

Helios – The King of All

The Identity of the Creator God in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*

Theodoros Bertzeletos

A thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master's degree in Classical Studies

Department of Classics and Religious Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

© Theodoros Bertzeletos, Ottawa, Canada, 2026

ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ὅλων Ἥλιος!
Helios, The King of All!
Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 156c

εἴπερ χρή πείθεσθαι τοῖς σοφοῖς, ἀπάντων ἀνθρώπων εἶναι τοῦτον κοινὸν πατέρα (λέγεται γὰρ ὀρθῶς ἄνθρωπος ἄνθρωπον γεννᾶν καὶ ἥλιος).
Further, I regard this God, if we may believe the wise, as the common father of all mankind.
For it is said with truth that man and the Sun together beget man.
Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131c

Ἐν γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστιν ἀγαθὸν κατὰ τὸν βίον, ὃ μὴ παρὰ τοῦδε τοῦ θεοῦ (Ἡλίου) λαβόντες ἔχομεν, ἥτοι παρὰ μόνου τέλειον, ἢ διὰ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν παρ' αὐτοῦ τελειούμενον.
For there is no single blessing in our lives, which we do not receive as a gift from this God (Helios), either perfect from him alone, or, through the other Gods, perfected by him.
Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 153d

Μηδεὶς οὖν ἡμῖν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν εἰς πολλὰ διαιρείτω μηδὲ εἰς πολλὰ τεμνέτω, μᾶλλον δὲ μὴ πολλὰς ἐκ μιᾶς ποιεῖτω. Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἀλήθεια μία. οὕτω δὲ καὶ φιλοσοφία.
Therefore, I say, let no one divide philosophy into many kinds or cut it up into many parts, or rather let no one make it out to be plural instead of one. For even as truth is one, so too philosophy is one.
Julian, *To the Uneducated Cynics* 184c

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	v
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction.....	1
1. Helios and Julian	1
2. Research Question: What is the identity of King Helios in Julian's <i>Hymn to King Helios</i> ?	4
3. Hypothesis	6
4. Methodology	9
Chapter 1: Helios in the Roman Empire.....	12
1. Greek Religion in Late Antiquity	12
2. Mithraism and the Cult of Sol Invictus.....	15
2.1 The cult of Mithras.....	15
2.2 Sol Invictus Elagabalus	25
2.3 Deus Sol Invictus	28
3. Religions in Eastern Provinces	32
3.1 Syria and Phoenicia.....	32
3.2 Egypt and the <i>Greek Magical Papyri</i>	34
3.3 Hermetism	37
Chapter 2: Helios in Neoplatonism and the <i>Chaldean Oracles</i>	39
1. Neoplatonism.....	39
1.1 Overview	39
1.2 Doctrine	41
1.3 Soul's Controversy.....	42
1.4 Basic Principles.....	43
1.5 Philosophers – Plotinus	45
1.5.1 Light.....	45
1.5.2 Plotinus' vs Julian's Metaphysical System	51
1.5.3 Traditional Gods.....	53
1.6 Philosophers – Porphyry	54
1.6.1 Light/Sun and Syncretism in <i>In the Cave of the Nymphs</i>	54
1.6.2 Light/Sun in Other Texts	59
1.7 Philosophers – Iamblichus.....	65
1.7.1 Overview.....	65
1.7.2 <i>De Mysteriis</i> : Theurgy and the Sun	66
1.7.3 Theurgy – Overview	67
1.7.4 Theurgy – Illuminated Matter	69
1.7.5 Theurgy – Ritual, Julian, light and Helios	71
1.7.6 <i>De Mysteriis</i> – Helios and Light.....	73

1.7.7 Metaphysics.....	78
1.7.8 Metaphysics – Simplified Version	83
2. <i>Chaldean Oracles</i>	85
2.1 Overview	85
2.2 Cosmogony Triads-Heliocentrism.....	86
2.3 Other Divinities Iynges, Connectors, and Teletarchs	92
2.4 Aion.....	94
2.5 Solar World – Hypercosmic Sun	95
3. Helios in Julian’s Cosmological dogma	96
Chapter 3: <i>Hymn to King Helios</i>	98
1. Overview	98
2. Analysis of the <i>Hymn</i>	103
2.1 Intimate relationship	103
2.2 Theology of the <i>Hymn</i>	108
2.3 Light – Surer Proofs.....	109
2.4 Syncretism – Helios’ Powers and other Gods	117
2.5 Helios’ Substance – Nature	136
2.5.1 Middleness	137
2.5.2 Binding Nature	139
2.5.3 Creative God	140
2.5.4 Providence.....	143
2.6 Helios and the Souls.....	143
2.6.1 Souls and Elements.....	146
2.7 Helios and Rome.....	147
3. Cosmological Structure.....	153
3.1 Metaphysical schema – Hierarchical Structures.....	153
3.2 Comparison with the Iamblichean Metaphysical system.....	160
3.3 Comparison with the <i>Chaldean Oracles</i>	163
Conclusion	166
1. General.....	166
2. Synopsis	174
Appendices	
Appendix A: Julian’s Metaphysical System (Three Worlds)	178
Appendix B: Metaphysical Schema	179
Appendix C: Solar Posterity	180
Bibliography	
Primary Sources	183
Secondary Sources	184

Abstract

The identity of King Helios (the intellectual Sun) in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* has been the subject of long-standing debate among modern scholars. In this thesis, following a thorough analysis of solar references in various religions and cults of the Roman Empire, Neoplatonic philosophy, the *Chaldean Oracles*, and Julian's writings, it will be argued that the concept and identity of King Helios are directly derived from the Iamblichean Neoplatonic cosmological and metaphysical schema, which, in turn, is heavily influenced by Platonic and Chaldean thought. However, one should not entirely dismiss possible Mithraic influences on Julian's conception of the supreme Solar God. King Helios is to be understood as the true divine Λόγος – the primary cosmic creator of the universe and the noeric Demiurge – who is not merely a traditional supreme deity but a cosmological force based on scientific reasoning. He stands as the supreme God because his powers are demonstrated through epistemological argumentation and observation.

Keywords: Helios, Julian, Iamblichus, *Chaldean Oracles*, Neoplatonism, Theurgy, Mithras, Noetic (Intelligible), Noeric (Intellectual), Intellect (Nous), the Sun

L'identité du Roi Hélios (le Soleil intellectuel) dans l'hymne *Sur Hélios– Roi* de Julien fait l'objet d'un débat de longue date parmi les chercheurs modernes. Dans cette thèse, après une analyse approfondie des références solaires dans diverses religions et cultes de l'Empire romain, la philosophie néoplatonicienne, les *Oracles Chaldéens* et les écrits de Julien, on soutient que le concept et l'identité du Roi Hélios découlent directement du

schéma cosmologique et métaphysique néoplatonicien de Jamblique, lui-même fortement influencé par la pensée platonicienne et chaldéenne. Cependant, il ne faut pas exclure totalement d'éventuelles influences mithraïques sur la conception julienne du dieu solaire suprême. Le Roi Hélios doit être compris comme le véritable Λόγος divin – le créateur cosmique primordial de l'univers et le Démonstrateur noérique – qui n'est pas simplement une divinité suprême traditionnelle, mais une force cosmologique fondée sur un raisonnement scientifique. Il est considéré comme le Dieu suprême car ses pouvoirs sont démontrés par l'argumentation et l'observation épistémologiques.

Mots clés: Helios, Julien, Jamblique, *Les Oracles Chaldéens*, Néoplatonisme, Théurgie, Mithras, Noétique (Intelligible), Noérique (Intellectuel ou Intellectif), Intellect (Nous), le Soleil

Preface and Acknowledgments

This thesis was completed under the guidance of Dominique Côté of the University of Ottawa, to whom I owe my deepest gratitude for his unwavering support. From the very beginning, he provided invaluable advice, and as my thesis progressed, he offered strategies that brought clarity and coherence to my writing. I had wanted to write a thesis about Julian for quite some time, but it was thanks to Dominique's suggestion to focus on Julian's solar hymn that I decided to concentrate on Helios. Dominique noted a notable lack of contemporary scholarship regarding the identity of the Sun God in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* and recommended that I explore this subject for my thesis. Initially, I hesitated due to the scarcity of existing literature, but as I delved deeper into studies about the Sun God, I became convinced that this was an ideal topic. Not only would it fulfill the thesis requirements, but it would also allow me to contribute significantly to a subject that has been scarcely addressed by modern scholars. I have never regretted this decision. The more I read about King Helios and Julian, the more captivated I became. The wealth of information on Neoplatonism, theurgy, the *Chaldean Oracles*, Mithras, and related topics was entirely new to me. It felt like diving into a diamond mine, with knowledge sparkling all around. However, this "magical" journey was far from easy, requiring an immense investment of time to grasp these complex concepts. The outcome was undoubtedly rewarding. Ultimately, the mystery of Iamblichean Neoplatonism, as expressed through Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*, was unraveled, and the identity of King Helios was clarified.

I would also like to thank Geoffrey Greatrex of the University of Ottawa, as it was thanks to him and his passion for Late Antiquity that I joined the master's program in Classical Studies at this university. I am deeply grateful to Ariel Fuenzalida of the University of Ottawa, whose teachings proved vital in helping me understand how Julian perceived the light of Helios in Mithraic and theurgic rituals. Elysia Guzik performed the invaluable work of copyediting and proofreading my thesis, correcting all these grammatical errors that remain undetected, regardless of how many times the text is read. Most of all, I want to thank my wife for her cheerful patience and understanding, which she demonstrated from the very beginning of the preparation of this thesis. She stood by me throughout all phases, encouraging me to persevere and listening to all the ideas and conclusions I had in mind. She read the several revisions I wrote and made precious suggestions on how to improve the style and correct phrases that lacked clarity. Without her moral and hands-on support, which extended well beyond the academic realm, I would never have been able to complete this thesis.

Introduction

1. Helios and Julian

The Sun is the most conspicuous celestial object in our solar system, and is the source of all life on Earth. People in antiquity were well aware of the importance of the Sun (known as Helios in Greek), and since it was the brightest object in the sky, they associated it with happiness and prosperity. Moreover, Helios was one of the primary tools for measuring time. According to its position, people could calculate the seasons and the time of day. Thus, their daily life depended largely on the Sun. Surprisingly, the Sun did not seem to hold a prominent position in the Graeco-Roman religion and mythology. This changed, in the third century CE, when Roman emperors officially adopted the Sun cult of Sol Invictus. This imperial heliolatry continued until the reign of the emperor Constantine, when it was interrupted by Constantine's so-called conversion to Christianity. Emperor Flavius Claudius Iulianus (Julian) then brought it back to "light", marking a time when the Sun cult reached its culmination.

Julian's religious beliefs have attracted considerable interest in this short-lived emperor – both within and outside of academia. As Wiemer observes, "Julian has always been a polarizing figure and in some quarters still arouses strong emotions"¹, and the views about Julian's religious agenda are far from unanimous. As will be explained, this also holds true for the exact identity of King Helios in his eponymous hymn. Moreover, there has been a recent surge of interest in both Julian and Helios, as evidenced by the publication of three related books in recent years, along with several articles over the past decade.² Despite the numerous publications about Julian, only a handful explicitly focus on the Sun God in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*.³ Therefore, this thesis, which aims to clarify the controversial identity of Julian's King Helios, is both timely and necessary. It not only

¹ Wiemer 2020: 207.

² M. Schramm 2022, S. Hijmans 2024, and J. Swist 2025.

³ Athanassiadi (1977) primarily focuses on the Mithraic elements; Smith (1995), in two chapters dedicated to Helios, mostly focuses on disproving Athanassiadi's claims for a Helios-Mithras; Dillon focuses on the theology of the solar hymn (2012); and De Vita (2018) seems to be one of the only ones that focus explicitly on Julian's Helios.

seeks to resolve a decades-long controversy, but also serves as a valuable complement to current research on Julian and the Sun God.

While Julian's magnetic and controversial personality is widely acknowledged, many scholars overlook the importance of his intention to try to "impose" an official heliolatry. The emperor was not just trying to revive the traditional religions. He was actually hoping to bring to light the rational discourse of the Greek philosophers, free from any censorship.⁴ In contrast with contemporary opinions on the matter, Julian considered this reasoned discourse a form of religion. This was not an innovation, but a trend of his age, when "the philosopher could also be defined as a priest of the highest God".⁵ In other words, King Helios, the supreme Creator of the universe according to the philosophic and scientific theories, could also simultaneously be considered the supreme God of the traditional religions. Julian appears to have been engaged in a decisive battle between reasoning and supposedly uncontested beliefs.⁶ This battle between reason and unchallenged faith was to reemerge again only after almost a thousand years during the scientific discoveries of the Renaissance. Modern scholars' difficulty with accepting this notion is understandable, and some academics compare the endeavour to "decipher" Julian's mind with trying to find the exit from a labyrinth.⁷ The same level of perplexity holds for determining the identity of Julian's Sun God. However, finding out who is exactly King Helios is an important task, because it will help the modern scholars understand the exact intentions of Julian's religious policy, since it will clarify if King Helios is to be understood as a metaphor for philosophic reasoning, a God from a traditional religion or mystic cult, or a combination thereof.

The more I explored Julian's writings and the relevant Neoplatonic texts, the further I was convinced that Julian was much more than a traumatic soul who had been severely injured by his Christian cousins. He was not only an extremely intelligent person capable

⁴ Julian, *To Sallustius* 252b; Smith 2012: 236; Elm 2012: 111. Athanassiadi (1992: 11) compares the appropriation of the Hellenic culture by the Christians as a mutilation "into the Church's Procrustean bed".

⁵ Wiemer 2020: 212.

⁶ What followed were the "so-called" dark ages of freedom of thought; Dodds (2001: 134) very acutely saw it as a period when advanced intellect was sacrificed to clerical truths that did not demand education. Julian's devotion to reasoned discourse was almost overexaggerating. We can clearly see this notion in his writings, especially in the *To the Cynic Heracleios* and *Misopogon*, where instead of punishing, like an authoritarian emperor, the insults from the cynic philosophers and the citizens of Antioch, he chose instead to contradict them like a philosopher.

⁷ Athanassiadi 1992: xvii.

of comprehending difficult philosophical notions and enduring impossible situations, but also an honest one with a high standard of moral integrity. His troublesome younger years certainly had an impact on his personality, but instead of clouding his mind, they only enhanced his determination and survival instinct, and brought forth love for humankind and the traditional moral values of the Roman Empire. Julian observed the moral decay of his age and he felt the need to stop it, since he foresaw that it would not only annihilate his beloved Hellenism, but would cause the destruction of the Roman Empire itself.⁸ Julian understood the solution to be educating the people with Hellenic values, and presenting them with the philosophical truth, in which Helios stands as the supreme God/Noûς of the Cosmos. His chances of success are impossible to calculate, but recent scholars contest the formerly established view of an unstoppable Christian tidal wave in a period of decaying traditional religions, thus, giving at least some considerable chances to Julian's "Herculean labour"; the restoration of the traditional religions through a philosophical perspective.

Julian himself claims that he has the fortune of being the third-generation descendant from an unbroken line of ancestors that worshipped the Sun.⁹ However, the relationship between Julian and Helios is more than that. Julian considers himself as a kinship of the Sun (ἑκγονοῦ τοῦ Ἡλίου)¹⁰, a solar God that stands at the highest hierarchy in our cosmos. Indeed, Helios is conspicuously the supreme God in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*, a treatise that was written in order to celebrate the birthday of Helios (Sol Invictus) on December 25th and which has been described as the emperor's "definite attempt to crystalize the Roman religion"¹¹ by presenting a rationalized religious system according to his personal religious beliefs.¹² Some scholars have considered this treatise as an attempt to confront irrational beliefs with a rational philosophic way of thought.¹³ Julian develops in the *Hymn* a cosmological metaphysical system, based on scientific, philosophical, and theological observations and theories, giving to Helios a central role and placing him as

⁸ Wiemer (2020: 215) also adds that the Christians were seen by Julian as a particular harmful contributor to this decay, since they prevented others from worshipping their Gods, and they refuted the several philosophical theories.

⁹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131c.

¹⁰ See Julian's personal myth (Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 229c).

¹¹ Athanassiadi 1992: 148.

¹² Dillon 2012: 104.

¹³ Smith 2012: 236.

leader.¹⁴ By presenting rational scientific thoughts, the emperor deploys visible cosmic observations as proofs of Helios' superiority in our universe.¹⁵ As he states, characteristically, 'How then can we now fail to believe, in view of this (the visible proofs of the Sun's power)?'.¹⁶ Julian describes the Sun God as ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ὅλων, "The King of All"¹⁷, the orchestrator and coordinator of all the demiurgic cosmic forces.

2. Research Question: What is the identity of King Helios in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*?

The strong Neoplatonic, Chaldean, and the debatable Mithraic influences are conspicuous in many of Julian's writings.¹⁸ The *Hymn to King Helios* is no exception. However, due to the obscure nature of many references in Julian's *Hymn*, it is not always clear exactly to which dogma the emperor references. As a result, 'numerous scholars have attempted to pin down and interpret the complex and elusive metaphysical structure which seems to form the background of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* and to identify its source or sources'.¹⁹ What is undisputed among scholars is the important influence that Neoplatonism had on Julian, in particular, its Iamblichean version, which is based on many of the teachings of the *Chaldean Oracles*, especially when it considers the ritual of theurgy. However, measuring Iamblichus', Mithraism's, and the *Chaldean Oracles*' degree of influence on Julian's thought and writings is not easy, since much of the evidence is lost; very few of Iamblichus' writings have survived, and from the *Chaldean Oracles*, just a few fragments. Considering Mithraism, the written evidence is even more scarce. To make matters more challenging, modern scholars strongly disagree on which doctrines can be clearly attributed to this mystic cult that was considered a major threat to Christianity and had obtained a strong influence among the soldiers.²⁰

¹⁴ Although Julian claims no philosophic innovations, he has no hesitation to call himself a philosopher and a theologian (*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161b).

¹⁵ Julian promotes his heliolatry and his rational views rather prudently, since he does not mention anywhere in the *Hymn* the religion of the Galilaeans (Christians). However, a reader can certainly detect this contrast between the reasoning of philosophical thought against an unreasoned faith (Smith 2012: 236).

¹⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 135a.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 156c.

¹⁸ The Mithraic influences have been rejected or completely ignored by recent scholars like Turcan (1988), R. Smith (1995), and A. Smith (2012).

¹⁹ Smith 2012: 229.

²⁰ Smith 1995: 139–142; Athanassiadi 1977: 360–361.

Due to the complexity of pinpointing a specific religious dogma in the *Hymn*, the exact identity of the Sun God is far from obvious. This is also due to the fact that Julian was not only an adherent of many mystic cults, but also a fervent believer in a religious syncretism. In Julian's writings, Helios is equated with several Gods, including Zeus, Apollo, Pan, Aphrodite, Dionysos, Sarapis, Mithras, Sol Invictus, the Homeric Helios, the Platonic Good, Mithras, and many other divinities. In addition, Julian supported the view that 'the Gods presented by traditional religion are compatible with Neoplatonic philosophy. In other words, he adhered to the view that traditional religion is philosophically sound'.²¹ The mystery cults, new and old, were also interpreted by Julian, and other Neoplatonic philosophers, as representing allusions to philosophical truths. All of the above, along with the scarcity of evidence in many cases, makes it extremely difficult to identify exactly whether or not Julian was making any allusions in the *Hymn* to specific cults or philosophical doctrines. As a result, modern scholars appear to be divided on exactly to whom Julian refers in his solar hymn, that is, which God is King Helios. Since Julian's allegiance to Iamblichean Neoplatonism is not in dispute, the disputes mostly focus on any other impact in Julian's thought, like his Mithraism, and on other influences like the *Chaldean Oracles*.²² Opinions range from Bidez's celebration of the power of Mithras, to Smith's total attribution of the *Hymn* to a Neoplatonic doctrine and a blunt rejection of anything Mithraic.²³ Others, like Dillon, recognize a mixture of Neoplatonic and Mithraic influences.²⁴ There is also a shifting trend among the scholars. While those up to the third quarter of the twentieth century tend to place particular emphasis on the importance of the Mithraic influence on Julian, scholars from the fourth quarter of the twentieth century until now tend to substantially diminish the Mithraic factor, and emphasize instead the Neoplatonic and Chaldean influences on Julian.²⁵ To make things more complex, the conception of what is precisely the Mithraic doctrine has changed during the recent years.

²¹ Liebeschuetz 2012: 213.

²² Smith 1995: 17–18, 142–143.

²³ Bidez 1930: 222; Smith 1995: 144.

²⁴ Dillon 2012: 115.

²⁵ Wright (1913), Bidez (1930), Lacombrade (1965), and Athanassiadi (1977) emphasize the Mithraic influences. However, Athanassiadi (1992) in the preface admits that she may have exaggerated the Mithraic factor. On the other hand, R. Smith (1995), Dillon (2012), and A. Smith (2012) place more importance on the Neoplatonic influences. However, Dillon implies a rather strong Mithraic influence on Julian by recognizing King Helios as Helios-Mithras. Others, more extreme, like Turcan (1988) deny any Mithraic influence or initiation of Julian into this mystery.

As a result, some recent scholars admit a much closer resemblance between Mithraism, theurgy and Neoplatonism.²⁶ In addition, the information from Julian's writings does not seem very revealing. Although Mithras is mentioned only twice in all of Julian's surviving writings, in one instance the emperor calls him his tutelary God, thus attributing to him an outmost importance. This paper will try to address exactly these issues, in order to be able to answer the aforementioned thesis question.

3. Hypothesis

It will be argued that the concept and identity of King Helios directly derive from the Iamblichean Neoplatonic cosmological and metaphysical schema, which in turn is heavily influenced by the Platonic and the Chaldean ones. The best description of King Helios by Julian is found in its eponymous *Hymn*. Here, Helios is presented as the Platonic Demiurge. Hence, Helios is the orchestrator and coordinator of all cosmological forces that constantly create the visible world. However, in pure Iamblichean fashion, he is placed at a level below the Good, which is positioned at the very top of the cosmos at the level of Being. Julian presents three worlds: The noetic world, with the One/Good standing as leader and creator of the noetic Gods; the noeric world, with King Helios as leader and creator; and the sensible world, with the visible Sun (φαινόμενος ἥλιος) as leader and creator of the planets, Moon, and Earth. All three leaders are interconnected and are placed in the middle of their worlds. Similarly, in the simplified Iamblichean system, the One is placed outside of the universe, the Good/Monad is the leader in the noetic world, and the Creator/noeric Intellect is the leader in the noeric/intermediate world, presenting itself to the visible world of matter with the Sun at its centre. Thus, it can be argued that in Julian's eponymous *Hymn*, King Helios is presented as the noeric Intellect of Iamblichus in its simplified version. Yet, the more "advanced" metaphysical system of Iamblichus is much more complex. In this system, Helios is to be equated to the third Demiurge, who is to be identified with the third Father of the Hebdomad, placed last in the noeric realm. This third Demiurge is directly responsible for the creation of the visible world, just like King Helios.

²⁶ The best representative of this view is Beck (2006), who has done excellent research on Mithraism, refuting many of Cumont's hypotheses. Other scholars, like Edmonds (2000) and Dillon (2012), also concur with his conclusions.

The nature and powers of King Helios are also strikingly similar to those of the Demiurge of Plato and Iamblichus.

Moreover, this tri-hypostasis system in the *Hymn to King Helios* bares conspicuous similarities to the one of the Chaldeans, who developed a similar metaphysical schema with three worlds – each governed by a Sun (or, more specifically, a ruler of fiery substance) placed in their centre. The first ruler is to be identified with Aion. The second ruler in the Chaldean theology is considered to be the transmundane-Sun, who is identified with Julian's King Helios. The third ruler, just like in the *Hymn*, is the visible Sun. Similar to Iamblichean theology, the Chaldeans place a supreme Father outside our universe. Surprisingly, Julian does not mention anything about a Good or Father beyond our Cosmos (likely due to economy of space in the *Hymn*, since it is dedicated to King Helios). The similarities between the *Hymn* and the Chaldean system are numerous. Julian, like the Chaldeans, emphasizes the notions of middleness and centrality. There is a multi-meaning of centrality, because it not only defines the central position of Helios, but also his harmonizing element related to all other parts of the universe. Helios integrates and directs everything in the cosmos. Moreover, Julian assumes a common substance among all three leaders, which connects them together. This substance, transmitted from the Good to King Helios, is spread all over the material world through the visible sun.

On the other hand, the similarities to the Mithraic dogma are much less obvious. However, as it will be shown they exist. Moreover, recent studies have altered our views on the doctrine of this mystic cult, and have actually brought Mithraism much closer to Neoplatonism. In Julian's mind, King Helios is also fused with many other divinities, but this does not result in any loss or change in his status. On the contrary, all other divinities are adjusted to fit the Neoplatonic and Chaldean definition of Helios. Thus, the supreme God Zeus, the King of the Gods, is equated with King Helios, "The King of All", and becomes a cosmological leader. Mithras in a similar fashion, as a supreme God and Sol Invictus, is completely equated with King Helios. The Sol Invictus of Aurelius, along with Sarapis (the supreme God in Hellenistic Egypt) and all the other supreme Gods, also become one with King Helios. Julian describes all of these Gods as having the same or similar characteristics as King Helios. Meanwhile, all the other non-supreme Gods are given cosmological attributes of Helios, and are presented as being part of him. Arguably,

Julian does not innovate on this, but rather follows a trend that had been highly developed in Late Antiquity. It follows the notion that all philosophies and religions lead to the same goal; they only follow different paths.²⁷ This religious syncretism leads to the divine light of King Helios, while the goal of philosophy is to make us like God. Thus, traditional religion and philosophy form a unified whole, in which each component confirms and complements the others.²⁸

One of the major contributions of this thesis to modern scholarship is the reintroduction of the Mithraic factor. It will be demonstrated that it is a mistake to consider the *Hymn* as merely a pure Neoplatonic text devoid of any Mithraic elements, as many recent scholars have argued. The *Hymn* aligns with several Mithraic components, and this should not be regarded as mere coincidence. Another important conclusion, which is especially emphasized as core to Julian's thought but has largely been underestimated by many scholars, is the significant influence of the *Chaldean Oracles*. Hence, the *Hymn* may actually serve as a guide to better understanding the *Chaldean Oracles*, which evolved in the fourth century in the form of theurgy. This deduction is fundamental, since there are only few fragments that have survived from the *Chaldean Oracles*, and our knowledge about them is limited. Additionally, this paper highlights the notion of complete and total religious syncretism under Julian's metaphysical framework.²⁹ Helios is not just a supreme Intellect; he is the Supreme Demiurge of all beings on earth and, therefore, is to be identified as the supreme creator God of every religion worshipped by mankind. Another contribution of this thesis to modern scholarship is the conclusion of a possible Porphyrian influence on Julian, something largely underestimated so far.³⁰ This Neoplatonic philosopher developed several important notions that are found in Julian's *Hymn*.³¹ Finally, this thesis introduces a concept rarely, if ever, addressed by modern scholars: the scientific elements in the *Hymn* that converge theology, celestial physics, and cosmology.

²⁷ This excludes the Christians, who, in an absolute way, considered their religion superior to any other.

²⁸ Nesselrath 2020: 54.

²⁹ R. Smith (1995) and Athanassiadi (1992) also mention the universal role of Julian's religious policy, however they do not emphasize in full extent his highly syncretic characteristics.

³⁰ Greenwood (2018) is a supporter of possible connection between Porphyry and Julian; However, some authors are uncertain of a literary relationship between Porphyry and Julian (Magny 2014: 6; Smith 1995: 191).

³¹ These include the idea that the One is situated within the universe, the association of both Asclepius and Heracles with Helios, the Platonized Mithras, and the notion of syncretism among various religions.

4. Methodology

Since the identification of King Helios is far from obvious, a detailed investigation will be conducted to reveal any possible influences on Julian's heliolatry. That is, what follows is an analysis of the solar references in the traditional religions, mystery cults, and philosophical dogmas, in Late Antiquity (with a focus on those practiced in the Roman Empire), that are most likely to have had an impact on Julian's heliolatry. The goal is to detect any possible similarities to Julian's conception of Helios. Finally, an analysis of the *Hymn to King Helios* will be conducted, to find out by which sources Julian was influenced and to figure out the identity of King Helios. All solar references found in Julian's writings will be compared to the findings from the analysis (conducted in the first two chapters). All the aforementioned analysis will be outlined in three chapters.

Chapter 1, subdivided into three parts, analyzes how the Sun was perceived in Late Antiquity. The first section investigates any solar references in Greek religion and philosophy in Late Antiquity. The second section focuses on the mystery cult of Mithras and the imperial cult of Sol Invictus. Each of these is a prime candidate for having directly influenced Julian in his conception of King Helios. In the *Hymn*, Julian equates Mithras with Helios. An analysis of Mithraism is also necessary, since, as mentioned above, there appear to be conflicting views on the exact doctrine of this religion. Concerning Sol Invictus, there is a conspicuous connection to King Helios, because the *Hymn to King Helios* itself was written during the festivities of Sol Invictus and is dedicated to this God. The third section includes a brief analysis of the religions and cults in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, most notably in Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt. This analysis is crucial, since Julian in the *Hymn to King Helios* refers to the solar wisdom of the Phoenicians and to the solar religion of the Syrian city of Emesa or Edesa, and equates Helios with the Egyptian Sarapis.

Chapter 2 summarizes the solar references in Neoplatonism up to the time of Julian, and examines the fragments of the *Chaldean Oracles*. As already stated, Julian's Neoplatonic and Chaldean background and allegiance are not contested by any scholar. Thus, it makes it fundamental to figure out whether Julian's cosmological structure of the *Hymn* is similar to the one that was advocated by the most famous Neoplatonic teachers or by the *Chaldean Oracles*. As Wright articulates, the *Hymn to King Helios* presents many

difficulties to a reader who is unfamiliar with Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.³² Chapter 2 is divided into two sections. The first section provides an initial overview of Neoplatonism, then examines the doctrines of the three most notable Neoplatonic philosophers – namely, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. In particular, this analysis focuses exclusively on pinpointing any important solar reference in their work – not an easy task, since it seems that King Helios is not clearly referenced as an important cosmological entity in the treatises of these philosophers. However, the analysis demonstrates that he is referenced indirectly, and his solar characteristics constituted an integral part of Neoplatonic philosophy. This section’s emphasis on Iamblichus and his theurgic ritual is significant because Julian was a fervent initiate in theurgy and mentions his wish to excel in theurgy several times in his writings. The second section includes an overview and analysis of the *Chaldean Oracles*, to help identify the cosmological structure and any solar characteristics and references of the cosmic divine entities in this mystic religion. Once again this is of prime importance, since the Iamblichean theurgic ritual is based on the arcane teachings of the *Chaldean Oracles*.

Finally, Chapter 3 provides a detailed analysis of the *Hymn to King Helios*. Building upon the analysis in the previous chapters, this chapter aims to better understand the solar references in the *Hymn*, in order to be able to identify King Helios. To achieve this goal, the exact cosmological system that is described in the *Hymn* must be revealed and compared to other schemas, especially the Iamblichean and the Chaldean. In addition, there is a need to pinpoint the position of Helios in that system and to determine accordingly to which philosophical and mystic dogmas his exact powers and nature referred. This is important, since it is commonly acknowledged that Julian was not an innovator in philosophy, hence he must have received his ideas from somewhere else.³³ It must also be clarified, if the metaphysical doctrine that Julian describes is a pure Neoplatonic/Chaldean one, or if there are Mithraic allusions, a fact which could imply a Helios that is more identifiable to Mithras than to the noeric Intellect of Iamblichus. Moreover, all the syncretic characteristics of Helios must be understood. Julian identifies Helios with several other

³² Wright 1913: 441; Wright also includes the friend of Julian Sallustius with his treatise, *On the Gods and the World*. I will also add the *Chaldean Oracles*.

³³ Julian himself claims that he is no expert in philosophy, but only a lover of it (Smith 1995: 16–17).

divinities. It will be determined if this is an innovation made by Julian, or whether he just follows the trend of his age. Altogether, the three chapters intend to offer a satisfactory and conclusive determination of the identity of Helios.

Chapter 1

Helios in the Roman Empire

1. Greek Religion in Late Antiquity

The Sun became increasingly important in Late Antiquity, both for the imperial cult and in most spiritual worship.³⁴ This holds true for many cults and religions, and the Greek traditional religion is not an exception. It becomes evident in some surviving texts, dating to around the third century CE, with the most conspicuous being the answers of the Oracle of Claros. In one of them, a certain Theophilos asked Apollo if he was really a God or if God was another.³⁵ The answer of Apollo is the following:

‘There exists a fire (phlogmos) which has occupied a vessel above the heavens - a fire infinitely in motion, a boundless eternity. It is not within the grasp of the blessed Gods, unless the mighty Father should plan his purposes so that he himself might be looked upon; in that place the ether does not bear the radiant stars; nor is the luminous moon raised up there. No God meets Him (the Father, who represents the noetic fire) on his path, nor am I myself (Apollo) spread out so far as to reach him, though I whirl through the ether in company with my light-rays. God is fire, a vast channel moving in a spinning motion with a whirring sound. But if someone touched that ethereal fire, he would not feel fear in his heart, for it has not power to burn. Through an unceasing care that derives from God himself, eternity mingles with eternities, Self-begotten, untaught, without a mother, unshakable, nameless, many-named, dwelling in fire-that is God; we are messengers (ἄγγελοι), only a small part of God.’³⁶

(Oracular response of Apollo at Claros, in Smith 1995: 98).

In the oracular answer, Apollo is presented as the Sun God, who is continuously traversing the ether (space) with his lighting rays. Apollo is just a messenger, made of a

³⁴ Shaw 2014: 254.

³⁵ There is some controversy about the origin of this text. Lewy (2011: 18, 19) claims that it forms part of the *Chaldean Oracles*, while Bouillot (2021: 39), Smith (2012, 98), Majercik (1989: 14), and Dodds (1961: 266) all accept that it is an Oracular response from the Apolline Oracle at Colophon (Claros).

³⁶ Oracular response of Apollo at Claros, in Bouillot 2021: 39. Ὅτι Θεοφίλου τινὸς τοῦνομα τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα ἐρωτήσαντος· ‘σὺ εἴ θεὸς ἢ ἄλλος; ἔχρησεν οὕτως· Ἔσθ’, ὑπὲρ οὐρανίου κύτεος καθύπερθε λελογχῶς, φλογμὸς ἀπειρέσιος, κινούμενος, ἄπλετος αἰὼν· ἔστι δ’ ἐνὶ μακάρεσσιν ἀμήχανος, εἰ μὴ ἑαυτὸν βουλὰς βουλευέσῃσι πατὴρ μέγας, ὥς ἐσιδέσθαι. ἐνθα μὲν οὐτ’ αἰθὴρ φέρει ἀστέρας ἀγλαοφεγγεῖς οὔτε σεληναίη λιγυφεγγεῖς αἰωρεῖται, οὐ θεὸς ἀντιάει κατ’ ἀταρπιτόν, οὐδ’ ἐγὼ αὐτὸς ἀκτῖσιν συνέχων ἐπικίδναμαι αἰθεροδινῆς. ἀλλὰ πέλει πυρσοῖο θεὸς περιμήκετος αὐλῶν, ἔρπων εἰλίγδην, ροιζούμενος, οὔκεν ἐκείνου ἀψάμενος πυρὸς αἰθερίου δαίσειέ τις ἦτορ· οὐ γὰρ ἔχει δαῖήν, ἀζηχεῖ δ’ ἐν μελεδηθμῷ αἰὼν αἰώνεσσ’ ἐπιμύγνυται ἐκ θεοῦ αὐτοῦ. αὐτοφυῆς, ἀδίδακτος, ἀμήτωρ, ἀστυφέλικτος οὔνομα μηδὲ λόγῳ χωρούμενος, ἐν πυρὶ ναίων, τοῦτο θεός· μικρὰ δὲ θεοῦ μερὶς ἄγγελοι ἡμεῖς.

small part of the Mighty Father, who lives outside our universe in a place where there are no stars, and who is an immense fire, self-begotten, untaught, continually spinning around producing the sound of *auloi*. This fire is not the same as the visible sun, since if someone touches it, he cannot be burned. There, the eternal God mingles eternity with eternity. This place is out of reach for the blessed Gods of our cosmos. It is clear that this oracular description of Apollo is very different from the Greek myths.

This answer of the Oracle of Apollo was interpreted by some Christian authors, like Lactantius, as a reference to the Christian God. Some modern authors believe that Apollo's answer was in a style that could be understood by a Christian.³⁷ But the fact that the answer was familiar to the Christians does not necessarily mean that it had any Christian characteristic or influence. On the contrary, careful examination of the text points to a Neoplatonic philosophy and the *Chaldean Oracles*. The notion of the existence of a creative fiery force in a constant swirling motion (Supreme God or Logos), residing outside our universe, who gives some of its attributes to the creative lesser forces of our cosmos (lesser Gods), is very Neoplatonic.

The Oracle of Claros was near Clazomenai in Ionia, a place that was one of the centres of Neoplatonic philosophy. Emperor Julian himself went to Ionia (western Asia Minor) to visit the Neoplatonic philosophers and study theurgy. This text was likely part of a book of the philosopher Porphyry that was called *Philosophy from Oracles*. The relationship between the Oracle of Apollo and the Neoplatonists can also be deduced by the fact that Iamblichus, one of the greatest Neoplatonists, describes in detail the procedure of divination in the Oracle of Claros.³⁸ Thus, it becomes likely that the priest, who spoke the oracular verse on behalf of Apollo, was well aware of the Neoplatonic dogma. Moreover, taking a socio-cultural view, this may also lead to the conclusion that Neoplatonic beliefs were not confined to a small number of philosophers. The well-renowned Oracle of Apollo was consulted by distant cities or armies, from as far as Hadrian's wall.³⁹ Most likely, the Oracle was expressing views that had to be understood by all those who were seeking the help of the God. Thus, some basic knowledge of

³⁷ Fox 1986: 171.

³⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.11.

³⁹ Fox 1986: 179.

Neoplatonic philosophy may have existed among the masses, or at least among all those who had been educated in *paideia*.

Interestingly, Iamblichus expressed the belief that all the Oracles of Apollo were being inspired by the divine light that purified the luminous spirit in the priests or prophetesses (ἀποκάθαρσιν τοῦ αὐγοειδοῦς πνεύματος ἐμποιεῖ).⁴⁰ The description of this divination process by the great philosopher bears resemblance to the one in theurgy, in the sense that both of them depend on the divine light of God.⁴¹ Moreover, Iamblichus implies that the priests of Apollo were also using divine symbols (συνθήματα) as receptacles (ὑποδοχαί), in order to bring in the prophetic luminous spirit in them through which they were able to receive the God. This again bears similarities to theurgy. It appears that the priests of Claros were mixing the divine symbols with water, resulting in its divine illumination. After drinking the “sacred” water, the priests felt the presence of Apollo (the God of light) in them. The illuminated splendor of the God was immediately sensed, since he flashed himself in the eyes of the priest like lighting from above, and united with him. The priest was neither himself nor had any consciousness of what he said or where on Earth he was. The divinatory words of the God (through the mouth of the priest) were the prophecy. In Delphi, Iamblichus describes a similar process, only this time the divine symbols were transmitting the divine in the form of smoke.⁴² The fiery spirit was inhaled by the prophetess, who gave herself absolutely to the divine spirit and was illuminated by the ray of the divine fire.⁴³ Hence, the importance of light in the divinatory process in both cases is conspicuous.

⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.11; The πνεῦμα (spirit) refers to a substance that surrounds the human soul and is called the soul-vehicle, since it mediates between the soul and the body. This notion seems to find authority in Plato and Aristotle and/or to have a Hermetic or Chaldean origin (Johnston 2019: 710; Clarke 2003:147, footnote 200; Dodds 1963: 313–318).

⁴¹ Johnston 2019: 710

⁴² Both ancient and modern scholars seem to be greatly divided on whether these fumes originated from Earth or were the cause of burning earthly materials (Clarke 2003: 149, footnote 202). However, the answer may lie in modern science. Although, the French archaeologists that excavated the site at the end of nineteenth-beginning of twentieth century did not find vapours of any gases, De Boer claims that there is an underground schism under the temple, where currently an underwater river flows, and it is possible that in the past, fumes were coming out from there. This is further reinforced by the fact that hydrocarbon gases were found by analyzing the river’s water (De Boer 2001: 707–710). Iamblichus seems to support the opinion of fumes coming out of the schism, but one certainly cannot exclude the usage of a divine σύνθημα, that was burned and the prophetess inhaled its illuminous divine vapours.

⁴³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.11.

2. Mithraism and the Cult of Sol Invictus

Two of the most conspicuous cults that were directly associated with the Sun were those of Sol Invictus and Mithras. The cult of Mithras appeared much earlier (first century CE) in the Roman Empire than the cult of Sol Invictus (third century CE). Both considered the Sun as a supreme God. There was, and still is, a tendency among scholars to conflate these two cults. P. Habel, in the nineteenth century, expressed the opinion that Sol Invictus is to be identified with the Persian Mithras. On the contrary, other authors, like G. Halsbergue, emphasize the differences between the two sects. In addition, there were actually two religions of Sol Invictus that developed separately. The first one was introduced in Rome by the emperor Elagabalus. Later on, the emperor Aurelian established the second cult of Sol Invictus.⁴⁴ The widespread confusion between the two cults of Sol Invictus and the one of Mithras is mostly due to two reasons. First, little scholarly attention is devoted to the existence, importance, and survival of a Sun cult in the Roman Empire. Secondly, from all the impressive rituals and myths which encompassed these three cults, we can follow little and comprehend less, due to the lack of substantial literary testimony.⁴⁵

2.1 The cult of Mithras

Studying the cult of Mithras is a great challenge. This is mainly due to the almost complete lack of literary evidence. The only text that actually analyzes the Mithraic mysteries (and that, very briefly) comes from Porphyry. Thus, scholars try to understand this religion through the interpretation of archaeological evidence. This approach is based on a lot of assumptions (due to the lack of sources); as a result, the several developed theories are open to criticism. There are three principal schools of thought about the origins of the cult of Mithras.

The first school of thought, developed by Cumont at the beginning of the twentieth century, supports the view that the Roman Mithras was a God who originated in the plains and mountains of Persia and held a conspicuous place in Persian religious beliefs. He was the middle God in the Zoroastrian dualistic religion, sitting between Ahura-Mazda (supreme God of eternal light) and Ahriman, the lord of darkness. He was depicted

⁴⁴ Halsbergue 1972: Introduction.

⁴⁵ Claus 2001: 15.

traversing the sky on a chariot with four white horses. He could hear, see, and know everything. He was the creator and the regenerator of all life on Earth. He represented the truth and good, constantly fighting evil. Like the Greek Helios, he was invoked in solemn oaths. The second school of thought, conceived by German scholars, believes that the cult has no connections with Persia and that it originated in Ostia (the port of Rome). The third school of thought is the most recent one, developed by Beck, and it suggests that Mithraism originated from Commagene. Beck's theory is actually closer to Cumont's, since the kings of Commagene were following the Persian tradition. Beck believes that Mithraism, and more particularly, its ritual of *taurobolium*, could represent an astronomical phenomenon that occurred in 62 CE and was observed by the "star-talk" experts of Commagene.⁴⁶

Arguments about the nature of the Mithraic cult vary even further. Roughly, they can be divided into two groups based on their method. The first group believes that there was an original Mithraic doctrine, which is expressed through the iconography in the *Mithraea*. On the other hand, the second group suggests that the art in the *Mithraea* was meant to create a mystic ritualistic experience for the participant, rather than representing an illustration of an official doctrine.

Although Mithras was not well accepted in the Hellenistic world, his cult was ultimately established in Rome during the first century CE. It was first introduced in Ostia, or was brought there, by Cilician pirates and eastern merchants. His cult began expanding across the Roman Empire, especially along the *limes*. There were at least four temples in Ostia where Mithras was celebrated. The Mithraic shrine was called *Mithraeum* or σπήλαιον (cave). Some of the shrines were placed in actual caves. Mithras was popular among the soldiers, and as a result most of the archaeological evidence comes from places where garrisons were placed.⁴⁷ Two of the "richest" findings areas is Dacia and upper Pannonia, together with the region along the Rhine, where several temples, statues, and votive offerings have been found. It should not be a coincidence that the name *milites* was given to a certain grade of initiates.

⁴⁶ Beck 2006: 236.

⁴⁷ However, recent studies tend to refute the idea that Mithras was primarily a military God (Swist 2025: 201).

Mithraic cult worship in the Roman Empire adapted to Graeco-Roman standards. It acquired a familiar cosmology for the Romans and the Greeks. Even if Mithras appeared as the principal God in the eyes of the devotees, he was not alone. He was not even at the top of the divine order. At the summit there was “Time”, which was called Αἰών, Κρόνος, or Saturnus. A statue found in a Mithraeum in Ostia (190 CE) depicts him as a human with a lion head enveloped by a serpent. He holds a key in each hand (to open the portals of heaven), along with a scepter, and on his back are four wings, decorated with the symbols of the seasons. His breast is engraved with thunder imagery (a symbol of Zeus). On the base of the statue are the hammer and tongs of Hephaistos, the cock and the pine-cone (associated with the Sun), and the wand of Mercury. In this statue, a clear religious syncretism can be identified, where the Mithraic Saturnus gathers the powers of many Graeco-Roman Gods. Following the Mithraic Saturnus, there was the supreme triad that consisted of Heaven (Jupiter), Earth (Juno), and their son Oceanus (Neptune). Like the Greek and Roman theogony, Jupiter in Mithraism succeeded Saturn. He reigned over the universe, along with Juno, with whom he had many children (Fortuna, Venus, Cybele, Minerva, Diana, Luna, and Nike, among others). Mithraism deified the four elements of the presocratic philosophers (fire, earth, water, air). Sometimes the elements were represented allegorically. For example, the lion represented fire; a cup, water; and the serpent, earth.

The seven planetary bodies – among them, the Sun and the Moon – were also important deities for the followers of Mithras. As a result, the Sun is depicted in some reliefs along with the other six planets (Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and Luna).⁴⁸ The planets encompassed in themselves several virtues and qualities. Along with the representation of each day of the week, they were also symbolically attached to a metal. These celestial bodies were often depicted as symbols in the *mithraea* and *spelaea*, and the most common ones were the Sun and the Moon. Their symbolic meaning was dualistic, since they represented at the same time both the substances from which they were formed, and the Gods for whom they were named. The most conspicuous celestial object was the Sun. This double representation was of particular importance, since the Sun was conceived as either united with Mithras himself or as distinct on its own.

⁴⁸ In antiquity, there were thought to be seven planets in total (the Sun counted as one of the seven).

Due to this fusion, the all-powerful Mithras was also called Sol Invictus, making it nearly impossible to distinguish to which God the inscriptions bearing the name Sol Invictus refer, that is, to Mithras or to the official cult of Sol Invictus. Several hundred votive inscriptions have been found referring simultaneously to both Sol and Mithras, demonstrating the fusion between Sol and Mithras, and making their identification with Mithras much easier. These are mostly in the forms *Sol Invictus Mithras*, *Deus Sol Invictus Mithras*, *Deus Sol Mithras*, or *Sol Mithras*. The rarest inscriptions are those that mention both Gods as separate deities. An inscription of a dedication of an altar from Sublazio in Gallia Cisalpina mentions Sol and his companion Mithras (*Deo Invicto Mithrae et Soli socio*). One in Bremenium on Hadrian's Wall was actually meant this way but the 'and' was erased later on, uniting again Mithras and the Sun (*Deo Invicto et Soli socio sacrum*).

A typical depiction of Mithras is on top of a bull, accompanied by two torch bearers. Mithras himself had been born from a rock. It is believed that the rock symbolizes the cosmos. A denarius that was found in Verulamium in Britain depicts Mithras' rock-birth. The inscription with the name Mithras is in Greek. In another finding, it is mentioned that Invictus was born from a rock.⁴⁹ Although the word Invictus could easily refer to Sol Invictus, it most likely refers to Mithras, since the denarius described above mentions Mithras specifically. The rock birth can also be interpreted as a further connection between Sol and Mithras. The natural philosophers claimed that the Sun was actually a flaming rock. Hence the myth of the birth of the God can refer allegorically to the solar characteristics of Mithras, who is described and depicted as follows:

Having a bright appearance, youthful, golden-haired, with a white tunic and a golden crown and trousers, and holding in his right hand a golden shoulder of a young bull. This is the Bear which moves and turns heaven around, moving upward and downward in accordance with the hour. Then you will see lightning bolts leaping from his eyes and stars from his body.
(*Greek Magical Papyri* [PGM] IV 695-700).

The solar and cosmic characteristics of Mithras in the above description are conspicuous (bright appearance, youthful, golden-haired, golden crown). Moreover, this supreme God clearly bears similar characteristics to the noeric Intellect of the Neoplatonists and the

⁴⁹ Claus 2001: 146-147, 62-63.

Chaldeans. The leaping lightning bolts and the body that encompasses all the stars in the universe allude to the Chaldean description of the noeric Nous.

The notion of middleness was also very important in Mithraism. In fact, many scholars base their claim that Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* is a praise to Mithraism on this concept. This is because Julian himself places prime importance on the central position of Helios in the universe.⁵⁰ Cumont held this Mithraic mediation to be at once cosmic, moral, and theological. The cosmic one is supported by a comment of Plutarch, who says that the Persians conceive Mithras as occupying the middle part of the cosmos between good and evil. However, this view has serious flaws since it is based on the arbitrary and much-contested assumption that the Roman Mithraism was based on the Persian one.⁵¹ The moral one places Mithras as the 'supporter of Man in his struggle towards the goal of moral excellence'.⁵² The theological one 'symbolizes the median position of Mithra-Logos between Man in his fallen state and the First transcendental Principle of infinite time'.⁵³ Mithras' centrality is further reinforced by the fact that the iconography portrays on his side the two torchbearers, who represent *Sol Oriens* and *Sol Occidens*. Hence, being in the centre, Mithras symbolizes the Sun at its zenith.⁵⁴

The so-called *Mithras Liturgy* offers clear evidence of a triadic cosmological metaphysical system, which bears resemblance to the Chaldean and Neoplatonic one. This piece is included in a series of "magical" spells that we call *Magical Papyri*.⁵⁵ In it, the "magician or Mithraist" performs a ritual, in a way that is similar to theurgy. The first realm is the earthly or sublunar region. Then, the Mithraist, after reciting a prayer and inhaling the fiery breath three times, is suddenly transferred to the circling world of the visible planetary Gods. There, he sees the visible sun disc, who expands and emits bright, luminous stars that fill the air. Then, the disc opens. From the inside appears a fireless circle with fiery doors shut tight, leading to the heavenly world (third in the cosmological order). After

⁵⁰ Athanassiadi 1978: 365; Smith 2012: 149–151.

⁵¹ Gordon (1975: 228–232) and Smith (2012: 149–151) strongly object on the Persian influence on Roman Mithraism.

⁵² Athanassiadi 1978: 365.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ PGM IV 475-829; This is considered a highly controversial document. While some authors like Cumont deny Mithraic content, others like Beck and Edmonds claim that it is a true representative of a more Platonized version of Mithraism.

another prayer, the doors open and bright light rays appear in front of him, while Helios⁵⁶ is seen at their centre. The Sun God then calls the great and luminous Mithras, who is the superior God and creator of Helios (the Sun), to come and meet the Mithraist.⁵⁷ In the *Liturgy*, Helios (the Sun) is hailed as a lord with great power and strength, a God with mighty breath, a mighty king, greatest of Gods, God of Gods, and lord of Heaven and Earth.⁵⁸ This description is similar in wording to Julian's in the *Hymn to King Helios*.

In the Mithraic iconography, Helios is usually depicted driving a chariot with four horses. This depiction is identical to the Greek and Roman representation of Helios/Sol. The chariot has astronomical significance in Mithraism. The horses are dragging Helios ceaselessly, forming a perpetual fixed circle, thus imitating the circular orbits of the celestial objects. The horses themselves, like the celestial objects, had a double meaning. On one hand, they represented the movement and struggle of the various forces of the universe. On the other hand, they were the incarnation of the four elements. The first horse was fire; the second, air; the third, water; and the fourth, earth. The Moon was represented similarly, since it was depicted standing on a cart drawn by white bulls.

A major difference between Mithraism and the Graeco-Roman religion or the Sol Invictus cults was that Mithraism was primarily regarded as a mystery cult. There were no large ceremonies organized by the local towns or the Roman state. On the contrary, there is evidence of the existence of a large number of *spelaea* where Mithras was celebrated. These places were usually small, able to accommodate only a limited number of people. The hierarchy in the Mithraic cult was also independent from the state. The priesthood and the initiates were divided into a hierarchy of seven grades. A person that had managed to climb to the highest grade was called *pater partum*. The number seven held deep symbolic significance. In Mithraic doctrine, the universe is composed of seven spheres (worlds). The followers of Mithras could be purified by baptism in one of the most important rituals, the *taurobolium* (bull killing). They honoured the seventh day of the week (Sunday), since it was also considered the day of the Sun, and celebrated the birth of Sol Invictus Mithras on

⁵⁶ Most likely the visible one, although he could be the lowest grade Demiurge Intellect of the Hebdomad.

⁵⁷ *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 486–703.

⁵⁸ *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 640–642.

December 25th. Moreover, like many Platonists, they also believed in the immortality of the soul.

By examining the iconography in the Mithraea, we can observe that the *taurobolium* seems to perform an essential role in Mithraism. In these scenes, the Sun and the Moon also play an important role, since they are consistently depicted with the iconography associated with this ritual. However, Sol and Luna do not seem to be the main figures, because they are depicted much smaller than Mithras, the bull, the snake, the dog, the scorpion, the raven, and the two torchbearers. The Sun is usually portrayed on his chariot or as a bust, radiating, and nude with a *chlamys*. He is also often holding a whip or a globe. In other words, he is represented much like the Sol or Helios of the Graeco-Roman religion. Thus, Helios is considered an independent figure who, in combination with Luna, represents a standard dualism—male and female, light and darkness, heat and cold, ascending and descending—all relating to the cyclical essence of eternity⁵⁹ (as the Sun and Moon were considered immortal deities).

The connection between the Sun and Mithras becomes obvious with careful observation of the *taurobolium*'s iconography. In most cases, Mithras is depicted staring at Helios, while at the same time the Sun God sends him bright rays. Helios seems to share his attributes with Mithras, thus participating in him. This can be interpreted as Mithras becoming Helios himself or as being a part of Helios. One could therefore claim that the solar characteristics are very conspicuous in Mithras, hence his epithet Sol Invictus. Although the iconography, as described, presented Helios in a Graeco-Roman style, Mithras is depicted in a Persian attire. Hence, there is a clear distinction between Helios and Mithras. In some other scenes, Helios seems to pay homage to the supreme Mithras.⁶⁰ In others, he is riding his chariot along with Mithras as his companion. Several depictions also have them becoming friends. The bull also seems to be connected with Mithras and Helios. This sacred animal is being presented as containing the demiurgic and generative substance of the material world. His creative function is being represented through the depiction of parts of the bull as fertile plants. For example, in one relief of the Tauroctony (V417), the bull was drawn with a tail's tip, like wheat. In other reliefs, there are corn-ears

⁵⁹ Hijmans 2024: 160.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 171.

or a cluster of grapes beneath the wound on the bull's neck.⁶¹ Mithras, by slaying the sacred bull, unleashes creative forces and helps to bring life to Earth. Hence, 'the killing of the bull has nothing to do with mere slaughter or destruction, rather with transfiguration and transformation'.⁶² *Taurobolium* 'is not a drama of the destruction of life...The bull is sacrificed so that new life may be produced, life brought by Mithras, God of light, the Sun, a God who is indeed almighty'.⁶³ The killing of the bull takes place in a cave, bearing similarities to the cult ritual of Cybele, which involves the slaughter of the bull Attis.

Although it is extremely difficult to determine the exact relationship between Mithras and Sol, the ritual for Helios Mithras in the *Magical Papyri* can shed some light on our investigation. Here, Mithras is presented as the supreme intellectual God who has begotten the visible Sol.⁶⁴ This description clearly demonstrates the superiority and the relationship of the noeric Solar Mithras over the sensible Sun. Concerning the iconography, the confusion over their precise relationship is even greater, due to the many variations in several depictions. However, there is one case where there is a clearer sequence of the events that led to their unification. In the Pannonian complex reliefs, there are four combined scenes of Mithras and Sol. In the first scene, Sol and Mithras are not interacting with each other. In the second scene, which is the most problematic to decipher, it seems that Sol submits to Mithras' superiority. The third scene shows a pact of friendship between the two Gods, on the front of the large altar of Mithraeum III. The fourth scene shows the ascension to heaven, as Mithras is mounted on Sol's chariot, and both of them ride together. This is symbolically interpreted as the unification of Sol and Mithras, and is usually depicted as the journey over the ocean, the great water.⁶⁵ Moreover, the last representation appears to allude to the Egyptian description of Re traversing the Nile/sea on a boat. These four scenes may also bring Mithraism closer to a Neoplatonic reading. Mithras can be interpreted as the unparticipated noeric Intellect, which is superior but not connected at first with Helios. When Mithras is transformed to a participated noeric Intellect – who, as will be demonstrated, is actually King Helios – he is connected with the sensible world,

⁶¹ Cumont 1896: 194; Claus 2001: 80.

