

**Flower of Fire:
Hekate in the *Chaldean Oracles****
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The *Chaldean Oracles*¹ is a revealed text attributed to Julian the Theurgist, a contemporary of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) and the son of another Julian, himself styled “the Chaldean”. Whether ‘Chaldean’ here functions as an ethnic designation or refers to the career of astrologer is unknown; but there is little, if anything, to explicitly connect the *Oracles* to ‘Chaldea’² (hence, whenever I use the term ‘Chaldean’ in this essay, it refers to the *Oracles*, and never to inhabitants of Mesopotamia). Though the *Chaldean Oracles* survive for us as an assemblage of fragments as evocative as they are obscure, the avid adoption of the *Oracles* into the canon of Late Antique pagan wisdom literature alongside much older texts and traditions speaks to their compelling appeal for those able to read them in their entirety. Due to the fragmentary state of their preservation, however, the modern literature on the *Oracles* has been dominated by efforts to resolve the problems of membership of fragments in the corpus, of their proper order, and, in short, of making the barest sense of what we possess of this influential text of Late Antiquity.

This effort has been further complicated by the necessity, for any understanding of the *Oracles*, of a fairly advanced understanding of the philosophical system of the Athenian

* This essay was originally published in *Bearing Torches: A Devotional Anthology for Hekate*, ed. Sannion (Eugene, OR: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2009), pp. 140-157. The pagination for this publication appears in brackets.

¹ Throughout this essay I shall use the simpler spelling ‘Chaldean’ rather than ‘Chaldaean’, more correct but slightly off-putting to the English reader’s eye.

² See, however, Polymnia Athanassiadi, “Apamea and the *Chaldaean Oracles* : A Holy City and a Holy Book,” in *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity : Essays in Honour of Peter Brown*, ed. Andrew Smith (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2005), pp. 117-143, which argues for a link between the *Oracles* and the temple of Bel in Apamea, which had a tradition of oracular production as well as a thriving Hellenistic philosophical culture.

Neoplatonists Proclus and Damascius, into which so much of what remains of the *Oracles* has been embedded; an understanding necessary as much in order to disentangle the *Oracles* from the exigencies of the Platonic system as to illuminate it from the latter. The curious interdisciplinary niche the *Oracles* occupied among these Neoplatonists has also hindered interpretation. Texts such as the Orphica were straightforwardly treated as ‘theology’, in the sense this term had for the Neoplatonists, that is, as a repository of information about the nature and functions of particular deities, but the *Oracles* seem to have been considered as theology and philosophy at once. We can see this from the Neoplatonists’ appropriation of technical terminology from the *Oracles* for philosophical concepts; in particular the term *pêgê*, literally a spring or fountain, but used by Proclus especially to refer to intelligible (supra-intellectual) form. At the same time, the text was also treated like other ‘theological’ texts in comparative contexts, i.e., as expressing a particular configuration of divine persons. This dual status of the *Oracles* will be important to the present essay. [141]

As a result of these factors, the effort of grasping what wisdom the *Oracles* may yet have to impart to us has really not even begun, nor is the very notion of such a project meaningful to those to whom, for their philological skills, the interpretation of the *Chaldean Oracles* has so far been entrusted. The present essay can barely make a beginning of this process, but hopefully can at least begin it in the proper way. To begin in the proper way means, in my judgment, to seek from the *Oracles* themselves rules for their interpretation. Such a rule is, I believe, offered in what has traditionally been considered fragment 1 of the corpus:

For there exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of mind.
 For if you should incline your mind toward it and perceive it as perceiving a specific thing, you would not perceive it. For it is the power of strength, visible all around,

flashing with intellectual divisions. Therefore, you must not perceive that Intelligible violently but with the flame of mind completely extended which measures all things, except that Intelligible. You must not perceive it intently, but keeping the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible in order to comprehend it, since it exists outside of mind.³

The fragment states that there is ‘something’ intelligible (*ti noêton*) which cannot be intelligible *as something*, though it is “manifest on every side” (*amphiphaous*); that lies outside the totality or complete extension of the system in which all things are ‘measured’, that is, against one another and according to common criteria, but ‘flashes’ with the application of such criteria (intellectual ‘cuts’, *tomaî*); and that is the power (or possibility, *dunamis*) of ‘strength’ (*alkê*). Some of these aspects will be discussed more fully later in this essay; for now, however, I wish to concern myself specifically with the sense of ‘something’, *ti*, here. The ‘something’ discussed in frag. 1 is very important; indeed, Majercik, in common with other commentators, sees in *ti noêton* “a reference to the highest God of the Chaldean hierarchy.” But I believe that in so doing, Majercik and others violate the very hermeneutical condition set by the fragment itself, thus in fact foreclosing the possibility of making the *Oracles* themselves *operative*, by treating the ‘something’ as something distinct from the perceiving of it.⁴ I propose that the fruitful way to understand ‘something’ here is not as a discrete something which comes to be known in a certain fashion, but instead as *whatever* comes to be known by the faculty designated here as “the flower of mind” (*nóou anthos*).

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³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Oracle fragments are by Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989).

⁴ Cf. frag. 20, “For Intellect does not exist without the intelligible, and the intelligible does not exist apart from Intellect.”

