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Rites of Passage in Magic and Mysticism

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One hundred years ago, Arnold van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* led contemporary anthropological thought in a new direction.[1] The study of myth and ritual was then dominated by the animistic school of Tylor and Frazer and the dynamistic school heralded by Marett and Hewitt.[2] Both schools had anticipated the Cambridge ritualists[3] by arguing that the primeval ritual – a spontaneous outburst of emotions – precedes and shapes the myth, a "successful tale" establishing and exemplifying concepts important to the society. The scholars endeavored, first, to define *the power* personified by characters in the myth, and worshipped in the ritual;[4] and second, to explain the mechanism through which this power was believed to influence disparate objects. This approach resulted in the classification of rites as *sympathetic*, implying that a part of an object involved in the ritual

[1] *Les rites de passage* (Paris: É. Nourry, 1909). The present paper refers to its English translation: *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). On van Gennep's biography and the scholarly reception of his ideas, see H. A. Senn, "Arnold van Gennep: Structuralist and Apologist for the Study of Folklore in France," *Folklore* 85 (1974): 229–43; and Rosemary Zumwalt, "Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of Bourg-la-Reine," *American Anthropologist* 84 (1982): 299–313. Catherine Bell briefly discusses van Gennep's theory in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), in chapters on structural approaches to the relation between ritual practices and forms of social organization.

[2] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1871); James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1890); Robert R. Marett, "Pre-animistic Religion," *Folklore* 11 (1900): 162–82; John N. B. Hewitt, "Orenda and a Definition of Religion," *American Anthropologist* 4 (1902): 33–46.

[3] Such as Jane E. Harrison and Gilbert Murray. See Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1903); and Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912).

[4] The animists defined this power as initially animate (nameless demons, ghosts, and so forth, who at some stage acquired a name), while the dynamists defined them as inanimate and abstract, *mana* or *orenda*, deriving these labels from languages of Pacific Islanders and Iroquois Indians. In addition to the note above, see Jeremy MacClancy, "Mana: An Anthropological Metaphor for Island Melanesia," *Oceania* 57 (1986): 142–53, containing a rich bibliography.

represents the whole object; and *contagious* – the objects, once in contact, keep mutual influence after the severance.[5]

Van Gennep considered ritual from a different perspective. In contrast to those who studied separate elements of a ritual, he approached it as a comprehensive whole in order to establish its structure and dynamics. He limited his observations to the life-crisis rituals accompanying individuals on their way from one location or status to another. Marriage and coronation, for example, belong to rites of passage because they change an individual's status within a given society; rituals that accompany institutional affiliation, on the other hand, signify an individual's incorporation into a new society; and sacred rituals, most complex of all, can do both of the above and also establish a special connection with the sacral world.[6]

The clearest example of life-crisis rituals is a rite of territorial passage: an individual bids farewell to his native land and people, then he travels through a neutral zone – liminal territories with extra-urban infrastructure[7] – and finally he arrives at a foreign land. Rituals accompany each of these three phases in order to reduce any harmful effect that an individual or a society may experience from crossing of borders or changes in condition. Van Gennep provides a few examples derived from history and modern anthropological observations;[8] yet the simplest is one describing a person coming from one house to another. Specific ceremonies should be observed at both doors (such as kissing a *mezuzah* in Jewish households, and solemn sitting in Slavic ones), and certainly, the territory between the houses also must be crossed. *Exiting*, *crossing*, and *entering* represent three necessary stages in any rite of passage, in the sense that it cannot be reduced to fewer stages, but these three can be subdivided into more sub-stages. The threefold dynamics exhibit quite a self-evident meaning – *separation* for exiting, *transition* or *marginalization* for crossing, and *incorporation* for entering – which must be emphasized by rituals for each of these stages. The sequence of separation, transition, and incorporation remains constant in all life-crisis rit-

[5] The division into sympathetic and contagious rites is only a part of this classification, although the most relevant part for the study of magical rituals. See Frazer, "Sympathetic Magic," in *The Golden Bough*, chap. 3.

[6] Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 65–145 and 166–88.

[7] Not necessary desolate areas, as van Gennep describes them (*Rites of Passage*, 19): see Irene Polinskaya, "Liminality as Metaphor: Initiation and the Frontiers of Ancient Athens," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives*, ed. David B. Dodd and Christopher A. Faraone (London: Routledge, 2003), 85–106, who argues against the concept of frontiers as factual liminal spaces with extra-urban infrastructure or no infrastructure at all. For a support of this concept, however, see Jean Pierre Vernant, "Une divinité des marges: Artemis Orthia," *Recherches sur les cultes grecs et l'Occident* 2 (1984): 13–27; and François de Polignac, *Cults, Territory and the Origin of the Greek City State*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[8] The frontier's crossing by a king of Sparta going to war, accompanied by a sacrifice (*Rites of Passage*, 19); the return of a victorious general to Rome, accompanied by rites of separation from the enemy's land and by passing through the triumphal arch (ibid., 21), and so forth.

uals, since, naturally, if an arrival somewhere is the purpose, then the departure from somewhere else must antecede it. However, in different rites of passage, the importance of each of the three stages is also different, meaning that the number and magnitude of rituals vary depending on the individual's purpose. Funeral rites, for example, emphasize separation, while transition plays an important role in pregnancy or initiation.

Equipped with van Gennep's theory, the present paper pursues a multistep task. First, we shall see how his tripartite pattern unfolds in rites of sacral initiation, starting from selection of such rites that can represent the whole spectrum of social and spiritual aspects of the ritual – from public to private, from supplicatory and reverent to aggressive and even impious. Having identified, in van Gennep's terms, the stages in the selected rituals, we shall take a closer look at their content, and analyze the way in which specific components of each stage express the significance of separation, transition, and incorporation.[9]

The basic purpose of rites of sacral initiation is introducing a person into closer contact with the divine. The consequences of this contact may be a union or communion with a deity, comprehension of the divine truth, gaining superhuman abilities, or incorporation into a community of initiates. From this perspective, we may classify ceremonies of mystery cults and some magical rites as belonging in the category of sacral initiation. Given the notorious difficulty in defining the concepts of magic, mystery, and mysticism, I am using these terms only to describe the selected *rituals* and to distinguish between them:[10] here, the selected rites of magic and mystery bring about the same effect – *communio dei* – but ultimately possess different aims, and also require different attitudes from the practitioner, both towards the deity and the society. As examples of the magical rite I have selected four spells for divination and a divine assistant (πάρεδρος): *PGM* I.1–42, 42–195, *PGM* VII.222–249, and *PGM* IV.154–285.[11] And as examples of the mys-

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[9] The theory of van Gennep continues to influence the scholarly analysis of rituals (see e. g., Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997], 114); yet it must be applied with caution: certainly, not every ritual is "a rite of passage"; not every "rite of passage" is initiation (see on this Fritz Graff, "Initiation: A Concept with a Troubled History," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, 3–24), and not every initiation brings about a "passage" to a new *social status* (Vincent Crapanzano, "Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco," *Psychoanalytic Study of Society* 9 [1981]: 15–36).

[10] The literature addressing this problem is extensive. For magic vs. religion, see Dorothy Hammond, "Magic: A Problem in Semantics," *American Anthropologist* 72 (1970): 1349–56; Henk S. Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," *Numen* 38 (1991): 177–97; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 1–19. For magic vs. mystery cults, see Hans D. Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 244–59; and Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 96–117. For mysticism, see Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 1–9.

[11] *PGM* refers to the *Papyri graecae magicae*, published in Karl Preisendanz, ed., *Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928; repr. with corrections and supplements by Albert Henrichs; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973; Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2002). *GMPT* and *PDM* refer to

tical initiation I have chosen a framework of Eleusinian mysteries, the Mithras liturgy (*PGM* IV.475–829), and another text from the corpus of Greek magical papyri (*PGM* III.494–611). Since rituals described by all these testimonies belong in one category, each of their three stages – separation, transition, and incorporation – must contain some features regularly recurring in the same stage of *all* initiatory rites as well as those peculiar to initiatory rites *only*. Therefore, my purpose is to distill these features and to interpret their importance for the whole ritual.

In the last step of the present inquiry, we shall look for the tripartite structure in the ascent account of the Hekhalot literature, an inquiry based on the assumption that the Hekhalot literature could be a product of the community of initiates, and could contain reference to an actual ritual of initiation.[12] Finally, if this search proves fruitful, we shall see whether essential features of rites of magic and mystery cults are also present in the ascent account, and if they convey the same meaning as they do in the aforementioned Greek rituals.

Separation

The Great Mysteries commenced on the tenth of Boedromion, half a year after the Lesser Mysteries at Agrae – an assembly providing the future initiate with preliminary instruction, preliminary purification (προκάταρσις), and swearing them to secrecy.[13] On the fourteenth of Boedromion, a procession of youths was dispatched from Athens to Eleusis, and entrusted with fetching the sacred objects that were kept in Eleusis since the Mysteries of the last year. On the next day, the actual ceremony of initiation began: the initiates (μύσται) assembled in the Painted Porch (ἡ ποικίλη στοά) near Eleusis, where those who had "clean hands and intelligible speech" were admitted by the hierophant to proceed.[14] On the sixteenth of Boedromion, the hierophant commanded, "To the sea, initiates!" (ἅλαδε μύσται) and those who passed the preliminary selection ran to the seashore, carrying with them a suckling pig. At the shore, the initiates underwent purification rituals, bathing in salty waters and sacrificing their piglets.

