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IV

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THE RELIGION OF THE LAST HELLENES

There is a rather touching scene from Marinus' *Life of Proclus* with which I would like to begin my consideration of this theme.[1] The young Proclus has just arrived in Athens from Alexandria, in the early autumn of 431 C.E., and, evading the attentions of numerous touts for the various prominent teachers of rhetoric, has, with the help of his friend and fellow-Lycian student Nicolaus, who meets him at the Piraeus, made his way to the residence of Syrianus, head of the Platonic Academy, with the aim of enrolling in that great institution. Syrianus and his assistant Lachares receive the young man civilly, but, when sunset arrived and the moon appeared in the sky, they moved to end the interview, "seeing as he was a stranger".

Now why would they be concerned to do that? Well, the reason, as it turns out, was that they wished to make their usual reverence to the moon-goddess on her appearance at the start of new month,[2] and they were not sure whether this young

[1] MARIN. *Procl.* 11. I am much indebted here to the excellent recent edition of the *Life* by H.-D. SAFFREY and A.-Ph. SEGONDS, in the Budé series, *Marinus: Proclus, ou sur le bonheur* (Paris 2001). I have also found useful as a background to this essay A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, "Proclus et la religion traditionnelle", in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à A. Piganiol* (Paris 1966), III 1581-90.

[2] Marinus' rather allusive phraseology ("the Moon had just made her first appearance, after parting from conjunction with the Sun") would suggest that this was actually the beginning of the lunar month, and thus the feast of the New Moon, or Noumenia, which was an important occasion in Athenian religious life, even in the fifth century C.E. By this time, however, it presumably had to be a private affair, for adherents of the Old Faith.

man was of the old faith or the new. One could not be too careful in the Athens of the early 430s. However, they were greatly heartened to see Proclus, "after proceeding just a short distance, and himself observing the moon appearing from her house", stopping in his tracks, taking off his shoes, and making his prayer to the goddess.[3]

So all was well on that count. Proclus was accepted into the inner circle of the Academy — and the rest, as they say, is history. Had he in fact been a Christian, however — like the mysterious 'Dionysius the Areopagite', or John Philoponus, over in Alexandria — he might well have been accepted for the purpose of taking lectures, but he would have had to have been tactfully excluded from a certain aspect of the life of the School, to wit, the aspect of Platonism as a religion.

Let us consider a moment longer, however, this prayer to the moon-goddess. Who or what may we imagine that Syrianus, Lachares and Proclus are really worshipping here? Are we to take it that they are indulging in straight-forward — or perhaps better, traditional — moon-worship?[4] The Moon herself, after all, is a rather minor deity in the Neoplatonic pantheon, being in effect only the manifestation at the celestial level of a much more exalted divinity — ultimately Hekate herself, as the supreme female principle of the Chaldaean system. If one turns to the Emperor Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods,* we find another deity also, Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, identified as the highest member of the chain of which the Moon is the lowest (*Or.* 5, 166 AB):

[3] As we learn later from Marinus (*Procl.* 19), Proclus' devotion in later life to the celebration of the Noumenia was very great, but even at this early age he had plainly acquired good habits.

[4] Not that the Moon herself (apart from the celebration of the new moon) was a particular object of worship in traditional Greek religion (except as Hekate, and to some extent Artemis), but there was a multiplicity of moon-goddesses worshipped around the Middle East, who would come within the ambit of a late Hellenic intellectual's concern.

> "Who, then, is the Mother of the Gods? She is the source (*pege*) of the intellective and demiurgic gods,[5] who in their turn guide the visible gods; she is both the mother and the spouse of mighty Zeus; she came into being next to and together with the great creator; she is in control of every form of life and the cause of all generation... she is the motherless maiden (*parthenos ametor*),[6] enthroned at the side of Zeus, and in very truth is the Mother of all the gods. For having received into herself the causes of all the gods, both intelligible and hypercosmic, she became the source of the intellective gods" (transl. W.C. Wright, slightly emended).

Julian here, without mentioning the Moon as such, postulates a sequence of deities, from the intelligible level of reality, down through the intellective and demiurgic, to the encosmic and visible. Cybele resides properly at the intelligible level, but manifests herself as Athene at the intellective level, and in fact Selene, or the Moon, at the encosmic level. Selene does not actually rate a mention here, but Julian alludes to her in his *Hymn to King Helios* (*Or.* 4, 154 D), as ruling over the visible world, in conjunction with Helios. Selene, Julian tells us, received the soul of Romulus, or Quirinus, when it was sent down to earth by her avatar at the intellective level, Athene, and returns his soul in due course to where it came from, even as Cybele, in her role as the transcendent Providence (*pronoia*) of the cosmos, does to Attis, who is the demiurgic Logos who descends into the material realm in order to impose form upon it (cf. *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods, Or.* 5, 166C-168 C).

So when the Neoplatonic philosophers saluted the moon, they were in fact doing reverence to the whole chain of generative female principles descending from Hecate or Cybele.[7] And so it would be, I would suggest, with their worship of any other member of the traditional pantheon.[8]

[5] Implying that she herself is at the level of the intelligible gods (*noetoi theoi*).

[6] A basic characterisation of Athene. — so she is also the daughter of Zeus.

[7] Proclus himself had a particular devotion to the Mother of the Gods, as we shall see below.

[8] Proclus was also, of course, much devoted to the Sun. Marinus tells us (*Procl.* 22) that he was accustomed to salute (προσκυνῆσαι) the sun three times a day, at its dawning, at mid-day and at its setting. No doubt the same theoretical

The last few generations of Hellenic philosophers, indeed, can be seen as remaining true, in matters of religion, to the position of their master Plato. Plato, after all, in the *Republic,* and more clearly still in the *Laws,* insists on scrupulous religious observance in his ideal state. The traditional gods of the Olympian pantheon, though stripped of all unsuitable stories about them, are to be worshipped in the traditional manner, and so are a host of lesser divinities, daemons, heroes and even nymphs. In Book V of the *Laws* (738 c-d), he insists that all traditional ceremonies and sacrifices should be performed, and that all the citizens should attend the festivals. There is to be a full set of temples on the acropolis of the central town, and other precincts of the gods in each of the twelve divisions into which the state is divided (745 b ff.).

On the other hand, it is plain that Plato himself does not believe in the gods in their traditional forms, and he does not seem to expect the rulers of either of his ideal states to do so either. The true ruling principle of the universe emerges in Books VI-VII of the *Republic* as the Good, and in Book X of the *Laws* as a rational World-Soul,[9] and the Guardians and the members of the Nocturnal Council are quite well aware of this, but they are expected both to enforce the performance of all the traditional rites, and participate in them enthusiastically themselves.

This is not necessarily a manifestation of hypocrisy, or of the promotion of religion as an 'opium for the people'. It would be Plato's belief that the gods are really there, even if only as particular manifestations of the World Soul, and that the maintenance of their traditional modes of worship will preserve the

baggage lay behind this simple ceremony as lay behind the worship of the moon; for which one may consult Julian's *Hymn to King Helios.* Cf. also H.-D. SAFFREY, "La dévotion de Proclus au soleil", in ID., *Le néoplatonisme après Plotin* II (Paris 2000), 179-191.

