

Chapter 6

Divine Inspiration, Possession and Contact with the Gods in Iamblichus' *De Mystериis*

Among the Neoplatonists, the most extensive, surviving discussion of the nature of divine inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός; ἐπίπνοια) and possession (θεοφορία; κατοκωχή), the process of consulting oracles, the nature and operation of oracles and, in a wider sense, the phenomenon of divination (μαντική) occurs in Iamblichus' *De Mystериis* 3.¹ As a response to Porphyry's request for a clear description of 'what happens in predicting the future' (τί τὸ γιγνόμενον ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ τοῦ μέλλοντος προγνώσει), Iamblichus' exposition centres on what causes divine inspiration and divination and their possible classification.² He offers a typology of diverse types of divination, categorising them into 'inspired' and 'inductive' modes. Using this typology, Iamblichus classifies oracles and certain types of dream divination (*oneiromancy*) as 'inspired' divination, but also discusses the nature and operation of various types of inductive divination, such as augury.³ By using this traditional Greek system of classification (of divination), he presents a view of 'inspired' modes of divination as caused by (at least in a partial sense) and based on states of divine inspiration and possession. Given that Iamblichus values 'inspired' modes of divination more than inductive types and views the former as the basis for the use of divination within theurgy, it seems important to undertake a comprehensive examination of Iamblichus' views of the states of divine inspiration and possession and the way in which these states fit in with his broader views on the nature of contact with the gods.⁴ Iamblichus identifies three cumulative types of contact with the gods – participation (μετουσία), communion (κοινωνία) and union (ἔνωσις) – which operate whenever communication is established between humans and the gods, such as in prayer and sacrifice, as well as in divine inspiration, possession and divination.⁵

¹ Iamblichus also discusses divination in *DM* 6 and 10: see Chapter 7, pp. 248–250; 264–266; 269–273.

² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.1 (99.9–10).

³ Oracles of Delphi, Didyma and Claros: *DM* 3.11; Dream Divination: 3.2–3; 'inductive' types of divination: 3.15–17.

⁴ Iamblichus' valuation of different modes of divination and the role of inspired divination within theurgy: see Chapter 7, pp. 240–243; 264–275.

⁵ Cf. Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.10–13); 5.26 (238.6). These three stages of contact or connection are also used by Iamblichus (*DM* 5.26 (237.12–238.5)) to characterise the three

Meanwhile, Iamblichus' views of divination are based on three key axioms, the first two of which are cosmological and metaphysical, and the third psychological: (1) the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the gods, the latter of which (that is, immanence) is characterised through the idiom of divine illumination; (2) a conceptual framework of a hierarchical, multiple schema of causation, with multiple causes conceptualised as operating *simultaneously*; and (3) a theory of the receptivity of the prophet(ess), ritual practitioner or theurgist, which is envisaged as being developable through ritual, ethical and intellectual means. The first and third axioms are particularly important for understanding Iamblichean views of divine inspiration and possession and will be examined in this chapter.⁶

The Relationship between Divine Inspiration, Possession and Oracles

Iamblichus' comments on divine inspiration and possession form the basis and foundation for his views of inspired divination, particularly oracles. This is because divine inspiration is the phenomenon experienced by the prophet(ess) (μάντις) which causes him or her to prophesy; in a direct sense, divine inspiration and possession inform μαντική.⁷ Iamblichus' claim that those who are inspired or possessed do not use their sense perception but instead have submitted their own life to the gods as a 'vehicle' (ὄχημα) or 'instrument' (ὄργανον) echoes Plato's *Ion*, which also postulates a view of divine inspiration as entailing total possession which overrides the sense perception of the initiate.⁸ Furthermore, Iamblichus' assertion that divine inspiration does not come from *daimones*, but from the gods, also alludes to Plato's *Ion*, where the same assertion is made against the common view that inspiration was solely daimonic.⁹ Iamblichus' concept of divine inspiration as total possession by the gods is also identical to the concept of 'prophetic madness' expressed in Plato's *Phaedrus*: it is sent directly by the gods as the 'greatest of goods' (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν) to humans and Plato gives the examples of the Pythia at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona, who were completely possessed by the god when they gave oracles.¹⁰ Like Plato, Iamblichus

cumulative stages of prayer – introductory (συναγωγόν), conjunctive (κοινωνίας) and that characterised by ineffable union (ἡ ἄρρητος ἐνωσις). Cf. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbelt (2003), 275, n. 355; Dillon (1973; repr. 2009), 407–411; Addey (2012), 133–150. On the inextricable links between sacrifice and prayer see *DM* 5.26 (237.6–10; 238.9–12; 239.10–240.8).

⁶ The second axiom will be examined in Chapter 7, pp. 240; 243–250.

⁷ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.27 (167.3–4); 3.8 (115.12–116.3); 3.10 (120.11–12); Sheppard (1993), 140, notes this important link between *DM* 3.4 and 3.11.

⁸ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (109.11); 3.1 (101.2–6); 3.7 (115.4–5); 3.11 (125.9); 3.14 (132.10); Shaw (1995), 8; Plato, *Ion* 534c–d.

⁹ Plato, *Ion* 536c; Iamblichus, *DM* 3.7 (114.7–8).

¹⁰ Plato, *Phdr.* 244a8–b3, trs. Fowler (1914; repr. 1982). Cf. Sheppard (1993), 139–140.

links the idea of total possession by the gods and divine inspiration with oracles and the oracular prophet(ess). *De Mysteriis* 3.4 (on divine inspiration) and 3.11 (on oracles) clearly demonstrate that Iamblichus' conception of inspiration is not only the same as Plato's, but also a traditional Greek conception.¹¹ Indeed, Iamblichus consciously links his discussion of inspiration with the preceding philosophical tradition by using various well-known phrases: Plato's *θεία μανία* (divine madness) and Heraclitus' *μαινομένῳ στόματι* (frenzied mouth).¹² Thus Iamblichus' views on divine inspiration, while appropriate and consistent for the theurgist, follow the Greek philosophical tradition, especially Plato's concept of 'prophetic madness' in the *Phaedrus* and the concept of 'divine inspiration' expressed in the *Ion*.

Preliminary Observations on Divine Inspiration and Possession

Iamblichus uses various terms to denote divine possession and inspiration, including *ἐνθουσιασμός*, *θεοφορία* and *ἐπίπνοια*, which are generally translated as 'divine inspiration', while *κατοκωχή* in the passive sense means 'held' or 'owned' and is akin to the English term 'possessed'. Iamblichus generally uses these terms interchangeably and does not treat 'divine possession' and 'inspiration' as distinct states.¹³ However, his claim that 'the manner of inspiration in its different alterations makes the divine possession also different' (*ὁ τρόπος τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν παραλλάττων ποιεῖ καὶ τὴν θεοφορίαν ἑτέραν*), suggests that these terms can sometimes be applied to the same phenomenon but as viewed from different perspectives: 'inspiration' (*ἐνθουσιασμός*) is sometimes applied specifically to the phenomenon as described from a transcendent perspective (that is, from above or 'top-down'; the pure illumination of the gods) while 'possession' (*θεοφορία*) can sometimes be applied specifically to the phenomenon as viewed from a human perspective (that is, from below or 'bottom-up'; the experience of the human ritual practitioner).¹⁴ Iamblichus also claims that cults of different deities produce different kinds of possession states and experiences.¹⁵ He includes an extensive discussion of the diverse types of possession produced in initiates by Dionysus, Pan and Cybele, as well as the possession of the Corybantian initiates.¹⁶

¹¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4; 3.11; Sheppard (1993), 140, 142; Dodds (1951), 68–75; 87, n. 41.

¹² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.8 (117.1), echoing Plato, *Phdr.* 244a; *DM* 3.8 (117.6), echoing Heraclitus, F92 d–k, which describes the Pythia. Cf. Sheppard (1993), 140–142.

¹³ Sheppard (1993), 138–139; Clarke (2001), 70, 86, n. 1.

¹⁴ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.6–7).

¹⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.3–7).

