

IAMBlichus AND PLUTARCH ON INSPIRATION*

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Abstract

This article argues that the works of Plutarch of Chaeronea (c. 45–120 AD) exerted a significant influence on Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 245–325 AD), with specific reference to his theory of prophetic inspiration. This analysis is expressly concerned with the works that Plutarch and Iamblichus devoted to divination: the Delphic dialogues and *De mysteriis*, respectively. Its objective is to show that Iamblichus was influenced by Plutarch's works, and to understand whether he tried to emend the doctrines and arguments of his predecessor in his attempt to adapt Platonic doctrines to his own original views on theology and ritual. Exploring the connections between Plutarch and Iamblichus will also provide the opportunity to delve into the conceptual ruptures and continuities characterising the history of Platonism during the first centuries AD.

Key Words

Iamblichus, Plutarch, inspiration, divination, Delphi.



I. Plutarch and Iamblichus in Dialogue

The heart of Iamblichus's account of oracular divination is set out in the third book of *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (or *Response to Porphyry*), a work responding to questions

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raised in Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*.¹ Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* is a cornerstone in Neoplatonic philosophy, and laid down some of the foundations of theurgy, a ritual practice that began in late antiquity, but was strongly influenced by ancient divinatory theories.² While writing his reply to Porphyry, Iamblichus might have been inspired by his precursor Plutarch, who also served as a priest at an oracular temple, and was interested in the art of divination, including its functioning and theoretical foundations.³ Plutarch's Delphic dialogues are explicitly devoted to oracular divination, and have always attracted considerable scholarly attention. They have been variously interpreted as a repository of Plutarch's own reflections on Delphic mantic, a faithful account of Delphic ritual, as reliable testimony for the broader socio-historical context in which the shrine was operating in the first centuries AD, and as an extensive repertoire of ancient views on prophecy. Iamblichus, who shared Plutarch's fascination with divination, could have taken inspiration from the writings of his fellow Platonist, and re-used them, whether with approval or otherwise.

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- ¹ For an accurate analysis of the alleged epistolary exchange between Porphyry and Iamblichus, including its Egyptian references and background, see: EMMA C. CLARKE, JOHN M. DILLON, JACKSON P. HERSHBELL, *Iamblichus: De mysteriis. Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, Society of Biblical literature, Atlanta 2003 (Writings from the Greco-Roman World, 4), p. xxvi–xlvi. The remarkable *Communication* by the Egyptologist Elsa Oréal, in SAFFREY, HENRI DOMINIQUE, ALAIN-PHILIPPE SEGONDS (eds.), *Porphyre. Lettre à Anébon l'Égyptien. Texte établi, traduit et commenté*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2012 (Collection des universités de France Série grecque - Collection Budé 492), p. xxxii–xxxviii is also extremely informative. The other main reference version of *De mysteriis* is: HENRI DOMINIQUE SAFFREY, ALAIN-PHILIPPE SEGONDS, ADRIEN LECERF, *Jamblique, Réponse à Porphyre (De mysteriis). Texte établi, traduit et annoté*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2013 (Collection des universités de France Série grecque - Collection Budé 496).
- ² Two recent studies have greatly advanced our understanding of the phenomenon of theurgy: ILLINCA TANASEANU-DÖBLER, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, Göttingen 2013 (Beiträge zur europäischen Religionsgeschichte, 1), and CRYSTAL ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism. Oracles of the Gods*, Ashgate, Farnham–Burlington 2014 (Ashgate Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity). The former explores late ancient theurgy and its historical development, while the latter proves the intersections between theurgy and divination.
- ³ Iamblichus as an historical figure and his role as a 'philosopher priest' are discussed in POLYMNIA ATHANASSIADI's recent study, « A Global Response to Crisis: Iamblichus' Religious Programme », in CHRISTOPH RIEDWEG (ed.), *PHILOSOPHIA in der Konkurrenz von Schulen, Wissenschaften und Religionen: Zur Pluralisierung des Philosophiebegriffs in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2017 (Philosophie der Antike, 34), p. 257–290. Evidence for Plutarch's employment as a priest in the Delphic sanctuary is provided by ANGELO CASANOVA, among others, in « Plutarch as Apollo's Priest at Delphi », in LAUTARO ROIG LANZILLOTTA, ISRAEL MUÑOZ GALLARTE (eds.), *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity*, Brill, Leiden 2012 (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition, 14), p. 151–157. FRANÇOISE FRAZIER offers a wonderful depiction of the sacred place of Delphi in « Delphes dans les 'Dialogues Pythiques' de Plutarque: un 'lieu inspiré' », in JEAN-MARC LUCE (ed.), *Delphes et la littérature d'Homère à nos jours*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2018, p. 209–233.

This article will therefore address the following questions: on what grounds can we assert that Iamblichus had Plutarch in mind while writing his own work on divination? What principles guided Iamblichus's approach to Plutarch's theories, and what were his conceptual objectives? Finally, what does the connection between Plutarch and Iamblichus indicate about the broader development of late-ancient Platonism?

In order to answer these questions, this article will be divided into two main parts. Sections II–V will explore points of contact between Iamblichus and Plutarch's theories of divination, concerning in particular the interaction between the material and transcendent principles in inspiration, the notion of mixture, the role of *daimones*, and the definition of the human medium from an anthropological viewpoint. Sections VI–VII will then focus on the wider metaphysical and cosmological conceptions implied by Iamblichus and Plutarch's divinatory theories, within the framework of the development of the Platonic tradition in antiquity.

The similarities between Iamblichus and Plutarch have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Carine Van Liefferinge has shed light on some conceptual parallelisms between these two philosophers,⁴ in light of their common aim of justifying the decline of the oracular activity during their respective life spans by advocating for a substantial harmony between philosophical analysis and religious beliefs.⁵ Crystal Addey has shown that Plutarch and Iamblichus resorted to strikingly similar aetiological models founded on multiple levels of causation in order to explain divinatory phenomena,⁶ while Aude Busine has demonstrated that Iamblichus's account of Delphic prophecy can be considered an 'extension' of Plutarch's.⁷ Anne Sheppard has identified the existence of a specific line of tradition associating the human imaginative faculty of *phantasia* (φαντασία) with prophecy, which has its origins in the exegesis of Plato's *Timaeus* 70e. Sheppard has shown that this reading, although seldom endorsed by the Neoplatonists, was nevertheless adopted by Plutarch and Iamblichus, both of whom resorted to

⁴ CARINE VAN LIEFFERINGE, « Jamblique, lecteur de Plutarque? », *Revue de philosophie ancienne*, 16 (1998), p. 37–53, explains that the commonalities between Plutarch and Iamblichus, rather than proving some direct influence of the former on the latter, were due to some persistent threads within the Platonic tradition. The common features that she highlights include the images of the theurgist in Iamblichus, and the 'divine man' in Plutarch (p. 45 and 51), and their common adherence to dualistic theories of Persian, Barbarian and Oriental provenance (p. 46–47). She also explains that Iamblichus's idea of « prodiges dans les statues » (p. 48–50) was grounded in his new approach to transcendence and materiality.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37–38.

⁶ ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy*, p. 216.

⁷ As Busine explains, Iamblichus's prophetic theory « se situe dans le prolongement de l'exégèse plutarquienne sur le *pneûma* delphique » (AUDE BUSINE, « La consultation de l'oracle d'Apollon dans le discours de Jamblique », *Kernos*, 15 (2002), 195).

phantasia to explain the contact between the human and the divine in prophetic inspiration.⁸

Moreover, there are reasons to believe that Iamblichus was at least partially familiar with the works of Plutarch, and could have read them either in their original form or in *compendia*.⁹ Iamblichus's *De anima*, in particular, contains several references to Platonists of earlier generations (generically referred to as οἱ Πλατωνικοί). He repeatedly blames them for their controversies on the topic of the composition of the world-soul (*psychogonia*), a major problem for Middle- and Neo-Platonists, who often advanced divergent exegeses of the section of Plato's *Timaeus* that describes the formation of the cosmic soul.¹⁰ This 'retrospective' approach to philosophy manifests the need, strongly felt by Iamblichus and all later Platonists, constantly to reflect on the philosophical identity and tradition of their school. This process of constant self-reflection and renovation is grounded in the exegesis Plato's works, and the desire to recover their authentic meaning.

