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Dionysius the Areopagite and the Legacy of Iamblichus

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Abstract

Neoplatonism takes a significant turn when Iamblichus integrates a mystical perspective based on the *Chaldean Oracles* into his doctrine. This compilation of fragments, which can be traced back to Babylonian Zoroastrianism, emerged in Hellenistic civilization and gained prominence as hermetic texts among philosophers from the 2nd century onward. For Iamblichus, the Neoplatonic concern regarding the feasibility of a return to the One is addressed not primarily through abstract theoretical philosophy, but rather through a philosophical wisdom illuminated by theurgic practice. Iamblichus affirms the legitimacy of the rites detailed in these hieratic texts by asserting that they were divinely inspired by God to Julian. Syrianus and Proclus play crucial roles in preserving and transmitting this legacy. By inheriting Iamblichus' teachings, they not only regarded this theurgical approach as a quasi-refoundational element of Neoplatonism but also introduced their own contributions to its development. Moreover, they served as the intermediaries through whom these doctrines reached the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. At this point, Dionysius the Areopagite enters the narrative. He revitalizes the concept of theurgy, though –as this work will endeavor to demonstrate– his effort to integrate Neoplatonism with Christianity reflects a return to Iamblichus' original interpretation of theurgy. Dionysius' doctrines provide a robust foundation for him to argue that the Christian rites instituted by Jesus –being performed by God himself, in and through his very person– are doubly true. Therefore, these rites assuredly lead to *theosis*, the sole means of achieving the union of the soul with the Christian God.

KEYWORDS: DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE - IAMBLICHUS - THEURGY - NEOPLATONISM - MYSTIC

Dionisio Areopagita y el legado de Jámblico

Resumen

El neoplatonismo da un giro significativo cuando Jámblico integra a su doctrina una perspectiva mística basada en los *Oráculos Caldeos*. Esta recopilación de fragmentos,

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que se remonta al zoroastrismo babilónico, surgió en la civilización helenística y ganó relevancia como textos herméticos entre los filósofos a partir del siglo II. Para Jámblico, la preocupación neoplatónica sobre la posibilidad de un retorno al Uno se aborda no tanto a través de una filosofía puramente abstracta, sino mediante una sabiduría filosófica iluminada por la práctica teúrgica. Jámblico afirma la legitimidad de los ritos detallados en estos textos herméticos, sosteniendo que fueron inspirados por Dios mismo a Juliano. Siriano y Proclo desempeñan un papel crucial en la preservación y transmisión de este legado. Al heredar las enseñanzas de Jámblico, no solo consideraron este enfoque teúrgico como un elemento cuasi refundacional del neoplatonismo, sino que también introdujeron sus propias contribuciones a su desarrollo. Además, actuaron como los intermediarios a través de los cuales estas doctrinas llegaron al autor del *Corpus Dionysiacum*. En este punto, Dionisio Areopagita entra en escena. Él revitaliza el concepto de teúrgia, aunque –como este trabajo tratará de demostrar– su intento de integrar el neoplatonismo con el cristianismo refleja un retorno a la interpretación original de la teúrgia por parte de Jámblico. Las doctrinas de Dionisio proporcionan una base sólida para que él sostenga que los ritos cristianos instituidos por Jesús –siendo realizados por Dios mismo, en y a través de su propia persona– son doblemente verdaderos. Por lo tanto, estos ritos conducen ciertamente a la *theosis*, el único medio para lograr la unión del alma con el Dios cristiano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: DIONISIO AREOPAGITA - JÁMBLICO - TEÚRGIA - NEOPLATONISMO - MÍSTICA

Introduction

Among the various teachings attributed to Iamblichus, who wrote in a foundational instance of Late-Ancient Neoplatonism, the doctrine of theurgy is undoubtedly both a constitutive part of his thought and an important legacy. On the other hand, it is not surprising –given the dating framework of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* known to us today– that some theses with an important conceptual proximity to that of Iamblichus form a central part of the program of divinization proposed by the enigmatic and elusive figure of Dionysius the Areopagite. This close connection between two such preeminent figures of Neoplatonic thought is certainly an invitation to further scrutiny, seeking to deepen the reception and form of belonging of the author of the *Corpus* to this lineage.

Firstly, we will examine the significance and true purpose of theurgy within the framework of Neoplatonism, a topic that has been contentious both among contemporaries of the period and subsequent interpreters. This debate undeniably persists among modern scholars. Within this academic discourse, contemporary arguments range from understanding theurgy as a natural religious outgrowth stemming from the Neoplatonists' unique interpretation of certain Platonic works they regarded as primarily theological, to viewing Neoplatonic theurgy as a survival strategy –or even a counteroffensive– against the rising threat of Christianity. As Christianity moved from being a clandestine movement to gaining official recognition, it inverted the order of proscription, challenging the Neoplatonic system of ideas. In this context, Dodds argues that post-Plotinian Neoplatonism embodies a form of superstitious weakness or philosophical inconsistency, rooted in the incorporation of irrational elements drawn from a syncretism between the Greek mythological tradition and the *Chaldean Oracles* (1951: 269-270). He goes so far as to equate magic with theurgy, distinguishing the two only by their aims: for Dodds, theurgy is magic with a religious purpose, while magic serves merely profane ends.

In contrast, following Shaw, this work will adopt a more contemporary perspective. Recent research on primary sources and authors has revealed a clear distinction

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between magic and theurgy, thus correcting, as Shaw argues, a significant interpretative error that has led to a negative appraisal of this period, particularly regarding the thought of Syrianus and Iamblichus (1999: 573-599). Shaw identifies two key features that differentiate theurgy from magic. First, unlike magic, which relies on sympathetic objects such as stones, animals, or statues, theurgy primarily employs myths, hymns, and passages from authoritative, revealed texts. Second, there is a fundamental difference in the intent of the practices: while magic seeks to coerce supernatural powers for worldly ends, theurgy, by contrast, is grounded in the friendship and benevolence of the gods, aiming not at material gain but at an ascent or transformation of the practitioner's soul.

In this work, we will argue, following Shaw's research (1985: 1-28), that it is Iamblichus who first introduces the term θεουργία (theurgy) to describe these rituals, defining them as θεία ἔργα (the works of the gods). For Iamblichus, theurgy is a set of rituals designed to connect humanity with divinity itself, and it bears no resemblance to simple magical acts (Clarke et al., 2003: 10-16), much less to sorcery (Stang, 2011: 1-13). Furthermore, it will be shown that, according to Iamblichus, theurgic rites manifest the traces of a divine presence. Although this presence is ineffable and lies beyond the intellectual grasp of humans, it can be attained through ritual action, enabling a union with the divine that surpasses the limits of intellectual effort.

