great throne beside the god (*PT* 271).

Though arranged and depicted in accord with the established genre of mythical paradigms and sacramental formalism, this ascent (*anodos*) is not an event of physical displacement and chronology, but rather elevation through the symbols (like the reading of the ontological text in reverse, moving from one point of identity to another, and finally reaching the innermost noetic centre), thereby summarizing the revealed divine presence and realizing essential union with the Principle. The Egyptian hieratic ascent, whose uplifting force is tied to the intelligible interpretation of symbols (by elevating to noetic truth: *De Myster.* 250.13-18), is not accomplished simply by rituals or sacred symbols themselves, but also by the accompanying knowledge, understanding, and illumination.

The ascent (*anagoge*) and reunification with or return to the divine is a kind of "hermeneutical clarification" or "presentation" of the "radiant power" (*akhu*) of words and images in the realm of semiotics and iconography. "I ascend to the sky among the gods, I bring and repeat the word of the gods", says the "deceased" (hierophant) who "knows the names" and is initiated into the sacramental meaning and radiant power of divine speech. This radiant power, *akhu*, reveals the metaphysical sphere of meaning that is imposed on sensible reality in a manner that explains it and directs it towards the intelligible source. Likewise the Iamblichean *noera theoria*, the intellectual interpretation or the "more epoptic" (*epoptikoteron*) approach, consists in identifying the characteristics of being discrete or continuous as aspects of the power of the One, active at every level of reality. However, according to J. Assmann:

"Instead of supplying definitions, Egyptians would state names, that is, the sacred and secret names of things and actions that the priests had to know to exercise the radiant power of the words. A highly characteristic, and certainly early, form of handing down these names is the commentary ('this means'), as exemplified by the Ramesseum Papyrus, which records knowledge that unfolds on two levels: that of appearances and that of meanings, or names".⁵³

The importance of god-given names which constitute manifested reality and may be related to the demiurgic Logos (Hu) is emphasized in Proclus' Commentary on the *Cratylus* of Plato. While launching into a discussion on the power of names, Proclus distinguishes two views prevalent among the ancients: 1) some take the view that the gods transcend all names which begin at the level of daimons; 2) others think that the names are only one type of *sunthemata* which the gods have sown at all levels of being. Since names are symbols correlated with noetic realities, there are correct names that constitute the dynamic meta-structure of reality (as a web of *agalmata phoneenta*, "vocal images" of the gods, i.e., the phonetic correlates of images which represent in words what the *sunthemata* sown by the gods represent in the cosmos) and through them one has access to the gods.

Like the Chaldeans, Indians, and Hellenes, the Egyptians have a revealed vocabulary suitable to the theurgic purpose of elevation. As J. Dillon explains, theurgy teaches us how to represent the structure of symbols and syntheses in the physical world by means of inarticulate utterances (*adiarthrototi ekphoneseis*; *In Crat.* LXII. p.31,27 Pasquali).⁵⁴ Being a sort of *agalmata* (such as properly constructed and animated statues), the mantric strings of syllables and vowels (*asema onomata*) transmit divine power. However, they are surpassed by divine names proper which stem from the intelligible realm and are used to call upon the gods. Like the divine names employed in the Sufi *dbiker*, they function as a means of ascent and union.

For the Egyptians, the name (*ren*) represents an essential relationship between the name and the named. Therefore everything that can be extracted from the name reveals something about the essence of the named, and everything said about the archetypal structure, the essence of a god, of a human being or of any manifested thing, is contained in its name.

11. Theurgic Union with the Divine Principle

Unity within divine Intellect is derived from the One's presence which is ineffable and transcends the realm of "uttered" noetic gods. For this reason Plotinus thinks that union with the One (which is possible when the soul has already been "deconstructed" and assimilated with *Nous*, i.e., when the soul re-establishes its initial Ra-nature) cannot be achieved by ritual, though purification and dialectic will lead upwards, due to the providentially arranged structure of the cosmos allowing this possibility. But the supreme goal is "outside the control of even the noblest philosopher", as J. M. Rist pointed out.⁵⁵

In this respect, one should remember that the Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hermeias (5th century A.D.) discussed the distinction between 1) *he endon telestike*, "internal telestic art", which makes our soul perfect and complete in all its powers, and 2) *he exo telestike*, "external telestic art", which helps to free our soul and body from troubling difficulties and furnishes us with a happy passage through life, clearly regarded as the process of purification (*katharmoi*) and rites (*teletai*) that set us among the gods (*In Phaedr.* 96.2-8; 97.23ff).

The external *telestike* is further described as *anthropike kai technike telestike*, "human and technical telestic", which depends on the skill of the priests and is used in the cult of statues (*peri tas therapeias ton agalmaton*), following the established law (*nomos*) of the city and native traditional customs. This *he technike telestike* and the related hieratic life provide assistance to pious citizens by means of sacrifices, prayers, incantations and rites, involving plants and stones (*ibid.*, 99.14-19; 165.14-15).

Internal theurgy, or inspired telestic, makes the soul intellectually active according to all its powers which, ultimately, are divine powers and attributes. A. Sheppard tries to convince us that Proclus, following his master Syrianus, divided theurgy into three types: the third kind of telestic (also described as *theia philosophia*, divine philosophy) serving to accomplish mystical union.⁵⁶

Proclus indeed subdivides the "ritual" of return into stages: 1) just as by soul we attain likeness to Soul (the realm of Osiris and Nut), and 2) by heart-intellect to the noetic world (the realm of Ra and his Eye, Hathor), so 3) it is by "the flower of intellect" (*anthos nou*), by our *henosis* (unity), we

attain union with the One or rather with the Father of the Intelligible Triad, if the supreme union with the One itself is reserved for "the flower of the whole soul". Proclus partly follows Porphyry who offered some kind of identification between 1) the *huparxis* in man and 2) the *huparxis* that is the One. But Proclus cannot accept that Porphyry's *huparxis* (called Father by the *Chaldean Oracles*) is the supreme Principle in the transcendent hierarchy.

The threefold division of theurgy and the designation of its lower ritualistic aspect as "merely skilful" is not correct, because every ritual has its inner dimension through which the human *huparxis* can be united with the divine *huparxis*. All *sunthemata*, notwithstanding the level of their ritual taxonomy, provide a direct access to the divine. Only human capacities differ; therefore each man attends to his sacrifice according to what he is and cannot surpass the proper measure.

In order to reach the One, the soul must be assimilated to the Whole (*pan*) by honouring all the gods, including the material ones, whose influence is universal and works on the principle of like to like (*di' homoioteta*: *De myster.* 193.18-19). In monistic metaphysics, "materiality is created out of substantiality", as Iamblichus says, speaking about the Egyptian tradition (*paradosis*) from which Plato derived his doctrine of matter (Proclus *In Tim.* 117d, L386.8). Therefore matter serves as the index (*deigma*) of divine presence, or as the mirror that reflects the spiritual condition of the soul.

Proclus maintains that the telestic rites obliterate all stains produced by generation. This obliteration is accomplished through the "divine fire" (*dia tou theion puras*), i.e., through the Flame of Gold, the Eye of Ra, the fiery Hathor-Sekhmet. Therefore Heracles, being purified through the telestic art, obtains a perfect restoration to the gods (*eis tous theous apokatastasios*). Accordingly, he serves as a model both for 1) philosophy and 2) theurgy, which is called *theia philosophia*, greater than all human virtue and knowledge.

Three ways of ascending to the divine are described by Proclus: 1) *erotike mania*, "erotic madness" – such as that which possessed Majnun and the Sufi martyr al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (A.D. 858-922) – enables the ascent through love to divine beauty, 2) *theia philosophia* enables the ascent through truth to divine wisdom, and 3) *theourgike dunamis*, the grace-bringing power, enables the ascent through faith to divine goodness. A. Sheppard thinks that all three ways mean the same thing and refer to mystical union.⁵⁷

In fact, the Egyptian formulation which affirms "One is All", implies that unity with the deity may be accomplished at any level of divine manifestation, thus paradoxically confirming the single Principle behind the millions of his faces, masks, and body-members, moving from multiplicity to the supreme and hidden Oneness, to the *deus absconditus*

whose manifestations (*bau*), irradiations, names, symbols, images, receptacles, reflections, and shadows are all deities, souls, and things. The ascending hierophant may be identified with the different portions of ontological text, at every point of *anamnesis* revealing the particular divine *eidos*, peculiar to that level, and, by recognizing and naming every cosmogonical entity, to "be united with the gods in On" (PT 617). Through Horus the Uniter he realizes himself as the essence of all the gods and says:

"I am the primeval hill of the land in the midst of the water" (PT 484).

When the ascending pharaoh presents himself to Shu as the son of Atum, Shu confirms this claim and says:

"You are the eldest son of Atum, his first-born; Atum has spat you out from his mouth in your name of Shu" (PT 660).

Who then is Shu? And does the "soul" still remain the same ascending soul, when it returns to the mouth of Atum "in his name of Shu"? Only the generic arrangement of ranks and the dynamic play of masks and functions are present. Finally, as it is attested in the *Book of Two Ways*, the ascending ba (such as the Sufi martyr al-Hallaj who proclaims the supreme unity, *tawhid*, by saying *ana'l-Haqq*, "I am God") may pronounce the theurgic statements of identity, for instance:

"I am *sahu* of Ra, the Lord of Maat... I am Ra" (CT 1034/5).

In this case, Ra himself confirms his own identity through the rite of *anamnesis*, performed by the soul which "disappears" as a separate entity and is assimilated into the "Great-name who made his light" (CT 1082/53). The "deceased" initiate, as a forever living spirit, is no longer in any sense "deceased" when Atum in him discovers himself as Atum and says:

"I am Atum" (CT 1063/34).

The mystical union (*benosis*) with the One is stated in such paradigmatic formulations as "I am Nun, Lord of Darkness" (CT 1132/2), or "I am [myself]" (CT 1142/15).

12. Intellect of the Father and His Cosmic Drama

Neoplatonic theurgy, itself being a hermeneutically refined version of ancient anagogic rites, is possible only in a kind of text-like symbolic "world" which is "full of gods" and is similar (*homoiotatos*) to the archetypal realm, the Essential Living Being (*autozoon*) of Platonists. The animated and visible universe is "animated" because it imitates the invisible completeness and brightness of the Essential Living Being. All living beings unitarily and generically are parts of this *autozoon* and they attain fulfilment under the Essential Living Being according to the multiplicities and heads contained in them.

Since the noetic *autozoon* encompasses all those genera that come after it (and all things proceed from the intelligible realm), it is regarded both as 1) a whole before its parts and as 2) a primary principle of causation which brings to completion all things from within itself. Therefore Iamblichus asks: How would any part of the All be completely devoid of God? And how would any place survive entirely unprotected by the superior ones? (Proclus *In Tim.* I.145.5). Damascius raises almost the same question:

"Are then all the elements which are in the universe also within us, and all that are in us also in the universe?" (*In Phileb.* 130.63)

The proper answer may be that "all things are everywhere, but in different modes in different places" (*panta einai pantachou legontes, allos mentoi kai allos*: *ibid.*). According to Proclus, all the causes share in each other and are in each, therefore in a certain sense the Paradigm of the universe (*to paradeigma tou pantos*) is encompassed by the Demiurge (*In Tim.* I.336.16). In this respect, Iamblichus says:

"Real existence and the beginning of created things and the noetic paradigms of the cosmos (*ten ontos ousin kai ton gignomenon archen kai ta noeta tou kosmou*), which we term the noetic cosmos, and such causes as we declare to pre-exist all things in Nature, all these things the Demiurge-God whom we are now seeking gathers into one and holds within himself" (Procl. *In Tim.* I.307.14).

Like the Egyptian priests, the Neoplatonists discerned different levels of demiurgic activity presided over by different creators, for instance, 1) the transcendent Father (*ho pater ton demiourgon*), 2) the Heavenly Demiurge, 3) the sublunary, genesiurgic Demiurge. The sublunary Demiurge may be interpreted as Hephaistos (Ptah), or the whole triad may be identified with Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto respectively. Thus the first primeval creator (*protos ton demiourgon*) is distinguished from the middle or second creator (*ho mesos demiourgos*) and the third creator (*ho tritos demiourgos*), who co-operates with the creative activity of the second (Procl. *In Tim.* I.74.15-16).

Hermes is regarded as the angelic intellection (*angelike noesis*) of the Father. This *noesis*, equivalent to the *logos* of the Father, is "geometric" and, therefore, creates the basis of the three-dimensional world. The Hermaic *logos* is analogous to the script transmitted by Thoth. Since Ptah (sometimes viewed as the supreme Demiurge) is the god of hieroglyphs, who creates them by inventing the forms and names of everything, Thoth simply writes them down. Therefore the world-creating words and hieroglyphs are viewed as "everything which Ptah has created and which Thoth has written down". The ontological structure of reality is hieroglyphic and readable. The writing practised by the priests only embodies what is already presented in the realm of noetic paradigms and implicit in the structure of manifestation. According to J. Assmann:⁵⁸

"It is a kind of Platonism. Plato interprets the visible world as the infinite material reproduction of a finite set of immutable ideas. The Egyptians interpreted the visible world as a kind of infinitely ongoing production which very faithfully follows an original finite set of types or models. And this same set is also represented by the hieroglyphic system. The hieroglyphs reproduce the world of things, and the world of things can be viewed as a world/word of signs. To the hieroglyphic mind, things and signs are interchangeable. It was this way of world-making that made Egyptian wisdom so attractive to the Neoplatonists of Late Antiquity..."⁵⁸

Iamblichus maintained (following Pythagoras in this respect) that the lines by which the gods proceed down are symbolized by Prometheus, equated to *pronoia* (providence). And the routes of their return upwards into the noetic realm are symbolized by Epimetheus, whose name means *epistrophe eis to noeton*, "reversion to the intelligible sphere" (Damascius *In Phileb.* 57.29).

Proclus provides a different interpretation: to him Prometheus represents the Circle of the Same within us, and Epimetheus the irrational nature which bounds it and prevents us from making the spiritual ascent (*In Tim.* 346.12ff). In both cases, the double circle of manifestation and reintegration constitutes the ontological, mythological, and semantic frame for the ritual activities which follow the rhythms of the cosmos.

Both the descent and ascent of the soul is a rite, like the daily solar circuit of Ra and the circular movement of the Year. Since human beings imitate archetypal patterns, translated into the language of sacred calendar and mythology, their life is ordered, ritualized, and dramatized by demiurgic forces turned into cultural forms. Only those events and actions that confirm the regular structure of the Whole and imitate the life of the gods are considered to be real, important, and worthy of mention, at least until the New Kingdom when the theology of divine will has emerged. But even in the realm of personal devotion, only typical, regular and predictable patterns, integrated into the ritual fabric of cosmic liturgy, are valued, not some contingent, accidental, and deviant characteristics.

A daily drama of the cosmic ritual, performed by the circuit of Ra, stands as the symbolic paradigm for all aspects and levels of the ongoing life-process, covering not only the pursuits of royal politics, economics, and jurisprudence, but also various types of esoteric initiations and "philosophies". The mystery of solar rebirth and the circuit of Ra are models for the pious life on earth and for spiritual initiation, aimed at the alchemical transformation of the soul, in the realm of Osiris.

The "solar discourse" provided a kind of sacramental interpretation, or metaphysical hermeneutics, able to translate invisible paradigms – presented in visible icons of the sun's circuit – into a design for human living and for departing to the beautiful West. Thus the circuit of the sun is stretched out as the sacred text and constitutes a series of symbolic

pictures that function on different levels of interpretation, both transcendent and immanent. In its mythological aspect of cosmic and social exegesis, the circuit affirms order over chaos, intellect over irrational passion, Ra over the snake Apep, thereby modelling the governmental and political dimension of sacred kingship, itself regarded as a multi-structured soteriological ship, whose light-bearing helmsman (pharaoh) triumphs over darkness and is united with his Father and all the gods.

Cosmic life at all levels reflects the conflict of Horus and Seth, resolved into transcendent union by the wisdom of Thoth. By realizing the permanent threat of disorder (*isefet*), the Egyptians tried to prevent any deviation and improvisation, while maintaining that an accurate ritual repetition can counter decline and decay, thus safeguarding links with the noetic realm and sustaining cosmic life itself. Rites and recitations were based on an exact mimesis of divine archetypes, projected into the cosmic process of cyclical recurrence. Their esoteric function consisted in elevating to first principles, leading from multiplicity to unity.

Finally, supreme unity transcends Eternal Recurrence (*neheb*) kept in motion by the macrocosmic rites of the Demiurge, imitated by the pharaoh-priest in the sphere of cult. Since the noetic realm, ultimately, may be reduced to the sole divine Thaumaturgus, both opinions, namely, 1) that souls which have attained perfection (*teleos apokathistamena*) in the noetic realm are exempt from descent and 2) that they must descend again, at least as some kind of avatars, are paradoxically both true at the same time.

However, notwithstanding monistic unity or strictly metaphysical oneness, the cosmos partakes of conflict by reason of the variety of its powers. Therefore the pharaoh and every priest, or administrator, who perform the *maat*-sustaining and *akh*-revealing rites, are viewed as warriors involved in the cosmic game. According to Proclus, paraphrasing Iamblichus:

"For since all things derive both from the One and from the Dyad after the One and are united in a way with each other, and have been allotted an antithetical nature, so also in the major categories of Being there is a certain antithesis of the Same as against the Other, and of Motion as opposed to Rest, and since all things that are in the cosmos partake of these classes, it would indeed be suitable to consider the conflict as extending through all things" (*In Tim.* I.78.6ff).

However, as A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out, the Devas and Asuras, powers of Light and Darkness, although distinct and opposite in operation, are in essence consubstantial: their distinction is a matter of orientation and transformation, but not of essence.⁵⁹ The war waged between Ra and Apep, Horus and Seth, may be interpreted, following Iamblichus, as that faculty which utterly destroys the unordered and irregular and which promotes the wisdom of immaterial and transcendent

intellection (Procl. *In Tim.* I.165.16). Therefore the warlike mode of life presided over by Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is “philosophical” in the sense of the great *jihad* – *al-jihad al-akbar* of the Sufis.

The hierarchy of divine forces constitutes a single theophany, though differentiated into levels and classes, or rather “body-members” of the cosmic state. Therefore both Porphyry and Iamblichus tell us of cosmic priests, shepherds, hunters, farmers, and warriors. According to Proclus:

“The philosopher Porphyry lays down as follows: the priests are analogous to the archangels in heaven turned towards the gods of whom they are the messengers, and the warlike class is analogous to the daimons that descend into bodies, and the shepherds, again to those who are appointed over the herds of animals, whom they declare in secret teachings (*di’aporrbeton*), to be souls who have failed of human intelligence... and hunters are analogous to those who hunt down souls and enclose them in bodies... and the farmers are those given charge over the crops” (*In Tim.* I.152.12ff).

Iamblichus criticizes the theories of Porphyry as “being neither good Platonism, nor true” (*oute Platonikos oute alethos*). As it is asserted by Proclus:

“Having made these criticisms, he (Iamblichus) establishes the priests as analogous through their similarity to all the secondary essences and powers, such as honour and serve the causes prior to themselves, and the shepherds to all those (beings) in the cosmos that have been allotted dominion over that life which inclines towards the body and over the irrational powers, and which arrange these in order, and the hunters to the general powers, which order the secondary powers by means of their search for Being, and the farmers to those who bring about the efficacy of those seeds which are borne down from heaven to earth, and the warriors to those who overthrow all that is godless, and make the divine to triumph” (*In Tim.* I.152.28).

13. Elevating Powers in the Pharaonic State-Body

The multi-dimensional cosmos, like the gigantic theatre of descent and ascent, of the eternal “divine comedy”, may be crossed through and deconstructed by employing instruments provided by the Demiurge himself who bestows true love, that is, love of wisdom, to men and guides them by awakening the epistropic forces that perform purifications, initiations, and telestic operations. Sacrifices and prayers are part of the way towards luminous self-knowledge. Therefore Iamblichus distinguishes three classes of prayer, in ascending order of perfection.⁶⁰

The first type is described as knowledge of all divine orders (*gnosis ton theon taxeon pason*) and concerns the approach (*sunagogos*) to the divine realm. The suppliant must know all these orders and their specific

attributes, i.e., must have a map, like the Egyptian initiate, before entering “the hidden place”, Amentet. The Egyptian map-making tradition is concerned with the archetypal range of reality and possible states of the soul (*ba*) through its Otherworldly travel when each psychic or spiritual state is experienced as an externalized environment.

The second type of prayer links us with the divine by sympathetic association, or similarity (*homoiosis pros to theion*) in matters of purity, education (*paideia*, which provides knowledge of how the right prayers are to be addressed to the right deities), and rank (*taxis*). In this case the gods send their gifts even before our requests are expressed. The efficacy of prayer is based on the teaching that all things proceed from the gods and remain in them at the same time. By means of ineffable symbols (*sumbola arrbeta*) the grace of the gods is actualized. As all things, which belong to various chains (*seirai*) of gods, experience manifestation, coming forth from initial principles, they also experience return (*epistrophe*), and to this *epistrophe* much is contributed by prayer.⁶¹

The third and highest type of prayer unites the immanent divine element (*to theion*) in us with divinity itself, and is described as *he arrbetos henosis*, unity beyond expression, establishing all power in the gods and completely integrating the soul in them by performance of the proper ritual acts (*bagisteia*). However, Iamblichus emphasizes that “it is impossible to participate individually in the universal orders of existence (*ton koinon taxeon*), but only in communion with the divine choir of those who, with intellects united (*homonoetikos*), experience a common uplift (*anagomenon*).” (Damascius *In Phileb.* 227.107).

In this respect, one should remember that any individualism and subjective personalism in the modern sense is excluded from Egyptian mystical life. The theurgic ascent is like an ecpyrosis which accomplishes the destruction of the “man” within us (*ton en hemin anthropon*). The soul is to be gradually transformed and assimilated to the universal hypostasis in order to participate in the eternal *epistrophe* and self-consciousness of the Intellect (i.e., of Ra himself). Nothing remains, except the perennial cosmogonical schema or the radiant noetic network of solar *bau* where any trace of separateness and human individuality is annihilated.

Plotinus regards different souls as different levels of consciousness. He distinguishes the shade of Heracles in Hades (who remembers all that he did in his life, since the mortal life belonged to the shade) from Heracles himself, assimilated with the gods:

“The higher soul ought to be happy to forget what it has received from the worse soul... The more it presses on towards the heights, the more it will forget, unless perhaps all its life, even here below, has been such that its memories are only of higher things; since here below too it is best to be detached from human concerns, and so necessarily from human memories” (*Enn.* IV.3.32).

While being assimilated to Ra, the soul embraces everything that exists, but, in fact, this is the unitary affirmation of Atum-Ra himself, of Being *par excellence*, not of certain particular and eventually “deconstructed” fragments of existence. Therefore, in the *Pyramid Texts*, only the pharaoh ascends to heaven and is united with first principles, because he, as the son of Ra, represents the whole creation and the whole of humanity, standing at its apex. In this sense, he is a prototype of the Christian *Logos*: nobody can ascend to the Father except through this pharaonic *Logos* and as this *Logos*. For this reason, the pharaoh is everybody’s *ka*, everybody’s divine Self and driving force.

The heart-guided individual is first integrated into the pharaonic state-body, as a participating member of this *imago dei*, of the Idea, that is, the Horus-king, who alone ascends to the supreme archetype. The State and immortality are inseparable (and this is, perhaps, the hidden meaning of Plato’s *politeia*); therefore the pharaoh, as the perfect cosmic *Anthropos* and the lord of burial presides over the means of salvation – the theurgy of stone and the way leading to an *akhet*, the threshold of Light. The Middle Kingdom texts emphasize the heart-intellect and the royal Self, for which all members of the state (itself viewed as the dismembered and reunited body of Osiris) must exchange their individual selves:

“Venerate the pharaoh in the inside of your bodies.
Pledge allegiance to His Majesty in your hearts.
He is Sia, who is in the hearts,
His eyes, they pierce every body.
He is Ra, thanks to whose beams, one sees,
An illuminator of the Two Lands, more than the sun...
The pharaoh is Ka, Hu is his mouth,
All things that exist are brought forth by him.
Bastet he is, who protects the Two Lands...
Sekhmet he is to him who violates his commandment”.⁶²

14. The Perfect Man who Slew the Lords

According to the *sutratman* doctrine, presented in Indian scriptures, all things are connected with the sun which is *atman* (spirit, intelligence, Atum-Ra) of all that is in motion or at rest. The sun strings all manifested entities and levels of being to himself on a thread (*sut্রে samavayate*), and this thread is the same as the Gale (*vayu, pneuma*, the breath of Shu). *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* declares:

“He who knows that thread and the Inward Ruler (*antaryaminam iti*), knows the Brahman, knows the worlds, knows the Devas, knows the Vedas, knows himself, knows all...” (*BU III.7.1-2*).

The soul of the sacrificer itself is food of the gods, because the sacrifice (death and transformation) defines the way by which the initiate

can ascend and enter the sun, thereby crossing over from mortality to immortality. Therefore the famous Egyptian “cannibal hymn” (*PT 273-274*), so named by 19th century puritans and positivists, who were devoid of any noetic insight or understanding of symbols, should be interpreted in the sacramental and theurgic sense, bearing in mind the real meaning of “food” in traditional ontologies, gnoseologies, and cultic practices. The hieratic knowledge is assimilated by “eating” and “drinking” it (sometimes in quite literal sense); therefore the process of eating represents transformation and unification: one’s belly, full of “magic” and knowledge, simply means the hidden inner dimension.

In the *Pyramid Texts*, the ascending pharaoh appears as a possessor of offerings, as the universal Sacrificer, who “eats men and lives on the gods”. Being like his Father Atum, who begot him, the pharaoh is the eternal *ba* “in company with Him whose name is hidden”. Thus the king, in his role of *pantheos*, is united with all manifested beings:

“As a god who lives on his fathers
And feeds on his mothers;
The pharaoh is a master of wisdom
Whose mother knows not his name” (*PT 273*).

He is explicitly described as an *imago dei*: “a sacred image, the most sacred of the sacred images of the Great One”, older than the oldest whom thousands serve. By swallowing all entities the king affirms himself as immanent possessor of all divine names and attributes, including their cosmic manifestations. Therefore the text says that he has swallowed the intelligence of every god; thereby his lifetime is eternity.

One could easily render this conception into Sufi terms and say that the pharaoh represents the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) whose eternal essence is the Muhammadan Reality (*haqiqa muhammadiyah*), or the Muhammadan Light (*nur muhammadi*), created out of God’s own Light. All living things derive life from him and all desiring souls are subject to his will, since the Perfect Man, also known as the Great Elixir, the Cosmos Reflecting Mirror, Guide, the Mighty Opium, is a manifestation of the archetypal Muhammadan Reality. This quality may be shared by many legendary prophets, sages, and avatars. According to the Central Asian Sufi ‘Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (13th century A.D.):

“This Perfect Man is always in this world and there is only one Perfect Man. This is because all creatures are like one person and the Perfect Man is the heart of that person and creatures cannot exist without a heart. There is not more than one heart, so there is not more than one Perfect Man in this world. There are many wise men in this world, but there is only one heart. Other people are in the process of perfection, each one has its own perfection”.

“There is no need for all humans to reach perfection. If all humans reached perfection, then the attributes, names and actions of this light would not be completely manifested, and the order of this world would

not exist. It is necessary for each person to have a level and be the locus of manifestation of an attribute. Each person has the preparedness for a task in order that the attributes, names and actions of this light become completely manifested and so that the order of the world exists".⁶³

Accordingly, the Pharaoh (likened to the Osirian *djed* pillar, *axis mundi*) is one of the distant metaphysical prototypes of the Hermetic and Sufi *Anthropos teleios*, God's caliph, who is established upon the Throne like Horus-Ra or Osiris-Ra. Nasafi continues:

"The alchemy that mankind performs is that he takes the soul of whatever he eats. He takes the select and quintessence of those things, that is, light is separated from darkness in such a way that light knows and sees itself as it is. This is not possible except in the Perfect Man... The Perfect Man completes this alchemy and completely separates light from darkness because light does not know or see itself in any other place and it sees and knows itself in the Perfect Man".⁶⁴

The divinized pharaoh "lives on the being of every god... even of those who come with their bodies full of *beka* from the Island of Fire", i.e., from the highest noetic sphere. The king "feeds on the lungs of the Wise Ones, and is satisfied with living on hearts and their *beka*", thereby becoming the master of all demiurgic, theurgic, and magic powers. Hence, all creative *beka* potencies, all souls and intellects are in the belly of the pharaoh who assumes a role analogous to that of Shiva-destroyer able to break the backbones of the gods, to take their hearts and crowns:

"It is Khons who slew the lords.

It is Shezmu (the god of wine-press) who cuts

Them up for the pharaoh

And who cooks for him a portion of them on his evening stones.

It is the pharaoh who eats their *beka*

And gulps down their spirits" (PT 273-274).

By using seemingly cruel images (not unlike the theomachies of Homer, defended by Proclus as having a certain esoteric meaning, if understood *kata ten aporrheton theorian*, according to the secret doctrine), this archaic "Stone Age" discourse describes the metaphysics of Atum and of his most sacred image, as well as the theurgic mystery of *anagoge*, portrayed as a tremendous myth, ritual, and cosmic drama. As J. Z. Smith pointed out, the incongruity of myth is not an error, but the very source of its power and an essential part of initiatory scenarios.⁶⁵

15. Theurgic Rites and Sacramental Theologies

This ritualized ascent represents not an individual case of subjective experience, but serves as a panentheistic model, or map, of reality, equated to the body of God. A Christian mystic of the Procline-Dionysian tradition essentially seeks the same sacred communion (*koinonia*) with

God, or the Cause of all, through participation in the sacraments of deification. The stylistic difference in rhetoric and theological details is of secondary importance: the uplifting may be accomplished by virtue of sacramental food, rites, and symbols; not only by symbols themselves, but also by their interpretation. Hence, the upward movement is the task of certain esoteric hermeneutics – directed by Thoth or the Holy Spirit – which leads through the sensible to the intelligible.

Iamblichus regarded theurgy as an essentially divine power which is manifest in certain traditional rites and sacrifices, including the Egyptian rituals, "since the Egyptians were the first to receive communication from the gods" (*De myster.* 258.4-5). In order to accomplish the noetic *apotheosis* and *henosis* (union) with the One, all the energies engaged in the soul's descent had to be re-engaged, transformed and ritualized into the anagogic energies of the gods. If the king represents all creation and stands for all human souls it means that the entire material and noetic cosmos must be swallowed so as to affirm his initial status as the all-inclusive Principle.

While employing the term "theurgy" to describe various sacramental activities, one should remember that even for Iamblichus *theourgia* is only one of a number of synonymous words. As A. Louth pointed out, all of them have more or less the same meaning and may be simply translated as "theurgy".⁶⁶ Among these synonymously used words are, for example, *mustagogia*, *hiera hagisteia*, *hierourgia*, *threskeia*, *hieratike technē*, *theosophia*, *he theia episteme*, i.e., the terms related to an initiation into the mysteries, spiritual guidance, celebration, sacred skill, divine wisdom (theosophy) and knowledge.

In Egypt, killing was strictly a state monopoly – the punitive force (*ba*) is symbolized by the flames of uraeus. The pharaoh as the all-inclusive *ba*, responsible for *maat*, is also the earthly image of the Demiurge. The royal image in the form of *ba* returns to its archetype. This idea became universalized after the collapse of the Old Kingdom (2670-2150 B.C.), when the initiatory way and the concept of *ba* were individualized to such an extent that, in principle, every man, symbolically assuming the role of the pharaoh (*imago dei*, both Horus and Osiris), may traverse the threshold into Duat as a winged soul, to pass the test of his heart on the Great Scales and ascend to the noetic realm.

The noetic realm itself is viewed as the ancestral "office" charged with maintaining the archetypal course of Ra and exercising eternal "creation" through life-giving power. This power has its prolongation in the ruling king, the golden Horus, the chief priest of the temple cult. All his activities are aimed at ensuring the proper rhythms of existence continue at the level of images. If these images deviate from their solar archetypes, the disorder and evil designs of enemies destroy the right theurgic relationship between the mythologized state and the community of gods.

According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, "the Vedic and Christian Eucharist alike preserve the values of cannibalism".⁶⁷ He thinks that very

little may be left of what we are accustomed to regard as spiritual values if all elements of prehistoric origin were to be substracted from the most intellectual forms of religious doctrine. This fact, however, does not mean that Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists were directly dependent on the already highly sophisticated *Pyramid Texts* or on some hypothetical rites of ascent (through the pillar of smoke, for instance) practised by Paleolithic man. The only thing we are sure about is that the theurgic synthesis (or rather re-adaptation of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Hellenic cult customs and metaphysical scenarios) accomplished by Iamblichus, who maintained the idea of continuous revelation, has relevance for the tradition of *philosophia perennis*. A. H. Armstrong says:

"I do not feel spiritually remote from Iamblichus when I light my candle at Chartres or Einsieden. This, combined, with an awareness that a good deal of what has to be said in criticism of theurgic theology can be applied to some utterances of Christian theologians, Protestant as well as Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, should safeguard us against any return to a patristic (that is to say sectarian and fanatical) judgement of theurgy".⁶⁸

A. H. Armstrong has in mind the Christian attacks against "pagan" theurgies, while at the same time imitating them and adapting them for Christian mystical theologies, sacramental liturgies, and sacred arts. P. Athanassiadi goes even further and says:

"Iamblichus' natural environment is, of course, the mystical dimension of Islam, as it developed from discussion in Sufi circles. ... their belief in the essential unity of the cosmos and in inspired revelation, and their constant effort towards achieving reunion with God are eminently Iamblichean themes, often expounded or pursued through methods which could well be described as theurgical."⁶⁹

The Athenian philosopher and theurgist Proclus, who "observed the Egyptian holy days more than the Egyptians themselves", according to Marinus (*Vita Procli* 19), belongs to the same category of sages. He believed that the true philosopher must be "the hierophant of the whole world in common" (*koine... tou holou kosmou hierophantes*: *ibid.*19).

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IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS AND NEOPLATONISM

1. Sacred Images and Idols

It has become habitual for students of Hellenic philosophy to ridicule the Neoplatonic *telestike* which sought to animate sacred images or to induce the presence of a god in an inanimate receptacle (*hupodoche*). The crusade against idolatry, recast in Biblical or positivist scientific language, is filtered through Reformation Protestant theology and idealized rationalism which found a new life in 18th century European Enlightenment. This zeal is directed not simply against supposed irrationalism and superstition (though such an impression is intentionally maintained, in spite of the fact that Protestant and other Western ideological beliefs, both religious and secular, may be regarded as equally fantastic), but against "Pagan" Neoplatonism in general and, especially, against the animation of images.

The classical example which is constantly provided even by those scholars who are otherwise quite sympathetic towards Neoplatonic metaphysics is that of Maximus, the spiritual master of Julianus. Similarly, just as Indian "idolatry" was treated as shameful by 19th century British educators, so Maximus is regarded with contempt because, according to Eunapius, he makes a statue of Hecate laugh and causes the torches in her hands to light up automatically (*Vita soph.*475).