⁶² Claus 2001: 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 81.

⁶⁴ *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 643–645.

⁶⁵ Claus 2001: 149–152.

while maintaining his superiority over the visible Sun. Moreover, the union implies that they are made of the same divine substance. Their joint ascent to Heaven may also allude to the soul's ascent that is achieved during the theurgic rituals, through the Sun's unburning rays, which transport the soul to the noeric world and Intellect.⁶⁶ Mithraism never became an official cult of the Roman Empire but there were some emperors (like Nero, Commodus, and almost certainly, Julian) who were initiated into its mysteries. It is after Commodus' initiation that the epithet "Invictus" was used more often by the Roman emperors.

Some scholars try to interpret the iconography and the symbols in the *Mithraea* not as mere representations of a doctrine, but as part of mystical ritualistic experience. A leading representative of this movement is Beck, who believes that the *Mithraeum* was perceived as an actual universe by itself, rather than a mere depiction of it. Beck applies a rather new technique (since the 1990s) – the cognitive method, which allows scholars to examine how Mithraism functioned not *qua* Mithraism, but *qua* religion. Therefore, whether or not the Mithraists touched an unworldly reality becomes 'in a secular academic context, as idle to deny as to affirm'.⁶⁷ The logic behind this approach is that, going back to prehistoric times, the human mind always formed representations of supernatural beings. In most cases, the mental representation of supernatural beings is a vital aspect of practicing a religion. Applying this to Mithraism, one might deduce that to become a Mithraist, an individual must hold Mithras in mind. Hence the goal of the rituals was to create a representation of the God and his cosmos to the initiates.

Taking a socio-cultural view, we must also understand that is "we" (i.e., the human mind, functioning in the human brain) who construct the Gods – not "society", not "culture". And it is here that the theory of evolution comes in. Societies and cultures may quickly come and go. On the other hand, any adaptive changes which significantly modify species are measured in tens of millennia of years. Hence, the time frame of approximately seventeen hundred years, from Late Antiquity to the present, is not enough to explain any change in the human brain. 'Quite the contrary, we may safely assume that we form our representations of supernatural beings... just as the ancients did', since 'same brain, same

⁶⁶ This is a personal interpretation of the four Mithraic frescoes. More on the Neoplatonic dogma can be found in Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ Beck 2006: 88.

mind’.⁶⁸ Hence, if we isolate ourselves from our current cultural beliefs and recreate a simulation of a Mithraeum, then during the performance of an identical Mithraic ritual, it is highly likely that we will be able to experience what the Mithraists did and perceive the same visions of the cosmic world and the supernatural.

It is commonly accepted that the Mithraic mysteries depended on the usage of many symbols. Modern scholars tend to interpret these symbols only allegorically. Thus, there is the belief that since they do not refer to a specific meaning, like language signs, they evoke something else. The Mithraists immediately understood what the symbol evokes. Beck argues that this interpretation is not entirely correct. According to Beck, the symbol of the dog may allegorically signify love and loyalty, but in the Mithraic mysteries it is also used as an astral symbol to represent the constellation of Canis Minor. Most symbols in a Mithraeum have an astral significance, which can be identified through the technique of “star talk”. Beck, by applying the notion of “star talk”, deduced the astral meaning of Mithras in the tauroctony. Therefore, since Mithras (in the centre of the scene) represents the Sun, and since the constellation Leo is midway between Taurus and Scorpius, it follows that the tauroctonous Mithras means Sun-in-Leo. Fascinatingly, this deduction may also identify the timing, because this astral configuration occurs only between the last third of July and the first two thirds of August.⁶⁹ The “σπήλαιον” (cave) is basically a constructed planetarium that is becoming ‘alive’ in the mind of the initiates during the mysteries. This three-dimensional space, which contains a ‘web’ of celestial objects – including the Sun, Moon, the five planets, constellations, celestial tropics, the zodiacs etc. – was constructed according to the model (excluding the divisions of the zodiac) that was established by Plato in the *Timaeus*.⁷⁰ As a result, ‘the celestial bodies are created specifically to instantiate Time in the cosmos’.⁷¹

The concept of “set and setting” was vital for the purpose of the ritual. Along with the dark and enclosed circular environment of the “cave” and the astral symbols, various *συνθήματα* were used in order to produce and enhance a cosmological mystical experience.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 89–90; This concept is very helpful in our understanding of how Julian actually perceived Helios during the rituals of the mysteries.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 214

⁷⁰ Plato, *Timaeus* 38c.

⁷¹ Beck 2006: 79.

These ranged from a plethora of lamps to incense, light effects, the πυρωπὸν ἄσθμα (fiery breath), etc.⁷² The effect was that the universe was coming to life with the proper usage of the various astral symbols and συνθήματα. In other words, the *taurobolium* represents a dynamic star chart. The Mithraists believed that by participating in their ceremonies, they were entering a new cosmos. It was like a “time out of time” in which the participants, through their mind, could enter the Mithraic universe and experience in “another reality” the arrival of their soul on Earth, its sojourn, and its departure as stages in an ampler continuum of being. Thus, the ritual replaced any verbal exegeses. Moreover, as already explained, the whole concept of the *taurobolium* most likely refers to an “ideal” month when specific astronomical phenomena occurred, showing the supremacy of the Sun, and the constellations of Lion, Scorpion, and Taurus in particular positions.⁷³ This modern exegesis of the Mithraic mysteries is based on a better understanding of other mystery cults, along with advances in neurology, and the careful interpretation of the only literary evidence in existence – the *De Antro Nympharum* of Porphyry. Key to our contemporary understanding of this concept is the controversial interpretation of Porphyry’s word, μυσταγογοῦντες. Beck translates it as “inducting into a mystery”. For him, Mithraism was clearly of an astral nature, where the superiority of the Sun was demonstrated through the mystic rituals of Mithras.

2.2 Sol Invictus Elagabalus

Due to an almost complete lack of evidence, the importance or essence of the cult devoted to Sol Invictus Elagabalus (established in 218 CE) has received the least attention from philologists and historians of religion, compared to the other two solar cults (Deus Sol Invictus and Mithras). Almost all the information we have derives from the descriptions of the lives of the emperors Severus and Elagabalus. Its origin was from Emesa in Syria. There was a large temple in the city in honour of the Sun God with the Phoenician name Elagabalus. The temple was lavishly decorated with gold, silver, and precious gems. Every year, the local communities and the neighbouring rulers were sending expensive offerings to the God. The temple differed from Graeco-Roman ones in that it did not contain any

⁷² *Ibid.* 76.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 43, 227–239.

statues representing the God; instead, a celestial black stone – likely a meteorite – served as a raw image of the sun, believed to have been sent by Zeus.⁷⁴

The etymology of the name Elagabalus is unknown. Several theories exist, with the most prominent being that it is either derived from Gibil, the Chaldean God of fire, or from the two Syriac words Ela (God) and Gabal (to form) – taken together, the Creator God.⁷⁵ In the Roman Empire at the time of Emperor Septimius Severus (193–211 CE), the cult became increasingly important. Severus married Julia Domna, the daughter of the chief priest, Solus Invictus Elagabal. The cult gained official recognition as the chief state cult of the Roman Empire during the reign of his grandnephew, Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (nickname: Elagabalus, 218–222 CE), who had also been a priest of the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabalus in Emesa.

One of the first tasks of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus as emperor was to establish a new official imperial cult dedicated to his patron God, Sol Invictus Elagabalus. As a supporting instrument, he also created a college of *sacerdotes* (priests) dedicated to the new Imperial sun cult, and made himself *Summus Sacerdos* (chief priest) of the Sun God – a title that was higher than the existing *Pontifex Maximus*.⁷⁶ He also built two temples dedicated to Sol Invictus Elagabalus: one, the Eliogabalium, on the Palatine Hill near the imperial palace, and the other in the lower city, where the grand mid-summer festivities honoring the God were celebrated. In an action that infuriated the citizens of Rome, he transferred into the Eliogabalium the sacred objects of the Great Mother, the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of the Salii, and all those that the Romans held sacred, proposing that no God might be worshipped at Rome, save Sol Invictus Elagabalus.⁷⁷ Moreover, he was publicly dressed with the vestments of the Syrian priests, forced the senators to offer incense and libations in honour of Sol Invictus Elagabalus at the beginning of each session, and required those who had made a public offering to first pronounce the name of the Sun God and not the traditional Roman Gods.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Herodian, 5.34–5.

⁷⁵ Halsbergue 1972: 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 75–77

⁷⁷ *Historia Augusta, Elagabalus* 6.6–7.

⁷⁸ Herodian, 5.5.

All these acts seemed to have offended many Romans, who saw Sol Invictus Elagabalus as a foreign God that was being imposed not only on them but on their Gods as well, including the supreme God Jupiter.⁷⁹ Antoninus's actions had revealed his intentions. His goal was not only to introduce Sol Invictus Elagabalus as another foreign God in Rome, but to also fuse him with all the other deities. However, Sol Invictus was to stand at the top as the supreme deity, rather than at equal status with the other deities. This very fact was most likely the reason that the emperor displaced all the other sacred objects of the Roman Gods and put them in the newly built solar temple. The notion of syncretism and fusion of the Sun God with the other deities can also be found in the emperor's decision to participate and be initiated in the cult of Magna Mater (Cybele) and celebrate the rite of Taurobolium. In addition, Antoninus arranged the marriage of Sol Invictus Elagabalus with the Dea Caelestis, a Carthaginian Goddess that was equated with Cybele. Following this divine marriage, the emperor, as high priest of the Sun God, began calling himself Magna Mater and Dionysus. This general syncretism created confusion among the common people of Rome, who referred to Sol Invictus Elagabalus as either the Sun God or Jupiter.⁸⁰

If we consider that the chief priest of a cult should behave according to the will of the God whom he represents, then Antoninus must have believed that Sol Invictus loved excess. Descriptions of his life, by Herodian and *Historia Augusta*, suggest that it was full of extravagances. While most of these events are likely fictional, they surely do not show an emperor's moderate behaviour, as reflected in the character of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE). Practically the only excess that these authors describe which can be considered as an act of *pietas* is the many animal sacrifices that the emperor conducted.

Antoninus was one of the most hated emperors. As a result, he suffered *damnatio memoriae* and his cult was not promoted by other emperors. Nonetheless, the cult must have continued on a smaller scale, though never gaining as much acceptance as the Mithraic cult. Identifying the spread or the impact of this cult in the Roman Empire is a great challenge for the historian. Very little is known about the characteristics of Sol Invictus Elagabalus. Moreover, a problem arises in that the Sun God had the same name as

⁷⁹ Cassius Dio, 80.11.

⁸⁰ *Historia Augusta, Antoninus Heliogabalus* 17, 28; Cassius Dio, 80.12.

Mithras, since both Gods were referred to as Sol Invictus. Hence, it is almost impossible for archaeologists to determine to which God the findings refer.⁸¹

One characteristic of the iconography of Sol Invictus Elagabalus was that he was sometimes depicted as a full figure standing on or off a chariot with a raised right hand. Cumont, L'Orange, and others interpreted this representation as a new iconographic element that heralded the introduction, in Rome, of the new Syrian cult of the Sun by the Severi.⁸² Although S. Hijmans concurs that the standing figure is a characteristic representation of Sol Invictus Elagabalus, he claims that the tradition of the raised right hand started under the reign of Vespasian. In the following years, this characteristic was generalized for the various Sun Gods (not only for Elagabalus), and continued well into the third and fourth centuries.⁸³

2.3 Deus Sol Invictus

Another cult of Sol Invictus was established in 274 CE in Rome by Emperor Aurelian following his successful campaigns against the Palmyrenes and their leader, Zenobia. Aurelian, during the decisive battle against the Palmerian troops, saw a supernatural being that gave strength and encouragement to the nearly defeated troops. The soldiers and the horsemen, feeling the extra power, turned the outcome of the battle and won a great victory for the Roman army. In the aftermath of the battle, Aurelian went to Emesa and entered the local temple of Sol Invictus Elagabalus. There, he saw and recognized the same divine power that had helped him in the previous battle. As a result, he became a great devotee of Sol Invictus. As soon as he went back to Rome, he built a magnificent temple for Sol Invictus and created the *Pontifices Dei Solis*, a new priesthood, to administer it.⁸⁴ The new college of priests was independent from the traditional priesthood, although its members were still drawn from the Roman elite senatorial class. This time Aurelian did not create another exclusive high priest title (*Summus Sacerdos*) for the Sun God, like Antoninus had

⁸¹ Halsbergue 1972: 117.

⁸² Cumont 1923: 69–72.

⁸³ Hijmans 2024: 64–66.

⁸⁴ *Historia Augusta, Aurelian* 25–35.

done around fifty years earlier.⁸⁵ The Sol Invictus cult of Aurelius would be under the authority of *Pontifex Maximus*, like all the other Gods.

Zosimus wrote that the emperor decorated the new temple with the spoils that were brought from the conquered city of Palmyra, which was the centre of two almighty Gods, the Sun God and the celestial supreme God Belos. This local God, Belos, was also called Zeus by the Greeks, and he had as his symbols the eagle and thunder. Aurelius placed statues of the Palmyrene Sun God and of Belos in his newly built temple of Sol Invictus.⁸⁶ If Zosimus' description is to be trusted, this inclusion of the two statues could be interpreted as another attempted syncretism between the Sun God and Zeus. Halsbergue believes that Aurelian established the solar cult in order to accomplish religious unity within the empire. In other words, Aurelian's ultimate goal was for Sol Invictus to be worshipped as the common supreme God by all subjects of the Roman Empire. This time, however, Sol Invictus would be a Romanised God. That is why Aurelian also incorporated elements from many of the empire's other solar cults into Sol Invictus, and his cult became a prime example of a syncretism.

In conclusion, Aurelian adapted and exploited the remnants of the existing cult of Sol Invictus Elagabalus, so that the worship of the Sun God emerged as an essentially new synthesis, capable of attracting new followers.⁸⁷ It may have been Aurelian's wish to combine his successful political reunification of the Roman Empire with a religious one, as well. What is important, though, is not the emperor's actual intentions – which are based on speculations – but the fact that Sol Invictus appeared as a supreme deity that could actually religiously unite all citizens of the Roman Empire.

It is also believed, although it cannot be confirmed, that Aurelian appointed December 25th as the birthday of Sol Invictus.⁸⁸ The first concrete evidence showing this day as *Natalis Invicti* comes several decades afterwards, on the calendar of the Chronograph, dated 354 CE.⁸⁹ The information from the calendar shows that even if December 25th was not established by Aurelian, it was certainly done at a later time. This

⁸⁵ Halsbergue 1972: 117.

⁸⁶ Zosimus, 1.61.

⁸⁷ Halsbergue 1972, 136,139–140.

⁸⁸ Salzman 1990: 150.

⁸⁹ Mommsen 1893: 256–278.

is most probably one of the most important pieces of evidence of the celebration of Sol Invictus in the Roman Empire. As Rupke writes, ‘the calendar is judged to be a religious document of central importance’.⁹⁰ But this evidence is contested by Hijmans, mostly based on the fact that the calendar does not specifically mention the name Sol for that date.⁹¹ Hijmans’ opinion, though, seems to disregard an important fact. The day December 25th was not just a common day in the Roman calendar. It was the day of the winter solstice⁹² (a feature that is not shared with our modern calendar). On this day, the Sun (daylight) starts to grow again, as the days become longer. This would have been an ideal day for the birth of the Sun, in a period when these astronomical phenomena were considered of utmost importance. This day also aligns with Julian’s description of the celebration of Sol Invictus, which occurs immediately after Saturnalia (December 17–23) but before the start of the new month.⁹³ At any rate, Hijmans does not give an alternative on who else, if not Sol, this Invictus could be.

The creation of the temple of Sol Invictus, and the celebration of the games in conjunction with an official day (December 25th, or another one) dedicated to the Sun God, strongly point to the establishment of a state solar cult, which survived for quite a long time. Almost a century later at the time of Emperor Julian it was still being celebrated in Rome. We do not know how many temples dedicated to Sol Invictus were built outside Rome, but the temple of Palmyra that was looted by Aurelian’s soldiers was rebuilt and likely operated as part of the cult of Sol Invictus, since the emperor arranged to send a pontifex from Rome and rededicated it to the Sun God.⁹⁴ There is insufficient epigraphical data to allow us to confidently conclude how well the cult had been worshipped among citizens within the empire. On the other hand, there is an abundance of coins depicting emperors with Sol Invictus during the late third and early fourth centuries.

Whether this notion of Sol Invictus as a supreme deity was shared by many people, or was merely a wish or an attempt by the emperors to impose their own religious beliefs is still contested. Some historians, like Wallraff, believe that the supremacy of the Sun as

⁹⁰ Rupke 2011: 64.

⁹¹ Hijmans 2024: 1019–1023.

⁹² Rupke 2011: 112.

⁹³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 156C.

⁹⁴ *Historia Augusta, Aurelian*, 31.

a deity became a common belief in the third and fourth centuries. Others, like Hijmans, hold the opinion that this view was mostly centered around the imperial and scholarly elite (especially in the fourth century), since there is insufficient evidence to support its widespread expansion. For Hijmans, both Antoninus' Elagabal and Aurelian's Sol are much better understood as deities of personal importance to these emperors.⁹⁵

Some authors, like Maurice, also hold the opinion that since the Sun God was considered by some as the only supreme deity, this notion could represent a movement to monotheism. According to Maurice, who equates Sol Invictus with Apollo and the *Logos* of the Neoplatonists, the study of the panegyrists shows that the supreme God of the Neoplatonists (Sun God or *Logos*) was commonly considered in the third and fourth century as the sole creator of the world.⁹⁶ This view, though, has its flaws. Apart from the arbitrary fusion of Sol Invictus with the *Logos* of the Neoplatonists, other authors, like Hijmans, oppose the idea of a widespread belief in the supremacy of Sol Invictus. Moreover, Hijmans rejects the idea that Sol Invictus had supremacy over the other deities, although he accepts that Sol could be referred to as the 'very greatest and ruler of all, (or as) the mind and organizing agent of the universe'.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Hijmans 2024: 1033.

⁹⁶ Maurice 1911: 385.

⁹⁷ Hijmans 2024: 1034–35, 1041.

3. Religions in Eastern Provinces

3.1 Syria and Phoenicia

In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the Sun God was highly revered. This was especially the case for the provinces of Syria and Phoenicia. In the coastal cities of Phoenicia, such as Byblos, Tyre, Sidon, and Berytus, they adored the Sun God Baal. In Syria, we know at least four major cities that worshipped the Sun. In Emesa, as we saw before, the Sun God Elagabalus was adored. He was standing at the top of a solar trinity. The other two deities were Azizos and Monimos, who were considered twin Gods, and represented the morning and twilight stars respectively. A series of inscriptions attests to their cult. Azizos was identified with the Greek Phosphoros: the morning star that precedes the sunrise and announces the arrival of light and life. Monimos was identified with Hesperos: the twilight star that follows the sunset.⁹⁸ Hence, they were evidently regarded as attendants of the Sun God. It appears that Julian was well aware of these divinities, since he mentions them as the *Paredroi* of Helios in his eponymous hymn.⁹⁹ Interestingly, the names of Phosphoros and Hesperos also appear in the cult of Mithras, and are identified with Cautes and Cautopates.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, they were considered by the Greeks as equivalent to the Dioscuri. Sometime during the Roman period, Azizos was ‘militarized’ by the Romans and was equated with Ares (Mars). As a result, his cult was introduced in the eastern Roman army. Monimos was considered the protector of the travelers and caravans, and was equated with Hermes (Mercury). These two solar twin Gods were also worshipped in Phoenicia, along with Baal.¹⁰¹

In Palmyra there were actually three independent sun deities: Yarhibol, Malakbel, and Shamash. Yarhibol was usually associated with Aglibol (the Moon God), and both together were often presented as a triad with the supreme God Bel, who was called Zeus-Helios by the Greeks.¹⁰² Azizos was also worshipped as a morning star, but his twin equivalent (evening star) was Arsu, and both were considered as protectors of the

⁹⁸ Vagasi 2017: 54.

⁹⁹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 150cd.

¹⁰⁰ Phosphoros and Hesperos appear in the main cult image of the Osterburken mithraeum (CIMRM 1292–1293).

¹⁰¹ Garcia 2023: 106.

¹⁰² Teixidor 1979: 47–52.

caravans.¹⁰³ Harran was another Syrian city where the Sun God and the Moon were revered as supreme deities. Before his Persian campaign, Emperor Julian stopped in this city to worship these two deities and consult their oracles. Later, Harran became one of the last strongholds for traditional religions and a refuge for Neoplatonic philosophers who fled the Roman Empire following the closure of the Academy of Athens in the sixth century CE. Evidence from the tenth century CE shows that the city was still worshipping the traditional Gods and resisting the teachings of the ‘followers of Nazareth’, while at the same time enjoying the privilege of religious tolerance from the Muslim caliphs of Syria.¹⁰⁴

The fourth city in Syria was Dura-Europos. This city was at the crossroads between the Parthian/Persian Empire and Palmyra, thus getting influenced by both sides. The Greek element was also particularly strong. The city had many different cults, including some dedicated to Sun Gods, reflecting its many cultural groups. There is a debate among archaeologists on whether these Sun Gods were mostly associated with the Palmyrene or the Parthian ones. Going further East, outside of the Roman Empire, it seems that the cult of the Sun and Moon in the Persian Empire was a very old one, going back to primitive Babylonia.¹⁰⁵ Hijmans believes that the multicultural environment of Dura-Europos, where many different cults existed simultaneously, could be presented as an example which can alter our perception that the religious change of the Roman Empire to Christianity was inevitable and unidirectional.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Vagasi 2017: 54.

¹⁰⁴ Dalley 1998: 152–154.

¹⁰⁵ Hopkins 1931: 119–137.

¹⁰⁶ Hijmans 2024: 1033.

3.2 Egypt and the *Greek Magical Papyri*

Egypt had a longstanding tradition in honouring Sun Gods. The most important solar deity was Re. He was the creator of life on Earth and directly connected to the kings of Egypt. His worship centre was in Heliopolis. Horus was one of the earliest Egyptian deities. He was represented as a sky God in the form of a falcon, where on one eye was the Sun and on the other, the Moon. In Roman times, Horus was venerated more as a solar God than as a cosmic sky God. He was also known as Horakhty or Horus of the Two Horizons, and represented both the rising and the setting sun. Over time, however, Horus came to symbolize only the east and the rising of the Sun. He also merged with other Egyptian solar deities and was honoured in many other forms. There was also another Sun God, Horus (the younger), who the Greeks called Harpocrates, and was the son of Horus ‘the elder’ and Isis. Plutarch (46–120 CE), in his *Moralia*, states that Isis gave birth to Harpocrates on the winter solstice. This is why the Egyptians celebrated him on December 25th.¹⁰⁷ The festival of victory was another annual festivity in honor of Horus. One more supreme solar deity was Amun-Re, who represented the fusion of the Gods Amun and Re and was the equivalent of the Greek God Zeus-Helios.¹⁰⁸ Osiris was also considered a celestial Sun God.¹⁰⁹

Sarapis was a God who was introduced during the Hellenistic period in Egypt and became the supreme God in that country. He represented the syncretism of Osiris and Apis.¹¹⁰ The great temple of Serapeum in Alexandria was built to honour him. Apis himself was the sacred solar bull, who was a demiurgic God connected with regeneration, and was conceived by the solar rays. Moreover, Sarapis (from his connection with Osiris) and Isis begot together the great solar God Horus. Interestingly, Sarapis is sometimes depicted with a headdress of the solar flower lotus. He was also connected with other Gods, like Pluto, Dionysus, and Asclepius.¹¹¹ All these Gods, both celestial and chthonic, are connected with Helios in Julian’s eponymous hymn. Starting in the third century CE, the association of Sarapis with Zeus and the Sun became increasingly prominent. “The phrase ‘Zeus Helios

¹⁰⁷ The time of the winter solstice; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 65.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkinson 2003: 201–209.

¹⁰⁹ Stambaugh 1972: 80.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 5–10.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 23, 27, 53, 64, 75.

Great Sarapis’ was a common formula in the second and third centuries CE.”¹¹² In some inscriptions, Sarapis is even connected with Aion, the God of eternity.¹¹³

A series of papyri containing spells were discovered in Egypt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This collection is called the *Greek Magical Papyri* because it contains a variety of magical spells, including formulas, hymns, and rituals that reference several Gods and their various attributes. The extant texts are mainly from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE, and they comprise only a small portion of the magical books that existed in antiquity. They reflect a true syncretism between the Greek and Egyptian religions. They were written mostly in Greek but some spells were written also in the local demotic language. There is a lot of fusion between the Gods, especially between the Greek and the Egyptian ones. The texts are considered one of the most important sources of religious life during that era. They were not official documents, nor were they written by an intellectual elite. Instead, they are considered unofficial texts that were written down by “common” practitioners. As a result, the *Magical Papyri* enable modern scholars to study Greek and Egyptian religions from a bottom-up perspective.

The name of the Sun God appears several times in the spells of the papyri. He is usually referred to as Helios with several different epithets and is assimilated with other Gods, mostly Egyptian. One of the most common epithets of Helios is ἡλαρός (cheerful). This appellation is justified by the concept of Helios as a source of life and regeneration, as well as by his association with the creation of the world.¹¹⁴ In the spell *To bring the God*,¹¹⁵ Helios is assimilated with “the greatest God” (τὸν μέγιστον θεόν) Horus Harpocrates, and is called “God of Gods” (θεὸ θεῶν). Moreover, Helios is described as ‘the one who enlightens everything and illuminates by his own power the whole cosmos’.¹¹⁶ His sacred symbol is the lotus bud. In another spell, *The systasis to Helios*,¹¹⁷ the Sun is assimilated as the image/archetype of the entire cosmos (ὁ τύπος, τὸ σύνολον τοῦ κόσμου). This seems to allude to the *Chaldean Oracles* and to Neoplatonic dogmas about the role of Helios in the universe. The portrait of Helios is based on the synthesis of natural, divine,

¹¹² Ibid. 79; SB I, 4963: Διὶ Ἡλίῳ Σαραπίδι μεγάλῳ.

¹¹³ Ibid. 84.

¹¹⁴ Pachoumi 2015: 397.

¹¹⁵ *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 985–1035.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 986–991

¹¹⁷ Ibid. III 494–611.

and cosmic powers. Helios is also associated with Apollo in the spell *Appearance of the God*.¹¹⁸ Many spells include several allusions to Helios, and for some of the spells, Iamblichus's comments try to explain their "true" meaning.¹¹⁹

The spell that produces direct vision brings the initiate into contact with an ineffable/noetic light in completely dark conditions.¹²⁰ This particular spell becomes even more relevant for the purposes of this thesis if we consider that many of the symbolic references in it are interpreted by Iamblichus in his exegeses of the Egyptian symbols, in his treatise *On the Mysteries*.¹²¹ The ritual is composed of several sub-spells, during which, the user invokes Helios (the God of light), and upon their successful completion, the practitioner will be able to "see" while being in dark. Helios is given the epithet ἱλαρός. The spell begins with the hymn:

‘Hail, serpent, and stout lion, natural sources of fire. And hail, clear water and Lofty-leafed tree, and you who gather up clover from golden fields of beans, and who cause gentle foam to gush forth from pure mouths Scarab, who drive the orb of fertile fire, self-engendered one, because you are Two-syllabled AE, and are the first-Appearing one, nod me assent, I pray’.
(*Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 939–945).

The key words in the above hymn are the "beans, fertile fire, self-engendered One and ascent". The beans refer to those of the plant Nymphaean Lotus, which is mentioned at the end of the spell. In Egyptian religion, the Lotus is considered as the cosmic plant and the soul of the Sun God Re.¹²² Iamblichus interprets the seating on the lotus as referring allegorically to intellectual and empyrean leadership. It appears that the philosopher implies that the ritual, with the symbolic help of the plant, contributes to the communication between the intelligible and the sensible world. Indeed, the spell plainly states that the practitioner, through this ritual, ascends to the ineffable One.

The practitioner eats the beans, as the hymn implies. After several intermediary ritualistic procedures and spells, the *magos* concludes the ritual with the "bringing the

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* II 64–183; Pachoumi 2015: 391–413.

¹¹⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 7.2, 251–252; "Spell to bring the God" (*Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) IV 985–1035).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* IV, 930–1114.

¹²¹ Pachoumi 2017: 394.

¹²² Clark 1959: 66–67

light” spell. In a dark room with only a faint lamp alight, the practitioner stays with his eyes closed. Then, after a while, he can open his eyes again. The lamp is completely turned off and the *magos* says: ‘you can now see all things wide-open and the greatest brightness within, but the lamp shining nowhere. Then you will see the God seated on a lotus, decorated with rays...’ The key words here are “brightness within”, which implies that the light is not coming from an external source but from within the practitioner. A similar experience is also described in the spell *The Mithras Liturgy* (PGM IV, 538-41), where the practitioner draws in “breath” from the sun’s rays. The key to these visionary and pneumatic experiences was “the belief that the soul’s aethereal body was directly connected to the Sun.”¹²³ Moreover, these are evidently descriptions of an ineffable experience of the noetic light, similar to the one that Beck describes in Mithraism and the one that Julian experienced in theurgy. In other solar spells, Helios gets the status of the supreme God and begetter of the cosmos. Hence, in the hymn, *To the creator of all* (PGM III, 550-558), Helios is presented as the founder of the world, the circuit of the holy spirit, the God of Gods, and the lord of the world, who has divided the universe by his divine spirit. In a strikingly similar description to that found in the *Hymn to King Helios*, the Sun is portrayed as the firstborn (of the One), since all the stars, planets, Earth, the Moon, and all the elements originate from Helios.

3.3 Hermetism

The importance of the Sun is clearly demonstrated in Hermetism, as well. The books of Hermes Trismegistus had great authority during the first centuries of our era. Although their origin is unknown, today the modern scholars classify them among the last productions of Greek philosophy, mixed with the Egyptian religion. Hermes is syncretized with Thoth, while Asclepios is an important figure, as well. Hermes Trismegistus describes his sacred knowledge in a collection of texts, which is now known as *Corpus Hermeticum*. These texts form a series of dialogues between Hermes, his discipline (Tat) and the God Asclepios.¹²⁴ It is useful to refer briefly to this Egyptian mystery cult, since Iamblichus claims that he based the divinities section (book eight) of *On the Mysteries* on the books

¹²³ Shaw 2014: 250.

¹²⁴ Salaman 1999: 79–81.

on Hermetism that were written by Seleucus and Manetho.¹²⁵ It appears that the Hermetic cult was influenced by the Pythagoreans, since it has incorporated in its doctrine the notion of the Decad which encompasses the highest ten powers and gives birth to the Soul: ‘The Decad is in the One, and the One is in the Decad’.¹²⁶ In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the noetic power of the light and the mundane Sun also play a key role in the highest mysteries. The Sun is sometimes considered as the ‘Second God’, the visible manifestation of the intelligible One. He creates the living things in the universe, just as his Father creates the Ideas.¹²⁷ In addition, in the Decad, where the One of the spirit is born¹²⁸ (ἐνάδος ἀριθμὸς πέφυκε τοῦ πνεύματος), life and light are unified.¹²⁹ Tat, by invoking the divine powers in him, sings a mystery chant while he is oriented towards the Sun. Hermes instructs his son Tat to pray by facing the southern wind during the setting of the Sun, and in a similar manner, facing the eastern wind when the Sun rises.¹³⁰ He also tells him to sing a hymn, praising the noetic light (τὸ νοητὸν φῶς) that is coming from the One and illuminates the holy knowledge (γνώσις ἁγία, φωτισθεὶς ἀπὸ σοῦ).¹³¹ The Platonic holistic notion of the Good is also found in Hermetism. Thanks to reason (Λόγος), the One encompasses all the powers of the world; it is both One and All (τὸ ἓν καὶ τὸ πᾶν).

¹²⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 8.1.

¹²⁶ Which is the tetractys, and it is present in all the cosmic principles; *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.12.

¹²⁷ Ménard 2011: XLIII.

¹²⁸ That should equate to the participated Intellect (Νοῦς) of the Neoplatonists.

¹²⁹ Thus, the One is being described as a Dyad: The One itself, which is like the Being/Unparticipated Intellect, and the Decad, which is like the participated Intellect (see Chapter 2 on Iamblichean Neoplatonism). The dyad together with life and light becomes a Triad. Hence, the Pythagorean, Platonic, and Chaldean triadic notion is present in Hermetism, as well.

¹³⁰ *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII, 16.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 18.

Chapter 2

Helios in Neoplatonism and the *Chaldean Oracles*

1. Neoplatonism

1.1 Overview

The branch of philosophy that modern scholars call Neoplatonism flourished in the third to fifth centuries CE and lasted until the sixth to seventh centuries. Its dogmas revolutionized the philosophical thinking of Late Antiquity. It is a philosophy predominantly spiritual in nature, belonging to the branch that has been called “philosophy as a way of life”. The dominant figures in this movement are Plotinus (204/5–270 CE), his student Porphyry (234–c. 305 CE), Iamblichus (c. 245–325 CE), and Proclus (412–485 CE). Neoplatonism was not a “static” philosophy, but a vibrant one that was constantly developing and adapting. The first major changes were made by Iamblichus, who introduced extra-philosophical activities, especially the practice of theurgy.

The term “Neoplatonism” is rather contemporary. It is an invention by nineteenth century Germanic scholarship, which ‘reflects a contemporary academic trend to systematize history into nameable periods’.¹³² The prefix “Neo” indicates that something new was found in the Platonic thought in this period. Indeed, modern scholars recognize a lot of original concepts that were developed by the Neoplatonists. The so-called “Neoplatonists” would likely identify themselves as “paleo” Platonists. This is because they did not consider themselves as innovators but rather, as defenders of the traditional Platonic philosophy. Our knowledge of this branch of philosophy is greatly enhanced by the fact that the Neoplatonic corpus makes up about 58% of the total Greek philosophical writing of 11 million words (6th century BCE to 7th century CE).¹³³

For the purpose of this thesis, we are mostly interested in the Neoplatonic philosophers (i.e., Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus) up to the period in which Julian lived. Julian recognized all three as great philosophers¹³⁴, but Iamblichus in particular (in Julian’s

¹³² Dillon 2004: xiii, xiv.

¹³³ Siorvanes 2018: 847–868.

¹³⁴ Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 222B.

eyes) was equal to Plato and had reached the status of divine.¹³⁵ Julian praises this philosopher in several instances, and recognizes that it was Iamblichus' writings that initiated him into other philosophical doctrines.¹³⁶ This holds especially true for the metaphysical conception of a generated world, 'and (Iamblichus) assumed for it, so to speak, of a creation in time in order that the magnitude of the works that arise from Helios might be recognized'.¹³⁷ The Neoplatonic philosophers accepted nine tetralogies (that is, thirty-six Platonic works) as genuine. By the time of "divine" Iamblichus, these dialogues had already been well studied. For Iamblichus and Proclus (and most likely for all the Neoplatonists)¹³⁸, out of all of the Platonic works, the cornerstones of philosophical knowledge were *Timaeus* – 'the most comprehensive statement of the structure of the sensible world'¹³⁹ – and *Parmenides* – 'containing the corresponding statement for the intelligible world'.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, it appears that the Neoplatonists relied on other philosophers, as well – most notably, Aristotle and Pythagoras – in order to interpret and understand the meaning of the Platonic dialogues and the so-called unwritten teachings of Plato. They claimed that there was a harmony across the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras. 'However, this agreement is reached on Platonic terms: Aristotle is in some respects deficient in comparison with Plato and subordinate to him'.¹⁴¹ This belief was further reinforced by the view that all of the philosophic doctrines are similar, since they all lead to one goal: to be united with the highest principle.¹⁴²

In their search for the fundamentally real, the Neoplatonists ponder the following question; what is the most basic thing in reality, and how do other things depend on it? This raises two sub-questions: the question of the One versus the many, and the question of constancy versus change.¹⁴³ These philosophers separated the cosmos into two worlds: the intelligible (noetic) and the sensible (material) one. However, this binary creates a wide gap between the intelligible and the material realm with no obvious "bridge" to connect

¹³⁵ The Neoplatonists believed in the divinity of Plato and of the philosophers in general, who were also considered as hierophants (Shaw 2013: 538).

¹³⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 146b, 150d, 157 b–c; Julian, *To the Uneducated Cynics* (IX) 188c.

¹³⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 146b.

¹³⁸ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 1.13, 1.15–17.

¹³⁹ Dillon 2004: xv.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ O'Meara 2018: 402.

¹⁴² Julian strongly adheres to this notion.

¹⁴³ Remes 2008: 35.

these two worlds. The solution to this problem was presented by the “divine” Iamblichus, who introduced a third world: the intellectual (noeric), which stands between the other two. As chapter 3 will demonstrate, the *Hymn to King Helios* closely follows this philosophical thinking.¹⁴⁴

1.2 Doctrine

According to the Neoplatonists, the first principle, the One/Good, stands at the very top of the intelligible world’s “hierarchy”. This claim is based on the idea that the simpler is prior to the more complex. In other words, the absolute first principle (One) must be absolutely simple, thus it is ‘just itself and of which nothing else can be predicated, even being, whereas being belongs to entities that admit partition and predication’.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Neoplatonists identify this highest principle with Plato’s “Idea of the Good” in the *Republic* and Aristotle’s “Unmovable One”. A core principle of their philosophy is that the sensible world mirrors the intelligible one. Thus, the noetic world must similarly bear the complexity that characterizes the sensible cosmos. This made the One unfit to exist in our Cosmos, thus the Neoplatonists placed it outside our universe. Its exact description would be next to impossible, since by existing outside of our cosmos, it is beyond any intellectual conception – thus making it completely ineffable. Nonetheless, these philosophers accepted that the “One” was a principle that was required ‘to sustain the articulated complexity of the intelligible world and to account for the qualified presence of this in the sensible world’¹⁴⁶.

Below this highest principle exists the noetic realm, which is the world where the Forms or Ideas of Plato exist. There, an Intellect subsists and “acts” as the orchestrator of our Cosmos. This Intellect descends directly from the One, bearing all its Goodness and Beauty. However, since it coincides with the Intelligible structure of the universe (which mirrors our sensible world), it must not be one but many. In other words, it must not be perfectly simple but systematic and complex. This high Intellect is also equated with the Demiurge of Plato in *Timaeus*. It can also be considered a dyad since it is identical with

¹⁴⁴ See detailed analysis in Chapter 3, and Nesselrath 2020: 56.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 38.

¹⁴⁶ Dillon 2004: xxi.

Being in that it encloses the Forms. It is not composed of objects; rather, Intellect itself is its object. In a lower hypostasis or level, the Neoplatonists placed the Soul. This is a Universal Soul which acts as an instrument/mediator of the generation of the sensible world by the Intellect.¹⁴⁷ As a result, it continuously descends and mixes with the sensible world, creating in the process the entire visible universe. Our individual souls form part of the Soul¹⁴⁸. The desire of the Soul is one of wholeness, completeness, integrity, and continuity. Its goal is to return to its Intellect and the One. This hierarchy of One, Intellect, and Soul was first developed among the Neoplatonists by Plotinus. The sensible world (with matter at the bottom) is the last level in the Neoplatonic descending scale. The ultimate goal of the Neoplatonists is for the human soul to return to the Intellect and to ultimately achieve union with the Absolute One.¹⁴⁹

1.3 Soul's Controversy

What becomes most intriguing is that one of the main differences between Plotinus and Iamblichus is their view on the status of the soul that descends into the sensible world. This is an important discrepancy between these two philosophers, since it determines the way that one can achieve his/her ultimate goal: union with the Good. 'In strictly Platonic terms the *novum* for Plotinus was his view of the soul as undescended'.¹⁵⁰ He claims that part of the soul never really descends into a body, thus he divides the human soul into two parts: the higher one and the lower one. The higher part stays in contact with the Universal Soul, so the link is never broken. "The lower soul aims at calming her passions so that they do not disturb man's higher nature, while the higher part gets purified by turning away from any distraction of the sensible world".¹⁵¹ Purification is achieved by living a virtuous life and through intensive intellectual training. Only after a perfect "intellectual catharsis" may the philosopher's soul ascend to the heavens and come to see the divine light and 'Intellect, like a sensible in being apprehended by sense-perception'.¹⁵² In other words, the

¹⁴⁷ Remes: 2008: 55.

¹⁴⁸ However, the individual souls' actual level of mixture with the material world was part of a bitter controversy among the Neoplatonists.

¹⁴⁹ Wallis 1972: 88.

¹⁵⁰ Shaw 2014: 71

¹⁵¹ Wallis 1972: 85.

¹⁵² Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.4.13.

philosopher ascends through contemplation into the κόσμον νοητόν (intelligible cosmos). As we shall see, divine Iamblichus has strong objections about the means by which the Intellect can be seen. This is because he believes that the individual soul has completely descended into our material world. In other words, it is completely embodied, with no way out of it. However, there is still hope, because the benevolent Gods have spread many divine symbols all around the Earth. Through the ritual of theurgy, these συνθήματα are activated, giving theurgists the power to energize the higher functions of their soul, thus allowing them to transcend the universe through their mind and to see the Intellect and the intellectual light. Therefore, Iamblichus believed that the proper and only method to achieve union with the Intellect was not through contemplation but through theurgy¹⁵³ – a ritual into which Julian had been initiated.

1.4 Basic Principles

To better understand how Julian conceptualizes and positions Helios within our cosmos, alongside the foundational Neoplatonic cosmological doctrine described above, it is essential to become familiar with some of the basic metaphysical principles of Neoplatonism. This is crucial because identifying the possible place of Julian's King Helios within Neoplatonism is a complex task. The Neoplatonic texts mention the name Helios only sporadically. Most of the time, when they refer to him or his luminous attributes, the philosophers do so either as a simple description of the Sun in our solar system or to provide a clearer example. They have not attributed the status of Supreme God to Helios in the same way that Julian has.

The fundamental principle of Neoplatonism is that reality consists of a hierarchy of levels of unity. Goodness and order are identified with form, measure and limit.¹⁵⁴ There are eight basic principles in Neoplatonism.¹⁵⁵ The first principle is “all that exists is caused by a single first cause”. The diversity and multiplicity of our cosmos have their origin in a perfect unity, the One. The second principle is of “spontaneous generation”. Proclus describes its essence perfectly: ‘Whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things

¹⁵³ Shaw 2014: 71, 180.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 48.

¹⁵⁵ As they are portrayed in Remes (2008).

which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the one originating principle in the universe'.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, there are causal relationships that trigger the effect of generation. The third principle is that of “non-reciprocal dependence”. It is basically an adaptation of the Aristotelian theory of “priority by nature”. The generated thing always depends on its creator. This relationship, however, is not reciprocal, since the prior is independent of the posterior. The fourth principle is that of “causal relationships”. The creator is always better than its creation, and the caused is always deficient to the cause. It is important to note that generation or creation occurs out of the necessity (ἀνάγκη) inherent in the nature of the supreme cause and every subsequent cause. Moreover, creation always proceeds from top to bottom, from the superior to the inferior. In other words, it is not temporal. What we perceive as a sensible universe is a continuous process that goes on for eternity.

The fifth principle is that of “plenitude”. The universe is considered a cosmos that is filled with all the magnificence of the first principle. Furthermore, it is characterized as a “complete cosmos”, meaning that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled. The sixth principle is that of “cyclic activity”. As Proclus states: ‘All that proceeds from any principle reverts with respect of its being upon that which it proceeds’.¹⁵⁷ This notion is vital for our understanding of the concept of the solar ascendance of the soul, which is found in both hymns of Julian. The seventh principle is the “realistic”, which encompasses the idea that everything exists but not everything thinks. Thus, being is prior to thinking. In Plotinus’ dogma there are two theories: ‘Either the Intellect generates intelligible objects in and by its activity, or the objects are prior to the Intellect which grasps an already existing being’.¹⁵⁸ The eighth principle, and the last one for our purposes here, is that of “omnipotence” and “omnipresence”. The higher principle is present everywhere in our universe, and its goodness is always in abundance and generous.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 25.1–2. Πᾶν τὸ τέλειον εἰς ἀπογεννήσεις πρόεισιν ὧν δύναται παράγειν, αὐτὸ μιμούμενον τὴν μίαν τῶν ὅλων ἀρχήν.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 31.

¹⁵⁸ Remes: 2008: 65.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 190-1.

1.5 Philosophers- Plotinus

1.5.1 Light

To understand Neoplatonism, acknowledging Plotinus is fundamental. Not only is he the founder of this philosophical school, but his writings are preserved in full, organized by his student Porphyry in nine treatises, which he named the *Enneads*. He does not give a specific epithet to the Intellect or to any other supreme intellectual being. As a result, at first glance, the name Helios appears to refer merely to the Sun that brightens our solar system. However, Plotinus provides several examples illustrating the importance of light. These can be interpreted either literally or as paradigms that establish his points. Many of these allegories are not original to Plotinus but are drawn from the works of Plato.¹⁶⁰ For our purpose, they will help in determining the solar importance for Plotinus.

This great philosopher declares openly that he considers the solar light beautiful. In his work *On Beauty*, he specifically focuses on the beauty of light, which is incorporeal, simple, and of explicit principle and form.¹⁶¹ In other words, the source of light is outside of the sensible world, due to its intelligibility. This intelligibility brings forth another important characteristic of light: its simplicity. In the Neoplatonic dogma, the level of complexity of a thing is directly related to its place in the universal hierarchy. Thus, the simpler something is, the higher it is positioned in the cosmological ladder, and the more divine are its characteristics. The One, which occupies the highest position in the hierarchy, is the simplest possible entity. In contrast, things in the material world are the most complex. Thus, Plotinus, by attributing to light a highly intelligible trait, he distinguishes it from the rest of the material world. As he says characteristically: ‘The Sun is also a God, because it is ensouled, and the other stars too’.¹⁶² However, apart from its divine status, the philosopher does not seem to attribute to the Sun any other major cosmological significance.

In other words, light is divine and has the supreme role of the highest Platonic forms. Its exquisite beauty is due to this incorporeality and higher status in the cosmological hierarchy. This can lead to another conclusion. If something is divine, its

¹⁶⁰ Dillon 2004: 7–177 (in several footnotes on Plotinus).

¹⁶¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 5.1.2.40–41. Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἥλιος θεός, ὅτι ἐμψυχός, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἄστρα.

source must share its incorporeal characteristics too. Hence, the Sun, as a source of solar light, must share the divine incorporeal characteristics of light as well. This notion is clearly demonstrated by Plotinus when he comments on the beauty of fire. The divinity of light is not exclusive to the Sun, since light from a common fire is also incorporeal, which makes it immensely beautiful. Therefore, the beauty and divine characteristics can be attributed to a common fire as well, since it is also a source of light. The conclusion is that all sources of light share common characteristics. As Plotinus states:

‘The simple beauty of a color resides in shape and in the mastery of the darkness in matter by the presence of incorporeal light. This is the reason why fire itself, among all the other bodies is beautiful: it has the role of form in relation to other elements, highest in position, finest of the other bodies, being as close as possible to the incorporeal, and alone is not receptive of other elements, though the others receive it.’¹⁶³

(Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.3.17–23).

The last sentence of Plotinus conspicuously shows the superiority of light and fire over the other elements. Being a higher principle from the rest of the material world, fire does not mingle with the other lower elements. This attribute reflects the third principle of “non-reciprocal dependence” that was mentioned before. The divine light can exist without the other elements. It is prior and independent while the other elements are posterior and dependent. The divine beauty of light is also evident in the starry night sky. This observation by Plotinus is intriguing, as it may allude to the introduction of the *Hymn to King Helios*, where Julian remarks that his affection for Helios and philosophy began with his fascination for the night sky, which he would gaze at for hours. The fact that Plotinus comments on the great beauty of light is important because he defines beauty as the personification of true Being: ‘God, Good, and Beautiful are the same, or rather goodness and beauty are the same’.¹⁶⁴

The characteristics of light are articulated thoroughly in the treatise *On the Problems of the Soul* of the *Enneads*. For Plotinus, light is an activity of the Sun or the

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 1.6.3.17–23. Τὸ δὲ τῆς χροῆς κάλλος ἀπλοῦν μορφῇ καὶ κρατήσῃ τοῦ ἐν ὕλῃ σκοτεινοῦ παρουσία φωτὸς ἀσωμάτου καὶ λόγου καὶ εἶδους ὄντος. Ὅθεν καὶ τὸ πῦρ αὐτὸ παρὰ τὰ ἄλλα σώματα καλόν, ὅτι τάξιν εἶδους πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα στοιχεῖα ἔχει, ἄνω μὲν τῇ θέσει, λεπτότατον δὲ τῶν ἄλλων σωμάτων, ὡς ἐγγὺς ὄν τοῦ ἀσωμάτου, μόνον δὲ αὐτὸ οὐκ εἰσδεχόμενον τὰ ἄλλα· τὰ δ’ ἄλλα δέχεται αὐτό.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 1.6.6.

source in general. The source of the light is its unique cause of illumination. It does not dissipate (due to its divine status) and continues to travel for eternity. That is why the terms “it has gone away” or “it is present” should not be used in the strict sense. The philosopher gives the astute example of a faraway Sun, claiming that its light will still reach us if there is no obstacle between us. “For even if the sun’s distance from us were many times what it actually is, the light would extend as far as this, so long as nothing prevents it or stands in between”.¹⁶⁵ If a corporeal body stands in the way of the light, one gets to see the identical light everywhere on the face that looks at the source, while on the other side it is dark. The light is not divided, however; it is always united. ‘There would be light everywhere, one and identical’.¹⁶⁶ The incorporeality of light is not refuted even if it comes from corporeal animals, such as fireflies. This is because they get the ability to illuminate from another incorporeal power.

Plotinus employs several analogies throughout the *Enneads* to illustrate the intelligibility of light in our cosmos. He strengthens and clarifies his argument by comparing light, or some of its attributes, to other divine entities. For example, he uses the expressions, ‘What is that striking thing shining on all the virtues like a light?’ and ‘divine Intellect shining on them all’¹⁶⁷. Another solar comparison likens individual souls to the rays of the Sun. Just as light depends on the Sun shining above us, souls descend on Earth and simultaneously yearn to return to the Universal Soul from which they originated.¹⁶⁸ In fact, the whole concept of the descent of the soul is described as an illumination:

‘For if the declination is an illumination of what is below, it is not moral error, any more than what remains in shadow is. What is illuminated is responsible; for if that did not exist, the soul would not have anything to illuminate. To descend or to decline, then, means that what is illuminated by it is so, because it shares its life with it.’¹⁶⁹

(Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.12.25–29).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 4.5.7.10–13. Ἐπεὶ καὶ εἰ πολλαπλασία ἡ ἀπόστασις ἢν ἢ νῦν ἐστὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοῦ ἡλίου, ἢν ἂν καὶ μέχρι ἐκεῖ φῶς μηδενὸς κωλύοντος μηδὲ ἐμποδῶν ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ ἵσταμένου.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 6.4.7.47–48. ἢν ἂν τὸ φῶς πανταχοῦ ἐν καὶ ταυτὸν ὄν.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 1.6.5.16–17, 1.6.5.21–22. ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις τὸν θεοειδῆ νοῦν ἐπιλάμποντα... τί τὸ ἐπὶ πάσαις ἀρεταῖς διαπρέπον οἷον φῶς.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 4.8.4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 1.1.12.25–29. Ἄλλ’ εἰ ἡ νεῦσις ἑλλαμνις πρὸς τὸ κάτω, οὐχ ἁμαρτία, ὥσπερ οὐδ’ ἡ σκιά, ἀλλ’ αἴτιον τὸ ἐλλαμπόμενον· εἰ γὰρ μὴ εἴη, οὐκ ἔχει ὅπῃ ἐλλάμψει. Καταβαίνειν οὖν καὶ νεύειν λέγεται τῷ συνεζηκέναι αὐτῇ τὸ ἐλλαμφοθὲν παρ’ αὐτῆς.

The divine light of the Soul creates the illumination (ἐκλαμπνις) of the inclination (νεύσις). The individual soul that goes down to the sensible world keeps its intelligible light, and “lives” in our body. At another point, Plotinus compares the Intellect with fire. This supreme entity sends the Soul as its expression in order to give life to the world, an action that is compared to the fire that is heated inside and sends its radiant heat to warm us.¹⁷⁰

Plotinus mentions also another form of light that he calls “true light”.¹⁷¹ This heavenly light emanates not from the visible sun, but directly from the One/Good, the Intellect, and the intelligible world. The Intellect, which is the most beautiful thing, is situated in this pure light and pure radiance, which can be seen by humans only when their soul gets purified and ascends to the Intellect through contemplation.¹⁷² Through this “inner way of observing”, the “true light” allows us to see all the beautiful forms of the intelligible world. Its characteristics are comparable to those of the sunlight. One cannot look at it directly without any preparation. First, the human soul must become beautiful to endure it, just as the eyes must become “sunlike” to withstand a direct gaze at sunlight.¹⁷³ Moreover, the contemplation of the “pure light” in the intelligible world is directly comparable to the observation of starlight in the sky. In both cases, one reflects on the source that produces the light and seeks that source. This intelligible light continuously fills and illuminates a part of our rational soul.¹⁷⁴

The One seems to be the origin of this “true light”. ‘An eternal radiation of light comes from it, though it reposes, like the light from the Sun, in a way encircling it, eternally, coming from it while it reposes’.¹⁷⁵ The solar analogy continues in other instances as well, where the philosopher intends to demonstrate that the luminous Intellect is an “Image of the One” since it comes from the One. It is a likeness in relation to it, just like the light that comes from the Sun is an image of its solar source.¹⁷⁶ The Soul is also described as a “pure light” around the Intellect.¹⁷⁷ The analogy of the Sun with the One or

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 5.1.3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 1.6.9.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 3.8.11.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 1.6.9.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 3.8.5.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 5.1.6.29–31. Περίλαμπνιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ μὲν, ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ μένοντος, οἷον ἡλίου τὸ περὶ αὐτὸ λαμπρὸν ὥσπερ περιθέον, ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀεὶ γεννώμενον μένοντος.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 5.1.7.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 5.2.9.

Good is based on a longstanding tradition in philosophy that has been well demonstrated by both Plato and Aristotle. However, Schroeder believes that the solar analogies described by Plotinus are not merely figurative.¹⁷⁸ Instead, the Neoplatonic philosopher develops a theory concerning the nature of light itself. If this modern view holds, the intent of Plotinus should be to stress a universal law – the unique role of the source and the effect of its withdrawal. Thus, Plotinus’ claim is that in our cosmos, the same illuminating law governing solar light in the sensible world also applies to the “true light” of metaphysical illumination. This aligns with Plato’s personal beliefs, as he states in the *Republic* that the light in the visible realm, which is correct and beautiful, originates from the intelligible world, where it provides truth and understanding. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of a Plotinian origin, transmitted through Iamblichus, for Julian’s Helios comes from the section in the *Enneads* that is describing the Soul. The text below is rather revealing:

‘The Sun in the intelligible world was actually Intellect - let us take that as a model in our discussion – and Soul comes next to it, being dependent on Intellect, maintaining its stability while the Intellect, too, remains stable. Soul actually gives its outer edges, those bordering on this Sun in this cosmos, to this Sun and through itself as an intermediary, forges a link with the intelligible world, and becomes, in a way, an interpreter of messages from that Sun to this one, and those from this one, insofar as they can reach it through the agency of Soul.’¹⁷⁹
(Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11.15-21).