Based on the previous discussion, a more direct link between Iamblichus and Dionysius the Areopagite will be established by drawing on Stang's analysis (2011: 1-13). Stang traces the development of theurgy from its pagan origins in the *Chaldean Oracles* of the 2nd century to its adaptation within the Areopagitic Christian mystical theology of the early 6th century. He begins by examining the theory and practice of theurgy as reflected in the fragmentary oracles, though he acknowledges that the surviving sources do not allow for definitive conclusions. From there, he shifts to the Neoplatonic reception of theurgy, focusing particularly on the contributions of Plotinus, Porphyry, and, most notably, Iamblichus. For Stang, Iamblichus' interpretation of theurgy is especially important for understanding its later Christian reception. His study culminates in an analysis of the use of the term theurgy in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, where he argues that while the author adopts a form of theurgy closely resembling that of Iamblichus, he radically reinterprets its meaning. Following Stang, and in agreement with many scholars, this work will argue that the author of the *Corpus* does not simply borrow Neoplatonic texts uncritically. Rather, he reworks them in accordance with his vision of Christian doctrine, understood as a mystical experience of divine manifestation and union. Among these intentional modifications, a key one pertains to his reinterpretation of theurgy.

In this context, it is fitting to examine sources close to Proclus and his contemporaries to gain a deeper understanding not only of his texts but also of his stance on theurgy. Specifically, investigating potential differences in the practical aspects of theurgy may reveal broader conceptual divergences from Iamblichus, which could help establish a more precise framework for the reception of this doctrine in the *Corpus*. To this end, the accounts provided by Hermias and Marinus from that period will be closely considered.

Finally, a comparative analysis of the use of the lemma θεουργ- by the aforementioned authors is conducted to underscore the significance and thematic connections between the explicit appearance and usage of this term in what are considered their principal works. The conclusions of this study integrate this lexical traceability with earlier arguments, highlighting the deeper relevance of theurgy in Dionysius. Specifically, it emphasizes the transformative integration that occurs both conceptually, through

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its adaptation to the Christian God, and formally, by embracing this new liturgy as the true mystagogy.

Porphyry's Dilemma

A well-known episode from the life of Plotinus involves the time when a friend urged him to accompany him to the temples for the usual ritual sacrifices. Plotinus declined, remarking that it was the gods who should come to him (cf. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 10). While this reflects the good humor of the Neoplatonic master, it also illustrates his doctrine that the human nous (intellect) remains –albeit in a state of deep lethargy– in contact with the divine Νοῦς, the second hypostasis in his triad of "One - Intellect - Soul". Moreover, it demonstrates his belief that a virtuous life, centered on intellectual contemplation, is sufficient for the soul's return to the One, or ὁμοίωσις θεῷ (assimilation to the divine) (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b1), without the need for any ritual to facilitate this process.[1]

History attributes a largely similar stance to his disciple Porphyry. However, as a result of his exposure to various texts and rites –including the *Chaldean Oracles*, which appeared in the Hellenistic world in the 2nd century– Porphyry expressed certain doubts that have been preserved in fragmentary form and have not gone unnoticed by scholars (cf. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* X.9). Porphyry, having been among the first Neoplatonists to engage with these texts (Dillon, 1992),[2] raises a crucial question in defense of Plotinus' *verissima philosophia* (the truest philosophy): is philosophical contemplation truly sufficient for union with the One, or are rituals also required? If the latter is true, how can one discern between true and false rites? Porphyry warns that the θεουργός –the priest or individual who seeks to propitiate the gods– undertakes a task without visible or guaranteed results (cf. Porphyry, *Ep. ad Anebonem*).

It is important to highlight, without deviating too far from the central theme of this paper, the significance of Porphyry's question in relation to the cultural heritage of his time and the historical relationship between philosophers and elements of Greek religion. On the one hand, there is the formal importance Plato attributes to rites in *Republica* X, for instance, and the charge of ἀσέβεια (impiety) brought against Socrates (cf. Plato, *Apologia* 17a-35d). On the other hand, there were varying degrees of moral and legal condemnation in Greece against magic and sorcery (Rives, 2003: 313-339). Similarly, in his *Epistola ad Anebonem* –where Anebo is presumably an imaginary Egyptian priest– Porphyry expresses respect for a perfected theurgic art, one that reveals the gods to humanity and closely resembles the Platonic concepts of μανία (divine madness) and εὐδαιμονία (happiness), rather than Egyptian practices. However, Porphyry then articulates his doubts about certain rites, viewing them not only as serious religious aporia (puzzlement), but as incoherent, given their reliance on bloody sacrifices and the invocation of barbarian (βάρβαρα) names. One of Porphyry's central concerns, as expressed in this text (Knipe, 2009: 93-102), is the paradox of invoking gods as superior beings, only to issue commands to them as though they were subordinate (Sodano, 1984).

There remains some debate among scholars regarding the true authorship of this epistle. Sodano (1984), following Zeller (1950), suggests that the letter may not have been written directly by Porphyry, but rather by a group of philosophers from the

1 There was a strong debate between Dodds and Merlan concerning whether Plotinus should be considered a "magician", a claim denied by Dodds but supported by Merlan. Armstrong and Luck align with Dodds in rejecting this characterization. Cf. Mazur, 2003, 2004.

2 Dillon has argued that, by the terms and phrases used by Plotinus, he seems to know the *Chaldean Oracles* related in some way to his teacher Numenius.

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school of Iamblichus, potentially laying the groundwork for Iamblichus' eventual response.[3] This response is found in a much longer work that, through a paraphrase by Marsilio Ficino, received the misleading title *De Mysteriis*. Its proper and complete title is Ἀβάμωνος διδασκάλου πρὸς τὴν Πορφυρίου πρὸς Ἀνεβὼ ἐπιστολὴν ἀπόκρισις καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπορημάτων λύσεις (*Reply of Master Abamon to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo and Solutions to the Difficulties it Presents*).[4] Symbolically, according to Saffrey (1990), the respondent –identified as *ab-Amon*, or "son of the god"– is portrayed as a high priest or teacher. However, other scholars argue that the name Abamon may refer to an individual of Egyptian origin who frequented the Neoplatonic school, seeking to reconcile Egyptian beliefs with Greek philosophical thought in pursuit of a syncretism between the two traditions.