For the later Hellenic Neoplatonists, divine images were not only symbols of the gods: they were filled with the divine presence. The ancient world is rich in testimonies about *statuas animatas sensu et spiritu plenas* (*Asclep.*24) – statues living and conscious, filled with the breath of life, which provide oracles and foretell the future, cause and cure disease, and do many other "mighty works". Such and similar results are achieved through sacred rites conducted in the temples, or by special inspirations, incubations, dreams, and visions. As the supreme God is the fashioner, begetter, irradiator, or imaginator, of the gods, so man (though indirectly) is the maker of the gods who dwell in temples, or rather of their material bodies, and, when they needed to be consecrated, sacralized, permeated by the divine and living Soul, or *pneuma*, and thus "animated" in the sacramental liturgical sense, found a way to enable theurgic communication with the divine.

The main argument against idolatry, raised by Jewish and Christian iconoclasts, consists in asserting that idols are mere works of human hands (*erga cheiron anthropon*). In no way can they be regarded as *theia erga*, divine works, based on the actions of the gods or their energies, irradiations and powers. Since theurgy intensifies the presence of the gods on earth, itself viewed as a god (i.e., a visible psycho-material

manifestation of the Egyptian Geb), or a temple, mediated through sacred rites, symbols, images and hieroglyphs, any attack against the power of "idols" is an attack against theurgy. There is no spirit in them (*ouk estin pneuma en autois*), no vital principle, *pneuma*, Egyptian *ka*, or Hindu *prana*. For the radicalized Hebrew Prophets, only Israel is a "statue" of Yahwe, or rather the living substitute for the cultic statue, since Yahwe mysteriously dwells in the seed of his nation and its history. To put it into Egyptian terms, he is the Lord of *kau* (pl. of *ka*, vital spirit, double).

The classicists who deal with late Hellenic philosophy sometimes forget that Neoplatonic theurgy is in many respects a continuation, restoration, or learned imitation of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern rituals, liturgies and spiritual techniques, surely reinterpreted according to the prevailing philosophical discourse of the time. And more than that. It requires very little hermeneutical effort (as Western rationalists and puritans maintain) for theurgy to be deduced from selected texts of the "divine" Plato himself and to be safely based on Pythagorean and Orphic wisdom. In this respect, animation of statues is inseparable from the Platonic theory of Ideas, which itself is scarcely "Platonic" in its ultimate origin, but stems from Egyptian and Mesopotamian mythological patterns.

If regarded in its "universal" metaphysical sense, animation of statues is neither a magic show arranged to deceive naive believers and irritate clever naturalists, nor simply a branch of Mediterranean theurgy aimed at obtaining oracles and producing *telesmata* – enchanted images whose presence had certain miraculous powers. The theurgic art of animation is closely related to the central metaphysical problems of the ancients, namely, those regarding the relationship between the divine principle and its manifestations (creation as theophany or self-disclosure), between the noetic archetypes and their earthly images, form and matter, soul and body. Accordingly, it presupposes the divine names and powers which organize and govern the cosmos – the divine body turned into the state (*politeia*) and holy shrine of initiation. Thus, before actual research into the misty problems of Neoplatonic *telestike* is started, one ought to outline the scope of subjects to be investigated – some of them to be explored beyond the limits delineated by purely historical analysis and beyond certain restrictions established by the study of the available documents.

The first and simplest surmise, if not the self-evident premise based on an "ineffable intuition", would be a reasonable supposition that, despite all possible historical, mythological and cultic differences, there must be some common metaphysical ground, or at least certain similarities, which connect the Neoplatonic art of animation with the analogous practices in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and India (especially with the manifold Tantric traditions, partly based on the ancient Dravidian and Mesopotamian substrate). Therefore the Neoplatonic *telestike* (be it

genuinely Hellenic or Chaldean) cannot be fully understood and explained without constant references to the cosmological doctrines and rituals of all those "philo-ionic" traditions from pharaonic Egypt to contemporary India. This is not a bold assertion of their identity or insistence that their contents are in all respects "perennial" and therefore unable to change, but rather the conviction that similar problems suggest similar solutions.

Comprehensive investigation (which is not our present task, however) would include such different but related topics as the prevailing conceptions of life and death, cosmogonical principles and animating forces, as well as traditional theories of *anthropos* and his relationship with the divine realm both in various mythological systems and in ancient Hellenic philosophy which itself partly derives from the rational exegesis of myths and deconstruction of rituals.

In the societies practising traditional crafts and artistic initiations, different levels and aspects of reality may be described by using the rich vocabulary of sculpture. The cultic statue belongs to a broader category of sacred images. Not only the human body but the universe as a whole may be compared to a divine statue. The Platonic *kosmos noetos*, a reproduction of the intelligent living Animal, and the solar *Nous*, the Demiurge, are sometimes regarded as statues and exemplary images. For Iamblichus, the stellar manifestations of the gods are *agalмата* – true icons or statues of the divine "drawn out of uniform Forms and noetic Essences" (*De myster.*168.4-5) by the Demiurge. Thus, the cosmos as a whole (*to pan*) is an image, created and animated by the "sounding statues" (or "vocal images", *agalмата phoneenta*: Damascius *De Phileb.*24), by the cosmogonical sounds which are the *agalмата* of the gods, later imitated by theurgists in the path of ascent and animation of artifacts.

On the microcosmic level, the human being as an *imago dei*, or *simulacrum dei*, may be likened to the theurgic statue constructed by the rules of symbolic iconography, according to the proper "ontological genre". For example, the figure of ruler, who, in pharaonic Egypt, is Horus incarnated, a son of Ra, of the solar Demiurge, is a visible model and vital principle (*ka*) for the entire body-like state. His historical heirs and imitators are initiates of all sorts, *mustai*, *bakchoi*, magicians, poets, and philosophers who in one way or another represent the central cosmic axis, the Perfect Man of the later Gnostics and Sufis. Finally, every human being, regarded as a puppet of the gods, may restore the primordial splendour of his body (acting through the mask of some divine hero or through the maintained state of the virtuous servant, *doulos theou*, *therapeutes*) and reveal the ideal inner statue by "polishing the mirror of the heart" in the search for the animating water of life.

2. Vehicles of Divine Forces

Any statue serves as the vehicle of a certain essence, therefore it is a body. Now there are physical, psychic, pneumatic, ethereal, and noetic bodies, immaterial and material, constituted by different elements or their mixtures. On the way of descent and ascent, analogy and preparedness govern their trajectories of life. In the organized cosmos of theophanies, where ideas and images, archetypes and copies are arranged according to strict hierarchy and put in order, the difference between natural and artificial is almost indiscernible: everything, except the One, is in a sense both artificial and natural. Therefore the fabricated cult statues simply constitute one of the numerous ontological levels (each filled by their own "statues" – models and images), where the bonds between form and matter, archetype and icon are made visible and where the higher divine forces are at work. Thus, not only a king, ancestor, parent, beloved, and spiritual master can be regarded as the real or imagined statue prescribed for adoration and contemplation, but also the dead body itself may be turned into the archetypal mask, stellar body, statue-like mummy (*sah*) which represents the ideal golden body of Osiris, reconstructed by Anubis, the chief mystagogue in the alchemical rites of rebirth, and animated by the Eye of Horus.

As a means of communication with the beyond, divine images served in the economy of cultic offerings, thus keeping the cosmic rhythms, creating social integration, affording health, abundance, protection and granting oracles. The methods of divination themselves are aspects of theurgical techniques used to elevate and divinize the soul, therefore no wonder that in certain cases the telestic statues assist in the process of initiation, rebirth and union with the divine essence. Even the tomb or sarcophagus may be regarded as *soma* and the womb of the goddess. Likewise the human body is both an alchemical tomb and a temple where the golden statue is to be produced and revealed. Behind all the ideas of a forged immortal body of metal or gold there lies the metaphysical symbolism and conviction that incorruptible bodies of the gods were made of precious substances – perfumes, stones, and metals, especially gold (*neb*).

In the *Pyramid Texts*, the anagogic gods (those who function as elevating forces) and the ascending *ba* of the animated king (who is himself constantly equated with Osiris, Horus, Thoth and other divine hypostases) are indistinguishable from their immortal iconographic statues or holy images. Since "all processions and all conversions are accomplished because of likeness" (*dia ten tes homoiotetos aitian*), according to Proclus (*Plat. Theol.* VI.3.17.1-2), the leader-gods (*hoi hegemonikoi theoi*) lift up and unfold all things in the demiurgic unity, including the blessed souls. And the soul (*ba*) of the Pharaoh is the most perfect *tut*, or divine image, which ought to be united with the Demiurge through the rites of ascent.

3. The Living Images of Everlasting Gods

According to Plato, the great statue of the cosmos is animated by the Demiurge who is equivalent to the Egyptian god Ptah. The Heaven as a whole is a living creature, self-moved by its own self-moving soul, because the Demiurge gave the universe the motion proper to its body:

"When the father who had begotten it saw it set in motion and alive, an *agalma* (statue, image, ornament, shrine) brought into being for the everlasting gods (*ton aidion theon gegonos agalma*), he rejoiced and being well pleased he took thought to make it yet more like its pattern. So as that pattern is the Living Being that is for ever existent, he sought to make this universe also like it, so far as might be in that respect. Now the nature of that Living Being was eternal, and this character it was impossible to confer in full completeness on the generated thing. But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving likeness of eternity" (*Tim.*37cd).

This passage may be regarded as the cosmological model for the theory of ontological images (*eikones*) and archetypal imitations. The phrase *theon agalmata* means traditional cult-statues (*ta xoana*), images of the gods, objects of worship established through the different levels of manifested being by the creative energies of divine irradiation. Thus the cultic *agalma* may be regarded as a god whose life stems not from itself but from the living god, the transcendent principle it represents, symbolizes or incarnates.

For the Neoplatonist Julian (Flavius Claudius Julianus, 331-363 A.D.), the Sun is the living statue (*to zon agalma*), endowed with soul and intelligence and regarded as an image of the noetic Father (*Ep.*51.434). The Demiurge is called the *agalmatopoiος του kosμου* by Neoplatonists, which means he produced the cosmos as an *agalma* and fashioned all lower gods as *agalmata*. For Plato (cf. *Leg.*931a), the terms *eikon* and *agalma* are almost synonymous, though not strictly equivalent. The animated cosmos is a living and moving *agalma* of the everlasting gods, therefore all theurgic *agalmata*, those which belong to the lower levels of existence, are modelled according to this pattern. The visible stars which symbolize invisible archetypes (the goal of soul's stellar ascent) are *agalmata* in the sense of divine habitations, vehicles (*ochemata*) which contain the divine presence. Hence, as the entire cosmos receives animating divine energies, so the cult statues, as the receptacles of the sacred powers, properly prepared or engendered by the union of *sophia* and *techne*, receive the invisible rays of the gods.

In the ancient Egyptian texts, these descending irradiations, or noetic and pneumatic rays, are called *bau* (manifestations), *sekhemu* (powers), *kau* (vital principles). However, not only manifestations (*keperu*, *bau*) and manifested theophanies or creatures are images: the Creator himself is

described as an image (*tut*). Atum, or Amun-Ra, as the divine *tut*, the supreme *imago Dei*, came into being from the ineffable depths of Nun, synonymous with the Neoplatonic One, when no other gods (*neteru*) existed and no name (*ren*) of anything was known. In this sense, he is both (1) *tut* of the supreme unimaginable Source and (2) *tut* as the noetic model and archetype. He is like “an image of the Ineffable that is ineffably identical with the Ineffable” in the Porphyrian metaphysics: the One-Being of the second hypothesis in Plato’s *Parmenides*, a product and image of the One.

In a papyrus from the reign of the New Kingdom pharaoh Rameses II (1279/1212 B.C.), Amun is described as

“fashioning (*hem*) himself, none knowing his shape (*qi*), goodly nature who came into being as the sacred, secret image (*bes*) who built (*qed*) his images (*seshemu*), who himself created (*qema*) himself, goodly power (*sekbem*) who made good his desire (*ib*), who joined his seed with his body to bring his egg into being within his secret self, being (or manifestation, self-disclosure – *kheper*) who came into being (or disclosed himself – *kheper*), image (or model, archetype, statue – *tut*) of what is fashioned (*mesut*)”¹

Along with the term *tut*, another term *bes*, used in the text, indicates a reference to the form of the supreme God at the eternal “first moment” of theogony when he reveals himself as the solar *kosmos noetos*, or the archetypal *pleroma* and orders (*taxeis*) of the gods, namely, *bes*, or *tut*, of the ineffable Abyss. This noetic Demiurge who establishes Being, Life, and Intelligence (the divine triad turned into the Ennead) is the model of his own creation and, consequently, of all ontological images irradiated by the divine Sun. A beautiful hymn at the temple of Hibis, carved in the first Persian period (XXVII Dynasty), proclaims that Amun-Ra

“made (*iri*) the gods (...), wise one excellent of being, intelligent one (...), who began all existence (...), who made great his image (*seshem*) to exalt his beauty, who fashioned (*nebi*) his image (*qi*) according to his desire, he having graced it with the grace of his breath (...), he having created (*qema*) his self, having begotten (*setji*) himself as the great image (*tut*)”²

Accordingly, any artist, or theurgist, who conducts the ritual of creation and animation of an image (*tut*), imitates the divine cosmogony, because creative activity and life (*ankh*) are attributes proper to Amun-Ra. This Demiurge made the *kau* of the gods, their vital principles, life energies, and the *ka* of any artist who produces his (i.e., the Demiurge’s) material image.

In the Shabaka text of the XXV Dynasty, known as the *Memphite Theology*, it is the supreme Demiurge Ptah who fashioned (*mesu*) the gods and created all things and all hieroglyphs (*medu neter*), i.e., the Forms that constitute the totality of the manifested universe. The coming into being (*kheper*) of creation is articulated by thoughts, images and spoken words:

Ptah conceives of the Ideas of things and invents the archetypal script that Thoth records and utters. Animated images of sacred script are inherent in the structure of the universe as are the Neoplatonic *sumbola* and *sunthemata*. Ptah Tatenen created the bodies (*setut*) of the gods in their likeness, i.e., produced their cultic images:

“And thus the gods entered their bodies of every kind of wood and mineral, all kinds of clay and all other things that grow on him (i.e., Ptah) from whom they originated (*kheper*). And thus assembled around him all gods and their *kau*”.³

The last line may be rendered also like this: “he has united the gods (i.e., their statues) and their *kau*”.

This passage attests the divine origin of the cult statues and indirectly confirms theurgy as an imitation of demiurgy. The statues are *theia erga*, the works of the Demiurge Ptah. In a certain sense, the gods themselves are united with their statues when their vital principles (*kau*) enter their bodies (*setut*). Therefore not only is the cult statue (*seshem, nen*) an image (*tut*) of the Demiurge, but the entire created, or rather manifested, cosmos is a divine statue, the body of Heka (creative Magic) constituted by his powerful images (*sekbem*) and words (*hekau*). According to the *Leiden Papyrus*:

“All the gods are three:

Amun, Ra, and Ptah, without their seconds.

His identity is hidden in Amun,

His is Ra as face,

His body is Ptah” (*Leid.300*).

4. Animation as a Ritual of Union with the Descending Rays of Ra

The cult statue, like any image, picture, or inscription carved or painted on the temple walls, and like the whole temple itself, had to be animated by the living power of the deity. Likewise, the entire cosmic state, imagined as an ordered symbolic structure, is reanimated by the rays of Ra, or Helios, i.e., the Sun whose rebirth every morning repeats the “first moment” when the self-created noetic scarab beetle (Amun-Kheper-Ra) emerged from the primordial waters of Nun:

“You rose up in this your name of High Hill.

You came into being in this your name of Kheper” (*PT 1587*).

The statue-like *sab*-body of Osiris, his inert corpse, reassembled by Thoth and “being what Anubis has done for him”, is animated by the ram-headed *ba* (“soul”) of the Sun. As *ba* and statue-like corpse, Ra and Osiris unite at the deepest point in the nocturnal journey through the Duat, or *mundus imaginalis*, which contains everything that has ever existed.

This mysterious nightly union of Osiris-Sokar and the solar *ba* precedes resurrection in the form of a scarab and serves as a model for the mystical rebirth of the initiate who follows the way of Thoth. The solar barque itself turns into a serpent whose fiery breath helps to ignite the new light. The night journey depicted in the New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld shows the path of alchemical transformation, rebirth, theurgic ascent and *apotheosis*.

The union of Ra and Osiris in the Duat is analogous to the ritual union of the hieratic statue with the Sun Disk on the roof of Horus' temple in Edfu, still celebrated at New Year's festival during Roman times. The holy procession of priests carries the statue up the staircase to the rooftop terrace (to the "back" of Heaven, the supercelestial place of Plato's *Phaedrus*, whither the Orphic mystai and the true lovers of wisdom, i.e., philosophers, fly to gaze on the infinite plenitude of light, to behold the spiritual world of Ideas and to contemplate God at its centre) and is described thus:

"Arrival of *hem* (the statue of his majesty Horus) at the Place of the first moment (i.e., of the first occasion, *tep sepi*, the realm of metaphysical realities), so that his *ba* might unite (*sema*) with his image (*sekhem*)".⁴

The first time, *tep sepi*, is entered when the ascending procession reaches the rooftop which symbolizes the back of the goddess Nut, the Platonic *hyperouranios topos*, discussed by Proclus in his *Platonic Theology*. According to J. Naydler:

"The concept of the First Time is comparable to that of the realm of being in which the Platonic Ideas exist. In Egyptian thought, though, it is not abstract ideas that are to be found here, but living gods and the archetypal relationships that obtain among them. The First Time is the realm of metaphysical realities conceived in terms of symbolic images and myths. These are the patterns that are reflected in the mundane world and that need to be participated in if mundane events are to be filled with archetypal power".⁵

On the rooftop terrace of the temple, the Eastern *Ba* (Horus, represented by the rising Sun) alights (*kehen*) upon his statue (*bes*), his august body (*sab*). In such ritual, "revelation of the Face" occurs and the images (*sekhemu*) of Horus, Hathor or other deities are united with their *ba* in the horizon (*akhet* – the term which also means a pyramid, the location of *akh*, here refers to the rooftop). Thus the *ba* of Ra is established upon the images of *neteru* and their statues (*sekhemu*) are renewed, so that they "might live by seeing his [noetic] rays".⁶ The Sun-god's (who is *Nous*, the creative Intellect of the Neoplatonists) *ba* (soul, manifested power) is united (*sema*) with the image (*sekhem*) of his *ka*. This union (*sema*) is among the paradigms and prototypes of theurgic union with the divine principle, of the *unio mystica* praised by later philosophers and initiates.

5. Opening of the Mouth and Awakening to Light

In the funerary realm, every mummy (*sab*) had to be reanimated by the living *ba*. Likewise every statue of the deceased, placed inside the tomb, must be animated by his living *ka* in order that the funerary cult could be maintained. In all these cases the quickening of inert matter (which, however, is already alive on a deeper ontological level) is achieved by means of certain *hieratike technē* and employing rituals such as an Opening of the Mouth ceremony. According to the ancients, such rituals were revealed by the gods themselves and actually performed by them (i.e., by the priests who played roles of the gods) following the patterns of *tep sepi*.

The Opening of the Mouth ritual is to be performed for the sacred building as a whole, for the tombs, sarcophagi, heart scarabs, magical figurines (such as *ushebtiti*) and other objects of the temple and funerary realm. The descent of *ba* and the sacramental union of the falcon-like Horus with his cultic body is described at Edfu in the text from the interior of the holy of holies:

"He alights (*kehen*) upon his statue (*bes*), he mingles with (*sensen*) his idol (*akhem*), he embraces (*sekhem*) his image (*sekhem*)".⁷

Once quickened by the Opening of the Mouth ritual⁸, a cult statue is considered "alive" on two different levels: (1) the *ka* of the god slept during the night and had been awakened in the morning for the offerings of the daily cult and other ritual activities; (2) the *ba* of the god, whose invisible noetic powers pierce through the material receptacle, maintained a permanent relationship with the intelligible source, or the Demiurge, symbolized by the Sun, though this bond is periodically re-established and rejuvenated through the union with the divine principle.

Certain shapes and material substances of which sacred objects are made were regarded as suitable receptacles or mediums for the spiritual powers of the gods (*neteru*). Heraiskos, the fifth-century Neoplatonist and practising theurgist from the Panopolite nome, who, according to Damascius, fostered the ancestral rites of Egypt and "made his soul to dwell always in sanctuaries and mystic places", confessing that the ancient Egyptians were wiser than himself, was able to divine whether or not the statues of the gods were animated, that is, filled with invisible divine irradiations.⁹

The divine "soul", *ba* (in a certain sense analogous to the immanent Form) makes the cult statue a manifestation of the deity whose epiphany in the religious procession (a ritual counterpart of the Neoplatonic *proodos*) is called "lifting up the beauty". The gods "live" and their life (*ankh*) and interaction constitute reality, but in the New Solar Theology, developed at the beginning of the XVIII Dynasty (1550 B.C.), the "life-giving" action is ascribed to the one world-creating and world-preserving Sun god. Now the "speaking" statue of Amun-Ra is carried in festival processions and

this image is regarded as being able both to illumine the entire landscape by its life-giving and sustaining divine light and to provide oracles.

For the ancient Egyptians, the world as a whole was animated from the beginning; therefore any secondary "animation" is synonymous with re-establishing or reactivating the otherwise hidden theurgic relationship between an image (the visible shape of hieroglyph) and a certain spiritual will or power, between a corporeal vehicle (such as the royal throne, sacred barque or any representation carved or painted according to the strict rules of symbolic iconography) and its archetypal principle, its *neter*. Everything here below is an image of its spiritual archetype and is involved in the rhythmic series of "ontological rituals" performed on different levels of being, including the mundane temple rites and funerary ceremonies.

The light-like primordial sound, pronounced by the supreme Creator or the Ennead of gods is characterized by miraculous force; therefore the world is this transcendent sound and the living (*ankh*) noetic (*akh*) image (*tut*) made substantial. The divine words, imbued with demiurgic and theurgic powers (*bekau*, analogous to the Hindu mantras) have animating, purifying, transforming, and elevating powers. They are the *onomata barbara*, *nomina barbara* praised by the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr.107).

An ability of the cult statue to act (*irt*), to reveal the divine presence and thus to serve as a container of the immanent sacred essence, is a response to the cultic act which can be explained in the light of ancient metaphysics centred on the problems of One and many, descent and ascent, archetypes and images, as well as those of initiation, transformation and spiritual rebirth. In this respect, the symbol of the Eye (*iret*) reveals the dialectic of life and death, the theory of sacrifice, reintegration and theurgic animation. The awakening to light, to the true divine identity, symbolized by the joining together of the scattered limbs of Osiris, is to be understood as psychic and spiritual integration accomplished on different levels of reality. This integration may be expressed and conveyed by the embrace (*sekhen*) that culminates in the quickening process of the image (*tut*).

6. The Sacramental Birth of Statues in Mesopotamia and Egypt

The Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaic theory of animation which deals with metaphysical problems of divine presence, of transcendence and immanence, seems rather strange and exotic only from the modern standpoint, created by the prevailing scorn, misunderstandings and exaggerations, partly raised by Biblical and Protestant polemics against the cult images. These iconoclastic attacks have their hidden purpose: to

annex and monopolize the ancient "theurgy", reducing it to the soteriological privilege of certain monotheist communities.

The manufactured icon is transformed into a living body or into an efficacious symbol of deity by the rites called *hidrusis* in Greek and *dedicatio* in Latin. In Mesopotamia, there were two such rituals, designated Mouth Washing (Akkadian *mis pi*, Sumerian *ka-lub-u-da-dingir*) and Mouth Opening (*pit pi*, *ka-dub-u-da*). Without this ritual, the sacred icon is only a dead product of human artisans which cannot consume food, drink water, beer, wine and smell incense, even if these sacramental activities are not to be understood literally, but rather spiritually.

During the *mis pi* ritual, the image made in the temple atelier (*bit mummi*), the place where the gods are born, is consecrated. The fact that the statue is the work of human hands is ritually denied and the authorship of Ea, the Image Fashioner (*nu-dim-mud*) is confirmed. The Akkadian Ea (Sumerian Enki) is god of the primordial waters (*apsu*), wisdom, magic and incantations, of arts and crafts, being analogous to the Memphite Demiurge Ptah, the Ugaritic Kothar-wa-Hasis, Clever and Skilled Artisan, Hephaistos and Daidalos of the ancient Hellenes.

The statue is produced by the gods themselves, acting through the "skilled artisans who know the secrets" (*ummani le'uti mude pirishtu*). This act of a real theogony belongs to the realm of "theurgy" in its etymological and metaphysical sense. In fact, the statue is not even manufactured, but "ceremoniously born" (*ke-nish im-ma-al-du-ma*) in a process which microcosmically repeats all phases of cosmogony. The materials used in the statue are already regarded as divine; therefore the fashioning of the statue (which consists in revealing its *eidos* on the level of material existence) by the artisans, who themselves play the roles of the gods, is a process of assimilating the image with the archetype through the ritualized descent of the Form.

According to Neoplatonists, only divine *Nous* is capable of contemplating the Forms, along with those theurgists (and artisans) established by Athena (*sophia*) in the Maker of the universe, i.e., elevated by purifications, mystic rites and symbols, by hymns and prayers, sacrifices and meditations. Therefore one could say that the human artificer follows the forms created by the divine Artificer (Ea, Ptah, Vishvakarma). He directly contemplates or visualizes (according to the canonized rules) a mental image of the deity through the Eye of the heart-intellect and draws this form from Heaven, the realm of *akh*, where the noetic models of art exist, or from the immanent divine light in the heart.

The god (*ilu*, understood as *salamu*, *salam*, i.e. the statue, completed and perfected in its form) is not simply "produced", but "actually born". In the royal inscription of Sargon II the manufacture of the statue is described using the verb *waladu*, "to beget":

“Nishshiku, creator of everything, begat images of their great divinities, and they took up their daises”.¹⁰

In certain Mesopotamian texts the image is not the product of an artisan, even the Creator Ea, but born of the loins of the gods and goddesses. Therefore V. A. Hurowitz says that “the process of iconoplasty is biological and not technological”.¹¹ We would insist on the designation “metaphysical” instead of “biological”, because the autogenesis of statue and conception of the noetic life cannot be treated in terms of modern biology. The Father of the gods is “creator of himself” (*bannu ramanishu*) and the Mouth Washing ritual states:

“In Heaven it (the god) is born of itself” (*an-na ni-bi-ta tu-ud-da-am*) and “on Earth it is born of itself” (*ki-a ni-bi-ta tu-ud-da-am: STT 199*).

The incantations of the Mesopotamian *mis pi* ritual stress the statue’s ability to smell odours, to see, to hear and even to walk. The *mis pi* ritual, like the Egyptian ritual called *Performing the Opening of the Mouth in the workshop for the statue (tut) of N.*, is only the culmination of the theogoninal process. As already attested in the *Pyramid Texts*, the opening of the nose and ears as well as of the mouth and eyes is performed for the dead King, equated to Osiris, whose “head is knit to his bones and his bones are knit to his head” (*PT 355*), and who “provides himself with his iron members” (*PT 419*).

7. The Way of the Golden Falcon

“Your mouth is split open by *dua-ur* in the Mansion of Gold, [your mouth] is split open by the two images which are foremost in the Mansion of Natron, your mouth is split open by Horus with this little finger of his with which [he] split open the mouth of his father, with which he split open the mouth of Osiris” (*PT 540*).

The exemplary theurgic ascent of the King, his animation and becoming divine through the Eye of Horus, is described as a rebirth in the nest of Thoth from the broken egg (*PT 669*), as a fly through the opened doors of the tomb, the doors of Nut (Heaven), and assuming a seat in the solar barque of Ra. He ascends as the reconstructed statue, “reassembled by Thoth” (*PT 448*) and raising his “iron bones”, his “golden members”: “for this body of yours belongs to a god” (*PT 723*). Thus, the statue-like King, the son of Ra, is “a sacred image, the most sacred of the sacred images of the Great One” (*PT 273-4*). His face is that of a jackal, his arms are those of a falcon, his wing-feathers are those of Thoth, his savour is the savour of a god, the savour of the Eye of Horus, because Horus has split open his eye that he may see with it in its name of “she who opens the way of the god” (*PT 638*), to fly up to the sky and be equated with Thoth, “the mightiest of the gods” (*PT 524*).

In the course of complicated ritual drama, which includes sacrifices and incantations, the mouth of the statue is touched with various implements, perhaps artisans’ tools, the little finger of the *sem*-priest and the adze called *neterty* (*neter* means a god, divine principle and spiritual power). The ritual imitates certain divine events and precedents, and its purpose is not only to make the statue a fit object for the cult (by opening hidden channels of grace), but also to serve for the theurgic *apathanatismos*, for turning the mortal human statue into the immortal divine statue. In this case, both the descent and ascent of the immortal light, of the divine *bau* (spiritual energies, manifestations) are to be viewed as inseparable and interpenetrating. The powers involved in such operations are higher than all human wisdom. And this is exactly the definition of theurgy provided by Iamblichus and Proclus. The King, who is the perfect *imago dei*, embodies perfect Wisdom, for he “becomes Sia who bears the god’s book, who is at the right hand of Ra” (*PT 250*). His throne is over the spirits, or intellects (*akhu*), he unites hearts and his “limbs are the Imperishable Stars” (*PT 570*). Hence, he is the Theurgist *par excellence*.

The Egyptian initiates, who followed this archetypal example of the ascending Mystagogue, the way of the divine golden falcon, were concerned to enter and experience states of consciousness which reveal their true identities and the ineffable unity of all. Since the conception of *tut*, the living (*ankh*) image of god (e.g. Atum, Ptah, Amun) has both external and internal meaning, the fashioning of the material statue and procreation of the spiritual body are analogous processes. The inner alchemical body, symbolized by gold, or other metals, is created following the patterns of Osirian transformation which, among other things, includes the gathering of limbs and the reconstruction of an archetypal *eidos*, accomplished by Anubis, the guide of initiates, as well as animation and resurrection on the level of *anima mundi*. The way of transformation and ascent is the way of Thoth who makes the Eye of Horus intact and integral, which means, besides other interpretations, the spiritual restoration of the heart-intellect and rebirth.

8. When the Womb-like Tomb is Opened

The process of making a statue by the technique of lost wax casting imitates the mystical way aimed at regeneration and theurgic union with the divine. Some rituals performed in the Egyptian temples, as well as their own architectural designs and structures, follow this both metaphysical and mythological pattern step by step. Let us briefly analyse the sequence of the process.

At first, the gathering together of an image, joining together the limbs of a statue or the dismembered body of Osiris is accomplished by (1) the creation of a form in wax for the metal statue to be cast, or (2) the spiritual integration, purification of body and heart, and mental concentration. The gathering together of an image outlines the inner *ba* form which needs to be transformed into gold (*akh*-spirit and its golden body).

This stage is followed by vitalization. The model made of beeswax is coated with clay and thus turned into a clay ball, analogous to the cosmogonical egg (the Egg of the Great Cackler which "lives" and "breathes the air", given by Atum), and the imagined (or painted) *sphaira*-like figure, used in spiritual exercises, known to Plotinus. The sphere is regarded as an icon of deity, the world as a whole which contains a sacred image of the god within. Keeping watch over this image, Plotinus removes both space and the imaginary conception of matter, calling upon the god (whose imaginary conception is held) to come (*Enn.* V.8.9.11). The heated and thus violated metal is poured into the mould. This action is analogous to the entering into the realm of life (*ankh*), animation by the heart which means "by the ray of *Nous*", the breath of life (*sah en ankh*). According to the spell for giving breath in the realm of the dead:

"I am the jackal of jackals, I am Shu who draws the air into the presence of the sunshine to the limits of the sky, to the limits of the earth, to the limits of the plume of the *nebeb*-bird, and air is given to those youths who open my mouth so that I may see with my eyes" (*BD* 55).

The universe, including the sensible realm, is equally dependent on the constant influx of this life-giving force, the breath of Amun. Therefore to make a sculpture in Egyptian means "to enliven, to revive". The transcendent divine essences, the gods in Heaven and their earthly images are thus co-ordinated. The Egyptian sculptor, the follower of Ptah and the initiate of Imhotep-Nefertum, is "the reviver". His imaginal operations – both external and internal – imitate the patterns established by the gods; therefore his art and the path of spiritual realization coincide.

The last phase of *ergon* consists in breaking the mould and revealing the perfect image, the beautiful divine statue. This is a birth of the god, analogous to spiritual rebirth, symbolized by the casting off of the mummy's bondage:

"The doors of the tomb are opened for you, the doors of Nut are unbolted for you... remove the mask which is on your face, loosen your bonds, for they are not bonds, they are the tress of Nephthys... that you may become divine" (*PT* 553).

The term *sah* means (1) the ritually embalmed body, turned into the archetypal icon of Osiris, the corpse of Sokar, his "mysterious image", i.e. the mummy wrapped in his strips of linen and likened to the silkworm cocoon, the pupa of the scarab, and (2) the star of Osiris, the luminous

spiritual or stellar body. The breaking off happens when the barque of Ra reaches the 10th hour of the Night¹² in the Duat, itself symbolized by the body of goddess Nut, the heavenly Cow who is eternally giving birth to the world of spiritual forms (stars). This goddess represents the overarching divine presence, in whose cosmic embrace all things rest, though she is only secondarily connected with sensory phenomena. The night journey of the Sun-god's *ba* is the model of all alchemical gestations in the womb of Nut-Hathor, the womb-like tomb (which imitates the primordial mound and the cave of primordial darkness), sarcophagus-vessel, cauldron, the nest of Thoth, and both the physical and mental body of the artisan, for all formations, transformations and the "foetal quickenings" which lead to the final maturation and birth. The mystery of spiritual realization and immortalization is based on this polysemantic pattern.

9. Divine Beauty and the Inner Golden Statue: From Egyptian Theology to Plotinus

The opening of the ball, or the egg, means the appearance of the divine body, itself like the golden sphere (*aten*) of Ra, or the golden (sometimes green) scarab which symbolizes the noetic fullness of Atum, the restored heart-intellect of the initiate, who is a perfect "philosopher" (in the sense of Plato's *Phaedo* 67cd, that "true philosophers make dying their profession") and can therefore be regarded as "dead", now reborn.

The divine powers may be temporarily incarnated in a human body (which itself is a *sunthemata* for the Neoplatonists) during the theurgic rituals. According to Proclus, some things pertaining to the statues established by the telestic art, are manifest, others are inwardly concealed: they symbolize the presence of the gods and are only known to the telestic artisans themselves (*In Tim.* I.273e). We do not know exactly what kind of *sunthemata* were used in the Neoplatonic rites of animation. However, the practice of concealing certain symbols, even entire sacred books, shells, and flowers, inside the statues, to use the mantric words of power (*hekan*), written formulas (the Neoplatonic *engrammata*) in hieroglyphic script, and images (*eikones*, *charakteres*, *schemata*) is common in the Egyptian tradition. Similar practices are attested even in classical Hellenic Hekate-magic (*Diodorus Bibl. hist.*4.51).

