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The Faces of the Moon: Cosmology, Genesis, and the *Mithras Liturgy*

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“Do not invoke the self-manifesting image of Physis.” The *Chaldaean Oracles* instruct the theurgist to avoid the face of the moon, as Proclus identifies the self-manifesting image of Physis [Nature]. “Do not look upon Physis!” says another *Oracle*, “For her name is like Fate.”¹ In the so-called *Mithras Liturgy*, a spell for immortalization contained in the Great Paris Magical Papyrus,² the magician seems to heed the advice of the *Oracles*, for the ritual preparations are carefully timed to avoid the presence of the moon in the sky, and the magician does not see the moon during his ascent through the heavens to a meeting with the supreme god.³ Why must the theurgist take such precautions and carefully bypass the power of the moon? By contrast, Emperor Julian’s Selene shows a beneficent face to the sleeping world below: “Selene beholds the intelligible which is higher than the heavens and

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¹ *Chaldaean Oracles* 101 = Psellus, *PG* 122, 1136 c12: μή φύσεως καλέσῃς αὐτοπτον ἄγαλμα; Proclus *In Remp.* 2.133.15–17: εἰς τὴν σεληνιακὴν...σφαῖραν, ἐν ἣ τῆς γενέσεως αἰτία πάσης καὶ, ὡς φησὶν τις ἱερὸς λόγος, τὸ “αὐτοπτον ἄγαλμα τῆς φύσεως” προσλάμπει; Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.69.15–16: σελήνη μὲν αἰτία τοῖς θνητοῖς τῆς φύσεως, τὸ “αὐτοπτον ἄγαλμα” οὐσα τῆς πηγαίας φύσεως; *CO* 102 = Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 317.29: Μὴ φύσιν ἐμβλέψῃς· εἰμαρμένον οὐνομα τῆσδε. Citations of the *Chaldaean Oracles* are according to the numbering of E. Des Places, ed., trans., and comm., *Oracles chaldaïques avec un choix de commentaires anciens* (Paris, 1971), adapted by R. Majercik, trans. and comm., *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (SGRR 5; Leiden, 1989).

² The *Mithras Liturgy* consists of lines 475–834 of the so-called Great Paris Magical Papyrus (PGM IV), which is generally agreed to date to the third or early fourth century B.C.E.

³ See my arguments in R. G. Edmonds, “At the Seizure of the Moon: The Absence of the Moon in the *Mithras Liturgy*,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. S. Noegel, J. Walker, and B. Wheeler (University Park, Penn., 2003), 194–204.

adorns with its forms the realm of matter that lies below her, and thus she does away with its savagery and confusion and disorder."⁴ Likewise, Plutarch claims that the face in the moon is the face of the prophetic sibyl, and the moon is the necessary way station for the soul in Plutarch's myth of the soul's ascent in *De facie*.⁵ The theurgists, however, are not the only testimony to the moon's terrifying face. Clement relates that Orpheus called the moon Gorgonian because of its terrifying face, a face like that which Odysseus feared Persephone would send up to him in the underworld when he was consulting the shades.⁶ Plutarch too knows of this frightening face, which terrifies souls coming out of incarnation, although he rationalizes it as merely a cliff formation on the surface of the moon.⁷ The moon shows different faces in these cosmologies, ranging from the most benevolent to the most terrifying.

In this essay, I locate these different faces of the moon and the cosmology of the *Mithras Liturgy* within the spectrum of cosmological systems in the first several centuries C.E. I argue that the *Oracles'* caution against the face of the moon and the Mithras Liturgist's avoidance of the moon stem from a particular set of cosmological choices within this spectrum, whereas Julian's and Plutarch's images of the moon stem from a different set of options. I focus on a limited set of elements within these cosmologies to make my comparisons. The first element is the role of the moon in the important divisions made within the cosmos, particularly the contrast between three realms and the seven planetary spheres as the significant division of the cosmos. The second element to be considered is the evaluation of the process of genesis, the soul's descent from the higher realms into matter. The final element is the nature of the intermediary powers that govern the boundaries between the divisions of the cosmos, particularly the entity who governs the border between the material and heavenly realms, the mistress of genesis. Different choices for each of these elements produce radically different cosmologies and suggest varying solutions for the problems of living within the cosmos.

The *Mithras Liturgy* represents one such solution, one way of living in the late antique world. Here, there is a tripartite division among earthly, heavenly, and hyperouranian realms, each governed by a luminary, rather than a focus on seven planetary spheres. The magician appeals to the highest powers in the realms beyond the material to bypass the power responsible for genesis

⁴ Julian, *Or.* 4.150a.

⁵ The sibyl's face: Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 398cd; *Sera* 566d. As a way station, cf. *Fac.* 943bc.

⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.49 = *OF* 33; *Od.* 11.633-635.

⁷ Plutarch, *Fac.* 944bc.

instead of calling on her aid. This bypassing suggests that the mistress of genesis is seen as hostile to souls trying to escape from genesis, rather than as a necessary intermediary for ascent. Although the moon is not depicted in the *Mithras Liturgy* itself, the depictions of the lunar goddess in other spells within the Great Paris Magical Papyrus indicate that the moon is a dangerous power, whose terrifying face should be avoided in a spell that seeks to bring the magician beyond her realm.

Cosmological Divisions

The basic division in any cosmology is between the familiar world of mortals, the material realm of earth, and elsewhere, the realms of divine or demonic powers and the dead. In the Hellenistic and late antique eras, the earth was most often postulated as the center of the cosmos, with other realms in spherical levels above it. Visible above the earth are the heavens, including the sun, moon, and stars, both the wandering stars (planets) and the fixed. These heavenly entities were often imagined in eight separate levels, starting with the moon and rising up to the highest sphere of the fixed stars. Beyond the visible cosmos, some philosophers postulated a hypercosmic realm, accessible only to the intellect, that was the true locus of real being, the perfect *pleroma* of the highest principles.⁸ Following the metaphor in Plato's *Republic*, a hypercosmic sun dominated this highest realm, just as the cosmic sun did the lower realm.⁹ The most significant cosmological divisions, therefore, were either tripartite, among the material, heavenly, and hypercosmic

⁸ The image of the hyperouranian realm goes back to the myth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, but it was developed and modified by philosophers and theologians of various persuasions. Cf. M. Tardieu, "La Gnose Valentinienne et les Oracles Chaldaïques," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol. 1: *The School of Valentinus*, ed. B. Layton (SHR 41; Leiden, 1980), 194-237, esp. 209, on the relation to the three fires of Stoicism; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 30-3. J. Flamant prefers to see the three-level cosmos as an older model, deriving from the Orient, but picked up by Greek thinkers as early as Anaximander ("Sotériologie et systèmes planétaires," in *La Soteriologia dei Culti Orientali nell' Impero Romano*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren [EPRO 92; Leiden, 1982], 223-42). The idea of an eighth heaven, a hyperouranian realm beyond the seven planetary levels, appears in a number of cosmologies; e.g., the "gnostic" *Hypostasis of the Archons* 95.31-35 and *On the Origin of the World* 112.1-25 (NHC II 4, 5) or the Hermetic *Poimandres* (CH I 24-26). Cf. the one-upmanship of the Hermetic *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI 6) and the "gnostic" *Apocalypse of Paul* (NHC V 2, 24:1-9), which reveal a ninth and possibly tenth realm above the eighth, which is above the world.

