

AT THE SEIZURE OF THE MOON

THE ABSENCE OF THE MOON IN THE MITHRAS LITURGY

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“At the seizure of the moon, take a sun scarab which has twelve rays, and make it fall into a deep, turquoise cup.”¹ The ritual instructions for the famous Mithras Liturgy tell the magician to begin the complex preparations for the encounter with the supreme sun-god Mithras “at the seizure of the moon,” that is, at the time of the new moon, when the moon is absent from the heavens.² This absence of the moon is not merely an isolated ritual detail, but rather it corresponds to a pattern throughout the whole spell, in which the absence of the moon is crucial to the magician’s project of immortalization through

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1. PGM iv.751–62. Translation slightly modified. All citations to the PGM are to Henrich’s second edition of Preisendanz (Karl Preisendanz and Albert Henrichs, eds., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2d ed., 2 vols. [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–1974]). All translations from the PGM are from Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). “At the seizure of the moon, take a sun scarab which has twelve rays, and make it fall into a deep, turquoise cup. . . . Pick it up and throw it into a glass vessel of excellent rose oil, as much as you wish; and spreading sacred sand in a pure manner, set the vessel on it, and say the formula over the vessel for seven days, while the sun is in midheaven.”

(Gr. λαβῶν κάνθαρον ἡλιακὸν τὸν τὰς ἰβ’ ἀκτῖνας ἔχοντα ποιήσον εἰς βητοῖν καλλάινου βαθὺ ἐν ἀρπαγῇ τῆς σελήνης βληθῆναι. . . . τοῦτον ἀνελόμενος βάλε εἰς ἀγγεῖον ὑελουῖν μύρου ροδίου καλλίστου, ὅσοι βοῦλει, καὶ στρώσας καθαρείως ἄμμον ἱερὰν ἐπίθεσ τὸ ἀγγεῖον καὶ λέγε τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ζ’ ἡλίου μεσουρανοῦντος.)

2. A search of the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, CD ROM E, University of California, Irvine, 1999) reveals only one other use of this term, in Horapollo 1.14.6, also referring to the absence of the moon at the conjunction of the sun and moon, that is, the new moon. The passage relates that male baboons mourn the absence of the moon at new moon: “For when the moon, moving into conjunction with the sun, is darkened, then the male baboon does not look nor does he eat; but he is bowed down to the earth in grief; as if lamenting for the rape [Gr. ἀρπαγῆν] of the moon.”

(Gr. ὅταν γὰρ ἐν τῷ μέρει τῆς ὥρας ἡ σελήνη συνοδεύουσα ἅλιω ἀφώτιστος γένηται, τότε ὁ μὲν ἄρσιν κυνοκέφαλος οὐ βλέπει οὐδὲ ἐσθίει, ἀχθεταὶ δὲ εἰς τῆν γῆν νενεκῶς, καθάπερ πειθῶν τῆν τῆς σελήνης ἀρπαγῆν.) (Horapollo 1.14.6, trans. George Boas, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, Bollingen Series xxiii [New York: Pantheon Books, 1950].)

his contact with the powers of the sun.³ While the absence of the moon from the ritual preparations is suggestive, its absence from the magician's ascent through the heavens is striking. In the Mithras Liturgy, the magician ascends through the heavens to a meeting with the supreme god, who is titled Helios Mithras. Although he encounters other planetary and astral gods and two deities with solar characteristics, he never sees the moon. Why does the magician avoid an encounter with the moon in his ascent, and why must all of his ritual preparations avoid her influence?

In this essay, I argue that this absence of the moon points to an underlying cosmology in which the moon is seen as a potentially hostile and dangerous power, in contrast to the benevolent power of the sun. The sun and moon are not merely two planetary powers in a cosmos divided into seven planetary spheres; rather, the moon rules over the lowest realm of earth, while the solar powers reign over the higher realms of the cosmos. Not only does this cosmology underlie the ritual instructions and the description of the magician's ascent through the heavens in the Mithras Liturgy, but this cosmology also corresponds with the redactor's organization of all the spells within the papyrus. The spells that invoke the powers of sun and moon are placed in different parts of the papyrus, and the sun and moon are invoked in different ways and for different purposes. This division reveals the significance of the sun and moon in the cosmology of the compiler of the Great Paris Magical Papyrus, giving insight into the worldview of a magician of the late antique period.⁴

3. "Immortalization" is the best, most direct translation of the Greek *apathanatismos*. The precise ramifications of the process are not explained in the text, but the immortality achieved is not permanent, just a temporary state of undyingness. Presumably, it means elevation to some sort of divine ontological status for the duration of the ritual, but since it does not last beyond this ritual, it is not really deification, which might suggest some permanent transformation to divine status. See Sarah Iles Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgical Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu," in Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg, eds., *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, Studies in the History of Religions, 75 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 179–80. Hans Lewy (*Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, ed. Michel Tardieu [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978], 177–200) discusses *apathanatismos* in terms of the immortal soul's separation from the mortal body.

4. The exact dates of the Mithras Liturgy and of the papyrus are of course uncertain, although the papyrus is generally agreed to date to the third or early fourth century B.C.E.; cf. PGM p. 64. Undoubtedly the Liturgy is older than the collection of spells within the papyrus, since it shows signs of editing. A. J. Festugière, in noting comparisons with the second-century C.E. Chaldaean Oracles, suggests that the Liturgy may go back to the same period (Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vols. 1–4 [Paris: Librairie LeCoffre, 1950], 1:303 n. 1); cf. Morton Smith, "The Hymn to the Moon, PGM IV 2242–2355," in *Proceedings of the XVI Int. Congr. of Papyrology*, American Studies in Papyrology, vol. 23 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 643–45, and, for discussions of the dates, William M. Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri: An Introduction and Survey; Annotated Bibliography (1928–1994)," in ANRW II: Príncipe, vol. 18.5 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 3419–20 and notes. Whether the redactor of the papyrus was himself a practicing magician who

THE MAGICIAN'S ASCENT

The so-called Mithras Liturgy has been described as "the single best known Greek papyrus in the world today,"⁵ and it has indeed enjoyed a certain amount of notoriety since its publication by Albrecht Dieterich in his *Eine Mithrasliturgie* in 1903. The Mithras Liturgy consists of lines 475 to 834 in the Great Paris Magical Papyrus (PGM IV), a thirty-six-page codex in Coptic and Greek. The redactor of the codex was clearly a scholarly magician, working with a large variety of sources from which he drew the spells to include in his codex. The Mithras Liturgy itself seems to have been collated from at least two manuscripts available to the redactor, since the redactor notes alternate readings in three separate places in the text.⁶ Thus, although the papyrus seems to have been written early in the fourth century C.E., scholarly consensus places most of the originals from which the redactor was copying or recopying as early as two centuries prior.⁷ In examining the Mithras Liturgy within the Great Paris Magical Papyrus, therefore, we may distinguish at least two sets of cosmological ideas: those of the original author of the Mithras Liturgy and those of the redactor of the papyrus.⁸ I will begin with the cosmology of the spell itself and then examine some of its correspondences with and differences from the cosmology revealed by the redactor's organization of the whole papyrus.