This ‘something’—though it is not in a certain respect *something* at all—is indeed the first principle of the system of the *Chaldean Oracles*, and was known as the *hapax epekeina*, the ‘single’ or ‘simplex’ transcendent, as distinct from the *dis epekeina*, the ‘double’ or ‘duplex’ transcendent. It has been a commonplace to treat these as entities in a rather simplistic sense as the ‘First God’ and ‘Second God’ of the system, and indeed, when the former in particular is referred to repeatedly in the fragments as ‘the Father’, it has seemed natural to personify them both. However, the author (likely Porphyry) of an anonymous commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides*, states that “some”—by whom Pierre Hadot and Ruth Majercik both believe the author of the commentary intends the very author(s) of the *Oracles*—“see fit to abolish number” with respect to the ‘Father’ “in that they absolutely refuse even to say that he is *one*.”⁵

There is no *one* identity for this figure, that is, it is not *numerically one*, because its identity is established simply as the object of the ‘flower of mind’, whatever this faculty may be exercised upon, and thus primarily as a mode of being linked to a mode of cognition; and I believe that only in this fashion does the Chaldean ‘Father’ achieve a significance beyond the merely iconic. Thus Proclus states at *Platonic Theology* III 21. 74. 7-8 that “just as the intelligible Gods are henads⁶ primarily, so too are they fathers primarily.” This passage refers

⁵ Ruth Majercik, “Chaldean Triads in Neoplatonic Exegesis: Some Reconsiderations,” *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2001), p. 266f (on the identity of the “some” referred to here, see also Majercik, “The *Chaldean Oracles* and the School of Plotinus,” *The Ancient World* Vol. 29 (1998), 103f, with refs. to Hadot, n. 80). Majercik interprets the abolition of number here as coming about purely through the identification of the Chaldean ‘Father’ with the Platonic One, which *is not one*; I would claim rather that there is a convergence here between Platonic doctrine and a doctrine legitimately deriving from the *Oracles*—which is not inconsistent with its presence there being due to the influence of earlier Platonic speculation, especially that concerning the characterization of the Platonic demiurge as ‘maker and father’ of the cosmic order at *Timaeus* 28c.

⁶ ‘Henads’: existentially unique individuals. For Proclus’ doctrine of henads, see my article “Polytheism and Individuality in the Henadic Manifold,” *Dionysius*, Vol. 23, 2005, pp. 83-

to his technical use of the term ‘father’ to characterize *a mode of divine activity*, a usage probably influenced by the *Chaldean Oracles*. Again, Proclus states in prop. 151 of his *Elements of Theology* that “All that is paternal in the Gods is of primal operation [*prôtourgon*] and stands in the position of the Good [*en tagathou taxeî*] at the head of all the divine orders [*diakosmêseis*].”

If Proclus’ remarks at 60K of his commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* about ‘Ad’ and ‘Adad’ indeed refer to lost material from the *Chaldean Oracles*, and thus identify the *dis epekeina* with the Syrian deity Hadad, with ‘Ad’ referring to the *hapax epekeina* as a back-formation, it still would not alter the fact that the primary reference of the *hapax* and *dis epekeina* is not to particular deities but to certain divine functions, viz. Majercik’s remark that “this First God is generally described in Stoicizing terms as a primal, fiery Intellect ... his nature is also regarded as essentially unknowable,” (p. 138). A function, too, is ‘essentially unknowable’ as a particular nature because its nature is universal, that is, its nature is to be instantiated by whatever entities perform the function it defines, and to whatever degree they do so.

Identifications of the Chaldean functions with particular deities are possible, of course, especially with regard to the *dis epekeina*, e.g., Porphyry’s identification of the *dis epekeina* with Yahweh (Lydus, *De mens.*, IV, 53), for the *Oracles* say with regard to the *dis epekeina* that [143] “the Father perfected all things and handed them over to the Second, which you—the entire human race—call the First” (frag. 7), that is, because theologies accord to the foremost deity in their pantheon the absolute primacy that belongs, strictly

103. On the ‘Intelligible Gods’ specifically, see “The Intelligible Gods in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus,” *Méthexis* 21, 2008, pp. 131-143.

speaking, to *each* deity in his/her perfect individuality.⁷ Damascius states that the “universal demiurge” (that is, divinity operating as the intellectual structure of the cosmos)⁸ has a sevenfold structure according to the Chaldeans, “each of them [the seven] being honored with the name of *dis epekeina* and containing in it all that the First does, only particularized in the declension into classes” (*De princ.* III 30. 13-16), elsewhere stating that the *dis epekeina* is divisible into a virtually unlimited plurality of intellects (*In Parm.* I 67. 24-5), or discrete cosmic operations.⁹ Thus it is, in effect, the function of the duplex transcendent to ‘measure’ all things by dirempting or dividing itself to *become* the measures themselves.

But if the simplex and duplex transcendent are not, or are not only or primarily, discrete divine *entities*, but two modes of divine *activity*, the position of apparently the only *named* deity in the *Chaldean Oracles*,¹⁰ and who is moreover explicitly presented as the divine operator of and the mediator between these two modes of activity, as we shall see, becomes even more important than has previously been appreciated; and that deity is none other than Hekate.

⁷ On these matters, see my “Polycentric Polytheism and the Philosophy of Religion,” *The Pomegranate* 10.2 (2008), esp. pp. 222ff.

⁸ On the nature of the Platonic demiurge, see Eric Perl, “The Demiurge and the Forms: A Return to the Ancient Interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 18 (1998), pp. 81-92.

⁹ Citations of Damascius are to volume, page and line number of *Damascius: Traité des premiers principes*, ed. L. G. Westerink and trans. Joseph Combès, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986-1991) [*De princ.*], and *Damascius: Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, ed. L. G. Westerink and trans. J. Combès, with the collaboration of A.-P. Segonds, 4 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997-2003) [*In Parm.*].

¹⁰ Either Rhea’s appearance in frag. 56, or the fragment’s membership in the corpus, is controversial (see Majercik, p. 165 and “Chaldean Triads”, p. 291-4), and the connection of Atlas to frag. 6 doubtful. Zeus appears in frs. 215 and 218, but neither of these are likely to belong to the *Oracles*.