All these *pharmaka*, *sumbola*, and *sunthemata* are analogous to the Egyptian amulets (hearts, buckles of Isis, *djed* pillars, collars of gold, papyrus sceptres, human-headed falcons, ladders, Eyes of Horus, *shen*-symbols, *ankh*-symbols, scarabs, some inscribed with *hekan*, words of power), which are placed on (1) the living human body (which itself resembles a "statue") or (2) the embalmed *sah*-body (mummy), along with

incenses, oils, perfumes and flowers. Any amulet (*meket, sa, wedjat*) which attracts and preserves divine energies and manifestations (*bau*) is a sort of *sunthema*. Animated statues, images, symbols and amulets work through the theurgic *heka*-power, and *heka* is regarded as the *ba* of Ra (Amun-Ra, Atum-Ra). The Hellenic *telesmata*, concealed or visible telestic images, especially animated statues, also had power to avert disaster and provide protection. According to the historian Zosimus, the theurgist Nestorius saved Athens from an earthquake in 375 A.D. by dedicating a statue of Achilles, regarded as a *telesma*, in the Parthenon following the instructions provided by the gods in a dream (4.18).¹³

According to Proclus:

“As an initiator into the mysteries, by placing certain symbols about statues, renders them more adapted to the participation of the superior powers (*ho telestes sunbola atta tois agalmasi perititheis epitedeiotera auta kathistesin eis metousian dunameon hupertepon*), thus also total nature fashioning bodies, by physical productive powers, the statues of souls (*agalmata ton psuchon*), disseminates a different aptitude in different bodies for the reception of different souls, the better and the worse (*In Tim. I.51ef*).

The passage confirms that animation is closely related to the theory of Ideas, or archetypal cosmogonical Forms, which Plato detached from the initial cultic sphere and rendered into rational philosophical discourse, thus building a solid scientific basis for the later Neoplatonic versions of theurgy. Every classicist remembers the passage from the *Enneads* of Plotinus (I.6.9.7ff), which may be understood not only in its intended metaphorical sense, because such metaphor itself stems from the realm of theurgic techniques and rituals, partly inherited by Hellenic philosophy. The passage alludes to the *Phaedrus* (252d, 254b), where Plato speaks of the lover who works on the soul of his beloved, fashioning it into the likeness of the god, their common divine archetype, and it runs as follows:

“How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; ... and never stop ‘working on your statue’ (*tektainon to son agalma*) till the divine glory of virtues shines out on you, till you see ‘self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat’. If you have become this, and see it, and are home with yourself in purity ... wholly yourself, nothing but true light (*phos alethinon monon*), not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended...” (*Enn. I.6.9.7ff*).

The “inner statue” is the golden body of the Egyptian theology, the ascending soul (*ba*) turned into luminous eternal spirit (*akh*). Thus through the sensuous body (*stbula-sharira*), to put it into the cultic terms of Hindu Tantra, an image which is interiorized and serves as a pointer to, or a

diagram (*yantra*) of, the unseen noetic realm, the spiritual essence (*sukshma-sharira*), or the divine presence, is revealed. Both external and internal images are symbolic constructs (*pratika*) whereby what is invisible and immaterial (*amurta*) is represented as visible and material (*murta*). External worship (*bahyayaga*) of the statue is necessarily accompanied by meditation (*manasa-puja*) on its outward form as well as its unembodied state, the noetic Form, or Idea. The seer and the object contemplated must be united. The worshipper is turned into the god (*ishta-devata*) he adores: he ascends to the *akh* realm and actually becomes Ra. So the initiate, whose *ba* is transformed and united with divine principles, may attest:

“I am Thoth, the favoured of Ra; Lord of strength who ennobles him who made him; great of magic (*heka*) in the Barque of Millions of Years; master of laws ... who does what Ra in his shrine approves” (*BD 182*).

“My head is that of Ra who is united with Atum ..., my tongue is that of Ptah, my throat is that of Hathor, for I have recalled with my mouth the speech of Atum...” (*BD 82*).

“I am he who dwells in his Eye, I have come that I may give *maat* to Ra” (*BD 96*).

“Let me see Ra” (*BD 65*).

“I am he in whom is the Sacred Eye” (*BD 42*).

“I am Ra” (*BD 42*).

Plotinus affirms almost the same, though in philosophical terms:

“No eye ever saw the Sun without becoming Sun-like... You must become first all godlike (*theooides*) and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty. First the soul will come in its ascent to intellect (*anabainon epi ton noun*) and there will know the Forms, all beautiful, and will affirm that these, the Ideas, are beauty; for all things are beautiful by these, by the products of intellect and essence (*panta gar tautais kala, tois nou gennemasi kai ousias: Enn. I.6.9.30ff*).

The Egyptian term *nefer* signifies both “beauty” and “goodness”, and also means happiness, joy and other related ideas, especially those of the divine realm. The hieroglyph *nefer* is a composite of the heart and trachea, and in fact belongs to the same type as the “union” (*sema*) hieroglyph. All gods (*neteru*) radiate beauty and their statues are beautiful (*nefer*) and alive (*ankh*). Both the appearance of the cult-statue and the transformed inner body (equated to a statue-hieroglyph, like the Hindu *asana*) of the initiate are called “lifting up the beauty” which represents the golden splendour (*meskhan*). As the cult image (*sekhem, tut*) is united (*sema*) with the descending *ba* of the noetic Sun, so the ascending human *ba*, already purified and made beautiful, seeks to unite with its divine archetype, the perfect and beautiful disk (or sphere, *aten*) of Ra.

Now the following conclusion should be drawn. Though the Neoplatonic *telestike* cannot be reconstructed in detail, the principles

which grounded its existence and theurgic efficacy may be outlined by investigating the cultic metaphysics and cosmogonical patterns of ancient civilizations and the Platonic tradition itself. The most striking is the realization that along with the external cultic dimension of animated images and statues there is their inner esoteric dimension which is concerned with the spiritual *dromena*, the completion (*telete* in its etymological sense) of the intelligible statue. In this final stage of solar knowledge (*gnosis*) a seer (*epoptes*) becomes "blessed" (*makarios*); he is reborn as the luminous and intelligent spirit (*akh*), now entering the divine body (*sab*) of light attached to the Sun barque. Thus the soul becomes Ra. This is the theurgic *apathanatismos*, immortalization through the noetic life (the breath of Shu) and union (*sema*) with the divine.

1 David Lorton *The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt*.- Born in Heaven, Made on Earth. The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East, ed. by Michael B. Dick, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999, pp.185-186

2 Ibid., p.184

3 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p.353

4 M. Alliot *Le Culte d'Horus a Edfon au temps des Ptoleemes*, vol. 1, Bibliotheque d'Etude 20/1, Cairo: Institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 1949, p.306

5 Jeremy Naydler *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1996, p.93

6 M. Alliot, *ibid.*, p.334

7 David Lorton, *ibid.*, p.197

8 See: T. J. C. Baly *Notes on the Ritual of Opening the Mouth*.- The Journal of Egyptian Archeology, vol. XVI, London, 1930, pp.173-186

9 Garth Fowden *The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society*.- Journal of Hellenic Studies CII, 1982, p.47

10 Victor Avigdor Hurowitz *The Mesopotamian God Image, From Womb to Tomb*.- Journal of the American Oriental Society 123, 1, 2003, p.151

11 Ibid., p.152

12 Alison Roberts *My Heart My Mother. Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt*, Trowbridge: North Gate Publishers, 2000, p.172

13 E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.294

TELESTIC TRANSFORMATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL REBIRTH

1. Philosophy in the Tomb-Sanctuary

If philosophy means preparation for death, a tomb may be regarded as a school of wisdom, if not a birthplace of philosophy. However, to say that by building a tomb for oneself one is "philosophizing" may appear as sheer madness to the contemporary reader who is unaware that the monumental tombs of pharaonic Egypt are not graves in any Christian or modern sense.

The tomb is to be regarded as a sanctuary where the main symbol of Osiris lies in the coffin. Since "death" means one's "Osirification" and is an expression of transcendence, of life in the hidden (*sheta*) state, the "dead gods" should be viewed as those who hide themselves in the state which seems to be "unmanifested" from the standpoint of external phenomena. This hidden (*amun*) state in the Duat is not conceived as being formless. The *bau* in the Duat are hidden (*sheta*) because their form cannot be seen unless illuminated by Ra. Likewise the *Set-urt*-sanctuary in the Edfu temple is called "the Seat-of-hiding" (*set-amun*):

"The gods are in their chapels, the Ennead is in its hall, the Hidden-one (Amun) is hidden in the Seat-of-hiding" (Edfu VII.12.4).

However, the hidden world contains all components of the world that may be manifested when the gods through the rite of appearance, or procession (*khai*), emerge from the "snake" and turn the temple into the House-of-appearance (*per khai*).

The rite of mummification is the rite of divinization or transmutation of the human body to the symbolic body of Osiris. This procedure is not aimed at conservation of the corpse, but rather of its deconstruction and, then, of reconstruction, thereby creating the cultic symbol of Osiris. In this respect, the mummy hidden in the burial chamber is equivalent to the cultic statue in the temple.

However, the statue of the deceased and his mummy are related to different ontological states. According to R. B. Finnestad, the statue is related to the *ka*-life of the deified deceased; therefore the offerings should not be regarded as a way of sustaining his existence in the beyond, but only his *ka*-life. The mummy is related to the *ba*-life of the deified deceased, i.e., to his life in the beyond.¹ Therefore the Opening of the Mouth ritual carried out on the statue makes this symbol of earthly cultic life operative, while when carried out on the mummy (since through the mummification the dead man's body is transformed to the body of Osiris) it makes this symbol of a "dead god" operative, introducing the divine presence into the tomb-sanctuary.

The ritual performed on the mummy, however, corresponds to the consecration of a cult statue. The statue, the mummy, and the coffin are symbolic representations of the deceased, his cultic images, but not the dead man himself.² R. B. Finnestad says:

“The deified man is... rendered cultically accessible through animating his statue with his *ka*. If his *ka* cannot resort to a statue, the dead man does not live an earthly life of the kind implied by the concept of *ka*. When the mummy is the object, attention is directed to the transcendent aspect of the dead man. The ritual has an evocative function: the Osiris is called from the beyond to be present in the sanctuary. This aspect of the dead man is mythically expressed by the concept of his *ba* that flies like a bird from the closed burial chamber”.³

In some cases the *ba* of the deceased is depicted outside the tomb watching the Opening of the Mouth ritual performed on the mummy. T. Burckhardt, however, thinks that the mummy and its mask function as receptacles of the psycho-somatic *ka*-forces, or the lower psychic modalities that had already been transformed during the man's lifetime. He says:

“According to Egyptian doctrine, the lower subtle modality of man, which the Hebrews call the ‘breath of remains’ and which normally dissolves after death, can be held and fixed by the sacred form of the mummy. This form - or this mask - thus plays, in relation to this assemblage of diffuse and centrifugal subtle forces, the role of a formative principle: it sublimates this ‘breath’ and fixes it, making of it a kind of link between this world and the soul of the dead man, a bridge by means of which the incantations and offerings of the survivors can reach the soul, and by means of which its blessings can reach them”.⁴

The offerings should be understood, first and foremost, in terms of this need of the survivors to make contact with the dead man: the offering table in the form of *ka*-arms accepts gifts of food, while the *ba* transcends this mortuary realm of communication. The mummy's mask is not a portrait of the dead man, but represents his archetypal form, his unchanging *eidos* made visible.

2. The Tomb as a Threshold of Light

The Egyptian royal tomb, especially that of the late New Kingdom, is a model of the cosmos and the temple of divine rites. It symbolizes the primordial mound and the womb of Nut-Hathor, the furnace of alchemical transformations and of spiritual gold-making. From the perspective of semiotics and hermeneutics, the tomb is a holy book full of theological texts and images. From the theurgic point of view, the tomb is a set of *heka* powers and efficacious *sunthemata*, partly embodied in the

stone (as building material, itself possessing certain magic properties). Accordingly, it is a kind of theurgic construction analogous to the Hindu *yantra* (geometric diagram). *Yantra*, as a special geometric schema or sacred icon, is a theurgic tool or any device, instrument, or mechanism used for carrying out a specific, especially magic, task. According to H. Zimmer:

“Whenever pure, divine Consciousness (*brahman*) binds Itself with the magic of its *maya* and assumes in play the form of human consciousness, then It may naively feel Itself to be part of a many-sided, variegated, articulated, and interconnected world; and so It may devoutly worship the personified divinities who inform this interconnected world, revering them in contemplation, images, and symbolic signs so that It might find Its way through the world which is unfolded before human consciousness; but when Consciousness elevates Itself to become the will to experience, as a totality and unity, Its own essence spread out in rich variety - the will to enter into Itself to find repose - then images and signs will serve as tools (*yantras*) for bringing about the union (*samadhi*) of perceiver and perceived”.⁵

Among the hieroglyphs related to funerary buildings is a picture of the Upper Egyptian shrine of Hierakonpolis which served as a determinative for the word *kar*, or *kari* (chapel). The symbol of a double stairway was a determinative for the noun meaning ascent. The Upper Egyptian pavilion-like shrine of the vulture goddess Nekhbet was known as the Great House (*per-ur*, *per-wer*, *per-aa*, Hellenized as “pharaoh”). The word *per* usually means “house” or “household” (*aikos*) and designates a temple as the totality of a deity's possessions, including the landed domains and workshops, contrasted to the actual temple, (the “god's house”: *bet neter*, *but neter*) built of stone. Like the servants in a household, the priests are called *hemu-neter*, “servants of the god”.

In a simplified form, the Upper Egyptian shrine became the *kar* - a type of chapel or portable shrine which housed the image of the god in temples and was carried in processions. When the doors (*aa*) of the shrine are opened by a priest in a daily service, it means that the gates of heaven are opened. Coffins and certain ritual pavilions containing the statues of deceased and divinized pharaohs were made in the form of this shrine.

The Lower Egyptian shrine of the serpent goddess Wadjet is the House of Flame (*per-nu*). Many coffins and sarcophagi (even the mastaba tomb of the V Dynasty pharaoh Shepseskare) were made in this shape.

Usually the tomb is called *akhet*, the “horizon” or threshold of light, the place of “rebirth” where the rejuvenated sun (symbolizing the immortal *spiritus*, or *intellectus*) rises. As an *akhet*, the tomb incarnated Osiris-Sokar himself. Here Osiris and Ra are reunited and deceased human beings acquire *im-akh*, blessedness, regarded as illumination, achieved by rising through the spinal column - through the body of the Snake, or the Crocodile, through which the Night-Sun passes. According

to the Alexandrian alchemist Olympiodorus, Osiris was a synonym for lead and his tomb the symbol of *chemia*, i.e., an art of the Perfect Black (*teleion melas*) of casting or alloying metals and transforming the soul into spiritual gold.

In Late period Egypt, the tombs of gods are also depicted as being on earth, even the tombs of the uncreated primordial Ogdoad, thereby indicating that the "tomb" is rooted in the Beyond Being and is both 1) a symbol of the hidden divine dimension and 2) the temple-body-book-like cosmos in miniature. So the tomb embodies certain theological formulas and metaphysical realities.

All these things must be remembered when examining the *soma-sema* (body-tomb) formula which occurs for the first time in Plato's *Gorgias*. Socrates cites Euripides as saying "Who knows, if life be death, and death be life?" and continues:

"Perhaps we too are dead, for I heard this from some wise man, that now we are dead, and that for us the body is a tomb" (*Gorg.*492e-493a).

This unnamed sage, surely a follower of Orpheus or Pythagoras, distinguished 1) those initiated into the mysteries of Hades, the unseen world, and 2) the foolish uninitiated men who

"will carry water to pour into a perforated jar in a similarly perforated sieve. And by the sieve, my informant told me, he means the soul, and the soul of the foolish he compared to a sieve, because it is perforated and through lack of belief and forgetfulness unable to hold anything" (*Gorg.*493bc).

In the *Cratylus* Plato refers to Orpheus who viewed the body as *sema*, and this word stands not only for a tomb, but also for a firm enclosure able to keep the incarnated soul within its limits. Therefore the body (*soma*) functions as a fence (*peribolos*) around the soul:

"Since the soul does penance for those things it is expiating, it has the body (*soma*) as a fence (*sema*), in order that it may be saved (*sozetai*), an image of a prison" (*Crat.*400c).

In fact, *sema* as a safeguarding enclosure, equated to the body, is the material dwelling of the soul, his protective house in the Egyptian sense of *per*. At the same time it is a temple: if the ritual service is being kept intact, the "philosophizing" soul is protected from destructive psychic forces and disorder (*isefet*). The tomb is a kind of magic *temenos* and *peribolos*, constructed around the House of Gold (*per neb*), the burial chamber where *sab*-body lies within the sacred mandala guarded by Isis, Nephtys, Neith, and Selket, and where the transcendent birth-giving takes place.

As C. J. de Vogel pointed out, Plato regarded "imprisonment" in the body as a means of salvation: "he understood the challenge of life in a positive sense, as a task given to man by a divine order, not at all as a misfortune".⁶ This is a theurgic point of view: the hierophant must assimilate all the powers he encountered in embodiment. The descent

(*kathodos*) of the soul into the particular human body is recognized by Plotinus as the soul's essential task to order and govern all subsequent lower manifestations:

"If the inclination (*neusis*) is an illumination (*ellampsis*) to what is below it is not a sin, for if it did not exist the soul would have nowhere to illuminate. The soul is said to go down (*katabainein*) or decline (*neuein*) in the sense that the thing which receives the light from it lives with it" (*Enn.* I.1.12.25-29).

The soul is *ba* of Ra, and its return in *patriam* is return to Atum-Kheper-Ra. Theurgy joins the soul with 1) the intellectual Power, which arranges the cosmos, and with 2) the anagogic Power leading to noetic Truth. Iamblichus described eight such Powers, related to different Egyptian gods presiding over ascending degrees of priestly initiation. The soul must be perfectly established in the activities, thoughts and creations of these Powers:

"Then, indeed, it establishes the soul in the Creator God in his entirety. And this is the goal of the hieratic ascent according to the Egyptians" (*De myster.*292.16-18).

For Plato, the soul's identity is the "Ra-nature" as well: the being which has its origin and roots in an order beyond visible things. The winged soul, or rather the higher part of the soul, equated to *nous*, the immortal and divine part in us, attains to knowledge of the truth, though the state of being bound in an earthly body (*kebat*, which is sharply contrasted to the intelligible body of light, symbolized by a mummy in the Egyptian tomb) touches it in so far as it has undergone a hard struggle against the Sethian darkness, a sort of *jihad* for spiritual survival by dominating the lower psychic forces. These forces (along with body itself), if properly ritualized, purified and controlled, may help the higher soul in its ascent (*anodos*), or may drag it down if they are dominated by Apep (Apophis), the snake of non-existence and darkness.

The solar barque is to be defended against the constant attacks of this iconographically crystallized image of evil, the enemy of Ra and all the gods, the monster of destruction who wishes to overthrow the ordered cosmos of solar theophanies. In everyday life the Egyptians were constantly engaged in fighting this enemy, trying ritually or by the purity of their hearts to recover and keep the equilibrium both of the cosmos and of themselves.

The body as such is not an evil thing, but a vessel of divine presence, the house of *ba*. Therefore only the corruptible mortal side of corporeality must be neglected or rather transformed, as far as possible, into the icon of intelligible forms. The Egyptian tomb as a bridge between visible and invisible is the most important thing on earth, since "the time that one spends on earth is only a dream", according to *The Harper's Song* (Theban Tomb 50). To build a tomb is the main work for which man lives. It is at

once the investment of all his material resources, his philosophical way of life, and the theurgic door to the beyond.

In fact, the tomb is built for the gods so as to affirm their eternal order and ritual of creation. To say that the mystery of the tomb and the corpse was "of this world" is to misinterpret the metaphysical nature of sensible reality which is never merely "this world" of the Cartesian subject, but rather *ta neteru*, "the land of the gods", the metaphysical realm poured into the physical. The "inner world" surrounds the ancient Egyptian consciousness as the "physical landscape", as the terrestrial body of Geb, symbolically articulated and turned into a display of divine words (*medu neter*) and of theurgic *sunthemata*.

3. Sacrificial Alchemy of Tombs and Altars

During their cultic service, the Egyptian priests are lifted up into union with the gods, yet remain in their mortal bodies. The Neoplatonist would say that divine light possesses their hieratic imagination – as if they are entering the solar barque, the luminous *ochema*. This is achieved through sacrificial rites which recapitulate cosmogony or in *photagogia*, the descent of solar rays, although their mortal thinking may remain the same as usual.

The tomb is an integral part of the solar circuit, the archetypal *schema* of eternal creation, of descent (*ba* moves down to the corpse of Osiris) and ascent (*ba* moves up to the spirit-intellect of Ra). Osiris and Ra constitute the metaphysical unity; therefore both the tomb and the body are necessary in the system of divine semiotics.

According to G. Shaw, the number of the body is called *bomiskos* ($5 \times 6 \times 7 = 210$) by the Pythagoreans, *bomiskos* being the diminutive form of *bomos*, the term for the altar of blood sacrifice. The soul is a spherical number ($6 \times 6 \times 6 = 216$) rooted in 6, the first number to blend the divisible with the indivisible; therefore to enter the sphere (*aten*, the solar orb of Ra) means to be initiated in the "bloodless secret" of the altar.⁷

The body is produced from *bomiskos*. The sacrificial alchemy of *ba* depicts the change from body to spirit and then to body again at the higher ontological level, and this operation symbolizes a drama of death and rebirth. The altar is a womb of transformation. It is analogous both to the material human body and the tomb, made for one's *ka* and for the theurgic icon of *sab*-body in the holy land of Sokar, in the beautiful West.

In Vedic India, the sacrificial altar, *vedi*, compared with the earth-navel, the womb, was female, and the ritual fire, *agni*, male. Their union brought forth the offspring – as the union of Isis and Osiris brought forth Horus, and that of Sekhmet and Ptah produced Nefertum, born out of the primeval lotus flower.

Sacrifice is a rending-apart of the unity of things and its restoration: the model for the activities of initiates, dialecticians, and grammarians, who follow the same pattern albeit on different levels. The altar (and the human body as well) is the sacred *topos* where the breakdown and reunification, death and reanimation, *proodos* and *epistrophe* take place. During the rite performed, the sacrificer becomes the entire manifested universe with all its demiurgic energies leading towards multiplicity and back to unity. Ultimately, the whole cosmic body (the universe as the Temple of Amun-Ra) is involved in the rite of sacrifice which finally ends in the restoration of the Eye of Horus, beatification, and "satisfaction" (*botep*, *betep*, also meaning "offering", a central concept in the ritual, viewed as an interaction between the gods themselves).

This temple-like cosmos is also the tomb and the alchemical laboratory. The rituals enacted in tombs and temples symbolically intervene in cosmic events and their noetic paradigms. The stone material itself was first used by Imhotep who cast the Djoser's *sed* festival of rejuvenation into stone, symbolizing the divine realm of permanence and incorruptibility, crystallized as the primordial noetic stone of *ben-ben* in Heliopolis. The forms executed in stone and decorated by script and images, curiously designated as "gods", show the intrinsically sacred character of stone in the Old Kingdom.

This is a probable source of the concept of the "philosophical stone" in late alchemical traditions (if this powerful symbol is not simply a prolongation and development of the "Paleolithic metaphysics"), because the stone was clearly seen as an interface between the visible world and the noetic reality, that is, the form where the deity became manifest from the primeval cone-shaped *ben-ben* down to the cultic statues and tombs.

The art of architecture was designed to shape, measure and control the path to salvation monumentalized in the visible configuration of intelligible Forms. Therefore a pyramid (*mer*), as it makes visible the invisible divine radiance, is called *akhet* and serves as a gigantic material *sunthema* for the ascent to heaven and inclusion within the circuit of Ra. As the *ba* of Ra ascends from the Duat, symbolized by the body of Nut, to the *akhet* and appears as a new-born Scarab, so the pharaoh's *ba* ascends by way of its *akhet* (pyramid).

Akhet, meaning that "radiant place" where the sun rises and sets, the Sun-door, and the land of the blessed, the noetic sphere of immortality, is the feminine form of *akh* which designates the spiritual state of being, the goal of initiation, transformation and ascent. The initiation rites, or the royal spiritual path to first principles, furnished the prototypes of Egyptian funerary religion. The utterances known to us as the *Pyramid Texts* (the oldest substantial and esoteric corpus of religious texts known to mankind) and other theurgic instruments are employed in order to

transform *ba* into a spirit of light (*akh*). This function is replicated by the architectural forms of stone pyramids and tombs.

The sacred territories of temples and the symbolical structures of tombs mirror the topography of the heavenly realm, and therefore must be regarded as images (*eikones*) of the related divine archetypes. No wonder that a pyramid is equated to the name of the deceased pharaoh (Osiris), because sacred speech (the sequence of hieratic names) served as a means of making the transcendent realm of meaning manifest in the immanent realm of symbolic objects and actions. Cultic speech and script transferred celestial events to the terrestrial domain and vice versa.

Accordingly, the *heka* of the spoken and written word not only provided the means of transposing noetic realities into material symbols and rituals, but also of elevating the initiate (for every true initiate is a "deceased" in the philosophical sense) to the archetypal realm where all earthly capacities achieve their richest noetic fulfilment, their *telos*. The verb *sakh* means to transfigure, to transfer into the "radiant place", and this ontic transfiguration may be described either as the "god's ascending to his horizon", or as spiritual rebirth.

Like the Neoplatonic term *skopos*, *akh* designates the aim of all human thoughts, words, and actions that are able to reach out into the realm of noetic archetypes, thereby constituting a certain particular bios, that is, the "philosophical way of life", the spiritual path of "builders". The "builders" are those who are vigilant about the concerns of eternity (*neheh*): they build the tomb, *akhet*, and construct the alchemical body of light. Hence, to erect a "tomb", both in a material and spiritual (inner) sense, means to strive for the *akh*. The material tomb houses the embalmed corpse (*sab*-image) on the Osirian level. It serves as a symbol for the intelligible *akhet* which houses the resurrected divine body (*sab*), shining with gold on the Ra level.

4. Alchemical Passage through Death

Egyptian alchemy inherited and transmitted the Osirian concept of initiation-ordeals, of death and rebirth, applied to alchemical bodies and involving their changes from one qualitative level of life to another. Hellenic antiquity regarded this art of the mysterious "stone" as "philosophy" transmitted by Thoth and Anubis. Sometimes the "stone" is likened to lightning on a dark night, the Heraclitean *keranos*, the lightning flash, or thunderbolt, that guides and governs all things, leading to qualitative change and a new ontic level of comprehension.

The Philosopher's Stone symbolizes the circular movement: up-and-down and down-and-up, *katabasis* and *anabasis*. This Stone may be equated to the Phoenix (the Heliopolitan *bennu* bird on the top of *ben-ben*), the Egg

in which All is included and a ferment of transformations is actualized, also with the Snake curving round with his tail in his mouth, sometimes enclosing Osiris as a mummy. As J. Lindsay pointed out:

"The resurrection that the alchemist seeks in himself and in his materials... is something that exists and manifests itself here and now... It is the movement from a lower level of life to a higher level, from one level of consciousness to a level with a qualitatively higher centre of organisation".⁸

Alchemy is inseparable from the theory of sacrifice. The sacrificial interpretation of life and all of its ritualized activities is based on noetic archetypes. According to this theological perspective, all our actions are actions of the Lord of Life, "a high Nile, on whose *ka* one lives, who provides for gods and men":

"His right Eye is the day,
His left Eye is the night,
It is He who guides the faces on all the ways.
His body is the primeval Water,
His entrails are the Inundation
That creates everything that is and keeps all that exists alive.
His breathing is the breath in every nose,
His are destiny and fortune for everyone" (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.5.19.20).

As the hidden Sun (*suryam gulham*) of the *Rg Veda* (V.40.6), He is to be found in the heart, as the All-worker (*vishvakarma*). Following this ancient theology of *pantheos*, the cosmogonical conquest of Ahi-Vrtra by Indra for the sake of Agni and Soma, the slaying and eating of the Snake (like the Egyptian Apophis), may be interpreted as the domination of the lower *ba* by the *Ba* of Amun. The self is ruled by the Self. Ahi-Vrtra stands as a mythological equivalent of Prajapati and Purusha – the archetypal *Anthropos*, who is dismembered in the process of demiurgy as are Osiris and Dionysus.

In a sense, the Sacrificer is himself a victim. His dramatic fate depicts the supernatural dialectic of the One and Many, the Principle (Monad) and its creative emanations. Since any procession is also reversion, the second phase of sacrifice consists in putting together again that which had been dismembered and scattered, and in building up the body of Osiris at a higher ontological level. Accordingly, every deceased who enters the Osirian Duat is "dismembered" in the realm of this world and "reconstituted" in the Netherworld as Osiris: his previous separate self "disappears" or radically changes its identity, being re-named and integrated into the higher unitary Self of Osiris, or *Anima mundi*.

This passage through death, assimilation and reanimation constitutes the spiritual path of initiation before one's natural death and is the sacrificial journey towards the further unification of Osiris and Ra. A. K.

Coomaraswamy argues that liberation (and this notion stands against all the too naïve expectations of modern individualists) is for the gods, not for men: we must not suppose that “we” are the heroes of this cosmic drama. There is but One Hero, the supreme Principle, or God, who “fettens himself by himself like a bird in the net” and then “breaks out of the snare”.⁹

This is the rite performed by the supreme Principle, and all other “rites” within the realm of Heka-manifestations follow this pattern of “forgetfulness” and “recollection” on different levels of being. Therefore to “rationalize” our conduct, as A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out, means to refer our activities to their noetic archetypes:

“If we cannot give a true account (*ratio, logos*) of ourselves and our doings it will mean that our actions have been ‘as you like it’ (*vrtha*), reckless (*asamkhyanam*) and informal (*apratirupam*) rather than to the point (*sadhu*) and in good form (*pratirupam*).”¹⁰

Our “rationality” stems from the intelligible pattern exposed by the self-revelation or self-disclosure of God, who, in the form of noetic plenitude, emerges from his own ineffable essential darkness.

5. Mummification and Dialectic

The Egyptian rites of embalming and mummification are based on the symbolic metaphysics of dismemberment and reconstitution of unity, which is inherited as an esoteric Orphic myth of Dionysus and the Titans in the Neoplatonic tradition.

“Why are the Titans said to plot against Dionysus?”- asks Damascius. “Because they initiate a mode of creation that does not remain within the bounds of the multiform continuity of Dionysus” (*In Phaed.* I.5).

Since men are created from the fragments of the Titans, “the Titanic mode of life is the irrational mode (*boti he titanike zoe alogos estin*), by which rational life is torn asunder (*ibid.* I.9). Through it we fragment the Dionysus (Osiris) in ourselves, thus becoming similar to Titans (the followers of Seth), “but when we recover that lost unity, we become Dionysus and we attain what can be truly called completeness” (*ibid.* I.9).

The rejoining of the limbs of Dionysus, or Osiris, is the prototype of overcoming death that also provides the mythical precedent for embalming conducted by Anubis, the initiator into the mysteries aimed at the restoration of life to the body at the psychic level of *mundus imaginalis*. Dismemberment symbolizes the irrational disintegration of the human being who now needs to be reunited and elevated to the realm of *akh*, or *nous*. Therefore the embalming process repeats the rites and inner experiences of initiation: the corpse is transformed into the icon of a new alchemical body, built up beyond the realm of physical existence.

The word *sab* means not only mummy, but also dignity, nobility, and the state of spiritual enlightenment which itself is invisible and is only symbolized by the material *sab*, filled with *heka* powers and placed into the coffin, i.e., into the body of the sky goddess Nut, the soul’s celestial mother. According to esoteric hermeneutics, the “placing of the *sab* in the coffin” is tantamount to the ascent of the deceased (of his winged *ba*) to the heavens and return to the winged daughter of Shu and Tefnut.

Through the body of Nut, divided into twelve hours of night and twelve hours of day, Ra himself travels. The goddess Nut swallows him as the evening sun and gives birth to him as the morning sun, the golden Scarab. While speaking about demiurgic Intellect (Ra) which contains pluralities in unity, divisible things undivided, and the Soul (Osiris) that first separates those contents which exist there in perfect unity, Proclus argues:

“This is why the theologians say that at the dismemberment of Dionysus his intellect was preserved undivided through the foresight of Athena and this soul was the first to be divided, and certainly the division into seven is proper primarily to Soul. It is therefore appropriate that Soul should have the function of division and of seeing things discursively. It is no wonder, then, that whereas the divine Forms exist primordially together and unified in the demiurgic Intellect, our soul attacks them separately... And so it is no wonder, as I said, that dialectic questions and answers approach different forms at different times... for spoken discourse breaks apart the single unitary thought” (*In Parm.* 808-809).

It seems that dialectic, like geometry, is a pursuit belonging to the Osirian realm: dialectic concerns divided multiplicity, but, finally, through the certainty that it establishes, leads to the Forms. In this sense, a dialectician may be equated to a Sufi *siddiq*, the sincere devotee whose soul is filled with light by God.

Ultimately, Neoplatonic dialectic follows the anagogic patterns, already presented in the *Pyramid Texts*. The initiatory ascent to heaven concerns the inner realities of the heart-intellect, symbolized by sensible images. Therefore the methods of dialectic should be regarded as rationally developed, reinterpreted, and transformed methods and procedures of sacred rites, including those of the royal coronation. The dialectical ascent and assimilation with divine realities (*apotheosis*) is like the initiatory ascent of the king “to heaven as a divine falcon” in order to contemplate “this sacred image in heaven.”

This elevation (as a part of the royal coronation rite) furnishes the initiate with *akh*-power of Ra and his Uraeus, thereby making the initiate familiar with “the wisdom of the gods like Horus”. If rendered into rational philosophical discourse, this elevation means an ascent to the Forms through dialectical exercises and purification of the soul, aspiring to communion with Intellect and the One. The royal way to

immortalization is that of the philosophical life, as opposed to the tyranny of one's lower mortal nature. According to Proclus:

"Tyranny is taken as a symbol of the life of becoming... the earth-born or Gigantic life. The true warfare with the Giants takes place in souls: whenever reason and intellect rule in them, the gods of the Olympians and Athena prevail, and the entire life is kingly and philosophical" (*In Parm.*692).

The philosopher, who is "winged" (*epteromenos*) like the Egyptian *ba* and separated from the lower inclinations, practises dialectic, defined by Plotinus as "the *logos* which can speak about everything in a reasoned and orderly way" (*Enn.* I.3.4.1-2).

Dialectic investigates existent things that are real (*ta onta*) and non-existent things (*ta me onta*), discusses good and not good, what is eternal and what is not eternal. It stops wandering about the world of sense and settles down in the realm of intellect, feeding the soul in what Plato calls "the plain of truth" (*Phaedr.*248b), where the soul finds its true food. Seeking scientific knowledge (*episteme*) of everything, dialectic uses the method of division to distinguish the Forms and to determine the essential nature of each thing (*Enn.* I.3.4.5-14).

Regarded as the supreme science (which has close analogies in all kinds of ancient metaphysics expressed in sacrificial and mythological discourse), dialectic is able to distinguish between appearance and reality, multiplicity and unity, various levels of being and gradations of form. It shows concern for "rationality" (which otherwise may be darkened and diminished), as Egyptian temple rites are concerned with the constant keeping of *maat* (truth and order), the solar "rationality", against the threat of *isefet*, irrationality, disorder, and darkness.

Therefore dialectic may be regarded as a well ordered rite of thought: it is efficacious and real to the extent that it is ritualized according to the intelligible patterns and rules of logic. It approaches "real beings" (*ta onta*) methodically, and the same strictly methodical approach characterizes hieratic rituals and sacrificial procedures. The method of dialectic consists in seeing similarities and differences that are related back to unity.

6. Musicians, Lovers and Philosophers

The concept of love is included in the very definition of philosophy. In this respect, one should observe that musicians of the Egyptian goddess Hathor are "lovers" as well. They are viewed as the divine incarnations of the goddess and of her golden son Ihy, the Lord of Hearts and the splendid lotus flower beside his mother. Therefore the initiate, guided by Maat-Hathor (order and drunkenness, intellect and love), may ascend to

the celestial *akhet* with Ihy, the deity of those music-makers who desire rebirth in the solar cycle.