The visible Sun of our solar system is directly compared to the Intellect in the intelligible world, and is being described as a direct image of that Intellect. Thus, according to Plotinus, ‘the sun in the intelligible world was actually Intellect’.¹⁸⁰ The Soul comes next to it and is dependent on the Intellect, and both maintain their stability. Moreover, the Soul simultaneously borders both Suns—the sensible and the intelligible. Hence, it develops into an intermediary, forging a link between the visible and the intellectual worlds. It ‘becomes, in a way, an interpreter of messages from that Sun (Intelligible) to this one (visible), and those from this one to that one’.¹⁸¹ It is through the agency of the Soul that

¹⁷⁸ Schroeder 1984: 240

¹⁷⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11.15-21. Ἦν δὲ νοῦς ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἐκεῖ ἥλιος οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν γινέσθω παράδειγμα τοῦ λόγου ἐφεξῆς δὲ τούτῳ ψυχὴ ἐξηρημένη μένοντος νοῦ μένουσα. Δίδωσι δὲ αὕτη τὰ πέρατα αὐτῆς τὰ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν ἥλιον τούτῳ τῷ ἡλίῳ, καὶ ποιεῖ διὰ μέσου αὐτῆς κάκεῖ συνῆφθαι οἷον ἐρμηνευτικὴ γενομένη τῶν τε ἀπ’ ἐκείνου εἰς τοῦτον καὶ τῶν τούτου εἰς ἐκεῖνον, ὅσον διὰ ψυχῆς εἰς ἐκεῖνον φθάνει.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 4.3.11.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

the two Suns are connected, allowing the divine substance of the Intellect to pass through them into the sensible world. This concept of an intermediary between the two Suns is almost an exact replica of the one that is described in the *Hymn to King Helios*, which has a strong note of Iamblichean influence. However, there is an important difference: The intermediary Sun, who is King Helios in Julian's *Hymn*, is not mentioned anywhere in the *Enneads*.

From all of the above, it can be deduced that "true light" plays an important role in the cosmological structure of the universe. Furthermore, the corporeal status of light also seems significant, since it is being compared many times to the Soul and to the Intellect, even to the One. Moreover, it is one of the most beautiful things (an attribute that belongs to the most superior entities). However, most of the time, Plotinus limits himself to just mentioning the solar or fire light as an analogy, in order to make his specific point. The fact that a clear connection between the "true light" of the intelligible world and the solar light has not been made explicitly by Plotinus, especially when he emphasizes the divine beauty of light in the sensible world, is also problematic. On the other hand, a direct connection between the visible Sun and the Intellectual Sun, who is the Intellect according to Plotinus, has been established through the agency of the Soul. However, the importance of the visible Helios as an entity, although recognized as a God, is not stressed even to a fraction, compared to Julian's *Hymn*. Moreover, although the Intelligible Helios and the sensible Helios have found their counterparts in both Julian's *Hymn* and in Plotinus' *Enneads*, in the *Enneads* there is no evidence of another Helios with the intermediary role that Julian's King Helios has. As a result, there is no clear evidence of the existence of King Helios in Plotinus' doctrine. In order to find out if Julian's Helios fits into the doctrine of Plotinus, we must take an "indirect" route. Thus, we must analyze which divinities of Plotinus may share similar characteristics with Julian's three hypostases of Helios.

1.5.2 Plotinus' vs Julian's Metaphysical System

Plotinus' metaphysical system consists of three intelligible hypostases: the One (which exists beyond our cosmos), the Intellect, which encompasses Being, and the Soul. From the generative forces of the Soul, the sensible world is created. Thus, at the apex of Plotinus' hierarchy is the One. At first, this seems to equate directly with the One in Julian's *Hymn*, as it also occupies the highest position in the *Hymn*'s hierarchy.¹⁸² However, fundamental differences appear to exist between Plotinus' One and Julian's One. In Plotinus' dogma, the One is presented as an absolutely simple entity/unity, being placed beyond Being, and beyond the intelligible realm. At the same time, it is the Creator of the Intellect. The Intellect consists of the Platonic forms or ideas, and its role is to further generate the world, a capability it possesses due to its complexity. On the other hand, in Julian's *Hymn*, the One seems to be much more complex. It is placed in the middle of the intelligible realm, being surrounded by the forms. It created King Helios, the leader of the intellectual realm, and is also the source of the intelligible Gods of beauty, existence, perfection, and oneness. Moreover, it is the cause of the other intellectual Gods, who are ruled by King Helios (Intellectual Sun).¹⁸³ Its transcendence is disseminated throughout the entire universe by this intellectual Sun. Thus, a central difference between Plotinus' and Julian's metaphysical system lies in the level of complexity of the One. The identity of the One in Julian's *Hymn* seems to be much more closely related to that of the Intellect in Plotinus' system. It can also be seen as a hybrid that has both the role and function of a One-Intellect combination. A. Smith claims that the description of the One as "intelligible" may be intentional, Julian's purpose being in bringing the highest principle closer to Helios. On the other hand, he may just follow a trend in Neoplatonism to represent the One in more "positive" terms concerning its relation to what it causes.¹⁸⁴

The third hypostasis in the Plotinic system is the Soul of the Universe, which is basically created from the Intellect and acts as an intermediary between the Intelligible realm and the sensible world. It has been given the role of the mediator between the changeless and eternal powers and the changing and temporal ones. The primary task of the Soul is acting

¹⁸² See Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis on Julian's metaphysical schema.

¹⁸³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 133b.

¹⁸⁴ Smith 2012: 231.

as the instrument of generation in the material world. As a result, it gives life and motion to the universe. It guides everything and takes care that it works in an orderly manner. Astonishingly, Julian does not include the Soul in his system. However, after reading the *Hymn*, the reason becomes clear. The role of the Soul is attributed to King Helios. This supreme solar God is responsible for the creation of the sensible world, exactly like the Soul is in the Plotinic system. King Helios also serves as an intermediary, as he exists on the intellectual level, which lies between the intelligible and the sensible worlds. Even individual souls appear to be created by Helios, such as those originating from the Soul.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, proposing an exact equation between King Helios and the Soul may be too bold, as Julian has undoubtedly elevated the status of Helios in the eponymous *Hymn* to a much higher level of praise than the status that the Soul holds in the *Enneads*.

In both systems—those of Plotinus and Julian—the Sun in the sensible world appears to serve similar but not identical functions. For Plotinus, the Sun is a God, though not the most important one. Its divine status arises from the fact that he is ensouled. In contrast, in Julian’s *Hymn*, the sensible Sun is of prime importance, since he is essentially the third hypostasis Helios and the direct offspring of King Helios,¹⁸⁶ receiving his beneficial solar energy. Among other roles, the Sun is responsible for all life on Earth. Our souls come to Earth and travel back to the Creator through his rays.¹⁸⁷

In conclusion, there are many analogies between the three supermundane hypostases of Plotinus (One, Intellect, Soul), and the two of Julian (One and King Helios). The similarities in the functioning of the universe between Plotinus and the heliocentric model of Julian are striking, since the cosmological system described in the *Hymn to King Helios* closely resembles that of Plotinus. However, there are differences, especially on the importance of Helios, and since Julian himself admits that he is no innovator, we must search elsewhere for his primary source for the identity of Helios. Moreover, the sensible Sun in our solar system plays a different role in the two dogmas. In Julian’s *Hymn*, the Sun is the incarnation and direct offspring of King Helios, and his actions are a continuation of

¹⁸⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 151c.

¹⁸⁶ The three hypostases of Helios are: Intelligible (One), Intellectual (King Helios), and Sensible (Sun).

¹⁸⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 152b.

those of his Father. Thus, his role in the cosmos is much more enhanced and important than the more conventional role of the Sun of Plotinus.

1.5.3 Traditional Gods

To conclude our discussion of Plotinus' system of thought, we should consider whether the traditional Greek Gods fit in his Neoplatonic dogma. This is not an easy inquiry, since they are rarely mentioned in the *Enneads*. Our interest is mostly in Zeus, because Julian identifies this God as equal to King Helios. Solmsen, in his article on the King of Gods, reaches the conclusion that there is not a fixed place for Zeus in Plotinus' system. When Zeus' name appears, it is usually as a quotation or allegory from a Platonic passage.¹⁸⁸ For example, when Plotinus refers to the God's gardens, he says that if Zeus is being described as a cause in Plato, then he can be the greatest cause among the causes, a fact that would equate him to the great Intellect and Soul.¹⁸⁹ In another instance, Plotinus quotes Plato in *Philebus*, who says that there is a royal Soul in Zeus and a royal Intellect. Plotinus adds that Aphrodite can be a grade below Zeus, impersonating Soul.

In an interesting passage, Plotinus, without referring directly to Plato, compares the Intellect (who generates Soul), to Kronos (who generates Zeus).¹⁹⁰ He claims that Kronos and the Intellect have the same characteristics, because they both tend to hold back what they generate. This view is further developed when Plotinus claims that the One 'is king of the king and of kings, and would more justly be called Father of Gods than Zeus.'¹⁹¹ In fact, the One is the grandfather of Zeus, who, not holding himself to the contemplation of his father –Kronos, imitated the activity of his grandfather –One. With this description, Plotinus seems to equate the Greek divine triad of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus to the three hypostases of his own intelligible hierarchy. Thus, Plotinus places the greatest Olympian God below the Intellect, but above the Soul, which is personified by Aphrodite.¹⁹² Another intriguing fact is that Plotinus compares the One to the Great King and calls It king of the

¹⁸⁸ Solmsen 1986: 72–73.

¹⁸⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.5.8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 5.1.7.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 5.5.3.21–22. βασιλεὺς βασιλέως καὶ βασιλέων καὶ πατὴρ δικαιότερον ἂν κληθεῖς θεῶν, ὃν ὁ Ζεὺς.

¹⁹² Calvo (2017: 83–84) believes that the triad Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus corresponds to the Plotinus' three hypostases (One, Intellect, and Soul); Armstrong (1984: 8) claims that the Intellect should be equated to Kronos.

king of the kings. This royal appellation has its echo in Julian's *Hymn*, where he calls Helios, "The King of All".¹⁹³

1.6 Philosophers - Porphyry

1.6.1 Light/Sun and Syncretism in *In the Cave of the Nymphs*

Porphyry is another important Neoplatonic philosopher. He wrote several treatises, and edited Plotinus' *Enneads*. Many of the works are lost, but some important texts have survived either in their entirety or in fragments.¹⁹⁴ Porphyry is considered to have popularized Plotinus. His greatest influence lies in the Latin West, where he is known for his moral and religious tendencies. He is famous for the argument that he had with Iamblichus about theurgy, and for his treatise *Against the Christians*.¹⁹⁵ He is often read with Plotinus.¹⁹⁶ The fact that only fragments of his metaphysical works survive resulted in his underestimation on this subject. Only recently has he been recognized as a constructive metaphysician.¹⁹⁷ Porphyry was one of the few philosophers to consider the first element in the noetic triad¹⁹⁸ to be sufficient as a first principle (One or Good).¹⁹⁹ In a similar way, in his *Hymn to King Helios*, Julian also situates the One in the noetic realm. Greenwood claims that Julian borrowed the themes of Asclepius and Heracles from Porphyry. While Julian portrays both Asclepius and Heracles as descendants of Helios, Porphyry depicts them as attributes or δυνάμεις of Helios.²⁰⁰

Porphyry's commentary on *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 'can make a credible claim to be the oldest piece of literary criticism in the European tradition to survive essentially intact to our own time'.²⁰¹ One of the most unique characteristics of this text is that it

¹⁹³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 154d.

¹⁹⁴ *On abstinence, Life of Pythagoras, Life of Plotinus, Homeric Questions, Sentences, In the Cave of the Nymphs* etc.

¹⁹⁵ Wallis 1972: 99.

¹⁹⁶ Remes 2008: 23.

¹⁹⁷ Wallis 1972: 99.

¹⁹⁸ πατήρ (ὄν), ζωή (δύναμις), νοῦς.

¹⁹⁹ Dillon 1973: 30.

²⁰⁰ Greenwood 2018: 421; However, some authors are uncertain of a literary relationship between Porphyry and Julian (Magny 2014: 6; Smith 1995: 191). Julian himself (*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 161c) says that he knew the treatise of Porphyry, but he had never read it.

²⁰¹ Lamberton 1983: 3.

clearly interprets Mithraism in Platonic terms.²⁰² Moreover, it is considered as a proof “that symbols and images are a key language and tool for the Neoplatonists to reveal their doctrines, similar to the Pythagoreans’ use of dual discourses, direct and symbolic”.²⁰³ In this work, Porphyry tries to explain the allegorical meaning of the description of a cave in Homer’s *Odyssey*.²⁰⁴ There is controversy among modern scholars on whether the text is original or Porphyry is simply quoting his sources, Eubulus, Numenius, and Cronius. Buffière believes that Porphyry merely reproduces Numenius’ and Cronius’ ideas.²⁰⁵ Lamberton does not consider Porphyry to have been an original thinker; nevertheless, he believes that this text expresses Porphyry’s personal views, which reflect a general tendency in third-century Neoplatonism. As he says, characteristically, ‘The appeal to authority is one of his most characteristic tropes - but his references may be more tantalizing than helpful’.²⁰⁶ Maurette considers it a much more original text. Nilufer claims that it is a product of a highly intelligent thinker connected with Porphyry’s other philosophical works.²⁰⁷ For our purposes, the originality of the information is not of concern. What we are looking for is the deeper meaning of this treatise. Porphyry’s commentary includes various references to Mithraism that are fused with Hellenic religious and philosophic traditions, which makes the text the first conscious attempt to create a syncretism between Mithraism and Graeco-Roman culture.²⁰⁸

It is striking how Porphyry starts his commentary with a multidirectional syncretism between the traditional Hellenic beliefs, pre-Homeric ancient traditions, Neoplatonic philosophy, and Mithraism. Traditional Greek religion is represented by the Nymphs, which are called Naiads, and the immortal Gods. Neoplatonic philosophy is expressed by the allegorical interpretation of the symbols in the cave; i.e. the stones and rocks symbolize the infinite nature of matter through its privation of form. The apt symbols of the “ancients” are the flowing waters and the darkness of the cavern. The Persian sacred caves are dedicated to Mithra. In summary, the cave, which is inhabited by the Nymphs, represents

²⁰² Maurette 2005: 64; Turcan (1988), in an excellent treatise, claims that the process of Platonizing the mystery cult of Mithras had already started by the middle Platonists.

²⁰³ Nilufer 2019: 8.

²⁰⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* 13, 102–112.

²⁰⁵ Buffière 1956: 394.

²⁰⁶ Lamberton 1983: 4.

²⁰⁷ Nilufer 2019: 8.

²⁰⁸ Maurette 2005: 63.

the universe and is considered holy because the ancients made caves and caverns sacred to the cosmos. In the same way, Zoroaster²⁰⁹ consecrated a cave ‘in honor of Mithra, the creator and father of the universe, since the cave was for him an image of the cosmos that Mithras created’.²¹⁰ Porphyry makes sure to clarify that the traditions of the “ancients” are those of the Hellenes (Greeks), who lived prior to Homer. Thus, his claim is that since time immemorial, the people of Greece were consecrating the caves to the Gods. The caves represent a microcosm of the divine universe. In conclusion, there is a sort of common ancestral knowledge, which connects the ancients, traditional Greek religion, Neoplatonic philosophy, and Mithraism.²¹¹

Moreover, despite the fact that Porphyry was a devoted Neoplatonist and supporter of the Graeco-Roman Gods, he seems to have excellent knowledge of the Mithraic liturgy and the Mithraic interpretation of various symbols. In fact, both Beck and Campbell believe that Porphyry is describing an actual Mithraeum.²¹² This Neoplatonic philosopher finds no conflict at all between Mithraism and his philosophic beliefs. The same convention certainly does not hold for Neoplatonism and Christianity. His notorious treatise *Against the Christians* conspicuously demonstrates his hostile feelings towards the religion of the “Galileans”.²¹³ The Christians were seen as a threat²¹⁴, the Mithraists, as allies. This Porphyrian notion of religious and philosophic syncretism is important because it can help us understand better Julian’s religious beliefs and subsequently the identity of King Helios (as discussed in the next chapter).

Turcan and Nilufer claim that the characterization of Mithras as ‘maker and father of all things’, clearly refers to the Platonic characterization of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. Porphyry refers to Mithras as τοῦ πάντων ποιητοῦ καὶ πατρός, while Plato refers to the

²⁰⁹ Porphyry quotes Eubulus as his source for the connection between Zoroaster and Mithras; Lamberton 1983: 25.

²¹⁰ Porphyry, *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 60.

²¹¹ Porphyry’s claim would certainly find support in the modern theory of a common ancestral spiritual religion, which is expressed by Eliade (2020).

²¹² Beck 2006: 85; Campbell 1968: 55.

²¹³ Julian referred to the Christians as Galileans in order to demote them.

²¹⁴ A prophetic forethought from Porphyry, as time proved, since with the laws of Theodosius I and II, the free practicing of traditional religions was banned. Moreover, the laws of Justinian forced the closure of the philosophic schools. The traditional Neoplatonic beliefs were almost forgotten until their reemergence in the Renaissance.

Demiurge as τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός.²¹⁵ Thus, the syncretism of Mithraism and Neoplatonism is established at the highest level. Furthermore, if we accept Turcan's opinion that this appellation of Mithras should be attributed to Numenius (second century CE), it means that, at the time of Porphyry, there was a more-than-hundred-years-old tradition of syncretism between Mithraism and Platonism. This concept of a *Mithras Platonicus* is also found in Celsus' writings.²¹⁶

The text is also abundant in solar allegorical meanings. An interesting allusion is when Porphyry refers to the gift of God, which is the celestial fire of the heaven (deriving from the Sun) that brings to proper maturity the fruit of the vine, which is a symbol of Dionysus. Here, the Sun is depicted as a deity with divine generative powers that have been attributed to him from a higher God. When referring to the Egyptian mysteries, Porphyry seems to be specifically interested in the Sun, because he emphasizes that only Helios (Re) out of all the divinities that have the "spirit of God" sail in a boat on the waters. The zodiac Leo is described as the house of the Sun, thus directly connecting the lion with Helios. Finally, Porphyry directly links the rays of the Sun with the ascent and descent of the souls.²¹⁷ The gates of the caves, where the souls ascend and descend, allude to the 'gates of the Sun, signifying by these Cancer (northern gate) and Capricorn (southern gate), for the Sun proceeds as far as to these signs, when he descends from the north to the south (summer solstice), and from thence ascends again to the northern parts (winter solstice)'.²¹⁸ Thus, the souls rise through Capricorn (winter solstice), and descend through Cancer (summer solstice). A similar type of relationship between the Sun's rays and the souls is also found in Julian's writings.²¹⁹ Remarkably, Porphyry links the Neoplatonic concepts directly with the Mithraic rituals. Mithras is presented as both a Creator, like the bull, and lord of γένεσις. This supreme God is carefully depicted as being 'oriented along the celestial equator with the North on his right and the South on his left. The Mithraic theologians place Cautes to the south because it is hot and the other one, Cautopates, to the

²¹⁵ Turcan 1988: 26; Nilufer (2019: 77) adds that Mithras is not only the Maker and Father of the Cosmos, but also the master of genesis, having the attribute of δύνανμις at the lower ontological level, and an astral figure.

²¹⁶ Albanese 2018: 682.

²¹⁷ Porphyry, *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 13, 10.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* 22.

²¹⁹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 152b–c.

north on account of the coldness of the North Wind'.²²⁰ The equatorial orientation of Mithras shows middleness which is correlated with the Sun. The Sun warms more the southern regions, a result that alludes to the ascent of the souls, while the Northern cold ones are more appropriate to represent the descent of the souls to matter. Moreover, the two torchbearers depict another solar symbolism related to Platonism. Cautes holds the upright torch, which symbolizes the rising sun and the ascendance of the soul. On the other hand, Cautopates holds the upside-down torch, which symbolizes the setting of the Sun, and the descent of the souls in the bodies. 'The symbolism that Porphyry finds in the iconography of the Mithraic trinity (Mithras, Cautes, and Cautopates) is very interesting because it evidences how deeply his interpretation is rooted in the Platonic philosophy'.²²¹

The best example of a solar syncretism between the Platonic philosophy, the Hellenic religion, and the Mithraic mysteries is to be found in the doctrine of the ascent and descent of the soul. Porphyry's description is revealing:

'The journey is either through the noetic or through the sensible, and within the sensible universe, it is either through the fixed stars or through the planets, and again either along the path of immortality or that of mortality... Plato speaks of two "mouths", one for those going up into Heaven and one for those going down into the Earth, while the theologians make the "gates" of souls the Sun and Moon, the ascent taking place through the sun and the descent through the Moon. Homer likewise mentions two "pithoi", of gifts he gives, one full of evils, the other of benefits.'²²²

(Porphyry, *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 29.5–15).

In this passage, the philosophic concept of the journey of the soul to the material world and vice versa, which is achieved via the gates of heaven, is being completely equated with the Mithraic ritual, in which the theologians represent the Sun and the Moon as the gates for the soul's trip. According to Nilufer, the Sun is led towards Intellect, while the Moon is led towards life – hence the soul passes first through the Moon and then through the Sun. 'The Sun seems to be the first divinity, marking the boundary between the region subjected to

²²⁰ Porphyry, *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 24.

²²¹ Maurette 2005: 69.

²²² Porphyry, *In the Cave of the Nymphs* 29.5–15. 'ἡ γὰρ διὰ νοητοῦ ἢ πορεία ἢ δι' αἰσθητοῦ· καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἢ διὰ τῆς ἀπλανοῦς ἢ διὰ τῆς τῶν πεπλανημένων, καὶ πάλιν ἢ διὰ τῆς ἀθανάτου ἢ διὰ τῆς θνητῆς πορείας δύο δὲ στόμια Πλάτων φησί, δι' οὗ μὲν ἀναβαινόντων εἰς οὐρανόν, δι' οὗ δὲ κατιόντων εἰς γῆν, καὶ τῶν θεολόγων πύλας ψυχῶν Ἥλιον τιθέντων καὶ Σελήνην, καὶ διὰ μὲν Ἥλιου ἀνιέναι, διὰ δὲ Σελήνης κατιέναι· καὶ δύο πίθοι παρ' Ὀμήρῳ 'δώρων, οἷα δίδωσι, κακῶν, ἕτερος δὲ ἐάων'.

generation and the path leading the soul up to the intelligible realm'.²²³ This scholar also proposes "a connection between Porphyry's division of the triad Being-Intellect-Life at the celestial level, and the assignment of the Sun and the Moon to the gates for the soul".²²⁴ Hence, with this Porphyrian syncretism, the Sun becomes extremely important for the Neoplatonic dogma. Even more importantly, this notion is also found in Julian's solar hymn. In Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs*, the validity of the syncretism is "sealed" by the authority of Homer.

1.6.2 Light/Sun in Other Texts

Porphyry emphasizes the divine aspect of light in other texts, as well. In his treatise *On Cult Images*, he speaks about a deity who is of 'the nature of light, and dwells in an atmosphere of ethereal fire, and is invisible to sense... He... led men on to the conception of his light... and to his undefiled purity'.²²⁵ This is a description of an intelligible God, most probably the Intellect, who is the personification of light. The ethereal fire can be compared to the "true light" of Plotinus (discussed above). This solar description of the Intelligible also bears resemblance to an answer given by the Oracle of Apollo at Claros²²⁶ – which further reinforces the idea of a syncretism between Neoplatonism and the traditional Graeco-Roman religion, at least at a higher priestly level. Porphyry, wanting to prove his point that earthly souls are imprisoned and are located far away from the divine light, quotes Empedocles, who says: "Heaven's exiles, straying from the orb of light".²²⁷ In the *De Abstinencia*, Porphyry notes that the beetle is venerated by the mystics in Egypt as an image of the Sun.²²⁸ In another instance, Porphyry describes the Athenian procession to the Sun and Hour as one of the most splendid, emphasizing the fact that originally, they were offering only herbs and fruits to these Gods.²²⁹

²²³ Nilufer 2019: 152.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 151.

²²⁵ Porphyry, *On Cult Images* Fragment 2 (= PE 3.7.2–4).

²²⁶ As discussed in Chapter 1.

²²⁷ Porphyry, *Sententiae* 41.

²²⁸ Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 4.9.8.

²²⁹ Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 2.7; Porphyry was a strong adherent of the vegetarian diet.

Porphry's reference to an Orphic hymn is arguably the most striking example of equating Zeus with an intelligible deity. In addition, it is another demonstration of how Platonic thought can be fused into the Graeco-Roman mythology.

Zeus was the first, Zeus last, the lightning's lord,
Zeus head, Zeus center, all things are from Zeus.
Zeus born a male, Zeus virgin undefiled;
Zeus the firm base of earth and starry heaven;
Zeus sovereign, Zeus alone first cause of all:
One power divine, great ruler of the world,
One kingly form, encircling all things here,
Fire, water, earth, and ether, night and day;
Wisdom, first parent, and delightful Love:
For in Zeus' mighty body these all lie.
His head and beauteous face the radiant heaven
Reveals and round him float in shining waves
The golden tresses of the twinkling stars.
On either side bulls' horns of gold are seen,
Sunrise and sunset, footpaths of the Gods.
His eyes the Sun, the Moon's responsive light;
His mind immortal ether, sovereign truth,
Hears and considers all; nor any speech,
Nor cry, nor noise, nor ominous voice escapes
The ear of Zeus, great Kronos' mightier son:
Such his immortal head, and such his thought.
His radiant body, boundless, undisturbed
In strength of mighty limbs was formed thus:
The God's broad-spreading shoulders, breast and back
Air's wide expanse displays; on either side
Grow wings, wherewith throughout all space he flies.
Earth the all-mother, with her lofty hills,
His sacred belly forms; the swelling flood
Of hoarse resounding Ocean girds his waist.
His feet the deeply rooted ground upholds,
And dismal Tartarus, and earth's utmost bounds.
All things he hides, then from his heart again
In godlike action brings to gladsome light.

(Porphry, quoting an Orphic hymn, *On Cult Images*, Fragment 3 [=PE 3.9.1-5]).

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένετο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀργικέραυνος, (5)
 Ζεὺς κεφαλὴ, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται.
 Ζεὺς ἄρσῃ γένετο, Ζεὺς ἄμβροτος ἔπλετο νύμφῃ.
 Ζεὺς πυθμὴν γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος,
 Ζεὺς πυθμὴν γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος,
 Ζεὺς βασιλεὺς, Ζεὺς αὐτὸς ἀπάντων ἀρχιγένεθλος. (10)
 Ἐν κράτος, εἷς δαίμων γένετο, μέγας ἀρχὸς ἀπάντων,
 ἐν δὲ δέμας βασιλειον, ἐν ᾧ τάδε πάντα κυκλεῖται,
 πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γαῖα καὶ αἰθήρ, νύξ τε καὶ ἡμαρ,
 καὶ Μῆτις πρῶτος γενέτωρ καὶ Ἔρως πολυτερπής·
 πάντα γὰρ ἐν Ζηνὸς μεγάλῳ τάδε σώματι κεῖται. (15)
 Τοῦ δὴ τοι κεφαλὴ μὲν ἰδεῖν καὶ καλὰ πρόσωπα
 οὐρανὸς αἰγλήεις, ὃν χρύσεια ἀμφὶς ἔθειραι
 ἄστρον μαρμαρέων περικαλλέες ἡερέθονται,
 ταύρεα δ' ἀμφοτέρωθε δύο χρύσεια κέρατα,
 ἀντολίῃ τε δύσιν τε, θεῶν ὁδοὶ οὐρανίωνων, (20)
 ὄμματα δ' ἡελίος τε καὶ ἀντιόωσα σελήνη.
 Νοῦς δέ <οἱ> ἀγνευδής, βασιλήϊος, ἄφθιτος αἰθήρ,
 ᾧ δὴ πάντα κλύει καὶ φράζεται· οὐδέ τις ἐστὶν
 αὐδὴ, οὐδ' ἐνοπή, οὐδὲ κτύπος, οὐδὲ μὲν ὅσσα
 ἢ λήθει Διὸς οὔας ὑπερμενέος Κρονίωνος. (25)
 Ὡδε μὲν ἀθανάτην κεφαλὴν ἔχει ἡδὲ νόημα.
 Σῶμα δέ οἱ περιφεγγές, ἀπείριτον, ἀστυφέλικτον,
 ἄτρομον, ὀβριμόγυιον, ὑπερμενὲς ὧδε τέτυκται·
 ὧμοι μὲν καὶ στέρνα καὶ εὐρέα νῶτα θεοῖο
 ἀῆρ εὐρυβίης· πτέρυγες δέ οἱ ἐξεφύοντο (30)
 τῆς ἐπὶ πάντα ποτᾶθ'· ἱερὴ δέ οἱ ἔπλετο νηδὺς
 γαῖα τε παμμήτωρ ὀρέων τ' αἰπεινὰ κάρηνα·
 μέσση δὲ ζώνη βαρυηχέος οἶδμα θαλάσσης
 καὶ πόντου· πυμάτη δὲ βάσις χθονὸς ἐνδοθε ρίζαι
 τάρταρα τ' εὐρώεντα καὶ ἔσχατα πείρατα γαίης. (35)
 Πάντα δ' ἀποκρύψας αὐθις φάος ἐς πολυγηθὲς
 μέλλεν ἀπὸ κραδίης προφέρειν πάλι, θέσκελα ῥέζων.
 (Porphry, quoting an Orphic hymn, *On Cult Images*, Fragment 3 [=PE 3.9.1-5]).

Zeus is described as the supreme creator of all the sensible world in the universe, and as a deity that encompasses everything, including Helios. Solar light is one of his attributes, since he is all-radiant and he can see through the Sun. As Porphry claims, Zeus is portrayed as the mind of the world. He is the whole world, animal of animals, and God of Gods. He is the νοῦς (mind), who brings forth all things through his thoughts and

subsequently creates them. Although he should have been portrayed as a sphere²³⁰, people represent him in human form. One can claim that Zeus' figure is a complete allegorical representation of all his intelligible attributes.²³¹ However, in this Orphic poem, the intelligible Zeus also sticks to the Greek mythological tradition and is portrayed as the son of Kronos. If we follow Plotinus' metaphysical hierarchy, Zeus could be identified as the Soul, while his grandfather Ouranos could be identified as the One, and Kronos, the Intellect. Nevertheless, even if this is not the case, the aforementioned description of Zeus has many common attributes with the Neoplatonic Soul or even with Julian's King Helios.

In the same treatise, Porphyry describes the Graeco-Roman Gods as individual intelligible powers,²³² obviously subordinated to Zeus – the all-powerful God. For the purpose of this thesis, we will focus exclusively on the Gods associated with light. The first one is Hephaistos, who signifies the sensible fire. His blue cap represents the revolution of the heavens, where the aethereal fire dwells, while he is lame because earthly fire needs matter. The second is Apollo, who represents the power of the Sun – that is, the energy emerging from the pulsation of the solar beams. The nine Muses that accompany his lyre represent the seven heavenly spheres, the sublunar sphere, and one of the fixed stars. Apollo is crowned by the laurel for two reasons. First, the plant represents the fire, therefore it is hated by evil daemons, and second, its leaves crackle when they burn, thus representing his prophetic art. The third God is Asclepius, who symbolizes the Sun's healing powers and has found the remedy for giving clear sight. The fourth is Dionysus who embodies the Sun's fiery power and its revolving, circular motion, through which he ripens the crops.

The Sun is associated with different deities, depending on its position in the sky and its effects on Earth. Hence, when the Sun revolves around the cosmic seasons and is the maker of "times and tides", he is called Horus. When the power of the Sun gives an abundant harvest, he is called Pluto. When he is using his destructive power, the Sun is called Sarapis. Cerberus is represented with three heads, because the positions of the Sun above the Earth are three: rising, midday, and setting. Finally, we have the hero Heracles,

²³⁰ In the Pythagorean doctrine, the sphere is the symbol of the intelligible Gods, while the square is the symbol of the chthonic ones.

²³¹ Porphyry, *On Cult Images*, Fragment 3 (=PE 3.9.1–5).

²³² Porphyry, *On Cult Images* Fragment 4 (= PE 3.11.1–2), Fragment 5 (= PE 3.11.5), Fragment 6 (= PE 3.11.7), Fragment 8 (= PE 3.11.22–44).

who represents the passing of the Sun from East to West, warding off the evils from the Earth. His twelve labours represent the twelve zodiacs in Heaven. The lion skin represents the uneven motion, and the “Leo” sign of the zodiac. As will be shown in the next chapter, some of the aforementioned Gods are named by Julian as powers of King Helios.

Both Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo* and Iamblichus’ Response to Porphyry (*De Mysteriis*) demonstrate some rather intriguing facts about the Sun. One of Porphyry’s questions concerns the divinity of the Sun. He asks Anebo, ‘If, however, the Gods are incorporeal alone, how will the Sun and Moon, and the visible celestials, be Gods? What is it that connects the Gods in the heavens that have bodies, with the incorporeal Gods?’²³³ Remarkably, Julian’s *Hymn to King Helios* seems to answer these questions. Another solar question is about the meaning of the Egyptian symbols of the Sun. Porphyry mentions mire, the lotus, the sailing ship, and the hourly changing of forms according to the zodiac. He expresses his doubts about the efficacy of these solar symbols to represent the attributes of Helios, and he wonders whether they could help the initiates to survey the God in dark conditions.²³⁴ In this question, Porphyry challenges Iamblichus, since one of the central tenets of theurgy is the ability to perceive divine light with closed eyes. Another intriguing question is the one concerning the Demiurge. Here, typical metaphysical and philosophical questions are raised: How do the Egyptians conceive the first cause to be – Intellect or above Intellect? Whether alone or with others? Whether incorporeal or corporeal? Whether it is the same with the Demiurge, or prior to Him? Porphyry, quoting Chaereon²³⁵, states:

²³³ Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo* 3.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 12.

²³⁵ The head of the Alexandrian school of grammarians in the first century CE.

(For Chaeremon) saw that what those who say that the Sun is the Demiurge, and likewise what is asserted concerning Osiris and Isis, and all the sacred fables, may be resolved into the stars and the phases, occultations and risings of these, or into the increments or decrements of the moon, or into the course of the Sun, or the nocturnal and diurnal hemisphere, or into the river [Nile]. And in short, the Egyptians resolve all things into physical, and nothing into incorporeal and living essences. Most of them likewise suspend that which is in our power from the motion of the stars; and bind all things, though I know not how, with the indissoluble bonds of necessity, which they call fate. They also connect fate with the Gods; whom, nevertheless, they worship in temples and statues, and other things, as the only dissolvers of fate.²³⁶

(Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo* 13, 14).

This passage seems central, since Porphyry attempts to conclude that Egyptian theology differs from Neoplatonic philosophy, based on the fact that the “people of the Nile” do not believe in the incorporeal universe and beings – something core in the Neoplatonic doctrine. Some of them may believe that the Sun is the Creator. However, the Sun as Demiurge is only the physical Sun, which does not coexist in a higher intelligible hypostasis. Indeed, this belief is different from Neoplatonic philosophy and from how Helios is presented in Julian’s *Hymn*. Moreover, the Egyptians believe in necessity, which they call fate, and it is derived from the notion of the celestial objects.²³⁷ They believe in astrology and not in human power of free will. Porphyry disagrees with this notion, while simultaneously showing his ignorance of the details of Egyptian astrology. Despite the fact that Julian mentions ἀνάγκη (Necessity) in his *Hymn to King Helios*,²³⁸ this particular notion of fate and astrology is not found in his text.²³⁹

²³⁶ Porphyry, *Epistula ad Anebonem* 12C1–13A5. Ἐώρα γὰρ τοὺς τὸν ἥλιον δημιουργὸν φαμένους καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν Ὅσιριν καὶ τὴν Ἴσιν καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἱερατικοὺς μύθους ἢ εἰς τοὺς ἀστέρας καὶ τὰς τούτων φάνσεις καὶ κρύψεις καὶ ἐπιτολὰς ἐλιττομένους ἢ εἰς τὰς τῆς σελήνης αὐξήσεις καὶ μειώσεις ἢ εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου πορείαν ἢ τὸ γε νυκτερινὸν ἡμισφαίριον ἢ τὸ ἡμερινὸν ἢ τὸν γε ποταμόν, καὶ ὅλως πάντα εἰς τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἰς ἀσωμάτους καὶ ζώσας οὐσίας ἐρμηνεύοντας. Ὡν οἱ πλείους καὶ τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἀστέρων ἀνήψαν κινήσεως, οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις Ἀνάγκης, ἣν Εἰμαρμένην λέγουσιν, πάντα καταδήσαντες καὶ πάντα τούτοις ἀνάψαντες τοῖς θεοῖς, οὓς ὡς λυτῆρας τῆς Εἰμαρμένης μόνους ἔν τε ἱεροῖς καὶ ξοάνοις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεραπεύουσιν.

²³⁷ That is different from the Necessity of the Chaldeans and Mithraists, that represents the natural laws (physics) of the universe.

²³⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 147A.

²³⁹ However, in the Greek tradition there was a strong belief that the configurations and courses are both signs and causes of things on Earth (Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.1–2).

1.7 Philosophers - Iamblichus

1.7.1 Overview

Iamblichus was a native of Chalcis in Syria. Most likely, he became a pupil of Porphyry and shortly afterwards, he founded his own school in Apamea. He is credited with composing many treatises, but only a few of them survive and almost all of them are in fragments. In opposition to Plotinus, Iamblichus ‘interpreted Platonism as teaching the presence of Gods in the material world. It followed that the embodied soul must not seek only to escape, but must do its share in establishing order and harmony’.²⁴⁰ Iamblichus’ metaphysical beliefs are central to the purpose of this thesis, since Julian himself acknowledges that his own views are based on the teachings of this philosopher, who is considered equal to or just inferior to Plato and Pythagoras.²⁴¹ The dependence of Julian’s writings on the metaphysical doctrine of Iamblichus is not doubted by modern scholars.²⁴² However, the philosopher’s importance on the metaphysical doctrine of the Neoplatonic school has been frequently underestimated.

Up to the mid-twentieth century, many scholars considered the period after Plotinus as one of decline for Platonic philosophy. Iamblichus was wrongly criticized for abandoning philosophy for superstition. This was mostly due to the introduction of theurgy into Neoplatonism, under his guidance. However, in recent years, respect for Iamblichus has increased, as his distinct contribution to the doctrine of the later Neoplatonic school has become clearer and more recognizable.²⁴³ This modern shift regarding the appreciation of Iamblichus as a significant figure in Neoplatonism, with positive contributions to the school, aligns with the view of his contemporary and admirer, Julian. Due to the increased recognition of Iamblichus as a significant constructive thinker, Julian’s metaphysical views in the *Hymn to King Helios* have gained greater appreciation as a valuable resource for understanding fourth-century Neoplatonism.

²⁴⁰ As Elm (2012: 92) confirms, quoting G. Clark.

²⁴¹ Julian, *To Priscus* (12); Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 146a, 157d.

²⁴² Only the precise extent is debatable; Smith 1995: xxvii.

²⁴³ Clarke 2003: xxv–vi; Wallis 1972: 99–100.

1.7.2 *De Mysteriis: Theurgy and the Sun*

The most important work of Iamblichus that has been preserved in its entirety is the *On the Mysteries*. The title *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* was given by the Renaissance scholar Marsilius Ficinus in the 15th century.²⁴⁴ The book was composed sometime between 280 and 305 CE. Although the text is attributed to an Egyptian prophet named Abamon, there is a general consensus among both contemporary and modern authors that this was a pseudonym that Iamblichus used. It is an answer to the aforementioned Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*.²⁴⁵ Assessments of *On the Mysteries* range substantially. From Dodds' 'a manifesto of irrationalism' to Clarke's 'a masterful attempt to combine the teachings of revelation literature with those of Neoplatonism, and to give theurgic rites a philosophical basis'.²⁴⁶

While many scholars generally consider Dodds' view to be anachronistic, Clarke's perspective is more widely accepted and supported by authors like Larsen, Nasemann, and Shaw. Tanaseanu-Döbler also denounces any claims for irrationality since "Iamblichus' worldview and his discourse of the miraculous are structured by specific rules and patterns of argumentation".²⁴⁷ The references to Egyptian theology in the book are just a *façade*, since the purpose of the book is considered to be a simultaneous praise and defense of theurgy. However, the work is more concerned with justifying the philosophers' religious innovations, and less with metaphysics. Nevertheless, some of Iamblichus' views on Helios emerge every now and then. This fact alone makes it an invaluable source for this thesis, since Julian was a fervent initiate. In his *Hymn to the Mother of Gods*, the emperor concludes by wishing to achieve perfection in theurgy.²⁴⁸ Thus, it is highly likely that any reference to Helios' identity in the *De Mysteriis* also reflects Julian's own beliefs.

²⁴⁴ The *De Mysteriis* was most probably brought to him, together with Pletho's *The Magical Oracles of the Magi of Zoroaster*, Psellus' works, and Proclus' *On the Hierarchic Art*, by the Byzantine philosopher Gemistus Pletho (Johnston 2019: 698).

²⁴⁵ Clarke 2003: xxviii–xxix.

²⁴⁶ Dodds 1951: 287; Clarke 2003: xxvi.

²⁴⁷ Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 95 (footnote 242).

²⁴⁸ Julian, *To the Mother of Gods* 180b.

1.7.3 Theurgy – Overview

The Neoplatonic theurgists were basing their doctrines not only on oriental cults, like the Chaldeans, but also on the same sectors and types of lore from which Plato, Empedocles, and Pythagoras were drawing their concerns and activities. Theurgy, or rather the Iamblichean version of it, can be defined as a ‘divine activity communally shared’ and as a “religious ritual demonstrating supernatural power, both symbolized and encapsulated the extraordinary miracle of the soul’s conversion back to its divine cause”.²⁴⁹ As Iamblichus says, it ‘is a method of salvation of the soul’ and this method is ‘the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of the unutterable symbols, understood solely by the Gods’.²⁵⁰ ‘Iamblichus is emphatic in stressing its status as a *techne* or an *episteme*: a systematic body of knowledge and expertise, with different subdisciplines (μέρη), which the practitioner has to appropriate completely, in order to achieve mastery of the whole art’.²⁵¹ It cannot be practiced by someone who is meditating alone, because as Iamblichus says ‘it is impossible to participate individually in the universal orders, but only in communion with the divine choir of those lifted up together, united in mind’.²⁵² It is a response to what Iamblichus saw as ‘the spiritual wasteland of his age, a world that had been drained of all depth, meaning, and divinity’.²⁵³ According to this philosopher, Plotinus’ and Porphyry’s doctrines, which claim that the Gods are too noetic to be engaged in material rites, are simultaneously both incorrect and “dangerous”. Iamblichus, like a prophet, realized that this belief would spell the ruin of all holy ritual and theurgic communion between Gods and men. In addition, it could tear apart the world of Plato in *Timaeus*. It created a bleak vision of the world, since it kept the divine at a distance from the Earth and prevented it from mingling with men. In

²⁴⁹ Shaw 2014: xx; Clarke 2003: xxvii.

²⁵⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 1.12, 2.11.

²⁵¹ Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 100; “From these principles it is possible to set out ‘scientifically’, ἐπιστημονικῶς, all the subdisciplines (εἶδη) of divination. Thus, even the subdisciplines of ‘theurgy’, like divination, are assigned a rigorous systematic structure. Therefore, we may conclude that Iamblichus does not privilege *techne* over *episteme* in order to stress its primarily non-theoretical character” (Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 100 (footnote 279); See also Iamblichus (*De Mysteriorum* 5.18, 5.26).

²⁵² Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus* 106.

²⁵³ John Milbank describes our modern era in a similar tone; see Shaw 1995: xxi.

other words, our planet was considered a desert devoid of Gods.²⁵⁴ Iamblichus would not let the earthly spiritual desolation happen. This dismal fate of mankind had to be changed immediately. Neoplatonism urgently needed a mediator between the mundane and the divine. Hence, he developed his own version of theurgy as the perfect means to restore contact with the divine order and to recover Plato's positive orientation toward the cosmos.²⁵⁵ Theurgy aims to reinforce the bond between the Gods and our physical world.

It is important to note that the philosophical goal did not change – just the means of achieving it. The ultimate aim was still the ὁμοίωσις τῷ Θεῷ (assimilation to God). From the Plotinic θεολογία (the word of God), it became the Iamblichean θεωργία (the work of God). The main reason that Iamblichus believed theology would not work, was because of the issue of the soul's place in the sensible cosmos. In direct contrast to the Plotinic doctrine of the soul, which points to the existence of an undescended one, Iamblichus believed that the entire soul had descended to Earth, and had become trapped in the material world. Hence, contemplation alone could not elevate it to the noetic world. It needed a more practical/material ritual. Theurgy is the “work of the Gods”, in which the human soul participated both as recipient and benefactor, and the only means of achieving the ὁμοίωσις τῷ Θεῷ (according to the theurgists). The “work of the Gods” includes all of the physical world (animals, humans, plants, earth objects). It is through this theurgic use of matter that the soul can rise all the way up to the noetic realm and join the One.²⁵⁶ This divine matter invokes the noetic light, hence light becomes of prime importance in theurgy. As Iamblichus says, characteristically, ‘all are reduced to one, the shining of the bright light in whatever way through whatever instruments it may shine forth’.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Brown (1978: 101) acutely observes that the Christians also believed that the physical world is Godless, hence their prevalence in the fourth century brought the final blow in disconnecting the physical world from God.

²⁵⁵ Shaw 2014: 16.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* x, 26.

²⁵⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.14.

1.7.4 Theurgy – Illuminated Matter

The importance of matter for the theurgists is striking. The embodiment of the soul became a divine service, a way of manifesting the will and beauty of the Gods. Theurgy is a ritual of sharing and cooperation with the rest of the natural world. “The theurgist’s highest good was not realized by escaping from materiality, but by embracing matter and multiplicity in a demiurgic way”.²⁵⁸ The only matter that is rejected is the one which is alien to the Gods. In fact, the salvation of the soul and the power of divination can only be attained through the theurgic use of matter that contains the divine itself. This notion is supported by Plato’s definition of God as the Demiurge (the Creator), who coordinates the ordering of matter. Moreover, by embracing divine matter through theurgy, one could participate in the creation of the cosmos and the Demiurge himself.²⁵⁹ Iamblichus uses the expressive term “illuminated matter”, hence alluding to another characteristic of Helios.²⁶⁰ The logic goes that, since it is necessary for the earthly things not to be deprived of participation in the divine, Earth also receives a share in the divinity. Thus, certain objects on our planet have received the divine power themselves. This divine power is guided by the “World Soul”. In Theurgy, the Goddess Hecate plays an indispensable role, since she is the speaker of many of the lines in the *Chaldean Oracles* and she is also the personification of the “World Soul”. All individual souls are linked with Hecate, and they are properly aligned with her through the ritual of theurgy – a *praxis* that gives them direct participation in the “Whole”.²⁶¹ The theurgic reference to Hecate almost certainly derives from the *Chaldean Oracles*.²⁶² In fact, there are many Chaldean notions in the *De Mysteriis* and Iamblichus himself refers to and quotes the Chaldean prophets.²⁶³

Iamblichus gives us a rough idea about what this “illuminated matter” exactly is and what it does. ‘Everything is based on the belief that the Gods shed their light everywhere in this realm, and whether an individual or object participates in their light depends upon the suitability of the receiver’.²⁶⁴ By observation and discovery, ‘the theurgic

²⁵⁸ Shaw 2014: 26.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 25–26.

²⁶⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.11–15, 5.23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* 2.7.

²⁶² Clarke 2003:101 (footnote 138); Lewy 1978: 382.

²⁶³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 3.31.

²⁶⁴ Finamore 1998: 66.

art in many cases links together stones, plants, animals, aromatic substances, and other such things that are sacred, perfect and godlike, and then from all these composes an integrated and pure receptacle'.²⁶⁵ All of these divine material objects or beings, which serve as ὑποδοχαί (receptacles), are called συνθήματα (symbols or signatures). Only with the use of these divine συνθήματα, 'the terrestrial realm or the men who dwell on Earth could enjoy participation in the existence of the higher beings. This procedure activates the better elements within us, and as a result the illuminated soul rises through light towards the beings superior to it'.²⁶⁶ Such symbols bear the "signatures" of the Gods and each is aligned with a specific deity. The concept of divine συνθήματα, introduced by Iamblichus into Platonic theurgy, appears to have been influenced by the mystery cults that flourished in the Roman East, particularly in Hellenized Egypt. Notably, these influences include the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the *Greek Magical Papyri*.²⁶⁷ As previously observed, several symbols were also used in the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri spells, and the spell of *direct vision* bears a resemblance to the theurgic experience of the bright noetic light. However, there is a fundamental difference between theurgy and the *Magical Papyri*. The latter is considered magic/technical, operating within the bounds of the generated realm, making use of horoscopes, manipulating and exploiting natural forces, and operating on an individual level, while the former 'summons the daemon down from the higher causal principles, and operates on a more universal basis... transcending the realm of nature' and reaching the supernatural (ὑπὲρ φύσιν or ὑπερφύης).²⁶⁸ Iamblichus, because of the fundamental difference mentioned above, regarded himself and theurgy as superior to magic practitioners and their rituals. This direct contact with God or the higher entities is called σύστασις (standing together), or sometimes, αὐτοψία (a 'face-to-face vision'), and these two terms are found both in theurgic sources and the *Magical Papyri*. "Because theurgic entities were fiery and filled with light, a more precise term for bringing on σύστασις with one of them was 'leading in the light'— *photagogia*

²⁶⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.23.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 5.21, 5.23, 8.7.

²⁶⁷ Shaw 2014: 25 (footnote 52); Derchain 1963: 220–26; Clarke 2003: xliii–xliv.

²⁶⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 9.1.

(φωταγωγία)”.²⁶⁹ This beneficial divine light bestows on theurgists every virtue and liberates them from passion.²⁷⁰

1.7.5 Theurgy – Ritual, Julian, light and Helios

One of the most important characteristics of theurgy is that it is open to anyone. Its soteriology can theoretically touch any soul, from the most material to the most spiritual, and its revelation, like that of Christianity, is intended for the masses, as anyone can theoretically be initiated into theurgy.²⁷¹ It can also be considered a philosophical “shortcut”, since the union with the ineffable, which Plotinus accomplished after years of contemplation, can be achieved with only a few days of preparation.²⁷² Hence, when young Julian approached Maximus of Ephesus, he was able to be initiated almost immediately into the theurgic ritual by this great hierophant and finally found what he had been seeking.²⁷³ This initiation was a landmark event in Julian’s solar faith. During the ceremony, the statues came to life and various συνθήματα were used together with luminous effects.²⁷⁴ ‘The sacrifice with this sort of matter stirs the Gods up into manifestation and immediately invokes their appearance, receives them when they come forth, and reveals them perfectly’.²⁷⁵ The hierophant invoked Hecate, so that the theurgist would be put into contact with the channel by which the soul had descended and could hope to reascend.²⁷⁶ Then after a while, the initiates were granted blessed visions. The noetic bright light appeared, and with the help of Hecate and the intelligible rays of the Sun, “teleported” the soul of the initiates (and of young Julian) to the noetic world of the intelligibles.²⁷⁷ Iamblichus himself emphasizes the importance of the theurgic light: (Theurgy) ‘causes a light to shine with intelligible harmony, and it reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eyes of the soul by means of the eyes of the body’.²⁷⁸ In other words,

²⁶⁹ Johnston 2019: 709.

²⁷⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 3.31.

²⁷¹ Shaw 2014: 17.

²⁷² Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 235d.

²⁷³ Eunapius, *The lives of the sophists* 436; Elm (2012: 95); Julian had initially become a devoted pupil of Aedesius. Maximus of Ephesus was a disciple of Aedesius who was Iamblichus’ disciple.

²⁷⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 4.55.

²⁷⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.23.

²⁷⁶ Smith 1995: 103.

²⁷⁷ ‘The Gods shed their light upon theurgists’ (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.12).

²⁷⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.6.

the ritual, by using the corporeal vision as a means to see the incorporeal, creates a theophanie (trance state) for the initiates. The material body plays an important part in this process, since “the psychic organ that received the divine light was the pneumatic or luminous body... In effect, Iamblichus used the ‘eyes of the body’ to awaken the ‘eyes of the soul’”.²⁷⁹ That is why part of the purification necessary to strengthen the pneumatic vehicle, or the body of the soul – which is the garment enclosing the soul – includes preparing the physical body through a specific diet for several days before the ritual. It is within this pneumatic body, as well as the aetheric and luminous (αἰθερώδους καὶ αὐγοειδοῦς) bodies, that the soul experiences its most profound illuminations by inhaling the Sun’s rays.²⁸⁰

The emperor in the *Hymn to King Helios* implies that he experienced a similar “trance” when he was younger and gazed at the Sun or the night sky, although at that time, he did not understand its meaning.²⁸¹ In the theurgic ritual, this became clear. Through these unburning bright lights, visible even in the dark with eyes closed, Julian was able to truly perceive King Helios, his favorite noeric divinity. This marked a milestone in his life because, at that precise moment, he saw the noetic light of Helios, which lifted him out of the darkness in which he had lived all those years.²⁸² The emperor describes this initiation as the moment he arrived at the threshold of philosophy, since it was this ritual that provided him with “concrete proof” of the noeric Helios’ true existence.²⁸³ In the ceremony, the emperor experienced the visionary revelation of Helios’ intelligible light, which could actually be seen by the human soul.²⁸⁴ No wonder that Julian considered the theurgists a special privileged group, directly connected with the divine.

The above description reflects Julian’s experience of the theurgic ritual only in the most approximate way. In addition, whether we (modern scholars) believe it to be an actual perception of the divine light of the noeric Intellect or not, as Beck says, is completely

²⁷⁹ Shaw 2014: 246–48.

²⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 5.26, 6.6, 7.2. Shaw (1995: 249–50) also points out to the similarities between the theurgic and the Kundalini yogic practices. Julian himself places primary importance on this enlightened purification, since he supports that, “Those who purified ‘the eyes of the soul’ through retreat and ‘turn [their] eyes inward’ could, with divine guidance, discern these (transcendent) prior causes in their own souls, “not actually, but potentially” (Elm 2012: 128).

²⁸¹ Smith 1995: 184; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131A.

²⁸² Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131a; Julian, *To the Mother of the Gods* 174b–c.

²⁸³ Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 235b.

²⁸⁴ Smith 1995: 187.

irrelevant.²⁸⁵ What is important is that we have to see through the eyes of Julian and try to enter his mind in order to better understand his conception of King Helios. Julian certainly did not consider the theurgic lights and the animation of the statues to be some kind of trick, as Eunapius states.²⁸⁶ This is why, according to Julian, the hierophant Maximus was highly esteemed as ‘one who surpasses all men in his time’, and taught him ‘to regard the Gods as guides to all that is good’.²⁸⁷

1.7.6 *De Mysteriis* – Helios and Light

There are several references to the Sun and light in the *De Mysteriis*. First of all, a solar reference is present in the identity of the primary Egyptian deity, which Abamon calls *Ikton* and identifies with τὸ ἓν ἀμερές (the partless One). This supreme God is ‘presumably the equivalent of the Neoplatonic One’, or most likely, ‘the presiding monad of the intelligible realm, the ἓν ὄν, or One-Being’.²⁸⁸ Paradoxically, *Ikton* cannot be identified with any God of the traditional Egyptian religion. However, Clarke (2003: xlv) suggests that he may be identified with the Sun God *Ihy*, the first-born son of the celestial Goddess Hathor. Thus, the One-Being is presented as a solar Deity. Moreover, the importance of light/fire in Theurgy is enhanced by the fact that Iamblichus calls the theurgists genuine “athletes of the fire”.²⁸⁹ Furthermore, this philosopher, like Plotinus, gives many solar allusions to explain the noetic characteristic of the divinities. This tactic of comparing noetic powers to the Sun’s rays fundamentally suggests a strong similarity between them. ‘The divinity illumines everything from without, even as the Sun lights everything from without with its rays. Even as the sunlight envelops what it illuminates, so also does the power of the Gods embrace from outside what it participates in it’.²⁹⁰ Such comparisons in the *De Mysteriis* are almost endless. Moreover, the “light of the Gods” has other similarities with the Sun’s light. Apart from the fact that both lights illuminate their subjects

²⁸⁵ Beck 2006: 88.

²⁸⁶ Eunapius, *The lives of the sophists* 436; Actually, Eunapius is reporting Eusebius of Myndus’ description of the ritual, not his own view.

²⁸⁷ Julian, *To the Cynic Heracleios* 235b.

²⁸⁸ Clarke 2003: xlv.

²⁸⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.10.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 1.9.

transcendently, they also form a continuum. Light cannot be cut; it is indivisible and always connected with its source. Even when it withdraws, the heat still remains in the bodies.

