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## **“GREETINGS, I AM AN IMMORTAL GOD!”: READING, IMAGINATION, AND PERSONAL DIVINITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY, 2ND – 5TH CENTURIES CE**

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AND PERSONAL DIVINITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY, 2<sup>ND</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES CE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

MARK ROBLEE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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University of Massachusetts Amherst/Five College Graduate Program in History

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Mother and Father.

## EPIGRAPH

Consciousness, Hermes reveals, is a great subject and very holy, no less than an account of divinity itself.

*The Latin Asclepius*

Understanding our selves—our natures, capacities, and possibilities—is the hardest thing in the world and yet endlessly fascinating because it cannot be finally settled by empirical research. There are no facts to decide, once and for all, whether the mind is part of the body, or whether it is a spiritual substance, or an epiphenomenon of the brain. We still do not know, in a scientific sense, what consciousness is.

A. A. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*

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support. I thank my sons, Nick and Robin, lights of my life, who contributed to this project in ways they will never know. Parents start off divine and if they are lucky become human. Furry, four-legged friends at home gave much comfort. Finally, this odyssey would never have been possible to begin with without the constant encouragement, patience, and support of my beloved wife, Jacqueline Strauss, ever graceful and wise.

## ABSTRACT

### **“GREETINGS, I AM AN IMMORTAL GOD!”: READING, IMAGINATION, AND PERSONAL DIVINITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY, 2<sup>ND</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES CE**

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In *City of God*, Augustine entertains “personal divinity”—the idea that a person could become an immortal god. Recent scholarship has focused on the social function of such beliefs. The divine status of public figures such as emperors and martyrs has become a trope widely understood in its social and institutional dimensions. I add to this sociological understanding by inquiring into individual experience. How did a late antique person become divine? How did she understand divinity and the limits of the self? In *City of God*, Augustine assembles an archive that includes references to works by Platonists Apuleius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, as well as Hermes Trismegistus (the eponymous mystagogue portrayed in the *Corpus Hermeticum*). With ancient and modern theories about reading and the imagination in mind—from Quintilian to Cognitive Poetics—this dissertation interrogates the way reading (or hearing) texts about personal divinity function as implicit “spiritual exercises” or imaginative technologies of self-transformation. My dissertation shows how the power of mental representations—

imagined images of self and world that reside within the mind—affect experience and construct “reality.”

Considering the role of imaginative reading and its transformative effects adds a layer of complexity to how historians of religion and religious studies scholars interpret texts about personal divinity, yielding greater compassion for how ancient peoples may have understood themselves on their own terms. Furthermore, the heightened self-reflexivity that results from imaginative engagements with discourses on personal divinity is part of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that Otto ascribes to the divine “Wholly Other.” The awe we experience at a thunder and lightning storm, for example, is as much the awe of being able to feel or perceive the storm. The texts I interpret explicitly provoke such awe. My research invites the modern reader into a numinous world where human consciousness itself becomes “divine” through a complex process of self-sacralization. Finally, this dissertation suggests that the writing of history informed by a reflexive philosophy of history functions much like the “spiritual exercises” that constitute my source texts. Writing history is a transformative practice that leads to self-knowledge in the present.

## *CAVEAT LECTOR*

History dissertations do not usually come with caveats. But, this is not a commonsense dissertation about “commonsense history.”<sup>1</sup> Allow me to explain. This is a dissertation about imaginary beings. That is, I shall be discussing things that are invisible. This makes them no less real but they require imagination in order to “see” them. Things like souls, gods, and people in the past. Thoughts and ideas, like gods, souls, and people in the past, are invisible. And, they are no less real. You can “see” them in your mind. They can (invisibly) occur to you. And, you can acquire new thoughts and ideas by listening to or, in this case, reading them. Gods, souls, and people in the past will take form as you read my words and the words of the thinkers—ancient and modern—that I shall present to you in this work. If there were a god of the imagination, I would invoke him or her now. Perhaps it is Hermes.

Hermes was the guide of souls and messenger of the gods.<sup>2</sup> He traveled between visible and invisible worlds. Indeed, he made the invisible, visible—bringing “existence out of the nonexistent,” knowing “the things hidden beneath heaven and earth.”<sup>3</sup> All the writers examined in this dissertation, including Augustine, are trying much as I am to figure out what divinity is and its relationship to humanity. All of these ancient thinkers were working out questions and problems dealing with what it means to be a conscious creature. For them, Hermes stood as guide to explore these questions that concern the boundary between the visible world of embodiment and the invisible worlds of thought

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<sup>1</sup> See section below on R.G. Collingwood in “Historical Practice” for an explanation of “common sense” history.

<sup>2</sup> See Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> *PGM* 8.1 – 52. This *Papyri Graecae Magicae* spell is addressed to Thoth who in late antiquity was the Egyptian Hermes.

and idea that humans hold within them and give shape to through the stories they tell about them. This is not just a metaphor.<sup>4</sup> Augustine spills a good deal of ink on Hermes Trismegistus and the writings attributed to him. And it is no coincidence that Apuleius went to great pains in court to counter charges of practicing *magia* in part because he had in his possession a small black wooden statue of Hermes, remarkably common as such objects were.<sup>5</sup> Iamblichus refers to the “books of Hermes” and the “way of Hermes” in his writings.<sup>6</sup> Eunapius tells us that Porphyry was “in the chain of Hermes.”<sup>7</sup> The words of the Hermetic corpus often seem to echo in Plotinus.<sup>8</sup>

Hermes (it should be noted) also gives his name to the act of interpretation, hermeneutics, and to subjects that are “hermetic,” meaning they are difficult to

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<sup>4</sup> Suggesting historians consider adopting an “unexpected” voice and style in the writing of history, Catherine Chin writes eloquently about the use of metaphor, short sentences, and “unrealities”: “As historians, we are sometimes afraid of unrealities, of whatever does not propose a close relationship between our worlds and the past events we are describing. Yet marking distance between words and events is what, paradoxically, brings the events more clearly to mind... Awareness of the imaginative work that writing does for us, in our own time, and in our own bodies, allows us to reconsider the constitutive nature of somatically-engaged fantasy for our own task of historical world-building. We write history for ourselves... If we were to accept the somatic, and aesthetic, qualities of historical production with the same level of seriousness that we grant to argumentative prose, we might use these qualities to create late antiquities that are themselves newly compelling.” “*Pro nobis fabula narrator: Late Antiquity as Art and Fantasy*,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, 16 September, 2015: <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/late-antiquity-and-the-new-humanities-an-open-forum/>

<sup>5</sup> See Apuleius, *Apologia* 63.

<sup>6</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8.1, 8.4, 8.5.

<sup>7</sup> Eunapius, *Vita Sophistarum* 457.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *CH* 16.7 with Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.3.17.28-38; *CH* 11.20 with Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.12.

understand, obscure, veiled.<sup>9</sup> He tells us, as in my first epigraph, that divinity is a great topic. In fact, it is so expansively great in scope that upon closer examination we find that no one knows quite exactly what it is. (A.A. Long says the same for “consciousness” in the second epigraph). We take it for granted that we know what it is to the extent that we exist within a worldview that has already defined it for us. If we are people of “Abrahamic-descended” traditions of belief, we will think in terms of “God”; if we are Graeco-Roman philosophers, that concept takes quite a few other shapes; if we are scientists in the modern sense, still another. The topic of divinity, itself, is “sacred,” “set apart” from the Latin, *sacer* (an issue I will address at length in chapter 2).

Hermes was also the patron of travelers. The unusual structure of this dissertation may require some orientation. An introduction will provide you with important preliminary discussions of problems, methods, and terms. But, in order to discover what is at the center of this dissertation, we will have to walk around, as it were. Readers will enter the discussion from a number of different approaches—“Ways of Hermes”—each intended to provide a complementary entryway into a difficult and confusing topic: Divinity. You will know that you have reached the “center,” when you stumble upon the words of the Muse in a “Poetic Postlude” which more or less encapsulates the spirit of the work. For a more detailed map, I refer you to the dissertation outline (“Ways of Hermes”) below.

Hermes was also a trickster and a thief. I suggest that there are three ways to engage with this project: 1) To view it as an intellectual history—a history of ideas and

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<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* 408A: “Ἀλλὰ μὴν τοῦτό γε ἔοικε περὶ λόγον τι εἶναι ὁ Ἑρμῆς, καὶ τὸ ἐρμηνεῖα εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἄγγελον 408καὶ τὸ κλοπικόν τε καὶ τὸ ἀπατηλὸν ἐν λόγοις καὶ τὸ ἀγοραστικόν, περὶ λόγου” (I should imagine that the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter, or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing has a great deal to do with language. English trans. Jowett).

of mentalities—concerning reading, imagination, and personal divinity; 2) As a way to enter a thought-world of people in the past and attempt to see through their eyes; 3) To use it as a measure of your own thinking about such topics as divinity and the self—indeed, about the “past”—and as a means of understanding your own invisible world of thought. If my extensive use of supporting secondary sources appears to obscure what is my contribution to scholarship, know that my argument is not stolen but rather you have been tricked. Like a good Late Antique mosaic, no one piece alone stands for the vision that appears before you.

It was a custom of the ancients to place a garland on the *herm* stone by the road as they set out upon a difficult journey or passed a boundary into unknown territory.<sup>10</sup> Let this caveat be so. You, dear reader, as Hermes assured us in the epigraph above, are about to enter an account of consciousness. Historical? Yes. But very much alive in the present where the past is accounted for.

Mark Roblee  
Plum Island, MA  
March 15, 2018

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<sup>10</sup> *Hermae* (ἑρμαῖ) are “statues composed of a head, usually that of the god Hermes, placed on a quadrangular pillar, the height of which corresponds to the stature of the human body (ἡ τετράγωνος ἐργασία, Thuc. 6.27; τὸ σχῆμα τὸ τετράγωνον, Paus. 4.33.4). ... One of the most important features in the mythology of Hermes is his presiding over the common intercourse of life, traffic, journeys, roads, boundaries, and so forth, and there can be no doubt that it was chiefly in such relations as these that he was intended to be represented by the *Hermae* of the Greeks and by the *Termini* of the Romans, when the latter were identified with the *Hermae*. It is therefore natural that we should look for the existence of this symbol in the very earliest times in which the use of boundary-marks was required; and in such times the symbols would be of the simplest character, a heap of stones or an unhewn block of marble.” In William Smith, William Wayte, and G. E. Marindin, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: J. Murray, 1890-91).

## A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

As a courtesy to general readers, Latin and ancient Greek authors, titles, and translations are in English in the main body of the text. Please note the following exceptions: *Corpus Hermeticum* (for work attributed to Hermes Trismegistus), *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (for the collection of Egyptian spells known in English as *The Magical Greek Papyri*) and *Metamorphoses* (the original title of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*). Ancient authors and original titles are given in full in Latin or ancient Greek transliteration in parentheses. Quoted passage numbers will appear parenthetically without author and title after the first mention in an extended, exclusive discussion. The original language is given in the notes accompanied by English translations if not supplied in the main text. The English translator is cited in the notes. See "Primary Sources" in the bibliography for full citation information including modern scholarly edition. My own translations are specified in the notes and my emendations appear in brackets in the text where and when they occur. In some cases, I have given slightly more of the original in the notes for clarity, context, and interest. On occasion, the original Latin and ancient Greek are not supplied in notes when glossed parenthetically in the text in sufficient part. Some references to Latin or ancient Greek passages are given in the notes with citation only when not quoted in text or immediately relevant to the discussion. Important words and phrases occur in the text in Latin, transliterated ancient Greek (without accents or other diacritical marks), Middle Egyptian, Arabic, or Hebrew as the case may be. Original Syriac, Coptic, and Middle Egyptian are given in English translation only. Some Middle Egyptian words are displayed using standard specialized transliteration fonts. One Arabic translation in English is accompanied by Arabic transliteration without the original in the notes, one Hebrew title appears in transliteration

in the notes. I have chosen not to use author and title abbreviations in the notes with the following exceptions: *Corpus Hermeticum* = *CH*; *Papyri Graecae Magicae* = *PGM*; “*Mithras Liturgy*” = *ML*. Abbreviations for Christian sources in the bibliography are listed there.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Historical Practice

“What historians do worst...is reflect on epistemology.”

Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*<sup>1</sup>

A word at the outset about my influences and historical practice should help the reader navigate the following case studies with an open mind. My focus in this dissertation is concerned with ideas and mentalities. This is an intellectual history about reading, imagination, and personal divinity in late antiquity. The choice to focus on ideas and the individual reader's reception does not constitute an objection to social history but rather it serves as an aid to understanding the social more fully. Indeed, intellectual history is a part of social history. That is, intellectual life happens in a social context. Broadly speaking, intellectual history is “the study of intellectuals, ideas, and intellectual patterns over time.”<sup>2</sup> I would like to think that I am doing the work of the intellectual historian here; but, I seek to do more than document the change of ideas and concerns of people in the past over time, even to do more than explore the context in which these

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15. Quoted in Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 77. Mark Salber Phillips gives an example of a lack of reflection on historical distance: “The very ubiquity of distance, however, has tended to render it invisible, and over time certain canonized ideas about the proper forms of distance have become so much a feature of our historiographical tradition that we are hardly aware of their influence.” “Distance and Historical Representation,” *History Workshop Journal* no. 57 (2004): 125. Thanks to Marla Miller for recommending this source.

<sup>2</sup> Peter E. Gordon, “What is Intellectual History? A frankly partisan introduction to a frequently misunderstood field,” (Harvard University, Cambridge MA: 2012): <http://scholar.harvard.edu/pgordon>. Used with permission.

ideas presented themselves and were discussed. My interest lies in *understanding* as much as *explanation*.<sup>3</sup> According to Peter E. Gordon, the intellectual historian's interest in "reconstructive understanding as against strict evaluation...has at least two notable consequences for the practice of intellectual history": "First, it enables intellectual historians to draw sometimes surprising and creative connections between different sorts of texts. Second, it allows them to think about intellectual 'meaning' in a rather capacious or open-ended fashion."<sup>4</sup>

Robert Darnton claims that intellectual history cannot be considered a "whole": "It has no governing *problématique*. Its practitioners share no sense of common subjects, methods, and conceptual strategies. At one extreme they analyze the systems of philosophers; at the other they examine the rituals of illiterates."<sup>5</sup> Darnton delineates four kinds of intellectual history practice: "the history of ideas (the study of systematic thought, usually in philosophical treatises), intellectual history proper (the study of informal thought, climates of opinion, and literary movements), the social history of ideas (the study of ideologies and idea diffusion), and cultural history (the study of culture in

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<sup>3</sup> See discussion of Collingwood's engagement with Dilthey and continental philosophy below and Karsten R. Stueber, "Understanding Versus Explanation? How to Think about the Distinction between the Human and the Natural Sciences," *Inquiry* 55:1 (2012): 17-32. Stueber provides a nice summary of the debate with nuanced commentary about whether the human and natural sciences are commensurable in subject and mode of study or not.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon, "What is Intellectual History?," 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael G. Kammen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 337.

the anthropological sense, including world views and collective *mentalités*).”<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation, my emphasis is on the latter.

A.O. Lovejoy’s history of ideas, with its search for “unit-ideas” and “mind,” was an approach to intellectual history that rose sharply in the post-war era and seemed to crash just as suddenly with the advent of social history in the 1950s and 60s. In his reassessment of Lovejoy’s contribution to the more recent direction of intellectual history, Anthony Grafton notes how “for the last ten years...younger scholars, especially graduate students, had been scrambling over the gunwales of the good ship History of Ideas, abandoning the effort to converse abstractly with the mighty dead.”<sup>7</sup> However, after a dazzling object lesson in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual and cultural history, Grafton concludes that, after all:

Lovejoy built extremely well—better, possibly, than he knew. The crossroads he laid out and paved remains a central and attractive meeting point for many disciplines. And the history of ideas—in the general sense of a study of texts, images, and theories that seeks to balance responsibility and precision in the formal treatment and analysis of its objects with an equally measured effort to connect them to a particular historical world—has proved resilient, even expansive, through multiple transformations of the disciplinary fields at whose borders it resides.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Darnton, “Intellectual and Cultural History,” 337.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Grafton, “The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice, 1950 - 2000 and Beyond,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 3 (2006): 3. David Harlan writes about “recent developments in literary criticism and the philosophy of language make it possible for intellectual historians to return to an earlier understanding of their discipline: intellectual history as a conversation with the dead about things we value.” “Reply to David Hollinger,” *American Historical Review* 94 (1985): 625. Quoted in David Boucher, “In Defense of Collingwood: Perspectives from Philosophy and the History of Ideas,” in R.G. Collingwood, *The Philosophy of Enchantment: Studies in Folktale, Cultural Criticism, and Anthropology*, eds. David Boucher, Wendy James, and Philip Smallwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), xcvi.

<sup>8</sup> Grafton, “The History of Ideas,” 30.

The flight from history of ideas (and intellectual history in general) to social history that Grafton describes was not the end of historians' attempts to engage with ideas. Elizabeth Clark observes the swing of the pendulum in the other direction:

By the late 1970s...a challenge to [social history's] dominance began to emerge in the form of a new cultural history equipped with a theoretical apparatus whose concepts—"mentalité, episteme, paradigm, hermeneutics, semiotics, hegemony, deconstruction, and thick descriptions"—might well bewilder many social and economic historians. These theoretical currents, however, have not merely reinvigorated intellectual history, but have contributed to its "dizzying" success, as the writings of Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Roger Chartier, and Dominick LaCapra (among others) testify. Intellectual history in this new mode provides a welcome home for late ancient Christian studies, as for premodern studies more generally.<sup>9</sup>

There are consequences to historical knowledge when we do not reflect on epistemology. Historians need to distinguish between "the reality of the past" which is "the historian's object of study," historiography, "which is the historian's written discourse about this object," and the philosophy of history, "which is the study of the possible relations obtaining between this object and this discourse."<sup>10</sup> In my research, I have hoped to avoid an approach to writing history that takes "epistemological positions without reflection or argument," what Jerzy Topolski terms "spontaneous epistemological realism."<sup>11</sup> Expanding on my discussion of intellectual history, I will equally engage with the history of mentalities, microhistory, and the philosophy of the historian and archaeologist, R.G. Collingwood.

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<sup>9</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Jerzy Topolski, "Historians Look at Historical Truth," in *Epistemology and History*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 406. Quoted in Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 17. Clark writes: "By spontaneous Topolski means that historians generally assume their epistemological positions without reflection or argument." (205, n. 78).

## *Histoire des Mentalités*

The history of mentalities was developed by the later *Annalistes* who were dissatisfied with the explanatory power of quantitative approaches to history of the previous generations. Jacques Le Goff describes the notion of “mentality” as a kind of “historical beyond”: “Its function, as a concept, is to satisfy the historian’s desire to ‘go further’, and it leads to a point of contact with the other human sciences.”<sup>12</sup> History of mentalities turned to emotions or affect with a keen interest in the role of epistemology in the writing of history.<sup>13</sup> A study of mentalities was intended to provide a meeting point for the tensions between “the individual and the collective, the long-term and the everyday, the unconscious and the intentional, the structural and the conjectural, the marginal and the general.”<sup>14</sup> Le Goff complains that feudalism, for example, cannot be understood adequately by only looking at economic, political, and institutional structures in the past. Ideas, attitudes, and beliefs also had a role to play for elites and common people in the feudal period.<sup>15</sup> The historian of mentalities must borrow understandings of human experience from the tool kits of the anthropologist, sociologist, and psychologist. Such historians are interested in the “mental worlds” of ordinary people as are the philosophers who interpret textual (and material) evidence with the understanding that “mental worlds” can be reconstructed even when not explicit. Le Goff describes it as a

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Le Goff, “Mentalities: a History of Ambiguities” in *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*, eds. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Mason de Sciences de l’Homme and Cambridge University Press 1985), 167.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 69-70.

<sup>14</sup> Le Goff, “Mentalities,” 169.

<sup>15</sup> Le Goff, “Mentalities,” 167.

kind of “archaeopsychology.”<sup>16</sup> This approach attempts to avoid the criticism of “floating ideas” leveled against history of ideas by analyzing mentalities with an eye to “where and by what means such mentalities were produced.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas, Darnton, who regards the history of mentalities as a kind of cultural history, criticizes the overly broad strokes sometimes found in studies of mentalities: “They tend to load the term with notions of *représentations collectives* derived from Durkheim and the *outillage mental* that Lucien Febvre picked up from the psychology of his day.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Le Goff suggests that the imprecision, ambiguity, or even vagueness that a history of mentalities sometimes presents, is, in fact, part of its usefulness. Jan Assmann sees the history of mentalities as a history of *meaning* that “discusses history as a cultural form in which the course of events forms the backdrop and the discourses generating and reflecting meaning occupy the front of the stage.”<sup>19</sup> His focus is on “the fundamental attitudes generally referred to as ‘mentality,’ attitudes that are implicit in texts, images, and the events of history without being explicitly expounded or commented upon.”<sup>20</sup> Mentalities are not ordered structures that determine predictable expressions. They highlight the presence of inner worlds of historical actors and offer a view into the “inside” of events, (a term that we shall take up again during our discussion of Collingwood below.)

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<sup>16</sup> Le Goff, “Mentalities,” 169.

<sup>17</sup> Le Goff, “Mentalities,” 174.

<sup>18</sup> Darnton, “Intellectual and Cultural History,” 346. See also Lucien Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle, la religion de Rabelais* (Paris: A. Michel, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), viii-ix.

<sup>20</sup> Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, viii.

## Microhistory

Like *Histoire des Mentalités*, microhistory evolved out of the dissatisfaction of the third generation of *Annalistes* with “what they deemed a mechanistic or deterministic form of history-writing that emphasized statistics, generalizations, [and] quantitative formulation.”<sup>21</sup> Microhistory ostensibly looks to particular events, communities, or individuals in order to suggest larger scale social and cultural trends. Bridging the concerns of intellectual, cultural, and social historians, microhistorians strive to capture “lived experience” from the “bottom up” in an attempt to present an inclusive social history. Notable practitioners include Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Darnton, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, and Carlo Ginzburg.<sup>22</sup> Coming out of the intellectual climate of the 1970’s in Bologna, like history of mentalities, microhistory was a response to the *Annales* School with its focus on the *longue durée* and quantitative social science. Microhistory “returns to interpreting utterance and beliefs, to describing brief dramatic events, and to envisioning a past characterized more by abrupt changes than by deep structural continuities.”<sup>23</sup> The broader historiographical trend of microhistory which, according to John Brewer, is a part, “emanates from two major debates within the social sciences and politics. One is concerned with the nature of everyday life under modern capitalism, the other with the vexed issue of the relations between free will and determinism – the

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<sup>21</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York : Basic Books, 1984); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale : The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), *vvi*.

question of the efficacy of human agency.”<sup>24</sup> Toggling perspectives of scale, microhistorians examine the relationship between social structure and agency, between the culture of the elites and the culture of the masses in order to discover the conditions under which agency seems to exert itself. Agency is excluded in any discussion of microhistorians purely revolving around structural constraints within society. By contrast, social microhistorians such as Giovanni Levi see all social interaction as “the result of an individual’s constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions in the face of a normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms.”<sup>25</sup> The ideology of self-sacralization explored in this study certainly qualifies as a manipulation of normative reality with freedom in (and of) mind. Microhistory challenges a reductionist and determinist view of history.

However, microhistorical theory and its methods invite a number of criticisms. Perhaps the most obvious one is in regard to selectivity and significance: “By what criteria are names to be picked out and how representative of broader social trends and collective mentalities are the subjects’ activities and thoughts? What can the few tell about the many, especially when the process of selection is neither random nor statistically rigorous? And how can historians concerned with trifles avoid producing trivial history?”<sup>26</sup> Still, even if the sample individual, group, or event are isolated and idiosyncratic, we can learn something about the relationship between the margin and the center, the deviant and the norm, and the power relationship between actors in a society.

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<sup>24</sup> John Brewer, "Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural And Social History* 1 (2010): 91.

<sup>25</sup> Brewer, “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” 96.

<sup>26</sup> Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory*, xiv.

## Collingwood

British philosopher, historian, and archaeologist, Robin George Collingwood (1889-1943) seems to have anticipated many of the concerns of contemporary intellectual historians, especially the historians of mentalities. He is favorably known for his articulation of historical imagination, what he termed “*a priori* imagination,” and his keen observation of the role of historians’ “present situatedness” in their inquiry.<sup>27</sup> Less favorably received, however, are his ideas about the intellectual foundation of history (“All history is the history of thought”), the persistence of the past in the present, the necessity of “re-enacting” the thoughts of people in the past, and his anti-positivism. All of these ideas, whether championed or criticized, have influenced the way I am writing history.

Collingwood equates inference with “*a priori* imagination,” a tool that allows the historian to fill in gaps between what the evidence provides. He gives the example of Caesar crossing the Rubicon: “I described constructive history as interpolating, between the statements borrowed from our authorities, other statements implied by them. Thus our authorities tell us that on one day Caesar was in Rome and on a later day in Gaul; they tell us nothing about his journey from one place to the other, but we interpolate this with a perfectly good conscience.”<sup>28</sup> Constructive historical imagination, Collingwood is careful to point out, must be grounded in evidence, a specific time and place, and must be consistent with the known facts surrounding it.

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<sup>27</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 240.

On the “present situatedness” of the historian, Collingwood suggests that historical interpretations depend not only on evidence available at the time of interpretation but also on the “attitude of mind from which the historian approaches it”: “In the person of the historian, the mind of his age ‘measures itself against’ the past, and shows what its own interests are, its own views and ideals of life, by the way in which it interprets that past.”<sup>29</sup> This “present situatedness” penetrates as well into the mind of the historian who must come “to grips with his own personality, by reconstructing the past in ways determined by the forces at work in that personality.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, “[t]he individuality of a man or an age, which determines the way in which the individual conceives itself and the world and determines its practical attitude to life, determines also the individual’s attitude to the past.”<sup>31</sup>

The notion that historiography reflects present society has become commonplace. For example, in his review of Alan Cameron’s *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Peter Brown puts in this light the older narrative of the altar of victory controversy:

It is not for nothing that the scenario of a desperate last stand of paganism was propounded with especial fervor in the years that immediately followed the end of World War II. Such an account echoed the fears of a postwar world. For scholars in Europe and America who had recently emerged from thirty years of violence and ideological intolerance, only to confront the new, spreading shadow of the

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<sup>29</sup> R. G. Collingwood, "Book Review: Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer," *The English Historical Review* 52 (1937): 144. Oddly, Joan Wallach Scott criticizes Collingwood for a failure not his own: "The question of where the historian is situated – who he is, how he is defined in relation to others, what the political effects of his history may be – ever enters the discussion." "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 783.

<sup>30</sup> Collingwood, "Cassirer," 144.

<sup>31</sup> Collingwood, "Cassirer," 144.

cold war, the conflict between a liberal paganism and an intolerant Christianity seemed like a foreshadowing of the nightmares of their own times.<sup>32</sup>

Constructive imagination is also necessary for historians because, unlike those “scientists” who study natural phenomena, historians study events that are not perceptible. Yet, Collingwood points out, the evidence of the past is indirect:

The historian cannot answer questions about the past unless he has evidence about it. His evidence, if he ‘has’ it, must be something existing here and now in the present world. If there were a past event which had left no trace of any kind in the present world, it would be a past event for which now there was no evidence, and nobody—no historian; I say nothing of other, perhaps more highly gifted persons—could know anything about it.<sup>33</sup>

To illustrate how the past is not dead but still living in the present, he gives the example of Latin. If the reading of Latin had not survived the Middle Ages, no historian would be able to write medieval history: “The past simply as past is wholly unknowable...it is the past as residually preserved in the present that is alone knowable.”<sup>34</sup> He offers a more abstract model explaining that history is more about process than event:

[Processes] are things which do not begin and end but turn into one another; and that if a process  $P_1$  turns into a process  $P_2$ , there is no dividing line at which  $P_1$  stops and  $P_2$  begins;  $P_1$  never stops, it goes on in the changed form  $P_2$ , and  $P_2$  never begins, it has previously been going on in the earlier form  $P_1$ . There are in history no beginnings and no endings. History books begin and end, but the events they describe do not. If  $P_1$  has left traces of itself in  $P_2$  so that an historian living in  $P_2$  can discover by interpretation of evidence that what is now  $P_2$  was once  $P_1$ , it follows that the ‘traces’ of  $P_1$  in the present are not, so to speak, the corpse of a dead  $P_1$  but rather the real  $P_1$  itself, living and active though encapsulated within the other form of itself  $P_2$ . And  $P_2$  is not opaque, it is transparent, so that  $P_1$  shines through it and their colours combine into one.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Brown, “Paganism: What we owe the Christians,” *The New York Review of Books*, April 7<sup>th</sup> (2011): 68.

<sup>33</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 96.

<sup>34</sup> R. G. Collingwood, “The Limits of Historical Knowledge,” *The Journal of Philosophical Studies* 3 (1928): 220.

<sup>35</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 97-98.

If all history is the history of thought, as Collingwood contends, then historical knowledge is “knowledge of what the mind has done in the past.”<sup>36</sup> How then can the historian *understand* the thoughts of the past?<sup>37</sup>

To answer this question, Collingwood gives Plato as an example. To know what Plato thought, the historian of philosophy must think Plato’s thoughts for herself. Historical understanding is “re-enactment of past thought in the historian’s own mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is another way that the past lives in the present. Historical knowledge exists in the present.<sup>39</sup> The “re-doing” of past thought perpetuates past acts in the present: “To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but

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<sup>36</sup> Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 218. This position shows the great influence of Dilthey on Collingwood’s thought and Collingwood’s engagement with continental philosophy. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *The formation of the historical world in the human sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Elizabeth Clark, who reiterated Peter Novick’s point about historians and epistemology quoted in the opening to this section, sees all history as intellectual history.

<sup>37</sup> “Taken at face value the *verstehen* approach (internal understanding rather than objective observation) is asking rather a lot of the historian – to rethink and re-experience thoughts and actions in the past. Not only was it asking a lot, for historians like E.H. Carr it was as a step too far in the direction of an idealism (and continental philosophy) that jeopardised objectivity. How can the historian be self-conscious and historicist?” Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 48.

<sup>38</sup> Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 215.

<sup>39</sup> Assmann provides another way to understand Collingwood’s point in terms of that may be more familiar to historians working after the linguistic turn: “History is seen here above all in terms of the way changes, crises, and new departures reflect shifts in existing structures of meaning. Their sequence may indeed be understood as a ‘development,’ but only as long as we resist seeing it simply as progress and decline—that is, as a one-way process heading straight for some ineluctable destination. If we discern coherence in this process, it is a coherence we owe to cultural memory and the way it contrives to take past meaning preserved in the written word and the pictorial images, reactivate it, and incorporate it into the semantic paradigms of the present.” Assmann, *Mind*, viii.

experiences to be lived through in his own man; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own.”<sup>40</sup> The historian must be “capable of entering into the minds of the person whose history he is studying.”<sup>41</sup> Re-enactment of thought is historical knowledge as opposed to what Benedetto Croce called “mere chronicle” or what Collingwood terms derisively, “scissors and paste” history.<sup>42</sup>

Collingwood’s philosophy of history (and mind) suggests an accessibility to ancient thought that is appealing to historians of mentalities:

[Metaphysics is] no futile attempt at knowing what lies beyond the limits of experience, but is primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world’s general ‘nature,’ such beliefs being the presuppositions of all their ‘physics’, that is, their inquiries into its detail. Secondly, it is the attempt to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times, and to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another.<sup>43</sup>

Collingwood’s anti-positivism set him at odds with historians (and philosophers) who believed that a historical science, using the principles and methods of the natural sciences, could fulfill the Rankean dream of discovering “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*” (“what actually happened”). Collingwood finds the study of human beings (apart from their biology) to be incommensurable with the study of the natural world. He writes:

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<sup>40</sup> Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 218.

<sup>41</sup> Collingwood, “Cassirer,” 144. One of Collingwood’s harshest critics, Hans-George Gadamer, qualifies this problematic position with his concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) which, interestingly, draws from another Collingwoodian idea he finds more compelling, that of “present situatedness” discussed above. Briefly, *Horizontverschmelzung* occurs when the scholar interprets a text with awareness of his or her own limited perspective but is able to see beyond that perspective toward a “horizon” which fuses with the perspective of the text (or writer). See Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 302.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Salber Phillips, “Distance and Historical Representation” *History Workshop Journal* no. 57 (2004): 135.

<sup>43</sup> Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 66.

A positivistic view of history (by which I mean one that endeavors to assimilate its principles and methods to those of the natural sciences) should answer the question “how then is historical truth to be reached?” by saying “we must eliminate the subjective element, as a source of distortion, and arrive at an historical view of the facts from the point of view of a generalized consciousness”...But this, although it is the proper method in natural science, is impossible in history.<sup>44</sup>

For Collingwood, the subjective element that the natural sciences sought to eliminate, was indeed, necessary for the production of historical knowledge.<sup>45</sup> The constructive imagination and the historical (and psychological) context of the historian that flavor the questions, methods, and interpretations are tools for inquiry that are not to be discarded. The processes of nature are events, while the processes of history are composed of actions which have an “inner side” consisting of thought. Collingwood uses the metaphors “outer” and “inner” to represent the relationship between thought and its expression through action.<sup>46</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of studying history is, for Collingwood, self-knowledge and knowledge of humanity. Thus, historical practice is a process of self-creation.<sup>47</sup> But, it is an “open” project (unlike the “closed” history of the textbook practiced by “scissors and paste” historians): “[H]istorical knowledge has perpetually to be revised and re-

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<sup>44</sup> Collingwood, “Cassirer,” 144.

<sup>45</sup> Collingwood, “Cassirer,” 144.

<sup>46</sup> “Dilthey calls this ‘the turn towards reflection, the movement of understanding from the external to the internal’. Its essence is the tendency to make use of every outward expression to understand the mental state from which it arises. When we read about war or economic activity, our minds are filled with images, ‘but what moves us, above all, in these accounts is what is inaccessible to the senses and can only be experienced inwardly...For all that is valuable in life is contained in what can be experienced and the whole outer clamor of history revolves around it.’” Phillips, “Distance and Historical Representation,” 134. Dilthey quote in Phillips from Wilhelm Dilthey and H.P. Rickman, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 172.

<sup>47</sup> Collingwood. “Cassirer,” 146.

created by new generations and new students, and can never be transferred from one mind, ready-made, to another.”<sup>48</sup>

In addition to their nominal focus on “intellect” and the “mental,” intellectual historians and cultural historians of mentalities were also interested in affect, emotions, sensibilities, manners, and taste long before the recent upsurge in history of emotion projects across the globe.<sup>49</sup> The humanities project of studying the widest range of human thought, experience, and creativity takes us far out of the realm of the political, economic, and institutional “facts” as Collingwood’s “scissors and paste” historians would understand them. Averil Cameron reflects on new directions for historians of late antiquity which owe something to epistemologically sensitive historians such as Collingwood and intellectual and cultural historians of the “linguistic turn”:

The recognition that history is only partly about ‘the facts,’ and very much about how we see the past, what we can learn from the past, and how the past is shown to us by its survivals, can be a liberating force. It frees us to use our own imaginations and to inquire into the imagination and the memory of our subjects. It presents us with emotion, imagination, and memory as possible and proper subjects of our inquiries. It opens up the history of late antiquity so that it can become a vast field of experimentation. Above all, it liberates our own understanding and speaks to our creative strengths.<sup>50</sup>

A recent study on imagination in late antiquity and the Middle Ages by Giselle de Nie explores the position of philosopher Gaston Bachelard that “imagination reveals our

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<sup>48</sup> Collingwood. “Cassirer,” 144.

<sup>49</sup> See Max Planck Institute: <https://www.history-of-emotions.mpg.de/en>

<sup>50</sup> “History and the individuality of the historian: the interpretation of late antiquity,” in *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity [Conference at Smith College in 1999]*, ed. Carole Ellen Straw and Richard Lim (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2004), 76-77.

experienced reality.”<sup>51</sup> De Nie stresses the utility and necessity of a history of emotions that includes imagination: “[I]dentifying the dynamic affective patterns...implicit in particular texts and images can uncover up to now unnoticed, important dimensions of experience and meaning.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, imagination, understood as a cognitive process in human consciousness and a key component in the activity of reading—perhaps, a thinking process as much as a feeling process—plays a central role in this dissertation.

## Humanities

What are the humanities? The humanities comprise those fields of knowledge and learning concerned with human thought, experience, and creativity... encompass[ing] all areas of research and learning that ask fundamental questions about the way individuals and societies live, think, interact, and express themselves... but [whose] subject matter concerns those aspects of the human condition that are not necessarily quantifiable or open to experiment.<sup>53</sup>

As an intellectual history about reading, imagination, and personal divinity in late antiquity, this dissertation is a humanities project. The central question is: how did a late antique person become divine? This question assumes that at least some late antique people thought they could become divine and that those people had something substantial in mind when they used the term “divine.” While this dissertation analyzes and interprets texts written by people in the past about their thought, experience, and creativity relating to “becoming divine,” it makes no claim to quantify “personal divinity” (or any human

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<sup>51</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes. Essai sur l'imagination due mouvement* (Paris: Joseph Corti, 1943), 10-13, 120.

<sup>52</sup> Giselle de Nie and Thomas F. X. Noble, *Envisioning Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Dynamic Patterns in Texts and Images* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 2.

<sup>53</sup> American Council of Learned Societies. “What are the humanities?,” <http://www.acls.org/about/faq/#humanities> (accessed March 15, 2017).

experience for that matter).<sup>54</sup> As for opening up the prospect of “becoming divine” to experimentation, well, I will leave that—as my writers did—to the reader’s discretion...and imagination.

### **Personal Divinity**

My study asks fundamental questions about human thought, experience, and creativity from the point of view of the individual, in particular, a late antique “ideal reader” (or hearer) who imaginatively engaged with texts about personal divinity.<sup>55</sup> This engagement was guided by *paideia*; that is, by an understanding of rhetoric and philosophy acquired through education (see chapter 1). The late antique people I am concerned with here were writers and readers of philosophy, particularly the work of Plato and his late antique commentators and works that appear to have been influenced by the notion that there is more to the world than what appears to the senses, that there is

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<sup>54</sup> On quantification and scientific validation in intellectual history projects: “The acknowledged failings of history as a truth-establishing discipline are balanced by invoking the falsifiability principle, whereby historical interpretations are asserted as provisional propositions (hypotheses) to be falsified in the light of the evidence. When we judge we have reached a point of maximum falsifiability, we are left with a residue that is a description that we believe comes closest to the historical truth. The gap between fact and mind is then at its narrowest. The doubts concerning the possibility of historical truth derive ultimately, of course, from the pervasive condition of Nietzschean-inspired postmodern epistemological scepticism. Doubts exist not only concerning history’s mimetic method, but also the adequacy of representational language. The mediatory role of the historical imagination through which the historian chooses to emplot the past as history is also claimed to be a major obstacle to objective knowing and truth. This is compounded by cultural relativism because historians cannot escape their epistemic or cultural preferences. At present there seems little likelihood of a *rapprochement* between the sceptics (and relativists) and the supporters of weak correspondence” Munslow, *Historical Studies*, 218.

<sup>55</sup> The quotation in this dissertation’s title, “Greetings, I am an immortal god!” (my translation) is from Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.7.10.39: “χαίρετ’, ἐγὼ δ’ ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος.” Plotinus alludes to Empedocles’ fragment B 112.

an invisible reality behind the world of appearances. For these late antique people, this invisible world is what they characterized as the *divine*.<sup>56</sup> This hidden divine reality was the source of all being and it was being itself. It was independent of the earthly cycles of life and death and accessible to humans because human consciousness was naturally divine: it was made of the same invisible “stuff” and also independent of the cycles of life and death.

A deathless consciousness that could access the divine was called “mind” (*nous*) or “soul” (*psyche, anima, pneuma*). The Homeric idea that “soul” is what makes a body move and live is carried through to Plato—“What is it that, when present in a body, makes it living? –A soul” (*Phaedo* 105c).<sup>57</sup> Indeed, for Plato (*Alcibiades* I 130c)<sup>58</sup> and for Cicero (*De Republica* 6.24)<sup>59</sup> the soul *was* the person, the soul defined the human

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<sup>56</sup> Historical philology demonstrates that word meanings change over time and place. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, to thoroughly trace the history of words and concepts like “divinity,” “god,” and “soul.” I will use the English terms “divine,” “sacred,” and “holy” more or less interchangeably; likewise, “divinities,” “deity,” “deities,” “god,” “gods.” For my purposes “personal divinity” is equivalent to “theurgy,” “immortalization,” “self-deification,” and “self-divinization.” Where philological nuances pertain to my arguments, I will draw them out in the particular chapter discussion.

<sup>57</sup> Emllyn-Jones, trans. “Ἀποκρίνον δὴ, ἧ δ’ ὅς, ᾧ ἂν τί ἐγγένηται σώματι ζῶν ἔσται; Ὡς ἂν ψυχῆ, ἔφη.”

<sup>58</sup> “τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχῆν.” *Alcibiades I*, now spurious, was not so for late Platonists.

<sup>59</sup> “Strive on indeed, and be sure that it is not you that is mortal, but only your body. For that man whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self, not that physical figure which can be pointed out by the finger. Know, then, that you are a god, if a god is that which lives, feels, remembers, and foresees, and which rules, governs, and moves the body over which it is set, just as the supreme God above us rules this universe. And just as the eternal God moves the universe, which is partly mortal, so an immortal spirit moves the frail body.” Keyes, trans. (*Tu vero enitere et sic habeto, non esse te mortalem, sed corpus hoc; nec enim tu is es, quem forma ista declarat, sed mens cuiusque is est quisque, non ea figura, quae digito demonstrari potest. deum te igitur scito esse, siquidem est deus, qui viget, qui sentit, qui meminit, qui providet, qui tam regit*)

being.<sup>60</sup> More than animating the body, the *psyche* and *anima* took on cognitive functions.<sup>61</sup> For the Platonists, it housed “insight and thought” in reflection of the divine so that the soul was a personal divinity, a *daimon* (Plato, *Alcibiades* 1 133b).<sup>62</sup> On the one

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*et moderatur et movet id corpus, cui praepositus est, quam hunc mundum ille princeps deus; et ut mundum ex quadam parte mortalem ipse deus aeternus, sic fragile corpus animus sempiternus movet.*)

<sup>60</sup> Despite significant differences between theorists in regards to whether the soul plays a role in thought, perception, desire, and biology, and whether it is a material or non-material thing, the earliest Homeric meaning of a force that moves things is carried through. Although *psyche* is the most common ancient word for soul, *daimon* (Empedocles), *animus* and *anima* (Lucretius), and *pneuma* are also used to refer to the soul. Although the Pythagoreans and Stoics had the concept of an immortal soul, it is Plato’s idea and the Neoplatonic elaboration upon it that concerns us here. Plato’s reasoning for the immortality of the soul can be summarized simply that the soul is a non-material force most like his imperishable “Good,” evident in its ability to apprehend the “Good” and animating power. For an excellent summary and analysis of the relationship between body and soul in ancient thought, see Kevin Corrigan, “Body and Soul in Ancient Religious Experience,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, 360 – 383 (New York: Crossroad, 1986). Also helpful is Hendrik Lorenz, “Ancient Theories of Soul,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/ancient-soul/>>.

<sup>61</sup> “The idea of *psychē* as an intellectual agent seems to stem from earlier usages in which an intense, intellectual decision must be made in the context of *psyche*/life: Odysseus performs every mental trick to save his life/*psychē*; Theognis is ‘bitten in his *psychē*’ concerning which course of life he will choose (*Odyssey* 9.422 – 23; Theognis 910).” Kevin Corrigan, “Body and Soul in Ancient Religious Experience,” in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, 360 – 383 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 368.

<sup>62</sup> “And can we find any part of the soul that we can call more divine than this, which is the seat of knowledge and thought?...Then this part of her resembles God, and whoever looks at this, and comes to know all that is divine, will gain thereby the best knowledge of himself.” Lamb, trans. (*Ἐχομεν οὖν εἰπεῖν, ὃ τι ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς θεϊότερον ἢ τοῦτο, περὶ ὃ τὸ εἶδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν; ... Τῷ θεῷ ἄρα τοῦτ’ ἔοικεν αὐτῆς, καὶ τις εἰς τοῦτο βλέπων καὶ πᾶν τὸ θεῖον γνούς, [θεόν τε καὶ φρόνησιν], οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἂν γνοίη μάλιστα.*) Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.5.27 – 29: “Moreover, the faculty that sees and judges whether the likeness is beautiful or ugly is assuredly superior to the actual likeness on which such a judgment is passed. Now that faculty is the human mind and the substance of a rational soul, and it is certainly not material, if even the likeness of a body, when seen and judged in the mind of one who is engaged in thinking, is not itself material. ... Furthermore, if our mind is not material, how can God, the mind’s creator,

hand, the divine was said to be beyond description and, on the other, it was described as intelligent, a kind of “god” that permeated the world of appearances. Although the constitution of gods in antiquity varied widely over time and place, the conception that developed among the thinkers I am describing tended toward the concept of god (*theos*) as invisible, intelligent, immortal power.<sup>63</sup>

The late antique peoples who thought they could *personally* access that invisible world, achieve a deathless state, and continue to exist as intelligent beings beyond the life of their body, claimed personal divinity.<sup>64</sup> They claimed to become gods.<sup>65</sup> Known as

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be material?” Wiesen, trans. (*cum in animo cogitantis aspicitur atque iudicatur, nec ipsa corpus est. Non est ergo nec terra nec aqua, nec aer nec ignis, qui bus quattuor corporibus, quae dicuntur quattuor elementa, mundum corporeum videmus esse compactu. Porro si noster animus corpus non est, quo modo Deus creator animi corpus est?*)

<sup>63</sup> For Homer, being godlike was to be the best by far in one or more aspects: strength, beauty, wit, glory. Gods have the “power to do things” (*θεοὶ δὲ τε πάντα δύνανται*) (Homer, *Odyssey* 10.306). But, immortality becomes the defining features of godliness in the philosophical tradition. Clement recalls Thales’ definition as “what has neither beginning (*ἀρχήν*) nor end (*τέλος*)” (Clement, *Stromata* 5.96.4). When Socrates was asked, “What is God?,” he similarly replied, “What is immortal and everlasting” (*ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀδιον*) (Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 1.29a). For Aristotle, immortality is the activity of god (*θεοῦ δ’ ἐνέργεια ἀθανασία*) (Aristotle, *De Caelo* 2.3, 286a9). See David M. Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012) for an excellent survey of godliness in Greco-Roman antiquity, esp. 43-45.

<sup>64</sup> *Personal* divinity, I suggest, was the personal (*psyche*) identification and participation in the invisible, intelligent power of the divine Mind (*Nous*), an emanating feature of the Neoplatonic One (*to hen*).