Plotinus, however, makes a distinction between 1) the musician, whose interest in the beautiful is confined to his art, and 2) the lover, who perceives the beautiful first through his sense of sight (the most intellectual of all senses, which surpasses hearing, according to the Greeks) and then through contemplation of intelligible beauty is able to enter the garden of truth. The lover is still unaware of his own knowledge which can be revealed through the conjoined practices of dialectic and the contemplative life. Nevertheless, love can inflame and stir desire for transcendence, serving as the wing for the soul. Peter A. Kay says:

"The life of philosophy is, among other things, the gradual overcoming of the irrational by means of rationality; the lover, who is caught between the formal and material sides of being, must learn to make himself *form...*"¹¹

Since love is not a pure rational principle, the lover is an image (*eikon*) of the philosopher, as the sensible world is an image of the noetic cosmos. Therefore the philosopher's task is to make proper use of his love for the passage to invisible noetic beauty. The philosopher stands for the hypostasis of *Nous* (Atum-Ra). For this reason he is praised and claimed to be "winged" already. It means that he is separated from the sensible realm of images and contemplates realities.

The practice of dialectic that he uses for ascent is a kind of spiritual *askesis*, directed by the spiritual master, and involves not simply a body of discursive knowledge, but the direct perception of noetic Forms by intellectual intuition, *noesis*, close to the Sufi *dhawq*, tasted knowledge. However, the highest point which dialectic is able to reach is the noetic realm, not the One itself.

The end of the dialectical journey is the solar barque of Ra, the unity of the intelligible circuit, thereby "attaining assimilation to God (*homoiosis theo*) through consciousness of the ultimate One-in-the-many, prior to the return to the One itself".¹² This is not the journey of the deceased, but of the living philosopher who is looking for archetypes by which sensible things can be measured, thus tracing them back to a higher level of unity. For this reason, Proclus makes a clear distinction between dialectic as the dialectical method (*epicheirematike*) of the Peripatetics and dialectic as the proper method of philosophy for the attainment of wisdom. This Platonic dialectic consists in purification and induces recollection of true reality (*In Parm.*989).

As J. P. Anton pointed out, "the purpose of dialectic is not *techne* but *sophia*; its aim is not production but recreation of ideal reality."¹³ If rendered into the language of myth, this "recreation" may be called "rebirth". For Plotinus, it is the rediscovery of one's true self, or return to

Intellect (Ra) through the anagogic *paideia* which implies recollection and ensures “the flight of the alone to the alone”.

The soul, which did not have realities themselves but impressions of them, “must bring the impressions (*hoi tupoi*) into accord with the true realities of which they are impressions” (*Enn.* I.2.4.23-25). This “bringing back” or leading on the upward path is the task of dialectic “which will take us up there where we must go” (*Enn.* I.3.1).

Plotinus describes the three kinds of men who could be acquainted with noetic realities or make the journey from image to archetype: the musician, the lover, and the philosopher. The musician (or the initiate of Hathor, who by rhythmical shaking of his sistrum, acrobatic dances and songs opens the path of renewal through the shining and beautiful Eye of Ra), and being sensitive to beauty of harmony and rhythm, is led upwards to the noetic structure of the primordial sound, the demiurgic *Logos*. The sensible music is measured by numbers (*arithmoi*) and is based on inner mathematical reality, therefore the musician finds the road of Beauty and is already intellectual (has an *akh* nature) but, as Plotinus maintains, is not conscious of his own intellectuality and needs philosophical guidance.

The Plotinian lover can reach a higher stage in the ascent. When the musician’s soul is enkindled by *eros* for intelligible beauty, it becomes a lover able to turn away from temporal images towards the noetic Forms that generate and permeate those images.

The Egyptian attitude is more integral and complex. Hathor, as the divine *shakti* of Horus, plays a part in the mysteries of the sun-barque and initiates ascent to the sky. The New Kingdom solar hymns are “aimed to help the tomb owners join Ra in his nocturnal descent and become absorbed into his great daily rhythm – his death and rebirth and his eternal return”.¹⁴ The ritual accomplishment, *telesiourgia*, is never separated from contemplation and from a certain kind of *noesis*.

7. Divine Knowledge and Theurgic Prayers

The Egyptian initiate, who knows the “mysterious representations” depicted in the *Amduat*, is “a well-provided *akh*”, being “a holy god in the following of Thoth”. To know and to be is the same. “He who knows” is equivalent to the Plotinian “philosopher” in whose soul all images have coalesced with their archetypes, thereby confirming 1) the complex unity of Intellect, and 2) the identity of the knower, his knowing, and what he knows. He who knows

“Goes forth in the daytime (i.e., the noetic light)...
Descends into the realm of the dead...
Is a well provided *akh*-soul”.¹⁵

According to J. Assmann, who regards the formulation of knowledge related to the transition and ascent as a science of its own (which reflects the typical bureaucratic and systematic style of Egyptian daily life):

“The accumulation of such an enormous body of knowledge based on pure speculation and meant to ensure individual salvation (i.e. in the sense of overcoming death) reminds one of the Gnosis and most surely represents one of its roots. Purity in the sense of deliverance from the burdens of earthly existence, may only be attained through knowledge. Purity and knowledge, these two concepts are closely interwoven; does not the deceased assert: I know the names... I am pure?”¹⁶

This knowledge constitutes the ladder of ascent to solar Intellect, making the eternal dimension of the noetic realm accessible to the soul so that it may “come forth as a god”. It helps the soul to reach the divine abode of eternal life where Maat dwells, i.e., the Platonic “plain of truth” where it is fed by intelligible food. This is the path of Plotinian dialectic leading upwards to Intellect, the cosmological ladder “on which the Forms descend from and ascend to the throne of the King.”¹⁷

As contemplation (*theoria*) ascends from nature to soul, and soul to intellect, the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject, because in intellect both are one, not by becoming akin, as in the best soul, but substantially, according to Plotinus. The Egyptian gods are beseeched to recognize the soul ascending to Ra:

“Be not unaware of me, O God;
If you know me, I will know you...
Be not unaware of me, O Ra;
If you know me, I will know you.
Be not unaware of me, O Thoth;
If you know me, I will know you” (*PT* 262).

The ascending path is the path of *gnosis*, of the divine names, because knowing and being are the same. It consists of dialectical interrogations, cross-examinations with predetermined questions and answers, proclamations of one’s true identity. By knowing the secret names of the gods, the initiate (himself being in the blessed state of *maa-kheru*) is able to build up a “mystical ship”, an imaginary *ochema*. This is accomplished by the sole means of mystical language which consists of names belonging to the intelligible realm. The “names” are regarded as noumena of things. Therefore, according to *Aitareya Aranyaka* (II.1.6), speech (*vac*) is the cord, and names (*namani*) the knots whereby all things are bound.

The Egyptian symbolism of the ship or barque (*wia*) is analogous to the Upanishadic and Platonic symbolism of the chariot (*ratha*, *harma*). The gods are travelling in papyrus boats with cabins or in the ceremonial barques used for cultic purposes. A shrine holding the god’s image stood where the cabin was usually located; and the head of the deity set upon a

collar often surmounted the prow and stern of the boat. God (*neter*), the divine henad, or the supreme Self, symbolically embodied in the sacred statue, is the passenger to whom the vehicle belongs; and all intelligible powers constitute its crew. Likewise in the Vedic *devavidya*, the intelligences or element-beings that constitute the psychic personality, are the names of the solar Principle, considered as Breaths (*pranah*), Gods (*devah*), Fires (*agnayah*), Faculties (*indriyani*) of the immanent solar Atman, Brahma, Indra, or Vayu. Strictly speaking, they are not human powers, but only names of Brahma's activities.¹⁸

The sacramental hermeneutics of the Egyptian priests transpose the individual parts of the initiate into the *akb*-realm: this deification of the limbs consists in equating each part of the body with a deity. In the dialectical drama of the otherworldly journey the deceased through his correct answers to the anonymous interrogator (a kind of "divine Socrates") must prove himself a god. The sharing of the divine nourishment (the sacramental food of truth, symbolized by all earthly offerings that ought to be elevated and reduced to their divine archetypes) makes the deceased, or the initiated "dialectician", a member of the community of gods. Wisdom of Thoth is an intellectual and sacramental activity which turns away from things below to their divine paradigms, the golden Forms, leading the soul to the sun-barque and union with Ra by means of recollection (*anamnesis*) and knowledge of the divine names, that is, by means of *dhiker*: theurgic invocation and remembrance.

Becoming like God is the ultimate end of the love of wisdom (*philosophia*) and the goal of its best part – the science of dialectic. Possessed of dialectical wisdom, the philosopher, according to Plotinus, is able to go up to the higher world, away from multiplicity. The final union, however, transcends the intellectual ability of philosophy and dialectic, because the unification of Intellect with the One is not a state (*stasis*) but a "state-outside" (*ekstasis*), and the attainment of it is for those who are already united with Ra.

At first we must "strip off what we put on in our descent", just as those who "go up to the celebrations of sacred rites" (*hoion epi ta hagia ton hieron*), are purified and strip off the clothes they wore before, going up naked, until passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, they see the simple, single, and pure Principle, "from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think" (*Enn.* I.6.7.5-13).

According to Iamblichus, who returned to the ancient theurgic perspective, *theoria* is insufficient for the ascent which is accomplished not through philosophy, but through the work of the god (*to tou theou ergon*). However, the philosopher's thought itself may be regarded as "the work of the god", even if he, as a human being, is still unable to realize it. In fact, *theourgia* and *theoria* are the same. Iamblichus, discussing the workings

of those theurgic rituals, invocations (*kleseis*) and illuminations that summon the souls upwards, says:

"It is evident from this work (*ton ergon*) that what we are now describing is the salvation of the soul. For in contemplation of the blessed sights (*theorein ta makaria theamata*) the soul achieves another life and enacts a new activity. It is no longer considered human... The ascent through invocations (*he dia ton kleseon anodos*) imparts to the priests purification from passions, a liberation from the realm of generation, and a union with the divine Principle" (*henosin te pros ten theian archen: De myster.*41.12-42.1).

The actualization of "another" intellectual life through illumination willingly sent by the gods does not simply mean that theurgic ritual has replaced contemplation, because *theoria* may also be regarded as a direct or indirect working of the gods. The sacred rites are inseparable from the ontology of the Forms and from intellection (*noesis*), aimed at intellectual truth (*noera aletheia*).

If the basis of theurgy is a certain "leading of light" (*photos agoge*), and this light-leading may be revealed in many forms, the rational soul (though unaffected by the divine light in particular theurgic rites, according to Iamblichus), nevertheless, is fully involved into the global schema of "divine workings", because some theurgic operations are intellectual. J. Finamore explains this distinction by introducing a notion of the higher theurgy which concerns the rational soul:

"Just as the vehicle (the seat of images) is united with the gods through its capacity to take on divine images, so the rational soul is united with the gods through its intellectual capacity".¹⁹

Mystical prayers (like the Sufi *dhiker Allah*), themselves regarded as *sunthemata* of the gods, are "intellectual powers" that bring about the union with the gods. The divine breath (*pneuma*), which descends and enters the initiate, or "the presence of the fire of the gods and some ineffable form of light" (*parousia tou tou theou puros kai photos ti eidos arrheton: De myster.*113.8-9), are such that they cover the initiate completely in a circle and he is unable to use any of his own powers.

According to J. Finamore, this divine fire is an illumination, emanating from the god's eternal vehicle to the initiate's ethereal vehicle, which has already been purified, emptied of its own images, and made fit to receive those luminous images imparted from the god. When the initiate's *ochema* is filled with images coming from the deity, this image-making faculty is taken over wholly, but the rational soul is unaffected and still functions.²⁰ This illumination means that the soul's vehicle (the microcosmic solar boat) begins its ascent to the god's vehicle (the macrocosmic solar boat).

But the rational soul is led to union by "the intellectual power contained in the words". G. Shaw describes them as "intermediate *sunthemata*", the names of the gods, *onomata*, which are "individual

theophanies” in the same way that the cosmos is the “universal theophany”.²¹ What does it mean to be “intellectual” in this Neoplatonic context? Surely it refers to the fact that our *logos* has its source directly in *nous* and this is the reason why the theurgist in his invocations and mantric incantations of the *asema onomata* is assimilated to the Demiurge (at the same time preserving his mortal corporeal part) and why the dialectician or the initiate of the mathematical mysteries (*mathematikoi orgiasmoi*) achieve the same assimilation to Intellect.

8. Intellect as the Spirit of Light

According to the Later Neoplatonists, intellective Intellect covers all those creatures to which the Demiurge gives *eidos*, form, but all that soul has in extension, intellect contains in an unextended manner. Therefore the contemplation of our microcosmic intellect is “objective” and that of the soul “subjective”. However, the Forms contemplated are not all on the same level of being, but constitute numerous levels. As Proclus explains:

“Every intellect contemplates directly itself (*nous heauton noei*); but the primal Intellect contemplates itself only... Each subsequent intellect contemplates simultaneously both itself and its priors, so that its object is itself and its source” (ET 167).

The pure intelligible is distinct from the intelligible in the thinker. This is an intelligible object of thought (*noeton*) in intellect, and an intellect in *noeton*. But the higher intellect is identical with its object (*toi noetoi ho autos*), whereas the lower is identical with its own content, not with the higher intelligible. Therefore Proclus argues that the transcendent Forms exist by themselves (*kath' auta*): they are not in us, and what is not in us is not coordinate with our knowledge (*episteme*) but is unknowable (*agnosta*) to our knowledge, being contemplated only by the divine Intellect:

“This is so for all the Forms, but especially for those that are beyond (*ep'ekeina*) the intellective gods; for neither sense-perception, nor knowledge based on opinion, nor pure reason (*logos*), nor our own intellective knowledge connects the soul to those Forms, but only an illumination (*ellampsis*) from the intellective gods renders us capable of being connected to those intelligible-and-intellective Forms... And for this reason, indeed, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (249d)... compares their contemplation (*theorian*) to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and visions (*epopteias*), elevating our soul under the arch of Heaven, and to Heaven itself, and to the place above Heaven” (In *Parm.* 949.13-38).

Philosophical ascent is analogous to that accomplished by the mystery-rites. And philosophy itself essentially is a rite of rebirth – “rebirth” meaning the soul’s unification with divine Intellect, symbolized by Helios

(who coincides with Dionysus, thereby becoming Ra-Osiris), the all powerful light of the cosmos, flaming with gold.

According to the Orphic teachings, which imitate Egyptian theological paradigms, all gods and, in certain respects, all things are manifestations of a single deity with all its powers. This is the king Amun-Ra who has hidden himself as Amun, and has distanced himself in his embodiment as sun:

“Tanen, who elevates himself above the gods:
The self-rejuvenating old one who traverses *nebeh*,
Amun, who abides in all things” (*Pap. Mag. Harris* III.10-IV.8).

As the Bes with seven heads he embodies the *bau* of Amun-Ra and “keeps his name mysterious before the gods, the giant of a million cubits”. In the Orphic cosmogony, from the primeval water, the beginning of everything, mud was formed and from these a dragon that had on it a lion’s head and a bull’s head, and in between the face of a god. This all-seeing Eye is the good spirit of light, Agathos Daimon, since *drakon* was believed to be derived from *derkein*, “to see”.

This spirit of light, Agathos Daimon, was called Heracles and Chronos, since Heracles, according to an Orphic etymology, means the coiling serpent: *drakon heliktos*. The serpent-like Heracles gave birth to an enormous Egg which contained male and female nature and all the many seeds, or archetypes, along with the biform god with golden wings, namely, Phanes, who combined in himself all the gods and cosmic powers, having two faces, one in front and one behind. The name of Phanes is usually derived from *phos* and *phaneros*, that is, from “light” and “illumination”.

Phanes-Helios, stretched like a radiant ribbon (the sphere of the sun) is depicted as a celestial serpent and is the universal god Pan (or Bes), moving the whole cosmos in harmony and manifesting itself in all cyclical changes (or cosmic rituals), including the cycle of the seasons with their changing winds, of succeeding days and nights. This Phanes-Helios-Dionysus (Amun-Ra-Osiris) is the light and life of the cosmos, for, according to Orphic theology, the winds engender life and the soul is borne by the winds (breaths of Shu) from the noetic solar realm into man.

The upper half of the burst cosmic Egg constitutes the heavens, surrounded by the fire of life bursting from the Egg and the coils of the sun serpent. Here, according to H. Leisegang, dwell those initiates cloaked in flames, who have attained the supercelestial region (*hyperouranios topos*) in the course of the mystery rite, or “the upper way” (*bodos ano*).²² They enter the fiery circuit of the solar barque, being “radiant in Light land”, in the Land of Enduring: their hands are taken by the *bau* of Heliopolis and grasped by Ra, their heads are lifted by the two Enneads (PT 532).

How have the *ba* of initiates risen to this supercelestial place, equated to the back of Heaven (the back of Nut) by Plato? H. Leisegang says that this is achieved either after departing from the body in death, or in the ecstasy of their mystery cult, re-enacted in ritual, for all mystical experiences and the corresponding myths are represented in a ritual by the initiates themselves:²³

“Whether we have to do with 1) a cult ritual, with 2) an actual ascension of the soul, or with 3) the inward ascent of the soul to God – all three show the same structure”.²⁴

The soaring of the soul to Heaven and beyond it is the symbolic expression of an inner process taking place in the soul, able to gaze into the infinite plenitude of light and contemplate the spiritual world of Ideas.

According to Iamblichus, the intellectual interpretation (*noera diermeneusis*) of the symbols, practised by the Egyptians, leaves behind the impressions (*eidolon*) of the images (*phantasiai*), thus rising to intellectual truth (*noera aletheia*: *De myster.*250.13-17). This is the Egyptian way of contemplation, interpretation of symbols, and theurgic rites, thereby moving from images to their intelligible archetypes, from the workings of the soul’s imaginative and irrational faculties to Intellect itself. But the images may be manifested on different levels of reality, being revealed in one particular ontological domain while remaining hidden in another. For example, the Egyptian term *seshem* mostly stands for a psychic image in the realm of Duat (or in the human *phantasia*), in contrast to a physical image, actually placed in the tomb. The term *seshem* is closely related to the hidden Amun whose *ba* are revealed through the secret images (*seshemu*).

9. The Osirian Initiation and Separation from the Mortal Body

“The *nous* in each one is god for man”, according to Euripides (fr.839.12), who is fascinated by the idea that human intellect is a part of the deity. W. Burkert regards this thought as “revolutionary” and relates to “the most striking thesis” which asserts that the well ordered arrangement of things in the cosmos proves the existence of a guiding providence (*pronoia*), of divine Intellect that moves everything.²⁵

The immortality of the soul, once taught as an esoteric doctrine of the mysteries, becomes explicit through early Hellenic philosophy. At death, the body (itself being like earth) falls into the earth, but the soul returns to the *aither*, the noetic light or fire. However, this Orphico-Pythagorean and Pre-Socratic theology is revolutionary only for the Greeks themselves, because teachings of the soul’s immortality, heart-intellect (*nous*) and providence clearly stem from much older Egyptian sources. W. Burkert himself is compelled to recognize striking parallels between the Egyptian

Book of the Dead and certain motifs introduced by Orphic mythology, still further elaborated by the Pythagoreans and Plato:²⁶

“This is in sharp contrast to the official, Homeric conception of the immortal gods. To what extent this myth and indeed the very cult of chthonic Dionysus and the beliefs in blessedness and punishments in the nether world depended on the Egyptian Osiris cult from the start remains at least a question that must be seriously asked”.²⁷

When the Greek epigram to those who fell in war in 432 B.C. “boldly” states: “The *aither* has received the souls, earth the bodies”, this is simply a repetition of what had already been said in the *Pyramid Texts* two thousand years before: soul (*ba*) to heaven, corpse (*shat*) to earth (*PT* 305).

For Egyptians, the body taken as a whole lacked the ensouling powers which imparted life (*ankh*) to the limbs; therefore only the body as a whole, called “corpse” (*khat, shat*) returned to the earth. The external and internal organs were regarded as the ensouled parts, governed by different life-giving deities and infused with their qualities. This buried body, *khat*, is analogous to the Greek *soma*, initially never used with reference to the living being, only to the corpse which resembled the de-activated statue. The living body is not *soma* or *khat* at all, but rather a composition of members (*kau*), each serving as a physical vehicle of psychic and spiritual qualities that can exist separately (on the higher ontological level) and, therefore, are regarded as not belonging to the material frame – the physical *khat*, liable to decay, and the mummified body in the tomb.

Since each member of the animated body-structure is a bearer of the different divine *eidōs* and the related psychic power, J. Naydler supposes that the initiatory ordeal of dismemberment (before ascending “on the smoke of the great censuring”) leads to a higher degree of psychophysical integration and a unitary self-consciousness, otherwise inaccessible to the member-based *psuche*:

“It was only through initiation or after physical death that a more unified self-consciousness such as we experience today could arise, as a counterpart to which the body was experienced ‘from outside’ as a unity”.²⁸

However, the author apparently falls into a grave mistake in his treating of “the modern post-Cartesian, dualistic experience of a unified inner self-consciousness” as the esoteric goal of the Osirian initiation. This evolutionary picture presents Cartesian dualism as a desired goal of which only the initiates could dream and teach in their “secret doctrines”, simply because the *ba*, for the Egyptians, was always a disembodied soul and its separation from the body was a fundamental initiatory experience, still echoed in Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy.

Be that as it may, the Egyptian doctrine of *ba*, defined as an immortal soul and out-of-body state, proved to be crucial for the early Hellenic philosophy, especially Platonism. Through the priestly initiation (death

before an actual physical death) *ba* is detached from the mortal body and ascends to the realm of *akh* so as to be united with divine Intellect. This metaphysical pattern based on the theory of 1) divine archetypes and their images, 2) noetic immortality, 3) education and transformation of the soul, and 4) its ascent through knowledge (*episteme, gnosis, anamnesis*), and *praxis* (*askesis, theoria*), became the main subject of philosophy.

Contrary to the *ka*-principle and vital energy which lead to an enhancement of the member-based psychology and which are bound to the tomb ("the place of *ka*"), out-of-body awareness (induced by spiritual exercises or spontaneously experienced at death) introduces the anagogic path of ascent, that is, of return to the Imperishable Stars. This out-of-body awareness is symbolized by the human-headed falcon.

When the *ba* leaves the lifeless body and rises up, man sees his members disintegrated and must detach his consciousness from the lower psychosomatic structure and its most dear memories, in order to reconstruct his true divine identity, that is, to be transformed and reborn as an intelligible being of light. This liberation is the only thing that is important in our earthly existence and the most difficult to achieve.

The *ba*-experience of looking at one's body as if from an outside viewpoint was essential for the Osirian initiation and recollection of one's spiritual Self. This separation from the mortal body is equated to the entering into a temple, into the holiest part of it, ruled by Osiris, the unified royal archetype of the image-like deceased. The path of the deceased (Osiris) to the universal Osiris (the Greek Dionysus) enthroned in the seventh of seven halls, corresponds to the path of the priest on his way to the holy of holies. This path may be further interpreted as an ascent and assimilation to the deity. Death, as the first step in passing a threshold of the Osirian temple, is the main task of philosophical initiation which stems from the ancient mysteries.

According to Plato, so long as we adhere to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our attaining to a vision of the true intelligible realities, let alone union with them. The body fills us with loves, desires, fears, and all sorts of fancies. In order to have pure knowledge we must separate ourselves from the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. Hence, "the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead" (*Phaed.*66c).

However, the realization of one's noetic consciousness (*akh*-identity) involves a newfound awareness of a spiritual body (*sab, sabu*), which serves as a vehicle of the initiate's intellect. During transformation (death and rebirth), one's corporeal members are transmuted by Osirian alchemy and knowledge of Anubis, germinating into the golden spiritual body, the intelligible *eidōs*. This transformation or "changing into" (*iret kheperu em*) does not refer to any actual (literally understood) rebirth on earth, but

belongs to an intermediate state between life and death, comparable to the *bardo* state in the Tibetan books of liberation.

According to W. Federn, this philosophical transformation and identification limb by limb with the noetic pantheon takes place through an inner experience and *beka* powers. It is meant to be performed primarily by the living. Its aim is to prepare the initiate for his death and actually transforms him through the *samadhi*-like experience.²⁹

The Sanskrit term *samadhi* literally means "synthesis" (*sam-a-dha*: to put together, mend, heal) and is an opposite to *vyadhi* – "analysis" (*vi-a-dha*: to divide up, disintegrate). These terms may be understood also in the sense of health and illness, of unity and diversity respectively. Inasmuch as man's various selves or different members are unified (*samabitah*) in the heart-intellect, itself identified with Brahma (Atum-Ra), one realizes the state of spiritual integration instead of estrangement from the Self (represented by the dismembering of Osiris).³⁰

10. Resurrection of the Golden Phoenix

Transformations in the realm of Duat (*alam al-mithal, barzakb* of the Sufis), such as "changing into any form" or "into any god" one wants, may be viewed as particular spiritual exercises and gnostic experiences. When this hypothesis is established and accepted, we should understand better the mysterious inscriptions in the XVIII Dynasty tombs, analyzed by W. Federn, for example: Why the phrase "May he undergo his transformations as he likes" can be paired with "May he follow his heart in his tomb" or "In order that he may follow his heart in his garden".³¹

The expression "following one's heart" (*shems-ib, or shems-ab*) probably denotes the *bios theoretikos*, contemplative way of life, and may be rendered in Greek as *scholazēin*, to have leisure, to be at leisure. This happiness-engendering contemplation "in the garden" implies the transformation of consciousness, restoration of the primordial "golden state", and assimilation with various divine names or "faces" of the deity, thereby mystically changing one's identity and turning all images back to their solar archetypes. This "re-membering" experience finally transforms the *ba* into the *akh*, carried by the spiritual body of light which is germinated when Ra calls the initiate to breathe the divine air. Ultimately, the initiate is turned into Atum-Ra himself, whose assembled limbs represent the company of the gods and the noetic paradigms. Thereby liberation from the Osirian realm (Duat) and the tomb is achieved.

The transformation and turning into a falcon of gold is sometimes depicted as a result of a passage through fire. The concept of purification and divinization involved an alchemical transformation of bodily members into gold or precious stones that symbolize and actually represent the

primordial divine substance. Thus, according to the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, the power of the true staff of Hermes (i.e., of the true philosophy) lies in the fact that it changes all that it touches into gold.³²

The "lifting up of the veil" and meeting with Gold (Hathor), who initiates the soul into a new shining existence at dawn in *akhet*, means that the goddess behind her veil is "none other than divine Reality in which the objective and the subjective coincide".³³ The veil is the cosmogonic projection by which the divine Being is bipolarized and which introduces the play of innumerable "mirrors". However, both veiling and unveiling, descent and ascent depend on the serpent power of Tefnut-Sekhmet-Hathor, the Egyptian Mahashakti. Egyptian thought, both in its essence and particular metaphysical symbolism, is close to that of Indian. Deba Brata Sen Sharma says:

"The manifestation of the universe is thus only a mode of his (the Supreme Lord's) self-revelation in which he utilizes no other material than his own Shakti. Or to put it in perhaps a more precise language, the Supreme Lord's self-manifestation as the universe is only a self-expansion in the aspect of Shakti (*sva-shakti-spharai*). As such, the manifestation of the universe symbolizes his divine glory (*aishvarya*), in the revelation of which the Shakti plays the most important role".³⁴

The Egyptian initiate is reborn as the scarab Khepera emerging from the top of the staff between a pair of horns called *wpt*, "summit of the skull". To open the skull in order to release the reborn is the same as to open the tomb, since the staff (like the caduceus of Hermes, able to change all into gold), is equivalent to the sacred tree (Hathor-Nut), the spinal *djed* column (Osiris), and the standing mummy – "the mound of Sokar". In "the secret darkness" of this mound, the scarab's egg is transformed into a worm. The new germ of divine life appears only after leaving the Osirian mummy-form within which the golden bird is brooding as in the Vase of Hermes (*kerotakes*), or in the Vase of the Philosophers Stone, shaped like an egg with an enclosing serpent, in which the Stone was held to be prepared.

Following an archetypal way of Ra-Khepera, the initiate (the dead man) emerges from the Snake, the spinal column at the top of the skull and is "reborn" as the imperishible *akh* carried by the immaterial golden body of light. The word *sa*, which means the back of the spine, is homonymous with the similar word *sa*, which means protection, amulet, *sunthema*. The *sa* sign is often joined with the *ankh* (life) and the royal *djed* pillar which represented both solar rebirth and the establishment of stability in the cosmos (the ultimate victory of Osiris over Seth).

J. Lindsay maintains that there is a direct line of tradition from the initiation-ritual of sky-ascent and the underworld descent to the alchemical initiation-ritual of god-revelation and transformation in body-

spirit.³⁵ T. Burckhardt traces alchemy back to the priestly art of the ancient Egyptians and says:

"That there is an inward gold, or rather, that gold has an inward as well as an outward reality, was only logical for the contemplative way of looking at things, which spontaneously recognized the same 'essence' in both gold and the sun. It is here, and nowhere else, that the root of alchemy lies".³⁶

The early Christian civilization inherited an alchemical imagery which was used to express the emerging theological conceptions of death and rebirth. The redeeming and transforming spirit is often likened to fire, analogous to the Flame of Uraeus, the Eye of Ra, whose creative activity is described as "cooking". Therefore Ambrose, dealing with the myth of the Phoenix, initially the *Bennu* bird of Heliopolitan cosmogony, says:

"Then when the clay of our flesh... has been cooked by the fire into a vessel (*testa*) so that this flesh, previously pressed down to the earth by a heavy burden, may with the aid of angels fly away towards heaven after receiving the wings of spiritual grace, it has here eternity as a genuine and appeasing pledge for its safety".³⁷

In the Hellenistic mythologies and scientific accounts, the Phoenix bird is related to the myrrh and frankincense produced by the alchemical force of the sun's fire in the driest and hottest parts of the world, less liable to putrefaction (*sepsis*) and, therefore, sweet-smelling. As the symbol of rebirth, the Phoenix is closely associated with the sun's course and those who lived in the Golden Age: he subsists on supernatural foods and produces no excrement (or his excrement is transformed into perfumes).

The decline of the Phoenix, according to M. Detienne, is its reduction to the status of the bat. For Neoplatonists, bats represent souls carried down to the shadows, since their wings are made heavy by the flesh (Proclus *In Remp.* I.120.5-10). Only the perfumed flame of spices on the sacrificial pyre may restore the original "golden" state of the Phoenix.³⁸

For the early Christians, the worshipper is baked in a pot by baptism, and hardened by fire into a new birth, like the solar bird on the Heliopolitan altar, that is, in the nest of frankincense and myrrh. According to the Egyptian cosmogonies of an alchemical type and to texts of initiation, those seeking to know the mysteries of regeneration in the Osirian Duat must know the nature of *ba* and all its transformations accomplished by the immanent fire of Hathor-Sekhmet. By entering the flames of destruction and passing through the fierce heat of transformation (the ecpyrosis which destroys the "man" within us) the initiate is reborn into new life.

This life-bringing destruction is at first accompanied by tears and grief for the rotted corpse of mortal personality, since humankind (*mnt*) arises from the tears (*mnt*) of Ra and is bound to the corruptible realm which must be destroyed. The Egyptian term for "kindling light" or "setting

fire" (*stj*) is related to the verb "impregnate" (*stj*) and this complicated mixture of mourning, destruction of enemies (mortality) and fiery generation of child (immortality) is depicted in the sixth hour section of the *Book of the Night* on the sarcophagus chamber of the Osireion at Abydos and in the tomb of Ramesses VI (1144-1136 B.C.).

The Christians also regarded the resurrected body as a golden statue, purified in the fire. By plunging into fire (spirit) and water, the "lead" of the flesh is to be transformed into spiritual "gold". The purifying pool of flames resembles the Lake of Fire in the Egyptian Duat filled with burning water and presided over by the four Thothian baboons, one at each corner. This rectangular mandala-like Lake cuts out all that is impure in the soul; therefore, if the *ba* enters it being impure and still identified with its mortal shell or some "psychic remains", it will suffer torment and fall down among the knives, as if being hacked to pieces.

To the pure initiate, this falsehood-destroying fire appears as the light of Ra, because at the level of noetic archetypes this Lake is regarded as the Isle of Fire or the fiery lotus flower infused with Ra's intelligible presence. The waters of Nun surround the Isle of Fire, or Heliopolis, the birthplace of Atum (or the divine *ba* of Ra), irradiated and illuminated by the noetic fire of the self-created trinitarian Atum-Khepera-Ra. The close metaphysical relationship of fire and water is emphasized in an alchemical saying quoted by Proclus:

"All things are dissolved by fire and glued together by water" (*In Tim.* III.321-24).

The Athenian philosopher continues:

"For melting and welding are necessary for the production of things whose parts are like each other (*homoimeron*), the latter being provided by moisture and the former by heat; for everything (*to pan*) is melted down (*teketai*) by Fire and is glued together (*kollotai*) by Water" (*In Tim.* III.321.22-25).

L. Siorvanes regards this "melting" of Fire and the "glueing" of Water as the source of the famous alchemical formula *solve et coagula*, dissolve and solidify,³⁹ though Proclus and other Neoplatonists are themselves recipients and interpreters of various ancient cosmological traditions. It is well known that Osiris is identified with the waters of the Nile into which he died and from which he was revived, these psychic waters of death and rebirth being an image and prolongation of Nun at the level of *Anima mundi*. The later alchemists associated the tomb of Osiris (in which his members were hidden but the face was revealed) with *chemia* and mercury, connecting water with lead.

11. Two Ways of the *Amduat*

The corpse of Osiris lies in Rosetau, "at the boundary of the sky", locked "in darkness and surrounded by fire". According to the *Coffin Texts*, whoever gazes on the mummified Osiris cannot die (*CT VII.302c*). The desolate realm of Rosetau, the "Land of Sokar, who is on his sand", is regarded as a sandy landscape where the solar barque needs to be towed and is itself transformed into a fiery serpent. The *Book of the Hidden Chamber*, designated by the scholars as *Amduat*, locates this land, where Horus and Sokar look after the protecting and renewing solar Eye, in the dark fourth hour of the Sun's night journey.

The *Amduat* in its opening section promises *gnosis* to the initiate nine times and depicts how a ram-headed *ba* of Ra enters into the body of Nut, or the Osirian Duat, at the first hour of the night. F. Schuon, who regards man as a reduced image of the cosmogonic unfolding, says:

"On earth, the divine Sun is veiled; as a result the measures of things become relative, and man can take himself for what he is not, and things can appear to be what they are not; but once the veil is torn, at the time of that birth which we call death, the divine Sun appears; measures become absolute; beings and things become what they are and follow the ways of their true nature".⁴⁰

The spiritual night journey ends with the initiate's rebirth in the morning, following the course of Ra through the twelve hours or sections of the goddess body. The texts and pictures of the *Amduat* constitute a unity: the representations are arranged in three registers, with the solar barque always depicted in the middle one. As E. F. Wente pointed out, in the *Book of Amduat* considerable stress is laid upon knowledge of the hidden realities, the netherworld beings and their activities.⁴¹ Therefore this book may be regarded as "philosophical" and "gnostic" in the original sense of these words.