Since the Mithras Liturgy was designed as a practical guide for the magician rather than a descriptive literary tour of the cosmos, its cosmology is not immediately clear. Comparisons with the Mithraic ladder of seven steps described by Celsus or with the planetary sequences in the Hermetic Poimandres and Macrobius have led some scholars to look for a sevenfold division of planetary realms in the ascent.⁹ The celestial gods, however, are encountered together in the realm

used the spells he collected cannot be known for certain. Garth Fowden suggests that the size and character of the collection "savoured more of the library than the workbench" (Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* [repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993], 170).

5. William M. Brashear, *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt* (Vienna: Verlag A. Holzhausens Nfg., 1992), 53.

6. Lines 500, 592, and 767.

7. Brashear, "Greek Magical Papyri," 3419, and other references in note 3 above.

8. Further ideas might be distinguished in the various revisions of the Mithras Liturgy before its redaction, but, for the purposes of this essay, I focus on the correspondence between the two most easily discernible.

9. Cf. Origen *Contra Celsum* VI.22, 31; *Corpus Hermeticum* I.25; Macrobius *In Somn.* 1.12. The dating of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (= CH) is of course uncertain, but the best guess is probably third century C.E. Celsus's work is dated to ca. 175–81 C.E., according to Origen's refutation, dating to the 240s. Macrobius is looking back to earlier traditions, writing at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century C.E. Cf. Paul's passage through the seven heavens with extra realms beyond in the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Paul* (NHC v.2) 20:5–21:28, 24:1–9. Another elaborate set of

of the winds before the doors of the sun. As the magician rises by inhaling the sun's rays,¹⁰ he can 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; and in similar fashion the so-called pipe, the origin of the ministering wind."¹¹ In this realm of winds and astrological rulers of the day and hour, the magician must protect himself against the inhabitants' wrath at an intruder, claiming to be a wandering star at home in the realm. "I am a star, wandering about with you, and shining forth out the deep."¹² The magician then approaches the doors of the sun and, after invoking the seven immortal gods of the world, invokes Helios, who comes when the doors of the sun open. The magician faces no sequence of planetary gates whose guardians need the password to permit the magician to ascend to the next realm. Even the invocation to the seven immortal gods of the world, presumably the planetary deities, only serves to open the doors of the sun into the next realm.¹³

seven planetary celestial customs may be found in the Mandaean *Ginza* (Gl. 111 51 Lidzbarski 578–82). Although Franz Cumont rejected Albrecht Dieterich's connection of the Mithras Liturgy with Celsus's Mithraic ladder, Reinhold Merkelbach ("Immortality Rituals in Late Antiquity," *Diogenes*, vol. 42.1, no. 165 [1994]: 100) still explains the cosmology of the Mithras Liturgy as an ascent through the seven planetary spheres to the realm beyond the fixed stars (Cumont states his arguments in *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* [Brussels: H. Lamertin, Libraire, 1899], 41, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* [New York: Dover Publications, 1956], 260, et al., against Albrecht Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 3d ed., ed. Otto Weinreich [Leipzig: Teubner, 1923], 89–90). Cf. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 1:305 n. 3, who describes the sun as in its customary fourth sphere, thus presuming the sevenfold division.

10. PGM IV.539–41: "Draw in breath [pneuma] 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 mid-air" (Gr. ἔλκε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀκτίων πνεῦμα γ' ἀνασπῶν, ὃ δύνασαι, καὶ ὄψῃ σεαυτὸν ἀνακοιφίζομενον καὶ ὑπερβαίνοντα εἰς ὕψος, ὥστε σε δοκεῖν μέσαι τοῦ ἀέρος εἶναι). On the technique of inhaling the sun's rays to ascend, see Radcliffe Edmonds, "Did the Mithraists Inhale?—A Technique for Theurgic Ascent in the Mithras Liturgy, the Chaldaean Oracles, and Some Mithraic Frescoes," *Ancient World* 32.1 (2000): 10–24; Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion," 181–83; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 184–85, 209.

11. PGM IV.545–50:

Gr. ὄψῃ γὰρ ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ τῆς ὥρας θείαν θέαν, τοὺς πολεῦντας ἀναβαίνοντας εἰς οὐρανὸν θεοῦς, ἄλλους δὲ καταβαίνοντας. ἡ δὲ πορεία τῶν ὁρμημένων θεῶν διὰ τοῦ δίσκου, πατρός μου, θεοῦ, φανήσεται, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ καλούμενος αὐλὸς ἢ ἀρχὴ τοῦ λειτουργοῦντος ἀνέμου . . . ὄψῃ δὲ ἀπειζόντάς σοι τοὺς θεοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σε ὁρμημένους. The disk of the god seems to refer to the source of the winds that blow in the sky, but it could also refer to a conduit that brings down divine pneuma and helps the magician ascend.

Cf. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion," 183–85.

12. Lines 574–75: Gr. ἐγὼ εἰμι οὐμπλανος ὑμῖν ἀστήρ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ βάθους ἀναλάμπω.

13. One of the reasons Cumont rejected a Mithraic origin for the Liturgy is the lack of correspondence between its cosmology and the cosmology of seven planetary zones he envisioned for Mithraism. "Cette description fantastique du monde céleste ne répond nullement à celle que nos sources nous font du paradis mithriaque, divisé en sept zones superposées. De même, dans les noms qui son-

However, the seven planetary spheres of heaven were not the only cosmological model popular in the Hellenistic and late antique eras.¹⁴ A three-level cosmos—divided into (a) the material, or earthly, world, (b) the ethereal, or cosmic, world, and (c) the noetic, or hypercosmic, world—is found in a wide range of sources, many of which based their cosmologies upon Platonic ideas that filtered through the Hellenistic world.¹⁵ In such a cosmology, instead of seven planetary rulers who each govern one layer of the cosmos, each of the three realms has a ruling luminary, often the moon, the sun, and (drawing from Plato's allegory of the Cave) the noetic sun, which illumines the middle cosmic world from its place in the highest noetic world just as the physical sun illumines the material world from its place in the heavens.¹⁶ The planets and other astrological rulers of the day and hour have their place in the middle cosmic realm, between the material world of humans and the noetic realm of the supreme powers. The moon marks the lower boundary of this cosmic realm; thus the material realm below the heavens is often called the sublunary world, presided over by the powers of the moon.¹⁷

The cosmos through which the magician ascends in the Mithras Liturgy corresponds better to this tripartite cosmos than to a sevenfold cosmos. The magi-

domnés aux dieux, et dont je n'ai pas la prétention de fournir l'étymologie, je n'ai découvert aucune analogie avec les appellations perses ou même chaldéennes" (Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés*, 41).