[9] How far these two entities are compatible is a nice point, on which I have had a certain amount to say elsewhere. See "Philip of Opus and the Theology of Plato's *Laws*", in *Plato's Laws. From Theory into Practice*, ed. by S. SCOLNICOV and L. BRISSON (Sankt Augustin 2003), 304-311.

balance and good order of the world. That is still Julian's view, in the mid-fourth century, and it is a view endorsed by Proclus, in the fifth, and Damascius in the sixth. Looking back on the development of what we would term Neoplatonism from the perspective of (probably) the 520's, Damascius, expressing the situation in terms of a contrast between philosophy and theurgy, has this to say:[10]

> "There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer theurgy, like Iamblichus and Syrianus and Proclus and the rest of the hieratics. But Plato, realising that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, united them in one single truth by calling the philosopher a Bacchus.[11] For indeed if the man who has freed himself from the realm of generation were to stand in the middle, he would pull both to himself. And yet it is clear that he calls the philosopher a Bacchus in his desire to exalt him, in the same way in which we would call Intellect a god, or the physical light spiritual light".

Damascius, then, sees the true philosopher as one who combines philosophical theory with religious observance. With this in mind, let us look a little more closely at the religious practice of a philosopher such as Proclus, as related to us by the faithful Marinus. The specifics of religious practice is a subject not much dwelt on by modern students of Neoplatonism, partly, perhaps, because it is part of the process of rehabilitating the later Platonists as philosophers — a process with which, I may say, I am thoroughly in sympathy — to downplay an aspect of their activity which was of basic importance to them, but not much in favour in modern philosophical circles, the performance of religious rituals, and other ways of relating to the gods. This tendency, however, well-meant though it may be, may lead to a serious distortion of our perspective.

[10] In his *Lectures on the Phaedo* I 172, p.105 Westerink. These are, admittedly, the transcripts of a student, but they doubtless express his views well enough.

[11] A reference to *Phaedo* 69 c, where Plato makes Socrates quote the Orphic tag, ναρθηκόφοροι μὲν πολλοὶ Βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι, in relation to the relative rarity of true philosophers.

The totality of this aspect of the lives of late antique Platonists may be summarized in the term 'theurgy,' activity in relation to the Gods, which is really no more than the Hellenic equivalent of Christian religious observance, or sacramental theology. It is only when Marinus, in the course of his ascent through the seven Iamblichean levels of virtue which provides the armature of his biography of his Master, ascends to a description of Proclus' theurgic virtues, that we learn some interesting details about this aspect of Proclus' life.

If one was a philosopher in the 'theurgic' tradition of Iamblichus, as opposed to the 'theoretic' tradition of Plotinus and Porphyry, then there were two levels on which one operated. First of all, one was concerned to observe all the rituals of traditional religion, including the major festivals, such as the Panathenaea, and such civic cults as the Eleusinian Mysteries; but there was also a more private, esoteric level of worship that might be observed, rituals associated with the *Chaldaean Oracles* or other mystery cults, such as Orphism or Mithraism.

In the case of Proclus, we learn in ch. 28 of Marinus' *Life* that "he observed the 'communions' (*systaseis*) and 'intercessions' (*entykhiai*) of the Chaldaeans, and employed the divine and secret (*aphthengtoi*) ritual wheels (*strophaloi*)".[12] He also

[12] There is a certain amount of technical terminology here, which reveals a considerable level of theurgic expertise on Proclus' part — an expertise, one might add, which could result in such notable achievements as causing rain and warding off earthquakes (*loc.cit.*)! *Systasis,* in Chaldaean ritual, implies the achievement of union with the divinity on the part of a practitioner. The word is used by Iamblichus in the *De mysteriis* (3, 14, 132) quoting Porphyry, but he then goes on to detail how a *systasis* is provoked, namely by the spiritual exercise known as 'drawing down the light', or *photos agoge.* This was plainly a magical procedure as well, as evidenced by a number of passages in the *PGM,* e.g. III 197-198; IV 778-779; VII 505ff.). It is also used by Proclus (e.g. *In Tim.* II 89, 16-20), and Damascius (*In Phd.* I 167, 2, p.101 Westerink). As for *entykhia,* it is mentioned by Iamblichus just before this, in 3,13, 131, in a context which suggests that it is also a theurgic procedure, probably involving prayer for a favour. Lastly, the *strophalos* was an elaborate wheel, with rattles on it, which one turned with a bull's-hide thong, to summon Hekate, cf. Psellus, *In or.Chald., Philosophica Minora* II, *Opusc.* 38, pp. 126-146 O'Meara.

practised the proper modes of enunciation (*ekphoneseis*)[13] and all their other rituals, as taught to him by Asclepigeneia, the daughter of his spiritual 'grandfather' Plutarchus, who had in turn learned all these secrets from his father Nestorius.

Here we seem to have a veil lifted upon the secret spiritual life of at least some strands of the Hellenic intelligentsia. Nestorius is a rather mysterious person, but as well as being the conduit, it would seem, for the transmission of the Iamblichean brand of Neoplatonism to Athens,[14] he, as well as his own father, also Nestorius,[15] was a hierophant of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and thus an authority also on traditional religion. He plainly bequeathed a proficiency in these theurgic practices to his son, who in turn bequeathed them, not to his son,[16] but — interestingly — to his daughter, who in turn communicated the secrets to Proclus.

It is plain from Marinus' narrative, as well as from many indications in Proclus' own writings, that what we would regard as religion rather than philosophy was an integral part of his life. He himself would not have made quite such a distinction as this; he would have made one, perhaps, between *theoria* and

[13] These *ekphoneseis* were the utterances of sacred names, of barbarian (often Egyptian, but sometimes Semitic) origin, or otherwise meaningless successions of syllables (even sequences of vowels), another feature which theurgy shared with 'vulgar' magic, cf. IAMBL. *Myst.* 7, where the power of 'barbarian names' is discussed at length. Damascius gives an amusing description of Isidore indulging in this Chaldaean practice in Proclus' presence, but confusing Proclus by imitating bird calls (*Phil. Hist.* 59E Athanassiadi).

[14] The precise steps of this transmission is something of a mystery, on which H.D. SAFFREY and L.G. WESTERINK have had a certain amount to say, in the introduction to their Budé edition of Proclus' *Platonic Theology,* pp.xxvi ff.

[15] On whom see SAFFREY-WESTERINK, *op.cit.*, pp.xxviii-xxix. Grandfather Nestorius, it seems, prevented an earthquake in 375 A.D. affecting Athens and Attica by prescribing a judicious sacrifice to Achilles, cf. ZOS. 4, 18, p.172,27 – 173,20 Mendelssohn. He was also a master of astrology, as Proclus testifies in *In R.* II pp.64,5 – 66,3 Kroll. The family would also seem to have had a particular reverence for Asclepius, which Proclus inherited.