¹⁶ Dionysus: *DM* 3.9 (118.5–6), 3.10 (123.2–5); Pan: 3.10 (122.4–5); Cybele: 3.10 (121.11–122.3); the Korybantes: 3.10 (121.7–8). Iamblichus uses these cults as key

Once again, he alludes to Plato's account of divine inspiration in the *Ion*, which also refers to the Corybantian and Dionysiac initiates. Socrates argues that Ion is inspired solely by Homer (a case of poetic inspiration) and makes an analogy with the Corybantes: the Corybantian initiates are inspired by their god alone, just as Ion is inspired by Homer alone.¹⁷ Plato's statement implies that different deities produce diverse types of inspiration, a notion further elaborated by Iamblichus.

Divine inspiration and possession are examined initially from a theoretical perspective in 3.4–8.¹⁸ Iamblichus quotes Porphyry, who argues that those who are divinely inspired and apprehend the future often do so in a waking state, and so they act and operate with their sense-perception. He also suggests a contradiction, since at the same time they are not conscious of themselves as they were before, perhaps implying that they have an inferior state of awareness.¹⁹ Iamblichus' response emphasises that those who are truly possessed by the gods do not act according to sense-perception, and they are not conscious of themselves in the sense of using their personal knowledge or experience.²⁰ To prove his point, Iamblichus gives a list of 'evidence' or 'characteristic signs' (τὰ τεκμήρια) which demonstrate that those who are possessed do not utilise normal human consciousness or sensation. These signs involve anaesthesia and resistance to injury.²¹ Many of them are not burned even when fire is applied to them on account of their divine inspiration; those who are burned do not react 'because at this time they are not living the life of an animate being' (διότι οὐ τὴν τοῦ ζώου ζωὴν ζῶσι τηνικαῦτα) and many who are pierced with spits, struck on the back with axes or cut with knives do not feel it at all.²² Self-harming with knives was a well-known feature of the Corybantic rites, which Iamblichus saw as an exemplary cult of divine possession.²³ He ends his list of examples as follows:

Αἱ τε ἐνέργειαι αὐτῶν οὐδαμῶς εἰσιν ἀνθρώπιναι· τὰ τε γὰρ ἄβαστα βατὰ γίγνεται θεοφορούμενα, καὶ εἰς πῦρ φέρονται καὶ πῦρ διαπορεύονται καὶ ποταμούς διαπερῶσιν, ὥσπερ ἡ ἐν Κασταβάλλοις ἰέρεια. Ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων δείκνυται ὡς οὐ παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς

examples of different types of possession, rather than postulating that they constitute an exhaustive account, because Porphyry had asked specifically about these cults (although he asked about Sabazios, whom Iamblichus equates with Dionysus): Porphyry, *Letter to Anebo* in Iamblichus, *DM* 3.9 (117.10–118.1).

¹⁷ Plato, *Ion* 536c.

¹⁸ Cf. Sheppard (1993), 138–143, for a comprehensive discussion of *DM* 3.4–8.

¹⁹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (109.6–9).

²⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (109.1–110.3).

²¹ Cf. Clarke (2001), 77, who cites modern psychological reports which detail similar phenomena.

²² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (110.4–9). Cf. Shaw (1995), 82–83; Clarke (2001), 77.

²³ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.9 (117.10–118.1); 3.10 (121.7–8); Clarke (2001), 77.

ἐνθουσιῶντες, καὶ ὅτι οὔτε τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην οὔτε τὴν τοῦ ζώου ζῶν ζῶσι, κατ' αἰσθησιν ἢ ὁρμήν, ἄλλην δέ τινα θειοτέραν ζῶν ἀνταλλάσσονται, ἀφ' ἧς ἐπιπνέονται καὶ ἀφ' ἧς τελῶς κατέχονται.

Their actions are in no way human, because what is inaccessible becomes accessible under divine possession: they cast themselves into fire and they walk through fire, and they walk over rivers like the priestess at Kastabala. From these examples it is clear that those who are inspired have no consciousness of themselves, and they lead neither the life of a human being nor of a living animal so far as concerns sensation or appetite, but they exchange their life for another more divine life, by which they are inspired, and by which they are completely possessed.²⁴

Iamblichus' concept of divine inspiration rests on two central points: (1) the recipient is wholly possessed by the gods and (2) consequently, he or she does not act or experience in a human manner using sense perception.²⁵ Does this mean that the inspired individual has no consciousness at all, according to Iamblichus? A common conception in anthropological scholarship is that all cases of possession necessitate the complete expulsion of the host individual out of their own body by a wholly alien agency.²⁶ According to Iamblichus, it is not the case that the recipient has no consciousness at all, though: the central point is that the inspired individual is not conscious of anything else *except the gods*.²⁷ As Clarke has noted, 'the human individual is eclipsed, not annihilated, by the divine force.'²⁸ Iamblichus repeatedly emphasises the fact that those who are possessed exchange their human life for a divine life.²⁹ According to Iamblichus, inspiration is emphatically not a transport of the mind, for the mind is not carried or swept away during the experience of true possession.³⁰ Rather the human individual consciousness is

²⁴ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (110.9–11.2). Cf. *DM* 3.6 (113.5–114.2); Shaw (1995), 82–83.

²⁵ Cf. Clarke (2001), 77.

²⁶ Cf. for example, De Heusch (1962), 129–133; Lewis (1971; repr. 2003), 40.

²⁷ Cf. Iamblichus, *DM* 1.10 (34.6–35.6), which examines 'the least of divine beings', the soul pure from contact with body which does not 'have need of the experiences which control sense-perception, for it is not at all confined within a body' (οὐδὲ τῶν προηγούμενων τῆς αἰσθήσεως παθημάτων προσδεῖται, οὐδὲ γὰρ ὅλως ἐν σώματι κατέχεται...).

²⁸ Clarke (2001), 83.

²⁹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (109.10–13; 110.9–111.2). Cf. also 8.7 (270.10–14); 8.8 (272.1–4); Shaw (1998), 248.

³⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.7 (114.5–8): 'So, then, it [divine possession] is falsely believed to be a transport of the mind by daemonic inspiration. For the human intellect is neither carried away if it is really possessed, nor does inspiration come from daemons, but from the gods.' (Φορὰ μὲν οὖν τῆς διανοίας μετὰ δαιμονίας ἐπιπνοίας ψευδῶς δοξάζεται. Οὔτε γὰρ ἡ διάνοια ἢ ἀνθρωπίνη φέρεται, εἰ γε ὄντως κατέχεται, οὔτε δαιμόνων, θεῶν δὲ γίγνεται ἐπίπνοια.).

replaced or enhanced by a kind of super consciousness. Iamblichus implies that the degree of connection to or contact with the god, as well as the extent to which the prophet(ess) or theurgist remembers the possession experience, depends partially on their cultivation of their receptivity (ἐπιτηδεύτης). Iamblichus' specific conceptions of this process will be explored further below.

Possession and Ecstatic Trance

Many scholars now associate possession states with ecstatic trance. Indeed, this was often thought to be the case in Graeco-Roman religious tradition and Iamblichus too accords a role to ecstasy in possession states, but he is keen to emphasise that divine possession is not simply the same as ecstasy (ἔκστασις):

Ἄλλ' οὐδ' ἔκστασις ἀπλῶς οὕτως ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ἀναγωγὴ καὶ μετάστασις, ἥ δὲ παραφορὰ καὶ ἔκστασις ἐμφαίνει καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον ἀνατροπὴν. Ἐτι τοίνυν ὁ τοῦτο ἀποφαινόμενος λέγει μὲν τι περὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων περὶ τοὺς ἐνθουσιῶντας, οὐ μέντοι τὸ προηγούμενον ἀναδιδάσκει. Ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο τὸ κατέχεσθαι ὅλους αὐτοὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ θείου, ὃ ἐπακολουθεῖ ὕστερον καὶ τὸ ἐξίστασθαι.