14. Cf. Jacques Flamant, "Sotériologie et systèmes planétaires," in Ugo Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren, eds., *La sotériologia dei culti orientali nell'impero romano* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 223–42, who thinks that the three-level cosmology is more archaic and rudimentary than the seven-level. Flamant prefers to see the three-level cosmos as deriving from "the Orient" but picked up by Greek thinkers as early as Anaximander (Flamant, "Sotériologie et systèmes planétaires," 226). Since, however, he manages to trace both models back before the third century B.C.E., I prefer to regard the models as two different, but not necessarily incompatible, cosmological options available in the Hellenistic or late antique periods. Someone picturing the cosmos could imagine the important divisions as seven planetary spheres or as three spheres, one of which contained the planets. See further on this subject my "Faces of the Moon: Cosmology, Genesis, and the Mithras Liturgy," in *In Heaven As It Is On Earth: Celestial Realms and Earthly Realities* (forthcoming). Cf. the attempts of Proclus and Psellus to synthesize the tripartite and varying sevenfold (Platonic and Chaldaean) cosmological structures of their sources—Proclus *In Ti.* 257d–259e and Psellus *Patrologia Graeca* 122, 1149c.

15. John Dillon traces the development of a triadic cosmos to Xenokrates (396–14 B.C.E.), who linked each realm (Sensible, Heavenly, and Intelligible) to an element and to one of the Fates. Such a triadic schema was picked up by other Platonist thinkers, especially Plutarch (Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* [London: Duckworth, 1977], 30–33).

16. Cf., e.g., Philo *De Opificio Mundi* VIII.31. David Ulansey ("Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun," in John R. Hinnells, ed., *Studies in Mithraism* [Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994], 257–64) discusses the idea of the double sun as it filters into Mithraism, but does not address the Mithras Liturgy.

17. As Sarah Iles Johnston notes: "The Middle Platonic school popularized the idea that the Moon was both a liminal point and a transmissive or mediating entity between the Sensible and Intelligible worlds, an idea that persisted throughout later antiquity in philosophical and mystical thought" (Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldaean Oracles and Related Literature* [Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990], 29).

cian encounters the winds and the planets in the ethereal, or celestial, realm before the boundary of the sun, which divides the ethereal from the hypercosmic realm. Even the two suns, Helios and Mithras, that the magician encounters correspond to the physical and noetic suns of the Platonic system, which rule over the ethereal and hypercosmic realms respectively.¹⁸ In the text the one figure missing from this cosmological system is the ruler of the material world, the keeper of the boundary between the material and celestial realms, the Moon. Just as the magician invokes Helios, the ruler of the celestial realm, to allow him to pass beyond to meet with Mithras, the ruler of the noetic realm, so one would expect that the magician would have previously had to entreat Selene, the ruler of the material world, for entry into the realm of Helios. The Moon, whether called Selene or Hekate or some other name, does indeed play such a role in other theurgic systems, where she serves as the intermediary who allows the magician to rise above the material world. As Sarah Iles Johnston has argued for the theurgy of the Chaldaean Oracles, Hekate is the first to be invoked and the first to appear to the theurgist seeking to rise to realms above.¹⁹ Why does the magician's ascent not include an encounter with Selene, but, to the contrary, why do his preparations avoid her presence as much as possible? To answer this question we must examine the role the moon plays as the ruler of the lowest world in such a tripartite cosmology.

THE ROLE OF THE MOON IN THE GENESIS OF SOULS

A passage from Porphyry's third-century C.E. *Cave of the Nymphs* may illuminate the obscurity caused by this absence of the moon in the Mithras Liturgy. Porphyry links the process of *apogenesis*, the ascent of the soul from embodiment in the material world, to the sun, and the process of *genesis*, the descent of the soul into flesh, to the moon: "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. . . . And the ancients called the Moon, who presides over genesis, a bee, especially because the moon is a bull and the Moon's [astrological] exaltation is Taurus, and bees are ox-born, and souls going into genesis are ox-born, and the ox-stealing god [Mithras] is he who secretly [hearkens to?/impedes?] genesis."²⁰ Whether or not these "theologians" have any connection to the Mithraic mys-

teries, this association of sun with *apogenesis* and moon with *genesis* can be found in a variety of other sources.²¹ Souls can return to the realm of the sun after their mortal existence, and souls about to enter bodies and a material existence pass through the moon into the mortal world.²²

The embodiment of the soul in the material world means that it no longer partakes of the perfection of the highest realm. This loss of perfection can, however, be interpreted in a variety of ways, with each interpretive choice producing a different cosmological outlook on the nature of the material world and the soul's *genesis* within it.²³ From the most optimistic perspectives, the descent of the soul and the creation of the material world are part of the revelation of the divine, the

ἐπεὶ ταῦρος μὲν Σελήνη καὶ ἕψομα Σελήνης ὁ ταῦρος, βουγενεῖς δ' αἱ μέλισσαι, καὶ ψυχὰι δ' εἰς γένεσιν ἰούσαι βουγενεῖς, καὶ βουκλόπος θεὸς ὁ τῆν γένεσιν λεληθότως † ἀκούων †. Porphyry *De Antro Nympharum* 18, 29 (translation adapted from Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, trans. Robert Lamberton [Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1983], and Roger Beck, "In the Place of the Lion: Mithras in the Tauroctony," in Hinnells, *Studies in Mithraism*, 29–50). The ox-stealing god is Mithras, but what precisely he does († ἀκούων †) to genesis remains uncertain. Beck renders it "hearken," following the conjectured text, but Lamberton proposes "impedes" because of the opposition of Mithras and the bull. Porphyry further links Cancer with the Moon and Capricorn with Saturn (20), noting that the gate of Cancer is for the descent of souls into genesis, whereas the gate of Capricorn is for apogenetic ascent. For Mithras as Saturn, cf. Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* 11.3.64: "For they reverse the star of Venus under the name of Isis, and that of Saturn as Mithras Helios." (Gr. σέβουσί τε γὰρ τὸν μὲν τῆς Ἀφροδίτης Ἴσιον ὀνομάζοντες, τὸν δὲ Κρόνου Μίθραν Ἥλιον.) See Roger Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 86.

