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Iamblichus's Theory of divination (μαντική) and Divine inspiration (θεία ἐπίπνοια): Nature and the Case of Hydromancy at Claros

Andreea-Maria Lemnaru-Carrez

Iamblichus, along with mystery cults¹ that were spreading in Late Antiquity² Mediterraneana, theorized various types of μαντική in the second part of his *De Mysteriis*, that one can categorize in two distinct groups : those belonging to inductive techniques such as augury and the interpretation of σύμβολα on the one hand, and those caused by divine inspiration: θεία ἐπίπνοια, θεία μανία and ἐνθουσιασμός on the other hand.

His exposition focuses on the mechanisms and causes of the latter, which play a major part in theurgical technique, as he delivers a scientific analysis of the phenomenon of possession (κατοκωχή).

According to Iamblichus, the purpose of μαντική is the prophet's (μάντις) soul's union (ἔνωσις) with the divine, which result in a πρόγνωσις of the future and enables the soul to temporarily free itself from its spatio-temporal limits while still in its mortal body. And as such, this experience seems to be of the utmost soteriological value. However, from a philosophical point of view, it seriously challenges Iamblichus's theology, and most of all, the status of divinity in regards to nature. Indeed, if the gods are transcendent in an ontological and hierarchical sense, which would prevent the very possibility of their union with a human soul, they are immanent throughout their presence and illuminations of the cosmos. But if it is so, are they to divinize the prophet's soul or is it meant to remain their mere instrument?

1 This study will rely on J. Dillon's, E.C Clarke and J.P Hershbell's edition of the *De Mysteriis*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2003, which will be referred to as DM. For Iamblichus's theorization of possession in mystery cults, see DM III,8 p. 137-144. Cf. also R. Turcan *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde Romain*, Paris, 1983 ; R. Pettazzoni, " Les mystères Grecs et les religions à mystères de l'Antiquité " in *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale*, II, p.303-312; but first and foremost, W. Burkert, *Antike Mysterien, Funktionen und Gehalt*, C. H. Beck, Munich, 1987.

2 See P. Athanassiadi, *Païens et chrétiens dans un âge d'angoisse*, Belles Lettres, 2010.

Iamblichus, guided by his characteristic will to organize and systematize religious *phenomena*, introduces various degrees of *θεία ἐπίπνοια* and *κατοκωκή*, classified by level of intensity and union with the divine. While stressing the difference between the causes and the symptoms of divinatory inspiration, Iamblichus insists on its most important sign: the descent of a *πνεῦμα* made of immaterial and noetic fire into the prophet³.

Nevertheless, in divinatory inspiration, this gradual union with the divine doesn't seem to be an abduction: the god does not take the oracle, but comes to him, visits him, which results in his soul's *αναγωγή*⁴, a feature that differentiates it from theurgical ascent, where the soul ascends⁵ on its *ὄχημα πνεῦμα*⁶ during the god's descent⁷. The steps of the deity's descent raise the so-called debate between Plotinus and Iamblichus⁸ about the soul's complete or partial descent: if the soul has fully fallen⁹, which means that no part of it remains "above", it can't reunite with its celestial part without going ritually through the whole realm of generation. This necessity leads us to highlight the importance of hydromancy in Iamblichus's theorization of *μαντική*, since he intends to both conserve water's sacredness and deny the natural or demonic causes of *κατοκωκή*.

3 See H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, ed. M. Tardieu, Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 2011 (1956) p. 39; p. 44-45; p. 60; p. 85 n. 70.

4 See P. Athanassiadi, *Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 83 (1993), pp. 115-130.

5 See H. Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy* op. cit. p. 170-171; 210 ; 413 and 414 for the steps of theurgical ascent.

6 See mostly E.R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology*, "the Astral Body in Neoplatonism", p. 313-321 and J. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, The American Philological Association, 1985.

7 See C. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, Ashgate, p. 221-222, 2014.

8 Despite this important opposition between Plotinus and Iamblichus, see Iamblichus's f. 34, *In Timaeum* book 2 II, in J. Dillon, *Iamblichus, the Platonic Commentaries*, 2009, p. 137 where he seems to have accused Porphyry of being un-plotinian (*μη̅ πλωτίνριον*), "being in agreement with Plotinus himself" according to Proclus. Therefore Iamblichus and Plotinus at least agreed on the intellegible paradigms (*τὰ νοητὰ τοῦ κόσμου παραδείγματα*) of the cosmos' pre-existence over nature. See also *ibid.* p. 307-309 for discussion.

9 See Iamblichus, *De Anima*, ed. and trans. J. D and J. Finamore, Brill, Leiden, 2002.

Therefore, to what extent does Iamblichus succeed in maintaining both the divine's immanence and transcendence? How does he account for the causes of divine inspiration? How does *θεία ἐπίπνοια* result in divination, and foreknowledge of the future (*πρόγνωσις*¹⁰)? Last but not least, what arguments does Iamblichus develop to justify the specific case of hydromancy, which leads him to accept nature as part of the sacred, and yet maintain the divine's transcendence?