⁹ Plato *Resp.* 517bc; cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.82.19-85.31; Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 433d; Philo, *Virt.* 104; *QG* 4.1; *In Exod.* 2.51; Julian, *Or.* 4.148a; Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 2.43.12-51.19; 2.64.10-65.26; *In Crat.* 101; *In Parm.* 1043.30-1045.25.

realms, or sevenfold, among the seven planets.¹⁰ Note that these two types of divisions are not mutually exclusive.¹¹ On the contrary, the division into seven planetary spheres implies a difference between heaven and earth and the realm beyond the planets, and the division into three realms can perfectly well acknowledge seven planetary spheres within the heavenly realm. The distinction lies in the relative importance placed on the different divisions within the cosmological system. In a tripartite system, the luminaries (the sun and the moon) tend to play a more important role than in sevenfold systems, in which they are grouped in among all the other planets.

The *Mithras Liturgy*, although it acknowledges the seven gods of the world in one invocation, operates within a primarily tripartite cosmos. The magician leaves the realm of earth and enters into the realm of wandering stars and other astral powers.¹² The boundary of this realm is the doors of the sun, beyond which lie the hypercosmic depths that are the realm of the highest god. The magician does not actually enter this realm, but waits at the doors of the sun for the epiphany of the supreme father.¹³ The description of the magician's ascent is clearly divided into three sections – leaving earth, traversing the heavens, looking into the hyperouranian realm – rather than into seven

¹⁰ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.11.4–9, divides the cosmologies of his predecessors into three basic groups. First, those who make a single division between the divine realm, which includes the fixed stars, the planets and the moon, and the earthly realm. Second, those who divide the universe according to the four elements, with a sequence of earth, water, air, and fire leading up to the moon, followed by a double sequence from earth to fire and fire to earth in the spheres of the planets and the fixed stars. Third, those who make the division between the fixed stars as the heavenly realm and all the planetary spheres and the earth as the lower realm. For the relation of Macrobius' account to his Middle and Neoplatonic sources, see J. Flamant, *Macrobe et le Néo-Platonisme Latin à la Fin du IVe Siècle* (EPRO 58; Leiden, 1977), 525–65.

¹¹ Cf. the attempts of Proclus and Psellus to synthesize the tripartite and varying sevenfold (Platonic and Chaldaean) cosmological structures of their sources: Proclus, *In Tim.* 257d–259e and Psellus, *PG* 122, 1149c.

¹² *PGM* IV 545–550: “You will see the divine order of the skies: the presiding gods rising into heaven and others setting. Now the course of the visible gods will appear through the disk of god, my father.” All citations to the *PGM* are to K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs, eds., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauber papyri*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1973–4). All translations of the *PGM* are from H. D. Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago, 1986).

¹³ *PGM* IV 624–629: “Then open your eyes, and you will see the doors open and the world of the gods which is within the doors, so that from the pleasure and joy of the sight, your spirit runs ahead and ascends. So stand still and at once draw breath [*pneuma*] from the divine into yourself, while you look intently.” The hypercosmic realm of the highest father, in both the *Mithras Liturgy* and the Chaldaean Oracles, is described as the depths; cf. *PGM* IV 664; CO frs. 18 and 183.

sections, as, for example, is the ascent through the planetary archons or the Mithraic ladder described in Origen's *Against Celsus*.¹⁴ Albrecht Dieterich, in his attempts to make the *Mithras Liturgy* fit in with the Mithraic ladder in Origen, divided the ascent into seven scenes, but even Dieterich's arbitrary seven sections do not correspond well to the seven planetary spheres. Although Franz Cumont rejected Dieterich's connection of the *Mithras Liturgy* with the Mithraic ladder, scholars such as Reinhold Merkelbach still explain the cosmology of the *Mithras Liturgy* as an ascent through the seven planetary spheres to the realm beyond the fixed stars.¹⁵ Such a reading distorts the cosmology underlying the spell.

The Descent of the Soul Through the Divisions of the Cosmos

The importance of the significant divisions in the cosmological system lies in the descent of the soul into the material world during the process of genesis. Although the moon sits at the boundary of heavenly and material worlds, in a system that emphasizes the seven planetary spheres, the moon may be less important in the process of the soul's descent. In each of the realms through which the soul descends on its way to incarnation, it picks up some element of its mortal composition. If the planetary spheres are the primary division, the soul acquires some characteristic of the planetary ruler as she passes through its sphere of influence. The clearest description of this process comes from Macrobius:

The soul, having started on its downward movement from the intersection of the zodiac and the Milky Way to the successive spheres lying beneath, as it passes through these spheres, not only takes on the aforementioned envelopment in each sphere by approaching a luminous body, but also acquires each of the attributes which it will exercise later, as follows: in the sphere of Saturn it obtains reason and understanding, called *logistikon* and *theoretikon*; in Jupiter's sphere, the power to act, called *praktikon*; in Mars' sphere, a bold spirit or *thymikon*; in the Sun's sphere, sense perception and imagination, *aisthetikon* and *phantastikon*;

¹⁴ Origen, *Cels.* 4.30–31 for the celestial “customs;” 4.22 for the Mithraic ladder. Cf. Paul's passage through the seven heavens with extra realms beyond in the Nag Hammadi *Apoc. Paul* (NHC V 2) 20:5–21:28, 24:1–9. Another elaborate set of seven planetary celestial customs may be found in the Mandaean *Ginza* (*GL* III 51; Lidzbarski 578–582).