<sup>65</sup> The term “theurgy” (“divine work”) was used by some of the writers I will be discussing (Augustine, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, the two Julians of the *Chaldaean Oracles*) and for many modern scholars, myself included, it satisfactorily encompasses the aims of the writers and readers of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, and, I argue, in prototypical form in Apuleius. Theurgy is a flexible label. However, I prefer the term “personal divinity” because it avoids the problem cases of restricted use. Garth Fowden has argued convincingly that Neoplatonic theurgy and Hermeticism occupy the same sphere of concern by virtue of their shared beliefs and practices. That standard work has been Yochanan, Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*. Translated by

*Platonici* and *theurgici* to Augustine, modern scholars call them Neoplatonists, Hermetists, and theurgists.<sup>66</sup>

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Michel Tardieu. Paris: Institut d'Études augustiniennes, 2011, recently released in a third edition including many corrections, clarifications, and an essay and bibliography from 1891 – 2011 by Tardieu. See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Following Fowden, Sarah Iles Johnston writes: “[I]n modern use, the term theurgist usually does not include some other figures who shared important beliefs with Proclus, Iamblichus, and the Juliani, including a soteriology based in Platonic metaphysics and an interest in animation rituals: I mean those whom we typically call the Hermetists, that is, those who composed and studied the philosophical and ritual texts that we subsume under the titles *Corpus Hermeticum* or *Hermetica*. Sharply dividing the theurgists from the Hermeticists falsely represents ancient reality, as Garth Fowden shows; for the milieu we will be considering here, ‘theurgy’ and ‘Hermeticism’ were two names for essentially the same constellation of beliefs and practices.” Sarah Iles Johnston, “Animating Statues: A Case Study in Ritual,” *Arethusa* 41 (2008): 450-451; Also see Claire Fanger, *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 15-27. More recently, Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler, shows how Hermetic texts “can be subsumed under this label e.g. by Iamblichus, who explicitly chooses to draw this connection ... Late authors such as Proclus or Damascius are more specific and reserve the term ‘theurgist’ for the Chaldean tradition, distinguishing it from Orphic lore. ... From the beginning of its Neoplatonic career, theurgy was not only connected with other rituals, but also with various terms which were used sometimes synonymously with it, sometimes to denote related and overlapping, though not distinct fields. Thus, while ‘hieratic’ is synonymous to ‘theurgy’ in Iamblichus, it is used in a wider sense by Proclus, for who ‘hieratic’ includes the Chaldean theurgists as a prominent instance, but can also refer to priests in general, or to the legendary wisdom of Egyptian priests in the *Timaeus*. .... ‘Telestic’ is another label for rituals that can be stretched at will ; it gradually enters the discourse about theurgy and slowly overlaps with the latter.” Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 278-279.

<sup>66</sup> For concise introductions to prominent members of the Neoplatonic school, see Dominic J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), chapter 2; Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 19 – 33. For social context, see Garth Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982): 33-59; Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; Edward Jay Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Apuleius is categorized by modern scholars as a “Middle Platonist,” in the tradition of Plutarch. He also, for some, will fall slightly outside of our period of late antiquity, being more representative of the “high Empire” of the Antonines.

## Individuals<sup>67</sup>

In Peter Brown's groundbreaking work on the "holy man" in late antiquity, rather than asking if late antique people believed that a person could become divine, he suggested we consider what they got out of believing so "on the ground." In other words, what function did the idea of personal divinity play in the organization of society? This question revolutionized scholarship, allowing the problem of belief and access to the minds of people in the past to be "bracketed." Scholarship in the last forty years has focused on the social function of beliefs and practices related to personal divinity.<sup>68</sup> The "divine" status of public figures in late antiquity such as emperors, martyrs, and monks has become a trope now widely understood in its social and institutional dimensions.<sup>69</sup> In

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<sup>67</sup> "What does individualization mean? First and foremost it includes the notion of de-traditionalization. Individual action is less and less determined by traditional norms handed down by family and the larger social context. Options open up, choices are made. On the part of the individual, this development is reflected in changes in 'individuation', the parallel process of gradual full integration into society and the development of self-reflection and a notion of individual identity. Socialization, the biographical process of being integrated into ever larger social contexts (not necessarily in any formal manner) by the individual's appropriation of social roles and traditions—and the development of individual identity go hand in hand." Jörg Rüpke, "*Individualization and Individuation*" in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. by Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101.

<sup>69</sup> While much of the scholarship on self-deification in this period has emphasized "ruler-cults" such as S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987); Sabine MacCormack, *Art and ceremony in late antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and, in the Egyptian context, Wildung, Dietrich. *Egyptian Saints: Deification in Pharaonic Egypt* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), in contrast, my research examines self-deification of individuals who did not represent themselves as wishing to become

this dissertation, I add to this social-functionalist understanding of personal divinity by inquiring more deeply into areas of personal meaning and individual experience. I am interested in the thoughts and emotions—the mentalities—even more, the *imaginations*—of late antique writers, readers, and hearers for whom personal divinity was seen as an option on their horizons.

In approaching the works of these writers, I recognize that human endeavors are complicated and contradictory, that the various thoughts and practices relating to personal divinity, for example, could be both socially and personally constructed in meaningful and functional ways without being reducible one to the other. That is, the idea of personal divinity can fulfill different social and personal functions at the same time. Anthony Cohen has criticized the tendency of social scientists to privilege the social aggregate at the expense of individual variation:

Traditionally the self and the individual have been treated as micro-versions of larger social entities by the social sciences in general, and by anthropology in particular....[T]his practice has resulted in the misunderstanding of social aggregates precisely because the individual has been ignored as a constituent element. By acknowledging the individual's self awareness as author of their own social conduct and of the social forms in which they participate, this informs social and cultural processes rather than the individual being passively modeled by them.<sup>70</sup>

I also recognize that the divine status attributed to a ruler with social power and the personal divinity of a reader of esoteric texts are quite different things. For example, an emperor's claim to divinity may serve to legitimize his authority while a philosopher's claim, which certainly legitimizes authority within an intellectual circle or textual

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members of the ruling elite.

<sup>70</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 114-115.

community, might also have the purpose of inspiring students to follow suit...not a desirable outcome for an emperor at all!<sup>71</sup>

The degree to which we may access the interiors of individual minds in the past (never mind of those present) is fraught to say the least. The problem of the extent to which we can “penetrate the secrets of the heart,” as Dodds put it, is a difficult one.<sup>72</sup> Richard Lim rightly draws our attention to the scarcity of sources outside of elite circles, of “*ipsissima verba* that should be taken as a form of ‘personal expression’ [allowing] one to get ‘as close as possible to the individuals themselves.’”<sup>73</sup> So, it is not without caution that I will attempt to unpack the subjective phenomena of personal divinity. With Carlin Barton, I subscribe to the idea that “[w]e have no access to minds other than our

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Lim has pointed out the decline of public dialectical disputation in late antiquity with the rise of the “pagan holy man.” See my chapter 4 and Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), esp. ch. 2 and Garth Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society.” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982): 33-59.

<sup>72</sup> E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety; Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 83.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Lim, “Reviewed Work(s): *People, Personal Expression, and Social Relations in Late Antiquity* by Ralph W. Mathisen,” *Speculum* 80, no. 3 (2005): 925. On the challenge of studying emotions in the past, Alexandra Verbovsek writes: “Current research [on rituals and emotions] focuses in particular on the genesis, codification, and functions of emotions. One of the most significant questions relates to the role of emotions in social and cultural processes. To date we do not know exactly how feelings, their presentations, and interpretation are constituted, so it is still an open question of whether emotions are predominantly guided by cultural influence and what the causes for emotion priorities and characteristics in different chronological, regional and ethnic contexts are. How can we know what, why, and where we need to feel? And how can we be sure about the individual and social consequences of our feelings? Is the cultural knowledge of emotions standardized, does it depend on social class and status, or is it individual and flexible?” “The Correlation of Rituals, Emotions, and Literature in Ancient Egypt,” in *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean. Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), 237.

own except insofar as we impute to them shared qualities.”<sup>74</sup> The difficulties in accessing experience<sup>75</sup> should not cause us to ignore its profound shaping influence nor prevent us from using humanistic approaches to “get at” the individual. Further, I believe that British historian and philosopher R. G. Collingwood (1889 – 1943) offers a solution to this difficulty in his insistence that the past lives in the present mind of the historian (see “Collingwood” above and Conclusion).

### **Reading Mysteries**

The activity of reading is front and center in this dissertation. Neoplatonic and Hermetic literature was intended to transform those who engaged with it through the “mystery of reading” which, as Arthur Versluis puts it, allows us to “travel ever more deeply in the worldview of the authors, perhaps even experience...moments of insight during which we suddenly see ourselves and the world around us in a new light.”<sup>76</sup> This notion was not unfamiliar to Augustine who explored how words, images, and mental representations “play a fundamental role in mediating perceptions of reality.”<sup>77</sup> Brian

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<sup>74</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5. For Ernst Gellner social functional approaches to ancient minds “enable us to attribute meaning to assertions which might otherwise be found to lack it.” “Concepts and Society,” in *Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis*, eds. D. Emmet and A. MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 115 – 149. Quoted in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 298. Smith comments: “Gellner restores the capacity for thought, for rationality and rationalization to the primitive and, by so doing, restores their recognizable humanity,” 298.

<sup>75</sup> See note 544.

<sup>76</sup> Arthur Versluis, *Restoring Paradise Western Esotericism: Literature, Art, and Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 4-5.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1.

Stock describes Augustine's theory of reading as a kind of ritual intended to bring the reader into an experience of personal divinity:

The act of reading is then a critical step upwards in a mental ascent: it is...a rite of initiation, in which the reader crosses the threshold from the outside to the inside world. This upward and inward movement takes place when the appropriate text is transformed into an object of contemplation. *Lectio* becomes *meditatio*.<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, Sarah Ahbel-Rappe suggests that the ideal reader of texts about personal divinity actively "take part in a theurgic ritual."<sup>79</sup> Richard Reitzenstein's characterization of these kinds of ancient texts as *Lese-Mysterium*, that is (in Brian Copenhaver's words) "texts meant to have cultic effects without actual cultic practice," highlights the importance of reading.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 1-2.

<sup>79</sup> Sara Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: non-discursive thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (United States of America: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), lii. See Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig 1927), 51-52, 64. Reitzenstein's assertion that Hermetic communities did not exist has been rejected by many scholars since the discovery of Coptic Hermetic ritual texts from Nag Hammadi that parallel the Greek texts and serve as evidence for a textual community. Garth Fowden writes: "Admittedly our philosophical texts imply an actual historical milieu that was dedicated to the spiritual life. Instruction and initiation were group experiences, even when at the highest levels, they involved only the spiritual guide and a solitary pupil; and those who participated in these encounters instinctively expressed their solidarity and joy through prayer and hymnody, and in such comradely gestures as embraces and the sharing of food." Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 149.

## Compassion

My emphasis on the creative role of imaginative reading as a “spiritual exercise”—with theurgic aims (see chapter 1 below)—adds a layer of complexity to how scholars and amateurs read texts about personal divinity, yielding I hope, a better appreciation for how ancient peoples may have understood themselves and their worlds on their own terms. Reading texts on their own terms restores something of the original potency they had for ancient writers, readers, and hearers. Reminding us that “historical and ethnographic records attest to considerable ontological diversity across human experience,” Greg Anderson suggests that “conventional historicist models, categories, and protocols require us to analyze non-modern lifeworlds as if all were experience within one and the same real world....”<sup>81</sup> Such a disciplinary practice “effectively modernizes the very fabrics of non-modern being, thereby denying past peoples the power to determine the truths of their own experience.”<sup>82</sup> Avoiding the conventional historicist models Anderson speaks of, scholars like Janet Coleman and Mary Carruthers have admirably represented premodern mentalities through their discussion of *memoria*, a word that meant more than “memory” means to moderns.<sup>83</sup>

Although it is commonplace now to think that “becoming divine” could only be a kind of self-deception, this dissertation offers the modern reader access to late antique texts and mentalities that now seems foreign to many. My approach challenges the

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<sup>81</sup> Greg Anderson, “Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The Case for an Ontological Turn,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 789.

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, “Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past,” 789.

<sup>83</sup> Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

tendency to explain away beliefs and experiences that seem unscientific to many moderns who reduce them to their utilitarian social function in order to make them palatable.<sup>84</sup> This dissertation stands as a corrective for what I see as unnecessary excess in the social-functional approach to human experience. By recovering this historical mentality, I hope, at least to provoke us to re-imagine a world that values many sources of human knowledge and many ways of being human.

### **Technologies of Self**

Michel Foucault's concept of the "technology of self" arose out of his engagement with Plato's discussion of how one should "care for the self."<sup>85</sup> Foucault describes the "technology of self" as a conscious, intentional shaping of one's own body, mind, or behavior that leads to some notion of "happiness, perfection, or immortality."<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Pierre Hadot suggests that technologies of self foster constructive introspection and lead to a transformed self-possession and independence:

What Foucault calls "practices of the self" do indeed correspond, for the Platonists as well as for the Stoics, to a movement of conversion toward the self. One frees oneself from exteriority, from personal attachment to exterior objects, and from the pleasures they may provide. One observes oneself, to determine whether one has made progress in this exercise. One seeks to be one's own master, to possess oneself, and find one's happiness in freedom and inner

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<sup>84</sup> "Modern aesthetic preferences are irrelevant to works' value as evidence. The fact that scholars often find the epic *vitae* bizarre, distasteful, or inexplicable indicates that we *should* pay attention...By focusing on the problematic and the neglected, we gain new perspectives." Anna Lisa Taylor, *Epic Lives and Monasticism in the Middle Ages, 800 - 1050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>85</sup> My trans. *Apologia* 86c: "ἐαυτοῦ ἐπιμεληθείη."

<sup>86</sup> Michel Foucault, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 19. Foucault's later thinking about technologies of self emphasized their use in expressing agency over governmentality.

independence. I concur on all these points. I do think, however, that this movement of interiorization is inseparably linked to another movement, whereby one rises to a higher psychic level, at which one encounters another kind of exteriorization, another relationship with “the exterior.” This is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason. At this point, one no longer lives in the usual, conventional human world, but in the world of nature. As we have seen above, one is then practicing “physics” as a spiritual exercise.<sup>87</sup>

I have come to understand the act of reading, hearing, and performing texts about personal divinity in terms of the “spiritual exercise”—that is, as a kind of thought experiment or mental practice intended to produce a change in self-concept or state of being—essentially, a self-fashioning—that brings one into a new relationship with the cosmos, a relationship understood as being beyond what is normally accessible through the senses. What I think makes them “spiritual” exercises is that they entertain subtle things, like the air or the breath of life (*spiritus*), things that are invisible or intangible—*almost seen*—and therefore require imagination in order to be “seen” or “felt.”<sup>88</sup> For example, the sphere that Plotinus invites his reader to imagine (described more fully in chapters 1 and 2) gives the sense that the mind is larger than the cosmos, that it exceeds the limits of a physical body. This “sense” happens in an imaginary inner “space,” what we can describe as an interior map of an inner landscape, invisible to others except perhaps in how the exercise effects the choices and actions of the reader. These spiritual exercises are *imaginative* exercises.

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<sup>87</sup> Pierre Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1995), 211.

<sup>88</sup> “The Greek *psyche* also means breath, as does the Latin *anima*. One of the early Milesian philosophers, Anaximenes, believed that the air is god, and he drew an analogy between the air, which sustains the universe, and the human soul: ‘As our soul, being air, holds us together, so do breath and air (*pneuma, aēr*) surround the whole universe’ (fr. 2).” Corrigan, “Body and Soul,” 367.

According to Neoplatonist scholar Sara Ahbel-Rappe, imaginative spiritual exercises—whether explicit or implicit—consist of an “active but directed use of the imagination, and [a] sustained presence of this imaginative construction as a method of changing habitual modes of thought or self-awareness.”<sup>89</sup> Self-deification, I will argue, can be usefully understood as a “technology of self.” These internal events—discourses played upon the stage of interiority intended to produce a change in self-concept, state of being, and relationship to the cosmos—impact the subject significantly constituting what I refer to as an “imaginative technology of self-transformation.”

Spiritual or imaginative exercises in texts can be explicit or implicit. That is, they can be *explicitly* prescribed using the hortatory subjunctive or the imperative mood as in Plotinus’s well known sphere exercise: “Let there be, then, in the soul an imagination of a sphere...” (*Ennead* 5.9.8).<sup>90</sup> Or, imaginative exercises can be suggested *implicitly* through imagery and concepts within the narrative of the text that serve to shape interior topography without calling attention to itself, using vivid language to draw a map of the self and its world in an interior imagined space of the mind. Implicit spiritual exercises generate inner experiences just as explicit ones do. Acts of reading (or hearing) are often explicit spiritual exercises but they are always implicit spiritual exercises.<sup>91</sup> Reading as

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<sup>89</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Armstrong, trans. “Ἐστω οὖν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φωτεινὴ τις φαντασία σφαίρας ἔχουσα πάντα ἐν αὐτῇ.”

<sup>91</sup> Catherine Bell (following J.Z. Smith) has noted how potentially any human activity can be separated out as “ritual.” See Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York/Oxford, 1992).

an exercise produces what Patricia Cox Miller refers to as a kind of “mental theater” or what Zeke Mazur has called “inner ritual.”<sup>92</sup>

Augustine gives an excellent example of the rhetorical technique: “Look, here am I, watching Cyprian; I’m crazy about Cyprian....I’m watching him, I’m delighted by him, as far as I can I embrace him with the arms of my mind” (*Sermones* 301A.7).<sup>93</sup>

Augustine’s idea of the three kinds of vision supports this idea: “[O]ne kind of vision occurs through the eyes, by which the soul perceives corporeal objects by means of the body; the second kind of vision occurs in the imagination, where the soul sees likenesses of corporeal things that are absent; in the third kind, vision occurs ‘through an intuition of the mind’, where ‘the soul understands those realities that are neither bodies nor the likenesses of bodies.’”<sup>94</sup> Regarding the use of allegory in Christian late antiquity, Denys Turner locates the “broad distinction between ‘literal’ and ‘spiritual’ senses” in Origen’s *On First Principles* in the early fourth century, in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* in

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<sup>92</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 87; Zeke Mazur, “*Unio Magica*: Part II: Plotinus, theurgy, and the question of ritual,” *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 43. The theoretical basis for the idea that the gaze was performative whether seen outwardly or inwardly is ubiquitous in antiquity from Aristotle to Augustine. See Miller 2009, 89 and also Carlin Barton, “Being in the Eyes: Shame and Sight in Ancient Rome” in *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body*, ed. Frederick David, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 216 – 235.

<sup>93</sup> Hill, trans. “*Ecce ego specto Cyprianum, amo Cyprianum....Specto, delector, quantum valeo lacertis mentis amplector.*”

<sup>94</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, “Relics, Rhetoric and Mental Spectacles in Late Antique Christianity,” in *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Giselle de Nie, Karl F. Morrison, and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2005), 33. Miller’s translation is based on several translated sections of *De gen. ad lit.* in Taylor, 185-186, 213. Text in August. *De gen. ad lit.* 12.6.15; 12.7.16; 12.24.50.

the early fifth, and in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* in the late sixth century.<sup>95</sup> Gregory argued that "the meaning invested in things was to be deciphered by analogical reasoning, linking orders of reality—the physical and the moral..."<sup>96</sup> This is Miller's point: "[I]t makes no difference whether the image is true to reality or not; what matters is that 'it is useful for some other purpose,'—[a transformative] knowledge."<sup>97</sup>

Imaginative exercises as technologies of self-transformation embedded in texts about personal divinity heighten reflexivity, an extreme form of self-consciousness that isolates the subject as object to be manipulated, worked on, transformed. In my project, I show how each text in this constellation of discourses about personal divinity offers imaginative exercises, constructing a highly sacralized or divine self-concept through interior map-making and topographies of self.

### **Performativity**

Words do things.<sup>98</sup> For the speaker and the hearer. For the writer and the reader. If I say (or you read), "The sky is blue," you would probably remember or reconstruct a brilliant blue sky in your mind's eye. If I say (or you read), "I am flying in the blue sky," you might imagine this as well. As unlikely as it is that you would ever see me flapping about in a clear blue sky, it is likely that you could imagine it. Your imagining would be

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<sup>95</sup> Denys Turner, "Allegory in Christian late antiquity," in *The Cambridge companion to allegory*, eds. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71-72.

<sup>96</sup> William D. McCready, *Signs of sanctity: miracles in the thought of Gregory the Great* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 5.

<sup>97</sup> Miller, "Relics, Rhetoric and Mental Spectacles" 35.

<sup>98</sup> On the concept of "performative utterance," see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

different than my imagining or the imagining of the person sitting next to you. At least somewhat. But, positing such a scene, I cannot imagine it for you. I cannot enter the interior world of your experience and draw my avian self on an expanse of your blue. You have to do it. It may be my descriptive words that suggest. But, it is you taking them in, internalizing them, and putting them together into an inward understanding. I contend that in seeing this scene in your mind's eye—me flying in the wild blue yonder—you are, having assembled it, re-enacting it. Uttering is performative. Language's "performativity" is what Judith Butler calls "the power of discourse to materialize its effects,"<sup>99</sup> a power realized through imaginative reading. Seeing too is performative. And, surely, seeing with the mind's eye, that is, imagining, is performative.

### **Scope of the Divine**

In *City of God*, Books 8 – 10, Augustine of Hippo<sup>100</sup> attempts to refute certain late antique ideas and practices pertaining to personal divinity. In doing so, he assembles the archive for this dissertation including works by second-century North African Latin

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<sup>99</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187.

<sup>100</sup> Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) was born in Thagaste, the North African Roman province of Numidia (now Algeria) and died in Hippo Regius in the same province. For manuscript tradition of *City of God*, see Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 275 – 276. Scholarship on Augustine's vast corpus is long and wide. See bibliography in Brown's biography below. Important biographical works include: Henri Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1983); Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2009); Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; James Joseph O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Ecco, 2005); Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

writer, Apuleius<sup>101</sup>; the third-century Roman-Egyptian Neoplatonist, Plotinus<sup>102</sup>; his student and biographer, Porphyry<sup>103</sup>; Iamblichus<sup>104</sup>, the Syrian philosopher known for his interest in ritual; as well as works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the eponymous mystagogue portrayed in the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Apuleius of Madura (c. 124 – c. 170). Roman North African (now Algeria) rhetor and philosopher, part of the Late Antique revival of Platonism. Studied and travelled in Athens, Italy, Egypt. For biography, background, writings, see S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 1 – 38. For manuscript tradition and bibliography on *De deo Socratis*, see C. P. Jones, and Apuleius. *Apologia; Florida; De Deo Socratis*. Loeb Classical Library: 534 (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017), vii - xxxii; For *Metamorphoses*, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*. Edited and translated by John Arthur Hanson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), vii – xvii.

<sup>102</sup> Plotinus (c. 204/5 – 270). Likely born in Egypt, studied in Alexandria, travelled to Persia and India. Primary source of biographical information contained in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*. Considered the founder of Neoplatonism, he formed a school in Rome in the household of Gemina where he taught men and women, politicians and scholars. Like Augustine, scholarship on Plotinus is vast. For manuscript tradition and references to commentaries and bibliographic works, see Plotinus, *Enneads*. Edited and translated A. H. Armstrong. 7 volumes. Loeb Classical Library 440 – 445, 468 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969 – 1988), xxviii – xxxiii.

<sup>103</sup> Porphyry of Tyre (c. 234 – c. 305). Born Phoenicia (now Lebanon), studied in Athens and Rome. Student of Plotinus, fellow student (and early teacher) of Iamblichus. Compiler of *Enneads*. For biographical information, see Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 245 – c. 325). Born in Syria, studied with Porphyry in Rome or Sicily. Known especially for his use of theurgy (ritual) and Egyptianizing disputation with Porphyry (*De Mysteriis*). See Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Afonasin, E. V., John M. Dillon, and John F. Finamore, eds. *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> *Hermetica* refers to second through fifth-century Graeco-Egyptian philosophical texts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, compiled by Byzantine and Renaissance scholars, including the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, portions of the *Nag Hammadi Codices*, and some Armenian texts. Hermetic texts are mentioned by Tertullian (early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.), Lactantius (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> c.), Cyril of Alexandria (5<sup>th</sup> c.), Clement of Alexandria (5<sup>th</sup> c.), Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> c.), and Michael Psellos (11<sup>th</sup> c.). Reintroduced (in part) to Europe by Ficino as the *Corpus Hermeticum* in Latin translation (1471). Recent translations and commentary include Mead, Festugière and Nock (Budé), Mahé, Scott, Copenhagen, and Litwa. For

This is not a dissertation about Augustine or *City of God* but rather about some of the sources Augustine read that constitute the archive for this study. But, it is important to understand Augustine's debate with the "pagan"<sup>106</sup> philosophers in Books 8 – 10. The archive is not random, Augustine assembles it for the purpose of refuting pagan philosophers and pointing them toward Christianity, the "true philosophy" in his view. He objected to the Platonic understanding of the relationship between the person and divinity which lead to practices, to the extent that he understood them, of worshipping "demons" and of "making gods" (i.e. statues) (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.23).<sup>107</sup> As we shall see, the Late Antique writers and readers at hand were more concerned with getting to know

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introduction to historical context, manuscript tradition, and commentaries, See *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*. Edited and translated by Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xiii – lix. The related *Papyri Graecae Magicae* are Graeco-Roman Egypt papyri, spells, formulae, hymns and rituals, composed between the second century BCE and fifth century CE. For manuscript tradition, historiography, and historical context, see *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*. Edited and translated by Hans Dieter Betz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xli – liii. For manuscript tradition, historiography, and historical context, see *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xli – liii.

<sup>106</sup> "Pagan," although commonly used by modern scholars to describe traditional, non-Christian people in late antiquity, was a polemical term used by Christian writers with a certain amount of disdain. The full title of *City of God* is *City of God Against the Pagans* (*De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*). As an alternative, some modern scholars (after the Emperor Julian) have used the term "Hellenes" to describe non-Christians in this period, particularly elite, literate ones. See discussion in Dylan M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the alien god: Platonism and the exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> "To unite, therefore, these invisible spirits to visible objects of bodily substance by some strange technique, so that the result is something like animated bodies, idols dedicated and subject to these spirits, this, Hermes says, is 'making gods,' and this great and miraculous power, he adds, of making gods has been given to men." Wiesen, trans. (*Hos ergo spiritus invisibiles per artem quandam visibilibus rebus corporalis materiae copulare, ut sint quasi animata corpora illis spiritibus dicata et subdita simulacra, hoc esse dicit deos facere eamque magnam et mirabilem deos faciendi aecepisse homines potestatem*).

their personal daimon and becoming a god. In fact, making gods (or becoming a god oneself) was not an uncommon thing in the ancient world.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Augustine’s god “makes gods of his worshippers” as well (*De civitate Dei* 10.1).<sup>109</sup>

Divinity in the Graeco-Roman world was a relative categorization.<sup>110</sup> The world was full of “gods” of all kinds that humans made (and unmade) every day.<sup>111</sup> A god could be a stone, an Emperor, an abstraction. The rituals of god-making and the prescriptions of god recognition varied over time from place to place. The Stoics, for example, believed that the whole universe was made of a “divine” material so everything in it was, by definition, “divine” including humans and their material soul stuff.<sup>112</sup> Cicero’s comment on the Roman custom of deification captures the ancient psychology of making gods: “[In many cases] some exceptionally potent force is itself designated by the title of god” (*De natura deorum* 2.23.61).<sup>113</sup> The transcendent and ineffable “god” of the Platonists had little to do with the Emperor as a “god” or “Terminus,” the Roman god of

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<sup>108</sup> I will confine my remarks to a small subset of how the term god was used in antiquity, focusing on the Greco-Roman intellectual traditions without considering the Jewish, early Christian, and Zoroastrian concepts.

<sup>109</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*deus facitque suos cultores deos.*” Cf. biblical references to “sons of god.” Notably, Psalm 82:6: “I said, you are gods; you are all sons of the Most High.”

<sup>110</sup> Litwa, *Transformed*, 39.

<sup>111</sup> To focus on *beliefs* about the gods is, in some to sense, “already ‘Christianizing’ the material. Litwa, *Transformed*, 39.

<sup>112</sup> This is not all that different from the Platonic position except that the Stoics conceived of the invisible power as having a subtle material substance while the Platonists viewed their divinity as being other than material.

<sup>113</sup> The psychological and social process that makes a “god” a “god” might best be understood as a process of sacralization (see discussions in chapters 2 and 5).

boundaries,<sup>114</sup> except in the sense that these “gods” were made by humans who named them as such, who “set them apart,” sacralized them, rendered them *sacer* (see chapter 2) as some exceptionally potent force.<sup>115</sup> In this study, I am re-examining Augustine’s archive to understand how the “Platonists”—Apuleius, Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus—conceived of the relationship between the human and the divine and how in their system of thought a person could become divine. At the same time, I will suggest ways for modern people to understand how this might be accomplished in ways that, I hope, do justice to their worldviews.

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<sup>114</sup> See Siculus Flaccus, *De Agrorum Conditionibus et Constitutionibus Limitum*: “When the Romans set up boundary stones (*termini*), they stood them erect on firm ground, close to the place where they had dug the hole in which they were about to fix them, and they adorned/crowned (*coronabant*) the stones with ointment and fillets and garlands (*coronae*). Above the hold in which a stone was to be set a sacrifice was made (*sacrificium factum*) and a victim was immolated and set ablaze with flaming torches; its blood was allowed to run down into the hold, and incense and fruit (or grain, *fruges*) were thrown into the hole as well. So also honeycombs and wine and other things, which it was customary to dedicate to the god Terminus (*Termini sacrum fieri*) were added. When the whole sacred meal had been burned by the fire (*consumptisque omnibus dapibus*), the stone was let down upon the still warm remains of the sacrifice and settled firmly and with great care. Pieces of stone were laid about it and tamped won hard, whereby it might be still more firmly fixed. This sacrifice was made by the owners (*domini*) of the property between which a boundary ran.” Thulin trans. (*Cum enim terminus disponent, ipso quidem lapides in solidam terram restos conlocabant proxime ea loca in quibus fossis fractis defixuri eos errant, et unguento velaminibusque et coronis eos coronabant. In fossis autem (in) quibus eos posituri errant, sacrificio facto hostiaque immolate adque incense facibus ardentibus, in fossa cooperti sanguinem instillabant, eoque tura consuetudo est Termini sacrum fieri, in fossis adiciebant. Consumptisque igne omnibus dapibus super calentes reliquias lapides conlocabant adque ita diligenti cura confirmabant. Adiectis etiam quibusdam saxorum fragminibus circum calcabant, quo firmitus starent. Tale ergo sacrificium domini, inter quos fines firimebantur, faciebant*). I thank Carlin Barton for this reference.

<sup>115</sup> In the first century CE, Aetius provides a taxonomy of gods: manifest gods (the sun, moon, etc.); harmful gods (Erinyes, Ares); beneficent gods (Zeus, Demeter); abstractions (Victory, Luck); deified passions (Eros, Aphrodite); the gods of mythology; and gods who were once men (Hercules, Dionysus). See Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* 2.1009. Apuleius presents a similar scheme in *De Deo Socratis*.

## Excursus on *Religio*

I will briefly address the problem of “religion,” since for most modern readers, the term dangles dangerously above my project. Most moderns likely to read this dissertation would think that the topic of personal divinity in late antiquity is a “religious” topic. However, as Carlin Barton has shown, “religion” in the modern sense, hadn’t quite been invented yet. *Religio*, the Latin word most scholars have translated “religion,” had begun to shift in meaning and discursive use by the time Augustine was writing *City of God*. It was, even in Augustine’s time, a term very much in flux. In *City of God*, Book 10.1, he struggles to find a word that accurately describes the theory and practice of Christianity as he envisions it. “Religion” isn’t it. Augustine writes:

For this is the worship that we owe to divinity or, if we must speak more explicitly, to deity. Since there is need for a single word to describe this I shall slip in a Greek word where necessary to convey my meaning. To be sure, wherever *latreia* occurs in the holy scriptures, our translators have rendered it ‘service.’...Consequently, if we were simply to use the Latin word *cultus*, this seems to mean service not reserved for God alone....Moreover, the very term *religio* too, although it would seem to indicate more precisely not any worship of God—and this is the reason why our translators have used it to render the Greek word *threskeia*—yet in the Latin usage, and that not of the ignorant but of the most cultured also, we say that *religio* is to be observed in dealing with human relationships, affinities and ties of every sort....*Pietas*, too, which the Greeks call *eusebeia*, is usually understood in its strict sense to refer to the worship of God. Yet this word is also used of obligations dutifully performed towards parents” (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.1)<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Hic est enim diuinitati uel, si expressius dicendum est, deitati debitus cultus, propter quem uno uerbo significandum, quoniam mihi satis idoneum non occurrit Latinum, Graeco ubi necesse est insinuo quid uelim dicere. λατρείαν quippe nostri, ubicumque sanctorum scripturarum positum est, interpretati sunt seruitutem....Proinde si tantummodo cultus ipse dicatur, non soli Deo deberi uidetur....Nam et ipsa religio quamuis distinctius non quemlibet, sed Dei cultum significare uideatur (unde isto nomine interpretati sunt nostri eam, quae Graece θρησκεία dicitur: tamen quia Latina loquendi consuetudine, non imperitorum, uerum etiam doctissimorum, et cognationibus humanis atque adfinitatibus et quibusque necessitudinibus dicitur exhibenda religio....Pietas quoque proprie Dei cultus intellegi solet, quam Graeci εuseβειαν uocant. Haec tamen et erga parentes officiose haberi dicitur.*”

It would be inadvisable for me to take on the massive and thorny issue of mapping “religion” in this study, especially given the fact that my advisor, Carlin Barton, has done it in her recent book.<sup>117</sup> I will sidestep the question of the relationship between “religion” and “magic,” whether or not “theurgy” should be classified as “magic” or “religion,” and, while I’m at it, I will ignore the problem of identifying “religious” overtones in the Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Apuleian texts at hand. A number of studies have already been done that give due credit to the complexities involved.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, following Barton’s advice, I scrupulously avoid the term “religion” (and for that matter, “magic”) in this dissertation almost entirely unless I am quoting another scholar whose use serves my own. There is good reason for this because thinking in terms of “religion” tends to color the fresh attention we might give to our sources. In any case, these can be more or less classified as ideologies and should not either be taken to refer to discrete areas of activity or concern (whatever they may mean) apart from any other sphere. Everything was “religious” or “magical” to the point of meaninglessness unless viewed from the modern point of view on such matters which has neatly detached and abstracted the behaviors we might be tempted to label as such.

However, I would like to present one modern definition of “religion” that I find useful, but which shall remain far in the background of my study or at least buried in the notes. It is from William James who defines “religion” as: “The feelings, acts and experiences of individual men (*sic*) in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves

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<sup>117</sup> Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016).

<sup>118</sup> Surveyed by James B. Rives, “Graeco-Roman Religion in the Roman Empire: Old Assumptions and New Approaches,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 8, no. 2 (2010): 240-299; H.S. Versnel, “Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” *Numen* 38, no. 2 (1991): 177-197.

to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.”<sup>119</sup> What I appreciate about this statement is the focus on individuals, solitude, and the relativity of the “divine.” The divine is personal. This characterization resonates with my own interest in the same and somehow connects to the “ideal reader” I am conceptualizing in this study which borrows heavily from reader-reception theory and ancient rhetorical theory (see chapter 1). Indeed, the concern with the inner thoughts and experiences of individuals relates to how I understand, via Collingwood, history writing itself as a “spiritual exercise” and a transformative philosophical practice, a topic I will take up in more detail in my conclusion to the dissertation.

### **“Ways of Hermes”: A Trail Map for the Dissertation**

Chapter 1, “Neoplatonism and the ‘Vehicle of the Soul’ (Map IS Territory)” takes us deeper into the Platonism that so influenced Augustine. In this chapter, I discuss imagination in the Neoplatonic context. The “vehicle of the soul” (*ochêma pneuma*) was a Neoplatonic technology for attaining personal divinity. This luminous soul vehicle was also understood to be the seat of *phantasia* (“imagination”) and the “organ” by which sensual and divine perceptions were apprehended. For the Neoplatonist, active imagination itself was the vehicle for the soul—or even, the soul itself—much like Blake’s “divine body of man.” Ancient and modern theories of rhetoric and reading

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<sup>119</sup> William James, *The varieties of religious experience.: a study in human nature : being the Gifford lectures on natural religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (New York: Modern Library, 1929), 31 – 32. Martin Jay (2005) places James’ interest in “experience” in the context of a larger phenomenological movement around 1900 that posited “religious experience” as a *sui generis* category, a position that has been criticized for “essentialism” by many scholars since the “linguistic turn.” Ann Taves has qualified the Jamesian approach by looking at “religious experience,” rather as “experiences deemed religious.” *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3, 4, 8, 14.

including Quintilian, Longinus, reader-reception theory and cognitive poetics taken with the Neoplatonic understanding of *phantasia* as a cognitive function help us understand how the language of the Neoplatonists could induce a heightened self-reflexivity that, when “inwardly turned,” results in a sense of self as divine.

Chapter 2, “Making Sacred Selves in the *Corpus Hermeticum*” responds to Augustine’s attacks on Hermes Trismegistus, the Graeco-Egyptian mystagogue of late antiquity, for “making gods” or idol worship. It provides a “redescription” of *theos* in the Hermetic texts. However, the Graeco-Egyptian Hermetists were more concerned with *making themselves into gods*: “This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 1.26)<sup>120</sup> For Hermetists, *apotheosis* (“deification”) was part of a hermeneutics of self-knowledge or a “technology of self.” The *Hermetica* offered a method of self-transformation that allowed one, in Hadot’s words, to become “one’s own master, to possess oneself, and to find one’s happiness in freedom and inner independence.”<sup>121</sup> I will argue that what scholars have characterized as an “inward turn” in late antique literature—perhaps most famously articulated by Plotinus (*eis to eiso; epistrephein pros to eiso*)<sup>122</sup>—is a turn toward self-sacralization largely informed by Neoplatonic psychology and anthropology. This chapter explores reading and imagination in Hermetic texts as “spiritual exercises” and argues that making gods (or reading about them) is a form of self-deification.

Chapter 3, “Divination is Divinization: Oracles in Late Antique Egypt,” which responds to Augustine’s quarrel with Hermes Trismegistus, looks at pharaonic Egyptian

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<sup>120</sup> See chapter 2 for original Greek.

<sup>121</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford; New York: Blackwell, 1995), 211.

<sup>122</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.8.4; 5.8.11.12; 6.9.7.18.

“traces” in late antique Graeco-Roman Egyptian divination techniques that relate to personal divinity. Whether performed publicly as a part of state cult or privately for elite (or non-elite) clients, divination in Egypt often suggested the possibility of personal divinity for those involved. To bring this possibility of personal divinity into greater relief, this chapter will interpret two divination practices, the late antique Egypt “*Mithras Liturgy*” and the ancient Egyptian *ph-ntr* oracle. I will make the case that self-deification as expressed in late antique Graeco-Egyptian cultic, magical and philosophic literature was not the exclusive domain of Hellenized philosophical elites such as Plotinus, but rather, part of a more general cultural milieu of traditional Egyptian temple thought and cultic practice.

Chapter 4, “The Philosopher in Late Antique Alexandria.” portrays the Neoplatonic classroom in Alexandria and the characters that populated the institutional histories. The purpose of this section is to provide historical and social context for the types of writers I am discussing in this dissertation and to get a sense of the (textual) communities that, in some cases we know, gathered around them. It is also intended to bring life to the people behind the ideas.

Chapter 5, “Isis, the *Cultus* of self, and the *Genius* of Apuleius,” responds to Augustine’s attack on Apuleius’s demonology. This chapter explores the construction of sacred identity in Apuleius’s second-century Latin novel, *Metamorphoses*, in view of his Platonic work, *The god of Socrates*. In a close reading that draws from recent studies in cultural anthropology and religious studies, I explore the construction of sacred identity with special attention to imagination as a “technology of self” and the nuances of “chosen subjection.” In this chapter, I develop a theory of interiority and inwardness that is explicit in *The god of Socrates* and implicit in *Metamorphoses*.

In the conclusion to the dissertation, I elaborate on the role of embodiment in personal divinity and how my study fosters compassion for ancient mentalities. Extending key concepts developed by Durkheim and Otto, I will present a theory of the sacred that has emerged from my work with these sources, and finally, drawing on Collingwood, suggest how the writing of history, informed by a reflexive philosophy of history functions much like the “spiritual exercises” that constitute my source texts. Writing history is a transformative practice that leads to self-knowledge in the present. Following this is the “Poetic Postlude” referred to above and four appendices including a short essay on Augustine’s education, additional details about his quarrel with the Platonists, a return to the Alar of Victory controversy invoked in the “Historical Prelude” (below), and finally, a broad historiographical essay about late antiquity as a field of study with an emphasis on Anglophone scholarship.

## Historical Prelude

Many were shocked when a disgruntled former Roman commander, now Visigoth king, famously sacked the “eternal city” in 410.<sup>123</sup> The old guard placed the blame on Christianity, the new cult steadily rising in might since Constantine (272 – 337).<sup>124</sup> Eighteen years earlier, Roman Christians removed the Altar of Victory from the Roman Senate along with funding for the traditional state cults. The aristocrat Symmachus’s plea (335 – 402) to return the altar in the name of tolerance for ancient custom —“It is not by one way alone that we can arrive at so sublime a mystery” (*Symmachus, Relatio* 13):<sup>125</sup>— fell on Valentinian II’s deaf ears (371 – 392), muffled by Ambrose (340 – 397), the powerful Bishop of Milan.<sup>126</sup> In 384, two years after the Altar of Victory was removed, a young Manichaean, Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) moved from Carthage to Milan after receiving an invitation from that same Symmachus on behalf of the imperial court in Milan to serve as a professor of rhetoric, a move that also brought Augustine in contact with his future confessor, Ambrose. In 387, Augustine returned to his native Africa, a

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<sup>123</sup> Alaric I (370/375-410). Averil Cameron questions the extent of the “sack”: “There is archaeological confirmation of burning in some areas, and there was no doubt much individual suffering, but there was no widespread destruction and the Goths were bought off after three days; they may never have intended an invasion” in Gillian Clark, “City of Books: Augustine and the World as Text” in *The Early Christian Book*, eds. William E. Klingshirm and Linda Safran (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 123; See also Neil Christie, “Lost Glories” *Rome at the End of the Empire*,” in *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City*, ed. Jon Coulston and Hazel Dodge (Oxford, 2000), 306-32, note 22.

<sup>124</sup> Edict of Milan (313), which decreed tolerance for Christian practice, with the Edict of Thessalonica (380) during the joint reign of Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II when Christianity was made the official state cult.

<sup>125</sup> Symmachus, *Relationes* 13: “*uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.*”

<sup>126</sup> Valentinian’s mother, the Empress Justina and Theodosius I, whose influence over the child emperor was immense, likely take more credit for the refusal.

Christian. If blood on the curial altar had insured the protection of Rome for 800 years, as some believed (Augustine argued that it hadn't) that policy expired in 410.

In 412, shortly after the attack on Rome, Augustine wrote a letter to Volusian, a Roman "pagan" official living in Africa Proconsularis (Numidia) about his plans to write *City of God*, the *magnum opus* he would complete over the next thirteen years.<sup>127</sup> The *City of God* is Augustine's response to those who blamed the sack of Rome on the abandonment of the traditional gods and their temples in favor of an imperial Christianity. Near the end of his life in 427, Augustine would again see frontier *foederati* "Vandalizing" Roman cities, even besieging the gates of his own Hippo Regius. During this time, he wrote *The Retractions*, emending his body of work before his death in 430. Recalling the sack of Rome in 410, Augustine reflects on the response that initially motivated the *City of God*: "The worshippers of many false gods, whom we call by the customary name pagans, attempting to attribute its destruction to the Christian *religione*, began to blaspheme the true god more sharply and bitterly than usual" (Augustine, *Retractiones* 69.1).<sup>128</sup>

In twenty-two books, *City of God*, "ranges over the moral and philosophical heritage of Graeco-Roman culture, the history of the world and of God's people within it, the purpose and limitations of human society, and the distinctive teachings of Christian theology."<sup>129</sup> Augustine referred to it as "this huge book" (Augustine, *De civitate Dei*

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<sup>127</sup> I will retain Augustine's use of the term "pagan" in parts of this dissertation in reference to adherents and practitioners of tradition classical cult and culture when seen through Augustine's eyes.

<sup>128</sup> Bogan, trans. "*cuius euersionem deorum faslorum multorumque cultores, quos usitato nomine paganos uocamus, in Christianam religionem referre conantes solito acerbius et amarius deum uerum blasphemare uel errors libros de ciuitate dei scriber institui.*"

<sup>129</sup> Clark, "City of Books," 118.

22.30).<sup>130</sup> The first ten books refute Roman ideas about the gods, five books devoted to popular cult and five to the philosophers. The remaining twelve develop the idea of the two cities, the earthly city and a “heavenly” one. In Book 3, Augustine lists scores of calamities that befell the ancient Romans centuries before the sacking of Rome: “[T]heir gods did not prevent the occurrence of those evils which they alone fear, even when they worshipped them unhampered” (3.1).<sup>131</sup> In a striking passage, he hammers his readers repeatedly: “Where were they (i.e. the “pagan” gods) when...? Where were they when...?”,<sup>132</sup> each time listing yet another historical tragedy taken from Livy, displaying

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<sup>130</sup> In a letter to Firmus written in 426/7, Augustine offers advice to copyists. *Epistula* 1\*a, 1: “There are twenty-two books which are rather too bulky to be bound together into one volume. If you wish for two volumes, they must be divided up so that one volume has ten books and the other, twelve. In the first ten, the vanities of the impious have been refuted and in the other twelve, our religion has been described and defended although, where it was more opportune, I have undertaken the defense in the first ten, as well as the refutation in the last twelve.” Eno, trans. (*Nes sunt XXII quos in unum corpus redigere multum est; et si duos uis codices fieri, ita diuidendi sunt, ut decem libros habeat, unus, alius duodecim. Decem quippe illis uanitates refutatae sunt impiorum, reliquis autem demonstrata atque defensa est nostra religio, quamuis et in illis hoc factum sit ubi opportunius fuit, et in istis illud.*)

<sup>131</sup> McCracken, trans. “*Sed neque talia mala, quae isti sola formidant, dii eorum, quando ab eis libere colebantur, ne illis acciderent obstiterunt.*”

<sup>132</sup> McCracken, trans. “*Ubi ergo erant illi dii, qui propter exiguam fallacemque mundi huius felicitatem colendi existimantur, cum Romani, quibus se colendos mendacissima astutia venditabant, tantis calamitatibus vexarentur? Ubi erant, quando Valerius consul ab exulibus et servis incensum Capitolium cum defensaret occisus est faciliusque ipse prodesse potuit aedi Iouis quam illi turba tot numinum cum suo maximo atque optimo rege, cuius tempore liberaverat, subuenire? Ubi erant, quando densissimis fatigata civitas seditionum malis, cum legatos Athenas missos ad leges mutuandas paululum quieta opperiretur, gravi fame pestilentiaque vastata est? Ubi erant, quando rursus populus, cum fame laboraret, praefectum annonae primum creavit, atque illa fame inualescente Spurius Maelius, quia esurienti multitudini frumenta largitus est, regni adfectati crimen incurrit et eiusdem praefecti instantia per dictatorem L. Quintium aetate decrepitem a Quinto Servilio magistro equitum cum maximo et periculosissimo tumultu civitatis occisus est?*”

his mastery of Latin literature.<sup>133</sup> Jason Moralee remarks: “Augustine rarely missed the chance to ridicule Roman claims that [they were] especially graced by the gods. In his *City of God*, Augustine wonders whether the gods of Troy, who were entrusted with Rome’s protection, were elsewhere when the siege started but returned just in the nick of time, drawing on the widely accepted view that absent gods and goddesses were unable to protect their own temples.”<sup>134</sup> The Roman gods, it turns out, were not much help with or without the Altar of Victory but nor was the Christian god to the dismay of the Christians. Augustine’s point is that all earthly cities will get sacked, save the “city of God.” This dissertation is concerned with Augustine’s refutation of the philosophers, particularly his ambivalent engagement with the Platonists in Books 8 - 10. Augustine sought a refuge for the woes of the world, much like the philosophers, a safe haven he found in what he considered the “true philosophy” in Christian teachings. But the problem of “salvation”—ultimately, liberation from death—was one his *Platonici* and *theurgici* were equally familiar with.