⁸ Anne Sheppard has pointed out that in the treatise *De insomniis*, Synesius of Cyrene exhibits the same belief in the possibility for imagination to partake in prophetic inspiration (ANNE SHEPPARD, « *Phantasia* and Inspiration in Neoplatonism », in MARK LOYAL [ed.], *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition. Essays Presented to John Whittaker*, Routledge, London 1997, p. 201–210, here p. 204–206 and 208).

⁹ The general introduction to the French edition of Plutarch's *Moralia* provides an overview of the textual transmission of his writings in antiquity. Cf. ROBERT FLACELIÈRE, JEAN IRIGOIN, *Plutarque, Oeuvres morales. Tome I, 1re partie: Introduction générale, Traités 1-2*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1987, (Collection des universités de France Série grecque - Collection Budé, 312), p. CCXXVII–CCXXXVII. According to this study, Plutarch's moral essays circulated widely after Plutarch's death, as attested by Aulus Gellius, Clement of Alexandria, Athenaeus, Porphyry, and other later authors (p. CCXXVIII). Porphyry, who may have been a teacher of Iamblichus, had an extensive, and presumably direct knowledge of Plutarch's oeuvre. On this topic, see also ELSA G. SIMONETTI, « Plutarch and the Neoplatonists: Porphyry, Proklos, Simplicios », in KATERINA OIKONOMOPOULOU, SOPHIA XENOPHONTOS (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plutarch*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2019, (Brill's Companions to Classical Reception, 20), p. 136–153. Sopater of Apamea (or Alexandria), who was probably the same Sopater whom Eunapius describes as a very gifted pupil of Iamblichus, composed a miscellany of *Various Extracts* (Ἐκλογαὶ Διάφοροι) in twelve books, which was partly summarised in Photius's *Bibliotheca* (cf. Eun. VS 5.1; 6.2). We should remember that there are a handful of letters preserved under the name of Iamblichus directed to a man named Sopater, who may be the same pupil of Iamblichus, or one of his sons or grandsons. There is also evidence of a local dignitary in Apamea named 'Sopater'. On this issue, see JOHN M. DILLON, WOLFGANG POLLEICHTNER, *Iamblichus of Chalcis: The Letters, Edited with a Translation and Commentary*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2009 (Writings from the Greco-Roman World, 19), p. xvi and 85. Sopater's collection of *excerpta* included various previous authors, such as Apollodorus, Athenaeus, Favorinus, and Plutarch himself. Several of Plutarch's writings were epitomised and assembled in Sopater's *Extracts*, occupying books eight to eleven. Cf. Phot. *Bibl.* 161.103a–105a; FRANCIS H. SANDBACH, *Plutarch. Moralia, Volume XV: Fragments*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1969 (Loeb Classical Library, 429), p. 2; FLACELIÈRE-IRIGOIN, *Plutarque*, p. CCXXIX–CCXXXI. Several *Moralia* that are now lost were quoted in this work, including Περὶ τε φύσεως καὶ πόνων, Περὶ δυσωπίας λόγου, Περὶ εὐθυμίας, Περὶ πλούτου.

¹⁰ Plat. *Tim.* 35a–b (cf. Plut. *De an. procr.* 1012B).

Iamblichus's *De anima* also includes two direct references to Plutarch, indicating that he may have been familiar with some of his, perhaps even some of those that are now lost.¹¹ This hypothesis becomes all the more likely, however, when one compares Iamblichus's and Plutarch's accounts of prophecy.

II. *Immaterial Principles and Material Changes*

While comparing Iamblichus's and Plutarch's discussions of prophecy, the feature that first stands out is their common apologetic intention. Both thinkers are committed to defending the right views on divination, and distinguishing divination from what it is *not*. Their objective is to defend the divine character of divination against wrong beliefs and erroneous interpretations, which could easily degenerate into dangerous and impious theological assumptions. However, their methodologies are completely antithetical.

Iamblichus, at the outset of the third book of *De mysteriis* – the one specifically devoted to divination – reports Porphyry's question as to what happens in the act of prognosis (πρόγνωσις).¹² He promptly explains that this question has no answer, since prediction is not a human endeavour. Divination is divine and supersensible, ungenerated and eternal (θεῖον, ὑπερφυές, ἀγέννητον, αἰδίων αὐτοφυῶς).¹³ Any study of divination requires looking straight at its essence, origin and principle (ἀρχὴ τῆς μαντικῆς).¹⁴ In fact, the ontological status of divination makes it impossible for us to examine its merely phenomenal appearance (τὸ γινόμενον), insofar as its essence is extraneous to things existing in nature and their changes (φύσις, φυσικὴ μεταβολή).¹⁵ This first passage is already indicative of Iamblichus's methodology of addressing the ontological and metaphysical foundations of *mantikê*, while backgrounding its contingent-material aspects. Conversely, Plutarch seems to focus primarily on the sensible dynamics of divination, and only eventually to discuss its wider cosmological and

¹¹ In the first *locus*, Plutarch and Atticus are described as philosophers who postulated a pre-cosmic disorder harmonised by a superior intellective power, contrary to Numenius, Porphyry, and Plotinus (cf. Iamb. *De an.* 23.1–11). In the second *locus*, taken from the eschatological section of *De anima*, Iamblichus relays that Plutarch, like Porphyry and other unspecified 'ancient thinkers' (οἱ παλαιότεροι), maintained that the human soul remains 'in its original hierarchical level' (ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκείας τάξεως) – an unclear expression, due in part to a textual *lacuna* that mutilates the passage (Iamb. *De an.* 47.1–2). Since Plutarch never presents this theory in any of his extant writings, John Dillon and John Finamore have hypothesised that Iamblichus might here be referring to a lost psychological work by Plutarch. See JOHN FINAMORE, JOHN DILLON, *Iamblichus' De anima. Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Leiden–Boston, Brill 2002 (Philosophia Antiqua, 92), p. 209.

¹² Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.1: τί τὸ γινόμενόν ἐστιν ἐν τῇ τοῦ μέλλοντος προγνώσει.

¹³ Ibid., 3.1.10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.1.14–15.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.1.6–8; see also 3.27.40.

theological framework. In other words, Iamblichus adopts a top-down, deductive approach, whereas Plutarch adopts a bottom-up, inductive one.