¹⁵ A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 3rd ed. (Teubner, 1923), 89. Cf. F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Bruxelles, 1899), 41; R. Merkelbach, “Immortality Rituals in Late Antiquity,” *Diogenes* 42 (1994): 85–109; Festugière, *Révélation*, 1:305 n. 3, who describes the sun as in its customary fourth sphere, thus presuming the sevenfold division.

in Venus' sphere, the impulse of passion, *epithymetikon*; in Mercury's sphere, the ability to speak and interpret, *hermeneutikon*; and in the sphere of the moon, the power of sowing and growing bodies, *phytikon*.¹⁶

Although the characteristics in Macrobius' account are positive attributes, useful to a productive life, the Hermetic account in the *Poimandres* describes the negative characteristics that the soul sheds at each planetary station as it makes its way out of incarnation:

Poimandres said: "First, in releasing the material body you give the body itself over to alteration, and the form that you used to have vanishes. To the demon you give over your temperament, now inactive. The body's senses rise up and flow back to their particular sources, becoming separate parts and mingling again with the energies. And feeling and longing go on toward irrational nature. Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father."¹⁷

Even if a process of physical descent is not described, the idea of acquiring planetary influences on the way to incarnation is often part of the process of genesis. In the *Pistis Sophia*, for example, each of the planetary archons contributes to the binding of the soul with its counterfeit spirit, causing it to become bound up in forgetfulness and the passions of the world.¹⁸

If the seven planetary spheres are not the primary cosmological division, the entity entering incarnation may still be imagined as acquiring parts of its being in its descent.¹⁹ Indeed, the basic idea that the soul acquires a body as it passes into the material realm depends on the division of the heavenly and earthly realms. In a more elaborate conception of the human being as composed of mind, soul, and body, Plutarch describes how the sun provides

¹⁶ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.12, trans. Stahl. Cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.355.13; Servius, *In Aen.* 11.51; and the Hermetic excerpt in Stobaeus 1.5.14 (= Stobaeus, *Herm.* XXXIX)

¹⁷ CH I 24–26. Translated in B. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation* (Cambridge, 1992), 5–6.

¹⁸ *Pistis Sophia* 131; cf. CH XVI 13–16.

¹⁹ Cf. Porphyry, *Sent.* 14.12.

the mind, which acquires a soul at the moon, and a body when it reaches the earth.²⁰

The moon thus becomes the portal to genesis, dividing the mortal from the immortal world.²¹ Porphyry relates that the moon is the gate of the descending soul: "The theologians make the 'gates' of souls the sun and the moon, the ascent taking place through the sun and the descent through the moon."²² Whether the stages of the soul's descent are imagined as two, three, or seven, the moon provides the lowest boundary before the earth.²³ As the final station in the soul's descent, the moon completes the process of the soul's incarnation.

Nevertheless, the role of the moon may be more significant in cosmologies with fewer divisions or those in which the moon is directly responsible for a greater portion of the soul's accretions – the whole physical body instead of just the faculty of growth. Firmicus Maternus describes her role thus:

The whole essence of the earthly body is governed by the power of the moon. Since she is located in the lower regions of the heavens, because of her nearness she has been allotted power over the earth and all the bodies animated by the breath of the Divine Mind. She maintains her course with infinite variety and runs with speed through all the signs, joining herself to all the planets. From different elements she builds up the human body, once conceived, and dissolves it again into its elements.²⁴

In these cosmologies, the moon is seen as the mistress of genesis, the power responsible for the incarnation of souls into bodily form, and the stranger in Plutarch's myth urges the narrator, "among the visible gods, to honor the moon especially, since she is most powerful over life."²⁵

²⁰ Plutarch, *Fac.* 943a, 944ef, 945c. Cf. *De genio* 591b.

²¹ Cf., e.g., CH XI 7; Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.11.6; Ocellus Lucanus II, §2. The idea can be traced back to Aristotle (e.g., *De generatione* 1.6 and *Cael.* 1.3), but is probably older. Plutarch refers to the moon as the turning point of genesis (*Gen. Socr.* 591c 9), ἡ καμπή τῆς γενεσεώς. She also is the physical mediator between earth and heaven in *Fac.* 938f.

²² Porphyry, *Antr. nymph.* 18.

²³ Cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.65.17–19, which describes the moon as nearest the earth, having the title [*logos*] of Physis and mother of genesis: τὴν μὲν σελήνην πρώτην εἰς τὸν περὶ γῆν τόπον τετάχθαι λέγων, ὡς φύσεως ἔχουσιν λόγον καὶ μητρὸς πρὸς τὴν γένεσιν. Cf. 3.69.9 as the cause of all genesis and corruption: μονὰς μὲν ἡ σελήνη, πάσης αἰτίας γενεσεώς καὶ φθορᾶς.

²⁴ Firmicus 4.1.6.

²⁵ Plutarch, *Fac.* 942c.

The Evaluation of Genesis

What, then, determines which face the moon as mistress of genesis will wear? The role of the moon in a cosmology is often dependent on the evaluation of the material world and the process of genesis that brings the soul into it. If the moon is identified as the intermediary principle responsible for the fate of souls in the material world, then the way in which mortal life is regarded colors the nature of that intermediary principle. In all the cosmologies of Late Antiquity, the material world was acknowledged to be inferior to the realm of the gods, so all cosmological systems had to grapple with the question of why human beings should live in an inferior condition. As the Hermetic *Asclepius* expresses it, "But what need was there, Trismegistus, that man should be placed in this material world? Why might he not have dwelt in the region where God is, and there enjoyed perfect happiness?"²⁶ There existed a whole spectrum of possible attitudes toward genesis, ranging from the most positive Platonic celebrations of the beauty of the cosmos to the most negative rejections of the world as the prison and torture chamber of the evil archons. An optimistic attitude to incarnation would correspond to a more positive image for the power responsible for genesis, whereas a more pessimistic attitude to genesis would correspond to a more negative image, a more terrifying face if that power were identified with the moon.²⁷

As Plotinus points out in his treatment of the question, interpreters in the Platonic tradition must start with the different, even contradictory, accounts given by Plato in the dialogues. The contrast between the imagery of the prison in the *Phaedo* or the fall of the soul in the *Phaedrus* and the description of the cosmos as good and beautiful in the *Timaeus* leaves open a wide range of interpretations of Plato's feelings about the process of genesis.²⁸

²⁶ *Asclepius* 1.7c. Cf. J. Dillon, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Thought," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 1:357–64, here 357: "Perhaps the chief problem that faces any religious or philosophical system which postulates, as does the Platonic, a primary state or entity of pure and unitary perfection, is that of explaining how from such a first principle anything further could have arisen." Arnobius puts it more crudely (*Adv. haer.* 2.37).

²⁷ Festugière's terminology of "optimistic" and "pessimistic" should be applied with caution and precision to specific facets of a cosmology, e.g., the evaluation of genesis, rather than to the cosmology as a whole. Any logos for living within the cosmos will describe the obstacles to living a happy life as well as providing for ways to get around these obstacles.

²⁸ Plotinus 4.8.1. Cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 67d, 62b; *Crat.* 400c; *Resp.* 514a–517b, 619d; *Phaedr.* 246c–247c; *Tim.* 34b.