Hekate's name occurs in five fragments, she may be discussed in as many as 66 others, and she may be the speaker in as many as eleven fragments.¹¹ An especially important fragment relative to Hekate is frag. 50, which states that “the center [*kentron*] of Hekate is borne in the midst [*messon ... pephorêsthai*] of the Fathers.” Ontologically, this is interpreted, e.g., by Proclus (*In Tim.* II 129f) as the plane of psychical being, “as a medium between things that are intelligible only and things that are objects of sensation, between beings that are solely eternal, and those that are altogether generated.” Hence Johnston, expressing a broad consensus among scholars of the *Oracles*, regards Hekate as simply equated with soul in the *Oracles*.¹² But this is unsatisfactory, as we shall see, inasmuch as the *Oracles*, while closely associating Hekate with the soul, do nevertheless distinguish them. Indeed, in Proclus' own interpretation of the Hellenic pantheon, the source of life for souls is seen more directly in Rhea, while the soul in its personal emergence is grasped through Persephone, who for Platonists embodies the soul's descent, not into death, but embodied life.¹³ Hekate's special role in this process, I shall argue, is *revelatory*; and this is prefigured in her iconography, in which she typically bears twin torches.

G.R.S. Mead referred to the *Chaldean Oracles* as “The Gnosis of the Fire”,¹⁴ and references to fire in them are too numerous to bother [144] collecting here. One thing, though, may be stated in general about the sense of ‘fire’ in the *Oracles*: fire is never referred to there as consuming or destroying anything, and hence Chaldean ‘fire’ is clearly the “creative fire” (*pur technikon*) of the Stoic philosophers, which, unlike the fire which merely

¹¹ Reckoning according to Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 1f.

¹² Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 153-163.

¹³ For the Platonic interpretation of Persephone, see Thomas Taylor, *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1790). For Hekate's role in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, see the Excursus at the end of this essay.

¹⁴ *The Chaldaean Oracles (Echoes from the Gnosis Vol. VIII)*, p. 20.

“converts fuel into itself,” instead “causes growth and preservation, as is the case in plants and animals where it is natural constitution [*phusis*] and soul [*psuchê*],” (Zeno of Kition).¹⁵ Chaldean ‘fire’, then, is the very operative principle itself, actuality or activity (*energeia*). Frag. 6 states, probably of Hekate,¹⁶ that “as a girdling, intellectual membrane” she “separates the first fire and the other fire which are eager to mingle,” these fires generally being associated with the simplex and duplex transcendent. Hekate’s iconic twin torches, though occasionally noted by modern commentators with regard to her characterization in the *Oracles* as *amphiphaês*, “shining on both sides” (frag. 189; cf. frag. 1, in which the intelligible object of the ‘flower of mind’ is described as *amphiphaous*, there translated by Majercik as “visible all around”), have not been sufficiently appreciated in interpreting her position between these two dispositions of ‘fire’, in part, I believe, because of the difficulty commentators have had in seeing these functions as her *instruments* rather than as divine *persons*. In this respect, Majercik’s “reconsideration” regarding the commonplace among interpreters of a Chaldean ‘divine triad’ consisting of the *hapax epekeina*, Hekate, and the *dis epekeina* is salutary,¹⁷ insofar as the tendency to treat this triad as a trinity of divine persons has distracted commentators from Hekate’s dominant role as the sole named deity in the *Oracles*.

In frag. 6, Hekate is identified with an item of her equipment, her girdle (*zostêr*), in accord with a principle Damascius explains with respect to the processions of the Gods from their ‘fontal’ (*pêgaios*) being to their diversified ‘principal’ (*archikos*) activity. The “principal Hekate”, e.g., emanates, he explains, from Hekate’s crown, while “principal Soul” (*archikê psuchê*) and “principal Virtue” (*archikê aretê*) emanate from her girdle (*De*

¹⁵ Stobaeus 1.213, 15-21 (*SVF* 1.120; Long & Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophers*, 46D).

¹⁶ This being the judgment of Majercik (p. 143) and Johnston (*Hekate Soteira*, p. 53). Simplicius quotes this fragment with reference to Atlas, but this seems to be a comparison rather than an identification.

¹⁷ “Chaldean Triads in Neoplatonic Exegesis: Some Reconsiderations”, esp. pp. 286-296.

princ. III 38. 2-6), her adornments being the detachable counterparts, as it were, of her limbs, the girdle being analogous in this sense to her flanks (*ibid.* 39. 4-7). This refers to frags. 51 and 52 of the *Oracles*, which state that “In the left flank of Hekate exists the source of virtue [or ‘fontal virtue’, *aretês pégê*], which remains entirely within and does not give up its virginity,” (52) while “Around the hollow of her right flank a great stream of the primordially-generated Soul gushes forth in abundance, totally ensouling light, fire, ether, worlds,” (51). Proclus alludes to these fragments in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* regarding the opposed circular motions of the soul, the “circles of sameness and difference” of *Timaeus* 36c, implying that Hekate’s ‘girdle’ may be taken [145] as these motions (*In Tim.* II 260.28-261.3). Whereas the account in the *Timaeus*, however, is of simple circular motions, the descriptions of the emanations from Hekate, if they are to be harmonized with the Platonic text, would suggest one motion spiralling outward—and perhaps the use of *peri*, ‘about’, already indicates something other than a simple outward streaming—while the other cannot be literally stationary but must be either a circular motion or a complementary spiraling inward, that is, centrifugal and centripetal motion, ensouling with the centrifugal and establishing virtue or perfecting the soul with the centripetal.