Porphyry's epistle calls Iamblichus's attention to the material elements (inferior causes) of the prophetic act. Porphyry asks why prophets in Claros, Delphi, and Didyma are inspired in three different ways: in the first temple by water, in the second by the effluxes of a chasm, in the third by hydric vapours.¹⁶ This gives Iamblichus the opportunity to explain that divination comes from the gods (ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν θεῶν), and is realised through the first causes (πρωτουργοὶ αἰτίαι), while secondary causal factors (δευτερουργοὶ) have a merely incidental effect.¹⁷ All the concrete tokens in the temple, as well as the ritual apparatus, are far less important than the primary cause, the god: the former are only preparatory elements that make inspiration possible.¹⁸ This idea follows from a theological system in which an immutable, sublime, and absolutely transcendent god never comes in touch with contingency.¹⁹

Iamblichus soon presents the *pars destruens* of his argument, or, as he says, the 'antidote' (ἀλεξιφάρμακον) to possible fallacies,²⁰ which consists in a list of factors that *cannot* be considered principles (ἀρχαί) of divination. These are: bodies (σώματα) and their passions (παθήματα), nature (φύσις) and powers related to nature (περὶ τὴν φύσιν δυνάμεις), human preparation (ἀνθρώπινη παρασκευή), customs (περὶ αὐτὴν ἔξεις), and art (τέχνη).²¹ A few lines later he reiterates that the activity of divination cannot be connected to bodily movements, mutable passions, and everything pertaining to nature, life, and change.²²

It cannot be mere coincidence that Plutarch's views on divination are founded on the exact same factors that Iamblichus rejects, and expressed in strikingly similar terms. Lamprias, the narrator and one of the main characters in Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum*, states that divination is founded on the disposition of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.11.4–8.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.1.40.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.11.63–66: ἕτερος ὢν καὶ τοῦ πυρός καὶ τοῦ πνεύματος καὶ τῆς ἰδίας ἕδρας καὶ πάσης τῆς περὶ τὸν τόπον φυσικῆς καὶ ἱερᾶς φαινομένης κατασκευῆς.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.13.40–44. On the hierarchy of beings in Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists, see ADRIEN LECERF, « L'évolution du concept de principe dans le premier néoplatonisme. Un bref parcours », in MARC-ANTOINE GAVRAY, ALEXANDRA MICHALEWSKI (eds.), *Les principes cosmologiques du platonisme: Origines, influences et systématisation*, Brepols, Turnhout 2017, p. 187–223. See especially p. 222, where the author discusses Iamblichus's metaphysics, and says, « les causes deviennent infiniment supérieures aux effets, elles conservent par rapport à eux un surplomb absolu, irréductible ».

²⁰ As emphasised by SAFFREY, SEGONDS, AND LECERF, *Jamblique*, p. 275, n. 5 to p. 75, ἀλεξιφάρμακον is a technical medical term that refers to 'antidote, contre poison'.

²¹ Ibid., 3.1.15.

²² Ibid., 3.1.32–34: κινήσεις σωμάτων ἢ παθῶν μεταβολὰς ἢ γενέσεις τινὰς ἐτέρας ἢ ζωῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐνεργείας ἢ λόγους ἐμψύχους ἢ φυσικοῦς.

human body (διάθεσις τοῦ σώματος) and the irrationality of the faculty responsible for divinatory activity (τὸ μαντικόν), described as ‘receptive to passions’ (δεκτικόν [...] πάθει).²³ Furthermore, Theon, a generally reliable and sensible character in Plutarch’s *De Pythiae oraculis*, asserts that the divinatory process depends on individual character (ἕξις), powers (δυνάμεις), abilities (τέχνη), and nature (φύσις).²⁴

Iamblichus then defines the preconditions that make the Pythia ready to receive prophetic inspiration, and become completely possessed by the god (ὅλη γίνεται τοῦ θεοῦ). She might either sit in the temple, or be encircled by the fiery (πυρῶδες) divine spirit (θεῖον πνεῦμα) that comes out of the chasm in Delphi. At that point, a ray (ἀκτίς) of divine fire (τοῦ θεοῦ πυρός) shines upon her, and she surrenders to the divine force of the *pneûma*. A stable harmony (expressed with the verb συν-ἀρμόζομαι) is *regularly* established between the Pythia and the *unchanging* divine prophetic power (σταθερὰ μαντική δύναμις).²⁵ The idea that some sort of divine spirit (the *pneûma*) capable of engendering prophetic effects springs out in Delphi and makes the Pythia able to foretell the future is present in Plutarch and other ancient authors.²⁶ However, the idea that the effluences of the prophetic *pneûma* are always constant and unchanged is a Iamblichean innovation. Moreover, contrary to Plutarch Iamblichus does not seem to believe that an irrational-chaotic psychophysical state of the Pythia might interfere with the prophetic act, because every single time she sits in the temple, she is in the right condition to prophesy. In other words, the regular character of the *pneûma* is

²³ Plut. *De def. or.* 432D; see also Iamb. *De myst.* 3.25.25.

²⁴ Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 404E. One should always keep in mind that *De defectu oraculorum* and *De Pythiae oraculis* are two *dialogues*, and therefore it is always necessary to consider a given concept in light of the character who expresses it. Plutarch does not have an official representative or mouthpiece; nevertheless, the views of Lamprias in *De defectu* and Theon in *De Pythiae* seem to be the closest to Plutarch’s own ideas. For an analysis of these dialogues in light of what they can tell us about Plutarch’s own philosophical reflection, see ELSA G. SIMONETTI, *A Perfect Medium? Oracular Divination in the Thought of Plutarch*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2017 (Plutarchea Hypomnemata).

²⁵ Cf. Iamb. *De myst.* 3.11.50–56. As Aude Busine has demonstrated, the expression used by Iamblichus to describe the action whereby the *pneûma* envelops the Pythia in a round bound of fire: ἀθρόον καὶ πολὺ τὸ ἀναφερόμενον ἀπὸ τοῦ στομίου πῦρ κύκλῳ πανταχόθεν αὐτὴν περιέχῃ, directly recalls the terminology employed in Neoplatonic cosmological accounts (BUSINE, « La consultation », p. 195).

²⁶ Cicero also attests to the presence of a spirit (*vis terrae, divinus afflatus*) in Delphi, responsible for prophetic inspiration, and subject to constant modifications in intensity (Cic. *De div.* 1.38).

combined with the always favourable condition of the Pythia, and a perfect harmony is *always* established between them.²⁷

The fact that the Delphic *pneûma* is defined as an essentially infallible inspiration tool gives the impression that Iamblichus is literally emending the words of his predecessor: Plutarch founded his interpretation of divination precisely on the notion of the changeability of the *pneûma*, which he defined subject to continuous mutations exactly like every other physical element. The inherent changeability of the *pneûma*'s effluences was so crucial an element for Plutarch that he used it to justify the striking decline of oracular production throughout Greece at the dramatic time of *De defectu oraculorum*.²⁸ According to Plutarch, the encounter between the wavering pneumatic efflux in Delphi and the soul of the Pythia, herself agitated by dangerous fluctuations and irrational disturbances,²⁹ is bound to have unpredictable and even lethal effects, as attested by the well-known episode of the death of the prophetess in *De defectu oraculorum*.³⁰ The Chaeronean believes that the harmony between the variable substance of the *pneûma* and the capricious, inconstant nature of the Pythia's soul cannot be established once and for all. Rather, this is a purely contingent and episodic phenomenon, a coincidence created by the encounter between the temporary state of the Pythia and that of the pneumatic force.³¹

Plutarch describes the notion of *enthousiasmos* as a *change* (μεταβολή) arising from a proper temperament and disposition of the body (κρᾶσις καὶ διάθεσις τοῦ σώματος).³² Iamblichus literally repeats and disproves all of these terms and concepts.³³ In *De mysteriis*, he insists that matter and its changes are opposed to what is divine, and contrary to divine inspiration itself. He reiterates that divine inspiration cannot be associated with any physical or emotional changes (κινήσεις σωμάτων ἢ παθῶν μεταβολάς) on multiple occasions.³⁴ This ontological

²⁷ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.11.50–67. See especially the use of the adverbs ὅταν - τότε. It is important to note that in *De myst.* 3.7 Iamblichus also declares that divination becomes mendacious, and inspiration loses its truthfulness and divine character, when it is contaminated by the damaging influence of material elements (Iamb. *De myst.* 3.7.27–31). This predicament does not seem to apply to Delphic oracular divination, which takes place under the aegis of the god Apollo, and where proper rites and omens are undertaken prior to beginning oracular consultation.

²⁸ For the widespread *topos* of the 'decline of oracles', see the extremely informative MARCO FRENSCHKOWSKI, *Offenbarung und Epiphanie. Band 1: Grundlagen des spätantiken und frühchristlichen Offenbarungsglaubens*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1995 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2/79), p. 15–106.