Yet it [i.e. divine possession] is not even ecstasy pure and simple, but an exaltation and transference to what is superior, whereas frenzy and ecstasy actually reveal a perversion toward what is inferior. Still more, the one who represents this ecstasy says something about the incidental feature of those who are inspired, but does not put his finger on the main point. *That is, they themselves are wholly possessed by the divine, the consequence of which is ecstasy.* [my emphasis]³¹

Iamblichus is not simply opposing inspiration to ecstasy, but rather saying that ecstasy is only a symptom and consequence of possession, not proof of its occurrence, and may sometimes occur through human actions.³² Thus, in Iamblichus' schema, an individual exhibiting the traits commonly conceived as 'ecstasy' (ἔκστασις) could be in a state of divine possession, but they could alternatively be experiencing a state such as drunkenness or madness. Ecstasy is thus not a defining characteristic of possession, but only a symptom of possession in some cases. This is reinforced by Iamblichus' explicit rejection of the idea that possession is identical or similar to the ecstatic state caused by drunkenness or madness: the latter states are purely human and they divert the human to inferior

³¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.7 (114.8–13).

³² Shaw (1998), 249–250; Clarke (2001), 75.

states which are contrary to nature, whereas divine possession is superior to nature and leads the human being to be united with divine entities which are superior.³³

Simultaneous Divine Descent and Human Ascent

Iamblichus' discussion of divine possession and inspiration is paradoxical: the human soul rises to the gods while *simultaneously* the gods descend to the human soul to possess it. Iamblichus argues that divine possession involves the human agent subsuming their consciousness to that of the gods, so that their soul is possessed by the divine. Thus the human soul, while possessed, sees through the eyes of a deity. Crucially, however, this is only possible because the soul contains a pre-ontological connection to the divine: Iamblichus states 'earthly things, possessing their being in virtue of the totalities of the gods, whenever they come to be ready for participation in the divine, straight away find the gods pre-existing in it prior to their own proper essence' (τὰ δ' ἐπὶ γῆς ἐν τοῖς πληρώμασι τῶν θεῶν ἔχοντα τὸ εἶναι, ὁπόταν ἐπιτήδεια πρὸς τὴν θείαν μετοχὴν γένηται, εὐθὺς ἔχει πρὸ τῆς οἰκείας ἑαυτῶν οὐσίας προϋπάρχοντας ἐν αὐτῇ τοὺς θεοὺς).³⁴ Iamblichus is not generally explicit regarding the simultaneous ascent of the soul with the descent of the gods in possession rituals. This is because he is so concerned to emphasise the divine as the ultimate and primary cause of divine possession.³⁵ However, as we have seen, he delineates some of the key features of possession in explicit contrast to ecstatic states caused by drunkenness and madness. He maintains that:

Δεῖ τοίνυν ἐξ ἀρχῆς διελέσθαι διχῇ τὰ εἶδη τῆς ἐκστάσεως... καὶ τὰ μὲν παρὰ φύσιν, τὰ δ' ὑπὲρ τὴν φύσιν· καὶ τὰ μὲν καταγωγὰ ψυχῆς, τὰ δ' ἀναγωγὰ. καὶ τὰ μὲν διίστησιν ἔξω παντάπασιν τῆς θείας μοίρας, τὰ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν συνάπτει.

It is thus necessary initially to distinguish two forms of ecstasy ... one is contrary to nature [i.e. ecstatic states caused by drunkenness and madness], the other superior to nature [i.e. divine possession]; one causes the descent of the soul, *the*

³³ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.25 (158.6–159.4); Shaw (1995), 234–235; (2003a), 56–57, makes the important observation that ὑπερφύης is accurately translated as “supernatural”, but the Iamblichean supernatural should not be confused with its later Christian expression. As a Pythagorean, Iamblichus' ὑπερφύης was never removed from nature but was invisibly present in it as its principle. Indeed, material nature is rooted in the immaterial even as it unfolds its powers into temporal reality' (57, n. 19).

³⁴ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.8 (29.1–3).

³⁵ Cf. Chapter 7, pp. 240–241.

*other its ascent; and one separates it [i.e. the soul] wholly apart from participation in the divine, while the other unites it to it [my emphasis].*³⁶

It may be instructive to examine how this paradoxical situation of simultaneous divine descent and human ascent occurs, according to Iamblichus. The philosopher describes states of divine possession which occur in cults where musical instruments (such as pipes, cymbals and tambourines) are used to encourage or induce a state of receptivity in the human being. In explaining the reasons for the use of music in these possession rituals, Iamblichus maintains that the harmony and rhythm of the music which induce the state of possession do not primarily belong to the soul. Rather, they are a reflection of the divine harmony; they are infused and permeated with divinity. The soul bears a memory of the divine harmony which it heard before incarnating in a human body; in this sense, the soul is closely allied with the divine harmony.³⁷ Iamblichus' theory is based on the Platonic theory of Recollection: Plato had discussed the way in which the human soul travelled in the train of the gods and glimpsed the divine realm before descending into a body in the physical world.³⁸ While Iamblichus is concerned to emphasise the ultimate importance of the divine as the primary cause of the possession, the soul's memory of the divine harmony and its receptivity to the trace of the divine harmony (τὸ θεῖον ἵχνος τῆς ἁρμονίας) act as an 'ascent' allowing the soul to receive the inspiration of the deity.

Divine Descent and Illumination

It is clear that Iamblichus' conception of the 'descent' of the divine is not to be taken literally as implying a descent in physical, spatial terms. Rather, he conceptualises the divine as giving off emanations which eternally illuminate the whole of the physical world with no diminution. This notion was common to Neoplatonist philosophers. They compared this process to the light of the sun whose rays light up external phenomena without any kind of detracting.³⁹ This idea clarifies Iamblichus' frequent descriptions of divine manifestation and power in terms of illumination. John Finamore notes that, 'Iamblichus defends the view that although the gods are superior to us and exist separately, they illuminate this realm with their light. It is this light that allows the gods' presence in this lower world.'⁴⁰ For Iamblichus then, the divine illuminates the whole world perpetually: *divine illumination is the idiom through which Iamblichus iterates the gods' immanence.*

³⁶ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.25 (158.8–9; 159.2–4).

³⁷ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.9 (120.3–10). Cf. also Iamblichus, *VP* 15.64–66.

³⁸ Plato, *Phdr.* 250b–251a; *Resp.* 402a.

³⁹ Cf. Iamblichus, *DM* 1.9 (30.9–31.8); Johnston (2008), 47.

⁴⁰ Finamore (1999), 87. Cf. also Johnston (2008), 47, and especially Finamore (1993), 55–64.

The divine is primarily located in the divine realm (and is thus transcendent) but is simultaneously manifested throughout the physical cosmos. The idea of the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the gods forms the central foundation of Iamblichus' cosmology and religious conceptions:

οὔτε γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ κρατοῦνται ἐν τισι τοῦ κόσμου μέρεσιν, οὔτε τὰ περὶ γῆν ἄμοιρα αὐτῶν καθέστηκεν. Ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν κρείττονες ἐν αὐτῷ, ὥς ὑπὸ μηδενὸς περιέχονται, περιέχουσι πάντα ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.

For neither is it the case that the gods are confined to certain parts of the cosmos, nor is the earthly realm devoid of them. On the contrary, it is true of the superior beings in it that, even as they are not contained by anything, so they contain everything within themselves ...⁴¹

According to the philosopher, the gods are transcendent in a causal and ontological sense: they exist in a superior, eternal realm and so do not 'move' from one location to another, as a partial and temporal being such as a human soul does. However, through their causal superiority and power, the gods are also immanent throughout the lower world, the material cosmos, through their divine illumination which permeates all things, even material objects.⁴² This notion of divine illumination is dependent upon the concepts of divine love (θεία φιλία) and sympathy (συμπάθεια) and encapsulates the idea of an animated cosmos, permeated by providential divinity. The 'descent' of the divine refers to this process of emanation or illumination and also implicitly refers to the superiority of the divine in a causal sense. Iamblichus frequently states that divine illumination and divination comes from 'without' (ἔξωθεν): this refers to the gods' transcendence and causal power rather than to the outside world.⁴³

Iamblichus consistently maintains that the divine illumination which enables theurgic divination and ascent is caused by and sent from the gods as an expression of their divine will and love.⁴⁴ Because of divine will, love and providence, the gods unceasingly shed their illumination on humans and orchestrate the union of theurgists with the divine; this union is considered to be a gift of the gods.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.8 (28.11–29.1).