The significance to ancient physics of the vortex and other concepts from fluid dynamics has been argued by Michel Serres with particular reference to ancient atomism.¹⁸ Serres has an innovative reading of atomism that focuses on the role of what he calls the “system of turbulence.”¹⁹ Serres’ reading assimilates atoms to vortices in fluids, similar in certain respects to William Thomson’s 19th century theory of atoms as “loci of a special type

¹⁸ For an introduction to Serres’ work in English, see the essays in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, ed. Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 54.

of rotary motion within a homogeneous aether pervading space,” with the consequence that matter is properly understood as “a mode of motion”.²⁰ The fragments of the *Chaldean Oracles* abound with vivid references to fluid and turbulent motion. In the *Oracles*, the “life-giving” fire “furrows” (36) and “rolls up” (38) into “channels” (60, 65, 66, 75, 110, 189); air, too, is described in terms of “streams”, “hollows” and “channels” (61); and one of the forms of theophany is “a sumptuous light, rushing like a spiral” (146). Indeed, it seems that there is a common language of fluid turbulence applied on all planes of being: “All things serve these three turbulent rulers/principles [*archais labrois*],” namely the “sacred course [*hieros dromos*],” the course of air, and the third, “which heats the earth by fire” (73). A common dynamics is also implied in the concept of diverse “ethers” belonging to each of the elements (62, 98) but presumably exhibiting similar turbulence activity. Within this differentiated fluid medium the “intelligible Thoughts from the Paternal Source” are said to “break” like waves upon “the bodies of the worlds”, “borne around the sublime wombs like a swarm of bees” (37),²¹ the Sources and Principles (*pêgai* and *archai*) are “whirled about in ceaseless motion” (49), as the “seven firmaments of the worlds” are “inflated” (57).

Within this dynamic context, Hekate, borne along in the midst of the ‘Fathers’ as if in a sea constituted by primary divine activity, establishes of and for herself a “center” (50), a center which clearly must be the result of an active *centering* in relative motion, as Damascius comments on frag. 50: “in terms of center she [Hekate] is in repose, but in terms of being carried she is moved,” (*In Parm.* III 60.1-4). I attribute this centering specifically to the contrary (centrifugal/centripetal) motions of/from Hekate in frs. 51 and 52, [146] which are also, and crucially, activities on behalf of the soul. I will consider further below the

²⁰ Robert H. Silliman, “William Thomson: Smoke Rings and Nineteenth-Century Atomism,” *Isis*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Dec., 1963), p. 461.

²¹ Trans. mod.

significance of the contrariety of these motions; but first I wish to discuss the elemental motion I believe to be common to the two.

The enigmatic frag. 63 tells us that “a single [or ‘unique’, *mian*] line is drawn in a curved shape,” upon which Damascius comments (*In Parm.* II 101.10-11) that the *Oracles* “make a great use of linear shape” (*tou grammiaiou schêmatos*). The term for ‘drawn’ here, *suromenê*, is also used in frag. 34, which states, regarding “the birth of variegated matter”, that from the “Source of Sources” (*pégê pégôn*) “a lightning-bolt, sweeping along (*suromenos*), obscures the flower of fire as it leaps into the hollows of the worlds,” while frag. 164 speaks of a precipice beneath the earth “drawing [*surôn*]” something—perhaps the soul, or simply exerting a ‘draw’—“down from the threshold with seven paths [*kata heptaporou bathmidos*]”,²² and frag. 70 speaks of the heaven (*ouranos*), ruled by “untiring Nature” which is in turn “suspended from the great Hekate”, “pulling down [*katasurôn*] its eternal course”, implying a constant downdraft motion like the atomists’ eternal cascade (or “laminar flow”, in Serres’ term) of atoms, with turbulence supplied by the curving line corresponding to the atomic ‘swerve’ or oblique motion, *parenklisis* in Greek or *clinamen* in Latin, a minimal indeterminacy or unpredictability that introduces “creative chaos” into the parallel flows of atoms falling in the infinite void, and spontaneity into the otherwise deterministic universe.²³ The atomic swerve is thus the turbulence minimum as well as the minimum nonzero value for a curve, the line in Euclidean geometry being a ‘straight curve’, and it is this swerve I wish to argue underlies both of the motions attributed to the Chaldean Hekate.

²² Trans. mod.

²³ See Ilya Prigogine’s and Isabelle Stengers’ “Postface: Dynamics from Leibniz to Lucretius,” pp. 137-155 in *Hermes*, op cit.

This indeterminate or turbulent motion, which can be expressed by the minimum curve and symbolized by the spiral, pertains especially to Chaldean Hekate because of her association with the instrument known as ‘Hekate’s top’ or ‘magic wheel’ (*strophalon*), mentioned in frag. 206, but more properly known as a *inyx* (whence the English word ‘jinx’), which gives its name to an important species of divine entity in the Chaldean system, the Iynges.²⁴ Frag. 37 characterizes the Platonic Ideas as “whirring forth” (*erroizêse*) from the Paternal Intellect in similitude to such whirling tops, and Damascius states that “The Great Hekate sends forth a lifegiving whirl [*zôogonon rhoizêma*],” (*In Parm.* III 42.16-8). The whirling motion of the daimonic Iynges is conceived as a form of self-motion: the Iynges “which are thought paternally [*patrothen noeous*] also think themselves, since they are moved by unspeakable counsels [*boulais aphenktois*] so as to think,” (frag. 77).²⁵ To grasp this statement operatively, we must understand the state of being ‘paternally thought’ as *identical* to the state of being [147] ‘moved by unspeakable counsels’, and both as being identical to the whirling or helical motion itself.