Both Alcinoüs in the *Didaskalikos* and Iamblichus in his work *On the Soul* survey the answers of various philosophers to the problem of genesis, examining both the purposes of the descents into genesis postulated and the types of descent (voluntary or involuntary).²⁹ This typology of descents proves useful for understanding the accounts in other cosmologies as well, as accounts with both positive and negative evaluations of genesis may differ in the purposes for which they imagine that souls become incarnate in the material world. A further distinction may be observed. Some of these descriptions of the descent of the soul describe the descent of individual souls as they come into incarnation, whereas other narratives describe the original descent of Soul [Psyche] as representative of the movement of all souls from the higher realms to the realms below. Nevertheless, the reasons, positive or negative, for which the soul may descend are similar in both types of accounts.

The positive reasons for the descent of the soul are primarily derived from the *Timaeus*. Some argue that the soul descends into genesis to fill out the cosmos, bringing into existence every possible form of entity, whereas others emphasize the benefits that the descent of divine influence brings to the lower realms.³⁰ These benefits of the upper realms may take the form of care and administration, or the soul's purpose may be described as the purification, perfection, and salvation of the lower realms.³¹ A positive effect on the soul that is tested and improved by its trials in the material realm is even suggested by some.³² Thus, the positive views of genesis all imagine that, in some way, the cosmos, or certain parts of it, is brought nearer perfection by the descent of the soul into matter.

The negative reasons for genesis and the descent of the soul may, following Iamblichus, be divided into voluntary and involuntary descents. In some cosmologies, the soul (or, more often, Soul or some other primary feminine

²⁹ Cf. Dillon, *Descent of the Soul*, and Festugière, *Révélation*, for overviews of these treatments and comparisons with some other contemporary cosmologies.

³⁰ Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 39e and 41b. Iamblichus in Stobaeus 1.49.39.44–53 ascribes to the Platonists of the school of Taurus the idea of completing the universe and unspecified others the idea of manifesting the divine. This idea of divine self-manifestation was also employed by Christian Platonists; see S. Elm in this volume.

³¹ *Asclepius* 1.8; Iamblichus quoted in Stobaeus 1.49.40.22–24. See S. I. Johnston in this volume for an account of the reincarnation of angelic souls for the purpose of helping and perfecting those in the lower world in the system of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

³² Iamblichus quoted in Stobaeus, 1.49.40.24–27; cf. Plotinus 4.8.5.

entity) abandons the heavenly realm through curiosity or some other form of willfulness. In various cosmologies described as “gnostic,” the lowest entity in the heavenly pleroma precipitates the fall of the soul into matter by her curiosity about the Highest Father or her desire to create on her own.³³ In its most extreme form, the soul is depicted as a helpless maiden, who leaves her father’s house and is raped and reduced to a life of prostitution in the evil world of matter.³⁴ In other systems, however, the fall is involuntary, either as a punishment for the same kind of willful behavior or for other crimes.³⁵ To suffer for her willfulness or crimes, the soul is fettered within the body as a prison, a prison that is built up out of the material elements or planetary influences through which she has passed.³⁶ Often this term of imprisonment is pictured as the “death” of the soul, her descent to the underworld and the torments of Hades.³⁷ Bodily passions become the torments of the underworld, inflicted by the daimones under the control of the ruler of this realm, who is, therefore, often identified with Hekate or Persephone.³⁸ This shift of the realm of death from chthonic to cosmic often corresponds to the identification of these traditional underworld goddesses with a celestial power such as the moon.

³³ Sophia in the Valentinian cosmologies described by Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.2.2–4) and Hippolytus (*Haer.* 5.25). Cf. also, e.g., the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, NHC VIII 2.135:10–28; *CH I* 12–14; Plotinus 4.3.12. On the problems of the familiar term “gnosticism” as a category, see M. A. Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N. J., 1999).

³⁴ Cf. *The Exegesis on the Soul*, NHC II 6.127.18–129.5. Cf. M. A. Williams, “Variety in Gnostic Perspectives on Gender,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. K. King (Philadelphia, 1988), 15.

³⁵ Origen, *Cels.* 8.53; cf. the Hermetic *Kore Kosmou* in Stobaeus, *Herm.* 23.24 = Stobaeus, I 49.44. The idea of the soul becoming incarnate for crimes such as oath-breaking or bloodshed goes back to Empedocles.

³⁶ For example, *Kore Kosmou*, in which souls are imprisoned in bodies made from the residue of previous creation mixed with water, to which the planets contribute their influences (Stobaeus, *Herm.* 23.26–30). The planetary daimons in *CHXVI* 13–16 govern mortals through the instrument of the body and irrational parts of the soul. Heimarmene is the name given to the whole system of government. Cf. also the creation of the body in Zosimus, *On the Letter Omega* 9–11, in which the body is formed from the four elements as a prison for the spiritual man, Phos.

³⁷ The basic idea that life is death and death is life appears in many places from as early as Empedocles, but later cosmologies elaborate on the paradox.

³⁸ Macrobius, *In Somn.* 1.10.9–17. Cf. H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Neoplatonism in the Later Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. by M. Tardieu (Paris, 1978), 282 and sources in n. 90.

Feminine Intermediary Principles

The Moon, however, is not the only entity imagined as mediating between the higher and lower realms in these cosmologies. The identity of the mediating power and the boundary that she mediates may vary widely in different systems. The nature of this entity, moreover, is dependent on the positive or negative evaluation of the material world and the process of genesis over that she presides. As John Dillon has pointed out, these mediating principles are most often conceived of as feminine, not just grammatically, but also in their function as generating lower principles.³⁹ In Pythagorean and Platonic systems, for example, the Indefinite Dyad is the principle that expands the entities of the universe from the original One to multiplicity.⁴⁰ Within the philosophical traditions (including the Peripatetics and Stoics) that drew on Plato’s *Timaeus* for cosmological imagery, the Soul (Psyche) of the world and the Receptacle of Being are both feminine entities that serve a mediating function between the designs of the higher powers and the realms below.⁴¹ These abstract entities were often given names or attributes in more mythical cosmologies, such as Sige [Silence] or the Barbelo in certain “gnostic” systems. In some cosmologies, the rational principle that orders the lower world is called Providence (Pronoia or even Prometheia) or personified as the wisdom [Sophia] of the highest.⁴² The Barbelo is described as the Perfect Forethought [Pronoia] of the Father, as well as a womb for the entirety, all of the entities that come into being after her.⁴³ The Hekate of the *Chaldaean*

³⁹ J. Dillon, “Female Principles in Platonism,” *Itaca* 1 (1986): 107–23, esp. 107–8; repr. in idem, *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Hampshire, 1990).

⁴⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1.6 (987b20); cf. Dillon, “Female Principles,” 108–10.

⁴¹ Receptacle of Being in Plato, *Tim.* 48d–53c. World Soul in *Tim.* 34b–36d; *Leg.* 896de (in which passage later interpreters understood a differentiation between good and evil world souls). Cf. Dillon, “Female Principles,” 110–23.