²⁹ Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 404E7–9: ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐν σάλῳ † ψαύουσιν [αὐτήν] καὶ συμπλεκόμενῃ τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ κινήμασι καὶ πάθεσιν ἐπιταράττουσιν αὐτήν.

³⁰ Plut. *De def. or.* 438A–C.

³¹ Cf. SIMONETTI, *A Perfect Medium?*, esp. p. 103–105.

³² Plut. *De def. or.* 432D.

³³ *Ibid.*, 437A: τὴν κίνησιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν τρόμον.

³⁴ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.33.

opposition is connected to Iamblichus's aetiological account: since inferior-material levels of causation cannot affect superior ones, contingent circumstances cannot cause any change (αἰτίαν τῆς θείας παραλλάξεως) on the superior, divine level.³⁵ Moreover, since the divine is absolutely transcendent (ἐξηρημένον), unmixed (ἄμικτον), and unchangeable (ἀμετάβλητον), it cannot be mingled with anything else, including the soul, and it cannot be mixed as an ingredient in a compound.³⁶

III. *The Notion of Mixture and the Role of Daimones*

Mixture (μῖξις, κρᾶσις) is a key element in Plutarch's theory of divination, so it is surprising to note the vehemence with which Iamblichus rejects this concept while discussing prophetic inspiration. The fact that both authors rely on the notion of 'mixture' for their explanations – Plutarch with approval and Iamblichus with firm disapproval – makes this concept a crucial touchstone for evaluating the different roles that Plutarch and Iamblichus ascribe to the inferior-material and superior-spiritual factors in divination, as well as the wider theoretical implications of their respective choices.

The notion of mixture lies at the very heart of the Chaeronean's account of prophecy, and is central to his scientific theory of nature at large, as is evident in his explanations of various earthly phenomena.³⁷ The most relevant instances of the concept of 'mixture' in Plutarch's discussions of oracular divination are the following: the special mixture (κρᾶσις) established between the *pneûma* and the soul;³⁸ the apt mixture and disposition (κρᾶσις καὶ διάθεσις) of the Pythia's body, a necessary precondition for inspiration;³⁹ the fitting mixture (κρᾶσις οἰκεία) arising in bodies at the moment of death, which gives prophetic powers to the moribund;⁴⁰ the mixture or combination (μειξίς) of two distinct movements (κινήσεις) that constitute inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός); the mixture between the thoughts of the god (νοήσεις μεμιγμένας) and the mortal body and soul of the Pythia, through which the former are disclosed to humans.⁴¹

All these occurrences clash with Iamblichus's convictions about *mîxis* and *krâsis*, which he excludes from prophecy. Iamblichus insists vehemently that divination

³⁵ Ibid., 3.8.19–20.

³⁶ Ibid., 3.21.13–14.

³⁷ See e.g. Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 395B and 395C, where the concept of κρᾶσις is used to explain the phenomenon of the 'blue patina' covering the bronze artefacts in Delphi (see also *De def. or.* 433A–B).

³⁸ Plut. *De def. or.* 432D–E.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 432C.

⁴¹ Cf. Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 404E–F.

has nothing to do with physical forces and mixtures (σωματικαῖς δυνάμεσιν ἢ κράσεσι),⁴² and that its origin *a fortiori* cannot be ascribed to anything human or contingent, since inferior forces of causality cannot affect superior ones.⁴³ Iamblichus adheres to a literal and straightforward interpretation of Diotima's assertion that 'god does not mix with human' (θεὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπῳ οὐ μίγνυται),⁴⁴ upon which he founds his dualistic cosmological and metaphysical account. Like other Neoplatonists, Iamblichus explains human-divine interactions in light of the notion of participation, rather than mixture. Human beings 'participate' in god's power when they are illuminated.

Iamblichus states that the principle (ἀρχή), or cause (αἰτία, αἴτιον) of divination lies in neither physical variables like heat, cold, moisture (θερμὸν καὶ ψυχρὸν καὶ ὑγρὸν), nor their mixture (μίξις, κρᾶσις).⁴⁵ In Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum*, these same factors are integrated within Lamprias's 'plausible and rational' explanation of the dynamics of inspiration. Here, physical variables such as warmth (θερμότης, or the adjectives ἔνθερμος and πυρώδης), dryness (ξηρότης), moisture (ὑγρότης), and chill (περίψυξις) qualify the encounter between the *pneûma* and the priestess' soul.⁴⁶

An even more direct reference to Plutarch in Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* concerns the divinatory virtues of the melancholic person (μελαγχολικός). Plutarch indicates that the peculiar bodily mixture (κρᾶσις τοῦ σώματος) characterising the melancholic is the cause (αἰτία) of her prophetic dreams.⁴⁷ Iamblichus deals with the same problem, but argues against Plutarch's position and seems to be literally emending the view of his predecessor: the prophetic dreams experienced by melancholic people are not caused by their bodily *krâsis*, he states, since individual mixtures or temperaments (κράσεις) play no role in divination, even with regard to the specific case of the melancholic person.⁴⁸

Aristotle offers a well-known account of the character of the melancholic person (μελαγχολικός) in *De divinatione per somnum*.⁴⁹ This topic must have been of

⁴² Iamb. *De myst.* 3.10.8.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.8.15–20.

⁴⁴ Plat. *Symp.* 203a.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.1.30.

⁴⁶ Plut. *De def. or.* 432E–433B. For an interesting analysis of these corporeal elements in the context of another work of Plutarch, see AURELIO PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, « Plutarch and Transgressions of Nature: Stylistic Analysis of *De facie in orbe lunae* 926C–D », in MICHIEL MEEUSEN, LUC VAN DER STOCKT (eds.), *Natural Spectaculars: Aspects of Plutarch's Philosophy of Nature*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2015 (*Plutarchea Hypomnemata*), p. 215–226.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 437F.

⁴⁸ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.8.8.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aristot. *De div. per somn.* 463b16. It is interesting to note that in SAFFREY, SEGONDS, LECERF, *Jamblique*, p. 276, n. 2 to p. 7, the authors clarify that « Le point de vue d'Aristote est purement scientifique et non pas religieux ».

interest to the Peripatetics, since treatment of the psychological category and conditions of melancholia is also found in the pseudo Aristotelian *Problems*.⁵⁰ Although these passages provide the common conceptual background to Plutarch's and Iamblichus's discussions of the character, features, and divinatory abilities of the melancholic, (along with those of other ancient authors),⁵¹ what is at stake here is the specific connection between the *krâsis* of the melancholics and their predictive capacities. While Plutarch sees a link between the psycho-physical condition of melancholic persons and their prophetic skills, Iamblichus literally and explicitly denies precisely this causal-conceptual connection.

As Iamblichus argues shortly after, real divination cannot be explained as a special disposition or proportion in matter (*ἐν ὕλης τάξει*)⁵² – an expression reminiscent of Plutarch's idea of the harmonic combination (*ἁρμονία τῆς κράσεως*) of the *pneûma* and the psychic substance that is required for inspiration, as reported by Lamprias in *De defectu oraculorum*.⁵³ It is interesting to note that Lamprias ascribes the function of moderating the delicate mixture between the *pneûma* and the soul of the Pythia to the daemons. They are the overseers, attendants, and guardians (*ἐπιστάτας καὶ περιπόλους καὶ φύλακας*) of this delicate balance, from which they remove all the disturbing-irrational elements. In the Delphic dialogues, *daimones* are never qualified as the *direct* inspirers of prophetic messages. They do not provoke illumination or possession; rather, they are the controllers and supervisors of the mantic performance.⁵⁴

Iamblichus also refutes the idea that the daemons might play an active role in prophecy and provoke inspiration. True inspiration comes not from the daemons but from the gods (*οὔτε δαιμόνων, θεῶν δὲ γίγνεται ἐπίπνοια*),⁵⁵ in virtue of their absolute ontological and aetiological priority in the genesis and comprehension of the rational order of the cosmos, which divination, as an entirely legitimate mode

⁵⁰ Cf. Ps.-Aristot. *Probl.* XXX 1 and 14. For a brilliant study of how this text is situated with respect to the *loci* on melancholia contained in Aristotle's works, see PHILIP J. VAN DER EIJK, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, ch. 5: « Aristotle on Melancholy », p. 139–168.