Hans D. Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; repr. 1992).

[12] For this position, see James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001).

[13] Clement, *Strom.* 5.11. The precise structure of the Eleusinian mysteries is a controversial topic. Van Gennep (*Rites of Passage*, 89–91) refers to them too, using as a source only a small monograph by Paul F. Foucart, *Recherches sur l'origine et la nature des mystères d'Éleusis* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1895). In this paper, I present my vision of Eleusinian rituals.

[14] Origen, *Cels.* 3.59: ὅστις χεῖρας καθαρὸς καὶ φωνὴν συνετός (lit: "whose hands are clean, and voice intelligible"), meaning that a person should understand Greek. For φωνή as language, compare to ἀγνώτα φωνήν ("unknown language") in Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1035, referring to the barbaric language of Cassandra.

This *group* selection and isolation signified the first phase in van Gennep's classification – the separation, although with quite a different intensity we would expect from the mystical initiation of an *individual*. The selection of the Eleusinian μύσται was rather symbolic, since all, including women and slaves, were admitted, while murderers, even if they dared come to Agrae, would there be instructed not to come to Eleusis. This general admission of everyone who could afford to purchase a piglet for sacrifice assured that the isolation and purification at the seashore would also not be too austere. Otherwise, Aristophanes would not have taken the risk of cracking his jokes, some of which were quite earthy, in front of the Athenian audience. The intolerable squealing of the butchered pigs and the odor of their cooking flesh apparently became proverbial.[15] In *Frogs*, the joyful cry of Xanthias and the rebuke of Dionysus sound frivolous enough to our ears, but did even more so to the ears of Athenians (337–339): "*Xan.*: O highly honored mistress! The daughter of Demeter! How dear to me the smell of the pork's meat is (ὡς ἡδύ μοι προσέπνευσε χοιρείων κρεῶν)! *Dion.*: Can't you remain calm when you see a sausage (οὔκουν ἀτρέμ' ἕξεις, ἤν τι καὶ χορδῆς λάβῃς)?!" In addition to the obvious gastronomical meaning, this pun also has a sexual connotation, since χοῖρος (in χοιρεῖων κρεῶν – "of pork's meat") is a slang word for female genitals,[16] and χορδή (sausage) might well be for penis.[17] In the context of the Eleusinian mysteries this wordplay may hint to the fact that both men and women were allowed to stay overnight at the seashore. Another exclamation by the leader of the chorus (440–448) confirms this suggestion: "Dance to Demeter with flowers … meanwhile I will depart, torch in hand, with these maidens (themselves the kindlers of torches) to a secluded spot." Clearly, the Eleusinian initiates did undergo a separation, but according to Aristophanes, their "secluded spot" and purification bore a somewhat light-hearted connotation. The seventeenth of Boedromion continued with a festival of Asclepius – *Epidauria*. Then, on the next morning, the initiates returned to Athens.

The separation of magicians was also expressed by purification and isolation, but of a very different depth. As a rule, the magicians had to abstain from animal food,[18] sexual intercourse,[19] and "all uncleanliness," and frequently had to isolate

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[15] Aristophanes, *Ach.* 747: "… and squeal with the voice of pigs at the Mysteries." On the pig sacrifice at the Mysteries, see George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 249–50.

[16] The meaning of χοῖρος as *pudenda muliebria* is explicit in the *Ach.* 773, and is commented in Suda, who states that this is a Corinthian usage.

[17] See commentary by Kenneth Dover on Aristophanes' *Frogs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 129.

[18] Frequently expressed as "ensouled" (ἔμψυχος) food; see *PGM* IV.732, 1766, *PGM* LXVII.2; and see Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 357–65.

[19] See also *PGM* IV.897–898, *PGM* XXXVII.1–2, *PDM* XIV.65–70, 145–150, 765–770, 815–820.

themselves from the profane world: in *PGM* I.42–195 and *PGM* IV.154–285, after the preliminary purification, the magician went to the highest place in his house (*PGM* I.55–56, *PGM* IV.170–175), the roof, and, in *PGM* IV, spread a pure linen garment on its floor, thus creating a sacred space for his ritual.[20] Unlike with the public rituals, there certainly was no point in the magician skipping parts of the instructions, and thus cheating himself.

Additionally, purification and seclusion were not the only way for a magician to separate. In contrast to the neophyte of a mystery cult, the magician, usually, was not going to be incorporated into a community of magicians.[21] On the contrary, he was going to claim a personal bond with his divine assistant, by using a secret knowledge available only to a small number of people whom, in fact, the magician did not care to know.[22] All magical words and actions were directed towards himself and toward the deity. The magician was both the "sender" and the "receiver" of the act and narrative in his drama, one individual playing two roles which, in a mystery cult, were divided between the hierophant and the initiate (with only a few exceptions that mention a fellow-magician).[23] Therefore, the magician had to look for a more dramatic way to express his separation, such as performing nocturnal rites, and drinking blood; or such as sacrificing a different animal in a manner different from the normative religious ritual method. *PGM* I.1–42, for example, requires a magician to drown a falcon in the milk of a black cow[24] and

[20] Sacred space is designated for the second part of the ritual – sacrifices and transformation – and the second phase in van Gennep's theory. Here, this is a liminal territory, separated from the profane world by taboos. On the concept and parameters of the sacred space, see Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur la nature et la function du sacrifice," *Année sociologique* 2 (1899): 29–138, translated as *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 25–28. See also Jan Bremmer, "'Religion,' 'Ritual' and the Opposition 'Sacred vs. Profane': Notes Towards a Terminological 'Genealogy,'" in *Ansichten griechischer Rituale*, ed. Fritz Graf (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998), 9–32. In the *PGM* collection, setting up a sacred space is explicit, e.g., in *PGM* IV.26–51, where the magician is required to construct a shrine on virgin soil – a place recently inundated (and thus purified) by the Nile. On mechanics of creating a sacred space, namely by encircling, in the Egyptian magical and public rituals, see Robert K. Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 56–57.

[21] Van Gennep maintained a different opinion. He is talking about "magico-religious fraternities," deriving all examples from anthropological observations of aboriginal societies in North America and Oceania, and anthropological interpretations of these observations (*Rites of Passage*, 108). This must be the reason for disagreement between anthropologists and classicists concerning the communal aspect of magic. See also Marcel Mauss, *L'origine des pouvoirs magiques dan les sociétés australiennes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1904).

[22] On this criterion as one distinguishing between magical and religious rituals, see Fritz Graf, "Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual," in Faraone, *Magika Hiera*, 188–213, at 195. Graf quotes *PGM* texts instructing the magician to conduct his ritual alone (*PGM* XII.36 is the most explicit).

[23] E.g., the mystagogue in *PGM* IV.172, 2254, and fellow-initiate (συμμύστης) in *PGM* IV.732 and *PGM* XII.94.

[24] This reveals a Greek influence in the ritual. Black sheep were sacrificed to establish a connection with the underworld and to appease the dead; more specifically to locate and appease a restless ghost: Suda, s.v. περὶ ψυχαγωγίας.

Attic honey and set it up as a votive statue for the invoked deity in a shrine made of juniper wood.

The drowning of a falcon in this ritual has been discussed at length, and different interpretations have been offered. The scholars who believe that the magical ritual in its essence is an intentional *reversal* of social and religious norms see the killing of a sacred animal at face value, as an acute violation of these norms,[25] and an explicit symbol of the magician's separation from society in general. The other group of scholars argues that a reversal for the sake of reversal is pointless, and the magician's ritual may look antisocial only due to the specific purpose and attitude of the magician, and, most importantly, the specific circumstances in which his ritual was conducted. In this vein, the magician used matronymics instead of patronymics only to be sure that his curse would find the victim;[26] the magician appealed to the "dark masters," such as Typhon and Seth in order to command suchlike demons but of a lower hierarchy;[27] the magician offered "hostile sacrifices" only in the so-called "slander spells" addressed as if from his victims, in order to make a deity angry with them.[28] In divinatory texts too, the magician used the service of a child medium because he wanted to imitate the temple oracle while an adult medium satisfying the criteria of purity was not available.[29] In view of these explanations, the magician seems to retain a religious attitude and all his actions are rather an "adjustment" of norms, or, more specifically, a "domestication" of religious ritual.[30]

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[25] Fritz Graf, "The Magician's Initiation," *Helios* 21 (1994): 161–78; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 114.

[26] Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt, tam in Graecis Orientis quam in totius Occidentis partibus praeter Atticas in Corpore inscriptionum atticarum editas* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1904), LI–LII.; Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 128.

[27] For the apotropaic nature of the demonic cult of Seth, Tutu, Petbe, Taweret, and Bes, see David Frankfurter, *Religions in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 112–31. Cf. Sarah I. Johnston, who does not see how, "outside of a dualistic religious system," the magician could play one god against the other, "because there is no other 'god' to whom a worshipper can turn" ("Sacrifice in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 344–58, at 348). Many texts, however, speak against Johnston's opinion: see, e.g., *PGM* IV.3086–3124, where the magician constrains Kronos by using a phylactery of Zeus holding a sickle.

[28] E.g., "Slander spell to Selene" (*PGM* IV.2622–2707); see Graf, "Prayer," 196.

[29] Sarah I. Johnston, "Charming Children: The Use of the Child in Ancient Divination," *Arethusa* 34 (2001): 97–117.