The divine light ‘is present indivisibly to all things that are capable of participating in it, and has filled everything with its perfect power’.²⁹¹ Its main characteristic is its unlimited causal superiority, which brings all things to completion within itself, uniting extremities with their starting points. The whole universe imitates this last characteristic. Hence, when it performs its circular revolution, it unites with itself and leads the elements in their cyclic dance. It holds everything together by producing a single continuity and harmony of all with all. In other words, the divine light is the single cause of the very existence and functioning of the universe. Hence, its cosmological significance is immense. Moreover, from the above description, it can be deduced that its attributes resemble those of the Plotinic World Soul. One more characteristic of the light of the Gods is that it is self-revealing/self-summoned, self-energizing, and self-willed. The invocations in theurgy invite this transcendent light to appear and to become visible to the human soul. It appears in the form of “blessed visions” and elevates the human soul to the noetic realm, making it no longer mundane. The concept of the soul's elevation through light is a significant theme in *On the Mysteries*; consequently, Iamblichus reiterates it on several occasions. During its solar ascension, the soul reaches the angelic order, which represents one of the highest sublunar divinities.²⁹²

All divinities are blessed with divine light, which is radiated by the divine fire from the highest point of the cosmological scale to its lowest depths. The divine fire shines universally on its own initiative.²⁹³ The degree of its presence depends on the order of each divinity.²⁹⁴ Thus, the images of the Gods are filled with the transcendent light and flash forth brighter than light. The ἐπίλαμψις (brightness) of this light is so great that our eyes are not able to withstand it.²⁹⁵ The archangels are full of supernatural light, which is partly bearable to the eyes. The angels are bright with perfectly endurable light. The daemons glow with smoldering fire with no bright radiance. The heroes have a fire that blends

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.* 1.11–12, 2.2.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* 4.3.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 2.4.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.8.

diverse elements. The cosmic archons reveal a comparatively pure fire, while the material ones, a mixed fire of several contrary elements. Finally, the souls produce a dim visible light, mixed with many compounds from the realm of generation.²⁹⁶ From all the above, it becomes clear that the Gods in the cosmological hierarchy have the purest form of light. Iamblichus describes it as having a fiery nature that fully preserves the indivisible and ineffable characteristics of the divine light, filling all the depths of the cosmos in a fiery yet non-cosmic manner. The fiery nature of the intelligible is another concept derived from Chaldean thought. There are actually three types of fire that correspond to the three levels of our universe: the earthly, the aerial, and the celestial – the brightest of all.²⁹⁷ The condition of light can change depending on the grade of the divinity. Thus, while the fire of the Gods is wholly stable, that of the souls changes according to multiple movements.²⁹⁸ From the above, it can be deduced that Iamblichus had developed “a theory of light” where the divine light participates as completely pure and incorporeal at the highest Intelligible levels, while degrading in quality as it goes down the hierarchy until its downfall to the material world.²⁹⁹

This divine light is not visible to human eyes but only to the “eyes” of the purified vehicle. However, it can be perceived through the ritual of theurgy. ‘Because divinity was understood to be essentially light, theurgic rituals often involved the manipulation or invocation of light’.³⁰⁰ During the theurgic ritual, the presence of the God’s fire and an ineffable form of light from without invade the person possessed. The Gods cause our human soul’s light to shine with intelligible harmony and reveal what is incorporeal as if it were corporeal to the eyes of the soul. Its inner light and form become pure and stable. This presence of divine light within our soul, which flashes like lightning from above, induces a trance state by depriving us of our senses, as Iamblichus asserts. However, one needs extended theurgic practice and prayers to attain a “divinely” trance state. This is because the divine light is too bright for our eyes to bear it initially. “Prayer nurtures our intellect, enlarges very greatly our soul’s receptivity to the Gods, reveals to men the life of

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 2.4, 2.7.

²⁹⁷ Clarke 2003: 95 (footnote 129).

²⁹⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.4.

²⁹⁹ Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013:103) and Finamore (1993: 60-61) also support this view.

³⁰⁰ Johnston 2019: 705.

the Gods, accustoms their eyes to the brightness of divine light... brings to perfection good hope and faith concerning the light”.³⁰¹ Those possessed (with the divine) can walk on fire without feeling anything and perform divination by uttering Gods’ words. Many times, the divine creates illuminations that descend from the Gods and entirely banish our own consciousness and movement.³⁰² In addition, this divine fire purifies the luminous spirit in us, thus strengthening and illuminating our soul-vehicle. It is through this illuminous vehicle that the soul comes down to the sensible world from the aether and vice versa.³⁰³ In another instance, Iamblichus says that the divine light is transcending through rays. The prophetess at Delphi ‘gives herself to the divine spirit, and is illuminated by the ray of divine fire’.³⁰⁴ This visual divine light should by no means be confused with the light of a regular fire; ‘Then, indeed, the God is present, shining on her (the soul) separately, being himself other than the fire’.³⁰⁵ Interestingly, this unburning fire can appear in full force either in the dark or under sunlight, hence it is not influenced by the sensible world’s conditions.³⁰⁶

Iamblichus makes clear that the luminous Gods appear out of their own free will and not out of necessity as Porphyry implies, since they are superior and thus not bound by necessity (κρείττων γὰρ ἀνάγκης).³⁰⁷ According to Iamblichus, the light of the Gods, invoked through the ritual of theurgy, is the only hope for our souls. ‘There is one remedy for its (the soul’s) inherent straying, confusion, and unstable changing, and that is, if it participates so far as possible in some portion of the divine light’.³⁰⁸ The World Soul, which is the cosmic Hecate, is also described as having a fiery/solar nature. It is seen as a shapeless fire manifesting itself around the entire cosmos as a whole, indivisible and formless Soul of the All.³⁰⁹

³⁰¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 5.26.

³⁰² *Ibid.* 2.5–6, 3.5–6, 3.11.

³⁰³ *Ibid.* 3.2, 3.13; For the different types of the Soul in the universal hierarchy see Proclus (*In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 3.234.18–24).

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 3.11. ‘Ἡ δ’ ἐν Δελφοῖς προφητὶς...δίδωσιν ἑαυτὴν τῷ θεῷ πνεύματι, ἀπὸ τε τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ πυρὸς ἀκτίνος καταναγάζεται’.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* ‘Καὶ τότε πάρεστιν αὐτῇ χωριστῶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπιλάμπων, ἕτερος ὢν καὶ τοῦ πυρὸς’.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 3.14.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 3.18.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* ‘Μία δ’ ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῷ τῆς ἐνυπαρχούσης πλάνης καὶ ταταχῆς καὶ τῆς ἀστάτου μεταβολῆς ἰατρεία, εἴ τινα μετουσίαν θεοῦ φωτὸς κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν μεταλάβοι’.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 2.7

The presence of the superior beings in the sensible world is a key concept for Iamblichus. As he says characteristically, ‘the primary beings illuminate (ἐλλάμπει) even the lowest levels, and the immaterial are present immaterially to the material’.³¹⁰ It is fascinating that, once again, a divine presence is described with solar characteristics, as it is referred to as illumination. In one more allusion, the truth is coexistent with the Gods, just as light is connected with the Sun.³¹¹ Iamblichus quotes Porphyry by calling the ignorance of honourable and lovely things “darkness”, but the knowledge of them “light”.³¹² This allegoric interpretation of darkness and light can act as a guide in deciphering Julian’s similar expressions.

One of the clearest connections between the Intellect and Helios is found in Iamblichus’ definition of the goal of theurgy. This “divine” philosopher says that the soul’s ‘ascent to the intelligible fire is granted to theurgists, a process which indeed must be proposed as the goal of all foreknowledge and of every theurgic operation’.³¹³ From this statement, it can be clearly deduced that the ascent of the soul to the intelligible fire is the ultimate goal for the theurgists and philosophers. Moreover, this ascent is done through immaterial fire.³¹⁴ In another paragraph, Iamblichus states that the soul ascends within the Intellect.³¹⁵ This last notion agrees with what is commonly accepted as the goal of philosophy for the Neoplatonists: to become assimilated with God/Intellect or the One. Hence, the intelligible fire, which radiates the intelligible light, can be identified with the Intellect. Moreover, this divine fiery source can also be described as an Intelligible Helios – a kind of fiery sphere – thus establishing a connection between the Intellect and the concept of a noetic Helios.³¹⁶ This interpretation aligns with Plotinus’ designation of the Intellect as Helios.³¹⁷

The notion of equivalence between the Intellect and Helios is further reinforced when Iamblichus explains the Egyptian symbols and myths. As mentioned in the previous

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* 5.23.

³¹¹ *Ibid.* 2.10.

³¹² *Ibid.* 2.11.

³¹³ *Ibid.* Δίδεται τοῖς θεουργοῖς ἡ πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν πῦρ ἄνοδος, ὃ δὴ καὶ τέλος δεῖ πάσης μὲν προγνώσεως πάσης δὲ θεουργικῆς πραγματείας προτίθεσθαι.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 5.26.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 5.15.

³¹⁶ It has already been demonstrated that Neoplatonic philosophers frequently employ solar imagery in their attempts to describe the characteristics of the Intellect, often portraying it as a fiery orb.

³¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11.15–21.

chapter, in traditional Egyptian mythology, the plant Lotus represents the soul of the Sun God Re. Iamblichus does not hesitate to declare that the plant's circular motion is uniquely connatural with the activity of the Intellect.³¹⁸ – hence implying that the Intellect and the Sun God Re are to be considered as similar cosmological forces. This view of Helios as the noetic ruler continues in the text. In his effort to explain the myth the Sun God Re, who is presented as the helmsman presiding over the ship while taking charge of its rudder, Iamblichus describes Helios as the transcendent leader in charge of the helm of the world. The Sun is depicted as the leader and guide who, possessing complete control over all the forces of the universe, directs and organizes their creative functions – much like the World Soul described by Plotinus.³¹⁹ As he says, characteristically: ‘every portion of the heavens, every sign of the zodiac, all the heavenly motions, and all time, according to which the cosmos is moved, and all things in the universe receive the potencies emanating from the sun’.³²⁰ Thus, the allegorical explanation of the various symbols indicate Helios’ ‘immutable, stable, unfailing, and at the same time complete gift to the universe’.³²¹ Pachoumi finds a direct parallelism between the Iamblichean cosmocrator Helios and Plotinus’ manifold One, since they are both at the same time One and many.³²²

1.7.7 Metaphysics

Iamblichus’ metaphysical system is significantly more complex than that of his Neoplatonic predecessors. Its composition is somewhat problematic because, of all his numerous treatises, only the *De Mysteriis* and some fragments have survived. However, a rough reconstruction can be made. Iamblichus is considered to be the only one that supported the existence of two Ones, or first principles.³²³ Moreover, he is the first to have developed the terms, which were adopted by many later Neoplatonists, of the ἀμέθεκτος (unparticipated) and μέθεκτος or μετεχόμενος (participated). The idea is that each intelligible entity (Intellect) has a truly separate, unmixed and transcendent aspect: the

³¹⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 7.2.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.* 7.3. Πᾶν μόριον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ πᾶν ζώδιον καὶ πᾶσα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ φορὰ καὶ πᾶς χρόνος, καθ’ ὃν κινεῖται ὁ κόσμος, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν τοῖς ὅλοις δέχονται ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου κατιούσας δυνάμεις.

³²¹ *Ibid.* ἐκδεικνύμενος δὲ τὴν ἀμετάβλητον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐστῶσαν καὶ ἀνέκλειπτον καὶ ὁμοῦ πᾶσαν καὶ ἄθρόαν εἰς ὅλον τὸν κόσμον δόσιν.

³²² Pachoumi (2017): 103–104.

³²³ Dillon 1972: 104.

unparticipated, which is called Henad.³²⁴ At the same time, it has a more “generous” nature, which relates and connects to other entities and finally, to the sensible reality: the participated. The unparticipated aspect always rests in its own activity, while the participated one engages in external activity. Each level in the cosmological hierarchy has a triadic structure – that is, its Intellect has three different moments: At the top stands the unparticipated, in the middle, the participant, and at the bottom, the participated.³²⁵ The participated Intellect, by creating its “identical” copy, functions as the connecting link between the several levels in the cosmological hierarchy. Thus, the participated entity always corresponds to the unparticipated of the next lower level.³²⁶ As Proclus says, each Henad ‘is nothing else than the One in its participated aspect’.³²⁷ The middle participant (κατὰ μέθεξιν or ἐν σχέσει), is described as that which gathers together the fullness (συμπλήρωσις) of the three elements in each level.³²⁸

At the very top of the cosmological hierarchy stands the ineffable One. As mentioned earlier, it has a dualistic nature (there are two Ones). Iamblichus describes the first One as πάντα ἄρρητος being completely independent from our universe, while the second One is presiding over, but not correlated (ἀσύντακτος) to, the noetic triad.³²⁹ The third divinity is called the dyad, which is composed of the πέρας (limit) and ἄπειρον (unlimited). Finally, after the dyad is our entire universe, where the unparticipated One Being or Eternal Being (τὸ ἐν ὄν or τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν) stands at the top of the triads of the noetic world. This unparticipated Monad “rules” the noetic realm. In Iamblichus’ view, the unparticipated One Being seems to be the alter ego of the participated ineffable One³³⁰, and has also been identified with Aeon (Αἰών). It is important to note that the One Being (First Intellect) has not filled our mind with knowledge of itself, hence we cannot know it. It serves as a measure (μέτρον) for the noetic realm the same way that Time (Χρόνος) serves the psychic and material realms.

³²⁴ Mesyats 2012: 153–168.

³²⁵ Wallis 1072: 126.

³²⁶ Remes 2008: 70–71.

³²⁷ Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem* 6.1069.7.

³²⁸ Dillon 1973: 418.

³²⁹ *Ibid.* 30. κρεῖττον καὶ τῶν γενῶν τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τῶν ἰδεῶν, ἐπ’ ἅκρῳ τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας, πρῶτος μετέχων τοῦ ἐνός.

³³⁰ Iamblichus, *In Timaeum II (Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta)* 29; Dillon 1973: 33, 35.

The Iamblichean intelligible world is far more complex than Plotinus', since it most likely includes eight intelligible/intellectual triads: three noetic, three noetic/noeric, and two noeric. The noeric realm, is described as an intellectual Hebdomad, a concept that is coming from the *Chaldean Oracles*.³³¹ It includes seven entities: two noeric triads (οἱ πατέρες and οἱ ἀμειλικτοί) and the ὁ ὑπεζωκός.³³² Each noetic/noeric triad is based on the three moments of the Intellect, described earlier. Remarkably, the triads appear to be directly related to the Chaldean triadic system: πατήρ (Father) or ὄν (Being), ζωή (Life) or δύναμις (Force), and νοῦς (Intellect).³³³ In the system of Iamblichus: the first element, ὄν (Being), can also be called νοῦς χωριστός (separated Intellect) or ἀμέθεκτος; the middle (Life) is κατὰ μέθεξιν; while the third element, νοῦς (Intellect), is referred to as νοῦς ἀχώριστος (non-separated Intellect) or μέθεκτος. There is also the concept of a force that continuously rotates everything in the universe in one of two opposite circular motions, hence the movement of νοῦς ἀμέθεκτος is described as the “motion of the same” (φορὰν τῆς ταυτοῦ), and that of νοῦς μέθεκτος as the “motion of the other” (φορὰν τῆς θατέρου).³³⁴ According to Proclus, the divinities in the first noeric triad in the hebdomad are called the *Fathers* (Πατέρες), and represent the Chaldean or Pythagorean triad of ὄν, ζωή, νοῦς. The third “Father”, who is equated with the noeric participated νοῦς, corresponds to the Platonic Demiurge.³³⁵ Damascius and Proclus state that Iamblichus located the monads of the Forms in the καθαρὸς or ἀπλοῦς νοῦς (the unparticipated ὄν, which is the first Intellect in the first noeric triad of the Hebdomad). By this, he means τὸ ἐκάστου (εἰδους) ἀδιάκριτον, not the Forms themselves, which properly reside in the participated νοῦς (the third Intellect in the first noeric triad of the Hebdomad).³³⁶ As mentioned earlier, the third Intellect in the first noeric triad is called Demiurge, and is identified by scholiasts with Zeus.³³⁷ To make things

³³¹ Tardieu 1980: 195.

³³² Proclus, *Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 1.308.20–24; The Chaldean notion of ὁ ὑπεζωκός represents the seventh member of the noeric hebdomad in Chaldaean-influenced Neoplatonic theology (Lewy 2011: 484).

³³³ Dillon 1973: 36.

³³⁴ Dillon 1973: 336; Plato, *Timaeus* 35b.

³³⁵ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 1.308.20–24. Μετὰ τὰς νοητὰς τριάδας καὶ τὰς τῶν νοερῶν θεῶν τρεῖς τριάδας ἐν τῇ νοερᾷ ἐβδομάδι τὴν τρίτην ἐν τοῖς πατράσιν ἀπονέμει τῷ δημιουργῷ τάξιν.

³³⁶ Dillon 1973: 37, 418; Iamblichus, *In Philebus (Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta)* 6; Proclus, *In Platonis* 1.308.20–24.

³³⁷ Dillon 1973: 418; Clarke 2003: 245; Subsequently, based on the Iamblichean triadic concept, the Demiurge in the first noeric triad (οἱ πατέρες) should be equivalent to the unparticipated Intellect in the

more complicated, the Paradigm is another name of the first divinity of the highest noetic triad. This Being is described as the loftiest in the whole noetic world (τὸ ὅπερ ὄν), thus it is equivalent to the top One-Being.³³⁸ The three aspects of Good (Beauty, Symmetry, and Truth) reside in the πάτριος νοῦς (Father Intellect), who must be either the first Intellect of the first noetic triad, or the first Intellect of the first noeric triad in the Hebdomad.³³⁹ The noeric divinities, guided by the participated noeric Intellect (Demiurge), are responsible for the creation of our sensible world, which occupies the lowest position in the cosmological hierarchy. Consequently, the visible cosmos is directly dependent on the higher noeric powers. This dependency also extends to the Soul and various demonic entities. The influence of Helios on all living beings is of primary importance. As Iamblichus says, ‘the terrestrial things derive their nourishment from celestial sources (the Sun). It is even more clear for the invisible causes. For soul is brought to completion by Intellect, and nature by soul, and all things similarly are nourished by their causes’.³⁴⁰ This noeric light from the Intellect that nourishes the Soul ‘travels not only within our own realm but also between (the ultramundane) realms’.³⁴¹

It seems that the noetic/noeric realms also have a leader to coordinate them. Iamblichus says that the Demiurge (the Creator) ‘gathers into one and holds in subjection to himself’ the noetic world.³⁴² It is not clear if there is just one Demiurge encompassing all the three triads in the noetic/noeric world or three different Demiurges (one for each realm), or just one Demiurge in one realm.³⁴³ However, he is most probably placed in the noeric realm, and is identified with the Demiurge that is mentioned in the previous paragraph, who is the third participated Intellect in the first noeric triad (οἱ πατέρες) in the

second noeric triad (οἱ ἀμειλικτοί). However, there appears to be no direct reference to this in the Chaldean dogma, where the three leaders in the second noeric triad seem to be subordinate to the Demiurge.

³³⁸ ‘This habit of referring to the same principle in different ways to suit different contexts (or in a commentary different lemmata) is a feature of Neoplatonic exegesis which can prove bewildering’ (Dillon 1973: 36).

³³⁹ Dillon 1973: 37.

³⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.10.

³⁴¹ Finamore 1993: 56.

³⁴² Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 1.317.20–25.

³⁴³ Sometimes there is confusion in the wording of the noetic/noeric notion, since they are often used interchangeably, both by ancient and modern authors; It is generally believed that the Chaldeans held the view that ‘the Demiurge presided over the whole noeric realm, or rather that the whole noeric realm was demiurgic’ (Dillon 1973: 418).

Hebdomad, and appears to be the leader of the second noeric triad.³⁴⁴ In another instance, Iamblichus says that ‘the Demiurge has set before all living creatures on sea and land copious and readily available sustenance’,³⁴⁵ thus supporting the view that the Demiurge is the creator of the sensible world. This is further reinforced by the fact that Proclus also calls Demiurge the God that created the sensible world, and equates him with Zeus.³⁴⁶ Julian also equates King Helios with Zeus, calls him the third Creator/Demiurge, and considers him leader of all the creative forces.³⁴⁷ Moreover, it is logical that the creator of the sensible world should be the leader and coordinator of all noeric forces (Gods) responsible for the creation of our visible cosmos. This idea also aligns with Plato’s concept of the Demiurge in *Timaeus*. Porphyry equates the Demiurge with the hypercosmic Soul, because she also created the material world. This is rather intriguing, since Plotinus’ description of the Universal Soul seems to bear resemblance to Julian’s King Helios. Between the noeric world and Earth, there are several lesser luminous divinities, who can influence our lives and bring us into connection with the Demiurge.³⁴⁸ This role is mostly attributed to the Daimons, who are agents of the Demiurge in his cosmogonic activity.

Iamblichus places the psychic realm within the noeric hypostasis. In addition, the Soul partakes in the participated noeric Intellect and thus the Demiurge (καθόσον ἐστὶ νοερά).³⁴⁹ The triadic notion of the ultramundane worlds seems to apply to the nature of the Soul, as well. Hence, there are actually three moments of the Soul: Ἡ ἀμέθεκτος/ὅλη ψυχή (the Whole Soul), ἡ μεθεκτὴ ψυχή (the soul of the universe) and ἡ ψυχή κατὰ μέθεξιν or ἡ μερικὴ ψυχή (the Soul divided among bodies to individual souls). The Whole Soul serves the role of the Monad for the Souls, who is the transcendent source of both the Soul of the Cosmos and the individual souls, and resides in the unparticipated Intellect. There, all Souls are in a neutral state, being unmixed with Soul’s life and power, and they have no

³⁴⁴ Damascius is claiming that the Chaldeans considered all the noeric entities demiurgic and calls them the seven supramundane Creators of the theurgists – οἱ ἑπτα δις ἐπέκεινα δημιουργοὶ παρὰ τοῖς θεουργοῖς (Dillon 1973: 418); This seems to be directly related to the appellation of Helios as ὁ ἐπάκτης θεός, by both Julian and the Chaldeans.

³⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5.10.

³⁴⁶ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 1.317.17.

³⁴⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* (XI) 141c, 143d; Julian, *To the Mother of the Gods* 161d.

³⁴⁸ These divinities range from Archangels, to Angels, Daimons, Heroes, and Cosmic Archons (material and immaterial).

³⁴⁹ Iamblichus bases this view on the belief that Plato (*Timaeus* 36c) is referring to the Intellect and not to the Soul.

contact with this high Intellect. It is the middle participant Intellect who mingles with them, directs them, and brings the two Souls (μεθεκτὴ ψυχή and μερικὴ ψυχή) to the participated noeric Intellect, who in his turn gives them life and powers. Thus, the participant Intellect acts as the intermediary through which the Soul is united with the Demiurge. The whole psychic realm is penetrated and guided by this noeric participated Intellect. The Soul's movement is twofold: it occurs from top to bottom and vice versa. Without the help of the participated Intellect, there can be no ascent of the soul to the higher Intellect.³⁵⁰ The notion of the affiliation of the Universal Soul with the Demiurge is important for our purposes, since it can explain the absence of the Soul from Julian's metaphysics in the *Hymn to King Helios*.

1.7.8 Metaphysics – Simplified Version

In his effort to present it as Egyptian, Iamblichus portrays a much more simplified metaphysical schema in the *De Mystериis*. However, it is, in reality, a brief summary of his more elaborated one. It is also possible that a simpler schema was needed to be more accessible to the average initiate, as the one previously described is highly complex.³⁵¹ Either out of modesty or in order to promote the truthfulness that comes out from the ancient knowledge, Iamblichus claims that all of this information derives from the Hermetic writings.³⁵² The One is a single entity which exists outside our universe. It is established as a Paradigm for the self-fathering true Good, who is a Monad springing from the One, the first God and king of our cosmos. From this pre-essential Monad – the “Father of Essence” – springs the Essence. The Essence is considered the principle of the intelligible (noetic) realm. In the next hypostasis,³⁵³ the demiurgic Intellect, the master of truth and wisdom, has been set over the creation of the visible realm. When he starts to generate life, he is called Amoun and he reveals and coordinates the invisible power of the hidden reason-principles. It should be noted that Amoun is commonly identified with Zeus and the Sun. These reasoned principles, which have creative powers, are equated with several other celestial Gods. Thus, when Amoun brings into perfection the several

³⁵⁰ Dillon 1973: 39, 336–337.

³⁵¹ Dillon 2012: 105.

³⁵² Iamblichus, *De Mystериis* 8.1.

³⁵³ That would be the intellectual (noeric) realm.

creations in accordance with the principle of truth, he is termed Ptah (Hephaistos for the Greeks). When he is producing goods, he is called Osiris. Likewise, he acquires additional names corresponding to other powers. The noeric principle is presented as a Sun God and as an “Intellect knowing himself”. He is the leader (ἡγεμὼν) of the intellectual realm and the guide of many other demiurgic Gods. The aforementioned “Iamblichean” description of Amoun certainly has many similarities with Julian’s noeric Helios.

Clark expresses his certainty that Amoun, who is also called Kmeth in the *On the Mysteries*, should be equated to the noeric Helios of Julian.³⁵⁴ Iamblichus also mentions another Egyptian system, in which four masculine and four feminine entities derive from the Sun. The Solar deity rules over all the elements in the realm of generation and controls their powers. There is also a similar group of entities that are associated with the Moon, and are responsible for the generation of Earth/planets. Moreover, Iamblichus continues by dividing the universe into two sections of four or twelve or thirty-six or the double of that, and by placing on the top of each section a deity. Lastly, he develops the belief that the Demiurge made the celestial spheres from the highest matter, while from the lowest residue he crafted the bodies which are subject to generation and corruption.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ Clark 2008: 164

³⁵⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 8.1–4.

2. *Chaldean Oracles*

2.1 Overview

The *Chaldean Oracles* are a collection of arcane, hexameter verses that were handed down by the Gods (θεοπαράδοτα) to a certain Julian the Chaldean and to his son. The latter came to be known as Julian the Theurgist. Whether the Juliani were actually from Chaldea cannot be confirmed.³⁵⁶ The importance of the *Chaldean Oracles* for the Neoplatonists was fundamental. They have been regarded, from Iamblichus onward, “as authoritative literature equal in importance only to Plato’s *Timaeus*”. Proclus says that it is ‘unlawful to disbelieve’.³⁵⁷ This belief forms no exception for Emperor Julian, who quotes the Chaldean wisdom several times in his texts.³⁵⁸ The level of significance that the emperor puts on the *Oracles* can most easily be demonstrated in his letter to his friend Priscus. During his campaign in Gaul, Julian wrote to Priscus, requesting a copy of Iamblichus’ commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*, which was authored by his namesake.³⁵⁹ The *Oracles* were tightly connected with theurgy, including its Iamblichean version. In fact, they were so closely connected that the Neoplatonists used the terms “Chaldeans” and “Theurgists” interchangeably.³⁶⁰ The influence of Iamblichus and the *Oracles* can be recognised in Julian’s two hymns – *To King Helios* and *To the Mother of the Gods*.³⁶¹ Moreover, the Chaldean system included an ascent ritual that was similar and closely connected to the theurgic one. It involved ‘purifications, trance, phantasmagoria, sacred objects, magical instruments and formulas, prayers, hymns, and even a contemplative element, all of which was practiced in the context of a mystery community’.³⁶² Having been initiated into theurgy, Julian also became acquainted with the Chaldean doctrine.³⁶³ ‘The anagogic function assigned to the Sun by the *Chaldean Oracles* is a point of great importance to Julian’.³⁶⁴ It is a pity that only fragments remain from the *Oracles*. To make things worse,

³⁵⁶ Majercik 1989: 1.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 2; Smith 1995: 96; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 3.63.24; Athanassiadi 1992: 48.

³⁵⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 156b; Julian, *To the Mother of Gods* 172d, and many times in Julian’s *Against the Galileans*.

³⁵⁹ Julian, *To Priscus* (12).

³⁶⁰ Smith 1995: 92.

³⁶¹ Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 138.

³⁶² Majercik 2013: 5.

³⁶³ Bidez 1928: 1477–1481.

³⁶⁴ Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 139.

apart from Psellos' exegesis on the *Oracles*, the commentaries of Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus are lost. The surviving fragments suggest an elaborate metaphysical system, based on solar theology, where 'the leader God of each soul was identified with one of the solar rays'.³⁶⁵ As the *Chaldean Oracles* state, characteristically, 'the fire-heated thought... holds the very first order in sacred worship'.³⁶⁶ Moreover, the solar words πῦρ and φῶς appear several times in the verses and are frequently interchanged.³⁶⁷

2.2 Cosmogony Triads-Heliocentrism

The *Oracles* describe a universe that is divided into at least three hypostases: the Empyrean or Olympian (intelligible and intellectual), the Ethereal (fixed stars and planets), and the Material World (sublunar realm and Earth).³⁶⁸ The Sun is the "leader" in the material world, while the Moon supervises over the sublunar region, which is responsible for the creation of matter. Our entire hypercosmic (intelligible and intellectual) cosmos is ruled by a triad consisting of three principal intelligible Gods who are the 'source of sources'³⁶⁹ and 'connect the All while measuring all things'.³⁷⁰ In addition, it seems that every subworld in our universe is also ruled by a triad.³⁷¹ This triadic notion is everywhere in the sacred doctrine, since all things are separated into three.³⁷² The number seven has also significant importance. In the three hypostases, there are seven creative Gods,³⁷³ and 'the Father has inflated the seven firmaments of the worlds',³⁷⁴ while in our solar system he has also made seven zones: the Sun, the five planets (Cronos, Zeus, Mars, Aphrodite, and Hermes), and the Moon.³⁷⁵ These Gods, along with the noetic/noeric world in which they operate, are based on solar (light and fire) characteristics. The supermundane worlds

³⁶⁵ Shaw 2014: 250.

³⁶⁶ *Chaldean Oracles* 139; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum* 1.211.11–13. 'τὴν πυριθαλπὴν ἔννοιαν... πρωτίστην ἔχειν τάξιν ἐν τῇ ἱερᾷ θρησκείᾳ παρεκελεύσατο'.

³⁶⁷ Lewy 2011: 344.

³⁶⁸ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* 2.57.10–14. This information cannot be derived explicitly from the fragments, but it is instead based on information from the later Neoplatonists like Proclus; Majercik 1989: 17.

³⁶⁹ *Chaldean Oracles* 30.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 23.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.* 27; This notion is also to be found in the Iamblichean doctrine with the triadic Intellect in each world.

³⁷² *Ibid.* 22.

³⁷³ See previous analysis on Iamblichus and Metaphysics.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 57.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 58.

are described as “solar worlds” that encompass the “whole light”.³⁷⁶ Moreover, the *Oracles* mention that the sensible Sun’s fire (ἡλιακὸν πῦρ) was intercalated by the noeric God at the heart of our solar system.³⁷⁷ This notion of solar centrality seems to be extremely important, “since Chaldean cosmology, as a whole, is informed by a heliocentrism in which the Sun functions as the ‘heart’ or ‘centre’ of the universe”.³⁷⁸ The *Oracles* define centrality as the ‘center, from which all things are equal up to the rim’.³⁷⁹ Thus, these “solar worlds” can be seen as three circles with each Sun (noetic, noeric, sensible) located in their centre. The surviving literature seems to support this view. One fragment describes each of these three worlds with its own ruler, and calls him Father. The three fiery leaders are to be placed in the midst of them.³⁸⁰ In another reference, the sky turns around (circular motion) and ‘the swift sun comes around the centre’.³⁸¹ This notion of centrality is important for our purposes, since it has an integral part in Julian’s solar hymn.³⁸²

At the top of the hypercosmic triad is a transcendent Mighty God. The exact cosmological placement of this Deity is still debatable.³⁸³ In some fragments he is

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 59.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 58.

³⁷⁸ This idea seems to relate to the Stoic concept of ‘three fires’; Majercik 1989: 17.

³⁷⁹ *Chaldean Oracles* 167. κέντρον, ἀφ’ οὗ πᾶσαι μέχρις ἄντυγος ἴσαι ἔασιν.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 73. This fragment has perplexed modern scholars (Majercik 1989: 170–171), as these worlds are referred to as: the sacred first world, the airy second world, and the third world in which our sun is located. The last world should refer to its aethereal nature (ἐν πυρὶ τὴν χθόνα θάλλει, is an obvious reference to the visible Sun). The term “airy substance” typically refers to the sublunar region and the Earth’s atmosphere. However, the only logical interpretation is that the airy world described in fragment 73—as preceding the aethereal (sensible) world, where our visible sun resides—is the noeric world. This interpretation, which I personally endorse, is further supported by fragment 76. In this fragment, three worlds are described: fire, aether, and matter. Here, the (noeric) world preceding aether is identified as the world of fire (πυρὴν). Therefore, one may infer that either the *Oracles* employed multiple terms to describe the noeric cosmological realm or that the term “airy” was inaccurately transcribed from the original text. Additionally, some scholars, such as Lewy (2011: 142), mistakenly interpret the last ruler as the Moon. This view is not correct because both the phrase “heats earth by fire” and the expression “All things serve these three extremely hot, fiery, and turbulent rulers” (τρίσι ταῖσδε λάβροις δουλεύει ἅπαντα) more aptly describe three Suns rather than the Moon.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.* 70. ταχὺς ἡέλιος περὶ κέντρον ὅπως ἐθάς ἔλθῃ.

³⁸² Proclus states that mathematicians place the Sun at the midpoint of the seven planets. However, they do so in a more linear manner; that is, the Sun is positioned at the midpoint along a straight line rather than at the center of a circle. This is because, apart from the great astronomer Aristarchus, Greek astronomers such as Ptolemy did not place the Sun but rather the Earth at the center of the solar system. In contrast, the Chaldeans appear to align their doctrine with the heliocentric theory, following Aristarchus, who placed the Sun at the center of our solar system. This may explain why Proclus is skeptical about the mathematicians’ claim regarding the Sun’s placement. As he characteristically notes, “they offer no proof but merely assert it as a necessity”. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum* III 6–24).

³⁸³ Majercik 2013: 6.

described as having ‘snatched himself away’ and existing ‘entirely outside’.³⁸⁴ This may imply an existence outside our universe, although it most probably refers to his unparticipated nature. Porphyry equates him with the Plotinian One, while Proclus situates him beneath the One at the first level of the intelligible order. The answer to this complicated matter may be found in fragment 27 of the *Oracles*, which seems to justify Proclus’ opinion. In this fragment, the Oracles state that “in every world shines a triad, ruled by a Monad” who precedes the triad. This statement clearly implies the existence of a higher God beyond the triadic system. He is most likely to be identified with the One/Monad of the Neoplatonists, although there is insufficient evidence to determine whether he resides inside or outside our universe. Nonetheless, his existence appears evident, and when the epithets “Paternal Monad”, “One”, or “Good” are mentioned in the *Oracles*, they must refer to this supreme deity, who is positioned prior to the triad.³⁸⁵ To no surprise, He is described as the “One Fire”.³⁸⁶ Furthermore, the next chapter will demonstrate that Emperor Julian’s cosmology becomes much more comprehensible with the aforementioned definition of the Chaldean Monad.

The first God in the triad is to be situated within our universe and characterized as the noetic First Νοῦς (unparticipated Intellect), who can be comprehended through ritualistic mysteries.³⁸⁷ His common appellations are: the “Father”³⁸⁸, “First”, “Paternal Intellect”, or just even the “One”. An important name is also “ὁ ἄπαξ ἐπέκεινα”, since he occupies the highest position on the cosmological ladder and transcends in only one direction—downwards. His essence is described as a “fiery flower”.³⁸⁹ He is ineffable, since he cannot be perceived by the flower of our mind. However, if we extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible, we can apprehend him. Moreover, he is characterized as a self-generated Paternal Intellect,³⁹⁰ and as the First Transcendent Fire that exists in a fiery cosmos. His role is thinking and creating transcendent powers, and he is not involved in matter.³⁹¹ He encompasses the Platonic world of multiform Ideas, which are “shot forth”

³⁸⁴ *Chaldean Oracles* 3, 84.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 7, 9a, 11, 12, 13, 26, 27, 37, 39, 49, 108, 109.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 1.

³⁸⁸ Lewy (1978: 142) claims that the name “Father” can also refer to other “rulers” like our visible sun.

³⁸⁹ Lewy 2011: 336.

³⁹⁰ *Chaldean Oracles* 39.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* 20, 21.

from him, and from these Ideas come the Forms.³⁹² The other two transcendent Gods, the noeric Intellect and the Power, were derived directly from him.³⁹³ The noetic Father is also responsible for generating many other deities who share several important connecting and demiurgic functions.

The second triadic God (noeric Intellect) is the demiurgic Νοῦς (Demiurge), who is situated in the second hypostasis (the noeric world), and whose role is to create the sensible world. He was placed by the Father as leader to govern all things.³⁹⁴ This second Intellect is called the “ὁ δις ἐπέκεινα” (Twice Transcendent), because he is positioned between the First Intellect and the sensible world. As the *Oracles* state: ‘the Ruler placed before the multiform cosmos an intellectual and imperishable model’.³⁹⁵ Some common descriptions of him are “the Demiurge, the Intellectual Fire, the skilled worker and the craftsman of the fiery cosmos”.³⁹⁶ He is also a Dyad, since he has a double function, as he ‘possesses the intelligibles in his mind and brings sense-perception to the worlds’.³⁹⁷ The noeric realm subsists in an immaterial fire and the ‘Intellect of the Father rides upon the unshakeable guides which shine inflexibly by the furrows of the Implacable Fire’.³⁹⁸ The Demiurge divides and transmits the Ideas through the Intellectual Fire and allots them to other intellectuals. These are the intellectual Thoughts from the Paternal Source that by ‘flashing here and there in various directions’ create matter and visualize the sensible world and ‘pluck in abundance the flower of fire from the acme of sleepless Time’.³⁹⁹ The “shooting” of the Thoughts from the Intellect is described as ‘Implacable Thunders that leap from him and the lightning-receiving womb of the shining ray of Hecate, who is generated from the Father. From him leap the girdling flower of fire and the powerful breath beyond the fiery poles’.⁴⁰⁰ The radiant of the Lightning bolt is so great that it ‘obscures the flower of fire as it leaps into the hollows of the worlds’.⁴⁰¹ The noeric Intellect is the leader and coordinates all the forces in the intellectual and sensible world, since ‘all

³⁹² *Ibid.* 37, 39; Lewy 2011: 335.

³⁹³ *Chaldean Oracles* 4, 5.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 22.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 37.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 33, 81.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 8.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 36.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 37, 38.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 35.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.* 34.

things yield to the intellectual Lightning bolts⁴⁰² of the intellectual Fire, serving the persuasive will of the Father'.⁴⁰³ 'Moreover, he is 'the dispenser of life-giving fire, (that) fills the life-giving womb of Hecate (and)...pours on the Connectors a force of fruitful and very powerful fire'.⁴⁰⁴

Power (δύναμις), who is personified by Hecate, is the third major God (or more appropriately, Goddess)⁴⁰⁵ in the Chaldean doctrine. Apart from Power, Hecate comes with at least four other names, 'each having a different attribute: Zoe, Psyche, Physis (also called: Ananke) and Heimarmene are four manifestations of her'.⁴⁰⁶ It is not surprising that she is of a fiery nature and is defined as the womb of the divine triad, which contains the All and in which all things are sown. She is also described as light, and a luminous demiurgic force (δύναμις) with female characteristics.⁴⁰⁷ 'Her hair appears dazzlingly in shimmering light'.⁴⁰⁸ Unlike the two previous Gods/Intellects, she is not confined in a specific place, since she is either described as being together with the first Father in the noetic realm, or following the Paternal Thoughts (Ideas) in the noeric world.⁴⁰⁹ However, the centre of Hecate is pinpointed 'in the midst of the Fathers'.⁴¹⁰ The name "Fathers" most likely refers to the leaders of the three hypostases, who are the three Suns (noetic Father, noeric Intellect, Visible Sun). If we accept this interpretation, the mid-point should refer to the center of each of the three Suns. Another interpretation is based on the fact that the reference is only to the two ultramundane Fathers: the noetic and the noeric. Hence, Hecate is the force that derives from the noetic Father and by transcending from the noetic to the noeric hypostasis, connects to the noeric Father. This same force energizes the "thunderbolts" that emanate from the noeric Father. Both interpretations position Hecate (who acts like the World Soul) in direct relation with Julian's King Helios. A main characteristic of the Goddess is that she is the personification of the fiery World Soul. Like

⁴⁰² Lewy (2011: 336) considers the "Lighting bolts" to be the Ideas.

⁴⁰³ *Chaldean Oracles* 81.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 32.

⁴⁰⁵ 'On the back of the Goddess, boundless Nature is suspended' (*Chaldean Oracles* 54).

⁴⁰⁶ 'The first produces the pure life of the blessed immortals, the second ensouls the worlds, the third rules by the law of necessity over the spheres, the fourth, mistress of the demons, dominates the terrestrial zone' (Lewy 2011: 98).

⁴⁰⁷ Majercik 2013: 7; *Chaldean Oracles* 4, 28, 29.

⁴⁰⁸ *Chaldean Oracles* 55. χαῖται μὲν γὰρ ὁξὺ πεφρικότε φωτὶ βλέπονται.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 4, 53.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* 50.

the Iamblichean Intellects, her nature is dualistic: her left side represents the unparticipated, while her right side represents the participated nature. ‘In her left flank exists the source of virtue, which remains entirely within and does not give up her virginity’.⁴¹¹ On the contrary, ‘around the hollow of her right flank a great stream of the primordially-generated Soul gushes forth in abundance, totally ensouling light, fire, ether, worlds... and pours forth on the All as it runs its course’.⁴¹² Thus, it is thanks to Hecate and her Demiurgic heat (energy) that the whole cosmos becomes alive and animated.⁴¹³ The source of this energy is the noetic Father himself. Through the channels of fire, this heat transcends all the leaders/suns that are situated in the middle of their world, until it finally reaches our Sun (the fifth in universal order)⁴¹⁴ and the centre of the Earth in the material world. In the sensible realm, ‘as the channels of fire mingle together (the highest life) perfects the works of imperishable fire’.⁴¹⁵

In the *Oracles*, the theologians describe our Sun as ‘fire, channel of fire... and dispenser of fire’.⁴¹⁶ From all the aforementioned “fire” and “light” references, it can be deduced that intelligible ‘reality in the *Oracles* takes the form of “noetic fire” (light), rays of which emanate from the Father through the Second Intellect, and thence down into the lower Hypostases of Being’.⁴¹⁷ Finally, in the sensible world, the noetic light and fire are emanated through the rays of the Sun, and by the contribution of the World Soul matter is created.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* 52.

⁴¹² *Ibid.* 51, 56.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.* 53.

⁴¹⁴ The seven levels of entities in the cosmological hierarchy are: First, (noetic) Father; Second, Hecate (noetic/noeric), Third noeric Intellects (Aion, Transmundane Sun, Demiurge), Fourth Demiurgic Gods/Fifth Element (noeric/Sensible), Fifth Sensible Sun and Celestial Planets, Sixth Moon and Sublunar region, Seventh Earth.

⁴¹⁵ *Chaldean Oracles* 66.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.* 60.

⁴¹⁷ Smith 1995: 100.

2.3 Other Divinities: Iynges, Connectors, and Teletarchs

“In the Chaldean system, a complex ‘chain’ of lesser beings fills the spaces between the Primordial Triad and the world of matter”.⁴¹⁸ These range from the Iynges, Connectors, and Teletarchs, to Angels and Daemons. The most important are the first three entities, who form by themselves a triad. The Iynges are the thoughts of the Father, but they are also considered self-thinking entities. They act as mediators or couriers between matter and the Gods.⁴¹⁹ They represent the power that unites humans with the Divinities, because they deliver messages to humankind. One might even suggest that the messages themselves are contained within the divine symbols, which are scattered across the Earth and employed in theurgy. As the *Oracles* state, ‘every world possesses unbending, Intellectual Supports (νοερούς ἀνοχῆας)’.⁴²⁰ In other words, the Iynges act as “binding” entities between the intelligible and sensible worlds.⁴²¹

The Connectors (συνοχεῖς) are another group of cosmic entities. Their creator is the Father himself, who is actually named as “First Connector” (ὁ πρῶτος συνοχεύς) and has mixed his own force of strength among them.⁴²² ‘Their chief purpose is to harmonize and protect the various parts of the Universe.’⁴²³ Furthermore, their name precisely indicates their function: they encompass, connect, and unify all things within themselves. The Father has also entrusted them with the role of protecting his lightning bolts.⁴²⁴ There are many types of Connectors, but particularly interesting for the purpose of this work is the role of the so called “material” connectors.⁴²⁵ These specific connectors are directly involved in theurgy. They are aided by the Teletarchs in descending to the human soul, and by Hecate, who connects the human soul with the rays of the Sun and facilitates its ascension. “This image of the Sun with its ‘connective’ rays can also serve as a paradigm for the role of the Connectors as a whole”.⁴²⁶ Thus, at the noetic and noeric hypostases, the Connectors unite

⁴¹⁸ Majercik 2013: 8.

⁴¹⁹ *Chaldean Oracles* 78.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.* 79.

⁴²¹ Majercik 2013: 9.

⁴²² *Chaldean Oracles* 82, 84.

⁴²³ Majercik 2013: 10.

⁴²⁴ *Chaldean Oracles* 81-82.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.* 80.

⁴²⁶ Majercik 2013:10.

the cosmic light rays of the primal Suns (Intellects), and spread stability and harmony throughout the Universe.

The third in rank are the Teletarchs (τελετάρχαι). They are three in number (another triad) and have a ruling and coordinating role in all three worlds, accordingly. It seems that they operate along with the Fathers of the universe. Thus, the first Teletarch guides the “wing of fire” in the noetic/noeric (Empyrean) world, the second Teletarch perfects the aether, and the third Teletarch perfects matter. The second Teletarch is also considered the “ruler of the souls”, which is a role that certainly brings him into connection with the World Soul and Hecate.⁴²⁷ As mentioned earlier, the Teletarchs guide the connectors to bring the human soul up to the Intellect. Moreover, each Teletarch has solar connections. ‘The Empyrean (Olympian) Teletarch is associated with the noetic Sun (and hence the noeric Sun too) as the intelligible source of light; the Ethereal Teletarch is associated with (visible) Helios as the direct source of the Earth’s light; the Material Teletarch is associated with the Moon and rules the sublunar zone’.⁴²⁸

Interestingly, the Teletarchs are also in close relationship with another triad: the virtues of Faith (πίστις), Truth (ἀλήθεια), and Love (ἔρως). Each Teletarch is associated with one specific virtue, hence Faith goes with the Material one, Truth with the Ethereal one, and Love with the Empyrean one. The virtues are of primary cosmological importance since all things are governed and exist in these three. In addition, they tend to purify the souls and help them go back to God through the theurgic rituals. There also seems to exist another “solar” virtue: the fire-bearing hope (ἐλπὶς πυρήοχος), which descends from the noeric Intellect and nourishes humankind.⁴²⁹ Love appears to be the virtue with the most cosmological significance. Apart from being mentioned several times in the surviving fragments, she derives directly from the Paternal Intellect,⁴³⁰ who “sowed the bond of Love, heavy with fire, into all things”.⁴³¹ The reason for this is ‘that the All might continue to love for an infinite time and the things woven by the intellectual light of the Father might not collapse’. It is thanks to ‘this ἔρως that the elements of the world remain on course’.⁴³²

⁴²⁷ *Chaldean Oracles* 85, 86.

⁴²⁸ Majercik 2013: 12.

⁴²⁹ *Chaldean Oracles* 46, 47, 48.

⁴³⁰ This could also refer to the noeric Intellect (see *Chaldean Oracles* 42).

⁴³¹ *Chaldean Oracles* 39.

⁴³² *Ibid.* ὃ σὺν ἔρωτι μένει κόσμου στοιχεῖα θεόντα.

Love is also constantly filling the soul ‘with deep ἔρωσ ... as the guide and holy bond of all things’.⁴³³ As expected, the soul is also considered a divine triad. It is consisted of pure Love (ἀγνὸς ἔρωτας), and the Father ‘mixed the spark of soul with two harmonious qualities, Intellect and divine Will’.⁴³⁴ The solar characteristics are evident in the virtue of Love, since she is created by the solar Father, she mixes heavily with the noeric fire (πυριβριθῇ), and she lights (φέγγει) the woven things to keep them together. In addition, it appears that this virtue of Love has many common characteristics with the Goddess Aphrodite in Julian’s *Hymn to King Helios*.

2.4 Aion

An important and simultaneously mysterious Chaldean solar Deity is Aion. Due to the scant surviving evidence, contemporary scholars find it difficult to precisely identify this entity in the cosmological Chaldean system.⁴³⁵ However, his solar characteristics are not in doubt. In the fragments, he is described as “Father-begotten light” (πατρογενὲς φῶς) and the “whole light” (ὅλον φῶς). He thus follows the Father while fully embodying the light. “The light of Aion is the motion of the Supreme God, and also the primal measure of all time. This ‘fiery God’ of eternity superior to all the other astral Gods... is the chief numen of the theurgists”.⁴³⁶ Proclus characterizes him as a noetic God superior to the noeric Intellect (νοῦς). Furthermore, this philosopher supports the notion that Aion is to be associated with Time, or rather that time derives from or is inferior to him. He demonstrates his view by comparing the relationship between Aion and Time as similar to the one of Intellect and Soul.⁴³⁷ He also reaches the conclusion that Time is anterior to Soul. Aion is also considered a Dyad who distributes the noetic light of the Father to the sources and principles:

⁴³³ *Ibid.* 43, 44. ‘ἔρωτι βαθεῖ...συνδετικὸν πάντων ἐπιβήτορα σεμνόν’.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 44.

⁴³⁵ The actual name Aion is not even mentioned in the surviving fragments but only in frame material; Majercik 1989: 14–15.

⁴³⁶ Lewy 2011: 101; It should be noted that other scholars, like Majercik and Dodds, have objected to the ‘time’ attributes of Aion (Majercik 1989: 14–15; Dodds 1961: 265–266).

⁴³⁷ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum III* 27.18–24. εἰ δὲ καὶ νοῦς μὲν αἰῶνος δεύτερος, ψυχὴ δὲ νοῦ μίμημα, πῶς οὐχὶ ὁ χρόνος αἰῶνος ὢν εἰκὼν κρεῖττόντι καὶ αὐτῆς <ἄν> εἴη τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ οὐσιωδέστερον; ὥς γὰρ νοῦς πρὸς ψυχὴν, οὕτως αἰὼν ἔσται πρὸς χρόνον, καὶ ἐναλλάξ· ὥστε χρόνος πρὸ ψυχῆς, ὥς πρὸ νοῦ αἰὼν, καὶ μετέχοιτο μὲν <ἄν> ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, οὐ μετέχοι δ’ ἄν αὐτῆς, ὥς οὐδὲ τοῦ νοῦ ὁ αἰὼν, ἀλλ’ ἐμπαλιν.

For (Aion) alone, copiously plucking the flower of mind from strength of the Father, has the power to perceive the Paternal Intellect (and) to impart (Intellect) to all Sources and principles, and to whirl them about and keep them forever in ceaseless motion. (*Chaldean Oracles* 49).

Aion's task of keeping the Ideas in ceaseless circular movement, thus having them in a constant away-and-back motion, is fundamental, since it is only through that movement that the principles (like the Iynges) can think.⁴³⁸

2.5 Solar World – Hypercosmic Sun

It seems that the notion of a transmundane King Helios was integral to the Chaldean doctrine. Proclus writes that the Chaldeans believed that the cosmic Sun has its source in a hypercosmic realm, which they describe as a “solar world”, consisted of the “entire light” (τὸ ὅλον φῶς).⁴³⁹ This expression should be understood as encompassing both the intelligible substance (non-burning fire) and the intramundane one (our Sun's fire) of the light. In this hypercosmic solar world, which must be the noeric realm, there is a transmundane Sun, who stands as a ruler and king of that world, just as his spitting image (the sensible Sun) is ruler and king of the planets in our solar system.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, this hypercosmic Sun, whom Proclus calls the truer sun (ὁ ἀληθέστερος ἥλιος), measures everything by time and he is time of time (χρόνου χρόνος ὢν).⁴⁴¹ Lewis believes that this transmundane Sun should be equated with Aion, because both make a perpetual circular movement and have the attribute of the “entire light”. Majercik extends it even

⁴³⁸ *Chaldean Oracles* 77.

⁴³⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum* III 83 1–16. ὁ ἥλιος ὑπερκόσμιος ὢν τὰς πηγὰς ἀφήσει τοῦ φωτός, καὶ οἱ γε μυστικώτατοι τῶν λόγων καὶ τὴν ὁλότητα αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ὑπερκοσμίοις παραδεδώκασιν· ἐκεῖ γὰρ ὁ ἡλιακὸς κόσμος καὶ τὸ ὅλον φῶς, ὡς αἱ τε Χαλδαίων φῆμαι λέγουσι καὶ ἐγὼ πείθομαι. ταῦτα καὶ περὶ τούτων; Lewy 2011: 101.

⁴⁴⁰ Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum* III 82.24–83.10. Proclus also presents a solar triad, which he equates with the noetic orphic Φάνης (Phanes), the noeric Zeus, and the sensible Sun. ‘μετὰ τῆς ἡγεμονικῆς ιδιότητος, δι’ ἣν βασιλεὺς καλεῖται τοῦ ὁρατοῦ παντὸς καὶ ἀνὰ λόγον ἵσταται πρὸς τὴν μίαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν πηγὴν... ἄρα θεωρήσομεν τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ὡς ἓνα τῶν ἐπτὰ καὶ ὡς ἡγεμόνα τῶν ὅλων καὶ ὡς ἐγκόσμιον καὶ ὡς ὑπερκόσμιον, καθὼ καὶ προσλαμβάνει τὸ θεῖον φῶς ὡς τάγαθὸν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὴν ἐκθεοῦσαν τοὺς τε νοητοὺς καὶ τοὺς νοερούς διακόσμους, ὡς ὁ Φάνης παρὰ τῷ Ὀρφεῖ προΐησι τὸ νοητὸν φῶς, ὁ πληροὶ νοήσεως πάντας τοὺς νοερούς θεούς, ὡς ὁ Ζεὺς νοερὸν καὶ δημιουργικὸν ἀνάπτει φῶς εἰς πάντας τοὺς ὑπερκοσμίους· οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος τὸ ὁρατὸν πᾶν ἀπολαμβάνει διὰ τοῦ ἀχράντου τούτου φωτός, καὶ ἀεὶ τὸ προσλαμβάνον ἐν ὑπερτέρᾳ τάξει τῶν προσλαμβομένων ἐστίν’.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.* 36.17–23. καὶ οὐ λέγω κατὰ τὴν ἐμφανῆ μόνον δημιουργίαν (τούτων γὰρ τῶν μέτρων καὶ ὁ φαινόμενος ἥλιος αἴτιος), ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀφανῆ καὶ ἐπαναβεβηκυῖαν ὁ ἀληθέστερος ἥλιος συμμετρῇ τῷ χρόνῳ τὰ πάντα, χρόνου χρόνος ὢν ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ τῶν θεῶν ὁμῆν· ὅτι γὰρ καὶ Πλάτων οὐ τὰ φαινόμενα ταῦτα μόνον οἶδεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ θεῖα.

further and equates him with both Aion and the Empyrean Teletarch.⁴⁴² Based on these assumptions, the divine triad of the three transmundane Chaldean Gods becomes Father, Hypercosmic Sun (Aion), and Hecate.⁴⁴³ Lewis claims that Julian's King Helios appears to be equated with the transmundane Sun of the Chaldeans, since the emperor mentions a secret tradition, according to which 'the sun travels the starless heavens far above the region of the fixed stars' and is stationed 'midway between the three worlds'.⁴⁴⁴ The secret tradition almost certainly refers to the Chaldeans.

3. Helios in Julian's Cosmological dogma

A thorough analysis of Julian's *Hymn* will be conducted in the last chapter. For now, it suffices to briefly summarize how Julian describes the cosmological position of Helios within our cosmos. The entire universe in the *Hymn to King Helios* is composed of three levels of reality: the intelligible, the intellectual, and the physical realms. Each of these realms is governed by a distinct leader. At the top of the hierarchy is the Good, or the One, situated at the center of the intelligible realm. The Good begets King Helios, who is placed at the center of the intellectual realm. King Helios, in turn, begets the visible Helios, who occupies the center of our solar system. In this framework, the Good serves as the "Father" of the intellectual Helios, thus constituting the intelligible counterpart of Helios. A key characteristic of this system is the concept of "middleness": all three leaders are positioned at the center of their respective realms. Another central concept is unity, achieved through connectivity; every level of reality is linked through the three hypostases of Helios. The notion of omnipresence is another attribute of Helios, realized through the transcendence of his solar rays. The theme of luminosity and transcendency is also prevalent throughout the hymn. A shared characteristic of the three leaders is their radiant luminosity. The most important role in Julian's cosmological system is played by the middle hypostasis Intellect, Helios, who is called King Helios. He unites the first and the last into one. In summary, he is responsible for the creation of the entire visible world. He brings everything into generation and maintains control, not only through his light but also through his powers—

⁴⁴² Lewy 2011: 152; Majercik (1989: 14–15) agrees with Lewis on the identification of Aion with the transmundane Sun.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.* 158.