[16] The son, Hierius, may not have been a very satisfactory person, though Damascius describes him as 'philosophising under Proclus' (*Phil.Hist.* 63B Athanassiadi) At any rate, he does not seem to have been entrusted with passing on the family's sacred lore.

praxis — though without ever separating the latter entirely from the former. Under the rubric of *praxis,* however, Proclus plainly pursued a pretty active life. He had, it seems, worked out that he belonged to the 'chain' (*seira*) of Hermes.[17] This, on the intellectual level, might simply mean that he discerned his chief philosophical talent to be in the area of exegesis (*hermeneia*), which indeed it probably is, but there was a spiritual aspect to this as well, and it resulted in a special devotion to Hermes' son, the god Pan, as Marinus tells us in ch. 33, through whom "he gained much goodwill and salvation for Athens from the god" (πολλὴν εὐμένειαν καὶ σωτηρίαν... Ἀθήνησι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ). This no doubt involved many visits to the civic shrine of Pan at the foot of the Acropolis, and conducting sacrifices there.[18]

Another major object of devotion for Proclus, as mentioned above, was Cybele, the Mother of the Gods. Marinus tells us (33) that he was the recipient of great good fortune (*eumoiria*) at her hands, receiving benefits from her almost daily, and that this was a great source of joy to him. Indeed, one of the clues that the substantial late-antique villa uncovered to the south of the Acropolis is in fact that of Proclus, and of the School, is the presence of a small shrine on the premises dedicated to the Mother, which still contained, when discovered, a statue of Cybele.[19]

[17] MARIN. *Procl.* 28. Whether this was the outcome of some form of theurgic ritual Marinus does not make clear; he simply says σαφῶς ἐθεάσατο, 'he saw clearly'.

[18] This devotion of his, we may note, was shared by the distinguished Athenian patrician Nicagoras the Younger, who happened to be eponymous archon of Athens in 485, the year of Proclus' death (MARIN. *Procl.* 36). We have an inscription erected by him (*IG* II^2 4831) testifying to fully twelve visits by him to the shrine of Pan on Mt. Parnes. Doubtless he did not neglect to visit the Acropolis shrine as well. Such an inscription serves to indicate the degree to which a prominent Athenian could still openly, if discreetly, profess Hellenism in the latter part of the fifth century.

[19] See A. FRANTZ *et alii*, *The Athenian Agora* XXIV: *Late Antiquity, A.D. 267-700* (Princeton 1988), 44 (with plate, 44b), and A. KARIVIERI, in *Post-Herulian Athens*, ed. by P. CASTRÉN (Helsinki 1994), 119-24, 132-6, and plate 18. Some scepticism has been directed against this identification, as a number of other villas have been uncovered in the area as well, but such scepticism seems to me somewhat excessive. The building is very much in the right area, on the basis of Marinus' description of it.

Proclus' devotion to Cybele, however, while plainly deeply religious in nature, was also buttressed by philosophical *theoria.* Marinus tells us that he composed a book on the Mother (*Metroake biblos*), which cannot, I think have been very different in content from Julian's *Hymn,* except possibly in the degree of elaboration of the metaphysical scheme presented. We may, I think, therefore safely take it that Julian's identification of the Mother as the supreme 'female', emanative, and productive element in the universe, with Attis (also highly honoured by Proclus) as the demiurgic Logos which descends to generate the physical realm, based as this is in turn on the theology of Iamblichus,[20] substantially represents the position of Proclus himself.

We are not here concerned with theory, however, but rather with practice. It is plain that Hellenic religion was real for Proclus. The Mother spoke to him, and granted him constant favours. Athene — herself, theologically, a lower manifestation of the Mother[21] —, at the dreadful time when the Christians decided to remove her statue from the Parthenon and take it to Constantinople as a sort of trophy,[22] appeared to him in a dream and told him to prepare his house, since she wished to come and live with him (ἡ γὰρ κυρία Ἀθηναία παρὰ σοὶ μένειν θέλει, Marinus, *Procl.* 30).

His dealings with Asclepius were also intimate and extensive. The special relationship seems to have begun in his teenage

[20] Julian does not, admittedly, acknowledge Iamblichus by name in this hymn, but he does in the *Hymn to King Helios,* in a quite comprehensive manner (*Or.* 4,146A: "Iamblichus of Chalcis, who through his writings initiated me not only into other philosophical doctrines but these also").

[21] In her capacity as a tutelary deity of a city-state (*polioukhos thea*), she would actually be a rather lowly, sublunar manifestation of Athena proper, but none the less worthy of reverence for that.

[22] Athena was also, admittedly, the patron goddess of Byzantium/Constantinople, but that would hardly be the reason why the Christian regime would carry off her statue thither. This event, along with the 'troubles' that beset Proclus (MARIN. *Procl.* 15), and caused him to leave town for a year, are generally agreed to have taken place at some time in the late 450's.

years back in Xanthus, in his homeland of Lycia, when he fell ill of a serious disease, the nature of which is not specified further by Marinus (*Procl.* 7), but probably involved fever and delirium.[23] It seems that Proclus, at the crisis of this illness, received a vision of a beautiful child, who turned out to be Asclepius' son, Telesphorus.[24] The divinity appeared in his bedroom, touched the young Proclus gently on the head, the fever left him, and he was healed. Proclus was blessed with good health for most of his life after that.

This special relationship with Asclepius continued for Proclus all through his life. A notable occasion, from his later years, is given prominence by Marinus in *Procl.* 30. It involves the serious illness of the granddaughter of his instructress in theurgy, Plutarch's daughter, Asclepigeneia — herself also Asclepigeneia.[25] The doctors had despaired of her, but Proclus, accompanied by his colleague Pericles of Lydia, went up to the civic shrine of Asclepius in Athens (the Asclepieion),[26] and interceded with the god "according to the traditional rites" (τὸν ἀρχαιότερον τρόπον, 29), whereat the young lady was instantly healed. Marinus notes, significantly, in this connection that Proclus did this without any fanfare, in such a way as to give no pretext to "those who were inclined to conspire against him" (οὐδεμίαν πρόφασιν τοῖς ἐπιβουλεύειν ἐθέλουσι παράσχων, 29),

[23] This is perhaps a good opportunity to note that, in view of the perspective of this paper, scepticism in face of Marinus' many reports of miraculous happenings is hardly appropriate. It matters little whether these events happened as reported. What is important is what people believed to be the case; and there is no real reason to doubt that, despite the encomiastic nature of this narrative, either Marinus or his audience disbelieved these stories.

[24] This youthful divinity, in a Lycian context, may be discernable as the Phoenician deity Eshmun, who was identified with Asclepius. Cf. DAM. *Phil.Hist.* 142B Athan. Certainly Proclus would be alert to such connections.

[25] She was the daughter of Archiadas and Ploutarche, and wife of Theagenes, an important patron of the School.

[26] On this distinguished shrine, see J. TRAVLOS, *A Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (London 1980),127-137. At some time towards the end of Proclus' life, it was transformed by the Christians into a church — a misfortune to which Marinus makes reference here.

indicating thus how precarious it was in later fifth-century Athens for a prominent Hellene such as the head of the Academy to make any public show of the performance of traditional rites.

On a more personal level, though, Asclepius, he felt, had even shielded him from developing the gout[27] that had afflicted his father, and which, as he got older, he came to feel, for that reason, was likely to take a grip on him (*Procl.* 31). Having already suffered from some twinges of it, he had initially been advised to put a plaster on the affected foot, but as he was resting on his bed with the plaster, a sparrow flew down and snatched it away. Since sparrows are under the protection of Asclepius.[28] Proclus took this for a sign of divine guidance, and he prayed to the god, who sent him a dream, in which a young man came to him from the direction of Epidaurus (the God's chief sanctuary), and, approaching him, kissed his legs and knees.[29]

This incident (which seems to have cleared up the gout problem) directs our focus once again to the role of dreams and visions in Proclus' spiritual life. He was perhaps, in this matter, somewhat more subject to influence than one would expect in a philosopher, but probably not far from the average among intellectuals of his time; and one might be forgiven for feeling that on occasion the dreams occurred a little too conveniently to be quite credible. That on the other hand, might not be quite fair, since the subconscious is quite capable of taking the

[27] This is presumably what the *arthritis nosos* that Marinus refers to is, since it is afflicting his foot.