[30] See Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 20–27; Ian Moyer, "The Initiation of the Magician: Transitions and Power in Graeco-Egyptian Ritual," in *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals*, 219–38; and the above articles of Johnston. This certainly does not exhaust examples of magical reversal, and, on the other hand, explanations of this reversal. Magicians sometimes saluted the sun at sunset, instead the sunrise; yet it can be explained by a complexity of the ritual and an involvement of Selene and astral constellations (e.g., *PGM* I.42–195 [72]; *PGM* IV.1331–1389 [1290–1292]) or Helios' mission of bringing the spirit of the dead from the underworld (e.g., *PGM* III.1–164). Magicians also wrote spells backwards, which again signified an implicit

In the case of the falcon, it was argued that the magician was *deifying* the bird by drowning it, turning it into his *hesiees* capable of crossing the borders of this world into the realm of the divine.[31] Furthermore, the magician was allegedly partial to the concepts held by Egyptian priests concerning sacred animals and the *hesiees*. Indeed, the rituals of the priest and the magician have common roots.[32] This, however, does not make them identical on a different scale.

The cult of sacred animals was common in Egypt.[33] At one end of the spectrum, gods were imagined and worshipped in the form of animals: Re as a hawk, Sekhmet and Bastet as a cat, Thoth as an ibis, Anubis as a jackal, Horus as a falcon, and so forth. At the other end, these animals were considered sacred as representations of gods while alive, but were believed to become these gods only after the death. Drowned people and animals as well as those eaten by crocodiles were given a semi-divine status too, probably the same as is implied by the word *hesiees*.[34] Still, only certain animals under certain circumstances could be *intentionally* deified by drowning. It was reported that in Memphis, the sacred bull Apis, reaching twenty-five years of age, was submitted to such an apotheosis.[35] His death in the waters of the Nile bound him to Osiris, and the sacred animal became the divine Oserapis. It is important to note, however, that epigraphic evidence speaks to the contrary: not many bulls attained this venerable age, and those who did were allowed to live.[36] The "custom" of drowning the bull Apis,

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curse – let So-and-So be as dysfunctional as this writing – rather than a reversal; see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 49, no. 1.

[31] Or *hesy*, signifying a divine status attained by a sacred animal upon apotheosis: see also *PGM* III.1–164, *PDM* XIV.88; *PDM* XIV.376, 638–639; on deification by drowning, see John G. Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and his Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 9–10.

[32] The most extensive argument on this account in this particular case was made by Moyer, "Initiation of the Magician," 219–38. When the initiation of a priest, Moyer argues, was complete, he gained access to an image of *bes/besy* – a divine being capable of crossing the boundaries of this and the divine worlds. A *besy* was sometimes represented as a falcon: in the Litany of Re, for example, where a falcon-*besy* introduces the deceased pharaoh to heavens. There also were priestly workshops, documented by inscriptions at the Dendera's temple, where such images were manufactured. Moyer's argument, however, is lacking evidence that could be decisive: mummification of sacred birds is not surprising, but their killing would have been. On Dendera inscriptions, see Philippe Derchain, "L'Atelier des orfevres à Dendara et les origins de l'alchimie," *ChrÉg* 65 (1900): 219–42.

[33] Herodotus 2.65; Diodorus Siculus 1.83; Strabo 17.1.38–40.

[34] Herodotus 2.90.

[35] See sources in Hermann Kees, "Apotheosis by Drowning," in *Studies presented to F. Ll. Griffith* (London: H. Milford, 1932), 402–5; and Griffiths, *Origins of Osiris*.

[36] There is a funeral inscription from the tomb of Apis who died in the second year of the king Pami (785–778 BCE), and attained to the age of twenty-six. Of many other sepulchral tablets, none belongs to Apis who lived more than twenty-one years: Richard Lepsius, "Ueber den Apiskreis," *ZDMG* 7 (1853): 417–37; Auguste Mariette, *Le Sérapéum de Memphis* (Paris: Gide, 1857). On the life of Apis, see Mustafa el Amir, "The ΣΗΚΟΣ of Apis at Memphis: A Season of Excavations at Mīt Rahīnah in 1941," *JEA* 34 (1948): 51–56. On his death: Richard Ganschinietz, "Ἀποθέωσις," *Glotta* 6 (1915): 210–12.

therefore, was not only specific but also theoretical. Egyptian priests took care of sacred animals, especially cats, ibises, and falcons;[37] a Ptolemaic epitaph reads: "I fed live ibises, falcons, cats, jackals and buried them according to the ritual."[38] Yet there is no evidence that a priest could kill one of these animals for a ritual purpose and take credit for it.

The analysis brings some solid facts to the forefront. The most basic purpose of the magician was facilitating communication with the divine. A *hesiees* could make it possible. Therefore, the magician prepared his *hesiees* only to reach his goal and not to violate any norms, especially since the concept of *hesiees* in addition to some details of the ritual's arrangement – mummy of a falcon, a miniature shrine with the statuette of the god – all seem to derive from temple rituals conducted by priests. Yet all this was little consolation to the falcon,[39] and the magician was his murderer. With all the similarity between temple and magical rituals, the magician was neither a priest nor a worshiper; nor did he intend to participate in a temple ritual or construct such a ritual at home – there were enough mummies of falcons that he could buy and peacefully put in a shrine. He, however, needed his own *controllable hesiees*.[40] And this is of no surprise, since his purpose and his attitude towards the divine were essentially different from those of the priest.[41] The magician took over the existing religious tradition

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[37] Numerous cemeteries and millions of mummies can testify to this. See Salima Ikram, ed., *Divine Creatures: Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005); and el Amir, "ΣΗΚΟΣ of Apis."

[38] Siegfried Morenz, "Ein neues Dokument der Tierbestattung," *ZÄS* 88 (1962): 45.

[39] As Moyer justly noted in "Initiation of the Magician," 221.

[40] Control over the soul of a murdered, an unburied, or untimely dead is a well-known concept in magic, frequently exploited in literature: these souls cannot cross to the Thereafter since they did not finish their years of life, or some business, or have an unsatisfied grudge in this world. See, e.g., Lucan, *de Bello Civili* 6.413–587 (Thessalian Erichto collects remains of the unburied corpses); Horace, *Epod.* 5 (four witches starve a boy to use his "longing" liver in a love-spell); Vergil, *Aen.* 6.325–30, 426–443 (concerning the destitute and unburied who cannot cross Styx). Mechanics of this control is sometimes similar (e.g., *PGM* IV.296–466: depositing a love-curse with someone who died in an untimely manner or violently; *PGM* IV.1390–1495: a love-spell based on sharing a meal with "heroes or gladiators" who "died a violent death"), and sometimes different from the rituals of *PGM*. In the Papyrus Mimaut (*PGM* III), the magician drowns a cat and makes him a *hesiees* "endowed with spirit" with the help of three amulets inserted into the cat. He also evokes the deity (Sekhmet or Bastet) represented by this cat, and urges the deity to avenge the mistreatment (sic!) of her image by someone the magician would indicate. The magician then takes water, where the cat was drowned, and sprinkles on the grounds where the controllable ghost of the cat *and* the revenge-driven deity should go. The complicated mechanics of the ritual are clearly based on killing the cat (which was a reproachable deed!). It was important for the magician to "deify" his *hesiees* personally so that only he and no one else could use it as a πάρεδρος (assistant) or οὐσία (magical substance): see the invocation for the "deification" of the sun-scarab in the Mithras liturgy (see below), *PGM* IV.762–763: ἐγώ σε ἐτέλεσα, ἵνα μοι ἡ οὐσία γένη χρήσιμος … ἐμοὶ μόνῳ … The use of a ready-made mummy, therefore, was not an option.

[41] See Versnel, "Some Reflections," on intention and attitude as key distinctions between magic and religion.

and pushed off its boundaries, separating himself not from the community in general, but specifically from the community of priests with whom he wanted to be contextually associated, and within whose circle he wanted to be singled out as someone more capable and potent. After all, it was not the magician who ascended to a god, but a god or a demon who was summoned to the magician as his assistant.

Transition

On the fifth evening since the "banishment" to the sea, the Eleusinian initiates gathered in the temple of Demeter in Athens, and the second phase of their initiation, transition, began. The statue of Iacchus, the son of Demeter, with myrtle garlands and a torch in his hand, and most importantly, the *sacra*, were carried down from Kerameikos to Eleusis, about fourteen miles away, notwithstanding numerous stops and dramatic enactments of important episodes of Demeter's journey. Here, during the night between the sixth and the seventh day, the μύσται underwent the most crucial part of their initiation: they had to leave all of their belongings behind and to cross the bridge of Cephissus. At this point the sacred drama began. People in masks stood on the bridge and addressed every initiate with sarcastic remarks about them, making the initiates feel troubled and upset.[42] Then, the initiates took a narrow path – "so that no carriage may pass"[43] – to the salty lakes of Rheitoi and traveled over them via the one-meter-wide bridge. There can be little doubt that the river Cephissus symbolized Styx, and the masked persons, personified monsters inhabiting its shores. In darkness, the procession arrived at Eleusis, and commenced searching for Persephone – perhaps a priestess who was beforehand "abducted" by her colleagues.[44] The infinite darkness of Hades withdrew as soon as Persephone was found. The hierophant sounded a gong, thus greeting the Queen of the Underworld.[45] Now the torches of Eleusis were lit,[46] joy and happiness pushed grief away, the worst

[42] Strabo (9.1.2) refers to these masked persons as γεφυρισταί – "abusers" (LSJ, s.v. γεφυρίζω) making it clear that they did not intend to cheer up the initiates as some researches argue.