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<sup>133</sup> James. J. O’Donnell suggests that Augustine was “using the authors as references works, rather than enjoying them as literary creations” in J.J. O’Donnell, “Augustine’s Classical Readings,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980): 161. See my Appendix A.

<sup>134</sup> Jason Moralee, *Rome's Holy Mountain: the Capitoline Hill in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 155.

## CHAPTER 1

### NEOPLATONISM AND THE “VEHICLE OF THE SOUL”: MAP IS TERRITORY<sup>135</sup>

Neoplatonism is a term used by scholars since the nineteenth century to describe a philosophical movement in the late Roman Empire between the third and sixth centuries that interpreted Plato but also drew from Aristotle, the Stoics, the Chaldean Oracles, and responded to Christianity. While there are important differences between the various Neoplatonists, they share a number of assumptions observed by Pauliina Remes, two of which I will mention here: 1) a commitment to an ineffable first principle, the One (*hen*), the source of all being and becoming and the idea that the Divine Mind (*nous*) can be known and 2) the idea that philosophy was a “way of life” that leads to becoming “god-like,” what I am calling “personal divinity.”<sup>136</sup> Aaron Hughes adds an important third assumption:

[M]any of the authors we today deem Neoplatonists seemed to have shared an assumption that the reader of a philosophical text must be an active participant. The meaning of the text can only be understood when the reader clarifies his or her own situation in the light of the text....A Neoplatonic reading, therefore, must be an active reading because one reads not so much for the message but for the experience.<sup>137</sup>

The “vehicle of the soul” (*ochêma pneuma*) was a Neoplatonic technology for attaining personal divinity. This soul vehicle was also understood to be the seat of

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<sup>135</sup> Homage to Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*. (Leiden: Brill, 1978). Smith writes: “The historian’s task is to complicate not to clarify...The historian provides us with hints that remain too fragile to bear the burden of being solutions” (290).

<sup>136</sup> Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 7-10.

<sup>137</sup> Aaron W. Hughes, and Abraham ben Meïr Ibn Ezra, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53.

imagination (*phantasia*) and the “organ” by which both sensual and “divine” (or non-sensual) perceptions were apprehended and experienced. It was a mode of perception and kind of consciousness that navigated the invisible world by making it visible. For the Neoplatonist, the active imagination itself was the vehicle for the soul—or the soul itself—much like William Blake’s “divine body of man.”<sup>138</sup> With ancient and modern theories about reading and the imagination in mind—from Quintilian<sup>139</sup> to Cognitive Poetics—this chapter interrogates the way reading (or hearing) texts, particularly those that discuss ideas about personal divinity, function as “spiritual exercises” that serve to cultivate personal divinity. In the Neoplatonic context, divinity is a quality of the “One,” the ultimate source of being and becoming for the Neoplatonists, sometimes called “Beauty,” (*kalon*) “God” (*theos*), or, after Plato, the “Good” (*agathon*). Divinity, in this context, might more easily be understood simply as “invisible, intelligent, immortal power.” *Personal* divinity, I suggest, was the identification and participation in the invisible, intelligent power of the divine Mind (*Nous*), an emanating feature of the One. Reading (or hearing) Neoplatonic texts as spiritual exercises was an imaginative engagement by philosophers with ideas about divinity that offered a method—through the vehicle of the soul—of achieving personal divinity.

Famously attempting to harmonize Aristotle with Plato (a point that will become critical to the exercise I offer at the end of the chapter), the Neoplatonists’ concept of the

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<sup>138</sup> “Annotations to Berkeley’s *Siris*” (1744) in William Blake, David V. Erdman, and Harold Bloom, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 663.

<sup>139</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35 – c. 100). Roman educator and rhetorician, born in Roman province of Hispania, died in Rome.

vehicle of the soul links the “star-chariots” in Plato (*Timaeus* 41d-e)<sup>140</sup> with the “starry *pneuma*” of Aristotle (*De generatione animalium* 736b 35-9).<sup>141</sup> E.R. Dodds describes the *ochêma pneuma* as “an inner envelope of the soul, which is less material than the fleshly body and survives its dissolution, yet has not the pure immateriality of mind.”<sup>142</sup> The vehicle of the soul became a feature on the Neoplatonic map of the soul’s journey. Despite the important technical differences between how it was theorized by individual Neoplatonists and despite its complicated evolution from earlier thinkers such as Galen and Poseidonius (nicely summarized by John Dillon),<sup>143</sup> the vehicle of the soul generally fulfills three functions. Quoting John Finamore: “[I]t houses the rational soul [i.e. “mind”] in its descent from the noetic realm to the realm of generation; it acts as the organ of sense-perception and imagination; and, through theurgic rites, it can be purified and lifted above, [as] a vehicle for the rational soul’s return through the cosmos to the gods.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> “And when He had compounded the whole He divided it into souls equal in number to the stars, and each several soul He assigned to one star, and setting them each as it were in a chariot.” Bury, trans. (*ζυστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλε ψυχὰς ἰσαρίθμους τοῖς ἄστροις ἐνειμέθ’ Ἐεκάστην πρὸς ἕκαστον, καὶ ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα.*)

<sup>141</sup> “And the natural substance which is in the *pneuma*; and this substance is analogous to the element which belongs to the stars.” Peck, trans. (*καὶ ἡ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι φύσις, ἀνάλογον οὖσα τῷ αὐτῶν ἀστροῦ στοιχείῳ.*)

<sup>142</sup> E. R. Dodds, *Stoicheiōsis Theologikē = The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 315.

<sup>143</sup> John Dillon, “Plotinus and the Vehicle of the Soul,” in John Turner, John Douglas, Kevin Corrigan, and Tuomas Rasimus (eds.), *Gnosticism, Platonism and the late ancient world: essays in honour of John D. Turner* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>144</sup> John F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 1. See note 65 for discussion of theurgic rites.

Although the vehicle of the soul was discussed explicitly by Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, there is a suggestion of such a body in Plotinus, where he discusses the descent of the soul: "...when the soul leaves the noetic realm, it goes 'first into heaven and receives there a body through which it continues into more earthy bodies'" (Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.3.15.1-3).<sup>145</sup> Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus thinks that the vehicle of the soul is immortal. The difference between Porphyry's and Iamblichus' position on the vehicle can be summarized as follows: "[F]or Porphyry the vehicle is created from portions of the bodies of the visible gods and perishes when these portions are sloughed off, whereas for Iamblichus it is ethereal and created whole by the Demiurge, and not subject to destruction or dissolution of any kind."<sup>146</sup> For the Neoplatonists, the soul vehicle was also key to realizing personal divinity. Gregory Shaw shows how "[t]he doctrine of the 'soul vehicle' in the Platonic tradition is essential for understanding the manner in which the later Platonists visualized immortality...the perfection of this aetheric and luminous body effected the soul's immortalization."<sup>147</sup> The key term here is "visualized." When readers visualized a vehicle, they mentally inhabited the means by which they could extend conscious existence beyond the limits of the physical body.

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<sup>145</sup> Armstrong, trans. "Ἰασι δὲ ἐκκύψασαι τοῦ νοητοῦ εἰς οὐρανὸν μὲν πρῶτον καὶ σῶμα ἐκεῖ προσλαβοῦσαι δι' αὐτοῦ ἤδη χωροῦσι καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ γεωδέστερα σώματα."

<sup>146</sup> Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 27.

<sup>147</sup> Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 51.

## The Seat of *Phantasia*

Turning to the vehicle's function as an organ of sense perception, the vehicle of the soul was understood as the seat of *phantasia*, the image-making faculty of consciousness. Synesius, a Christian Neoplatonist (373 – 414) and student of Hypatia (d. 415), later identified the luminous body of the soul with the imagination itself.<sup>148</sup> Robert Berchman describes how the Neoplatonic imagination, in the best sense, functions:

The imagination (*phantasia*) receives the products of thought (*logoi*) and perception (*aesthesis*). These products are then passed on to the reasoning faculty for processing. Imagination is, accordingly, based on something far more profound than an awareness of physical conditions. It carries a meaning close to the idea of consciousness. This means that the imagination is a power of perceptive awareness that transcends sensation. Significantly, it refers to that mental faculty which provides knowledge of the intelligibles above and within the soul.<sup>149</sup>

Indeed, apprehension of an invisible divine power required imagination. But make no mistake: the discussion of imagination in the texts is more often critical than not. Gerard Watson notes that the Neoplatonists were suspicious of the imagination for its tendency to amplify passions such as anger and desire, but they also accepted “the (Aristotelian) understanding of [the imagination] as a middle between sense and intellect, and even [welcomed] it as a possible help to a glimpse of a higher world.”<sup>150</sup> Operating between sense and intellect, Neoplatonic imagination partakes of both sense and intellect as a cognitive function, “close to the idea of consciousness.”

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<sup>148</sup> Synesius, *De Insomniis* 1.134a,1. See Donald Andrew Russell, Ursula Bittrich, Börje Bydén, and Heinz-Günther Nesselrath. *On prophecy, dreams and human imagination: Synesius, De insomniis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Robert M. Berchman, *Porphyry against the Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 102.

<sup>150</sup> Gerard Watson, *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (Galway: Galway Univ. Press, 1988). 96.

Despite the cautions expressed above, the view that the imagination “penetrates...what the mind cannot conceive,” to quote Kevin Corrigan, persists in Neoplatonic thought.<sup>151</sup> While on the one hand *phantasia* is a highly technical term with positive and negative connotations in the texts, it can loosely be understood as imagination. Imagination and thought work together. Again, Corrigan: “As a borderland between the material world and the purely immaterial world of the intellect, this space of the imagination offers a transitional domain that the mind can come to inhabit. This visionary space does not contain external object nor illusions nor hallucinations. Rather, it is above all a realm of self-illumination....”<sup>152</sup> Imagination, therefore, served to elevate consciousness beyond its normal capacities. Indeed, one might ask how imagination and consciousness are different at all.

Imagination in this period does not have the connotation of something that is “just made up” or “untrue” as it does in the modern sense.<sup>153</sup> For the Neoplatonists on the other hand, imagination was a cognitive faculty that gave shape to sense perceptions so

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<sup>151</sup> Kevin Corrigan, and Plotinus, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), 232.

<sup>152</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 173.

<sup>153</sup> Henry Corbin comments on the fate of imagination in modernity: “Imagination is confounded with fantasy. The notion that the Imagination has a noetic value, that it is an organ of knowledge because it ‘creates’ being, is not readily compatible with our habits ....The degradation of the Imagination into fantasy is complete. An opposition is seen between the fragility and gratuitousness of artistic creation and the solidity of ‘social’ achievements, which are viewed as the justification and explanation of developments in the artistic world. In short, there has ceased to be an intermediate level between empirically verifiable reality and unreality pure and simple. All indemonstrable, invisible, inaudible things are classified as creations of the Imagination, that is, of the faculty whose function it is to secrete the *imaginary*, the unreal. In this context of agnosticism...all forms of divinity are said to be creations of the imagination, hence unreal.” Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 180 – 181. Divinity is “real” for us but not without us. Whatever it is, it needs us.

that the mind could make judgments. It also gave shape to the “higher” soul’s apprehension of the gods and the Forms in the intelligible realms. Gregory Shaw notes: “On the horizontal level *phantasia* was merely the play of the discursive mind, but if properly purified and trained, the vertical dimension that sustained it could be awakened.”<sup>154</sup> In Sara Ahbel-Rappe’s words: “Plotinus relies upon a series of thought experiments embedded within the text, whose purpose is to foster the potential for self-awareness and so orient the student upon a path of self-knowledge.”<sup>155</sup> The purification and training was achieved through “spiritual exercises” or imaginative technologies of self-transformation that led to an exalted self-perception and access to knowledge.

Often it seems the Neoplatonists tended to patrol the border between intellect and imagination. The Neoplatonists often divide up cognitive features into “higher” and “lower” because of their suspicion of imagination, a point taken up by Crystal Addey who offers an important critique of the modern (and ancient) tendency to dichotomize ways of knowing, privileging certain kinds of knowledge over others.<sup>156</sup> Despite this tendency, the Neoplatonists return again and again to a notion of imagination that is a kind of cognition in its own right. Intellect required imagination. Can one imagine thinking without it? Plotinus addresses this relationship: [T]he image-making power...show[s] the intellectual act as if in a mirror, and this is how there is apprehension and persistence and memory of it. Therefore, even though the soul is always moved to

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<sup>154</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 221.

<sup>155</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 79.

<sup>156</sup> Crystal Addey, “In the Light of the Sphere: The ‘Vehicle of the Soul’ and Subtle-Body Practices in Neoplatonism,” in *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, ed. Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 156-7.

intelligent activity, it is when it comes to be in the image-making power that we apprehend it” (Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.3.30.10-16)<sup>157</sup> On the one hand, the “higher” mind on Plotinus’ map is *always already* in contemplation, although unknown to itself. Only through imagination does it realize it is doing so. On the other hand, Plotinus’ discussion betrays the irony of the Neoplatonic attempt to downgrade imagination to a “lower” status.

Aaron Hughes explains the import of the imagination to the Neoplatonic philosophical project of visualizing and identifying with invisible divine power:

[Imagination] is the faculty that is ultimately responsible for the creation of images or symbols that capture certain perspectives of the divine’s ineffability. The imagination now becomes the primary vehicle whereby the individual grasps that which exists without matter.... As a result, the imagination ultimately becomes responsible for giving the transcendental an appropriate phenomenality. But this is not simply a translation of something ineffable into a communicable form. Rather, the imagination’s gaze is the main component of the experience.<sup>158</sup>

Divine union or co-activity with the mind of god—which was the Neoplatonic aim—must be imagined as a possibility to begin with, if it is to be a possibility. Imagination is not simply a vehicle, it is the soul, it is what the soul does, or, more to the point: the soul *is* what it does. The more we look, the more the vehicle of the soul as active imagination begins to look like the soul. The imaginative function is more than a feature on a map, *it is the territory itself*. Despite all their caution, the soul’s vehicle remains a technology of self-transformation for the Neoplatonist, a pathway for personal divinity, a way to

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<sup>157</sup> Armstrong, trans. “τὸ φανταστικὸν ἔδειξε τὸ νόημα οἷον ἐν κατοπτρῷ, καὶ ἡ ἀντίληψις αὐτοῦ οὕτω καὶ ἡ μονὴ καὶ ἡ μνήμη. διὸ καὶ ἀεὶ κινουμένης πρὸς νόησιν τῆς ψυχῆς, ὅταν ἐν τούτῳ γένηται, ἡμῖν ἡ ἀντίληψις. ἄλλο γὰρ ἡ νόησις, καὶ ἄλλο ἡ τῆς νοήσεως ἀντίληψις.”

<sup>158</sup> Hughes, *Texture of the Divine*, 4-6.

participate in and identify with the divine, what Neoplatonists mapped out as the unseen and ineffable source of being in its intellectual capacity.

### **Spiritual Exercises and Rhetoric**

To better understand the imaginative gaze, let us consider an under-examined aspect of how the Neoplatonic texts, when read or heard, function as “spiritual exercises.” The appeal to imagination as a rhetorical strategy learned in the late ancient schools of rhetoric—combined with the Neoplatonic understanding of imagination’s role in the map of the soul—helps us appreciate how these texts function as imaginative technologies of self-transformation that constructed an experience of personal divinity for their audience. The Neoplatonists were men and women of *paideia*.<sup>159</sup> Edward Watts discusses how the philosophers had “separated themselves from the average [person] by their knowledge of and appreciation for the worlds, ideas, and texts of classical antiquity.”<sup>160</sup> In the late antique Roman world, education for the aspiring elite “consisted of study at a school of

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<sup>159</sup> Notably, Hypatia and Sosipatra. See Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995); Sarah Iles Johnston, “Sosipatra and the Theurgic Life: Eunapius *Vitae Sophistorum* 6.6.5-6.9.25,” in *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices*, eds. Jörg Rüpke and Wolfgang Spickermann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012). Robert Lamberton writes: “The combination of Porphyry’s emphasis on the philosophical commitment of the two Geminas and of Amphicleia (*Plot.* 9.1-3) with his insistence on the openness of the school (*Plot.* 1.13) seems to tip the scale in favor of [women’s] presence in the lectures and discussions. Plato’s Academy, according to the traditions that went back at least to Dicaearchus (fr. 44 Wehrli), included women, and the Platonic teachers of the fourth and fifth centuries clearly included women (Hypatia) and we know that women were among their students.” Richard Lamberton, “The Schools of Platonic Philosophy of the Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Biographies,” in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Yun Lee Too (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 441.

<sup>160</sup> Edward Jay Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 2.

letters” where basic literacy was taught.<sup>161</sup> Those with means continued with a grammarian, learning the grammatical rules, acquiring an introductory knowledge of the canon. Some ventured further working through the *progymnasmata* where composition was practiced.

The next phase was the school of rhetoric where literary allusions (and their moral and historical significance) and oratorical strategies were taught. The final destination for a few was the school of philosophy.<sup>162</sup> The course of study pursued under teachers of rhetoric and philosophy was costly, lengthy, and rigorous: “Indeed, of the fifty-seven students of Libanius whose term of study is known, fully thirty-five dropped out by the end of their second year.”<sup>163</sup> Porphyry studied with Plotinus in his school of philosophy and it seems Iamblichus studied for a time under Porphyry. The lineage of students and teachers is represented in Eunapius’ *The Lives of the Philosophers* and Damascius’

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<sup>161</sup> Watts, *City and School*, 2. On Roman Egypt in particular: “As in the rest of the contemporary Graeco-Roman world, education in Roman Egypt was a privately organized affair, unregulated by the state. Parents had to arrange, monitor, and determine the extent of their children’s education, depending on their means, the local availability of teachers, and the expected future roles of their children in society... The physical setting of education could be rather informal and depended on the individual teacher... Despite its non-institutional character, education followed a broadly uniform cultural matrix throughout the Greek world, including Egypt.” Amin Benaissa, “Greek Language, Education, and Literary Culture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 528.

<sup>162</sup> For education generally, see Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956); Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Yun Lee Too, *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>163</sup> Watts, *City and School*, 5.

*Philosophical History*.<sup>164</sup> We know something of Plotinus' later education. Porphyry recounts thirty years after his teacher's death:

In his twenty-eighth year Plotinus became eager to study philosophy and it was recommended that he go to the most renowned teachers in Alexandria at that time. He came away from their lectures so full of sadness that he communicated his experiences to a friend. That friend, who understood the desire of his heart, sent him to Ammonius, who he had not yet tried. Plotinus, upon going and hearing him speak one time, told his friend, 'This is the man I was seeking' (*Vita Plotini* 3, 7-13).<sup>165</sup>

While we don't know the details of the philosophers' earlier grammatical and rhetorical educations, we can assume that in order to enter a school of philosophy, they would have become learned in the rhetorical strategies of *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* that were taught in rhetoric handbooks of Aristotle and Quintilian.<sup>166</sup> *Ekphrasis* and *enargeia* refer to the use of vivid language to affect the mind of the reader or listener and persuade them by appealing to the imagination.<sup>167</sup>

Ruth Webb explores how the use of vivid language in oratory and writing to describe an object or scene brings it to life in the imagination. *Ekphrasis* and *enargeia* are

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<sup>164</sup> See Philostratus, Eunapius, Wilmer Cave Wright, *Philostratus, the lives of the Sophists; Eunapius, lives of the Philosophers* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1921); Damascius le Diadoque, and Polýmnia Athanasiádi. *The philosophical history* (Athens: Apamea, 1999); Marinus of Neapolis and Al. N., Oikonomides, trans. *The Life of Proclus and the Commentary on the Dedoma of Euclid* (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1977).

<sup>165</sup> Armstrong, trans. "Εἴκοστὸν δὲ καὶ ὄγδοον ἔτος αὐτὸν ἄγοντα ὀρμησαὶ ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν καὶ τοῖς τότε κατὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν εὐδοκιμοῦσι συσταθέντα κατιέναι ἐκ τῆς ἀκροάσεως αὐτῶν κατηφῆ καὶ λύπης πλήρη, ὡς καὶ τινι τῶν φίλων διηγείσθαι ἃ πάσχοι· τὸν δὲ συνέντα αὐτοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ βούλημα ἀπενέγκαι πρὸς Ἀμμώνιον, οὐ μηδέπω πεπειρατο. Τὸν δὲ εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἀκούσαντα φάναι πρὸς τὸν ἐταῖρον· τοῦτον ἐζήτουν."

<sup>166</sup> Aristoteles, and John Henry Freese, *The "Art" of Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Quintilian, and Harold Edgeworth Butler, *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1920).

<sup>167</sup> Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 88.

used as “a means of arousing the emotions and as a figure of speech which has the particularly vital role of ensuring that the listener is swayed by the speaker’s case.”<sup>168</sup>

Patricia Cox Miller characterizes *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* using Hayden White’s terms: “They are figuratively real—that is, they are narrative pictorial strategies that seduce the reader in to forgetting that these are images in texts.”<sup>169</sup> Our best source for understanding *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* is Quintilian who explains how the orator “should achieve *enargeia* through the use of mental images.”<sup>170</sup> He writes:

What the Greeks call *phantasiai* (we shall call them ‘*visiones*’, if you will) are the means by which images of absent things are represented to the mind in such a way that we seem to see them with our eyes and to be in their presence. Whoever has mastery of them will have a powerful effect on the emotions. Some people say that this type of man who can imagine in himself things, words and deeds well and in accordance with truth is ‘good at imagining’ (*Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.29-30).<sup>171</sup>

“[A]wareness of visualization as an important element of both reading or listening to others’ work and creating one’s own” was central to a rhetorical education.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, the hope was that orators (and writers) could “predict and control such a seemingly individual and subjective process.”<sup>173</sup> The rhetorically trained Neoplatonic philosophers likely deployed *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* with the aim of persuading their students and

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<sup>168</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 88.

<sup>169</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 109.

<sup>170</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 88.

<sup>171</sup> Russell, trans. “*Quas φαντασίας Graeci vocant (nos sane visiones appellemus), per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur animo ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentes habere videamur, has quisquis bene ceperit is erit in adfectibus potentissimus. Quidam dicunt εὐφαντασίωτον qui sibi res voces actus secundum verum optime finget: quod quidem nobis volentibus facile contingent.*”

<sup>172</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 96.

<sup>173</sup> Webb, *Ekphrasis*, 107.

readers. Bringing the faculty of imagination to life by offering vivid language and imaginative exercises is more than image-making, it is, in the Neoplatonic context, soul-making. Such imaginative “activation” of the soul made it possible for the Neoplatonist to apprehend and participate in the invisible divine power constitutive of the Neoplatonic god, the One (*hen*) and its Mind (*nous*).

### **Cognitive Poetics**

Modern theories of the imagination and reading also help us understand how the Neoplatonic discourses on personal divinity function as imaginative technologies of self-transformation. Cognitive poetics (and its predecessors, reader-response and reader-reception theory)<sup>174</sup> offer an approach with roots in ancient theories of reading and rhetoric that, like *ekphrasis* and *enargeia*, are concerned with the effect of language on the imagination of the reader.<sup>175</sup> In his study of reading in the medieval period, Duncan Robertson draws from the reader-response criticism of Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser.<sup>176</sup> Setting forth the basic premise of the approach, he writes: “The partnership between the reader and the text is where the reader ‘participates both in the production and the comprehension of the work’s intention.’”<sup>177</sup> Pamela Bright’s study of reader-reception

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<sup>174</sup> Stanley Eugene Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 123-162; Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>175</sup> See Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

<sup>176</sup> Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Trappist, Ky: Cistercian Publications, 2011).

<sup>177</sup> Robertson, *Lectio*, 32. Wolfgang Iser notes: “If reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the read will be ‘occupied’ by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn will cause the drawing of new ‘boundaries.’”

theory in Augustine describes how “[t]he world of reading creates and encourages contemplative ‘spaces’ for the reader’s imagination; it is at once a contemplative world and a world charged with energy and engagement.”<sup>178</sup>

Adding fresh insight from cognitive science to the humanities, Hugo Lundhaug explores personal divinity in the Christian and Gnostic contexts. Lundhaug presents an “interpretation from the perspective of how the human mind makes sense of a text by means of the creation and integration of multiple mental representations. Acknowledging the universal underlying mechanics of thought may...enable us to analyse the intellectual products and patterns of thought of peoples and cultures far removed from our own with an adequate degree of methodological clarity....”<sup>179</sup> To be sure, any text will incite a multiplicity of “reader-responses,” informed by and negotiated according to personal,

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Text and reader no long confront each other as object and subject, but instead the ‘division’ takes place within the reader himself. In thinking the thoughts of another, his own individuality temporarily recedes into the background, since it is supplanted by these alien thoughts, which now become the theme on which his attention is focused. As we read, there occurs an artificial division of our personality, because we take as a theme for ourselves something that we are not. Consequently, when reading we operate on different levels. For although we may be thinking—it will merely remain a more or less powerful virtual force. Thus, in reading there these two levels—the alien ‘me’ and the real, virtual ‘me’—which are never completely cut off from each other. Indeed, we can only make someone else’s thoughts into an absorbing theme for ourselves, provided the virtual background (the real ‘me’) will take on a different form, according to the theme of the text concerned. This is inevitable, if only for the fact that the relationship between alien theme and virtual background is what makes it possible for the unfamiliar to be understood” in Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tomkins (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). 67.

<sup>178</sup> Pamela Bright, “Augustine and the Ethics of Reading the Bible,” in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser, Lorenzo DiTommaso, and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 64.

<sup>179</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth: Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 64, 4-5.

social, historical, and material contexts.<sup>180</sup> Lundhaug echoes Margaret Freeman who cautions us that “literary texts are the products of cognizing minds and their interpretations the products of other cognizing minds in the context of the physical and sociocultural worlds in which they have been created and read.”<sup>181</sup> We should remember that the effectiveness of *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* relied to some degree on a system of shared knowledge in a social context and that the “cognizing mind” has both individual and social aspects. Individual experience is not necessarily a product of social experience even as it may be informed by it.

### **The Sacred and the Sublime**

Earlier I described personal divinity in the Neoplatonic map of the soul as a “sacred status.” More needs to be said about the process of self-sacralization where human consciousness becomes “divine.” Through an analysis of linguistic and ritual context, Roman historian Carlin Barton has developed a new understanding of the social and psychological dynamics of the “sacrificial system” (see chapter 2 for detailed discussion). Barton writes: “Forces, powers, functions needed to be isolated, defined, carved out of nature and harnessed in order for the charges on them to be either

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<sup>180</sup> Isabella Sandwell uses the sermons of John Chrysostom and the letters of Libanius to complicate identity in late antiquity and offers a new approach to thinking about Christianization. Relying on the social anthropology of Fredrik Barth and T.H. Eriksen, she makes the case for multiple fluid social identities and allegiances. While John Chrysostom is unambiguous about what differentiates Christians from Greeks or Jews, the writings of Libanius suggest a range of degree in cultic and ideological identification. See *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>181</sup> Lundhaug, *Cognitive Poetics*, 51.

augmented and reinforced or debilitated and dispersed.... Absolutely anything or anyone could be sacralized or desecrated....”<sup>182</sup>

Building upon Barton’s insights, I argue that the “inward turn” in Late Antique Neoplatonic texts is a turn toward sacralization of self-reflexivity itself.<sup>183</sup> Imaginative engagements with personal divinity heightened self-reflexivity. By becoming “aware of awareness,” reflexivity is “set apart” (sacralized, rendered *sacer*). Such reflexivity took philosophers to the heart of a strange, sometimes overwhelming, recognition of the fact of existence where self becomes the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that Otto ascribes to the divine “Wholly Other.”<sup>184</sup> This point is key to the whole project of personal divinity.

Robert Doran would agree. He describes a “structure of experience” theorized by first-century rhetorician Longinus as “sublimity” (*hypsos*, literally “elevated”).<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Carlin A. Barton, “The Emotional Economy of Sacrifice and Execution in Ancient Rome,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*. 29, no. 2 (2003): 346.

<sup>183</sup> In an essay that charts the development of the phrase “*epistrophe pros heauton*” (return or reversion to self) from Heraclitus to Aquinas, Lloyd Gerson defines “self-reflexivity” as “roughly awareness or cognition of one’s own occurrent cognitive or affective states.” “*Epistrophe pros heauton*: History and Meaning,” *Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 7 (1997), 2.

<sup>184</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy; An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

<sup>185</sup> The author and date of *Peri hypsos* are uncertain although the current consensus attributes it to a first-century Pseudo-Longinus. See Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 29-31. The influence of Longinus on early modern writers and the “subjective turn” of modern aesthetics are clear. While the fact that Longinus is unattested in other ancient sources until the tenth century makes him appear unique, it is unlikely that his thought appeared independently of an intellectual community. Other ancient authors such as Caecilius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Philo of Alexandria take up related themes using similar language. Longinus was concerned, like Quintilian, with the effect of language on the

According to Longinus, the use of “sublimity” as a rhetorical strategy produces “the paradoxical experience of being at once overwhelmed and exalted...”<sup>186</sup> Like *ekphrasis* and *enargeia*, *hypsos* is intended to affect the mind of reader (or hearer). “Elevating” language was used to instill a feeling of grandeur (*megethos*) or high-mindedness (*megalophrosyne*) that characterized sublimity (*hypsos*). In his rhetoric handbook, *On the Sublime*, Longinus writes:

For grandeur produces ecstasy (*ekstasis*) rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder (*thaumasion*) and astonishment (*ekplexis*) always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement (*ekplexis*) and wonder (*thaumasion*) exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer (Longinus, *Peri Hypsos* 1.4).<sup>187</sup>

This “invincible power and force” elevates the mind above its normal state, literally “standing outside” (*ekstasis*).<sup>188</sup> The use of “elevating” rhetoric by describing the actions of heroes or volcanoes, Longinus argues, “lifts us toward the mighty mind (*megalophrosynes*) of god” (*Peri Hypsos* 36.1).<sup>189</sup> Sublimity, through its combination of wonder and astonishment, produces a state that is both overwhelming and exalting—a heightened self-reflexivity, a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* within and directed inwardly toward the self. Neoplatonic texts deliberately provoked self-sacralizing awe.

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mind of both orator and audience, and, like the Neoplatonists, on the “divinity” of those who approached the sublime.

<sup>186</sup> Doran, *Longinus to Kant*, 4.

<sup>187</sup> Russell, *Literary* trans. “οὐ γὰρ εἰς πειθῶ τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ἀλλ’ εἰς ἔκστασιν ἄγει τὰ ὑπερφυᾶ· πάντα δέ γε σὺν ἐκπλήξει τοῦ πιθανοῦ καὶ τοῦ πρὸς χάριν ἀεὶ κρατεῖ τὸ θαυμάσιον, εἶγε τὸ μὲν πιθανὸν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, ταῦτα δὲ δυναστείαν καὶ βίαν ἄμαχον προσφέροντα παντὸς ἐπάνω τοῦ ἀκροωμένου καθίσταται.”

<sup>188</sup> James Porter prefers “inward ecstasy” when looking at the rhetoric of sublimity in Plotinus. *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 608.

<sup>189</sup> Russell, Loeb trans. “τὸ δ’ ὕψος ἐγγὺς αἴρει μεγαλοφροσύνης θεοῦ.”

## “Do this at home”

In order to highlight the central role imaginative reading as a technology of self-transformation plays in my argument, I want to offer the reader an exercise of the imagination that will help illustrate the Late Antique mentality I seek to uncover. A dissertation about “spiritual exercises” should do no less. To follow is a Neoplatonic map of the soul’s journey. Let’s say you are a Neoplatonic philosopher. Within you and beyond you, there is an invisible, ineffable source of being, the One, the All. It is, in Damascius’ words, an “unknowable darkness” (Damascius, *De Principiis* 17.125.4).<sup>190</sup> Then, there is the *Nous*, conceived of as the “Divine Mind,” which, after creating the Forms and the gods, emanates *psyche* or the individual soul. Your thinking and imagining soul, which is immaterial, has a vehicle. It’s your imagination. Now, your soul wants to be god-like, like Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover,” the work of the *Nous* is to be engaged in an imaginative exercise of cosmic proportions, to “reflect on itself” (*Metaphysica* 1074b, 34-5).<sup>191</sup> When you engage in thought, which requires imagination, you mirror this divine self-reflexive *Nous*.<sup>192</sup> But, how do you go “through the looking glass”? How do you raise yourself to the level of the divine? You need purification. If, like Plotinus, you

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<sup>190</sup> My trans. “Σκότος ἄγνωστον.” Cf. Ramesside Period hymn to Amun-Re in *Leiden Papyrus* I 350 (17 – 18): “One is Amun, who hides himself from them, / who hides himself from the gods, no one knows his essence./ He is more distant than the sky, / and deeper than the netherworld./ No god knows his true form, / his image is not unfolded in the papyrus rolls. / He is too mysterious to be disclosed, / too great to be investigated, / too mighty to be known... / No god can call him by his name.” Hornung, trans.

<sup>191</sup> Tredennick, trans. “ἡ νόεσις νοήσεως νόησις.”

<sup>192</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 128. See Plotinus on mirror in note 151.

purify yourself by always working on your “inner statue” (*Ennead* 1.6.9)<sup>193</sup>, chipping away all that is not what you really are or if, like Iamblichus, you achieve a “restoration of [your] own essence” through prayer and theurgic ritual reconnection with the gods (*De Anima* 43).<sup>194</sup> Then, when you imaginatively contemplate *Nous*, you become “the object of your knowing” (Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.4.2)<sup>195</sup>—an Aristotelian notion that the Neoplatonists adapted freely to achieve their aim.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, knowledge was always self-knowledge. Is this just a word game for the mind? I don’t think so. What the Neoplatonist philosopher sought required transformative experience. That’s where heightened reflexivity and the sacralization of the self come in. In moments of heightened self-awareness—as, say, in a thunder and lightning storm, when you become in awe of its power and then, reflecting on the awesomeness of your capacity to be in awe, you realize you are part of the power of the storm. You become a highly-charged, set-apart, self-aware of its sacred status. This is a moment of attaining personal divinity. Like the experience of personal divinity sought after by the Neoplatonists, Longinus courted

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<sup>193</sup> A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 260-1.

<sup>194</sup> Finamore and Dillon, trans. “ἀπόδοσις τῆς οὐκείας οὐσίας.”

<sup>195</sup> Armstrong, trans. “Intellect itself is its objects, granted that it does not get their forms from somewhere (for where could it get them from?). But it is here with its objects and the same as and one with them: the knowledge of things without matter is its objects.” (*αὐτὸς νοῦς τὰ πράγματα, εἶπερ μὴ εἶδη αὐτῶν κομίζεται. πόθεν γάρ; ἀλλ’ ἐνταῦθα μετὰ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ ταῦτὸν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἔν· καὶ ἡ ἐπιστήμη δὲ τῶν ἄνευ ὕλης τὰ πράγματα*).

<sup>196</sup> See Aristotle’s “identity theory” of knowledge in Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.7, 431a and 8, 431 b (Hett, trans.). Pauliina Remes comments: “In *Metaphysics*, God is said to think of itself, of intelligibility, and thereby becoming that intelligibility... Plotinus’ synthesis is to treat only the perfect knower, *nous*, and its objects as identical, but this ideal thinker resides in every human soul.” Pauliina Remes, “Inwardness and Infinity of Selfhood: From Plotinus to Augustine,” in *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, eds. Pauliina Remes and Juha Sihvola. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 158.

rhetorical moments (*kairos*) of reflexive intensity where “...a well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning (*skeptou*)” (Longinus, *Peri Hypsos* 1.4).<sup>197</sup> The “shattered” reader (or hearer) became elevated to a new state of awareness and self-knowledge conceived as divine.

### **Conclusion: Ways of Knowing**

Historian Monica Black, following Dipesh Chakrabarty,<sup>198</sup> wants to go “a step beyond the kind of ethnographic empathy that has become an established part of the practice of many historians...to find a way of proceeding in...inquiries into human experience and culture that permits the existence, agency, and reality of the unseen.”<sup>199</sup> So do I. The Neoplatonists permitted the reality of the unseen. They imagined it. Whether speaking about Neoplatonism, Hermetism, or other similar movements, accounting for imaginative engagements with texts about personal divinity—and the resultant heightened self-reflexivity—complicates how scholars interpret esoteric maps of the soul. Like Carolyn Dinshaw, “I acknowledge that there are different knowledge cultures, different ways of knowing and sources of knowledge, and different purposes and goals, and I join in the critique, therefore, of expert knowledge production.”<sup>200</sup>

For me, “what is crucial in historical study is to give us and our students a heightened capacity to appreciate the multiplicity and complexity of human experience,

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<sup>197</sup> Russell, *Literary* trans. “ὕψος δέ που καιρίως ἐξενεχθὲν τὰ τε πράγματα δίκην σκηπτοῦ πάντα διεφόρησεν.”

<sup>198</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>199</sup> Monica Black, “The Supernatural and the Poetics of History,” *The Hedgehog Review* 13.3 (2011): 73.

<sup>200</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 38.

past and present, and to come to some understanding of the various processes by which one symbolic order comes to be prized over another or erased altogether.”<sup>201</sup> The Neoplatonic commitment to an “invisible power” accessible through the imagination may be an “erasure” we can now re-imagine or understand in new ways. In her discussion of imagination in late antiquity, Patricia Cox Miller (after Bachelard) suggests that “images (and the imagining process) do not passively reproduce ‘reality’: they actively create it.”<sup>202</sup> This strikes at the heart of why the Neoplatonists could not really do without imagination. If imagination was the vehicle for the soul, it also was its reality. In a map of the soul, where imagination is the soul, the map is the territory.

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<sup>201</sup> Black, “Poetics,” 75.

<sup>202</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 179; Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002).

## CHAPTER 2

### MAKING SACRED SELVES IN THE *CORPUS HERMETICUM*

This chapter redescribes the “sacred” in Late Antique Hermeticism in terms of individual experience rather than social function. “Redescription” is “a form of explanation that privileges difference and involves comparison and translation, category formation and rectification, definition and theory.”<sup>203</sup> Using the sections from the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Latin *Asclepius* that Augustine cites in Books 8 and 9 in *City of God*, I will demonstrate how the Hermetic literature can be read as a method of self-sacralization or personal divinity. This chapter is divided in two parts, treating the Greek and Latin Hermetic tractates in turn. Let us first consider some of the problems associated with the Hermetic literature.

#### **Hermetica**

The *Hermetica* are a collection of Graeco-Egyptian texts produced between the early first and late third centuries CE between the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Diocletian.<sup>204</sup> They are attributed to (or at least center upon) Hermes Trismegistus, a

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<sup>203</sup> Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller. *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 1. Thanks to Gerhardus van den Heever, University of South Africa for his comments about redescription in relation to my approach.

<sup>204</sup> Although beyond the scope of this chapter, it would be interesting to explore how Neoplatonism, the *Hermetica*, and early Christian literature respond to the “Crisis of the Third Century,” a time of great political, military, economic, and social instability for the Roman Empire. Stephen Greenblatt, writing about the complex tension between individual agency and the constraints of social structures, comments: “This tension cannot be resolved in any abstract theoretical way, for in given historical circumstances structures of power seek to mobilize some individuals and immobilize others. And it is important to note that moments in which individuals feel most completely in control may, under careful scrutiny, prove to be moments of the most intense structural determination, while moments in which the social structure applies the fiercest pressure on the

“mystagogical figure who represents a blending of the Egyptian god Thoth...with the Greek god Hermes.”<sup>205</sup> Early Christian writers such as Lactantius and Augustine cite the *Hermetica* extensively.<sup>206</sup> Hermetic writings are referred to by the Neoplatonists Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Damascius.<sup>207</sup> The *Hermetica*—or *Corpus Hermeticum* as Renaissance Neoplatonist translator Marcilio Ficino titled them, include a group of seventeen tractates in Greek as well as the *Asclepius*, a Latin version of an original Greek text, various fragments from the fifth-century *Stobaeus*, a few texts excerpts from the *Nag Hammadi Codex*, and many of the “Theban cache” that has come to be known as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. A portion of the Theban collection includes demotic (late phase Egyptian) material as well which has been excluded from most scholarly studies until recently.<sup>208</sup> A concern with cosmology and the relationship between the individual and divine characterizes most of the texts although many of the texts offer practical strategies in ritual format (“spells”) for negotiating the concerns of day-to-day life such love, healing, protection and revenge.

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individual may in fact be precisely those moments in which individuals are exercising the most stubborn will to autonomous movement.” Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 251-2. See Garth Fowden’s discussion of Max Weber’s “Laienintellektualismus” in Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 189.

<sup>205</sup> Ronald R. Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 284.

<sup>206</sup> See Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.61, 7.13.4; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.

<sup>207</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8.1; 8.4; 8.5.

<sup>208</sup> Hans Dieter Betz includes them in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*. Edited by Hans Dieter Betz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See Janet H. Johnson’s introduction to the Demotic papyri.

Scholars since André-Jean Festugière have divided the *Hermetica* into “technical” and “philosophical” texts. The term “technical” refers to the use of symbolic actions and materials along with performative utterances. The “philosophical” texts seem closer to what one would expect from Platonic writers. The philosophical texts generally posit, to use Brian P. Copenhaver’s words, “a theory of salvation through knowledge or gnosis.”<sup>209</sup> Peter Kingsley comments:

There is a tendency nowadays to replace the distinction between ‘philosophical’ *Hermetica* and ‘magical’ or alchemical ones, which was used by an older generation of scholars, with a distinction between the ‘theoretical’ and the ‘technical’. This is a step forward, because it lays less weight on an imagined dichotomy between the rational and irrational. And yet it is still not quite adequate. We can call these ‘philosophical’ texts theoretical, if we want. But that is only because we choose to stay at the level of theory. Viewed in their own context, they shared an intensely practical purpose. They were meant to engage not just the mind and intellect but – often through the power of example – one’s whole life and being.<sup>210</sup>

Copenhaver has rightly pointed out the lack of any “clear, rigid distinctions” in the ancient world between “lofty” teachings about the “fate of the soul” and texts and practices that strike some “as a merely instrumental device of humbler intent” because of their interest in the practicalities of daily life.<sup>211</sup> Copenhaver suggests that the technical texts are equally concerned with salvation as “the resolution of man’s fate where it finds him.”<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xxxvii.

<sup>210</sup> Peter Kingsley, “An Introduction to the Hermetic: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” in *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, edited by Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (Amsterdam: In the Pelikaan, 2000), 33.

<sup>211</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xxxvii.

<sup>212</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xxxvii.

Ronald Cox describes Hermetic salvation as “self-recognition” (*gnothi seauton*)<sup>213</sup> which puts the Hermetic project in a Platonic milieu. Garth Fowden has also challenged the dichotomy between “philosophical” and “technical” texts and suggests that if we are to understand the *Hermetica* as the product of a practicing community on the ground, these two kinds of texts need to be considered in tandem: “Hermetism can only be properly understood if the technical and philosophical books are seen as enshrining related aspects of Man’s attempt to understand himself, the world around him, and God—in fact, as a practical spiritual ‘way.’”<sup>214</sup>

The *Papyri Graecae Magicae* divination ritual known as the “*Mithras Liturgy*” (examined in chapter 3) is a central point of comparison for Garth Fowden with the “philosophical” *Corpus Hermeticum*: “The technical *Hermetica*, developing stage by stage the doctrine of sympathy [e.g. “As above, so below”] in its application to man both body and spirit, thus provide a *propaideia* to the philosophical *Hermetica*, whose peculiar preoccupations and style they occasionally approach.”<sup>215</sup> The doctrine of sympathy would find its highest expression in the Egyptianizing, theurgical, hermetic, Neoplatonism of Iamblichus who described his approach as a continuation of the “way of Hermes.”<sup>216</sup>

Since the 1980s, most scholars concede that “hermetic manuscripts, technical as well as philosophical, reflect the influence of genuine Egyptian prayers, texts, and modes

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<sup>213</sup> Cox, *Salvation*, 303.

<sup>214</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, xvi.

<sup>215</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 78.

<sup>216</sup> Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8.1; 8.4; 8.5.

of transmission...”<sup>217</sup> For example, the translation of the title of *Corpus Hermeticum* 1, “Poimandres,” is now accepted as an Egyptian rendering of “mind of Re” instead of the Greek, “shepherd.”<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, the suggested social context depicted in the text points to Egyptian sources: “The teacher at the centre of the tractates is not a philosopher engaged in intellectual debate with his disciples in the Graeco-Roman manner. He is more like a priest imparting ancient wisdom within the precincts of a great temple.”<sup>219</sup> The idea that a teacher could also be like a ritual expert shall become more important as we explore the Egyptian approach to personal divinity as an imaginative technology of self-transformation, taken up in chapter 3.