Despite a tradition that recognizes Iamblichus as the author of *De Mysteriis* –a view supported by manuscripts such as those mentioned by Ficino and one owned by Cardinal Bessarion– this attribution was long contested. Notably, studies by Meiners and Von Harless, published in Zeller's *Philosophie der Griechen*, cast doubt on Iamblichus' authorship. However, scholars who upheld the attribution to Iamblichus –such as Geffcken, Bidez, Kroll, Dodds, Rosan, Friedl, Festugière, Des Places, Saffrey, Dalsgaard Larsen, and Romano– were ultimately vindicated by Meyer's work.[5] As Nieva (2018) points out, the transformation that Neoplatonism undergoes with Iamblichus' resolution of his master Porphyry's dilemma is now widely acknowledged. Iamblichus is regarded by many Neoplatonists as a second founder of the movement, as he introduced theurgy –a concept rooted in the *Chaldean Oracles*. Indeed, it is believed that Iamblichus himself coined the term θεουργία, as it does not appear in the oracles. Through this innovation, he made theurgy a central element of his philosophical system.

Dodds' position on the close ritual parallels between magic and theurgy has already been noted. In Appendix II of his work on the irrational in Greek culture (1951: 269-270), he argues that theurgy represents a superstitious weakness or philosophical inconsistency, stemming from the introduction of irrational elements through the syncretism of Greek mythological traditions and the *Chaldean Oracles*. From this perspective, Dodds asserts that while magic is driven by profane ends, theurgy is equally vulgar, though directed toward religious purposes. His assessment of theurgy is damning, characterizing it as a last resort –*in extremis*. For Dodds, theurgy is nothing more than an act of desperation in the face of the decline of Greek thought and the neglect of both gods and men. However, to achieve the aims of this study, it is essential to confront Dodds' conclusions with those of other prominent –often more recent– scholars who challenge many of his assertions. Before engaging with these counterarguments, it is crucial to examine the origin and rationale behind Dodds' claims, particularly the role of the *Chaldean Oracles* in what he describes as the hieratic turn in Neoplatonism.

The Babylonian Affair

Although the theological influences in Neoplatonism are varied and complex, making it difficult to distinguish them fully from Platonism itself, some remote antecedents can be traced to the Pythagorean tradition. One of the earliest elements worth highlighting is the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, a compilation of three theogonies of Orphic origin.

3 As he also did with respect to the Christian religion, which he confronts not only by showing inconsistencies and several *non sequitur* in his sources, but also through an extensive work well known for the 4th century –which is only fragmentarily preserved– under the name of *Adversus Christianos*, with *De Philosophia ex Oraculis* and *De Regressu Animae*, which represent his defense of the philosophy of Plotinus against Christianity.

4 Cf. Vallicellanus F 20, datable c. 460; Marcianus graecus 244, datable before 458.

5 It can be found in the Introduction and notes by E. Ramos Jurado in his translation of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*.

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Philological studies of these texts have identified several variations, with their dating estimated around 500 BC.

Another significant aspect, emerging in the Hellenistic period, is the influence of theological conceptions from the eastern Mediterranean, which became more complex due to the syncretism between the traditional Greek pantheon and the newly encountered deities of the territories first conquered by Alexander the Great and later by the Romans. The practical implications of this were considerable: even the simplest daily ritual acts required believers to correctly identify and address the gods, knowing their proper names and titles. Profound theological questions could arise from something as basic as ignorance about how to invoke a god in prayer or ritual (Copenhaver, 2000: 32).

Neoplatonism of this period is not immune to these developments, and it is important to recognize that this influence is not merely an external reflection on theology but stems from a profound conviction about the importance of religious practice, particularly the central role of words and gestures. Porphyry, at the end of the 3rd century, in his polemic against Christianity, collects similar material in his *De Philosophia ex Oraculis Haurienda* (cf. *Porphyrii Phil. Frag.*), fragments of which have been preserved through citations by various authors.[6] As for Iamblichus, it is well known that the *Corpus Hermeticum* significantly influences his theological thought (D'Amico, 2016), which in turn shapes his reception of the *Chaldean Oracles*. These *Oracles* are crucial for understanding Iamblichus' role within Neoplatonism and, for this reason, are the focus of extensive scholarly study.

The first major steps in this direction were taken by Kroll (1894), who undertook the task of compiling –and organizing to the best of his judgment– the few surviving fragments of the *Chaldean Oracles* at the end of the 19th century. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the significant interpretative advancements made nearly a century later by Des Places (1971). This distinction is crucial, as many of Dodds' assertions rely on Kroll's edition and similar early 20th-century studies, while Des Places' edition and translation of the *Oracles* benefits from his prior work on Iamblichus (1966), offering a more refined understanding of the material.

This shift in interpretation is reflected in Shaw (1999, 573-599), who relies on sources and authors that postdate Dodds. These have allowed him to delineate a clear distinction between the two positions, thus correcting what he considers a significant interpretative error. According to Shaw, this mistake has contributed to a negative assessment of this Neoplatonic period, particularly in relation to the thought of Iamblichus and Syrianus. Shaw identifies two key features that differentiate theurgy from magic: first, theurgy is not limited –like magic– to the use of sympathetic objects such as stones, animals, or statues. Instead, it primarily employs myths, hymns, and passages from revealed texts. Second, and more fundamentally, while magic seeks to coerce supernatural powers, theurgy is rooted in the friendship and benevolence of the gods, aiming to effect transformation not in the divine but within the human practitioner.

This perspective can also be confirmed through Des Places' editorial work on the aforementioned texts. Accordingly, Shaw argues that Iamblichus describes these rituals as θεία ἔργα –divine actions– coining the term θεουργία to define them (1985: 1-28). Although this might initially appear more akin to magic than to Platonism, Iamblichus understood theurgy as a means of intensifying the presence of the divine on earth in order to subordinate humanity to the divine will. This stands in stark contrast to magic

6 From Eusebius of Caesarea, Julius Firmicus Maternus, Augustine of Hippo, John Philoponus and a text known as *Theosophy of Tübingen*. Cf. Johnson, 2013: 25.