[28] Cf. AELIAN. *VH* 5, 17, where the story is told of how the Athenians put to death a certain Atarbes because he had killed a sparrow (*strouthos*) sacred to Asclepius. Aelian's terminology (τοῦ Ἀσκληπίου τὸν ἱερὸν στρουθὸν ἀπέκτεινε) seems rather to imply that *some,* not all, swallows were sacred to Asclepius — presumably those which frequented his sanctuary — which would seem more likely.

[29] Asclepius also had a role in his final illness, appearing to him (in a twilight zone between dozing and wakefulness) as a snake coiling round his head, just before his declination into total *paresis* (MARIN. *Procl.* 30).

initiative in interesting ways, especially in a milieu where prophetic dreams, both from divine and from (deceased) human sources, were a secure part of the cultural tradition.

At any rate, many of Proclus' major decisions in life were directed, or influenced (on his own account), by dreams. First of all, when he was still a young student of rhetoric, accompanying his mentor, the sophist Leonas, on a political mission from Alexandria to Constantinople, the goddess Athena appeared to him in a dream and urged him to turn his attention to her favourite city, Athens, and her particularly favoured pursuit, philosophy (*Procl.* 9). This can of course be seen as the culmination of a process of intellectual development which was leading him away from rhetoric and the law (his father's profession), and a career in imperial administration, towards more abstract and rarefied interests, but the crucial occurrence of a dream cannot be entirely discounted. Again, we learn from Damascius (*Phil.Hist.* 56 Athan.), rather than from Marinus, that Proclus took refuge in some divine warning (εἰ μὴ θεῶν τις ἀπεκώλυσεν) — probably a monitory dream — to discourage Syrianus from betrothing to him his relation (niece?) Aedesia.[30] Rather later in his career, he was the recipient of prophetic or monitory dreams from both of his mentors, Plutarch and Syrianus, on various topics. Plutarch appeared to him, on the completion of five years' work on a vast commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles,* to tell him that he would live for as many years as the work possessed quaternions (*Procl.* 26), and on counting, there turned out to be seventy of these. The purpose of Plutarch's apparition here is presumably congratulatory, and prophetic. In fact, Proclus lived slightly longer than 70, but, as Marinus specifies, his last few years might be taken not to count, as he was really not in command of his powers — possibly Alzheimer's was the problem; Marinus describes it as a

[30] Proclus would, of course, have been no more than 25 or so at this time (Syrianus died not long after 437), but it seems that in general he had no interest in marriage. Aedesia was subsequently married off to Proclus' fellow-student, Hermeias, and founded a philosophical dynasty in Alexandria.

paresis, a sort of paralysis. A monitory dream, on the other hand, came to him in his later years from Syrianus, when Proclus was pondering the propriety of being buried in the same tomb with his master,[31] as Syrianus had prescribed at his death (*Procl.* 36). Syrianus appeared to him, and threatened him with unspecified consequences for even thinking about it!

These dreams are no doubt only the tip of an iceberg. They are phenomena occurring to a man who felt himself, no doubt, to be close to both the divine world and to the world of the illustrious dead, so that there was nothing strange in communications coming to him from either quarter. A belief in prophetic dreams and portents, after all, is something that would not separate Hellenes from Christians — the issue between them would only be deciding on the proper source of such phenomena. Proclus himself is not unusual, among late Hellenic intellectuals, in his reliance on dreams. Many of the major figures in Damascius' *Philosophic History*[32] are reported to have experienced both dreams and waking visions, and to have guided their actions accordingly;[33] and of course a well-respected and widespread method of healing at the hands of Asclepius involved incubation in one or other of his shrines. Indeed, we have a rather nice (and characteristically waspish) story relayed by Damascius (*Phil.Hist.* 89) about Plutarch of

[31] He was worrying whether it might not be "contrary to propriety" (παρὰ τὸ καθῆκον) — presumably to break open a tomb and put in someone else unrelated to the inhabitant(s). It may be relevant, in this connection, to call to mind the many fearsome imprecations on Lycian tombs (of which so many fine examples still exist in that country) against re-using a given tomb to house any alien body. Proclus was Syrianus' 'spiritual child', but he was not a blood relation.

[32] Formerly known as *The Life of Isidore,* but I think now more properly designated, by its latest editor, Polymnia Athanassiadi, as *The Philosophic History.* Certainly Damascius' teacher Isidore is a major figure in the work, but it is really a rather wide-ranging history of the last few generations of the Hellenes, covering a wide swathe of the fifth century.

[33] Examples are Isidore (9, 11, 27), Aedesia (56), Domninus (89), Severianus (108), and Damascius himself (87A). Some of these, admittedly, such as that of Severianus (he is riding the ridge of a mountain as if it were a chariot), seem to bubble up from the subconscious, rather than to be sent down from the gods, and would be of much interest to Freud.

Athens and his pupil Domninus, both of whom were in bad health at a certain point, and both of whom sought a cure from Asclepius by means of incubation. Asclepius duly appeared to each of them, and by way of prescription told them to eat plenty of pork. At this Plutarch protested (to the cult statue of Asclepius directly!), and Asclepius actually spoke forth most melodiously from his statue, and gave him a different prescription. But Domninus, Damascius reports disapprovingly, ate the pork, though he was a Syrian, and it was against his ancestral traditions. This cured him, it seems, but he then had to go on eating pork indefinitely. If he ever left off even for a day, the symptoms returned.

Talk of dreams, however, brings us to the question of the cult of the dead, who so often appear in dreams. In this area Proclus was perhaps a little unusual in the assiduity of his practices. Marinus describes these as follows (*Procl.* 36):

> "More than anyone else, this blessed man was cognisant of, and put into practice, the rites due to the departed. For he neglected none of the dates when they are habitually honoured, but each year, on certain fixed days, he made the rounds, not only of the monuments of the Attic heroes, but also of the tombs of past philosophers, and more generally of his other friends and acquaintances, and he performed, not by proxy but in person, the traditional rites. And after having rendered the relevant services to each, he went off to the Academy,[34] and, in a certain particular spot, he propitiated the souls of his ancestors and in general those of his race (τὰς τῶν προγόνων καὶ ὅλως τὰς ὁμογνίους ψυχάς)."

Now one might find this behaviour all very odd. Why would Proclus, as a Lycian, feel it necessary to go about Athens, honouring not only those belonging to him, but the Attic heroes? And who are the ancestors that he is propitiating in the Academy? Saffrey and Segonds feel that this must refer to his spiritual ancestors in the Platonic tradition,[35] and this does

[34] Which was, of course, at this time only a public park.