⁴⁴⁴ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 148b.

perfection, creation and generation, and the linkage of all things—which are expressed via his rays and various Gods.⁴⁴⁵ The omission of the World Soul in the solar hymn is striking, since it constitutes a fundamental part of the Neoplatonic cosmology.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 142d–152a.

⁴⁴⁶ Smith 2012: 229; However, this is purportedly made by Julian, as it will be explained in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Hymn to King Helios

1. Overview

It is in Antioch, at the time of the famous Roman festival of *Solis Agon* or Ἡλιαία, towards the end of December, that Julian composed the *Hymn to King Helios*. These festivities were performed to celebrate the birthday of *Sol Invictus* on December 25th.⁴⁴⁷ As he had done with the composition of the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, that he dedicated to Cybele a few months earlier, and with his satire *Kronia*, which he dedicated to Cronos a few days earlier, Julian felt both the personal and official need to write a treatise honouring the mighty Helios, as well.⁴⁴⁸ This oration was composed in only three days and is considered a φυσικὸς ὕμνος, ‘a hymn that describes the physical qualities of the Sun God’.⁴⁴⁹ De Vita emphatically calls it ‘a panegyric to Sol Invictus’.⁴⁵⁰ However, it is, in effect, much more than that, since it is simultaneously considered a philosophical and an epistemological treatise.⁴⁵¹ Julian describes the cosmological position of Helios in the whole universe.⁴⁵² Moreover, this text is being seen as “Julian’s definitive attempt to crystalize the Roman religion”, and is read in conjunction with the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*.⁴⁵³ This is why both texts are considered to demonstrate how seriously Julian took his role as Pontifex Maximus.⁴⁵⁴ In addition, they are characterized as the epitome of Julian’s philosophical and religious beliefs, with each text complementing the other.⁴⁵⁵ In both hymns, the emperor explains the religion from a philosophical perspective. However, one cannot stop wondering how such an important task was not done more meticulously, since in both cases, Julian wrote the hymns in just a few hours. Thus, it seems that the primary purpose

⁴⁴⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131d.

⁴⁴⁸ Personal, due to his strong appreciative feelings towards the Gods, and official, due to his position as Pontifex Maximus (highest priest) of the Roman Empire.

⁴⁴⁹ Wright 2013: 348; Lacombrade 1965: 77; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157bc.

⁴⁵⁰ De Vita 2018: 458.

⁴⁵¹ Smith 1995: 144.

⁴⁵² Julian seems to allude to Plato’s *Timaeus*, which was also considered as a “hymn of the universe” (ὕμνος τοῦ Παντός); see also Azize (2012: 22).

⁴⁵³ Athanassiadi 1992: 148; Dillon (2012: 103) also agrees with this characterization.

⁴⁵⁴ Nesselrath 2020: 51.

⁴⁵⁵ As Wright (1913: 441) states emphatically, ‘The Fifth Oration (Mother of the Gods) can hardly be understood apart from the fourth (King Helios)’.

of writing them was to express his sincere personal thanks to the Gods, and not to officially establish his religious policy. The latter, though, had to be in the back of Julian's mind, since he begins his solar hymn or λόγος by addressing his subjects, or rather, every human being in the world: 'What I am about to say I consider to be of the greatest importance for all things that breathe and move upon Earth and have a share in existence and a reasoning soul'.⁴⁵⁶ The personal touch is also in the *hymn*, since in the same phrase Julian declares that this λόγος is especially important to him, because he is a follower of King Helios (εἰμι τοῦ βασιλέως ὁπαδὸς Ἡλίου).⁴⁵⁷ Thus, Julian wishes to express his personal thanks to Helios by setting out his affection for this mighty God/Creator, so that his subjects might also learn to love him. That is why he prays to Helios to grant him perfect knowledge of Himself, that he may instruct all men, but especially those who are worthy to learn.⁴⁵⁸ The view that the *hymn* constitutes a more unofficial attempt⁴⁵⁹ is reinforced even more by the fact that Julian seems to have spent considerable time writing the polemic *Against the Galilaeans*, which was considered a more official and masterfully composed text, difficult to refute. On the contrary, the solar hymn was composed hastily in just three nights (ἐν τρισὶ μάλιστα νυξίν),⁴⁶⁰ without any preparation, since Julian included only 'a few thoughts from many, as they occurred to my (his) mind'.⁴⁶¹

The Hymn to King Helios has intrigued modern scholars more than any other treatise, mainly due to its ambiguity, or rather the disagreement among scholars, on the identity of King Helios. Opinions are divided between two camps: the first one expresses the view that King Helios is to be identified primarily with Mithras, and the second one believes that he is to be identified solely with the noeric Iamblichean Neoplatonic

⁴⁵⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 130b. Προσθήκειν ὑπολαμβάνω τοῦ λόγου τοῦδε μάλιστα μὲν ἅπασιν ὅσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπι πνέει τε καὶ ἔρπει, καὶ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ λογικῆς ψυχῆς καὶ νοῦ μετεἴληφεν.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 130c.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 157d.

⁴⁵⁹ It is speculative, but it is reasonably safe to believe that Julian was planning to establish an official policy to persuade his subjects to honour King Helios as the supreme God and protector of the Roman Empire. In this hymn, Julian's intention seems to be precisely that—to convince his subjects that Helios is the supreme God. This stance directly contrasted with the authoritarian laws of the Christian emperors, who forbade sacrifices under penalty of death (*Theodosian Code*, 16.10.4, 16.10.10–18, 16.10.25).

⁴⁶⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157c.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* 157d.

Intellect.⁴⁶² However, at a first glance, this oration appears far from obscure. Julian himself bluntly states which sources he used, and Mithraism is nowhere to be found among them. In fact, there is only one clear Mithraic reference in this text, and it is inserted for the sole purpose of presenting Mithras as one of Helios' several identifications.

Nevertheless, proponents of the Mithraic theory claim that this text is full of Mithraic allusions, and that Julian was conspicuously expressing his devotion to Mithras. However, this opinion is only based on an effort to match Julian's metaphysical doctrine with obscure Mithraic parallels, which have been rejected by some scholars, like Smith.⁴⁶³ Athanassiadi has made perhaps the best attempt to "prove" that Julian had Mithras in mind, when he was writing the *Hymn to King Helios*. She claims that any Neoplatonic theory had to be in accordance with the tenets of Mithraism, while any other reference has a good chance of being Mithraic.⁴⁶⁴ However, there is a clear problem with this line of thought. First of all, the Mithraic cult remains, in many respects, a mystery due to insufficient evidence to describe it precisely. Maybe the most direct reference to it comes from Porphyry's *In the Cave of the Nymphs* and the *Mithras Liturgy*, but the Mithraic references in both texts have been rejected by some scholars.⁴⁶⁵ Secondly, because of the "mist" that covers the Mithraic doctrine, it is almost impossible to establish it firmly. As a result, Athanassiadi refutes Cumont's, Gordon's, and Turcan's suggestions on the Mithraic cult, since they do not match those in the *Hymn to King Helios*.⁴⁶⁶ In addition, as was described in the analysis on Mithraism, the beliefs about its doctrine, especially those considering its Persian origin, have changed a lot during recent years – in particular, as a result of Beck's efforts to decipher its cosmic symbols.⁴⁶⁷

On the other hand, in several instances in the *Hymn to King Helios*, Julian indicates Iamblichus and the *Chaldean Oracles* as his sources. As he says, characteristically: 'For he (Iamblichus) is the source for what I have here set down, a few thoughts from many, as

⁴⁶² The first view is supported by scholars like Wright, Bidez, Lacombrade, and Athanassiadi, while the second one by R. Smith, Finamore, A. Smith. Dillon (2012) seems to stand in between. He supports the strong Neoplatonic elements, but also tries to fit Mithras in the equation.

⁴⁶³ Smith refutes the Mithraic claims and concludes that the Mithraic influence, if any, is minimal (Smith 1995: 144).

⁴⁶⁴ Athanassiadi 1977: 363.

⁴⁶⁵ See relevant analysis of Edmond (2000: 10).

⁴⁶⁶ Athanassiadi 1977.

⁴⁶⁷ See Chapter 1 on Mithraism; For a further analysis on the reasons of why Mithraism does not form part of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*, see Smith (1995: 139–178).

they occur to my mind'.⁴⁶⁸ Apart from Julian's personal claims that pinpoint Iamblichus as his source, there are several other indications in the *Hymn to King Helios* that Iamblichus and the *Chaldean Oracles* are indeed the major sources for the emperor. It is not an overstatement to say that almost every phrase by Julian concerning the metaphysical schema alludes to this divine philosopher or to the Neoplatonic doctrine in general. Moreover, the structure of the *Hymn to King Helios* seems to allude to Iamblichus' treatise *On the Soul*. In this work, the divine philosopher first discusses the essence, then the potencies, and lastly, the activities of the soul. Julian puts forward exactly the same schema, where he first speaks of the οὐσία of Helios, then he turns to an account of his δυνάμεις, and finally to his ἔργα (hypercosmic, celestial, sublunar).⁴⁶⁹ As already stated, the Neoplatonic influence on Julian is indisputable among contemporary scholars. This fact, in conjunction with the claim that 'in the area of philosophy, Julian has no aspirations to originality',⁴⁷⁰ makes the *Hymn to King Helios* exceptionally valuable, since it can become a major source for fourth-century Neoplatonism. Practically, the *Hymn to King Helios* serves as a bridge between the Plotinian *Ennead* and the writings of Proclus, because there are hardly any surviving Neoplatonic texts from the period between these two prominent philosophers.

As the following analysis will demonstrate, the metaphysical schema in the solar hymn exhibits a remarkable resemblance to both the Iamblichean and Chaldean doctrines. This is to no surprise, though, since, as shown in Chapter 2, the Iamblichean dogma was heavily influenced by the Chaldean, especially in the ritual of theurgy – a ritual that had great personal importance for Julian. In fact, it constituted the goal of his life, since it would be through theurgy that his soul would go through the process of anagogy and reach King Helios, and maybe even the Good Itself.⁴⁷¹ However, an important factor needs to be considered: syncretism – a notion that forms an integral part in Julian's conception of the solar religion. The emperor had been initiated in at least four mysteries: theurgy, Mithraism, Cybele's cult, and Eleusis. Despite their differences, there are also many

⁴⁶⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157d. ὅθεν δὴ καὶ νῦν ὀλίγα ἐκ πολλῶν ἐπὶ νοῦν ἐλθόντα διεληλύθαμεν'; Moreover, addressing Sallustius, Julian urges him: 'if you wish to meet with a more complete and more mystical treatment of the same theme, then read the writings of the inspired Iamblichus on this subject.

⁴⁶⁹ Dillon 2012: 112.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 104.

⁴⁷¹ Julian, *To the Mother of the Gods* 180bc.

similarities.⁴⁷² The pinnacle of these similarities is the “solar” (luminous) characteristics that exist in all of these cults. During his initiation, Julian experienced in these mysteries the vision of the same ineffable, unburning light – an unburning light that could also be perceived with closed eyes.⁴⁷³ This “light” was his proof that the noeric Helios existed and that he was the supreme common God to all traditional religions. The noeric Sun, who functions as the Platonic Λόγος and Demiurge—equated with the Iamblichean noeric Intellect—can also be associated with many other Gods, as has already been demonstrated and will be further explored in the following analysis of the solar hymn. The name of the supreme God was actually irrelevant, as Julian explains in his myth *To the Cynic Heracleios*.⁴⁷⁴ What was relevant was the metaphysical schema into which Helios would be placed; the Iamblichean and Chaldean cosmology. It is no coincidence that of all the books, Julian (during his campaign in Gaul) asked his friend Priscus to fetch him Iamblichus’ comments on the *Chaldean Oracles*.⁴⁷⁵ Moreover, the emperor testifies that this hymn contains few of the many thoughts outlined in Iamblichus’ treatise on the same theme. This divine philosopher had achieved perfection on the knowledge of Helios, and Julian prays to the Sun God that he too may attain no less.⁴⁷⁶ In the following analysis of King Helios, it is sometimes difficult to determine which hypostasis (noetic, noeric, or visible) of Helios Julian refers to, since the emperor often uses the name Ἡλῖος (Helios) or “King of All” interchangeably for the leaders of the three worlds.

⁴⁷² In the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, Julian interprets an ancient Phrygian cult in a pure Neoplatonic way, and compares it directly to the ritual of Eleusis. Mithraism (see Chapter 1) and theurgy (see Chapter 2) had also many solar characteristics.

⁴⁷³ See analysis on theurgy (Chapter 2), Mithraism (Chapter 1), and *Hymn to the Mother of Gods*. Wasson (2008: 59) demonstrates elaborately the importance of the bright vision in the mysteries of Eleusis, which represented the divinities themselves.

⁴⁷⁴ Julian, addressing to the King of the Gods, tells Him ‘Father Zeus or whatever name thou dost please that men should call thee’ (*To the Cynic Heracleios* 131a).

⁴⁷⁵ Julian, *To Priscus* (12).

⁴⁷⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157d: ‘This hymn is the text in which Julian most explicitly acknowledges his fundamental debt to Iamblichus’ (Nesselrath 2020: 60); Elm (2012: 292) also supports the view that the *Hymn to King Helios* is based on Iamblichus and the *Chaldean Oracles*.

2. Analysis of the *Hymn*

2.1 Intimate relationship

The *Hymn to King Helios* is precisely what the title suggests: a tribute to the Sun God, a solar divinity that possesses a special place in Julian's heart. Julian expresses King Helios' personal importance as follows: 'I possess within me, known to myself alone, proofs more certain than I can give'.⁴⁷⁷ This "famous" phrase is taken as the flagship of Mithraic proof in the *Hymn*. For Athanassiadi, there is no doubt that the word οἶκοι refers directly to a "supposed" Mithraeum that Julian had constructed in the palace in Constantinople. The existence of such a Mithraic temple is based on two contemporary testimonies: one by Himerius, and the other by Libanius. Himerius' testimony is rather revealing. He starts his oration by mentioning that he spent time with the emperor (Julian) and cleansed his soul (ψυχὴν καθάραντες) by getting initiated into the mysteries of Mithras the Sun (Ἥλιος Μίθρας) upon his arrival in Constantinople. Moreover, he dedicated his oration to his fellow initiates (ἡμετέροις Μύσταις) and the emperor, as an offering of gratitude for Helios. What is even more intriguing is the fact that Himerius feels comfortable in associating Helios Mithras with Apollo, and the Mithraic mysteries with the ones at Eleusis. He goes on by praising Julian as the brightest ornament in the city, shining even more brightly than gold, since he washed away by his virtue the darkness that was preventing them from raising up their hands to pray to Helios. In addition, he commends the emperor for raising temples for the Gods, and for introducing religious rites from abroad, the latter being probably a reference to the Mithraic mysteries, those of Cybele, and theurgy. He concludes by wondering how someone could expect less from an emperor that associates himself with Helios, 'both to give light and to reveal a better life'.⁴⁷⁸ From Himerius' description, it becomes obvious that Julian was actually initiated into Mithraism and that he not only worshipped Helios-Mithras in Constantinople, but he also urged his friends to be initiated, as well. Moreover, Himerius expresses the same kind of syncretism that we have already seen in Julian's writings. Helios is the central God, a parent of Julian, and he can be equally referred to as Helios-Mithras or Apollo. In other words, the connective link between the several traditional divinities is Helios and his solar

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 130bc. Τούτου δὲ ἔχω μὲν οἶκοι παρ' ἑμαυτῷ τὰς πίστεις ἀκριβεστέρας.

⁴⁷⁸ Himerius, 41.1–2, 8–9. αὐτὸν ἡλίῳ φύσιν συνάπτοντα ὁμοῦ τε λάμψαι καὶ φῆναι βίον τὸν κρείττοντα.

attributes. In addition, the Mithraic mysteries seem to be on par with the ones at Eleusis (both of them offering the anagogy of the soul). Along the same lines, Libanius mentions that the emperor built ‘a temple in the middle of the palace to the God who leads in the day, and he partook of mysteries, being initiated and in turn initiating’.⁴⁷⁹ While Libanius does not mention the name Mithras, it can be inferred, due to all the other similarities, that he refers to this particular supreme God. Moreover, the emperor, most probably, had become a Mithraic Father, the seventh and higher grade in the hierarchy of the Mithraic cult, since he was able to initiate others. This fact does not diminish Julian’s interest in theurgy, especially when put in conjunction with what can be inferred from his own writings.⁴⁸⁰ Thus, although the performance of the Mithraic mysteries can be taken for granted, it is highly likely that Julian was also performing theurgic rituals. Thus, Himerius’ reference to Helios-Mithras can simultaneously allude to the theurgic Iamblichean and Chaldean solar Intellect.

The word οἶκος should not be taken for granted as an allusion to the palace in Constantinople. Turcan expresses the view that it alludes to the religious vision that Julian mentions in his personal myth in the *To the Cynic Heracleios*.⁴⁸¹ This is, indeed, a plausible alternative that should not be ignored; I tend to agree with it, except that I believe that it should not be limited to a single vision. It is a likely alternative, because when Julian wrote the *Hymn to King Helios*, he was staying in his palace in Antioch and not in Constantinople, thus the term οἶκος becomes unlikely to refer to the palace in the city where he was born.⁴⁸² Julian specifically mentions that the “οἶκος” is known to himself alone. It is hardly to be expected that the mysteries of Mithras in the temple in Constantinople were known only to the emperor, especially since Himerius mentions it in a public oration. Moreover, if taken figuratively, the word οἶκος can equally refer to something “within personally”. Hence, it does not need to refer only to an intimate place. If we accept the second interpretation, οἶκος can indeed refer to something that Julian had experienced himself alone and no one else. This can practically refer to only one thing: a visionary experience of Julian.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Libanius, *Orations* 18.127.

⁴⁸⁰ Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 180bc; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157c.

⁴⁸¹ Turcan 1988: 111–112.

⁴⁸² However, Julian may have also established a Mithreum in Antioch (although it is not mentioned).

⁴⁸³ A vision can only be truly understood by the person who experiences it.

However, as mentioned, it does not need to refer to a specific one.⁴⁸⁴ It can equally allude to the theurgic, Mithraic, or any other mysteries in which Julian had been initiated and through which he had experienced this bright, luminous vision. In other words, the reference would not be to the mysteries themselves, but to the solar vision that Julian had experienced in them.

As demonstrated in a previous analysis on the mysteries,⁴⁸⁵ the common feature in all of them is the bright light that the initiate experiences. Thus, the “surer proofs within me” (παρ’ ἐμαυτῷ τὰς πίστεις ἀκριβεστέρας) that Julian personally experienced refers to the ineffable noeric unburning—and often colorful—light that one could see even with closed eyes by participating in the mysteries. Moreover, this “light” is considered a core characteristic of the God in any “solar” mystery, whether he is Mithras, Helios, or Attis. In other words, no matter into which mystery Julian was initiated, he experienced the same noeric divine light, which was the manifestation of the Sun God Himself. This very fact “paved the way” for an easy syncretism between every solar God in Julian’s mind. The theory that the “surer proofs” refer to experiences in mystic rituals gains further validity from the fact that Julian states it would be sacrilegious to disclose any additional information about them. Moreover, Julian describes the days of his youth as a period of darkness, while the days that he spent studying philosophy were described as a period of enlightenment, a time where the heavenly light shone all about him, and a period of time which urged him to continue a contemplative journey.⁴⁸⁶ This expression of the “heavenly light” is most likely another allusion to his initiation into theurgy by the hierophant Maximus of Ephesus.

Julian has no problem in revealing, or rather repeating over and over again, his devotion to Helios. It stands as a family inheritance, where solar worship began three generations before him.⁴⁸⁷ The emperor calls Helios his master and devotes himself to his

⁴⁸⁴ This is because Julian, as an initiate in many mysteries, experienced several visions.

⁴⁸⁵ See analysis on Mithraism (Chapter 1), rituals in *Greek Magical Papyri* (Chapter 1), and Theurgy (Chapter 2).

⁴⁸⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131a; The expression about a period of darkness is also found in Julian’s letter to the Alexandrians, and to the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. It almost certainly refers to the period that he believed in what he considered the “hypocritical” faith of the Galilaeans.

⁴⁸⁷ These ancestors, faithful followers of Sol Invictus, were Claudius II, his grandfather Constantius I, and his father Julius Constantius; Swist (2025: 108) describes the *Hymn to King Helios* as an important source for the Sun’s relationship with the Flavian dynasty.

service (αὐτὸν ἐπιδίδωσι τῇ θεραπείᾳ τοῦ δεσπότου).⁴⁸⁸ This personal solar relationship can only be shared with “few others”, which is likely a reference to the “few happy theurgists”, who revere the God of Seven Rays.⁴⁸⁹ As a child of the Sun, he had an innate attraction to Helios from a young age. As a result, he gazed intently at the Sun and at the starry sky at night. He was so curious about the celestial objects that he was considered an astrologer (ἀστρομάντις). Julian feels the need to clarify that although he has a kinship with Helios, in reality, the Sun shares this privilege with all of humankind.⁴⁹⁰ As he writes, characteristically, ‘I regard this God (Helios), as the father of all mankind’.⁴⁹¹ The emperor mentions a well-known Aristotelian sentence to support his claim, stating that ‘it is said with truth that man and the Sun together beget man’.⁴⁹² This solar anthropogony, with Helios as the father of all humans, may also derive from both the Orphics and the *Chaldean Oracles*, and it may relate to the *Hymn*’s frequent associations of Helios with Zeus, who is also considered the Father of Gods and men (Ζεὺς πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν).⁴⁹³

Helios (the visible one), acting as the World Soul, is also responsible for sowing our planet with souls, which originate not only from himself but also from the other Gods. Moreover, the lives of these souls depend on the selection made by these Gods (including Helios), who are identified with the seven planets. Julian holds the belief that Helios personally selected his soul, and he brought it into being from eternity.⁴⁹⁴ The emperor, like Porphyry and Iamblichus, believes that Helios and the other Gods can influence our lives – that is, he gives credit to astrology. This comes as no surprise, however, since both in Mithraism and in the *Chaldean Oracles* there is the belief that the noeric fire is the luminous essence of the World Soul, who, through the visible Sun and the planets, travels to Earth in order to ignite and guide the individual souls of all living beings by “breathing”

⁴⁸⁸ Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 131d.

⁴⁸⁹ Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 172d–173a.

⁴⁹⁰ This notion of equality leads to humility from the part of Julian, since, despite his solar kinship, he does not regard himself as superior (O’Meara 2018: 409).

⁴⁹¹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131bc.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* 131c.

⁴⁹³ Swist 2025: 91.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 157a.

the luminous pneuma upon them.⁴⁹⁵ Hence, the planets play an important role in the creation and control of the individual souls.⁴⁹⁶

At the end of the *Hymn*, Julian prays to Helios, “The King of All”, to grant him the opportunity to praise and celebrate him at the festival of Sol Invictus. The emperor has every reason to do so, since Helios cares for him, ‘even as also he brought into being his soul from eternity, and made it his follower’.⁴⁹⁷ Thus, the emperor is a pious follower (ὁπαδός) of Helios, and concludes the *Hymn* with the following prayer (which resembles those at the ending of the *Hymn to the Mother of Gods* and *Kronia*, in the theurgic and anagogic content):⁴⁹⁸

‘For the third time, therefore, I pray that Helios, the King of all, may be gracious to me in recompense for this my zeal; and may he grant me a virtuous life and more perfect wisdom and inspired intelligence, and when fate wills, the gentlest exit that may be from life, at a fitting hour; and that I may ascend to him thereafter and abide with him, for ever if possible, but if that be more than the actions of my life deserve, for many periods of many years!’
(Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 158bc).⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁵ See Chapter 2 – *Chaldean Oracles*; Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 202.

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Neoplatonic philosophers describe as golden chains such vertical links between souls and leader Gods, as well as the horizontal sequence of divine philosophers, from Orpheus to Pythagoras, to Plato, all the way to Iamblichus and Maximus’ (Swist 2025: 216).

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 157a. Hence, ‘Julian the emperor, himself linked to the God by the triple allegiance of dynasty, philosophy, and sonship’ (Elm 2012: 290).

⁴⁹⁸ Tanaseanu-Döbler (2022: 191–192) claims that the term ὁπαδός originates from Iamblichus, who, in the *De Anima*, interpreting *Phaedrus*, refers to pure souls (uninfluenced by the material body) as followers of specific Gods sent to humans by them. Among philosophers, the term denoted someone who was particularly fond of and well-versed in the philosophical knowledge of a specific subject. Swist (2025: 92) also agrees that this term subscribes to the Iamblichean concept of leader Gods. In another tone, Elm (2012: 289) claims that the word ὁπαδός carries traditional imperial and dynastic overtones.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 158 b–c. Εὐχομαι οὖν τρίτον ἀντὶ τῆς προθυμίας μοι ταύτης εὐμενῇ γενέσθαι τὸν βασιλέα τῶν ὅλων Ἥλιον, καὶ δοῦναι βίον ἀγαθὸν καὶ τελειοτέραν φρόνησιν καὶ θεῖον νοῦν ἀπαλλαγὴν τε τὴν εἰμαρμένην ἐκ τοῦ βίου πρᾶττάτην ἐν καιρῷ τῷ προσήκοντι, ἀνοδὸν τε ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ μονὴν παρ’ αὐτῷ, μάλιστα μὲν αἰδίων, εἰ δὲ τοῦτο μείζον εἴη τῶν ἐμοὶ βεβιωμένων, πολλὰς πάνυ καὶ μυριετῆς περιόδους.

2.2 Theology of the *Hymn*

First of all, the very appellation of Helios as “King” puts a Platonic seal on the hymn. The royal nature of the Sun had already been asserted by Plato.⁵⁰⁰ Following the introduction on the personal importance of King Helios, Julian goes on to compose an *encomium* for the Sun God by describing ‘his substance and his origin, and his powers and energies, both visible and invisible, and the gift of blessings which he bestows throughout the world (both the noeric and visible)’.⁵⁰¹ The *Hymn*’s content precisely follows the above description, in that order. Julian, at least in the area of philosophy, has no aspirations to originality. As a result, it is believed that Julian is not expressing original ideas nor does he distort the theological doctrines discussed in the text.⁵⁰² In fact, there seems to be only one exception, which Julian mentions specifically and which will be discussed later in our analysis.⁵⁰³ Finally, there is no reference to a World Soul in the metaphysical schema of the *Hymn*. However, as mentioned previously, King Helios has incorporated the functions of the Soul.⁵⁰⁴ Julian clarifies from the start that King Helios is not the visible sun, who is just his visible self. On the contrary, He is invisible to the naked eye, and as a result, to comprehend him, or ‘attain to a description that would be worthy of him’, would be nearly impossible.⁵⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the emperor expresses the belief that with this hymn, Helios would be rather pleased.

⁵⁰⁰ Athanassiadi 1992: 148–149; One can also say that the kingship of Helios alludes to Julian’s rulership. Helios, being the King of the Universe, while Julian the king of the Roman Empire.

⁵⁰¹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 132b.

⁵⁰² Dillon 2012:105; Athanassiadi 1977: 363.

⁵⁰³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 147bc.

⁵⁰⁴ An opinion that Dillon (2012: 106) shares as well.

⁵⁰⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131d–132a.

2.3 Light – Surer Proofs

One of Julian's main claims concerning the truthfulness of his heliocentric philosophy, which is expressed through a heliolatry, is the "manifested proofs" (ἐναργεῖς αἱ πίστεις) that are spread all over the visible world.⁵⁰⁶ The logic goes that 'as product of the activity of the Highest Good and the Great Helios, the visible Sun permits man to deduce by analogy the operation of the intelligent and intelligible Sun from which he proceeded'.⁵⁰⁷ Julian, quoting Plato, says that the sky is also an instructor for our wisdom. For from its contemplation, we have learned the nature of number, whose distinguished characteristics we know from the course of the Sun.⁵⁰⁸ The first measurement of time was able to be made by measuring daylight. Later, by observing the Moon's light that Helios bestows on the Goddess (Σελήνη), we progressed still further in understanding cosmological matters. This evidence becomes apparent for the one – namely, the philosopher and scientist, 'who studies the unseen world in the light of things seen'.⁵⁰⁹

The most conspicuous evidence comes from light itself. Julian describes it as 'a sort of incorporeal and divine form of the transparent in a state of activity'.⁵¹⁰ This reference to light exemplifies how the Platonic concepts are merged with the Aristotelian ones. Julian uses Aristotle's theory of light, which suggests that the nature of light is incorporeal (rather than Plato's theory, which suggests that light is corporeal).⁵¹¹ The emperor concludes that the light is a form of the substance of which the heavenly bodies are made, which is none other than the fifth substance.⁵¹² In a language that resembles that of the *Chaldean Oracles*,

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 133c; These "clear proofs" form part of his polemic against the faith of the Christians. They are well demonstrated in his treatise, *Against the Galilaeans*. On the other hand, in Neoplatonism, there is a clear connection between the divine and the natural world (Siorvanes 2018: 859-861). Hence, the visible proofs in our cosmos can serve as further evidence of the divine activity and nature.

⁵⁰⁷ Elm 2012: 298.

⁵⁰⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 152c.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 133c–134a; This is also the major principle of modern cosmologists and scientists, who develop their cosmological theories about the universe, based on facts from evidence that they gather here on Earth and in our solar system; This passage also seems to allude to Plato (*Republic* 529b–530b).

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.* 134a.

⁵¹¹ Wright (1913: 363) correctly observes that Julian's description of light reflects that of Aristotle (*De Anima* 419a).

⁵¹² A scientifically correct conclusion, since both the solar particples and the gas planets are primarily composed of hydrogen and helium. The original identification of the fifth substance is unknown. However, based on the philosophers' description, it can be equated with a mixture of elementary particles that are described by modern scientists as a necessary consequence of physical laws having a certain symmetry at every point in spacetime.

Julian says that the culmination and flower of incorporeal light itself is the Sun's rays.⁵¹³ The incorporeality and divine beauty of light also forms the core of Plotinus' theory.⁵¹⁴

The Sun's rays are the result of the energy/activity of the pure Intellect that diffuses its undefiled brightness everywhere in our cosmos.⁵¹⁵ It is rather surprising that, for the theory of light, Julian cites the Phoenicians (who are described as scientists and wise people in divine matters), rather than Iamblichus, as a source. However, it may make sense, since, as demonstrated earlier, the Aurelian cult of Sol Invictus originated from Emesa, a Syrian town.⁵¹⁶ However, it appears that Julian's source is, again, Iamblichus, since, in another reference to the Phoenician solar theology, Julian claims that he gathered this information from this divine philosopher.⁵¹⁷ Julian quickly compares the Phoenician theology to another theory.⁵¹⁸ According to the second theory, the source of light is not a body, but the energy/activity of pure Intellect pouring light into its own abode. This Intellect (Νοῦς) is situated in the middle of the heavens, 'from where it fills the heavenly circles with a well mastered vigor of every kind and illumines all things with light divine and undefiled'.⁵¹⁹ The above description is remarkably similar to the one found in the *Chaldean Oracles*, where the noeric Intellect ejects demiurgic firebolts in all directions in the heavens, and the Sun is called 'channel and dispenser of fire'. As mentioned in the analysis on the *Oracles*, this light is called the 'flower of mind', deriving from the Paternal Intellect, and is dispersed throughout the universe by the noeric Intellect or Aion, and whirls all the sources and principles in a ceaseless motion. Moreover, the *Oracles* mention that by using the mind, the Paternal Intellect can be perceived through this divine light.⁵²⁰ The whole concept seems to allude directly to the cosmological and theurgic doctrine of the *Chaldeans*, as well

⁵¹³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 134a. Αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ φωτὸς ὄντος ἀσωμάτου ἀκρότης ἂν εἴη τις καὶ ὥσπερ ἄνθος ἀκτῖνες; Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 105; See Chapter 2 – *Chaldean Oracles* for similarities.

⁵¹⁴ See Chapter 2 on Plotinus and Light.

⁵¹⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 134a. ἄχραντον εἶναι ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τοῦ καθαροῦ νοῦ τὴν ἀπανταχῇ προῖοῦσαν αὐγήν.

⁵¹⁶ The term Phoenicians refers to both the regions of Syria and Phoenicia; Julian (*Hymn to King Helios* 150d) refers to the inhabitants of Emesa as Phoenicians.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*; For an analysis of the possible existence of Phoenician theology, see Azize 2012.

⁵¹⁸ Iamblichus had likely developed a "light theory" based on the *Chaldean Oracles*, and compared it to the one of the Phoenicians of Emesa. On the other hand, the theory of the Phoenicians could have been an Iamblichean invention, where he presented his own theories, just as he had done in the *De Mysteriis* with the Egyptians.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.* 134b. ὅθεν ἐπιλάμπουσα πάσης μὲν εὐτονίας πληροῖ τοὺς οὐρανίους κύκλους, πάντα δὲ περιλάμπει θεῖῳ καὶ ἀχράντῳ φωτί.

⁵²⁰ *Chaldean Oracles* 34, 49; See Chapter 2 – *Chaldean Oracles*.

as the process of anagogy that connects our souls to the Intellect through the rays of the Sun.

Thus, Julian describes the Sun as the source of light, who acts as the demiurgic leader of our solar system and disperses his pure light to all the visible cosmos. In turn, using the logic that the functions of the visible Sun mirror those of the noeric Helios, he deduces that Helios is the origin of the undefiled light and likewise that Helios disperses his light to all the noeric Gods in the noeric world. Moreover, applying the theory that all three worlds are connected through the three Helii, he concludes that the same pure light of the noetic Helios (Good) is channeled to the noeric Helios (King Helios), and in turn, is transferred to the visible Helios (the Sun), who emits it all over the visible cosmos. In other words, he presents “the sun’s rays as the perfect conduit linking the immaterial with the material world”, and uses the theories from the Phoenicians and the Chaldeans to prove his point.⁵²¹ In a similar fashion, the central position of Helios is also deduced from the centrality of the visible Sun in our solar system.

To further prove his theory on the perfecting powers of light, Julian resorts to Plato. Alluding to a passage in the *Republic*, he says that the Demiurge, by giving the power of sight to those who see, and the power of being seen to the objects of sight, he brings both vision and visibility to perfection in a single activity. The perfecting giving powers are expressed in the creation of forms and substance.⁵²² Hence, the visible forms in our universe act as a proof of the perfecting powers of King Helios. Julian recognizes that he may philosophize a bit too much, and immediately reverts to something that everyone can observe: the “power of the sun”, which is conspicuously demonstrated in the universe.⁵²³ By working day and night, the Sun changes and sways the whole universe in front of our eyes.⁵²⁴ The leadership and superiority of the Sun is also demonstrated, since no other heavenly body in the universe has this power, at least on its own. Julian claims that the planets and the Moon get their powers through the light and energy of the Sun. This seems

⁵²¹ Dillon 2012: 115. Referring to ancient wisdom is a common tactic to support one’s point in Antiquity.

⁵²² Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 134c–134d; Plato, *Republic* 507–508.

⁵²³ This seems to be a clue that Julian intended to make the *Hymn to King Helios* as simple as possible, in order to be understood by the masses.

⁵²⁴ Julian, here, refers to the beneficial effects that daylight has on Earth, to the luminous numerous stars and planets in the night sky, and to the movements of all the celestial objects: all visible and apprehensible by everyone.

to allude directly to Iamblichus, who describes in a similar fashion how the Moon, and the planets Venus and Mercury, get their demiurgic powers from the Sun.⁵²⁵

In an epistemological way, Julian gives as an example to support his claim the revolution of the planets around the Sun, implying that they revolve due to the energy that derives from the Sun.⁵²⁶ This planetary circular motion around the Sun is also a visual proof that he is located at the centre of the solar system. In addition, the planets appear to yield to the power of the Sun by revolving around him and converging towards him. This planetary revolution, which is described as a “dancing circle”, is conducted in perfect harmony. Julian’s words here are characteristically Iamblichean⁵²⁷ and Chaldean, since he uses almost the same vocabulary as the *Oracles* by describing the planets as yielding to the lighting rays of their king – a movement that is expressed in a perfect harmony.⁵²⁸ Likewise, Julian includes a characteristic Chaldean phrase: ‘(Helios) priding himself on the harmony of light’.⁵²⁹ Moreover, the notion of a dominated intellectual Νοῦς, to whom all other divinities yield, also finds its match in the Chaldean doctrine. In it, the noeric Intellect is the leader and coordinates all the forces in the intellectual and sensible world, since all things yield to his intellectual Lightning bolts. Likewise, Julian concludes that as the Sun is the leader and orders the celestial objects, in a similar way, Helios is the leader of the noeric Gods, and coordinates everything in an orderly fashion. Thus, the most venerable ordering of bodies among the noeric Gods corresponds to the same arrangement as the one in the sensible world. Following this way of thinking, both the Sun and Helios are placed in the centre of their world. As a second example, the emperor describes how the light of the Moon depends on and derives from the Sun; ‘the light of the moon waxes

⁵²⁵ ‘The Sun above the Moon, because it manifestly fills the Moon with its powers and has the relationship of Father to the realm of Generation, and above the Sun, Venus, and Mercury’ (Iamblichus, *In Timaeus* Fr.70,16–18).

⁵²⁶ In modern terms, this is called gravitational energy; By describing the revolution of the planets, Julian seems to refer to Ptolemy’s observation (who had placed Earth at the center), and not to Aristarchus’ (who had placed the Sun correctly at the centre of the solar system). However, the emperor, concerning the Sun, is following the Chaldean wisdom, who places the Sun at the center as well.

⁵²⁷ Iamblichus (*In Timaeus* Fr.70) also emphasizes the symmetry (συμμετρία) of the movements of the planets Mercury and Venus.

⁵²⁸ *Chaldean Oracles* fr.81.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.* fr.71.

and wanes varying in proportion to its distance from the Sun’ – hence, another proof that the Sun has superior powers and control over the celestial objects.⁵³⁰

The emperor lets the facts speak for themselves concerning the importance of light for humankind and the world in general. As he says, characteristically: ‘What need is there for me to glorify his beams and light? For everyone knows how terrible is night without the Moon and stars’.⁵³¹ By this fact alone, one can appreciate what a great gift the light of the Sun is to us. Moreover, the Sun’s ceaseless activity and demonstrated power is perceived by the fact that he continuously shines all day and night. The conclusion is that ‘there is no single blessing in our lives which we do not receive perfected from him alone, or through the other Gods, perfected by him’.⁵³² Julian sums up all of Helios’ functions that can be deduced from the aforementioned “surer proofs”. All these powers and functions are unique to the Sun and accordingly, to Helios; they do not belong to any other visible deity or noeric God. Moreover, all of these, as demonstrated by the previous analysis in this chapter and in Chapter 2, are also advocated by the Neoplatonists and the *Chaldean Oracles*:

‘First is his power to perfect, from the fact that he makes visible the objects of sight in the universe, for through his light he perfects them, secondly, his creative and generative power from the changes wrought by him in the universe; thirdly, his power to link together all things into one whole, from the harmony of his motions towards one and the same goal; fourthly, his middle station we can comprehend from himself, who is midmost; and fifthly, the fact that he is established as king among the intellectual Gods, from his middle station among the planets’.⁵³³ (Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 135c).

The theory that the radiant and stainless substance of King Helios is also present on Earth can be proven by looking at light itself: ‘Not even the light which comes down nearest to the Earth from the Sun is mixed with anything, nor does it admit dirt and defilement, but remains wholly pure and without stain and free from external influences among all existing

⁵³⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 135b. ὥς τὸ τῆς σελήνης αὐξεται καὶ λήγει φῶς, πρὸς τὴν ἀπόστασιν ἡλίου πάσχον, πᾶσι που δῆλον.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.* 153c.

⁵³² *Ibid.*; The Moon reflects the light of the Sun, and the stars also represent the Sun’s light.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* 135c. λάβωμεν οὖν ἐξ ἀπάντων τὸ μὲν τελεσιουργὸν ἐκ τοῦ παντὸς ἀποφαίνειν ὁρᾶν τὰ ὁρατικά (τελειοῖ γὰρ αὐτὰ διὰ τοῦ φωτός), τὸ δὲ δημιουργικὸν καὶ γόνιμον ἀπὸ τῆς περὶ τὸ ζῦμπαν μεταβολῆς, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἐνὶ πάντων συνεκτικὸν ἀπὸ τῆς περὶ τὰς κινήσεις πρὸς ἓν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συμφωνίας, τὸ δὲ μέσον ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ μέσου, τὸ δὲ τοῖς νοεροῖς αὐτὸν ἐνιδρῦσθαι βασιλέα ἐκ τῆς ἐν τοῖς πλανωμένοις μέσης τάξεως.

things'.⁵³⁴ This is because the light derives from the noeric Helios, and by transcending the sensible world, it reaches Earth through the Sun. This theory of a transcendent "light" (which is not just a metaphor) is very Neoplatonic and was developed extensively by Plotinus, who also described the divinity of light and referred to the noetic one as "true light".⁵³⁵ Helios' perfect pure essence in the visible world can also be perceived by observing the heavenly planets, who are made of the pure and unmixed nature of the divine substance which exists in Helios. This pure substance makes the planets divine and eternal.

Maybe the most conspicuous proofs of the magnificence of Helios are found here on Earth. One does not need to turn one's eyes to the sky in order to realize the superiority of the Sun to everything else in our world. Here, Julian introduces the Neoplatonic and Iamblichean notion of limit and limitlessness.⁵³⁶ Our planet has two conflicting characteristics. It is at the same time both eternal and contains "Being" in a state of becoming. These two characteristics coexist together due to the Sun's ability to hold "Being" by means of definite limits. This is because the nature of "Being" cannot be unlimited in time (eternal) by itself, since it is neither uncreated nor self-subsistent. This is a typical description of the Neoplatonic principle of "causal relationships".⁵³⁷ The epistemological logic is that the ceaseless generation on Earth would deplete it of all energy and substance at some point in time if nothing were resolved back. Julian states it perfectly: 'If from being something were generated absolutely without ceasing and nothing were resolved back into it, the substance of things generated would fail'.⁵³⁸ The role of the energy replenisher is taken up by our Sun, who sends his beneficial energy rays every day upon Earth. That is why 'from him are we born, and by him are we nourished'.⁵³⁹ The Neoplatonic principle of "cyclic activity" is also applied.⁵⁴⁰ All of the substances of Earth's creations are recycled back into it after the end of their lives. This way, the materials of our planet are not depleted and are reused over and over again.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.* 140d.

⁵³⁵ See analysis on Chapter 2 on Plotinus and Light.

⁵³⁶ Julian expanded on this notion in the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*. See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus and Metaphysics.

⁵³⁷ See Chapter 2 – Neoplatonism and Basic Principles.

⁵³⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 137d;

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.* 152b.

⁵⁴⁰ See Chapter 2 on Neoplatonism and Basic Principles. This principle forms the fundamental modern concept of a self-sustaining Earth: All created substances are recycled in order to be used again.

The various forms of life and phenomena on Earth constitute the best proofs of the life-generative power of King Helios: ‘For some forms he perfects, others he makes, or adorns, or wakes to life, and there is no single thing which, apart from the creative power derived from Helios, can come to light and to birth’.⁵⁴¹ The generative power of Helios is also demonstrated through the powers of Athena and Aphrodite. Helios, through these Goddesses, laid down for our protection, and the propagation of every race on Earth, what is almost a law, that we should unite to beget our kind. Aphrodite, as Goddess of love, represents the power of union between the genders, while Athena, as Goddess of wisdom, the mechanism that produces new life. The Sun plays a more obvious role in the propagation of all the plants and animals, because they are aroused to bring forth their kind, depending on the Sun’s course.⁵⁴² Julian references Aristotle’s *Meteorologica* when discussing the formation of rain, wind, and clouds in the sky, presenting these phenomena as clear evidence of Helios’ powers.⁵⁴³ Julian inquires, in a scientific context, whether two types of vapour are generated and all these weather phenomena are produced through his powers. He concludes that the answer is of course positive, since this process involves the warming of water by the Sun’s rays, which causes the change of state from liquid to vapour and subsequently back to liquid. Consequently, the water from the seas transforms into clouds, which then produce rain and moisture, leading to various physical alterations in the Earth’s surface.⁵⁴⁴

The beneficial powers of the Sun and the dependence of all living organisms on Earth upon them are easily conceived by the Sun’s regular movements. When the Sun approaches Earth, he raises up and stimulates its substances by his solar rays, and when he departs to a distance, he diminishes and destroys them: ‘He (the Sun) himself continually revivifies it by giving it movement and flooding it with life... Ever does his gift of blessings descend evenly upon earth’.⁵⁴⁵ It is a continuous, twofold process: first of all, the Sun shines daily on the same annual course on Earth, and secondly, he shines ceaselessly over all Earth

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.* 140b. τὰ μὲν γὰρ τελειοῖ τῶν εἰδῶν, τὰ δὲ ἐργάζεται, τὰ δὲ κοσμεῖ, τὰ δὲ ἀνεγείρει, καὶ ἐν οὐδὲν ἔστιν, ὃ δίχα τῆς ἀφ’ Ἡλίου δημιουργικῆς δυνάμεως πρόεισι καὶ γένεσιν.

⁵⁴² Here, Julian refers to the dependence of plants and animals on the seasons that are created by the Sun. It is no coincidence that spring is called the growing season.

⁵⁴³ Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 129.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 152a.

⁵⁴⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 137d. This also reflects Plato’s description of the Sun’s powers that nourish everything on Earth and cause things to become (*Republic* 509b).

by moving all the time from one place to another.⁵⁴⁶ This notion of a perpetual process due to the Sun's activity is essential for the generation and functioning of the cosmos, and it reflects the eternal nature of Helios.⁵⁴⁷

Sun's activity is also a conspicuous demonstration of justice and sameness, since the God (the Sun) never benefits this changeful world less or more than is his custom. All this alludes to the concept of consistency, which is part of the Neoplatonic notion that the higher the divine being, the more stable it is. Finally, the visible Sun, since he is "distributing his rays over the whole universe, along with the unifying power of his light, he is proved to be the master workman who gives an individual existence to everything that is created".⁵⁴⁸ Thus, he (the Sun) is the best proof of the existence of King Helios. Through the visible Sun, we comprehend King Helios' very self and we behold him with our eyes.

Throughout the *Hymn*, Julian continuously emphasizes how all the marvelous creations of King Helios have been conceived by rational observation of the natural phenomena on Earth and the celestial sky. From these observations, ancient philosophers, like modern scientists, sought to understand the various cosmological forces that originate from a central energy source. As Julian says, characteristically:

'From his works men have learned to know this God, who makes the whole heavens perfect through the gift of noeric blessings, and gives it a share of noetic beauty; and taking the heavens as their starting-point, they have learned to know him both as a whole and his parts also, from his abundant bestowal of good gifts. For he exercises control over all movement, even to the lowest plane of the universe. And everywhere King Helios makes all things perfect, nature and soul and everything that exists'.⁵⁴⁹

(Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 149a).

⁵⁴⁶ Here, the emperor must be referring to the conclusions of famous astronomers like Ptolemy, since he is basically describing the orbiting of the Earth around its axis, which results in daily sunshine on all the parts of the Earth (except on the poles).

⁵⁴⁷ 'Central to Julian's concept is the unity and continuity of the creative process, eternal and everlasting in an uninterrupted sequence of activity' (Elm 2012: 298).

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 141ab.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 149a. ξυνῆκαν γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐξ ὧν ὁ θεὸς ὅδε ἐργάζεται, τὸν ζύμπαντα οὐρανὸν τοῖς νοεροῖς ἀγαθοῖς τελειωσάμενος καὶ μεταδοὺς αὐτῷ τοῦ νοητοῦ κάλλους, ἀρξάμενός τε ἐκεῖθεν ὅλον τε αὐτὸν καὶ κατὰ μέρη τῇ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀδρῶν δόσει *** πᾶσαν γὰρ ἐπιτροπεύουσι κίνησιν ἄχρι τῆς τελευταίας τοῦ κόσμου λήξεως φύσιν τε καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ πᾶν ὅτι ποτέ ἐστι, πάντα πανταχοῦ τελειοῦται.

2.4 Syncretism – Helios’ Powers and other Gods

Julian was a strong believer that all philosophies based their doctrines on a single objective. Their goal was to master self-knowledge, which is identified with “Likeness of God”. As Julian says, characteristically: ‘Let no one divide or cut philosophy into many things: or rather let no one make many out of what is one’.⁵⁵⁰ Different roads may have been taken, but the destination was the same for each branch of philosophical schools.⁵⁵¹ The same arguments were equally applied in the field of the traditional religions. For Julian, a complete syncretism between the various Gods, who shared the same attributes, was perfectly feasible.⁵⁵² However, this was not an innovation that was particular to him. It was based on a trend of religious syncretism that originated in ancient Greek tradition. “As the Greeks came into contact with different cultures, rather than recognizing the individual characters and identities of the ‘foreign’ Deities, the Greeks equated them with their own Gods”.⁵⁵³ Starting from the Homeric epics and continuing with Herodotus, this trend increased in the Hellenistic era and reached its culmination in Late Antiquity.⁵⁵⁴ Hence, Julian, in this hymn (and in many other writings), has no hesitation in fusing and relating many other divinities to Helios. His goal was to ‘present the Roman world with a consistent and viable religious system, made up of all the current traditions and practices of solar worship’.⁵⁵⁵

The various Gods identified as either equal to or part of Helios’ attributes assist the Sun God in completing the activities that bring his blessings to the entire universe, reaching even the farthest corners. The first syncretism that Julian presents is between Helios and Zeus. For the emperor, these two Gods are one and the same, and they have a joint or rather a single sovereignty among the noeric Gods. This cannot be considered an innovation by Julian, since it was a common practice in Late Antiquity to equate these two supreme deities.⁵⁵⁶ The “kingly” characteristics of both Gods are conspicuous. As all the Olympian

⁵⁵⁰ Julian, *To the Uneducated Cynics* 184c.

⁵⁵¹ Smith 1995: 65.

⁵⁵² Wiemer 2020: 224–225.

⁵⁵³ Budin 2004: 98.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; See also Chapter 1 on Late Antiquity.

⁵⁵⁵ Athanassiadi 1977: 370–371.

⁵⁵⁶ Dillon 2012: 110. As demonstrated, Plotinus, in his *Enneads*, equates Zeus with the second Intellect, while the Homeric Poems directly equate Zeus with Helios. See Chapter 2 on Plotinus, and Chapter 1 on Late Antiquity.

Gods yield to Zeus' will, in the same way all the noeric Gods yield to King Helios – an action that mirrors the yielding of all the planets to the visible Sun.⁵⁵⁷ As proof that this is not an arbitrary conclusion, the emperor calls to witness the priests of Cyprus, “who set up common altars to Helios and Zeus; but even before them let us summon as witness Apollo, who sits in council with our God. For this God declares: ‘Zeus, Hades, Helios, Sarapis, three Gods in one Godhead!’”.⁵⁵⁸ Thus, Julian immediately associates Helios with three other Gods (Zeus, Hades, Sarapis). These Gods are to be considered on a par with him. On the other hand, Apollo constitutes a part of him, sharing one of his attributes and sits in council with him. Both Hades and Sarapis are to be considered as having the same anagogic functions as Helios. This is because they both are considered invisible and wise Gods of the afterlife, and they are responsible for the fate of individual souls. To support his claim, Julian quotes Plato, who calls Hades a God full of wisdom, and says that he is not to be considered dreadful but on the contrary, mild and pleasing, since he frees from generation and elevates to the noetic world the souls of those who have lived most righteously and justly.⁵⁵⁹ Thus, Julian considers Hades and Sarapis as Gods who regulate the fate of the souls – a function which is to be directly associated with the goal of theurgy.⁵⁶⁰

Julian feels the need to constantly emphasize that the knowledge and doctrines which he describes come from the ancient and wise men, and they do not form part of a wholly new innovation.⁵⁶¹ Hence, he refers to Homer and Hesiod, the most venerable of the poets, in order to support his claims for the superiority of King Helios. Hesiod ‘said that Helios is the son of Hyperion and Thea, intimating thereby that he is the true son of Him who is above all’ (in other words, the One).⁵⁶² According to Julian, this statement serves as clear evidence that the knowledge of Helios’ origin – as the offspring of Hyperion, the most divine and supreme Being – was known to the wisest ancient poets, who either expressed their own views or were divinely inspired by Apollo and the Muses. Thus, Julian

⁵⁵⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 135b. This expression – yielding, is also characteristic of the Chaldean *Oracles* (fr. 81).

⁵⁵⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 136a.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 136a–b; Platon, *Phaedon* 80d, 83d, *Cratylus* 403b.

⁵⁶⁰ See Chapter 2 – Theurgy.

⁵⁶¹ As previously mentioned, it was important for the scholars in Late Antiquity to attribute their claims to the ancient wisdom, in order to attribute more validity on their own statements. See also analysis in Chapter 2 on Porphyry’s *Cave of the Nymphs*.

⁵⁶² Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 136c. Julian refers to the meaning of the name of Hyperion, which means ‘he that walks above’ or ‘the God above’ (Υπέρτατος).

equates Hyperion with the definition of Good/One in his metaphysical system. Once again, using the same wording as Plotinus or Plato's second letter, Julian calls Hyperion πάντων ἐπέκεινα καὶ περὶ ὃν πάντα καὶ οὐ ἔνεκα πάντα ἐστίν (beyond everything and everything being around him and goal of all things that exist).⁵⁶³ This aligns with the appellation of the Good as the one "beyond Intellect" (τὸ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ), described earlier. Moreover, on several occasions, Homer refers to Helios as Hyperion, mirroring the designation used for his father, a tactic which points to the common features that the Good and Helios share. Helios (the noeric Intellect), like his father Hyperion (the One), is characterized by an autonomous nature that transcends all necessity.⁵⁶⁴ In addition, Homer confirms that Zeus is at the same level of hierarchy as King Helios, since he calls him lord of all things, granted with the power to constrain the other Gods.⁵⁶⁵

Furthermore, Julian points to a passage in *Odyssey*, where Helios demanded that the comrades of Odysseus should be punished, otherwise he would stop shining among the Gods. Zeus immediately acceded to his demand and refrained from issuing any orders or threats, unlike his behavior toward the other Gods. This fact shows the autonomous existence of the Sun, and the great power that he has to perfect. The condition of "autonomy" and the function of "the power to perfect" are essential aspects of the Neoplatonic principles of "spontaneous generation", "non-reciprocal dependence", and "causal relationships".⁵⁶⁶ Why else, the emperor asks, 'do the Gods need him unless by sending his light, himself invisible, on their substance and existence, he fulfills for them all the blessing?'⁵⁶⁷ In addition to the Sun's supremacy over the divine planets, the aforementioned phrase allows us to infer that Julian regards all other Greek gods, with the exception of Zeus, as identifiable to the noeric gods and subordinate to both King Helios and Zeus.

⁵⁶³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 136d. This phrase by Julian can be directly compared to the following phrases of Plotinus and Plato: ἐπέκεινα πάντων καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ σεμνοτάτου νοῦ (Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.13); πάντων βασιλέα πάντ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἐκείνου ἔνεκα πάντα, καὶ ἐκείνο αἴτιον πάντων καλῶν (Plato, *Epistles* 2.312e).

⁵⁶⁴ Ὅμηρος δὲ αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς Ὑπερίωνα καλεῖ, καὶ δείκνυσί γε αὐτοῦ τὸ αὐτεξούσιον καὶ πάσης ἀνάγκης κρεῖττον (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 136d); Homer (*Iliad* 8.480, *Odyssey* 1.8).

⁵⁶⁵ Ὁ γάρ τοι Ζεὺς, ὡς ἐκείνός φησιν, ἀπάντων ὢν κύριος τοὺς ἄλλους προσαναγκάζει (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 136d.)

⁵⁶⁶ See Chapter 2 on Neoplatonism – Basic Principles.

⁵⁶⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 137b.

As previously demonstrated, Helios is regarded as the supreme God in the noeric world. Being the direct offspring of the One, he possesses the unique privilege of not being subject to Necessity.⁵⁶⁸ As a result, “for all that he wills he is, and can do, and puts into action. For he does not will what is not, nor does he lack power to do what he wills, nor does he desire to put into action what he cannot”.⁵⁶⁹ The statement appears to directly reference the *Oracles*, which depict the supreme Father as entrusting the Intellect with the governance of all things determined by Necessity.⁵⁷⁰ Despite the fact that the hypercosmic powers and activities of Helios are countless, Julian would present us with a few, identifying them simultaneously with several other Gods – most of them deriving from the Greek pantheon.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, Helios concentrates within him and unites together all the powers. As Julian says, characteristically, ‘For verily there are Gods related to Helios and of like substance who sum up the stainless nature of this God (Helios), and though in the visible world they are plural, in him they are one’.⁵⁷² These powers are transmitted via the Sun’s rays, and are diffused everywhere in our cosmos, demonstrating their beneficial and demiurgic nature. Julian reiterates the Neoplatonic concept that entities positioned higher within the cosmological hierarchy exhibit greater simplicity, whereas those situated lower become increasingly multiplied and structurally more complex. As the supreme noeric God, Helios is characterized exactly by this notion of simplicity, which attains the level of oneness. Being the offspring of the Good/One, Helios is one himself. Hence, through his midmost position and mediating role, ‘he reveals the whole noeric substance throughout as one, since he brings together the two extremes’.⁵⁷³ He binds the noeric causes (that lean towards both the noetic and visible), which are wholly separate from the bodies, into a unity, with himself as their central point.⁵⁷⁴ These creative causes can also be personified

⁵⁶⁸ In other words, King Helios is above the laws of physics.