[43] Paul F. Foucart, *Les mystères d'Éleusis* (Paris: A. Picard, 1914), 305; George Méautis, *The Mysteries of Eleusis* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1932), 35.

[44] For the "abduction" as part of the sacred drama, see Tertullian, *Nat.* 2.7: "Why is the priestess of Ceres abducted, if it is not because Ceres suffered the same thing?" and Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 39.4: "Nor have we any abduction of some maiden, nor does Demeter wander ..."

[45] According to Apollodorus of Athens (*FGrH* 244 F 110b) sounding a bronze gong in Eleusis should be connected to the cult of Hekate-Persephone – Queen of the Underworld (cf. also Theocritus, *Id.* 2).

[46] Lactantius, *Epit.* 23 compares this procession to the mysteries of Osiris: the initiates "beat their breasts, prosecute their search with loud lamentations, thus imitating the mother's anguish," but when Osiris was found, the mourning ended "with a note of joy." According to Lac-

crisis in history of humankind was averted – crops started growing again, life on earth continued.

A few points concerning the sacred drama must be explained and emphasized. First, the wandering of the μύσται in darkness symbolized their descent to Hades, hence the misguided reports of Christian writers about dark subterranean compartments, where the μύσται, allegedly engaged in orgies.[47] No subterranean structures were found in Eleusis. Second, the descent of the μύσται, who were representing Demeter, to Hades, the finding of Persephone, and their reemergence to light have a few layers of meaning, yet one is dominant. The agricultural significance of the ritual cannot be ignored – the return of Persephone and the gift of spikes by Demeter to Triptolemus is a pledge to the ever-turning wheel of seasons and the limitless supply of crops that Mother Earth would produce. The annual travel with the *sacra* from Eleusis to Athens and back again emphasized the territorial integrity of the polis and reestablished, year after year, Demeter's protection. These ideas, however, are byproducts of the central act in the ritual – the death accompanied by suffering, loosing one's property,[48] confusion in darkness, and eventual rebirth signaled by the torchlight.[49] A sui generis rehearsal of dying and an intravital experience of regeneration is what attracted people to Eleusis. "In the Mysteries we learn not only to live happily but to die with fairer hope (*cum spe meliore moriendi*)," wrote Cicero,[50] one of many authors who comprehended and conveyed in their writings the primeval purpose of the Mysteries: to vanquish the fear of death. All other values and intentions have been

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tantius, the torches were lit from the beginning, in "an all night search for Proserpine, and when she has been found the whole proceeding ends in congratulations, amid the waving of torches." I am convinced, however, by Plutarch's fragment 128, comparing the crowd of Eleusinian μύσται *wandering in darkness* to a soul suffering at the moment of death; and by Lucian, *Cat.* 22: two men comment on darkness in Hades, "A: 'Tell me, for of course you have been initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries, do you think that things here are similar to those there?' B: 'You are right; look, a torch-bearing female figure is approaching.'" It follows that torches were lit at some point of the search in darkness.

[47] See George E. Mylonas, "Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries," *CJ* 43 (1947): 130–46, at 141.

[48] An inherent association of the Mysteries with death is best expressed by Plut., fr. 5.9: "When a man dies, he is like those who are being initiated into the Mysteries. The one expression τελευτᾶν and the other τελεῖσθαι correspond ..."

[49] Cf., however, a different opinion of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, who argues that the Mysteries originally had political and agricultural significance, and since the sixth century BCE, acquired eschatological meaning as a result of an increasing anxiety "and a more individual perception of one's death." Sourvinou-Inwood, "Festival and Mysteries: Aspects of the Eleusinian Cult," in *Greek Mysteries: Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London: Routledge, 2003), 25–49; Sourvinou-Inwood, *"Reading" Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[50] *Leg.* 2.14. See also Pindar, fr. 137 a S (also apud Clement, *Strom.* 3.17.2): "Blessed is the man who has seen these things / before passing beneath the hollow earth. / He knows the end of life as he knows / the beginning granted by God."

built upon this core, including a properly eschatological significance promising the initiate a sort of happiness after death.[51]

Third, Eleusinian mysteries were the most popular mystery cults in antiquity. In 408/9 BCE the number of initiates was calculated as 2,200,[52] and in Roman times it had to be at least twice as many. It may seem improbable, yet it is true, that a few thousand μύσται crowded in a patch of land, were roaming in circles around the Telesterion, and that this pokey walking could grant a feeling of mystical experience.[53] Just as the general admission devaluated the separation,[54] the imitation of suffering and death in jam-packed crowds had to make the transitional part dull, and pave the way for mystery rituals with more private settings.

One of such "private mysteries," the Mithras liturgy (*PGM* IV.475–829) seems to contain an older variant of the Mithraic initiation thoroughly reworked by the magician for his own construction of a magical ritual. Because of this remodeling, only a few details of the Mithras liturgy correspond to details of the Mithraic cult, as known from elsewhere. Together with it, new sections, purely magical in character, were incorporated into the initiation.[55] One such section instructed the practitioner how to prepare for the ascent (ll. 750–788). As usual, the mystagogue and, possibly, his fellow initiate (συνμύστης, l. 734) had to remain pure (ἁγνεύειν) for seven days and to abstain from meat and bath.[56] Then

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[51] Equally numerous are sources that convey this meaning, e.g., Aristophanes, *Pax.* 374: Trygaeus, threatened by Hermes, answers, "then lend me three drachmas for a suckling pig; I must get initiated before I die"; Isocrates, *Paneg.* 28: "… the Mysteries, whose initiates have (fairer) hope *both* for the life's end, and for the joy forever after (τε τῆς τοῦ βίου τελεθτῆς καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος αἰῶνος ἡδίους)."

[52] Maureen B. Cavanaugh, *Eleusis and Athens, Documents in Finance, Religion and Politics in the Fifth Century BC* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 211.

[53] It does seem improbable to Nicholas J. Richardson; see his *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 25.

[54] The notion that the general admission devaluated the secrecy and the message of the Eleusinian mysteries is conveyed by Plato, *Rep.* 2.378, who contrasts the reception of a truly exclusive knowledge, such as the doings of Uranus and Kronos (if these doings would have been true), with petty revelations of the Eleusinian mysteries: "a chosen few might hear them in a mystery, and they should sacrifice not a common pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim; and then the number of the hearers will be very few indeed."

[55] The bibliography on the Mithras liturgy is extensive. The principal reference works are Albrecht Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Teheran: Imperial Organization for Social Services, 1976); Reinhold Merkelbach and Maria Tooti, eds., *Abrasax: ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts*, vol. 3, *Zwei Griechisch-Ägyptische Weihezeremonien: Die Leidener Weltschöpfung; Die Pschai-Aion-Liturgie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1990); and Hans D. Betz, *The "Mithras Liturgy": Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

[56] The mystic-magician could indeed need a fellow initiate in order to remember the prophecy (although the instructions assure that he would anyway), since he himself prophesied in ecstasy: λέγεις ὡς ἐν ἐκστάσει ἀποφοιβώμενος (line 739). For ἔκστασις as a state of physical weakness and loss of control induced by the god's presence, see Apuleius, *Metam.* 8.27–28, and the scene of Paul's collapse caused by the vision of Jesus in Acts 9:3–9 and 22:6–11. Also see Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 64–101. The

the magician(s) had to deify a sun-scarab by poisoning it[57] on the night of a new moon symbolizing the rebirth and apotheosis of the scarab,[58] which then started transforming into the solar god Khepry.[59] After that, the magician(s) put the scarab into a glass vessel, poured "excellent rose oil" over it, spread sacred sand and pronounced the incantation over the vessel for seven days while the sun was in mid-heaven. The beetle was addressed personally, as a personification of Khepry. On the seventh day, the initiate(s) had to wrap the scarab in fine linen and embalm it with myrrh and Mendesian wine. Finally, the magician(s) had to take the beetle to a flourishing bean field; and after the funeral feast, extract the beetle's οὐσία for the ointment, and bury the beetle.[60] This διδασκαλία τῆς πράξεως, which functions as an act of separation of the initiate in the Mithras liturgy itself presents the threefold dynamics of the rites of passage on the part of the beetle: poisoning as separation,[61] seven-day transformation, and finally a shared meal as a sign of communion with the initiate/s.

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requirement of refraining from bath (βαλανεῖον) is unparalleled in *PGM*, and implies rather abstinence from public baths, due to their association with impurity, than abstinence from bathing.

[57] The beetle should eat a "cake" made of honey and seeds of the fruit pulp of the lotus, and immediately die. Merkelbach (*Abrasax*, 246) states that the scarab suffocates because it gets stuck in the honey, while Betz seems to imply that seeds of the lotus fruit are poisonous for a beetle (*"Mithras Liturgy"*, 208). In my opinion, it is the vessel that kills the beetle. The magician had to put it first in a vase made of a natron and sulfur concoction (καλλάϊνος) – commonly used in antiquity as insecticide – to give him a "cake" and wait until the beetle would be dead, and then, to deposit the dead beetle into a glass vessel (following Theodor Hopfner's interpretation of καλλάϊνος in *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, 2 vols. [Leipzig: Haessel, 1921, 1924], 2.1, § 121).

[58] Merkelbach, *Abrasax*, 245.