[35] *Marinus, ou Sur le bonheur,* p.42 n.5.

indeed seem the most reasonable interpretation; but Marinus' terminology remains somewhat bizarre. In general, though, the best explanation for this extraordinary assiduity is perhaps to recall Proclus' own dictum that the philosopher must become the hierophant of the whole world. If someone like him, in the latter part of the fifth century, was not prepared to perform these rites and ceremonies for the distinguished dead, then who would? And if this were not done, then that continuity with previous generations which would ensure the spiritual health of the community would be broken.

But it is perhaps time to pull all these reflections together, and to attempt some more general characterization of late antique religion in the Hellenic tradition. I would be inclined to characterize it under three headings: antiquarianism, syncretism, and allegorization. Each of these characteristics can be explained by the nature of the religious tradition that had been bequeathed to the last Hellenes, and the challenges that beset them, specifically from the Christian establishment.

1) *Antiquarianism.* Under this heading, I would class all efforts by late antique Hellenic intellectuals to identify and preserve ancient cults and cult-sites both in their own cities and elsewhere in the world. The rationale for this activity would be the belief that ancient rites were bequeathed to men either by the gods themselves or at least by sages directly inspired by them, and that the neglect of such rites risked alienating the gods, and other more minor deities, from humanity, with consequent risks to the fabric of society and even to the balance of nature. It would be some considerations of this sort that led Proclus, for example, to do the rounds of the Attic heroes. Over in Alexandria, to adduce another example, Asclepiades, the father of Horapollon, is presented by Damascius (*Phil.Hist.* 72D Athan.) as a notable religious antiquarian, with a particular interest in the antiquities of Egypt.

> "As for Asclepiades," he says, "who had been educated mainly in Egyptian literature (ἐν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις βιβλίοις), he had a more accurate knowledge of his native theology,[36] having investigated its principles and methods and having enquired closely into the absolute infinity of its extreme limits, as one can clearly see both from the hymns that he composed to the Egyptian gods and from the treatise that he set out to write on the agreement of all theologies.[37] He also wrote a work dealing with Egyptian prehistory (Αἰγυπτίων ὠγυγίων πράγματα), which contains information covering no less than thirty thousand years, indeed slightly more" (transl. Athanassiadi).

This same Asclepiades is also reported by Damascius to have ascended Mount Lebanon in the area of Heliopolis to view the *baitylia,* or aniconic phallic pillars, that were objects of worship there, so he was also a practitioner of religious tourism.

2) *Syncretism.* This, at any rate brings us to the next salient characteristic of Hellenic religiosity, a concern to link up into a coherent system, if possible, all divinities worshipped anywhere in the known world. It was by the time a matter of considerable sensitivity — since it had long been a main plank of Christian anti-polytheist propaganda — that traditional religious worship was irreducibly chaotic, since apparently co-ordinate supreme divinities (as well as a plethora of lesser ones) flourished in various parts of the world, none being observably subordinate to any other. It was therefore a major concern of Hellenic intellectuals to identify as far as possible all such deities, showing them to be merely national manifestations of one and the same supreme god, whether Zeus or Jupiter or Amun-Re or Marduk; and similarly at lower levels. Thus, the god of the Jews could be

[36] This need not, I think, imply that Asclepiades had actually mastered Egyptian, or the system of hieroglyphs, or indeed that he was of native Egyptian stock. His son Horapollon, after all, composed a (still-extant) book on the hieroglyphs which makes it clear that he did not understand them.

[37] This, of course, relates more to our second category, that of syncretism; but the categories overlap. We know more of this treatise from Damascius' treatise *On First Principles,* III p.167 Westerink-Combès.

satisfactorily identified with Dionysus, and in turn with Osiris, Bel with Cronus, or Isis with the Moon.

Many more exotic figures had to be fitted in as well, however. We find Proclus for instance, engaging in an interesting investigation of this sort during his enforced period of withdrawal from Athens in the late 450's (Marinus, *Procl.* 32), when he came to visit the god in Adrotta in Lydia, as part of his antiquarian/syncretic tour of Asia Minor, in an attempt to identify just which of the known gods he was. The god, Marinus tells us, welcomed Proclus warmly when he visited his temple, and manifested himself to him personally, though initially without identifying himself further. Opinion among the locals, it seems, was divided as to his identity. A majority favoured Asclepius, on the basis of various observed similarities, but there was a dissident school of thought influenced by the reported sightings of a pair of young horsemen riding the road towards Adrotta, who were thought to be the Dioscuri — who might indicate, if anything, an identification with Zeus (their father). To solve the problem, Proclus prayed to the god himself, who then appeared to him in a dream, making the remarkable statement: "What then? Have you not hearkened to Iamblichus telling who these two are, and celebrating Machaon and Podalirius?" — that is to say, the two medical sons of Asclepius, who served at Troy.[38]

There is much that is remarkable about this anecdote, but for our purposes it demonstrates well how much of a concern it was to intellectuals like Proclus to fit all local divinities into the system. That is part of what is meant by being a 'hierophant for the whole world'.

[38] It is most remarkable for a god to make a 'literary' reference of this sort, basically referring Proclus to a treatise, or possibly hymn, of Iamblichus', but it serves to indicate the status of Iamblichus (in Proclus' subconscious!) as an authority on syncretism. We may recall the Emperor Julian's tribute to Iamblichus in the same connection, in the *Hymn to King Helios* (*Or.* 4, 150D), giving him due credit for the identification of the Emesan deities Monimos and Azizos with Hermes and Ares respectively.

3) *Allegory.* The third 'pillar', so to speak, of late Hellenic religiosity is a concern to allegorize disreputable or irrational features of traditional mythology in such a way as to draw out the hidden and edifying significance of them, and neutralize ill-natured criticisms of the myths, initially by philosophers, sophists, or simply 'enlightened' laymen, but later by Christian controversialists. This allegorizing tendency goes back a long way, even to the fifth century B.C.– we see an ironic reflection of it at the beginning of Plato's *Phaedrus* (229 b-e) — but it picked up momentum in the Hellenistic era with the Homeric exegesis of the Stoic-influenced School of Pergamum, reflected both in the *Homeric Allegories* of Heraclitus (or Pseudo-Heraclitus?) and the systematic allegorical exegesis of the *Pentateuch* by Philo of Alexandria.

However, for a nice example which would have particular resonance for our late Hellenic intellectuals, we may turn to Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods,* and specifically to a passage where he is interpreting the self-castration of Attis (*Or.* 5, 168Cff.). Attis is in effect, as has been mentioned earlier, the demiurgic Logos, projected upon matter by the Mother, who is transcendent divine Providence, but which must be recalled to the intelligible realm — that is, 'castrated' — before it becomes completely diffused and corrupted in the material realm:

> "Therefore, immediately after the castration, the trumpet sounds the recall for Attis[39] and for all of us who once flew down from heaven and fell to earth. And after this signal, when King Attis stays his limitless course (ἵστησι τὴν ἀπειρίαν) by his castration, the god bids us also root out the unlimited in ourselves and imitate the gods our leaders and hasten back to the defined and uniform (ἐπὶ τὸ ὡρισμένον καὶ ἑνοειδές), and if it be

[39] The sounding of trumpets was a feature of the Hilaria, the feast of the castration, celebrated on March 23-25 each year — very much at the time of the Christian Easter. Indeed, Julian in his discussion of Attis seems continually to be casting sidelong, ironic glances at the Christian doctrine of the passion and resurrection of Christ. It was doubtless part of Julian's plan for creating a religious counterweight to Christianity to set up Attis, duly allegorized, as a 'rational' equivalent of Christ.