⁵⁶⁹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 142d.

⁵⁷⁰ *Chaldean Oracles* Fr.22-24.

⁵⁷¹ This approach is similar to Sallustius, who classifies the cosmic gods into four main aspects (demiurgic, animating, harmonizing, guarding). These Gods are Zeus (demiurgic and animating), Apollo (demiurgic and harmonizing), Aphrodite (demiurgic and harmonizing), and Athena (demiurgic and guarding). See Schramm (2022: 157).

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* 143b. Εἰσὶ γάρ τοι θεοὶ συγγενεῖς Ἡλίῳ καὶ συμφυεῖς, τὴν ἄχραντον οὐσίαν τοῦ θεοῦ κορυφούμενοι, πληθυνόμενοι μὲν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, περὶ αὐτὸν δὲ ἐνοειδῶς ὄντες.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.* 144c. δι’ ἧς ὅλην δι’ ὅλης τὴν νοερὰν οὐσίαν, τὰς ἀκρότητας αὐτῆς εἰς ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸ συνάγων, ἀποφαίνει μίαν.

⁵⁷⁴ This again reflects the Neoplatonic notion of the oneness. Everything swirls around the Intellect and merges towards its centre.

by several deities. In conclusion, Helios connects the noetic substance with the visible world by providing the means to render it visible.⁵⁷⁵

The demiurgic power of Helios is distinctly evident in the visible Sun, who, wherever its luminous rays shine, brings forth life. Julian claims that the creative power of Zeus completely coincides with Helios'. Thus, Zeus and Helios are one and the same God. There is an equal and identical dominion of both Gods over the separate creation, which is formed prior to substances in the realm of absolute causes and subsequently exists prior to and apart from visible creation. In a similar manner, Apollo abides with Helios and is his colleague by reason of the simplicity of his thoughts (ἀπλότητα τῶν νοήσεων), the stability of his substance (τὸ μόνιμον τῆς οὐσίας), and the consistency of his activity (κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν τῆς ἐνεργείας).⁵⁷⁶ Moreover, he possesses specific attributes associated with Helios (ἀπλότης, μόνιμον, and κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν). Consequently, he is characterized as a component of Helios rather than being entirely equivalent. However, these three aforementioned attributes are loftier traits which come from the noetic realm,⁵⁷⁷ thereby establishing Apollo as a high-ranking God. In opposition to the noetic attributes of Apollo, Dionysus (the son of Zeus) controls the divided substance. In other words, he has the dividing creative function, which is the primary force responsible for the creation of the visible world of multiplicity and life. Although the forces of the two Gods seem to oppose each other (i.e., stability and oneness vs. creation and multiplicity), they coexist harmoniously within Helios. Moreover, it seems that Apollo (having noetic attributes) is controlling Dionysus' demiurgic powers. That is why Julian says that 'Apollo is the interpreter for us of the fairest purposes that are to be found with our God (Helios)'.⁵⁷⁸ Furthermore, 'Helios, since he comprehends in himself all the principles of the fairest noeric synthesis, is himself Apollo the leader of the Muses'.⁵⁷⁹ This deduction by Julian is particularly intriguing, as it implies

⁵⁷⁵ This is done by producing all these new elements and powers that are necessary to establish the visible forms. (The noeric Helios has similar functions to the second Sun of the modern cosmologists, who uses its immense energy to produce the necessary heavier elements that are needed to create the visible material forms, which in turn are being produced by the energy of our visible Sun. See Appendix II – Solar Posterity)

⁵⁷⁶ Apollo appears to be the actual inspiration of Julian in this matter. Julian uses this claim to support the truthfulness of his words, since who knows the nature of Apollo better than God himself?

⁵⁷⁷ As we have seen from the Neoplatonic doctrine.

⁵⁷⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 144a. ἐξηγητὴς ἡμῖν ἐστὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοῦ καλλίστων διανοημάτων.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 144b. Πάσας δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ περιέχων ὁ θεὸς ὅδε τὰς ἀρχὰς τῆς καλλίστης νοερᾶς συγκράσεως Ἥλιος Ἀπόλλων ἐστὶ Μουσηγέτης.

that whenever he invoked Apollo to inspire his writings, he was, in effect, appealing to his favourite and supreme God, King Helios.

Advocates of Mithraic interpretations of the *Hymn* argue that the reference to Dionysos' creative role alludes to the tauroctony, which is central to Mithraic doctrine. Athanassiadi (1977: 367) states that the tearing of Dionysos by the Titans in the Orphic mythology has a strong resemblance to the sacrifice of the Mithraic bull, since in both traditions this act symbolizes the creative function of the dividing substance. However, there is no evidence within the text, nor any explicit indication provided by Julian, regarding this matter. Thus, it is more likely that 'Julian could look to a Platonist exegesis of the (Orphic) myth which had begun as early as Xenocrates and later found a place in Plutarch'.⁵⁸⁰ I would not be as categorical as Smith in dismissing any Mithraic influence on this subject. The Neoplatonist Proclus interprets the body of Dionysus as the cosmic Soul, with his heart as the cosmic Intellect. The body, divided into seven parts, symbolizes the plurality and diverse modes through which the Soul contemplates Ideas, in contrast to the heart, which represents unity and oneness.⁵⁸¹ The myth of Dionysus significantly contributes to the parallels between Mithraism and Neoplatonism, facilitating Julian's synthesis of these two doctrines. A comparable approach is observed in the myths concerning the creative, life-giving role of the Mithraic bull and the bull Attis of Cybele.

Asclepios is another deity closely associated with Helios. In fact, this "Saviour God" is the offspring of Helios, who sent him to Earth to save humanity by promoting health and safety for all.⁵⁸² This association appears to originate from Iamblichus, who states that Asclepios is to be located in the Sun. Consequently, Asclepios is sent from the Sun to the realm of creation. Moreover, Asclepios fills the sphere of Becoming with symmetry and good temperament.⁵⁸³ Julian goes on to confirm that among all the gifts that Helios has bestowed on us, Asclepios is the greatest of all. This is because Helios fills the whole of our life with fair order (ὅλην ἡμῖν τὴν τῆς εὐταξίας ζωὴν συμπληροῖ), and Asclepios was sent to Earth in order to save us and to bring to us health. This God, who

⁵⁸⁰ Smith 1995: 147.

⁵⁸¹ Van Den Berg 2001: 287–89; The myth of Dionysus and the Titans also mentions that Athena saved his heart.

⁵⁸² Julian, *Against the Galilaeans* 200a; *Hymn to King Helios* 153b.

⁵⁸³ Iamblichus, *In Timaeum* Book 1, Fr. 19.

actually appeared on Earth in human form, saved many souls and cured many bodies. Moreover, he imparted medical knowledge to humankind and healed thousands of patients at the Asclepieia, his healing centres. Julian immediately grasped the importance of the concept of “fair order” (εὐταξία). In addition to establishing order in the universe and within our terrestrial environment, it also symbolizes a state of physical and mental well-being. A central aspect of this deity’s characterization as the “Saviour God” and healer is his role in upholding the fair order in all life. Julian most probably alludes to Aristotle and Plato, who had understood that the loss of balance in our soul, mind, and body leads to sickness.⁵⁸⁴ Hence, by bringing fair order (balance) to our inner self, Asclepios was able to cure our soul and body that was suffering due to the fact that it had become unbalanced.⁵⁸⁵

All these powers of King Helios, which are associated with various noeric Gods, existed before the beginning of the world. Using these powers, Helios was able to create our cosmos (solar system), and fill it with good gifts (ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀποπλήρωσις) through his works. As a genuine son of the Good, his first work was to bestow on the noeric Gods a beneficent and perfect substance (ἀγαθοεργὸν καὶ τελείαν αὐτοῖς διδοὺς τὴν οὐσίαν). His second work is ‘his most perfect distribution of noetic beauty among the noeric and immaterial forms’.⁵⁸⁶ Julian explains that the generated substance in the visible world is guided by King Helios, who is eternally beautiful.⁵⁸⁷ Moreover, like the Sun’s rays, Helios’s rays shine (far more brightly) on all the noeric Gods, bestowing on them the faculty of thought. Another work of Helios, “The King of All” (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ὅλων Ἥλιος), is the creation of all the nobler races (τοῖς κρείττοσι γένεσιν) – that is, the angels, daemons, heroes, and those divided souls which remain in the category of their archetype and never actually get into a body. This is similar to Iamblichus’ description of the superior

⁵⁸⁴ The concept of restoring balance is fundamental in modern medicine. The objective of prescribed medications, whether for mental or physical health, is to achieve this equilibrium. In mental health treatment, medications aim to regulate neurotransmitter levels in the brain to restore chemical balance. Similarly, in physical health, medications target symptoms with the goal of reestablishing bodily balance.

⁵⁸⁵ In *Against the Galileans*, Julian seems to try to present Asclepios, the “Saviour of All”, as a counterbalance to the Christian God. As an adherent to philosophy, Julian must have thought Asclepios’ healing methods, practiced through the Asclepieia, were a much more rational alternative to other faiths, which were primarily based on belief in mere miracles.

⁵⁸⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 144d–145a. Δεύτερον δὲ ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ τοῦ νοητοῦ κάλλους ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς καὶ ἀσωμάτοις εἶδεσι τελειοτάτη διανομή.

⁵⁸⁷ Julian, once more, promotes the idea of an independent and eternal Helios.

beings that are, however, inferior to the noeric Gods.⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, Julian's reference to an "archetype soul" alludes to a World Soul. The connection between superior beings and individual souls, which originate from the Soul of the cosmos (ψυχῆς ἐν κόσμῳ) was demonstrated by Plotinus as well.⁵⁸⁹

In a rather obscure passage, Julian says that Helios is lord of five zones in the heavens. When he traverses three of them, he begets the three Graces (τρῆς γεννᾷ τὰς χάριτας), while the remaining two are the scales of mighty Necessity (μεγάλης ἀνάγκης εἰσὶ πλάστιγγες). The emperor does not explicitly clarify the meaning of that phrase. The statement becomes even more peculiar when he suggests that this description may be incomprehensible to the Greeks.⁵⁹⁰ Hence, it seems that Julian is describing something that would look incomprehensible to the masses. This is why he feels compelled to elaborate further on the matter by inserting into the "equation" the Dioscuri. Even if it was incomprehensible to the Greeks, the name of the Graces could always allude to Greek mythology. It appears that there are several different versions regarding their exact identities and that of their mother; however, in all accounts, their father is Zeus.⁵⁹¹ Hence, it can be said that Helios is also considered their father. Therefore, the Graces are directly associated with Helios, and this is exactly what it looks like in the *Hymn*. Julian seems to refer to the astronomical observations that mark the ecliptic, that is, the yearly path that the Sun follows in the celestial sphere. In astrology, the celestial sphere is divided into five zones: the celestial equator,⁵⁹² the two tropics (Cancer and Capricorn), and the two poles (north and south). The first three zones (equator and two tropics) apparently mark the yearly path of the Sun, hence helping in the determination of the seasons. Thus, the equator marks the two solar equinoxes (spring and fall), where the daylight and night are the same. While, for the northern hemisphere, the tropic of Capricorn marks the winter solstice (shortest day of the year) and the tropic of Cancer, the summer solstice (longest day of the year).⁵⁹³ Julian appears to attribute precisely this astrological significance when he

⁵⁸⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriorum* 1.20, 2.6. See Chapter 2 – Iamblichus.

⁵⁸⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.5.6.

⁵⁹⁰ And most probably, to the Romans, as well.

⁵⁹¹ *Orphic Hymns* 59; Hesiod. *Theogony* 906.

⁵⁹² The celestial equator marks the projector of Earth's equator into the heavens.

⁵⁹³ Thus, starting from winter solstice, the yearly course of the Sun is: Moving northern from the tropic of Capricorn, passing through the equator (spring equinox), and finishing at the tropic of Cancer on the summer

associates the Graces with the initial three zones.⁵⁹⁴ Indeed, his reference to the tropics and the equinoxes constitutes an integral component of the Eleusinian, Cybele, Mithraic, and Chaldean mystical doctrines; therefore, this statement appears to be an indirect allusion to these traditions. In the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, Julian provides a detailed exposition of the significance attributed to specific points in the Sun's movement within ritual contexts.⁵⁹⁵ This esoteric meaning likely accounts for why such concepts would have been incomprehensible to the "common" Greeks.

The reference to the celestial poles is intriguing, since Julian connects them to the great Necessity, who is an important Goddess in Mithraism. Moreover, Mithraism was directly connected to the celestial phenomena. As we have seen, the Mithraists had created in the Cave a "planetarium" that marked the celestial objects in the sky.⁵⁹⁶ This is a crucial point for the proponents of the Mithraic allusions, who hold it as a "flagship" to support their theory.⁵⁹⁷ However, the role of Necessity was highly important in the *Chaldean Oracles* as well, where she is presented as an aspect of Hecate that controls the planetary movements.⁵⁹⁸ Necessity also controls the triadic aspect of the dyad, determining the order of its beginning, middle, and end.⁵⁹⁹ Hence, Julian's reference to Ἀνάγκη (Necessity) may equally allude to both doctrines.⁶⁰⁰ The celestial poles are the two points in the sky where the Earth's axis of rotation, infinitely extended, intersects with the celestial sphere. Both north and south look fixed in the sky, while all the other celestial objects and stars revolve around them. In other words, it looks like the celestial sphere rotates around the poles, and each pole (north and south) stands at the centre of the sky. The stars that are in the celestial poles appear stationary. Hence, to the ancients, it appeared as if there was a force that defied the laws of nature and maintained the stars fixed in the sky. Necessity represents the force

solstice – marking a six months' course. Then, it goes back again, moving south, passing through the equator to again reach the tropic of Capricorn after another six months.

⁵⁹⁴ Wright 1913: 401; Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 204.

⁵⁹⁵ For the Mithraic importance, see analysis in Chapter 2 – Porphyry *In the Cave of the Nymphs*.

⁵⁹⁶ See Chapter 1 – Mithraism.

⁵⁹⁷ Athanassiadi 1977: 369.

⁵⁹⁸ Smith (1995: 155).

⁵⁹⁹ *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 24.

⁶⁰⁰ Although Smith (1995: 155), in his zealous effort to reject any Mithraic allusion, prefers to associate Julian's concept of Necessity with the *Oracles*, he simultaneously acknowledges objections to this approach, such as the question of why an analogue to Hecate and the World Soul would appear unusual to Greek philosophers.

that moves celestial objects around the poles. The equator divides the entire sky into two zones: the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere. The “scales of Necessity” appear to allude to the balance and harmony they bring to Earth's celestial skies, with each scale representing the center of one of the two celestial hemispheres.

In Greek mythology, Ἀνάγκη (Necessity) holds a significant role. She is the primordial Goddess of necessity, compulsion, and inevitability, emerging at the dawn of creation. She appeared at the same time as Χρόνος (Time), and she is his mistress. Together with Time, they laid the foundations for the creation of our cosmos, and by encircling it, they set it in motion. She is considered superior to the Olympian Gods, who are bound by her will. Thus, we see that Necessity is important in all three religions (Mithraism, *Chaldean Oracles*, Greek religion). Julian calls Helios her lord. This actually makes sense. As the direct offspring of the Good (a fact that makes him the King of All), King Helios is eternal and comes before time, hence he controls Necessity (which appeared at the same moment with Time). To understand the logic better, we can compare it to modern cosmology. In a cosmological modern interpretation, Necessity can be compared to the laws of physics that apply to all the forces in the universe.⁶⁰¹ However, they do not apply to the extreme gravitational forces, like ones that exist in the black hole,⁶⁰² which twists space and time and does not obey the universal laws of physics.

As already mentioned, in a further effort to explain the “mystical” meaning of the polar circles to the Greeks, Julian presents the Dioscuri. He says that these twin Gods are called “alternate of days”.⁶⁰³ Due to his inquisitive nature, he attempts to provide a mystical explanation for this meaning⁶⁰⁴ and notes that theologians have developed the theory that the term “alternate days” refers instead to the two hemispheres of the universe. However, for the first and possibly only time, he rejects the theory of the theologians, deeming it illogical, since the difference of the light between the northern and southern hemisphere is not easily perceptible.⁶⁰⁵ Thus, Julian develops his own theory. Initially, he proposes that

⁶⁰¹ Which may be compared to the attributes of King Helios and the Olympian Gods.

⁶⁰² It is intriguing to compare the black hole to a noetic/noeric hypostasis of Helios.

⁶⁰³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 147a.

⁶⁰⁴ This represents a classical Julian and Neoplatonic approach, which acknowledges the presence of an underlying truth within every myth.

⁶⁰⁵ Based on the modern conception of the northern and southern hemispheres, the theologians' theory actually makes sense. Each hemisphere exhibits behavior that is precisely opposite to that of the other. The difference is more readily observed at the poles, where, when it is night at one pole, it is day at the opposite

the term “alternate of days” does not refer to daylight, but rather, to both the celestial tropics and poles. However, he admits that people in the region (torrid zone) where shadows are cast in an opposite direction (ἀμφίσκιος)⁶⁰⁶ can actually see both tropics in the sky. However, this does not apply to the poles, which are visible only from their respective hemispheres. Thus, Julian’s conclusion appears to be that the Dioscuri in the Greek mythology represent the two poles. This deduction is logical, as when it is daytime at one pole, it is simultaneously nighttime at the opposite pole. The rays of the Sun cannot be at the two poles simultaneously, except on the sacred days of the equinox. Thus, the Dioscuri and the scales of Necessity precisely express the same mystical and cosmological meaning: the two celestial poles that cannot be observed simultaneously.⁶⁰⁷

The *Hymn*’s reference to the Dioscuri is considered another Mithraic allusion. According to Athanassiadi, ‘Julian’s treatment of the Dioscuri myth, both in its moral and its cosmic meaning, supports Cumont’s interpretation of the same myth, and provides additional evidence... for the importance of the notion of necessity in Mithraism’.⁶⁰⁸ Indeed, Cumont’s hypothesis of the Mithraic meaning of the Dioscuri as the two celestial hemispheres mirrors Julian’s initial proposal about the tropics and the poles. Smith is once more ready to dismiss another Mithraic allusion, and suggests that Julian refers to a Iamblichean comment on the *Oracles*. The reality is that since there is not enough evidence available, no one can be absolutely certain, but the similarities between the Mithraic interpretation of the Dioscuri and Julian’s should not be dismissed as trivial.⁶⁰⁹ In this regard, we can better understand Julian’s innovation. The emperor questions the Mithraic allusion to the Dioscuri as representing the two hemispheres, and reinterprets it to mean only the poles – thus, bringing it into conformity with the interpretation of the scales of Necessity. However, as was explained before, if the term ‘alternate of days’ is interpreted not according to the celestial zones but according to the hemispheres, as the theologians’

pole, and vice versa. Hence, the term “scales” refers to their equipoise movement, and alludes directly to the two hemispheres.

⁶⁰⁶ In the torrid zone (region between the two tropics), the shadows change orientation. In the northern hemisphere, the orientation at noon is due north during the winter and due south during the summer. The opposite occurs in the southern hemisphere.

⁶⁰⁷ This is the author’s personal interpretation.

⁶⁰⁸ Athanassiadi 1977: 370.

⁶⁰⁹ However, some authors, like Gordon (1975), refute Cumont’s hypothesis. Recent evidence presented by Beck (2006) has confirmed the Mithraists’ complex celestial interpretation.

claim, where each hemisphere encompasses both a tropic and a pole, it can actually make sense, since both the north and south hemisphere behave in exactly the opposite way.

Another divine syncretism is between Helios and Oceanus. Julian, following up the previous theme between the relationship of Helios with the three Graces, claims that since ‘Helios is the father of the seasons; and since he never forsakes the poles, he is Oceanus, the lord of two-fold substance’.⁶¹⁰ From the preceding analysis, Helios’ relationship with the seasons can be comprehensively understood, as his annual trajectory marks the progression of the seasons. The reference to the poles may have a double interpretation. If it refers to daylight on the actual poles on Earth, one may claim that the Sun is always shining at least on one pole during the year (alternate of days). However, if it refers to the celestial poles that appear at the centre of the celestial sky, one may claim that King Helios abides in the poles, since time “appears” to stop in that region and everything remains still.⁶¹¹ Now, why is He also equated with the Titan Oceanus? While it is not obvious at first glance, Julian’s logic can be explained by Homer, whom Julian quotes by saying: ‘Oceanus who is the father of all things (for mortals and for the blessed Gods)’⁶¹². In conjunction with another Homeric phrase from the *Iliad*, West believes that Homer is suggesting a myth where Oceanus and Tethys were the first parents of the whole race of the Gods.⁶¹³ Hence, Oceanus (representing the sea and water), in a cosmological way, is portrayed as a primordial cause of everything, like Helios. Julian continues in an epistemological approach to prove his point, by claiming that, ‘there is no single thing in the whole existence that is not the offspring of the substance of Oceanus’.⁶¹⁴ This exaltation of Oceanus is also in accordance with the Mithraic doctrine that places him in the ruling triad together with Zeus.⁶¹⁵ However, once more, Julian does not give a single hint that he had Mithraism in mind.

⁶¹⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 147d.

⁶¹¹ See previous explanation on Necessity.

⁶¹² Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 147d–148a.

⁶¹³ ‘Oceanus the origin of the Gods and mother Tethys’ (in West 1997: 147).

⁶¹⁴ It is fascinating how Julian describes so accurately a modern scientific theory, by combining Oceanus and Helios as the source of all existence on Earth. Contemporary biologists also believe that all life on Earth began from the Oceans and the water, in conjunction with the Sun’s energy.

⁶¹⁵ See Chapter 1 – Mithraism.

In the whole text, perhaps the most difficult theory to explain is why Oceanus is the lord of the two-fold substance.⁶¹⁶ The answer may be found in a surviving fragment of the *Oracles*, and it is related to Necessity.⁶¹⁷ The relevant passage, which comes from an excerpt of Damascius, describes how Necessity determines the internal order of a Dyad, which also has a middle, thus becoming actually a Triad. Each Dyad, or Triad with a middle, has a twofold substance, which can be described as the unparticipated (infinite) and participated (connective).⁶¹⁸ What is not clear at all is the point that Julian wants to make on the role that the poles play in conjunction with Oceanus or Helios. Julian tries to explain it in an astrological way. Initially, the emperor clarifies that he is referring to a dogma associated with the mysteries, though he does not specify whether it is Mithraic or Chaldean. However, it is generally believed that he is referring to the *Chaldean Oracles*.⁶¹⁹

Julian goes on to describe a theory or rather “established truth”,⁶²⁰ where ‘the Sun travels in the starless heavens far above the region of the fixed stars. Moreover, on this theory, he will not be stationed midmost among the planets but midway between the three worlds’.⁶²¹ Based on the foregoing, it appears evident that Julian is describing the existence and cosmic placement of the noeric King Helios. This knowledge seems to have formed part of a sacred knowledge, since the emperor admits that it would be better to keep silent. Moreover, the conception of Helios being placed midway between the three worlds seems to be related to the one previously described about the celestial poles: a place where the stars appear to be stationary in the centre of the sky. However, Julian does not expand on this, most likely because he does not want to reveal any arcane knowledge of the mysteries – a knowledge that may have come from time immemorial, since it described (as in Homer’s poems) Oceanus as the primary source of existence in the cosmos. However, it is almost certain that Julian refers to Homer as an authority and not as a source. As explained

⁶¹⁶ This refers, as Julian claims, to Oceanus’ mystical interpretation.

⁶¹⁷ *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 24.

⁶¹⁸ See also Chapter 2 – Iamblichus and Metaphysics. The term “twofold” was commonly used by the Neoplatonists. Proclus (*In Timaeus* 2.261) refers to the Demiurgus as the ruler over the twofold world, the supercelestial and the celestial, comprehending also the beginning, middles, and ends of wholes.

⁶¹⁹ Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 124.

⁶²⁰ Julian states that the priests of the mysteries claim that they have learned this knowledge by the Gods or the mighty Daemons, hence they should be treated as “established truths”. This comes in contrast to the unproven theories of the astronomers, who are to be treated as mere “hypothesis”.

⁶²¹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 148ab. ὁ δίσκος ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνάστρου φέρεσθαι πολὺ τῆς ἀπλανοῦς ὑψηλότερος· καὶ οὕτω δὲ τῶν μὲν πλανωμένων οὐχ ἔξει τὸ μέσον, τριῶν δὲ τῶν κόσμων.

previously, his sources on this matter are more likely to be the *Chaldean Oracles*. This view is also confirmed by Lewy, who believes that Julian is referring here to the Transmundane Sun of the Chaldeans.⁶²² Indeed, the characteristics of King Helios and the Transmundane Sun are almost identical. Both stand as a ruler and king of the whole universe, just as their spitting image (the sensible Sun) is ruler and king of the planets in our solar system. This noetic/noeric Sun constitutes part of the divine cosmological triad of Father, Hypercosmic Sun (Aion), and Hecate.⁶²³ Consequently, Julian appears to identify King Helios with the Hypercosmic Sun of the Chaldeans, who is likewise associated with Aion and positioned subordinate to the Father.⁶²⁴

There are also several other Gods/cosmological powers in the heavens that owe their existence to Helios. Julian's description of all these Gods is based on astronomical observations that are presented in a pure astrological manner.⁶²⁵ The emperor is essentially describing the solar zodiac, which is formed by the Sun's annual course (ecliptic), its signs, and their subdivisions.⁶²⁶ He is first referring to the three celestial spheres (two tropics and equator) that are divided by four (the seasons), and the result is twelve divine powers (the twelve zodiac signs). Hence, the Zodiac circle of 360 degrees is divided into twelve parts, each one corresponding to thirty degrees of the circle. Then, the twelve signs are further divided into three parts of ten degrees each (the Decans) to better cover the influence that the celestial powers have on us. Thus, in the Zodiac, there are thirty-six Gods in all. This description of the Zodiac finds its mirror in the *De Mysteriis* of Iamblichus.⁶²⁷

Interestingly, Julian notes that the four seasons, which signify the change of time, are a gift from the three Graces, who represent the three celestial spheres. That is why the Graces are depicted as imitating a circle.⁶²⁸ Dionysus is also considered to participate in the gift of the Graces. Hence, he is called Χαρτοδότης, and he is said to reign along with Helios. This is done through his particular characteristic of representing the divided

⁶²² Lewy 2011: 152.

⁶²³ See Chapter 2 on *Chaldean Oracles* and Solar World-Hypercosmic Sun.

⁶²⁴ This view is also supported by Smith (1995: 153).

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.* 148c. Once again, Julian emphasizes the difference between those who survey the heavens scientifically and those that do it like cattle.

⁶²⁶ The solar zodiac (or zodiacal belt) is a wide ring in the sky, centered on the ecliptic – the Sun's annual circular path divided into twelve signs – commonly used in astrology to map the Sun's position.

⁶²⁷ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus and Metaphysics – Simplified Version.

⁶²⁸ The celestial annual circular course of the Sun around the ecliptic, caused by Earth's orbit around the Sun.

creative substance, which is the cause of all creation.⁶²⁹ Afterwards, Julian presents Horus, the Egyptian solar God, as one of the several Gods who belong to Helios. The logic to present him at this point presumably has to do with the belief that Horus gave his name to both the twenty-four hours (ῥῶραι) and the four seasons (ῥῶραι).⁶³⁰

The numerous deities subordinate to Helios are assembled into a unified grand army, which has been entrusted to Athena Pronoia (Ἀθηνᾶ Προνοία). The emperor seems to be innovating for a second time, by altering the traditional myth of Athena, who was sprang from the head of Zeus. In a Iamblichean way, Julian claims that Athena was born whole from the whole of him (ὅλην ἐξ ὅλου).⁶³¹ The Goddess of Wisdom may also be linked to Helios through her multiple associations with Apollo. The relationship is profoundly ancient, originating from Homer, as asserted by Julian, and persisting through the works of Aeschylus and Herodotus.⁶³² Thus, Athena has received her nature from Helios and she is his intelligence in perfect form. Julian provides a more analytical account, relative to the other Gods, of Athena's solar attributes, thereby emphasizing the significant role that this solar Goddess plays in cosmological creation:

‘Athena binds together the Gods who are assembled about Helios and brings them without confusion into unity with Helios, the King of All: and she distributes and is the channel for stainless and pure life throughout the seven spheres, from the highest vault of the heavens as far as Selene the Moon: for Selene is the last of the heavenly spheres which Athena fills with wisdom: and by her aid Selene beholds the noetic which is higher than the heavens, and adorns with its forms the realm of matter that lies below her, and thus she does away with its savagery and confusion and disorder. Moreover, to mankind Athena gives the blessing of wisdom and intelligence and the creative arts. And surely, she dwells in the capitols of the cities because, through her wisdom she has established the community of the state’⁶³³ (Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 149d–150a).

⁶²⁹ See earlier analysis in this chapter on Dionysus.

⁶³⁰ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.21.13.

⁶³¹ Iamblichus uses a similar expression about the soul, where he says that she is established in the whole Demiurgic God (Majercik 1989: 36).

⁶³² Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 125.

⁶³³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 149d–150a. συνάπτειν μὲν τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἥλιον θεοὺς αὐτῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν ὅλων Ἡλίῳ δίχα συγχύσεως εἰς ἕνωσιν, αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν ἄχραντον καὶ καθαρὰν ζῶην ἀπ’ ἄκρας ἀψίδος οὐρανοῦ διὰ τῶν ἐπτὰ κύκλων ἄχρι τῆς Σελήνης νέμουνσαν ἐποχτεύειν, ἣν ἡ θεὸς ἦδε τῶν κυκλικῶν οὐσαν σωμάτων ἐσχάτην ἐπλήρωσε [διὰ] τῆς φρονήσεως, ὅφ’ ἣς ἡ Σελήνη τὰ τε ὑπὲρ τὸν οὐρανὸν θεωρεῖ νοητὰ καὶ τὰ ὑφ’ ἐαυτὴν κοσμοῦσα τὴν ὕλην τοῖς εἶδεσιν ἀναιρεῖ τὸ θηριῶδες αὐτῆς καὶ παραχῶδες καὶ ἄτακτον. Ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἀγαθὰ δίδωσιν Ἀθηνᾶ σοφίαν <τό> τε νοεῖν καὶ τὰς δημιουργικὰς τέχνας. Κατοικεῖ δὲ τὰς ἀκροπόλεις αὕτη δῆπουθεν καταστησαμένη τὴν πολιτικὴν διὰ σοφίας κοινωνίαν.

The aforementioned description of Athena is quite different from what one might expect, because it does not conform exactly to her traditional aspects. She is more appropriately characterized as the Hecate of the *Oracles*, who, in turn, functions analogously to the World Soul of the Neoplatonists.⁶³⁴ Like Hecate, Athena represents the Power (δύναμις) which unites the world and brings it into harmony. The common characteristics between the two Goddesses are numerous. Athena's fiery nature is well-founded, as she is said to have been born from King Helios. She unites all the noeric forces (Gods) around King Helios, and she has been appointed as their leader. She is not confined in one place, since she traverses the whole universe from the highest vault in the heavens to the lowest place here on Earth. In a pure Chaldean terminology, Athena, like Hecate, 'is the channel for stainless and pure life throughout the seven spheres, from the highest vault of the heavens as far as Selene the Moon'.⁶³⁵ The significance of Hecate and the Moon's influence on Earth is well documented in the *Chaldean Oracles*. Hecate, apart from being described in the *Oracles* as a channel of fire and life, also has the Moon as her symbol. The life-giving power of Athena is transmitted through the Moon upon our planet, bringing order and harmony. Another factor contributing to the identification of Athena with Hecate is her role as a guide for souls during their journey from Helios to Earth and back. As the emperor explains, Athena, Goddess of Forethought, received the soul of Quirinus when it was sent down to Earth by Helios, and when it was time to return again, she led him back to the Sun God, The King of All.⁶³⁶ While Athena's traditional traits are still attributed to her ("she gives the blessing of wisdom and intelligence and the creative arts"), her military attributes are not mentioned.⁶³⁷

This depiction of Athena as both Hecate and the World Soul accounts for the lack of an autonomous mention of the World Soul within Julian's metaphysical schema. Simultaneously, it incorporates the World Soul into the substance of King Helios. In addition, the aforementioned exegesis conforms with the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, where the noeric Attis, incorporating the demiurgic role of Athena, is described as the generative life-giving power (World Soul), and as the offspring of Helios and Cybele. The

⁶³⁴ See Chapter 2 on the *Chaldean Oracles* and Cosmogony-Triads-Heliocentrism.

⁶³⁵ Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 149d–150a.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.* 154d.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.* 150a.

Great Mother of the Gods is depicted as Προνοία (Providence), serving as the noetic counterpart to the intellectual Athena.⁶³⁸ The cosmological portrayal of Athena in the *Hymn to king Helios* does not constitute a novel interpretation. Proclus explains that Porphyry and Iamblichus also associated Athena with Selene (the Moon), which is considered the origin from which souls descend.⁶³⁹ However, there is one fundamental difference: Julian's exclusion of Athena's warlike features. In contrast, Iamblichus incorporates these features in his description of Athena. Proclus says that this divine philosopher 'interpreted war as the disorderly, confused, and material nature of Athena; but wisdom as her immaterial and separate intelligence'.⁶⁴⁰ Hence, according to Iamblichus, Athena, with her wisdom, brings order to the material world, but she is simultaneously the cause of disorder, too.

Another Goddess that is related to Helios is Aphrodite. As proof of this deduction, Julian once again refers to the ancient wisdom of the Phoenicians. The syncretism between Aphrodite and the local Phoenician Goddess Astarte was well known from the time of Herodotus, who claims that the worship of Aphrodite has a Phoenician origin. By the time of Late Antiquity, the worship of Aphrodite and Astarte had a bidirectional orientation.⁶⁴¹ Julian's depiction of the "Phoenician" Aphrodite bears a striking resemblance to a Neoplatonic interpretation.⁶⁴² The Goddess of Love is presented as assisting Helios in his unified creative role: "She is, in very truth, a synthesis of the heavenly Gods, and in their harmony, she is the spirit of love and unity".⁶⁴³ In a manner characteristic of Neoplatonism, Helios is depicted as the primary creative cause, with Aphrodite identified as a co-cause alongside him.⁶⁴⁴ This description is similar to the one by Proclus, who describes her as illuminating all things with union and harmony.⁶⁴⁵

As with the three Graces and Necessity, both astronomy and astrology hold significant importance in this context. Julian explains that because the planet Aphrodite (Venus) orbits close to the Sun, it bestows additional powers upon the Goddess, which also

⁶³⁸ Hence, Julian indirectly relates Attis to Athena.

⁶³⁹ Proclus says that this knowledge is also connected with the Eleusis mysteries.

⁶⁴⁰ Proclus, *In Timaeus* 1.139 (24d) (1.165.15–30).

⁶⁴¹ Budin 2004: 95–96; Azize 2012: 38.

⁶⁴² In reality, there are no surviving scriptures of a Phoenician theology to be compared to the Neoplatonic one, or at least to verify that Julian's claim about a Phoenician belief is true (Azize 2012: 5).

⁶⁴³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 150b. Ἔστι δὴ οὖν αὕτη σύγκρασις τῶν οὐρανίων θεῶν, καὶ τῆς ἁρμονίας αὐτῶν ἔτι φιλία καὶ ἔνωσις.

⁶⁴⁴ The focus is on the description of Helios, who is containing the connected chain of causes.

⁶⁴⁵ Proclus, *In Timaeus* 1.66 (20d).

affect our planet. Aphrodite ‘fills the skies with fair weather and gives generative power to earth; for she herself, together with King Helios, takes thought for the continuous birth of living things’.⁶⁴⁶ Furthermore, ‘our souls are enchanted with her charm and the Goddess sends down to earth from the upper air rays of light most sweet and stainless, more lustrous than gold itself’.⁶⁴⁷ Hence, Julian establishes a direct association between Aphrodite and the Sun by means of astronomy and astrology. In describing her light, he refers to the planet Venus, which reflects the light of the Sun and was described by his contemporary astronomers as λεύκη (bright white), ξανθή (blonde), and ἀκτῖσι χρυσόησι (with golden rays).⁶⁴⁸

Julian elaborates further on the Phoenician (or, more likely, Syrian) theology, by referring to the beliefs of the inhabitants of Emesa.⁶⁴⁹ However, he claims as his direct source not a Phoenician one, but divine Iamblichus. Hence, this fact seems to plainly explain all the Neoplatonic concepts that were found in the description of the “Phoenician” Aphrodite. The emperor intends to highlight that the inhabitants of Emesa associate Helios with Monimos and Azizos within their temples. These two Gods, in turn, are equated with Hermes and Ares respectively, ‘who are the channel for many blessings to the region of our earth’.⁶⁵⁰ Now, why does Julian bring Monimos and Azizos into the picture? It may be because these two Gods are identified with the two stars that always appear at sunrise and sunset, hence their direct association with the Sun (πάρεδροι Ἡλίου). Azizos is identified with the Greek Phosphoros, the morning star that precedes the Sun and announces the arrival of light and life. On the other hand, Monimos is identified with Hesperos, the evening star that follows the Sun.⁶⁵¹ These two stars are actually the planet Aphrodite,

⁶⁴⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 150b. πληροὶ μὲν τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐκрасίας, ἐνδίδωσι δὲ τὸ γόνιμον τῇ γῇ, προμηθευμένη καὶ αὐτὴ τῆς ἀεργενεσίας τῶν ζώων; This claim may also have to do with the fact that the planet Venus is brightest during Spring and Fall.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 150c.

⁶⁴⁸ Lacombrade 2023 [1965]: 127.

⁶⁴⁹ There is a confusion among the modern scholars on whether Julian is referring to Emesa or Edessa, since the surviving texts mention them interchangeably. For the purpose of this thesis, it does not matter, because both cities were actually famous for worshipping the Sun God. The cult of Sol Invictus and the emperor Elagabalus actually originated in Emesa; Azize (2012: 41–42) believes that Julian likely intended to refer to Edessa.

⁶⁵⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 150cd; Hermes, like Aphrodite, is also connected with the Moon, from whom all blessings come to Earth (Proclus, *In Timaeus* 1.139, 24d).

⁶⁵¹ See Chapter 1 – Religion in the Eastern Provinces.

which is visible only during these two times of the day.⁶⁵² This likely explains the fact that Julian mentions them immediately following his description of Aphrodite.

Julian's reference to these two stars has fueled the claims for another supposedly Mithraic allusion. This is because they also appear in Mithraism, and are identified with Cautes and Cautopates, the two torchbearers of Mithras.⁶⁵³ However, Julian provides no indication that he associates the stars with either Cautes or Cautopates. As an initiate in Mithraism, he would certainly have in his mind this connection with the two associates of Mithras, but for some reason he did not want to bring it forward in the *Hymn*, even though he had every reason to do so. As Cautes and Cautopates are placed on each side of Mithras, they indicate his μεσότης (middleness), a key concept in the *Hymn*. This depiction of the torchbearers also symbolizes the Sun at its zenith.⁶⁵⁴ On the other hand, Julian explicitly states that he acquired all of his information from Iamblichus, and there is no indication that this divine philosopher had been initiated into Mithraism or that he had ever written anything about Mithras, unlike Porphyry.⁶⁵⁵ Moreover, the recurring references to the Phoenician theology in his *Hymn* may have to do with the fact that Iamblichus himself, who was from Syria, was interested in the local heliolatry. This was rather convenient for Julian, who wrote this hymn to honour the celebrations for the birthday of Sol Invictus (Solis Natalis) and thus, was interested in connecting his Neoplatonic heliolatry to the cult of Sol Invictus that originated from Emesa. There is also an indication that Julian was aware of the procedure of the Solar ceremony in Emesa, since he notes that Azizos precedes Helios in the sacred procession.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵² Initially, the Greeks believed that they were two separate stars, but at some point, in the classical period, they realized that they were actually one star, which was to be identified with the planet Venus (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2, 20, 53).

⁶⁵³ Cumont 1888: 95–98; See Chapter 1 – Religion in the Eastern Provinces, and Mithraism.

⁶⁵⁴ Athanassiadi 1977: 365; See Chapter 1 – Mithraism.

⁶⁵⁵ Smith 1995: 142.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 157; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 131d, 154b. See Chapter 1 – Sol Invictus.

2.5 Helios' Substance – Nature

In order to understand the nature of King Helios, whom Julian calls “The King of All”, the emperor compares him to the visible Sun and epistemologically analyzes the functions of the visible universe.⁶⁵⁷ Julian himself emphasizes the scientific nature of his approach, which is based on rationality. He has received the information from those ‘who look at the heavens, not like horses and cattle, or some other unreasoning and ignorant animal, but from it draw the conclusions about the unseen world.’⁶⁵⁸ As he states, characteristically: ‘I think it right from the visible to have faith about the invisible’.⁶⁵⁹

King Helios, due to his superior divine status, has a limited nature – a characteristic which grants him immortality.⁶⁶⁰ Thanks to this limited nature, he keeps all things together. Another characteristic of Helios is his simplicity and sameness, since he makes the simplest movement of all the heavenly bodies.⁶⁶¹ Julian, once more, refers to the authority of Aristotle, who recognized the superiority and leadership of the Sun over the other planets, based on these two aforementioned characteristics alone. The Sun assimilates and adjusts the powers granted to the Earth by other deities, harmonizing them within himself and the universe for the benefit of all things.⁶⁶² Similarly, King Helios’ mode of intercourse is that of a leader among the noeric Gods, while the modes of interaction of the others are at the same time in harmony with his.⁶⁶³ Julian continuously emphasizes the perfect nature of King Helios. It is due to this perfect nature that his higher creations, like the visible Gods (the planets), have also been made perfect, since they are composed of the same divine substance.⁶⁶⁴ Moreover, as a creation of the eternal Good, King Helios also shares his

⁶⁵⁷ It should be noted that this is a rather scientific approach, since modern cosmologists conduct a similar methodology, in their effort to describe how the universe works.

⁶⁵⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 143b. ὅσα φασὶν οἱ τὸν οὐρανὸν οὐχ ὥσπερ ἵπποι καὶ βόες ὁρῶντες ἢ τι τῶν ἀλόγων καὶ ἀμαθῶν ζώων, ἀλλ’ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀφανῆ πολυπραγμονοῦντες φύσιν.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 138b. πολὺ δὲ πλέον ἐκ τῶν ἐμφανῶν ἀξιοῦμεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀφανῶν πιστεῦειν.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 137c.; Plato (*Republic* 509b) also reflects on this notion of imperishability, who describes the Sun as “not coming to be” (οὐ γένεσιν αὐτὸν ὄντα), despite the fact that he is the creation of the Good/Demiurge.

⁶⁶¹ This is confirmed by the fact that the Sun stands still in the centre of the solar system. Julian refers to the sameness and simpleness of the movement of the Sun on the Earth’s sky, compared to that of the other planets, which is more complex and irregular.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.* 138ab.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.* 138a–c.

⁶⁶⁴ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 151b.

eternal and everlasting nature, which is transmitted to the visible Sun. This eternity is reflected in his everlasting activity.⁶⁶⁵

2.5.1 Middleness

One of the most important characteristics of the nature of Helios is his “middleness” (μεσότης). Now, how is this “middleness” defined? Julian clarifies that, like Empedocles’ *Harmonia*, ‘it is not the mean which in opposites is seen to be equally remote from the extremes... but that which unifies and links together what is separate’.⁶⁶⁶ This creates another question: What entities does Helios connect, and what is his position relative to them? Helios ‘is midway between the visible Gods who surround the universe and the immaterial and noetic Gods who surround the Good’.⁶⁶⁷ In other words, Helios is positioned in the noeric world, which stands between the noetic and the visible one. This middle world has the most important function in the creation of the universe, hence the primary status of King Helios in the cosmological structure.⁶⁶⁸ Moreover, “his (Helios’) noeric and beautiful substance is middle in the sense of being unmixed with extremes, complete in itself, and distinct from the whole number of the Gods, visible and invisible, both those perceptible by sense and those who are noetic only”.⁶⁶⁹ This notion of independence and perfection emphasizes Helios’ higher divine nature, since the noetic and divine substance is also without external influences and without additions – something that does not hold for the visible world. As Julian writes: ‘The ungenerated offspring (King Helios) in beauty noeric and eternal guides the generative cause (Sun) in the visible world; which offspring this God (Good) called into existence and keeps at his side, and to it he assigns also perfect reason’.⁶⁷⁰ Hence, it is clear that the noeric world, in a pure Iamblichean way, acts as the necessary intermediate link between the noetic and the visible world.

⁶⁶⁵ Elm 2012: 298.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 138d. Μεσότητα μὲν δὴ φαμεν οὐ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἐναντίοις θεωρουμένην ἴσον ἀφεστῶσαν τῶν ἄκρων... ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐνωτικὴν καὶ συνάγουσαν τὰ διεστῶτα.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 139a. ὅτι τῶν τε ἐμφανῶν καὶ περικοσμίῳ θεῶν καὶ τῶν ἀύλων καὶ νοητῶν, οἱ περὶ τὰ γαθόν εἰσιν.

⁶⁶⁸ The utmost importance that Julian places on the noeric world seems to contradict the “orthodox” Neoplatonic notion of top-down hierarchy (Nesselrath 2020: 61).

⁶⁶⁹ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 139a. Ὡς μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ μέση τις, οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄκρων κραθεῖσα, τελεία δὲ καὶ ἀμιγῆς ἀφ’ ὅλων τῶν θεῶν ἐμφανῶν τε καὶ ἀφανῶν καὶ αἰσθητῶν καὶ νοητῶν ἢ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἡλίου νοερὰ καὶ πάγκαλος οὐσία, καὶ ὁποῖαν τινὰ χρὴ τὴν μεσότητα νομίζειν, εἴρηται.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 145b. αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐν τοῖς φαινομένοις αἰτίας γονίμου προκαθηγεῖσθαι τὸν ἐν τῷ νοερῷ καὶ διαιωνίῳ κάλλει τόκον ἀγέννητον, ὃν ὁ θεὸς οὗτος ἔχει [καὶ] περὶ ἑαυτὸν ὑποστήσας, ὃ καὶ τὸν τέλειον νοῦν διανέμει.

Julian tries to explain, as simply as he can, how this intermediate connection works. In a fully Neoplatonic notion, he claims that, ‘Wholly one is the intelligible world, pre-existent from all time. And it combines all things together in the One. Again, is not our whole (visible) world also one complete living organism, wholly throughout the whole full of soul and intelligence, perfect, with all its parts perfect?’⁶⁷¹ Julian explains that the noetic and visible worlds are interconnected by a unifying force that binds all entities. The noetic unity sustains the existence of all within the noetic realm, whereas the unity in the sensible world interconnects all entities, bestowing upon them a shared perfect nature. The noeric King Helios occupies an intermediate position between the noetic and visible worlds, transforming the noetic force into the unifying principle of the visible world. These two ultimate unities constitute a continuum, thanks to the uniform middle perfection of King Helios (Ἡλίου μέση τελειότης ἐνοειδής ἐστίν). All these concepts regarding the nature of Helios, oneness, a Universal Soul, and perfection constitute an essential component of the Neoplatonic doctrine.⁶⁷²

This notion of μεσότης is supposedly one of the strongest references to Mithraism in the *Hymn*. Nesselrath suggests that, on this subject, Julian distances himself from the Neoplatonic top-down hierarchy, since he emphasizes the middleness of King Helios, which is a typical Mithraic characteristic.⁶⁷³ Mithras, indeed, stands in the middle in several instances (e.g., in his middle position between Cautes and Cautopates, which represents the high noon position of the Sun between its rising and setting, and in his role as a mediator between man in the fallen state and the First Principle in the cosmological system).⁶⁷⁴ However, the middleness of Mithras is disputed among some scholars, and the centrality of Helios can be perfectly explained through the Iamblichean Neoplatonic doctrine. Thus, as Smith states, there is no need to assume a primary Mithraic influence, because Julian “simply Platonizes”.⁶⁷⁵ However, this notion of middleness could have enabled Julian to readily identify Mithras with the noeric Helios, especially since Mithras was *a priori* a

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.* 139c. “Ἐν παντελῶς τὸ νοητὸν αἰεὶ προϋπάρχον, ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ὁμοῦ συνευληφὸς ἐν τῷ ἐνί. Τί δέ; οὐχὶ καὶ ὁ σύμπας κόσμος ἐν ἐστὶ ζῶον ὅλον δι’ ὅλου ψυχῆς καὶ νοῦ πλήρης, τέλειον ἐκ μερῶν τελείων.

⁶⁷² See Chapter 2 – Neoplatonists; The Neoplatonic principle of “plenitude” aligns with Julian’s description of a “complete” world.

⁶⁷³ Nesselrath 2020: 61.

⁶⁷⁴ See analysis in Chapter 1 – Mithraism, and in Chapter 2 – Porphyry *In the Cave of the Nymphs*; Athanassiadi 1977: 365.

⁶⁷⁵ Smith 1995: 148.

Solar God. Julian's emphasis on the vital role of King Helios as mediator is well in line with the views of his friend Sallustius, who wrote *On the Gods and the World*.⁶⁷⁶ In it, Sallustius says that 'as much as the first God differs from our nature, by so much is it necessary that there should be more powers situated between us and him; for all natures which are much distant from each other possess a multitude of connecting mediums'.⁶⁷⁷

2.5.2 Binding Nature

Julian says that in the noetic world, there is a "binding force" which orders all things into one. This deduction was made by observing the revolution of the celestial objects in the visible world. Taking a passage from Plato and combining it with Aristotelian concepts, or maybe taking it from Empedocles,⁶⁷⁸ Julian claims that the same binding force also exists in the visible world. By observing the night sky, one can see how the Fifth Substance, which links and compresses together all the parts, holds together things that by nature are prone to scatter and fall away from one another.

The whole concept is based on the observation that the entire universe revolves around a centre, while the planets revolve around the centre of the solar system, which is the Sun. Thus, the binding force of the Sun attracts the planets towards him, resulting in the orbit of the planets around the Sun.⁶⁷⁹ In other words, Julian describes the gravitational force that is emitted by the Sun. This description also finds its exact match in a passage in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, where the planets are directed towards their divine causal principle.⁶⁸⁰

The emperor goes on to say that King Helios combines both binding forces (the noetic and the one in the visible world) into one. What he means is that the binding force, which exists in the noetic world (and necessarily subsists prior to the one in the visible world), is also a power of Helios in the noetic world. A power that, by subsisting in Helios, is transformed into one which can be extended into the visible world. Moreover, Helios, is not only situated between the two extreme worlds, but also stands in the middle of the other

⁶⁷⁶ It is generally considered the "Bible" of the traditionalists, representing Julian's conception of the traditional religion.

⁶⁷⁷ Sallustius. *On the Gods and the World* 13.

⁶⁷⁸ Wright 1913: 379.

⁶⁷⁹ Plato, *Timaeus* 58a. This is an accurate description; the scientific name of the binding force is gravity.

⁶⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.17.

noeric Gods. This middleness should be seen not merely as occupying the centre of the noeric world, but as linking all the noeric forces together. This is done with the “binding force” that emanates from Helios, through his luminous energy, which causes the revolution of the whole noeric world. The result is that, like a whirlpool, all things are ordered into one, since they orbit towards the centre.⁶⁸¹ Now, this “binding force” is also produced in the visible world, thanks to the transcending characteristics of King Helios, who transfers his powers to the visible Helios (Sun). This concept seems to allude to the *Chaldean Oracles* that describe this binding force as “Love”. As they state: This binding force is ‘sowed heavy with fire into all things’, and is necessary ‘in order that the All might continue to Love for an infinite time and the things woven by the intellectual light of the Father might not collapse’. In addition, ‘with this Love (binding force), the elements of the world remain in course’.⁶⁸²

2.5.3 Creative God

Julian employs the same reasoning to elucidate all other phenomena observed in the visible world. Helios is responsible for everything that we see in the universe. He is the single creator of all, assisted by the creative Gods.⁶⁸³ The central element in this entire process is the connecting power of King Helios, who facilitates the linkage between the noetic and sensible worlds. In other words, nothing in the sensible world could exist without the intervention of Helios. Every noetic force or substance is transmitted to the visible world through Him. This transmission should not be understood merely as a passive conduit; rather, the noetic forces and substances are further developed and multiplied within the noeric realm by King Helios and the noeric deities. By assimilating all elements into himself, Helios projects them through the sensible Sun into the visible world. Hence, the unconditioned principle (the pure and undefiled and immaterial substance), which exists among the noetic Gods and the celestial phenomena in the sensible world (including

⁶⁸¹ It is tempting to compare Julian’s description with the functions of the “black hole” described by modern cosmologists. These “black holes”, by swirling around and creating a massive gravitational force, gather all the energy and matter from the universe towards their centre, and push it through luminous vertical rays, millions of light years away. These “demiurgic” rays of the “black holes” contain many “nutritious” ingredients necessary for the formation of the visible world and the Suns.

⁶⁸² *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 39, 40.

⁶⁸³ εἰς μὲν ὁ τῶν ὅλων δημιουργός, πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ κατ’ οὐρανὸν περιπολοῦντες δημιουργικοὶ θεοί (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 140a).

the planetary Gods), has as mediator the unconditioned essence (the radiant and stainless substance) of King Helios. The rays of Helios emanate from this noeric creative substance, illuminate all noeric things, and descend to the visible Sun, who illuminates the perceptible world.⁶⁸⁴ The noeric power of Helios originates from the generative life force within the noetic realm, which has manifested in our world. This manifestation is attributed to the life-generating power of King Helios, who occupies an intermediary position between the two extreme realms. Moreover, this life-generative power, as described in the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, is to be identified with Attis – a solar God who has been engendered by King Helios, and is to be associated with the solar rays in the sensible world. By using the linking power of Helios, Attis reaches Earth through our visible Sun’s solar rays. Attis represents one of the many creative forces associated with Helios. Although there is a singular Creator of the whole (King Helios), the creative Gods (who revolve in the heavens) are many.⁶⁸⁵ Midmost among those divinities is the creative activity of Helios, which is represented by the several noeric creative forces, known as the noeric Gods. Julian also considers the planets as divinities, due to their contribution in creating life on Earth.⁶⁸⁶ Furthermore, without the creative activity of King Helios, the noeric Gods, and the Sun these visible Gods (planets) would not have come into existence.⁶⁸⁷

The above description of Helios as a supreme Demiurgic God bears resemblance to Mithraic iconography and doctrine. As demonstrated, Mithras is portrayed as a creative God who sacrifices the bull, symbolizing the demiurgic powers that bring life to Earth. Moreover, the visible Sun bestows his solar rays on Mithras, who is looking at the Sun – a possible allusion to the demiurgic powers of the solar rays that create life on Earth.⁶⁸⁸ In addition, the phraseology in the *Hymn to King Helios* and Mithraism is extremely similar. Eubulus describes Mithras as “Father and Creator of all”, while Numenius directly

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 140a–d.

⁶⁸⁵ These creative Gods consist of the numerous lesser divinities that exist in the sensible world, in the sublunar region, and on Earth.

⁶⁸⁶ Modern day science has confirmed the indispensable role of the planets on life on earth. This holds especially true for the planet Jupiter, that acts like a “true” savior God for Earth. His immense gravitational force attracts most of the comets that try to enter the inner solar system, and pulls them on its surface. Without Jupiter, many asteroids would have crashed on Earth. Hence, it is highly likely that there would be no life on our planet, or at least that life would have evolved different.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 140a, 141b.

⁶⁸⁸ See analysis in Chapter 1 – Mithraism.

identifies Mithras with the Demiurge, the second God of his triad.⁶⁸⁹ Hence, the resemblance between Julian's description and the Mithraic doctrine has fueled claims of strong Mithraic allusions on this subject in the *Hymn*.⁶⁹⁰ However, as already demonstrated, the Platonic and Neoplatonic allusions are numerous, which hardly leave any doubt of a close relationship between Julian's narration and Neoplatonism. Having to choose whether Iamblichean Neoplatonism or Mithraism was at the front of Julian's mind, the teaching of the divine philosopher takes priority.⁶⁹¹

One of the most important mediating functions of Helios has to do with the Platonic Forms or Ideas. It would be impossible for the immaterial and intelligible forms to materialize in the visible world without the intervention of King Helios with his noeric forces. The noeric forms are found between the two other kinds of forms: the noetic and the visible ones. In turn, King Helios is placed midmost among the noeric forms. Julian adds that "the visible forms could never have existed or been preserved, had they not been brought, by Helios' aid, into connection with the substance" – hence, another important mediating role of Helios as Demiurge.⁶⁹² It is thanks to the noeric causes of separation of the forms, and of the combination of matter, that the noetic forms are divided and united in order to create matter in the visible world. Therefore, Helios, as mediator between the noetic and the sensible world, is the direct Creator God, just like Plato's Demiurge. Apart from his oneness and the resemblance with his paternal One, his creative nature and substance allow him to create multiplicity and shape the forms in the last of the worlds (sensible world). This concept alludes to Neoplatonists and the Chaldeans, where in their dogma everything started from One, and, as it goes down in hierarchy, is starting to multiply.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁹ Smith 1995: 147.