21. Robert Turcan (*Mithras Platonius: Recherches sur l'hellénisation philosophique de Mithras* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975], 25–26, 62–89) argues that Porphyry's testimony reflects only Platonic cosmological ideas, whereas Beck suggests that such ideas may have had wider currency, including various Mithraic groups (Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders*, 35 n. 73, 91–100; now idem, "Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel," *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 [2000]: esp. 178–80). Richard Gordon critiques the very idea of a clear division between the theological speculations of the Neoplatonic "allegorisers" and the religious ideas of the mystery cults themselves: "Even theoretically under these circumstances, there can be no dividing line of the kind claimed by those who seek to distinguish between the 'real' Mysteries, essentially simple and down-to-earth—suitable for soldiers—and the interpretive Mysteries, full of allegorical speculation. We cannot dismiss Euboulus and Pallas as neo-pythagorean outsiders, unrepresentative of properly Mithraic interpretation. Given the intellectual habits of antiquity, no body of utterance as suggestive and peculiar as that of the Mysteries could have remained immune to allegorisation for very long" (Gordon, "Mystery, Metaphor, and Doctrine in the Mysteries of Mithras," in John R. Hinnells, ed., *Studies in Mithraism* [Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994], 121).

22. Cf., e.g., Plutarch *De facie* 943a–945d, *De Iside* 367d, *De genio* 591; Iydu *De mensibus* 1v 80, Julian *Or.* v.172ce. Dillon discusses Plutarch's ideas on cosmology and the descent of the soul from sun and moon in *De genio*, *De facie*, *De def. or.*, *De sera*, noting connections with Xenokrates, as well as Stoic ideas of Poseidonius (Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 199–225 [cf. 108–13], 24–33).

23. Ioan P. Couliano (*The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992]) similarly discusses consideration of Gnosticism through a set of structural oppositions that define the possible forms of cosmology. Regardless of the ontological status one gives to the resulting form, the method provides a useful way of categorizing the evidence and describing the relations between one system and the next in the face of the enormous gaps

18. For this double sun as a feature of the Mithras Liturgy that may reflect actual Mithraic doctrine, see below. Cf. Edmonds, "Did the Mithraists Inhale?" and Ulansey, "Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun."

19. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, 111–33.

20. Gr. καὶ τῶν θεολόγων πύλας ψυχῶν ἡλιον τιθέντων καὶ σελήνην, καὶ διὰ μὲν ἡλίου ἀνείνα, διὰ δὲ σελήνης κατιέναι. . . . Σελήνην τε οἶσαν γένεσως προστάτιδα Μέλισσαν ἐκάλεον ἄλλως τε

expression of the completion of the cosmos.²⁴ Although the descent of souls from the creator is thus, for some, part of a good and ordained process, the *genesis* of souls is not always so positively portrayed. At the other extreme, the fall of the soul into the material world appears as a disaster, a loss of the wings that keep it aloft in the heavenly realm or even an imprisonment of the soul in the body.²⁵ For some, the body is the tomb of the soul, a prison that binds the soul native to the heavenly realms down in the realm of death and corruption.²⁶ Mortal life is at best an exile or prison term to be served in expiation for a previous crime; at worst it is a brutal enslavement to the vicious powers that rule the material world and try to keep souls from their true home in the heavens.²⁷

The moon as the ruler of *genesis* in a tripartite cosmos can thus be either a positive or a negative entity. In some of the more “optimistic” schools of thought regarding *genesis*, the moon is a beneficent power.²⁸ The moon serves as an intermediary between the material and higher worlds, not only sending souls down

in the evidence. Festugière (*La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 3:63–96) discusses the range of options, dividing them into “optimistic” and “pessimistic” currents. I explore the cosmological options further in my “Faces of the Moon.”

24. This idea stems ultimately from the *Timaeus*; Festugière (*La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 3:73–76) discusses such proponents as Plotinus and Calvenus Taurus. Cf. also Hermetic *Asclepius* 1.8; CH IV.2; Jambl. in Stob. 1.49.40.22–27.

25. Plotinus (IV.8.1) contrasts the negative images of the cave in the *Republic*, the *phroua* in the *Phaedo*, and the loss of wings in the *Phaedrus* with the *Timaeus*’s idea that creation is good. Cf. *Phaedo* 67d, 62b; *Cratylus* 400c; *Republic* 514a–517b, 619d; *Phaedrus* 246c–247c; *Timaeus* 34b. Cf. also Gregory Shaw (*Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995], 24–26) on the Iamblican reconciliation of the two elements in Platonism. Festugière (*La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 3:77–96) comments on this “pessimistic current.”

26. In a Hermetic treatise (*Corpus Hermeticum* VII.2) the body is “the bonds of corruption, the dark cage, the living death, the sentient corpse, the portable tomb” (Gr. τὸν τῆς φθορᾶς δεσμόν, τὸν σκοτεινὸν περίβολον, τὸν ζῶντα θάνατον, τὸν αἰσθητὸν νεκρόν, τὸν περιφόρητον τάφον). Cf. also the planetary *daimons* in CH XVI.13–16, who govern mortals through the instrument of the body and irrational parts of the soul; Origen *Contra Celsum* VIII.53; the Hermetic *Kore Kosmou* in Stob. Herm. XXIII.24 = Stob. I. 49.44. Cf. also the creation of the body in Zosimus *On the Letter Omega* 9–11, where the body is formed from the four elements as a prison for the spiritual man, Phos.

27. In some cosmologies, the soul (or more often Soul or some other primary feminine 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 soul into matter by her curiosity about the Highest Father or her desire to create on her own, for example, Sophia in the Valentinian cosmologies described by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.2.2–4) and Hippolytus (*Ref.* v.25). Cf. also the Letter of Peter to Philip in NHC VIII.2.135:10–28. In the Hermetic *Poimandres*, the male principle, the Anthropos, ventures from curiosity beyond the celestial sphere and beholds his own reflection in Physis (CH I.12–14). Through desire for his own divine image, he descends and mingles in love with Physis. 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. Cf. the *Exegesis on the Soul* in NHC II, 6.127.18–129.5.