⁴² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.12 (128.8–129.11). Cf. also 1.8 (27.7–28.10); 1.9 (31.9–32.6); 5.23 (232.9–12).

⁴³ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.23 (155.12–156.2).

⁴⁴ *DM* 1.12 (40.14–41.8). Cf. also 3.14 (132.9–133.3; 134.10–15); 5.9 (209.9–11).

⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.18 (143.14–144.3); 3.20 (149.4–150.2); 3.23 (156.1–2); 4.1 (181.6–9); 5.9 (209.9–11); 5.10 (211.10–14); 5.25 (236.1–8); 5.26 (238.6–9; 240.3–6). Cf. *VP* 1.1–2 on Pythagorean philosophy as a gift of the gods which can only be understood by humans with the assistance of the gods; Shaw (1995), 51; 92–93; 141; Finamore (1999), 87; 90; Feichtinger (2003), 133.

In response to Porphyry's questions regarding the role of the gods within the operation of divination, Iamblichus repeatedly insists that the divine power of illumination is never controlled by human beings, but is *ultimately* caused by the goodness of the gods:

Ἐπειτα ἀπορεῖς εἰ ἄχρῃ τοσούτου κατὰγεται εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν ἀνθρώπων τὸ θεῖον ὥς μὴ ὀκνεῖν τινὰς καὶ ἀλφριτομάντεις εἶναι. Τὸ δὲ οὐ καλῶς ὑπολαμβάνεις, τὴν περιουσίαν τῆς δυνάμεως τῶν θεῶν καὶ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν ἀγαθότητα καὶ τὴν πάντα περιέχουσαν αἰτίαν κηδεμονίαν τε ἡμῶν καὶ προστασίαν ὑπηρεσίαν ἐπονομάζων. Καὶ ἔτι ἀγνοεῖς τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἐνεργείας, ὥστε οὐ καθέλκεται οὔτε ἐπιστρέφεται οὗτος εἰς ἡμᾶς, χωριστὸς δὲ προηγεῖται καὶ δίδωσι μὲν τοῖς μετέχουσιν ἑαυτόν, αὐτὸς δὲ οὔτε ἐξίσταται ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε ἐλάττων γίγνεται οὔθ' ὑπηρετεῖ τοῖς μετέχουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον πᾶσιν ὑπηρετοῦσι προσχρῆται.

Then you raise the question whether the divine is brought down for the service of human beings, to the extent that it does not hesitate even to take on the role of those who divine with barley meal. But you don't properly understand what you call 'service' when applying this word to the overwhelming power of the gods, and their superabundant goodness, and their all-encompassing responsibility, their care and patronage. Moreover, you ignore the manner of their activity, that this is neither drawn down nor turned toward us, but, being transcendent, it guides and gives itself to its participants; and is neither altered in itself nor made less, nor is it subservient to its participants, but, on the contrary, it makes use of all that is subservient to it.⁴⁶

Iamblichus' view of the gods and their divine will is paradoxical: their divine illumination is constant and will always manifest itself if the appropriate conditions and receptivity are in place, yet simultaneously it is, in an ontological and causal sense, *superior* to necessity and is viewed as encompassing a spontaneous and creative graciousness and benevolence.⁴⁷ This reflects Iamblichus' paradoxical notion that the gods are both transcendent (and thus superior to necessity) and immanent (through their benevolence, will and love) throughout the cosmos, simultaneously.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.17 (139.8–140.4).

⁴⁷ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.4 (11.12–12.5); 1.8 (27.7–28.3); 1.12 (40.14–41.8); 1.14 (44.8–45.6); 3.18 (145.6–146.4); 3.19 (146.5–9; 147.3–11); 3.23 (155.10–156.2); 3.31 (176.3–6); Feichtinger (2003), 134.

⁴⁸ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.8 (27.7–29.7); 1.9 (29.13–30.2); 5.23 (232.11–12; 233.2–8); Shaw (1995), 29–30, n. 6; Van Liefferinge (1999), 82–85; Struck (2004), 220; George (2005), 293, n. 33.

Iamblichus' terminology of divine illumination and radiance is applied to both dream divination and oracles, showing a common mode of receiving the divine in different types of inspired divination. In his account of dream divination, Iamblichus states:

Ἄλλοτε δὲ φωτὸς ἐπιλάμπαντος λαμπροῦ καὶ ἡρεμαίου κατέχεται μὲν ἡ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὄψις καὶ συμμύει τε, ἀναπεπταμένη οὕσα πρότερον· αἱ δ' ἄλλαι αἰσθήσεις διεγρηγερμέναι τυγχάνουσι, καὶ συναισθάνονται πῶς εἰς τὸ φῶς οἱ θεοὶ ἐκφαίνονται, ὅσα τε λέγουσιν ἀκούουσι καὶ ὅσα δρῶσιν ἴσασι παρακολουθοῦσαι.

At other times, however, when a light shines brightly and peacefully, not only is the sight of the eye possessed, but closed up after previously being quite open. And the other senses are awake and consciously aware of how the gods shine forth in the light, and with a clear understanding they both hear what they say, and know what they do.⁴⁹

The terminology of light and illumination utilised by Iamblichus in his description of this type of divine dream bears striking similarities to his description of the operation of the Oracles at Claros and Delphi.⁵⁰ In Iamblichus' account of the oracular procedure at Claros, the prophet drinks water from a spring in a subterranean chamber, undergoes various ritual preparations and then delivers his oracles. Iamblichus asserts that the water has oracular power, but refutes the idea that some prophetic spirit passes through the water. Rather the divine illuminates the spring, thus filling it with prophetic power.⁵¹ He also maintains the prophet's drinking of the water from the spring and other ritual preparations purify the soul-vehicle and make it receptive, allowing it to receive the divine illumination fully.⁵² Divine illumination emanates from the god's ethereal vehicle to the human's ethereal soul vehicle, which is wholly taken over by the gods and the oracular message is pictured in the soul's imagination: these 'pictures' or images come from the gods; thus, divine illumination irradiates the vehicle, causing divinely inspired images in it.⁵³ Iamblichus concludes by applying the terminology of divine illumination to the soul of the prophet: 'he has the inspiration of the god illuminating the pure sanctuary of his own soul, and providing for it an unhindered divine possession, and a perfect and unimpeded presence' (... εἰς καθαρὰν ἔδραν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς ἐλλάμπουσιν ἔχει τὴν τοῦ

⁴⁹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.2 (104.4–8).

⁵⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11; Finamore (1993), 58–59.

⁵¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (124.8–125.3); Finamore (1993), 58–59.

⁵² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (125.3–6); Finamore (1985); Addey (2013a), 149–167.

⁵³ Finamore (1999), 89–93; Shaw (1995), 87; Addey (2013a), 155–156..