[59] Khepry/scarab-beetle is the morning manifestation of Re – his daily rebirth. This association is specifically important for the notion of resurrection. See E. A. Wallis Budge, ed. and trans., *Book of the Dead*, (London: British Museum, 1899; London: Arkana, 1985), chap. 83: "I have soared as the primeval one soars: I have become Khepri. I have grown as plants grow ..."

[60] This neatly corresponds to the bipartite funeral ceremony in Greco-Roman Egypt (κηδεία καὶ περιστολή), here expressed by θάπτειν for the part of embalming, and by ἀποτίθεσθαι for depositing a corpse in the cemetery. See also Dominic Montserrat, "Death and Funerals in the Roman Fayum," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. M. L. Bierbrier (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 33–44.

[61] Actual death of the initiate is certainly the valid act of separation in rites of passage on his/her behalf. Van Gennep briefly refers to the Coffin texts (*Rites of Passage*, 158–59), a very relevant example that can now be supplemented with more details from the newer publications. The deceased had to pass through six, seven, nine of twelve gates of the Hereafter, and to cross the fiery rivers and islands guarded by fearsome creatures. S/he had to know their names, and the names of the boat and its components in order to continue his/her journey (188h–194f: "'Say my name,' says the bow-warp. "Oh you lock of Isis that Anubis has attached with the craft of the embalmer.' 'Say my name,' says the mooring-post. "Mistress of the Two Lands in the Shrine, is your name'"). If the deceased failed, a terrible fate awaited him/her, very much in the style of the Hekhalot (182b–183g: "He will reach another gate, and find the SNSNTY there standing. They will say to him: 'Come and we will kiss you!' and then will cut off the nose and lips of anyone ignorant of their name"). The excerpts are taken from the El-Bersheh coffin text, published in Dieter Mueller, "Early Egyptian Guide to the Hereafter," *JEA* 58 (1972): 99–125. For the picture

When the first stage of the liturgy – the separation – is complete, the magician must anoint his face with the ready-made beetle concoction (thus taking over Khepry's potential for resurrection), and start saying the invocations. He is praying to be "improved" (line 519) on account of his mortal nature, and "transferred to the immortal birth" (ματαπαραδόσθαι τῇ ἀθανάτῳ γενέσει, line 501) now, when the "bitter and relentless necessity" (πικρὰ ἀνάγκὴ ἀχρεοκόπητος)[62] that is death, was pressing on him, because only then, he, who was born mortal, would be able to behold "golden brightness of the divine brilliance," "sacred fire," and "awesome water of the down." Then he dies: elevated into midair, the magician stops seeing and hearing all earthly things but does see the divine world and himself (lines 539–545).[63] The magician then ascend, passes through the spheres of the ministering winds, planetary gods, fixed stars, Helios, polar gods, and finally meets with Mithras. At the crucial moment, standing before Helios, the magician must "inbreathe the divine"; and then ἀποκατασταθῇ σου ἡ ψυχή – his soul would be completely restored – he is resurrected (lines 629–630) by Helios out of countless particles of the universe (650). Although the mortal body of the magician was a mixture (κρᾶσις) of the four elements – earth, water, fire, and air – only three of them, with an omission of earth (lines 510–15: ἱερὸν πνεῦμα – φρικτὸν ὕδωρ – ζωογόνος αἰθήρ), participate in his immortal rebirth.[64]

The transitional phase in the form of death and rebirth is even better visualized in the magical charms for a divine assistant. The murderer of a falcon (*PGM* I.1–42) was the only one who managed to achieve a quasi-divine status in a different way – by drinking milk and honey in which the falcon was drowned. Then, "something divine [had to] inspire [his] heart." In three other rites of this kind (*PGM* I.42–195, *PGM* VII.222–249, *PGM* IV.154–285) the magician had to put on the "black cloth of Isis" (τελαμὼν ὁλομέλας Ἰσιακός, e. g. *PGM* I.59) – an imitation of a mummy-wrap – while he was lying on the ground or going to sleep.[65] One of these rites (*PGM* IV.176) even specified the instruction: "wrap

of the map of the Hereafter with seven gates, see the Cairo Coffin 28, 083 in Wilhelm Bonacker, "The Egyptian 'Book of the Two Ways,'" *Imago Mundi* 7 (1950): 5–17.

[62] ἀχρεοκόπητος: literally, "a debt that cannot be discharged." See Merkelbach, *Abrasax*, 235; and Betz, "*Mithras Liturgy*", 115.

[63] ὄψῃ σεαυτὸν ἀνακυφιζόμενον. Does the magician see himself from outside, as if he is not in his body? The text probably speaks of entering into the state of ecstasy, here clearly equated with the state of dying. See Betz, "*Mithras Liturgy*," 133–34.

[64] Earth is associated with the mortal part of the practitioner, and therefore must be left behind. See Betz, "*Mithras Liturgy*," 116.

[65] Black robe of Isis is one of her two robes which she wears as *mater siderum, parens temporum orbisque totius domina* (Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.7). One robe was of six different colors and represented heavenly orbits of six planets – Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. As the Moon goddess she also wore a black robe "shining with a particular splendor" (*Met.* 11.3; see also Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 352 B, 372 D). Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.7.23 (ed. Paul Wendland, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916; Hildesheim: Olm, 1977]) says that body members of Osiris were searched ὑπὸ τῆς ἑπταστόλου καὶ μελανείμονος Isis – mistress "of the seven-colored garment who also is clad in black." In this case, it seems that the multicolored cloak symbolized

yourself like a corpse [and] close your eyes." In both *PGM* I.42–195 and *PGM* IV.154–285, a sea falcon played the role of resuscitator: at a certain moment, according to these texts, the bird should "fly down and strike you on the body with his wings, signifying this: that you should arise." The magician would then change his mummy-wrap to a priestly white cloth and "return as lord of a godlike nature" (κάτελθε ἰσοθέου φύσεως κυριεύσας, *PGM* IV.220).

Thus, magicians also played dead and were reborn; however, not only in order to behold the divine brilliance, but, first of all, as a means of protection from the wrath of his future πάρεδρος, who might be unwilling to answer the magician's call. Here again, an aggressive attitude of the magician is revealed in a shift from the passive receiver of prophesies to the active commander of gods. His manipulation of heavenly forces derives from common beliefs, but is far from religious piety: although the purpose of the ritual described in *PGM* IV.154–285 is a σύστασις with Helios, the magician is instructed to pray to Seth-Typhon, posing as his assistant in a war against Osiris and other gods, including Helios-Re. The Sun god should certainly be annoyed, but there is nothing he can do against someone equipped with a μαγικὴ ψυχή (l. 210).

The same scheme and concept is integral to the ritual for an encounter with Bes (*PGM* VII.222–249). It required the magician to establish an alliance with Seth by painting a lamp with red ocher and the blood of a dove and a crow.[66] After this rite of separation, he put the "black cloth of Isis" around his hand and neck, lest Bes "smite him." Then, the magician, wrapped in this protective "shroud," went to sleep, and when he was just about to wake up, his *transition* was accomplished; the god had to come and stay with him for as long as the magician required.[67]

Incorporation

The last part of the Eleusinian initiation – ἐποπτεία, a ceremony that, according to van Gennep's theory, signified the incorporation of the initiate – took place

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seven planets (including the Moon), and the separate black dress might be associated with the death of Osiris. It is also possible that the statues and votive figurines, mentioned in Plutarch, were dressed in seven robes, each of a different color, or in single multicolored robe. See Miroslav Marcovich, "The Isis with Seven Robes," *ZPE* 64 (986): 295–96.

[66] Magical rites with a more "positive" attitude require using a lamp "not painted red" since red is the color of Seth: e.g., *PGM* I.277, 294; VII.540; VIII.64; XII.23; LXII.1; see Wilhelm Kroll, "Minium," *Pauly-Wissowa* 15 (1932): 1848–54; and Georges Posener, "Les signes noirs dans les rubriques," *JEA* 35 (1949): 77–81.

[67] These moments between sleep and wakefulness were commonly recognized as a time when apparitions would come, which were not to be trusted by serious diviners: see a discussion of *phantasma* (*visum*) in Macrobius, *Somn. Scip.* 1.3.

in the Telesterion, a monumental hall covering a space of 2,500 square meters.[68] What happened there is a remarkable secret, remarkable because it was shared with hundreds of thousands of initiates worldwide. It seems logical to assume that the event was only a bogus enigma: its rituals were well-known; however, their open divulgation was forbidden, due to moral or even legal limitations.[69]

It is not surprising, therefore, that only Christian writers provide us some information about the ceremony inside the Telesterion. The most elaborate of these sources is the Naassene Homily, summarized by Hippolytus in his *Refutation of all Heresies* (*Philosophumena*), yet it is also the least reliable.[70] While comparing Phrygian mysteries of Attis with Eleusinian mysteries, Hippolytus points out that the hierophants of both cults show to the initiates the same ridiculous *sacra* – "a cut corn-stock reaped in silence." At the same time, they set up a "huge fire" and the hierophant pronounces: "August Brimo has brought forth a holy son, Brimos!" If this report should be believed, "August Brimo" denotes either Demeter or Persephone, and the son Brimos is either Pluto, born from Demeter, or Dionysus, born from Persephone. Since Hippolytus associates Eleusinian Brimos with Attis, and Attis is presented in the Naassene Homily as both a deity and the primeval man, the enactment of his re/birth signifies the re/emergence of not only a godchild but also the archetypal unity of the divine and the humane. If, again, the goal of the initiates was "the realization of this [primeval] Anthropos within,"[71] the Eleusinian ἐποπτεία was nothing short of the *unio mystica*!