This knowledge of the hidden names (or intelligible forms) is "knowledge of the mysterious *ban*" (*rekh bau shetau*), which can be acquired by the initiate upon earth through the esoteric *paideia*. The *Book of Amduat* provides "knowledge of the *bau* that are in the Duat and their functions pertaining to what is in the hours (*unun*) in their secret names" (*renu-sen shetau: Long Amduat 76.6-7*). The book assures us that:

"The one who knows these secret designs (or mysterious images: *seshemu sheta*) is a well-equipped *akb*. He goes out and comes in within the Duat" (*Long Amduat 45.4-5*).

The gnostic is transformed through his knowledge. He is liberated from destructive irrational forces, mortality, and corruption:

"The one who knows it upon earth is one whose fluid the Fierce Faced One (i.e., the snake Apep) does not drink" (*Short Amduat 297-300*).

Further it is said that the gnostic who knows these words (*rekh medu pen*) is able to approach the hidden realities and Duat dwellers. However, this knowledge is esoteric and confined only to the initiates:

“This is drawn in such a manner in the hidden part of the Duat (*ament net duat*), being remote and hidden (*amen*) because of the selectivity of those who know it” (*Long Amduat* 12.2-3).

This knowledge is modelled on divine patterns and consists of secret words which the gods of Duat say to “this god” and which “this god” says to them, “this god” meaning the solar *ba* who passes the gates and sections of the Netherworld.

The *Book of Amduat* is concerned with instructions for drawing symbolic representations of what is in the Duat, and these pictures function as 1) meaningful signs and images of spiritual hermeneutics, 2) sacred icons for contemplation, and 3) theurgic *sunthemata*, imbued with transformative and anagogic divine powers. The *Long Amduat* version emphasizes “drawing”, that is, the ritual practice of concentration on images (*seshemu*), or symbolic forms, presumably close to the Tantric meditations that include visualizations and drawings of various *yantras* and *pratimas*.

The sacred image grows out of the inner vision; therefore the visible material picture is a copy of the inner *seshem*, and its formal structure is based on the intelligible Idea. Moreover, it does possess an inexorably fixed order (no element may occupy a different location within the general framework) and is inseparable from the mantric words of power, *bekau*, or “divine speech” (*medu neter*). In this respect, the sacred image corresponds in form to the image of the deity in the heart and expresses the essence of divine powers visualized in meditations. The deity’s form can be made up of a secret name, for the divine *ba* is present in its name to the same extent as it is present in cult statues and cosmic manifestations (*keheperu*). Likewise the *Kularnava Tantra* says that the *yantra* consists of mantras, for the god’s form is mantric (*devata mantrarupini*). The same text proclaims:

“What the body is for the spark of life (*jiva*), what oil is for the lamp’s light, that is what the *yantra* represents for all the gods... Each deity on his own seat, and each one with his own special *yantra* appropriate to it...” (*Kularnava Tantra* VI.86-90).

In this case, quasi-geometric *yantras* are analogous to hieroglyphs of Thoth: without the “consignment of breath” (*pranaprasthana*) breathed into them they are dead. This consignment of breath is the insertion into an image of the same divine power that animates the initiate. As H. Zimmer pointed out:

“Whoever worships a figurative sacred image brings before his inward eye the *shakti* animating him in precisely that manifestation through which he is accustomed to see the Divine, by virtue of his initiation...”⁴²

The *Long Amduat* provides the following explanation of its sacred representations:

“This is drawn according to this *seshem* in the hidden place of the Duat (*ament net duat*). The one who draws (*irer*, or *arer*) these representations (*seshemu*) is the likeness of the great god himself. It is useful for him upon earth” (*Long Amduat* 22.2-4).

The *Short Amduat* version is almost the same, but emphasizes *gnosis* instead of the execution of images, be they mental or sensible:

“This is drawn according to this *seshem* in the hidden place of the Duat. As for one who knows (*rekh*) these representations, [he is] the likeness of this great god himself...” (*Short Amduat* 12-14).

Both the drawing of these mysterious *seshemu* that serve for the *symbolike theoria*, (i.e., for contemplation or interpretation), and the process of knowing them lead to assimilation with the deity, the living ram-headed *Ba* of the solar Intellect. Similarly, as the *yantra* is so called because it brings under control (*ni-yantrana*) all the evils stemming from errors and ignorance, so the drawings of the *Amduat*, visualized by an inner sight (the Eye of Horus) and executed, are regarded as useful for those initiates who “draw” them in all ontological realms: physical, psychic, and spiritual:

“This is drawn according to this *seshem* which is in outline upon the east of the hidden chamber of the Duat. It is useful for the *akh* who draws (*irer*) it – upon earth, in heaven, and inside the earth” (*Long Amduat* 193.6-7).

The *Short Amduat* supplies *rekh* (knowing) instead of making or drawing (*irer*). However, ritual *praxis* and *gnosis* are inseparable. For example, the mantric rituals of Isis (*bekau Aset*) for repelling the snake Apep from Ra, performed in the hidden part of the Duat and upon earth, may be regarded either as performed theurgic actions or as gnostic contemplations.

Both attitudes lead to the same truth: the initiate realizes the nucleus of the image as his own inmost essence. When the spell of ignorance is broken, he can pronounce: “I am Ra”. Therefore he who performs (*irer*) these *bekau* rites, related to the visualized and drawn *seshemu*, and he who knows (*rekh*) them, are both “in the barque of Ra (*wia en Ra*) in the sky and in the earth (*em pet em ta*)”. “In the sky” means in the noetic realm after the body’s death, and “in the earth” – still living in the physical body like the *jivanmukta*. Only the selected initiates “can know (*rekh*) this *seshem* without the knowledge (*rekh*) of which the Fierce Faced One (the snake Apep) may not be repelled” (*Long Amduat* 123.2-5; *Short Amduat* 170-179). The snake Apep symbolizes the irrational forces of both personal and transpersonal subconscious darkness.

12. The Union of Osiris and Ra

The *ba* of Ra, standing within a *kar* type shrine in the solar barque and accompanied by other boats, is like a cult statue passing along the processional route: the axial succession of rooms with a series of doorways that had to be penetrated. The solar *ba* enters the cavern of Sokar between the two heads of the Aker-sphinx and the Lake of Fire below.

In the sixth hour of the night journey, depicted in the *Book of Amduat* and other afterlife books, the ram-headed *ba* reaches the water hole of Nun – the darkest point of the Duat where the mummified corpse of Ra lies. This corpse is actually turned into the symbolic icon representing Osiris-Sokar. When Ra and Osiris (as the solar *ba* and its innermost image depicted in the form of a scarab) unite at midnight, in the realm of Sobek and Nun, the new light is ignited through the Eye, now restored by Thoth who takes his seat in front of the solar barque.

In the next (seventh) hour, Apep, the serpent of non-being, is defeated and dismembered, while Ra and Osiris are in the coils of a protective *Mehen*-serpent. Atum itself is depicted on a serpent along with three human-headed and already divinized *bau*-birds.

In the tenth hour the *ba* of Sokar (the falcon in the serpent) and the *ba* of Osiris (the falcon-headed serpent) make their appearance in the front of the barque, and the motif of healing the Eye by Thoth and Sekhmet is again emphasized.

The actual rebirth of the noetic Sun (or the initiate's *akh*-intellect), modelled as an imitation of the original theogony, occurs only in the twelfth hour and is situated inside the serpent called "World-encirler". The solar procession passes through the body of this serpent from tail to mouth. E. Hornung argues that the backward direction indicates the necessary reversal of time:

"All these beings enter the serpent's tail old and frail, weakened by age, and emerge from its mouth as newborn babes. At the end of the hour, the solar beetle, which was already present in the bow of the barque, flies into the outstretched arms of Shu..."⁴³

This motif of the backward direction is echoed in Plato's *Statesman*:

"Such resurrection of the dead was in keeping with the cosmic change, all creation being now turned in the reverse direction" (*Polit.*271b).

This philosophy of the "restored golden age" and of "training ourselves to give and understand a rational account of every thing" (*ibid.*286a) stems from solar eschatology and the "royal art" of spiritual rebirth. The soul is in intellect (*nous*), since intellect is the *arche* of the soul and through the fiery process of rebirth the soul becomes *nous*. The soul inhabits three realms: 1) the sensible world (*aisthetos kosmos*); 2) the intermediary Duat, or Heaven; 3) the intelligible world.

Though the call to separate soul from body is among the main metaphysical and ethical injunctions laid upon us by the Neoplatonists, this separation does not necessarily refer to the moment of death. The "philosophical separation" (analogous to that practised by the Egyptian royal priests and sages) is a stage towards the act of union with the intelligible realm, i.e., of "the coming forth into Day", the solar rebirth. Through sacred rites, contemplations and spiritual exercises (philosophical *praxis*) the soul may separate itself from the body before the body separates itself from the soul at this moment of physical death. The separation and ascent of the soul is accomplished during this life and means living the life of the inner man, turning to one's heart-intellect.

Since the lower activities of man are a mere by-product or an image of the higher divine Self (just as every *ba* is a lesser manifestation of the supreme divine *Ba*), the spiritual ascent implies that the lofty position of the disembodied and regenerated soul helps to govern, transform, and assimilate the mummy-like body which now reveals its luminous intelligible aspect. According to Porphyry, the constitution (*schesis*) of the body is retained in Hades through the stamping of an *eidolon* (image, *simulacrum*) on the *pneuma* by *phantasia* (*Sent.*32). He says that to be in Hades for the soul is

"to preside over an image whose nature is to be in a place, and to have an obscure hypostatic form of existence. That is why if the subterranean realm be a dark place, the soul, without separating from existence, descends into Hades when she attaches herself to some image. ...she impresses a form on the *pneuma* by the power of her imagination, and thus she acquires an image. The soul is said to be in Hades because the *pneuma* that surrounds her also happens to have a formless and obscure nature... This is not to imply that the essence of the soul changes place, or is in a locality, but acknowledges that she contacts the habits of the bodies whose nature it is to change location... Therefore, when in a condition of superior purity, she unites with a body that is close to immaterial nature, that is, an ethereal body. When she descends from the development of reason to imagination, she receives a solar body. If she... falls in love with forms, she puts on a lunar body" (*Sent.*32).⁴⁴

The *Book of Gates* (employed in the Ramesside royal tombs), which emphasizes the "way of ritual" and speaks of knowledge only in relation of making offerings, nevertheless confirms that "those who know Ra" (*rekhyu Ra*) are initiates upon earth, though their *akh* are already at the secluded place of the West. In this book, immediately before the sixth hour the Judgment of the Dead is depicted, an Ennead of justified initiates (*maakheru*) stand on the steps, while their lower irrational parts (the "enemies") are put into the Place of Annihilation. This justification is regarded as a necessary condition before the union of the solar *ba* and its Osirian image in the sixth hour of the night. The mummies of the

initiates, or the deceased, are depicted as lying on a serpent-shaped bed: they participate in the archetypal union of Ra and Osiris, which results in spiritual resurrection and restoration of the soul's primeval intelligible nature. The human beings who were swallowed by the rope-like Apep (the ignorant mortal nature) now raise their heads from the serpent's body. The circular Lake of Fire, inhabited by a uraeus, is also represented.

The creative and illuminative power of Ra is sometimes symbolized by the sceptre of Atum. As the divine Intellect, Ra is equivalent to *Buddhi* which derives from the Sanskrit root *budh*, meaning "to wake up", and is clearly distinguished from *manas*, the discursive mind standing between the senses and *buddhi*. The world of Platonic Forms, or the realm of radiant luminosity identical with the archetypal fount of being, namely, Atum-Ra, is an object of mystical experience. Like the Plotinian *Nous*, "it might be likened to a living sphere... to a globe of faces radiant with faces all living, to unity of souls, all the pure souls... with Intellect enthroned over all..." (*Enn.* VI.7.15.24-29).

The *noesis* (intellection) which deals with the Forms, or *akhu*-lights, is provided by Ra as a graceful illumination. The illumination is synonymous with the unity of the Eye of Ra and its receptacle. The goal of Ra in the Duat is to gaze on his own corpse and effect the resurrection of Osiris-Amenrenf, "he whose name is hidden". Sometimes the corpse of Osiris appears lying in a sarcophagus surrounded by the snake Ouroboros. The sun ball pushed by the scarab beetle contains Osiris and Ra, and, after the union of these gods in the Duat, Ra emerges from the ball in the form of a ram's head.

This pattern of unification and regeneration may be repeated at different levels of being. The sarcophagus and the tomb may be equated to the temple – a place where gods are revealed, since the temple itself may be invoked as the form of a god. The building activities, the liturgical acts and the theogonic contemplations – all are related. The ritual invocation effects the appearance of the god (*ad khai*) by calling forth his hidden being from the primordial darkness, the tomb, or the hidden (*sheta*) naos of the "black stone" (*iner kem*). Thus, through the rites of *peri* and *khai* the deity is manifested into daylight and, likewise, the transformed initiate emerges from the Osirian Duat. As an equivalent of the king, the initiate himself becomes the lord of the rituals (*neb irit ikhet*), who creates and maintains the divine life. His body is the coffin (*ankh*) and the temple. Therefore R. B. Finnestad says:

"The effect of the uniting of the *ba* of the god with his temple is that all gods are seen in his light and acquire existence in his theophany. The mythologem of the *ba* flying out of the underworld and spreading his light in the cosmic room is his coming to unite with the divine forms of cosmos, and these include not only the forms of the Winged Disk – engraved over the doorways along his road – but the forms of all gods:

they come into being in his light and they are forms of his light, manifesting his diversified being. The uniting act of the creator means that he communicates himself; the gods receive his *ba*-capacity, the capacity of the light manifested in the sundisk – which is the power to appear from the dark underworld".⁴⁵

The *Book of Praying to Ra in the West, Praying to the United One in the West*, usually described as the *Litany of Ra*, deals with seventy-four divine manifestations (*keperu*) and seventy-five invocations. The union of Ra and Osiris is emphasized; therefore the names and the depicted figures refer to the main forms of Ra in the Duat. Ra is symbolically regarded as a migratory bird that enters the Duat and thus serves as a paradigm of rebirth repeated by those initiated into the mysteries. For this reason the initiated gnostic, or deceased, confirms that he has a thorough knowledge of Ra's manifestations at the psychic Osirian level: both of their forms and of their names.

This knowledge shows the hidden ways towards union, because the gnostic realizes the true relationship between archetypes and images: his own *ba* is an image of Ra (the demiurgic Intellect) and of Ra's *Ba* (an intellectual part of the Universal Soul). He invokes the mysterious nocturnal Sun, like Lucius, the initiate of the Isis mysteries in Apuleius, who at midnight caught sight of the Sun, dazzling in radiant light (*nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine: Metam.* XL.285). This invocation allows him to encounter Nun, Ra and his divine *Ba*.

The ritual descent (*katabasis*) into the Duat may be experienced inwardly or performed as a descent into a crypt or a tomb, itself frequently equated with the divine "book" which contains an esoteric knowledge (*rekh*) of the solar theophanies and of eternal life. Through this *descensus ad infernos*, the subsequent transformation and meeting the gods "face to face" are achieved in the realization of one's divine identity: "I am one of you".

The initiate is equated both with the corpse and the *ba* of the United One, Osiris-Ra, and, finally, he is assimilated to the divine Intellect itself. His limbs are deified and he becomes "entirely a god" who can affirm this spiritual miracle saying in triumph: "I am Ra".

13. The Inner Alchemical Work and Return to Itself

The return to the solar Principle is "the return to itself" (*he epistrophe pros heauton*), to the self-knowledge of *Nous*, and this self-knowledge is the knowledge of the luminous Forms, not of a private self. The modes of cognition correspond to the grades of reality. And as the divine Forms are paradigms for their subsequent images, so *Nous* is the paradigm of all modes of cognition. In a certain sense, all knowledge is Ra's knowledge,

albeit manifested as a hierarchy of different modes and degrees. This is because all things are either intelligible (*noeta*), or objects of discursive thought (*dianoeta*), whose objects are images (*eikones*) of the intelligibles; or objects of perception (*aistheta*), which themselves are images of discursive thought (*Anon. Proleg. VIII*).

However, as T. Burckhardt pointed out, in connection with the reflection of archetypal realities on lower levels of being, "the imagination possesses a certain advantage over abstract thought", because "it is capable of multiple interpretation" and relies on the inverse correspondence that exists between the corporeal and spiritual realms".⁴⁶ The self-knowledge which the Delphic oracle exhorts us to seek is self-reflective activity by which the soul realizes its immortal essence (Damascius *In Phaed.*176.6; Olympiodorus *In Alcib.* I,8.15-9.19). As Proclus argues, this knowledge is also knowledge of the Forms that are transcendent in the sense of being "exempt" (*exeremena*) from subjects and "unknowable" to them, except by the heart-intellect which is unattainable by lower recipients (*In Parm.*949.13-28).

There are different kinds and degrees of transcendence and a twofold unity for every class of plurality: one that is immanent and one that is transcendent. According to L. Siorvanes, the Latin *transcendere* is coined for the Greek term meaning displacement or transition (*metabasis*) and also is related to *epekeina*, "on the far side", "beyond" (cf. Plato *Rep.*509b).⁴⁷

Self-knowledge is knowledge of what is above, in the realm of archetypes, because the effect is contained within the cause and in knowing the latter one must know the former. Thus self-reflectivity constitutes a return to one's source, and the idea of *imago dei* (*tut neter* of the Egyptians) provides the metaphysical basis for the *epistrophe pros beauton*, return to one's true and divine Self. Proclus argues that the soul is not merely a living entity but also life itself, capable of self-knowledge, and therefore *gnosis* is a kind of life. This self-reflective activity belongs only to a non-bodily entity (*ET* 187).

The imagination as a mirror reflects images which come from a higher ontological level and the sight or contemplation of them turns the soul back towards that higher level.⁴⁸ Proclus says:

"Just as nature stands creatively above the visible figures, so the soul, exercising her capacity to know (*kata to gnostikon energousa*), projects on the imagination, as on a mirror, the principles of the figures (*tous ton schematon logous*); and the imagination, receiving in pictorial form these reflections of the ideas within the soul, by their means affords the soul an opportunity to turn inward from the pictures (*ton eidolon*) and attend to herself. It is as if a man looking at himself in a mirror and marvelling at the power of nature and of his own appearance (*morphen beauton*) should wish to look upon himself directly and possess such a power as would enable him to become at the same time the seer and the object seen" (*In Euclid.*141.2ff).⁴⁹

There is a hierarchy of knowledge. Even in examining physical things a displacement (*metabasis*) and an ascent from the corporeal to the incorporeal state may be observed, because sense-perceived bodies belong analytically to a different rank than their physical qualities. One who cares to transfer his attention to the Forms from the things of sense ought to establish intellect instead of opinion (*doxa*) "as his guide on the road" and contemplate each Form as unconnected with sensible things. However, theurgic faith transcends both discursive reasoning and intellect. According to Proclus, the souls who are to be led upwards show their readiness to participate in the divine and need the help of attendant daimons for their ascent. By this help (since everywhere what is imperfect joins itself to the perfect through its fitness for the daimonic gifts) they are lifted up to more divine causes which are completely separate from body (*In Parm.*666-668).

This separation of the *ba* from the body is implied in the short invocation to Sokar (*BD* 74). The soul of the deceased, liberated from the earthbound body, shines in the sky and climbs on the sunshine, though her body remains inert. As A. Roberts pointed out, this out-of-body experience, celebrated by the ritual dances and chants of Hathor, releases certain supernatural powers able to regenerate existence anew in the solar circuit:

"Just as a live plant comes from an apparently lifeless seed, and Horus comes from Osiris, so the *ba* now soars from the body which is viewed as a seemingly lifeless corpse".⁴⁹

The author says that this liberation is also celebrated in the beautiful chant of the Ancestor Ritual, following the pharaoh's service at the Heliopolitan sun altars. By the Ancestor Ritual A. Roberts means the XIX Dynasty ritual performed for the ancestral rulers, also known as the Ritual of Amenhotep I. She interprets this ritual as a threefold passage of rebirth which consists in 1) reintegration, the cult renewal of the body, 2) regeneration of life in the heart realm, and 3) the service of Osiris which leads to cosmic Heliopolitan rebirth.⁵⁰

This is the sevenfold transformational journey made according to fixed theological patterns. The same archetypal structure recurs in a variety of different ways in the architectural design of the New Kingdom temples, in the journey of death and rebirth through the body of Nut depicted in the *Book of Night* and even in the composition of the *Memphite theology*. The passage through the twelve hours of the *Book of the Night* (the tomb of Ramesses VI provides two complete versions of this book) means both 1) a re-creation of the world and 2) spiritual liberation of the initiate.

While seeking the flame-like heart-intellect in the psychosomatic darkness, the initiate travels through the inner organs of the sky goddess Nut. Her macrocosmic divine body is related to the microcosmic structure of the initiate's body. Like the Tantric *sadhaka*, the "traveller"

resembles a finely tuned instrument: the rituals and visualizations, along with breath exercises, lead to the activation of the elevating serpent power of Hathor. Like the Tantric *chakras*, created by yogic visualization, the inner organs of Nut, related to different night-hours and different *keperu* of Ra, are imagined and experienced in this inward odyssey from the tomb to solar immortality.

Mental purification consists primarily in meditation and visualization of *sesbemu*, the hidden images imbued with subtle transformative power, especially by visualizing one's members as *neteru* and as constituent elements of the divine body. This exercise includes one's identification with the proper deity. Contrary to the Greek philosophical *theoria*, which relied on discursive reasoning and dialectic, at least at the lower levels of the soul's *anabasis*, the Egyptian *theoria* is based on the transforming power of imagination, guided by theological reasoning which follows archetypal patterns. The images are not defined as illusory simulacra (the means of ontological deceit) but regarded as vehicles of the serpent power of Hathor-Sekhmet.

The concentration upon graphic representations of a deity, upon its hieroglyphs and the related *heka*-names, is a part of a spiritual discipline inseparable from sacred rites. Therefore *theoria* consists in the contemplation of dynamic divine constellations perceived through mental and natural images, or of one's worshipped deity regarded as one's very Self. The transformative inner ritual, itself based on knowledge of divine names and visualizations of symbols, constitutes a progressive catharsis aimed at the creation of the luminous golden body, *sah* (analogous to the Tantric *diviya-deha*), and the transcendence of the self. This means the passage from self-imposed confinement into a mortal body and into the finite world, that is, from the irrational disorder (*isefet*) and imbalance to the rational order (*maat*) and the transcendent balance of *peras* and *apeiria*, the equilibrium of Horian and Sethian forces.

The inner alchemical work consists in a proper re-arrangement of divine powers through their images and symbols. The means of analogy are employed to depict a relationship between *eikones* and *paradeigmata*. The microcosmic tomb (or the horizon of one's psychosomatic consciousness) becomes a battle-field of Ra and Apep. The battle itself may be likened to the semiotic game conducted between the transformed (living) and damned (dead) elements of oneself. The Sun's death and rebirth journey through the twelve night hours not only serves as a model for the inner alchemy of human consciousness, but also can be seen as a symbolic journey through the twelve months of the annual cycle and the related festivals. A. Roberts says:

"This night journey is one of the fundamental deep processes underlying mythology, liturgy, ritual and sacred architecture during the New Kingdom, a process in which the 12 hours of cosmic night are

ritually transposed into seven stages of transformation enacted in a threefold temple".⁵¹

The totality of the course of Ra encompasses three divine realms: the primeval Waters, the intelligible cosmos, and the Duat. They correspond roughly to the One (Nun), Intellect, and Soul of the Neoplatonists. With the help of Nun, or a crocodile-headed Sobek, the nocturnal Sun (which may symbolize the potential intellect) is actualized – transformed into a scarab or a child. The solar rebirth occurs on Nut's thighs when the *ba* reaches the twelfth hour named "She who sees the beauty of Ra" in the *Book of Night*. This rebirth is described as the opening of a ball of clay formed by a craftsman, or the opening of the cavern "for those who are in Nun" (BD 67). In this respect, the tomb is symbolically related to the highest ineffable Reality, the supreme source of all life and all intelligence.

This idea is echoed in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature, for example, in the treatise on goldmaking attributed to Kleopatra. Ostanes and other philosophers asked Kleopatra to tell

"how the highest descends to the lowest, and how the lowest rises to the highest, and is united with it... how the blessed waters visit the corpses lying in Hades fettered and afflicted in darkness and how the Medicine of Life reaches them and rouses them..."⁵²

The dead bodies in their tombs are like the stars which are hidden for seventy days in the House of Geb, or the Duat, in order to be regenerated there. The union of *ban* and their corpses in the Duat is the result of the paradigmatic union of Ra and Osiris followed by the miracle of rebirth through the gate "with the mysterious entrance".

This mystery of sunrise is the ultimate aim and end (*telos*) of philosophy. Only the soul which has practised philosophy successfully is pure when it leaves the body and, therefore, may attain to the divine nature, according to Plato (*Phaed.*82bc). The philosopher's soul goes to a glorious, pure, and invisible place "into the presence of the good and wise God", and this way to the true Hades is reserved "only for the lover of wisdom" (ibid.82c).

Accordingly, Kleopatra speaks of the miraculous waters, like those of the reviving Nile, which are able to awaken the bodies and the spirits imprisoned in their tombs. In a little while they grow and rise up, putting on glorious colours like flowers in spring. They are not mature till the fire has tested them. But

"when the tomb is opened, they come out from Hades as the babe from the womb."⁵³

The practitioners of alchemy called their art "philosophy" which consists in a process of death and resurrection, modelled on the ancient Egyptian "mysteries of the stone" and the "flight of the golden Horus". However, the main patterns of alchemy stem directly from the New Kingdom Books of the Duat, those that depict the secret *sesbemu* of the

tomb-temple, the “philosophical” separation of *ba*, its transformation and miraculous union with the mummiform corpse. This union means renewal of the sun-intellect, symbolized by the golden light. Thus the royal soul (the most perfect one) is turned into *akh* and enters the Day of the intelligible realm while Osiris, though animated, must remain in the realm of the psychic Duat.

The tomb functions as a temple, and every temple during the night hours becomes the *set-ammun*, a place of transcendent darkness where the god has hidden his form so that nobody knows or sees him before his coming into being. This is a place where transition from latent to manifest life takes place. Therefore R. B. Finnestad argues:

“Death is life in the *sheta*-state; and there is also a *coming out* (*prj*) from the tomb analogous to the coming out from the temple; the function of the tomb is in this respect parallel to that of the temple: the tomb is a place of the hidden world from which the *ba* of the dead person comes out, the place of his latent life. Like the temple, the tomb is also a place of *uniting* with the sun: the sun unites with the reliefs or paintings of the world represented in the hall, when the tomb is opened – and the cosmic life of the dead person emerges into being. He even has a statue which lives his *ka*-life in the cosmicized tomb”.⁵⁴

14. Metaphysics of the Heart

The heart (*ab*, *ib*) plays a crucial role in the transformation of the soul and in its striving for the golden state of perfection. According to Stephanus of Alexandria:

“We must strip matter of its qualities to arrive at perfection; for the aim of philosophy (i.e., alchemy) is the dissolution of bodies and the separation of the soul from the body”.⁵⁵

The heart is a seat of intellect within the human microcosm, often equated with one’s very being. Since the heart held the individual’s life and intelligence, the form of the related hieroglyph was reminiscent of a vase, or an alchemical vessel, and scarabs were depicted on the heart-amulets wrapped with the mummy. In addition, the heart (weighed against the feather of *maat* before the throne of Osiris) was the only organ left inside the mummiform body.

The Heart of Atum is the true source of his activity by which the divine Ennead is created. The fiery Eye of Ra, Hathor-Sekhmet, dwells at the heart of the macrocosm, and the microcosmic heart-intellect (*nous*) is the eye of the soul. Plotinus stressed the transcendence of *nous* and described it as *basileus* (pharaoh, king) to which we turn. One becomes *nous* when one abandons all the other phases of oneself and gazes on *nous* by means of *nous*, i.e., by the integral Eye of Horus. M. Lings speaks of the

openness of the Eye of the Heart as an inward opening that distinguishes the saint from the ordinary man:

“The significance of this inward opening may be understood through the relationship between the sun and the moon which symbolize respectively the Spirit and the Heart: just as the moon looks towards the sun and transmits something of its reflected radiance to the darkness of the night, so the Heart transmits the light of the Spirit to the night of the soul. The Spirit itself lies open to the Supreme Source of all light, thus making, for one whose Heart is awake, a continuity between the Divine Qualities and the soul.”⁵⁶

The right eye (*wedjat*) is that of the sun, the Eye of Ra. The left eye is that of the moon, the Eye of Horus. The restored Eye of Horus (or Thoth) is the mirror of intellect which is illuminated by higher paternal Intellect and is the symbol of offerings. For the Egyptians, all bodily organs function only because the heart “speaks from the vessels of every limb” and commands them to do so. S. H. Nasr regards the heart as the centre of the human microcosm and therefore the seat of sentiments, of the will and “of the Intellect by which all things were made”. He tries to connect the word heart (*hrdaya* in Sanskrit, *kardia* in Greek, *cordis* in Latin) with the root *brd* or *krd* which, “like the Egyptian Horus, imply the centre of the world”.⁵⁷

This cardiac intelligence is never separated from either faith or love and must be viewed as the microcosmic reflection or prolongation of divine intelligence, the noetic light of Ra. The centrality of heart-intellect is the centrality of Horus, represented by the ruling pharaoh – the exemplary *imago dei*, the Heart, Sia and Hu of all hearts in Egypt. Hathor, or *Het Heru*, is the “house of Horus” and the power, *shakti*, of the Heart.

J. Assmann distinguishes three major historical stages of what we should call “metaphysics of the heart” in Egypt. However, the different historical aspects, modes, and paradigmatic attitudes of spiritual hermeneutics related to a particular interpretative framework cannot lead us to the false conviction proclaimed by J. P. Vernant, namely, “that there is no such thing as pure mind”,⁵⁸ or intelligence, essentially untouched by imposed historical, psychological, and social conditions. J. Assmann speaks about 1) the ideal of the “king-guided” individual, coeval with the Old Kingdom, when the heart of the pharaoh thinks and plans for all; 2) the “heart-guided” individual of the Middle Kingdom, when the heart full of *maat*, based on personal merit, enables a life in harmony with the gods that transcend death; 3) the “god-guided heart” of the New Kingdom that has taken God’s guiding will into itself.⁵⁹

The passion and resurrection of Osiris were originally reserved for the royal initiate who, as the illuminated and awakened *ba* of Osiris, was transformed into a star, or an intelligible archetype. The initiate or his travelling soul plays the role of Horus at the beginning. He is the physician

for Osiris, Horus the Healer. Being armed by the therapeutic wisdom of Thoth, he restores the dismembered divine Eye or the mirror-like Heart. This means a sort of "philosophical integration". The Horus role ceases when Osiris begins to revive and the initiated is identified with Osiris ready to be united with Ra.

J. Assmann argues that the advent of popular Osirianism of the Middle Kingdom "opened up a new path of salvation over and above the lithic route of Imhotep",⁶⁰ because "the true tomb" is now equated with one's virtue: it is built by knowing truth and doing right. The Judgement in the Duat is no longer modelled on earthly tribunals but rather on initiatory rituals of trial and purification.⁶¹

In New Kingdom Egypt, the esoteric teachings of the heart-intellect are explicitly stated and popularized as the doctrine of "putting god into one's heart", which means personal piety and devotion extended into all aspects of life. Thus, instead of the impersonal norms of *maat*, which constitute immanent justice and order, the personal will of God is emphasized. Therefore the Ramesside period teachings of Amenemope advises one to make one's heart steadfast and regard *logos* as the rudder of the boat and the God-of-All as its steersman (XX.3-6). Now pious individuals with a "god-guided heart" do not seek for protection among men, but regard Amun as their sole protector. They are *fugara*, the poor ones in a special sense, whose service to the pharaoh is replaced by service and loyalty to God.

Now piety is based not on *maat* as social order and justice, but on the inner "silence". Therefore this metaphysical silence becomes the main virtue of pious contemplative men, the silent ones who submitted themselves to God's will. This attitude is a distant prototype of Pythagorean introspection and silence. The mysticism of the heart-intellect implies the dialectic of exterior and interior; it appeals both to the immanent divine presence and to the hiddenness of *deus invisibilis* who surpasses all human and divine knowledge. The devotee says:

"You are Amun, lord of the silent,
Who comes at the call of the pure".⁶²

The Lord is known to be merciful. However, He is closed to the one "who has found his mouth, but is open to the silent". Only the silent one finds the well of Thoth in the desert of this earthly life. Otherwise the sweet spring of immortality is closed and beyond one's reach. The language proceeds from the holy silence and returns again to it, as S. H. Nasr pointed out while speaking about the eye of knowledge which the Sufis call the eye of the heart (*'ayn al-qalb*).⁶³

15. Understanding of Soul and Body

Through the Orphic, Bacchic, and Pythagorean circles the Egyptian doctrines of 1) an *imago dei*, 2) the heart-intellect, 3) dismemberment and reconstitution of one's primordial "golden" nature, 4) separation of the immortal soul from the body, and 5) union with the divine Principle were all transmitted to the Hellenic world, transformed, adapted and rationalized. Those esoteric cults, whose teaching was later taken up and transposed by Plato into the field of philosophy (e.g., the theory of Ideas, philosophy as preparation for death, and ascent to the *hyperuranios topos*), elaborated doctrines of the soul's immortality that separate it from the body now regarded as a tomb, or a receptacle (*hypodochē*), of the soul.

This radical affirmation of an immortal and divine element within us which marked a turning point or even rupture in the Hellenic culture is based on the creative reinterpretation of Egyptian metaphysical initiations, rites, and symbols, merged with scientific and religious ideas derived from Assyria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Persia and India. There are clear structural parallels between Egyptian, Orphic and Upanishadic texts.

The Pythagorean purification, concentration and separation of the soul always mean an *anamnesis* which is no less than recollection of the divine source and the soul's true noetic identity. Their philosophical *askesis* follows the already established patterns of the Osirian initiation, trial and transformation aimed at emancipating the soul in this life (as it will be after death in the Duat) and assimilating it to God. Platonic purification (*katharsis*) also consists in separating (*to chorizein*) the soul from the body and teaching the soul to bring itself together from all parts of the body (*Phaed.*67cd). This philosophical or dialectical procedure clearly resembles a reconstitution of the dismembered Osiris and his union with Ra.

In the so-called "archaic" period, which is dated after the Egyptian Ramesside Age and coincides with the Neo-Assyrian expansion, the Greeks (called *Iawanu* by the Assyrians) still do not make a clear distinction between body and soul. They had no term to designate the body as an organic unity, since the word *soma* (like its Egyptian equivalent) designated a corpse, and *guia* – the bodily members. As J.-P. Vernant pointed out, "the Greek body of antiquity does not appear as a group morphology of organs fitted together in the manner of an anatomical drawing", but rather assumes the form of a sort of heraldic picture, a coat of arms on which each person's social and personal status is inscribed through emblematic traits and can therefore be deciphered.⁶⁴ Even beauty, understood as a radiance of the gods, can be poured onto the body from the outside by touching it with the golden wand (*Od.* XVI.173-183).

Such transformation carried through the operation of the divine "form" is analogous to the luminous descent of *ba* onto the statue and is

imitated in the activities of purifying, bathing, censing and applying oils to the body which (when cleansed of everything that makes it blemished, disfigured or dirty) belongs to the same category as a god's statue. However, the mortal body vanishes after its death or the departure of its vital forces: only the *mnema*, or *sema*, the funeral memorial, remains as a kind of corporeal substitute. The corpse, *soma*, would rot and decay if the consuming pyre did not transfer it into invisibility, or if the rite of embalming did not turn it into an immutable form, the beautiful Osirian *eidōs*, which serves as a visible sign, *semeia*, of the transformed divine body characterized by its blinding splendour and excess of light.