⁴² Providence: e.g., *Ap. John* 27.1–14; *Orig. World* 113.5–9. Sophia: e.g., Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1–4; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (NHC III 3); *Eugnostos* (NHC III 4); *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC III 4); *I Apoc. Jas.* (NHC V 3). For further examples and discussions, see most notably M. A. Williams, “Higher Providence, Lower Providences, and Fate in Gnosticism and Middle Platonism,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. R. T. Wallis (Studies in Neoplatonism 6; Albany, N. Y., 1992), 483–507; and I. P. Culianu, “Feminine versus Masculine: The Sophia Myth and the Origins of Feminism,” in *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, ed. H. G. Kippenberg (Berlin, 1984), 65–98.

⁴³ Sige: e.g., in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.1.1; *Eugnostos* (NHC III.4) 88.5–10. Barbelo: e.g., in *Ap. John* 4.26–27. Attributes of the Barbelo in *Ap. John* 5.5.

Oracles is the fount and womb, the life-giving mother for the lower realms.⁴⁴ This maternal aspect, which is present even in Plato's Receptacle, recurs in many different feminine principles within these cosmological systems.⁴⁵

This feminine intermediary serves both to connect the higher with the lower and to mark the separation between them.⁴⁶ On the one hand, she represents the force that conveys the divine, supreme qualities of the higher beings to the lower, as Julian describes Providence [Prometheia] setting in order, correcting, and changing to the better all the dregs of the universe.⁴⁷ However, this principle can also be seen as the separating wall that marks the boundary. In the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Hekate is described as a kind of membrane that keeps apart the fires above and below that long to join together.⁴⁸ Plutarch combines both functions in the moon, but divides them into two different traditional names: "the moon both takes and gives and joins together and divides asunder in virtue of her different powers, of which the one that joins together is called Ilithyia and that which divides asunder Artemis."⁴⁹

This tendency to separate the two functions of the intermediary leads to the multiplication of such intermediary entities in various cosmologies. The higher and the lower aspects of the intermediary are distributed to different entities, as Plutarch does with Ilithyia and Artemis.⁵⁰ These feminine

⁴⁴ CO fr. 30: πηγὴ τῶν πηγῶν, μήτρα συνέχουσα τὰ πάντα. Cf. CO fr. 32: τὸν ζῳογόνον... Ἐκάτης κόλπον.

⁴⁵ ὑποδοχή described as πῖθῆνη at Plato, *Tim.* 49a. Cf., e.g., Philo's Sophia (*Det.* 116-117) as trophos, tithenikomos, mother of all things in the world; Plutarch's Isis in *Is. Os.* 372e; even Alcinous, *Didask.* 10.

⁴⁶ Tardieu, *Gnose Valentinienne*, 217, points out that different systems emphasized either the connective or the disjunctive function.

⁴⁷ Julian, *Or.* V 170d; cf. *Or.* IV 150a.

⁴⁸ CO fr. 6 (= Simplicius, *In Aristotelis de Caelo* 2.1) quotes this line to describe Atlas as the dividing connector, but the line is also found in Damascius (2.13, 29). Tardieu points to the similarities with the Valentinian Horos, who likewise divides the realms (*Gnose Valentinienne*, 208). See also S. I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (ACS 21; Atlanta, Ga., 1990), 53-61.

⁴⁹ Plutarch, *Fac.* 945c. Cf. *Quaest. conv.* 658-659. Ilithyia is the goddess of childbirth, whereas Artemis is the divider, based on an etymologizing of her name as ἀερότομις (the one who cuts through the air) or perhaps ἀρταμείν. Cf. Porphyry *apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 3.11; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.15.20.

⁵⁰ G. C. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *JTS* 11 (1969): 75-104, distinguishes five types of Sophia in the Valentinian tradition. Sophia is given various other names in this tradition, however, that are specific to the particular type, e.g., Sige or Barbelo as god's consort; Achamoth as the lower Sophia; Eleleth. As Tardieu, *Gnose Valentinienne*, 211, notes, in complex triadic systems such as Valentinian gnosticism or the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the lowest entity of the higher triad can become the first entity of the lower triad.

mediating principles may be imagined either as personifications of abstract principles or identified with divine figures from the mythic tradition. Moreover, depending on the complexity of the system, traditional names may be distributed among multiple entities, each of which has a somewhat different function, or a single entity may be identified with a variety of names from the tradition. Once again, the evaluation of genesis in the cosmology determines the nature of these entities. Systems with an optimistic view of genesis emphasize the higher principles that convey the benefits of the divine to the world below, whereas more pessimistic systems may multiply the entities that separate mortals from the divine and emphasize their absolute domination of human life.

The principle that animates and brings generation to the cosmos can be seen as the World Soul (Psyche) or as the animate cosmos itself personified as Nature (Physis).⁵¹ The different aspects of this feminine intermediary principle may be seen as separate entities, with different names and functions. Thus, as Lewy notes,

Plotinus distinguished two aspects of the World-Soul, of which the above remains without relation to the sensible world, while the lower, directing itself towards this world, gives form to all things in which and through which it moves [Plotinus, V 1.2]. This lower aspect of the World-Soul was called by Plotinus Physis [Plotinus, III 8.4 *et passim*].⁵²

The *Chaldaean Oracles* identified the Cosmic Soul with Hekate, to whom they attributed positive, even maternal characteristics, whereas they warned against the lower aspect, Physis, described as the mistress of daimones and connected with Destiny (Heimarmene).⁵³ In other cosmologies, too, Physis appears not as a benevolent Mother Nature but as a dangerous and highly sexualized entity, seducing higher spiritual principles into her material embrace.⁵⁴

⁵¹ As Tardieu, *Gnose Valentinienne*, 214, notes, both the Valentinians and the Manichaeans imagined Psyche as an intermediary power.

⁵² Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 356.

⁵³ Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, 136-9. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 98, instead of distinguishing their roles, argues that Hekate was identified with the whole range of positive and negative intermediaries.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Paraph. Shem* (NHC VII 1). In some texts, the entity Physis seems to be imagined as *physis*, which can mean the female genitalia. Cf. such uses of the term in PGM IV 2305, 2594, and 2655.