### **The Making of the Sacred**

In order to understand the self-sacralizing aspect of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, let us first consider the dynamics of the “sacrificial system” as developed by Carlin Barton. Barton’s investigation into the emotional life of ancient Romans has explored honor,

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<sup>217</sup> Gregory Shaw, “Taking the Shape of the Gods: A Theurgic Reading of Hermetic Rebirth,” *Aries* 15, no. 1 (2015): 3. See also Ian S. Moyer, *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100-300 CE)*. (Leiden: Brill, 2005); *The ancient Egyptian book of Thoth I, Text*. Edited by Richard Jasnow and Karl Theodor Zauzich (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005); Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); R. Gordan, “Reporting the marvelous: private divination in the Greek Magical Papyri,” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. P. Schafer and H.G. Kippenberg (Leiden, 1997): 65-92; Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995); Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>218</sup> Shaw, “Hermetic Rebirth,” 3.

<sup>219</sup> Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45.

shame, violence, the gaze, and gender, among other things.<sup>220</sup> Her focus on emotions is far from sentimental. Emotions, she demonstrates, are also ideas that shape cultural ideology and practice. Echoing anthropologist Edward Hall, Barton assumes that ‘[c]ulture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants.’<sup>221</sup> Indeed, considering the complicated nature of human emotions—which cannot often be separated from thoughts—Barton offers a fresh view of the skeleton of culture. Her vision of cultural and social life is that of an archaeologist. She brings a sensitivity to layered modes of thought and an emotional stratigraphy that continue to influence new layers built upon them.

Barton’s work engages “the sacred” or, as she puts it, “the sacrificial system.” Her examination of the “sacrificial system” does not rely on any conventional or assumed concept of “religion.” Rather, through an analysis of linguistic and ritual context, Barton has developed a new understanding of the social and psychological dynamics of *sacrificare* (from *sacer*, “set apart,” and *sacere*, “to make sacred”) outside of the sphere of “religion” as modern scholars have understood it:

The Roman sacrificial system was an elaborate physics of binding, capturing, taming and domesticating energy with the purpose of enhancing and concentrating it, in order, finally, to direct that energy back into the community. Conversely, the sacrificial system was a way of binding and capturing, taming and domesticating energy with the purpose of ‘de-sacralizing,’ i.e., desecrating and diminishing that energy in order, finally, to exclude or eliminate, ‘execute’ or ‘exterminate’ it from the community... Forces, powers, functions needed to be

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<sup>220</sup> Carlin Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Carlin A. Barton, “Being in the Eyes: Shame and Sight in Ancient Rome” in *The Roman Gaze*, ed. David Fredrick (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Carlin A. Barton, “The Emotional Economy of Sacrifice and Execution in Ancient Rome,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 29 (2003): 341- 360.

<sup>221</sup> Edward Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 39. Quoted in Barton, *Roman Honor*, 290.

isolated, defined, carved out of nature (like the walls of Romulean Rome) and harnessed in order for the charges on them to be either augmented and reinforced or debilitated and dispersed....Charges could be almost infinitely raised or lowered or simultaneously raised by some and lowered by others. Absolutely anything or anyone could be sacralized or desecrated....<sup>222</sup>

For Barton, what scholars have tended to describe as “sacred” for the Romans was not distinct from “the secular”: “What might be outside the sacred frame in one perspective could be within the frame of an other.”<sup>223</sup> The line between sacred and secular will blur for those who follow Carlin’s line of inquiry into the foreign emotional country of the Romans.

Recent research by Carlon Barton and Daniel Boyarin recover the ambiguity of “*religio*,” “*deus*,” “*threskeia*,” “*theos*,” terms that have been “set apart, sacralized, and calcified” by “almost eighteen hundred years of linguistic development.”<sup>224</sup> They argue: “the flexible, undefined, and less formalized powers and play of emotions exercised in the Latin *religio*...will be suppressed in an increasingly defined, disciplined, regimented system of government legitimated by reference to a notion of an ultimate authorizing power.”<sup>225</sup> This new work challenges how many of us look at “the sacred” in antiquity and its presumed co-conspirator, “religion.”

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<sup>222</sup> Barton, “Emotional Economy,” 341, 346.

<sup>223</sup> Barton, “Emotional Economy,” 347.

<sup>224</sup> Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 116.

<sup>225</sup> Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 16.

## Sacrificing God

Building on Barton's understanding of the ancient Roman sacrificial system and Barton and Boyarin's critique of "religion," I offer comments on the archive Augustine assembles in *City of God*, Books 8-10 where he engages Apuleius' *The god of Socrates*, works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, as well as the late Platonism of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. These works share a concern with an inner self, its relationship to "god" (more on this term in a moment), and the prospect of *apotheosis*, becoming a "god," what I am calling in this chapter "making a sacred self," understood as personal divinity. Augustine has been credited with the invention of the inner self but discussions that express a strong sense of interiority certainly predate him and his archive above reflects this "inward turn."<sup>226</sup> Apuleius's concern with the inner *daemon*, the importance of inner vision in the Hermetic tractates, and the "innerworldliness"<sup>227</sup> of the Neoplatonists call Augustine's credit into question.

For our purposes, I will be looking at selected fragments from the *Hermetica*, a collection of dialogues between Hellenized Egyptian deities that display the syncretic spirit of late antique Alexandria in its cast of characters and intellectual influences.

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<sup>226</sup> Phillip Carey, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pauliina Remes offers a compelling counter to Carey et al. arguing that Augustine's debt to Plotinus is greater than generally acknowledged by modern scholars. Although she is concerned with the limits of individuality in Plotinus and Augustine, she points out that the notion of an inner space or inner realm is not universal. She writes: "Personhood, many argue, was understood as communal and tied to the cosmic and divine, rather than private or individual." Remes, "Inwardness," 160. I don't see these apparent poles as mutually exclusive, the Platonists as well as the Stoics conceive of the self as tied to the cosmic (*nous/logos*) and individual (*daimon*) at the same time.

<sup>227</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 71.

Rather than focusing on the transition that *religio* underwent as a strategy for state formation, as Barton does, I will focus on the person apart from the state. The Hermetic approach to sacralization was not, as in the Ciceronian-turn of *religio*, a “necessary means to the end of social order.”<sup>228</sup> It was a personal approach set apart from—albeit, co-existing with—the concerns of social life.

In approaching the Hermetic texts, this chapter asks: What can we see when we remove “God”—with all its “religious” connotations—from the equation? Rather than translating the Greek word *theos* using the Germanic word “God,” let us look at how the Hermetic texts define (or set apart?) *theos* in order to, like Barton and Boyarin, “conceptualize it anew and speak [of a culture] without invoking the anachronistic concept of religion.”<sup>229</sup> While a longer study would chart the use of *theos* starting with the pre-Socratics, even in a short chapter, we can begin to “take off the scrim of religion” as Barton puts it; that is, to take off the overlays of translation, reception, and commentary beginning with the Church Fathers and into the last century.

By removing “God” from the equation, from a context where it may not really belong, we can see how “the sacred,” that is, the sacrificial system formulated by Barton, operates outside of a “religionizing” understanding of the ancient world. In the selected Hermetic fragments below, I will be looking at how the texts define, set-apart, and sacralize *theos* and then how (and, importantly, why) the Hermetic reader identifies with this highly charged idea to become *theos*, sacralizing the self. In particular, I will be focusing on Greek passages that describe *theos* as invisible, requiring inner vision and imagination in order to be seen and known. The “invisible world is materialized in

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<sup>228</sup> Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 51.

<sup>229</sup> Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, back cover.

images, that is to say, in figurative language or world-pictures that are crucial for knowledge, since what is considered to be ‘real’ is a function of the pictorial imagination”<sup>230</sup> The Hermetic way of seeing this invisible *theos* demonstrates an imaginative technology of self-transformation through reading as a spiritual exercise.

## Defining Theos

*Theos* first appears inwardly to Hermes as a thought, “an enormous being completely unbound in size,” saying, “I know what you want, and I am with you everywhere.” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 1.1).<sup>231</sup> Yet, its enormity is bound by that fact that it occurs as a thought in Hermes’ mind. Inwardly imagined as thought unbound, *theos* is bounded by the imagination. *Theos* is set apart as an imagined thought. The unboundedness of *theos* might at first conjure up a transcendent reality but its boundedness as a thought occurring within the mind suggests that *theos* is an immanent, embodied, inner reality. In this same passage, *theos* is set apart as an intimate, inner feature of Hermes, knowing his thoughts and feelings, ever present, similar to Apuleius’ inner *daemon* in *The god of Socrates*: “that particular type of divinity, identical with the mind of each and every person” (*De deo Socrates* 15.3)<sup>232</sup> that watches “everything with

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<sup>230</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 82.

<sup>231</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “Ἐννοίας μοί ποτε γενομένης περὶ τῶν ὄντων καὶ μετεωρισθείσης μοι τῆς διανοίας σφόδρα, κατασχεθεισῶν μου τῶν σωματικῶν αἰσθήσεων, καθάπερ οἱ ὕπνω βεβαρημένοι ἐκ κόρου τροφῆς ἢ ἐκ κόπου σώματος, ἔδοξά τινα ὑπερμεγέθη μέτρῳ ἀπεριορίστῳ τυγχάνοντα καλεῖν μου τὸ ὄνομα καὶ λέγοντά μοι, Τί βούλει ἀκοῦσαι καὶ θεάσασθαι, καὶ νοήσας μαθεῖν καὶ γνῶναι; — φημὶ ἐγώ, Σὺ γὰρ τίς εἶ; — Ἐγὼ μὲν, φησὶν, εἰμὶ ὁ Ποιμάνδρης, ὁ τῆς ἀύθεντίας νοῦς· οἶδα ὁ βούλει, καὶ σύνειμί σοι πανταχοῦ.”

<sup>232</sup> Harrison, trans. “*quod is deus, qui est animus sui cuique, quamquam sit immortalis, tamen quodam modo cum homine gignitur.*”

close attention” (16.6).<sup>233</sup> Indeed, we soon learn, *theos* is Hermes’ mind. *Theos* tells him, “I am...mind, your *theos*,” explaining, “your mind is *theos*” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 1.6).<sup>234</sup> Apprehending Mind with the mind leaves the witness “trembling, terrified, out of [her] wits” (1.8)<sup>235</sup>

*Theos* cannot be seen by the “uninitiated” (ἀμύητος), literally “those who do not shut their eyes” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 5.1).<sup>236</sup> Like Plotinus’s imperative in *The Enneads* to “shut your eyes and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use...” (*Ennead* 1.6.8).<sup>237</sup> the Hermetist must imagine *theos* inwardly in order to see and understand *theos*. Hermetic seeing occurs through the “eyes of the mind” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 5.2).<sup>238</sup> To see the invisible *theos* with the mind’s eye is to see what “seems invisible to the multitude” as “entirely visible” (5.1).<sup>239</sup> Hermetic seeing is making the invisible inwardly visible. *Theos* seems invisible to the “multitude” because they look for

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<sup>233</sup> Harrison, trans. “*quin omnia curiose ille participet.*”

<sup>234</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “Τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο, ἔφη, ἐγὼ Νοῦς ὁ σὸς θεός.”

<sup>235</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “ὡς δὲ ἐν ἐκπλήξει μου ὄντος.” “*Daimon* and, for the matter of that, *theos*, *theoi*, *to theion* are constantly used to denote the incalculable non-human element in phenomena.” Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion; the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 222. The implication is that the mind is non-human or divine as I argue here.

<sup>236</sup> My trans. “ἀμύητος.”

<sup>237</sup> Armstrong, trans. “...ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα ἀφεῖναι δεῖ καὶ μὴ βλέπειν, ἀλλ’ οἷον μύσαντα ὄψιν ἄλλην ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγείραι, ἣν ἔχει μὲν πᾶς, χρῶνται δὲ ὀλίγοι.”

<sup>238</sup> My trans. “τοῦ νοῦ ὀφθαλμοῖς”

<sup>239</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “σὺ δὲ νόει πῶς τὸ δοκοῦν τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀφανὲς φανερώτατόν σοι γενήσεται.”

it through bodily eyes instead of the eyes of the mind, through outer vision rather than inner vision.

A difficult passage in *Corpus Hermeticum* navigates the nuances of inner and outer seeing for the Hermetists: “Everything that has appeared [to the bodily eyes] (*phainomenon*) has come into being because at some point it appeared [to bodily eyes] (*ephane*). But the invisible (*aphanes*) is always [invisible], it does not need to come to be seen [outwardly]” (5.1)<sup>240</sup> Invisible things, things that do not appear outwardly, are seen inwardly. The passage continues: “The very entity that makes this visibility [of *theos*, the mind] does not make itself visible; what makes [sense perception] apparent is not itself apparent; what presents images of everything (i.e. imagination) is not present to sense perception.”<sup>241</sup> “Only thought (*noesis*), because it...is invisible, sees the invisible...your mind’s eye will see it” (5.2).<sup>242</sup> “Can you see thought and hold it in your hands?” (5.2).<sup>243</sup> The “entity that makes visibility” is *theos* the mind, the mind’s eye. *Theos* is not an external transcendent entity but an internal immanent entity equated with the imagining mind itself. This “entity” is the imagining mind: “(*Theos*) is the mind’s eye” (13.17).<sup>244</sup> The Hermetist acknowledges the role of inner vision, of imaginative

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<sup>240</sup> Copenhaver and Scott, trans. My emendations in brackets. “πᾶν γὰρ τὸ φαινόμενον γεννητόν· ἐφάνη γάρ· τὸ δὲ ἀφανὲς αἰεὶ ἐστί· τοῦ γὰρ φανῆναι οὐ χρήζει· αἰεὶ γάρ ἐστί.”

<sup>241</sup> Copenhaver and Scott, trans. My emendations in brackets. “ὡς αἰεὶ ὧν φανερωῶν αὐτὸς οὐ φανεροῦται, γεννᾷ οὐκ αὐτὸς γεννώμενος, ἐν φαντασίᾳ δὲ <οὐκ ἔστι> πάντα φαντασιῶν. ἡ γὰρ φαντασία μόνων τῶν γεννητῶν ἐστίν.”

<sup>242</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “νόησις γὰρ μόνη ὁρᾷ τὸ ἀφανές, ὡς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀφανὲς οὐσα. εἰ δύνασαι, τοῖς τοῦ νοῦ ὀφθαλμοῖς φανήσε- ἀφανὲς οὐσα. εἰ δύνασαι, τοῖς τοῦ νοῦ ὀφθαλμοῖς φανήσεται, ὦ Τάτ.”

<sup>243</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “νόησιν ἰδεῖν καὶ λαβέσθαι αὐταῖς ταῖς χερσὶ.”

<sup>244</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ νοῦ ὀφθαλμός.”

thought—which is itself invisible—in processing images and assigning meaning to those images, as *theos*. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, in Sarah Ahbel-Rappe’s words, “[points] the reader toward a conception of interiority in which the experience of imaginative production” sets apart the “the imagination as the object.”<sup>245</sup> Or, to put it another way in Pauliina Remes words, imagination “makes the mind which receives perceptions aware of both the external object of perception *and* the mind itself.”<sup>246</sup> Self-reflexive thinking, imagining, and seeing is acting as *theos*. Turning inward (*eis to eiso*; Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.6.8.4) like Aristotle’s self-reflexive *theos* who thinks about thinking (*noesis noeseos*; *Metaphysica* 1074b, 34-5), the Hermetic self, turns the gaze to the mind’s eye—imagining imagination—becoming *theos*.<sup>247</sup>

The late antique theory of *phantasia* (imagination) also helps us parse the ambiguities of inner and outer vision in this era. *Phantasia* was understood in two ways: it was the image-making faculty of consciousness, an organ of sense perception that presented images to the mind but it also created images independent of sense perception. Because of this dual meaning, Robert Berchman argues that *phantasia* is “based on something far more profound than an awareness of physical conditions. It carries a meaning close to the idea of consciousness... [*Phantasia*] is a power of perceptive

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<sup>245</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 128.

<sup>246</sup> Remes, “Inwardness,” 165.

<sup>247</sup> “ἡ νόεσις νοήσεως νόησις.”

awareness that transcends sensation.”<sup>248</sup> Hermetic imagination shaped sense perception but it could also “see” what could not be sensed.

### **An Imaginative Technology of Self-Transformation**

Reading or hearing the Hermetic texts was a “spiritual exercise.”<sup>249</sup> But, texts that offered exercises in self-development (*askesis*) were deployed in late antiquity by a number of traditions including the Stoics, the Neoplatonists, and the Hermetists. In spiritual exercises, thought “takes itself as its own subject-matter, and seeks to modify itself...[Unlike the word “spiritual”] the word ‘thought’ [Hadot continues] does not indicate clearly enough that imagination and sensibility play a very important role in these exercises.”<sup>250</sup> Indeed, spiritual exercises rely on imagination—the ability to visualize things unavailable to the senses. “Spiritual” exercises help the reader (or hearer) experience things that are invisible or intangible and therefore require imagination in order to be “seen” or known.

Imaginative exercises in the Hermetic texts can be explicit, often signaled by the use of imperative, subjunctive, or optative moods: “Make yourself grow to immeasurable immensity...” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 11.20) or “Command your soul to travel to India...” (11.19).<sup>251</sup> In explicit exercises the student in the dialogue and the reader are actively lead

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<sup>248</sup> Berchman, *Porphyry Against*, 102.

<sup>249</sup> The term “spiritual exercises” is taken from Ignatius of Loyola’s sixteenth-century *Exercitia spiritualia* although the concept predates Loyola considerably.

<sup>250</sup> Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises*, 81-2.

<sup>251</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “συναύξησησον σεαυτὸν”; “κέλευσόν σου τῆ ψυχῆ.”

through a series of images, ideas, and emotional and (imagined) physical states in order to experience a new ability and sense of self. But, self-transforming exercises can also be implicit using vivid language to *suggest* an image, scenario, or experience without telling the reader to actively enter into it. For example: “In the deep there was boundless darkness and water and fine intelligent spirit, all existing by divine power (*dynamei theia*) in chaos” (3.1).<sup>252</sup> The reader sees the darkness and water, the power and chaos as inner images and processes. In explicit and implicit exercises, the Hermetic reader, similar to Hugo Lundhaug’s early Christians, makes sense of the text “by means of the creation and integration of multiple mental representations.”<sup>253</sup>

### **Making a Sacred Self**

The self-sacralizing result of this imaginative technology of self-transformation takes place when the student transfers the power of seeing and understanding from the physical eyes to the eyes of the mind. *Theos* is seen with inner vision and is constitutive of inner vision. Such a transformation is illustrated in statements such as the following where the transformed reader explicitly identifies as *theos*: “I no longer picture things

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<sup>252</sup> Copenhagen, trans. “ἦν γὰρ σκότος ἄπειρον ἐν ἀβύσσῳ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ πνεῦμα λεπτὸν νοερόν, δυνάμει θεία ὄντα ἐν χάει.”

<sup>253</sup> Lundhaug, *Cognitive Poetics*, 64; Reader-reception theorist, George Poulet, vividly describes the transformative power of thinking and reading exercises: “I feel sure that as soon as I think something, that something becomes in some indefinable way my own. Whatever I think is a part of *my* mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist. Already the notion is inconceivable and seems even more so if I reflect that, since every thought must have a subject to think it, this *thought* which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a *subject* which is alien to me. It all happens, then, as though reading were the act by which a thought managed to bestow itself within me with a subject not myself.” “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority” in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, edited by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 44-45.

with the sight of my eyes...I am in heaven, in earth, in water, in air; I am in animals and plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; everywhere” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 13.11).<sup>254</sup>

Seeing self as *theos* in heaven, earth, animals, and plants suggests that *theos* has an external reality permeating all things. But that external reality depends on inner vision, *theos* is projected onto the sensible world as the mind’s eye externalized. Even in the Hermetic tractates that portray an “outer” sense of *theos* (that is, as an invisible, creative, ordering force that manifests in and as nature), the reading process makes the imagination of this force an *inner* perception.<sup>255</sup> The emphasis of the exercise of Hermetic seeing offered by the texts always returns the reader to the eyes of mind. Patricia Cox Miller captures the Hermetic way of seeing in her study of late antique imagination observing (after Bachelard) that “images (and the imagining process) do not passively reproduce ‘reality’: they actively create it.”<sup>256</sup> Becoming *theos* transforms the inner self<sup>257</sup> and

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<sup>254</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “οὐχ ὁράσει ὀφθαλμῶν ἀλλὰ τῆ δια δυνάμεων νοητικῆ ἐνεργεία. ἐν οὐρανῶ εἰμι, ἐν γῆ, ἐν ὕδατι, ἐν ἀέρι· ἐν ζώοις εἰμί, ἐν φυτοῖς· ἐν γαστρί, πρὸ γαστροῦ, μετὰ γαστέρα, πανταχοῦ.”

<sup>255</sup> “Every act of perception is to some degree an act of creation, and every act of memory is to some degree an act of imagination.” Gerard M. Edelman and Giulio Tononi, *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* (London, Penguin Books, 2000), 101. Antoine Faivre writes that “It is partly under the inspiration of the *Corpus Hermeticum*...that memory and imagination are associated to the point of becoming identical, part of the teaching of Hermes Trismegistus consisting in ‘interiorizing’ the world in our *mens*.” Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), xxiii.

<sup>256</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 179.

<sup>257</sup> “Imagination produces effects so real that they can ‘mold’ the imagining subject.” Corbin, *Alone*, 180. British Idealist A.S. Pringle-Pattison describes the relationship between self and the world it inhabits: “The self exists only *through* the world and *vice versa*, that we might say with equal truth the self *is* the world and the world is the self...So the self and the world are only two sides of the same reality; they are the same intelligible world looked at from two opposite points of view. But, finally, it must not be

world the Hermetist inhabits.<sup>258</sup> Even when *theos* seems external to the reader—in passages that depict *theos* as “the Craftsman” (*demiurgos*) of an ordered cosmos (*Corpus Hermeticum* 5.8, *passim*)<sup>259</sup>—such an external depiction must be imagined internally in the mind of the reader. The transcendent *theos* is always immanent. Indeed, following Gregory Shaw, the Hermetic sacred self creates the world it inhabits as a demiurgic mind.<sup>260</sup> *Theos* possesses the power of imagination, by imagining the universe, *theos* created it.<sup>261</sup> When the Hermetist thinks about *theos* as an unbounded kind of thought, as including everything the mind’s eye could imagine, including the mind’s eye itself, the thinker becomes “the object of... [its] knowing” (Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.4.2)<sup>262</sup>—an Aristotelian notion<sup>263</sup>—adopted enthusiastically by the Neoplatonists and present in the

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forgotten that it is only from the point of view of the self or subject that the identity can be grasped; this, therefore, is the ultimate point of view which unifies the whole... The transcendental self, as the implicate of all experience, is, for a theory of knowledge, simply the necessary point of view from which the universe can be unified, that is, from which it become an universe.” “Philosophy as Criticism of Categories,” in *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*, eds. A.S. Pringle-Pattison and R. B. Haldane Viscount Haldane (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883), 38.

<sup>258</sup> “Yet the development of *phantasiai* as something in the middle between the subject and the objects in the world can be seen as one step among many in the gradual movement towards the idea of an individual soul which interprets the world in a manner particular to just him or her – *an inner realm proper to one individual.*” Remes, “Inwardness,” 166. My emphasis.

<sup>259</sup> My translation. “δημιουργός.”

<sup>260</sup> Shaw, “Hermetic Rebirth,” 136-169.

<sup>261</sup> After Corbin, *Alone*, 182.

<sup>262</sup> Armstrong, trans. “ἀλλ’ ἐνταῦθα μετὰ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ ταῦτόν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐν· καὶ ἡ ἐπιστήμη δὲ τῶν ἀνευ ὕλης τὰ πράγματα.”

<sup>263</sup> Pauliina Remes brings nuance to Plotinus’ use of Aristotle’s “identity theory” of knowledge and the divinely reflexive *νόεσις νοήσεως νόησις*: “Knowledge is, rather, a peculiar form of self-intellection or self-thinking... The answer to the criticism that the

*Corpus Hermeticum*: “That which is known by thinking is equal to the thought” (2.5).<sup>264</sup>  
(To my knowledge, this Hermetic parallel to Aristotle’s “identity theory” of knowledge has not been pointed out by scholars until now).

Understanding the invisible nature of *theos* and the need for inner vision in order to see and know *theos*, the Hermetic student equates her own inner vision with that of *theos*: “Thus, unless you make yourself equal to *theos*, you cannot understand *theos*; like is understood by like” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 11.20).<sup>265</sup> To understand *theos*, Mind implores Hermes to actively imagine *theos*: “So you must think of a god in this way, as having everything—the cosmos, itself, [the] universe—like thoughts within itself.” (11.20).<sup>266</sup> *Theos* contains all things, including itself, including the mind’s eye, in itself as thoughts...especially the thoughts of the one thinking about *theos*. Once that understanding is achieved, the very apparent (*phanerotatos*) world is seen with new eyes as *theos*, having the attributes of *theos*. Through the exercise of reading, *theos* is simultaneously imagined in and as the thoughts of the reader: “I see the universe and I see myself in mind” (13.13).<sup>267</sup>

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self of the self-intellection of this sort is not special or personal enough to be a self, and that its self-reflexivity would hardly qualify as knowledge of a self, becomes both yes and no. Intellect’s self-knowledge does not yield any personal or individual information. What it reveals in addition to the objects of knowledge is subjectivity.” Remes, Pauliina. *Plotinus on Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 157-158, 170, 173. See Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.4.2.3 – 11.

<sup>264</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “Τὸ γὰρ νοητὸν τῷ νοοῦντι νοητὸν ἐστίν.”

<sup>265</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “ἐὰν οὖν μὴ σεαυτὸν ἐξισιάσης τῷ θεῷ, τὸν θεὸν νοῆσαι οὐ δύνασαι· τὸ γὰρ ὁμοίον τῷ ὁμοίῳ νοητὸν.”

<sup>266</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “εἴτα σὺ μὲν δύνασαι ταῦτα, ὁ θεὸς δὲ οὐ; τοῦτον οὖν τὸν τρόπον νόησον τὸν θεόν, ὥσπερ νοήματα πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχειν, τὸν κόσμον, ἑαυτόν, <τὸ> ὅλον.”

<sup>267</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “Πάτερ, τὸ πᾶν ὁρῶ καὶ ἑμαυτὸν ἐν τῷ νοί.”

Barton writes that for the Romans “[t]he charge within a person, the sacred thing within a person, was equivalent to the honor in which she or he was held. *Animus*, spirit or will, was its source.”<sup>268</sup> For the inward-turning Hermetists, honor in the eyes of another no longer mattered, the *animus* sidestepped social relations. The Hermetists could be self-consciously theological (*theologesomen*; 17). They did not consider *theos* “an ultimate authorizing power” that legitimized authority, but a notion of self that authorizes the individual; not a “transcendental reality,” but an immanent, embodied one, a spacious, creative inner being of the imagining self read as *theos*, set apart, made sacred.

### **The Latin *Asclepius***

In Book 8 of the *City of God*, after a friendly tribute to Platonism as the philosophy that prefigured Christianity, Augustine of Hippo rails against fellow North African, Apuleius, the second-century rhetor and late Platonist, and also against Hermes Trismegistus, the eponymous “author” of the third century Graeco-Egyptian *Hermetica*.<sup>269</sup> Commenting on *The god of Socrates*, Augustine accuses Apuleius of demon worship (*cultu daemonum*) and practicing the art of magic (*magicae artes*). Quoting extensively from a section of the Hermetic Latin *Asclepius* for evidence, he charges Hermes with making statues into gods (*deos facere*). As a writer in the Christian tradition, it is no surprise that Augustine would object strenuously to suggested practices

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<sup>268</sup> Carlin Barton, “Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds,” in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24-5.

<sup>269</sup> Although the so-called *Hermetica* are anonymous, I will follow Augustine’s convention by referring to the author as “Hermes” for the purpose of this dissertation.

involving demons or idol worship. It is surprising, however, given his Neoplatonic bent, that he would fail to note the concern with inner divinity in the works of Apuleius and Hermes, which, incidentally, might well have been included together in the same codex on Augustine's bookshelf.<sup>270</sup> Augustine's reading of the *Asclepius* is painfully selective, though that of a master apologist. The point of the *Asclepius*, and of *The god of Socrates* for that matter, as Francis Clooney observes, is about "the need to cultivate the higher self and to exercise one's freedom in choosing a life of wisdom...[This] should be acceptable to Augustine, but still he passes over it in silence."<sup>271</sup> Indeed, the Graeco-Egyptian Hermetists were more concerned with making themselves into gods: "This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god" (*Corpus Hermeticum* 1.25).<sup>272</sup>

In a close reading of the Latin *Asclepius*, I will interrogate the relationship between the imagination and the construction of self in relation to the divine. I would like to offer a reading of *Asclepius* with a certain understanding of imagination in mind, that is, how imagination functions as a technology of self. Drawing attention to the inseparability of "the self" and "the sacred," I will suggest that imagination is more than a function of what theurgic Neoplatonists refer to as the "vehicle of the soul" (*ochema pneuma*) but rather it is the vehicle *itself* (see chapter 1).

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<sup>270</sup> Vincent Hunink, "Apuleius and the 'Asclepius,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 50, no. 3 (1996): 290.

<sup>271</sup> Francis X. Clooney, "Augustine, Apuleius, and Hermes Trismegistus: *The City of God* and Advice on How (Not) to Read Hindu Texts" in *Augustine and World Religions*, edited by Brian Brown, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth, 141-172 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008.), 150.

<sup>272</sup> Copenhaver, trans. "τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ ἀγαθὸν τέλος τοῖς γνῶσιν ἐσχηκόσι, θεωθῆναι."

## Performing *Deus*

In a performative utterance that we can only imagine, Hermes describes a unified cosmos in which soul and matter are stirred so “the whole might seem to be one and that all might seem to be from one” (*Asclepius* 2).<sup>273</sup> This cosmology is not an empirical description of a physical landscape. It is a map of cosmic proportions that must be drawn in the mind. It must be imagined. It is not here (pointing down like Aristotle in Raphael’s *The School of Athens*), it is not here (pointing up like Plato) at least as far as we can see with our eyes open, it is here (pointing to the head). In imagining it we become players in a “mental theater” or practitioners of an “immaterial demiurgy.”<sup>274</sup> If Hermes is going to initiate Asclepius, Tat, and Hammon into this cosmology, he has to do more than describe it. He has to *prescribe* it. Hermes’ anthropology is equally suggestive and impressive to a seeker. Humanity is conjoined to heavenly gods, airy demons, and earthly nature: “Everything is permitted him: heaven itself seems not too high, for he measures it in his clever thinking as if it were nearby. No misty air dims the concentration of his thought; no thick earth obstructs his work; no abysmal deep of water blocks his lofty view. He is everything, and he is everywhere” (6).<sup>275</sup> Such an expansive, ekphrastic, rhetorical strategy posits an imaginal world as fact and orients the audience in that world. We are told what we are, where we are, and what we can do there...with our eyes closed. This world is “figuratively real” because, as Patricia Cox Miller has observed, the

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<sup>273</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*ut totum unum et ex uno Omnia esse videantur.*”

<sup>274</sup> For “mental theater” see Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 85; For “immaterial theurgy,” see Gregory Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos,” *Ancient Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1999): 121-143.

<sup>275</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*Omnia illi licent; non caelum videtur altissimum, quasi e proximo enim animi sagacitate metitur...intentionem animi eius nulla aeris caligo confundit, non densitas terrae operam eius impedit, non aquae altitude profunda despectum eius obtundit. Omnia idem est, et ubique idem est.*”

“narrative pictorial strategies...seduce the reader into forgetting that these are images in texts.”<sup>276</sup>

Put to the imagination, pictorial narratives serve as so-called spiritual exercises.

The classic example would be Plotinus’s “sphere exercise”:

Let there be, then, in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it, either moving or standing still, or some things moving and others standing still. Keep this, and apprehend in your mind another, taking away the mass: take away also the places, and the mental picture of matter in yourself, and do not try to apprehend another sphere smaller in mass than the original one, but calling on the god who made that of which you have the mental picture, pray him to come (*Enn.* 5.8.9).<sup>277</sup>

In this exercise, “Plotinus appears to be engaged in an introspective experiment in both self-consciousness and metacognitive self-awareness.”<sup>278</sup> Plotinus offers the “sphere

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<sup>276</sup> Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 109. Also see Hayden V. White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>277</sup> Armstrong, trans. “ἔστω οὖν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φωτεινὴ τις φαντασία σφαίρας ἔχουσα πάντα ἐν αὐτῇ, εἴτε κινούμενα εἴτε ἐστηκότα, ἢ τὰ μὲν κινούμενα, τὰ δ’ ἐστηκότα. φυλάττων δὲ ταύτην ἄλλην παρὰ σαντῶ ἀφελῶν τὸν ὄγκον λάβε· ἄφελε δὲ καὶ τοὺς τόπους καὶ τὸ τῆς ὕλης ἐν σοὶ φάντασμα, καὶ μὴ πειρῶ αὐτῆς ἄλλην σμικροτέραν λαβεῖν τῶ ὄγκῳ, θεὸν δὲ καλέσας τὸν πεποιηκότα ἧς ἔχεις τὸ φάντασμα εὔξαι ἐλθεῖν.” James Porter comments: “What the reader is being asked to reproduce in her mind is an image of the world conceived in its totality as pure form and pure immanence—the complete immanence of intelligible reality to the whole of reality. ... The whole is the fruit of a spiritual exercise. But we should not assume that on this purer version of things the highest beauty lies in the mere ascent to the Good, the Form, and the Beautiful and in the movement away from matter and sensation.... On the contrary, in its most compelling form, the highest Beauty requires the *descent*, as it were, of these higher realities *into* the rest of being.” *Sublime*, 603 – 604.

<sup>278</sup> Brian Stock, *The Integrated Self: Augustine, the Bible, and Ancient Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 118. John Cavadini challenges Stock’s contention that reading for Augustine displaces Neoplatonic self-transformation. Cavadini points out that for Augustine it is the reading of one particular text, Christian scriptures. J.C. Cavadini, “[Review of] Stock, Brian. *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1999): 165.

exercise” as an explicit practice, cuing the reader with the hortatory subjunctive, “Let there be....”

### Self-Identification with *Deus*

On the other hand, the self-identifications with the god we see throughout the *Hermetica*, function as *implicit* exercises. Offering no cue to the reader to perform a visual exercise, there are nonetheless performative. In one love spell from the hermetic *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, we find two instances where divine identity is formed in order to empower the aim of the performer: “For you are I, and I am you; your name is mine, and mine is yours. For I am your image” and “I know you, Hermes, and you know me. / I am you, and you are I” (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* 8.37-38, 49-50).<sup>279</sup> In one tractate of *Corpus Hermeticum* we see a forceful statement equating self-knowledge with self-deification: “So you must think of a god in this way, as having everything—the cosmos, himself, [the] universe—like thoughts within himself. Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like” (11.20).<sup>280</sup> For Wouter Hanegraaff, the final salvation of the Hermetic material—to become divine—“consists not so much in unification with the divine as in the recognition that he has always been one with it. ... In looking at this ultimate divine reality, he finds that he is looking at himself.”<sup>281</sup> The emphasis shifts from “ultimate divine reality” to “self.”

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<sup>279</sup> Betz, trans. “σὺ γὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ σὺ, τὸ σὸν ὄνομα ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ ἐμὸν σόν· ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμι τὸ εἶδωλόν σου” and “οἶδά σε, Ἑρμῆ, καὶ σὺ ἐμέ. ἐγὼ εἶ<μι> σὺ καὶ σὺ ἐγώ.”

<sup>280</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “εἶτα σὺ μὲν δύνασαι ταῦτα, ὁ θεὸς δὲ οὐ; τοῦτον οὖν τὸν τρόπον νόησον τὸν θεόν, ὡσπερ νοήματα πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχειν, τὸν κόσμον, ἑαυτόν, <τὸ> ὄλον.”

<sup>281</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism” in *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. M. Sgarbi (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 3-4.

Those who understand “the divine” to be something that is transcendent and beyond the self might be tempted to think of the self as a subset of that ultimate reality. I am trying to put that view—which may be more a Christian overlay—on its head: In this case, the ultimate reality is something that is rather a part of self, an inner experience, immanent. It is not as if there is an outer, other being that the self approaches and seeks union with but rather that “being” is an inner, familiar capacity that just needs to be understood the right way. These exercises help the Hermetist develop the inner vision needed to navigate an inner cosmology and to impress that understanding upon the perceptible world. The spiritual world is an imaginal world and its first founding inhabitants are not gods or demons or angels but rather our thoughts.

### **Consciousness is Divine**

Hermes tells us that consciousness is made not from the four perceptible elements but from invisible ether (*Asclepius* 6). Consciousness, like thought, is invisible, immeasurable except in its effects, interior, private. Consciousness is, Hermes reveals, “a great subject and very holy, no less than an account of divinity itself” (6).<sup>282</sup> Consciousness is divinity itself. Indeed, Hermes insists, it takes a “godlike concentration of consciousness” to follow such a fluid account of divinity, “most like a river running in torrent from a height, sweeping, plunging, so that its rapid rush outraces our concentration...” (3).<sup>283</sup> A discourse on the divinity of consciousness requires a consciousness of divinity, it seems, a concentration of god-like self-consciousness.

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<sup>282</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*est enim sanctissima et magna, et non minor quam ea quae est divinitatis ipsius.*”

<sup>283</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*torrenti simillima est fluvio e summo in prona praecipiti rapacitate currentis; quo efficitur ut intentionem nostrum.*”

Some might object that I am overstating humanity's apotheotic *telos* according to the Hermetists. After all, for Hermes, the "true, pure and holy philosophy" is to "adore the godhead with simple mind and soul and to honor his works, also to give thanks to god's will" (14).<sup>284</sup> The highest god, the "master and shaper of all things" (8)<sup>285</sup> seems much like the familiar king-god. Theurgy is divine work but it is explicitly conceived as "being worked upon by the gods." Indeed, Sarah Iles Johnston's characterization of "[t]he pious Iamblichaeon theurgist [who] *subordinated* himself to the gods, allowing them to work upon him" could equally be applied to the theurgic Hermetist.<sup>286</sup> This representation appears again and again in the sources. But what if we were to read this subordination from the point of view of a self armed with an imaginative, performative technology? Subordination to a seemingly external power may be more nuanced than at first it seems.

In his study of self-formation in the late antique *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan*, J. Wyn Schofer observes the strategy of attaining "the character of a sage through subordination to particular authorities with the goal of, in various senses, internalizing aspects of them."<sup>287</sup> There is a fine and porous line between serving power and being an agent or avatar of it, a line that has much to do with how one represents

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<sup>284</sup> Copenhaver, trans. "*Simplici enim mente et anima divinitatem colere eiusque facta venerari, agree etiam dei voluntati gratias.*"

<sup>285</sup> Copenhaver, trans. "*Dominus et omnium conformator.*"

<sup>286</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 79.

<sup>287</sup> J. Wyn Schofer, "Self, Subject, and Chosen Subjection: Rabbinic Ethics and Comparative Possibilities," *Journal of Religious* 33, no. 2 (2005): 256; Solomon Schechter, and Menahem Kister, *Avoth de Rabbi Nathan: Solomon Schechter Edition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997).

oneself. In imagining a god that is of a “higher order,” though a distant relative in the spectrum of divinity (more on that in a moment)—say, a god whose “willing and achievement are complete for him at one and the same moment of time” (*Asclepius* 8)<sup>288</sup>—the Hermetist imagines having that state in him or herself.<sup>289</sup>

I want to suggest that the emphasis we often see put on human subjugation to a superior god is an inverted imaginative strategy that serves to stretch the identity of the subject beyond its normal bounds. Imagining god is imitating god. Furthermore, if all the levels of reality from matter to God “become levels of inner life, levels of the self” then, Pierre Hadot concludes, “the human self is not irrevocably separated from its eternal model.... This true self—this self in God—is within ourselves... [W]e can identify ourselves with it. We then become this eternal self....”<sup>290</sup> All sacralization contains an element of self-sacralization because it is self-reflexive awareness that recognizes or inscribes perceived power. It is not the sacred, conceived as a powerful *external* force that is Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, but rather the self-reflexive awareness itself, which creatively names power sacred in the first place. That is our mysterious and frightening “Wholly Other.”<sup>291</sup> Durkheim helped us to see that in those organized sacralizing behaviors we have come to call “religion,” a society effectively adores itself.

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<sup>288</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*Voluntas etenim dei ipsa est summa perfection, utpote cum voluisse et perfecisse uno eodemque temporis puncto compleat.*”

<sup>289</sup> Schofer’s dynamic of chosen subjection will be taken up more pointedly in ch. 5’s discussion of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* and *De deo Socratis*.

<sup>290</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or, The Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>291</sup> “Fearful and fascinating mystery.” Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy; An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

These collective efforts also require individual agents who are self-reflexively aware. If all sacralizing behaviors contain an element of self-sacralizing and if, as a sacralizing behavior, *apotheosis* is self-sacralizing, then the sacred is society writ large, yes, but more so, the sacred is self-reflexive awareness—the self— writ large.

### Self as Statue

Abruptly Asclepius interrupts Hermes: “Are you talking about statues, Trismegistus?” who responds, “Statues, Asclepius, yes. See how little trust you have!” (*Asclepius* 24).<sup>292</sup> Now I think we can talk a bit about the statues that so irked our Bishop of Hippo who chides the theurgists for idolatry (“making gods”). Hermes says just as god “is maker of heavenly gods, so it is mankind who fashions the temple gods...” (23).<sup>293</sup> Yet, god still serves as the “eternal model” for mimesis: “Humanity persists in imitating divinity, representing its gods in semblance of its own features, just as the father and master made his gods eternal to resemble him” (23).<sup>294</sup> What appears to be making gods and idolatry, as it did to Augustine, is actually the symbolic enactment of an inner change. Making gods makes you a god: “What we have said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of all wonders that humans have been

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<sup>292</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*Statuas dicis, O Trismegiste? Statuas, O Asclepi. Videsne quatenus tu ipse diffidas?*”

<sup>293</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*deus ut effector est deorum caelestium, ita homo factor est deorum qui in templis sunt humana proximate contenti.*”

<sup>294</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*in illa divinitatis imitation perseverat, ut, sicuti pater ac dominus, ut sui similes essent, deos fecit aeternos, ita humanitas deos suos ex sui vultus similitudine.*”

able to discover the divine nature and how to make it” (37).<sup>295</sup> In an analogy I doubt was lost on the Hermetists, just as gods, demons, or angels can inhabit statues, so the divine souls of humans inhabit human bodies. Animating statues reflects an inner imaginal process, “working on one’s inner statue” in Plotinus’s words (*Ennead* 1.6.9)<sup>296</sup>, toward apotheosis, theurgic divinization, *theothenai*.

## Conclusion

In *Asclepius*, the imagination is a technology for embodying what both Hermetic writers (and the Neoplatonists who followed them) viewed as the soul’s inheritance: to become a god. For the late antique Hermetist, apotheosis was an imagined, embodied state: “We rejoice that you have deigned to make us gods for eternity even when we depend on the body” (*Asclepius* 41).<sup>297</sup>

I’d like to propose a new term: “*autourgos*,” usually translated as “farmer,” literally, “self-worker.” Gregory Shaw has argued that apotheosis, or theurgic divinization, is demiurgy.<sup>298</sup> That is, the “divine work” of theurgy is not only changing one’s imaginal state to that of god but also identifying as co-participant, divine crafter, in creating the cosmos. *Theourgos* is *dēmiourgos*. Extending this equation—that the theurgist is demiurgist, I would add that theurgist is also “autourgist”—*theourgos* is

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<sup>295</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*Minus enim moranda, etsi Miranda sunt, quae de homine dicta sunt <cetera>; omnium enim mirabilium vincit admirationem, quod homo divinam potuit invenire naturam, eamque efficere.*”

<sup>296</sup> Armstrong, trans. “*μη πάσῃ τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα.*”

<sup>297</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*gaudemus quod nos in corporibus sitos aeternitate tua fueris consecrare dignatus.*”

<sup>298</sup> Shaw, “Hermetic Rebirth,” *passim*.

*autourgos*. No, not the “farmer” but literally, the “self-worker” who “works alone”!  
*Corpus Hermeticum* 2.14.4 says as much: “Working alone, he is in his work eternally since he is what he makes.”<sup>299</sup>

In *Symposium* 1, Xenophon used the expression “*autourgos tes philosophias*” for “one that has worked at philosophy by himself, without a teacher.”<sup>300</sup> But, philosophy as a way of life is always eventually worked at without a teacher if it is to fulfill the aim of self-transformation. We have to do the intellectual, and the imaginative, “heavy lifting” ourselves. Theurgy is the work of the *autourgos*, the self-worker, cultivating inner divinity, whose “seed” is the imagination.

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<sup>299</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*αὐτουργὸς γὰρ ὢν, αἰεὶ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ, αὐτὸς ὃν ὁ ποιεῖ.*”

<sup>300</sup> Marchant and Todd, trans. “*ἡμᾶς δ’ ὁρᾷς αὐτουργούς τινὰς τῆς φιλοσοφίας ὄντας.*”

## CHAPTER 3

### DIVINATION IS DIVINIZATION: ORACLES IN LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT

While traveling in Egypt, the first-century Greek doctor, Thessalos of Tralles, sought a “direct divination,” an “eye-witness” oracle with Asclepius, the god of healing, to advise him on the medical uses of plants. In a letter to Emperor Augustus, he writes:

Arriving, then, in Diospolis (Thebes) — I mean the most ancient city of Egypt which also has many temples — I was residing there, for there were scholarly high-priests (*archiieris*) and elders ascribing to various teachings there. Now as time advanced and my friendship with them increased, I was inquiring whether any magical operation (*magikes energieias*) was still preserved. I observed the majority protesting strongly against my rashness concerning such an expectation. Nonetheless, one man, who could be trusted because of his patient manner and the measure of his age, did not throw away the friendship. This man professed to have the ability to perform direct (*autoptiken*) divination by means of a bowl (*Thessalos* 1.12-15).<sup>301</sup>

When it comes to divination in late antique Graeco-Roman Egypt, it is difficult to separate the “priest” from the “magician,” “religion” from “magic,” or philosophy from all of the above. Whether performed publicly as a part of state cult or privately for elite (or non-elite) clients, divination often suggested divinization—the possibility of personal divinity—for those involved. To bring this possibility of personal divinity as understood by the Egyptians into greater relief, this chapter will interpret two divination practices — the New Kingdom Egyptian *ph-ntr* oracle in its public and private guises and the Late Antique Graeco-Egyptian “*Mithras Liturgy*.” I will attend to the Egyptian concept of *hk3* and those who deployed it in the context of Greek and Egyptian cultural interactions. I

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<sup>301</sup> Friedrich, trans. “Γενόμενος οὖν ἐν Διοῦς πόλει - ἀρχαιοτάτην <λέγω> τῆς Αἰγύπτου πόλιν καὶ πολλὰ ἱερὰ ἔχουσαν - διέτριβον αὐτόθι· ἦσαν γὰρ <ἐκεῖ> καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς φιλόλογοι καὶ <γέροντες> ποικίλοις κεκοσμημένοι μαθήμασιν. προβαίνοντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου καὶ τῆς πρὸς αὐτούς μοι φιλίας μᾶλλον ἀύξανομένης, ἐπυνθανόμην, εἴ τι τῆς μαγικῆς ἐνεργείας σφύζεται. καὶ τῶν μὲν πλειόνων ἐπαγγελίας ὁμοίας τῇ προπετεία μου <ἐπι>φερόντων κατέγνω· ἐνὸς δὲ τινος διὰ τὸ <οὐ> σοβαρὸν τῶν ἠθῶν καὶ τὸ τῆς ἡλικίας μέτρον πιστευθῆναι δυναμένου οὐκ ἀνεχαιτίστην τῆς φιλίας. ἐπηγγείλατο δὲ οὗτος αὐτοπτικὴν ἔχειν λεκάνης ἐνεργεῖαν.”

will make the case that personal divinity as expressed in late antique Graeco-Egyptian oracular literature—even when written in Greek—was not an *interpretatio graeca* or “Hellenization” but rather part of a more general cultural milieu of traditional Egyptian temple thought and cultic practice. This chapter demonstrates the contribution of Egyptian thought to Late Antique discourses on personal divinity seen in Hermetic texts as well as in the theurgic attitude of the Neoplatonists.<sup>302</sup> Finally, I will suggest that divination **is** divinization—that divination bestows a “sacred status” upon the querent (and the audience)—giving him or her access to powers and states of being normally attributed to the Egyptian gods—in both explicit and implicit ways. Divination rituals, performed publicly or privately, can be read as texts that function as imaginative technologies of self-transformation that suggest personal divinity.