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or sorcery (τοῖς γόησιν, cf. Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* III.26.10) and wonder-working (θαυματουργία, cf. op. cit. 175.13f), whose aim is to subordinate the divine to human will. In this regard, it is worth noting the extensive studies that have explored the relationship between theurgy, magic, and sorcery within Neoplatonism. These works reflect the varied –and sometimes contradictory– views of scholars on the positions of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. Several reliable sources on this topic are referenced in the bibliography (Copenhaver, 2000; Burkert, 1990; Dillon, 1992, 2002, 2010).

The disagreements between Iamblichus and Porphyry have been recognized since antiquity (cf. David; Bidez; Depalma Digeser, 2009). Perhaps the most significant of these, as Shaw has termed it, is Iamblichus' *via universalis*: no soul can return to its divine source solely through its own power without the human person's participation in religious rituals involving material elements. Plotinus' view of magic directly influenced the development of Iamblichus' thought on theurgy, and alongside various Pythagorean influences –such as that of Nicomachus of Gerasa (Finamore, 1999)– there is also an unmistakable Gnostic component in Iamblichus' work (García Bazán, 1978).

Lastly, it is important to note that the combination of these three elements –a philosophy with soteriological purposes, certain Gnostic doctrines, and initiatory rites– not only precedes Iamblichus but also transcends him, tracing back to traditions such as Persian Zoroastrianism and Mithraism (which even had Roman versions) and to Druidic cults with similar features. However, Iamblichus' role as a key figure in introducing these aspects into a current of Western thought is paradigmatic. His influence has become a reference point for various expressions of hermetic and esoteric thought that emerged much later. It can be affirmed that for Iamblichus, the divine is absolutely transcendent and beyond any human intellectual effort, which is insufficient for direct communion with the divine. Yet, Iamblichus also maintains the firm conviction that by appealing to the divine trace within humanity, and through the words and gestures of theurgic rites, one can achieve a unification with that divine source.

In relation to this, a key conclusion emerges from the analysis of the various historical forms in which philosophy has been paired with initiatory mysteries. As one delves deeper into initiation, the performative aspects of rites diminish, and liturgical gestures decrease as one advances through higher degrees. This is because, ultimately, for the final logic of gnosis, the highest point of enlightenment does not lie in the symbolic solar illumination of the surface, but in the total darkness of the primordial void. However, the perspective that clearly emerges from *De Mysteriis* and defines Iamblichus' thought is his successful synthesis of Neoplatonic theology with the theurgy of the *Chaldean Oracles*. This not only distinguishes him from his predecessors and places him at odds with his teacher, but also exposes him to significant risks. A misinterpretation of theurgy as μαγεία (magic) or γοητεία (sorcery) could lead to severe condemnation in the empire, where such practices were often punished, even by death.

The Hieratic Turn of Neoplatonism

The renewal of Iamblichus' ideas was accepted and adopted –at least in part– by the majority of Neoplatonists in the two centuries that followed. However, among these successors, we also find justifications for moderating some of his convictions or adjusting the language they used. This suggests, as Lewy (1956: 462-463) argues, that for Iamblichus' followers, such as Syrianus and Proclus, theurgy and philosophy were seen as alternative methods for achieving the same goal: ἄφελε πάντα (the removal of all things) and union with the gods. Yet, as Rosan has pointed out, there is a distinction in Proclus between a more elementary theurgy and a higher,

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more advanced form (1949: 213 ff.). A distinctive feature of Proclus' approach is its strong astronomical foundation, reflecting the central role astrology plays in his philosophy and theurgy. Following Rosan, it can be affirmed that Proclus' theurgy is fundamentally astrological in nature (1949: 44-47).

Similarly, in line with his predecessors, Proclus distinguishes between θεία ἐπιστήμη (divine science) and ἱερατική ἐπιστήμη (hieratic science) (cf. Proclus, *De Sacrificio et Magia* 148.7, Bidez 1936). Hieratic science is understood comprehensively as both an ἐπιστήμη (science) and a τέχνη (art); it encompasses a body of knowledge that is both scientific and technical. Rooted dynamically in the gods, the θεουργικὴ δύναμις (power of theurgy) is considered superior to any other science (cf. Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* V.18 and 26; II.10; V.21), as it surpasses human knowledge: "ἢ κρείττων ἐστὶν ἁπάσης ἀνθρωπίνης σωφροσύνης καὶ ἐπιστήμης" (Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* I.25.7; Saffrey-Westerink, 1997). Although theurgy transcends mere technical knowledge, it remains –following Plotinus' formula– an art or technique practiced by human beings. In this sense, when Proclus refers to the hieratic techniques of "οἱ πάλαι σοφοί" (the ancient wise ones), he is not referring to Egyptians or Persians, but rather to the sacred arts of the Greek priests.

It is important to highlight Sheppard's contribution regarding Proclus, who –following his teacher Syrianus– classified theurgy into three levels. The first level involves pure ritual, with gestures and sayings considered a form of white magic. The second involves a ritual of elevation that exalts the soul to the lowest level of the intelligible realm. The third, and most advanced, is a form of "theurgy" that is not a ritual at all, but instead produces a union of the soul's one with the higher intelligible realm and the First Hypostasis (1982: 212-224). This marks a subtle but significant departure from Iamblichus' view, while also providing a more nuanced understanding of the textual evidence compared to the earlier division of theurgy into just two types. If Sheppard's interpretation is correct, it suggests that although Proclus maintains –and perhaps even elevates– the importance of ritual theurgy in the process of the soul's return, its efficacy does not extend beyond the lowest of the intelligible gods.

It is evident that Proclus continues to regard ἐπιστροφή (the return) as the pinnacle of mystical experience –one that even surpasses the Plotinian ideal– through its use of hymns and mythological symbolism, which is contemplative rather than ritualistic (Anchepe, 2013: 59). Although Proclus incorporates this meditation within the framework of theurgy, its theoretical basis aligns with the same principles that underlie theurgy. However, the final union of the soul with the One is clearly contemplative, not ritualistic, distinguishing it from Iamblichus' *via universalis* (Sheppard, 1982: 213). Moreover, given Proclus' reputation as a rigorous and rational thinker, his belief in theurgy cannot be dismissed as mere superstition. It is essential to recognize the value of theurgy within his system, as it is by no means a foreign or irrational element grafted onto his philosophy (Trouillard, 1982).