However, such a hidden intelligible body "radiant with immortal beauty" (*kallos ambronon*) was reserved for the Greek gods, not for human beings. The Egyptian mysteries of divinization were introduced only as secret, attractive, and sometimes suspicious doctrines of the soul's immortality, namely, that by rising up to the Sun, or the divine *Nous*, we may be dissolved into the luminous substance of the Self from which derive our fragmented, dismembered, and fallen selves. This gnostic salvation is built on a transcendent insight that goes beyond reason, i.e., on revelation and initiation that show the path of "homecoming" leading to the Sun-gates and "another shore".

Like the Egyptians, the Greeks of the archaic period used the body's vocabulary to express a being whatever its actual ontological status. According to general scholarly opinion, the so-called "Homeric religion" (if understood literally, not in the light of certain Neoplatonic hermeneutical readings) lacked the gnostic notion of the immortal *ba* and its mystical re-union with the supreme God. However, there are striking similarities with Egyptian and Mesopotamian anthropology even before the advent of Pythagorean metaphysics. A living man is never said to possess a *psuche*. In this respect, the *psuche* is analogous to the *ba* which appears only when separated from the corpse. But the Egyptian initiates acquire their *bau* through theurgic rites, *askesis*, contemplation, and *gnosis*. This acquisition means a "death" before one's physical death and mystical re-union with Ra whilst one is still here below.

16. The Homecoming of Odysseus

From the Homeric epics it is clear that living human beings do not have a *psuche*, but once they are dead, they become *psuchai* – not the Egyptian *bau*, however, but impoverished shades destined for eternal darkness. They are not souls but phantoms, *simulacra*, that lack a real existence. One could assume that this is only an exoteric attitude which is intentionally incomplete and concerns so-called psychic remains, shadow-like doubles (*kan*), or that there is a deeper significance running beneath

the apparent surface of events and names. Homer's two songs are only the central part of an epic cycle which initially ran from the imagined beginning of the world, the Golden Age, down to the Heroic Age. M. Bernal, for instance, maintains that the *Odyssey* is a Greek version of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. He says:

"While I am convinced that the vast majority of Greek mythological themes came from Egypt or Phoenicia, it is equally clear that their selection and treatment were characteristically Greek, and to that extent they did reflect Greek society".⁶⁵

S. R. Hill, who bases his interpretations on *dhatava* and *stoicheia* – the unmanifested and universal roots of all constituent matter and all language (since everything in creation begins as *dhatu* seed which are heard only by Atman in the noetic realm, though their *spbota* – bursting expansion – creates an entire universe), says that the whole of *The Odyssey* can be viewed as a tale of a man who had to be stripped of everything in the process of "surrendering himself". Both Rama, the main hero of *Ramayana*, and Odysseus had to learn "to surrender" before they could be reunited with their real creative power, represented by Penelope and Sita respectively.⁶⁶ If so, Odysseus' homecoming is the journey of the initiate, which involves various tests, encounters with divine powers, transformations and return to the paternal *Nous*.

For T. Burckhardt, who based his interpretation on Porphyry's exegesis, Penelope represents the soul in its original purity, as the faithful wife of the spirit: the fact that she weaves her nuptial garment by day and each night undoes it again shows that her nature is related to universal substance, *phusis* or *maya*.⁶⁷ According to T. Burckhardt:

"Every path leading towards spiritual realization requires of man that he strip himself of his ordinary and habitual ego in order that he may truly become 'himself', a transformation which does not take place without the sacrifice of apparent riches and of vain pretensions, and thus not without humiliation..."⁶⁸

For certain Hellenic philosophers, the world of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* symbolizes the soul's dialectical ascent: expressing these matters through riddles (*di' ainigmaton*), Homer, being a philosopher himself, keeps spiritual things hidden and refrains from speaking of them directly. His poems could sustain multiple levels of meaning simultaneously and without contradiction. Thus, Numenius and Porphyry regard Odysseus as the symbol of man who tries to escape the realm of becoming (*genesis*) and arrives at that intelligible place where there is not even any memory of the physical universe.

During his wanderings in the realm of Poseidon (an equivalent of Egyptian *Sṯ*, transcribed as *Seth* in Greek and *Sutekk* in Akkadian) Odysseus has had to face twelve major obstacles which are spiritual tests and phases of his inner transformation, like the twelve hours of the

Egyptian Duat passed by the nocturnal Sun. The Byzantine commentators of Homer thought that line 296 of Book XIII (which concerns the retelling of Teiresias' prophecy by Odysseus to Penelope) was the last line of the *Odyssey*. The end of Odysseus' journey over the dark and stormy sea of generation would be marked by complete ignorance of material works: when a wayfarer, seeing Odysseus' oar, would think that it was a winnowing fan, then the ultimate surrender and return to the divine Intellect would be accomplished.

S. R. Hill regards a winnowing fan as "the very symbol of Ganesha's ears, which kept the words of untruth and of the unwise away from the soul".⁶⁹ The nature of the death prophesized for Odysseus is close to Hesiod's description of death in the Golden Age, which is the blissful return (*pralaya*) to the Creator, or rather to His *saccidananda*⁷⁰: "that which is" (*sat*, Being), "the consciousness of that which is" (*cit*, Intellect), and "the bliss of the consciousness of that which is" (*ananda*, joy of Life). This is the triad of Atum-Tefnut (Maat)-Shu (Ankh) in the Heliopolitan theology.

The chief suitor of Odysseus' wife (*Penelopeia* means "weaving worker", like the Egyptian goddess Neith), namely, Antinous, may be deciphered as meaning "opposite to intelligence". Antinous is killed by Odysseus, though at an early stage of his journey the life of the senses must be transcended not by violence but by contemplation, according to Porphyry, who interprets the cyclops as a part of Odysseus himself – a part he wants desperately to escape, but is unable to do so before the spiritual integration of opposites. However, all "foolish" (*nepioi*) companions are gradually lost, until Odysseus returns alone to Ithaca.

17. From the Homeric Ghost to the Immortal Soul of Plato

According to Porphyry's interpretation, Homer envisioned three places where souls live: 1) the physical realm here below, 2) the Elysian Fields (identified with the portion of the moon illuminated by the sun), analogous to the Osirian Fields of Rushes, *Sekhet Iaru*, where souls take their "psychic" bodies along, and 3) Hades, where they go without bodies (Stob. *Ecl.*1.41.53). He maintained that Homer's Hades contains concentric rings of beings: souls of women, souls of men, and the gods at the centre. In the fragments of *The Styx*, preserved by Stobaeus, Porphyry explains Antikleia's description of the dead (*Od.* XI.219-222) as follows:

"The idea is that souls are like the images appearing in mirrors and on the surface of water that resemble us in every detail and mimic our movements but have no solid substance that can be grasped or touched. This is why he calls them 'images of dead men' (*eidola kamonton: Od.* XI.476)" (Stob. *Ecl.*1.41.50).

The archaic *eidolon* may be defined as 1) a dream image (*onar*), 2) an apparition sent by a god (*phasma*), and 3) a phantom of a deceased (*psuche*). This insubstantial *eidolon* is more like a double that "manifests both a real presence and irremediable absence at the same time",⁷¹ than an image, and this double entirely belongs to the other world. This otherworldly dimension of something invisible glimpsed through (or of the supernatural erupted into) the visible in the form of the archaic *eidolon* is reduced by Plato to the seeming, illusion and nonbeing (*Soph.*240b 11).

The new conception of soul, opposite to the Homeric *psuche* (an *eidolon* or *phasma* of the dead, a ghostly double) is elaborated by the Orphics and Pythagoreans who closely followed the Oriental esoteric teachings of a "perfect man" capable of re-ascending to heaven. This re-ascending presupposes immortalization through the noetic fire (following Horus and the Phoenician Heracles, now regarded as an archetype of the spiritual hero) and liberation of the immortal soul. The Hellenic philosophy from its very beginnings is based on this "passage to new state" and the ideal of rebirth. The soul may be released from the wheel of *genesis* and divinized through asceticism and *philosophia* which may be regarded as a modified and rationalized "branch" of the ancient cultic practices (*teletai*). The golden realm of Ra is its ultimate *telos*; therefore a golden genital attributed to Pythagoras suggested that he is outside the cycle of birth and death, being the true image of Apollo.

It is with Plato that the inversion of the relations between body and soul is completed. As J.-P. Vernant pointed out:

"Instead of the individual being intimately bound to a living body and a *psuche* presented like the *eidolon* of the body that is no longer here, its phantom or double, it is now the immortal *psuche* that constitutes one's real being."⁷²

The soul constitutes one's real being not after one's death, but in this life itself. The soul becomes "our self in each of us" (*Leg.*12.959a). Therefore the living body radically changes its status: it is only the image of resemblance which accompanies the soul, a simple appearance, an illusory image. Now no longer is *psuche* the ghostly *eidolon* of the body but rather body is the ghostly phantom of the soul. This is a revolutionary passage from 1) the soul regarded as a ghostly double of the body-members to 2) the body as a ghostly reflection of the soul, i.e., the body confined to the realm of mere seeming.

Plato devalued the image and positioned it firmly in the sensible world with its irrationalities, inconsistencies, and illusions. The world of images is the world immersed in the flux of the sensible; therefore the life of *phantasia* is not real life but merely a dream and a slumber, "dreaming, whether in sleep or in waking" (*Rep.*476c5). J.-P. Vernant rightly observes that in the Greek texts of the 6th and 5th century B.C. neither *eikasia*

(semblance, guess) and *doxa* (opinion, notion, judgement, splendour), nor *phainomena* had yet taken on their essentially negative connotations.⁷³

The concept of *doxa* in its Platonic sense of fancy (*dokein* signifies "to seem", "to appear") corresponds to the Hindu concept of *maya* which may be conceived both as a creative cosmic power and a personal delusion of the embodied *jiva*. The image is ascribed to the realm of *doxa*, that is the domain of *phantasia*, since *phantasia* (seeming, imagining) and *aisthesis* (sensation) are regarded as being identical (*Theaet.*152c). However, before the rise of the new Platonic *paideia*, both *eikasia* (using resemblances, comparisons, analogies) and *doxa* (using similitudes as a way of reaching hidden dimensions) were considered adequate strategies of thought. Through the masks of appearances (*phainomena*) one can grasp *adela* (what is invisible); therefore *phainomena* are neither deprived of value, nor illusory. According to Democritus, phenomena constitute the visible aspect of things that are invisible: *opsis ton adelon ta phainomena*. This view stands close to the notion of the sensible cosmos as a display of metaphysical symbols.

The transition from a positive to a negative evaluation of images, now defined as a mode of unreality, that is observed from the 5th century B.C. onwards, may be viewed as a turning away and departure from Egypt and its symbolic iconology, although this separation of *doxa* and *episteme* itself is initially based on the Egyptian distinction between the common mental horizon of worshippers and that which constitutes *rekh*, the esoteric *gnosis* of one's true identity, and involves certain metaphysical *anamnesis*.

In the Upanishadic milieu, this distinction is described as 1) the Path of the Fathers which leads to the level of the moon and then again to the earthly womb, and 2) the Path of the gods (*devayana*) which is based on the interiorization of the Vedic sacrifice and leads to solar liberation through a special kind of knowledge. For those who go from the world of the gods to the sun, from the sun to the light and to the realm of Brahma, there is no return (*BU VI.13-15*).

When the concept of interior sacrifice ("sacrifice" meaning the disciplined life of a seeker of sacred knowledge) is generalized to the entire life of the gnostic, the "philosophical way of life" is established. The true sages go into the afterlife by way of the fire, not by the way of the smoke, and this passage is based on the rite performed within the mind (*manasayajna*), or the heart-intellect. The "interiorization of sacrifice" means the practice of contemplation and meditation. The distinction between the two paths, firmly established by the Upanishads, arises in the age of Brahmanas (c.800-500 B.C.) which chronologically coincides with the period of the XXV-XXVI Dynasties (Shabaka, Taharqa, etc.) and the Saite period in Egypt.

The philosophy of Plato requires the aspirant to pass from seeming to the reality of Forms through recollection (*anamnesis*) and knowledge (*episteme*), as if following the path of the Egyptian initiate who identifies himself with the winged soul in order to fly to the solar barque and join the intelligible circuit of the gods. Although Plato based his concept of the immortality of the soul upon Parmenides' concept of true being, this "being" itself represents the Egyptian concept of "what is" (*netet*) contrasted with "that which is not" (*intet*): both are engendered by the Lord of All, *Neb tem*, i.e., Atum, "the sole and only one". As S. Slaveva-Griffin pointed out, Plato

"employs the allegory of the charioteer's journey to illustrate the immortal nature of the soul (*Phaedr.*246a 6-b4), alluding thereby to Parmenides' account of the chariot journey of a young philosopher beyond sense-perceptible reality to the realm of eternal existence".⁷⁴

The wisdom "which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts" is attainable only "when we are dead, and not in our lifetime" (*Phaed.*66b). Therefore Plato defines philosophy in a way that conforms to what he regards as an ancient tradition, naming it a practice for death. This attitude is directly related to an attitude of the Osirian tomb-initiation which legitimizes "the deceased" as the god of wisdom, Thoth, and through the "scientific" knowledge of names and contemplation of forms leads to the Sun god in his barque.

Purification, concentration, and separation of the soul here also mean recollection and divinization. Thus, the aim of philosophical *askesis*, as practised by a disciple of immortality, is to separate the soul from the flux of becoming and seeming in this life, bringing it to the state it will experience after death and providing it with an unchanging divine existence. Since the *psuche* constitutes the reflection projected by external and immortal Being (i.e., is an image of Ra, a ray of Atum), it is the soul of man which is capable of the knowledge of being, namely, recollection (*anamnesis*) of the intelligible realities and realization that "I am Ra". According to W. Burkert:

"What mystery priests had sought to make credible in ritual thus becomes the certainty of the highest rationality... The word which in the epic tradition distinguished the gods from men becomes the ineradicable seal of the essential personality, *athanatos*".⁷⁵

The immortal soul transcends the body affected by death: it is called on to ascend with a passionate undertaking described by Plato in the language of the mysteries. This is an initiation which secures a blessed state and an intellectual vision (*epopteia*). The love and contemplation of divine beauties means that the winged soul cannot be abandoned by the gods: there is no longer practical piety as a virtue in its own right, but only the one goal, namely, return to the starry archetypes and "assimilation to God as far as possible". W. Burkert continues:

"In place of the beholding of festivals of the gods there is the beholding of the well ordered cosmos of things that are, still called by the same word, *theoria*. This involves restraint of individual wishes, knowing integration..."⁷⁶

18. Reawakening of Intellect and Rehabilitation of Images

Plato employed and reinterpreted the central Osirian and Orphic myth of the ritual death, dismemberment, and reconstitution of the initiate, turning this myth into his own dialectic of analysis and synthesis aimed at self-transcendence. Thus, the pedagogy of the soul derived from telestic rites and was reduced to mystagogy again by the Neoplatonists.

Plato defines the soul as that which moves itself – life which has an ability to animate and move the cosmic body and individual bodies. This concept stands close to the Egyptian *ba*-theology, but now a proof of immortality is developed on the seemingly solid scientific ground of dialectic, mathematical sciences, geometry, and astronomy. The latter is viewed as being fundamental to the ontology of an animated cosmos and cosmic piety.

As in the *Pyramid Texts*, the stars are regarded as the archetypal abodes of divinized souls, because man is rooted in heaven. Being a plant of heaven on earth, man has the divine element within itself, namely, the hidden Eye of Horus, the heart-intellect (*nous*), synonymous with a *daimon* in man. This intellect, when awakened through recollection, purification, philosophical exercises and knowledge, leads the soul back to its own archetypal star from which it has descended. This is the central aim of philosophy: the homecoming or return to one's native star. In Platonism, the ancient rites of noetic rebirth are partly translated into the language of science (*episteme*) and retold as a myth of homecoming. In the *Laws* Plato says:

"The situation has been entirely reversed since the days when thinkers thought of the stars as without souls... It is no longer possible that any single mortal will be god-fearing for long if he has not grasped these two principles mentioned, that the soul is the oldest of everything which participates in coming-to-be (and that it is immortal, and that it is ruler over all bodies), and moreover (secondly) he must grasp as has now been said many times, the intelligence of being which is in the stars, as mentioned, and in addition also the necessary preliminary mathematical sciences" (*Leg.* 967a ff).

Since a perishable and visible body is the *eidolon* of an invisible and immortal soul, it follows that the soul in turn is the *eidolon nou*, the image or reflection of the intelligible. According to Plotinus, the intellect is "separated" (*choristos*) in its relation to the soul, and likewise the soul is

"separated" in relation to the body. However, what intellect, soul and body have in common is that they are types, levels, or modes of *energeia* (actuality or activity)⁷⁷. Therefore there are no sharp distinctions between *psuche* and *soma*: bodies that are completely devoid of a soul, and that do not partake in any *energeia* whatsoever, are reduced to sheer indeterminacy. Hence, "physical" phenomena are in a sense "psychic" phenomena, though it is not the soul itself, but its "reflection", an "image" of it, that is fused with the body and makes it perform the function of a living organism.

Bodies are animated like the *baituloi*, or *litboi empsuchoi*, ensouled stones, related with the god Apollo. Likewise the *antbelioi theoi*, "gods that face the sun", i.e., the statues at the entrance of buildings, are animated by the pneumatic rays of the sun. The soul is a kind of light from Intellect, "around the Intellect without having a place", and the soul, through contemplation, "creates the contemplated object just as geometricians draw their figures while contemplating" (*Enn.* III.8.4.7). The soul's activity (*energeia*) constructs the lines which confine the space filled up by a body.

Plotinus even goes so far as to speak of the divine *Nous* as the first image of the One. On the next ontological level the Soul is viewed as the reflection (*eidolon*) of *Nous*. Thus, contrary to Plato's own reservations regarding all kinds of *eidola*, *eikones*, and *phantasmata*, the image is evaluated again by the subsequent Platonic tradition. The Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists proved to be wise enough to dissociate *phantasia* (imagination) from the one-sided concept of *mimesis* understood as imitation of the sensibles, imitation that makes the image merely a semblance, a reproduction of some already given appearance.

Now dissociated from the realm of illusory appearances, imagination had once again acquired the power of contemplating the invisible, i.e., the power of divine symbol that characterized the ancient Egyptian images able to elevate to the noetic realm of Ra, the world of Forms that Plato had reserved for "philosophy"⁷⁸ understood in somewhat too rationalistic a fashion. The "transcendent imagination" is not the simulator producing semblances "without any true reality", but divine power. This divine power has its own *sophia* which can transform the initiate making him "like a god" (*homoiousthai theoi*). Likewise this power brings images back to their intelligible archetypes.

The rehabilitation of images means an actual return to the telestic rites and sacred arts from which *philosophia* derived its idea of ascent to the real Being which ultimately coincides with the spiritual Self of all souls.

- 1 R. B. Finnestad *The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts*. – *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 25, 1978, p.130
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.132
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.134
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Glossary

Agalma: (αγαλμα) image, cult-statue, ornament, shrine, object of worship, something in which one takes delight; *theon agalmata* is the common phrase for “images of the gods” and “cult-statues” which may be “animated” by the theurgists; the word *agalma* contains no implication of likeness and is not a synonym of *eikon*; for Plato, the created cosmos is “a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods” (*ton aidion theon gegonos agalma: Tim.37c*); for the Emperor Julian, the visible Sun is “the living *agalma*, endowed with soul and intelligence and beneficent, of the noetic Father” (*Ep.51.434*).

Aisthesis: (αισθησις) sensation, perception, as an opposite of intellection (*noesis*), understanding and pure thought; more loosely – any awareness; for Plato, some *aistheseis* have names, such as sights, sounds, smells, cold and heat, distress, pleasures, fears, but nameless *aistheseis* are countless (*Theaet.156b*); for Plotinus, perceptions in this world are dim intellections (*noeseis*), and intellections in the noetic world are vivid perceptions; Philo of Alexandria postulates an Idea of *aisthesis*, along with an Idea of *nous*, in the Intellect of God (*Leg. Alleg. I.21-27*).

Akḥ: the ancient Egyptian term for intelligence, spiritual light, illumination, irradiation; it may designate both a spiritual being (the winged soul, *ba*, divinized and raised above the Osiris state) and the entire spiritual dimension that corresponds to the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos*; through the celestial ascent a pharaoh (the prototype of a philosopher-mystic of later times) becomes a “shining one” (*akḥ*), a star irradiating light throughout the cosmos, and is united with Ra (the divine Intellect) as his “son”.

Akhet: the Egyptian term meaning “horizon”, a kind of sun-door for entering into or coming from the Duat (the Osirian Netherworld); the hieroglyphic sign for “horizon” shows the two peaks with the solar disk between them, protected by the *aker*, a double lion; *akhet* is a threshold realm (comparable to the Islamic notion of *barḥakḥ*) between the Heaven, the Earth, and the Duat; etymologically it is connected with other words meaning radiance, intelligence, noetic light, spirit, “making into a spirit of light”; *akhet* is symbolized by the pyramid; therefore the pharaoh ascends to Heaven (in order to be included into the circuit of Ra) by way of this *akhet*, i.e., the threshold of light; the *akhet* hieroglyph was applied in Egyptian art, especially in architectural forms: the two pylons which flanked the temple’s entrance represented the two peaks of *akhet*, and the statue of Atum-Ra, or Amun-Ra, was displayed for the god’s epiphany (*khaai*) between these mountain-like towers.

Al-insan al-kamil: the Arabic term for the Sufi concept of a Perfect Man which, ultimately, derives from the ancient cosmogonies centred on macrocosmic Man (Vedic *Purusha*, Gnostic *Anthropos*); in the Egyptian solar theology, it is represented by the pharaoh, the son of Ra, who unites in himself both Horus and Seth, or is identified with Thoth in all respects; in Sufism, the Perfect Man is God's deputy on earth, because he manifests perfection of all divine attributes; the Prophet Muhammad, Khidr, Solomon, Jesus and other Islamic prophets belong to this category; the Perfect Man is a manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality (like a manifestation of the Neoplatonic *Nous*); the term *haqiqa muhammadiyah* (Muhammadan Reality) is a term of the first thing that God created (i.e., *Nous*, Atum-Ra), and this Reality is manifested within the world (in terms of finality and *telos*) as the Perfect Man; although each individual thing of the world is God's mirror, the Perfect Man, as an apex of all creation (i.e., the Horus-like royal entity), is the perfect mirror and therefore he is both the goal of creation and the link between God and His creation by which God sees Himself; Ibn al-'Arabi contrasts the Perfect Man with the animal man (*al-insan al-hayawan*).

Anagoge: (ἀναγωγή) ascent, elevation, bringing up; the approach to the divine realm by means of purifications (*katharmoi*), initiations (*teletai*), the Platonic dialectic and allegorical exegesis, contemplation (*theoria*) and the ineffable sacred rites employed in theurgy; it is prefigured by the sacred way which the initiates of mysteries (*mustai*) walk, the path to the mountain (*oreibasia*); typological analogies of the Neoplatonic ascent to the divine may be seen in the *Pyramid Texts* and the accounts of *mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad in the later Islamic tradition.

Anamnesis: (ἀνάμνησις) recollection, remembrance; in the Orphico-Pythagorean context, it is understood as a remembrance of one's true divine nature, revealed through sacred initiation; the idea of memory and restoration of the soul's true identity is crucial for the Egyptian tradition as reflected in the *Book of the Dead* and later employed by the Pythagoreans and Plato who explains *anamnesis* as the recollection of things known before birth and forgotten (*Meno* 85d); thus Platonic learning is equated to remembering (*Phaed.*72e).

Ankh: the Egyptian term meaning "life"; the hieroglyph *ankh*, originally perhaps representing a knot or a bow, is a symbol for divine life, for the "breath of life", provided by Shu and other gods, and for regenerating the power of water; *ankh* also designates a floral bouquet (offered to the gods) and a mirror, itself an important metaphysical symbol; various items used in hieratic rites (e.g., the hooped sistrum) were fashioned in the shape of this hieroglyph; the *ankh* survived into the Coptic period and was inherited by the Christians as the *crux ansata*.

Anthropos: (ἄνθρωπος) man; in Gnosticism, the macrocosmic *anthropos* is regarded as the Platonic "ideal animal", *autozoon*, or a divine *pleroma*, which contains archetypes of creation and manifestation.

Apatheia: (ἀπαθεια) impassivity or freedom from emotions, understood as a philosophical virtue; *apatheia* means not being affected in any way and is applied both to the sages and transcendent entities by the Neoplatonists.

Apeiron: (ἄπειρον) (*apeiros*, *apeiria*): lacking of limit, unlimited, as an opposite to *peras*, a bound; the even as an opposite to the odd; this is a fundamental Pythagorean term, designating one of the main principles of manifested being; the Pythagorean Unlimited is indefinite and in need of Limit, it is infinite in a negative sense as infinitely divisible; in Neoplatonism, *peras* and *apeiron* constitute the primal archetypal duality located somewhere between the ineffable One and the noetic cosmos.

Aporrhotos: (ἀπορρητος) secret, prohibited, unspeakable; the common designation of mysteries and sacred rites of initiation; in Neoplatonism, the term is applied in metaphysics and negative theology, frequently understood as a characteristic of the First Principle.

Apotheosis: (ἀποθεοσις) divinization; in the esoteric sense it is accomplished by the philosophical purification and theurgical *anagoge* which reveals one's primal and true identity with divine principles; this is not a Homeric conception, because Homer clearly separates the gods and men; however, following the ancient Egyptian spiritual patterns, the Orphic texts already promised *apotheosis* and immortality for the initiated soul who (like the Egyptian *ba* and the *psyche* in Plato's *Phaedrus*) restores her wings and raises herself back to the divine homeland.

Arche: (ἀρχή) beginning, starting point, authority, government, heart, principle; *archai* are understood as the first principles by Neoplatonists; the term *archetupos*, an archetype, is used by Plotinus in a sense of the divine paradigm or the noetic model of the manifested entity.

Arete: (ἀρετή) excellence, goodness, virtue; Plotinus makes a distinction between the civic virtues (*politikai aretai*) and the purificatory virtues (*kathartikai aretai*); Porphyry adds two other grades – the theoretic virtues (*theoretikai aretai*) and the paradigmatic virtues (*paradeigmatikai aretai*) – the former being that of the soul which beholds *nous* within itself, the latter being the virtue proper to the divine Intellect, *Nous*, itself; Iamblichus discerns seven grades of virtue which in an ascending order illustrate the anagogic path to the divine: natural, ethical, civic, purificatory, theoretic and paradigmatic virtues are crowned by the hieratic virtues (*hieratikai aretai*) that are proper to the One – they make the soul godlike (*theoides*) and unite with the First Principle through theurgy.

Arrhetos: (αρρητος) ineffable, unspeakable; this term is close to *aporrhetos* and is used to designate rites and visions of the mysteries and the transcendent nature of the One in Neoplatonism.

Arithmos: (αριθμος) number; for the Pythagoreans, number is the first principle (Arist. *Metaph.* 986a15); Iamblichus sometimes identifies the gods with *arithmoi*, regarding the first numbers from the monad to the decad as deities and archetypal models of manifestation; the numerical organization of the cosmos requires the organizing principles of bodies to be treated as physical numbers and distinguishes them from mathematical numbers, which are the paradigms of physical numbers, but ideal, noetic, or eidetic (*eidetikos*), numbers transcend even mathematical numbers.

Askesis: (ασκησις) in ancient philosophy, this term designates not an "asceticism", but spiritual exercises; therefore *philosophia* is understood not as a theory of knowledge but as a lived wisdom, a way of living according to intellect (*nous*); an *askesis* includes remembrance of God, the "watch of the heart", or vigilance (*nepsis*), *prosoche*, or attention to the beauty of the soul, the examination of our conscience and knowledge of ourselves.

Aten: the Egyptian term for the "sun globe" or "sun disk", regarded as a visible icon of Ra; represented as the simple sun disk, the disk with uraeus, the disk with rays emanating from it, or as the sun disk containing the scarab beetle (*kheper*) and the ram (*ba*); under the reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) the sun disk is worshipped as the solar deity Aten whose rays are depicted as arms proffering *ankh* hieroglyphs.

Atman: the Sanskrit term designating the innermost nature of all divinities, of all living beings, of all manifested forms; according to *Manu Smriti*: "All the gods are this one *atman*, and all dwell in *atman*" (12.119); this is the universal continuum of consciousness, the Self; as an unqualified consciousness being one with *brahman*, *atman* is self-luminous; it is not "this" nor "that", unseizable, indestructible, unbound, it is not born, nor does it die when the body is slain; it is hidden in all things, but can be perceived only by the sages with the Eye of Intellect (the Egyptian Eye of Ra) when *atman* reveals itself; as *Paramatma* it is the complete and integral supreme Self (the Egyptian Atum-Ra); the ego-personality, or individual self, called *jiva*, is regarded as a root ignorance and, therefore, contrasted to one's true identity – the transcendent Self, or *atman*.

Autozoon: (αυτοζων) essential living Being, or noetic Animal, which contains within it Ideas of all living creatures and the Archetypes of the four elements (*Tim.* 30b); it is a completely coherent *archetypus mundus*, timeless, ungenerated, immaterial and the perfect matrix of the psychic and physical cosmos; for Plotinus, it is a well-rounded-whole, composed of

individual intellects, or noetic lights; "a globe of faces radiant with faces all living" (*Enn.* VI.7.15).

Ba: the ancient Egyptian term which means "manifestation" of certain divine qualities, arranged in a descending and ascending hierarchy; in the eschatological and soteriological context, it may be understood as "soul" moving up and down, as an individual in an out-of-body state which is attained through initiation or death, when the physical body (*khat*, *soma*) is experienced as a corpse; *ba* is the vehicle of ascent, pictured as a human-headed bird which flies into the spheres of light and finally becomes aware of itself as an *akh*; the concept of *ba* influenced the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of soul (*psuche*) who tries to restore her wings through *anamnesis*, initiation into philosophy, and then ascends to the divine realm.

Barzakh: the Arabic term for "isthmus"; an imaginal reality, regarded as a mirror image, is a *barzakh* between the reflected object and the mirror: an imaginal (not imaginary) thing is both the same and different from each of the sides that define it; in Islamic Sufi theology, *barzakh* is taken to mean a certain intermediate state or realm, like the Egyptian Duat, which constitutes a barrier between the two seas of the Quranic cosmology or between any of two different ontological levels of being; it may be compared to 1) a mediating prism which breaks down noetic light into the varied colours of a sensible realm and to 2) a lens which concentrates the rays from above; the period in the *barzakh* (comparable to the Osirian Fields of Rushes) prepares the deceased for the resurrection, just as the time spent in the womb prepares him for birth into this world; according to Ibn al-'Arabi: "The resurrection is a *barzakh*. There is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*, since a *barzakh* is the arrangement of one thing between two other things, like the present moment [between the past and future]" (*Futuhāt* III.156.27 W. Chittick); as a mediating instance *barzakh* is equated 1) with the heart (*qalb*) which mediates between the realm of Spirit (*Ruh*) and that of the individual soul (*nafs*), or 2) with the pole (*qutb*) which, in the Sufi hierarchy, functions as the world sustaining and saving *Logos*, i.e., as the Horus-like pharaoh, albeit hidden (because, contrary to the official "state metaphysics" in Egypt, Sufism, often standing against the corrupt official powers, was forced to elaborate the parallel esoteric hierarchy constituted by externally unrecognized "spies of God").

Ben-ben: the Egyptian word carrying the connotation of "outflow"; the pyramid-like sacred stone or pillar that came to be the cult object of Ra in the Heliopolitan temple represents the primordial *ben-ben*, i.e., the noetic "stone", or the primeval hill, which emerges from the apophatic abyss of Nun as the first self-projection of Atum ("All" and "Nothing"), as the seed of the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos*: "Atum-Khepera, you culminate as hill, you raise yourself up as the *bennu*-bird from the ben-ben stone in the abode of the Phoenix at Heliopolis" (*PT* 1652); the wondrous *bennu*-bird,

sitting on the top of the *ben-ben*, is said to come from the Isle of Fire having filled its body with the demiurgic *beka*-power and may be compared to the self-created original solar Word (*Logos*) which brings light into darkness; this bird of light is the primeval hypostasis of Ra, that is, the light-like intelligible Being; Heliopolis represents the symbolic centre of the manifested world, of all theophanies.

Bios: (βίος) life, or a way of life, analogous to the Hindu *darshana*; therefore one can speak of the Pythagorean way of life, the Orphic way of life; to be a philosopher implies a rupture with daily life (*bios*) and purification of one's passions in order to experience the transcendence of divine Intellect and the soul with respect to the mortal body.

Bomiskos: (βωμισκος); *bomos* is the Greek sacrificial altar; being the most important element for the sacred work (more important than the cult stone, tree, and spring) the altar is ritually set up in the *temenos*, the sacred enclosure, when the first sacrifice is performed *in illo tempore* by Heracles or some other hero; the Greek altar is constructed of bricks and white-washed with lime, sometimes decorated with volutes in the middle of which lies the metal tablet on which the fire burns; in Pythagorean philosophy, *bomiskos* designates the irregular volume from which body is produced; the theurgist's physical body is also regarded as the sacrificial altar on the way to the divine realm.

Brahman: the Sanskrit term for the ultimate non-dual and un-manifest Principle, in certain respects comparable to Nun of the Egyptians or the ineffable One of Neoplatonists; it is the supreme reality without quality or distinction; as *Brahma nirguna* it is the unqualified Beyond-Being; as *Brahma saguna* it is Being, or Ishwara, equivalent to Atum-Khepera-Ra who emerges from the abyss of Nun; when designated as *saccidananda*, *brahman* is the fullness of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ananda*); however, it is described by negation of everything (*neti-neti*, not this, not that); *brahman* transcends Intellect and everything that is thinkable; it is invisible, inconceivable, "that which speech cannot express, but through which speech is expressed ... that which thought cannot conceive but through which thought is thought ... that which breath cannot breathe but through which breathing is breathed" (*Kena Upanishad* I.4 ff); it is "the light of lights beyond darkness" which dwells in the hearts of all; the human person, who genealogically belongs to the priestly *varna*, is called a *brahman* and conventionally regarded as a legal representative of the *sattva* quality or even as a direct embodiment of this Principle, though, in fact, he may be an ordinary man, actually devoid of any real "divine wisdom".

Daimon: (δαίμων) in the ancient Greek religion, *daimon* designates not a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity: it is an occult power that drives man forward or acts against him: since *daimon* is

the veiled countenance of divine activity, every god can act as *daimon*; a special knowledge of *daimones* is claimed by Pythagoreans; for Plato, *daimon* is a spiritual being who watches over each individual, and may be considered as his higher self, or an angel; whereas Plato is called "divine" by Neoplatonists, Aristotle is regarded as *daimonios*, meaning "an intermediary to god" – therefore Aristotle is to Plato as an angel to a god; for Proclus, *daimones* are the intermediary beings located between the celestial objects and terrestrial inhabitants.