### **The Egyptian “Priest-Philosopher”**

The ritual expert in Egypt like the one in the Thessalos anecdote above, performed divination rites that embraced the roles of “priest,” “magician,” and “philosopher.” However, except from the point of view of Roman legislation in Egypt that condemned *magia*, “magician” or “magic” may not be the most helpful terms to use in our discussion. Indeed, “magician” and “magic” carry a long history of polemical baggage, often being used by historical agents and scholars alike to sanction certain practices while condemning others, and then with reference to that equally slippery term, “religion,” a category that the Egyptians didn’t have either in the way moderns have

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<sup>302</sup> Theurgy = “divine work.” See chapter 1 for detailed discussion of theurgy.

tended to apply it to them—“etically.”<sup>303</sup> Neither category—“magic” or “religion”—was indigenous to the Egyptians.

Beginning in the reign of Diocletian (c. 244-311), divination and other related practices were reclassified as illicit *magia*.<sup>304</sup> By 359, an Egyptian oracle prompted the emperor Constantius II (317 – 361) to abolish oracles throughout the empire.<sup>305</sup> Egyptian cult practices were negatively recast in the Roman Christian mind. Writing in the fifth century, the Christian polemicist Zacharias Scholasticus accused Neoplatonist theurgist Isidore of using rituals and words of power for malefic purposes (i.e. “sorcery”).<sup>306</sup> The lines between categories like “religion,” “philosophy,” “theurgy,” and “magic,” blur and change over time—especially so in the great confluence of cultural identities that was late antique Egypt. The Neoplatonic theurgist used many of the same methods as the Egyptian “priest” including invocations, words of power, and natural materials. The theurgists utilized materials that indexed the gods, “the *symbola* that [the gods] themselves have sown in the cosmos.”<sup>307</sup> Engaging these sacred symbols, theurgic rituals of supplication were seen to raise practitioners “gradually to the level of the object of supplication”<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ian Moyer, “Thessalos of Tralles and Cultural Exchange,” in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, eds. Scott Noegle, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

<sup>304</sup> James B. Rives, “Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime,” *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2003): 334.

<sup>305</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3356.

<sup>306</sup> Garth Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 102 (1982): 47.

<sup>307</sup> John Dillon, “Iamblichus Defense of Theurgy: Some Reflections,” *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 1 (2007): 35.

<sup>308</sup> Dillon, trans. “ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἰκετείας κατὰ βραχὺ πρὸς τὸ ἰκετενόμενον ἀναγόμεθα.”

That is, the practitioners became divine. Especially for the Iamblichan “philosopher,” ritual engagement with the material expressions of the divine as they are manifest in nature was seen equally as engaging the imagined, invisible, transcendent, expression of the divine as an achievement of personal divinity.

Let us perhaps use the Egyptian term normally translated into “magic,” *heka*, instead. Unlike *magia*, *heka* had no unorthodox, illegal, or deviant connotations. Rather, as both a cosmic force and a deity of that force, *heka* was “a primary and necessary element of creation, used naturally by the gods, and granted as a...benefit to [hu]mankind.”<sup>309</sup> The hieroglyph means, “power.” As a god, *Heka* had official cult status in the temple at Esna in Upper Egypt even in Roman times and was invoked equally as a “destructive force of compulsion...[a] generative harvest deity, and [a] patron of oracles.”<sup>310</sup> Egyptologist Robert Ritner comments: “Serving both generative and destructive ends, *Heka/heka* represents an amoral force inherent in the created order, a power which could be tapped by appropriate words and gestures. There is no ‘black’ vs. ‘white’ magic; both gods and demons may use its force.”<sup>311</sup> On the identity of the practitioner of *heka*, Ritner rightly argues against the hotly debated image of the “itinerant” or “freelance” magician in Egypt. He says:

Preconceived notions of the magician...on the outskirts of tradition are totally inappropriate for Egypt where the magician was invariably a literate priest, the very source of tradition. The common Egyptian term for magician signified

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<sup>309</sup> Robert K. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: the Demotic Spells and their Religious Context," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* 2.18.5, eds. W. Haase and H. Temporini, (2000): 3353.

<sup>310</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3353-4.

<sup>311</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3354.

‘lector priest’, the ritualist who recited the written spells. Such spells were temple property, composed, edited, and stored in the temple scriptorium.<sup>312</sup>

So, we might also use *hry-tp*, the native term for this “lector priest”—who was ritual expert and practitioner of *heka*—as an alternative to the awkward hybrid, “priest-magician-philosopher.” Using such native terms as *heka* and *hry-tp* avoids many misunderstandings of Egyptian thought and practice that stem from Greek and Roman—as well as modern scholarly—biases.

### **Greek and Egyptian Interactions**

In order to understand the Egyptian contribution to late antique discourses about personal divinity evident in the transition from the public pharaonic-era oracles (*ph-nt*) to private oracles (such as the “*Mithras Liturgy*”), we need to address the problem of accessing Egypt through Greek (linguistic) hands. After the conquest of Alexander, Egypt is said to have become “Hellenized.” The term “Hellenization” carries with it two assumptions: 1) Greek culture is superior to Egyptian culture; 2) Egyptians assimilated to Greek culture, rather than appropriated it. Recently scholars have begun to consider a more nuanced encounter between Greeks and Egyptians than simple “Hellenization.” Arguing against the Hellenization model, Glen Bowersock suggests that rather “[t]he Egyptian elite was probably quick to seize the instrumental advantages of learning Greek already under the Ptolemies, and by the third century it had fully internalized the conquerors’ culture.”<sup>313</sup> Egyptian elites didn’t stop being Egyptian, just because they learned Greek. Taking advantage of new cultural currency hardly means abandoning all

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<sup>312</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3354.

<sup>313</sup> Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, 9.

of the old. Robert Ritner challenges the idea that the use of Greek language suggests the primacy of Greek influence:

Greek language does not necessarily imply Greek culture. One must not confuse the Greek-speaking world with the Greek cultural world, any more than one should assume a unity of cultural outlook in English writings from London, Navaho reservations, Botswana, and New Delhi.<sup>314</sup>

As an example, Ritner points to the oldest *Papyri Graecae Magicae* spell, written in Greek by an Egyptian woman of Greek descent before the arrival of Alexander that follows standard temple uses and protocols.<sup>315</sup> Ritner challenges Hellenizing triumphalism by pointing out the Egyptian mythic and theological elements—specifically solar in nature—that underlay the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. He asserts: “Confronting the divine powers or ascending to join them, engendering favor and controlling one’s enemies—are not newly spawned by contemporary ‘philosophies,’ but derive from unbroken Egyptian traditions far older than Greek philosophy, indeed older than Greek culture itself.”<sup>316</sup> While the notion of “unbroken tradition” remains controversial—flying in the face of current thinking about cultural mobility, perhaps—it should be considered cautiously but seriously.<sup>317</sup> In the study of culture, we ought not disregard the resiliency of *habitus* nor the “transmissibility” of cultural memory.<sup>318</sup>

Native Egyptian constituencies appropriated elements of Hellenism to form a “subtle interpenetration” in order to maintain a cultural identity distinct from

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<sup>314</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3360.

<sup>315</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3360.

<sup>316</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3360.

<sup>317</sup> See Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, 2010.

<sup>318</sup> See Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Hellenism.<sup>319</sup> Ian Rutherford reminds us: “For ancient Greek writers themselves the similarities and differences between Greek and other peoples, real or imagined, was a central concern, not only because this is a way of defining what it means to be Greek, but also because in the hyper-connective ancient Mediterranean, encounters with other cultural traditions was central part of lived experience.”<sup>320</sup> Reassessing Arnaldo Momigliano’s thesis of Egyptian decline under Greek rule “through an intellectual imperialism that exoticized and dominated Egypt, its customs, and its wisdom through representations that served Greek needs or desires...,”<sup>321</sup> Ian Moyer revisits Herodotus’s meeting with Egyptian priests in Thebes, Manetho’s composition of an Egyptian history in Greek, the arrival of Egyptian gods on the Greek island of Delos, and a Greek doctor’s magical revelation in Egypt as “four transactional moments—moments when Egyptian as well as Greek discourses, actions, and representations produced the historical outcome.”<sup>322</sup> In the process, he shows how much of the scholarship on Hellenistic Egypt has drawn from nineteenth-century colonial concerns especially those of Johann Gustav Droysen.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> David Frankfurter, “The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt; Religious Worlds and Actors,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* (2000): 163.

<sup>320</sup> “Introduction: Interaction and Translation between Greek Literature and Egypt,” in *Greco-Egyptian Interactions: Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BCE – 300 CE*, ed. Ian Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>321</sup> Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 2. See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>322</sup> Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 2.

<sup>323</sup> Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 11-36. Droysen was a nineteenth-century German historian known for his study of Alexander the Great. See Robert Southard, *Droysen and the Prussian School of History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

Garth Fowden's argument for the prominence of Egyptian intellectual influence in the post-pharaonic *Hermetica*, although largely accepted today, challenges the dominant thinking for most of the twentieth century. While Hellenism held sway politically, Egyptianism permeated cultural expression so much so that "the product of their interaction was at least as much Egyptian as Greek."<sup>324</sup> Greek and Roman writers such as Lucian, Lucan, Plutarch, Porphyry, and Iamblichus acknowledged this autochthonous intellectual primacy. Acknowledging that literary references might be more than appeals to the authority of timeless Egyptian wisdom allows us to consider such evidence as genuine expressions of identity, tradition, thought, and practice.

The interaction between Greeks and Egyptians is as complex as the resultant dynamic syncretism. Syncretized figures such as Hermes-Thoth were nothing new to the Egyptians. The internal syncretism of the Egyptians can be seen in deities such as Amun-Re or Atum-Khepri that predate Hermes Trismegistus considerably. The practice of absorbing foreign gods is also well attested and can be seen in Baal-Set during the Canaanite occupation and in Zeus-Ammon under the Ptolemaic Greeks. Syncretic cultural expressions go much deeper than names of deities. The *Hermetica* express a more general "fusion of Egyptian and Greek ways of thought" which occurred after the conquest of Alexander in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. Peter Struck offers ample examples of Jewish, Christian, Platonic, and Egyptian elements in Late Antique Roman-Egyptian literary productions.<sup>325</sup> There is little question that the *Hermetica* as a whole display manifold traditions together.

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<sup>324</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 14.

<sup>325</sup> Peter T. Struck, "Hermetism," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 651.

By the fifth century, “traditional Egyptian...temple culture was mixed inextricably with classical culture, spectacle, and a thorough syncretism of sacred idioms.”<sup>326</sup> The Alexandrian intellectual culture was elite, urban, and for the most part Hellenistic. However, certain Egyptian-identified luminaries stood out such as Chaeremon in the first century, the Panopolitan family of Aurelius Petearbeschinis in the fourth century, and the family of Horapollon in the fifth century (see detailed discussion in chapter 4).<sup>327</sup> The example of the ethnically Egyptian family of Horapollon who taught in the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria as “Hellenized” elites is helpful in understanding how Egyptian thought made its way into Hermetic texts. These Egyptian thinkers were raised in families “familiar with the temple culture, trained in temple rituals, but individually dedicated to expressing their traditions in Hellenistic literary and philosophical forms.”<sup>328</sup> But, the Egyptianizing elements in Neoplatonic philosophy were established from the beginning, emphasized by Iamblichus, and enacted by families such as Horapollon’s.

The Egyptian temple *hry-tp* in his or her Hellenistic form had become the illicit *magos* under Diocletian, casting a new light on traditional practices. At the same time Neoplatonists such as Horapollon sought to “claim links with indigenous temples in order

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<sup>326</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 172.

<sup>327</sup> Like many families tied to temple cult of the fifth century, they attempted to preserve Egyptian cultural identity while gaining stature as Hellenic intellectuals. The *Corpus Hermeticum* material that would have been well known to Horapollon and the Alexandrian Neoplatonists is a likely heir to at least some Egyptian esoteric teachings. Garth Fowden has argued that the “hybrid late antique theosophical system of Hermetism was the project of none other than Egyptian *hry-tp* who understood Greek models of the philosophical life as complementing perfectly their own values and pursuits.” *Egyptian Hermes*, 156.

<sup>328</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 191.

to promote values quite different from indigenous temple culture.”<sup>329</sup> Neoplatonist philosopher and historian Damascius describes Horapollon’s family “earnestly pursuing the...traditions of their (native Egyptian) heritage with ... passion....”<sup>330</sup> The question remains as to what extent the Neoplatonic theurgists were invoking the authority of “eternal Egyptian wisdom” or drawing on current practices that complemented, or perhaps, were at the root of Neoplatonism. While the expediency of repackaging native wisdom for Hellenized consumers is easily overstated, it almost certainly played its role in the centuries since Alexander, transforming the performance of “Egyptian wisdom” first encountered or imagined by Plato and Pythagoras.

A more nuanced understanding of Hellenism offers an opportunity to find “[t]races of the Egyptian voices in the long history of dialogue between Greece and Egypt [that] are there to be found, even in texts designed to erase or supplant them....”<sup>331</sup> Indeed, Hellenism provided a “creative translation of traditional texts, practices, and ideas into a new cultural idiom, not their obliteration in the face of higher culture.”<sup>332</sup> These traces in translation provide clues that help us to recover lost or rejected intellectual and cultural contributions, for our purposes particularly in regards to personal divinity and imaginative technologies of self-transformation. A close reading of our two sites of divinization, the *ph-ntr* oracle and the “*Mithras Liturgy*,” confirms this.

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<sup>329</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 165.

<sup>330</sup> David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 223.

<sup>331</sup> Moyer, *Limits of Hellenism*, 274.

<sup>332</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 163.

## Popular Piety and Personal Divinity

In order to understand the public performance of the *ph-ntr* oracle as a “transformative text,” we need to consider the nature of public piety in ancient Egypt. The archeological record favors material culture produced by and for elites but evidence for workshop and personal piety resides in fragmentary votive offerings, penitential inscriptions, and literary or visual accounts of public festivals and oracles.<sup>333</sup> In the Old Kingdom common people performed temple service in assigned rotations, after the New Kingdom formal religious rituals were primarily conducted by a professional class. Nonetheless, it is clear that over the long stretch of time access to divinity became “democratized”<sup>334</sup>: “[S]ources that originated in royal and priestly circles later came to be translated, often reformulated, and popularized.”<sup>335</sup> Progressively, “mysteries associated with divine kingship became available to deceased mortals as royal esoteric texts and myths were incorporated in the mortuary literature of commoners.”<sup>336</sup> In the Middle Kingdom, this trend continued through the *Book of the Dead*, in some cases adapted to particular trades or occupations including “spells designed to transform an individual into

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<sup>333</sup> Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 46 – 51.

<sup>334</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 26.

<sup>335</sup> Elaine Pagels, “Esotericism and Mysticism,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 640.

<sup>336</sup> Edward F. Wente, “Esotericism and Mysticism,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 641.

a divine entity and those containing statements baldly identifying the speaker with a high deity such as Re or Atum.”<sup>337</sup>

In the New Kingdom, commoners had access to the *Book of Amduat* that “included references to its efficaciousness on earth for the living person who knows its contents, and it is stated that such an individual is the likeness of the great god.”<sup>338</sup> A Late Period Demotic text, *Setne Khamwas and Naneferkaptah*, describes a seeker of wisdom in search of the “Book of Thoth” that bestows godlike powers upon the owner.<sup>339</sup> The themes of self-transcendence, divine visions, and even union with the divine that appear in early Royal liturgy become the concerns of non-elite populations before the Ptolemaic period.

In the Roman period, temple culture revolved around local cults.<sup>340</sup> Certain aspects of cultic life expanded from elite circles to included popular audience. Gaëlle Tallet suggests that, “deprived of previous revenues and privileges, the clergy was highly dependent on private income.”<sup>341</sup> Especially in the changing spiritual climate of the second and third centuries, when such private incomes were revoked by law, “the intimate contact with the One God that could be attained by members of a cultural elite after years of rigorous intellectual training was not going to be confined to the tiny

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<sup>337</sup> Wente, “Esotericism and Mysticism,” 641.

<sup>338</sup> Wente, “Esotericism and Mysticism,” 641.

<sup>339</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, vol. 3, The late period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 125 – 138.

<sup>340</sup> David Frankfurter, “Religious Practice and Piety,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 320.

<sup>341</sup> Gaëlle Tallet, “Oracles,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 411.

minority that had the necessary wealth and education to qualify for membership.”<sup>342</sup>

Russell observes in the sources a growing demand for esoteric teaching “amongst the many merchants, artisans, and government official who thronged the major cities of the empire....”<sup>343</sup> One can imagine a range of responses to such demand, exemplified in the Thessalos vignette above, from sincere to opportunistic and everywhere between.

However, our attention to the opportunistic impulse need not overshadow the sincere ones.

Popular piety in Egypt included some notion of god-like immortality. While it was common in the ancient world to expect some kind of survival after death, for most of the ancient world “the lot of the dead was rather dismal.”<sup>344</sup> However, “[t]he great exception to common beliefs about the afterlife was provided by ancient Egypt.”<sup>345</sup> The prospect of immortality was built in to Egyptian anthropology:

Humans were perceived as composites of physical and nonphysical aspects or modes of existence. The most important of these were the physical body and the heart and the incorporeal entities called the *ka* and *ba*. Each of these *kheperu* (manifestation) could act as the vehicle for survival after death....The *ba*, originally the manifestation of an entity’s distinctive powers, came to signify the capacity of the deceased to move freely between the earthly realm and that of the gods.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 44.

<sup>343</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 44.

<sup>344</sup> John J. Collins, “Death, the Afterlife, and Other Last Things: Introduction,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 470.

<sup>345</sup> Collins, “Death,” 470.

<sup>346</sup> John Taylor, “Death, the Afterlife, and Other Last Things: Early Period,” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S.I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 471.

While in second-century Rome, “deification could be taken for granted as following upon death without any implied claim to high social status”; in Egypt “this process of ‘democratization’ had been going on for many centuries.”<sup>347</sup> Progressively, “mysteries associated with divine kingship became available to deceased mortals as royal esoteric texts and myths were incorporated in the mortuary literature of commoners” as noted by Edward Wente.<sup>348</sup>

### **The *ph-ntr* Divination Oracle**

An Egyptian divination ritual was an opportunity to ask questions of the “gods,” in Egyptian, the *ntrw*, conceived of as active powers or energies in life. By means of an oracle, statues embodying the powers of the *ntrw* could be approached by common people to answer important questions on matters of health, marriage, and work and to make judgments in legal matters.<sup>349</sup> From the New Kingdom onward, “the primary way to consult the gods was to appeal to them during their public appearances outside the temple, either personally or through the mediation of a [*hry-tp*].”<sup>350</sup> These public oracles were known as *ph-ntr* “the standard expression for an oracular consultation of a divine statue”<sup>351</sup>—meaning “god’s arrival” or “reaching god.”<sup>352</sup> Gaëlle Tallet describes the *ph-ntr*:

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<sup>347</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 27.

<sup>348</sup> Wente, “Esotericism and Mysticism,” 641.

<sup>349</sup> Wilkinson, *Complete Gods*, 46.

<sup>350</sup> Tallet, “Oracles,” 401.

<sup>351</sup> Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1995), 214.

The procession of divine statues gave inquirers the opportunity to seek an oracle, and once the god had ‘approved’ the request, the procession stopped and the consultation could start. This kind of consultation could work through spoken address or through the medium of writing, whereby written questions and names were placed before the god...In oracles, the god is often said to nod his head...some movement on the part of the priests carrying the shrine would have been required to...indicate yes or no by moving forwards or backwards.<sup>353</sup>

Oracles and festivals provide compelling evidence for a prototypical idiom of personal divinity among non-elites before and during the period of hermetic synthesis:<sup>354</sup>

“While the ritual innovations particular to elite classes in Roman Egypt remain a rich topic for synthetic discussion...it is clear that ... practices lay on a continuum across classes, both in the observance of traditional ... and, ultimately, in Christian practices as well.”<sup>355</sup> Since the New Kingdom, oracles had been connected with personal piety because they were a “privileged mode of direct contact with gods.”<sup>356</sup> Public temple festivals “permitted individuals to enter into direct personal relations with god...”<sup>357</sup>

Personal piety was exemplified by ritual expressions of intimacy, in Fowden’s words, “shading into self-identification” with the god.<sup>358</sup> Jan Assmann observes: “This [personal] expression is so typical of the new movement that we can legitimately accord

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<sup>352</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3346.

<sup>353</sup> Tallet, “Oracles,” 401-402.

<sup>354</sup> Significant dissent from this position is expressed by Roger Bagnall who asserts that evidence for festivals is weak in the fourth century. See Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 269.

<sup>355</sup> Frankfurter, “Religious Practice and Piety,” 331.

<sup>356</sup> Tallet, “Oracles,” 409.

<sup>357</sup> Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 232.

<sup>358</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 25.

it the rank of a self-designation and equate personal piety with ‘giving god into one’s heart.’”<sup>359</sup> A similar sentiment can be seen in a prayer ostrakon from Amenophis II: “I have given you into my heart because you are strong, ...[you] protector, behold: I no longer know fear.”<sup>360</sup> Votive offering like these were “placed in the path of the god as he set out on his procession; thus, individuals could address the god ‘in person’ (that is, his processional image) without the mediation of cult and state.”<sup>361</sup> Though unlikely that common people attending oracles and festivals would aspire to the level of divinity attributed to the pharaoh, the notion of continuing a personal relationship with a cult figure is idiomatic.<sup>362</sup>

Once divination was prohibited under Roman rule at the end of the second century,<sup>363</sup> *ph-ntr* practices were “driven underground, becoming instead a private practice.”<sup>364</sup> Like the public oracle, private oracles too expressed personal piety. While “[i]ntrinsically ‘private’—eliciting answers, revelations, and aid for purely personal concerns—the [private] oracular procedure was no less sacerdotal...” nor were they less

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<sup>359</sup> Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 230.

<sup>360</sup> G. Posener, “Ostrakon Cairo 12217,” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 27 (1975): 206 – 209. Quoted in Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 231.

<sup>361</sup> Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 231.

<sup>362</sup> Wilkinson, *Complete Gods*, 51.

<sup>363</sup> By decree of Q. Aemilius Saturninus, prefect of Egypt under Septimus Severus (193-211 CE).

<sup>364</sup> Robert K. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: the Demotic Spells and their Religious Context" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* vol. 2, pt. 18, sec 5 (2000): 3356.

an expression of personal piety and intimacy with the gods.<sup>365</sup> The story of Thessalos's consultation with an Egyptian *hry-tp* is an example of such a private *ph-ntr*. Ritner describes it in its private guise:

[T]he most common goal of the procedures...was the direct petition of a god for revelation, using lamps, bowls, mediums, or dreams. 'Bowl [*heka*]' is attested in Egypt from the New Kingdom onward, specifically in spells for beholding the solar bark and the gods of the underworld. The bottoms of shallow bowls are painted with scenes of the sun god or other deities whom the ritualist intends to visualize.<sup>366</sup>

Importantly, the oracular procedures in the Hermetic *Papyri Graecae Magicae* such as the "*Mithras Liturgy*" bear a striking similarity to the *ph-ntr*. Although private, they display a ritual tradition rooted in native Egyptian public temple practice.<sup>367</sup>

### **The "*Mithras Liturgy*"**

The so-called "*Mithras Liturgy*" is both oracle and ritual of *apathanatismos* ("immortalization," a feature of personal divinity). This oracular ritual is part of the "Theban cache" known by scholars since Karl Preisendanz in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.<sup>368</sup> As a "direct divination,"<sup>369</sup> it is a descendent of the New

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<sup>365</sup> Ritner, *Mechanics*, 215.

<sup>366</sup> Ritner, "Magical Practice," 3346-3347.

<sup>367</sup> As a counter-point, Frankfurter suggests that while the *ph-ntr* share structural similarities with the divination spells of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* and, indeed, with divinizing visions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, they change in context—from priestly performance to private, individual or pedagogical practice—suggesting Graeco-Roman "spiritual ambitions for wisdom, a cosmic or super-cosmic dimension...." "Consequences of Hellenism," 181.

<sup>368</sup> Karl Preisendanz and Albert Henrichs, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri. Herausgegeben Und Übersetzt* (Stuttgart: in aedibus B.G. Teubneri, 1973); For the recent English translation, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical*

Kingdom *ph-ntr* at home with other Theban cache divination rituals in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. The name “*Mithras Liturgy*,” so-called, derives from Albrecht Dietrich who believed that the text was used in the ancient cult of Mithras, a thesis now generally dismissed. The more recent translation by Hans Dieter Betz<sup>370</sup> suggests substantial Greek Middle Stoic influence in contrast with Garth Fowden and Robert Ritner who have ably identified its Egyptian underpinnings.

Addressed to a daughter, a female ritual expert (whose appearance confirms that women were Hermetic practitioners, a point that has been given surprisingly little attention by scholars), the ritual structure of the “*Mithras Liturgy*” consists of a complex series of “ascension” visualizations taking the operator from the elemental world to become a “rising star” (“*Mithras Liturgy*” 1.574) passing through the gate of the sun disk (1.576) into the realm of various gods including seven snake-headed maidens (or *tychai*, 2.663-673) and seven bull-headed youths (or “pole lords,” 2.674-693), all stellar figures related to Egyptian cosmology, to consult the god Helios-Mithras.<sup>371</sup> Importantly, the vision of the sun disk here resembles *ph-ntr* bowl oracles that utilized painted scenes of the solar Re on the bottom of bowls to aid visualization. The “visualizations” are multi-sensory which intensified the inner experience rendering a more effective “spiritual exercise.” The supplicant is exhorted to “see” (in Greek, *opse*, “you will see,” *passim*)

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*Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). The section known as the “*Mithras Liturgy*” is PGM 4.475-820.

<sup>369</sup> A ritual that approaches the oracular deity directly allowing *autoptiken* (an “eye-witness account” as in the Thessalos vignette above).

<sup>370</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”*: Text, Translation and Commentary (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

<sup>371</sup> Betz, *Mithras Liturgy*, 174-180.

various images but also to feel sensations such as the quaking of thunder (“you will hear thundering and shaking in the surrounding realm...you will experience yourself being shaken,” 1.622-3).<sup>372</sup>

In addition to visualizations and imagined sensations, ritual techniques of the “*Mithras Liturgy*” include performative utterances (“I am going to envision with immortal eyes,” 1.516),<sup>373</sup> ritual gestures (“at once put your right finger on your mouth,” 1.557),<sup>374</sup> words and names of power (the often untranslatable *voces magicae, passim*), and breathing (“Draw in breath from the rays three times, drawing in as much as you can,” 1.538).<sup>375</sup> Performative utterances include identification with the source of creation (“Origin of my origin...first beginning of my beginning...,” 2.488-489),<sup>376</sup> identification with the five elements, and identification as a god (“I am PHEROURA MIOURI,” 1.724).<sup>377</sup> The visualizations, utterances, and attendant ritual actions reinforced the practitioners’ sense of being divine. Following the process of self-divinization in the “*Mithras Liturgy*” described above, the divination proper begins—but, becoming god-like was a precondition for receiving knowledge of the oracle. Again, in Norman Russell’s words, “to obtain an oracle directly from the god...can only be done if the human mind is raised to the level of the divine.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “αἰσθηθήσει ταπασσόμενον.”

<sup>373</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “κατοπτεύειν...ὄμμασι.”

<sup>374</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “δάκθλον ἐπὶ τὸ στόμα.”

<sup>375</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “ἀχτίνων πνεῦμα γ’ἀνασπῶν, ὃ δύνασαι.”

<sup>376</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “Γένεσις πρώτη τῆς ἐμῆς γενέσεως...ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐμῆς ἀρχῆς πρώτη.”

<sup>377</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “Ἐγὼ εἶμι φεροθρα μιουρι.”

<sup>378</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 50.

## Self-Identification with the God

Garth Fowden observes that “self-identification with a god...is an authentically Egyptian trait” that can be seen across Egyptian ritual texts from all periods.<sup>379</sup> Robert Ritner explains: “Identification of ritualist...and deity is fundamental to all Egyptian spells. The pattern is continued without break in the [*Papyri Graecae Magicae*], where the expression ‘I am (NN)’ is still usually written in Egyptian as *ANOK*.”<sup>380</sup> The pharaonic inscription on the statue of thirteenth-century Ramesside Prince Khaemwaset testifies to the antiquity of the notion: “He [Setne] hath caused thee to become great of form, he liveth through thee, O god, and thou livest through him.”<sup>381</sup> Later, in one *Papyri Graecae Magicae* love spell, we find two instances (cited previously) where divine identity is formed in order to empower the aim of the performer: “For you are I, and I am you; your name is mine, and mine is yours. For I am your image” and “I know you, Hermes, and you know me. / I am you, and you are I” (8.37-38, 49-50).<sup>382</sup>

One example, “Thanksgiving Prayer,” appears in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the Nag Hammadi codices.<sup>383</sup> While the “Thanksgiving

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<sup>379</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 26. Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3346.

<sup>380</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3346-3347. “NN” = “name of the deceased.” “ANOK” = “I am.” In this example, the practitioner identified with a divine, immortal ancestor.

<sup>381</sup> A.W. Shorter, “The statue of Khā’emuas in the British Museum,” in *Studies presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London 1932), 130.

<sup>382</sup> Betz, *PGM* trans. “σὺ γὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ σὺ, τὸ σὸν ὄνομα ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ ἐμὸν σὸν· ἐγὼ γὰρ εἶμι τὸ εἶδωλόν σου” and “οἶδά σε, Ἐρμῆ, καὶ σὺ ἐμέ. ἐγὼ εἶ<μι> σὺ καὶ σὺ ἐγώ.”

<sup>383</sup> The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices refuted “Festugiere’s contention that there was no hermetic community and that hermeticism was simply a literary phenomenon” in Shaw, “Hermetic Rebirth,” 2.

Prayer” is appended to a ritual in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, the ritual part is omitted in the Latin *Asclepius*, again calling into question the line that had been drawn between technical and philosophical Hermetica (see chapter 2). In the Nag Hammadi version, the prayer follows a rare Hermetic tractate, similar to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but also includes the trademark *voces magicae* or vocalic chant of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, perhaps a surviving bridge between philosophical and technical Hermetic text.<sup>384</sup>

Scholars have taken this as evidence of “a certain amount of sharing between Hermeticists and the magicians who produced the *Greek Magical Papyri*.”<sup>385</sup> The current consensus is that there was considerable overlap. The “Thanksgiving Prayer” also provides one of the best examples of *apathanatismos*—self-identification with a god while still embodied. In its *Papyri Graecae Magicae* form we find: “We rejoice because you showed yourself to us; we rejoice because while we are / [still] in bodies you deified us by the knowledge of who you are” (3.598-601).<sup>386</sup> Similarly, in the Latin *Asclepius* 41: “And we who are saved<sup>387</sup> by your power do indeed rejoice because you have show

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<sup>384</sup> Patricia Cox Miller write about the use of vocalic chant in the *PGM* in her essay, “In Praise of Nonsense”: “Clearly the vowels of the alphabet designate that point at which the human and divine worlds intersect, at least from the perspective of this text. To speak this language is not only to invoke the God; it is also to sound the depths of one’s own primal reality. These strings of vowels are hymnic recitations of praise to the God and to human Godlikeness.” *The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity: Essays in Imagination and Religion* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 224.

<sup>385</sup> William Grese, “Magic in Hellenistic Hermeticism,” in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Washington: London: Folger Shakespeare Library: Associated University Presses, 1988), 51-55.

<sup>386</sup> Betz, *PGM* trans. “χαίρομ[ε]ν, ὅτι σεαυτὸν ἡμῖν ἔδειξας, χαίρομεν, ὅτι ἐν πλάσμασιν ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἀπεθέωσας τῇ σεαυτοῦ γνώσει.”

<sup>387</sup> *Salvati* in Scott, *Hermetica* 1, p. 374. Scott offers a line-by-line comparison of the Greek *PGM* version with the Latin *Asclepius*.

yourself to us wholly. We rejoice that you have deigned to make us gods for eternity even while we depend on the body.”<sup>388</sup> In the *Nag Hammadi Codex* (6.7) in Coptic (though probably copied from the Greek), the parallel “Prayer of Thanksgiving” passage reads: “We rejoice, having been illuminated / by your knowledge. We rejoice / because you have shown us yourself. We rejoice / because while we were in (the) body, you have made us / divine through your knowledge.”<sup>389</sup> Iamblichus shares a similar understanding in *On the Mysteries*, his defense of theurgy and homage to the way of Hermes: “The benevolent and gracious gods shine their light generously on theurgists, calling their souls up to themselves, giving them unification, and accustoming them, while they are still in their bodies, to be detached from their bodies and turned to their eternal and noetic principle” (1.12).<sup>390</sup> The many examples of embodied personal divinity in our sources point to a basic precept in the Egyptian imagination.

## Conclusion

To access and understand the privileged knowledge the oracle provides, the practitioner must become like the source of the oracle in perspective. You must become godlike. Through a series of visualizations, ritual actions, and performative utterances— notably, an explicit statement of self-identification with a god, the practitioner of *heka*

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<sup>388</sup> Copenhaver, trans. “*Gaudemus quod te nobis ostenderit totum, gaudemus quod nos in corporibus sitos aeternitate <tua> fueris consecrare dignatus.*” Copenhaver suggests that *consecrare* indicates the “diffidence of the Latin translator about apotheosis,” 260.

<sup>389</sup> Brashler, trans.

<sup>390</sup> Shaw, trans. “οἱ θεοὶ τὸ φῶς ἐπιλάμπουσιν εὐμενεῖς ὄντες καὶ ἴλεω τοῖς θεουργοῖς, τὰς τε ψυχὰς αὐτῶν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς ἀνακαλούμενοι καὶ τὴν ἔνωσιν αὐταῖς τὴν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς χορηγοῦντες, ἐθίζοντές τε αὐτὰς καὶ ἔτι ἐν σώματι οὖσας ἀφίστασθαι τῶν σωμάτων, ἐπὶ δὲ τὴν αἰδίον καὶ νοητὴν αὐτῶν ἀρχὴν περιάγεσθαι.”

identifies as divine and therefore assumes the ability to understand the privileged knowledge about to be received. This is achieved through self-identification with the oracle's *ntrw*.

While the self-identification with the god in the “*Mithras Liturgy*” is explicit, self-identification with the *ntrw* in the earlier public festival *ph-ntr* oracles is implicit, by virtue of personal piety. The intimacy of the personal relationship that “shades into self-identification” through word, visualization, or offering—whereby the deity is understood to reside “within the heart” as we saw on the prayer ostrakon—is a participation, a form of sharing the powers of the deity by internalizing those powers. Public ritual has a personal, inner aspect. The tendency toward using self-identification with a god while embodied as a technology of self—*apathanatismos*—in traditional Egyptian temple thought and cultic practice becomes fully expressed in the *Hermetica*, an innovation later adopted by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Iamblichus who aligned themselves with Egyptian intellection tradition.

We have fully explored the imaginal mechanism—spiritual or imaginative technologies of self-transformation—in previous chapters. With all his emphasis on the “error” of idolatry, Augustine seems anxiously unaware that the Hermetists who were “making gods” (*De civitate Dei* 8.23) were also making themselves into gods. Although Augustine cites the Latin *Asclepius* at length, but he does not bring the following line to our attention: “Not only is he god he also creates gods.”<sup>391</sup> From the point of view of the Hermetists, “[t]his human fashioning of the earthly gods far from diminishing their

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<sup>391</sup> Cf. *Nag Hammadi Codex* 6.8 and *Asclep.* 23. See Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 80; *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson and Richard Smith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 333.

stature only points to the divine nature of human beings themselves.”<sup>392</sup> The Hermetists held that a person, through philosophical practice and ritual enactments, could achieve *apathanatismos*, could become immortal and divine while still in a body. But the source of this perspective on the self “was probably not earlier Greek philosophical schools, but such Egyptian *hry-tpw* as Chaeremon, Anebo, Bitys, or Orion, as expressly claimed by the Neoplatonists themselves.”<sup>393</sup>

A late fifth-century Egyptian teacher at an elite Alexandria philosophical school, surely familiar with the *Hermetica*,<sup>394</sup> expressed traditional Egyptian popular cultic piety when he “went out to an Isis temple in the village of Menouthis for assistance in procreation.”<sup>395</sup> His understanding of *apathanatismos* as the aim of the Mithras oracle was similar to his understanding of the *ph-ntr* with Isis: the purpose in both cases was “to obtain an oracle directly from the god, which can only be done if the human mind is raised to the level of the divine.”<sup>396</sup> That fashioning of personal divinity—a sacred self—occurs through an imaginative exercise of self-transformation placed upon an inner landscape of cosmic proportions.

Let us return to Thessalos, our Greek doctor who sought Egyptian wisdom. He won his direct divination with Asclepius but he doesn’t tell us exactly how the direct divination was performed except that he was “led through the god’s secret names”—

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<sup>392</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 47.

<sup>393</sup> *hry-tpw* is the plural form. Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3371.

<sup>394</sup> Ritner, “Magical Practice,” 3371.

<sup>395</sup> Frankfurter, “Religious Practice and Piety,” 331.

<sup>396</sup> Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 50.

presumably a series of *voces magicae* (*Thessalos* 1. 23).<sup>397</sup> But we might know a little more.

After the main part of the “*Mithras Liturgy*” oracle ends, optional variations on the rite are provided that involve additional participants: “[I]f you wish to show [another], after you judge whether his worth as a man is secure, handling the occasion as though in the immortalization ritual you yourself were being judged in his place, recite for him the first prayer, of which the beginning is “First origin of my origin...[a]nd say the successive things...over his head, in a soft voice, so that he many not hear...” (2.739-747).<sup>398</sup>

It is quite likely that *Thessalos*’s Egyptian *hry-tp* took this option—being uncomfortable with the alien *Thessalos*’s bold wish for a direct divination and with the danger involved in performing an illegal act—instead himself performing the prerequisite self-divinization—using a rite similar to the “*Mithras Liturgy*” on behalf of his client.<sup>399</sup> But, *Thessalos* seems to have secured a bit of divinity for himself as well. Left alone in the room, *Asclepius* says to him: “Oh blessed *Thessalos*, attaining honour in the presence

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<sup>397</sup> Friedrich, trans. “προαγαγὼν διὰ τῶν ἀπορρήτων ὀνομάτων τὸν θεὸν.”

<sup>398</sup> Betz, *ML* trans. “ὡς σὺ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ χρινόμενος ἐν τῷ ἀπαθανατισμῷ.”

<sup>399</sup> J.Z. Smith argues against the standard interpretation that the priests’ hesitance to meet *Thessalos*’ demand for a “face to face” encounter with the deity: “The *propeteia* of *Thessalos* does not consist of his inquiry into a forbidden subject which, if exposed, might make the priests liable to prosecution; rather it is his faith in the continued efficacy of magic itself—a faith which the priests had evidently lost.” Smith, *Map*, 179. Interestingly, *Thessalos*’ rash demand, *monos pros monon* (“face to face”), recalls similar phrases in Neoplatonic theurgy. See Plotinus, *Ennead*, 6.9.11; Porphyry, *De abstinentia*, 2.49; Proclus, *In Timaeus*, 1.212, 24; et cetera.

of the god. As time passes, when your successes become known, men will worship you as a god” (*Thessalos* 1. 25).<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Friedrich, trans. “ὦ μακάριε παρὰ θεῶν τυχὼν τιμῆς θεσσαλέ, προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου καὶ γνωσθέντων τῶν σῶν ἐπιτευγμάτων ὡς θεὸν ἄνθρωποι σε θρησκέ<σ>ουσιν.”

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PHILOSOPHER IN LATE ANTIQUE ALEXANDRIA

This chapter will present a “snapshot” of the intellectual and social life of the late antique Neoplatonic classroom by focusing on one moment recalled in the sources below concerning the family of Horapollon and an incident involving the student Paralius.

There is much more that could be said about the social life of the Neoplatonists. Richard Lim’s work on public disputation in late antiquity offers an important qualification for my history of ideas approach particularly in regard to the theme of the Neoplatonic and Hermetic pursuit of a “*noesis*” beyond “*logos*” that appears throughout this dissertation. Lim argues that late antiquity heralded a devaluation of dialectic as a method for arriving at truth and legitimizing authority. He writes:

An intensified advocacy for apophatic simplicity as a paradigmatic virtue was but one of the many results of this confluence of competing interests. Many individuals and groups sought to domesticate the perceived threat of dissensus in public disputing, choosing from various ideological strategies and cultural values to mobilize hierarchical form of authority against a culture that validated individualistic claims and rational argumentation.<sup>401</sup>

In this chapter, I hope to strike a balance between reading the sources for the experiences they may have engendered (i.e. personal divinity) and presenting something close to an emblematic portrayal of the life of the philosophers—Neoplatonic and Hermetic descents of the *hry-tp* discussed in chapter 3—in late antiquity on the ground.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>402</sup> Robert Lamberton offers an example of reading the Neoplatonists not only for their philosophical value but for what they tell us about daily life in the past: “The *Life of Plotinus* provides important support for the notion that students of philosophy typically shopped around, listening to teacher after teacher in one center of learning, and then in some cases moving on to other centers. There is little doubt that, by the year 300, this sort of philosophical odyssey of inquiry had become a *topos*, a frequently repeated motif suitable to the characterization of the restless, young intellectual in his thirst for

In the 460s, despite a history of occasional persecution--mostly notably the attack on the Serapeum in 391 and the murder of Hypatia in 415—Neoplatonism was “a generally accepted way of thinking and living in the Eastern Mediterranean; moreover, as epitomized by Proclus and Athens, it was a recognizably Greek way.”<sup>403</sup> Yet, from its Alexandrian beginnings it incorporated cult practices of Hellenized Egypt and Syria in tandem with the ideas and prescriptions of Plato and Pythagoras. Adherents considered Neoplatonism, in the words of Hierocles, the “purified philosophy of Plato.”<sup>404</sup> Neoplatonism was more than a literary tradition reinvented in the Second Sophistic for elite imperial unity as the rhetoricians and grammarians in Alexandria might have led their Christian students to believe.

### **The Family of Horapollon**

The Alexandrian teacher Horapollon is an interesting case who opens doors to a further consideration of resilient heritages, continuities, cultural exchange, and strategies of resistance. Until recently scholarship on the effect of Hellenism on Egypt has been viewed reductively as “colonizer versus colonized.” More recently scholars have begun to consider a more complicated encounter where native constituencies appropriated elements of Hellenism to form a “subtle interpenetration” in order to maintain a cultural identity distinct from Hellenism (see chapter 3 for detailed discussion of Greek and

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knowledge and truth.” Robert Lamberton, “The Schools of Platonic Philosophy of the Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Biographies,” in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Yun Lee Too, Leiden: Brill, 2001), 438.

<sup>403</sup> Polymnia Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 113 (1993): 1.

<sup>404</sup> Fowden, “Pagan Holy Man,” 33.

Egyptian interactions).<sup>405</sup> Assimilation has two sides. The “other” native cultural identity—the Egyptian priest-philosopher (or *hry-tp*, see chapter 3)—became romanticized, endowed with “alien wisdom.” On the other hand, especially in Roman times, it was feared for its “potential to subvert society and cosmos.”<sup>406</sup>

Horapollon himself emphasized the Hellenistic culture of his upbringing, but Damascius describes his father Asclepiades and uncle Heraiscus “earnestly pursuing the...traditions of their [native Egyptian] heritage with religious passion...” (*Isidori*, fr. 174).<sup>407</sup> Like many families of the fourth century tied to temple cult, Horapollon’s attempted to preserve Egyptian cultural identity while gaining stature as Hellenic intellectuals. The *Corpus Hermeticum*, material that would have been well known to Horapollon and the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, is heir to at least some Egyptian esoteric teachings. Garth Fowden has argued:

Our philosophical texts imply an actual historical milieu that was dedicated to the spiritual life. Instruction and initiation were group experiences, even when at the highest levels, they involved only the spiritual guide and a solitary pupil; and those who participated in these encounters instinctively expressed their solidarity and joy through prayer and hymnody, and in such comradely gestures as embraces and the sharing of food.<sup>408</sup>

While the tone of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is overwhelmingly contemplative and dialectic, it also has some philological connections with the theurgic *Papyri Graecae Magicae* of the same era. Horapollon, Heraiscus, and Asclepiades can be seen to

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<sup>405</sup> Watts, *City and School*, 163.

<sup>406</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 164.

<sup>407</sup> Frankfurter trans. in *Roman Egypt*.

<sup>408</sup> Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 149.

negotiate the intersection between Hellenic and Egyptian intellectual traditions and identities evident in Alexandrian Neoplatonism and Graeco-Egyptian Hermeticism.