This study will first focus on the common metaphysical ground Iamblichus wishes to provide all types of *θεία ἐπίπνοια*, and shall afterwards address the case of a hydromantic oracle¹¹ (*χρησμος*): Claros (Colophon) in Asia Minor, in order to study Iamblichus's arguments in favor and against the power of water in the oracle's inspiration.

Degrees and types of divine inspiration

Iamblichus, in *De Mysteriis*, III, wishes to provide a scientific and organized account of the forms and degrees of *θεία ἐπίπνοια*:

Ἔστι δὴ οὖν πολλὰ τῆς θείας κατοκωχῆς εἶδη καὶ πολλαχῶς ἡ θεία ἐπίπνοια ἀνακινεῖται, ὅθεν δὴ καὶ πολλὰ τὰ σημεῖα αὐτῆς ἐστὶ καὶ διαφέροντα. Τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ διαφέροντες, ἀφ' ὧν ἐπιπνεόμεθα, καὶ τὴν ἐπίπνοιαν ποιοῦσιν ἕτεραν, τοῦτο καὶ ὁ τρόπος τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν παραλλάττων ποιεῖ καὶ τὴν θεοφορίαν ἕτεραν. Ἡ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, ἢ ἡμεῖς ὄλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνώμεθα, ἢ κοινὴν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν τῆς ἐσχάτης δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχομεν, ποτὲ δ' αὖ τῆς μέσης, ἐνίοτε δὲ τῆς πρώτης· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν μετουσία ψιλὴ γίγνεται, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ κοινωμία, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἔνωσις τούτων τῶν ἐνθουσιασέων·

There are, therefore, many kinds of divine possession (*πολλὰ τῆς θείας κατοκωχῆς εἶδη*), and divine inspiration (*θεία ἐπίπνοια*) is aroused in many ways. Hence, there are indeed many different signs of it. For, on the one hand, the gods by whom we are inspired are different and produce diverse inspiration; on the

10 See DM III,1 p. 119 ; DM III I p. 121 ; III 2 p. 125 ; III,12 p. 151 ; III,22 p. 177.

11 For a general study of oracles in Late Antiquity, see A. Busine *Paroles d'Apollon. Pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l'Antiquité tardive (I^{er}-IV^e siècle)*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2005.

other hand, the manner of enthusiasm in its alterations makes the divine possession also different (τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν παραλλάττων ποιεῖ καὶ τὴν θεοφορίαν ἑτέραν).

For either the god possesses us (ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει), or we become wholly the god's property (ἢ ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα), or we exercise our activity in common with him (ἢ κοινήν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν). And sometimes we share in the god's lowest power (τῆς ἐσχάτης δυνάμεως), sometimes in his intermediate (τῆς μέσης), and sometimes in his primary power (τῆς πρώτης). And sometimes there is a mere presence (παρουσία), sometimes a communion (κοινωνία), and sometimes even a union (ἔνωσις).¹²

According to Iamblichus, divination is indeed a category of θεία μανία¹³. As a result of this statement, the first issue he has to face is the nature of divine inspiration: is it natural or supernatural? And if it is indeed supernatural, why does nature seem to play a part in it? Before addressing this delicate matter, Iamblichus sets up a general and systematic theory of enthusiasm he will further use in all his observations on religious experience.

He asserts that “divine possession is neither the accomplishment of the body nor of the soul, nor of both together, nor do these contain in themselves some cause of divine alteration, nor is it the nature of the greater to be generated from the inferior¹⁴”, and that “the gift of foreknowledge” is “sent down by the gods¹⁵”. This gift is “advantageous to souls for saving (σώζειν) and leading them upwards (ἀνάγειν)¹⁶”. Unlike Plutarch in his *De Defectu Oraculorum*¹⁷ who

12 DM III, 5 p. 131

13 DM III,8 p. 137.

14 Ibid.

15 DM III,1 p. 119.

16 DM X,4 p. 349.

17 *De defectu oraculorum*, 38. τὸ γὰρ ἀφισταμένων καὶ ἀπολειπόντων τὰ χρηστήρια τῶν δαιμόνων ὡσπερ ὄργανα τεχνιτῶν ἀργὰ καὶ ἄναυδα κείσθαι λεχθέν ἕτερον λόγον ἐγείρει μείζονα τὸν περὶ τῆς αἰτίας καὶ δυνάμεως, αἷς χρώμενοι ποιοῦσι κατόχους τοῖς ἐνθουσιασμοῖς καὶ φαντασιαστικούς τοὺς προφήτας καὶ τὰς προφήτιδας. οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε τὴν ἔκλειψιν αἰτιᾶσθαι τοῦ ἀπαυδᾶν τὰ μαντεῖα μὴ πεισθέντας ὃν τρόπον ἐφεστῶτες αὐτοῖς καὶ παρόντες ἐνεργὰ καὶ λόγια ποιοῦσιν οἱ δαίμονες. (For what was said then, that when the demons withdraw and forsake the oracles, these lie idle and inarticulate like the instruments of musicians, raises another question of greater importance regarding

mentions demonic intervention in μαντική, Iamblichus insists on the gods as the only cause of θεία ἐπίπνοια, excluding by all means any intervention of inferior supernatural beings.