Proclus' conception of theurgy is deeply integrated into his metaphysical system, and he carefully articulates it within specific areas of his philosophical thought (Gersh, 2014). In Des Places' edition of the *Chaldean Oracles*, Proclus offers minimal commentary, but in fragment five, he references the θεῖα σύμβολα (Divine Symbols), which, in his system, correspond to the Divine Henads. These Henads are extensions of the One, the supreme hypostasis, and are the only entities capable of uniting the soul with the divine. They mediate the diffusion of the One to the lower hypostases. The implication of this fragment is that Proclus conceives of the "one in the soul" in relation to the First Hypostasis with all the literal and symbolic weight that the term σύμβολον (symbol) carries. This also helps explain why Proclus retains the term theurgy for the union with the One, even when it occurs without ritual (Des Places, 1971: 206-212).

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An example of this maximal version of Proclean theurgy, leading to ἕνωσις (union), can be found in cases where the soul's return is received by the divine, not through theurgic ritual, but through contemplative elevation:

> ... τελευταία δὲ ἡ ἕνωσις, αὐτῷ τῷ ἑνὶ τῶν θεῶν τὸ ἓν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνιδρύουσα καὶ μίαν ἐνέργειαν ἡμῶν τε ποιοῦσα καὶ τῶν θεῶν, καθ' ἣν οὐδὲ ἑαυτῶν ἐσμεν, ἀλλὰ τῶν θεῶν, ἐν τῷ θείῳ φωτὶ μένοντες καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ περιεχόμενοι. (*In Plat. Timaeum* I.211.24-28)
>
> ... finally, the unification, which establishes the unity of the soul in the unity of the gods, making one and only our activity and that of the gods, according to which we are no longer ourselves but the gods, remaining in the divine light, enveloped by their embrace. (*In Plat. Timaeum* I.211.24-28)

In addition to the writings of Proclus, the testimonies of Hermias of Alexandria and Marinus of Neapolis provide further insight into the role of theurgy in the Neoplatonic school of the 5th century. Hermias, a contemporary of Proclus and a fellow student of Syrianus, offers valuable context, particularly through his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, which is believed to largely reflect Syrianus' teachings on that dialogue (cf. *In Plat. Phaed.* scholia; Couvreur, 1971). Sheppard draws attention to the terminology used by Hermias in recounting Syrianus' response to a question from Proclus regarding the *Phaedrus* (cf. 244 ff.), where Syrianus asserts that theurgy gathers and unifies all forms of μανίαι (divine madness), πᾶς ἄλλας πάσας συλλαβῦσα (cf. *In Plat. Phaed. scholi*a 92: 6).[7]

On the other hand, there is the testimony of Marinus, a Syrian by origin, who was a disciple of Proclus in Athens and his presumed successor, though of lesser historical significance. Of Marinus' possible works, only a few epigrams and, most notably, the *Vita Procli* have survived. As a detailed biographer of the Diadochus, Marinus –perhaps influenced by the literary style of the time– practically portrays Proclus as a thaumaturgist, offering specific examples of his devout practices. These accounts confirm Proclus' profound piety: he regularly took sea baths as a form of purification, performed Orphic and Chaldean purification rites dedicated to the Great Mother, observed Egyptian holy days, and generally kept the religious festivals of all peoples and nations. He honored these occasions not with feasting and idleness, but through fasting, vigils, and hymns (cf. Marinus, *Vita Procli* 18-19).

Marinus recounts various prodigies performed by Proclus using theurgic arts. While we neither affirm nor deny the Diadochus' ability to make it rain (cf. ibid. 28), it is evident that ritual played a significant role in his life. However, the lowest type of theurgy, which Proclus seems to have engaged with, does not appear to be of much importance –if any– at least in his writings (Sheppard, 1982: 223).[8] What is notably absent from Marinus' detailed biographical account is any direct reference to the third degree of Neoplatonic theurgy or any rituals performed by Proclus that would align with this higher form of theurgy. Smith infers from chapter three of the *Vita* what Sheppard calls "supra-human virtues" associated with the highest level of theurgy, but even if this were evidence of Proclus' contact with the divine, it is clearly unrelated to any ritual action (Smith, 1974: 113-114).

7 The same word, συλλαβῦσα, is used by Proclus here in the PT and again with reference to a theurgy which "gathers together" the *maniai* of the *Phaedrus*. I suggest therefore that the theurgy in question here in Proclus is the same as the theurgy in question in Hermias, i.e. that it is a theurgy which can bring about mystical union, the highest of the three types implied in the Hermias passage. Saffrey and Westerink are too swift in saying that Proclus here affirms the superiority of theurgy to rational knowledge, for they fail to ask in what sense of theurgy he does so. Smith is on the right track in talking of a 'higher theurgy', but he has failed to see how the passage arises out of discussion of the *Phaedrus* and so misunderstands details of it. Cf. Sheppard, 1982: 219-220.

8 Who successively invokes for this purpose Smith, 1974.

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All this evidence, when considered alongside the arguments of Sheppard and other scholars,[9] allows us to conclude that there are notable differences in attitudes toward theurgy among Neoplatonists from the 2nd to the 6th centuries. Despite Proclus' frequent allusions to theurgy and his performance of theurgic rituals, there appears to be a subtle return to Plotinus' approach, emphasizing a purely contemplative "philosophical theurgy" as the means for achieving ἕνωσις (union with the divine), while reserving a more practical role for minor rites.

Consequently, they are more closely connected by their shared appreciation of rites that unite the soul with the divine –what might be termed "transcendent theurgy"– as introduced by Iamblichus and later reinterpreted by Dionysius the Areopagite.

Dionysius and the Work of God

The identity of the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* remains an open question and a subject of ongoing controversy, even at the time of writing this article. Although this issue is not central to the analysis proposed here, it is nonetheless relevant to briefly address it, particularly in relation to the uchrony suggested by the title. This is especially important considering current findings on intertextual references (Suchla, 1990; Heil-Ritter, 1991), structural analysis (De Andía, 2008), and direct receptions (Saffrey, 1966, 1982) present within the *Corpus*.

First, although the independent dating developed by Koch (1895) and Stiglmayr (1895) –based on the textual correspondence between part of Book IV of *De Divinis Nominibus*, the core of the work, and Proclus' *De Malorum Subsistentia*–[10] provides a fairly accurate timeframe for the composition, it only adds further uncertainty regarding the author's identity.[11] While the rigor of Stiglmayr's work is widely acknowledged, his hypothesis that the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is none other than Severus of Antioch remains inconclusive. Severus, a bishop who held the Patriarchate from 512 to 518, fits the temporal, geographical, and personal context Stiglmayr outlines, but no definitive proof has emerged. A thorough analysis of this issue can be found in Devresse's work (1929: 159-167).