Horapollon shared a complex at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria with his father and uncle as well as with other notable Neoplatonist teachers including Ammonius Hermiae, Isidore, and Asclepiodotus. Watts imagines lively halls providing a stage for interscholastic rivalry where traditionally-minded students “could argue that Plato agreed with the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world, [while] Christian students could counter that Plato’s *Timaeus* seems to say very much the opposite,” where traditional cultists would talk about “trips to the shrine of Isis in Menouthis, [while] Christians [would speak] of miraculous cures at the shrine of St. Cyrus.”<sup>409</sup> Nonetheless, the vibrant heterogeneity of the Neoplatonic classroom and, perhaps, the growing exuberance of Horapollon’s interest in traditional cult, proved too much for the young Paralius, a new student from Aphrodisius sent to be groomed, most likely, for an imperial post. After an unsatisfying encounter at the suburban Menouthis shrine of Isis, Paralius broke the taboo against disloyalty to alma mater and is beaten by his peers. Zachariaias, a leading anti-Chalcedonian monk at Enaton aided by “schoolyard evangelicals”—*philoponoi*—recast the “punishment of an obnoxious teenager into a religious persecution.”<sup>410</sup> Hearing the complaint, Patriarch Peter Mongus seized the opportunity to heal a long “confessional dissonance” with Enaton by inciting an anti-pagan riot in 486 CE that led to the sacking of the Isis shrine. Horapollon fled temporarily with aid of *praefectus* Entrechius; Neoplatonic headmaster Ammonius Hermiae agreed to curtail

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<sup>409</sup> Edward Jay Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>410</sup> Watts, *Riot in Alexandria*, 11.

religious instruction, end ritual sacrifice, and remove the theurgic *Chaldean Oracles* from the curriculum.<sup>411</sup>

## A Philosophical History

Damascius (458 – after 538), the last scholarch of the Neoplatonic school in Athens, composed the *Life of Isidore* during the first quarter of the sixth century after he had become head of the Academy. An “irreverent hagiography,” it describes the intellectual elite in Athens, Alexandria, and Aphrodisias in the tradition of Neoplatonic aretalogies.<sup>412</sup> Horapollon’s grandfather, Horapollon the Elder, was a cosmopolitan and thoroughly Hellenic intellectual who embraced the Classical canon at the Alexandria *mouseia*.<sup>413</sup> Damascius describes the elder’s sons, the divine Heraiscus and erudite Asclepiades, as more interested in reviving an alternative “Egyptian canon” in the context of Iamblichan theurgy: “But by nature Heraiscus had a more godlike form in appearance, but the one who was more knowledgeable and skillful in the wisdom of the Egyptians (was) Asclepiades, because the latter had been spending so much time studying Egyptian wisdom” (Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, fr. 161).<sup>414</sup> Heraiscus explored sacred spaces and rites: “and his soul on every occasion dwelt in holy sanctuaries of initiation, practicing not only

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<sup>411</sup> Watts, *City and School*, 224. The *Chaldean Oracles* are similar to the Hermetic material, of unknown origin. They were referred to by Neoplatonists including Emperor Julian. See *Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Edited and translated by Ruth Dorothy Majercik. Westbury: Prometheus Trust, 2013.

<sup>412</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 2.

<sup>413</sup> Fowden, “Pagan Holy Man,” 46.; Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 185.

<sup>414</sup> My trans. “τὴν μὲν φύσιν θεοειδέστερος ἦν Ἡραῖσκος, ὁ δὲ τὴν Αἰγυπτίων σοφίαν δαημονέστερος, ὁ Ἀσκληπιάδης, ἅτε τοσοῦτον χρόνον οὗτος μὲν τῇ Αἰγυπτίων προσδιατρίβων.”

his native rites in Egypt but also those of the other (nations)” (fr. 174).<sup>415</sup> Heraiscus was known for his spiritual discernment: “Heraiscus had a natural ability for distinguishing between sacred statues that were living and those that were not. For just as he saw one, his heart was struck with divine power and he was startled in body and soul, as though fallen upon by the god” (fr. 174).<sup>416</sup>

Asclepiades, on the other hand, “reared himself more in the Egyptian books [and] was more precisely informed of their native theology” (fr. 161).<sup>417</sup> In the spirit of Neoplatonic ecumenism, he sought a “harmony of all discourses about the gods” (fr. 161)<sup>418</sup> and “wrote a treatise encompassing the knowledge of the primeval Egyptians” (fr. 161).<sup>419</sup> Damascius was familiar with the written work of Heraiscus and Asclepiades. He understood the Egyptian convention of dividing the cosmos into traits of many gods as a intellectual gift to the Neoplatonists: “[I]t is possible for those who wish to learn by reading their writings, and I speak of the written work of Heraiscus concerning the Egyptian teaching in general (that was) written for Proclus the philosopher, and that of the Egyptians with the other theologians that was begun to be written by Asclepiades”

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<sup>415</sup> My trans. “*ἐν ἀδύτοις ἐκάστοτε καὶ τελεστήριον ἐνδιδαιτᾶσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν, οὗτι κατ’ Αἴγυπτον μόνην κινουῦντι τὰς πατρίους τελετάς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀλλοδαπῆς.*”

<sup>416</sup> My trans. “*Ἡραῖσκος αὐτοφυῆς ἐγένετο διαγνώμων τῶν τε ζώντων καὶ τῶν μὴ ζώντων ἱερῶν ἀγαλμάτων. εὐθύς γὰρ ἐμβλέπων ἐπιτρόσκετο τὴν καρδίαν ὑπὸ τοῦ θειασμοῦ καὶ ἀνεπήδα τό τε σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ὥσπερ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ κατάσχετος.*”

<sup>417</sup> My trans. “*Ἀσκληπιάδης ἐπιπλεῖον ἐν τοῖς Αἴγυπτίους βιβλίους ἀνατραφεὶς ἀκριβέστερος ἦν ἀμφὶ θεολογίαν τὴν πάτριον.*”

<sup>418</sup> My trans. “*τῶν θεολογιῶν ἀπασῶν τὴν συμφωνίαν.*”

<sup>419</sup> My trans. “*καὶ συγγραφὴν δὲ ἔγραψεν Αἴγυπτίων ὀγνύγων πράγματα περιέχουσαν.*”

(Damascius, *De Principiis* 3.3).<sup>420</sup> When Heraiscus died, Asclepiades, who had some knowledge of traditional funerary rites, prepared the body with a shroud when “at once hieroglyphs shone with light on all over the cloth, and around them were seen apparitions befitting a god.” (Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, fr. 174).<sup>421</sup> On the miraculous circumstances of his birth appropriate to a Neoplatonic saint: “[H]e is said to have been born from his mother holding the silencing finger up to his lips, like the Egyptians tell in the sacred story about Oros [Horus] and before Oros about Helios” (fr.174).<sup>422</sup> The Hellenized “Oros” descends from the child form of the Egyptian sun god Horus, becoming Harpocrates in the Hellenistic period. Harpocrates is often portrayed with a finger in his mouth.<sup>423</sup> The allusion to the Egyptian “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony used to “animate” devotional statuary, would have been obvious to the Egyptian theurgists.<sup>424</sup>

Horapollon does not fare as well as his father and uncle in Damascius’ view.

Heraiscus had predicted that Horapollon would eventually convert to Christianity:

“Horapollon did not have the character of a philosopher, but kept hidden the notion about

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<sup>420</sup> My trans. “ὡς ἔξεστι μαθεῖν ἐκείνων συγγράμμασιν ἐντυχοῦσι τοῖς βοθλομένοις, λέγω δὲ τῇ Ἡραῖσκου ἀναγραφῇ τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου καθόλου λόγου πρὸς τὸν Πρόκλον γραθείση τὸν φιλόσοφον καὶ τῇ ἀρξαμένη γράφεσθαι συμφωνία ὑπὸ Ἀσκλνπιάδου τῶν Αἰγυπτίων πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλοθς θεολόγους.”

<sup>421</sup> My trans. “αὐτίκα φωτὶ κατελάμπετο πανταχῇ τῶν σινδόνων ἀπόρρητα διαγράμματα, καὶ περὶ αὐτὰ καθεωρᾶτο φασμάτων εἶδη θεοπρεπῆ.”

<sup>422</sup> My trans. “λέγεται γὰρ κατελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μητρὸς ἐπὶ τοῖς χεῖλεσιν ἔχων τὸν κατασιγάζοντα δάκτυλον, οἷον Αἰγύπτιοι μυθολογοῦσι γενέσθαι τὸν Ὁρον καὶ πρὸ τοῦ Ὁρου τὸν Ἥλιον.”

<sup>423</sup> George Hart, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 88.

<sup>424</sup> Ann Macy Roth, “Fingers, Stars, and the ‘Opening of the Mouth’: The Nature and Function of the *ntrwj*-Blades,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* v. 79 (1993): 57-79.

God that he held” (fr. 314, 317).<sup>425</sup> In the Syriac *Life of Severus*, Zacharias Scholasticus introduces Horapollon as a grammarian, “a man who was a specialist in his art and a splendid teacher” but “also a pagan, bewildered by demons and magic” (15).<sup>426</sup> Just before Paralius led the mob to sack the Menouthis shrine, Horapollon escaped temporarily.<sup>427</sup> Zacharias describes the astonishment of the pagans when the Christians survived the night without divine retribution (32).<sup>428</sup> Soon afterward, “all the people of Alexandria, at the time of gathering for service, were shouting many words against the “pagans” and against Horapollon, that he should not be called Horapollon but ‘Psychepollon,’ which means ‘destroyer of souls.’” (32).<sup>429</sup>

The year of the riot Bishop Peter Mongus succeeded in closing down Horapollon’s school of rhetoric in all of its real or supposed theurgic frenzy. The

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<sup>425</sup> My translation. “ὁ δὲ Ὁραπόλλων οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἥθος φιλόσοφος, ἀλλὰ τι καὶ ἐν βυθῶ τῆς περὶ θεοῦ δόξης ὧν ἦδει ἀποκρυπτόμενος.”

<sup>426</sup> Ambjorn, trans.

<sup>427</sup> Alan Cameron criticizes scholars who argue that an organized “pagan resistance” existed in late antique Christian Egypt. See appendix C. The misunderstanding, in his view, is based on a reading of sources like Damascius’ *Life of Isidore* and Zacharias Scholasticus’ biography of Bishop Severus of Antioch. Although he acknowledges Syranius’ statement (“One could call us fighters since we defend the best and most beautiful of philosophies from the charges brought against it,” *Metaphysica* 91.8), he also points out that the Neoplatonists were as antagonistic with their philosophical colleagues as Christian thinkers. Acknowledging the survival of traditional pre-Christina thought and cult in late antiquity, he still questions interpretations that equate survival with resistance. In his view, too much credence is given to the testimony of Paralius in Zacharias. He argues that the “paganism” of the poets (and philosophers) that seemed to “flower” in a Christianized late antique Egypt is more literary than cultic. Christian fanatics, he claims, were unable to tell the difference between cult statues and mythological art, and were “probably raiding the sculpture gardens of well-to-do Christians.” *Wandering poets and other essays on late Greek literature and philosophy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 160.

<sup>428</sup> Ambjorn, trans.

<sup>429</sup> Ambjorn, trans.

grammarian was arrested with his uncle Heraiscus and tortured by Nicodemes, a Roman Christian Praetorian prefect under Emperor Zeno. When they were released, Horapollon left Alexandria and Heraiscus went into hiding in the house of a Christian doctor named Gessius where he fell ill and died. Asclepiades joined him shortly thereafter.<sup>430</sup> Horapollon returned to Alexandria to take over the school after having accepted Christianity. Such was the fate of these “Hellenizing priests who gave the cities’ philosophers the illusion of continuity with an Egyptian religious ‘essence.’”<sup>431</sup> But, was it an illusion? Let us now turn to the Egyptianizing elements in Neoplatonist writings as well as the Hermetic texts said to be the product of Egyptian “priest-philosophers.”

### **Representing Egypt**

The Pythagorean tradition “laid great emphasis on the sage’s duty both to honor the gods himself, and to ensure that the public cults were conducted in a fit and becoming manner.”<sup>432</sup> In *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch writes that Pythagoras learned the use of symbols from Egypt.<sup>433</sup> Plato in *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* demonstrated high esteem for the oral wisdom of the Egyptians. The Egyptian Plotinus considered hieroglyphs to be evidence of a parallel, if not original, theory of Platonic Forms: “[B]y drawing devotional

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<sup>430</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 20.; Watts, *City and School*, 225.

<sup>431</sup> Frankfurter, “Consequences of Hellenism,” 170.

<sup>432</sup> Fowden, “Pagan Holy Man,” 52.

<sup>433</sup> Mark Edwards, trans., *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000): 68.

images and inscribing in their temples one image to each thing, they created a way of understanding” (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 5.8.6).<sup>434</sup>

Damascius also portrayed the Egyptians as seminal contributors to Neoplatonism: “Egyptian philosophers in our own day have discovered and brought out the truth hidden in certain Egyptian understandings, so that with them the unique principle of the all (One) was celebrated as unknowable darkness.” (Damascius, *De Principiis* 17.124.4).<sup>435</sup>

Writing in the guise of an Egyptian *hry-tp* in *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus responds to an attack from Porphyry. He “allies himself with the ancient holy ranks of the Egyptian caste, and reminds us of the tradition that the Greek philosophers (including Pythagoras, Plato, Democritus, Eudoxus and ‘many others’) first learnt their wisdom from the Egyptians.”<sup>436</sup> Defending his theurgical innovation, Iamblichus responds:

First, I would like to interpret to you the type of theology (used by) the Egyptians. For these people, imitating the nature of the universe and the demiurgic power of the gods, display certain signs of mystical, arcane and invisible notions by means of symbols, just as nature copies the unseen principles in visible forms through some mode of symbolism, and the creative activity of the gods shows the truth of the forms in visible signs (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 7.1).<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Hadot, trans. “ἀγάλματα δὲ γράψαντες καὶ ἐν ἑκάστον ἐκάστου πράγματος ἄγαλμα ἐντυπώσαντες ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς τὴν ἐκείνου οὐ διέξοδον ἐμφῆναι.”

<sup>435</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, trans. “οἱ δὲ Αἰγύπτιοι καθ’ ἡμᾶς φιλόσοφοι γεγονότες ἐξένεγκαν αὐτῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν κεκρυμμένην εὐρόντες ἐν αἰγύπτιοις δὴ τισι λόγοις, ὡς εἶη κατ’ αὐτοὺς ἢ μὲν | μία τῶν ὄλων ἀρχὴ Σκότος ἄγνωστον ὑμνοθμὲν.”

<sup>436</sup> Emma C. Clarke, *Iamblichus’ De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous* (Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate, 2001): 8.

<sup>437</sup> My trans. “πρότερον δὲ βούλομαι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων τὸν τρόπον τῆς θεολογίας διερμηνεῦσαι. ὅτι γὰρ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ παντός καὶ τὴν δημιουργίαν | τῶν θεῶν μιμούμενοι καὶ αὐτοὶ τῶν μυστικῶν καὶ ἀποκεκρυμμένων καὶ ἀφανῶν νοήσεων εἰκόνας διὰ συμβόλων ἐκφαίνουσιν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ φύσις τοῖς ἐμφανέσιν εἶδσι τοὺς ἀφανεῖς λόγους διὰ συμβόλων τρόπον τινὰ ἀπετυπώσατο, ἢ δὲ τῶν θεῶν δημιουργία τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν ἰδεῶν διὰ τῶν φανερῶν εἰκόνων ὑπεγράφατο.”

Iamblichus's idea that theurgy was needed to surpass the limits of purely philosophical thinking was a break from Porphyry and Plotinus. Eunapius of Sardis (ca. 349 – after 414) uses the term “theurgy” in his *Lives of the Philosophers* where he presents it as a branch of the *paideia* of a philosopher. Referring to Porphyry's accomplishments, Eunapius includes “theurgic rites” (*Vitai Sophistarum* 6.2, 2-3).<sup>438</sup> Damascius considered Iamblichus an “innovator,” but with some reservations. To many within and beyond Neoplatonist circles, Iamblichus's emphasis on Egyptian, Orphic, and Chaldean cultic practice appeared to verge on illicit *magia* even though it was a reasonable extension of Hellenic ecumenism. Using the symbols that the gods have embedded in the world, the Iamblichan theurgist “made use many of the invocations, including *voces magicae*, and many of the materials, of the ‘vulgar’ ... but he [used] them with a proper understanding of how they work.”<sup>439</sup> While, “deference to Egyptian wisdom [...] was already a *topos* in the Platonic dialogues where ‘Egypt’ functioned as an ideal culture against which Plato measured his own,” Iamblichus's “Egyptomania” has been overstated.<sup>440</sup> Iamblichan theurgy, especially translated and adapted by Alexandrian teachers like Horapollon, probably did reflect genuine Egyptian cult practices.

I will turn my attention now briefly to examples from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Papyri Graecae Magicae* that suggest at least a bidirectional influence. The following excerpt from a spell clearly borrows from the “thanksgiving” or “spiritual sacrifices”

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<sup>438</sup> My trans. “θεουργὸν τελεταῖς.”

<sup>439</sup> Dillon, “Iamblichus,” 35.

<sup>440</sup> Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 238-239.

found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Nag Hammadi codices, and both Neoplatonic and Christian discourse. It also mirrors Neoplatonism's concern with incorporate salvation:

“We give you thanks to you, psyche, with each heart stretched out to you, unutterable name honored by the addressing of god and blessed by the holiness of god, for to everyone and to everything you have been fatherly / goodwill, affection, friendship and sweetest power, give us charisma of mind, speech, knowledge; intellect so that we might understand you, speech so that we might call upon you, knowledge so that we might know you. We rejoice because you showed yourself to us; we rejoice because while we are / presently embodied you deified us by the knowledge of yourself” (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* 3.591-601).<sup>441</sup>

Another example from the *Corpus Hermeticum* portrays a student of the Graeco-Roman hybrid Thoth-Hermes or Hermes Trismegistus, who ironically warns his reader about the deficiencies of the Greek language in expressing Egyptian wisdom:

“[I]t will be more obscure (he explained) when the Greeks later desire to translate our language to their own and thus produce in writing the greatest distortion and obscurity. But this discourse, expressed in our paternal language, keeps clear the meaning of the words. The making of the sound of Egyptian words have in themselves the energy of the objects they speak of” (*Corpus Hermeticum* 16.1-2).<sup>442</sup>

Greek readers would find reinforcement of the idea of a deeper Egyptian source in Neoplatonism. These texts served to authorize and sacralize the Egyptian philosopher as well as the broader Neoplatonic intellectual community.

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<sup>441</sup> My trans. “χάριν σοι οἶδαμεν, ψυχῆ, κατὰ καρδίαν πρὸς σὲ ἀνατεταμένεν, ὄνομα τετιμημένον | τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ προσηγορία καὶ εὐλογούμενον τῆ τοῦ | θεοῦ ὀσιότητι, ἢ πρὸς πάντα καὶ πρὸς πάντα πατρικὴν || εὐνοίαν καὶ στοργὴν καὶ φιλίαν καὶ ἐπιγλυκυτάτην ἐνέργειαν εδείξω, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν νοῦν, | λόγον, γνῶσιν. νοῦν μὲν, ἵνα σε νοήσωμεν, λόγον | δέ, ἵνα σε ἐπικαλέσωμεν, γνῶσιν, ἵνα σε ἐπιγνώσωμεν. χαίρομεν, ὅτι ἐν πλάσμασιν ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἀπεθέωσας τῆ σεαυτοῦ γνώσει.”

<sup>442</sup> My trans. “καὶ ἔτι ἀσαφεστέρα (φανήσεται) τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὕστερον βοθηθέντων τὴν ἡμετέραν διάλεκτον εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν μεθερμηνεύσαι, ὅπερ ἔσται τῶν γεγραμμένων μεγίστη διαστροφή τε καὶ ἀσάφεια. ὁ δὲ λόγος τῆ πατρῴα διαλέκτω ἐρμηνεθόμενος ἔχει σαφῆ τὸν τῶν λόγων νοῦν. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς φωνῆς ποιὸν...καὶ ἡ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων δύναμις ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἔχει τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῶν λεγομένων.”

## After the Riot

The Alexandrian philosopher would eventually become a casualty of Christian aggression. Horapollon became Christian. Damascius despises Horapollon for his “conversion” (under torture) but perhaps, as Athanassiadi suggests, this once “combative spirit had been worn away by a psychological war of attrition which lasted too long.”<sup>443</sup> His uncle Heraiscus, who had raised him, was dead. His father and teacher also. His wife took the household goods and departed with her lover. Perhaps, the “fortunes of his professional and domestic life thus seemed to combine against any hope of peace and happiness.”<sup>444</sup> The vitality of fifth century Alexandrian Neoplatonism was, in part, “the expected product of a world which had endorsed intolerance.”<sup>445</sup> While a self-serving “bricolage” and a nostalgic grasp at recalling an earlier authority was surely at play, the material that the ecumenical intellectuals had at their disposal in Egypt—as heirs to traditional cultic thought—was also at hand. At the very least, the family of Horapollon worked to expand the preexisting Egyptianizing elements in Neoplatonism as well as its practical application through theurgic ritual.

Just as we see new ideological movements invoking authentic pasts, Neoplatonists like Horapollon appropriated the language, rituals, and monuments of traditional Egyptian cult to bolster the sense of authenticity and authority of their “theosophy” and in opposition to Christianity. Identity connects as much as it

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<sup>443</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 21.

<sup>444</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 21.

<sup>445</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 12.

differentiates, it depends on “others” and responds to them.<sup>446</sup> More than a narrative constituent in a literary world, the material and documentary record portrays identity as negotiable currency in social power relationships.<sup>447</sup> Through the choices and actions of Horapollon and his family, Alexandria, ‘the city of foreigners’, for a short time may have been “vindicated in Egyptian eyes and was even viewed as the very epitome of Egyptianism.”<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Erich S. Gruen, ed., *Cultural Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 1.

<sup>447</sup> Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, eds. *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 8.

<sup>448</sup> Athanassiadi, “Persecution and Response,” 17.

## CHAPTER 5

### ISIS, THE *CULTUS* OF SELF, AND THE *GENIUS* OF APULEIUS

Shortly after his initiation as a priest of Isis, Lucius speaks these words to the goddess: “I shall store your divine countenance and sacred godhead in the secret places of my heart, forever guarding it and picturing it to myself” *Intra pectoris mei secreta*, “the secret places of my heart” (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.25). The word “secret” derives from the Latin *secerno*, meaning that which has been “set apart.” Lucius “sets apart” his heart, his deepest knowing. This line roundly echoes the words that Isis imparted in the dream vision promising Lucius “salvation” from his asinine fate: “You will clearly remember and keep forever sealed deep in your heart the fact that the rest of your life’s course is pledged to me until the very limit of your last breath.” *Penita mente*, “deep in your heart,” which can also be rendered as “in the innermost part of the mind” (11.6). When we read *The god of Socrates*, these secret places of the heart, these innermost parts of the mind—claimed by the goddess in *Metamorphoses*—shift slightly in meaning and location.

This chapter explores how Apuleius’s philosophical work, *The god of Socrates*, informs his portrayal of the Isis Cult in his second-century Latin novel, *Metamorphoses*. In doing so, I hope to complicate our understanding of the Isis cult as portrayed in *Metamorphoses* and to offer some thoughts about the construction of the “sacred power” and what I am calling the “sacred self,” arguing that the self is the source of sacred power to achieve personal divinity in *Metamorphoses* even though it appears that Isis is that source.

To some extent, this will be a Platonic reading of Apuleius’s novel, a point of view that a number of scholars beginning with Filippo Beroaldo in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and

more recently, Thibau, DeFilippo, Moreschini, Dillon, Schlam, and Walsh to name a few—have entertained, at least to some extent, particularly in regard to the embedded “Cupid and Psyche” tale in Books 4 through 6.<sup>449</sup> Acknowledging the Platonic themes at play, Nancy Shumate writes: “The well-documented syncretistic tendencies of the age make a fusion of Platonic philosophy and Isiac religion not at all strange in a text from the imperial period; Plutarch’s treatise *On Isis and Osiris* makes this very clear.”<sup>450</sup> Recently Friedmann Drews offers a Platonic reading using Apuleius’s “daemonology” from *The god of Socrates* to explain the problem of the relationship between the Isis and Osiris initiations in Book 11, the so-called “Isis Book.”<sup>451</sup> What hasn’t been done is to apply Apuleius’s daemonology—in particular his theory of the personal *daemon*—to the revelation of Isis. This application of “daemon” theory is not arbitrary in my reading. Rather *Metamorphoses* explicitly invites it. I bring four modern perspectives into play in order to suggest another way to think about the role of selves in the construction of the “sacred” that helps us understand how Late Antique people became divine.

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<sup>449</sup> More recently, see Claude Moreschini, *Apuleius and the Metamorphosis of Platonism* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015); Richard Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Alexander Kirichenko, “*Asinus Philosophans*: Platonic Philosophy and the Prologue to Apuleius' ‘Golden Ass,’” *Mnemosyne*. 61, no. 1 (2008): 89-107.

<sup>450</sup> Nancy Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>451</sup> Friedmann Drews, “A Platonic Reading of the Isis Book,” in *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses, Book XI: The Isis Book*, ed. Wytse Hette Keulen (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 517 – 528.

## The God of Socrates

In *The god of Socrates*, Apuleius elaborates on Plato's idea of the *daimonion* (in Latin, *daemon*), the personal divine voice or guardian that advised Socrates, a favorite topic of writers of the Greek Second Sophistic. Apuleius lays out a taxonomy of being consisting of the "highest, intermediate, and lowest" (Apuleius, *De deo Socrates* 115), the highest status reserved for the immortal gods and the lowest for humans. The intermediate beings are *daemones*: intermediary powers, beings in substance and habitation somewhere between gods and humans, closer to the air.<sup>452</sup> Their job is to deliver prayers to the gods. These more or less invisible beings have "no earthy solidity which can occupy the field of our vision...the rays of our gaze are let through by their loose texture" (144).<sup>453</sup> Active imagination is required to "see" them: "Come then, let us shape in our minds and imaginatively create a kind of bodily texture..." (140).<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> In his study on the matter, physics, and biology of demons in late antiquity, Gregory A. Smith notes: "Being invisible is also not the same as being a metaphor." "How Thin is a Demon?" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.4 (2008): 482.

<sup>453</sup> Harrison, trans. "*quod nulla in illis terrena soliditas locum luminis occuparit, quae nostris oculis possit obsistere, qua soliditate necessario offensa acies inmoretur, sed fila corporum possident rara et splendida et tenuia usque adeo ut radios omnis nostri tuoris et raritate transmittant et splendore reverberent et subtilitate frustrentur.*"

<sup>454</sup> Harrison, trans. "*Cedo igitur mente formemus et gignamus animo id genus corporum texta.*" Interestingly, Gregory A. Smith comments: "Demons with superfine bodies fit but poorly into a cosmos supposedly characterized by a sharp or even 'dualistic' opposition between lifeless matter and pure spirit. Indeed, it is time to abandon the label 'dualist' altogether, especially if incautiously used in the context of material things. Among other dangers, assuming a dualistic framework makes it far too easy to assume that invisible things were conceived as (merely) mental things, in the Cartesian sense: internal or imagined things, devoid of spatial extension, products or objects of pure thought. In short, dualism makes it far too easy to reduce ancient demons to a metaphor, or to restrict oneself to the psychological, wholly internalized, readings" "How Thin is a Demon?," 489. See my chapter 1 for how active imagination in the ancient sense differs from a modern "psychological, wholly internalized" sense.

However, there is another class of *daemones* that concerns us here. Apuleius compares them to the Latin *genii*: “You could call the *daemon* a ‘*Genius*’, since that particular type of divinity, identical with the mind of each and every person, is (though itself immortal) nevertheless born in some sense together with a human being” (151).<sup>455</sup> More importantly, Apuleius describes the *daemon* as the “human mind (*animus humanus*) itself, even while still located in the body” (150).<sup>456</sup> It dwells “in the inmost sanctum of the human mind in the function of consciousness itself” (156).<sup>457</sup> The *daemon* seems *curiosus*, inspecting “everything with close attention” (155), for one “can have no secrets (*secreti*) before these guardians” (155).<sup>458</sup> Though curious indeed, the daemonic self desires the Platonic “Good”: “The virtuous desire of the mind (*bona cupido animi*) is also a good god (*bonus deus*)” (150).<sup>459</sup> Still in keeping with the general view of *Metamorphoses*’ moral timbre, the human *can* be the *curiosus* as long as he or she desires the authorized virtue of Plato and Plutarch. But, how do we locate authorized virtue? Is it a philosophical or theological abstraction or an internally negotiated configuration of the self? Before launching into these questions, let us briefly revisit the tale of Lucius on the eve of his quest for salvation.

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<sup>455</sup> Harrison, trans. “*poteris ‘genium’ vocare, quod is deus, qui est animus sui cuique, quamquam sit immortalis, tamen quodam modo cum homine gignitur.*”

<sup>456</sup> Harrison, trans. “*Nam quodam significatu et animus humanus etiam nunc in corpore situs daemon nuncupatur.*”

<sup>457</sup> Harrison, trans. “*in ipsis penitissimis mentibus vice conscientiae deversetur.*”

<sup>458</sup> Harrison, trans. “*quin omnia curiose ille participet; omnia visitet, omnia intellegat*” and “*ut sciatis nihil homini prae istis custodibus nec intra animum nec foris esse secreti.*”

<sup>459</sup> Harrison, trans. “*Igitur et bona cupido animi bonus deus est. Unde nonnulli arbitrantur, ut iam prius dictum est, “eudaemonas” dici beatos, quorum daemon bonus.*”

## The Tale

On his way to Thessaly, a region in Greece known for its secrets, Lucius overhears a conversation between fellow travelers about a *saga* or “wise woman” named Meroe who “can lower the sky and suspend the earth, solidify fountains and dissolve mountains, raise up ghosts and bring down gods, darken the stars and light up Tartarus itself” (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.8).<sup>460</sup> He describes himself to the travelers as “the sort who wants to know everything, or at least most things” (1.2).<sup>461</sup> Aristomenes obliges with an unusual account of his own “present inquisitiveness [*instans curiositas*]” that led to punishment at the hands of two *sagarum*, Panthia and Meroe (1.12). Apuleius becomes the *curiosus*, the “one who looks,” while the *saga* Meroe, in her rare and secret power, is “that which attracts attention.”<sup>462</sup> The *saga* uses this secret power to punish lovers who stray or spurn (1.9). Soon thereafter, Lucius arrives at the farmhouse of Milo and Pamphile where he meets the lovely Photis and his aunt, Byrrhena. Byrrhena warns him that his hostess Pamphile is a *maga*, a dabbler in secret knowledge, similar to the *saga*. This news fascinates him. He has an “excessive passion to learn the rare and marvelous...those spells of the magic art (*artis magicae*)” (1).<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Hanson, trans. “‘*Saga*’ inquit ‘*et divini potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera exstinguere, Tartarum ipsum illuminare.*’”

<sup>461</sup> Hanson, trans. “*sed qui velim scire vel cuncta vel certe plurima.*”

<sup>462</sup> Carlin Barton describes the person afflicted with “*cura*” as too filled with care and interest; that is, *too careful* or anxious.

<sup>463</sup> Hanson, trans. “*anxius alioquin et nimis cupidus cognoscendi quae rara miraque sunt, reputansque me media Thessaliae loca tenere, quo artis magicae nativa cantamina totius orbis consono ore celebrentur.*”

Lucius is transfixed by the rare and the secret. *Curiosus*, *curiose*, and *curiositas* connote an excessively anxious attention and extreme inquisitiveness: “I was on tenterhooks of desire and impatience alike, and I began to examine each and every object with curiosity” (2.1).<sup>464</sup> His desire to know transforms his perception: “Nothing I look at in that city seemed to me to be what it was; but I believed that absolutely everything had been transformed into another shape by some deadly mumbo-jumbo” (2.1).<sup>465</sup> He spies on Pamphile, as she is about to steal away to her lover by transforming into an owl. Photis helps Lucius replicate the operation by rubbing an herbal ointment over his body. Subject to her *artes magicae*, he becomes “so transfixed with awe that [he] seemed to be something other than Lucius” (3.21).<sup>466</sup> But instead of being transformed into the bird of wisdom, Lucius turns into an ass (3.25).<sup>467</sup>

Fortunately, Photis instructs him that he need only take a bite of roses in order to return to his former state (3.25). Thus begins the misadventured quest for the rose where Lucius learns more about wise women and joins the company of thieves, heroes, bakers, legions, false priests, and aristocrats who beat, ridicule, and make a spectacle of him until, in utter despair, he finds his salvation—which I argue is his “sacred self”—in a dream vision, through a garland of roses, in the cult of Isis.

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<sup>464</sup> Hanson, trans. “*suspensus alioquin et voto simul et studio, curiose singula considerabam.*”

<sup>465</sup> Hanson, trans. “*Nec fuit in illa civitate quod aspiciens id esse crederem quod esset, sed omnia prorsus ferali murmure in aliam effigiem translate.*”

<sup>466</sup> Hanson, trans. “*At ego nullo decantatus carmine, praesentis tantum facti stupore defixus, quidvis aliud magis videbar esse quam Lucius.*”

<sup>467</sup> Carlin Barton summarizes: “Through his fatal fascination Apuleius’s curious Lucius loses everything, even his human form, and becomes himself a monster, a human ass.” Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, 91.

## The Sacred and Society

What is *sacer* about a “sacred self”? *Sacer* indicates a highly charged condition, good or bad, but always a little dangerous or wild, and always very important. Further, the sacred is something we respond to powerfully, often anxiously, and, in response, we attribute power to it. For the Romans, to call something “sacred” was a hopeful tool for acknowledging, controlling, channeling, or repelling a power. When something is set apart, it becomes sacred in the Roman sense of *sacer*; that is, it requires heightened attention or care, expressed in *cura* or *cultus*. A curate and a cult care for the sacred.

Carlin Barton describes the sacrificial system in ancient Rome as a way of navigating, domesticating, elevating, mitigating, or nullifying forces, powers, or functions in natural and social life (see chapter 2). That which becomes “sacred” is isolated or “set apart.” In this Roman sense, *sacer* could be used to describe almost anything: people, places, things, animals, ideas, emotions, natural processes, or invisible beings—imagined, perceived, or something in-between: “Absolutely anything or anyone could be sacralized.”<sup>468</sup> Regardless, the sacred was always powerful, worthy of careful attention, and likely dangerous.

That which is secret, set apart, or sacred invokes wonder, reverence, anxiety, and even fear. Or, equally to the point, that which invokes wonder, reverence, anxiety, and fear *becomes* set apart. What is both dangerous and desirable, to the many, to the few, or to the one, is secret and sacred. The anxious care given to fire as the *focus* of the few in a Roman home is similar to the emotional importance of the Vestal *cultus* to the many. But, what of the one, the “sacred self”? This chapter assumes the existence of such a “one,” of an individual, embodied, private self. I even suggest that this self can be “cultivated” (i.e.

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<sup>468</sup> Barton, “Emotional Economy,” 346.

“care of the self”) and argue, that this is precisely the case in the works of Apuleius.<sup>469</sup> For there remains, I contend, an aspect of self, however we understand its construction, that is a cognitive ability, an internal reflexivity, and a solitary knowing. There exists in many if not all of us a secret world of being, of imagination, thought, feeling, and desire. Its contours are surely shaped by society but its existence as a space of experience is, I maintain, an *a priori, sui generis* stratum of human existence.<sup>470</sup> The same reflexivity that allows one to critically assess society is also private, secret, and set apart from the social world it criticizes. Of the self, it is reflexive awareness or the capacity to be aware that one is aware that seems to withstand (if not enable) its own social deconstruction.

The extent to which shaping social layers can be shed is a matter of debate. Nonetheless, the inner part of us that reflects upon these exterior shapers, in its ability to do so, remains essential. The same wonder, reverence, anxiety, and fear, given to that which is secret, set apart, or sacred in the social world, also applies to the self. We both fear and desire our secret world and the secrets of others. The sacred, in this older sense, was something—anything—that elicited a powerful response—like Lucius the ass’s response when encountering Isis or like the philosopher’s when encountering her daemonic nature—and, through that powerful response, we attribute power back to the “Other,” to the person, place, thing, force, function, fantasy, etc. that presented itself so

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<sup>469</sup> While the scholarly literature that explores social and linguistic constructions of self—including a technology for its care, I will not treat it here. The broader discourse incepted by thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler informs my own discussion in what their discussions broadly offer and lack.

<sup>470</sup> My position is both common sense and Idealist. “Our idea of person is then the idea of a consciousness which thinks, which has a certain permanence, which distinguishes itself from its own successive experiences and from all other consciousness—lastly, and most important of all, which acts.” Rashdall Hastings, “Personality, human and divine,” in *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays by Eight Members of the University of Oxford*, ed. Henry Cecil Sturt (London, New York: Macmillan, 1902), 372.

powerfully charged. Hence, the awe-inspiring thunder and lightning storm becomes sacralized or “set apart” as *Zeus/Theos/Deus* by virtue of our powerful response, our experience of awe. And, if the awe is internalized, turned inward, the self becomes sacred, personal divinity is attained.

In both *The god of Socrates* and *Metamorphoses* selves become sacred—set apart—as the result of a new, more intimate, relationship with a source of sacred power. What is interesting here is the question of when, why, and how the self was to become set apart, i.e. how the self became sacred. As for “sacred power,” in the case of *Metamorphoses*, the goddess Isis is the source of sacred power; in *The god of Socrates*, it is the personal *daemon* that is source. For Apuleius, the process of entering into “a new more intimate relationship” with a source of sacred power entails a metamorphosis, a transformation, what Arthur Darby Nock views as a conversion expressing “the high-water mark of the piety which grew out of the mystery religions”<sup>471</sup> or what Nancy Shumate would characterize as a “collapse of familiar cognitive constructs [that] precedes...reconstruction of a new world and world view...”<sup>472</sup> The new world of the convert is an expression of agency although expressed through society and culture: “Constituted by society and made competent by culture, individuals make their worlds through their acts of perception and interpretation. The external world is filtered and, in the process, remade, by the self. It is in this sense that the self is the centre and the premise of the individual’s world.”<sup>473</sup> Sacralizing the self not only changes how inner

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<sup>471</sup> Nock, *Conversion*, 138.

<sup>472</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 14.

<sup>473</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 114-115.

experience is framed by the subject, but changes how the world it inhabits is experienced. “More intimate” suggests an identification with but also an internalization of an external source of sacred power (a point to which I will return later.) One difference, so it seems, is the location: The daemon is “in here.” Isis is “out there.” Or, is she?

### “Chosen Subjection”

It appears for Apuleius’s Lucius in his ill-begotten form that the only way out of “Fortune’s great tempests and mighty stormwinds” (*Metamorphoses* 11.15) is voluntary subjection to an exalted authority.<sup>474</sup> Salvation requires, as the initiating priest of Isis Mithras explains, “obedience to our cult and taking on the voluntary yoke of her service; for as soon as you become the goddess’s slave you will experience more fully the fruit of your freedom” (11.15).<sup>475</sup> However, this “voluntary yoke” or chosen subjection may be (as alluded to in chapter 2) more subtle than it seems at first.

J. Wyn Schofer’s study of ethics and self-cultivation in *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*—a late antique Jewish commentary on ethical maxims and pedagogical discourse that includes both legal and non-legal material—introduces the notion of “chosen subjection,” the “subordination and internalization of external authorities” into our conversation.<sup>476</sup> The teachings contained in *The Fathers* were intended to instruct rabbinical students in virtue, the ethics of character, and transform them into sages. A key passage in *The Fathers* exemplifies this kind of subordination: “Let your house be a

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<sup>474</sup> Hanson, trans. “*magnisque Fortunae tempestatibus et maximis actus procellis.*”

<sup>475</sup> Hanson, trans. modified, “*teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. Nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis.*”

<sup>476</sup> Schofer, “Chosen Subjection,” 263.

meeting place for the sages, sit in the very dust of their feet, and drink with thirst their works” (*Avot* 1:4).<sup>477</sup> For students of the sage, chosen subjection expresses “an extremely hopeful sense that the self can expand in fundamental ways through engagement with powers external to it...”<sup>478</sup> As I argued in chapter 2, self-sacralization occurs even when the self confronts a force that appears to be greater than it. In Schofer’s words: “[O]ne attains the character of a sage through subordination to particular authorities with the goal of, in various senses, internalizing aspects of them.”<sup>479</sup>

While Schofer modestly characterizes his project as descriptive and comparative, he also seeks to theorize a dynamic at play in his source text, one that he admits may not be explicit. Cautiously, he explains: “[This] project entails an assertion that some would take to be controversial: vocabulary from outside the rabbis’ culture can give insight into implicit or overarching concerns that they themselves did not name.”<sup>480</sup> The etic vocabulary Schofer employs has a Foucauldian pedigree. In his view, scholars who hesitate to draw from modern formulations of “self” and “subject” in the scholarship on discourse fail to understand the “full subtlety and complexity of the sources.”<sup>481</sup> Like Schofer, I point to Judith Butler’s general observation in defense of subtlety: “[P]ower that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into

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<sup>477</sup> Schechter and Kister, trans.

<sup>478</sup> Schofer, “Chosen Subjection,” 276.

<sup>479</sup> Schofer, “Chosen Subjection,” 256.

<sup>480</sup> Schofer, “Chosen Subjection,” 260.

<sup>481</sup> Schofer, “Chosen Subjection,” 260.

subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity."<sup>482</sup>

Although "scholars of discourse attend to the social function of language and its relation to both practices (such as self-transformation) and institutions (such as the rabbinic movement)," Schofer chooses to focus on practices of self-transformation.<sup>483</sup> By doing so, he demonstrates how chosen subjection serves more than the social function that concerns many discourse scholars like Butler. In Schofer's formulation, chosen subjection "generates internalization of that which is other, extending or expanding the self beyond its original capacities," an approach that is relevant to my sources as well.<sup>484</sup>

Reborn and renewed, Lucius claims that Isis resides in his heart. Has Lucius internalized Isis? Does Isis constitute his divine self-identity? Or, is the dynamic of chosen subjection even more subtle? Schofer elaborates: "If the goal of willed subjection is an expansion of the self through incorporation of that which is other, then we should attend to the specific points at which the other...becomes part of the self."<sup>485</sup> How does a person become a "sacred self," be it sage, a priest of Isis, or *daemon*? The answer is both through "'practice' (including ritual and exercises) and 'discourse' (including symbols, tropes, and more generally 'language in use')." <sup>486</sup> Perhaps it is not Isis, an external authority *internalized*, but rather the *daemon* of Apuleius's Lucius, an inner authority

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<sup>482</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1 – 18. Quoted in Schofer, "Chosen Subjection," 274.

<sup>483</sup> Schofer, "Chosen Subjection," 258, n. 3.

<sup>484</sup> Schofer, "Chosen Subjection," 279.

<sup>485</sup> Schofer, "Chosen Subjection," 282.

<sup>486</sup> Schofer, "Chosen Subjection," 263.

*externalized* as Isis, that constitutes his self-identity as a “sacred self.”<sup>487</sup> The self is the source of sacred power after all. Apuleius’ understanding of the *daemon* in *The god of Socrates* suggests the insertion of an intentional Platonic subtext in *Metamorphoses*.

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<sup>487</sup> “Internalization” is an important concept in contemporary psychological theory. David Harvey claims that “discourses internalize power, beliefs and values, institutions, material practices, and social relations. Humans are porous, absorbing elements of their ecosystems as well as language and other aspects of their surrounding society” in David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 48 – 57 and David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 98 – 101. Paul Ricoeur appeals to internalization at several points in his treatment of character formation. He argues that dispositions are formed through identification with or internalization of values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes. Moreover, while most practices are fundamentally interactive and learned from others, people can internalize such interaction and come to “play alone, garden alone, do research alone in a laboratory, in the library, or in one’s office” in Paul Ricœur, *Oneself As Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 156. Kenneth C. Wallis and James L. Poulton explore the development of “internalization” as a psychological concept in which they explore the uses of the concept by Freudian, cognitive-behavioral, and humanist schools in Kenneth C., Wallis and James L. Poulton, *Internalization: The Origins and Construction of Internal Reality* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001). For W.W. Meissner, internalization is “any process of transformation by which external relationships, object representations, and forms of regulation become part of the inner psychic structure and thus part of the ‘inner world.’” in W.W. Meissner, *Internalization in Psychoanalysis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1981). Internalizing the sage depends on identification with the sage. This is something more than just learning from the sage. For R.H. Kopp, “learning is more conscious while identification remains on the whole unconscious” in R.H. Kopp, “A Definition of Identification: a Review of the Literature,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*. 42. Ludwig Eidelberg defines identification as a process in which the subject, whether conscious or unconscious, “has the impression that he thinks, feels or acts like the object—or the object has such an impression” in Ludwig Eidelberg, *Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 184. Arnold H. Modell goes even further: “[The] representation of an external object that has been taken in to the ego to form a permanent element within the total personality” in Arnold H. Modell, *Object Love and Reality: An Introduction to a Psychoanalytic Theory of Object Relations* (London: Hogarth [for] the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1969), 145. The external object “taken in to the ego” consists of a “mental picture” for Hinsic and Campbell, a memetic impression that forms a permanent structure of the psyche in Leland E. Hinsic and Robert Jean Campbell, *Psychiatric Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 373.

## “Conversion”

Lucius’ apparent “conversion” to the cult of Isis bears further consideration if we are to entertain the possibility of Platonic influence. Nancy Shumate proposes a new reading of *Metamorphoses* as “a narrative of conversion.”<sup>488</sup> However, she disagrees with Nock and others who suggest that we can get a picture of the Isis cult in antiquity from Apuleius’s novel. Studies like Shumate’s question the narrative’s usefulness in accessing social reality.<sup>489</sup> The focus on the personal experience of conversion marks what is new for Shumate. Moving from the external/social to the internal/personal, Shumate argues : “The process of conversion is a kind of shift in cognitive paradigms, and the period of crisis before conversion is an unsettling sojourn in paradigm limbo, so to speak, during which habituated structures of meaning and systems of organizing reality disintegrate.”<sup>490</sup>

The resultant divinity achieved by Lucius’s return to human form and initiation as a priest of Isis, especially when understood in the Platonizing terms of *The god of Socrates*, “is not an agent of moral redemption (as a social phenomenon) but rather an epistemological anchor and a transcendent source of meaning and order (as a personal

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<sup>488</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 1. Citing Lucius as an early example of a “marked spiritual reorientation” that distinguished conversion from adherence to cult, A. D. Nock describes how the “ministers of Isis” were not “above considerations of profit,” citing the example of the story of an Isis-devotee Paulina who was deceived by Mundus dressed as an amorous Anubis after the priests of goddess were bribed (Flavius Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 18.65-80) in Nock, *Conversion*, 138, 150, 153.

<sup>489</sup> See Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 11. Paying attention to “a mass of vivid, concrete and realistic detail, on physical objects, houses, social structure, economic relations, the political framework of the local communities, and the wider political framework of the Empire,” he induces a social, economic, and political world. See also Fergus Millar, “The World of *The Golden Ass*” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 63-75.