Foreknowledge, according to Iamblichus, would directly derive “from the gods who in themselves possess the limits of all knowledge of existing things, from whom the mantic power is distributed throughout the whole cosmos, and among all the different natures found there¹⁸”.

Another striking feature of Iamblichus's theorization of divine inspiration is the difference between θεία ἐπίπνοια and κατοκωχή. Although they seem at first equal, the latter is the result, or effect of the first. Therefore, divine inspiration is prior to the phenomenon of possession as its very consequence.

Iamblichus encompasses both in the general category of ἐνθουσιασμός, which literally means to be in a god (ἐνθεος), whose mode may vary according to the deity who inspires it. Therefore, enthusiasm is the very phenomenon of manifestation of the deity through the oracle, which can be separated in several types of trance, and several corresponding symptoms or signs¹⁹.

Of utmost importance is the capacity of the soul to act in common with the god, at the highest level of κατοκωχή. This single and common activity between the soul and the god highly contrasts with the multiplicity of his powers. To put it in other words, according to the power we share in, the lowest, the intermediate or the first and highest, the degree of union between the oracle's soul and the god varies until it culminates in ecstatic ἔνωσις, although Iamblichus stresses that this state of trance is not a mere frenzy, but an “exaltation and transference to what is superior²⁰” (ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ἀναγωγή καὶ μετάστασις).

Let us now review the different stages of the soul's common ἐνέργεια with the deity which descends upon it. The very presence of the god

the causative means and power which they employ to make the prophetic priests and priestesses possessed by inspiration and able to present their visions. For it is not possible to hold that the desertion by the demons is the reason for the silence of the oracles unless we know precisely the manner in which the demons, by having the oracles in their charge and by their presence there, make them active and articulate.)

18 DM op. cit. III,1 p. 121.

19 For these symptoms, which are all related to ritually induced physical anaesthesia, see DM III,4 p. 128-131.

20 See DM III,7 p. 135

causes the soul to participate in his lowest power. In this first case, which seems to correspond to visions, the divine spirit and the oracle's soul are separated, each of them conserving their individuality. When the soul achieves a *κοινωνία* with the deity, it participates in its intermediate power. The supreme level of enthusiasm results in the soul's unification with the deity in accordance with its participation and its nature. In Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, XI, Lucius's vision of Isis culminates in his *ἱερός γάμος* with the goddess, although it does not involve common *πρόγνωσις*, but the very glimpse from the soul's future postmortem condition, as a consequence of the temporary remembrance of its divine essence.

According to Iamblichus, this blissful trance is bound to purify the luminous vehicle of the soul through the oracle's complete loss of self-consciousness²¹, as the prophet symmetrically becomes the vehicle of the gods²²:

πάρεστι δ' εὐθύς καὶ χρῆται ὡς ὄργάνῳ τῷ προφήτῃ οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ
 ὄντι οὔτε παρακολουθοῦντι οὐδὲν οἷς λέγει ἢ ὅπου γῆς ἐστίν·
 ὥστε καὶ μετὰ τὴν χρησμοδίαν μόγις ποτὲ ἑαυτὸν λαμβάνει.

(The divine pneuma) uses the prophet as an instrument (ὡς ὄργάνῳ τῷ προφήτῃ) while he is neither himself nor has any consciousness (οὔτε παρακολουθοῦντι) of what he says or where on the earth he is, so that even after prophesying, he sometimes scarcely gets control of himself.²³

21 For this complete loss of self-consciousness during enthusiasm see also DM op. cit. III,4 p. 129 : “In this area also, I want to make clear the characteristic signs (τὰ τεκμήρια) of those who are truly possessed by the gods (τῶν ὁρθῶς κατεχομένων ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν παραδειξαι). For if they have subjected their entire life as a vehicle or instrument (ὡς ὄχημα ἢ ὄργανον) to the gods who inspire them, either they exchange their human life for the divine, or they direct their own life towards the god. They neither act according to sensation, nor are they awake in the manner of those who have their senses aroused; neither do they themselves apprehend the future, nor are they moved like those who act according to purpose. But they are not even conscious of themselves (οὐδὲ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς) neither as they were before, nor in any other fashion, nor, in general, do they turn (ἐπιστρέφουσιν εἰς ἑαυτοῦς) their personal intelligence upon themselves, nor do they project any personal knowledge.”

22 See G. Shaw, “Containing Ecstasy : the Strategies of Iamblican Theurgy”, *Dionysius XXI* (2003), p. 53-88 and especially p. 59-60.

23 DM III,11 p. 147.

This phenomenon has been widely documented by anthropological research on possession cults and trance²⁴, which helped us get a better understanding of the mechanisms of divination in the ancient world, especially at Delphi²⁵. An interesting parallel has been drawn between hellenic institutional divination and the modern Nechung oracle, Tibet's state oracle²⁶ who would “collapse into unconsciousness²⁷” at the end of his trance. The signs of possession are the same Iamblichus describes²⁸. In modern language, they can be described as peculiar

24 For a comparative and anthropological approach to this phenomenon, see B.E. Schmidt, *Spirits and Trance in Brazil*, Bloomsbury, 2016 and (with L. Huskinson), *Spirit Possession and Trance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Bloomsbury, 2010. See also R. Prince (ed.), *Trance and possession states*, R.M. Bucke Memorial Society, Montreal, 1968 ; F.D Goodman *When the spirits ride the Wind: Trance Journeys and other Ecstatic Experiences*. Indianapolis University Press, 1990 ; I.M LEWIS, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit possession*, Routledge, London, 2003 (1971).