Hypotheses regarding the identity of the author that extend beyond the ten "known" candidates –ranging from Severus of Antioch to Dionysius, Abbot of Rhinokorura, as suggested by Hipler (1861)– have recently expanded to include two notable alternatives, each suggesting multiple authors or a group of editors. On the one hand, Mazzucchi (2006: 299-334), followed by Lankila (2011: 14-40), posits that several members of a declining Neoplatonic academy, facing the rise of Christianity, sought to preserve core Neoplatonic ideas by infiltrating –or even subverting– Christian doctrines with their own terminology and concepts. On the other side, Mainoldi revives the longstanding controversy surrounding Monophysitism, proposing that monks from a Syrian-origin monastery, supported by Emperor Justinian at his palace of Ormisda, were involved. According to Mainoldi, these monks, influenced by Hegias –a former disciple of Damascius who had converted– aimed to produce a quasi-canonical text whose authority would favor Monophysite doctrine, a view also supported by Empress Theodora, against the rulings of Chalcedon (Mainoldi, 2017a).

9 See, e.g., Gersh, 2014; Lewy, 1956; and Trouillard, 1982

10 The Greek original is lost but the Latin translation by William of Moerbeke is preserved (c.1280).

11 Fundamental to this argument, at a lower level, is the reference in *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* 425C to the symbol of faith proposed by Peter the Fuller in 511. At a higher level, there is the colophon of the Syriac translation of a treatise by Severus of Antioch, where the first known citation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* appears in the year 528.

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Whatever the case, even when acknowledging the contradictions or inconsistencies within the Areopagitic text –such as the mention of several lost (and likely non-existent) works or impossible personal contacts with figures from the 1st century– it is essential to consider the experience of reading and engaging with the text itself. Direct exposure to the work does not give the impression of multiple voices or a patchwork of units from different authors. Instead, it conveys a sense of cohesion, as if the reader is encountering a single, unified subject –overflowing with a singular experience and purpose: the theological foundation and mystagogical pedagogy of *theosis*. The aim of this paper is not to resolve the question of Dionysius the Areopagite's true identity, nor to solve that mystery definitively, but rather to provide the necessary framework to determine the dating, philosophical influences, and, most importantly, the aspect of the Neoplatonic tradition in which the author of the *Corpus* is situated.

At this point, without diminishing Proclus' contribution –possibly as Dionysius' teacher and certainly as a textual source– it is necessary to advance the argument that the form of transcendent theurgy, even with the importance Proclus assigns to other forms, is more closely aligned with the original teachings of Iamblichus. In turn, this alignment becomes one of the key interpretative tools for understanding the works of Dionysius (Mainoldi, 2017b).

In this context, and clearly only in this sense, the reference to the author of the *Corpus* as a disciple of Iamblichus is to be understood –not as a direct or contemporary disciple, but as a faithful continuator of Iamblichus' conception of theurgy. This is further enriched by the addition of Proclean propositions, which are often traced in the text. To support this claim, it is necessary to delve deeper into the reception of the doctrine of theurgy and examine how much of it reached Dionysius, mediated or otherwise, through Proclus. In this regard, it is helpful to follow Stang's analysis (2011: 1-13), which traces the development of theurgy from its original pagan associations with the *Chaldean Oracles* in the second century to its integration into Christian mystical theology in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Stang begins by investigating the theory and practice of theurgy as expressed in the fragmentary *Oracles*, arguing that the surviving sources are insufficient for drawing firm conclusions. He then moves on to the Neoplatonic reception of theurgy, from Plotinus to Porphyry and especially Iamblichus. According to Stang, Iamblichus' doctrine of theurgy is particularly significant for its later Christian reception, as he emphasizes the interpretation of theurgy as the "work or action of God". This recalls the *via universalis*, where it is God who acts through the theurgist to achieve the otherwise impossible unitive step –a contrast to the view held by Proclus. Stang concludes by examining the use of the term theurgy in the *Corpus*, arguing that while the author inherits the Iamblichean form of theurgy as the "action of God," he imbues it with new meaning by presenting the Incarnation of Christ as the preeminent theurgy, or the ultimate work of God.

It is important to consider that the author of the *Corpus* not only critically incorporates elements of Neoplatonic philosophy, selectively adapting them in line with his exposition of Christian θέωσις (deification) as a mystical experience, but also introduces intentional modifications. Examples of such adjustments include the redefinition of the supra-essential triad and the shift from the concept of gradations to hierarchies. The cautionary remarks of classical scholars of the *Corpus*, who warn readers not to be "too hasty in assuming that [Dionysius] means by theurgy exactly what the Neoplatonists did," are particularly significant in this regard.[12] According to the index in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* II, θεουργία and its cognates such as θεουργικός and θεουργός appear more than ten times in *The Celestial Hierarchy*; more than thirty times in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; five times in *The Divine Names*; and once in *Epistle IX*.

12 According to Rorem who is quoted by Louth, 1989: 73-74.

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In all four cases where the *Corpus* author uses the term θεουργός, he applies it as an adjective, following exactly Iamblichus' wording, and not as a noun meaning "theurgist".

In his pioneering study of Dionysian liturgy, Paul Rorem presents compelling evidence that Iamblichus' theory of theurgy influenced the Areopagite. Rorem argues that there is no patristic precedent for Dionysius' division of worshipers into three classes: those who worship using obscure (material) images; those who require no material aids; and "our hierarchy," which occupies the "middle between extremes" (1984: 106-107). For Dionysius, theurgy, in its various sub-degrees corresponding to human nature, always involves a ritual with a material element –much like Iamblichus' *via universalis*– and reserves immaterial theurgy exclusively for the angelic hierarchy (*CH* 293A). However, Rorem also notes that Dionysius introduces a significant shift from Iamblichus regarding the term ἔργον θεοῦ (work of God). While Iamblichus uses it as an objective genitive, indicating an action directed toward God, Dionysius employs it as a subjective genitive, meaning an action performed by God, particularly in the Incarnation (Shaw, 1999: 589).