> possible, to the One itself. After this, the Hilaria must by all means follow. For what could be more blessed, what more joyful than a soul which has escaped from limitlessness and generation and inward storm, and has been translated up to the very gods?" (transl. Wright).

This piece of exegesis, however, leads Julian to some more general reflections, provoked initially by the thought that there might appear to be any degree of inconsistency or change of mind in the actions of the Mother, something that would be quite unworthy of a divinity (169Dff.):[40]

> "But let no one suppose my meaning to be that this was ever done or happened in a way that implies that the gods themselves are ignorant of what they intend to do, or that they have to correct their own errors. But our ancestors in every case tried to trace the original meanings of things, whether with the guidance of the gods or independently — though perhaps it would be better to say that they sought for them under the leadership of the gods — then when they had discovered those meanings they clothed them in paradoxical myths. This was in order that, by means of the paradox and the incongruity, the fiction might be detected and we might be induced to search out the truth".

This becomes quite an important, even if far from original, statement of the rationale of the allegorization of myths. It is precisely the inconsequentiality of certain stories, or details of stories, that should lead us to discern that there must be a higher level of meaning involved; and to go back a further stage, to the dawn of history, we must assume that these stories were consciously cast into these absurd forms by primordial sages (including the inspired poets, such as Homer and Hesiod), with the help of the gods themselves, to separate the sheep from the goats — or rather, the intellectuals from the *simpliciores.*

Proclus, as we have already seen, also composed a treatise in honour of the Mother of the Gods (including, inevitably, the

[40] Interestingly, this is a major concern of Philo of Alexandria also, provoking from him a whole treatise — *That God is Immutable.*

myth of Attis), and no doubt allegorized it along very much the same lines as does Julian here. That the Attis myth had considerable resonance for other Neoplatonists as well is indicated by a tale that Damascius tells about himself in the *Philosophic History* (87A Athan.). In the course of his peregrinations from Alexandria to Athens in 489/90, he calls into the sanctuary of Apollo at Hierapolis in Phrygia for an incubation and has a significant dream, "in which I was Attis and, at the instigation of the Mother of the Gods, I celebrated the feast of the Hilaria, which signified my salvation from death". He declines to specify, we may note, whether he also dreamed of self-castration!

These, then, I should say, are the chief *external* characteristics of late Hellenic religion. On the internal, spiritual level, however, we may note in the such a typical case as that of Proclus a mode of life filled with rituals of one sort or another, both public and private, and within that again, a practice of prayer which exhibits considerable elaboration. I have discussed this elsewhere, in a paper entitled "The Neoplatonic Philosopher at Prayer",[41] but some brief remarks are called for here. Iamblichus, in *De mysteriis* 5, 26, sets out a theory of theurgic prayer (picked up on later, and somewhat elaborated, by Proclus, in *In Ti.* I p.207,23 — p.209,1 Diehl), in which he sets out three stages of prayer, beginning with the 'introductory' (συναγωγόν), "which leads to contact and acquaintance with the divine", and culminating in "ineffable unification" (ἄρρητος ἕνωσις), "which establishes all authority (*sc.* over our spiritual life) in the gods, and provides that our souls rest completely in them". For Proclus (*In Ti.* I p.211,24ff.), the equivalent state is "unification", which establishes the "One' of our

[41] In *Metaphysik und Religion. Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens. Akten des internationalen Kongresses vom 13.-17. März 2001 in Würzburg,* hrsg. von Th. KOBUSCH und M. ERLER, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 160 (München-Leipzig 2002).

soul in the very 'One' of the gods, and brings about a single activity of ourselves and the gods, in virtue of which we are not in control of ourselves, but in that of the gods, coming to rest in the divine light and completely enveloped by it".

Behind these inevitably rather allusive characterisations of the highest level attained in prayer, with their references to the 'One' of the soul, and to divine 'fire' and 'light', there lies, I would suggest, a considerable quantum of intense spiritual experience, culminating in an at least quasi-ecstatic state, involving a vision of 'fire'. There are spiritual exercises lurking here, of which we are not going to be given the details, but of which I think we may safely assume the existence. Proclus, we know from Marinus (*Procl.* 24), slept comparatively little during the night, regarding sleep, in the best Platonic manner, as "a sort of laziness of the soul" (ἀργίαν τινὰ τῆς ψυχῆς), so he spent much of the night in prayer or the composition and chanting of hymns. Proclus' surviving hymns[42] have the appearance, to a modern eye, of pretty turgid compositions, but they plainly meant a lot to him as aids to prayer and meditation. In his last illness, we are told (*Procl.* 20), even when no longer retaining much consciousness of anything else, he greatly valued his disciples' chanting of hymns to him, and was even able to join in himself to some extent.

With this reference to the Neoplatonic philosopher at prayer I will end my survey. Of course there is a great deal more that could be said, and many more examples that could be adduced, but I hope that I have been able to show that it was possible for a late Hellenic intellectual to enjoy a spiritual life which was every bit as genuine and as coherent as that of his Christian counterpart. The world was indeed still full of gods, even if "the current atheism" (as Proclus would term it) was intent on driving a wedge between humanity and its sources of spiritual

[42] Recently edited, with a fine introduction and commentary, by R.M. VAN DEN BERG, *Proclus' Hymns*, Philosophia Antiqua 90 (Leiden 2001).

support, and it was still possible, at least up through the early decades of the sixth century, to accord them proper, if discreet, worship — but even that, by reason of the dogmatic zeal, of the Emperor Justinian, was destined not to be possible much longer. Around two centuries after Constantine had declared Christianity the official religion of the Empire, the old faith had finally to go completely underground, only to re-emerge in later centuries, with various degrees of deviousness, in such figures as Michael Psellus and George Gemistus Pletho.

DISCUSSION

J. Scheid: J'ai trouvé votre exposé aussi fascinant que délicieux. Ce sont notamment les parties sur l'antiquarisme et le syncrétisme qui m'ont fait réfléchir. Je n'avais jamais fait attention au fait que le texte de Marinus décrit de façon aussi précise les pratiques cultuelles de Proclus. J'ai cru voir réalisée, en vous entendant, cette union entre la *theoria* et la pratique cultuelle telle que Varron ou Cicéron la recommandaient. J'aimerais en savoir davantage sur l'ancienneté de cette conduite. Les Anciens visitaient les lieux de culte connus, comme on le sait de Pompée, Tibère, Pline le Jeune, Hadrien, Marc-Aurèle ou encore Apollonios de Tyane. Mais il y a une grande différence entre la curiosité des visiteurs et la conduite de Proclus.

Celui-ci se déplace d'un sanctuaire à l'autre, comme Pausanias ou les philosophes dans leurs panoramas des formes divines, non pour dresser un inventaire, mais pour y rendre un culte. Quel culte rendait-il? Le culte local, ou un culte générique censé satisfaire à toutes les obligations? On comprend en tout cas, en vous écoutant, pourquoi Justinien a fermé l'Académie.