25 See L. Maurizio, “ Anthropology and spirit possession : a reconsideration of the Pythia's role at Delphi ”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 115 (1995), p. 69-86.

26 Similar to the *pawo* (*dpa.'bo*) are the *lha-pa* and *klu-pa*, also possessed by minor divinities of local cults. R. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, Faber, London, 1972 p. 188, quoted by H. Sidky, “ The State Oracle of Tibet, Spirit Possession and Shamanism ”, *Numen* 58 (2011), Brill, p. 71-99 ; p. 79, writes that “ There are mediumistic specialists who incarnate minor deities and belong, in spite of their Lamaist dress, to the nameless religion of the people. These are shepherds, who have on some occasion been “chosen” by a deity and from then on have been able to embody him. They go into a trance and sing, but they only incarnate local gods, gods of the sky (*lha*) and the underworld (*klu*), gods of the soil, etc. From these they get their name: *lha-pa*, *klu-pa*. ” See also W. Geoffrey Arnott, “ Nechung : a modern parallel to the Delphic oracle ? ”, *Greece & Rome*, vol. 36, p. 152-157 (1989) and H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, “ Tibetan Oracles ”, in *Himalayan anthropology: the Indo-Tibetan interface* (James F. Fisher ed.) World anthropology, vol. 35, W. de Gruyter, 1978, p. 287-298 ; T. Ngodup, F. Bottereau-Gardey and L. Deshayes *Nechung, l'oracle du Dalai-lama*, Presses de la Renaissance, Paris, 2009 ; B. ZOTZ, *Zur europäischen Wahrnehmung von Besessenheitsphänomenen und Orakelwesen in Tibet*, Vienna University, 2010.

27 W. Geoffrey Arnott op. cit. p. 155.

28 See n. 19 ; DM III,4 p. 130-131 : “ Here is the greatest evidence: for many, even when fire is applied to them, are not burned, since the fire does not touch them on account of their divine inspiration. And many who are burned do not react, because at this time they are not living the life of an animate being. And some who are pierced with spits have no awareness of it, nor do others who are struck on the back with axes; still others whose arms are cut with knives do not feel it at all. Their actions are in no way human, because what is inaccessible

movements of the head, hyperventilation and most fascinatingly, a complete change of the facial features, corresponding to their loss of individually and identity²⁹. As Apamea's master puts it, "those who are inspired have no consciousness of themselves"³⁰ (οὐ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς ἐνθουσιῶντες): they literally, yet temporarily, self-dissolve.

However, just like Iamblichus would differentiate personal and popular divination from official oracles, modern research differentiates the first category of the *pawo* (*dpa.'bo*) from the Tibetan State Oracle³¹. Iamblichus's description of the oracle's withdrawal from mundane matters is also strikingly similar to that of the Tibetan *kuden* (receiving body of the god) who sought physical and mental purification several days before each consultation through ritual acts, having "consecrated water poured over his head while mantras were chanted"³²:

καὶ πρὸ τοῦ πίνειν δὲ οὕτως ἀσιτεῖ τὴν ἡμέραν ὅλην καὶ νύκτα, καὶ ἐν ἱεροῖς τισιν ἀβάτοις τῷ πλήθει καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀνακεχώρηκεν ἀρχόμενος ἐνθουσιᾶν, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀποστάσεως καὶ ἀπαλλαγῆς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἄχραντον ἑαυτὸν εἰς ὑποδοχὴν τοῦ θεοῦ παρασκευάζει· ἐξ ὧν δὴ εἰς καθαρὰν ἔδραν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς ἐλλάμπουσιν ἔχει τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπίπνοιαν, ἀκώλυτόν τε αὐτῇ παρέχει τὴν κατοκωχὴν καὶ τὴν παρουσίαν τελείαν ἀνεμπόδιον³³.

Even before drinking, he fasts the whole day and night, and after becoming divinely inspired, he withdraws by himself to sacred, inaccessible places, and by this withdrawal and separation from human affairs, he purifies himself for receiving the god; and through these means, he has the inspiration of god illuminating

becomes accessible under divine possession: they cast themselves into fire and they walk through fire, and they walk over rivers like the priestess at Kastabala." For a phenomenological modern approach of trance, see L.C Peters, D. Price-Williams, "A Phenomenological Overview of Trance." (1983), *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 20(1), p. 5-39.

29 W. Geoffrey Arnott op. cit. p. 154.

30 Ibid.

31 Cf. T. Gibson, "Notes on the History of the Shamanic in Tibet and Inner Asia", *Numen* vol. 44,1 (1997), p. 39-59.

32 W. Geoffrey Arnott op. cit. p. 153.

33 DM III,11 p. 146-147.

the pure sanctuary of his own soul, and providing for it an unhindered divine possession, and a perfect and unimpeded presence.