These powers are often also identified with traditional mythic goddesses. Pronoia, the forethought of the Father, is often connected with Athena, who sprang motherless from the head of Zeus. Not only is Athena traditionally associated with thought and wisdom, but her Delphic epithet Pronaia is easily read as Pronoia to strengthen the identification.⁵⁵ Xenocrates seems to have identified the Indefinite Dyad with the Mother of the Gods, whereas Julian made a distinction between higher and lower Pronoias, whom he identified with Cybele and Athena, respectively.⁵⁶

The multiplication of these entities within a given cosmology is common. Several Pronoias may exist at different levels of the cosmos, or the aspect more concerned with the lower world, Physis, may herself be divided into several levels of powers, such as Anagke [Necessity], Tyche [Fortune], and Heimarmene [Destiny], that order the worlds below them.⁵⁷ A Hermetic text, for example, assigns Pronoia to the rational, Anagke to the irrational, and Heimarmene to the somatic, whereas the *De fato* attributed to Plutarch describes three Pronoias that relate to Heimarmene in different ways.⁵⁸ These powers of fate might be identified with the Moirae (Fates) of the poetic tradition, and the three Moirae – Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis – were distributed at different levels of the cosmos by different thinkers.⁵⁹ Indeed, philosophers and theologians meditating on the problems of fate and free will devised a vast number of different configurations of the relations of Physis to Pronoia, Anagke, Tyche, Heimarmene, and the Moirae, but all these powers are feminine principles that impose order on the lower world from their intermediary position.⁶⁰ Although divine Providence is generally positively evaluated, Necessity, Fortune, the Fates, and Destiny are more often negatively viewed by the mortals whose fates they determine. In particular, the lowest level of fate (whether called Heimarmene, Anagke, or another name) becomes, in a

⁵⁵ Julian, *Or.* 4.149bd; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.17.55, 70.

⁵⁶ Xenocrates, fr. 15, makes Zeus the Monad and Mother of the Gods the Dyad; cf. Rhea as Dyad in Philolaus, fr. 20a; Julian, *Or.* 5.166a.

⁵⁷ Williams, "Higher Providence," discusses the different Providences and Fates in Middle Platonism and Gnosticism.

⁵⁸ Stobaeus, *Herm.* 8.7 = Stobaeus, I 4.8; Pseudo-Plutarch, *De fato* 572f–574b.

⁵⁹ Many Platonic philosophers, drawing on Plato's myth in *Resp.* 617c, make use of these figures. Cf., e.g., Plutarch's *Fac.* 945c 3 with the Moirae on sun, moon, and earth.

⁶⁰ For example, Pseudo-Plutarch, *De fato* 568ef; Apuleius, *De Plat.* 1.12; Chalcidius, *In Tim.* c. 142, 144, 148; Nemesius, *De nat. hom.* 38, 753b; Plutarch, *De procreat. anim.* 27.1 1026b; Atticus *apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 15.12.1; Plotinus 3.1.7; Proclus, *In Remp.* II 356.28. Cf. the wide range of selections in Stobaeus 1.4 (*peri Anagke*) and 1.5 (*peri Heimarmene*). Cf. Williams, "Higher Providence," and Dillon, "Female Principles."

cosmology with a pessimistic view of genesis, the power responsible for keeping souls imprisoned and miserable in matter.⁶¹

Again, the Moon could be imagined in this intermediary role, but her nature as benevolent or malevolent was dependent on the outlook of the cosmology on genesis. Among the more optimistic Platonists, Plutarch calls the World Soul and Receptacle Isis, whom he also identifies with Athena.⁶² Plutarch, however, also identifies the feminine intermediary power, whether as Athena Pronoia or as Isis, with the Moon, making the Moon a benevolent, even salvific deity. He further describes the Moon as Hekate and Kore, since Kore/Persephone, as mistress of the underworld, is often identified with the Moon who receives souls departing from incarnation after death.⁶³ Hekate, of course, is identified with the Moon in many sources, but her aspect is not always as positive as it is in Plutarch.⁶⁴ In addition to being identified with the goddesses of death, the Moon can also be seen as the fate that controls the lower realm. Clement relates that Orpheus described the white-robed Moirae [Fates] as the phases of the moon.⁶⁵

The Moon then could be identified with a range of these feminine intermediary principles, but her nature would thus depend on whether she were identified with the lower powers such as Physis or Anagke, who imposed order on the material world and divided the material from the celestial, or with a higher power, such as Isis or Athena, whose function was more to unite the lower with the higher.⁶⁶ In the *Mithras Liturgy*, the moon is avoided in the ascent and, therefore, not described, but the magician begins by invoking Pronoia and Psyche, clearly positive aspects of the higher feminine

⁶¹ Cf. the creation of Fate by the evil archons in *Ap. John* (BG 72.2–12; CG II 11–32) to trap humans in the world and prevent them from remembering the realms above. The planets (the five of Heimarmene and the sun and moon) give the soul a cup of Lethe in *Pistis Sophia* 3.131; cf. *CH XVI* 13–16; Stobaeus *Herm.* XII = Stobaeus, 1.5.20.

⁶² Plutarch, *Is. Or.* 372e; cf. 354c.

⁶³ Athena in *Fac.* 922a, 938b; Isis in *Is. Or.* 372d; Hekate in *Fac.* 937f, *Def. orac.* 416e; Persephone/Kore in *Fac.* 942de. For Isis as Persephone, cf. *Is. Or.* 361e. Porphyry, too, identifies Athena as the moon (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 3.11, 113c).

⁶⁴ Cf. Epicharmus, fr. B54 (= Ennius in Varro, *De Ling. Lat.* v 68); Porphyry *Antr. nymph.* 18; Iamblichus in Lydus, *De mens.* 4.149; Martianus Capella 2.161–162.

⁶⁵ Cf. Moon as Fortuna in Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.19.17.

⁶⁶ The *Chaldaean Oracle's* Hekate provides an interesting case in this regard, as so many of Hekate's traditional attributes are negative. Nevertheless, as Johnston points out, Hekate's traditional kourotropic functions as well as her connections with magic make her a positive figure within the *Chaldaean Oracle's* cosmology (*Hekate Soteira*). In other cosmologies, however, such as that found in *PGM IV* as a whole, Hekate may not have been so beneficent.

intermediary.⁶⁷ In the Great Paris Magical Papyrus from which the *Mithras Liturgy* comes, moreover, there are a number of spells with elaborate invocations to and descriptions of a lunar goddess, Selene, who is identified with a number of different goddesses and powers, particularly Hekate, Persephone, Physis, and Anagke.⁶⁸ Although the cosmology of the *Mithras Liturgy* itself and the cosmology of the redactor who compiled the papyrus are by no means identical, they seem to share certain basic ideas, among which is the evaluation of the moon as a dangerous power. As I have argued elsewhere, the redactor divided the papyrus into sections, one of which contained spells appealing to solar powers and one of which contained spells appealing to lunar powers.⁶⁹ The *Mithras Liturgy*, which avoids the power of the moon, is placed in the solar section with other spells that appeal to the sun as a beneficent power connected with special knowledge. By contrast, all the spells that appeal to the moon do so for purposes connected with sex, death, or the underworld.⁷⁰ Although the *Mithras Liturgy* shuns the power of the moon, other spells in the papyrus invoke Selene as Anagke, Hekate, Persephone, and a host of other epithets, emphasizing her malevolent nature:

“Hail, Holy Light, ruler of Tartaros, who strike with rays; hail, Holy Beam, who whirl up out of darkness and subvert all things with aimless plans . . . awesome destiny is ever subject to you . . . e’er with sorrows fresh, wolf-formed, denounced as infamous, destructive, quick, grim-eyed, shrill-screaming.” Or: “You whose womb is decked out with the scales of creeping things, with pois’nous rows of serpents down the back, bound down your backs with horrifying chains . . . O you who bring death and destruction, and who feast on hearts, flesh-eater, who devour those dead untimely, and you who make grief resound and spread madness.”⁷¹

Some invocations seem particularly suited to the moon as the ruler of genesis and the material world:

⁶⁷ PGM IV 475. The contrast between positive and negative aspects of the feminine intermediary thus supports the MS reading Psyche instead of Dieterich’s suggestion of Tyche for this first line of the *Mithras Liturgy*.

⁶⁸ Physis: PGM IV 2830, 2913; Anagke and Moira: 2855 (cf. 2242 where Anagke is subject to the moon); Hekate and Persephone/Kore: 2241–2358, 2441–2621, 2708–2784, 2708, and 2785–2890.

⁶⁹ Cf. Edmonds, “Seizure,” for more on the divisions of the papyrus.

⁷⁰ PGM IV 2441–2621, 2708–2784, 2891–2942, 2943–2966 are all erotic charms; 2241–2358, 2622–2707, 2785–2890 are designed to cause the goddess to wreak violent harm on someone.

⁷¹ PGM IV 2241–2245, 2246, 2276–2278, 2802–2206, 2865–2869.

Mistress of night and chthonic realms, holy, black-clad, ‘round whom the star-traversing nature of the world revolves whene’er you wax too great. You have established every worldly thing, for you engendered everything on earth and from the sea and every race in turn of winged birds who seek their nests again, Mother of all.⁷²

The Moon shows her terrifying face as a dangerous goddess whose violence must be carefully channeled against someone else, a goddess whose control over sex and death reveals the darker aspects of the mistress of genesis.

Living in the World

The different cosmologies here surveyed offer a variety of solutions for interacting with the power that controls the material world, whether that power is imagined as an abstract astrological fate or a hostile and dangerous goddess. Vettius Valens, in keeping with Stoic theories of astrological fate, proclaimed, “No one is free; all are slaves of Destiny [Heimarmene],” whereas Manilius advised mortals to forget their worries in the knowledge that Fate pre-determines all things.⁷³ The impersonal nature of astrological fate could be a reassuring idea in contrast to the idea of hostile goddess and her demonic cohorts, actively working for the detriment of mankind.

Philosophers who rejected, with Plato, the idea that gods could be moved by prayers, counseled that one should “submit to fate without unseemly wrangle” rather than rail against the situation,⁷⁴ but the majority of folk were often unwilling simply to accept their lot in life without trying to improve it in some way. Traditional Graeco-Roman religion would suggest that the divine powers that rule the world, however they are identified, be supplicated with prayers and sacrifices to win their favor. The so-called “Orphic Hymns” prescribe prayers and sacrifices not only for traditional deities such as Zeus, Dionysos, and Poseidon, but also for Tyche and Physis, who is identified variously as Fate [Aisa] and Life [Zoe] and Pronoia.⁷⁵ Many people turned to the various mystery cults available in order to get special treatment from the gods, but the cults of different deities made different claims. The salvific

⁷² PGM IV 2550–2556.

⁷³ Vettius Valens 5.9; Manilius, *Astronomica* 4.12–16.

⁷⁴ Cf. Plotinus’ comparison of two men, one who accepts his mortal life and the other who cries out against it (2.9.18).

⁷⁵ *Orphic Hymn* 10 to Physis; cf. 72 to Tyche. Others claim that the stars that control fate can be swayed by prayer, e.g., Nemesius 36.745.

deity in a mystery cult was often precisely the higher and beneficent aspect of the feminine intermediary power, whose mediation of the upper and lower worlds brought divine help to the world below. Isis, in Apuleius, plays this role, saving her worshipper from his sufferings at the hands of Fortuna, the higher intermediary trumping the powers of the lower.⁷⁶ In some of the “gnostic” tales, Sophia, or a similar figure, not only brings about the fall of soul into matter, but is also responsible for the soul’s salvation, transmitting the understanding of the higher realms to humans trapped in the material world.⁷⁷

However, others turned not to a feminine intermediary power, but to a masculine power from a higher level of the cosmic hierarchy. The Logos or Christ is sometimes substituted for Sophia as the savior in “gnostic” stories, and in other sources Christ brings salvation from the domination of astrological fate in particular.⁷⁸ In the *Pistis Sophia*, Christ ingeniously reverses the rotation of the planetary and astral spheres for part of the year, thus disrupting all the calculations of the astrologers and freeing humans from the domination of the planetary archons.⁷⁹ Christ was not the only such savior; Osiris and Serapis were seen by some as Egyptian alternatives superior even to Isis,⁸⁰ whereas Attis and Mithras were among the other figures to whom people turned for rescue from the domination of the rulers of the material world.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.15, in which Isis identifies herself not only with a number of traditional mythic deities but also with such entities as Pronoia. Cf. the whole genre of Isis aretologies (texts collected in M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis-und Sarapis-Religion* [Hildesheim, 1985]). Isis also plays a salvific role in the *Kore Kosmou* (Stobaeus, *Herm.* XXIII 64–69 = Stobaeus, I 44.492–532). Julian’s identification of the higher Providence with Magna Mater (*Or.* 5.166a) links the savior cult with the philosophical descriptions of the feminine intermediary power. Perhaps some such idea underlies Plotinus’ reference to gnostics who conjure the world soul (2.9.14).

⁷⁷ Cf., e.g., the discussion in Williams, “Higher Providence,” 486, of the role of Barbelo/Pronoia, the higher feminine entity, in the recensions of *Ap. John*.

⁷⁸ Tatian, *ad Graecos* 10; John Chrysostom, *Homily VI* on Matthew 1; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 74, 78.

⁷⁹ *Pist. Soph.* 1.18; cf. *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII 1) 43.13–26.

⁸⁰ Julian identifies Serapis with the Sun as the power that frees mortals from genesis (4.136b), and a papyrus fragment preserves Serapis’ promise to a worshipper to alter his fate (D. L. Page, *Select Papyri* [Cambridge, Mass., 1962], 3:426); cf. this and other examples cited in R. Merkelbach and M. Totti, *Abrasax: ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts* (Opladen, 1990), 80–1. In the *Kore Kosmou* (Stobaeus, *Herm.* XXIII 64–69 = Stobaeus, I 44.492–532), Osiris is listed along with Isis as a deity sent to save mortals in incarnation. Note that Apuleius’ Lucius must be initiated into the mysteries of Osiris even after he turns to Isis.