Demiourgique seira: (δεμιουργική σειρά) the vertical series of gods, irradiating in time from the Creator (*demiourgos*) in his timeless act of creation and crossing different levels of being, is called *demiourgique seira*, a demiurgic chain; therefore a series of philosophers emanating in time from Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato is called *chruse seira*, the golden chain; the appellation "golden" refers to the vertical rays of the divine light and godlike nature of wisdom preserved by a "chosen race" (or "golden race") of philosophers.

Demiourgos: (δημιουργός) Creator in Plato's *Timaeus*, literally "craftsman", who as the Father and King contains in one the perfection of all things; when things are distributed to the particulated or manifested world, they become diversified and come under the power of different ruling principles; the Platonic Creator creates by appealing to a higher Paradigm, *autozoon*, which, for Neoplatonists, lies at the highest noetic level; for Proclus, *demiourgos* is the intellectual Living-Being (*noeron zoon*), and the Forms in the Creator's Intellect are compared to the notions of public offices in the mind of a statesman; He is the efficient (*poietikos*), the formal (*eidetikos*), and the final (*telikos*) cause of the temporal, physical world; initially, the Greek concept of the divine craftsman is related to the Egyptian god Ptah and the Ugaritian Kothar-wa-Hasis.

Dhawq: the Arabic term meaning "tasting"; understood by the Sufis as a direct experience of theophanies, of certain spiritual states and stations (for instance those belonging to the *mundus imaginalis*, the cosmological and psychic realm where invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are spiritualized), or of "that which truly is", i.e., the Divine Being; in a sense, *dhawq* is analogous to unveiling, or finding (*kashf*), which means at one and the same time to perceive and to be that which is perceived; this direct "tasting" (along with its semi-sensual implications) is aimed at the "true knowledge" which allows the combination of similarity and incomparability, or imagination and reason; the concept of *dhawq*, regarded as heart-vision, heart-savour, or "aisthesis of the heart", is originally Peripatetic; also it may be understood as the creative intuition, or as the first state of mystical intoxication, or as "the first degree of contemplative vision (*shubud*) of God within God" (Tahanawi, d.1745).

Dhikr: the Arabic (Quranic) term for “remembrance”, “recollection”, “invocation”, by certain metaphysicians is regarded as an equivalent of the Platonic term *anamnesis*; in Sufism, *dhikr Allah* means the constant mentioning of the supreme name of God (*al-ism al-a'zam*), that is, *Allah*, or of certain other divine names, formulas, and verses of the *Qur'an*; this practice (analogous to the repetition of Hindu mantras and Egyptian “words of power”, *bekau*) consists of invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisan*), invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*), and invocation of one’s secret innermost self (*dhikr al-sirr*); it is aimed at the sacramental purification, at the overcoming and transcending of one’s lower soul (*nafs*), at the alchemical restoration of *al-fitrah*, one’s primordial nature equivalent to the cleansed mirror able to reflect a radiant image of God; it is thought that *dhikr* (transmitted by the spiritual master through initiation) brings perfection and enables the aspirant to approach God as close as possible; the supreme *dhikr* is regarded as a means of subsistence (after experiencing of annihilation, *fana'*) and of mystical union, although the concept of “union” frequently is treated as being suspicious in the Islamic theological milieu.

Diadochos: (διαδοχος) successor, the head of the Platonic Academy in the chain of transmission; however, the *diadoche* is hardly a matter of institutional continuity, and may be understood in the sense of the golden chain of philosophers which serves to transmit the sacred knowledge and principles of pure (*diakkekatharmene*) philosophy.

Dialektike: (διαλεκτικη) dialectic; for Plato, only those who philosophize purely and righteously bear the title of dialectician (*Soph.*253e); sometimes the method of *sunagoge* (collection) and *diairesis* (division) is identified as dialectic; for Proclus, the Forms at the intelligible (*noetic*) and intellectual level cannot be defined, but they are definable at the level of soul and below; therefore dialectic defines, by *diairesis*, these images of Forms, though the Forms themselves it can only contemplate; there are three processes of dialectic: 1) cathartic, used to purge ignorance, 2) recollective, which raises to the *anamnesis* of true reality, 3) a mixture of the two; usually Proclus makes a sharp distinction between the so-called Parmenidean dialectic, which provides a path to the divine realities, and the dialectical method (*epicheirematike*) of the Peripatetics.

Dianoia: (διανοια) discursive reason, mind; discursive knowledge, located between immediate apprehension and fallible opinion (*Rep.*511d); according to Proclus, the One, when we apprehend its presence in each of the Forms, “ought not to be viewed by the faculty of opinion, nor by discursive reason (*dianoia*), for these kinds of knowledge are not cognate with intellectual monads, which are neither objects of opinion nor of discursive reason, as we learn from the *Republic* (VI.511a). Rather it is

proper to see by intuitive apprehension that simple and unitary existence of Forms” (*In Parm.*880).

Dikaiosune: (δικαιοσυνη) justice; its opposite is *adikia*, injustice; giving to each man his due is just, according to Plato (*Rep.*331e); *dikaiosune* may be understood in a cosmic and divine sense, since to perform the task for which one is naturally equipped is to follow one’s divine archetype, one’s own *dharma*, to put it in Hindu terms, which is *lex aeterna*, the eternal law of creation.

Djed: the Egyptian hieroglyph meaning “stability” and representing both the macrocosmic and microcosmic *axis mundi*, the backbone of Osiris; the sign is depicted as a stylized representation of a pillar or a column around which sheaves of grain were tied; during the Old Kingdom, it is associated with Ptah, the chief Memphite Demiurge, called the Noble *Djed*; during the New Kingdom, it is used as a symbol of Osiris and represents his regenerative power; this symbol sometimes was pictured with a pair of eyes and regarded as a receptacle of a living god, as a sacred icon animated through the Opening of the Mouth ritual; the royal ritual of Rising the *Djed* Pillar was aimed at the re-establishment of stability, of the cosmic order, and symbolized the rebirth both of the deceased pharaoh and of the initiate; accordingly, the pillar represents the path of alchemical transformation (passing through death and resurrection) and theurgic ascent, that is, the philosophical way leading to the union of Osiris and Ra; the *djed* pillar, supported by Isis and Nephtys, is analogous to the Tantric *sushumna*, the spinal column, which shows the royal way to immortality, leading to the crown of the head (the golden lotus-flower of Ra-Nefertum); the baboons of Thoth, i.e., the eastern *bau*, who praise the noetic sun rising from the top of the vertically standing *djed* pillar, serve as an indication that the Osirian transformation is accomplished through the wisdom of Thoth, through his supernatural knowledge (*rekh*) and theurgic power (*heka*).

Djet: the Egyptian term related to Tefnut, the daughter of Atum, identified as the principle of the intelligible Order, *Maat* (analogous to the Pythagorean Limit, *Peras*); sometimes rendered as Eternal Sameness, *djet* stands as a complementary opposite term to *neheh*, or Eternal Recurrence, identified as the noetic Life of Shu, the son of Atum; on the lower levels of manifestation, *djet* carries Osirian attributes and signifies certain eidetic completedness; *djet*-time, or *djet*-eternity, is akin to “the enduring continuation of that which, acting and changing, has been completed in time” (J. Assmann), to the cosmic wholeness and plenitude, often explained in categories of space, or understood as the accomplished ideal totality of Forms; if *neheh* carries attributes of Ra and represents a cyclical infinitude of creation, manifested through the breath of Shu (the Pythagorean series of *apeiria*), *djet*, instead, represents an unchanging

permanence (the structure imposed by *peras* and oriented towards an *epistrophe*, therefore related to the mortuary cult and continuation of the completed image).

Doxa: (δοξα) opinion; in Platonism, a sharp distinction is made between the eternal noetic world of Forms (Ideas, Archetypes) of which knowledge (*gnosis*) is possible and the perceptible world of becoming which is only opinable (*doxastos*); for Proclus, the perceptible entities are opinable, but true being is an object of intellect (*Elements of Theology* 123); opinions may be true or false, knowledge only true.

Dunamis: (δυναμις) power, capacity; Aristotle regards *dunamis* as one of his fundamental principles (*archai*); Plotinus describes the One as the seminal power of all things (*dunamis panton*: *Enn.* III.8.10.1); a net of divine powers in their descending and ascending order is a net of theophanies: in this respect *dunamis* is analogous to the ancient Egyptian *sekhem*; the powers of the divine Intellect and Soul appear to be present at every part of the cosmos, but the physical world (and the human body) is unable to receive the full power of incorporeal Reality; *dunamis* sometimes may be equated with daimonic forces.

Eidolon: (εἰδῶλον) image, idol, double, apparition, phantom, ghost; in Homer, there are three kinds of supernatural apparitions that are called by the term *eidolon*: 1) the phantom (*phasma*), created by a god in semblance of a living person, 2) the dream-image, regarded as a ghostly double that is sent by the gods in the image of a real being, 3) the *psuche* of the dead; the Homeric *psuche* is not a soul, but a phantom, a thin vapour that proves to be ungraspable; for Pythagoreans and Plato, *psuche* is no longer the *eidolon* of the body, but the immortal soul that constitutes one's real being; for Plotinus, the soul is the *eidolon nou*, a *simulacrum* of *nous*, an image that is already obscured; the conception of *eidolon* is partly related to the ancient Egyptian concept of *ka*.

Eidos: (εἶδος) visible shape, form, a kind of thing, the intelligible Form, or the noetic Idea, of Platonism; the word is etymologically connected with *video*, and the term *idea* also comes from the same root as Greek verb *idein* and the Latin verb *videre*, both meaning "to see"; therefore *eidos* is closely connected with contemplation (*theoria*), transcendental or divine imagination, and mystical vision.

Eikon: (εἰκὼν) image, icon; a mirror-image as a direct representation of its *paradeigma*; for Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, the sensible world is an image of the noetic world and time is an image of eternity (*Enn.* III.7.11), therefore the lower realities may be contemplated in ascending hierarchy as images, or traces, of the higher paradigms; Proclus makes a distinction between an *eikon* and a *sumbolon*: the Pythagoreans, before

revealing directly the truths of their doctrine, present *eikones* of reality (*In Tim.* 1.29.31ff).

Ellampsis: (ἐλλαμπσις) irradiation, shining forth, manifestation, illumination, flowing from the principle as a cause; for Proclus, "only an illumination (*ellampsis*) from the intellectual gods renders us capable of being connected to those intelligible-and-intellectual Forms ... For this reason, indeed, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (249d) compares the contemplation of them to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and visions (*epopteias*), elevating our souls under the arch of Heaven, and to Heaven itself, and to the place above Heaven" (*In Parm.* 949).

Episteme: (ἐπιστημη) knowledge, scientific knowledge of what is unchanging and necessary, e.g. Platonic Forms; since *episteme* is regarded as a certain knowledge of reality, the objects of *doxa* (opinion) cannot be assigned to *episteme*, for Proclus, the task of science is the recognition (*gnosis*) of causes, and only when we recognize the causes of things do we say that we know them (*Elements of Theology* 11); science, or scientific knowledge (*epistemonike gnosis*), depends on the synthesizing power of mind, but "intellect (*nous*) is the proper spectator of the Forms, because it is the same nature as them" (*In Parm.* 924.32-37).

Epistrophe: (ἐπιστροφή) reversion, return; in the Neoplatonic threefold scheme of manifestation, a thing, or rather an intelligible entity, proceeds from itself to multiplicity, and returns to itself, while its essential characteristic identity remains unchanged at the initial level; the three moments – remaining (*monē*), procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*) – are phases of a simple continuous and dynamic process (sometimes regarded as simultaneous) that infuses unity-diversity, causation and predication; it is essentially a metaphysical and logical relationship.

Epopteia: (ἐποπτεία) the most important mystical vision that culminates the Eleusinian mysteries, the beholding of the secret symbols or epiphanies of the gods; *epopteia* is the highest stage of initiation; *epoptai* (beholders) are those who came back to watch the rituals again; in a similar way, the philosophical purification and instruction culminates in *epoptika* – the direct revelation of truth and contemplation of Forms, or divine realities.

Eros: (ἔρως) love, sometimes personified as a deity, daimon, or cosmogonical, pedagogical and soteriological force, manifested in the process of demiurgy and within the domain of providence; for Plato, philosophy is a sort of erotic madness (*mania*), because Eros, though implying need, can inspire us with the love of wisdom; Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* describes education in erotics as an upward journey or ascent towards the perfect noetic Beauty; Plotinus uses the union of lovers as a

symbol of the soul's union with the One (*Enn.* VI.7.34.14-16); Proclus distinguishes two forms of love: 1) ascending love which urges lower principles to aspire towards their superiors, 2) descending or providential love (*eros pronoetikos*) which obligates the superiors to care for their productions and transmit divine grace (*In Alcib.* 54-56); for Dionysius the Areopagite, who follows Proclus, the *eros ekstatikos* becomes the unifying factor of the cosmos.

Eusebeia: (ΕΥΣΕΒΕΙΑ) piety, meritorious piety; "to change nothing of what our forefathers have left behind" – this is *eusebeia* (Isocr. 7.30); for Platonists, piety means not simply bringing sacrificial offerings and fulfilling cultic duties, but also humility, supported by philosophy and combined with love (*eros*), faith (*pistis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) that finally leads to assimilation to God.

(For Greek words starting with φ see listing starting ph)

Gnosis: (ΓΝΩΣΙΣ) knowledge; *gnosis* is contrasted with *doxa* (opinion) by Plato; the object of *gnosis* is *to on*, reality or being, and the fully real is the fully knowable (*Rep.* 477a); the Egyptian Hermetists made a distinction between two types of knowledge: 1) science (*episteme*), produced by reason (*logos*), and 2) *gnosis*, produced by understanding and faith (*Corpus Hermeticum* IX); therefore *gnosis* is regarded as the goal of *episteme* (ibid. X.9); the idea that one may "know God" (*gnosis theou*) is very rare in the classical Hellenic literature, which rather praises *episteme* and hieratic vision, *epopteia*, but is common in Hermetism, Gnosticism and early Christianity; following the Platonic tradition (especially Plotinus and Porphyry), Augustine introduced a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, *scientia* and *sapientia*, claiming that the fallen soul knows only *scientia*, but before the Fall she knew *sapientia* (*De Trinitate* XII).

Goeteia: (ΓΟΗΤΕΙΑ) magic; a sharp distinction is made between 1) the sinister *goeteia* and 2) *theourgia*, the sacramental divine work, by Iamblichus in *De mysteriis*; however, magic is sometimes interpreted as *gnosis*, and *gnosis* pertains to the secret divine names as facilitating the power of magic; the Hellenistic magic (frequently equated with the mysteries and labelled *musteria*, *musterion*, *musterion tou theou*) is related to the ancient mystery-cult initiation and the Egyptian doctrine of *heka* – the miraculous power of creation, governed by the god Heka, who distributes *hekau*, the cultic words of power (as Hindu mantras) that perform divine liturgies and transformations of the soul; Hermis-Thoth, *Isidos pater*, is regarded as the founder of the holy tradition (*paradosis*) of the magic arts and the author of the secret names "wrote in Heliopolis with hieroglyphic letters"; therefore the magician sometimes is called the mystagogue (*mystagogos*).

Hairesis: (αἵρησις) taking, choice, course of action, election, decision; this term (plural, *haireseis*) refers to any group of people perceived to have a clear doctrinal identity; *hairesis* is a group with fairly coherent and distinctive theories, with an acknowledged founder (*hairesi-arches*) and leaders who articulate their rejection of rival theories through theoretically founded polemics; Diodorus of Sicily complains that the Hellenes, unlike the Orientals, always introduce doctrinal innovations in important matters, thus "founding new *haireseis*" (2.29.6); in the 2nd century A.D., *hairesis* had become a standard term for philosophical schools; the early Christians use *hairesis* to refer to a body of false beliefs.

Heka: although this Egyptian term designates both demiurgic and theurgic power, usually it is rendered as "magic"; in its role as the creative power, the personified god Heka (analogous to Hindu Maha-Maya) stems from the primeval creative utterance of Atum and is contained in the divine *Logos*: being regarded as the father of the gods and of all that becomes manifested, Heka constitutes and permeates every level of manifested reality, be it noetic, psychic, or physical; by the permanent work of Heka the different levels of being are woven into an integral magic carpet, therefore the *heka*-power has the transforming and elevating function on the path of an inner alchemy and ascent of the soul; the conception of *heka* is intimately connected with that of *maat*, right cosmic order and justice; therefore the *heka*-magic is inseparable from the cultic, political, social, economical, scientific, artistic, and philosophical aspects of the Egyptian state-life; in the rite of the pharaoh's ascent and his assimilation to the supreme divine Principle (that is, his equation to the transcendent and immanent *pantheos*, the Reality of all that exists), the *heka* of the gods is to be sacramentally "eaten" and contained in his "belly"; the possession of magical words of power (*hekau*) is essential for the initiate in the Osirian realm of Duat where the soul (*ba*) is tested, transformed, and (if proved to be *maakheru*) turned into *akh* through *heka*-based theurgic power and knowledge.

Hen (to hen): (εν; το εν) the one, which can mean: 1) Unity or Oneness in general; 2) the unity of anything that has unity or is one thing; 3) that which has unity, anything that is one; 4) the one thing we are speaking of, as opposed to "other ones" (see: F. M. Cornford *Plato and Parmenides*, London, 1969, p.111); for Neoplatonists, the One is the ineffable source of Being, the Supreme Principle, explicitly regarded as God by Proclus; *to hen* transcends demiurgic Intellect and constitutes the first divine *hupostasis* of Plotinus; it corresponds to Nun, the Father of the gods (*neteru*) in the ancient Egyptian theology.

Henas: (ενας) henad, unit; the term is taken by Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus from Plato's *Philebus*, where it is used interchangeably with the term "monad"; since for every real being there is a unit, and for every unit

a real being (Procl. *Elements of Theology* 136), the henads are pure unities, the sources of being's identity, located between the pure One and the noetic One (or Being); more precisely, the henad is the first principle (*arche*) and the measure (*metron*) of being; the One is unparticipable, but the henads are participable: therefore they correlate with real beings; Proclus divides henads into transcendent or independent units and those that are immanent and belong to their participants and are irradiations of the first; in theurgy, henads constitute a set of theophanies, i.e. divinity in its many different forms at all different levels of reality: therefore the divine henad stands for the god-entity as a whole; the difference between the One and the participable henads (which may be compared with the Egyptian *netern*), opens the theurgic way of adoration, worship and ascent; according to Proclus, "the most divine thing in us is the 'one' in us, which Socrates called the illumination of the soul (*Rep.*540a7), just as he called truth itself light" (*In Parm.* VII.48); since like is apprehensible by like, the "one of the soul" makes union with the ineffable One possible.

Henosis: (ενωσις) unity; unity is the characteristic that everything has in common; anything depends on unity and only unity is the goal of all things; in Neoplatonism, the soul's purification, accomplished primarily through philosophy, culminates in noetic vision and finally in mystical union (Plot. *Enn.* VI.7.36); the divine truth is an indivisible *henosis* of real beings.

Hermaïke seira: (ερμαϊκη σειρα) Hermaic chain (of transmission, or heavenly initiation); the Neoplatonists commonly associated themselves with the Hermaic chain, i.e. vertical "golden" chain of the noetic light and wisdom that emanate through Hermes Logios and other angelic powers from the divine Intellect (*nous*).

Hermeneus: (ερμηνευς) interpreter; *hermeneus* owes his name to Hermes, the messenger of the gods; *hermeneus* is an interpreter of the hieratic rites and liturgies (in Egypt, such hermeneutical procedures, called "illuminations", were practised at least from the times of the Middle Kingdom), divine omens, tokens, symbols, oracular utterances, and, in the case of Neoplatonists, the Homeric poems, Plato, Aristotle and the *Chaldean Oracles*; the goal of *hermeneutike* is to reveal the inner meaning (*huponoiã*) of the texts and indicate the highest truth that points beyond the discourses, thus elevating the soul to the first principles themselves; there is an ontological hierarchy of interpreters and interpretations: therefore each lower language of theophany functions as the *hermeneus* of the higher one and renders it comprehensible at a lower level at the expense of its coherence.

Hieratike technè: (ιερατικη τεχνη) sacred art, hieratic art, namely the priestly art, theurgy, accomplished by the gods themselves through

different degrees of initiation, transformation, elevation (*anagoge*) and ineffable mystagogy; it represents the ascending path to unification with the One through scientific training (*agoge epistemonike*) on certain henadic qualities, ontological symbols, sacred rites, divine names and theurgic powers; according to Proclus: "the theurgists established their sacred knowledge after observing that all things were in all things from the sympathy that exists between all phenomena and between them and their invisible causes, and being amazed that they saw the lowest things in the highest and the highest in the lowest" (*Hier. Art* 148).

Hierophantes: (ιεροφαντης) hierophant, priest of Eleusis, he who shows sacred things; since the language of mysteries was employed by Plato and the later Platonists, philosophy is often regarded in terms of a mystery initiation, and a true philosopher or a spiritual leader of *hairesis* is equated to the hierophant of mysteries.

Hieros logos: (ιερος λογος) sacred tale, sacred word or book (e.g. possessed by the initiation priests of Dionysus and Pythagoreans); there were *logoi* (accounts, explanations) within practical mysteries and additional *logoi* adduced from outside; they were both exoteric and esoteric, about the mysteries and within the mysteries, developed on three different hermeneutical levels: those of myth, allegory, and metaphysics.

Homoiosis theos: (ομοιωσις θεω) likeness to God; the phrase is derived from the famous passage of Plato's *Theaetetus* 176bc; it is understood as the end (*telos*) of life which is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*); for Iamblichus, "knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us resemble the gods" (*Protrep.* ch.3).

Huparxis: (υπαρχις) pure existence of a thing, an essential foundation; the term covers the level of pure unity (which is the foundation of all manifested realities) and the divine; for Proclus, being's pure essence is no actual being, but a unity (*henas*) with existence (*huparxis*), and this unity is the spark of divinity; the *huparxis* of henads is not existence of certain concrete subjects, but unqualified existence, unconditioned even by being.

Hupodoche: (υποδοχη) reception; the receptacle underlying all the world of becoming; for Plato – the material principle, the mother and receptacle of the whole visible cosmos (*Tim.*51a); *hupodoche* is equivalent to space (*chora*) and nurse (*tithene*); according to Iamblichus, pure and divine matter receives and reveals the gods in cosmogony (*De myster.*232.17); each level on the Neoplatonic chain (*seira*) of theophany is regarded as the receptacle of its superior (which functions as a "form" in respect to "matter"); the embodied soul is a *hupodoche* of the god due to the soul's capacity or theurgic suitability (*epitedeiotes*); in theurgy, minerals, plants, animals, divine statues and icons, temples and sacred landscapes can be

regarded as the receptacles of the descending divine light or power; initially, this is the Egyptian doctrine of *descensio* and *translatio*: the gods and divine powers descend into their images (*akbemu*) and animate the material world, understood as an *imago caeli*.

Hypostasis: (υποστασις) standing under, sediment, foundation; in Neoplatonism, *hypostasis* is a synonym of *ousia*, that means being, substance, existence; the three *hypostaseis* of Plotinus are three fundamental levels, or dimensions, of divine reality: the One, Intellect, and Soul.

Hypothesis: (υποθεσις) proposal, intention, argument, hypothesis, the premiss of a syllogism; the nine hypotheses of dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides* are regarded by the Neoplatonists as the nine *hypostaseis*, or levels of reality, extending from the ineffable One to pure matter, or non-being.

Idea: (ιδεα) in non-technical use the term refers to the visual aspect of anything; for Plato and the Platonists, it is the highest noetic entity, the eternal unchanging Form, the archetype of the manifested material thing; in Plato, *idea* is a synonym of *eidōs*, but in Neoplatonism these two terms have a slightly different meaning.

Imago dei: "the image of God" in Latin, the Egyptian *tut neter*; the numerous conceptions of likeness (*homoiosis*) to God were elaborated in the Platonic philosophical tradition and Scripture-based Christian theology, namely, that man (though shaped from the earth and therefore a mortal, passible, shortlived being) is honoured with God's own image which (sometimes equated with the microcosmic *nous*) reflects the immortal, pure, and everlasting divine nature; accordingly, as the image of God, the immortal human soul (or heart-intellect) is viewed as a mirror of God, both to others and to itself; in the case of Christ (analogous to the Horus-like pharaoh, *Ra sa*, Osiris resurrected, the Perfect Man of Sufi metaphysics), the overwhelming cosmological "image" (*eikon*) stands for living and active essence, thereby establishing a dominion over all creatures; being made in the image of God, man (who recovered his pure primordial nature and realized his final spiritual perfection) is the vicegerent of the Lord; though ultimately of Egyptian origin, "this very concept of the *Imago Dei* which formed a synthesis between the Platonic-Aristotelian-Stoic view and the Christian view of man, ... dominated the whole of the Patristic period and the Christian Middle Ages" (E. Brunner).

Isefet: the Egyptian term which designates "lack", or "deviation" from the meaningful divine order (*maat*), that is, all negative Sethian qualities, such as falsehood, violence, sickness, enmity, and so on; the meaning of creation (constituted by the different levels and modes of manifestations, *kbepem*) lies in its noetic plenitude, that which yields being, order, life, and

justice; therefore all suffering, rebellion, crime, and injustice (the symptoms of lack, delusion, and non-being) are indications of the world's loss of its original intelligible plenitude for the reason of its moving away from the primeval noetic source and, as a consequence, of its deviation from the correct archetypal patterns; the sacred institution of kingship is revealed and established as a means to overcome *isefet* and reconstitute the disfigured *imago dei*, that is, to recover one's true spiritual identity, according to Egyptian theology: "Ra has placed the pharaoh in the land of the living, forever and ever, judging humankind and satisfying the gods, realizing *maat* and destroying *isefet*".

Ka: the Egyptian term for one's vital power, or for one's "double", which also may be understood as an abstract principle symbolizing an individual's psychic tendencies, moral qualities, and appetites; *ka* may indicate male potency and the sustaining power of life; the *ka* hieroglyph represents two extended arms, perhaps suggesting the gesture of praise, prayer, or one of embrace (since the hieratic power of *ka* is ritually transmitted through the priestly embrace – that is, through embracing statues and spiritual disciples – which imitates the archetypal "event" when Atum embraced Shu and Tefnut *in illo tempore*); the *ka*-double is fashioned along with the material human body by the ram-headed god Khnum on his potter's wheel; to "go to one's *ka*" meant to die; however, the *ka* (when located in the vital realm of the dead ancestors) needed continuing nourishment provided in the funerary sanctuaries-residences to the animated statues: the food-offerings themselves are designated as *kau* and are thought as being imbued with the life-power of *ka*; the fundamental qualities attached to the notion of *ka* included subsistence, nutrition, penetration, force, splendour, magic, worth, radiance, greenness, vassalage (that of serving an official, or a spiritual master, who often occupied the rank of official or administrator of the pharaonic state); all ancestors are regarded as *kau*, therefore to beget a child is to re-establish a vital link with them; Osiris is viewed as the *ka* of Horus (in the role of his father and the source of his fortune), and Horus is viewed as the *ka* of Osiris when he embraces and revives his father Osiris; the pharaoh's *ka* is the source of prosperity to the whole world and to all inhabitants of the theocratic state.

Katharsis: (καθαρσις) purification, purgation of passions; the term occurs in Aristotle's definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 1449b 24) and seems to be borrowed from medicine, religious initiations and magic.

Kheper: the Egyptian hieroglyph, depicting the sacred scarab (*Scarabaeus sacer*), represents this insect itself and metamorphoses or transformations involved in all possible "becomings"; *kheper* means coming into being, manifestation, development, changing, and so on; different ontological manifestations (such as one's corpse, shadow, *ka*, *ba*, *akh*, *sab*) are regarded

as *kheperu*; Atum, as the source of all existence, is the “lord of *kheperu*”; Atum is described as developing “in this your identity of the Scarab”, that is, in his hypostasis of the noetic sun at the dawn of creation; Ra emerged from the abyss of Nun in his identity of Khepera; therefore Atum (*neb tem*, the lord of totality) is the transcendent completeness and the supreme noetic source of being, Khepera (Kheperer) is the proximate cause of all manifestations (*kheperu*), and Horus is the final cause; while Khepera is the entity embodied in the sun as it rises in the morning; it is the symbol of the initiate’s rebirth.

Kosmos noetos: (κοσμος νοητος) the intelligible cosmos of divine Forms and intellects, located between the One and the Soul; it embraces the hierarchy of different levels and orders (*taxeis*) of divine reality (such as Being, Life, and Intellect), filled with the various triads of the intelligible (noetic), intelligible-intellective (noetic-noeric) and intellective (noeric) gods; among the metaphysical categories and triads of *kosmos noetos* are such as: existence (*huparxis*) – power (*dunamis*) – activity (*energeia*), remaining (*monē*) – procession (*proodos*) – reversion (*epistrophe*), symmetry (*summetria*) – truth (*aletheia*) – beauty (*kallos*).

Logismos: (λογισμος) numerical calculation, the power of reasoning, reason.

Logos: (λογος) the basic meaning is “something said”, “account”; the term is used in explanation and definition of some kind of thing, but also means reason, measure, proportion, analogy, word, speech, discourse, discursive reasoning, noetic apprehension of the first principles; the demiurgic *Logos* (like the Egyptian *Hu*, equated with Thoth, the tongue of Ra, who transforms the Thoughts of the Heart into spoken and written Language, thus creating and articulating the world as a script and icon of the gods) is the intermediary divine power: as an image of the noetic cosmos, the physical cosmos is regarded as a multiple *Logos* containing a plurality of individual *logoi* (*Enn.* IV.3.8.17-22); in Plotinus, *Logos* is not a separate *hupostasis*, but determines the relation of any *hupostasis* to its source and its products, serving as the formative principle from which the lower realities evolve; the external speech (*logos prophorikos*) constitutes the external expression of internal thought (*logos endiathetos*).

Maat: the ancient Egyptian term for measure, harmony, canon, justice and truth, shared by the gods and humans alike; *maat* is the essence of the sacred laws that keeps a human community and the entire cosmic ordered; it establishes the link between above and below; “letting *maat* ascend” is a language offering during the hieratic rites and interpretation of the cosmic process in terms of their mystic and salvational meaning; for Plato, who admired the Egyptian patterns, the well-ordered cosmos, truth, and justice are among the main objects of philosophical discourse.

Mania: (μανια) madness, frenzy; the state of frenzy is connected with the psychic state called *entheos*, “within is a god”; being possessed by a god means a loss of one’s understanding (*nous*); the god Dionysus is the Frenzied One: therefore some kind of enthusiasm, madness and inspiration is related to the prophecy and mystical experience; Plato distinguishes the prophetic *mania* of Apollo from the telestic *mania* of Dionysus, adding two other types of *mania* – the poetic and erotic or philosophical enthusiasm (*Phaedr.*244a-245a); the philosopher is the erotic madman, but his divine erotic madness and divine *sophrosune* (temperance, virtue, prudence) are to be united in the successful experience of love which elevates through *anamnesis* towards the divine realm.

Mathema: (μαθημα) any study which a person may learn (*manthanein*); later the term is confined to the mathematical sciences, harmonics and astronomy.

Maya: the Sanskrit term related to the root *ma* (measure, fashion, making); it is a divine property or power involved in the creation of the world and, therefore, regarded both as demiurgic wisdom and (when compared to the supreme Principle *per se*) as the universal delusion; thus, creation is viewed as a product of *maya*’s art and, ultimately, is an illusion, if regarded as self-sufficient, i.e., as separated from its source; the power of *maya* is analogous to the power of *heka* which is either combined with *maat* (order, justice, proper measure, truth), or misused in the context of *isefet* (which includes an irrational passion) and thereby turned into a dream-like illusion and magic; the cosmic play (*lila*) is based on the inexhaustible power of divine *Maya* which is transcended only by the ineffable union with the supreme Principle, the archetypal Thaumaturgus himself; in Platonic epistemology, the realm of *maya* should be equated to the realm of human opinion, *doxa*, contrasted to true knowledge, *episteme*.

Me: the Sumerian term (rendered as *parsu* in Akkadian) designates the properties and powers of the gods close to those both transcendent and immanent archetypes which are called Forms, or Ideas, in Platonism; however, the concept of *me* is expressed in the language of myth; it covers the ideas, models, things, and activities that are central to the theocentric universe and the civilized human life; the related term *gish-bur* (demiurgic plan, design) denotes how these noetic prototypes are manifested in an orderly way in the realm of the state-based economical, social, cultic, and spiritual life; when the *me* are forgotten (or the *dharma* neglected, in Sanskrit terms), the well-attuned political, social, and religious cosmos falls into disorder.

Medu neter: “divine words”, “divine speech”, i.e., the Egyptian hieroglyphs; in a certain respect, they may be regarded as the visible symbolic images, if not “incarnations”, of the Platonic Forms, that is, of

the intelligible Hieroglyphs which are the archetypes of manifestation; all *medu neter* (in their noetic *akbu* aspect) originated from that which was thought of by the heart of Ptah and commanded by his tongue, i.e., by Thoth; the manifested universe is an articulation of the noetic hieroglyphs; the Memphite theology argues that Ptah created all things and all hieroglyphs, after he formed the gods; the concept of *medu neter* is based on the theory of creation by the Word (*Hu, Logos*); therefore the sacred script (which is also the chief form of the Egyptian sacred art) on its own level reflects the structure of reality, the configuration of the noetic archetypes.

Methexis: (μεθεξις) participation; for the Pythagoreans, things are imitations of numbers, but for Plato, particulars participate in their Forms; Iamblichus extended "participation" into a general term for the informing of lower principles by higher ones and thus established the triad of transcendent Form, immanent universal and material particular; this general scheme of unparticipated (*amethetton*), participated (*metechomenon*) and participant (*metechon*) terms may be applied to different levels of manifestation; the unparticipated terms operate on lower realities only indirectly, through the intermediary of the participated terms which they produce; thus the ontological levels are multiplied and divine transcendence is preserved.

Mimesis: (μιμησις) imitation, representation; in the *Poetics* 1447a-b Aristotle includes all the fine arts under *mimesis*, among them epic, tragedy, comedy, painting and sculpture; the images produced by *mimesis* are not at all like photographic images; according to H. Armstrong, the classical Hellenic artists' images are mimetically closer to those of the traditional arts of the East than to those of nineteenth-century Europe: "If we establish in our imagination the figure of the masked singing actor as our image of *mimesis* we shall not do too badly" (*Platonic Mirrors*, p.151); however, in the vocabulary used by Proclus the terms *mimesis* and *mimema* are usually reserved for art of an inferior type, though Proclus says that "the congenital vehicles (*ochemata*) imitate (*mimeitai*) the lives of the souls" (*Elements of Theology* 209) and "each of the souls perpetually attendant upon gods, imitating its divine soul, is sovereign over a number of particular souls" (*ibid.*, 204).

Mi'raj: the Arabic term for ascent, elevation (analogous to the Greek term *anagoge*); if the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) constitutes, metaphysically speaking, the descending cosmogonical path of manifestation and revelation, the Night of Ascent (*laylat al-mi'raj*) constitutes the ascending path of return (Greek *epistrophe, anodos*), exemplified by the Prophet's ascent from Mecca via Jerusalem to the highest heaven and the Divine Presence; from the time of Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.875) onwards, this *mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad is

explicitly taken as a prototype for the Sufi ascent through the seven heavens to the Garden (*janna*), located between the eighth and the ninth heavens, that is, the Footstool and the Throne; thereby the Muslim mystics move beyond human qualities and are reborn into a higher realm of existence; according to Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz: "Just as heaven is the staircase of the *mi'raj*, so the frames of form are the ladder into the heart's world"; although most of the Sufis accepted the bodily nature of the Prophet's *mi'raj*, they thought that in the microcosm (whose summit is a place of the spirit, contrasted with all the negative traits associated with the passionate soul, *al-nafs al-ammarah*) the "friends of God" make their non-bodily ascents in imitation of the Prophet.