This supranoeitic state of consciousness, which seems to be paradoxically enough the very dissolution of self-consciousness, needs to be ritually anticipated according to Iamblichus, for the soul to undergo all the levels of being before achieving its final union with the deity.

In order to strengthen his concordist project of harmonization between all pagan cults³⁴, Iamblichus provides them with a common metaphysical ground. When institutional oracles were losing their adepts³⁵, Iamblichus tried to rehabilitate them, one by one, insisting on the fact that “foreknowledge and forecasting are not the province of a power exerting sympathetic influence or of something enmeshed in matter and held fast in a specific place and body, but, on the contrary it is characteristic of a power that is freed from all these.”³⁶ Now that we have introduced Iamblichus's general theory of divination, we shall focus on the case of hydromancy for the theological and metaphysical issues it involves.

34 If this project is usually associated with Proclus (cf. H.D Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques : une caractéristique du néoplatonisme athénien”, in *On Proclus and his influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E.P Bos and P.A Meijer, Leiden, 1992, p. 35-50) there are solid arguments that lead us to think of Iamblichus as his forerunner, which concord with the description Julian the Emperor gave of him as “the savior of the whole pagan world”. In his *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus indeed not only asserts that there is a philosophical symphonia between Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras and Plato, but also a religious and theologic harmony supported by a common metaphysical system between mystery cults, divination, its two categories (inspired or technical) and their various types (oracles, dream divination, signs interpretation) ; Chaldean theurgy and Egyptian religion.

35 See K.M Heineman, *The decadence of Delphi : the Oracle in the Second Century AD and Beyond*, London and New-York, 2018 ; in which she attributes the decadence of institutional oracles to the late-antique interest in theological revelations instead of practical and individual predictions. Cf. P. Athanassiadi, “The Fate of Oracles in Late Antiquity: Didyma and Delphi”, *Δελτίον ΧΑΕ* 15 (1989-1990), Περίοδος Δ'• Σελ. p. 271-278.

36 DM III,22 p. 177. Οὐ γὰρ συμπαθοῦς δυνάμεως οὐδ' ἐνόλου καὶ κατεχομένης ἐν τινὶ τόπῳ καὶ σώματι τὸ προγιγνώσκειν τε καὶ προμηνύειν τὸ μέλλον, ἀλλὰ τούναντίον τῆς ἀπὸ πάντων τούτων ἀπολελυμένης.

Hydromancy: towards the oracle of Apollo Clarius at Colophon

It is no coincidence that the first actual and official oracle Iamblichus analyzes is that of Claros in Colophon³⁷, on the coast of Ionia, which was best known for its hydromantic tradition. Just like the two Juliani who had achieved a rain miracle during Marcus-Aurelius's military campaign on the Danube, Iamblichus himself seems to have had a specific bond with hydromancy, since we learn through Eunapius that he had performed such a ritual in Gadara's hot springs. As a matter of fact, Iamblichus had summoned there two water genies from the spring bed, Eros and Anteros³⁸, a passage written in a hagiographical style which deserves our attention:

As they had decided to head towards Gadara (...), they reached it at the best season of the year. Iamblichus was taking a bath, and so were his disciples, who were still insisting on the same subject. Smiling, Iamblichus told them “I have a religious apprehension to show you my powers, however, this shall happen for you.” He therefore asked his disciples to investigate the old name of the two smallest but prettiest springs. When they had fulfilled this command, they said: “Although these

37 On the oracle of Claros, see L. Robert, "Les fouilles de Claros (1954)", in *Opera minora* VI (1989), p. 523-549; *id.*, "L'oracle de Claros", in C. Delvoye, G. Roux (eds.), *La civilisation grecque de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Brussels, 1967, p. 306-312 ; A. Busine, "La consultation de l'oracle d'Apollon dans le discours de Jamblique", *Kernos*, 15, 2002 ; V. Pirenne-Delforge, "Le sanctuaire de Claros et son oracle", *Kernos*, 29, 2016 ; J. De la Genière, "Le sanctuaire d'Apollon à Claros, découvertes récentes", *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 136-1, 1992, p. 195-210 ; C. PICARD, *Éphèse et Claros, recherches sur les sanctuaires et les cultes de l'Ionie du Nord*, B.E.F.A.R., 123, Paris, 1922 and "Un oracle d'Apollon Clarios à Pergame", *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 46, 1922, p. 190-197 ; H. W. Parke, *The Oracle of Apollo in Asia Minor*, London, 1985; J. Stauber and R. Merkelbach, "Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros", *Epigraphica Anatolica*, heft 27, 1996, p. 1-53 ; and J.-C. Moretti, "Le temple de l'oracle d'Apollon à Claros" in O. Henry *Premières Rencontres d'Archéologie de l'Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes - Archéologies et espaces parcourus*, Nov 2010, Istanbul, Turkey. Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes Georges Dumézil, 1, p.111-128, 2012, *Rencontres d'Archéologie de l'IFEA*.