⁵¹ For instance, Cicero, in *De divinatione* and through the voice of his brother Quintus, criticises Aristotle for connecting divinatory capabilities to a weak body, as it is the case with melancholic people, and argues that divination can only arise from a lucid mind (cf. Cic. *De div.* 1.38.81–2).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.1.28.

⁵³ Plut. *De def. or.* 437A; compare this material harmony with the spiritual harmony that humans reach through ascesis in Iamb. *De myst.* 3.9.40.

⁵⁴ Plut. *De def. or.* 436F–437A. Their role is different in 'individual' or 'private' divination however, which Plutarch and other Middle-Platonists ascribed to the *δαιμόνιον* in a Socratic sense. A most valuable contribution on this topic is GEERT ROSKAM, « Socrates' *δαιμόνιον* in Maximus of Tyre, Apuleius, and Plutarch », in DELFIM F. LEÃO, FRANÇOISE FRAZIER (eds.), *Tychè et Pronoia: la marche du monde selon Plutarque*, Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra 2010, p. 93–108.

⁵⁵ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.7.3–5.

of knowledge acquisition, helps to disclose. The end of the third book of *De mysteriis* sheds further light on Iamblichus's reasons for excluding daemons from the divinatory process: they do not have any knowledge of the future.⁵⁶ Here Iamblichus wishes to disprove the opinion of the Christians – called 'the atheists' (τῶν ἀθέων δόξα) – who ascribe every divinatory practice to the evil daemon (πονηροῦ δαίμονος).⁵⁷ By depriving daemons of any function in prognosis, he completely dissociates divination from the lower orders of agents in the cosmos (including both the material and daemonic levels), and avoids criticism from Christians on this point.

One might therefore conclude that for both Plutarch and Iamblichus, the class of daemons is an important connecting element in their cosmologies, since it ensures the harmony and continuity of the cosmos.⁵⁸ But contrary to a common misconception that is suggested by ancient Christian critiques of divination unsupported by Platonic testimonies, they do not play any significant part in the mantic process.⁵⁹ It is indeed striking that despite the many differences between their respective approaches to divination, Plutarch and Iamblichus tend to assign a marginal and secondary role to the daemons, while ascribing every truthful prophetic inspiration exclusively to the divine, rather than the daemonic.

IV. *The Anthropology of Divination*

Iamblichus warns that the Delphic priestess, who is responsible for the reception and delivery of prophetic responses, needs to be free from material interferences. Like Plutarch, he resorts to the traditional *topos* according to which prophets need to be uneducated and simple-minded (εὐηθικοί),⁶⁰ and the Pythia be a naive and unexperienced woman.⁶¹

Iamblichus argues that ingenuous and uneducated people become able to pronounce wise words in virtue of their complete possession by the divine, a dynamic in which their own qualities play no role. For Iamblichus, inspiration

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.18.17 and especially 3.22.37.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.31.73–74. See the very informative discussion on this point in SAFFREY, SEGONDS, LECERF, *Jamblique*, p. 300, n. 5–6 to p. 134.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.10.9–15; 4.7.9–11.

⁵⁹ See e.g. Joh. Chrys. *Hom. I Ep. Cor.* 29.12.1.

⁶⁰ Cf. Plat. *Ion* 534d–e; *Phdr.* 244b.

⁶¹ Plutarch and Iamblichus both believe that the simplicity and naivety of the Pythia is responsible for her heightened receptive qualities. In order to explain this notion of receptivity they resort to different terms however, both of which have a deep cosmological resonance. For a concise analysis of the term ἐπιτηδειότης, employed by Iamblichus, see GLENN R. MORROW, JOHN M. DILLON, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1987, p. 13: « In the Neoplatonic universe, receptivity is all (ἐπιτηδειότης); it answers to the Christian concept of grace. The gods cannot confer gifts upon us unless and until we are ready to receive them ».

equals possession (θεοφορία, κατοκωχή), and implies the total loss of personal identity and self-consciousness on the part of the medium, such as the Pythia, who donates herself completely, with her body and her soul, to the divine power.⁶² According to this view, divination is neither based on individual faculties, nor on a separation or abstraction of the intellect from the rest of the human compound.⁶³

When one looks at Plutarch's dialogues, one sees that the Pythia needs to be as *pure as possible* and that the disturbing movements that affect her body and soul should be reduced to a *minimum*. Theon explains that prophetic inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός) results from two simultaneous movements: the one intrinsic to the Pythia, according to which she contributes her own qualities and nature, and the other extrinsic, coming from outside (ἔξωθεν), i.e. from the god. Iamblichus emends this explanation almost literally: prophetic inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός) is not an emotion (πάθος), and does not pertain to the psychic constitution and abilities of individuals, but comes *only* from outside (ἔξωθεν), which means, again, from the god.⁶⁴ In other words, Plutarch and Iamblichus agree that the medium is not in a completely frenzied state, which would mark a perversion toward what is irrational and inferior. Nevertheless, Iamblichus inclines towards a much more radical, de-materialised view of the psychophysical condition of the medium, in which human faculties play no role at all, and inspiration comes *only* from the god (ἔξωθεν).⁶⁵ For Iamblichus, the prophet is not in control of his- or herself, but completely controlled by the divine agent.⁶⁶

The markedly cooperative activity that Plutarch proposes in *De Pythiae oraculis* argues instead that the god does not act as a puppeteer who takes control of human bodies.⁶⁷ As explained by Theon in this dialogue, the burden of the Pythia's personal qualities and nature cannot be removed from the process: her voice, rhythm, and words directly and inevitably shape the oracular responses that she utters. The god only puts images (φαντασμία) into her mind and a light (φῶς) into her soul that allows her to see the future.⁶⁸ But if one zooms in on the interchange taking place between the priestess and the god, the exact way in which they are supposed to come into contact remains obscure. Plutarch's reader is left

⁶² Iamb. *De myst.* 3.4.5 and 10-15.

⁶³ Ibid., 3.8.1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.24.1-20; 35. Cf. SAFFREY, SEGONDS, LECERF, *Jamblique*, p. 279, n. 3 to p. 85.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.4.21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.8.25. The receptivity of the seer is a secondary, but crucial aspect for Iamblichus. He attaches great significance to ritual preparations, which render the seer a pure and ideal receptacle of the divine. Cf. CRYSTAL ADDEY, « Ecstasy between Divine and Human: Re-assessing Agency in Iamblichean Divination and Theurgy », in JOHN F. FINAMORE, JOHN PHILIPS (eds.), *Literary, Philosophical and Religious Studies in the Platonic Tradition: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual International Society for Neoplatonic Studies Conference*, Academia Verlag, Bonn 2013, p. 7-24.

⁶⁷ Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 404F.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 397C-D.

wondering how the god, who is pure and transcendent, can put (παρίστημι) a light into the Pythia's mind, and images into the passionate, irrational, and inferior part of her soul. No answer is provided in the Delphic dialogues.

Iamblichus's explanation of Delphic prophecy seems to be aimed at covering precisely this gap, by attempting to bridge the huge distance that Plutarch's dualistic account had opened between the Pythia and Apollo. Iamblichus makes it clear that the god is present (πάρεστιν) but remains separate, and illuminates the Pythia from afar (χωριστῶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπιλάμπων).⁶⁹ In order to better understand how this 'illumination from afar' happens, it is necessary to look at some passages in which Iamblichus and Plutarch discuss the role of the imaginative faculty (φαντασία) in inspiration.