<sup>490</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 14.

experience).<sup>491</sup> Lucius becomes personally divine through the self-sacralization of “conversion.” Lucius’ “process of conversion with which we will be concerned, then, involves nothing less than the collapse of an entire system of premises and assumptions about how the world works and its replacement by one radically different, or at least so it seems to the convert.”<sup>492</sup> Defending against the criticism that she is “confusing narrative with experience,” Shumate asserts that “experience and narrative reinforce each other in a kind of discursive loop”:<sup>493</sup>

Raw experience occurs within particular attributional systems that give it particular and culturally contingent meanings. Literary narratives certainly have a place in such systems, but overarching them are the larger and more thoroughly naturalized master narratives of the culture, which in turn shape subsequent narrative of all kinds as well as experience itself, and on and on...the moment subjectivity begins, it enters a discursive system already saturated with interpretations and report of experience, that is, with the preexisting scripts that we use to make sense of reality. Even areas commonly regarded as bastions of objectivity—notably those of scientific and social scientific inquiry—are not immune.<sup>494</sup>

At first glance, Lucius’s initiation into the cult of Isis represents a self’s complete submission to an external source of sacred power. In order for Lucius to be released from the throes of his asinine fate, he must become a slave to Isis (*deae servire*, *Metamorphoses* 11.15), who is the only power greater than fate: “[B]y the providence of the great and mighty goddess, I would overcome Fortune who was so savagely battering

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<sup>491</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 15. My clarification in parenthesis.

<sup>492</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 15.

<sup>493</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 17.

<sup>494</sup> Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion*, 17. “As Thomas Kuhn argued thirty years ago, scientists too work within culturally defined paradigms that inform and limit the way they think about problems. Any ‘scientific revolution’ is defined by a shift in these cognitive paradigms more than by any positivistic advance toward true and objective knowledge.” Shumate, 23.

me” (11.12).<sup>495</sup> But, the *Metamorphoses*, read with *The god of Socrates* in mind, suggest my alternative reading. Even in Lucius’s apparent surrender to Isis, there is nothing more sacred than what lies within the secret places of the heart. Next, I shall consider ancient dream theory in order shed light on the transformation of Late Antique selves, followed by two modern perspectives on sacred selfhood that resonate with our two texts and a return to the role of curiosity in the quest for personal divinity.

### **The Dream of the *Daemon***

Reading late antique dream literature, Patricia Cox Miller sees Middle Platonists Plutarch and Apuleius as proponents for “a daemonic provenance for dreams...whose placement of dreams in a daemonic context served to underscore their mediatorial and transformative function.”<sup>496</sup> In Miller’s view, Plutarch understood the *daemon* as “the capacity of every person to construct a framework within which to interpret experience,” but Apuleius, she continues, “understood daemons as deeply embedded in human affairs.”<sup>497</sup> So embedded, I contend, that the *daemon* is the self in the sense that I have defined it, as a “reflexive feature of consciousness”—that part of us, remember, that experiences awe at the powerful thunder and lightning storm. But, if the *daemon* is the self, why does Apuleius speak of it as a separate entity? Miller solves this problem by reconceptualizing Apuleius’s *daemones* as *potestates* (powers)—what she refers to as a

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<sup>495</sup> Hanson, trans. “*deae maximae providentia alluctantem mihi saevissime Fortunam superarem.*”

<sup>496</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 55.

<sup>497</sup> Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 55, 57.

“‘personalization[s] of power’...something more like ‘psychic’ abilities.”<sup>498</sup> In her view, the daemonic is a function of mind, a function of consciousness itself. The daemonic mind uses a “daemonic language” through dreams that express, in her terms, “the need for finer tuning of the sensibilities”—that is, a transformative caring for the self.<sup>499</sup>

Lucius’s dream vision of Isis can be read as a voice or sign from his *daemon*—his innermost secret, sacred, self—telling him, perhaps, it was time to turn away from curious *artes magicae* toward the more socially sanctioned *arcana secreta*.<sup>500</sup> Seen as a daemonic production, the dream of Isis takes on, in Miller’s view, what she refers to as “an epistemological function as source of self awareness and ethical reflection.”<sup>501</sup> The dream of the *daemon* functions as what Michel Foucault has called “a ‘technology’ of the self, a hermeneutics of self-knowledge” that, I concur, empowers the dreamer to refine, augment, and expand the self that has been “set apart” or sacralized.<sup>502</sup>

Regardless of his Isiac Platonism, such a self-centered or psychological interpretation of the *daemon* might not have been that far from Apuleius’s mind either. Using ancient dream hermeneutics as a critical lens, Vared Lev Kenaan suggests that Apuleius would have been familiar with writers who deny the “divine provenance” of dreams such as Heraclitus, Cicero, and Petronius. Not unlike Miller, Lev Kenaan posits

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<sup>498</sup> Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 58.

<sup>499</sup> Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 59.

<sup>500</sup> The contrast between *artes magicae* and *arcana secreta* has been interpreted, in the “moral reading” as the contrast between “magic” and “religion.” However, *arcana* (via *arca*) suggests a “place for safekeeping, chest, or box.” It is possible to read the contrast as a turn from a concern with the spectacle of the *maga* toward the inner mysteries of the self.

<sup>501</sup> Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 59.

<sup>502</sup> Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 59.

that Apuleius' approached daemonic dreams psychologically "as the source of subjective imagination, as the locus of the private experience of the world, and as the material from which the self is invented."<sup>503</sup>

### **The *Cultus* of Self**

In his study of "new religions" and the "New Age movement," Paul Heelas explores sacralization of the self in the modern context. The term "New Age movement" loosely describes "a vast array of groups, communities and networks that are engaged in a process of a transformation of consciousness."<sup>504</sup> Despite the problems with such categories, "New Age movement" is meaningful in so far as it accounts for apparent innovations that diverge from modern authorized notions of the sacred in conventional religious institutions. However, students of the ancient world will immediately see that there is nothing "new" or "modern" about New Age interest in self-sacralization. Heelas admits this: "Self-religiosity is 'as ancient as the Upanishads, for instance; or, to take an example from the West, can be found in the millenarian movements of the Middle Ages."<sup>505</sup>

The similarities between New Age thought and Platonism in the late ancient world are striking.<sup>506</sup> Comparing the New Age approach to self-sacralization helps

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<sup>503</sup> Vered Lev Kenaan, "Delusion and Dream in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," *Classical Antiquity* 23, no. 2 (2004): 265.

<sup>504</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London: Routledge, 2006), 401.

<sup>505</sup> Paul Heelas, "The New Age in Cultural Context: the Premodern, the Modern and the Postmodern," *Religion*. 23, no. 2 (1993): 110.

<sup>506</sup> April D. De Conick, *The Gnostic New Age : How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today* (New York: Columbia University Press,

understand its correlate in ancient cult and philosophy. Indeed, the expression “inward turn” is used by scholars of the New Age movement in much the same way as it is used by scholars of late antiquity to describe the concern with personal divinity (*epistrophe*). The New Age movement seems to agree with both the Isiac and Platonic concept of universal creative divinity: In the world of Heelas’ subjects, “all life-all existence-is the manifestation of Spirit, of the Unknowable, of that supreme consciousness known by many different names in many different cultures.”<sup>507</sup> A notion of a Platonic “world behind appearances” also occurs: “All life, as we perceive it with the five human senses or with scientific instruments, is only the outer veil of an invisible, inner and causal reality.” The New Age anthropology of the self is two-fold consisting of “an outer temporary personality and a multi-dimensional inner being (soul or higher self).” New Age thinkers express a frustration with the “habit of materialism” nicely polemicized by Apuleius in the end of *The god of Socrates*: “The outer personality is limited and tends towards materialism.”<sup>508</sup> Heelas’s finding that the New Age’s version of salvation “cannot be found by tinkering with what we are by virtue of socialization”<sup>509</sup> echoes

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2016); Dylan Burns, “Seeking Ancient Wisdom in the New Age: New Age and NeoGnostic Commentaries on the Gospel of Thomas,” in *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and its Others*, ed. Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2007).

<sup>507</sup> Heelas, “New Age in Cultural Context,” 104.

<sup>508</sup> Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 104.

<sup>509</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 19.

Mithras's admonition to Lucius: "Not your birth, nor even your position, nor even your fine education has been of any help to you" (*Metamorphoses* 11.15).<sup>510</sup>

Likewise, wisdom in the New Age can only be attained by "moving beyond the socialized self...thereby encountering a new realm of being."<sup>511</sup> New Age groups, like the late Platonists, are interested in the innermost part of the self, the secret heart. Heelas writes: "The inner realm, and the inner realm alone, is held to serve as the source of authentic vitality."<sup>512</sup> The self is conceived as secret, sacred, and set apart from any external authority or idea that would otherwise cultivate it. The (small "s") self cultivates the (big "S") Self much as the *daemon* is the Self. Like Lucius secretly observing Pamphile's transformation realizing he "seemed to be something other than Lucius," (*Metamorphoses* 3.22), some New Age groups posit that we are not who we think we are, that, in the course of our day to day life, we are working from a "lower self with base instincts," busybodies of curious desire.<sup>513</sup> How, then, and where, are we to locate the sacred in the self? Quoting Heelas:

New Agers often treat practices (such as astrology or channeling), which might be thought to involve external authority, in detraditionalized fashion (astrology and channeling here being seen as ways of 'putting us in touch with our deeper selves'). If New Agers themselves have got it right, we are in the realm of the [Zen] koan, not the Ten Commandments. That is to say, religion, as normally understood in the west, has been replaced by teachers whose primary job is to set up 'contexts' to enable participants to experience their spirituality and authority.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Hanson, trans. "*Nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa qua flores usquam doctrina profuit.*"

<sup>511</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 19.

<sup>512</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 19.

<sup>513</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 20.

<sup>514</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 23.

Perhaps, the “great unspoken mysteries of the [Isis] cult” provided such a context for Lucius; the notion of the *daemon*, a context for the philosopher. Once the external authority was internalized, it transformed. As with New Age groups, “[t]he basic idea, it should be apparent, is that what lies within—experienced by way of ‘intuition’, ‘alignment’ or an ‘inner voice’—serves to inform the judgments, decisions and choices required for everyday life. The ‘individual’ serves as his or her own source of guidance.”<sup>515</sup>

### **The Sacred Self**

Thomas J. Csordas’s ethnography of Catholic Charismatic healing in New England is a study of ritual efficacy and in this sense offers something to our discussion.<sup>516</sup> Csordas asks: “How does faith healing work, if indeed it does?” He locates efficacy not in “symptoms, psychiatric disorders, symbolic meaning, or social relationships, but [in] the self in which all of these are encompassed.”<sup>517</sup> Similar to Shumate, Csordas defines the transforming effect that occurs in ritual healing as “a restructuring of cognition and memory.”<sup>518</sup> Ritual performance, he asserts, “stimulated transformations of memory and cognition...that in turn could have real emotional and

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<sup>515</sup> Heelas, *New Age Movement*, 23. See “autourgos” in chapter 2, p. 100.

<sup>516</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>517</sup> Csordas, *Sacred Self*, 3.

<sup>518</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

physical effects.”<sup>519</sup> An experience of the sacred is, in Csordas’ words, “an existential encounter with Otherness that is a touchstone of our humanity...it defines us by what we are not—by what is beyond our limits or what touches us precisely at our limits.”<sup>520</sup> Healing is achieved when the “self is objectified and represented as a particular kind of person with a specific identity” within the context of a “coherent ritual system”—the embodiment of a sacred self.<sup>521</sup> Csordas’s process of becoming a “sacred self” resembles the transformation seen in both *Metamorphoses* and *The god of Socrates*.

### ***Curiositas* Revisited**

P.G. Walsh claims that *curiositas* is “the key to the novel.”<sup>522</sup> Apuleius uses the word twelve times in *Metamorphoses* but it is little attested before, only once, in fact, in a letter of Cicero.<sup>523</sup> To begin to understand *curiositas* we must look to the better attested *curiosus* which Apuleius uses twelve times in the novel as well. In general, *curiosus* means bestowing care or pains upon a thing; in particular, it has the connotation of inquiring eagerly or anxiously about a thing.

In her study of the emotional lives of Romans in the late Republic and early Empire, Carlin Barton writes about a prevalent fascination with the “curious,” that is,

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<sup>519</sup> Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity*, 18.

<sup>520</sup> Csordas, *Sacred Self*, 5.

<sup>521</sup> Csordas, *Sacred Self*, 24.

<sup>522</sup> “The Rights and Wrongs of Curiosity (Plutarch to Augustine),” *Greece & Rome* 35, no. 1 (1988): 76.

<sup>523</sup> Walsh, “Rights and Wrongs,” 75.

“the one who looks and the strange or unusual object which attracts the look.”<sup>524</sup> The *curiosus*, she asserts, was motivated by frustration: “He or she could not resist those things in heaven and earth prohibited by the Powers That Be. The secret was the rare; the secrets of the gods the rarest and most forbidden—and therefore the most desired.”<sup>525</sup> Envy or *invidia* were inextricably intertwined with *curiositas*; the unattainability of the rare or the secret led to a contorted desire that turned to malice in frustration. Plautus writes: “No one is curious who is not also malevolent” (*Stichus* 208).<sup>526</sup> The envy of the *curiosus*, Barton establishes through an exhaustive survey of the sources, was feared in ancient Rome as the “evil eye.” In Platonic thought, the *curiosus* is a *polupragmon*, a meddler, literally, a “busybody.” In *On Being a Busybody*, Middle Platonist Plutarch writes about those who “pass over the stories and subjects of common speech and pick out the hidden scandals of every household” (Plutarch, *Moralia. De curiositate* 516d-f).<sup>527</sup> As a Middle Platonist himself who alludes to Plutarch in the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius would have been familiar with Plutarch’s discussion.

Apuleius portrays curiosity, “the drive for wonder,”<sup>528</sup> in Carl Schlam’s words, as a vice, especially in regard to secret knowledge and otherworldly spectacles—in this case, the *artes magicae* and *divina disciplina* of the *saga* and the *maga*. On his eventual

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<sup>524</sup> Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, 87.

<sup>525</sup> Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, 89.

<sup>526</sup> De Melo, trans. “*nam curiosus nemo est quin sit maleuolus.*” Quoted in Barton, *Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, 88.

<sup>527</sup> Barton trans. “*παραπλησίως οί πολυπράγμονες, ὑπερβάντες τοὺς ἐν μέσῳ λόγους καὶ ἱστορίας καὶ ἂ μηδεὶς κωλύει πυνθάνεσθαι μηδ’ ἄχθεται πυνθανομένοις, τὰ κρυπτόμενα Ἐκαὶ λανθάνοντα κακὰ πάσης οἰκίας ἐκλέγουσι.*”

<sup>528</sup> Carl C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 119.

return to human form, Mithras, the priest of Isis who assists Lucius, encapsulates the novel's apparent moral: "[B]ut on the slippery path of headstrong youth you plunged into slavish pleasures and reaped the perverse reward of your ill-starred curiosity" (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.15).<sup>529</sup>

But is curiosity always a vice? Lucius's desire to know eventually brings him his desire. He does in fact, as he puts it, "penetrate to the hidden mysteries of the purest faith" (*Metamorphoses* 11.21).<sup>530</sup> The "hidden mysteries" are *arcana secreta*; Lucius learns the secret of the sacred (*Metamorphoses* 11.21). This distinction between curiosity and *curiositas* calls to mind the Greek *thauma* (or wonder), invoked by Plato as the first impulse to philosophy.<sup>531</sup> While Plutarch criticizes the *curiose polupragmon*, the "meddling busybody," he also suggests that we should, as P.G. Walsh puts it, "direct such curiosity toward the things of heaven and earth and sea..."<sup>532</sup> Neither Plato nor Plutarch discourage inquiry or wonder as long as it is in the cause of becoming a better person as they might have it. Perhaps, following Joseph G. DeFilippo, "*curiositas* is blameworthy in a way that mere curiosity is not."<sup>533</sup> In *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch suggests that the name of Isis itself is a Greek word relating to *oida* (know) and that, as a

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<sup>529</sup> Hanson, trans. "*sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates, curiositatis improsperae sinistrum praemium reportasti.*"

<sup>530</sup> Hanson, trans. "*quo rectius ad arcana purissimae religionis secreta pervaderem.*"

<sup>531</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d.

<sup>532</sup> Walsh, "Rights and Wrongs," 73.

<sup>533</sup> Joseph G. DeFilippo, "*Curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*," *American Journal of Philology* 111, no. 4 (1990): 478.

result, her shrine the *Iseion*, “promises knowledge and comprehension of reality” (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 352a).<sup>534</sup>

In his study of *curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius’s novel, DeFilippo suggests that knowledge of Isis can only be acquired when one is “free of the interfering and unhealthy impulses which riddle the soul of the *polypragmon*.” Once Lucius regains his form, Mithras reminds him that the promised revelation he has long sought must be initiated by Isis in the form of a sign: “[T]he day on which each person can be initiated was marked by a nod from the goddess...” (*Metamorphoses* 11.21).<sup>535</sup> Prior to that point, Lucius’s approach had been quite different. In Schlam’s words: “Lucius’s eagerness to know what is wondrous, directed toward magic, is characterized as an unholy assault on the divine.”<sup>536</sup> By the end of the tale, we get the feeling that Lucius has learned his lesson. But, the lesson is not so much about inquisitiveness as the way in which one inquires. Perhaps, the desire for secret virtue directs one toward Isis, while the desire for secret vice directs one toward the *maga*.

## Conclusion

The aspect of self—that is, the “reflexive feature of consciousness” I have been entertaining—that is in play, at least for Apuleius’s Platonic audience in his treatment of the cult of Isis is something that can only be seen when read in tandem with *The god of Socrates* which would have been the case for second-century readers and for Augustine

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<sup>534</sup> Babbit, trans. “τοῦ δ’ ἱεροῦ τοῦνομα καὶ σαφῶς ἐπαγγέλλεται καὶ γινῶσιν καὶ εἶδησιν τοῦ ὄντος· ὀνομάζεται γὰρ Ἰσεῖον ὡς εἰσομένων τὸ ὄν, μετὰ λόγου καὶ ὁσίως εἰς τὰ ἱερὰ παρέλθωμεν τῆς θεοῦ.”

<sup>535</sup> Hanson, trans. “*nam et diem quo quisque possit initiari deae nutu demonstrari.*”

<sup>536</sup> Schlam, *Making an Ass*, 48.

in the fifth century. For Apuleius, even in Lucius's apparent surrender to Isis, there is nothing more sacred than the self. To behold Isis, in her sensible form as the moon, or in powerful tides running through the natural and social worlds, is an awe-inspiring and powerful mystery. But it is the awe itself, our metacognitive awareness of powerful experiences, that is terrifying and fascinating, *tremendum et fascinans*. By co-creating the sacred, this reflexive feature of consciousness, perhaps, is the *mysterium*. It may also be a longing for Csordas' "sacred self" and a re-enchantment of experience that motivates self-sacralization. Writing on the uses of the "miraculous," Graham Twelftree suggests the appeal of self-sacralization:

[F]or those in Western civilizations who are detached from an interpretative community and from spiritual attainment, and for whom the windows of transcendence have been closed, the perception of a miracle...is relocated in the theatre of the questing self. The miracle becomes a sign of the God within us all. 'Where classical miracle stories inspired fear and awe, inducing worship of God and admiration of the saint, modern miracles tend to inspire admiration of the divinity that is the self.'<sup>537</sup>

If Lucius is to become free he must, from the Isiac point of view, serve the goddess. From the Platonic point of view, though, he must cultivate his *daemon*, which resides in the inner most part of his self. Chosen subjection to Isis restores Lucius to his human form, curing him of ill-starred curiosity. But, the *cultus* of self, and the imaginative transformation of identity it entails, raises him to the level of a goddess...or at least a *daemon*. Late Antique readers schooled in philosophy might very well have observed the Platonic soteriology in Apuleius's ribald tale.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *The Cambridge companion to miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>538</sup> *Metamorphoses* and *De deo de Socrates* were in circulation during Apuleius's lifetime (2<sup>nd</sup> c.). Augustine refers to both works in *De civitate Dei*.

## CONCLUSION:

### THE WAY IN IS THE WAY OUT

This dissertation has been about reading, imagination, and personal divinity in late antiquity. It asked: How did Late Antique readers become divine? From Graeco-Roman wisdom and ritual texts to early Christian theology, late antique literature abounded with discourses on personal divinity, the idea that a human could become “divine,” a “god.” Using a selection of Neoplatonic and Hermetic texts that Augustine of Hippo contends with in Books 8-10 of *City of God*, I have demonstrated how ancient and modern theories of imagination and reading help modern people understand the construction of personal divinity for Late Antique readers. Although Augustine accused the Neoplatonists, Hermetists, and theurgists of “worshipping demons,” “animating statues,” and “making gods,” I have shown that they were more concerned with getting to know their indwelling mind they called the *daimon/daemon*, they were more concerned with using cultic rite—the theurgic arts—to “bring the gods to earth” (that is, to make the invisible, visible), and they sought to animate their bodies like living sacred statues by becoming gods themselves, embodied, ensouled. They believed that knowledge of the self’s true nature resulted in personal divinity—expressed by this inscription from the Šābian Temple of Ḥarrān: “He who knows himself becomes a god.”<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* (London; New York: KPI in association with Islamic Publications, London, 1986), 134. After Justinian I closed the academy at Athens in 529, Damascius, Simplicius, and other Neoplatonic philosophers seem to have fled to the Persian court of Chosroes in 531 (recorded in Agathias 2.30.5 – 2.31.4), and perhaps also (as Michel Tardieu has argued) to the Šābians in Ḥarrān (northern Mesopotamia). Corbin recalls the early Islamic historian and geography Al Mas‘ūdī’s reading of the following temple inscription, “Platonic in tone,” on the great Temple of Ḥarrān in 332 AH (944 CE): *Man ‘arafa nafsahu ta’allaha* (“He who knows himself is deified”). The inscription recorded in Mas‘ūdī, trans., C. Barbier de Meynard et al., 64 – 65. Given the influence of Neoplatonism on Islamic philosophy, much is made of this Neoplatonist flight. See also Watts, Edward Jay. “Where to live the philosophical life in

In this dissertation, I am interested in the imaginations of late antique writers, readers, and hearers for whom personal divinity was seen as an option on their horizons. I have taken “seriously those elements in the ancient worldview that seem most alien to moderns as a way to explain how ancient worldmaking worked.”<sup>540</sup> And, like Averil Cameron, I use my own imagination to inquire into the imagination of my subjects.<sup>541</sup> This dissertation is, therefore, an “experiment in the sympathetic imagination of the imaginations of other people.”<sup>542</sup>

In my project, I add to the social-functionalist understanding of personal divinity by inquiring more deeply into areas of personal meaning and individual experience. By attempting to understand the experience of such individuals as “ideal readers,” I have hoped to offer a corrective for the excesses of a social-functional approach that has privileged the social aggregate at the expense of the person. As much as they, as people, may have been socially constructed and historically contingent, that is, shaped by their environments and their pasts, they were more than their conditioning, just as much as we are.<sup>543</sup> It may take hard work to get to that “more,” to sort through what is personal and

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the sixth century? Damascius, Simplicius and the return from Persia,” *Greek, Roman, And Byzantine Studies* no. 3 (2005); David Pingree, “The Ṣābians of Ḥarrān and the Classical Tradition,” *International Journal Of The Classical Tradition* no. 1 (2002).

<sup>540</sup> Catherine M. Chin and Moulié Vidas (eds.), *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>541</sup> “History and the individuality of the historian,” 76-77.

<sup>542</sup> Chin and Vidas, *Late Ancient Knowing*, 4.

<sup>543</sup> While I remain attentive to the shaping influence of social and cultural structures and discourse, to the layers of presentation, representation, and reception and, indeed, to the personal positionality that textures my historical storytelling, I seek to avoid the infinite regress of “discursive turtles always already all the way down,” obliterating the agency of

what is social, which is why *catharsis* (purification) was so important to the *Platonici* and the *theurgici*. They believed the divine part of themselves didn't have to do with their "situatedness." So, as noted above, Plotinus advised us to always work on our "inner statue" chipping away at the human constructions; Iamblichus saw the purification necessary for self-divinization as a "restoration of one's own essence."

Gregory Shaw laments that scholars today do not believe in ancient wisdom "although we are highly skilled at describing how ancient philosophers and theologians believed in gods, wisdom, and the divine life."<sup>544</sup> Indeed, it has become commonplace

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the individual who has the imaginative power to go beyond the brutishness of the historico-socio-cultural present. I stray beyond the Durkheimian legacy that posits "a social realm which was subject simply to social forces and hence home purely to social facts, caused individual consciousness to be seen as irrelevant, irretrievable or non-existent." And, I challenge the conflation of individualism and individuality that portrays the embodied cognition of individuals, "perceiving, interpreting, intentioning, creat[ing], imagin[ing]—in a word, conscious" as somehow a "Western" socio-cultural fiction. Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 66. To qualify Joan Scott's dictum—"It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience," Martin Jay suggests that we work with "experience" as "a nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior." "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 Summer (1991): 779; *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 6–7. In this dissertation, I have hoped do something more nuanced, which is to look at individual agency, in Kathleen Canning words, as "a site of mediation between discourses and experience [which] serves not only to dislodge the deterministic view in which discourse always seems to construct experience, but also to dispel the notion that discourses are shaped by everything but the experiences of the people texts claim to represent." "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19 (1994): 378. Frances Flannery reminds us: "[T]he sacred texts we study often seem to arise precisely as a result of some transformative moment in the life of an ancient author or community." *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 10.

<sup>544</sup> See full passage here: "It may be helpful to begin by pointing out that scholars today do not believe in ancient wisdom. To be more direct, we do not believe in wisdom at all. We know that Neoplatonists believed that wisdom allowed them to become divine and

now to think that “becoming divine” could only be a kind of self-deception. But, description needs *verstehen*—understanding, if it is to explain anything at all. Our sources should be read with compassion for a worldview—and experience—of the individual writers and their readers, on their own terms. Personal divinity was not wishful thinking for late antique peoples. It was actively and creatively imagined and what was imagined was experienced.

Reading texts about personal divinity was performative. The activity of reading, and imagining what was read, constituted an implicit “spiritual exercise” or imaginative technology of self-transformation. Sara Ahbel-Rappe sees the ideal reader as taking part in a theurgic ritual:

Absorbed in the world of the text, one is to leave behind the world of natural objects and ordinary thoughts. What takes their place is no less than an entire tradition, one purporting to redescribes the universe, locating the soul in the center of an unfolding cosmology that is enacting precisely through the soul’s ascent, or recitation, we might say of its cosmic liturgy. As a recipient of the text, the reader is located both historically as a link in the chain of transmission and ahistorically as a part of the world evoked through this transmission.<sup>545</sup>

Absorbed in the world of the text, the reader embodies the text, carrying an image of a newly discovered world, an *imago mundi*, that she projects, in Henry Corbin’s words, onto “a more or less coherent universe, which becomes the stage on which her destiny is

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reveal the gods in their very bodies, but we do not believe that anymore. Today we do not believe in wisdom, and we do not believe in gods—in or out of our bodies—but we are highly skilled at describing how ancient philosophers and theologians believed in gods, wisdom, and the divine life. However, rather than assume our lack of understanding in these matters, we assume theirs. Our reasoning works as follows: since we know that there is no wisdom in the deep and deifying sense described by the Platonists, we conclude that, when they extolled the virtues of wisdom, they were involved in sophisticated forms of self-deception.” “The Neoplatonic Transmission of Ancient Wisdom,” in *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Nathaniel DesRosiers (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 107 – 108.

<sup>545</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 172-173.

played out.”<sup>546</sup> For Augustine’s *Platonici* and *theurgici*, active imagination was soul-making and imagination was the soul itself.

These imaginative engagements with texts about divinity, cultivated a heightened self-reflexivity and an experience of “the sublime.” The Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and theurgic writers were trained in rhetoric, they were educated to use language to affect their readers’ minds and bodies. Using vivid descriptions, transporting images, and disorienting thought exercises as part of an initiatory teaching on the nature of the self and the divine, the texts are designed in content and style to shock, to rouse a sense of self-reflexive awe, to provide an experience of “the sublime”—all to effect, in Greg Shaw’s words, “an ecstatic removal from one’s habitual self-consciousness.”<sup>547</sup>

For the soul to become divine it needed to expand beyond the body but it can only do so by, paradoxically, turning inward. The boundaries of the Neoplatonic and Hermetic soul-self are no less than “those of the intelligible cosmos”—intelligible because they are inside.<sup>548</sup> To venture past (or deeper within) those boundaries, with a mind embodied, was to enter a state of awe: “mad, drunken, love.”<sup>549</sup> It was “to become a god” (*theothenai*; *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.26). The moment when “the apprehension that soul is

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<sup>546</sup> Angela Voss, “Becoming an Angel: The *Mundus Imaginalis* of Henry Corbin & the Platonic Path of Self-Knowledge,” in *Alchemical Traditions: From Antiquity to the Avant-Garde*, ed. Aaron Cheak (Melbourne, Australia: Numen Books, 2013). Quoting Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 7-8.

<sup>547</sup> Shaw, “Living Light,” 60.

<sup>548</sup> A. H. Armstrong, “The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and in the Cosmos in Plotinus” in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R.B. Harris (Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Old Dominion University, 1976), 195.

<sup>549</sup> See Plotinus’ use of ecstatic language to describe self-expansion in *Ennead* 6.7.35.24 – 27; 36.17-18.

not other than the intellect”<sup>550</sup> is, in Plotinus’ words, when one becomes “truly intelligible, both knower and known, self-apprehended and not dependent on another in order to see” (Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.3.8.40-42).<sup>551</sup> This moment is “thought thinking itself” (Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1074b, 34-5), the activity of the divine, an ecstatic awareness of awareness, the moment of self-realized divinity.<sup>552</sup>

Texts that entertain questions about consciousness and the divine are written and read by living human bodies. “Invisible, intelligent, immortal, powerful,” are the terms used to define divinity in the Neoplatonic and Hermetic contexts and, as we have learned, they are the terms that equally refer to the reflexive feature of consciousness we call “mind,” what the Augustine’s *Platonici* called “soul.” If the soul was deathless and divine, it could only claim this knowledge as a mortal body. Gabriella Carone makes a crucial point here:

Even when the self appears as a ‘floating ego’ that can expand its potentialities from the soul’s dispersion in the bodily realm of becoming towards, ultimately, further unification and identification with the hypostasis Intellect [*nous*] and finally the One, Plotinus still seems interested in securing the preservation of the self’s *empirical* identity even at superior, non-empirical levels. The interest in keeping that identity would be to guarantee that we can recover our *historical personality* when we descend from the higher levels and come back to ordinary life, something that seems inevitable given our bodily condition...It is important that I can call and recall that experience as *mine*, and as distinct from that of another.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 237.

<sup>551</sup> Armstrong, trans. “λάμπων ὁμοῦ καὶ λαμπόμενον, τὸ ἀληθῶς νοητόν, καὶ νοῶν καὶ νοούμενον, καὶ ἑαυτῷ ὀρώμενον καὶ οὐ δεόμενον ἄλλου.”

<sup>552</sup> Tredennick, trans. “ἡ νόεσις νοήσεως νόησις.” The self is not only preserved, it is increased. See Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.5.12.

<sup>553</sup> Gabriela Roxana Carone, “Mysticism and Individuality: A Plotinian Paradox” in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. John J. Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 177 – 178. See Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.3.17, 26 – 28: “As long as one is in contact, it is altogether neither possible, nor is there time, for the one who has had the contact, to speak; it is only afterwards that one can reflect upon it” (Carone, trans.). (ἀλλ’

Turning the attention of the reader inward toward features of her consciousness, such as “the mind’s eye” and the “entity that makes visibility,”<sup>554</sup> Sara Ahbel-Rappe observes how the texts “[point] the reader toward a conception of interiority in which the experience of imaginative production” sets apart the “the imagination as the object.”<sup>555</sup> This object, as Synesius concluded above, was the “soul.” An inner world of sublime self-reflexivity, ecstatic awareness of awareness—perhaps is not so far removed from Aristotle’s god—“thought thinking itself,” or better, “imagination imagining itself.” This inner world becomes the site of the *mysterium, tremendum, et fascinans* that Rudolf Otto ascribes to the “Wholly Other.” It is not “Wholly Other.” It is shockingly familiar. It is our own *experience* of experience. Otto’s “god” is heightened self-reflexivity writ large. Roman historian and philosopher of history R.G. Collingwood explains:

The experience of sublimity contains an element of illusion.... The power which is sublimity appears in that experience as belonging to an object which compels us in spite of ourselves to admire it; the object seems to be active, we to be passive. But this is not really the case. The power which we attribute to the object is really our own; it is our own aesthetic activity. The shock of sublimity is the shock of an uprush of imaginative energy within ourselves; and the illusion consists in the fact that we do not feel this energy as our own. ... We are worshipping an idol whose divine attributes are only the magnified shadow of our own powers.<sup>556</sup>

The shock of the sublime and the subsequent awakening to our co-creative role in manifesting divinity is what the theurgists referred to as waking the “innate gnōsis of the

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*ἀρκεῖ κἄν νοερῶς ἐφάπασθαι· ἐφαιμάμενον δέ, ὅτε ἐφάπτεται, πάντη μηδὲν μήτε δύνασθαι μήτε σχολὴν ἄγειν λέγειν).*

<sup>554</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.17. See discussion in chapter 2.

<sup>555</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 128.

<sup>556</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 36.

gods [that] co-exists with our very nature” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.3.10-8.1).<sup>557</sup>

Jeffrey Kripal offers another way to understand this deep-seated knowledge that pre-exists discursive thought, this “innate gnôsis” identified by Iamblichus. Kripal writes: “[T]he sacred and the psyche, are fundamentally related, for whatever the sacred is or is not, it is intimately tied to the deepest structures of the human psyche...[W]e are the sense of the sacred...the sacred and the human are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>558</sup> Waking up—as embodied, sentient creatures—we find the divine is *always already* embodied, intimately a part of our experience of the world *in moments of awe*. The divinity of the “wholly other” referred to above is terrifying not because of its “otherness” but because it is intimately familiar to us, drawing our attention to the strangeness of the fact of our existence. It dwells in the secret places of the heart (*intra pectoris mei secreta*) like Apuleius’ *daemon*, Isis. It is *theos* the mind’s eye of Hermes.

Sometimes, as Friedrich Nietzsche and others have pointed out, when you stare long enough into the abyss at the limit of your imagination, it stares back. Why? Why does it stare back? Perhaps because the abyss is sleeping and your staring awakens it. Perhaps because the abyss is a mirror, you see yourself awakening. But, perhaps, as Jeffrey Kripal suggests, the abyss is a two-way mirror: there is something you imagine on the other side that both is and is not you, it is more than you, and its “more-ness” calls to you. Out of Damascius’ “unknowable darkness,” it calls to you to *become* more. It desires you as you, it. And, it must become human to be known at all. It is not so much

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<sup>557</sup> Dillon, trans. “Συννοπάρχει γὰρ ἡμῶν αὐτῇ τῇ οὐσίᾳ ἢ περὶ θεῶν ἔμφυτος γνῶσις.” Quoted in Shaw, “Living Light,” 63.

<sup>558</sup> Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 255.

that theurgists wanted immortality (Iamblichus saw that as a by-product of theurgy), they wanted to divinize matter, or, more properly, to recognize the innate divinity of embodiment; not to ascend, but to expand into greater wholeness, paradoxically, by becoming mortal gods.

Not long before the Emperor Justinian I closed the School of Athens in 529 CE, scholar Damascius records his teacher's caution that while "the practice of theurgy is divine...those who are destined to be gods must first become human..." (*Vita Isidori* 150).<sup>559</sup> What did it mean to Isidore that one must first become human in order to become divine? Isidore's admonition was intended to "wake" the reader to the fullness of a human bodily experience that is capable of divine apprehension and expression here and now and so fulfill the "divine work" of bringing together invisible heaven and visible earth as an inner, innate, embodied gnosis, acting in the world: "Ecstasy transforms theurgists into gods, yet because theurgists are human, the gods become human."<sup>560</sup>

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates seems to berate Glaucon for his slow take: "Haven't you realized that our soul is immortal and never destroyed?" To which Glaucon replies:

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<sup>559</sup> Athanassiadi, trans. "Εὐὶ δὲ θεϊότερον χρῆμα, ὡς σὸ φῆς ὧ Ἥγία, ἔλεγε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰσίδωρος, ἡ ἱερατικὴ πραγματεία, φημὶ μὲν τοῦτο χάγῳ· ἀλλὰ πρῶτον ἀνθρώπους γενέσθαι τοὺς ἐσομένους θεοὺς δεῖ." Isidore is responding to Hegias, one of the competitors for the Neoplatonic scholarchy in Athens. Richard Lim has drawn our attention to the way in which late antique philosopher were "deeply implicated in the rich texture of mundane social interactions and the spirit of competitive strife, or *agon*, that permeated the Graeco-Roman culture." *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* (frag. 52.3659.i.22 – 44) describes the quarreling of philosophers as being louder than "raving lunatics"! (Lim, *Disputations*, 31). "Becoming human" may have also been intended as a derogatory remark directed at Hegias which would have been in keeping with the often adversarial tone in the various "philosophical histories" composed by scholarchs and loyal students.

<sup>560</sup> Shaw, "Living Light," 62.

“No, by god, I haven’t. Are you really in a position to assert that?” (10.608d).<sup>561</sup>

Sympathetic to Glaucon’s point (about Socrates’ current embodied state), historian Garth Fowden wonders how the *Platonici* and the *theurgici* might have appeared to onlookers in late antiquity: “[The theurgist] was important because he embodied, at a particular point in time and space, the fundamental unity of the divine and human worlds that endowed the whole of creation and history with meaning. And in his personal experience of such *theioi andres*<sup>562</sup> the late antique pagan could feel that he had found at last the true meaning of those prophetic lines from the *Odyssey* quoted by Eunapius [*Vita Sophistarum* 6, 7.7]: ‘And the gods, in the likeness of strangers from far countries/put on all manner of shapes, and wander through the cities’ (Homer, *Odyssey* 17.485-6)”.<sup>563</sup> Plotinus, whose immortal eye caught these lines from Homer as well, could not have agreed more:

For in this way the other gods also when many are present often appear to one, because that one alone is able to see them. But these are the gods who “in many forms travel round our cities” but to that god the cities turn, and all the earth and all the sky, who everywhere abides by himself and in himself and has from himself being and the things which really are down to soul and life depending on him and moving to an unbounded unity by his sizeless unboundedness (*Ennead* 6.5.12)<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> Lorenz, trans. “οὐκ ἤσθησαι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅτι ἀθάνατος ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ οὐδέποτε ἀπόλλυται; καὶ ὃς ἐμβλέψας μοι καὶ θαυμάσας εἶπε: μὰ Δί’, οὐκ ἔγωγε: σὺ δὲ τοῦτ’ ἔχεις λέγειν.”

<sup>562</sup> For *theios aner* (“divine man”), see Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen* (Leipzig, 1927).

<sup>563</sup> Fowden, trans. “καὶ τε θεοὶ ζείνοισιν εἰκότες ἀλλοδαποῖσι, παντοῖοι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστροφῶσι πόλης.” Quoted in Fowden, “Pagan Holy Man,” 59.

<sup>564</sup> Armstrong, trans. “ἀλλ’ οὗτοι μὲν οἱ θεοί, ὅτι παντοῖοι τελέθοντες ἐπιστροφῶσι τὰς πόλεις, εἰς ἐκεῖνον δὲ αἱ πόλεις ἐπιστρέφονται καὶ πᾶσα γῆ καὶ πᾶς οὐρανός, πανταχοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μένοντα καὶ ἔχοντα ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὰ ἀληθῶς ὄντα μέχρι ψυχῆς καὶ ζωῆς ἐξηρητημένα καὶ εἰς ἓν ἄπειρον ἰόντα ἀμεγέθει τῷ ἀπείρῳ.”

I have hoped that this perspective on the creative role of imagination will add a layer of complexity to how scholars and amateurs read texts about personal divinity yielding greater compassion for how ancient peoples may have understood themselves and their worlds. Furthermore, I have attempted to provoke modern readers to re-imagine a world that values many ways of knowing and many sources of knowledge. Greg Anderson suggests that “a modern academic discipline that takes seriously the ontological heterogeneities of human experience would hopefully help nurture greater sensitivity to the alterities of lifeworlds that have yet to be fully subsumed by Western modernity. And in so doing, such a discipline just might encourage us to think more critically about the ontological commitments of that same modernity, perhaps even help us to imagine less exploitative, more equitable, more sustainable lifeworlds of the future.”<sup>565</sup> Recognizing ontological diversity in the past and the present is a necessary step, often unexplored, for creating social spaces that are truly diverse and inclusive. I have tried to consider a selection of what the ancients considered “wisdom” as such and so conversed with the “mighty dead.”<sup>566</sup> I view the pursuit of personal divinity expressed in these texts similarly to how Peter Brown approached late antique asceticism, as “a heroic and sustained attempt, on the part of thinkers of widely different background and temper of mind, to map out the horizons of human freedom.”<sup>567</sup> I have taken the philosophers and the historians I have engaged with seriously. For ancient philosophers,

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<sup>565</sup> Anderson, “Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past,” 810.

<sup>566</sup> See my introduction on historical practice, intellectual history, and history of ideas.

<sup>567</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 442.

philosophy was a “way of life” whose purpose was transformation of the self.<sup>568</sup> This could equally be said of historians like R.G. Collingwood, (as well as Dilthey and Croce before him). Writing history is a transformative practice that leads to self-knowledge in the present.

Espousing a strange blend of Idealism and Historicism, Collingwood, not so unlike the *Platonici*, was interested in the peculiarities of self-reflexivity, awareness of awareness, thought thinking about itself. He writes:

The peculiarity of thought, then, is that it is not mere consciousness but self-consciousness. The self, as merely conscious, is a flow of consciousness, a series of immediate sensations and feelings; but as merely conscious it is not aware of itself as such a flow; it is ignorant of its own continuity through the succession of experience. The activity of becoming aware of the continuity is what is called thinking.<sup>569</sup>

Historical research is intimate for Collingwood. When reading an account of an event, we do not make the “author’s perspective our own” but we form our own perspective by “getting in touch with that of the author.”<sup>570</sup> History as a philosophical practice and exercise in the ancient sense is a transformative process and “not merely a process of becoming, but a process of self-creation.”<sup>571</sup> It is “a specialized form of human insight.”<sup>572</sup> In Collingwood’s historical method, we become the object of our knowing and in doing so we come to know ourselves...which has a distinctively Neoplatonic ring to it, doesn’t it?

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<sup>568</sup> In the ancient world, philosophers were initiates (*mustos*). See Hadot, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1995; Kingsley, “Esoteric Tradition,” 1998.

<sup>569</sup> Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 306.

<sup>570</sup> Collingwood, “Cassirer,” 145.

<sup>571</sup> Collingwood, “Cassirer,” 145.

<sup>572</sup> Phillips, “Distance and Representation,” 134.

It is doubtful that Collingwood would ever say that “self-knowledge leads to personal divinity” the way the *Platonici* did or at least in those terms. Perhaps he gets as close to it as he would when he describes how both artists and scientists perceive the objects of their imaginations as “nature.” For both artists and scientists perceiving the natural world, “the cognitive activity feels its object to be independent of it and set over against it as a limit to its own freedom.”<sup>573</sup> The limit to its own freedom is a sense of finitude but, Collingwood continues, “a mind that was wholly finite could not be aware that it was finite; where finitude is known it is transcended.”<sup>574</sup> An embodied, imagined divinity of the person seems like the “lived transcendence” Collingwood suggests here, perhaps not so far from Augustine’s *Platonici* and *theurgici* after all.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Collingwood, *Outlines*, 50. Beyond the ability of the artist and the scientist to ask, Collingwood’s philosopher wonders, “whether this feeling [of independence and limit] is not in some sense an illusion, and whether the object may not in reality be in some sense constituted by the very act which apprehends it.” Cf. Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 179 – 181.

<sup>574</sup> Collingwood, *Outlines*, 51.

<sup>575</sup> Collingwood was influenced by the German Idealist Hegel whose engagement with Renaissance Hermeticism is well-known. See Connelly, J. “The Hesitant Hegelian: Collingwood, Hegel, and Inter-War Oxford.” *Bulletin – Hegel Society of Great Britain* 51/52 (2005): 57-73. On Hegel’s Hermeticism see Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the hermetic tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). Magee introduces his book with the following quotation from Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (my adaptation): “*Theos* is *theos* only so far as it knows itself. Its self-knowledge is, further, self-consciousness in the human and the human’s knowledge of *theos*, which proceeds to the human’s self-knowledge in *theos*.” Magee comments: “This Hermetic doctrine of the ‘circular’ relationship between God (*sic*) and creation and the necessity of man for the completion of God is utterly original. It is not to be found in earlier philosophy. But it recurs again and again in the thought of the Hermeticists, and it is the chief doctrinal identity between Hermeticism and Hegelian thought.” Magee, *Hegel*, 1, 10. One can see hints of this aspect of Hegel in Collingwood in his unpublished lecture, “Realism and Idealism” (1935): “The only answer which seems to me to be admissible for a sound metaphysic would be, that all these kinds of unity are to be found in the real world, and that its ultimate unity will be none of them to the exclusion of the others, but will be a unity of them all, a unity of kinds of unity. Some of them are material unities, some mental, some mathematical, some logical; consequently the

## POETIC POSTLUDE

Rant

You cannot write a single line w/out a cosmology  
a cosmogony  
laid out, before all eyes

there is no part of yourself you can separate out  
saying, this is memory, this is sensation  
this is the work I care about, this is how I  
make a living

it is whole, it is a whole, it always was whole  
you do not “make” it so  
there is nothing to integrate, you are a presence  
you are an appendage of the work, the work stems from  
hangs from the heaven you create

every man / every woman carries a firmament inside  
& the stars in it are not the stars in the sky

w/out imagination there is no memory  
w/out imagination there is no sensation  
w/out imagination there is no will, desire

history is a living weapon in yr hand  
& you have imagined it, it is thus that you  
“find out for yourself”  
history is the dream of what can be, it is  
the relation between things in a continuum

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ultimate unity of the world will be a unity of being, within which there are these and doubtless other orders of being, each with a peculiar type of unity of its own, found there and nowhere else. And this answer is certainly in the spirit of objective idealism; it is hinted at more than once in passages of Plato, and it is the guiding thread of the chief modern attempt at an objective idealism, the philosophy of Hegel.” Quoted in Connelly, “Hesitant Hegelian,” 72. Gary Browning acknowledges that Hegel’s influence is complicated and ambiguous, especially in regards to Hegel’s unitive Absolutism. We see this clearly in *The New Leviathan* where Hegel is portrayed as obstructing “liberal civilization”: “*In Prolegomena to Logic* (1920), [Collingwood] suggests, ‘...because Hegel did not shake himself free from his Spinozistic and Schellingian training he tended to fall back, whenever he was not in his happiest mood into just this (monistic) view of the concept [“unity of thought”] and his followers have erected the whole into a kind of fetish.’” (Browning, *Rethinking*, 182; Collingwood, *Prolegomena*, 10). But, Collingwood is much more positive about Hegel in the unpublished works as seen above, probably, Browning argues, because his British readers were patently unreceptive to German and Italian idealism during the interwar period.

of imagination  
what you find out for yourself is what you select  
out of an infinite sea of possibility  
no one can inhabit yr world

yet it is not lonely,  
the ground of imagination is fearlessness  
discourse is video tape of a movie of a shadow play  
but the puppets are in yr hand  
your counters in a multidimensional chess  
which is divination  
& strategy

the war that matters is the war against the imagination  
all other wars are subsumed in it.

the ultimate famine is the starvation  
of the imagination

it is death to be sure, but the undead  
seek to inhabit someone else's world

the ultimate claustrophobia is the syllogism  
the ultimate claustrophobia is "it all adds up"  
nothing adds up & nothing stands in for  
anything else

THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST  
THE IMAGINATION  
THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST  
THE IMAGINATION  
THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS IS THE WAR AGAINST  
THE IMAGINATION  
ALL OTHER WARS ARE SUBSUMED IN IT

There is no way out of a spiritual battle  
There is no way you can avoid taking sides  
There is no way you can not have a poetics  
no matter what you do: plumber, baker, teacher

you do it in the consciousness of making  
or not making yr world  
you have a poetics: you step into the world  
like a suit of readymade clothes

or you etch in light  
your firmament spills into the shape of your room  
the shape of the poem, of yr body, of yr loves

A woman's life / a man's life is an allegory

Dig it

There is no way out of the spiritual battle  
the war is the war against the imagination  
you can't sign up as a conscientious objector

the war of the worlds hangs here, right now, in the balance  
it is a war for this world, to keep it  
a vale of soul-making

the taste in all our mouths is the taste of power  
and it is bitter as death

bring yr self home to yrself, enter the garden  
the guy at the gate w/ the flaming sword is yrself

the war is the war for the human imagination  
and no one can fight it but you/ & no one can fight it for you

The imagination is not only holy, it is precise  
it is not only fierce, it is practical  
men die everyday for the lack of it,  
it is vast & elegant

intellectus means "light of the mind"  
it is not discourse it is not even language  
the inner sun

the polis is constellated around the sun  
the fire is central

-- Diane Di Prima (1985)<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> *Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 159 – 161.