⁸¹ Julian, *Or.* 5.162a, 165b, retells the myth of Attis.

Not only did mystery groups offer special connections with the gods, but individual practitioners performed rites that they claimed would alter adverse fate or help the soul free itself from the dominion of the rulers of this world. Magicians devised rituals for contact with the highest powers of the universe that would allow the magicians not only to change their fate but to perform a whole range of wonders in the material world, from resurrecting the dead to crossing the Nile on a crocodile.⁸² Other spells, however, rather than appealing to a power beyond the cosmos, invoke the powers that govern this world, the astrological rulers of the day and hour, the planets and constellations, and even the mistress of genesis herself, Heimarmene, Physis, or Anagke.⁸³ The *Chaldaean Oracles* provided divine revelations from Hekate and other deities, whereas Platonic philosophers such as Iamblichus and Proclus practiced theurgy to help their spirits ascend free from mortal constraints.⁸⁴ Different cosmological perspectives permitted different ways of coping with the problems of the material world and living beneath the dominion of the mistress of genesis.

Conclusion

The magician in the *Mithras Liturgy* then must, as does the theurgist of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, avoid the face of the moon because the moon is imagined as a malevolent and dangerous mistress of genesis, allied, if not wholly identified, with the bitter and pressing Necessity the magician hopes to escape – if only for a while. By contrast, the benevolent face of the moon that shines in Plutarch is part of a cosmological system with an optimistic outlook on genesis, which identifies the feminine intermediary principle with beneficent deities like Athena and Isis and emphasizes her role as the one who connects the lower realms with the upper. In the *Mithras Liturgy*, these benevolent,

⁸² Cf. the list of magic works in *PGM* XIII 235–340. Arnobius (2.13, 62) attacks those who promise through magic rites to climb to heaven or free themselves from death. Cf. Porphyry, *Philos. orac. apud Eusebium, Praep. ev.* 4.4.

⁸³ Rulers of the day, etc. Cf., e.g., *PGM* II 8–79; XIII 30, 58, 118, 230, 430; Psellus, *Quaenam sunt Graecorum opiniones de daemonibus* c. 7 (= J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les Mages Hellénisés* [Paris, 1938], 2:172.2). Heimarmene is seldom mentioned in the *PGM* (only *PGM* I 216 and XIII 635), but Anagke is often invoked (*PGM* III 120; IV 1175, 1399, 1456, 2056, 2062, 2196, 2241, 2855; VII 236, 302, 475; VIII 94–95; IX 11; XI 64; XV 10, 13; XIXa 11; XXXVI 342, 346; CI 1).

⁸⁴ Tardieu, *Gnose Valentinienne*, 223, draws the parallel between the theurgical and philosophic practices and the rituals of other groups, such as baptism, in escaping the domination of the mistress of genesis and fate.

higher aspects are perhaps mentioned as Pronoia and Psyche, but they play no role in the magician's ascent. The magician is enabled to rise out of the earthly sphere through the pneumatic rays of Mithras Helios, the salvific light that streams from the hypercosmic sun through the cosmic sun and down into the material world.⁸⁵ The feminine intermediary principle plays a more active role in the theurgy of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, as Hekate seems to be the primary deity invoked for help in the ascension rituals.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the Chaldaean theurgist must always avoid Physis, the lower aspect of the World Soul, who may appear with her daimon dogs to drag the theurgist back into the "mortal covering of bitter matter," as the body is described.⁸⁷

Magic, however, is a more flexible system for dealing with the world than any philosophical system. A magician who makes use of other spells in the Great Paris Magical Papyrus may at times find a way to interact with the power he avoids in the *Mithras Liturgy*. The magician invokes the moon to help him in a violent act, either stirring up her anger against someone and inciting her to violent revenge, or bringing to fruition a violent "love charm" in which the victim is compelled to go immediately to the magician or suffer excruciating torments.⁸⁸ These spells harness the dangerous power of the malevolent mistress of genesis, often involving an element of coercion of the hostile goddess to turn her power against another. There is, however, an element of danger should the magician himself become the target of her

⁸⁵ PGM IV 539–541. On the technique of inhaling the sun rays to ascend, see R. G. Edmonds, "Did the Mithraists Inhale? – A Technique for Theurgic Ascent in the *Mithras Liturgy*, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and Some Mithraic Frescoes," *Ancient World* 32 (2000): 10–24; S. I. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgical Ascent in its Cultural Milieu," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. P. Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (SHR 75; Leiden, 1997), 165–94, esp. 181–3; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 184–5, 209. Cf. Julian, *Or.* 5.172cd; CO 123, 124; CH XVI 16.

⁸⁶ Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*.

⁸⁷ CO 129. Psellus, PG 122, 1137 a1–10, describes the epiphany of Physis as preceded by deceptive daimones. Synesius, *Hymn* 5 (2) 52–53, describes Physis as mother of daimones. The nature of the moon herself is unclear in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, as she is nowhere in the extant fragments identified directly either with Hekate or with Physis. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 144, suggested that the moon should be seen as the Material Teletarch, corresponding to the Intellectual and Intelligible Suns in the higher realms, but he admits that she is never so identified; cf. Majercik, *Chaldaean Oracles*, 12 and 17. Although parallels with Plutarch and Julian make such an identification seem plausible, Proclus' identification of the image of Physis as the moon, along with the warnings against invoking or looking on the image of Physis, seems to suggest that the moon was identified instead with Physis.

⁸⁸ Cf. the so-called "slander spells" at PGM IV 2241–2358, 2441–2621, 2622–2707; charms of attraction at 1390–1495, 2441–2621, 2708–2784, 2943–2966. On these *agoge* spells, see C. A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 41, 133–46.

wrath. As one spell notes, "the goddess is accustomed to make airborne those who perform this rite unprotected by a charm and to hurl them from aloft down to the ground."⁸⁹

Both the *Mithras Liturgy* and the spells to the moon in the Great Paris Magical Papyrus assume a cosmological system in which the moon, as the feminine principle that governs the boundary of the material world, is a dangerous and malevolent goddess. Although the moon may show another face in more optimistic cosmologies, such as those of Julian or Plutarch, the attitudes toward genesis and the material world that underlie the spells in the Great Paris Magical Papyrus are more pessimistic, showing a world presided over by the terrifying face of the moon.

⁸⁹ PGM IV 2507–2509; cf. 2627.

HEAVENLY REALMS
AND
EARTHLY REALITIES
IN
LATE ANTIQUE RELIGIONS

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