Imagination is often recalled in Plutarch's Delphic dialogues. In *De defectu oraculorum*, the Pythia's mantic faculty (μαντικόν) is defined as 'receptive' (δεκτικόν) of passions, images and predictive impressions (φαντασιῶν πάθεισι καὶ προαισθήσεων). As this passage makes clear, *phantasia* is closely connected to the irrational element, an association confirmed by the correlated use of adverbs that express a lack of *logos* (ἄσυλλογίστως, ἄλόγως, φαντασιαστικῶς).⁷⁰

By contrast, for Iamblichus only a divine, superior form of imagination gives access to accurate knowledge of the future (φανταστικὴ τοῦ μέλλοντος).⁷¹ This type of *phantasia* does not rely on a passion of the soul (πάθος ψυχῆς), nor is it determined by inferior levels of causation.⁷² The reason for this bifurcated view of *phantasia* ultimately lies in the structure of the cosmos itself.

The cosmos does not stand on passions (πάθη), but on rational principles (λόγου). Since the world has an ordered, coherent, and rational nature, no truthful prediction can come from human passions; rather, there must be a superior, divine kind of imagination that is responsible for disclosing the future to us. No connection is possible between disordered motions (ἄτάκτους καὶ παραχώδεις κινήσεις) and the future (τῷ μέλλοντι).⁷³ Whereas passion is exclusively concerned with the present, foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις) is oriented towards the future.

Iamblichus thus distinguishes between the human faculty of imagination (ἡ ἐν ἡμῖν φανταστικὴ δύναμις),⁷⁴ which may be either correct or incorrect, and divine

⁶⁹ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.11.50–66.

⁷⁰ Plut. *De def. or.* 432D and 433C.

⁷¹ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.22.25.

⁷² Ibid., 3.7.30.

⁷³ Ibid., 3.24.10.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 3.14.12. The vehicle of the soul, as the recipient of the divine *phantasia*, is purified through ritual preparations. On this topic, see the instructive article: CRYSTAL ADDEY, « In the Light of the

imaginings (φαντασάαι θεΐαι), which are always true, and transmitted through the 'vehicle of divine light' that takes hold of our imaginative power.⁷⁵ Light is the link connecting the transcendent and the contingent realms, and the means through which the god extends his power onto the entire cosmos.

V. *Metaphysical Conceptions and the Platonic Tradition*

The preceding discussion indicates that Iamblichus clearly knew Plutarch's works, and was even challenging and revising the theories advanced by the latter. Plutarch and Iamblichus both stand out in the Platonic tradition insofar as they developed the most detailed accounts of the practice and theory of divination, and attempted to systematise its different kinds.⁷⁶ The above analysis has shed light on crucial aspects of their respective approaches, on the basis of which I can now raise some more general considerations.

First, one may note that Plutarch and Iamblichus adopt two radically antithetical perspectives on divination. Although they share the same explanatory framework of multiple causation, they have opposing views on the relative importance of the two causes. While Iamblichus emphasises the role and relevance of primary (ultimate) causes, Plutarch emphasises the role of secondary (auxiliary) causes. The distinctive feature of Plutarch's approach is his attention to materiality: he asserts that *both* contingent and transcendent factors are essential for the scientific study of earthly phenomena. He thereby grants full epistemic dignity to the material (inferior) elements; the *pneûma*, the ritual apparatus, the temple itself, the human medium, and even the daemons all need to be taken into account for an accurate scientific explanation of divination.⁷⁷

Sphere: The Vehicle of the Soul and Subtle Body Practices in Neoplatonism », in JAY JOHNSTON, GEOFFREY SAMUEL (eds.), *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, Routledge, London 2013 (Routledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy), p. 149–167.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2.14. The 'vehicle of divine light' is the correct interpretation of Iamblichus's expression φωτὸς ἄγωγη, according to MATTEO AGNOSINI, « Giamblico e la divinazione κατὰ τὸ φανταστικόν. Verso l'integrazione di un genere divinatorio: il caso dell'idromanzia », in HELMUT SENG, LUCIANA G. SOARES SANTOPRETE, CHIARA. O. TOMMASI MORESCHINI (eds.), *Formen und Nebenformen des Platonismus in der Spätantike*, Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg 2016, (Bibliotheca Chaldaica, 6), p. 376–382. See also SAFFREY, SEGONDS, LECERF, *Jamblique*, p. 287, n. 1–2 to p. 99.

⁷⁶ Plutarch wrote other works on this topic that are now lost, such as *De divinatione* (Περὶ μαντικῆς, fr. 147), which was apparently devoted to the art of divination (μαντικὴ τέχνη) in comparison with other *technai*.

⁷⁷ See esp. *De def. or.* 414F–415A, where Cleombrotus emphasises the fact that Plato was the first philosopher to give due importance to nature (φύσις) and matter (ὕλη), and thus introduced the notion of substrate (ὑποκείμενον). Later in the same dialogue (435F–436A), Lamprias explains the theory of so-called double causation, according to which *both* the superior-divine and inferior-material orders of causation have to be taken into account for a complete understanding

Conversely, Iamblichus advocates for the absolute *otherness* of divination, a divine gift and therefore a special phenomenon that cannot be compared with any other.⁷⁸ As indicated above, Iamblichus claims that it is impossible to know what happens during the divinatory act.⁷⁹ He deems bodies, passions, natural forces, material mixtures and dispositions merely accessory factors. Like Plutarch, he believes that divination can be studied in a scientific way, but his certainty rests on completely different grounds than those of Plutarch.

The scientific methodology adopted by Iamblichus for the study of divination in *De mysteriis* bears a close resemblance to Aristotle's theory of demonstrative reasoning (ἀπόδειξις), which consists in deduction from true and self-evident (ἐξ ἀληθῶν καὶ πρώτων) principles (ἀρχαί).⁸⁰ According to Iamblichus, the supreme principle (ἀρχή) of divination is its divine nature and provenance: every truthful prediction (πρόγνωσις) comes from the gods. From this self-evident truth, all the different forms (εἶδη) of divination can be easily inferred in a scientific way (ἐπιστημονικῶς).⁸¹ The system of prediction mirrors that of the whole cosmos: the common divine provenance of the cosmos and divination confirms the existence, coherence, and truth of both of them, on the basis of a perfect parallelism between ontological and epistemological stances.⁸²

Despite this top-down approach, which emphasises transcendence, Iamblichus's position proves more pragmatic and well-defined than Plutarch's when it comes to the nature of the *messages* that divination is expected to disclose.

of phenomena. For Plutarch's conceptions of aetiology and science, see PIERLUIGI DONINI, « Problemi del pensiero scientifico a Roma: Il primo e il secondo secolo d.C. », in GABRIELE GIANNANTONI, MARIO VEGETTI (eds.), *La scienza ellenistica. Atti delle tre giornate di studio (Pavia, 14-16 aprile 1982)*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1984, p. 353-374; GEORGE R. BOYS-STONES, « Plutarch on the Probable Principle of Cold: Epistemology and the *De primo frigido* », *Classical Quarterly*, 47 (1997), p. 227-238; MICHIEL MEEUSEN, « How to Treat a Bee-Sting? On the Higher Cause in Plutarch's *Causes of Natural Phenomena*: the Case of *Quaest. Nat.* 36-37 », *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*, 105 (2013), p. 131-157. For an excellent overview of the roles and natures of causes in Plutarch and other Middle-Platonists, see FRANCO FERRARI, « Le système des causes dans le platonisme moyen », in CARLO NATALI, CRISTINA VIANO (eds.), *Aitia II. Avec ou sans Aristote. Le débat sur les causes à l'âge hellénistique et impérial*, Peeters, Leuven 2014, p. 185-205.