Unfortunately, there is good reason to be skeptical of Hippolytus' testimony, and most importantly, its message. First of all, the Telesterion is hardly suitable for reaping corn and burning a "huge fire." The authors of the *Homilies* and the *Refutation* might have borrowed these details as well as the rest of his report from Orphic hymns and invocations that mention Brimos. This Brimos is indeed the *different Dionysus* – not the son of Zeus and Semele, but of Zeus and Persephone.[72] The *same different Dionysus* might be venerated at Eleusis; not as

[68] This is the size of the Telesterion in Periclean period, twice as big as the Archaic Telesterion (seventh century BCE) that was only 336 square meters. For a brief summary of the development of the Telesterion, see Nancy A. Evans, "Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries," *Numen* 49 (2002): 227–54, esp. 230–36. For a more detailed report, Margaret M. Miles, *The Athenian Agora: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: The City Eleusinian* (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies, 1998).

[69] Aeschylus was charged with impiety and was happy to escape the death penalty for divulging the secrets of Eleusis (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 3.1.17; Herodotus 2.156; Pausanius 8.37.6); Alcibiades (in Plutarch, *Alc.* 22) was sentenced to death (yet not executed) for pretending to be a hierophant at his private party, and for showing the *sacra* to the uninitiated; Pausanius (1.38.7) stopped short of telling what was happening inside the Telesterion, because he was warned in a dream not to reveal the secret.

[70] Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.8.40 (Wendland, p. 98).

[71] Jarl Fossum, "The Myth of the Eternal Rebirth: Critical Notes on G. W. Bowersock, 'Hellenism in Late Antiquity,'" *VC* 53 (1999): 305–15, at 310.

[72] Dionysus-Zagreus, born by Persephone, killed by Titans, and resuscitated by gods. See Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus. Myth and Cult* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 191.

Brimos, son of Persephone, however, but as Iacchus, son of Demeter.[73] The opportunity for confusion is obvious. In addition, the ceremonies dedicated to the Virgin goddess were not unique to Eleusis: in Alexandrian Koreum, the torch-bearers descended into an underground shrine and brought up a statue of Kore to celebrate the birth of Aion; similar ceremonies occurred in Nabatean Petra and Elusa, involving the virgin goddess Khaamon and her offspring, Dusares.[74]

The testimony of Clement of Alexandria, on the contrary, appears genuine, not least of which because it does not contain obvious discrepancies. According to him, the μύσται had to say a password (σύνθημα) in order to accomplish their initiation, and this password apparently summarized their actions: "Having stopped fasting, I drank the barley drink (κυκεών), and I took from the chest; having finished my work, I put into the basket and again from the basket into the chest." An interpretation of these words may be as follows: the initiates drank the κυκεών to mark their return from Hades and ate their first meal after the rebirth. Then, there is the question, what object could thousands of initiates take from a sacred chest and "process" before returning it to the chest? At this point, the corn-stock of Hippolytus comes to mind: the initiates took ears of corn, peeled them (not reaped), put them in their baskets and eventually returned them to the sacred chest. Such a sacrament may seem absurd if seen by an outsider, and this elegantly explains the sarcastic comment of Clement: "What a beautiful spectacle! Fitting the goddess indeed ..."[75]

The effect of the incorporation on the practitioners in the Mithras liturgy and *PGM* III.494–611 is basically the same as in Eleusis: they all behold a secret manifestation of the divine and hear the revelation. The experience of *PGM* mystics,

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Orphic texts frequently refer to him. See Vittorio Macchioro, *Zagreus: Studi intorno al Orfismo* (Firenzi: Vallecchi, 1930); and Fritz Graf and Sarah I. Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2007), 54–59.

[73] There are many sources that may imply that Iacchus is Dionysus, but only a few of them are explicit: e.g., Strabo 10.3.10 (trans. Horace L. Jones, LCL [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923]): "Now most of the Greeks assigned to Dionysos, Apollon, Hekate, the Mousai (Muses), and above all to Demeter, everything of an orgiastic or Bacchic or choral nature, as well as the mystic element in initiations; and they give the name Iacchus not only to Dionysus but also to the leader-in-chief of the Mysteries, who is the Daimon of Demeter."

[74] Fossum, "Myth of the Eternal Rebirth," 306–7.

[75] Clement, *Protr.* 1.21.2 (ed. Miroslav Marcovich, *Clementis Alexandrini 'Protrepticus'* [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 30): Καλά γε τὰ θεάματα, καὶ θεᾷ πρέποντα. Two other versions concerning the secret event in the Telesterion must be mentioned. The first is that the μύσται were shown some ancient statuettes of Demeter and Persephone (Mylonas, *Eleusis*, 273–74; Larry J. Alderink, "Eleusinian Mysteries in Roman Imperial Times," *ANRW* 2.18.2:1488), the second is that the μύσται underwent a fire-ritual enacting the story of Demophon (Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis, Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* [New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1967]). It is unclear, however, how the story of an *unsuccessful* immortalization could inspire the μύσται, and why the accounts of Clement and Hippolytus must be ignored completely in favor of more "logical" but less elaborate accounts; see Nicholas J. Richardson's review of Kerényi in *English Historical Review* 84 (1969): 373.

however, is undiluted with agricultural rites and rituals of communal integrity. Instead, it is a pure inspiration from the god, given to the chosen few. Thus, the practitioners of the Liturgy dream of having a revelation in "thousands of verses" which they would nevertheless retain in memory. The instruction of both *PGM* III.584–585 and 606–607 stresses the one and only wish of the practitioner: "I beg, master … that you might now illuminate me with knowledge of things bellowed by you (ἡ γνῶσις ἐρατῶν πρὸς σέ) even after the kind restoration of my material body (τὸ ὑλικὸς σῶμα) … we rejoice because you showed yourself to us … we ask no [favor except this]: will that we be maintained in knowledge of you (σου γνῶσις)."[76]

The requirements of the magician, as usual, are formidable: he has no colleagues with which to unite, and he only needs divine inspiration to take him one step further – to an intimate encounter with god, promised in both *PGM* VII.222–249 and *PGM* IV.154–285. The god should answer the magician's requests, and come and speak with him until the magician dismisses him. The ideal, however, is not only to meet your πάρεδρος, but also to bond with him as a friend; and this is what the author of *PGM* I.1–42 has in mind, promising the magician an assistant that "will be [his] companion and will eat and sleep with [him]" (lines 1–2). *PGM* I.82–88 provides the most elaborate account regarding this "friendship ritual": when the magician accomplishes all the requirements, he shall meet Helios. Then, the papyrus instructs, "Take the god by the hand and leap down, [and] after bringing him [into] the narrow room where you reside, [sit him] down. After first preparing the house in a fitting manner and providing all types of foods and Mendesian wine, set this before the god." During this feast, the magician has to put Helios under an oath (line 89): "I shall have you as a friendly assistant (φίλος πάρεδρος), a beneficent god who serves me …"[77] The communion of the magician and his divine assistant is now sealed.

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In summary, the rituals of communion with gods as discussed above, both public and private, demonstrate not only the same structure, but also the same essential aspects and elements of this structure; yet their characteristics are different:

a) The *separation* was effected by personal seclusion, by inventing new taboos or breaking the old ones. Magicians engaged in all of these, but for public, state-approved cults, breaking the taboos or making them too difficult to observe was certainly not an option; for this reason, the separation of Eleusinian mystics was quite palpable but hardy selective or secluded. There are no stories about the

[76] Trans. W. C. Grese in Betz, *GMPT*, 33–34.
[77] Trans. E. N. O'Neil in Betz, *GMPT*, 6.

actual exclusion of commoners from the Mysteries, and at the same time, the exclusion of the arch-hero Heracles and arguably the arch-theurgist Apollonius of Tyana are well-known. In these stories, both Heracles and Apollonius eventually reject services of the Eleusinian hierophant, pointing to their *private* achievement in "much truer mysteries" (μυστήρια πολὺ ἀληθέστερα).[78] But if their rituals are true, then what is Eleusis? It could also be a mystical ritual, yet available and comprehensible to everyone, even children.

b) The *transition* was the principal and the most elaborate part of the rituals for the divine communion. In fact, it appears that the transformation of the practitioner – through death to rebirth – was the main purpose of these rituals and the communion with gods was necessary only to confirm the transformation. This observation becomes obvious from many vantage points; one of them (in addition to the one discussed above) presents an attempt to identify the purpose of the Mithras liturgy – is it really an ascent to Mithras? The practitioner ascends to Mithras for prophecies but calls it the ritual of immortalization (line 747: ὁ ἀπαθανατισμὸς οὗτος; also 477: ἀθανασίαν ἀξιῶ). Upon closer examination, however, the dilemma is only apparent here. Immortalization, that is, the transformation through death and rebirth, can explicitly mean the ascent: ῥητέον ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ περὶ τὴν πυρὰν ἐκείνην τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως πραγματεία μιμεῖται τὸν παρὰ τοῖς θεουργοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαθανατισμὸν εἰς τὴν χωριστὴν ζωὴν ἀνάγουσα τὴν τοῦ Πατρόκλου ψυχήν. – "It must be said that all the diligent efforts of Achilles on account of that fire are similar to the ἀπαθανατισμός of the soul among the theurgists, bringing up the soul of Patroclus to a different life."[79] Also, it is the *perfection* (τελείωσις) of the mortal nature – the same concept though differently embraced and enacted: union with the divine emanation for the philosopher (*τελεωτάτη* εὐχῆ [the *perfect* prayer] = ἄρρητος ἕνωσις [ineffable union]),[80]