28. Festugière’s terminology of “optimistic” and “pessimistic” should be applied with caution and precision to specific facets of a cosmology, for example, the evaluation of *genesis*, rather than to the

into embodiment but also serving as a conduit for the benefits of the higher worlds to the lower.²⁹ As Julian comments: “Selene beholds the intelligible, which is higher than the heavens, and adorns with its forms the realm of matter that lies below her, and thus she does away with its savagery and confusion and disorder.”³⁰ In such a cosmology, the moon, as the overseer of *genesis* in the material world, appears as a benevolent figure, spreading the order and beauty of the highest realms into the lowest and darkest reaches of the cosmos. Consequently, deities identified with the moon in such a cosmology, such as Eilithyia, Persephone, and Hekate, display their nurturing and beneficent kourotrophic aspects and downplay the traditional negative associations.³¹

Although cosmological systems such as that of the Chaldaean Oracles concentrate upon the beneficent aspects of the moon and of goddesses such as Hekate, this option requires, as it were, more philosophical legwork to rationalize away the negative traditional aspects of the deity while at the same time making use of the positive aspects of Hekate as intermediary and goddess of magical power.³² If there is no need to put a positive spin on *genesis*, then Hekate need not have her negative attributes removed. Such is the case in cosmologies where *genesis* and its rulers are negative. If the soul has left the realm of true life to abide in the dark underworld of material, the powers that rule this world can therefore be identified with powers of death and the underworld such as Persephone and Hekate.³³ Some “Gnostic” systems elaborate a whole hierarchy of archons and

cosmology as a whole. Any logos for living within the cosmos will describe the obstacles to living a happy life as well as provide for ways to get around these obstacles.

29. Johnston discusses how Hekate, as the ruler of the sublunar world in the Chaldaean Oracles, serves as the channel by which the Ideas that whirl forth from the Paternal Intellect in the hypercosmic realm are transmitted throughout the cosmos (Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, 49–70, 107–8).

30. Julian, *Or.* IV (Hymn to King Helios), 150a: Gr. ἡ Σελήνη τά τε ὑπὲρ τὸν οὐρανὸν θεωρεῖ νοητὰ καὶ τὰ ὑφ’ ἑαυτῆν κοσμοῦσα τὸν ὕλην τοῖς εἶδειν ἀναιρεῖ τὸ θηριώδες αὐτῆς καὶ παραχῆδες καὶ ἄτακτον.

31. “Traditional” may be applied in the sense of the ideas and associations passed down in Greek mythical and religious discourse before the time of these cosmologies in the first several centuries C.E. Hekate is *kourotrophos* (the nurturer of the young) already in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (411–51). Erwin Rohde (*Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925]) has a characteristically copious note listing appearances of Hekate *kourotrophos*, 322 n. 91; for a discussion of Hekate’s kourotrophic roles, see Sarah Iles Johnston, *The Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 212–15. For Persephone as a *kourotrophos*, especially in southern Italy, see Theodora Hadzisteliou Price, *Kourotrophos: Cults and Representations of the Greek Nursing Deities* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 175.

32. Johnston discusses the strategies by which the traditional negative aspects of Hekate were separated from the goddess and assigned to Physis, leaving Hekate’s traditional roles as intermediary (Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, 136–42).

33. The material realm is thus identified, in these cosmologies, with the underworld, the realm of the dead. To be in the body is to be dead; that is, life in the body is death, in contrast to the real life

powers that conspire to keep the soul in the ignorance of the material world, drawing on malevolent figures from a variety of religious traditions.³⁴ Other cosmologies simply emphasize the darker aspects of traditional Greek mythic deities such as Persephone, dark queen of the underworld, and Hekate, mistress of *daimones* and keeper of the keys of hell. Adopting traditional attributes of such deities, the mistress of *genesis* becomes the ruler of the dark world of the tomb of the body, who leads mortals astray with her *daimones*, phantoms of sensual desire and deceit who distract the soul from understanding its true nature.³⁵ Interpreted within such a cosmological framework, Persephone and Hekate are fitting deities for the position of the ruler of the material world, the power that keeps souls locked in the shadowy world of matter.

THE FACE OF THE MOON

The moon, in a cosmology that takes such a negative view of *genesis*, can become a threatening presence, a powerful force for harm. The face of the full moon is associated with terror and madness, the gorgon's head the sight of which can kill or petrify.³⁶ The moon is the image of Physis, the personification of the material world, and theurgists are warned not to invoke the image of Physis or to look upon her.³⁷ She is the mother of the *daimones* that inhabit the material world, the evil spirits who work harm upon the human race.³⁸ Looking upon the moon or calling on her name brings the powers of *genesis*, the forces that bind the soul into

of the soul in realms above. Such an equation of the material world with the underworld starts perhaps as early as Empedocles (ca. 492–432 B.C.E.) and becomes a common trope.

34. E.g., *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1.59:26) or the *Pistis Sophia* (chaps. 136–37), both of which elaborate a system of planetary archons in addition to other powers. Origen (*Contra Celsum* VI.30–31) provides the clearest picture of ascent past such a collection of planetary archons. Cf. *Paraphrase of Shem* (NHC VII, 1) for an evil Nature and her brood of demons.

35. The hounds of Hekate, Porphyry says, are evil *daimones* (Gr. ποιηροὶ δαίμονες), hostile spirits who lead mortals astray (Porphyry ap Eusebius Prep. Ev. 4, 23, 7–8).

36. Cf. Plutarch *De facie* 944c 29.6: Gr. ἐκφοβῆ δ' αὐτὰς καὶ τὸ καλοῦμενον πρόσωπον ὅταν ἐγγὺς γένηται βλοσυρὸν τι καὶ φρικτῶδες ὁρώμενον. Clement Alexandri *Stromata* v.49: Gr. γοργόνιον τὴν σελήην διὰ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ πρόσωπον. Lewy (*Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 271–72) compares with these supposed dangers the custom of averting the eyes when worshipping Hekate, the sources for which can again be found in one of Rohde's notes (*Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief*, 325 n. 104).

37. *Chaldaean Oracles* 101 = Psellus *Patrologia Graeca* 122, 1136 c12: “Do not invoke the self-manifesting image of Physis” (Gr. μὴ φύσεως καλέσης αὐτοπποῦ ἀγάλμα). Proclus *In Remp.* II.133.15–17 claims that the image (Gr. ἀγάλμα) of Physis is the Moon; CO 102 = Proclus *Theol. Plat.* 317.29 warns “Do not look at Physis! For her name is like Fate” (Gr. Μὴ φύσιν ἐμβλέψης. εἰμαρμένον οὐνομα τῆσδε).