The ‘counsels’ or directions according to which the Iynges are moved are not unspeakable as the result of some arbitrary prohibition; rather, they are unspeakable because it is impossible to express *in advance* the value or course of the swerve. Here Chaldean ‘ineffability’ and atomistic indeterminacy converge. Under the conditions of a system “in which the initial conditions determining various qualitatively distinct behaviors are not clearly separated but are, on the contrary, as close as one might wish,”

in order to predict deterministically the type of behavior the system will adopt, one would need *infinite* precision. It is of no use to increase the level of precision or

²⁴ On the *inyx* in relation to the *Oracles*, see Chap. VII in Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*; for the general use of this and similar instruments in ancient magic, see A. S. F. Gow, “*Iygx, Rhombos, Rhombus, Turbo*,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 54, Part 1 (1934), pp. 1-13.

²⁵ Trans. mod.

even to make it *tend* toward infinity; uncertainty always remains complete—it does not diminish as precision increases. That means that divine knowledge is no longer implied in human knowledge as its limit, as that toward which one might tend with increasing precision; it is something other, separated by a gap.²⁶

It is not a matter here, however, of some arcane ‘higher’ knowledge, but of the transition between knowledge as such and living volition. To be ‘paternally thought/moved’ is to be *self thought/moved*, for to be ‘paternally thought’ is to be an object of thought in a manner that transcends intellection itself; it is to be a unique, spontaneous and, in the physicist’s terms, “irreversible” individual. The *gap* representing such individuals in the intellectual system or economy is expressed in the *Oracles* by discontinuous motions like ‘leaping’ and ‘flashing’, especially as of lightning (e.g., frags. 1, 34, 35, 37, 42, 76, 87, 90, 147, 148, 190) and less often, by ‘abysses’ (e.g., frags. 112, 183, 184, but in particular frag. 18: “You who know the hypercosmic paternal abyss by perceiving it”).²⁷

I have elsewhere argued for the reciprocal implication of the ‘paternal’ mode of activity and metaphysical individuality in Proclus;²⁸ what we see in the *Oracles* may lie at the root of this peculiar doctrine, at least in the terms in which Proclus chooses to express it. Damascius emphasizes that the line drawn into a curve is ‘one’, possibly with the sense ‘unique’—a unique curving trajectory for *each* self-moving helical ‘fire’. Damascius makes

²⁶ Prigogine and Stengers, *op cit.*, 151f. Contrast this with Lewy, *The Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, who attributes to Hekate two *different* sorts of motion: “In the region of the stars ... the action of ‘ensouling’ produces regular motion, which in the absence of a contrary force bears the character of pure necessity,” while in the “hylic world”, “where Spirit is opposed to Matter ... the demonic satellites of the latter are active,” (p. 98). In my interpretation, ‘free’ motion is characteristic of Hekate’s activity both on the ‘higher’ and the ‘lower’ planes.

²⁷ Note also, with respect to the parallels I have drawn here between the *Oracles* and ancient atomism, that frag. 183, “the real is in the depth [*to d’atrekes en bathei esti*]” virtually quotes verbatim Democritus, frag. 117 (Diels), “for truth is in the depths [*en buthôî gar hê alêtheia*]”.

²⁸ See “The Intelligible Gods in the *Platonic Theology* of Proclus.”

special reference to the spiral or helix just before he cites frag. 63, explaining that (commenting on Plato, *Parmenides* 145b1-5) a ‘figure’ or ‘shape’ (*schêma*) is to be conceived in general as “that which is inscribed in an angle, even if it is not closed,” and hence “the spiral [*helix*] is a shape for us, as in theology,” the latter probably a reference to the *Oracles* (*In Parm.* II 100.22-101.2), since [148] frag. 146 describes the theophany of an unidentified deity as being accompanied by a light “rushing like a spiral [*rhoizaion helichthen*].” But earlier in the discussion Damascius refers to theology in a more theoretical sense, when treating the supra-intellectual character of shape, which he conceives as the “autocircumscription of a substance” (*tês ousias autoperigraphos*). Inasmuch as intellect, too, is self-circumscribing, for it converges upon itself, intellect possesses ‘shape’ and therefore shape is metaphysically prior to intellect. Accordingly, “the determination [*aphorismos*] of shapes is theological,” (ibid., p. 100.20-21), because in the Neoplatonic hierarchical ontology, the theological is prior to being (the ontological) and hence to intellect.²⁹ Shapes demonstrate their supra-intellectual character through, for example, the presence in them of irrational numbers and infinite quanta; but shape is theological for Damascius also, and indeed especially, insofar as shapes are the *self*-circumscription of substances, and thus share in the intrinsic selfhood of that which is prior to formal (universal, intellectual) being.

²⁹ The hypostasis of Being is functionally duplex insofar as it is passive with respect to the Gods, who are prior to it, active with respect to Intellect, which is posterior to it. In this regard it is not uncommon, since Being is the first genuine hypostasis—the One neither is, nor is one—to split Being into its divine and intellectual moments. Thus Proclus explains at *PT* III 21. 74f the equivocations by means of which “Plato himself and his most genuine disciples frequently call all [true] beings intellect,” while the henads or Gods “are frequently called intelligibles,” as the ultimate causes of intellectual structure, “and beings are called intelligible intellects,” as structures accessible to intellectual analysis. For more on the status of Being, see my “The Gods and Being in Proclus,” *Dionysius*, Vol. 26, 2008, pp. 93-114.

The soteriological framework of the *Chaldean Oracles*, however, urges us to augment the static reading with a dynamic one that emphasizes, not the ontological position of individuals, but their power to change their state, which begins, for the *Oracles*, from the very material ground of manifestation. “Primordial matter,” states frag. 173, “is starry and heavenly”; hence “if you extend your mind, illumined by fire, to the work of piety,” one may “save the flowing body” as well (frag. 128), while frag. 97 urges us to “boast of the harmony under which the mortal body exists,” and frag. 129 to “save also the mortal covering of bitter matter.” It is unnecessary to engage in the debates over whether Chaldean salvation amounts to saving the body from its infirmities, or a corporeal resurrection, or saving only the vehicle of the soul, and not the flesh; what matters is that whatever they do, the means of doing it lies in the *Oracles’* fluid-dynamic account of ideality, which establishes a common plane of intellectual and material process.