Stang addresses this issue by noting that much of the 20th-century scholarship errs in considering the direct references to Christ within Dionysius' Neoplatonic language as merely "cosmetic". By focusing on the absence of many elements from Jesus' ministry in the *Corpus*, these scholars also misjudge the literalness with which the Areopagite understands the ἔργον θεοῦ (2011: 10 ff.). If one of the theurgy's more general meanings refers to the έργου θεού as God's salvific work in the world and more specifically to his preeminent work, the Incarnation, then equivalently, ἐν-έργεια also refers to God's work –and his hierarchies– in general. This can be seen explicitly in the very beginning of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

> ... θεουργικής επιστήμης και ενεργείας και τελειώσεως έκ 5 τών υπερκοσμίων και ίερωτάτων ημάς άποδειξαι λογίων χρή τοις τής ιεράς μυσταγωγίας τήν τελετήν έξ ιεραρχικών μυστηρίων καί παραδό- σεων τετελεσμένοις. (*EH* 369A-372A)
>
> It is necessary that, to those perfected in the initiatory perfection of the sacred mystagogy from the hierarchical mysteries and transmissions, we show them, from the supramundane and most sacred Oracles, that the sacred hierarchical government according to us is proper to the science and activity and perfection inspired by God and divine and theurgic. (*EH* 369A-372A)

The cooperative sense of hierarchy or priest also appear more evidently in the Greek than in the translation (theurgist or theurgic are terms that Dionysius avoids) as can be seen in this semantic proximity: συνεργία - θεουργία - ἡ θεία ἐνέργεια - λειτουργία - θεοῦ συνεργοί - θεουργικοί. A similar record can be found in *The Celestial Hierarchy*:

> ... γὰρ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ἱεραρχίᾳ κεκληρωμένων ἡ τελείωσις τὸ κατ᾽ οἰκείαν ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναχθῆναι καὶ τὸ δὴ πάντων θειότερον ὡς τὰ λόγιὰ φησι «Θεοῦ συνεργὸν» γενέσθαι καὶ δεῖξαι τὴν θείαν ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἑαυτῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀναφαινομένην. Οἷον ἐπειδὴ τάξις ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶ τὸ τοὺς μὲν καθαίρεσθαι. (*CH* 165B)
>
> ... thus, each of those chosen for the sacred government has perfection according to his own proportion, to be elevated to the imitability of God and to the most divine of all, as the Oracles affirm, to be "God's collaborator" and to receive the divine activity manifested in oneself according to what is possible. (*CH* 165B)

However, distancing himself from the prophets, Dionysius asserts repeatedly that Christian rituals "divinize," demonstrating that the object of the rite is more than

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just a reference to God's works, but also involves the transformation of the symbols and the participant (Rico Pavés, 2001: 31; Janowitz, 1991: 369).[13] In this sense, it can be seen in *Epistle IX* that the Eucharist too is both ἔργου θεού –reduplicative work of God in this case– and divinization for the celebrant and the assembly: "... and that Jesus himself, with parables, speaks of God and conveys the theurgic mysteries through the figurative service of the table" (*Ep. IX*,1108A).[14] Thus, the author of the *Corpus* considers that this rite is capable of manifesting the heavenly work on earth, to connect the many layers of the cosmos and to participate the highest secrets in material symbols such as bread and wine-transformed. Shaw's statements, which reinforce what has been previously considered, are clearly conclusive regarding the direct relationship between the *Corpus* and the hieratic turn consolidated by Iamblichus within Neoplatonism (1999: 595).[15]

A Textual Argument

As previously stated, in the complete absence of biographical coordinates and minimal historical clues, the analysis of cross-references, correlations and intertexts are the best tools available –at the moment– for a paleographic study and an ecdotic of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.[16] Likewise, the value of this textual, or philological, approach can be seen not only in the critical editions and translations of the *Corpus*, but in Dionysian studies in general which are very attentive to these exercises and have contributed a significant value to an interpretation of the Dionysius the Areopagite and the connections –strong or weak– to potential direct and indirect sources.[17]

In this particular case, a search for the appearance and use of the lemma θεουργ- in the main works of the authors mentioned here as origin and main bridge, in confrontation with the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, while it may reveal the presence or absence of a *lien objectif* between them in relation to the subject of analysis, represents at least, a metric of the specific weight of this concept within their thought. For this, the *De Mysteriis* according to the most recent edition by Saffrey and Segonds (2013), and Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell's (2003), will be compared with the edition by Des Places (1966). Two works considered by the experts as central to the Proclean thought are selected: the *Theologia Platonica*, in the editions of Abate (2005) and that of Saffrey y Westerink, (1968-1997) and the *Institutio Theologica* in the edition of Dodds (1963). While, favorably due to its short length, the complete *Corpus Dionysiacum* can be taken, using for this the most recent critical editions (Suchla, 1990; Heil-Ritter, 1991).

13 Dionysius remarks that the imitation of God consists in collaborating with God.

14 Dionysius, *Ep. IX*, 1108A: "... καὶ αὐτὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐν παραβολαῖς θεολογοῦντα καὶ τὰ Θεουργὰ μυστήρια παραδιδόντα διὰ τυπικῆς τραπεζώσεως".

15 Like Iamblichus, Dionysius believed that God was present in the liturgy and leading the rites, which explained their deifying power. Did Dionysius, then, simply transpose the principles of Iamblichean theurgy into his *ekklesia*? Did he create a theurgic society, as Rist suggests, in a manner that was more politically successful than anything Iamblichus or other Neoplatonists were able to achieve?
To suggest that Dionysian theurgy was not different in kind, but only in specific expression, from Iamblichean theurgy should not be reason to condemn the Areopagite. It simply recognizes that in the fourth to the sixth centuries, particularly among Syrian theologians –both Christian and non-Christian– there was a pronounced interest in experiencing the divine rather than merely thinking and talking about it, and Iamblichus was the first to provide a comprehensive rationale for doing so.

16 See the website www.lumera.cloud, a multidisciplinary project aimed to combine the latest practices in Digital Humanities with computational Artificial Intelligence techniques. More specifically, it consists of a neural network for deep machine learning based on a language model to trained recognize connections from the morpho-syntax of texts written in ancient Greek dating from the 3rd century BC to the 6th century AD. At the present time it is processing sources of: Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius.

17 Cf. Boiadjiev-Kapriev-Speer, 2000; Kapriev, 2021; Edwards-Pallis-Steiris, 2022.

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This brief *excursus*, which allows us to have an additional reference –at least quantitative– of the presence of theurgy in the main texts of Iamblichus, Proclus and Dionysius, shows that only in the *De Mysteriis* there are about twenty-three appearances, while there are none in the *Institutio Theologica* and barely two in the *Theologia Platonica,* while on the other hand, in the *Corpus* the quantity climbs again to the important number of thirty-four occurrences.