38. Psellus (*Patrologia Graeca* 122, 1137a1–10) describes the epiphany of Physis as preceded by deceptive *daimones*. Synesius *Hymn* 5 (2) 52–53 describes Physis as mother of *daimones*. Cf. Johnstone, *Hekate Soteira*, 139–41.

its body. The moon, is seen not as a helpful intermediary, a necessary step on the way up through the heavens, but as a dangerous power that must be avoided, bypassed with an appeal to beneficent powers of the higher realms, to prevent her from keeping the soul in the dark realm of matter. As the ruler of *genesis*, the moon is a power whose influence is dangerous and hostile to the soul that is trying to escape from the shackles of fate that bind it to the material world.³⁹

Although the Mithras Liturgy itself does not provide such a picture of the malevolent moon goddess, because of the magician's careful precautions against her influence, other parts of the same Great Paris Magical Papyrus from which the Mithras Liturgy comes offer just such a picture. While we should not assume a consistent cosmology throughout the whole papyrus, the organization of the spells in the papyrus indicates that the redactor selected and arranged spells to fit within certain cosmological assumptions.

Several other spells in the papyrus invoke the moon under the names of Selene, Persephone, Hekate, and Brimo, listing epithets that stress her malevolent power:

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 back 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.⁴⁰

While many of the epithets are traditional descriptions of Hekate or Persephone, some seem particularly suited to the moon as the ruler of *genesis* and the material world: “Mistress of night and chthonic realms, holy, black-clad, ‘round whom

39. Cf. the magician's complaints of the present bitter and pressing Necessity in PGM IV.525 and 605: “the present bitter and relentless necessity which is pressing down upon me” and “on account of the pressing and bitter and inexorable necessity” (Gr. τὴν ἐνεστώσαν καὶ κατεπιγούσαν με πικρὰν ἀνάγκην ἀχρεοκόπητον and ἕνεκα τῆς κατεπιγούσης καὶ πικρᾶς καὶ ἀπαραιτήτου ἀνάγκης).

40. PGM IV. 2241–45, 2246, 2276–78, 2802–6, 2865–69: Gr. χαῖρε, ἱερὸν φῶς, ταρταροῦχε, φωτοπλήξ, χαῖρε, ἱερὰ αὐγὴ ἐκ σκοτῶν εἰλημμένη, ἀναστατοῦσα πάντα βουλαις ἀστόχους . . . φρικτῆς Ἀνάγκης πάντοτε σοὶ ὑπεροτρομένης . . . ἰεοπειθῆς, λυκά, στηλίτι, οὐλοή, ἀκρίη, χαροπή, ὄξυβόη. . . ἢ ἰηδὸν φολίσι πεπυκασμένη ἐρπιστήρων, ἰοβόλοις ταρσοῖσι κατομαδοῖσι δρακόντων, σφιγγομένη κατὰ πῶτα παλαμναίους ὑπὸ δεσμοῖς. . . αἰμοπότι, θανατηγέ, φθορηγίης, καρδιόδατε, σαρκοφάγε καὶ ἀοροβόρε, καπετόκτυπε, οἰστροπλάνεια.

the star-traversing nature of the world revolves whenever 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."⁴¹ The ruler of the darkened realm of earth is the Mistress of Genesis, who binds all mortal creatures with her chains.

In all these spells to the moon, the magician invokes the moon to help him in a violent act. Either the spell stirs up her anger against someone, inciting her to violent revenge, or it is a violent "love charm," in which the victim is compelled to go immediately to the magician or suffer excruciating torments.⁴² These spells involve an element of coercion of the hostile goddess to turn her power against another, as well as an element of danger should the magician himself become the target of her wrath. As one spell notes: "[T]he 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."⁴³

SUN AND MOON SECTIONS OF THE GREAT PARIS MAGICAL PAPYRUS

In the Great Paris Magical Papyrus, the spells that invoke the power of the moon reinforce the idea that, in the cosmology of the redactor who compiled the papyrus, the moon was a dangerous and hostile entity, who might be coerced or deceived into directing her violence at others. Such a power is distinguished by the redactor from the other cosmic ruler to whom prayers are addressed in several spells in the papyrus, the sun. The spells that invoke the moon are grouped together in the later part of the papyrus, whereas the spells that invoke the sun, including the Mithras Liturgy, are all in the earlier part of the papyrus. The organization of the Great Paris Magical Papyrus has received little comment from scholars, although some general groupings by the purpose of the spell have been noted.⁴⁴ Careful attention to the groupings of spells, however, can reveal some of the cosmological presuppositions of the magician selecting and arranging them.

41. PGM iv.2550–56: Gr. *νοχία, χθονία, άγία, μελαμείμων, ήν άνακυκλείται κόσμου φύσις άστροφόποιος, ήμικ' άγαν αύξης, ου τά κοσμικά πάντα τέθεικας: γεινής γάρ ου πάντα έπί χθονός ήδ' άπό ποίτου καί πτηνών δ' έηής παντοία γένη παλινεδρα, πανγενικήτερα.*

42. Cf. the so-called "slander spells" PGM iv.2241–358, 2441–621, 2622–707; charms of attraction 1390–495, 2441–621, 2708–84, 2943–66. On these agoge spells, see Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 41 ff., 133–46.

43. PGM iv.2507–9: Gr. *έωθεν γάρ ή θεός τοις άφυλακτεριστοις τούτο πράσσοντας άεροφερείς ποιείν καί άπό τοῦ ύψους έπί την γήν ρίψαι.* Cf. 2627: as a result, the magician is warned not to perform such spells too often, 2506, 2569.

44. Cf. the listings of the spells in the papyrus by Brashear, "Greek Magical Papyri," 3497–98, and Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, xi–xii. Brashear also has an index of spell types

The papyrus begins with a few miscellaneous spells (lines 1–87), followed by a large section in which most of the spells are addressed to the sun (lines 88–1227).⁴⁵ A section in the middle (lines 1227–2240) contains a mixture of spells to various powers (Christ, Aphrodite, the constellations of the Bears, Eros), as well as two spells invoking Helios and one that invokes the chthonic powers (although not in lunar form). A number of spells follow that do invoke the moon (lines 2240–890), and the papyrus concludes with another miscellany of short spells (lines 2891–3274). While these divisions are by no means exact, the redactor does make a clear division of "sun spells" and "moon spells" in the papyrus. Although this magician feels free to draw upon the resources of a number of religious traditions, we can perhaps get a picture of his cosmological ideas from his selection and organization of spells within the papyrus. The sun is the supreme heavenly power, beneficent and connected specifically with special knowledge.⁴⁶ The moon, on the other hand, is a hostile power connected with sex, death, and the underworld, far from the beneficent intermediary and helper of the sun that appears in other cosmological systems. Such a depiction of the moon reveals a pessimistic view of the material world and the mortal condition, although the magician also sees opportunities to manipulate the constraints of fate, either by appeal to the beneficent powers of the higher realms or with spells that coerce or deceive the hostile powers of the sublunar world.