Morphe: (μορφη) shape; e.g. *kata somatos morphen* – "in a bodily shape" (*Phaedr.* 271a); sometimes *morphe* is used as a synonym of *idea* and *eidōs*.

Mundus imaginalis: "imaginal world", the world of the Imaginable; the conception of *mundus imaginalis* was popularized by the French scholar Henry Corbin as a possible rendering of the Arabic *al-alam al-mithal*; this *alam* is the world of symbolic visions and of typifications, viewed as an intermediate isthmus (*barzakh*) between the intelligible and the sensible, i.e., the world in which spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized; this realm is prominent in the later Sufi cosmologies, though some contemporary scholars argue that the faculty of imagination (compared to the mirror which reflects both noetic and sensible sides of reality) was turned into the separate ontological world (the whole dream-like universe of symbols and animated mythological figures, established within that initially was the hypostasis of Soul in Plotinus) due to the creative misinterpretations of al-Ghazali's texts and the Peripatetic misreadings of the Neoplatonic meta-cosmic hierarchy; however, one of its prototypes may be found in Plato's description of the "real earth" which is full of "sanctuaries and temples truly inhabited by gods, and oracles and prophecies and visions and all other kinds of communion with the gods which occur there face to face" (*Phaed.* 111c ff); according to the philosophy of Ishraq, developed by al-Suhrawardi and his Persian followers, it is called the "intermediate Orient" (*al-mashriq al-awsat*) of Angels-Souls (those who move the heavens and are endowed with pure active Imagination), preceding the pure Orient of the higher pleroma; Ibn al-'Arabi describes it as the plane of images (*amthal*) and imagination (*khayal*) which is located between the plane of the sensible experience and the plane of the Presence of Lordship (*rububiyah*); to regard it as a world *sui generis* of eternal archetypes would be (according to the Greek Neoplatonists) akin to locating these archetypes at the level of mathematical *phantasia* which, in the case of Ishraqis, assumes the mythological status of the living wonderland in which noetic Ideas present themselves in imaginal forms and in which material things appear as subtle

bodies; however, far from being the realm of intelligible archetypes, this is the dream-world of magicians, the twilight realm of Osirian Duat, or of Anima Mundi, integrated into the Islamic Sufi theory of prophetic and visionary experiences; the imaginal faculty (*khayal*) works by an inner perception that perceives ideas in sensory form; in the school of Ibn al-'Arabi, imagination is considered 1) as the universe itself, 2) as an intermediate macrocosmic world, and 3) as an intermediate microcosmic world.

Mustagogia: (μυσταγωγία) an initiation into a mystery; leading and guidance of the initiate (*mustes*, plural, *mustai*) to the *telesterion* where initiations take place; a mystagogue is the introducer into the mysteries, the leading priest, instructor or spiritual guide; Proclus viewed the philosophy of Plato as a "mystagogy" an "initiation into the holy mysteries themselves" (*Plat. Theol.* I.1); for the Byzantine Christians, a mystagogy means a liturgical contemplation of the mystery of the Church.

Musteria: (μυστηρια) the proceedings of initiation and sacred rites are called mysteries; the Eleusinian festival is known simply as *ta musteria* or *arbetes teletai*; the initiates – *mustai* and *bacchoi* – walk a sacred way, the goal of which is inner transformation and eternal bliss: "happy and blessed one, god will you be instead of a mortal"; the Orphic mysteries have striking parallels in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the *Coffin Texts*; the mysteries are characterized as an esoteric, secret, forbidden (*aporrheton*) and unspeakable (*arhbeton*); the special states, attained through initiation (*telete*), are claimed to be valid even beyond death; the mystery-language is adopted by Plato and used by his followers; even the Stoic Seneca speaks of the initiatory rites of philosophy, "which open not some local shrine, but [the] vast temple of all the gods, the universe itself, whose true images and true likeness philosophy has brought before the mind's eye" (*Ep.*90.28).

Muthos: (μυθος) myth, tale; *legomena*, "things recited", in the Eleusinian mysteries, i.e. the recitations of the *hieros logos*, belong to the sphere of myth; the one-sided opposition between an irrational *muthos* and rational *logos* in Hellenic philosophy and culture, established by modern scholarship, is wrong, because even in Plato, myths constitute the essential part of philosophy; all true myths require a proper cosmological and metaphysical *exegesis*; according to Proclus, the hieratic myths have a certain inner meaning (*huponoia*) and conceal secret or unspoken (*aporrheton*) doctrines, sometimes inspired or revealed by the gods themselves; Sallustius associates the highest level of myth with transcendent divine reality and the lowest with deceptive perceptions within the realm of the senses; thus a Myth (like Hindu *Maya*) is analogous

to the manifested cosmos itself, understood as the visible veil of the hidden invisible truth.

Nehet: the Egyptian term related to the ontological series of Shu and sometimes rendered as Eternal Recurrence; *nehet*-eternity, or *nehet*-time, perhaps should be conceived as the cyclic time of Ra which is reflected as our everyday time of constant rhythmic change; therefore it is not completed in the sense of the Osirian *djet*-time; this is time of eternal return which is emphasized by the regular repetition of temple rituals.

Neter, *neteret* (pl. *neteru*, *neterut*): the Egyptian term for "god" and "goddess" respectively; the *neter* hieroglyph depicts a figure sitting in profile while knees bent and feet drawn back toward the body; another related hieroglyph looks like a staff wrapped with cloth, or like a cultic flag; in both cases an association with wrapping and binding (*ut*) is evident, and the mummy-like nature of the tightly wrapped body of the sitting figure indicates an idea of deification (or that of an immanent participation in the divine) through soul-transforming death and rebirth; in the Ptolemaic period, the hieroglyph of a star also signified "god"; the series of all gods are viewed as manifestations or hypostases of the supreme Principle ("Lord of All", "Sole Lord who bore all by means of Heka") which Itself may be called by different names; *neteru* may be also rendered as "divine principles", "archetypal names", "hieroglyphs", "paradigms and energies of the manifested being"; the totality of divine forces that constitute the Egyptian universe is summarized by the term "Ennead" (*psdt*), that is, "group of nine" which means both the chief noetic meta-structure of archetypes and the indeterminate amount of divine forces, the plurality of gods; in the *Instruction for Merikare* the Creator is referred simply as *neter* and human beings regarded as images (*smn*) of this God; the gnostic identification with *neteru* was indispensable if the initiate wished to attune oneself to the power of a particular divine principle and to re-establish one's true identity through sacred hermeneutics, purification, integration, assimilation, illumination, and theurgic union.

Noesis: (νοησις) intellection, thought, intellectual intuition, pure intuitive apprehension which transcends discursive reason and is related to *nous*; unified noetic intuition at different levels of reality; for Proclus, intelligible and at the same time intellective (*noeton hama kai noeron*) Life, which is characteristic of self-substantiated henads, exemplifies *noesis* as a process; at the highest ontological level, *noesis* provides union with the intelligible (*noeton*) world through the so-called "flower of intellect" (*anthos nou*); for Iamblichus, the unifying power of the gods transcends all human *noesis* (which appears to resemble Plotinian *dianoia*), but this human *noesis* is a necessary part of ascent and co-operation with the divine; the supreme

noesis is attainable only through the working of theurgy by the grace of god.

Nous: (νοῦς) intelligence, immediate awareness, intuition, intuitive intellect; Plato distinguished *nous* from *dianoia* – discursive reason; *Nous* is the second hypostasis of Plotinus; every intelligence is its own object: therefore the act of intellection always involves self-consciousness: the substance of intelligence is its noetic content (*noeton*), its power of intellection (*nous*), and its activity – the act of *noesis*; in a macrocosmic sense, *Nous* is the divine Intellect, the Second God, who embraces and personifies the entire noetic cosmos (Being-Life-Intelligence), the Demiurge of the manifested universe; such *Nous* may be compared to Hindu *Ishvara* and be represented by such solar gods as the Egyptian Ra; *nous* is independent of body and thus immune from destruction – it is the unitary and divine element, or the spark of divine light, which is present in men and through which the ascent to the divine Sun is made possible.

Ochema: (ὄχημα) vehicle; a boat which conveys the souls of the dead, the soul's chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*; by Aristotle, *ochema* is understood as *pneuma* – the seat of imagination (*phantasia*), analogous to that element of which the stars are made; the *ochema-pneuma* as an astral body functions as a quasi-immaterial carrier of the irrational soul; daimons have a misty *pneuma* which alters its form in response to their imaginings and thus causes them to appear in ever changing shapes; for Iamblichus, the aetherial and luminous vehicle (*aitherodes kai augoeides ochema*) is the recipient of divine *phantasiai*; *ochema* carries soul down to the state of embodiment and is darkened until it becomes fully material and visible: the material or fleshly body is also a sort of *ochema*; Proclus distinguished 1) the higher immaterial and luminous *ochema* into which Plato's Demiurge puts the soul (*Tim.*41e) and 2) lower, *pneumatikon ochema*, which is composite of the four elements and serves as a vehicle of irrational soul – it survives bodily death, but finally is purged away.

Onoma: (ὄνομα) word, name; a noun as distinct from a verb; for Proclus, a name is an *eikon* of a *paradeigma*, a copy of a model; the words (*onomata*) are *agalmata*, the audible "icons" or "statues" of higher divine realities; therefore true names are naturally appropriate, like images that reflect the form of the object, or like artistic icons that reflect Platonic Forms rather than objects of the sensible world.

Ousia: (οὐσία) being, substance, nature, essence; as P. Hadot pointed out: "If we consider the series formed by *ousia* in Plato, *ousia* in Aristotle, *ousia* in the Stoics, *ousia* in the Neoplatonists, and the *substantia* and *essentia* in the church Fathers and the Scholastics, we shall find that the idea of *ousia* or essence is amongst the most confused and confusing notions" (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p.76); since true being is permanent and

intelligible, the substance (*ousia*) of beings is their *logos* and their essence, according to Plato (*Phaed.*65d-66a); Proclus identifies pure Being (*on*) with Essence and Substance itself (*autoousia*); for Neoplatonists, being, real existence and essence are inseparable: beings exist insofar as they are accessible to intellect and have a fixed definition: in the intelligibles the essence is never distinguished from real being.

Paideia: (παίδεια) education, culture; the programme of traditional Hellenic education based on imitation of Homeric exemplars; Plato initiated a philosophically oriented *paideia* that challenged the traditional pattern of poetically sanctioned culture and shifted the emphasis from body to soul (see: W. Jaeger *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1943, 3 vols.).

Paradeigma: (παράδειγμα) exemplar, paradigm, archetype, pattern, model; according to Plato, a paradigm of his perfect state is laid up in Heaven (*Rep.*592b); the noetic Paradigm is regarded as the model for the creation: the visible world is a living creature made after the likeness of an eternal original, i.e. the ideal Living Animal in the world of Forms; thus the world is an image of eternal paradigms (*paradeigmata*); therefore the Demiurge makes the cosmos as an *agalma* (hieratic statue, cultic image, ornament) and sets up within it the *agalmata* of the individual gods.

Paradosis: (παραδοσις) transmission, tradition; e.g. *Orpheos paradosis* – the Orphic tradition.

Per ankh: the Egyptian term meaning the House of Life, i.e., the temple scriptorium and a high school for esoteric training whose priests maintained an oral tradition of initiation and also produced writings in different branches of knowledge, including theology, mathematics, ritual expertise, hieratic liturgy, hermeneutics, genealogy, astrology, sacred geography, mineralogy, medicine, mythography, architecture, the science of theurgic talismans and image-making; the staff of every *per ankh* was constituted by the lector-priests (*beri heb*) whose role was associated with sacred books and the *beka*-power, as well as with preservation of *maat*, the cosmic order, and maintaining the theurgic tradition of mystical ascent and assimilation to the gods; only through esoteric knowledge and initiation into the invisible realm, that is, through symbolic death and rebirth, accomplished in the House of Life, was one able to reveal one's *ankh*-identity and be united with immortal divine principles; in the diagram of the *per ankh* (*Pap. Salt* 825) it is depicted as a symbolic mandala with Osiris at the centre: Isis and Nephthys occupy the corners at the side of his feet, Horus and Thoth – the corners at the side of the head, Geb represents the ground, Nut – the sky; the priests of the House of Life follow "the secret way of Thoth"; one of the chief lector-priests (*beri tep*) said regarding the formula imbued with the *beka*-power: "Do not reveal it

to the common man – it is a mystery of the House of Life” (*Pap. Leiden* 344r).

Pera: (περας) limit, boundary; the fundamental cosmological principle of the Pythagoreans; the Unlimited (*apeiron*) is indefinite and in need of Limit which in the table of opposites is related to Odd, One, Right, Male, Rest, Straight, Light, Good, Square; the principles of Limit and the Unlimited (discussed in Plato’s *Philebus*) are the Pythagorean monad and dyad that constitute the order of henads in Proclus and play a central role in the constitution of reality; limit and unlimited serve as two principles (*archai*) of mathematical reality (*ousia*).

Phantasia: (φαντασια) imagination; for Plato, *phantasia* belongs to the realm of appearance and illusion; for Aristotle, *phantasia* is neither perception nor judgment but a distinct capacity of the soul, the capacity which responds to appearances derived from memory, dreams and sense-perception; the 2nd century A.D. sophist Philostratus was the first to call the faculty of producing visual images *phantasia* which is contrasted with *mimesis*: “For *mimesis* will produce only what she has seen, but *phantasia* even what she has not seen as well; and she will produce it by referring to the standard of the perfect reality” (*Life of Apollonius* 6.19); the Neoplatonists lack the concept of creative imagination, though the Neoplatonic *phantasia* can reproduce images of higher principles in mathematics and language; therefore *phantasia*, as a mirror, is placed at the junction of two different levels of being: the mirror of imagination not only reflects images of phenomena but also images of noetic Forms, Ideas, thus translating revelations and divine epiphanies into visible icons and symbols of the higher realities; at the junction of *phantasia* (which is identified with *nous pathetikos* by Proclus) rational and irrational meet; the objects of *phantasia* are *tupos* (imprint), *schema* (figure) and *morphe* (shape).

Philosophia: (φιλοσοφια) love of wisdom; the intellectual and “erotic” path which leads to virtue and knowledge; the term itself perhaps was coined by Pythagoras; the Hellenic *philosophia* is a prolongation, modification and “modernization” of the Egyptian and Near Eastern sapiential ways of life; *philosophia* cannot be reduced to philosophical discourse; for Aristotle, metaphysics is *prote philosophia*, or *theologike*, but philosophy as *theoria* means dedication to the *bios theoretikos*, the life of contemplation – thus the philosophical life means the participation in the divine and the actualization of the divine in the human through personal *askesis* and inner transformation; Plato defines philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.*67cd); the Platonic *philosophia* helps the soul to become aware of its own immateriality: it liberates from passions and strips away everything that is not truly itself; for Plotinus, philosophy does not wish only “to be a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it

wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the Intellect and the Good”; in late Neoplatonism, the ineffable theurgy is regarded as the culmination of philosophy.

Phronesis: (φρονησις) thought, understanding, practical wisdom, sagacity, prudence; according to some modern scholars, *phronesis* is closer to the English “wisdom” than *sophia*, because “wisdom” is, in standard English, applied to practical matters; but this is still a disputed issue, since, for Aristotle, *sophia* covers bodily, aesthetic, political, theoretical, and religious or metaphysical areas of human activity (*On Philosophy*, fr.8).

Phusis (φυσις) (*physis* in a more conventional English transcription): nature (of something), nature as opposed to the artificial; for Proclus, it is the last immaterial reality or power that exists immediately prior to the material world and is responsible for all the motion and change within it.

Pragmata: (πραγματα) things; in Proclus *ta pragmata* also mean transcendent realities, noetic entities, real beings.

Pronoia: (προνοια) providence; the well ordered arrangement of things in the cosmos is based on a guiding and planning providence; the concept is developed before Socrates; according to Proclus, since all proceeding things in their essential aspect “remain” in their higher causes, or archetypes, the higher causes not only contain their lower effects but they know, or fore-know (*pro-noein*), these effects; foreknowledge is also a kind of love – the providential love (*eros pronoetikos*) by which higher causes care for their effects.

Proodos: (προοδος) procession; the metaphysical term in the Neoplatonic scheme of *monoproodos-epistrophē* (primarily a non-phenomenal process) that means manifestation; the noetic Life covers multification, the unlimited, and potency or power (*dunamis*) that leads to *proodos*; for Proclus, remaining-procession-reversion apply to every form, property, or entity, except the One and matter.

Psyche (ψυχη) (usually transcribed as *psyche*): soul; breath of life, life-stuff; Homer distinguishes between a free soul as a soul of the dead, corresponding with *psyche* (and still regarded as an *eidolon*), and body souls, corresponding with *thumos*, *noos* and *menos*: following the Egyptian theological patterns, the Pythagoreans constituted the *psyche* as the reflection of unchanging and immortal principles; from Plato onwards, *psuchai* are no longer regarded as *eidola*, phantoms or doubles of the body, but rather the human body is viewed as the perishable *simulacrum* of an immaterial and immortal soul; there are different degrees of soul (or different souls): therefore anything that is alive has a soul (Aristotle *De anima* 414b32); in *Phaedrus* 248b the soul is regarded as something to be a

separate, self-moving and immortal entity (cf. Proclus *Elements of Theology* 186); *Psuche* is the third *hypostasis* of Plotinus.

Rekh: the Egyptian term for “knowledge” which, first and foremost, is the knowledge of spiritual realities, divine names and hieroglyphs, of the sacred cosmic topography, mythical iconography, and all beings of the Netherworld; this elaborate store of knowledge, including scientific observations and theological interpretations, had a cultic function and culminated in *gnosis*, that is, in realization of one’s different archetypal identities and in the restoration of one’s divine nature; knowledge of the Duat conferred a nether-worldly identity on the initiate as “a holy *neter* in the following of Thoth”; Thoth (Djehuty), regarded as Hermes Trismegistus by the Hellenes, and his consort Sesheta, or Maat, are the chief guardians and providers of all knowledge and wisdom; knowledge of Ra, or of his images and noetic rituals expressed in the sun’s daily course, conferred on the sage or the initiate a noetic identity: “He who knows it is a *ba* of the *bau* with Ra”; “He who knows these mysterious representations (or symbols) is a well-provided *akb*”; the pharaoh, standing at the apex of all creation, is the Gnostic *par excellence*: he knows the theurgic way of ascent and his own metaphysical identity, knows the mysterious words that the eastern *bau* (the “angels” of Thoth) speak, knows the cosmogonical birthings of Ra and his self-generations in the waters of Nun; in the *Amduat*, the pharaoh, or the priest who represents him in the cult (and, consequently, every initiate, sage, or philosopher), knows the mysterious *ban* of the Netherworld, the gates and the roads Ra (the solar *Nous*) travels, knows “what is in the hours and their gods”, the transfigurations of Ra and his images; the spiritual knowledge of the Netherworld determines one’s “Osirification”, alchemical transformation, and immortalization, thereby allowing one to face Ra or to be united with Atum-Ra.

Ren: the Egyptian term for “name”; the divine light, or the sacred, may be present in the divine names as it is present in the hieratic statues and all divine manifestations (*kheperu*): therefore it is maintained that an essential relationship exists between the name and the named; accordingly, the sacred language is regarded as a dimension of divine presence; the Egyptian hymns with name formulas (analogous to the *dbiker*-formulas in Sufism and Hindu mantras) themselves are called “transfigurations” (*sakhu*) and are related to the root *akb*, meaning to radiate, to illuminate, to be a divine spirit or an intelligible light; therefore *akhu* (radiant noetic quality) refers to the theurgic power of the sacred word which is able to illuminate, elevate, or to reveal the divine realities as well as their hidden meaning; in the cult realm, the sacred language is viewed as the language of deities themselves, since only deities make use of the theurgic power of

names, along with the pharaoh (the son of Ra) and the initiated priests to whom the pharaoh delegates his priestly and “philosophical” function.

Sab: the Egyptian term for one’s “golden” spiritual body which serves as a vehicle of the *akb*-intellect; the idealized shape of the mummy (viewed as an icon and receptacle of the animating divine forces) is a visible symbol of the immortal *sab* body and itself is called *sab*; the “germination” of the spiritual body constitutes a long path of initiations and alchemical transformations based on metaphysical knowledge and correct hieratic rites; the initiate is to be identified with the sacred Scarab, the god of self-renewal, who represents the cosmogonical emergence of Being from the ineffable Beyond-Being: “I am the god Khepera, and my members shall have an everlasting existence...”; the germination of the spiritual body, that is, of the noetic body of light, follows the patterns of the member-based body-structure and the member-based archaic psychology: all the members of one’s body need to be turned into their spiritual equivalents; the re-membering of the Osirian body (i.e., the restoration of the members of the dismembered body) as well as the passage beyond the Osirian realm to that of Ra, are the essential components of the germination of the immortal *sab*-body; the initiate himself (as the radiant *akb* saturated by the rays that irradiate from the intelligible Demiurge) claims to be both the primordial lotus (a symbol of self-transformation and rebirth) which shines in the Land of Purity, and the golden child, Ra-Nefertum, who emerges from the divine lotus-flower or from the Lake of Flames in his glorious solar form; *khat* (or *shat*) is one’s mortal body, one’s corpse, and *sab* (or *sahu*) is one’s immortal spiritual body.

Sekhem: the Egyptian term designating “power”, an active emanation of deity or the divine power which (as a sort of *shakti*) can be attached to any god; in a certain respect, *sekhem* is made visible in the *sekhem* sceptre held by the Egyptian officials as a symbol of royal authority; the initiate or the deceased, who is united with noetic principles, also acquires the quality of *sekhem* which, however, may differ in its measure and intensity; the receptacle of a god (its sculptured or painted image) is called *sekhem* as well: therefore the numerous texts describe the *ba* of the god which alights on his *sekhem*: thereby the image is animated and is able to reveal the divine presence, provide oracles, or irradiate divine grace (like the Sufi *barakah*) and glory; the *sekhem*-power is often associated with Hathor, known as “Eye of Ra”, the whole (restored) *Iret*-eye, the vehicle of divine energy projected into the world; this power has both demiurgic and theurgic, as well as destructive and salvific aspects.

Seira: (σειρα) chain, series; the term, derived from Orphism and Homer, refers to the vertical series, consisting of a single principle, monad or henad, and repeated at different levels of reality; *seira* and *taxis* are both transverse and vertical series; each level of *seira* (which may be compared

to a ray of light) reproduces those above it: therefore the gods' names refer not only to the head as the source of each procession, but also to all the members of that procession: "For each chain bears the name of its monad and the partial spirits enjoy having the same names as their wholes. Thus there are many Apollos and Poseidons and Hephaestuses of all sorts" (Proclus *In Remp.* I.92.2ff); thus the manifested reality is arranged as the hierarchy of chains that embrace divine, angelic, daimonic, heroic, human and irrational levels (including animals, plants and minerals), all dependent on their proper divine head, in the sense of being in its *seira*; in some respects *seira* is equivalent to the Arabic Sufi term *silsilah*.

Sema: the Egyptian term for "union"; the *sema* hieroglyph represents two lungs attached to the trachea and symbolizes the unification of equal parts (e.g., the union of Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt – or of two gods such as Horus and Seth, Horus and Thoth); the *sema* hieroglyph reflects the royal prerogatives of union; however, in funerary and esoteric initiatory contexts it may signify the initiate's becoming a royal *ba*, or a *netet*; that is, to indicate a kind of mystical union, or union between different divine principles themselves.

Shakti: the Sanskrit term for "power" and the name of the goddess; while the Advaita Vedanta considers *shakti* as material and different from the spiritual *Brahman*, certain Tantric schools regard *Shakti* as being identical to the supreme Principle (*Parama Shiva*, whose possession of *Svatantrya Shakti* indicates his absolute integral nature which acts through his power of action, *kriya shakti*); accordingly, the manifestation of the universe is a mode of the supreme Lord's self-revelation through his own *Shakti* which functions on the different levels of being and acquires different qualities; as a feminine aspect of the divine, *shakti* is both creating the universe of theophanies (functioning as *spanda-shakti* or ultimate vibratory energy) and revealing the divine glory (*aishvarya*); *shakti* is both "closing" (*nimesha*) and "opening" (*unmesha*), that is, involved in the process of progressive manifestation, characterized by obscuring or concealing spiritual realities, and in the process of spiritual realization and the dissolution of the cosmos either macrocosmically (at the end of a world cycle), or microcosmically (by the annihilation of one's lower nature); the *shri-yantra* which depicts the complementary relationship between *Shiva* and *Shakti*, consists of the five upward-pointing triangles which represent *Shiva*, and the four downward-pointing triangles which represent *Shakti*: their interweaving stands for cosmic existence as a whole; as the primordial life force (*mukhya-prana*) *shakti* is universally present in the cosmos; as the serpent power (*kundalini-shakti*) it is depicted as being coiled around a *shiva-lingam* or as ascending through the spinal column, *sushumna*, and leading the initiate (*sadhaka*) to immortality and

enlightenment; thus, it is analogous to the power of the Egyptian goddess Hathor.

Skopos: (σκοπος) aim, purpose, target; Iamblichus developed the doctrine that each philosophical source work, especially in the case of Plato's dialogues (since the dialogue is regarded as a microcosmic reflection of the divine macrocosm) must have one basic subject matter, or *skopos*, to which all parts of the text are related; consequently, the introductory portion of the dialogues now assume an allegorical and metaphysical significance.

Sunthema: (συνθημα) token, passport, parole, symbol (in most cases meaning the same as *sumbolon*); a plaited basket (*cista mystica*) of the Eleusinian mysteries is called the "watchword" (*to sunthema Eleusinion musterion*: Clement of Alex. *Protrep.*2.21.2); the *sunthemata* of the *Chaldean Oracles* are considered as the "thoughts of the Father" and have a cosmogonic role similar to that of the Forms in Middle Platonism; they have an anagogic function: when the soul remembers the paternal *sunthema*, it returns to the paternal Intellect; according to Iamblichus, the gods create all things by means of images and signify all things through *sunthemata* (*De myster.*136.6.ff); there are material *sunthemata* and immaterial *sunthemata* (among them – stones, shells, parts of animals, plants, flowers, sacred statues and icons, sounds, rhythms, melodies, incantations, lights, numbers, ineffable names of the gods); the material objects that preserve the power of the gods are regarded as *sunthemata* by the theurgists and function as receptacles for the gods; the *sunthema*, understood as the impression and power of the god (similar to Hindu *yantra*), awakens soul to the divinity which it presents or symbolizes.

Sumbolon: (συμβολον) symbol (*sumballein* means "to join"); a fragment of a whole object, such as a *tessera hospitalis*, which can be joined with the other half; *sumbolon* suggests both incompleteness and the partial revelation of secret meaning; the so-called Pythagorean symbols are maxims (*akousmata*, "things heard") representing in an enigmatic and archaic form the basic teachings on the proper conduct of life; only in the allegorical tradition of Neoplatonic hermeneutics the theory of metaphysical, cosmogonic, and theurgic symbolism was elaborated, and *sumbolon* achieved the status of a major critical concept; in the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *sumbola* are sown throughout the cosmos by the Paternal Demiurge and serve as the essential means of ascent and return to the gods; every soul was created by the Demiurge with harmonic ratios (*logoi*) and divine symbols (*sumbola theia*: Proclus *In Tim.* I.4.32-33); the *logoi* that constitute the soul's essence are *sumbola* and may be awakened through theurgic rites; for Proclus, the inspired myths of Homer communicate their truth not by making images (*eikones*) and imitations (*mimemata*), but

by making symbols (*symbola* or *sunthemata*), because “symbols are not imitations of that which they symbolize” (*In Remp.* I.198.15-16).

Sophia: (σοφία) wisdom; the term covers all spheres of human activity, all ingenious invention aimed at satisfying one’s material, political and religious needs; Hephaistos (like his prototypes – the Ugaritian Kotharwa-Hasis and the Egyptian Ptah) is *poluphronos*, very wise, *klutometis*, renowned in wisdom – here “wisdom” means not simply some divine quality, but wondrous skill, cleverness, technical ability, magic power; in Egypt all sacred wisdom (especially knowledge of secret divine names and words of power, *hekau*, or demiurgic and theurgic mantras, which are able to restore one’s true divine identity) was under the patronage of Thoth; in classical Greece, the inspired poet, the lawgiver, the politician, the magician, the natural philosopher and sophist – all claimed wisdom, and indeed “philosophy” is the love of wisdom, *philo-sophia*, i.e. a way of life which requires effort in order to achieve its goal of wisdom; the ideal of *sophos* (sage) in the newly established Platonic *paideia* is exemplified by Socrates; in Neoplatonism, theoretical wisdom (though the term *sophia* is rarely used) means contemplation of the eternal Forms and becoming like *nous*, or a god; there are characteristic properties which constitute the divine nature and which are transmitted to all the divine classes: good (*agathotes*), wisdom (*sophia*) and beauty (*kallos*).

Taxis: (τάξις) order, series; any level of reality, constituted by *seira* in which the distinctive property of a particular god or henad is successively mirrored; the chain of being proceeds from simplicity to complexity and subsequently from complexity to simplicity; the hierarchy of *taxeis* establishes the planes of being or world-orders (*diakosmoi*).

Telestike: (τελεστική) one of the Neoplatonic names for theurgy and hieratic rituals; the animation of statues; *telestike mania* of *Phaedrus* 244e employs purifications and rites; according to *Hermeias* (*In Phaedr.* 92.16-24), *telestic* madness is ranked above all the others inasmuch as it gathers all the others together and possesses them (that is, theology, all philosophy and erotic mania); there are different kinds of *telestike*.

Telete: (τελετη) initiation, the rite of initiation; to initiate is *telein* or else *muein*; the initiate is called *mustes*, the ritual of initiation – *telete*, and the building where initiation takes place – *telesterion*; *telete* is also used for religious celebration generally; the mysteries are called *teletai*; in Neoplatonism, souls follow the mystery-rites (*teletai*) and prepare for the beholding of the realities of Being; according to *Proclus*, faith (*pistis*) is the cause of the ineffable initiation: “for on the whole the initiation does not happen through intellection and judgment, but through the silence which is unifying and is superior to every cognitive activity” (*Plat. Theol.* IV.31.8-16).

Theios aner: (θειος ανηρ) divine man, a god-like sage; the Neoplatonic ideal of “sainthood”.

Theologia: (θεολογια) divine science, theology, *logos* about the gods, considered to be the essence of *teletai*; for Aristotle, a synonym of metaphysics or first philosophy (*prote philosophia*) in contrast with physics (*Metaph.* 1026a18); however, physics (*phusiologia*) is sometimes called a kind of theology (*Proclus In Tim.* I.217.25); for Neoplatonists, among the ancient theologians (*theologoi*) are Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod and other divinely inspired poets, the creators of theogonies and keepers of sacred rites.

Theoria: (θεωρια) contemplation, theory; the contemplative virtue is called *theoretike*; like the beholding of festivals of the gods and their epiphanies, philosophy introduces the beholding of the well ordered cosmos, still called by the same word, *theoria*; in Neoplatonism, the creative power of the cosmos is contemplation (*theoria*) and intellection (*noesis*): therefore divine *praxis* is *theoria*; for Plotinus, on every level of reality creation is the result of the energy produced by contemplation (*Enn.* 8.3-4); every intellect contemplates directly itself; contemplation may be compared to the mystery-rites (*teletai*).

Theos: (θεος) god; the term sometimes is used in a wide and loose sense; “everything is full of gods” (*panta plere theon*), according to Thales; the cosmos may be regarded as a theophany – the manifestation of the One (likened to the supreme transcendent Sun) and the divine *Nous* that constitutes the different levels of divine presence concealed by screens or veils (*parapetasmata*); in ancient Greece, speaking of *theos* or *theoi*, one posits an absolute point of reference for everything that has impact, validity, and permanence, while indistinct influences which affect man directly can be called *daimon*; for Plato and Plotinus, *nous*, the universal soul, the stars, and also the human soul are divine; thus there are invisible and visible gods, arranged in a hierarchy of henads which follows the arrangement of nine hypotheses of Plato’s *Parmenides*; *theoi* are the first principles, henads (as *protos theos*), intellects and divine souls, but the supreme God is the ineffable One, or the Good; in some respects, *theos* is an equivalent of the Egyptian *neter*; *neteru* are the gods, the first principles, divine powers, manifestations – both transcendent and immanent.

Theourgia: (θειουργια) theurgy; the rites understood as divine acts (*theia erga*) or the working of the gods (*theon erga*); theurgy is not intellectual theorizing about God (*theologia*), but elevation to God; the term is coined by the editors of the *Chaldean Oracles*, but the ancient practice of contacting the gods and ascent to the divine goes back to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian hieratic traditions; Neoplatonic theurgy is based both on the Chaldean patterns and the *exegesis* of Plato’s *Phaedrus*,

Timaeus, *Symposium*, and other dialogues, and thus regarded as an outgrowth of the Platonic philosophy and the Pythagorean negative theology; therefore the theurgical *praxis* do not contradict the dialectic of Plato; theurgy deifies the soul through the series of ontological symbols and *sunthemata* that cover the entire hierarchy of being and lead to unification and ineffable unity with the gods; theurgy is based on the laws of cosmogony in their ritual expression and imitates the orders of the gods; for Iamblichus, it transcends all rational philosophy (or intellectual understanding) and transforms man into a divine being.

Tep sepi: the Egyptian term for the metaphysical notion of the First Time (*in illo tempore* of traditional cosmogonies and ritual practices), that is, for the noetic realm of all archetypal precedents; as the First Occasion, *tep sepi* means the coming into being from the abyss of Nun (*deus absconditus*), the passage from the Beyond-Being to Being, symbolized by the emerging of Atum-Ra from the primordial Waters; *tep sepi* is the mythical and ageless age of the gods where all paradigmatic events of Egyptian theology (such as death and resurrection of Osiris) are located in the eternal "now".

Upaya: the Sanskrit term meaning "way", "path", "method", "means of approach"; F. Schuon regards the exoteric forms of all religions as a sort of *upaya*, that is, both as an indispensable means for one's spiritual life and as a "soteriological mirage" – a providential formal veil of the "formless truth".

Yantra: the Sanskrit term for the symbolic geometric design which functions as a means of different ritual practices, contemplation, visualization, concentration, theurgic ascent and assimilation to divine principles; *yantra* is a hieratic instrument, a device for immortalization which saves (*trayate*) all beings from the Lord of Death; if *mantra* is regarded as the soul of the initiate's chosen deity (*ishta-devata*), *yantra* is the deity's receptacle, its sacred body; in a certain respect, *yantra* is a graphic image of the entire universe, viewed as a well-structured play of theophanies; usually *yantra* is a simplified geometric representation of the *mandala*-like palace which has four gates and the central dot (*bindu*); the so-called *puja-yantras* are the cultic instruments of worship, and the *raksha-yantras* are the protective amulets; the *shri-yantra* is a geometric representation of the Macranthropos (*purusha*); *yantras* belong to the same kind of hieratic items as the theurgic *sumbola* and *sunthemata* employed by the Hellenic Neoplatonists and the Egyptian priests skilled in sacred geometry, contemplative mathematics, and talismanic lore.

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