θεοῦ ἐπίπνοιαν, ἀκώλυτόν τε αὐτῇ παρέχει τὴν κατοκωχὴν καὶ τὴν παρουσίαν τελείαν ἀνεμπόδιστον).⁵⁴ The terminology of divine illumination is similarly utilised by Iamblichus in his discussion of the prophetess at Delphi: his account of the Pythia as, ‘illuminated by the ray of divine fire’ (ἀπό τε τῆς τοῦ θείου πυρός ἀκτῖνος καταυγάζεται) as the fiery spirit rises from the aperture and envelops her entirely in a circle, filling her with divine brightness, is remarkably similar to the description of the spirit which encircles the dreamer and the light which shines brightly on the dreamer.⁵⁵ In a similar sense, Iamblichus comments that the woman at Branchidae, the prophetess at the Oracle of Didyma, is ‘filled by the divine radiance’ (πληροῦται τῆς θείας αὐγῆς).⁵⁶ The references to ‘divine radiance’ and the encircling of the prophet or dreamer by the divine illumination refer to the soul-vehicle, which was thought to be made spherical through its contact with the gods.⁵⁷

Human Ascent and Receptivity (ἐπιτηδεσιότης)

In a similar sense to divine descent, the ‘ascent’ of the soul was clearly not conceptualised by Iamblichus in spatial, physical terms but as an ‘abstract’ ascent of the soul to its own causal origins through its receptivity (ἐπιτηδεσιότης); in other words, the ascent refers to an *ascent of consciousness to the gods*. Speaking of the divinatory power of the gods, Iamblichus maintains that ‘existing itself prior to the totality of things, it is sufficient, by its own separateness, to fill all things to the extent that each is able to share in it’ (αὐτὴ μέντοι πρὸ τῶν ὅλων προϋπάρχουσα αὐτῷ τῷ χωριστῷ ἑαυτῆς ἱκανὴ γέγονεν ἀποπληρῶσαι πάντα, καθ’ ὅσον ἕκαστα δύνανται αὐτῆς μετέχειν).⁵⁸ The first part of this statement emphasises the causal superiority and power of the gods, while the latter part (‘the extent that each is able to share in it’) refers to the ‘receptivity’ or ‘suitability’ which enables the prophet(ess) or theurgist to share in divine power.⁵⁹ Through ritual, intellectual and moral means, the human being can increase the receptivity of his or her soul to these illuminations so that they can become possessed by a deity.⁶⁰ Iamblichus’ account of oracles includes an examination of the ritual preparations and procedures which the prophet(ess) undergoes in order to increase his or her receptivity to divine illumination so that he or she can become possessed and utter the oracles of the god: the prophet at Claros purifies himself through drinking

⁵⁴ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (126.1–3), trs. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell (2003), with emendations.

⁵⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (126.8–12); 3.2 (103.11–104.5).

⁵⁶ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (127.5).

⁵⁷ Iamblichus, *In. Tim.* F49; Shaw (1995), 89–92; Addey (2013a), 152–153.

⁵⁸ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.12 (129.9–11).

⁵⁹ On receptivity, cf. Chapter 1, pp. 26–28.

⁶⁰ Shaw (1995), 84–87; Addey (2013b), 7–24.

the water from the spring, withdrawal to solitary places, meditation and fasting, while the prophetess at Didyma undergoes ritual bathing, fasting for three days and withdrawal and meditation in the innermost sanctuaries of the temple.⁶¹ Elsewhere, Iamblichus seems to suggest that different levels of ascent are involved in different cases of divine possession:

Ἡ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, ἢ ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα, ἢ κοινὴν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν τῆς ἐσχάτης δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχομεν, ποτὲ δ' αὖ τῆς μέσης, ἐνίοτε δὲ τῆς πρώτης· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν μετουσία ψιλὴ γίγνεται, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ κοινωνία, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἕνωσις...

For either the god possesses us, or we become wholly the god's property, or we exercise our activity in common with him. And sometimes we share in the god's lowest power, sometimes in his intermediate, and sometimes in his primary power. And sometimes there is a mere participation, sometimes a communion, and sometimes even a union ...⁶²

According to Iamblichus' schema, different states of divine possession can involve: participation sharing in the god's lowest power, communion sharing in the god's intermediate power and union sharing in the god's primary power. The level of ascent involved in these types of possession seems to be partially dependent upon the receptivity of the possessed human being: the greater the capacity or receptivity of the human being, the greater the level of ascent. However, participation, communion and union are *all* conceived as types of ascent to the divine within a continuum of ascent, conceptualised philosophically as reversion to the causal origin of the human being.

The soul is seen as the receptacle of the gods, a conception which seems similar to Mary Keller's notion of the 'instrumental agency' of the possessed.⁶³

⁶¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (125.11–126.3; 127.10–13). At 125.4–6, Iamblichus states that the prophet's drinking of the water from the oracular spring 'bestows the receptivity and purification of the luminous spirit in us, through which we are able to receive the god' (αὕτη μὲν ἐπιτηδεύουσα μόνον καὶ ἀποκάθαρσιν τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν αὐγοειδοῦς πνεύματος ἐμποιεῖ, δι' ἣν δυνατοὶ γιγνόμεθα χωρεῖν τὸν θεόν). Cf. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbelt (2003), 147, n. 200: 'the luminous spirit within us' refers to the soul vehicle; Finamore (1985), 128–129.

⁶² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.7–11).

⁶³ Iamblichus refers to the 'divine element of the soul' (which acts as a receptacle for the gods) at *DM* 1.15 (46.9); 5.26 (239.6); 7.4 (255.13–256.2); 8.7 (269.11–13; 270.6–14). The 'One of the soul' (the same pre-ontological connection with the divine): Iamblichus, *In Phaedr.* F6; Dillon (1973, repr. 2009), 253. The notion of instrumental agency: Keller (2002) primarily focuses on the role of women in possession cults in postcolonial contexts,

Keller maintains that instrumentality in possession states refers to the power of receptivity, comparable metaphorically to a hammer, flute or horse that is wielded, played or mounted, while agency implies action as well as 'a place where exchanges occur'.⁶⁴ Iamblichus too focuses on the receptivity of the possessed, describing them as an 'instrument' (ὄργανα) and 'vehicle' (ὄργανον) of the gods.⁶⁵ Divine possession for Iamblichus is not a matter of a totally alien agency overcoming its human victim. Rather, it is conceptualised as a phenomenon involving a transcendent and simultaneously immanent deity working *through* the soul of the possessed. The deity is conceived as being already linked to the human soul causally and pre-ontologically and so the possession experience is seen as enhancing and transforming the soul. Thus, receptivity to the divine is seen as enhancing the human being and is a source of power.⁶⁶ This conceptualisation of divine possession can be more fully explored using Keller's notion of instrumental agency, since the notion of instrumentality entails a far more subtle conception of the agency of the possessed individual: 'the instrumental designation indicates that the subject exercises a unique type of agency that is neither autonomous nor passive.'⁶⁷ Keller maintains that 'the concept of instrumental agency serves to highlight the way that receptivity has often been evaluated as an extremely powerful capacity among possession traditions. Rather than coding receptivity negatively as a type of passivity, instrumental agency accounts for this revaluation; one's receptivity marks a developable sacred space.'⁶⁸ This notion of instrumental agency allows us to appreciate the nuances of Iamblichus' account of divine possession and to reassess his conceptualisation of the receptivity (ἐπιτηδεύουσι) of the possessed as a developable sacred space – a 'space' where the individual can develop his or her discipline and contemplation using intellectual, ritual and moral means to increase his or her capacity to receive the divine. Thus possession itself is reassessed as a sacred space which necessarily entails the involvement of both divine and

but many of her theoretical observations on conceptions of agency in spirit possession are relevant to scholarship on divine possession and divination in ancient religious contexts. Cf. also Addey (2013b), 7–24.

⁶⁴ Keller (2002), 9–10.

⁶⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.4 (109.11); 3.1 (101.2–6); 3.7 (115.4–5); 3.11 (125.9); 3.14 (132.10).

⁶⁶ Iamblichus, *DM* 1.8 (29.1–3); 1.12 (41.9–13); 3.2 (105.5–8); 3.5 (111.11–13); 3.31 (179.3–8); 4.2 (184.1–6); 4.3 (185.9–12). Cf especially *DM* 3.25 (158.9–159.4): divine possession 'furnishes goods more precious than human good sense' and causes the ascent of the soul by uniting it to participation in the divine; 3.25 (159.10–11): 'divine possession is a perfection and deliverance of the soul' (ἡ δὲ θεοφορία τελειότης καὶ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς).

⁶⁷ Keller (2002), 77.