J.M. Dillon: Yes indeed, Justinian was no doubt right, from his own perspective, to suppress them! I should say that there was a great concern for continuity in cult practices among late Hellenic intellectuals. That would have been part of their pervasive antiquarianism. But of course how far they achieved that is another matter. We can observe them, at the same time as they are concerned to preserve the old ways, also showing great loyalty to rather more exotic cults such of those of Mithras and the Great Mother, and of course to theurgic practices. But

everything was given at least a veneer of antiquity. This is certainly what Julian is trying to do (e.g. in assimilating Mithras to Helios and to Apollo), and Proclus also, in his way.

F. Marco Simón: Like J. Scheid, I too was struck by this — might one say "structural"? — duality, already documented in Varro or Cicero, in the latest Hellenic authors analyzed by J. Dillon, from Proclus to Damascius: a first level of ritual, compulsorily enforced, with regard to traditional religion, and another level of speculation or philosophical theory (or, in the case of theurgy, of esoteric knowledge). We find here, once more, the same contrast between the public aspect (ancestral ritual which must be maintained and which, as N. Belayche showed, was expressed in the world of the "confession stelae" in Anatolia through ritual obligation) and the private aspect (religious or philosophical speculations; *gnosis* as against *pistis*, as it were). These two levels, which partly correspond to the intellectuals and *simpliciores* mentioned by J. Dillon with regard to the interpretation of allegory, are, I believe, expressed in various documents. I shall give an example of a type of source which, in my opinion, contains a message whose meanings and complexity depended on the cultural level of the recipient.

In the time of Julian, certain coins were minted at the end of 362, in other words, just before the fateful expedition to Persia, whose reverse showed a new and original iconography in comparison with those already in existence: a bull facing the right with two stars above it, surrounded by the inscription *Securitas Rei Pub(licae)*. Elsewhere I have argued (*Athenaeum* 87 [1999], 201-214) as against identification of the animal as the ox Apis or the Mithraic bull, for an iconic ambivalence, aimed at ideological persuasion by the emperor, with two distinct levels of interpretation, which can be explained in the context of the emperor's neo-Platonic circles. One interpretation, more open, linked to the sacrifice of a bull as a ritual expression of the traditional religion of

romanitas as opposed to Christianity (hence the implicit relationship established in the epigraph between the security of the *Res publica* and the need to carry out sacrifices as a necessary condition); and a second level, represented by the two stars which, judging from Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, might be considered to be symbols of the two gates of the Sun, Cancer and Capricorn, through which the descent and ascent of Attis came about (an *epanodos* which symbolizes and makes possible the soaring of the souls of initiates to heaven).

In addition, with regard to what is being said here about bull sacrifice, I would like to give an example of what I believe to be a ritual that was manifested in two different ways, one epigraphic and the other iconographic, on either side of the western Pyrenees. *Lactara* (Lectoure) has the greatest concentration of bull taurobolic inscriptions in the western part of the Roman Empire. Now, in the territory of the Vascones, on the southern side of the Pyrenees, a series of reliefs has been found with bulls' heads (some with stars between the horns) and also sacrificial scenes. Recent excavations in the Roman town of Las Musas in Arellano (Navarre), by the River Ebro, have unearthed a rectangular construction with a large amount of ashes, interpreted as being evidence of sacrifices. Access to this construction was between two stone blocks with representations of bulls' heads.

The archaeologists on this dig have interpreted this as evidence of bull sacrificing activities. As I have pointed out elsewhere (*Gerión* 15 [1997], 297-319), it may be no coincidence that the most detailed description of this ritual — albeit in a derogatory context — is to be found in Prudentius (*Perist.* 10, 1006-1050), a native of *Calagurris*, a town adjoining the area of the dig, who was writing during the same period as the date of these remains. At any event, the date of these finds, the beginning of the 5th century CE according to the coins, documents the survival of this ancestral sacrificial ritual among the rural aristocracy of this area

of *Tarraconensis* to a relatively late period, as with the Aquitanian altars at *Lactara*.

J.M. Dillon: Yes indeed, there is this dualism between ritual and philosophical belief, though I do not think there is necessarily an incoherence. Your adducing of the example of the coin of Julian is most interesting, since it shows, in my view, how concerned Julian was to assimilate his undoubted devotion to Mithraic ritual with both his Platonist philosophical convictions and with the forms of traditional Roman religion. I believe that very many late Hellenic intellectuals achieved this delicate balancing act between the rather exotic rites that they might be indulging in and the maintenance of traditional religious forms. Your report of the recent discovery of Mithraic inscriptions and monuments in Spain is indeed most interesting, and perhaps indicates how widespread was the syncretistic adoption of such cults among the intelligentsia.

Ph. Borgeaud: J'ai été vivement intéressé par la manière dont vous mettez en évidence, dans la pratique des néoplatoniciens, ce souci extrême de maintenir en vie la tradition. Je pense que vous avez absolument raison, même à propos de ce rêve où Damascius se voit transformé en Attis, sans pour autant passer par une quelconque castration: la tradition n'exigeait pas, en effet, de castration pour celui qui, sans être galle, pratiquait jadis (jadis par rapport à Proclus ou Damascius) le rite. Les autels tauroboliques, sur ce point, sont clairs: on manipulait les *vires* de l'animal sacrifié (taureau ou bélier), cela suffisait. Point n'était besoin de se mutiler.

À propos de ces tauroboles ou crioboles, d'ailleurs, on voyait déjà se constituer une sorte de canon rituel, du côté de la "résistance païenne", un phénomène qui confirme lui aussi tout ce que vous nous avez dit: il suffit de lire la liste des initiations pratiquées dans l'entourage très aristocratique de Prétextat, de Pauline et de leurs amis, à la fin du 4ème s. On y voit figurer, à côté de la Mère des dieux, Vesta, Mithra, Sol, Hécate, Liber et

Isis. L'influence de ce milieu se laisse observer non seulement dans la région de Rome, mais jusqu'en Grèce. Prétextat lui-même fut proconsul d'Achaïe, et il a sans doute profité de cette occasion, tout comme son épouse, pour se faire initier aux mystères de Iacchos et de Coré à Eleusis, de Dionysos à Lerne, d'Hécate à Egine. Une quinzaine d'années plus tard, sous le mandat d'un autre proconsul vraisemblablement lié au même milieu, Phosphorius, le dénommé Archéleos se fait initier en Argolide aux mystères de Dionysos de Lerne et en Attique, à Phlya, à ceux d'Attis et de Rhéa par taurobole.

Pour revenir à la pratique des néoplatoniciens, et ce sera ma seconde remarque, ce que vous avez dit de leurs possibles visites dans la grotte de Pan au flanc du Parnes rejoint de manière surprenante le récit que l'on rencontre dans la *Vie de Platon* attribuée à Olympiodore, que l'on trouve en introduction à son commentaire de l'*Alcibiade*. Après la naissance (miraculeuse) de Platon ses parents prirent le bébé et le déposèrent sur les pentes de l'Hymette, l'abandonnant momentanément, pendant qu'ils sacrifiaient pour lui aux dieux de l'endroit, à savoir Pan, les Nymphes et Apollon *Nómios* (l'Apollon pastoral). Des abeilles, s'approchant de l'enfant qui reposait, emplirent sa bouche de rayons de miel. On s'accorde généralement à reconnaître ici une allusion à la grotte de Vari, où Apollon était vénéré à côté des Nymphes et de Pan, et où des inscriptions conservent le souvenir de phénomènes de nympholepsie (de transe causée par les Nymphes). A moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'une autre grotte du même secteur, la grotte dite du lion près de Liopesi. Les néoplatoniciens, qui ont une véritable passion pour les antres et les gouffres mystiques, devaient effectivement s'y rendre en excursions ou pèlerinages, et y pratiquer de petits sacrifices, tout en rattachant, en l'occurrence, leurs rituels au souvenir de Platon.