⁷⁸ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.10: οὐδ' ὅλως ἀνθρωπικόν ἐστι τὸ ἔργον, θεῖον δὲ καὶ ὑπερφυῆς ἄνωθ' ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταπεμπόμενον, ἀγέννητόν τε καὶ αἰδίον αὐτοφυῶς προηγείται.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.1.1 and *supra*.

⁸⁰ Aristot. *Top.* 1.100a18.

⁸¹ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.50.

⁸² Ibid. Note here that the distinction between two kinds of divination follows the same line as Cicero's well-known classification: *Duo sunt enim divinandi genera, quorum alterum artis est, alterum naturae* (Cic. *De div.* 1.6.11-12). For Iamblichus, technical divination is the exegesis of the signs scattered by the gods in the cosmos (Iamb. *De myst.* 3.16.35). *Sympatheia*, which is the mutual interconnection of all the cosmic elements, makes it possible for the divine signs to be propagated all over the world. Iamblichus deems technical divination, which relies on material tokens and employs logical inference and conjecture, inferior to natural-inspired divination.

Indeed, Plutarch never explicitly discusses the content of the divinatory responses, or the knowledge they might reveal to the enquirers,⁸³ except in scattered references to the predictive function of divination in the Delphic dialogues.⁸⁴ A slightly different attitude emerges in the treatment of *individual* (as opposed to *oracular*) divination. In *De genio Socratis*, messages sent by the gods to chosen individuals on earth amount to the disclosure of a sort of ‘divine education’ (παιδαγωγία), which guides them through the path of virtue.⁸⁵ The generally vague conceptualisation of the cognitive dimension of divination reveals something crucial about Plutarch’s interests and methodology: he conceives divination and its intrinsic physical and psychological aspects as a phenomenon worthy of study *per se*, regardless of the *content* that it is expected to disclose.

Iamblichus, on the other hand, is very concerned about the kinds of messages that divination reveals, and especially the spheres of knowledge that it grants access to.⁸⁶ The foremost evidence for Iamblichus’s deep interest in the cognitive-epistemic functions of divination is the substantial identification that he establishes between the words *mantikê* (μαντική) and *prognôsis* (πρόγνωσις), which he employs interchangeably, thus clarifying that he intends divination to be a predictive tool.⁸⁷ In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that the centuries between Plutarch and Iamblichus witnessed a considerable development in science, in which the notion of *prognôsis* played a leading role, especially in the field of medicine, as confirmed by the works of Galen of Pergamum. Galen had introduced ‘prognosis’ as a scientifically relevant concept, and defined it as the future outcome of the present physical condition of patients, inferred from the

⁸³ One possible exception is his complaint about the poor quality of enquiries addressed to the oracle (*De E* 386C; *De Pyth. or.* 408C), but even here he does not discuss the content of the oracle’s responses.

⁸⁴ Sarapion, a Stoic poet, and character in *De Pythiae oraculis*, reports that some prodigies occurred before key historical events in Rome (note his use of the words πρόγνωσιν, προειπεῖν, and προλέγω in 399D; cf. 398E–F). Lamprias again calls the mantic faculty of the soul the ‘prognostic part’ in *De defectu oraculorum* (προγνώστικὸν μέρος, 433A). The Stoic philosopher Theon employs the notion of prediction (πρόγνωσις) in a typically Stoic manner in *De E apud Delphos* (387B), by referring to the order of the interconnected series of past, present, and future events, which makes prediction possible. But none of these cases imply that for Plutarch divination must be predictive *per se*.

⁸⁵ Plut. *De genio Socr.* 593B.

⁸⁶ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.23: θεάματά τε ἔχει θεῖα καὶ θεωρήματα ἐπιστημονικά. In this regard, we can define theurgy as an epistemological and ethical tool that transforms the consciousness and soul of the individual, or as a practice that leads to an ontological and ethical transformation of the soul. Cf. ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, ch. 7, esp. p. 269–273.

⁸⁷ For an excellent analysis of the notion of *prognôsis* in Iamblichus, see PETER T. STRUCK, *Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2016, p. 243–246.

stochastic-combinatory analysis of their bodily symptoms (τεκμήρια).⁸⁸ His methodology combined this empirical approach with a theoretical understanding of the discipline of medicine as founded on rational principles.

The extensive use of the notion of prognosis in medical treatises might have played into Iamblichus's interest in the epistemic dimension of divination, and in the identity that he establishes between 'divination' and 'prediction'⁸⁹ – although he intends 'prediction' in a very broad sense, i.e. as a tool of self-knowledge, that helps one access divine wisdom, and aims at the ethical betterment of the recipient.⁹⁰

That divination can not only be a subject of scientific study, but can also give access to scientific knowledge, is well exemplified by Iamblichus's definition of divination as a practice that permits 'divine visions and scientific insights' (θεάματα [...] θεῖα καὶ θεωρήματα ἐπιστημονικά) through divine actions and signs (θεῖοις ἔργοις ἢ σημείοις).⁹¹ The important adjective here is 'scientific' (ἐπιστημονικά). What does it mean to have 'scientific visions'? This is certainly consistent with the fact that Iamblichus intends to offer a well ordered account of scientific theology (ἐπιστημονικῆς θεολογίας ἢ διάταξις) in *De mysteriis*.⁹² But it can be further clarified by a passage in which Iamblichus discusses the prophetic power of dreams. Dreams that allow for a vivid vision of the future are those in which the intellect is detached from the body, and therefore able to attain a superior kind of knowledge. This notion is shared by Plutarch, who in *De genio Socratis* provides a mythical account of the capacity of intellect (νοῦς) to separate itself from the rest of the human being and embark in a cosmic journey, in which it grasps eschatological truths. This is, however, a mythical narrative, a stylistic choice and device that provides an oblique way to indicate the truth.⁹³ Iamblichus, instead, explains straightaway that the detachment of the intellect from the body

⁸⁸ See Gal. *Prog.* 2.27.5–3.18.1. It is also important to note that Galen excluded any kind of divinatory practice from the field of medical prognosis in order to defend himself against accusations of being a sorcerer (γόης), rather than a competent physician. Cf. ROBERT J. HANKINSON, « Prédiction, prophétie, pronostic: la gnoseologie de l'avenir dans la divination et la médecine antique », in JOSÉ KANY-TURPIN (ed.), *Signe et prédiction dans l'Antiquité: actes du colloque international interdisciplinaire de Créteil et de Paris, 22-23-24 mai 2003*, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, Saint-Étienne 2005, p. 147–162; PIETER VAN NUFFELEN, « Galen, Divination and the Status of Medicine », *Classical Quarterly*, 64 (2014), p. 337–352.

⁸⁹ This does not mean that Iamblichus would endorse the truthfulness of inductive divination based on *stochasmos*, which he deems inaccurate and fallible (see Iamb. *De myst.* 3.15).

⁹⁰ On the ethical benefits of divination for Iamblichus, see n. 84 *supra*.

⁹¹ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.1.21–24: the translation is from CLARKE, DILLON, AND HERSHBELL, *Iamblichus*, p. 119. The French edition of SAFFREY, SEGONDS, AND LECERF has: « des visions divines et des méditations qui rendent capables de savoir » (*Jamblique*, p. 76).

⁹² Iamb. *De myst.* 1.4.68; see also 1.8.112 and 2.11.61.

⁹³ Plut. *De genio Socr.* 589F–590A.

allows for a *direct* apprehension of superior truths. Divination in Iamblichus becomes *de iure* a completely adequate means of knowledge acquisition in the field of god, essences, and principles (ἄσώματες οὐσίαι). When the purest form of divination (τελειότερα μαντεία) occurs, and the divine, intellectual part (τὸ νοερόν [...] καὶ τὸ θεῖον) of the soul is united with superior entities, abstract concepts are disclosed to it as well as individual destiny. In this process, the whole soul receives true knowledge of the intelligible world, including pure visions of the gods and incorporeals,⁹⁴ and this is what ‘scientific visions’ seems to signify.