⁶⁸ Keller (2002), 82.

human agency.⁶⁹ While Iamblichus makes it clear that the divine agency is hierarchically superior (as the ultimate and primary cause), human agency is marked by a subtle (yet crucial) blend of humbleness or openness *and* activity: receptivity has to be developed through assimilation to the divine in ethical, ritual and intellectual spheres.⁷⁰

Levels of Ascent and Connection to the Gods: Participation, Communion and Union in Dream Divination (*oneiromancy*) and Oracles

Iamblichus claims that divine possession and inspiration can involve three cumulative stages or types of connection to the gods: what exactly are the distinguishing features of (and differences between) participation (*μετουσία*), communion (*κοινωνία*) and union (*ἔνωσις*)?⁷¹ These cumulative stages of ascent are clearly linked with the prophet(ess)'s receptivity, but can we be more specific about them? Firstly, the stages of connection correlate with the type of possession experience: participation involves the god completely possessing the prophet(ess) (*ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει*), communion involves the prophet(ess) becoming 'wholly of the god' (*ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα*), while 'union' involves exercising 'our activity in common with him [i.e. the god]' (*κοινὴν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν*).⁷² Iamblichus' characterisation of the state of 'union' (*ἔνωσις*) offers a vital clue: 'exercising our activity' in common with the god implies divine work (theurgy) and suggests the attainment of vision of intelligible reality, since truth co-exists 'in essence' with the gods because it is based in the intelligible realm. This suggests that the levels of contact and ascent are connected, at least partially, with the individual soul's memory of intelligible reality.⁷³ Yet

⁶⁹ Cf. *DM* 5.23 (232.5–7) on the conjunction of divine causal agencies and human preparations aligning themselves with the former in the operation of efficacious sacrifices which confer great benefits, a statement which encapsulates Iamblichus' attitude towards all efficacious types of ritual.

⁷⁰ The humbleness and openness which form a vital component of receptivity are characterised by Iamblichus as 'consciousness of our nothingness' (*ἡ συναίσθησις τῆς περὶ ἑαυτοὺς οὐδενείας*) in comparison with the gods which naturally makes humans turn to prayers to the gods: *DM* 1.15 (47.13–48.3). Cf. Feichtinger (2003), 123–160; Shaw (1995), 111–112.

⁷¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.9–11). These three stages of contact with the gods which characterise the possession experience parallel the three cumulative stages of prayer set out at *DM* 5.26 (237.12–238.5). Cf. pp. 215–216, n. 5 above.

⁷² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.5 (111.7–9).

⁷³ A vital caveat must be mentioned: I am not suggesting that theurgy was conceived as simply dependent upon intellectual thought nor that possession states are caused by intellectual thought, both of which Iamblichus repeatedly denies. Rather, possession

this type of memory is memory in a Platonic sense (that is, memory of the eternal realities experienced before the first descent into the body) which draws on (and develops) the theory of Recollection.⁷⁴ Those ritual practitioners who have trained their consciousness and contemplated intelligible reality while simultaneously developing their receptivity (through ethical and ritual means) may attain a greater level of connection to the gods through their assimilation to the divine vision and are more likely to *remember* their possession experience because of their *conscious* familiarity with the intelligible world of noetic reality. Consequently, it seems that the levels of ascent also correlate with the prophet(ess)'s or theurgist's *memory* of the possession experience: the degree to which they *remember* the prophetic visions experienced during the possession states depends on whether they experience participation, communion or union. Iamblichus implies that participation involves experiencing divine consciousness but not remembering the experience, while communion and union imply increasing familiarity and affinity

states are conceptualised as the individual receiving divine illumination and experiencing a simultaneous ascent of consciousness, to a greater or lesser degree. Yet intellectual contemplation is a vital prerequisite for theurgy and an important component of the individual's receptivity; thus, repeated and habitual contemplation of intelligible reality (if practised alongside ritual and ethical practices which allow the cultivation of receptivity) is conceived as potentially enabling an affinity or familiarity with intelligible reality which aids memory of subsequent visions attained through divinatory experiences: see below for an examination of Iamblichus' account of the role of intellectual activity and consciousness in dream divination in *DM* 3.2–3.3.

⁷⁴ There may be an important parallel with the salvific function of Memory (Mnemosyne) in the tradition represented by the Orphic gold tablets here: Pinchard (2012), 1, states: 'Authentic Orphism may be defined as the cultural process ... that leads from the positive valuation of external memory concerning epic or theogonic old patterns ... towards the positive valuation of the internal memory which is conceived of as bringing the philosopher's soul in touch with eternal realities' and 'Plato goes one step further in the identification between the one who remembers and the object that is remembered in the salvific remembrance. Whereas in the gold tablets Mnemosyne's water is for the initiate the only means to reach his own divine centre, the Platonic *anamnêsis* is already the real immortality itself. Henceforth the internal life of the soul is an aspect of intellectual activity ... the salvation is somehow obtained through remembering memory ... The act of remembering is from now on the aim as well as the means, the goal as well as the road. For the intelligible Forms stand inside the remembering intellect ... The divine part of the soul, the intellect, is not something which can accidentally remember, but is the remembering itself. In this case the subject and its act are not to be separated ... The *noesis* must be a circular movement because the intelligible Forms which the intellect can grasp stand at the centre of the soul since its origin. So the act through which the intellect returns to itself is its very essence. *Anamnêsis* is nothing less than such a return, such a connection between end and beginning' (15).

with, and consequently memory of, the divine visions experienced during the possession state.

This characteristic of connection with the gods is implied in Iamblichus' comments regarding a difference in the level of conscious awareness between the dreamer and the oracular prophet(ess). The dreamer's senses (although his physical eyes are closed) are consciously aware of how the gods shine forth in their light, and he or she has a clear understanding of what the gods say and do.⁷⁵ According to Iamblichus, certain dreamers have an even higher level of conscious awareness where their intellect (νοῦς) is engaged:

Τελειότερον δ' ἔτι τοῦδε θεωρεῖται, ἡνίκα ἂν καὶ ἡ ὄψις βλέπῃ καὶ ὁ νοῦς ἐρρωμένος ἐπακολουθῇ τοῖς δρωμένοις, κίνησίς τε τῶν θεωρούντων συνυπάρχῃ.

This is observed even more fully when the sight is active and also the mind (νοῦς), with full vigour, understands the things done, and there is a response at the same time in those observing.⁷⁶

Since Iamblichus states that the mind has 'full vigour' (ὁ νοῦς ἐρρωμένος), presumably 'active sight' (ἡ ὄψις βλέπῃ) has a metaphorical sense, referring to the dreamer's wisdom. Iamblichus is clearly alluding to the theurgist, since the idea of the mind of having full vigour is reminiscent of the instructions given to the theurgist in the *Chaldean Oracles*.⁷⁷ It is the theurgist who would comprehend the 'things done' (τοῖς δρωμένοις) or, in other words, the process of receiving a god-sent dream. In other words, the philosopher-theurgist is fully aware and fully understands the divinatory dream. The understanding of the philosopher-theurgist dreamer will be discussed further below.

When Iamblichus turns to his description of Oracles, he comments on the consciousness of the prophet of Claros:

...χρηῖται ὡς ὀργάνῳ τῷ προφήτῃ οὔτε ἑαυτοῦ ὄντι οὔτε παρακολουθοῦντι οὐδὲν οἷς λέγει ἢ ὅπου γῆς ἐστίν· ὥστε καὶ μετὰ τὴν χρησμοδίαν μόγις ποτὲ ἑαυτὸν λαμβάνει·

... [the god] uses the prophet as an instrument while he is neither himself nor has any consciousness of what he says or where on earth he is, so that even after prophesying, he sometimes scarcely gets control of himself.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.2 (104.4–10). Cf. Finamore (1998), 161.

⁷⁶ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.2 (104.8–10).

⁷⁷ *Chald. Or.* F1; F2.

⁷⁸ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (125.9–11).