J.M. Dillon: Many thanks for those remarks. First of all, as regards Damascius' dream: I quite agree — of course, 'castration' could be allegorized as spiritual castration; and indeed there is

no evidence that any late Greek philosopher considered castrating himself. The only man I can think of who may have done this (if we can believe Eusebius) is the Christian theologian Origen, and he was rather young at the time — nor is he likely to have been influenced by the worship of the Great Mother!

Secondly, I am very glad to have the information about Praetextatus and other Roman nobles. It amplifies my remarks about late Greco-Roman intellectuals in a most welcome manner!

Lastly, as regards the devotion of Proclus (and others) to Pan, that is indeed a most interesting report by Olympiodorus about Plato (the detail about the bees, however, probably borrowed from a similar story about the infant Pindar!), and no doubt it would be known to later Platonists generally, and would have deepened their reverence for Pan.

N. Belayche: Les pratiques rituelles de ces néo-platoniciens ne sont-elles pas encore plus traditionnelles que celles des dévots anatoliens des II^e^-III^e^ siècles? Elles intègrent aussi bien des pratiques divinatoires tardives (la "roue d'Hécate" attestée chez Ammien Marcellin 29,1, 29-33 et par un *divinatory kit* publié par A. Mastrocinque, in *JRA* 15 [2002], 174-187) qu'une réglementation traditionnelle sur l'occupation des tombeaux, tout comme des références culturelles évidentes (cf. les reliefs grecs où Asclépios touche l'épaule du malade, cf. *supra* n. 65). En revanche, la négociation avec le dieu sur le porc serait impensable dans la relation éminemment inégalitaire des dévots anatoliens avec leurs seigneurs divins, alors qu'elle rappelle des conduites de transaction exemplifiées par l'épisode de Jupiter et Numa pour la procuration des foudres (Ovide, *Fast.* 3, 333-348).

Le tour des sanctuaires fait par Proclus en Asie Mineure pose un problème chronologique. Quelle valeur historique peut-on attribuer à cette information, si l'on admet l'analyse de St. Mitchell (*Anatolia.* II: *The Rise of the Church* [Oxford 1993], 62-64), qui conclut que l'Asie Mineure est largement christianisée dès le IV^e^ siècle, voire majoritairement chrétienne dans certaines régions dès le milieu du III^e^ siècle?

L'expérience du "feu" divin m'évoque l'oracle de Claros sur le dieu ineffable, gravé sur la muraille de la cité lycienne d'Oenoanda ("le feu est son séjour [*en puri naiôn*]", l. 3). Comment fonctionnait l'articulation entre le ritualisme hyper-traditionnel pratiqué par Proclus et ce *highest level* d'expérience spirituelle, et est-ce que ces deux formes de pratiques trahissent des niveaux différents de "croyance"?

J.M. Dillon: I would have no doubt that the Neoplatonist philosophers would in fact be far more traditionalist in their practices than the devotees of the various Anatolian and other cults whom you have presented to us in your most enlightening paper, mainly because they were more conscious of what they were doing, which was to preserve tradition. Even Proclus' involvement with Chaldaean rites (inherited from his master Plutarch) could be seen as sanctioned by the gods themselves, and so of timeless antiquity.

As regards Proclus' remarkable tour of inspection in Anatolia, which is generally dated to the mid 450's or early 460's, I can see no basis for doubting the basic historicity of Marinus' testimony. If Mitchell is right, therefore, about the advanced state of Christianization of the region by this time, we can only assume at the same time a network of shrines which held out as centres of the old religion, of which Proclus was well informed. Damascius, after all, about forty years later, is still able to visit quite a number of centres of Hellenic worship in Anatolia (particularly in the vicinity of Aphrodisias), as well as over the rest of the Near East. So the triumph of Christianity was not quite so uniform as it may appear by this time.

As for the 'divine fire', your adducing of the evidence of the oracle of Claros is most interesting. It is certainly a Chaldaean concept, but plainly far more widespread than that.

D. Stökl: Warum hat Proklus *barfuß* gebetet? *Bemerkung*: Der hellenische Antiquarianismus erscheint etwas später als das, was ich in meinem Beitrag als jüdische Tempelnostalgie bezeichnet habe.

J.M. Dillon: Your question is a most interesting one, and I'm not sure that I have an answer for it, though others may. It is certainly my recollection that it was a Pythagorean practice to enter sanctuaries, and to pray, barefoot, but I am uncertain how far it was a general Hellenic practice. Perhaps someone could help me with that?

As for your remark about the coincidence of the growth of antiquarianism among the Hellenic intelligentsia with Jewish nostalgia for the Temple, that is also most interesting, and perhaps symptomatic of a similar situation in either case.

C. Bonnet: Dans le texte que vous avez si judicieusement analysé pour nous, Marinus présente Proclus comme une sorte de "saint païen". L'historien peut-il utiliser ce texte comme un "portrait" fidèle de la religiosité du philosophe, et par extension des "derniers philosophes", ou ne faut-il pas préalablement s'interroger sur les modèles suivis par l'auteur, par exemple celui de Pythagore, ou d'Apollonios de Tyane? Ne serait-il pas utile de cerner les contours du projet biographique de Marinus? À quelle occasion rédige-t-il cette biographie? Pour quel lectorat? Utilise-t-il des *topoi*? Quel impact recherche-t-il sur son public? On sait, depuis Plutarque au moins, que les récits biographiques répondent à une sélection et à un arrangement narratif des faits. Comment Marinus a-t-il construit la mémoire de Proclus? N'entend-il pas mettre en scène une ritualité païenne exemplaire qui fasse contrepoids aux modèles proposés par l'hagiographie contemporaine?

J.M. Dillon: Yes, it is quite true that Marinus' 'Life' of his master is a thoroughly formalized production, probably composed to be read at a memorial service for Proclus on the first anniversary of his death, and presented to a gathering of his former pupils and admirers. It does therefore partake of the genre of hagiography. However, I think that it is quite possible to read between the lines, and to discern the factual substratum. Certain stories, however embellished, could not be told at

all to an audience who knew the facts, had there not been some factual basis for them. Incidents such as dreams or miraculous occurrences, of course, have to be taken *cum grano salis,* but I adduce them primarily as evidence for the sort of thing that people *believed.*

J. Kellens: Il faut préciser qu'il n'y a jamais eu de culte du feu en Iran, même si le feu joue un rôle central dans le sacrifice. Car le feu n'est pas la cible du sacrifice, il est le moyen du sacrifice.

J.M. Dillon: You surprise me greatly with that information. The one thing that I would have thought I knew about Zoroastrianism, or Iranian religion in general, was that fire was a primary object of worship! But there it is — one lives and learns. In the tradition from which the *Chaldaean Oracles* derive, at any rate, fire is very much the medium in which the gods have their being, though I am not sure that it is an object of worship as such. Union with a (spiritual) fire, however, does appear as the culmination of Neoplatonic theurgic prayer.