The possibility for divination to disclose the secrets of the material and intelligible realms is rooted in the very structure of the cosmos. Ordinary as well as divinatory knowledge encompasses both transcendent principles, and things that come into existence, arranged starting from their original cause.⁹⁵ As a consequence, divination cannot qualify as an *intuition* (ἐπιβολή, ἐπαφή).⁹⁶ Rather, the possibility of foreknowledge is rooted in the complete interconnection of all causes, an idea reminiscent of Stoic *sympatheia*, but which Iamblichus re-interprets in a Platonic framework, while limiting its influence to the sublunary realm.⁹⁷ The god and everything divine is superior to necessity (ἀνάγκη), which is restricted to the material cosmos.

The action of the gods demonstrates their love for humankind (φιλανθρωπία). The notion of *philanthrōpia* is strongly present already in Plutarch, who so names the care and benevolence of the gods towards humans and the material world, exerted through providence.⁹⁸ In Iamblichus, *philanthrōpia* becomes a divine bond (θεῖα φιλία) that envelops the entire cosmos (both down- and upwards), and guarantees the harmony and interconnection of all its components. It is this divine interrelation, lovingly embracing the whole world and all its parts,⁹⁹ that makes

⁹⁴ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.3.26–33.

⁹⁵ See the example of the god Asclepius, who delivers therapeutic remedies — Iamb. *De myst.* 3.4.43.

⁹⁶ Peter Struck devotes a whole, thought-provoking chapter to this topic in his 2016 monograph *Divination and Human Nature*. For the difference between intuition and instinct on the one hand, and divination on the other, see Iamb. *De myst.* 3.26.

⁹⁷ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.18.30 and 26.40; cf. Plut. *De def. or.* 432B, which argues for a natural kinship between the psychic faculty of memory and the future.

⁹⁸ Plut. *Num.* 4.4. and *De def. or.* 413C. Essential works on Plutarch’s conception of providence are: JAN OPSOMER, « Quelques réflexions sur la notion de Providence chez Plutarque », in CARLOS SCHRADER, JOSÉ VELA, VICENTE RAMÓN (eds.), *Plutarco y la Historia. Actas del V Simposio Español sobre Plutarco, Zaragoza, 20–22 de junio de 1996*, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, Zaragoza 1997 (Monografías de Filología Griega, 8), p. 343–356; FRANCO FERRARI, « Provvidenza platonica o autocontemplazione aristotelica: la scelta di Plutarco », in LUC VAN DER STOCKT, FRANCES BONNER TITCHENER, HEINZ GERD INGENKAMP, AURELIO PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ (eds.), *Gods, Daimones, Rituals, Myths and History of Religions in Plutarch’s Works: Studies Devoted to Professor Frederick E. Brenk by the International Plutarch Society*, Universidad de Málaga, Málaga 2010, p. 177–192.

⁹⁹ Cf. Iamb. *De myst.* 3.12.10 and 25.

inspiration and prediction possible.¹⁰⁰ One of Iamblichus's most impressive innovations, that is, his novel interpretation of the *pneûma* (discussed in section III), is connected with the cosmological model he proposes. For Iamblichus, the *pneûma* is not only essential for Delphic divination, but also has an explanatory function, and plays a crucial ontological role within the cosmic structure.¹⁰¹ That said however, while bringing the *pneûma* to the side of spirituality and transcendence, he provides a much less favourable treatment of matter. Iamblichus's ontology is constructed around one central assumption – repeated above, in various formulations – according to which the transcendent realm (the gods and the planets) is superior to the material realm and free from contamination (which Iamblichus refers to with verbs such as: ἐπιθολόω, μάνω, χραίνω). He even argues that the historically significant practice of animal sacrifice, which was intended as one of the means of communication between mankind and the gods, is essentially worthless, because it does not establish any connection between these two worlds.¹⁰²

There is only one case of effective communication between the contingent and the divine, which is the one established by the theurgist. The theurgist is able to connect to the transcendent realm, by acting according to the laws of sympathy and activating the right symbols in the material cosmos.¹⁰³ Iamblichus's views on divination can thus be modelled as a kind of pyramid. The lowest levels are occupied by the more fallacious forms of divination, in which matter plays a significant role,¹⁰⁴ while the higher levels incorporate practices that are less and less entangled with materiality, and hence purer and closer to philosophical contemplation (θεωρία). At the top of the pyramid is 'divine divination,' the truthful knowledge and science of the future, which is extremely useful and ennobling for human souls.¹⁰⁵ By thus envisioning Iamblichus's different forms of divination as forming a pyramidal structure we are able to escape the aporetic need to identify Iamblichus as either a dualist or a monist.

¹⁰⁰ The beneficent action of the gods within the contingent world, and on behalf of human beings is called *energeia* (ἐνέργεια); it is a transcendent force in which human beings participate (Iamb. *De myst.* 3.17.10). For a thought-provoking reading of the dynamics of *sympatheia* as a force embracing the whole cosmos, interpreted in light of philosophical friendship (φιλία), see the excellent work by MICHAEL SCHRAMM, *Freundschaft im Neuplatonismus, Politisches Denken und Sozialphilosophie von Plotin bis Kaiser Julian*, De Gruyter, Berlin–Boston 2013, ch. 2: *Jamblich*, esp. p. 126–129.

¹⁰¹ See also VAN LIEFFERINGE, *Jamblique*, p. 44.

¹⁰² Iamb. *De myst.* 5.4.32–35.

¹⁰³ For the use of symbols in rites and theurgy, see the fascinating passage: Iamb. *De myst.* 7.2.

¹⁰⁴ Some examples include the reading of *charaktêres* (3.13.1), all wrong kinds of inspiration (3.14.30 and 3.25.1–10), and daemonic invocations (3.22.1).

¹⁰⁵ Iamb. *De myst.* 3.10.3–4.

VI. *Concluding Remarks*

This study may also tell us something about the wider developments of the Platonic tradition in later antiquity. In the two centuries intervening between Plutarch and Iamblichus, divination became increasingly relevant for pagans, who were forced to come to terms with the vision of prophecy proposed by Christians. Many pagan philosophers, especially Platonists and Stoics, did their best to support the cause of divination, and this theoretical endeavour often required a profound revision of other areas of philosophical reflection, such as theology, ontology, psychology, and the theory of knowledge. Eventually, it resulted in the accentuation of transcendence, a process that is generally referred to as the 'sacralisation' of philosophical discourse.

Platonist philosophers share a specific line of reflection on divination that distinguishes them from other ancient thinkers. Due to their generally twofold ontological system, the first and foremost problem they face is to justify the communication between the contingent and the transcendent plan, a problematic interaction on which the whole architecture of divination is inevitably founded. Plutarch's main theoretical difficulties concern the explanation for how material factors such as the *pneûma* might come into contact with and affect immaterial elements such as the soul, and vice versa. Iamblichus faces the same questions, but makes substantial changes to the components involved in the process of divination – a tactical manoeuvre, rooted in his metaphysical system, that allows him to find effective solutions to questions Plutarch left unsolved. The main improvement lies in Iamblichus's new way of conceiving the material principle. While Plutarch introduces contingency and irrationality as essential elements that determine earthly phenomena and their explanations, Iamblichus designs a cosmology in which the power of divine *noûs* is preeminent over materiality.¹⁰⁶ By making the divine power an overarching governing and causal principle that embraces the entire world, Iamblichus escapes the traditional Platonic *aporia* concerning the huge chasm between human beings and the gods. Finally, the reflections of both Plutarch and Iamblichus prove that it is impossible to theorise divination without including it in a coherent and comprehensive account of the cosmos.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 3.20.5–10.

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