38 Cf. A.-J. Festugière's translation of this episode in H.D Saffrey's edition of the *De Mysteriis*, Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013, p. XXXVII. See also G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, op. cit. "Eros and the One of the Soul" p. 118-126 for further discussion of that passage.

people don't know why, they call the first one Eros, and the second Anteros.” Iamblichus touched the water with his finger – he was sitting on the side of the spring, where water overflows – after he pronounced a short spell, and invoked in this way a young boy from the depth. His skin was white, he had golden hair (...) and was moderately tall. He looked as if he had just bathed. Facing his disciples' surprise, Iamblichus said: “let's go to the next spring,” as he stood up and began walking in a focused way. There, when he had fulfilled the same magical operations, he invoked another Eros similar to the first one in all except that his hair was black and shining like the sun. Together, these two boys were holding him in their arms like they would have behaved with a real father. However he returned each one of them to their own spring, and (...) went away after he bathed.

Interestingly enough, this is the only testimony we are able to rely on regarding Iamblichus's miracles, although it seemed to have been a magical, and not theurgical operation here, but also an association of Syrian and Greek mythology. Although these two figures seem to belong to Syrian popular religion's genies, one shall not forget that Eros and Anteros are first and foremost Aphrodite's and Ares's sons. According to the *Phaedrus*³⁹, Anteros is nothing but aswered love, the mirror reflection of the lover's feelings. In Eunapius's testimony, both Erotes arise from water, primordial element of indifferenciation, once Iamblichus has invoked them with *συνθήματα*⁴⁰, sacred words endowed with operative power. This alleged miracle might have been one of the reasons why Apamea's philosopher was revered as ὁ θεῖος Ἰαμβλίχος. Since he was publically recognized as a philosopher able to perform the demiurgical act of differenciation, primeval matter's

39 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 255e. “It is as if he had caught an eye disease from someone else, but could not identify the cause; he does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror. So when the lover is near, the boy's pain is relieved just as the lover's is, and when they are apart he yearns as much as he is yearned for, because he has a mirror image of love in him – returned love.” (καὶ οὐθ' ὅτι πέπονθεν οἶδεν οὐδ' ἔχει φράσαι, ἀλλ' οἶον ἀπ' ἄλλου ὀφθαλμίας ἀπολελαυκῶς πρόφασιν εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἔχει, ὥσπερ δὲ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐν τῷ ἐρῶντι ἑαυτὸν ὀρῶν λέληθεν. Καὶ ὅταν μὲν ἐκεῖνος παρῆ, λήγει κατὰ ταῦτα ἐκείνῳ τῆς ὀδύνης, ὅταν δὲ ἀπῆ, κατὰ ταῦτα αὐτῷ ποθεῖ καὶ ποθεῖται, εἰδῶλον ἐρωτος ἀντέρωτα ἔχων·)

40 Cf. DM I,12 p. 53 : “ The sacred names (ὀνόματα θεῶν) of the gods and the other types of divine symbol (θεῖα συνθήματα) that have the capacity of raising us up to the gods are enabled to link us to them. ”, and also I,21 p. 81 ; II,11 p. 115 ; III,14 p. 155 ; III,15 p. 157 ; IV,2 p. 207 ; VI,6 p. 287 ; VIII,1 p. 291.

reception (χώρα⁴¹) of two opposite (έναντίοι) yet sympathetic forms⁴², Iamblichus would indeed include himself in the priest-king Sampsigerami dynasty who ruled over Emesa. In this magical operation, water seems to contain within itself all virtual δύναμει, while playing the role of a mirror in Eros's fundamental loneliness.

Although it is a πνεῦμα made of immaterial fire⁴³ which descends upon the prophet, water, along with light in φωτὸς ἀγωγή or φωταγωγία⁴⁴, seems to be the main natural means of divination in most of the declining official oracles of the Late Roman Empire, which justifies that Iamblichus addresses it:

Τὸ δὴ ἐν Κολοφῶνι μαντεῖον ὁμολογεῖται παρὰ πᾶσι δι' ὕδατος χρηματίζειν. Εἶναι γὰρ πηγὴν ἐν οἴκῳ καταγεῖω καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῆς πίνειν τὸν προφήτην ἔν τισι τακταῖς νυξίν, ἱερουργιῶν πολλῶν

41 See *Timaeus* 49a–b; 52a for the receptacle as a χώρα that receives and transmits the Forms, and G. SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul*, Penn State Press, University Park, 1995, p. 55 and E.C. Clarke, *Iamblichus's De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous*, Ashgate Press, 2001, p. 86, n.4 and H. Lewy, op. cit. p. 295-297 for discussion.

42 See G. SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul* op. cit. p. 124 for Eros's function in the reunification of the soul as the divine's experience of genuine separation.

43 DM III, 6 p. 133. Τὸ δὲ μέγιστον ὀρᾶται τῷ θεαγωγῶντι τὸ κατιὸν πνεῦμα καὶ εἰσκρινόμενον, ὅσον τέ ἐστι καὶ ὁποῖον· μυστικῶς τε πείθεται καὶ διακυβερνᾶται. 'Ορᾶται δὲ καὶ τῷ δεχομένῳ τὸ τοῦ πυρὸς εἶδος πρὸ τοῦ δέχεσθαι· ἐνίστε δὲ καὶ τοῖς θεωροῦσι πᾶσιν ἐκδηλον γίννεται, ἥτοι κατιόντος ἢ ἀναχωροῦντος τοῦ θεοῦ· (But it is most important that the spirit descending and entering is seen by the medium, both in its extent and its quality; and that he is mystically obedient to and directed by it. The form of fire is seen by the recipient before the reception; and sometimes it even becomes conspicuous to all the spectators, during either the descent or the withdrawal of the god.)