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[78] A story of the successful initiation of Heracles before his *katabasis* to Hades is transmitted by many sources: Apollonius Rhodius 2.5.12; Euripides, *Hercules Furens* ll. 610–613; Diodorus Siculus 4.26.1; and Plato, *Ax.* 371E. Although he was both a foreigner and a murderer of the Centaurs, both obstacles were overcome. However, there circulated a different version of the story (transmitted in *PMilVogl.* I 20), according to which, Heracles was excluded from the Mysteries, obviously after his *katabasis* – the genuine initiation. The Vogliano papyrus contains his reproaching speech: "Do you shut up Eleusis and the [sacred] fire …? But I have already been initiated into [much] truer mysteries … Close to the secret objects all through the night [I be] held the fire … I saw the Kore …" (trans. Daniela Colomo, "Herakles and the Eleusinian Mysteries: P. Mil. Vogl. I 20, 18–32 Revisited," *ZPE* 148 [2004]: 87–98, at 91). Apollonius was denied because he was a wizard and therefore impure (Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.18).

[79] Proclus, *Rem.* 1.152.9–12 (ed. Wilhelm Kroll, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis rem publicam commentarii*, 2 vols. [Leipzig: Teubner, 1899; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965]).

[80] Iamblichus, *Myst.* 5.26 (Édouard des Places, ed., *Jamblique. Les mystères d'Égypte* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966]), for example, describing the role of prayer in the theurgy, repeatedly uses different forms of τέλειος-τελείω, always meaning the different aspects of perfection on the theurgist's way to the god: "the most perfect [prayer] has as its mark ineffable unification (τὸ δὲ τελεώτατον αὐτῆς ἡ ἄρρητος ἕνωσις ἐπισφραγίζεται), which establishes all authority in the gods, and provides that our souls rest completely in them (τελέως ἐν αὐτοῖς κεῖται). Prayer …

absorption of the divine essence for the magician,[81] a group-wide spectacle for the participant in a public ritual, and the term for an *initiation* (τελετή) for all of them.[82]

c) Whereas a rite of transformation had to put the practitioners in a specific state of mind, to give them a feeling inexpressible in words (ἄρρητος ἕνωσις indeed),[83] the *incorporation* had to provide knowledge – a palpable testimony to the authenticity of the practitioner's feeling. The question, again, is the authenticity of this testimony. Is it your fellow initiates, with their hustle and bustle, who accept you in their cohort, or gods themselves? Is your newly-gained knowledge a real secret? Will it, after all, bring you any extraordinary good?

Ascent in the Hekhalot

At this point, the discussion is leading to the focus of the current inquiry. Rituals for the divine communion were classified as magic and mysticism, regardless of any additional criteria necessary to form idiosyncratic categories of magic and mysticism. The application of van Gennep's theory to various rituals of this sort located a few elements *sine quibus non* (see supra: seclusion, taboos, transformation, secret knowledge). An *apparent* ritual for the divine communion without these elements should now be considered as misclassified, and, by extension, as neither magic nor mysticism. In this light I shall attempt to analyze the descriptions of the Ascent in the Hekhalot Rabbati (HR) and Hekhalot Zutarti (HZ).[84]

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provides us the triple advantage which we gain from the gods through theurgy: the first leading to illumination, the second to the common achievement of projects, and the third to the perfect fulfillment [of the soul] through fire (εἰς τὴν τελείαν ἀποπλήρωσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός). … Extended practice of prayer … gradually brings to perfection the capacity of our faculties for contact with the gods (κατὰ βραχὺ δὲ τελειοῖ τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν πρὸς τὰς τῶν θεῶν συναφάς)."

[81] Τελετή is the title of the magician's transformation in *PGM* IV.26–51, induced by the sacrifice of a rooster and by drinking its blood. Discussing the cognates of the words τελετή, I follow and expand the argument of Johnston, "Sacrifice," 355–56, on account of *PGM* IV.26–51 and the "essential meaning" of its title as "completion."

[82] Many sources (e.g., Plutarch, *Demetr.* 26.1), however, imply that τελετή specifically means *transformation* also in reference to the mystery cult: see Kevin Clinton, "Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries," in *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (London: Routledge, 2003), 50–78.

[83] Which, according to Joseph Dan, is the very essence and even "a general definition of mysticism": "If the mystics insist that this is beyond words, it is the duty of the historian to accept it, and stop his research at this point. Mysticism is that which cannot be expressed in words, period" (*The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 5).

[84] Peter Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, in collaboration with Margarete Schlüter and Hans Georg von Mutius, TSAJ 2 (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 1981): §§ 335–374; 407–419; 422–424 (HZ); §§ 199–277 (HR).

The stage of separation seems clear. As we have seen, personal isolation was an option for both magicians and the participators in mystery cults. Yet the levels of their isolation and their attitudes towards the forbidden are different: whereas the μύστης exalted himself by inventing and observing new taboos, the magician tended to break or rather adjust the existing ones. Those who descend to the merkavah clearly sided with the μύσται: they did want, as the text states, to be "singled out in the world" (§ 335 [HZ]: *lehityaḥed ba-ʿolam*), and their means of the separation mainly included fasting and purification: "Whoever wishes to learn this mishnah, and to express the name explicitly, should sit in fast for forty days and rest his head between his knees until the fast takes control of him" (§ 424 [HR]).

Both fasting and ritual purification are attested in numerous passages of the Scripture and the rabbinic literature.[85] Tannaitic sources contain many stories about prominent rabbis whose "teeth were blackened from fasting."[86] However, this practice was used only as a way of atonement or mourning. The idea that the fasting exerted a positive influence on the ability of an individual to contact the divine world was assumed by some but ultimately rejected by rabbinic authorities.[87] Later, in the Talmud, any excessive fasting was criticized; it will suffice to quote the remark of Rav Sheshet in *Taʿanit* 11b: "A scholar fasting all day deserves that a dog should eat his dinner."[88]

The *yored merkavah*, however, had to exhaust himself by the forty-day fast, meaning, as everywhere in the Talmud, the total abstinence from food and drink.[89] This opposed the mainstream tradition in a very specific way, by follow-

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[85] See Steven D. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 253–88. Observance and deviation from the halakhic rules by the merkavah practitioner has been repeatedly discussed: see particularly Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah Ben Ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the 'Hekhalot Rabbati,'" *AJS Review* 1 (1976): 269–81; Saul Lieberman, "The Knowledge of Halakha by the Author (or Authors) of the Heikhaloth," in Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 241–44; and Michael D. Swartz, "'Like the Ministering Angels': Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic," *AJS Review* 19 (1994): 135–67, esp. 136–37. In disagreement with David J. Halperin, who does not see how fasting and purification should help during the ascent, Swartz ("A New Edition of Hekhalot Literature," *JAOS* 104 [1984]: 33) points to their obvious relevancy.

[86] E.g., *y. Shabb.* 5:4 (33a), *b. Hag.* 22b, *b. Naz.* 52b.

[87] See S. Lowy, "The Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature," *JJS* 9 (1958): 19–38; but cf. Swartz, "Like the Ministering Angels," 149, who quoting the same and other sources (e. g., *y. Kil.* 9:4 [32b] and *y. Ketub.* 12:3 [35a]) interprets them in a more vision-friendly way.

[88] For the late medieval sources see numerous passages in *Sefer Hasidim* (e. g., MSS Parma §§ 66–67, JTS Boesky § 54, Bologna print § 617); see Peter Schäfer and Michael Meerson, eds., *Princeton University Sefer Hasidim Database*, (https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim): "... Rabbi Yehudah said that a person should not exhaust himself in fasting, lest he might lose his health ... and had god desired the fast, he would have ordered Israel [to keep] it; he, however softened his heart ..."

[89] Lowy, "Motivation of Fasting," 21. To be sure, the Hekhalot abounds with instructions for partial fasts, that is, abstinence from animal food and some vegetables: e. g., "anything defiling"

ing the two foremost authorities of Judaism. The first was Moses, who fasted forty days on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:28–29); the second was Elijah, who had to fast forty days and forty nights during his travel to the mountain of God in Horeb, while it was God himself who sustained Elijah on his journey, as a sign of endorsement from God's messenger, and the fulfillment of God's promise to rise up another prophet like Moses (1 Kgs 19:7–9). Taking into account that the *yored merkavah* went so far as to imitate even the sitting position of Elijah, holding his head between his knees, it is not difficult to imagine what idea the author of the ascent wanted to convey: as the magician was exalted over the Egyptian priest, the hero of the ascent elevated himself above the authority of rabbis, in the company of true messengers of God – Moses and Elijah. The difference between this and other types of separation can be articulated if we compare the microform of the ascent with that of Sar ha-Torah: like a magician, the adjurator of Sar ha-Torah had to seclude himself in an upper chamber of the house for twelve days, eating only bread baked with his own hands, and for clothing, only the garment that he himself washed (§ 299).[90] Here, there is no attempt to imitate the mainstream tradition; and the conditions, although difficult, are not impossible.