Clearly there is a marked difference between the ecstatic trance of the oracular prophet and the full and clear understanding of the dreamer, in Iamblichus' view. The prophet at Claros does not remember and is not conscious of his prophetic utterances while experiencing divine inspiration; this implies that his connection to the god is conceived as 'participation' (μετουσία). The extent to which Iamblichus' comments on the consciousness of the prophet of Claros are applicable to all oracular prophets and prophetesses is somewhat unclear: for example, Iamblichus' description of the Pythia at Delphi becoming 'wholly the god's possession' (ὅλη γίγνεται τοῦ θεοῦ) utilises the precise terminology which he applies to the intermediate state of 'communion' (κοινωνία) and thus suggests the need for some caution.⁷⁹ It is probable that Iamblichus assumed that the receptivity of each specific prophet(ess) could vary widely depending on the individual's capacities and their active cultivation of their receptivity, so that generalisation according to the type of divination utilised or according to the precise divinatory context is not possible.

A vital caveat must be also be mentioned, with respect to the differences adduced between the conscious awareness of the dreamer and that of the oracular prophet: Iamblichus justifies his comments on the clarity of the dreamer's conscious understanding in the context of Porphyry's challenge that our level of consciousness while asleep must be less than when one is awake, and therefore our waking consciousness and understanding is superior to that experienced in divine 'god-sent' (θεόπεμπτοι) dreams. By pointing to the dreamer's clear understanding, Iamblichus is refuting Porphyry's challenge:

Οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ οἷον τέ ἐστι τὴν ἐναργῇ παρουσίαν τῶν θεῶν τῆς ὕπαρ ἐγγιγνομένης παρακολουθήσεως ἀπολείπεσθαι· ἀλλ' εἰ χρὴ τάληθές εἰπεῖν, καὶ σαφεστέραν αὐτὴν εἶναι ἀνάγκη καὶ ἀκριβεστέραν ἐκείνης καὶ σύνεσιν ἐμποιοῦσαν τελειότεραν.

For it is surely impossible that the gods' clear presence could be inferior to that of wakeful consciousness. And if we are to speak the truth, the divine presence must be even more clear and distinct than that, and produce a more perfect understanding.⁸⁰

The distinction in terms of conscious awareness may be related to the relevant ritual context: the dreamer would have to remember their divine vision themselves whereas the oracular prophet(ess) (μάντις) may have had an interpreter to record and interpret the oracles issuing from them.

⁷⁹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.11 (126.12–13); 3.5 (111.8).

⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.2 (105.5–8).

In another sense too, the difference in conscious awareness between those experiencing dream divination and oracles may be related to the specific nature of dreaming. Iamblichus quotes Porphyry's statement that the soul has a double life, one with the body and the other apart from the body. When one is awake one mostly uses the life in common with the body, apart from when thinking or engaging in pure thoughts, when one detaches oneself from the body. In sleep, Iamblichus postulates, we are completely freed from the chains of the body and engage in a life detached from generation.⁸¹ This purification from generation is similar to the state cultivated by the philosopher in his waking life, which may account for the high degree of awareness of the dreamer.

Iamblichus then sets out the philosophical basis and a hierarchy of different types of dream divination:

Τότε δὴ οὖν, εἴτε νοερὸν εἴτε θεῖον ταῦτόν ὑπάρχον εἴτε καὶ ἐν ἐκάτερον ἰδίᾳ καθ' ἑαυτὸ ὄν, τὸ τῆς ζωῆς εἶδος ἀνεγείρεται ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἥ πέφυκεν. Ἐπειδὴ οὖν ὁ μὲν νοῦς τὰ ὄντα θεωρεῖ, λόγους δ' ἡ ψυχὴ τῶν γιγνομένων ἐν αὐτῇ πάντων περιέχει, εἰκότως δὴ κατὰ τὴν περιέχουσαν αἰτίαν τασσόμενα ἐν τοῖς προηγουμένοις αὐτῶν λόγοις προγιγνώσκει τὰ μέλλοντα. Καὶ ταύτης δ' ἔτι τελειοτέραν ποιεῖται μαντείαν, ἥνικα ἂν τοῖς ὅλοις, ἀφ' ὧν ἀπεμερίσθη, συνάπτῃ τὰς μοίρας τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τῆς νοερᾶς ἐνεργείας· πληροῦται γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν ὅλων τότε τῆς πάσης εἰδήσεως, ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐξικνεῖσθαι ταῖς ἐννοίαις τῶν περὶ τὸν κόσμον ἐπιτελουμένων.

At this time, then, this form of life, whether it is intellectual or divine, which is the same thing, or each one separately, it is aroused in us, and energises according to its own nature. Since the intellect, then, contemplates real beings, and the soul encompasses the reasons in itself of everything coming into existence, it is reasonable that it should know beforehand future things arranged according to their predominant reasons, and the first cause which encompasses them. And it produces an even more perfect divination, surely, when it unites its apportioned lots of life and intellectual activity to the universals from which it had been separated. For it is then filled from the universals of total knowledge, so that, for the most part, it arrives at conceptions of what goes on in the cosmos.⁸²

⁸¹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (106.3–9); 5.15 (219.1–5). Cf. Shaw (1995), 82; Finamore (1998), 157, points out that this passage of Iamblichus clearly echoes Plato's *Resp.* 571b, since Plato had emphasised that the person who had trained reason to command irrational impulses in the day is the one who keeps them from interfering with dreams at night.

⁸² Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (106.9–107.4), trs. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell (2003), with emendations. Cf. Finamore (1998), 161–162, for the excellent suggestion that Iamblichus' *DM* 3.3 presents a hierarchy of different types of divination based upon the source of the

Iamblichus first sets out a general theory of the operation of dream divination: he argues that in sleep, the human body is detached from the chains of generation and, therefore, can potentially contemplate real beings (τὰ ὄντα).⁸³ This idea is based on the Neoplatonist principle that ‘like attracts like’, since Iamblichus states that the soul encompasses the reasons of everything coming into existence (in a manner appropriate to soul): thus, the soul can contemplate real beings because it contains the principles of all things. Iamblichus’ explanation is also clearly based on the Platonic theory of Recollection, the theory that the human soul has seen the Forms before it first descended into a body. Iamblichus maintains that since the soul encompasses the reasons of everything coming into existence, it is reasonable it should know beforehand future things arranged according to their first principles, and the first cause which encompasses them. This is based on the Neoplatonist concept that all things are contained in potentiality in that which causes them, a notion that is fundamental to the later Neoplatonist metaphysical structure of the cosmos. Thus, Iamblichus asserts, by knowing the principles, the soul can know future matters which arise from specific principles. The first principles of future things are, according to Iamblichus, encompassed by the first cause. As we have already seen, for Iamblichus, the first, or highest cause is divinity. So, by knowing the divine, which is eternal and unchanging, humans can know the future.

Iamblichus claims that the intellect produces an ‘even more perfect divination’ when it unites its apportioned lots of life (μοίρας τῆς ζωῆς) and intellectual activity (νοεράς ἐνεργείας) to the universals: when it is filled with the universals of total knowledge, it can arrive at conceptions of what goes on in the cosmos. Finamore claims that by using the term ‘universals’, Iamblichus refers here to contact with the visible gods, who fill the soul with knowledge of future events that the soul discovers with its own thoughts.⁸⁴ It is somewhat unclear as to whether this stage of dream divination is envisaged as ‘communion’ or ‘union’, for the dreamer uniting his ‘activity’ to the universals is similar to, but not quite the same, as ‘exercising one’s activity in common with the god’, the characterisation of ‘union’. In his subsequent comment, Iamblichus clearly refers to ‘union’:

‘Ἀλλ’ ἐὰν μὲν τὸ νοερόν ἑαυτῆς ἢ ψυχῇ καὶ τὸ θεῖον συνυφαίνῃ τοῖς κρείττοσι, τότε καὶ τὰ φαντάσματα αὐτῆς ἔσται καθαρώτερα,

divination and the level of psychic involvement. Finamore claims that five types of dream divination are presented here.

⁸³ Cf. Finamore (1998), 162, who comments: ‘By *ta onta* Iamblichus means, of course, the Forms, which reside at the level of the Demiurgic Intellect; the *logoi* are the active reason principles of the Demiurge at work within the cosmos.’