RITUAL PREPARATIONS AT THE SEIZURE OF THE MOON

Some spells invoking the dangerous power of the moon must be performed at moonrise, when the moon begins to influence the world below; another dangerous spell for summoning the spirits of the dead must be performed under the light

("Greek Magical Papyri," 3499–505). Smith ("Hymn to the Moon," 643–45) makes a few comments on the sections of the papyrus that concern the purpose of the spells.

45. The spell in 296–466 is a curious exception to the division, since it contains a spell of attraction that invokes the chthonic deities. However, the prayer that is attached to the procedures is a hymn addressed to Helios, entreating him to mollify the *daimon* who performs the attraction and claiming that Helios has enabled mankind to understand the threads of Fate so that such magic may be performed. I would suggest that the redactor classified this spell as a "sun" spell because of the hymn to Helios. Despite the chthonic nature of the spell, moreover, the moon is not invoked, nor must the spell be performed in the presence of the moon. Instead, the hymn is sung at the setting sun.

46. PGM iv.88–153 uses a boy medium to find out about a lover; 154–285 and 930–50 are for lecanomancy; 950–1115 is for lychnomancy; 1115–66 and 1167–226 (as well as 1275–308, which is primarily a Bear spell) are all-purpose, powerful spells; 296–466 and 1928–2125 both involve summoning spirits of the dead, but the sun is invoked in both cases to ensure that the spirit is "gentle, gracious, and pondering no hostile thoughts towards me" (Gr. *πραύν, μελιχλιον μηδ' άπτία μοι φρονέουτα*) (451, cf. 1974–75).

of the full moon.⁴⁷ By contrast, all the magician's preparations for the ascent in the Mithras Liturgy must take place when the moon is absent from the sky. Beginning at the time of the seizure of the moon, when the moon exerts least influence over the process, the magician prepares the ointment by infusing a vessel of high-quality rose oil with a specially prepared sun-scarab beetle. The ointment is further filled with the power of the sun by the recitation of a magic formula over the vessel for seven days at the time of day when the sun is in midheaven. The magic ink for the formula must also be prepared when the moon is absent from the sky, at the conjunction of the sun and moon (again, the new moon) that occurs in the sign of the lion, that is, Leo, the astrological house of the sun.⁴⁸ In each case, the ritual preparation must take place when the influence of the moon is least powerful and when the sun's influence is present.⁴⁹ Whereas spells that manipulate the dangerous power of the moon often require the moon's presence in the sky, the

47. PGM iv.2441–621, 3125–71, are spells to be performed at moonrise. Cf. iv.52–85, where the magician must hurry home to prevent the hostile spirit from locking him out. Although the spirit is not explicitly a spirit of the dead, the ritual of summoning it with the leftover morsels of food resembles a spell in the papyrus (iv.1390–495) in which morsels are explicitly left for spirits of the dead who have died violently. Another spell that requires the full moon is the agoge spell in iv.2708–84, which must be performed on the thirteenth or fourteenth of the month, at the full moon.

48. PGM iv.779–88:

“Having obtained the above-mentioned herb kentritis, at the conjunction [of the sun and moon] occurring in the Lion, take the juice and, after mixing it with honey and myrrh, write on a leaf of the persea tree the eight-lettered name, as given below. And having kept yourself pure for 3 days in advance, come at morning to face the sunrise; lick off the leaf while you show it to the sun, and then he [the sun god] will listen to you attentively. Begin to prepare on the new moon in the Lion, according to the god's [reckoning].” (Gr. βαστάξας κεντρίτιν τῆν προκειμένην βοτάνην τῆ συνόδῳ τῆ γενομένην λέοντι ἄρον τὸν χυλὸν καὶ μίξας μέλιτι καὶ ζμύρινη γράψον ἐπὶ φύλλου περσέας τὸ ὀκτογράμματος ὄνομα, ὡς ὑπόκειται, καὶ πρὸ γ' ἡμερῶν ἀγνεύσας ἐλθὲ πρῶτα πρὸς ἀνατολὰς, ἀπόλειχε τὸ φύλλον δεικνύων ἥλιῳ, καὶ οὕτως ἐπακοῖσεται τελείως. ἄρχου δὲ αὐτὸν τελεῖν τῆ ἐν λέοντι κατὰ θεὸν νομηνία.) Note that the oil is prepared at the time of a new moon and then stored for later use at the specific time of the new moon in the Lion. The magician, having picked the kentritis, keeps pure for three days before the new moon, then begins the procedure by mixing the ink, writing the formula, and licking it off.

49. Only when the ritual is altered by a later practitioner does this timing shift. In a section of instructions clearly added later, the magician is instructed by the god to throw away the ointment made at the time special to Mithraists and to make use of an entirely different ritual scarab prepared at the full moon (PGM iv.792–98). On the revisions of the Mithras Liturgy, see Morton Smith, “Transformation by Burial (1 Cor. 15.35–49; Rom. 6.3–5 and 8.9–11),” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 52 (1983): 109–10. The magician who revised the ritual preparations need not have had any understanding of the cosmological implications of the timing, either its specifically Mithraic associations or even the general connection of the moon with genesis. Nor need the redactor who compiled all the spells into the Great Paris Magical Papyrus have taken the revisions into account when organizing the spell within the papyrus. For the redactor, the appeal to the powers of the sun and the absence of the moon from the ascent would certainly have been sufficient to place it within the section of spells that appeal to the beneficent power of the sun, regardless of any inconsistency created by the revised preparations.

Mithras Liturgy, which is to free the magician from the chains of fate, requires the moon's absence.