As a result of their inexpressible (self-)guidance, the *inynges* are essentially free themselves, but they can be a source of bondage in other things. Frag. 223 speaks of entities that are drawn “unwilling from the ether by means of unspeakable [*aporrêtois*] *inynges*,” and the presence of *inyx*-wheels in the hands of *erotes* in art of the classical and Hellenistic periods shows that these self-moving or ineffably guided entities are most readily perceived in passionate complexes with the power to *subvert* the will.³⁰ Such complexes are in effect *partial souls* themselves. Thus every soul must secure its own freedom in a turbulent cosmos full of binding and liberating forces, both of which have their origin in the elemental ‘freedom’ of the swerve-motion.³¹ [149]

³⁰ See Sarah Iles Johnston, “The Song of the *Iynx*: Magic and Rhetoric in *Pythian* 4,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 125 (1995), pp. 177-206.

³¹ Cf. the still unsurpassed account by Giordano Bruno in his 1588 essay *De Vinculis in genere* (“A General Account of Bonding”), trans. Richard J. Blackwell in *Cause, Principle*

With this consideration the perspective of our inquiry begins to shift, in effect, from the ‘torch’ of ensouling or vivification to the ‘torch’ of perfecting or virtue. The essence of virtue in the *Oracles* is, effectively, liberation, especially from binding forces like the “chthonian dogs” referred to in frag. 90, who “leap from the hollows of the earth” and “never show a true sign to mortals,” while frag. 91 speaks of a female “driver of dogs of the air, earth, and water,” perhaps meaning Hekate. These feral forces are probably the same as the “earthly beasts [*thêres chthonos*]” that frag. 157 warns can “occupy your vessel.” There should be nothing surprising in Hekate’s control over binding and liberating forces alike, for everything that lives does so by binding certain things to itself and separating itself from other things. There is hence nothing evil or vengeful about the actions of these ‘dogs’, who occupy a niche in a natural order in which souls unable to secure their integrity are subject to attack from forces seeking to bind their substance to their own. Indeed, it is beneficent that such forces should be under Hekate’s control, because she can always lead a soul out of whatever bondage it has acquired.

Frag. 125 states that the duplex transcendent sows in the worlds “lights which are set free”, and Proclus states in his fragmentary commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles* that “every life [*zôê*]” possesses “its own easily liberated [*euluton*] energy,” (*De phil. Chald.* 2). Understanding that the forms of bondage are many, what techniques for liberation do the *Oracles* impart? Frag. 124 speaks of “those who, by inhaling, thrust out [*exôstêres*] the soul”³² and hence “are free”. This simultaneous drawing in and pushing out recalls the centrifugal and centripetal motions around Hekate, and expresses the soul’s stabilizing or ‘centering’ itself in the cosmos. On the one hand, the soul draws ‘inspiration’, so to speak,

and Unity and Essays on Magic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 143-176.

³² Trans. mod.

from the “symbols” that “the Paternal Intellect has sown ... throughout the cosmos, (the Intellect) which thinks the intelligibles. And (these intelligibles) are called inexpressible beauties,” (frag. 108). The symbols sown by the Paternal Intellect, in accord with the nature of the ‘paternal’ plane of action, are significant *relative to each unique individual*; hence they act through the experience of beauty, the most subjective of perceptions, in this way illuminating a path specific to each soul. As Damascius explains in the discussion incorporating frag. 1 of the *Oracles*, the ground of intelligibility may not lie in an object’s presenting itself to the intellect “as an object of cognition [*gnôston*], but as an object of desire [*epheton*],” so that the intellect’s striving is fulfilled “not by knowledge [*gnôsis*] but by substance [*ousia*] and by the total and intelligible perfection,” (*De princ.* II 104. 20-23).

The striving for knowledge fulfills itself at last in the object of desire that perfects, not merely the mind, but the *whole* being, whether [150] we are speaking about the mind of a mortal creature or the ‘mind’ of the cosmos itself, that is, its own tendency to order and to higher states of complexity. For this reason Proclus augments the *Oracles’* concept of the “flower of the intellect” with that of the “flower of the whole soul” which serves to unite the individual with the One, that is, with their own absolute individuality, on the basis of the recovery of which, and only on this basis, is it possible to obtain direct experience of one’s patron or tutelary deity, according to the principle that like knows like: “as we apprehend intellect by becoming intellectually-formed [*noeideis*], so becoming unit-formed [*henoeideis*] we ascend to unity [*henosis*],” (*De phil. Chald.* 4). It is not a matter here of ‘uniformity’, but of *individuation*, nor of dissolving into the deity, but of authentic theophany, one-on-one. This is what it means to *apprehend by unity*, unique individual to unique individual. In this encounter the totality self-perceives, for the totality is comprised in the unique, since only an infinite determination is unrepeatable.