⁸⁴ Finamore (1998), 162 and n. 18, claims that the ‘universals’ mentioned here are the visible gods, referring to the whole souls of the visible gods as differentiated from ‘partial’ human souls (citing Proclus, *In Tim.* 3.276.19–22).

ἤτοι περὶ θεῶν ἢ τῶν καθ' ἑαυτὰς ἁσωμάτων οὐσιῶν, ἢ ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν περὶ τῶν εἰς ἀλήθειαν συμβαλλομένων τὴν περὶ τῶν νοητῶν.

But if the soul weaves together its intellectual and its divine part with higher powers (τοῖς κρείττοσι), then its own visions will be purer, whether of the gods, or of essentially incorporeal beings, or, generally speaking, of whatever contributes to the truth about intelligible things.⁸⁵

This passage clearly refers to 'union' because the soul exercises its activity in common with the god, weaving together its intellectual and divine part with the 'higher powers' or 'greater kinds', Iamblichus' habitual designation for the gods and divine orders.⁸⁶ Iamblichus later adds:

Ἐὰν δὲ τοὺς λόγους τῶν γιγνομένων ἀνάγῃ πρὸς τοὺς αἰτίους αὐτῶν θεοὺς, δύναμιν ἀπ' αὐτῶν προσλαμβάνει καὶ γινῶσιν ἀναλογιζομένην ὅσα τε ἦν καὶ ὅσα ἔσται, θεωρίαν τε παντὸς χρόνου ποιεῖται καὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ συμβαινόντων ἐπισκοπεῖ τὰ ἔργα, τάξιν τε αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ ἐπανόρθωσιν τὴν προσήκουσαν μεταλαγχάνει.

If, however, it refers accounts of things happening to their causes, that is, to the gods, it receives from them a power and knowledge embracing things that were and will be, and takes a view of all time, and surveys events happening in time, and it participates in their order, care and appropriate improvement.⁸⁷

This section reflects the task of the theurgist, for theurgy involves referring accounts of things happening to their first, highest causes, that is, the gods. In dream divination, the theurgist-dreamer can survey all events happening in time and thereby participate in their order, care and appropriate movement.⁸⁸ The theurgist

⁸⁵ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (107.7–11).

⁸⁶ Finamore (1993), 163, makes the excellent suggestion that this type of dream divination connects the recipient to the intelligible gods, basing his argument on Iamblichus' description of this type of dream as providing 'the truth about intelligible things' (περὶ τῶν εἰς ἀλήθειαν συμβαλλομένων τὴν περὶ τῶν νοητῶν. *DM* 3.3 [107.10–11]). The argument is also based on his identification of the preceding type of divination at 107.4–7 as uniting the dreamer with the 'intellectual gods' because it is said to receive the 'totality of intlections'.

⁸⁷ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (107.11–108.3), trs. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell (2003), with emendations.

⁸⁸ Finamore (1998), 163, describes this type of dream divination as follows: 'Here the soul, existing out of time, attains a synoptic view of things existing in time and even shares in

seeks to unite his soul to the highest cause, the gods, and thereby participates in the order and care of the universe, imitating the creative action of the Demiurge.

Yet although 'communion' and 'union' are conceived as being the states most commonly attained by the theurgist, it is difficult to establish a firm differentiation between the theurgist and the oracular prophet or dreamer in relation to their experience of the stages of connection to the gods (participation – communion – union). In fact, following the discussion of the philosophical basis of dream divination, Iamblichus immediately offers the example of dream incubation as it was practised in Asclepius' sanctuaries and its power to cure diseases (which he follows with other examples of divine dreams and their practical benefits).⁸⁹ In doing so, he refers to a traditional (and public) oracular institution associated with dream incubation. He concludes his list of examples by stating, 'But why go through such occurrences one by one, when daily events offer a clarity greater than any story?' (Καὶ τί δεῖ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐπεξιόντι μηνύειν, τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν αἰεὶ συμπιπτόντων κρείττονα τοῦ λόγου τὴν ἐνάργειαν παρεχομένων;), a comment which seemingly alludes to the theurgists.⁹⁰ In terms of the stages of connection to the gods experienced by the ritual practitioner, no clearcut differentiation between theurgy and traditional religious practices can be observed in Iamblichus' account, pointing to the philosopher's insistence on the line of unbroken continuity and community which extends throughout all cultic ritual and worship in which human beings receive the gods.⁹¹

Conclusion

Iamblichus' views on divine inspiration and possession, while appropriate for the theurgist, follow the Greek religious and philosophical tradition and accord especially with Plato's concept of 'prophetic madness' delineated in the *Phaedrus*, and the notion of 'divine inspiration' expressed in the *Ion*. Thus, Iamblichus' notions of divine inspiration and possession directly inform his account of oracles and other forms of inspired divination. Although Iamblichus' account emphasises that the possessed individual does not act or experience in a human manner involving sense perception, this does not entail that he or she has no consciousness at all. The central point is that the inspired or possessed individual has no consciousness of anything else *except the gods*. This implies a replacement or enhancement of human consciousness by divine consciousness in possession

the rank (*taxis*) of the intelligible gods themselves.'

⁸⁹ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (108.6–8).

⁹⁰ Iamblichus, *DM* 3.3 (109.1–3); Shaw (2012) 96–97.

⁹¹ Cf. Chapter 1, pp. 32–34; Chapter 7, pp. 277–280; Iamblichus, *DM* 1.9 (31.9–32.6); 5.10 (211.12–14); 5.20 (227.1–10); 5.21 (228.11–229.6; 229.10–230.11); 5.24 (235.7–11); 5.26 (240.9–14); Shaw (2012), 97.

rituals. Iamblichus' account rests on the notion of simultaneous divine descent and human ascent: the human soul ascends to the gods while the gods descend to the human soul to possess it. Yet the divine descent is envisaged in terms of divine illumination (constantly available and present throughout all ontological levels), which is the idiom through which Iamblichus iterates the immanence of the gods. The terminology of divine illumination is applied by Iamblichus to oracles and dream divination. Meanwhile the human ascent partially depends on the ritual practitioner's capacities and active cultivation of his or her receptivity. Receptivity is implicitly coded as a developable sacred space which is marked by a subtle blend of openness and humbleness combined with an active and simultaneous cultivation of intellectual, ritual and ethical discipline and praxis. Iamblichus envisages the ascent of the soul as *an ascent of consciousness to the gods* which is partially dependent on the individual's cultivation of receptivity, although primarily and ultimately dependent on the will of the gods themselves. Thus, the god works *through* the soul of the possessed, replacing or enhancing the consciousness of the ritual practitioner. The level of contact or connection with the gods (and thus, the level of ascent) is designated in three cumulative stages: participation, communion and union, all of which involve receiving and manifesting the divine illumination of the gods. Yet, the extent to which the prophet(ess) or theurgist has cultivated his or her receptivity will affect the type of connection or contact experienced: those who have trained their consciousness and contemplated intelligible reality while simultaneously developing their receptivity through ritual and ethical praxis may attain a greater level of connection to the gods through their assimilation to and alignment with the divine vision and are more likely to *remember* their possession experience because of their *conscious* familiarity with the intelligible world of noetic reality. Consequently, it seems that the levels of ascent also correlate with the prophet(ess)'s or theurgist's *memory* of the possession experience: Iamblichus implies that participation involves experiencing divine consciousness but not remembering the experience, while communion and union imply increasing familiarity and affinity with, and consequently memory of, the divine visions experienced during the possession state. In terms of the stages of connection to the gods experienced by the ritual practitioner, no clearcut differentiation between the theurgist and the prophet(ess) of the oracular sanctuary can be observed in Iamblichus' account, pointing to the philosopher's insistence on the line of unbroken continuity and community which extends throughout all cultic ritual and worship in which human beings receive the gods. The line of unbroken continuity and community uniting theurgy with traditional religious practices will become even clearer in Iamblichus' account of oracles and other forms of inspired divination.

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