## APPENDIX A

### AUGUSTINE THE READER

It is worth taking a brief moment to discuss what we know about Augustine's reading habits generally and in regard to the writers he cites in Books 8 - 10.

Augustine's use of classical references throughout *City of God* is striking. Gillian Clark, captures the force of this use:

Augustine was out to show that he shared the classical deduction and the cultural referents of his opponents. He too could write the Latin of five centuries ago that was the hallmark of the educated man. *City of God* is his most consciously and consistently Ciceronian work, both in content and in style. Latin-speaking schoolboys worked through Terence and Sallust and Virgil as well as Cicero, and there they all are, reinforced by Livy for the legends of the early republic and Varro for its religion.<sup>577</sup>

Harald Hagendahl allows for the possibility, though, that rather than being intimately familiar with many of the classical authors he cites, as he appears to be, Augustine's knowledge was gathered from secondary sources such as books, commentaries, or even schoolbooks.<sup>578</sup> Nonetheless, especially in the case of *City of God*, Hagendahl argues that Augustine "prepared himself for his magnum opus by extensive study of profane authors and had them at hand during the course of his work," a position echoed by Marrou and O'Meara.<sup>579</sup> Augustine seemed to be proud of his literary prowess, especially when addressing "pagans" as he does in *City of God*. In one letter, he seems flattered by Darius

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<sup>577</sup> Gillian Clark, "City of Books: Augustine and the World as Text," in *The Early Christian Book*, eds. William E. Klingshirn, and Linda Safran (Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 126.

<sup>578</sup> Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Göteborg: Universitet, 1967), 690.

<sup>579</sup> Hagendahl, *Latin Classics*, 708-709. Cf. Henri Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1983), 129; John Joseph O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: An Introduction to the Confessions of St. Augustine*. London; New York: Longman, 1980), 94.

who praises the “immortal fruits” of his wisdom (Augustine, *epistula* 230). In another letter written during the Vandal invasion of North Africa in 429, Augustine composes a homily on praise (*epistula* 231) seeming to delight in citing Persius, Cicero, Plutarch, Ennius, and Horace before finally turning to the expected biblical references.<sup>580</sup>

In addition to his use of biblical citations, *City of God* displays a wide variety of literary sources including Latin, Greek, Jewish, and Christian writers. Among the Latin writers, Varro, Cicero, Sallust, and Livy figure prominently, offering examples of tragedies that befell Rome under the watch of pagan cult as well as the unseemly behavior of their gods. His knowledge and citations of the Greek philosophers would have been from Latin translations. His access to the philosophies of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus are believed to have been through the lost translations by Latin Christian Platonist Marius Victorinus.<sup>581</sup> Of Apuleius, we know that Augustine read *De deo Socrates*, *Apologia*, at least parts of *De Mundo*, and that he had some familiarity with *Metamorphoses*.<sup>582</sup> James J. O’Donnell speculates that Augustine came into possession of a codex containing *The god of Socrates* and the Latin *Asclepius* in 412/3, possibly through Volusianus or, seeing how popular it was in intellectual circles in Hippo, he may have sought it out himself in order to refute it preemptively.<sup>583</sup> He does not seem to have

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<sup>580</sup> Augustine, and Wilfrid Parsons. *Letters Volume V, Volume V* (Baltimore, MD: Catholic University of America Press, 1956) 158-165.

<sup>581</sup> Gerard J. P. O’Daly, *Augustine’s City of God: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 257.

<sup>582</sup> O’Daly, *City*, 253. Augustine alludes to Apuleius’s *Apologia* (*De civitate Dei* 8.19) and *Metamorphoses* (18.18), but draws more from *De Mundo* (4.2) and extensively from *De Deo Socrates* (8 – 9).

<sup>583</sup> O’Donnell, James J. “Augustine’s Classical Readings,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980): 149.

been aware of the Greek Hermetic works or other related Hermetic literature such as what is now referred to as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, a collection of rituals in Greek (and demotic Egyptian) discussed in chapter 4. While he admits to having read only a small amount of Plotinus,<sup>584</sup> he read Porphyry's now lost *The Ascent of the Soul* (*De Regressu Animae*) and his *Letter to Anebo* (*Epistula ad Anebonem*) where Augustine may have learned of Iamblichus' philosophy.

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<sup>584</sup> O'Daly, *Guide*, 258. See Augustine's *De Beata Vita* 1.4 and *Contra Academicos* 2.2.5.

**APPENDIX B**  
**AGAINST THE PAGANS**

In *City of God*, Augustine objects to the idea—articulated by Apuleius in *The god of Socrates*—that *daemones* (or to him, “demons”) act as intermediaries between humans and the gods, serving a salvific function. Augustine has a clear alternative to Platonic *daemones* in mind as the title of Book 9.15 indicates: “On the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” Underlying his argument for “Christ as Mediator” is a more general concern with a traditional Platonic philosophical problem of the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible realms—the outer and inner realms respectively.

Augustine’s argument about the difference between Apuleius’s “daemonic mediators” and “Christ as mediator” is complicated as the two models share certain elements. Augustine’s Neoplatonic pedigree shows up when he finds imaginative common ground with his intellectual forbearers. For example, he acknowledges that both non-Christian gods and Christian angels could be “visible and...shining bright [like the sun or moon]...or...invisible and mere objects of...thought.” (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.27).<sup>585</sup> Regarding the nature and existence of the gods of traditional Roman state cult, Augustine writes in Book 9: “If the Platonists prefer to call the angels gods rather than demons and to include them among those whom their founder and master Plato describes as gods created by the supreme god (*summo deo*), let them say what they please, for we must not engage in labored argument with them over words” (9.23).<sup>586</sup> The bishop

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<sup>585</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*sive visibiles, quos conspicuos lucere cernebat, solem ac lunam et cetera ibidem lumina, siue inuisibiles, quos putabat.*”

<sup>586</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Hos si Platonici malunt deos quam daemones dicere eisque adnumerare, quos a summo Deo conditos deos scribit eorum auctor et magister Plato: dicant quod uolunt; non enim cum eis de uerborum controuersia laborandum est.*”

acknowledges virtually “no quarrel between them [the Platonists] and us on that score” (9.23) despite the labored arguments that make up the *City of God*.<sup>587</sup>

The *daemones*, although immortal like the gods of the Greek philosophers, were a class of beings conceived of as being “lower” than the gods—existing in the air. And, being closer to the earth, they were able to interact more directly with humans than the gods were. They were also, according to Apuleius, subject to passions, and, while immortal, they were miserable because of their passions. Like the Platonists, Augustine maintains that “true” divinity is not *passable* or capable of suffering. Humans, who are neither immortal nor exempt from suffering, have a soul, the part of their being understood as capable of experiencing personal divinity. Therefore, Augustine argues: “We need the sort of mediator who is linked to us in our lowest state by bodily mortality yet is...immortal...by spirit...” (9.17).<sup>588</sup> Although Augustine takes issue with Apuleius’s demonology, he agrees with the general point: “In the scale of nature, angels do occupy, metaphysically, a middle position between God and humans, and demons are simply a species of angels, being less powerful because less wise” (21.6).<sup>589</sup>

The figure of the “Mediator” bears a startling resemblance to Plotinus’s idea of the soul (*psyche*). Plotinus understood the soul itself an “intermediary *logos*”<sup>590</sup> in much the same way that Augustine understood the intermediary function of Christ as *Logos*—

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<sup>587</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*ideo inter nos et ipsos paene nulla dissensio est.*”

<sup>588</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*sed tali qui nobis infimis ex corporis mortalitate coaptatus inmortalis spiritus iustitia.*”

<sup>589</sup> Sarah Byers, “Augustine and the Philosophers,” in *A Companion to Augustine*. Chichester, eds. Mark Vessey and Shelley Reid (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 185.175- 187

<sup>590</sup> Watson, *Phantasia*, 326.

the “Word made flesh” (John 1:14). This similarity is not a coincidence. Throughout Books 8 - 10, Augustine refers to Platonism as the philosophy that came closest to the “true” philosophy of Christianity. Although he lights into Apuleius and Porphyry with a vengeance, Plotinus seems to have earned his respect: “Plotinus is certainly praised as surpassing, in the period just preceding our own recollections, the rest of Plato’s followers in his understanding of the master” (9.10).<sup>591</sup>

Augustine then turns his attention from Apuleius’s demonology to a “different opinion of the demons [that] was adopted and expressed in his writings by the Egyptian Hermes, who is called Trismegistus” (8.23).<sup>592</sup> Drawing from Latin *Asclepius* 38, Augustine describes the “telestic art”<sup>593</sup> of the Hermetist: “To unite, therefore these invisible spirits to visible objects of bodily substance by some strange technique, so that the result is something like animated bodies, idols dedicated and subject to these spirits, this, Hermes says, is ‘making gods,’ (*deos facere*) and this great and miraculous power, he adds, of making gods has been given to men” (8.23).<sup>594</sup> Augustine fails to see how for the theurgists, the telestic art was equally concerned with attaining personal divinity for the one making the god (a point discussed in chapters 4 and 5). Instead, Augustine refutes:

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<sup>591</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Plotinus certe nostrae memoriae uicinis temporibus Platonem ceteris excellentius intellexisse laudatur.*”

<sup>592</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Nam diversa de illis Hermes Aegyptius, quem Trismegiston vocant, sensit et scripsit.*”

<sup>593</sup> My trans. “*ἡ τελεστικὴ τέκνη.*”

<sup>594</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Hos ergo spiritus invisibiles per artem quandam visibilibus rebus corporalis materiae copulare, ut sint quasi animata corpora illis spiritibus dicata et subdita simulacra, hoc esse dicit deos facere eamque magnam et mirabilem deos faciendi aecepisse homines potestatem.*”

Such gods then, the gods worshipped by such men and by such men artfully fabricated, gods that are in fact demons bound by the chains of their desires through some strange technique to idols, when they were described by Hermes as gods made by men, were nevertheless not endowed by him, as they were by the Platonist Apuleius (with whom we have already dealt adequately and show how illogical and absurd are his opinions), with the office of being interpreters and intercessors between gods made by God and men who God also made, carrying prayers to heaven and fetching back gifts as answers to prayers. For it is extremely foolish to suppose that gods made by men have more influence with gods made by God than have men themselves, who were also made by the same God (8.24).<sup>595</sup>

Augustine sees what he believes to be Hermes' admission of the error of "paganism" in the Latin Asclepius based on his reading of two sections, the first, a mistranslation of the Greek.<sup>596</sup> "It was this grave error and unbelief on the part of men who did not pay due attention to worship and divine religion, namely the art whereby man could make gods, that the sage deploras..." (8.24).<sup>597</sup> The second section is an apocalyptic vision Hermes foretells for Egypt:

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<sup>595</sup> Wiesen, trans. "*Deos ergo tales, talium deos, arte factos a talibus, id est idolis daemones per artem nescio quam cupiditatum suarum vinculis inligatos cum appellaret factos ab hominibus deos, non tamen eis dedit, quod Platonicus Apuleius—unde iam satis diximus et quam sit inconueniens absurdumque monstravimus—ut ipsi essent interpretes et intercessores inter deos quos fecit Deus et homines quos idem fecit Deus; hinc adferentes vota, inde munera referentes. Nimis enim stultum est credere deos quos fecerunt homines plus valere apud deos quos fecit Deus quam valent ipsi homines, quos idem ipse fecit Deus.*"

<sup>596</sup> "Augustine understands this work to say that this making of gods is a consequence of human unbelief and religious degeneration, but he bases this interpretation on a causal reading of 'quoniam' in Asclep. 37, a statement that Augustine finds puzzling in the context of the treatise's demonology, and for which he must find an ingenious explanation (Hermes is inspired by an evil spirit 8.24)." O'Daly, *Guide*, 117, n. 26; See also Scott, *Hermetica* IV, 183, n. 2; Wiesen, 114-115, n. 2.

<sup>597</sup> Wiesen, trans. "*Iste ergo multus error et incredulitas non animadvertentium ad cultum religionemque divinam invenit artem qua efficeret deos. Et tamen quod multus error et incredulitas et a cultu ac religione divina aversio animi invenit, ut homo arte faceret deos, hoc dolet vir sapiens.*"

We must certainly take note how this Egyptian, pained to think that the time would arrive when abolition would come in Egypt of all that worship which by his own admission was set up by men who were gravely in error, unbelievers and indifferent to the observance of *divinae religionis*, said among other things: ‘Then this land, this holy seat of shrines and temples, will be covered with sepulchers and with dead men... (8.26).<sup>598</sup>

Augustine understands the vision of Egypt’s shrines and temples “covered with sepulchers and with dead men” to be a foretelling of a victorious Christian martyr cult.

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<sup>598</sup> Wiesen, trans. “*Sane advertendum est quo modo iste Aegyptius, cum doleret tempus esse venturum quo illa auferrentur ex Aegypto quae fatetur a multum errantibus et incredulis et a cultu divinae religionis aversis esse instituta, ait inter cetera: ‘Tunc terra ista, sanctissima sedes delubrorum atque templorum, sepulcrorum erit mortuorumque plenissima.’*” Cf. Latin *Asclepius* 24.

## APPENDIX C

### THE ALTAR OF VICTORY REVISITED

In *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Alan Cameron ably dismantles the myth of a unified non-Christian resistance to Christianity, at least among the Roman senatorial elite, famously encapsulated in the story of Symmachus and the Altar of Victory (as well as the Battle of Frigidus and elsewhere).<sup>599</sup> Cameron reads the reaction of non-Christians to 410 as a matter of cultural difference, de-emphasizing the possibility of an ideological showdown between “true-believers” and demonstrates how, in fact, it was the Roman Christians who insured Rome’s afterlife in the form of “Classical” heritage. Yet Peter Brown observes that:

Cameron’s account of the end of paganism finds singularly little place for resentment, for regret, still less for anger at the success of so much blasphemy against the gods and continued, unspoken fear of their vengeance. Evidence for such feelings exists for the Eastern Roman Empire. But Cameron rules this evidence out of court, as being limited to small circles of alienated intellectuals.<sup>600</sup>

Indeed, by bringing Eastern sources (Damascius, Zacharias) to our attention, Edward Watts has brought that resentment, regret, and anger to life in his studies on the academies of Athens and Alexandria and the struggle of their scholars, rhetors, and philosophers against steadily diminishing means and social intolerance.<sup>601</sup> Watts cautions us that while Roman state cult died, it is difficult to pin down the exact circumstances:

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<sup>599</sup> Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>600</sup> Peter Brown, “Paganism: What we owe the Christians,” *The New York Review of Books*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Website accessed March 15, 2017.

<sup>601</sup> Edward Jay Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006; Edward Jay Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

“Depending upon the regions, sources, and languages scholars choose to privilege, Roman[s] ... can be seen as violently resisting Christianity’s expansion or as passively standing aside while Christians dismantled traditional [cultic] institutions.”<sup>602</sup>

The Altar of Victory controversy was more of a symbolic episode whose effect was felt in the defunding of Rome’s traditional state cult by Gratian in 382. Cameron’s focus on the senatorial elite ignores the vast majority that saw traditional cult persist for far longer.<sup>603</sup> This dissertation attends to the literary sources that nourished the persistence of ancient ideas. The non-Christian discourses and practices intended to cultivate personal divinity, even while under the influence at times of similar Christian ideas, is a site for the persistence of Classical heritage and ancient thought. Alan Cameron concedes:

So many of the activities, artifacts, and enthusiasms that have been identified as hallmarks of an elaborate, concerted campaign to combat Christianity turn out to have been central elements in the life of cultivated Christians. This is the one area in which “paganism” (defined as the Roman tradition, Rome’s glorious past) continued to exercise real power and influence on men’s minds. Despite the best attempts of Augustine and other rigorists, the Roman literary tradition played a vital and continuing role in shaping the thought-world of Christians, both at the time and in the centuries to come.<sup>604</sup>

One can’t help but wonder if Cameron’s lengthy objection to the persistence of traditional pre-Christian thinkers and practitioners up until this concession might have

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<sup>602</sup> Edward Jay Watts, “Review of Alan Cameron. *The Last Pagans of Rome*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2011. Pp. X, 878. \$85.00,” *The American Historical Review*. 116, no. 5 (2011): 1552.

<sup>603</sup> Watts, “Review of Alan Cameron,” 1552.

<sup>604</sup> Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 801.

something to do with his preference, although common, for referring to them with the polemical term of Christian origin, “pagan.”<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Anthony Kaldellis complains that Alan Cameron offers little about the “last pagans”: “One learns nothing...about their gods or reasons for not converting to Christianity. The book assimilates them to the generic social background, which is defined in Christian terms. Christian groups and discourses are generally given priority and treated as normative with strikingly more interest and close engagement. And authors who seem to want to deviate from the fold of the Church are marched right back in and disciplined by the label ‘unconventional Christians,’ what that means. The sixth century, for example, has been homogenized into a ‘monolithically’ Christian society far beyond even the dreams of Justinian.” “Late Antiquity Dissolves,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, 16 September, 2015: <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/late-antiquity-and-the-new-humanities-an-open-forum/>

## APPENDIX D

### THE WORLD OF LATE ANTIQUITY

An interdisciplinary and international field, late antique studies gathers late Roman historians, Byzantinists, early medievalists, Islamicists, classical archaeologists, patristic and religious studies scholars whose diverse approaches include social anthropology, archaeology, and cultural/literary theory. Just as disciplinary boundaries are crossed, so are temporal and geographic lines. While there continues to be debate surrounding its periodization,<sup>606</sup> Brown is famous for the provocation: “Late antiquity...it’s later than you think!” The geographic scope, while centered in the Mediterranean world, now reaches well beyond any of the Empire’s political boundaries as historians of late antiquity seem have found the ancient analog to globalization, indicating a shift in focus from centralizing power to a diverse periphery. Local and regional studies predominate as does a concern for representations and interpenetrating social networks.<sup>607</sup> In *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (2012), Scott Johnson portrays Irish monks (in a very *spätere Spätantike*) commenting on Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae* in one corner of the late antique world while a bilingual stele in Chinese and Syriac is erected in the Tang capital to commemorate 150 years of Christian presence in China.<sup>608</sup> Gibbon’s “fallen” empire seems rather more to have spread, diffused, and relocated (Ward-Perkins’ “vanishing drain pipes” aside). The Byzantines, as we call

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<sup>606</sup> Arnaldo Marcone, “A Long Late Antiquity?: Considerations on a Controversial Periodization,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1: 4-19 (2008).

<sup>607</sup> Adam M. Schor, *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>608</sup> Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

them, called themselves *Rhomaioi* after all. Henri Pirenne may have been the first to challenge Gibbon in his 1939 *Mahomet et Charlemagne*<sup>609</sup> but Brown takes a modified “global turn” himself, arguing against dramatic rupture in favor of continuity by focusing on trade routes and regional identities that persisted despite the various sackings from North and East. Building upon the previous generation of scholarship on the late Roman world—notably in Michael Rostovtzeff, Ronald Syme, A.H.M. Jones, H.I. Marrou, and, his teacher, Arnaldo Momigliano, Brown steers the conversation toward cultural and ideological history under the influence of Mary Douglas’s social anthropology.<sup>610</sup> Gibbon’s emphasis on institutional history has been replaced by a concern for social, cultural, and intellectual trends. Documentary sources are liberally complemented by material culture. New archaeological discoveries challenge the triumphalism of our Christian sources, highlighting a concern for traditional Graeco-Roman culture amidst a growing Christian state. Archaeological studies present regional vitality and affluence that discards any notion of a “Dark Age.” While the persistence of tradition is clear, the other side to the reassessment of Christian “triumphalism” is the recognition that traditional thought and practice also changed—notably, in the new brand of apologia of

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<sup>609</sup> Henri Pirenne, and Bruno Dumézil, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris: Tallandier, 2016).

<sup>610</sup> Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, *Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981); Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960); Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire: 284-602; A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey. I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956); Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

the philosophers—and in some cases waned without intervention from marauding monks, disagreeable bishops, or zealous emperors, as in the temple complexes of Upper Egypt.

The last twenty years have seen a number of guides, companions, and historiographical overviews that indicate a discipline come of age. Bowersock, Brown and Grabar's 1999 *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* uses a "long late antiquity" from 250 to 800 CE.<sup>611</sup> The *Guide* crosses temporal and spatial boundaries erected by nineteenth-century Classicists and provides a remedy for "too many bishops and not enough villages." Garnsey and Humfress's edited a collection in *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (2001) provides a reductus of the "Jones Report" in its concern with institutional history.<sup>612</sup> In 2004, a similar work edited by Swain and Edwards, *Approaching Late Antiquity* focuses on the period between 200-400 CE, drawing from recent archaeology of political-economy with particular attention to "top-down" effects of law, military organization, and Imperial reform on society.<sup>613</sup> *The Past Before Us* (2004), edited by Carole Straw and Richard Lim, provides an excellent overview of the historiography of late antiquity since the time of Gibbon.<sup>614</sup>

Recent trends in the direction of scholarship stand out: the change in focus from center to periphery, the influence of the "linguistic turn" with its infusion of literary

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<sup>611</sup> G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>612</sup> Peter Garnsey and Caroline Humfress, *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (Cambridge: Orchard Academic, 2001).

<sup>613</sup> Simon Swain, ed., *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>614</sup> Carole Ellen Straw and Richard Lim, *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity [Conference at Smith College in 1999]* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

theory and self-critical awareness of the personal and the present upon historiography, and the marshalling of multi-disciplinary approaches. The notion of Rome's fall into decadence is challenged, as is the insistence on abrupt historical breaks. Continuities and remains are recognized in context. Religious Studies scholars seek the material and social historians look to the force of ideas.

The "challenge" for the future seems to be striking a balance between close critical readings "against the grain" with the realpolitik of the *longue durée* freed from its nineteenth century presentism. The impact of social history and material culture studies paints a more complex and interconnected late antique world revealing unexpected continuities and surprising contradictions. Rousseau's *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (2009) is self-consciously historiographical and, in keeping with *The Past Before Us*, is much more reflexive than the other compendia preceding it.<sup>615</sup> *Companion*, like *Guide* includes more families and monasticism and less army and slavery. The use of Foucauldian and literary theory is here taken for granted and well-demonstrated: agency, performance, and textual communities populate its pages. Law becomes a prism into a society rather than its structural determinant.

### **Brown's Influence**

In *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (1981), Peter Brown chronicles the rise and function of the cult of saints in early Western European Christianity.<sup>616</sup> Using social anthropology and a wide array of primary sources to

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<sup>615</sup> Philip Rousseau, *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>616</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

resurrect a “history from below,” Brown surveys a variety of human experiences with tombs, shrines, relics, and pilgrimages. He pays particular attention to the idea that the bodies of saints provided a locus where heaven is joined with earth, setting the stage for significant further work by others on the body, materiality, and the senses in late antique religion such as Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (2006), Georgia Frank’s *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (2008) and Patricia Cox Miller’s *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (2009).<sup>617</sup> Brown asserts that the cult was not an upsurge of popular superstition as Hume and Gibbon would have it but rather an imaginative shift that reflected changing social relations in Roman society. *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982), a collection of essays, lectures, and reviews that covers much of Brown’s work in the 1970’s while teaching at Oxford and the University of London, was published roughly a decade after *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine* (1972).<sup>618</sup> Brown asks not, “Why did late antique people believe in the supernatural?” but rather, “What did they get out of believing so?” As a historian of Christianity, Brown stresses the need for “imaginative models” that help the historian enter into the thought-worlds and the pressing concerns of late antique men and women. However, an imaginative model is also a theoretical framework and one that, in part, he

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<sup>617</sup> Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. *Scenting Salvation - Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Frank, Georgia. *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>618</sup> Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

owes to Mary Douglas. Included among the thirteen articles is the influential “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity” (1971) which launched an inquiry into the social organization of sanctity and demystification of power that continues today.<sup>619</sup> The social-functionalist argument in “Holy Man” is revisited throughout a volume that ranges widely from Pirenne to Gregory of Tours, Theodoret to Libanius, and the *Book of Kells* to the early medieval ordeals. A careful study of the construction of the holy in late antiquity and its loci--especially in the holy person, relic, and icon—as well as, more generally, the functional interaction between humans and the supernatural, weaves the essays together. For Late Antique society, Brown argues that the “idea of the holy” was an embodied field for the projection and mediation of individual concerns and therefore a matrix for social cohesion and arbitration. Brown’s *The Body and Society* (1988) examines how the ideology, practice, and institutionalization of sexual renunciation developed over time and place in early Christianity.<sup>620</sup> Citing nearly every major early Christian source (as well as selected contemporary medical and philosophical texts from the likes of Galen and Porphyry), Brown reads the body of late antique Christianity, amassing social prescriptions for marriage, family, and sexuality from St. Paul to St. Augustine in both the Eastern and Western Empires. His familiar social anthropology is replaced to some extent by a social psychology (or archaeology?) coming out of Brown’s interaction with Foucault (and Hadot and Veyne before him). Brown reads the multifarious body as political site, social construct, spiritual exercise, and path of

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<sup>619</sup> Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies*. 61 (1971): 80-101.

<sup>620</sup> Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

resistance. In most of his case studies, gender performance and the social regulation of bodies are front and center. In considering questions of what it means to be a person in a society, he examines the options people had in private and social life, that is, the opportunities for (and limits of) freedom, a concern that I share in my research on personal divinity. When imaginative maps get redrawn, power gets relocated. What may have seemed like an option for freedom on the ground, soon became a disciplinary institution of great consequence, wealth, and power, not the least of which was to cast an enduring shadow over the psyche of the West in the form of sexual shame. In *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (1992), Brown describes the transformation of *paideia* from its classical nexus to a new Christian imperial context.<sup>621</sup> A new language of power (triumphal representations) and a new style of urban leadership emerges as the bishopric superseded the pagan aristocracy's role in civic euergetism and the philosophers' conciliar *parrhesia* while gaining the support of the poor (whom they could now discipline). Brown also asserts that the pagan elite continued to function under an "ideology of silence." Claudia Rapp's *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (2005) follows up on Brown's thesis and further complicates the complex construction of episcopal authority.<sup>622</sup>

### **Contra Brown**

Unsurprisingly, the success of the Brown's influence has elicited a response, exemplified concisely in Andrea Giardina's characterization of the field as "an explosion

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<sup>621</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>622</sup> Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2013).

of late antiquity” and in Bryan Ward-Perkins’ provocative *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005).<sup>623</sup> Ward-Perkins reacts to the preponderance of Eastern focused correctives of late with some “positivist” Western material culture analysis of his own. He bases much of his argument on the availability of high-quality “comfort” goods such as pottery, roof tiles, and coins. It is tempting to fault him for being “too Marx and not enough Weber” except that it is hard to argue with his common-sense portrayal of the devastating effects of war. He questions the Brownian re-characterization of “decline” and “crisis” as “transition” and “transformation,” and refutes the more recent attempts to recast violent invasion as “accommodation.” By way of offering an explanation for these reassessments, Ward-Perkins suggests that post-WWII political developments have impacted historiography. Ultimately prioritizing the material base as a cultural matrix, he suggests that while 800 may work for the East, the West and the Aegean experienced significant material “simplifications” by 400 and 600, respectively.

### **Late Ancient or Early Christian?**

In his essay, “Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire” (1963), Arnaldo Momigliano suggests that any interpretation of the decline of the Roman empire must take into account the triumph of imperial Christianity.<sup>624</sup> However, he adds, it will not be a “simple return” to Gibbon. The question of “survival” needs to be understood in relation to two developments—the relative decline of the city in the Western empire and the rise of the Christian state. For social and cultural historians of late antiquity, at least,

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<sup>623</sup> Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>624</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

the notion of transformation has, by and large, replaced that of survival through a study of Rome's periphery and a consideration of hybridity and fluid identity as historical processes. What the periphery looks like and how these processes play out in the East and the West are both similar and different as we shall see later in this essay. Nonetheless, the notion of "survival" and its necessary corollary—Christianization or, perhaps, imperialization—has been the central problem of late antique studies since its inception in the 70s with the arrival of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750* (1971).<sup>625</sup> Nevertheless, the question of how Rome adopted imperial Christian ideology and which aspects of traditional culture survived the Christianization of Rome is not so far from Gibbon as one might think.

It was Peter Brown's reassessment of the thesis advanced in Edward Gibbon's masterwork *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J. Bury, 1902) that launched the field of late antique studies.<sup>626</sup> Eschewing Gibbon's characterization of Christianity as a superstitious usurper, Brown made the case for the transformation of classical heritage in Christian times. Brown's work has established late antiquity as a complex and dynamic historical period for academic study. He has paired persistent probing of source material with multiple imaginative and theoretical models—in an almost "disciplinary iconoclasm" that includes social and literary theory, anthropology, psychology and hagiography. New models have given rise to new questions with which to interrogate old problems. Central to his contribution is an insistence upon linking "the

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<sup>625</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

<sup>626</sup> Edward Gibbon, and J. B. Bury, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: Edited in Seven Volumes with Introduction, Notes, Appendices, and Index* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

social and the spiritual revolutions of the late antique period” without reducing their relationship to a unilinear cause and effect.

### **Christianization**

The master narrative of Christianization, following the triumphalism of the Church Fathers, is as follows. After Constantine’s Edict of Toleration in 313, emperors became increasingly intolerant of traditional religion, outlawing animal sacrifice and even the burning of incense in the home. Encouraged by edicts and bishops, monks began destroying cult images and temples. Non-Christian resistance was generally ineffective as the Altar of Victory was removed from the Senate. Holy men attracted followers because of their athletic asceticism and miraculous healing. Emperor Julian’s revival failed in the fourth century. In the fifth century, a declining tradition cult and rising Christianity saw more destruction of temples and more building of churches. Finally, Emperor Justinian closes the Academy at Athens (529), and enforced baptism of non-Christians ensues. Regardless of whether or not one accepts this fairly reasonable oversimplification, it still doesn’t explain why people were attracted to Christianity.

The problem of christianization remains central to the field although the problem itself is understood in different ways. On the question of conversion and the appeal of Christianity, A.D. Nock’s *Conversion: The Old and New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (1933) remains the standard.<sup>627</sup> In her essay, “Paganism and Christianization” (2012), Jaclyn Maxwell gathers a number of theories about the

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<sup>627</sup> Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

attraction of Christianity.<sup>628</sup> MacMullen, she writes, points to the effectiveness of imperial ideology, the appeal of holy people, healing, and exorcism; Jones, to a sense of expediency among the upwardly mobile after the crisis of third century; Salzman, to an aristocracy that reformed Christianity to its aims; Fowden, to the increased mobility in the empire and the need for *Zugehörigkeit*; Frankfurter, to the charisma of leaders and the fact that abandoning former beliefs was not, in practice, required. Ramsay MacMullen's 1984 *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (1984) challenges uncritical reception of patristic representations of the "triumph" of Christianity.<sup>629</sup> MacMullen argues that in order to understand the dynamic of Christianization in the Roman empire between 100-400, we must first understand the preexisting state of non-Christian ideological commitments. While the diverse cultic traditions of the Graeco-Roman world were non-exclusive, the exclusiveness of imperial Christian ideology forced adherents (not converts in the Nockian sense) to make a choice. An interest in the miraculous, a desire for spiritual and social benefits of adhesion, and a fear of physical pain (heavenly or imperially sanctioned), combined with the subsequent demonization of non-Christian cultic practices, enabled Christianity to gradually supersede traditional beliefs and practices.

Citing the persistence of traditional cultic practices and beliefs into early modern and modern societies as evidence for the relative "triumph" of Christianity, Pierre Chuvin argues in *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (1990) that christianization between 300-600 was, in fact, possible due to the non-Christian elites' loss of power, public policies of

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<sup>628</sup> Jacklyn Maxwell, "Paganism and Christianization," in *The Oxford handbook of late antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>629</sup> MacMullen, Ramsay. *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

exclusion that encouraged their assimilation, and finally, under Justinian, threats of physical elimination.<sup>630</sup> For Chuvin, the process was gradual and complex, displaying contradictory evidence between official representations and legal proscriptions, on the one hand, and local material and epigraphic sources, on the other. He traces the retreat of non-imperial ideologies from a popular and public forum to the more private and philosophical spheres.

Gillian Clark wonders if Roman institutions might have had more of an impact on Christianity than previously considered. In *Christianity and Roman Society* (2004), Clark's argument that Roman society transformed Christianity relies on the premise that traditional society embraced the emerging textual and ethical communities out of political expediency rather than from commitment to ideology.<sup>631</sup> Her discussion of the difference between philosophical and Christian "selves" is especially interesting but she emphasizes political and economic impacts over such ideological developments. The innovative role of martyrs, saints, and bishops is well documented yet those social innovations are trumped, in her view, by the alliance between imperial and episcopal power.

Hal Drake analyzes the "Constantinian Revolution" in terms of realpolitik. In *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (2000), he refutes the inherent intolerance many scholars have attributed to Christianity, choosing to focus on the politics of power rather than theology.<sup>632</sup> His portrait of a pragmatic Constantine who

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<sup>630</sup> Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>631</sup> Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>632</sup> H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

used the rising bishops as administrative adjuncts, while seeking to build a stable ideological consensus between pagans and Christians through an “inclusive monotheism,” is original and draws from current day scholarship on American power politics.

Michele Salzman mines A.H.M. Jones’ *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (1971) for data regarding ideological and career identity shifts within the Senatorial class in *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (2002).<sup>633</sup> She argues that the senatorial aristocracy, more than the imperial court, influenced the transformation of the Roman Empire from pagan to Christian identification. Once self-identification as a Christian, she maintains, ceased to disrupt personal, familial, and social networks, conversion became a matter of self-interest. It was in this climate that Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine “transformed” their Classical *paideia* for Christianity.

Recent archaeological studies have had a significant impact on our understanding of Christianization. In “The Fate of Rural Temples in Late Antiquity,” a contribution to Bowden, Lavan, and Machado’s *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside* (2004), Beatrice Caseau charts conflicting ideology evidenced by the destruction of traditional temples (as well as the persistent attraction to these sites) in the countryside of the late Roman Empire up to the sixth century.<sup>634</sup> Outside of the cities, the suburban, rural, and “uncultivated” zones contained both elaborate temple structures and more

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<sup>633</sup> A. H. M. Jones, John Robert Martindale, and John Morris. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>634</sup> William Bowden, Luke Lavan, and Carlos Machado, *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

informally defined sacred landscapes or sanctuaries. Surveys of cultic sites indicate ebbs and flows in use that correlate to settlement patterns and economics, as much as ideological shifts. In one example, she points to the villa of St- Aubin-sur-Mer in Normandy which was built on top of a Celtic *fanum* from the second century later to be toppled in the fourth century by a Roman shrine. She concludes that the enforced “privatization” of tradition cultic practice (i.e. moving from public to private spaces) resulted in the loss of temple traditions. In “The Fate of Pagan Cult Places in Palestine,” from Lapin’s edited *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Late Roman Palestine* (1998), Tsafirir notes that while expressions of traditional cult (statues of gods and heroes, mosaics with imagery from Graeco-Roman mythology) survived into the sixth century, there is no evidence of temples or temple sacrifice after the end of the fourth century in Palestine, at any rate.<sup>635</sup> Tsafirir reads Epiphanius against Ammianus Marcellinus to confirm that violent destruction of pagan temples was slower than apologists generally indicate. Relying heavily on the work of epigrapher, Louis Robert, and with an interest in Greek polis-cult, Robin Lane Fox argues for the vitality of ethnic “polytheisms” in the late empire in *Pagans and Christians* (1986).<sup>636</sup>

## **The Greek East**

In *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (1990), Glen Bowersock, in much the same vein as Baynes’ *Hellenistic Civilization and East Rome* (1946), challenges the view of Hellenism

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<sup>635</sup> Hayim Lapin, *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine* (Potomac, MD: University Press of Maryland, 1998).

<sup>636</sup> Robin Lane Fox and Reg Piggott, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Folio Society, 2010).

as Hellenizing; that is, a forceful overlay of Greek cultural forms and values.<sup>637</sup> Drawing on a range of philological, literary, archaeological, and visual evidence—especially the mosaics from Paphos, Cyprus—he argues that Hellenism was not imperialistic. Greek culture enriched and influenced through contact, to be sure, but also provided a vehicle for local cultural expression and preservation. Much of Bowersock’s discussion of Hellenism involves the survival of tradition culture in late antiquity despite patristic claims of triumph. He uses Syrian and Egyptian examples to reassess Momigliano’s *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (1975).<sup>638</sup> For example, when John of Ephesus comments on the thousands of non-Christians in the mountains near the Maeander Valley, Bowersock reminds us of valley cult practices described in sixth-century B.C.E. inscriptions that continued to be depicted on local coins into the sixth century C.E. According to Damascius, these practices were also known to fifth and sixth-century Alexandrian Neoplatonists.

In *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (2007), Isabella Sandwell uses the sermons of John Chrysostom and the letters of Libanius to complicate identity in late antiquity and offers a new approach to thinking about Christianization.<sup>639</sup> Relying on the social anthropology of Frederik Barth and T.H. Eriksen, she makes the case for multiple fluid social identities and allegiances. While John Chrysostom is unambiguous about what differentiates Christians from Greeks or

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<sup>637</sup> G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Norman Hepburn Baynes, *The Hellenistic Civilization and East Rome* (London: G. Cumberlege [printed by J. Johnson], 1946).

<sup>638</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>639</sup> Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Jews, the writings of Libanius suggest a range of degree in ideological identification and practice.

In “The Student Self in Late Antiquity” (2005), Edward Watts examines how traditional classical education for elites—*paideia*—blurred the boundaries between classical, Christian, and Jewish identities as a normalizing strategy in Egypt.<sup>640</sup> In his *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (2006), a cultural history of *paideia* in its social, political, and economic context, Watts comments on the relationship between Bishop Synesius and Philosopher Libanius to show the collegiality that exists between classical and Christian intellectuals who shared *paideia*.<sup>641</sup> In *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (2010), Watts traces the resilience of Graeco-Roman heritage and the way in which non-Christian and Christian intellectual groups reconfigured this heritage in post-Constantinian Alexandria.<sup>642</sup> Drawing from Neoplatonist Philosopher Damascius’ *Vita Isidori* and Bishop Zacharias Scholasticus’s *Vita Severi*, he argues that both groups had long histories of preserving and communicating their collective pasts. Prior to the fourth century, internecine Christian disputes occupied more Christian attention more than philosophically-centered teachings (see also Richard Lim’s “Christian Triumph and

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<sup>640</sup> Edward Jay Watts, “The Student Self in Late Antiquity,” in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, eds. David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>641</sup> Edward Jay Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>642</sup> Edward Jay Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

Controversy,” 1999).<sup>643</sup> With the rise of monastic communities as a model for Christian instruction, upper class Christians were now “cut off” from the intellectual training provided by the traditional classical philosophical schools. In this new climate, Christian pedagogues used Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii* as an *interpretatio Christiana* on classical *paideia*. However, Christians in Alexandria continued to be interested in traditional classical *paideia*. Rather than thinking in terms of Christianization, he understands the social and cultural change in Alexandria as contingent upon “personal connections and individual interactions.”

### **The Latin West**

The Greek East has sometimes been the evidential “linchpin” for both the survival of classical culture and its transformation. However, a similar hybridity is evident among Western intellectuals in nascent late antique successor states albeit without the force of imperial Byzantium. In *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2003), Peter Brown makes amends to the lacuna of the West in *The World of Late Antiquity*.<sup>644</sup> It was Marrou’s *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (1949) that had planted the notion of the vitality of the Western Empire in the fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>645</sup> Nonetheless, it was, perhaps, an under-appreciation for the “barbarian frontier” in *The World of Late Antiquity* (which has since been corrected by Peter

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<sup>643</sup> Richard Lim, “Christian Triumph and Controversy,” in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, eds. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, 196 - 218 (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>644</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>645</sup> Henri Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1983).

Heather, Walter Goffart, Wolf Liebeschuetz, and Ian Wood) that led him to revisit the localization of Christianity in emerging “micro-Christendoms” in Europe (and beyond) in *The Rise of Western Christendom*. He recalls Theodoric’s comment that a rich Goth imitates a Roman while only a poor Roman imitates a Goth. In “Conversion and Christianization in Late Antiquity: The Case of Augustine” (2004), Brown uses the recently published “Dolbeau sermons” of Augustine to complicate our notion of christianization in the West.<sup>646</sup> We see the bishop on the ground contending with the *superstitio* of nominal “Christians” who still consulted astrologers and diviners. Christianization did not amount to conversion in any Nockian sense. As Averil Cameron points out in “Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory After Foucault” (1986) it was not as if people simply adopted a new “religion,” changed their whole view of the world and way of living from some “reorientation of the soul.”<sup>647</sup> Rather, it was slow changes in the society that allowed the possibility for Christianity to “adhere” itself to society. Alan Cameron in *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011) persuasively argues against the picture of elite Roman pagans acting in resistance to christianization as symbolized in Symachus’s famous Altar of Victory and the Battle of the Frigidus.<sup>648</sup> That said, his argument works best when confined to the West. In *The End of Ancient Christianity* (1990), Robert Markus considers the “Christianities” of the West in North Africa, Gaul, and Italy under that assumption that the boundary between Christianity and other spheres

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<sup>646</sup> Peter Brown, “Conversion and Christianity in late antiquity: the case of Augustine” in *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity [Conference at Smith College in 1999]*, eds. Carole Ellen Straw and Richard Lim (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2004): 103 – 117.

<sup>647</sup> Averil Cameron, “Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory After Foucault,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 266-271.

<sup>648</sup> Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of activity is not fixed nor are Christianity's constituent beliefs and practices universal. He advances the notion of "de-secularization" to describe how Christianity appropriated previously non-religious spheres of activity into its scope.<sup>649</sup> More concerned with attitudes about classical cultural elements that continued to be part of the life and mind of late antique peoples, Markus points to the Gallo-Roman poetry of Ausonius which displays an easy blend of motifs from classical culture and Christian ideology. While he and his pupil Paulinus shared the imaginative landscape of *paideia*, Paulinus eventually renounced his wealth and status to follow "authentic" Christianity through ascetic practice, a choice Ausonius, like so many other late Roman Christians, found simply unnecessary. They each drew the "map" of what constituted Christianity differently.

In "Christianization, Secularization, and the Transformation of Public Life" (2009), Richard Lim looks at Markus' process in reverse. In a society where notions of the sacred infused all spheres of activity, it was not until early Christianity becomes a threat to classical culture that certain select practices, like participating in sacrifices and imperial cult, became "religious" while other practices rooted in traditional culture avoided that categorization.<sup>650</sup> Lim argues that one of the ways Christianity reshaped Graeco-Roman culture and society was through the construction of the sphere of the *saeculum*. Public spectacles such as the *munera* and *ludi*, though demonized by some, were relegated to the *saeculum* which became an "autonomous discursive space" for classical culture where it was protected from Christianization, yet transformed in its accommodation. The *ludi* and *munera* were desacralized and then secularized. In

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<sup>649</sup> R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>650</sup> Richard Lim, "Christianization, Secularization, and the Transformation of Public Life," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, eds. Philip Rousseau and Jutta Raithel (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Barton's view, this "secularization" might be seen as an alternative, unauthorized (in the minds of the normative Church Fathers, at any rate) sacralization. Lim cites Stark and Bainbridge's study of the cycle of desacralization and resacralization in modernity, a work inspired by Weber's notion of disenchantment as a feature of modernity.<sup>651</sup> In *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (1995), Brown attempts to highlight the cultural and ideological *bricolage* between traditional and Christian thought and practice that, especially in the Western limes, constituted a "Middle Ground."<sup>652</sup> Brown cautions against privileging the Christian Church as the "principal agent in the diffusion of a more adaptable form of classical culture."

Understanding Christianization as a Geertzian "cultural system" that included vibrant and conservative non-religious institutions and traditions while considering how hybridity and fluid identities functioned, particularly in the periphery, moves us forward in identifying the nuances of contested sacralizations and secularizations. Taking such a view offers an apotropaic against reverting to a dichotomous "survival versus triumph" model of social change in late antiquity. Nevertheless, it is heartening, I think, for those of us who, when stumbling upon a celebration of *kalendae ianuarii*, might find some comfort in "continuity over time" once in a while.

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<sup>651</sup> Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). See also Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006); Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review, ". *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 692-716.

<sup>652</sup> Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna: 1866 –
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Migne)
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i>

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