Proclus explains that in “celebrating divine things” the soul is perfected by “placing before and carrying to the Father the ineffable symbols of the Father, which the Father placed in the soul in the first progression of essence [*ousias*],” (*De phil. Chald.* 1; trans. T. M. Johnson). Individual souls, by completing their substance through striving for the things that are beautiful to them, return to the God (or Goddess) they worship something that has proceeded primordially from that God: “the Paternal Intellect does not receive the will [*thelein*] of <the soul> until <the soul> emerges from forgetfulness and speaks a word, remembering the pure, paternal token,” (frag. 109). This token is ‘paternal’ by virtue of its peculiarity to the individual in question; and by “remembering” it and its origin in the divine beauty, the individual is incorporated into the self-understanding of the God, and insofar as this is a moment in the existential individuality of the Gods themselves, the worshiper participates in the ‘paternal’ activity of the divine. Proclus explains that the “flower of the intellect”, though “intellectual ... is apprehended by the Paternal Intellect according to the unity [*hen*] in it,” (*De phil. Chald.* 4) for in the flower of intellect what the Gods recognize is not primarily intellectual content, but rather our very individuality expressed through it. This is why, as frag. 13 states, “nothing imperfect [*ateles*] runs forth from the Paternal Principle,” for on the plane of ‘paternal’ activity, there is no *telos*, no end separable even in principle from each individual who is ontologically an end in itself. In this regard, a Stoic pun on the name of Hekate may be instructive: ‘Hekate’ is so called *dia to hekastou pronoeisthai*, “on account of <her> foreknowledge of <or ‘providence’ for> each [*hekastos*].”³³

The duplex transcendent, on the other hand, involves self-reflection or self-objectivation, and thus is a “dyad” or double (Proclus, *In Crat.* 51.18-52.3). [151] Hence frag. 5 states that “the craftsman of the fiery cosmos” is “intellect <derived> from intellect

³³ *SVF* II 930.

[*nou nóos*].” In more abstract terms, Damascius, using Chaldean terminology to speak about Platonic concepts, calls the demiurge (i.e., the duplex transcendent) “twice the simplex” and the infra-intellectual processions of the Gods as “twice the duplex” (*In Parm.* II 132.4-5), because the act of self-reflection essential to demiurgic intelligence, as Proclus explains, quoting the *Oracles*, “has a double function: it both possesses the intelligibles in its mind and brings sense-perception to the worlds,” (frag. 8; *ibid.*, 51.29-30). The knowledge possessed in and through the duplex transcendent is *objective* knowledge in a very special sense, namely that in its awareness of possessing thought it *is* the very objectivity of its contents, which results, in a further evolution of the divine activity, in a squaring, so to speak, of the state of duplex transcendence into a mode of activity that is “twice the twice” and identical with *aisthêsis*, or sense-perception, the plane of activity of the encosmic divine processions. In similar fashion, frag. 25 states that “the Father thought these things and a mortal was brought to life by him,” that is, a mortal *qua* mortal, *ateles*, for its *telos* is thought separately from it. This progression of modes of intelligence, from the “partless, simple, and indivisible” simplex transcendence (frag. 152), to the objectifying self-analysis of duplex transcendence, which allows it to unfold from a dyad, to a triad (frags. 27-9), or a tetrad, or a hebdomad, or the unlimited multiplicity (i.e., infinite divisibility) inherent in sense-perception, and back again, is the cycle of manifestation in the *Oracles*.

I have spoken of Hekate’s torches, but another element of her traditional equipment seems to have been incorporated into the Chaldean system, namely her *keys*.³⁴ For Damascius says, regarding the intelligible intellect (or “all-perfect animal(ity)”, *zôion panteles*) of the Platonists and the third intelligible-intellective triad, the “perfective” (*telesiourgos*) plane of divine activity, that “the one and the other are celebrated as ‘keys’ by

³⁴ On Hekate as *kleidouchos*, or “keybearer”, see Johnston, *Hekate Soteira*, pp. 39-48.

the Gods themselves” (frag. 197; *In Parm.* II 99. 11-12), attribution simply to ‘the Gods’ being a common shorthand way of referring to a provenance from the *Oracles*. It is impossible to say just how Damascius arrives at such a precise identification between elements of the highly articulated Platonic system and the *Oracles*, but it would be prudent to assume that this precision means we are dealing with functions distinct from the simplex and duplex transcendency as such, though obviously related to them. These keys, I believe, insofar as we may understand them through their philosophical elaboration, are the *virtues* corresponding to the two fires. Virtue itself, we recall, emanates from Hekate’s left side (frag. 52), but it has a dual aspect, just as we could regard the centrifugal and centripetal motions as in effect two aspects of ensouling, which emanated from her right (frag. 51). [152]

The two primary Chaldean virtues, that is, those with a cosmogonic function, are *love* and *strength*. Frag. 39 explains that “after he thought his works, the self-generated Paternal Intellect sowed the bond of Love, heavy with fire, into all things ... in order that the All might continue to love for an infinite time and the things woven by the intellectual light of the Father might not collapse ... with this Love, the elements of the world remain on course.” The concern that things not “collapse” seems akin to what is said in frag. 68, that the ‘maker’ (*poiêtês*) fashioned things so that “the world might be manifest [*ekdêlos*] and not seem membrane-like [*humenôdês*].” At the same time, frag. 104 warns us not to “deepen the surface [*bathunês toupipedon*].” Plainly there are conflicting orientations at work, one which *deepens*—cf. frag. 183, “the real is in the depth [*en bathel*]”—where the other *flattens*. With the motion of deepening go the references to *extension* (various forms of *teinai*) as in frags. 1 and 128, which refer to “extending” the mind, an activity grounded in the duplex transcendent, for frag. 12 states that “the Monad is extensible [*tanaê*] which generates duality.” In extending itself the mind generally “measures” things (frag. 1), that is,

it relates things to one another and associates them in the understanding, thus ‘deepening’ the world through its ‘supports’—for “every world possesses unbending intellectual supports” (frag. 79)—but when the mind is extended to the simplex transcendent it has the effect instead of *flattening* these supports and opening up ‘channels’ of turbulence (association?) across the planes that are ordinarily distinct. In this way we “perceive the shape of light which has been stretched forth [*protatheisan*],” (frag. 145) in the world’s “inflation” (frag. 57).