Compared to the forty-day fast, the requirement to observe biblical and halakhic commandments appears banal, and one may be surprised that Rabbi Ishmael says no ordinary person can do it: "Whoever is clean and guiltless of idolatry and of sexual sins and of murder and of slander and vain oaths and of blasphemy and presumption and of groundless enmity and who keeps every positive and negative commandment" (§ 199 [HR]) is permitted to ascend.

The incident with Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah and the woolen cloth (§§ 225–228 [HR]) explains the despair of Rabbi Ishmael. While Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah was beholding the merkavah, he mentioned those who "are and [at the same time] are not permitted" to pass the fearful guardians of the sixth gate. Since his students, including Rabbi Ishmael, were puzzled by this expression, they needed to bring back Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah and ask him for an explanation. But how? A servant of Rabbi Akiva put on Nehuniah's knees a woolen cloth that had made contact with a woman who *could* have been at the end of her period, but who, in fact, was well over it. Moreover, she took a ritual bath not once but twice. And moreover, the woolen cloth was treated with aromatic substances – "myrtle, oil of *foliatum*, and balsam" – that had magically eliminated the slightest hint of impurity. Nevertheless, the vision of Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah was immediately

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in § 314; "onion, garlic, and garden vegetables" in § 489; only "bread of his own hands" in §§ 299, 489 and 684. However, a prescription for fasting without additional instructions implies the total abstinence of food.

[90] On Sar ha-Torah texts, see David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 376–86, 427–46; Swartz, "Like the Ministering Angels," 145–47; Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 62, 77–90.

interrupted, and, in truth, this sudden deposition of Rabbi Nehuniah is yet more difficult to explain than his mysterious account. It was certainly not the impurity but rather a distant echo of its hypothetical possibility that obstructed the ascent! For who could be secure from a groundless suspicion? Perhaps the same one who could survive forty days without food and drink.

The most elaborate phase of the descent and ascent is the transition. At the first glance the overall structure of the "descent" to the merkavah and the initiatory rites of Mithras are very similar: there is the travel through seven palaces, and there is the travel through seven spheres.[91] It is also not surprising that one step before the last should be decisive – as are both the sixth day of the Eleusinian initiation and the sixth palace of the Hekhalot. The atmosphere of danger and suffering is everywhere: in place of monsters of gloomy Hades, threatening deities of the fixed stars, and dwarf-like Bes, who may "smite" you in sleep, there are the guardians of the gates, whose gaze makes man shiver in a cold sweat (§ 248 [HR]), and whose voices tear out his ribs, twist his bowels, and "dissolve all of him into blood" (§ 104).

Yet this is exactly the place where the main difference between the "descent" to the merkavah and the rituals for the divine communion can be found. The death and rebirth is certainly the most dramatic way to express the transformation in the rites of passage; and moreover, it had a particular meaning for those who seek the divine communion, for in order to experience the divine presence, they had to be either dead or immortal. Therefore, only those who suffered damage and pain, and extinguished their corporeal nature could be transformed and, as a result, could see the god.

This is not what happens in the Hekhalot ascent. The guardians of the gates shatter and throw into the fiery river the *unworthy* ones who *cannot* proceed further.[92] The New York manuscript explains in detail why Ben Azzai did not reach the seventh palace, leaving no doubt that in the Hekhalot his death is a punishment for coming unprepared and, as a result, confusing the marble stones with water (§ 345 [HZ]):[93] "And these are the four who entered the Garden … Ben Azzai took a glimpse of the sixth palace … and *his body did not bear* …

[91] For parallels in the apocalyptic literature, see Adela Y. Collins, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses," in *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 59–93. For a discussion of the specific parallel between the Hekhalot ascent and the Mithras liturgy, see Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 140–60.

[92] § 407 (HZ): "If one was unworthy to see the king in his beauty, they would encourage him, saying, 'Enter!' and when he would enter, then they would crash him and throw him into the river Rigyon."

[93] The München manuscript contains a shorter version of this story, skipping an explanation of why Ben Azzai was killed, how Ben Zoma "was hurt" (*nifga'*), and how Elisha ben Avuya "cut the shoots" (Schäfer, *Synopse*, 146).

and he died." This is certainly not a reward – communion with God's righteous ones – as it appears in the Tosefta (*Hag.* 2:3) and the Talmud (*y. Hag.* 2:1 [77b] and *b. Hag.* 14b–15b).[94] In the Hekhalot, he was killed by guardians of the sixth palace, whose duty was destroying all those who would try to "descend" to the merkavah without permission (§§ 224 ff. [HR]). Both Simeon ben Gamaliel and Rabbi Ishmael were close to meeting the same fate at the entrance to the seventh palace – for they did not have the names and the seals of the guardians – and survived only because they mastered the whole corpus of the rabbinical literature (§ 239 [HR]).

Thus, the incorporation of the *yored merkavah* into the divine world in the form of sacramental communion with angels was a reward for the survivors who avoided the annihilation of their mortal body![95] In the sixth palace, Katspiel the Prince, sat *yored merkavah* in a chariot of brilliance and trumpeted before him, while Dumiel the Prince (§§ 231–232 [HR]) gave *yored merkavah* a gift. Any act of donation, according to van Gennep's survey, signifies the incorporation;[96] but this one was especially valuable – a free passage to any of the seven palaces. Finally, in the seventh palace (§ 237 [HR]), the *yored merkavah*, enjoying all kinds of music and songs, was allowed to behold the throne of glory, cherubim, ophanim, and the holy beasts, whose liturgy he eventually joins (§§ 251–257 [HR]). The ceremonial setting of this communion makes it similar to the magical ritual; but again, with one decisive difference: in contrast to the magical rites, here, the initiative lies in the hands of angels and not the *yored merkavah*, meaning that those who would normally have been objects of the ritual, here became the conductors.

It is clear, then, that the description of the ascent presents a different paradigm from that of the rituals for the divine communion, provoking the question: Does the ascent narrative, after all, refer to any sort of ritual?[97] Here, it is important

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[94] Peter Schäfer provides a persuasive argument on this issue in *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 198–99. There is, however, a single place in the Hekhalot where a physical annihilation has a positive sense: the transformation of Enoch into Metatron in 3 Enoch 15:1b–2, § 19, discussed in the context of the initiatory ritual by James R. Davila, "Shamanic Initiatory Death and Resurrection in the Hekhalot Literature," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, 283–302, at 299: "... at once my flesh was changed into flame, my tendons into a fire of glowing heat, my bones to glowing juniper coals, my eyelids to radiance of lighting-bolts, my eyeballs to torches of fire, the hair of my head to glowing heat and flame, all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and my bodily frame to scorching fire." However, the experience of Enoch, *pace* Davila, is not only unparalleled in the Hekhalot, but also cannot be projected on any other "descender" to the merkavah, who takes every precaution that he "*would not* be destroyed or burned" (§ 248 [HR]), and repeatedly asks God to spare him from "drowning in fire and flame" (§§ 393, 470, 730, [HZ] 626 [Sar ha-Panim]). Yet "burning" and "drowning" is what usually *should* happen to the initiate who welcomes the transformation and does not try to avoid it.

[95] "The body" is explicitly at stake in this passage: *ve-(lo') saval gufo* refers to the experience of the four.

[96] *Rites of Passage*, 31.

[97] The question repeatedly addressed: see Peter Schäfer, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 277–95; Martha Him-

to remember that magic and mysticism are rituals in the first place, and the literary sources (so-to-say second hand magic and mysticism)[98] inevitably refer to these rituals, describing the desired effect or providing instructions on how it can be attained. The effect is more or less standard – union or communion – but the instructions may to some extent vary. Whenever the literary source with such instructions deviates from "the field evidence" for a specific ritual, as in case of the Mithras liturgy and a few well-preserved Mithraea,[99] an interpreter can use a loophole called "imaginative performance." According to this sort of interpretation, a literary source may present a drama with "genuine but stylized representations of cultic scenarios, through which the initiate will remember the actual performances" in the actual ritual.[100] In view of the instruction "to practice this mishna regularly, month by month and year by year" (§ 424 [HZ]), such interpretation could be possible. Yet what shall we say about a thoroughly misleading "imaginative performance"? Perhaps, that there is a message and not a ritual at stake.

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melfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 106–10; and Swartz, "'Like the Ministering Angels," 140–45. The *locus classicus* referring to a ritual of the ascension to the merkavah is Hai Gaon's responsum in B. M. Lewin, *Otsar ha-Ge'onim: Thesaurus of the Geonic Responsa and Commentaries*, 13 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1928–43), 4.2:14 (*Hagigah*, resp. § 20).

[98] An additional classification of literary sources is drawn by Sarah I. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in its Cultural Milieu," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 165–94, at 168: she distinguishes between the "direct recitations of occult knowledge" and "a revelation [that] was framed" as a literary story.

[99] Most notably, the Mithraeum in Ostia, the wall paintings of which seem to present the different stages of initiation. See Giovanni Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia*, 2 vols. (Rome: Librerio dello Stato, 1954), 2, plates xix–xxv; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Weihegrade und Seelenlehre der Mithrasmysterien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 58–59, 62–65. See also Jaime A. Ezquerra, "Mithraism and Magic," in *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza*, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 519–49.

[100] Betz, "*Mithras Liturgy*," 139, referring to Dieterich's contribution to the study of the liturgy in *Mithrasliturgie*, 95.