44 DM III, 14 p. 155. According to Dillon, φωταγωγία was a way to make divine beings visible through light shining or water, since higher beings were made of immaterial light, that could reveal itself through water used as a mirror. See PGM IV 955 and 1103. See also E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951, p. 299 for discussion on that fascinating divinatory tradition that may be related to the *Chaldean Oracles* on the one hand, and to a minoan astronomical ritual on the other hand. A calendar regulator made of an alabaster bowl was embedded in the darkest part of the floor in Knossos's Central Palace Sanctuary, placed such that sunrise in the morning of the equinoxes would shine on the northern side of the of the door and strike the bowl. See M. Blomberg and G. Henriksson, "Minoan Astronomy" (p. 1431-1441) p. 1435 in ed. C. N. Ruggles *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*, Springer, New-York, 2014.

γενομένων πρότερον, πίνοντα δὲ χρησμοδεῖν οὐκέθ' ὀρώμενον τοῖς παροῦσι θεωροῖς. Τὸ μὲν οὖν εἶναι μαντικὸν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτόθεν πρόδηλον· τὸ δὲ πῶς ἐστὶ τοιοῦτον, οὐκέτ' ἄν, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, πᾶς ἀνὴρ γνοίη· δοκεῖ μὲν γὰρ διήκειν τι δι' αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα μαντικόν· οὐ μέντοι τό γε ἀληθὲς οὕτως ἔχει. Τὸ γὰρ θεῖον οὐ διαπεφοίτηκεν οὕτω διαστατῶς καὶ μεριστῶς ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῦ μετέχουσιν, ἀλλ' ὡς παρέχον ἔξωθεν καὶ ἐπιλάμπον τὴν πηγὴν, πληροῖ δυνάμεως αὐτὴν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ μαντικῆς· οὐ μέντοι τοῦ γε θεοῦ πᾶσά ἐστιν ἢ ἐπίπνοια ἤντινα παρέχει τὸ ὕδωρ, ἀλλ' αὕτη μὲν ἐπιτηδειότητα μόνον καὶ ἀποκάθαρσιν τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν ἀυγοειδοῦς πνεύματος ἐμποιεῖ, δι' ἣν δυνατοὶ γιγνόμεθα χωρεῖν τὸν θεόν.

It is agreed by everyone that the oracle at Colophon prophesies by means of water (δι' ὕδατος χρηματίζειν). There is a spring in a subterranean chamber (πηγὴν ἐν οἴκῳ καταγείῳ), and from it the prophet drinks on certain appointed nights, after performing many preliminary ceremonies, and after drinking, he delivers his oracles, no longer seen by the spectators present (θεωροῖς). That this water has oracular (μαντικόν) power is immediately obvious. It seems that some prophetic spirit (πνεῦμα μαντικόν) passes through the water; but this is not correct, for the divine does not permeate what partakes in a fragmented and divided manner (διαστατῶς καὶ μεριστῶς), but it is by exercising its power from without (ἔξωθεν), and illuminating the spring, that it fills it with its own prophetic power. Still, not every inspiration that the water gives is from the god, but this only bestows the receptivity and purification (ἐπιτηδειότητα καὶ ἀποκάθαρσιν) of the luminous spirit (ἀυγοειδοῦς πνεύματος) in us, through which we are able to receive the god (χωρεῖν τὸν θεόν). But the presence of the god is different from and prior to this, and flashes like lightning⁴⁵ from above⁴⁶.

45 For the incorporeal source of light and its relation with fire in Iamblichus, see See H. Lewy op. cit. p. 45 ; 202-203 ; J. Finamore, “ Iamblichus on the Light and Transparent ”, in *The divine Iamblichus : Philosopher and Man of God*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark, London, Bristol Classical Press, 1993, pp. 55-64 and M. Kapstein *The Presence of Light : Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

46 *De Mysteriis* III,11 p. 147.

The first step of Iamblichus's demonstration is to concede that prophecy indeed occurs through the means of water in Claros, a testimony consistent with Tacitus's description of the oracle⁴⁷. However, if he acknowledges that this water has “oracular power”, Iamblichus refuses to assert that it would actually be divinatory in itself.

As a matter of fact, if he were to accept water's divinatory power, Iamblichus would assert that the causes of divination are natural, and therefore not divine, a hypothesis he needs to dismiss by all means to strengthen paganism's legitimacy. In order to support his claim of a fully supernatural cause in divination, he declares that no πνεῦμα μαντικόν passes through water, before justifying it through his theory of the unity of the divine. To put it otherwise, if the divine πνεῦμα was conducted by water, divine power would be divided and separated. Yet the power of the gods is one according to Iamblichus, and as such, it should act uniformly.