The silence –or quasi-cancellation of the term– in the two capital works of the Diadochi is striking, and beyond the fact that an explanation for this can be found in the detailed analysis of them -apart from the author's intention- the objective fact is conclusive: there is no repetitive appeal to theurgy in the theological systematization of Proclus.

The table below shows the details of the cases' declination and direct references to the appearance in each work according to its critical edition.

		De mysteriis		***Theologia platonica***		***Corpus Dionysiacum***	
		23		**2**		**34**	
Sing. Noun							
N	θεουργία	1	*269.11*	1	*I.124.23*	3	[00159] [00306]
G	θεουργίας	5	*184.2;* *228.9;* *267.8;* *279.14;* *280.18*			15	[00008] [00132] [00152] [00158] [00205] [00207] [00221] [00313] [00356] [00401] [00380] [00552] [00066] [00094] [00094]
D	θεουργίᾳ	2	*45.7; 147.1*			1	[00095]
Pl. Noun							
G	θεουργιῶν	1	*98.2*				
Pl. Neu. Adj.							
N	θεουργικά					2	[00281] [00026]
G	θεουργικῶν					5	[00031] [00311] [00530] [00536] [00542]

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		De mysteriis		*Theologia platonica*		*Corpus Dionysiacum*	
		23		**2**		**34**	
Pl. Masc. Adj.							
N	θεουργικοί					1	[00008]
G	θεουργικῶν	1	*228.2*				
D	θεουργικοῖς	1	*29.18*				
Sing. Fem. Adj.							
N	θεουργική	1	*233.11*				
G	θεουργικῆς	8	*28.6; 91.10; 96.16; 97.1; 98.17; 179.11; 228.14; 273.3*	1	*I.113.6*	2	[00005] [00306]
D	θεουργικῇ	1	*284.3*				
A	θεουργικήν	2	*152.13; 292.16*			1	[00529]
Pl. Fem. Adj.							
A	θεουργικάς					4	[00321] [00342] [00546] [01058]

Zero occurrences of the lemma were found in the *Institutio theologica* of Proclus. Only the occurrences in the decline that appear are recorded. In the *Corpus*, there are, additionally, six hápax from θεουργ- in about eleven occurrences.

From the same analysis, it becomes clear that Iamblichus initially uses the adjective form, while Dionysius demonstrates a marked preference for the noun form in the genitive case. This usage is not concentrated in any particular work but is distributed proportionally across the *Corpus*. Although there is no textual isomorphism between the two authors, this consistency in Dionysius' use of the term suggests a deliberate and meaningful incorporation into his thought. Furthermore, the appearances of the term in the neuter gender and feminine plurals –unique to Dionysius– can be seen, within their contexts, as an expressive development by the author of the *Corpus*, representing not merely a reception of Iamblichus' terminology but an intentional conceptual extension of it.

This final textual argument serves as a corollary to the preceding analysis, reinforcing the claim that the author of the *Corpus* –while not in direct relation with Iamblichus– nonetheless aligns himself with that tradition. He adopts a doctrine of high theurgy as a non-philosophical, performative ritual with material elements, in contrast to his immediate predecessor, Proclus. Furthermore, following Iamblichus, the author of the *Corpus* consistently expresses the conviction that the only way for humanity to ascend to the divine is through God first descending to man, a theme that permeates the *Corpus* (cf. *De Mysteriis* VIII.8.7-11).

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Conclusions

Up to this point, a link has been traced between Iamblichus' introduction of high theurgy and its reconfiguration by the author of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. Additionally, certain evaluative elements have been presented, suggesting the presence of ritual practice in the *Corpus*, yet one that seems to be regarded as having a lower level of unitive elevation in the intermediate references. This aspect certainly requires further exploration, particularly in relation to the ongoing debate about the true purpose of the hieratic shift in late antique Neoplatonism –whether it reflects genuine theological reflection or a practical strategy for sustainability. Nonetheless, the question of intentionality does not alter the essential characteristics that align the author of the *Corpus* with Iamblichus, despite the mediating receptions between them.

Additionally, it can be argued that the work of Dionysius the Areopagite with Neoplatonism –particularly his integrative modification of Iamblichus' mystical doctrines and transcendent theurgy into his symbolic theology and Christian mysticism– parallels what Iamblichus himself did earlier with the *Chaldean Oracles* and the Neoplatonism that preceded him. Of course, the appropriation made by the author of the *Corpus* involves significant modifications, both in metaphysical aspects to adapt them to the conceptual framework of Christianity –distancing it notably from Gnosticism– and in ritual practices. Dionysius assumes and reshapes these rituals, introducing new terminology and texts concerning the σύμβολον and κήρυγμα, establishing a Christocentric liturgy as the true initiatory mystagogy. To assert the full intentionality of Dionysius in this reference to Iamblichus might be somewhat exaggerated, but it would also be incorrect to regard this alignment as purely coincidental. An author producing such a small, programmatic *corpus* as the *Corpus Dionysiacum* –particularly one so mystical and original in its expression–undoubtedly engages in a deliberate and critical appropriation of Iamblichus' distinctive expressions.

For reasons of focus and scope, this article has not explored the triangulation of Iamblichus' theurgy with the influences the author of the *Corpus* received from the Cappadocians, particularly Gregory of Nyssa. This remains a subject for future investigation, though it has already been addressed by significant studies, which offer valuable contributions to the understanding of this issue (De Andía, Fiori, Lilla, Scasozzo).

Lastly, the analysis of concordances in the use of the lemma θεουργ- across the fundamental works of Iamblichus and Proclus, compared with the complete *Corpus Dionysiacum*, provides explicit textual support for the conclusions drawn from the historiographical perspective.

As a corollary, it is necessary to affirm that a careful analysis of Dionysius the Areopagite's thought leads to the paradox of finding him highly receptive to Platonism –particularly Neoplatonic structures and expressions– while being firmly resistant to a purely Gnostic initiatic soteriology. At the same time, through his use of double apophatic negation, the author of the *Corpus* dissociates himself from any magical rhetoric or hermetic symbolism devoid of *theosis*. Yet, he aligns closely with Iamblichus' *via universalis* through his divine mysteries and an elevated form of theurgy, akin to Christian rites.

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