But this ‘flattening’ is not like seeing through an illusion; instead, it is what prevents the ‘paternal’ works from ‘collapse’, because it liberates the creative fire which is in the control of all self-moving beings. Thus frag. 42 speaks of Love “which leapt first from Intellect, clothing his fire with the bonded [*sundesmion*] fire in order to mingle the fontal cups [*pêgaios kratêras*] while offering the flower of his fire.”³⁵ These “fontal cups” or “source kraters” are pre-intellectual forms “mingled” or rearranged in the “bonds” created by worldly entities when they take up their agency in recognition of one another. Hence the soul is said to be filled “with a deep love [*erôti bathei*]” (frag. 43), because in forming bonds it creates new ‘depths’, which are at once worldly supports and counterworldly abysses. This movement of *eros* is, I believe, the “thrusting forth” of the soul that frag. 124 described as simultaneous with ‘inhaling’ or ‘inspiration’ in those who are “free”.

This is the Chaldean virtue of love; as for the other ‘key’, the virtue of strength, we read in frag. 1 that the object of the ‘flower of mind’ is the *dunamis alkês*, which Majercik translates, rather redundantly, as “the power of strength”. To avoid the redundancy, we can read *dunamis* [153] instead as ‘potentiality’ or ‘possibility’, and understand the simplex transcendent as the precondition for that which the *Oracles* term ‘strength’. Frags. 49 speaks

³⁵ Trans. mod.

of “the strength of the Father” from which “the flower of the mind” is “plucked” so as to keep the Sources and Principles (*pégai* and *archai*) “whirling about in ceaseless motion”; frag. 82 explains that this strength infuses the ‘Connectors’, *sunocheis*, Gods presiding over the establishment of the transverse planes or ‘channels’ I have characterized as being produced through the ‘flattening’ motion. ‘Strength’, then, is what maintains motion and keeps the diverse planes of action in communication, and it is peculiarly associated with the *possession of a symbol* or revelation. Frag. 118 explains that “some apprehend the symbol of light through instruction” while others are “fructified with their own strength while they are sleeping,” that is, through receiving dream symbols; frag. 117, likewise, speaks of those “saved through their own strength,” who are characterized by Proclus as the more “vigorous” and “inventive” natures (*In Alc.* 82/177), while frag. 2 urges one “arrayed from head to toe with a clamorous light, armed in mind and soul with a triple-barbed strength” to “go toward the empyrean channels ... with concentration,” by “casting into your imagination the entire token of the triad.” The “triad” in question is none other than the “triple-barbed strength” granted by possession of a “token”, *sunthêma*, a personal, we might even say *idiosyncratic* revelation that arms the theurgist for the cosmogonic work demanded of them. It is a triad because, as frag. 27 states, “in every world shines a triad, ruled by a Monad,” for this is the elemental structure of manifestation, the triangle being the minimum *enclosed* figure, as opposed to the spiral, the minimal ‘open’ figure in the Chaldean system according to Damascius. Armed with this token, the theurgist is charged, literally, with reinventing the world.

Conclusion

When we reach out with the flower of mind and recognize the uniqueness of things, the Gods reach back to us through the flower of the entire soul, which is “the whole essence of the center and of all the diverse powers around it,” the unity “upon which all the psychical powers converge,” which “alone naturally leads us to that which is beyond all beings,” (*De phil. Chald.* 4). This systole and diastole of enlightenment is Hekate’s work, for she performs in and from herself the centrifugal motion of vivification, the primary procession from the simplex transcendent, which is freedom with the power to bind, and the centripetal motion of perfection, the return of the ‘bound’ intellectual and symbolic structure of the cosmos to its free and erotic origins, [154] which is liberation through the duplex transcendent. By virtue of these reciprocal motions, Hekate is responsible for the soul’s dynamical centering on the ‘paternal’ plane of primary, or individuating, activity.

Excursus: Hekate in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

The activities of the Chaldean Hekate can be understood as an intensive meditation upon and elaboration of Hekate’s actions in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which fall into three stages:

1. (*HHD* 22-5): Hekate, described as “Perses’ daughter still innocent of heart [*atala phroneousa*],” hears Persephone’s cries “from her cave [*ex antrou*],” as does Helios.

Here, Hekate is quiescent, but responds to the “voice” of the soul descending to embodiment, to which compare the “lifegiving whir” or “hum” (*rhoizêma*) with which Damascius associates Hekate (*In Parm.* III 42.18).

2. (51-61): On the tenth day [*dekate*] of her search, Demeter meets Hekate “with a light in her hand [*selas en cheiressin echousa*]” and tells her what she heard. Demeter runs with her “with burning torches in her hands” to Helios, who saw the events.

The numbers *ten* and *four* (the ten being the expansion of four, 1+2+3+4) are spoken of as “key-bearers”, *kleidouchoi* in the pseudo-Iamblichean *Theology of Arithmetic* (28.13, 81.14 de Falco), this being an epithet of Hekate’s as well. The text refers first to Hekate’s single light at first, but then to Demeter’s twin torches, as they run back to Helios to retrieve the vision. Thus, at the furthest limits of the centrifugal motion, the centripetal motion of “virtue” (keys) comes into play.

3. (438-440): Hekate, described as at 25 as “of the glossy veil [*liparokrêdemnos*]”, embraces Persephone on her return, and “the mistress [*anassa*]” becomes Persephone’s attendant and servant [*propolos kai opaôn*].

At the beginning and the end of the sequence, Hekate is veiled, as when the world is rendered flat or “membrane-like [*humenôdês*]” (frag. 68). In embracing Persephone on her return, that is, the soul upon its liberation from self-imposed bondage, Hekate is acknowledged as Mistress, and assumes a role of guide and helper to the soul in its future transformations (“ascents” and “descents”).