Ἀχώριστος μὲν γὰρ οὖσα τῆς φύσεως τῶν τόπων καὶ τῶν ὑποκειμένων αὐτῇ σωμάτων ἢ τοιαύτη δύναμις, ἢ προϊοῦσα κατὰ κινήσιν τὴν ἀφοριζομένην ἀριθμῶ, οὐ δύναται τὰ πανταχοῦ καὶ ἀεὶ προγιγνώσκειν ὡσαύτως· ἀφειμένη δ' ἀπόλυτος τῶν τόπων καὶ τῶν διαμεμετρημένων τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς χρόνων (ἅτε δὴ κρείττων οὖσα τῶν γιγνομένων κατὰ χρόνον καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τόπου κατεχομένων) τοῖς πανταχοῦ οὖσιν ἐξ ἴσου πάρεστι, καὶ τοῖς κατὰ χρόνον φυομένοις πάντοτε ἅμα σύνεστιν, ἐν ἐνί τε συνείληφε τῶν ὄλων τὴν ἀλήθειαν διὰ τὴν χωριστὴν ἑαυτῆς καὶ ὑπερέχουσαν οὐσίαν.

Such a power, if inseparable from the nature of places and of bodies subject to it, or preceded by a motion limited by number, cannot know beforehand things everywhere and always in the same manner. But if separate and free from places and times measured by number (since it is superior to things happening in time and held in place) it is equally present with beings wherever they are, and is always at the same time present with those growing in time, and embraces in one the truth of all existing things because of its own separate and superior essence (ὑπερέχουσαν οὐσίαν).⁴⁸

47 In *Ann.* II, 54, Tacitus also reports that the oracle used to go down to a cave before drinking sacred water from a spring.

48 *De Mysteriis*, III, 12 p. 151.

Through the case of water in the hydromantic oracle of Colophon, Iamblichus wishes to reconcile two priorities of his metaphysical system : 1) the transcendence of the divine, and 2) its omnipresence and therefore, immanence.

To that effect, he achieves a *tour de force* in trying to demonstrate the divine's immanence as the very consequence of its transcendence. Although it may first appear as a *contradictio in terminis*, Iamblichus states that the divine “embraces in one the truth of all existing things because of its own separate and superior essence (ὑπερέχουσα οὐσία)”⁴⁹. Not only does he support that there is no contradiction between these two assumptions, but he also asserts that there is a causal relationship between these two opposed characteristics. If the divine was not transcendent, it would not be able to encompass all existing things from without, Iamblichus argues.

However, to avoid the weakness of this contradiction Porphyry might have attacked, he has to point it out himself, and make it clear through a clear statement: the divine “both illuminates from without and fills all things”. We may find an argument for this statement in the first part of this treatise: according to Iamblichus, the divine is beyond λόγος, and especially διάνοια. Accusing Porphyry of being a rationalist even when it comes to theology – that is to say, a blasphemer, he writes:

σὺ δ' ἔοικας ἡγεῖσθαι τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὁποιοῦν γινώσιν, δίδοσθαι τε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων τὸ ἕτερον μόνιον, ὥσπερ εἶωθε καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς διαλέκτοις προτεινομένων· τὸ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμῶς παραπλήσιον· ἐξήλλακται γὰρ αὐτῶν ἢ εἶδησις, ἀντιθέσεώς τε πάσης κεχώρισται.

You, however, seem to think that knowledge of divinity is of the same nature as a knowledge of anything else, and that it is by the balancing of contrary propositions that a conclusion is reached, as in dialectical discussions. But the cases are in no way similar. The knowledge of the gods is of a quite different nature, and is far removed from all antithetical procedure (ἀντιθέσεώς τε πάσης κεχώρισται)⁵⁰.

Indeed, if the divine, as a hypercosmic reality encompassing the cosmos, exists beyond the aristotelian law of non-contradiction, it can

49 *De Mysteriis*, III 12 p. 151.

50 DM I,3 p.15.

be both transcendent and immanent, Iamblichus argues. Moreover, since the gods' oracular power is prior to everything (πρὸ τῶν ὄλων προϋπάρχουσα), all living and non-living beings on Earth shall share in it (μετέχειν).

In hydromancy's case, Iamblichus intends to solve this dianoetical difficulty by arguing that divine power, whereas it fills all things, “illuminates the spring from without” and “flashes from above” like lighting. And although he acknowledges, just like Plotinus that “the universe is a single living being”, and that Earth has received a part of the divine, Iamblichus refuses to identify matter with the divine itself. Both matter and nature partake in the divine, without being confused with it, but are nonetheless divinized through μετουσία. Furthermore, if no part of the soul remained above, nature has logically to be the very first step of theurgical ascent.

This doctrine justifies the religious use of natural elements in both theurgical rituals and μαντική, because both respect the laws of cosmological συμπάθεια. Since water partakes in the divine, as everything in nature, it is used in divination without threatening it of becoming a natural phenomenon.

This Iamblichean concept of nature understood as a receptacle of the divine, just as it is a receptacle of the forms, justifies his view of a simultaneously transcendent and immanent noetic principle. For if the divine was only transcendent, nature would be deprived of it, and so would we, forever unable to achieve our souls' union with superior principles or beings - locked in an earthly prison.

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