⁶⁹⁰ Athanassiadi 1977: 367.

⁶⁹¹ Smith (1995: 148) also agrees with this view.

⁶⁹² Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 141a.

⁶⁹³ See Chapter 2 – Neoplatonists and Chaldeans; Impressively, this is what contemporary cosmologists also support.

2.5.4 Providence

Everything in our visible cosmos was created due to Helios' providence through his visible rays and countless other invisible blessings. Helios' first act was to give form to the Sun's Angels. These divinities that stand at the top of the hierarchy of the lesser deities are identified with the Archangels of Iamblichus.⁶⁹⁴ Next was his province of generating the world of sense-perception. This generative force is composed of two parts: the more honourable part contains the cause of heavens and the heavenly bodies, while the inferior part, the cause of life and becoming, which contains from eternity the uncreated cause.⁶⁹⁵

2.6 Helios and the Souls

We should understand that the Sun 'does not only fill the whole heavens with visible rays of light, but also with countless other blessings that are invisible'.⁶⁹⁶ Following this logic, Julian says that like the visible Gods (the planets), who were created by their leader (the Sun) and lord Helios, there are other numerous invisible Gods that exist in the sublunar region, and they are also the result of the works of Helios.⁶⁹⁷ While Julian explicitly says that the planetary Gods were created by the visible Sun, he simultaneously implies that they also owe their existence to the noeric Father, King Helios, due to their association through the divine solar rays. Likewise, Helios exercises his power over the sublunar region through the visible Sun. Furthermore, the emphasis on the distinction between the life-generative powers of the sublunar region and those present in the rest of the universe provides additional evidence of influence from the *Chaldean Oracles* and Mithraism.⁶⁹⁸ Julian says that these invisible Gods live in the upper levels of the sublunar region, and 'are linked together with King Helios: and these Gods guide the four-fold nature of the elements, and inhabit, together with the three higher races,⁶⁹⁹ those souls which are upborne

⁶⁹⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.6; Lacombrade 1965: 115. See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Helios, and Light.

⁶⁹⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 141c.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 151b. πληροῦντα δὲ τὸν ὅλον οὐρανὸν ὥσπερ τῆς φαινομένης αὐγῆς οὕτω δὲ καὶ μυρίων ἀγαθῶν ἀφανῶν ἄλλων.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 150d. ὅσα δὲ ὑπὸ τὴν Σελήνην ἐργάζεται, μακρὸν ἂν εἴη τὰ πάντα ἀπαριθμεῖσθαι.

⁶⁹⁸ See Chapter 1 – Mithraism, Chapter 2 – Porphyry and *In the Cave of the Nymphs*, and Iamblichus and Theurgy.

⁶⁹⁹ Julian (*Hymn to King Helios* 145c) states that the highest κρείττονα γένη should be identified with Angels, Daemons, and Heroes, and also the divided souls. Similarly, Iamblichus [*De Mysteriis* 2.3] names as the three

by the elements'.⁷⁰⁰ These souls are the ones that do not give themselves over to bodies, and they have incorporated the loftier elements (fire and earth). It appears that the invisible Gods, who preside over matter in the sublunar region, are to be identified with the Archons described by Iamblichus. According to this divine philosopher, souls also inhabit initially the same region, and manifest themselves in various forms.⁷⁰¹ Hence, we see here a direct connection between Helios and souls – a link that is made through the intermediary of the invisible Gods, and higher races, who live in the sublunar region.⁷⁰² The result is that Helios' generative powers fill all the Earth with souls, and set in motion the whole of Nature and kindle life therein.

Helios is the cause of the many blessings for the divided souls (μερισταῖς ψυχαῖς), both the ones in the higher sublunar region, and those that descend down to Earth and enter the bodies.⁷⁰³ This appears to be another allusion to Iamblichus, who posits that the soul attains completion through the Intellect.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, in a pure theurgic and Mithraic way, Julian claims that 'the most divine gifts that Helios bestows on the souls are those that free the souls from the body and lift them up on high to the region of those substances that are akin to the God'.⁷⁰⁵ Continuing to employ the language characteristic of these two esoteric traditions, 'the luminous divine rays are assigned as a sort of vehicle for the safe descent of our souls into this world of generation'.⁷⁰⁶ The emperor's reference to the mysteries is further evidenced by his assertion that he does not wish to provide additional proof of their truth.

Julian also seeks to highlight Helios' capacity for judgement. Through this faculty, Helios guides souls with justice and purifies them with his radiant light. Moreover, Helios

higher races the Archangels, Angels, and Daemons. The Archons follow fourth, and the heroes are fifth in the hierarchy. The divided souls are among the higher races, but they form a category of their own.

⁷⁰⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 151c. οὕτω δὴ καὶ περὶ τὸν ἐν γενέσει τόπον θεοῦς τινας ἐπιβεβηκέναι νομιστέον ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἡλίου συνεχομένους, οἱ τὴν τετραπλὴν τῶν στοιχείων κυβερνῶντες φύσιν, περὶ ᾧς ἐστήρικται ταῦτα ψυχὰς μετὰ τῶν τριῶν κρειττόνων ἐνοικοῦσι γενῶν; See also a similar description by Iamblichus in the *De Mysteriis* 2.3.

⁷⁰¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.3.

⁷⁰² These invisible Gods, who live in the sublunar region, are considered inferior to the noeric Gods.

⁷⁰³ The term "divided souls" implies the existence of an archetype World Soul.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 5.10. See Chapter 2 – Iamblichus and Metaphysics.

⁷⁰⁵ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 152b. Τὰ μὲν οὖν θεϊότερα καὶ ὅσα ταῖς ψυχαῖς δίδωσιν ἀπολύων αὐτὰς τοῦ σώματος, εἴτα ἐπανάγων ἐπὶ τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ συγγενεῖς οὐσίας.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.* τὸ λεπτόν καὶ εὐτονὸν τῆς θείας ἀγγῆς οἷον ὄχημα τῆς εἰς τὴν γένεσιν ἀσφαλοῦς διδόμενον καθόδου ταῖς ψυχαῖς.

is the cause of the soul's journey to its appointed end.⁷⁰⁷ Although Julian initially appears to reference Aristotle when asserting that Helios' activities influence the divided souls,⁷⁰⁸ this statement more accurately alludes to theurgy. In this context, thanks to the mediation of Hecate, the human soul is purified by divine light prior to its ascent to Helios via the Selene (the Moon). Moreover, this *anagogia* of the soul is achieved thanks to a luminous vehicle.⁷⁰⁹ It is similar to the Mithraic mysteries, where the Mesotes of Helios-Mithras is overstretched, and the soul, after getting illuminated, enters the aethereal world, where it is submitted to Mithras' judgement. Moreover, the process of the *anagogia* of the soul in the *In the Cave of the Nymphs* and in the *Mithraic liturgy* shows similarities with the one in theurgy.⁷¹⁰ Athanassiadi claims that Julian's description of Helios, as the judge *par excellence* of the divided souls, fits with the abundant evidence we have of Mithras κρίτης.⁷¹¹ Smith rejects any possible Mithraic references, despite some obvious similarities.⁷¹² However, Julian may well have had Helios-Mithras in mind, especially for taking the role of judge of the souls.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 152d.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Presumably, Julian sought to establish an authoritative figure akin to Aristotle, similar to his approach with Plato, to support his solar claim, rather than relying on the *Chaldean Oracles* and Mithraism.

⁷⁰⁹ Smith 1995: 154; See Chapter 2 – Iamblichus and Theurgy. As stated in Chapter 2, in a sense, everyone was capable of participating in the ritual of theurgy. The connection between the souls and the Gods holds for every individual soul in our material cosmos. 'By fulfilling that activity, we become more godlike and thereby lighten the ethereal vehicles of our souls, such that we can follow our leader Gods, (just as Julian would have followed Helios) ... Failing that, we lose our proverbial wings and fall into embodiment' (Swist 2025: 216).

⁷¹⁰ Athanassiadi 1977: 369; Smith 1995: 154; Edmonds 2001: 10–11.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² According to Smith (1995: 154), the Neoplatonic similarities are far more relevant.

2.6.1 Souls and Elements

There is also a clear connection between the nature of the souls and the four elements, or more appropriately, the four states of matter.⁷¹³ Concerning the role of the elements, Julian seems to have been influenced by both the Platonic and the Mithraic tradition – the latter, as it is expanded by Porphyry in his *In the Cave of the Nymphs*. The critical importance of the elements in the creation of matter seems to allude to Plato, the *Chaldean Oracles*, and Iamblichus. Plato describes the elements as ‘qualities, copies of the forms, which the Demiurge causes to become sensible in space. Appropriately combined (that is to say, guided in their movements), they will constitute the bodies of creatures (and all matter in general) in the sublunar world’.⁷¹⁴ As in Julian’s description, the Platonic Demiurge does not act directly, but leaves the task to the Gods that he had created himself. In a similar manner, the *Chaldean Oracles* declare that the Demiurge creates the whole world out of the four states of the elements: ‘ἐκ πυρὸς, ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ γῆς καὶ παντρώφου αἰθέρος’.⁷¹⁵ These elements can be formed into bodies, because they conceal in them the noetic principles. Iamblichus claims that the souls live in the same sublunar region as the elements. In addition, the Archons, who are the rulers of the cosmos (κοσμοκράτορες or ἡγεμονικοί), administer the sublunar elements and preside over matter.⁷¹⁶

On the other hand, the significant role that the elements play in relation to the souls appears to allude to Porphyry’s Mithraic exegeses, wherein he explains that the heavier and wetter the souls are, the more they are drawn to matter and consequently descend to Earth. However, as stated, Porphyry may actually give a Neoplatonic explanation of the myth, as some scholars (such as Turcan) have claimed.⁷¹⁷ However, there is one difference between the Mithraic doctrine and the Platonic. In the Mithraic religion, the elements are of outmost importance and are presented as divine, while a Neoplatonist would not profess the divinity of the four elements. Smith is absolute that the Neoplatonic near-exact analogues are far more compelling than any Mithraic overtones. On the opposite side,

⁷¹³ The four elements (earth, water, air, fire) of the Greek philosophers represent the four states of matter: solid (earth), liquid (water), gas (air), and plasma (fire). Plato (*Timaeus* 50a) states that they represent a change in quality and not an alteration in substance or permanent ground. The core elements that form matter are actually many more.

⁷¹⁴ Smith 1995: 156; See also Plato, *Timaeus* 49a–50a.

⁷¹⁵ *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 40, 67.

⁷¹⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.3.

⁷¹⁷ See Chapter 2 on Porphyry’s *In the Cave of the Nymphs*.

Athanassiadi notes that the reference to the elements forms a brilliant compromise between the two dogmas ‘and presenting Helios as the coordinator of the Gods assigned to rule the quadruple nature of the Elements’.⁷¹⁸ I tend to agree with Athanassiadi, and will add that the elements also appear to have some divine characteristics, since Iamblichus had them placed in the upper sublunar region among the higher races and divinities.⁷¹⁹

2.7 Helios and Rome

The connection between Helios and Rome forms a vital part of Julian’s imperial and religious policy: ‘As symbol of empire and governance, the Sun was far more potent and far easier to recognize’ than any other divinity.⁷²⁰ After presenting all the facts and arguments that established the metaphysical and cosmological supremacy of King Helios in his three hypostases and attributes, the emperor deemed it necessary to further demonstrate the direct connection between Helios and Rome.⁷²¹ The Sun God is not only the supreme Lord of the universe, but also, naturally, the protector God of the greatest empire on Earth, the Roman Empire. ‘The Sun, eternal, victorious, invincible, guaranteed the security of the *res publica*’.⁷²² Moreover, “as evidenced by their exceptional heliolatry, the Romans’ preeminent piety makes them the best imitators of the Gods, and therefore most fit to rule the world”.⁷²³ Before proceeding to prove his claims of an ancestral Roman solar religion, Julian expounds on how Helios connected the Romans with the Greeks. It is thanks to Apollo, says Julian, that by coordinating the colonization of the Greek cities in the Archaic and Classical period, the Sun God made it easier for the Romans to govern all the world. This solar God ‘has set up oracles on every part of the world, and gave to men inspired wisdom, and regulated the cities by means of religious and political ordinances’.⁷²⁴ Moreover, ‘the Romans themselves not only belong to the Greek race, but also the sacred

⁷¹⁸ Athanassiadi 1977: 370.

⁷¹⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 2.3. Whether the originator of this idea was Iamblichus or Porphyry, who was interested in the Mithraic mysteries, is unknown. However, almost certainly Julian did not innovate, but took it as granted from Iamblichus.

⁷²⁰ Elm 2012: 289.

⁷²¹ The emperor demonstrates remarkable knowledge of the history of Rome (Nesselrath 2020: 58–59).

⁷²² Elm 2012: 292.

⁷²³ Swist (2025: 167).

⁷²⁴ Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 152d.

ordinances and the pious belief in the Gods which they have established and maintain are, from beginning to end, Greek'.⁷²⁵

Helios was the patron God of the Romans from the very establishment of their Imperial city (ἡ βασιλεύουσα πόλις), since he is the founder of Rome. Following this belief, Julian tries to demonstrate how Helios was always connected with Rome. In order to accomplish this endeavour, the emperor calls upon every syncretism he can make and takes advantage of Rome's foundation myth. In this effort, he declares as true almost any theory that can connect the Romans with Helios. Thus, he begins by claiming that the most conspicuous proof that Helios is the founder of Rome is to be found in Zeus (Jupiter) himself, who is glorified as the father of all things, and inhabits Rome's citadel, together with Athena (Minerva) and Aphrodite. As previously explained, Julian equates Zeus with Helios, while Athena and Aphrodite are two of his attributes.⁷²⁶ However, the Capitoline was actually dedicated to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Hence, Julian has to substitute Juno with Aphrodite to further illustrate his point. Apollo also dwells on the Palatine Hill, alongside Helios (Sol Invictus).⁷²⁷

The legendary founders of Rome, Romulus and Aeneas, are also linked with Helios.⁷²⁸ Aeneas is associated with Helios through Aphrodite, who is his mother. Romulus is connected to Helios through Ares, who is identified with Azizos, one of the torchbearers and associates of Helios.⁷²⁹ However, Julian does not seem satisfied with this connection, and claims that a noble solar daemon with the character of Ares actually visited Silvia, when she was carrying bath water for the Goddess Vesta (Ἑστία).⁷³⁰ Julian expands the connection between Romulus and Helios even further by referring to the legend of his apotheosis.⁷³¹ According to the sacred tradition, the soul of the God Quirinus (Romulus' name after his apotheosis) came down to Earth from Helios and Selene (the Moon). After

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.* 153a. Here, Julian refers to the Romans' official adaptation of the Greek Pantheon during the second Punic war.

⁷²⁶ See section on syncretism in this Chapter.

⁷²⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 153d.

⁷²⁸ Swist (2025: 155–161) characteristically refers to the founder of Rome as “Solar Romulus”, whom he calls a theophany of Helios. He also compares Romulus to Attis, since they both descended from Helios and they both have demiurgic powers; Attis is the creator of matter, while Romulus the creator of Rome and the Roman people.

⁷²⁹ See the previous analysis in this chapter, and Chapter 1 – Religions in Eastern Provinces and Syria.

⁷³⁰ The Vestal virgin who gave birth to the twins, Romulus and Remus.

⁷³¹ Ovid, *Fasti* 2.496.

Romulus had fulfilled the purpose for which he had descended,⁷³² the Sun God separated his mortal body by fire through a thunderbolt, and elevated his soul. The original legend mentions Jupiter, not Helios, but for Julian both are one and the same God. The original Roman legend's mention of the Moon shining during the manifestation of the divinized Romulus's soul on Earth provides additional support for Julian's theurgical beliefs.⁷³³ That is, even the Roman legends emphasize the significance of the Moon's solar light, both in the creation of matter and in the journey of souls to and from the heavens. Moreover, Julian attributes the role of the soul's mediator (who is represented by Hecate in theurgy) to Athena (Minerva), who elevates Romulus' soul.

Tangible proofs of the solar allegiance of the Romans are numerous, and they all originate from the very first years of Rome's foundation. Numa, the second legendary Roman King after Romulus, is presented through his works as the founder of the Roman heliocentric religion and as a talisman of authentic *Romanitas*, since the Romans ascribed to him many of their laws, customs, and religious ceremonies.⁷³⁴ The solar practices that had survived up to Julian's time are considered by the emperor as clear proofs that Roman heliolatry comes from time immemorial. One of the most conspicuous proofs of Roman heliolatry is found in the temple of Vesta. The vestal maiden priestesses guarded the undying flame of the Sun, which was placed in the centre of the circular temple that represented the universe.⁷³⁵ The Roman calendar that is based on the Sun's trajectory is another prominent solar proof, which has practical applications.⁷³⁶ Surprisingly, the

⁷³² The founding of Rome.

⁷³³ 'The Moon was shining and there was no need for a torch' (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.496); Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 154d.

⁷³⁴ Numa is presented as 'an archetypal philosopher and lawgiver, whose perfect purity and theurgy gave him the requisite knowledge of the Gods in order to establish the proper system of their worship' (Swist 2025: 163). Julian regarded his educational and religious program as being implemented in accordance with the traditional *Romanitas*, originally established by Numa.

⁷³⁵ ἄσβεστον ἐξ Ἡλίου φυλάττουσι φλόγα παρθένοι παρ' ἡμῖν ἱεραὶ κατὰ τὰς ἀδιαφθόρους ὤρας (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 155a). It appears that the sacred flame was set alight by mirrors reflecting the unpolluted flame from the rays of the Sun (Plutarch. *Numa* 9.6–7). The temple of Vesta was circular to imitate the shape of the cosmos. Like Helios, who is placed in the centre of the universe, the sacred fire was placed in the centre of the temple. Indeed, Plutarch explains that the flame represents the cosmic hearth, which is to be identified with the fiery cosmic Monad of the Pythagoreans. Earth was considered to be not stationary in the centre of the universe, but instead revolving around the Sun, like the other celestial objects – thus, being much less important than the Sun in the cosmic vastness (Plutarch. *Numa* 11.1–2). Julian interprets the Pythagorean fiery Monad as the equivalent of King Helios (Swist 2025: 164–65).

⁷³⁶ Among all the nations in antiquity, it seems that only the Romans and the Egyptians had a solar calendar. All the others had a lunar one.

emperor seems to play down the fact that the Romans also worship Mithras and Sol Invictus (whom he calls Helios). Although he mentions these two solar Gods, he does not expand any further on the subject, due to the fact that they constituted more recent additions (νεώτερα) to the religious ceremonies of the city.⁷³⁷ As Julian states: ‘If after this I should say that we also worship Mithras, and celebrate games in honor of Helios every four years, I shall be speaking of customs that are somewhat recent’.⁷³⁸ According to the supporters of strong Mithraic allusions in the *Hymn*, this forms another proof of his Mithraic allegiance.⁷³⁹ However, as Smith correctly points out, Julian does not emphasize the importance of Mithras in relation to Helios.⁷⁴⁰ In fact, it is quite the opposite: it constitutes a new addition to the city’s religions, and he wants to play down it as much as possible. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Julian’s faith in Mithras is minimized.

Hence, it becomes clear that in the *Hymn to King Helios*, Julian prefers to focus on solar proofs from the remote past. The emperor adheres to a significant trend in Late Antiquity, wherein referencing ancient customs was regarded as a mode of securing the truthfulness of one’s sayings.⁷⁴¹ This strategy was meticulously devised, as the emperor considered it essential in his endeavor to establish Helios as an ἀρχηγός (leader) of Rome. As a dedicated philosophical thinker, though, he also gives credit to more contemporary scientific discoveries that determined the date of the festival of Sol Invictus. One of the most ancient customs by almost every nation in the world is the beginning of the year, which falls either on the spring or fall equinoxes, or on the summer or winter solstices. The equinoxes symbolize the equality between day and night, thereby signifying the limit and divine nature of Helios. The solstices represent the limit in the course of Helios. Moreover, these dates are of special importance to the emperor himself, because they are celebrated by many mystical cults.

Julian conducts a scholarly analysis of the reasons concerning the celebration of the New Year on these particular dates. He claims that each nation chose a date based on its

⁷³⁷ See Chapter 1 on Mithraism and on Deus Sol Invictus.

⁷³⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 155b. Εἴ σοι μετὰ τοῦτο φαίην, ὥς καὶ τὸν Μίθραν τιμῶμεν καὶ ἄγομεν Ἡλίου τετραετηρικοῦς ἀγῶνας, ἐρῶ νεώτερα.

⁷³⁹ Athanassiadi 1977: 361.

⁷⁴⁰ Smith 1995: 128–129.

⁷⁴¹ On the contrary, the Christians, as a general rule, rejected any other traditional ancient wisdom as false, while appropriating anything that they found useful. By comparison, contemporary scholars and scientists tend to regard Christian dogma as superstitious and fictional, in comparison with concrete, scientific facts.

own specific culture. For example, the more agricultural nations preferred the equinoxes or the summer solstices, as a landmark for the change of the year. Hence, one nation celebrates the spring equinox, which is the best season for “those that adapted for work in the fields, when the Earth burst into bloom and exults, when all the crops are just beginning to sprout. Others again awarded the crown to the summer season, since at that time they feel confidence about the fruits on the trees”. Others preferred the fall equinox, which marks ‘the time when all the fruits are in their perfect prime and decay has already set in’.⁷⁴²

However, the Romans, not being an agricultural nation, chose the beginning of their year based on religious criteria and on their reverence for Helios, whom they considered to be the cause of all that is useful. They ignored the question of mere utility. Through the guidance of King Numa, they chose the winter solstice to observe the New Year.⁷⁴³ In an astronomical and astrological manner, Julian explains: ‘that is to say when King Helios returns to us again and leaving the region further south and rounding Capricorn, advances from the south to the north to give us a share of the blessings of the year’.⁷⁴⁴ Again, as a scholar, Julian clarifies that the early Romans did not know the scientific astronomical discoveries of his day, but had simply observed that from that date the sun travels from south to north and the day becomes longer.⁷⁴⁵ With a conspicuous reference to the *Chaldean Oracles* and a simultaneous reference to the importance of science, Julian explains that he means ‘the nicety of those laws which the Chaldeans and Egyptian discovered, and which Hipparchus and Ptolemy perfected’.⁷⁴⁶ He also claims that it is from these rather contemporary scientific and mysterious truths that in Rome, ‘we celebrate, before the beginning of the year, at the end of the month which is called after Kronos (Saturn), in honor of Helios the most splendid games (Ἡλίαια) and we celebrate the festival to the Invisible Sun’.⁷⁴⁷ Hence Julian completely equates Sol Invictus with King Helios,

⁷⁴² Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 155cd.

⁷⁴³ On Julian’s attempt to prove the antiquity of Roman heliolatry, see also Swist (2025: 165) and Hijmans (2024: 1024).

⁷⁴⁴ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 156a.

⁷⁴⁵ The zodiac or the circling of the Sun in the celestial sky.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 156b.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 156c. Οὕτω δὲ ταῦτα καὶ παρὰ τῶν μεταγενεστέρων, ὥς ἔφην, ἔχοντα κατενοήθη. Πρὸ τῆς νομηνίας, εὐθέως μετὰ τὸν τελευταῖον τοῦ Κρόνου μῆνα, ποιοῦμεν Ἡλίῳ τὸν περιφανέστατον ἀγῶνα, τὴν ἑορτὴν Ἡλίῳ καταφημίσαντες ἀνικῆτω.

and celebrates his favourite divinity on December 25th at the birthday of the Invisible Sun. This God, the emperor says, not only ‘cares for the whole human race in common, but especially for my own city (Rome), even as also he brought into being my soul from eternity, and made it his follower’.⁷⁴⁸ Here, Julian makes a double point. First of all, Helios is not only the protector of the emperor himself, but also of the whole Roman Empire. Secondly, ‘the care for Rome does not subtract from his care for humanity at large’, since Helios cares for the whole human race, as well.⁷⁴⁹ As a true benevolent emperor who cares for his country and his subjects, Julian prays to Helios in a moving prayer, not just for himself, but for the wellness of the whole Roman Empire and therefore, of all its citizens, as well:

“May it be Helios’ grace, to endow my city as a whole with eternal existence, so far as it is possible, and protect her; and for myself personally, may he grant that, so long as I am permitted to live, I may prosper in my affairs both human and divine; finally may he grant me to live and serve the state with my life, so long as is pleasing to him myself and well for me and expedient for the Roman Empire!”⁷⁵⁰
(Julian. *Hymn to King Helios* 157b).

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 157a. ἐπιμελόμενός τε τοῦ κοινοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους ἰδίᾳ τε τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐξ αἰδίου ψυχὴν ὑπέστησεν, ὁπαδὸν ἀποφύνας αὐτοῦ.

⁷⁴⁹ Swist 2025: 91.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 157b. Ταῦτά τε οὖν ἡμῖν, ὅσα μικρῷ πρόσθεν ἠϋξάμην, δοίη, καὶ ἔτι κοινῇ μὲν τῇ πόλει τὴν ἐνδεχομένην αἰδιότητα [τὰ] μετ’ εὐνοίας χορηγῶν φυλάττοι, ἡμῖν δὲ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον εὖ πράξαι τὰ τε ἀνθρώπινα καὶ τὰ θεῖα δοίη, ἐφ’ ὅσον βιδῶναι ξυγχωρεῖ, ζῆν δὲ καὶ ἐμπολιτεύεσθαι τῷ βίῳ δοίη ἐφ’ ὅσον αὐτῷ τε ἐκείνῳ φίλον ἡμῖν τε λώιον καὶ τοῖς κοινοῖς Ῥωμαίων συμφέρον πράγμασιν.

3. Cosmological Structure

3.1 Metaphysical schema – Hierarchical Structures

Julian begins his description of the metaphysical schema by referring to the Platonic belief of a ‘divine and wholly beautiful universe... (that) is held together by the continuous providence of the God, has existed from eternity ungenerated, (and) is imperishable for all time to come’.⁷⁵¹ He also includes the Iamblichean notion of the Fifth Substance, ‘whose culmination is the beams of the sun’ (οὗ τὸ κεφάλαιόν ἐστιν “ἄκτις ἡελίου”). This fifth substance, or aether, which is responsible for the creation of the visible world, is mentioned several times in the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*.⁷⁵² Above the Fifth substance and the visible world, in the second and higher degree, there is the intelligible world (βαθμῷ δὲ ὥσπερ δευτέρῳ τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου). ‘In a still loftier sense it (the visible world) is guarded by the King of the whole universe, who is the center of all things that exist’.⁷⁵³ In a pure Neoplatonic manner, Julian embellishes Him with several “Platonic” epithets: “It is right to call him the ‘beyond Intellect’ (τὸ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ), or the Idea of beings, and by beings I call the whole noetic region, or the One, since the One seems somehow to be prior to all the rest, or, to use Plato’s name for him, the Good”.⁷⁵⁴ In a notion that echoes Plato’s *Republic*, the Good (τάγαθόν) incorporates in it the “primal creative substance” (πρωτουργὸν οὐσίαν) from which King Helios was made: thus, making him a prime offspring (ἐκγονος and βλάστημα) of the Good.⁷⁵⁵ Neither the “beyond Intellect” (τὸ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ) nor the “Idea of beings” (ιδέαν τῶν ὄντων) appear with exactly the same wording in Plato’s or Iamblichus’ works.⁷⁵⁶ However, both Plato (*Republic* 509b) and Iamblichus (*De Mysteriorum* 1.5) refer to the Good as “beyond Being” (τὸ ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας). At first this looks like a mistake by Julian. However, Plotinus uses the exact same

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.* 132c. See Plato, *Timaeus* 39–41.

⁷⁵² This refers to the original Aristotelian concept of aether.

⁷⁵³ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 132c–132d. πρεσβυτέρως δὲ ἔτι διὰ τὸν πάντων βασιλέα, περὶ ὃν πάντα ἐστίν.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Οὗτος τοίνυν, εἴτε «τὸ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ νοῦ» καλεῖν αὐτὸν θέμις εἴτε ιδέαν τῶν ὄντων, ὃ δὴ φημι τὸ νοητὸν ζύμπαν, εἴτε ἔν, ἐπειδὴ πάντων τὸ ἐν δοκεῖ πως πρεσβύτατον, εἴτε ὁ Πλάτων εἴωθεν ὀνομάζειν τάγαθόν.

⁷⁵⁵ Swist (2025: 109) correctly observes that Julian uses the same terminology to describe his personal relationship with Helios (ἐκγονος and βλάστημα) in the autobiographical myth in *To the Cynic Heracleios*.

⁷⁵⁶ Some authors, like Nesselrath (2020: 60), describe the placement of the Good in the noetic realm as the most important difference between Julian and Iamblichus. However, as it will soon be demonstrated, this actually does not constitute a difference, since Iamblichus himself recognized a Good in the noetic realm at the level of Being.

wording, where he describes the Good as ‘ἐπέκεινα πάντων καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ σεμνοτάτου νοῦ’ (beyond all things and beyond the majesty of Intellect).⁷⁵⁷ Furthermore, it appears that modern scholars have overlooked a particular detail.⁷⁵⁸ Iamblichus claims that there are actually two levels of Good: the Good that is beyond Being, and the Good which exists on the level of Being (τὰγαθὸν τὸ τε ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τὸ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπάρχον).⁷⁵⁹ Thus, it seems that the first level of Good, which Iamblichus in the next paragraph calls “cause of Good” (αἰτία τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), refers to the Platonic One, while the second level of Good (τὸ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπάρχον) is equivalent to Being. Iamblichus explains that by οὐσία (Being), he means the most honourable substance, which is by its own nature incorporeal and is the particular feature of the Gods, running through all the classes which constitute them. This omnipresence of the divine incorporeal οὐσία of the Good,⁷⁶⁰ from which King Helios is also made, is one of the main features in Julian’s *Hymn*. Hence, in the *Hymn*, the emperor’s description of the Good should allude to the Iamblichean version that places its existence on the level of Being. That is why he calls the Good “beyond the Intellect” and not “beyond Being”, since the Intellect is posterior to Being. This interpretation of two levels of Good in Iamblichus’s mind is further reinforced by the fact that the emperor initially calls King Helios the son of the Idea of the Good (ἐκγονος τῆς ιδέας τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) – thus, implying that there is also another Good at a higher level than the “Father” of King Helios.⁷⁶¹ This seems to resolve the confusion about the identity of the Good, which was caused in the first place by Julian’s fusion of the two types of Good in his description in the *Hymn*.⁷⁶² In addition, this interpretation solves another “mystery”. Some authors, like Smith, believe that Julian uses the word “substance/Being” (οὐσία) incorrectly, since the Good does not reside in the level of “Being”, but at a higher level.⁷⁶³ However, as explained

⁷⁵⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.13. Since Julian was speaking from memory, it is possible that he did not remember the exact wording. The mistake would seem trivial, though, since the Good is indeed “beyond Intellect.” Dillon (2012: 106) seems to have overlooked Plotinus’ passage, which did not escape Lacombrade (2023 [1965]: 202). However, as it will be explained, this is not a mistake made by Julian.

⁷⁵⁸ At least to my knowledge.

⁷⁵⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.5.

⁷⁶⁰ Julian calls it “πρωτουργὸς οὐσία”.

⁷⁶¹ The terminology “Father”, which is used for both the Good and King Helios, seems to be another allusion to the *Chaldean Oracles* (Swist 2025: 111).

⁷⁶² Similarly, there is confusion about the appellation of Helios, since Julian calls interchangeably Ἥλιος both the noeric and the visible Sun, making it difficult at times to distinguish which one he is referring to.

⁷⁶³ Smith 2012: 233.

above, this is not the case according to Iamblichus. Julian also makes sure to clarify, as already described, that although the Good is in the noetic world, it is considered older than anything else and sits at the top edge, being “The King of All”.⁷⁶⁴

Two things should be noted here about Julian’s introduction of the metaphysical schema. First of all, Julian mentions three worlds; the visible, the noetic, and the highest of all above it. Second, this King of the whole universe is clearly a hypostasis prior to Helios. There seems to be here a discrepancy with the rest of the *Hymn*. Surprisingly, the noeric hypostasis of Helios is not mentioned, while in all the other instances, King Helios is clearly situated in the noeric realm. From the aforementioned description, it might be assumed that King Helios is situated in the noetic realm and the One, in the realm outside of it. This slight deviation by Julian, though, does not change his main concept of a triadic world with three hypostases. In the rest of the *Hymn*, the Good is moved from outside of this world and is situated in the noetic world, and Helios is moved from the noetic level to the noeric one.⁷⁶⁵ This discrepancy may be explained by Dillon’s suggestion that Julian is alluding here to the wording of a non-Platonic second letter (312c), which was ‘universally revered in later Neoplatonic circles as Platonic, describing, in mysterious terms, a sequence of three principles’.⁷⁶⁶

The highest principle, the “uncompounded cause of the Whole” (ἡ μονοειδὴς τῶν ὅλων αἰτία),⁷⁶⁷ ‘reveals to all existence beauty, and perfection, and oneness, and irresistible power; and... produced, as middle among the middle and intellectual (noeric), creative causes, Helios the mightiest God, proceeding from itself and in all things like unto itself’.⁷⁶⁸ Hence, two important things can be deduced from the above description. First, the “Good” is placed in the noetic world since it created the noeric Helios. Second, King Helios is placed in the middle (noeric) world; he is One and proceeds from One God, and he stands

⁷⁶⁴ Smith (2012: 230) claims that this “positive” feature of the One, that is, a One that has some kind of thinking and is not totally transcendent, simply addresses the longstanding Neoplatonic issue of linking the One with its products.

⁷⁶⁵ That the introduction of the noeric world dates back to the Iamblichean era, see De Vita 2011: 142.

⁷⁶⁶ περὶ τὸν πάντων βασιλέα πάντ’ ἐστὶ καὶ ἐκείνου ἕνεκα πάντα, καὶ ἐκεῖνο αἴτιον πάντων καλῶν. Δεύτερον δὲ περὶ τὰ δευτέρα, καὶ τρίτον περὶ τὰ τρίτα (Dillon 2012: 106).

⁷⁶⁷ This appears to be another Iamblichean expression that has survived through the commentaries of Proclus (*In Cratylus* 63.22) μονοειδὴς καὶ ἀμέριστος αἰτία, and *In Timaeus* (2.297.17) ἡ μονοειδὴς αἰτία τῶν ψυχῶν.

⁷⁶⁸ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 132d–133a. πᾶσι τοῖς οὓσιν ἐξηγουμένη κάλλους τε καὶ τελειότητος ἐνώσεώς τε καὶ δυνάμεως ἀμηχάνου... μέσον ἐκ μέσων τῶν νοερῶν καὶ δημιουργικῶν αἰτιῶν Ἥλιον θεὸν μέγιστον ἀνέφηνεν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ πάντα ὅμοιον [ἐν] ἑαυτῷ.

as middle among the middle creative causes, who are to be identified with the noeric Gods.⁷⁶⁹

Julian presents the notion of connectivity between the three worlds (noetic, noeric, sensible), which is done through Helios. Quoting Plato, he says, ‘that what the Good is in relation to pure reason and its objects in the intelligible world, such is the Sun in the visible world in relation to sight and its objects’.⁷⁷⁰ Moreover, the visible Sun ‘is the offspring of the Good which the Good begat in his own likeness’.⁷⁷¹ Julian takes Plato’s allegorical comparison of the Good and the visible Sun to equally apply to the noeric Helios, who is considered as the direct offspring of the Good, and in turn, the direct creator of the visible Sun.⁷⁷² Thus, all three (Good, Helios, visible Sun) are directly vertically related and have a central part as archons in their respective worlds. The solar rays are the connective link between the Good, King Helios, and the visible Sun. They originate from the noetic realm and they remain pure and undefiled, even by descending here on Earth. Hence, “the (visible) sun’s light represents the continuity and mediation between the intelligible and intellectual realms and visible, physically manifest reality—between the divine and human”.⁷⁷³

The Good is also described as ‘the cause of the intelligible Gods of beauty, existence, perfection, and oneness, connecting these and illuminating them with a power that works for good’.⁷⁷⁴ The concept that the Good reveals to all existence beauty and perfection is purely Platonic. Plato described the Good as the primary cause of all beautiful things, and Plotinus as the cause of the divine light that reveals the absolute beauty to all sensible things. Furthermore, the notions of a One that created everything, of a oneness that exists everywhere in the universe, of connectivity, and of perfection, are also part of the fundamental principles of the Neoplatonists.⁷⁷⁵ Remarkably, this concept of a One

⁷⁶⁹ The creative causes is a more philosophical and scientific term, compared to Gods, which is a more religious term.

⁷⁷⁰ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 133a.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.* For the direct relationship between the Good and the Sun in Plato’s works, see also Plato’s *Republic* 508b. This “duplication” of Helios means much to Julian, since it forms his core argument for proving the existence of King Helios through the analogy of the surer proofs that are observed in the visible universe (Nesselrath 2020: 56).

⁷⁷² For more on this allegory, see also Ferrari 2022: 106–112.

⁷⁷³ Elm 2012: 294.

⁷⁷⁴ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 133b.

⁷⁷⁵ See analysis on Neoplatonists and Plotinus (Chapter 2).

Intellect encompassing everything is applicable to King Helios, as well. As Julian writes, ‘The Gods related to Helios are of like substance who sum up the nature of this God, and though in the visible world they are plural, in him they are one’.⁷⁷⁶

Julian asserts that Helios has been appointed by the Good to rule and govern the noeric Gods, explaining that Helios is the son of the first and greatest entity, namely the Idea of Good (τοῦ πρώτου καὶ μεγίστου τῆς ιδέας τὰγαθοῦ γεγονὸς ἔκγονος). As a result, Helios has been granted by his Father ‘dominion among the noeric Gods, and himself dispenses to the noeric Gods those things of which the Good is the cause for the noetic Gods’.⁷⁷⁷ This noeric cause, which resembles the Good and resides in Helios, guides the noeric Gods to blessings for them all, and regulates all things according to pure reason. Interestingly, although subservient to Helios, the noeric Gods are also the offspring of the Good and came into existence at the same time as the noeric Sun. Hence, their relationship is lateral. Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the noeric Helios functions in precisely the same manner as the noeric Intellect in the Iamblichean tradition and the Demiurge in the Platonic system.⁷⁷⁸

In the same manner, the offspring of King Helios, the visible disc who is the third in rank, ‘is clearly, for the objects of sense-perception the cause of preservation, and this visible sun, is the cause for the visible Gods (planets) of just as many blessings as we said mighty Helios bestows on the noeric Gods’.⁷⁷⁹ Thus, Julian develops a clear pattern. Each world has his own solar archon with similar functions, and all of the leaders stand in the centre. In addition, all three worlds are connected through the middle archon, the noeric King Helios. This hierarchy seems to follow the Neoplatonists’ second and third principles of “spontaneous generation” and “non-reciprocal dependence”.⁷⁸⁰ Julian does not distinguish the sublunar region as a different level, something that is likely done in the *Chaldean Oracles*, but he incorporates it instead into the visible world. However, he

⁷⁷⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King* 143b.

⁷⁷⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 133b. τὴν ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς θεοῖς παρεδέξατο δυναστείαν, ὧν τὰγαθὸν ἐστὶ τοῖς νοητοῖς αἴτιον, ταῦτα αὐτὸς τοῖς νοεροῖς νέμων.

⁷⁷⁸ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Metaphysics.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 133c.

⁷⁸⁰ See Chapter 2 – Basic Principles. ‘Whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the one originating principle in the universe’, and the generated thing always depends on its creator. This relationship, however, is not reciprocal, since the prior is independent of the posterior.

certainly considers it as a sublevel, since he mentions specifically the demiurgic role of the Moon on Earth, and the higher deities that exist in that region.⁷⁸¹

Additionally, Julian tries to present a chronological order for the creation of the universe. He first refers to Plato and to the glorious hero Iamblichus (ὁ κλεινὸς ἥρως Ἰάμβλιχος) as authorities on the subject, who ‘employed the conception of a generated world, and assumed a creation in time in order that the magnitude of the works that arise from Helios might be recognized’.⁷⁸² However, this does not sound compatible with Julian, who considers Helios as eternal and indestructible, and claims that Iamblichus also had his doubts on putting a temporal limit on the creation of the world. Thus, the solution, which almost certainly must have been supported by Iamblichus, is that Helios ‘came forth from an eternal causer, or rather brought forth all things from everlasting, engendering by his divine will and with untold speed and unsurpassed power, from the invisible things now visible in present time’.⁷⁸³ The eternal causer is the Good in the noetic realm, which stands beyond time. On the other hand, the visible realm of creation exists within time. The noeric realm, which stands between these two realms, marks the transition from a “beyond time” status to a universe that becomes both generated and corrupted as time begins and progresses. Thus, King Helios has a strategic position, since he is placed midmost in the middle (noeric) realm.

If we take as a fact that Julian actually accepts the Iamblichean and Chaldean triadic characteristics of the intellects, and there is every indication of that,⁷⁸⁴ then we can envision Helios as having its higher (unparticipated) part being eternal (beyond time) and connecting the noetic and the noeric world together, while his lower (participated) counterpart is mixed with time and involved in creating the visible world through the activity (ἐνέργεια) of the Sun.⁷⁸⁵ The middle participant of Helios is involved dynamically in creating time and bestowing equal blessings on the Gods who came forth by his agency

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.* 154d.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.* 146ab. ἄχρις ὑποθέσεως τῷ γεννητῷ προσχρωμένους καὶ οἰονεῖ χρονικὴν τινα τὴν ποιήσιν ὑποτιθεμένους, ἵνα τὸ μέγεθος τῶν παρ’ αὐτοῦ γινομένων ἔργων ἐπινόηθῃ.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.* 146bc. ὁ θεὸς ἐξ αἰωνίου προήλθεν αἰτίας, μᾶλλον δὲ προήγαγε πάντα ἐξ αἰῶνος, ἀπὸ τῶν ἀφανῶν τὰ φανερά βουλήσει θεῖα καὶ ἀρρήτῳ τάχει καὶ ἀνυπερβλήτῳ δυνάμει πάντα ἀθρόως ἐν τῷ νῦν ἀπογεννήσας χρόνῳ.

⁷⁸⁴ Julian (*Hymn to King Helios* 157bc) refers to the three-fold creative power of the God; *Chaldean Oracles* fr. 26–29; Schramm 2022: 149.

⁷⁸⁵ The visible world includes the seven spheres (planets), the eighth sphere (entire universe), and the Earth, which revolves forever in a continuous cycle of regeneration (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 146c).

and in company with him.⁷⁸⁶ The threefold nature of the Good in the noetic world can be better understood through the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, *Kronia*, and the *Oracles*.⁷⁸⁷ The unparticipated part is equal to Cronos,⁷⁸⁸ who is also at the level of the Being. The participated noetic part that is connected with the noeric Helios is equated with Rhea in the *Kronia*, and Cybele in the *Mother of the Gods*, who is considered to be both the Mother and the Wife of Helios. I do not think it would be too daring to also associate the Chaldean Aion with both Julian's Good and King Helios. Specifically, Aion has the characteristics of the participated noetic Intellect (Good) and the unparticipated noeric one (King Helios). This supreme noetic/noeric God is described as a Father-begotten light, who is superior to time, and has plucked the flower of mind. Moreover, he has the task of keeping the Ideas in a ceaseless circular movement, thus keeping them in a constant away-and-back motion. The middle noetic participant can be equated with Hecate, who is the fiery and illuminous energy of the Father, and connects all three worlds. Hence, Hecate as the tri-world "life" aspect of the Intellects is also the middle participant of King Helios (the noeric Intellect).⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Combining the *Hymn to King Helios* with *Kronia* and the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, the noeric triadic Intellect becomes equivalent to Zeus / Helios – Cybele / Hera – Attis / Athena.

⁷⁸⁷ As analyzed earlier, this Good is at the level of Being and is inferior to the Neoplatonic Good/One or the Father of the Chaldeans, who stands beyond this universe.

⁷⁸⁸ See also Chapter 2 on Plotinus – Metaphysics. There is also the view (Schramm 2022: 147) of the existence of a constant duality in Julian's works. The male Gods Cronos, Zeus, and Helios represent the invisible cosmic ἐνέργεια (energy), while the Goddesses (their female counterparts, respectively) Rhea, Hera, and Cybele represent the δύναμις (force).

⁷⁸⁹ See analysis in Chapter 2 – *Chaldean Oracles*.

3.2 Comparison with the Iamblichean Metaphysical system

Summarizing Julian's metaphysical hierarchical structures, we have the following three levels of reality, with a leader standing at the centre of each level⁷⁹⁰:

1. Being/Noetic World – Good (leader and creator of noetic Gods/Forms)
2. Noeric World – King Helios (leader, but not creator of noeric Gods, creator of higher sublunar Deities)
3. Physical Universe/Sublunar Region – Visible Sun (leader and creator of visible Gods (planets), Moon, and Earth)

As explained in the previous section, Julian hints that there is also an ineffable Good above the level of the essential Good, since he calls Helios “the son of the Idea of the Good”. This mirrors Iamblichus' description of two types of Good: A Good beyond Being, and a Good at the Level of Being.⁷⁹¹ It is no surprise that Julian does not directly mention the first Good. As A. Smith correctly observes, the emperor is not interested in expanding on the noetic realm or the exact status of the One, because his main concern is to describe the characteristics of the noeric King Helios and his blessings on the physical realm.⁷⁹² Julian's primary interest lies in demonstrating the existence of a shared "oneness" among the leaders of the three worlds, highlighting that this unity is facilitated by the connecting power and mediating role of King Helios. This “substance” that descends from the Good to the visible world is nothing other than the intelligible light, which is incorporeal (ἄσώματον). The idea of a total transcendent light is not merely a metaphor, but the result of reasoned discourse. Moreover, it seems to have been taken directly from Iamblichus, who describes the noeric light as ‘traveling between the ultramundane realms, reaching the Earth through the Sun’.⁷⁹³ The characteristics of the Iamblichean description of the light are also strikingly similar to Julian's description in the *Hymn*. The divine light is indivisibly present in all things, fills everything with perfecting power, has an unlimited causal superiority which brings to completion all things within itself, and brings together extremities. Its cycling revolution swings around it the elements and holds everything together by producing a single continuity and harmony of all with all. In other words, the

⁷⁹⁰ See also Appendix I.

⁷⁹¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.5.

⁷⁹² Smith (2012: 230) astutely observes that Julian is “telescoping” the complex ideas of Iamblichus.

⁷⁹³ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Metaphysics, and on *Chaldean Oracles*; Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 135a; See also Smith 2012: 231–236.

divine light is the single cause of the existence and functioning of the universe, and functions similarly to Plotinus' World Soul.⁷⁹⁴

What may seem striking is the complete omission of the Soul as an independent hypostasis. As was demonstrated, this was a clear assumption in Plotinus' metaphysical hierarchy. However, Plotinus' characteristics of the World Soul, as already described, appear to have been incorporated into the attributes of King Helios and his divine light – specifically, in the characteristics of Athena, whom Julian presents in a similar fashion as both the noeric equivalent of the providence of Cybele, and as a Goddess with the same characteristics as the Chaldean Hecate. Moreover, Helios connects directly to the divided souls, who live among the higher deities in the higher sublunar region. This last notion in the *Hymn* finds its match in Iamblichus, who also places the higher souls among the classes of Beings superior to us: Angels, Daemons, and Heroes.⁷⁹⁵

Iamblichus' metaphysical schema, as analyzed in Chapter 2, is a complex one. He envisages a separate level with two Ones and a Dyad, followed by our universe with three intelligible levels of reality (noetic, noetic/noeric, noeric), each having several triadic Intellects. Finally, at the very bottom is the visible world. Although Julian explicitly states that his work is derived from a lost treatise by Iamblichus, the metaphysical framework presented in the *Hymn* is notably simpler than that of the divine philosopher. However, there are several similarities – especially the description of the role of the Iamblichean Demiurge (third Intellect in the noeric level) – that seem to be incorporated in Julian's King Helios.⁷⁹⁶ Firstly, the Iamblichean Demiurge is also identified with Zeus. Secondly, the noeric divinities are guided by the Demiurge, and together with him, are responsible for the creation of the visible world. Thirdly, the Demiurge gathers everything into one and holds in subjection to himself the intelligible world. Fourthly, the Demiurge has created several less luminous divinities, who may influence our lives and bring us into connection with him. Fifthly, just as in Julian's *Hymn*, the World Soul partakes in the participated noeric Intellect, who is the Demiurge.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁴ See analysis of Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Helios and Light.

⁷⁹⁵ Dillon 2012: 106; See analysis of this Chapter on Syncretism, and Helios and the Souls.

⁷⁹⁶ Dillon (2012: 106) also sees Helios as combining the functions of Demiurge and transcendent Soul; Schramm (2022: 135) agrees with this view, too.

⁷⁹⁷ See Chapter 2 Iamblichus – Metaphysics.

As noted in Chapter 2, Iamblichus had also developed another metaphysical system, which formed practically a simplified version of the highly complex one, and can be illustrated as follows:⁷⁹⁸

1. Ineffable One (Outside our universe)
2. Noetic World – Good/Monad (Surrounded by Forms)
3. Intermediate (Hypercosmic) World – Demiurgic Intellect (creator of the celestial spheres and leader of the Demiurgic Gods, who are part of his attributes and help in the creation of the visible world)
4. The Physical Universe/Sublunar region

The One stands at the top as a single entity, prior of all causes and beings. It is also the Paradigm of the Good or Monad, the first God and king of our cosmos. The Good or Monad is called the “Father of Essence” (οὐσιοπάτωρ), and is pre-essential, the first principle of the noetic world (νοητάρχης), and God of Gods. As in Julian’s *Hymn*, He is considered the first Intellect (τό πρῶτον νοητόν), surrounded by the first objects of intellection, which are the Forms. From Him springs, in the next hypostasis, the Demiurgic Intellect (ὁ δημιουργικός νοῦς), who is master of truth and wisdom, and has been set over the creation of the visible realm. He can generate life by coordinating the reason-principles, who have the same characteristics as Julian’s causal principles that are impersonated by the noeric Gods. This Demiurge is described as the leader of the intelligible realm and as an “Intellect knowing himself”. But most importantly of all, he guides the several demiurgic Gods, who form part of his attributes. These Gods are incorporated in three ranks: the aethereal, empyrean, and the celestial. The Demiurge is called by many names, depending on his demiurgic functions: Sun God Amoun (creative function), Hephaistos (perfective function), Osiris (producing goods), and similarly with his other functions.⁷⁹⁹ In addition, he created the celestial spheres from the highest matter, and rules over all the elements in the realm of generation.

In the sublunar region, several deities are associated with the Moon, and are responsible for the generation on Earth. Similar to Julian’s division of the celestial circle,⁸⁰⁰ Iamblichus divides the universe into two, four, twelve, thirty-six or the double of that and

⁷⁹⁸ See Chapter 2 Iamblichus – Metaphysics/simplified version.

⁷⁹⁹ See Chapter 1 on Egypt, where Amoun is identified with Zeus and the Sun God.

⁸⁰⁰ Which, as seen, is according to the Zodiac circle.

places on each section a deity. Moreover, the luminous nature of the divinities is conspicuous. The divinities illuminate everything, just like the Sun does with his rays. Hence, the light of the Gods is similar to the Sun's light. Both of them illuminate their subjects transcendentally, they fill everything with their perfecting power, they are both a continuum everywhere the same throughout, they cannot be cut, and they are indivisible and always connected with their source. Finally, even when they withdraw, the heat still remains in the bodies and the souls.⁸⁰¹ It is extraordinary how all these Iamblichean concepts find their equivalence in the *Hymn to King Helios*. Thus, it follows that since the emperor is not considered a big philosophical innovator, he must have gotten most of his material from Iamblichus. The only notion that actually does not appear to be emphasized by Iamblichus is that of centrality, which forms an integral part of the *Hymn*. However, as seen previously, this may find its source in the *Chaldean Oracles* and Mithraism.

3.3 Comparison with the *Chaldean Oracles*

As already mentioned, Julian most certainly drew most of his information from the lost treatise of Iamblichus' commentary, *On the Chaldean Oracles*. Hence, it is useful to compare the Chaldean metaphysical system with the one in the *Hymn*. Although Iamblichus' treatise has not survived, there are several fragments from the *Oracles* themselves that have been gathered in a unified collection. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, they provide enough information to roughly understand their metaphysical system. The most interesting fragment, concerning the metaphysical schema, is Fr. 73,⁸⁰² where three worlds, ruled by three Suns, are mentioned. It can be summarized as follows:

1. First Sun – Sacred path (Empyrean)
2. Second Sun – Aery path (Ethereal)
3. Third Sun – Sensible path (Hylic)

The resemblance of the above description of the three worlds to the one in the *Hymn* is evident. The *Oracles* support a “three worlds” cosmological system: the Empyrean, the Ethereal, and the Hylic. The general consensus among the scholars is that each world is

⁸⁰¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.9. See also Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Helios and Light.

⁸⁰² For the controversy on this fragment, see Chapter 2 on *Chaldean Oracles* – Triads and Heliocentrism; Dillon 2012:108.

governed by its own ruler: Aion, the Sun, and the Moon, respectively.⁸⁰³ However, Fr. 73 clearly describes the third ruler as “heating Earth by fire” (a reference to the Sun, hence excluding the Moon). This does not mean that the Moon’s role is not important in the *Oracles*. On the contrary, it is essential because Selene (the Moon) transmits the light of the Sun onto the Earth, and serves as a symbol of Hecate. One can conclude that the sublunar region, defined as the space between the Moon and the Earth, is not autonomous; rather, it has been integrated into the visible world, which is governed by the Sun – paralleling the depiction found in the *Hymn to King Helios*.

As demonstrated in the analysis of the *Oracles* in Chapter 2, the concept of triadic structures pervades their sacred doctrine, (i.e. three hypostases, three worlds, three leaders). This triadic significance is also found throughout the *Hymn*, and is emphasized by Julian toward the end of the text, when, addressing to Salustius, he claims that he composed it in three nights at most, in harmony with the three-fold creative power of the God.⁸⁰⁴ Moreover, the notion of centrality is fundamental to the Chaldeans, and reflects the central position of the shining fiery leaders in each of the three worlds. The *Oracles*, like Julian, define centrality as the center from which all things are connected and are equidistant to the periphery. The three solar worlds are described as three circles, swirling constantly, with each Sun/ruler located in the centre being connected with the other Suns. The fiery nature of the rulers is also conspicuous, and their energy is transmitted through solar rays, reaching every point in the universe.⁸⁰⁵

The description of the rulers in the Chaldean doctrine is summarized as follows: Outside of the hypercosmic ruling triad stands a transcendent Mighty God, which is described as “One Fire” and is equated with the ineffable One of the Neoplatonists, which also stands outside our universe. The first God in the triad is characterized as the Noetic First Intellect, called the Father, and is described as the First Transcendent Fire that exists in a fiery cosmos.⁸⁰⁶ His solar characteristics are indisputable, since he is described as “whole light” (ὅλον φῶς). In addition, He encompasses the Platonic Ideas, who are the

⁸⁰³ Finamore 1985: 133.

⁸⁰⁴ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 157bc.

⁸⁰⁵ Penati (1983: 562) supports the existence of Chaldean influences on Julian’s thought, and claims that “the Chaldean doctrine allowed Julian to distinguish Helios’ invisible and intellectual nature from the visible manifestation, the solar disk, and also allowed him to proclaim this divinity as the true divine Λόγος”.

⁸⁰⁶ Finamore 1985: 133; Penati 1983: 562.

forerunners of the Forms and are also created by Him, along with many other Gods. The second triadic God – the equivalent of Julian’s King Helios – is the Demiurgic Intellect (Demiurge). Like in the *Hymn*, He was placed by the Father as leader to govern all things. Amazingly (and again, as in the *Hymn*), this leader is twice Transcendent, since He is placed between the First Intellect and the sensible world. He transmits the Ideas through the intellectual Fire, and allots them to the intellectual Thoughts, which are responsible for creating matter and visualizing the sensible world. Like King Helios, He also appears to incorporate the substance of the Universal Soul, since He is the dispenser of the life-giving fire that fills the life-giving womb of Hecate – the personification of the World Soul. Hecate appears in shimmering light and unlike the other leaders, she is not to be confined in one place. It is thanks to Hecate and her Demiurgic heat that the whole cosmos becomes alive and animated. As analyzed, the role of Hecate in Julian’s *Hymn* seems to have been taken by the Greek Goddess Athena.