This timing for the ritual preparations may be an important instance of genuinely Mithraic elements in the Mithras Liturgy, since the conjunction of the sun and moon with the sun in the sign of Leo had special significance for the Mithraists as the time of Mithras's slaying of the bull. As Roger Beck has argued, the elements in the Mithraic tauroctony provide a picture of the heavens, with the animals representing various constellations (the scorpion is Scorpio, the snake is Hydra, the dog is Canis Minor, etc.) and with the bull and Mithras depicting the moon and the sun—specifically, the sun in its astrological house of Leo.⁵⁰ The Unconquered Sun slaying the lunar bull, Beck argues moreover, is linked to the processes of *genesis* and *apogenesis*, of the descent and ascent of souls.⁵¹ The ritual preparations for the Mithras Liturgy, then, are prescribed for the time that is most appropriate to the Mithraic bull-slaying, when Mithras as the power of *apogenesis* overcomes the power of *genesis* in the form of the lunar bull.

This correspondence suggests that the spell was originally composed by someone who had some understanding of Mithraic ideas about the sun and moon. Indeed, in contrast to Franz Cumont's famous claim that the Mithras Liturgy is neither Mithraic nor a liturgy, scholars have identified a number of genuinely Mithraic features in the cosmology of the Mithras Liturgy. The peculiar doubling of the sun-gods in the ascent not only appears in Platonic contexts but is a standard feature of Mithraism, where Sol, the sun, appears separately from Mithras Sol Invictus.⁵² Mithras as the ruler of the celestial pole, turning the heavens by means of the Bear constellations in the form of a bull's shoulder, appears not only in the central scene of the Mithras Liturgy⁵³ but in a variety of Mithraic monuments. The positioning of the Great Bear on the ceiling of the Ponza mithraeum, as Beck has argued, shows that at least some Mithraic groups made the connection between the Great Bear (whose Egyptian name, Plutarch tells us, was “the bull's shoulder”) and Mithras, for Mithras is depicted with the bull's shoulder in

50. “It follows from the composition and logic of the tauroctony as a map of the solar journey that the icon represents Mithras as Sun god in the sign of Leo.” Beck, “In the Place of the Lion,” 45.

51. “The tauroctony, I have claimed throughout, is a map (and calendar) for genesis and apogenesis, for the descent and ascent of the human soul. It is as the great agents of these processes that Mithras and the bull as Sun and Moon are placed on the map.” *Ibid.*, 48.

52. Cf., e.g., Ulansey, “Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun.”

53. PGM iv.697–700:

“Youthful, golden-haired, with a white tunic and a golden crown and trousers, and holding in his right hand a golden shoulder of a young bull: This is the Bear which moves and turns heaven around” (Gr. νεῶτερον, χρυσοκόμαν, ἐν χιτῶνι λευκῷ καὶ χρυσῷ στεφάνῳ καὶ ἀναξυρίσσι, κατέχοντα τῆ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ μόσχου ὤμοι χρύσεου, ὅς ἐστιν Ἄρκτος ἢ κριοῦσα καὶ ἀντιστρέφουσα τὸν οὐρανόν).

the side panels of a number of monuments.⁵⁴ Even the idea of ascent on the rays of the sun, as I have argued, fits in with Mithraic ideas of *apogenesis* through the celestial gate of Capricorn, as the Barberini tauroctony's sunbeam indicates.⁵⁵ As we can see, then, from his prescription of the ritual preparations for the seizure of the moon in Leo, the magician who composed the Mithras Liturgy did not merely insert the prestigious Mithras as the endpoint of the magician's journey, but these ritual preparations that fit in with Mithraic ideas of the timing of its central religious scene, the tauroctony, are part of a cosmological perspective that partakes of a number of Mithraic elements.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of the moon in the Mithras Liturgy, then, provides clues to the cosmological perspectives both of the creator of the spell itself and of the redactor who compiled the Great Paris Magical Papyrus. In the cosmologies of other theurgic systems, the powers of *genesis* are a necessary part of the cosmic order, and the moon serves as a helpful intermediary for those seeking contact from the material world to the realms above. In the Mithras Liturgy, by contrast, the ambivalent position of the moon as intermediary in other cosmologies is interpreted in a more negative sense, since this ruler of *genesis* must be absent for the apogenetic ritual to succeed. Although the surviving evidence for Mithraism does not present a par-

ticularly negative picture of the moon and *genesis* (apart from the obvious fact that Mithras slays the lunar bull), the redactor of the Great Paris Magical Papyrus found in the Mithras Liturgy a scenario that could be fit within more pessimistic views of the moon and *genesis*. Throughout the papyrus, the moon is a hostile power, trapping souls in *genesis* through hostile *daimones* and the chains of fate. This power can be coerced into assisting in violent magic, but it must be kept as far as possible from an enterprise that aims at *apogenesis*. The magician's preparations and ascent to the great god Mithras, therefore, must take place when the moon is entirely absent from the sky, at the seizure of the moon.

54. Cf. Plutarch *De Is.* 359d. "The polar symbol that the god of the *Mithrasliturgie* carries is the *Stierschenkel*. Now the *Stierschenkel* is the Egyptian constellation corresponding to Ursa Major, and it is Ursa Major (its size clearly identifies it as such) that, contrary to proper *astrothesie*, has been placed at the pole and the centre of the Ponza zodiac." Roger Beck, "Interpreting the Ponza Zodiac: II," *JMS* ii.2 (1977): 126. Beck, confirming the hypothesis of Dieterich denied by Cumont, has identified the object that Mithras is holding during the so-called investiture-of-Sol scenes as the shoulder of a bull, rather than a Phrygian cap, as Cumont suggested (Beck, "Interpreting the Ponza Zodiac," 124–27). See also R. L. Gordon and John R. Hinnells, "Some New Photographs of Well-Known Mithraic Monuments," *JMS* ii.2 (1978): 213–19, for a discussion of some of the specific monuments on which this motif occurs.

55. Cf. my "Did the Mithraists Inhale?" I build my argument on Beck's analysis of the Barberini monument, where he draws upon Porphyry to explain the positioning of the sunbeam through Capricorn and the torch of Cautes. (Cf. Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders*, 91–100.)

56. This is not, of course, to suggest that the Mithras Liturgy is, as Dieterich claimed, an adaptation of a real Mithraic ritual. The author of the Mithras Liturgy reveals his familiarity with many of the features of Mithraic cult practice and is likely to have been an initiate. However, he was also a theurgic magician, a religious craftsman in a syncretistic age, who had no qualms about bringing together elements from a variety of sources to achieve his magical, religious, and philosophical ends. Attilio Mastrocinque (*Studi sul Mithraismo [Il Mithraismo e la magia]* [Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1998], 119) discusses a variety of ways in which Mithraic elements were put to use in magical material, although he does not see the Mithras Liturgy itself as a particularly valuable source for understanding the interrelation of Mithraic and magical practices.

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