In addition, Julian (who speaks of a mystic truth that places the Sun midway between the three worlds) explains in the *Hymn* that the second transmundane ruler in the *Oracles* should also be considered a supra-physical Sun. King Helios is to be identified with this transmundane Sun, who is equivalent to the second noeric leader (Demiurge) of the Chaldean Triad, and encompasses both the supramundane substance and the intramundane one. Moreover, His offspring is the visible Sun.⁸⁰⁷ As already explained, the Chaldean Aion is to be identified as a noetic/noeric God, incorporating the characteristics of both the participated (noetic) First Intellect and the unparticipated (noeric) transmundane Sun. All of the above Chaldean notions seem to find almost their exact match in Julian’s *Hymn to King Helios*. Any discrepancies between the two systems are most certainly to be attributed to the changes that Iamblichus made in his commentary on the *Oracles*.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁷ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 148a. See previous analysis in this chapter, and Chapter 2 on *Chaldean Oracles* – Transmundane Sun.

⁸⁰⁸ Finamore 1985: 134.

Conclusion

1. General

This thesis focused on the analysis and determination of the identity of Julian's King Helios. To achieve this, it investigated how Helios was conceived in the Graeco-Roman world in Late Antiquity, and compared the findings to Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*. This research shed much-needed "light" on the long debate about the exact identity of King Helios: This supreme God is the privileged offspring of the platonic One/Father, sharing the same substance with Him. Furthermore, he is to be defined as the true divine Λόγος (Logos), the primary cosmic Creator of the universe, and the noeric Demiurge of Iamblichus, who can be (simultaneously) Mithras, Sol Invictus, or any other supreme God of any traditional religion. Moreover, Helios is the supreme God of the Roman Empire and the protector divinity and kinsman of Julian himself. Despite the lack of direct Mithraic references, one should not exclude the identification of Helios with Mithras. The *Hymn to King Helios*, along with Julian's admission that Mithras is his patron God in *Kronia*,⁸⁰⁹ is rather revealing on this subject. Mithras, however, should be identified as a Platonized Persian God, just as Porphyry saw him. In addition, the description of Helios in the *Hymn* is, most of all, based on the Iamblichean, Mithraic, and Chaldean teachings,⁸¹⁰ and than on any other doctrine. The following paragraphs illustrate the conclusions from the analysis in the three preceding chapters.

Thus, the present study not only helps resolve years of controversy regarding the exact identity of King Helios but also offers a new interpretation of Julian's Sun God. King Helios should not be viewed as strictly adhering to a single dogma or religion but rather as a fusion of many beliefs, including Mithraism, resulting in one common truth. This appears to be a common error made by many previous scholars who attempted to identify His identity. Athanassiadi, although recognizing the Neoplatonic elements in Julian's *Hymn*, focuses primarily on the supposed Mithraic allusions and presents the work as a contribution to Mithraic theology, claiming that every assertion made by Julian must

⁸⁰⁹ Julian, *Kronia* 336c; Smith 1995:125.

⁸¹⁰ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus and the *Chaldean Oracles*.

conform to Mithraic doctrine.⁸¹¹ On the contrary, R. Smith, while using a similar approach, tries to prove exactly the opposite: that everything can allude to Neoplatonic dogma, while there is nothing purely Mithraic in the *Hymn*.⁸¹² More recent works, such as those by Dillon (2012) and A. Smith (2012), adopt a more open approach. Dillon explicitly acknowledges the strong Chaldean influences, along with the “pure” Neoplatonic elements in the *Hymn*. However, he does not emphasize the possible Mithraic elements, despite recognizing a potential connection between Neoplatonism and Mithraism. Moreover, the works of both authors focus on analyzing the metaphysical schema in the *Hymn* rather than the specific identity of King Helios, which is the focus of this thesis. The only recent work explicitly focused on the identity of King Helios appears to be an article by De Vita (2018), which has been published solely in Italian, and lacks a thorough analysis of the subject. Therefore, this thesis also aims to fill a gap in recent scholarship on the *Hymn*, which tends to emphasize the overall metaphysical framework rather than King Helios specifically.

The syncretism between Helios and the other Gods, which forms an integral part of Julian’s religious policy, is certainly not an innovation. On the contrary, it appears that this notion was becoming increasingly popular during the Imperial period, especially beginning in the third century of our era. The most conspicuous divine fusion was with Apollo, who seems to have been syncretized with Helios, due to his solar attributes.⁸¹³ However, Julian’s syncretism was far more than just a fusion between Helios and some other Gods. The emperor merges the Neoplatonic cosmological doctrine with the traditional religions. Any God that he presents is adapted and integrated according to this philosophy’s metaphysical system. His goal appears to be the presentation to the Roman world of a consistent and viable religious system based on Neoplatonic-Iamblichan, Mithraic, and Chaldean doctrines, designed to incorporate all contemporary traditions and practices. King Helios is presented as the supreme Creator of the universe. Thus, every God from any religion has to and can be related to him. The supreme Gods, like Zeus, Hades, Oceanus, Mithras and Sarapis, are of equal status with Helios. Others, like Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Asclepius form part of his attributes. Apollo expresses the singularity of his thoughts,

⁸¹¹ Athanassiadi 1977: 383.

⁸¹² Smith 1995: 159.

⁸¹³ See chapter 1 – Late Antiquity.

Athena is his intelligence in perfect form, Aphrodite represents his creative function, Dionysus is the attribute of the dividing creative function, and Asclepios, the savior of man, fulfills the fair order of the whole life.

During the third and early fourth centuries of our era, in the form of Sol Invictus, Helios was considered the protector of the Roman emperors and Rome. Julian revives this belief and meticulously tries to reaffirm and prove that the destiny of the Roman Empire is linked to Helios, whom he considers its patron God; the reason that Rome ruled supreme all this time was because Helios had preordained her sovereignty. If this link is broken, Rome will not have His protection and will fall. The Hymn to King Helios' composition seems to be partially connected to that reason. It was composed to honour the birth of Sol Invictus (Solis Natalis), which was celebrated by the festival of Ἡλαῖα in Rome on December 25th. However, Julian, following the trend of his age that the ancient traditions are the most venerable, also felt the need to connect his Neoplatonic Helios to the myth of the foundation of the eternal city. His syncretic approach is again put into action. A conspicuous proof that Helios was, from the very beginning, the patron God and founder of Rome is the fact that Jupiter and Helios are one and the same God. The myth of Romulus, the founder of Rome, is also connected to Helios and the anagogy of the soul, which alludes to the ritual of theurgy. As Julian explains, since Romulus is connected to Ares, he is also connected to Helios, because Ares is one of the two paredroi of Helios. Thus, Romulus also achieved salvation by having his soul join King Helios, through the assistance of Athena, the παρθένος ἀμήτωρ (motherless virgin). Moreover, the "stamp" on the solar connections of the Romans is based on the fact that their calendar is solar-based. In the whole world, only the Romans and the Egyptians had a solar calendar, in contrast with all the other cultures, which had a lunar calendar. However, Helios was not just the patron God of Rome, but also the protector of Julian himself. The emperor explains in detail how he perceived this intimate relationship with the solar God. From his early years, Julian had developed an affinity for the Sun, staring both at him and at the celestial sky for hours, having been captivated by the marvels of the heavens.

The analysis of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*, indicates that Neoplatonism constitutes the principal philosophical doctrine to which Julian had devoted his soul and

faith, and he had every reason to do so.⁸¹⁴ It was thanks to the teachings of the Neoplatonic philosophers that Julian had managed to escape from the darkness and state of despair into which he had fallen. In particular, it was the Iamblichean version of Neoplatonism about which Julian felt so much affection. Most importantly, it was through the wisdom of the Iamblichean philosophers and hierophants that the emperor was able to actually perceive the divine light of Helios – something that was achieved through the ritual of theurgy.⁸¹⁵ All of this philosophical knowledge had given him hope for the future. His outer world might have been filled with corruption, injustice, and impiety, but there was a way out of it, or even better, a means to improve it. The solution was to reestablish a better world through the philosophical way of life, characterized by justice, truth, knowledge about the divine and the functioning of the cosmos, and piety. As a result, it comes as no surprise that the Neoplatonic teachings were his primary guide concerning the explanation of the metaphysical order and the identification of the supreme divinity. The *Hymn to King Helios* is strongly based on the Iamblichean doctrine. Julian himself leaves no doubt about that, and quotes this divine philosopher as his ultimate source. Although there are other references (e.g., to Phoenician theology, or to the Chaldeans), Julian claims that he received all of his information from Iamblichus' treatise – most likely, a lost commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles* that Julian asked to be brought to him during his stay in Gaul.⁸¹⁶

Thus, in the eponymous hymn, King Helios is presented as a supreme God/Intellect with strong Neoplatonic metaphysical characteristics. The description of the Platonic Νοῦς as a Noetic Helios was a long-standing tradition, since it is strongly supported by Plotinus, as it is demonstrated in the *Enneads*. In addition, this great philosopher was a strong adherent of a belief about a noetic “true light” that travels from the Noetic Sun to Earth through the visible Sun.⁸¹⁷ Plotinus calls the noetic Helios king of the king of the kings.⁸¹⁸ However, there is a significant difference with Julian's metaphysical system. For Plotinus, the intermediary between the intelligible and the visible worlds is the World Soul, not King Helios. It was the divine Iamblichus who developed the theory of the existence of an

⁸¹⁴ See analysis in Chapters 3.

⁸¹⁵ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Theurgy – Ritual, Julian, light and Helios.

⁸¹⁶ Julian, *To Priscus* (12).

⁸¹⁷ See Chapter 2 – Plotinus.

⁸¹⁸ The first King is the One/noetic Helios, the second the visible Sun, and the kings are the planets.

intermediate noeric world, hence advocating to the presence of a connective noeric Intellect that Julian equates with King Helios.⁸¹⁹ In its full development, the Iamblichean metaphysical system is far more complex than the one that Julian describes in the *Hymn to King Helios*, since it includes several hypostases of noetic and noeric Intellects. In addition, just before the visible world, there is a noeric Hebdomad. The Demiurge of the entire sensible world is considered as the last noeric Intellect, and is situated in this Hebdomad. Julian in the *Hymn to King Helios* presents a much more basic metaphysical system that includes just three worlds: the noetic, the noeric, and the sensible. Each world has a leader/Intellect standing at the centre: the noetic world has the Platonic Good, the noeric world has King Helios, and the sensible world has the visible Sun. As a result of this simplicity, Julian avoids referring to the noeric Intellect/Helios as the third Demiurge in the solar hymn. The reason that Julian chose to present a more simplified version is most likely due to the fact that he intended to present a solar philosophical religion that could be understood by all his citizens. As he states: ‘the higher knowledge is reserved for the few happy theurgists’.⁸²⁰

Iamblichus does the same thing in the *De Mysteriis*, in which he describes a much simpler metaphysical system that he attributes to the arcane Hermetic books.⁸²¹ This simplified system has the One standing at the top as a single entity, outside our universe, and prior of all causes and beings. From the One sprang the Being (Essence), which is considered the principle of the noetic realm. As in Julian’s *Hymn*, it is considered the first Intellect (τὸ πρῶτον νοητόν), surrounded by the first objects of intellection, which are the forms. In the next hypostasis (the noeric), the Demiurgic Intellect (ὁ δημιουργικὸς νοῦς), who is master of truth and wisdom, has been set over the creation of the visible realm. In a similar fashion, in Julian’s *Hymn*, the role of the Demiurgic Intellect has been taken by King Helios. Moreover, since the emperor is not considered a significant philosophical innovator, he must have obtained most of his sources from somewhere else, and Iamblichus is the most likely candidate.

⁸¹⁹ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Metaphysics.

⁸²⁰ Julian, *To the Mother of the Gods* 172d – 173a.

⁸²¹ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Metaphysics.

Another possible source for Julian could also be Porphyry, since several concepts in the *Hymn* allude to this philosopher. These include the idea that the One is situated within the universe, the association of both Asclepius and Heracles with Helios, and the notion of syncretism among various religions. The concept of syncretism is especially significant because it forms an integral part of Julian's definition of King Helios. Like Julian, Porphyry attributed several cosmic qualities to Helios, linking him with various Olympian gods. Moreover, Porphyry demonstrates extensive knowledge of Mithraism. In his explanation of the *In the Cave of the Nymphs*,⁸²² he not only syncretizes Mithraism with Persian and Greek religions but also interprets this mystery cult using purely Neoplatonic and astrological terms. Thus, Porphyry's description of Mithraism helps explain the Neoplatonic conformity of the Mithraic allusions found in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*.

King Helios stands at the centre of the whole cosmos, and is defined as middle among the middle.⁸²³ This μεσότης (middleness) is key in describing and understanding the role and function of this supreme demiurgic power of the universe. The One, being in the noetic world, is not directly in contact with the visible world, hence it cannot create it. An intermediary force is needed, and this demiurgic power is King Helios. He is the offspring of the One, who has bestowed upon him control and dominion over all the causes that are responsible for the creation of the visible world. The noetic light/energy of the One is transmitted through King Helios to the visible Sun, who in turn spreads it to the solar system, creating the planets, the Moon, Earth, and all life. In addition, this middleness is twofold. King Helios is also placed in the middle of his world, and through his (gravitational) force, swirls all things in a circular motion around him, bringing everything towards the centre (namely, to himself).

Julian places particular emphasis on the scientific observations which verify the superiority and existence of King Helios.⁸²⁴ As he states, all the evidence about Helios' powers is found here on our planet and in the celestial sky. For example, it is due to the Sun's energy that everything comes to birth and grows on Earth. This becomes clear by observing what happens to a plant when it stays in the dark, or by observing the seasons,

⁸²² See Chapter 2 on Neoplatonism – Philosophers – Porphyry.

⁸²³ See Chapter 3 on Helios' Substance – Nature – Middleness.

⁸²⁴ See Chapter 3 on Light – Surer Proofs.

because when the daylight is reduced during winter, growth halts for most plants. Thus, Julian realized that all the blessings on Earth derive from the Sun's energy, which reaches our planet through his solar rays. Moreover, the centrality and leadership of the visible Sun is clearly perceived in the sky, because all the other planets "dance" around and converge towards him. Now, since the noeric realm cannot be perceived with our eyes, one should find another method to conceive it. The connection to the noeric Helios is achieved through the following deduction: since the entire universe functions by one universal law, the noeric Helios should function similarly to his visible counterpart (the Sun). Hence, through the visible Sun, we comprehend King Helios' very self and we behold Him with our eyes. In addition, the same solar rays that are emitted by King Helios are being channeled through our visible Sun, who, in turn, emits them into the visible world.

The complete exclusion of a World Soul is one of the most obvious features in Julian's cosmological doctrine. However, this is not an omission.⁸²⁵ Its characteristics and functions have been incorporated in King Helios, and are mostly represented by Athena, who forms one of his attributes. In the *Hymn to King Helios*, the cosmos is described as one complete and flawless living organism, full of soul and intelligence. This two-fold "perfection" is coordinated by Helios, who stands midway as a united force that binds everything together in both the intelligible and the visible worlds. This binding power holds collectively the entire universe, unites the intelligible to the sensible world, and is simultaneously responsible for the creation of the whole cosmos. Therefore, Helios, through his solar rays, is responsible for the vivification and formation of everything on Earth, including the development of intelligent life. As Julian states, 'there is no single blessing in our lives that we do not receive as a gift from this God, either perfect from him alone, or, through the other Gods, perfected by him'.⁸²⁶ Hence, Helios, acting like the World Soul, is also responsible for sowing our planet with souls, which proceed not just from himself, but from the other Gods, as well.⁸²⁷ Being responsible for generating our souls, Helios is also the ultimate destination for the reverse process.⁸²⁸ The salvation of our souls is achieved through the process of ἀναγωγή, and their ascension to the universe. The

⁸²⁵ See Chapter 3 on The Theology of the Hymn, and Syncretism – Helios' Powers and other Gods.

⁸²⁶ Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 154cd.

⁸²⁷ All the other cosmological powers/Gods are subordinate to Helios.

⁸²⁸ See Chapter 3 on Helios and the Souls.

final destination for the pious human souls is King Helios Himself. Their journey back to their Creator is achieved in a protective and illuminous vehicle (energy beam) that passes first through the Moon and the visible Sun. Iamblichus supported the view that the proper and only method to achieve this union with the noeric Helios (Intellect) was not through contemplation, as Plotinus claimed, but through the ritual of theurgy.⁸²⁹ Julian was a strong adherent of this belief, and in his writings, he wished for perfection in theurgy.⁸³⁰

As a result, it comes as no surprise that Julian's King Helios bears close resemblance to the supreme divinities of the *Chaldean Oracles*, which are described as fiery entities.⁸³¹ These texts were the primary source for Iamblichean theurgy, and conspicuously mention three worlds ruled by three Suns. The universe is described as a "solar world," which consists of the "entire light". In the hypercosmic solar universe, which is the noeric realm of Iamblichus, there is a transmundane Sun, who stands as a ruler and king of that world just as his spitting image (the sensible Sun) is ruler and king of the planets in our solar system. Moreover, this hypercosmic Sun measures everything by time, and he is "time of time". Indeed, in the *Hymn*, Julian speaks of a mystic truth that actually places the Sun midway between the three worlds. This mystic truth is to be identified with the *Chaldean Oracles*.⁸³² Thus, King Helios is also to be identified with this Chaldean transmundane Sun, who is equivalent to Αἰών, the second leader (noetic/noeric Intellect) of the Chaldean Triad,⁸³³ and encompasses both the transmundane substance and the intramundane one.

⁸²⁹ See Chapter 2 on Iamblichus – Theurgy.

⁸³⁰ Julian, *To the Mother of the Gods* 180bc.

⁸³¹ See Chapter 2 on the *Chaldean Oracles*.

⁸³² See Chapter 3 on Metaphysical schema – Hierarchical Structures – Comparison with the *Chaldean Oracles*.

⁸³³ The divine triad of the three transmundane Chaldean Gods are: Father, Hypercosmic Sun (Aion), and Hecate.

2. Synopsis

One could safely conclude that King Helios represents, most of all, the Neoplatonic concept of the Demiurgic Intellect of the universe – particularly, the simplified Iamblichean notion of the noeric Intellect (νοερὸς νοῦς), who is the offspring of his noetic counterpart and of the ultimate Good in our universe. In turn, King Helios is the creator of the visible Sun. Thus, he represents the second hypostasis in the cosmos,⁸³⁴ and sits in the middle of the universe, joining the higher intelligible to the lower sensible levels. He is, therefore, the connective force between the Platonic noetic Ideas and matter. This central position of the noeric Helios makes him ruler and creator of the entire universe, “The King of All”. Helios, as the source of all life in the universe, incorporates several attributes of the Neoplatonic World Soul. Some of his main characteristics, which are all integral in Neoplatonism, are perfection, connectivity, creativity, harmony, and unity. This notion of a connected world that is full of the unified energy of King Helios also led the Neoplatonists to an appreciation for the material cosmos, in general – a love for nature, including both animals and plants – since they also have souls and they are composed of the divine, too.⁸³⁵

However, Julian’s King Helios seems to have also been heavily influenced by the *Chaldean Oracles* and their concept of theurgy that Iamblichus brought to Neoplatonism. These *Oracles* describe a three-part world, each one having a fiery leader at each centre. As an initiate in theurgy, Julian had actually seen the noeric burning light of Helios in that ritual. It was this visible proof that convinced the emperor that his soul can actually achieve salvation, through the theurgic notion of anagogy, and reach Helios in the heavens. The emperor had experienced this same unburning light in the mystery rituals of other cults, like Mithras’ and Eleusis’. In addition, the doctrines of these mysteries had likely been much more closely related to Neoplatonism than what had been believed until recently. Hence, it was not difficult for the emperor to syncretize them, and to consider that their dogmas refer to a common Supreme Solar Deity. For Julian, in other words, Helios, Sol Invictus, and Mithras are one and the same God – a God that is identified in accordance with the Iamblichean Neoplatonic doctrine, which was influenced by the wisdom of the *Chaldean Oracles*.

⁸³⁴ The three hypostases are: Noetic, Noeric, and Sensible.

⁸³⁵ This comes in direct opposition to the Christian doctrine of a material world depraved of the divine.

Julian, as a Roman emperor and Pontifex Maximus, felt the obligation to save the Roman Empire from the status of moral and religious decay that had fallen upon it. Helios seemed to be the ideal divinity to achieve this. As the offspring of the Platonic ἀγαθόν (Good), this supreme solar God was the perfect representative of justice, truth, and piety, thus the optimal Saviour God for the Romans. At any rate, the emperor was certain that his personal miraculous escape from the “claws” of Constantius, and his ascension to the throne, was due to Helios and the other traditional Gods.⁸³⁶ Being a strong adherent of a philosophical religious syncretism, it was not difficult for Julian to follow the trend of his era and make Helios the supreme divinity of all the traditional religions in the Roman Empire. Thus, Helios was actually not only the binding and uniting force of the entire universe, but also the ultimate divinity, who connected together all the philosophies and religions. In philosophy, the goal to become like God practically meant to become like the cosmic Helios and the Good – that is, to acquire all knowledge about the universe’s functioning. In religion, Helios stood on equal status with any other principal God, and above of any other divinity, who was to be identified with one of his cosmic and demiurgic attributes. As the cosmic supreme God, the Neoplatonic Helios was also to become the protector Deity of the Roman Empire, bringing to its citizens justice and making them pious to the true cosmic Gods – the representatives of the universe’s creative forces.

The convergence of theology, celestial physics, and cosmology in the *Hymn* appears to form a rather important part of Julian’s attempt to “persuade” his subjects about the religious truth of the status of King Helios as the ultimate creator of our cosmos. In other words, Julian seems to deviate from many other religions, traditional or not, which primarily tried to convert others by claiming a truth that was primarily based in extraordinary miracles and myths. It is true, that the emperor himself has to revert to ‘divine’ interventions on Earth at some parts in the *Hymn*, but these are limited on his attempt to persuade his fellow subjects on the ancestral origin of the heliolatry in the Roman state. The overall religious concept of the *Hymn* is based on the deification of the cosmological forces of the universe.⁸³⁷ The powers of Helios were demonstrated by visible

⁸³⁶ See Julian’s personal myth in his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*.

⁸³⁷ Smith 2012: 236.

proofs on Earth and careful observations of the celestial phenomena in the sky.⁸³⁸ Julian appears to follow a Neoplatonic tradition that puts great significance on observation.⁸³⁹ The metaphysical system in the *Hymn to King Helios*, which as already said mostly derives from the Iamblichan and Chaldean metaphysics, is meant to describe the process of the creation of our cosmos. As a result, the supra-sensible hypostases, noetic and noeric Intellects, divine triads, and hebdomads represent the several demiurgic forces in the universe. In other words, the description of the cosmological powers as “religious” deities is like a myth, where the truth lies beneath it. It is like many other myths in Antiquity, where they were viewed as true stories that unveil the true origin of the world and of human beings. They were used in the fields of history, philosophy and physics for the explanation of the natural world (a typical example of the allegorical usage of the myths is Hesiod’s *Theogony*). As Sallustius (De Diis, III.8–10), used to say: ‘the cosmos itself can be called a myth, since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and intellects are concealed’. Moreover, as explained in this thesis, Julian was very keen in the usage and allegorical interpretation of the myths.

Thus, Julian’s King Helios is derived from the ancestral and philosophical knowledge that was based on hands-on scientific observations that strived to determine the origins of the universe. Therefore, he is not just a traditional divinity, but a cosmological force based – in many respects, on scientific reasoning.⁸⁴⁰ Personally, I believe that the evidence about the scientific base of King Helios as a cosmogonic Creator is so conclusive that one may excuse someone if he/she presents the claim that Julian was pushing forward (consciously or unconsciously) not simply a revival of the traditional religions, but the

⁸³⁸ Julian wonders how one can fail to believe to the powers of Helios, after observing all the beautiful and wondrous things that he has produced on Earth and in the universe (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 135a); The scientific line of thought of Julian fits very well with the Neoplatonic dogma, who venerated Pythagoras as the ‘inventor’ of advanced mathematics, and as the one who discovered that the whole cosmos is being operated under mathematical laws and numbers.

⁸³⁹ Filed 1988: 168; Proclus also placed primary importance in astronomy and mathematics, and places high value in Plato’s advice that the true philosopher should concentrate his attention in an astronomy which deals with the heavenly observations and applies the findings beyond the heavens, and compares the absolute slowness and speed with their true values (Sambursky 1962: 146).

⁸⁴⁰ Indeed, similarly to a contemporary scientist, Julian conducts a comprehensive presentation of Helios by describing his substance and origin, his powers and energies, and the blessings which he bestows throughout all the worlds (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 132b).

establishment of scientific and philosophical logic⁸⁴¹ as the most significant belief. King Helios was to be the supreme God, because his powers were philosophically proven by scientific argumentation and observation of the natural world and cosmic phenomena.⁸⁴² As a result, all the other religions had to be adapted according to this reasoning, and to recognize Helios as the primary Creator of the visible universe.

Hence, an intriguing field of further research could be on whether Julian's attempt to establish Helios and subsequently, the Neoplatonic metaphysical system as a state religion can actually characterize his reign as the first official attempt to institute a religion that is based primarily⁸⁴³ on (scientific/philosophic) reason, in opposition to unreasoned belief.⁸⁴⁴ This field, to the best of my knowledge, has been scarcely explored by scholars to date. However, recent years have seen a growing academic interest in both Julian's works and the role of Helios in the Roman Empire, which has paved the way for further research on this subject.⁸⁴⁵ Another promising area for investigation is the connection between Mithras and Helios. While the identification of Helios with Neoplatonic concepts is widely accepted, most recent scholars reject the Mithraic references in Julian's hymn. Nevertheless, as the analysis in this thesis demonstrates, some Mithraic allusions in Julian's writings should be considered valid. Furthermore, recent publications have provided new evidence of syncretism between Neoplatonic philosophy and the Mithraic cult,⁸⁴⁶ suggesting that the precise solar characteristics of Mithras warrant re-evaluation.

⁸⁴¹ Philosophy and science ran as parallel concepts until at least the eighteenth century. Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, defines "philosophy" in a similar manner to contemporary definitions of "science".

⁸⁴² Siorvanes (2018: 860) emphasizes the importance of nature and the cosmological phenomena for the Neoplatonists, since in their doctrine 'the study of the natural world was tied closely to the study of the divine'.

⁸⁴³ However, most probably, not exclusively. Moreover, all this scientific/philosophical knowledge had to be explained in the form of myths in order to be understood by the majority of the people who were unfamiliar with the difficult philosophical concepts.

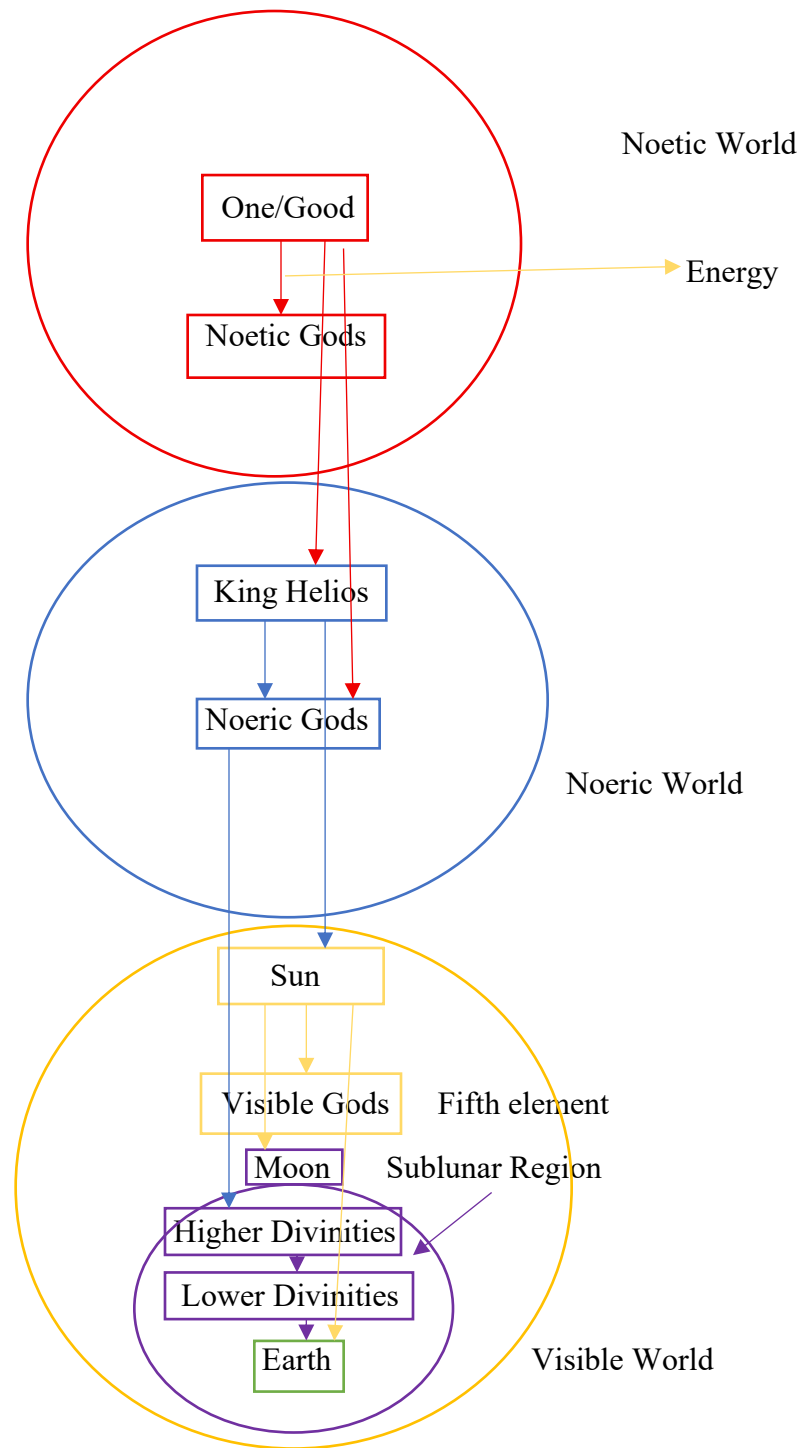
⁸⁴⁴ Julian clearly separates his personal theurgic beliefs about the supernatural in theurgy, which he avoids to mention it, from the scientific proofs of Helios in the *Hymn*. This scientific orientation seems to have the roots, at least partly, in Iamblichus. Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013) supports the view that Iamblichus' methodology had also a scientific background.

⁸⁴⁵ Three new published books have emerged during the last three years; Schramm, M. 2022, Hijmans, S. 2024, and Swist J. 2025.

⁸⁴⁶ Beck (2006), Edmonds (2000).

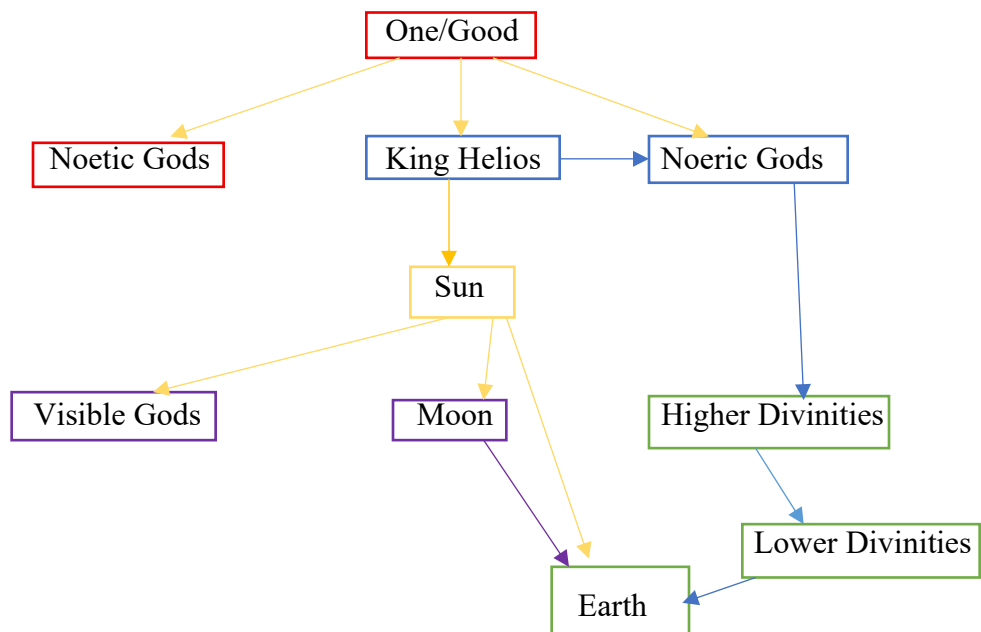
Appendix A

Julian's Metaphysical System (Three Worlds)



Appendix B

Metaphysical Schema



Appendix C

Solar Posterity

Julian's premature departure seemed to doom to oblivion his conception of "true" Romanitas, along with the free, rational, and scientific mind of the philosophers.⁸⁴⁷ The Romans were about to enter a long, gloomy period, described by many as the "Dark Ages". However, a spark of Helios (the Sun) was still left in some souls, and as a result, philosophy continued to be exercised by a handful of minds – like Proclus, and Damascius. Nevertheless, even if these were difficult times for free and curious minds, the solar spark was never completely extinguished. A school of philosophy still existed in the Syrian city of Carrhae, at least until the tenth century, under the protection of the local Caliphs, who respected those who still resisted the teachings of the Galilaeans. Then, in the fourteenth century, the solar spark turned into a flame in the soul of Plethon, who became a fervent Neoplatonist and travelled to Italy, introducing the doctrines of this philosophy to the free Renaissance minds, like Cosimo. From that time on, the way to scientific wisdom started to be paved slowly. The "solar flame of truth" could not be extinguished. Bessarion, a student of Plethon, introduced the writings of Plato, Strabo, and Euclid to Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli – one of the first great astronomers, geographers, and mathematicians during the Renaissance, advisor to Christopher Columbus, and teacher of Leonardo da Vinci.

In the sixteenth century, Copernicus reintroduced in western thought the idea of Heliocentrism, which had an integral role in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios* and in the *Chaldean Oracles*. Copernicus used core ideas from Platonism to help design his sun-centered model of the universe, and considered the Sun not just as a physical body but as the mind and lamp of the universe; a clear echo of Neoplatonism. Galileo Galilei invented the first telescope, proved and defended the heliocentric theory, and believed that the

⁸⁴⁷ Julian's conception of the proper paideia and behaviour was expressed as the perfect mixture of divinely inspired, universal Greek and Roman wisdom (Elm 2012: 119): 'Romanitas was a fragile achievement, it should be not taken for granted and it could easily be at risk if people abandoned the way of life of their forefathers' (Papadopoulos 2021: 103). For the evolution of the concept of Romanitas, see the work of Papadopoulos (2021); Dodds (2001: 134) saw it as a period when advanced intellect was sacrificed to clerical truths.

universe is written in mathematical language. Although Galileo was condemned for heresy, this time, Helios would not hold any resentment against the impious humans.⁸⁴⁸ The quest for (scientific) truth would continue slowly, but steadily.⁸⁴⁹ In the seventeenth century, Johannes Kepler further studied the orbits of the planets around the Sun. Kepler, in his work *Mysterium Cosmographicum*, used a Neoplatonic model to explain the distances between the six known planets, and believed that the cosmos is a physical reflection of mathematical beauty, formulas, and platonic solids (just like Plato in *Timaeus*).⁸⁵⁰ Isaac Newton developed his theory of gravity, which explains how the force from the energy of the Sun attracts all the planets towards it and orbits them around it.⁸⁵¹ In the twenty-first century, scientists now accept the indispensable role that the Sun, or rather the Suns, hold for everything in the universe. Modern astronomers have developed cosmological theories that are extremely similar to the Neoplatonic ones. Cosmologists and astronomers claim, as Julian did, that there are three hypostases of Suns in the universe, which are solely responsible for everything that has been created in our cosmos, including all life on Earth.⁸⁵² In addition, the Suns are placed in the centre of what is called a solar system. Likewise, an invisible great energy (black hole) is placed at the centre of our galaxies, twisting the galaxies around itself and dragging them towards it. The similarities between the black hole and King Helios are striking: the notion of centrality, circular revolution, the orbiting of the stars around the centre, jettisoned energy rays, pulling force towards the centre, connection to the ineffable universe, coordination of all demiurgic forces, and the emission of the brightest light in the universe.⁸⁵³ Finally, like the Neoplatonists, most cosmologists tend to agree that the universe was first created by a single fiery point of unity that contained all the prototypes of everything that exists in the cosmos.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁴⁸ As he did in Julian's personal myth in the *To the Cynic Heracleios*.

⁸⁴⁹ A compelling focus of future research would be to study the level of the impact that Neoplatonic teachings had on these early modern astronomers.

⁸⁵⁰ Kepler felt extremely close to both Plato and Proclus (Field 1988: 1,167-168).

⁸⁵¹ It can be argued that Newton, with his law of gravity, succeeded in expressing mathematically what the Neoplatonists and Julian described only theoretically—namely, the characteristics of the force or energy of celestial objects, including the Sun; Newton was a member of the Cambridge Mathematical tradition, whose members highly valued Platonism, and a student of Henry More, a prominent Cambridge Platonist, who sought to reconcile the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy with natural science.

⁸⁵² Klessen 2023; Schlaufman 2018.

⁸⁵³ Reynolds 2021; Rodríguez 1999; Ghez 1998.

⁸⁵⁴ Genzel 2020; Senovilla 1998.

Julian would have been pleased that the dense fog that had covered the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity has mostly been cleared nowadays. The solar rays of King Helios “managed” to disperse this mist almost completely and ‘the people have cleansed themselves of the stain of godlessness’.⁸⁵⁵ As a result, we now live in an age of rationality and scientific truth, arguably far from being influenced by widespread prejudices and uncontested dogmas.⁸⁵⁶ Almost every scientifically-oriented and so-called “progressive” mind considers Helios (the Sun) as the true Creator of humankind, and the solar energy as the primary force that is constantly creating and holding together everything in the universe. In addition, this increased knowledge for our cosmos has contributed to an increased sense for “love” and “care” for our planet and all life on Earth, in general. This is because many people now tend to no longer consider the flora and fauna on Earth as inferior, but as equal to us humans. We believe, like Julian and the Iamblichean Neoplatonists, that everyone and everything is part of the same system and shares the same solar and magnetic energy that animates us and gives us life. We are all children of Helios!

⁸⁵⁵ Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 180b; the word “godlessness” meaning, lack of universal knowledge.

⁸⁵⁶ What Thomas Paine, one of America’s Founding Fathers, called “The age of reason” in his works, which argue for the philosophical superiority of deism (the philosophical/scientific position and rationalistic theology) over institutionalized religion.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Aristotle. *De Anima*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. S. Hett. 1957).
- Cassius Dio. *Roman History, Volume IX*. Books 71-80. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by E. Cary, H. B. Foster. 1927).
- Chaldean Oracles*. (Leiden, The Prometheus Trust, translated with introduction and commentary by R. Majercik. 1989, 2nd ed. 2013).
- Cicero. *De Natura Deorum*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by H. Rackham. 1933).
- Corpus Hermeticum*. (London, Inner Traditions International, translated by C. Salaman., D. Van Oven., W. D. Wharton. 1999).
- Corpus Hermeticum*. Tomes I-IV (Paris, Collection des universités de France, texte établi et traduit par A. J. Festugière et A. D. Nock, 1972).
- Damascius. *Lectures on the Philebus*. (Wiltshire, The Prometheus Trust, translated by L.G. Westerink. 2010).
- Eunapius. *The Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W.C. Wright. 1968).
- Gregory Nazianzen. *Contre Julien, Discours 4-5*. (Paris, Éditions du Cerf, éd. et trad. par J. Bernardi. 1983).
- Greek Magical Papyri*. (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, translated by H.D. Betz. 1986).
- Herodian. *History of the Empire*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by C. R. Whittaker. 1970).
- Himerius. *Orations*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, translated, annotated, and introduced by Robert J. Penella. 2007).
- Historia Augusta*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by D. Magie, revised by David Rohrbacher. 2022).
- Iamblichus. *De Mysteriorum*. (Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, translated with introduction and commentary by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell. 2003).
- *In Platonis dialogos commentariorum (fragmenta)*. (Leiden, Brill, translated by J. Dillon. 1973).
- Julian. *Hymn to King Helios*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol 1. 1913); (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, éd. et trad. par C. Lacombrade. 1^{er} tirage 1965, 2023).
- *To the Cynic Heracleios*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 2. 1913).
- *To the Mother of Gods*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 1. 1913).
- *To the Uneducated Cynics*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 2. 1913).
- *Kronia (The Caesars)*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 2. 1913).
- *Against the Galileans*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 3. 1923).
- *Consolation to Himself on the Departure of the Excellent Sallustius*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by W. Wright, Vol. 2. 1913).
- *Lettres et Fragments*. (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, éd. et trad. par J. Bidez and F. Cumont, Tome I 2^{ème} partie 2023 [1924]).
- Libanius. *Orations*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by A. F. Norman, Vol. 1. 1969).
- Orphic Hymns*. (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, translated with introduction and commentary by N. Athanassakis and B. M. Wolkow. 1960).
- Ovid. *Fasti*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by J. G. Frazer. 1931).
- Pausanias. *Description of Greece* (New York, Cambridge University Press, translated by J.G. Frazer. 2012 [1898]).
- Plato. *Complete Works*. (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, translated by G.M. Grube, D.J. Zeyl, C. Reeve, ed. by J. M. Cooper, D. S. Hutchinson. 1997).
- *Epistles* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by R. G. Bury. 1929).

- Pliny. *Natural History*, Volume X: Books 36-37, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by D. E. Eichholz. 1962).
- Plotinus. *Enneads*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, ed. and trans. by J. Dillon, L. Gerson, R. A. H. King, A. Smith, J. Wilberding. 2018); (Leiden, Brill, P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, *Plotini opera*, 3vols: 1:1951; 2:1959; 3:1973). The Brill edition is used only as reference to the Greek original text.
- Plutarch. *Parallel Lives*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by B. Perrin, Vol.1. 1914)
- *Isis and Osiris*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, translated by F. C. Babbitt, *Moralia* Vol. 5. 1936).
- Porphry. *In the Cave of the Nymphs*. (Barrytown, Station Hill Press, translated with introduction and commentary by R. Lamberton. 1983).
- *On Cult Images*. (Leipzig, La faculté De Philosophie et Lettres, J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre: le philosophe néo-platonicien*. 1913).
- *Sententiae*. (Leipzig, Teubner, translated by E. Lamberz. 1975).
- *Letter to Anebo (Epistula ad Anebonem)*. (Cambridge, Center for the Study of World Religions [distributed by Harvard University Press], *On Theology and Theurgy*, translated by F. Muller. 2026).
- *On Abstinence from Animal Food*. (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, traduit par M. Patillon, A. Segonds, J. Bouffartigue, M. Patillon, *Porphyre De l'Abstinence*. Tome II :2022[1979], Tome IV:1995).
- Proclus. *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*. (Amsterdam, Hakkert, translated by E. Diehl. (3 vols) 1:1903; 2:1904; 3:1906; repr. 1965).
- *In Platonis Parmenidem*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, translated with introduction and commentary by J. M. Dillon and G. R. Morrow. 1987).
- *Elements of Theology*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, ed. and translated by E. R. Dodds. 1963, reprinted 2004).
- Sallustius. *Des Dieux et du Monde*, (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, éd. et trad. par G. Rochefort, 1^{er} tirage. 2023 [1960]).
- Theodosian Code*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, *The Corpus of Roman Law* (Vol. 1), translated by C. Pharr. 1952).
- Zosimus. *New History* = Zosime, *Histoire nouvelle*. Tomes I-III (Paris, Collection des universités de France, texte établi et traduit par F. Paschoud 1971-1979).

Secondary Sources

- Albanese, L. 2018. "Porphyry, The Cave of the Nymphs, and the Mysteries of Mithras," *Acta Ant. Hung* 58. 681- 691.
- Armstrong, A. H. 1984. *Plotinus*. Cambridge.
- Athanassiadi, P. 1992. "Philosophers and Oracles: Shifts of Authority in Late Paganism," *Byzantion* 62. 45-62.
- 1992. *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*. London.
- 1977. "A Contribution to Mithraic Theology: The Emperor Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume XXVIII, Issue 2. 360-371.
- Azize J. 2012. *The Phoenician Solar Theology*. Piscataway.
- Beck, R. 1988. *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras*. Leiden.
- 2006. *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire*. Oxford.
- Bidez, J. 1928. "Note sur les Mystères Néoplatoniciens," *Revue belge de philosophie et histoire* 7. 1477-1481.
- 1930. *La Vie de l'Empereur Julien*. Paris.
- Bouillot, K. 2021. "Comparer 'l'oracle d'Oenoanda': retour sur un scénario philologique complexe," *Revue des Études Anciennes* 123. 35-54.
- Brown, P. 1978. *The Making of Late Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Budin, S. L. 2004. "A Reconsideration of the Aphrodite-Ashtart Syncretism," *Numen* Vol.51, No.2. 95-145.
- Buffière, F. 1956. *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*. Paris.
- Calvo, J. 2017. "Myth and Exegesis in Plotinus: How to Divide and Recompose Words and Things," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* Vol. IX, No. 2. 24-29.

- Campbell, L. 1968. *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*. Leiden.
- Clark, D.C. 2008. "Iamblichus' Egyptian Neoplatonic Theology in De Mysteriis", *Journal of Platonic Tradition* 2. 164-205.
- Clarke, E. C. Dillon, J. M. and Hershbell, J. P. 2003. *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries*. Atlanta.
- Claus, M. 2001. translated by R. Gordon. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, New York.
- Cumont, F. 1888. "Le Culte de Mithra à Édesse" *Revue Archéologique*, Troisième Série, T. 12. 95-98.
- 1896. Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra (vol. 2). Brussels.
- 1923. "Il sole vindice dei delitti ed il simbolo delle mani alzate," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di archeologia* 3.1.1. 65-80.
- Dalley, S. Reyes, A.T. Pingree, D. Salvesen, A. and McCall, H. 1998. *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*. Oxford.
- De Boer, J. Z. Hale, J. R. and Chanton, J. 2001. "New evidence for the Geological Origins of the Ancient Delphic Oracle (Greece)," *Geology* 29 (8). 707-710.
- De Vita, M. C. 2011. *Giuliano Imperatore Filosofo Neoplatonico*. Milano.
- 2018. "Figlio del Bene e Re dell'universo: il dio Helios di giuliano Imperatore" in *Chora. Revue d'études anciennes et médiévales*, 15. 457-484.
- Derchain, P. 1963. "Pseudo-Jamblique ou Abammon," *Chronique d'Égypte* 38. 220-26.
- Dillon, J. 1972. "Iamblichus and the Origin of the Doctrine of Henads," *Phronesis* 17. 102-106.
- 1973. *Iamblichi Chalcidensis In Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*, (*Philosophia Antiqua* 23). Leiden.
- and Gerson, L. P. 2004. *Neoplatonic Philosophy*. Indianapolis.
- 2012. "The Theology of Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*," in *The Platonic Heritage*, London. 103-115.
- Dodds, E.R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Los Angeles.
- 1963. *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*. Oxford.
- 1961. "New Light on the Chaldaean Oracles," *The Harvard Theological Review* 54 (4). 263- 273.
- 2001 [1965]. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge.
- Edmonds, R. 2000. "Did the Mithraists Inhale? – A Technique for Theurgic Ascent in the Mithras Liturgy, the Chaldean Oracles, and some Mithraic Frescoes," *Ancient World* 32.1. 10-24.
- Eliade, M. 2020 [1972]. *Shamanism*. Princeton and Oxford.
- Elm, S. 2012. *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church*. Berkeley.
- Ferrari, F. 2022. "Solartheologie und Lichtmetaphysik im vorjulianischen Platonismus" in M. Schramm. *Sonne, Kosmos, Rom Kaiser Julian, Hymnos auf den König Helios*. Tübingen. 105-131.
- Field, J. V. 1988: *Kepler's Geometrical Cosmology*, Chicago.
- Finamore, J. 1985. *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Chico: California.
- 1993. "Iamblichus on light and the transparent," in H. J. Blumenthal & Gillian Clark. *The divine Iamblichus: philosopher and man of Gods*. London. 55-64.
- 1998. "Julian and the descend of Asclepius," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* VI (2). 63-86.
- Fox, R. L. 1986. *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World*. London.
- Garcia, J. R. C. 2023. "The Cult of Azizos in Roman Dacia: New Approaches," *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 29 (1). 105-121.
- Genzel, R. and Ghez, A. 2020. "Theoretical foundation for black holes and the supermassive compact object at the Galactic Centre," *The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences*, Stockholm.
- Ghez, A. M.; Klein, B. L.; Morris, M.; et al. 1998. "High Proper-Motion Stars in the Vicinity of Sagittarius A*: Evidence for a Supermassive Black Hole at the Center of Our Galaxy," *The Astrophysical Journal*. 509 (2). 678–686.
- Gibbon, E. 1993 [1788]. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London.
- Gordon, R. L. 1975. "Franz Cumont and the doctrines of Mithraism", *Mithraic Studies* 1. 215-248.
- Greenwood, D. N. 2018. "Porphyry's Influence upon Julian: Apotheosis and Divinity," in *Ancient Philosophy* 38. 421-434.
- Halsbergue, G. 1972. *The Cult of Sol Invictus*. Leiden.
- Hard, R. 2020. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. New York.
- Hijmans, S. 2024. *Sol: Image and Meaning of the Sun in Roman Art and Religion* (2 Vols). Boston.
- Hopkins, C. 1931. "The Palmyrene Gods at Dura-Europos," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51. 119-137.
- Johnston, S. I. 2019. "Magic and Theurgy," in D. Frankfurter (ed.). *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 189)*. Leiden-Boston. 694-719.

- Klessen, R. S.; Glover, S. C.O. 2023. "The First Stars: Formation, Properties, and Impact," *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics*. 61 (1). 65–130.
- Lacombrade, C. 1^{er} tirage 1965 (2023). *L'Empereur Julien* (X-XII). Paris.
- Lamberton, R. 1983. *Porphyry: In the Cave of the Nymphs*. New York.
- Liebeschuetz, J. 2012. "Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*: The Revival and Justification of Traditional Religion," in N. Baker Brian and S. Tougher (ed.). *The Writings of Julian 'the Apostate'*. Swansea. 213-227.
- Lewy, H. 2011 [1956; 1978]. *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*. Ed. M. Tardieu. Paris.
- Magny, A. 2014. *Porphyry in Fragments: Reception of an Anti-Christian Text in Late Antiquity*. New York.
- Majercik, R. 1989. *The Chaldean Oracles*. Leiden.
- Maurette, P. 2005. "Porphyry and Mithraism: *De antro nymharum* and the Controversy against the Christians," *Dionysius* XXIII. 63-82.
- Maurice, J. 1911. "La dynastie solaire des seconds Flaviens," *Revue Archéologique* Quatrième Série T. 17. 377-406.
- Ménard, L. 2011. *Hermès Trismégiste, étude et traduction*. Paris.
- Mesyats, S. 2012 "Iamblichus' Exegesis of *Parmenides*' Hypothesis and his Doctrine of Divine Henads," in E. Afonasin. J. Dillon J. and F. Finamore (ed.). *Iamblichus and the Foundations of Late Platonism*. Leiden-Boston. 151-176.
- Mommsen, T. 1893. "Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae", *editio altera pars prior*. Berlin. 254-279.
- Nesselrath. H. G. 2020. "Julian's Philosophical Writings", in S. Rebenich – H. -U. Wiemer (ed). *A Companion to Julian the Apostate*. Leiden – Boston. 38-63.
- Nilufer, A. K. 2019. "Porphyry's *In the cave of the nymphs* in its intellectual context," in R. Berchman and J. Finamore (ed.). *Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition* 23. Leiden – Boston.
- O'Meara, D. 2018. "Plato's Political Dialogues in the Writings of Julian the Emperor," in H. Tarrant, F. Renaud, D. Baltzly, and D. A. Layne (ed). *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity*. Boston. 400-410.
- Pachoumi E. 2015. "The Religious and Philosophical Assimilations of Helios in the Greek Magical Papyri," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 55. 391–413.
- 2017. *The Concepts of the Divine in the Greek Magical Papyri*. Tübingen.
- Papadopoulos, I. 2021. *The Idea of Rome in Late Antiquity: From Eternal City to Imagined Utopia*. Amsterdam.
- Penati, A. 1983. "L'Influenza del Sistema Caldaico sul Pensiero Teologico dell'imperatore Giuliano," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*. No. 4. 543-562.
- Remes, P. 2008. *Neoplatonism*. New York.
- Reynolds, C. S. 2021. "Observational Constraints on Black Hole Spin," *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics*. 59 (1). 117–154.
- Rodríguez, L. F. 1999. "Sources of Relativistic Jets in the Galaxy," *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics*. 37. 409–443.
- Rüpke, J. 2011. *The Roman Calendar from Numa to Constantine: Time, History and the Fasti*. Oxford.
- Salaman, C. 1999. Van Oven., D., Wharton W. D., *The Way of Hermes*. London.
- Salzman, M. R. 1990. *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley.
- Sambursky, S. 1962. *The Physical world of Late antiquity*. London.
- Schlaufman, K. C.; Thompson, Ian B.; Casey, Andrew R. 2018. "An ultra metal-poor star near the hydrogen-burning Limit," *The Astrophysical Journal*. 867 (2). 98.
- Schramm, M. 2022. *Sonne, Kosmos, Rom Kaiser Julian, Hymnos auf den König Helios*. Tübingen.
- Senovilla, J. M. 1998. "Singularity Theorems and Their Consequences," *General Relativity and Gravitation*. 30 (5). 701–848.
- Shaw, G. 2013. "Theurgy and the Platonist's Luminous Body," in A. D. DeConick, G. Shaw, and J. D Turner (ed.). *Practicing Gnosis*. Leiden. 537-57.
- 2014. *Theurgy and the Soul*. Kettering.
- Siorvanes, L. 2018. "Plotinus and Neoplatonism: The Creation of a New Synthesis," in P. T. Keyser, and John Scarborough (ed.). *Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World*. Oxford. 847-868.

- Smith, A. 2012. "Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*: The economical use of complex Neoplatonic concepts," in N. Baker and S. Tougher (ed.). *Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian*. Chicago. 229-237.
- Smith, R. 1995. *Julian's Gods*. London.
- Schroeder, F. 1984. "Light and the Active Intellect in Alexander and Plotinus," *Hermes* 2nd Qtr. 239-248.
- Stambaugh, J. 1972. *Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies*. Leiden.
- Swist J. 2025. *Julian Augustus: Platonism, Myth, and the Refounding of Rome*. New York.
- Tanaseanu-Döbler, I. 2013. *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The invention of a ritual*. Göttingen.
- 2022. "Theologe, Myste, Gesandter der Götter: Kaiser Julians Selbstinszenierungen als religiöses Subjekt" in M. Schramm. *Sonne, Kosmos, Rom Kaiser Julian, Hymnos auf den König Helios*. Tübingen. 167-209.
- Tardieu, M. 1980. "La gnose valentinienne et les *Oracles chaldaïques*," in B. Layton (ed.). *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism I: The School of Valentinus*. Leiden. 194-237.
- Teixidor, J. 1979. *The Pantheon of Palmyra*. Leiden.
- Turcan, R. 1988. *Mithras Platonius: Recherches sur l'hellénisation philosophique de Mithra*. Leiden.
- Van Den Berg, R. M. 2001. *Proclus' Hymns. Essays, Translations, Commentary*. Leiden-Boston.
- Vagasi, T., 2017. "Deus Azizos, the Lucifer from Hemesa in the Danubian Provinces," *Hungarian Polis Studies* 23. 53-79.
- Wallis, R.T. 1972. *Neoplatonism*. London.
- Wasson, R.-G. Hofmann, A. and Ruck, P. 1978 (reprint 2008). *The Road to Eleusis*. Berkeley.
- Wiemer H.-U. 2020. "Revival and Reform: The Religious Policy of Julian", in S. Rebenich – H. -U. Wiemer (ed). *A Companion to Julian the Apostate*. Leiden – Boston. 207-244.
- West, M. L. 1997. *The east face of Helicon: west Asiatic elements in Greek poetry and myth*. Oxford.
- Wilkinson, R. 2003. *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. London.
- Wright. W. 1913. *Julian*, Volume I. Cambridge.