

Blood Sacrifice and Bloodless Sacrifice in Porphyry and Iamblichus



di

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In the following pages I will focus on the similarities and differences between the conceptions of sacrifice held by Porphyry and Iamblichus. In a section of *Ad Porphyrium (De mysteriis)*¹, Iamblichus criticizes the view of sacrifice expressed in Porphyry's lost *Letter to Anebo*. Yet, we are made familiar with Porphyry's ideas on sacrifice by the second book of his treatise *De abstinencia*². While I will compare the different conceptions of sacrifice found in *Ad Porphyrium* and *De abstinencia*, such a comparison cannot be an exact one: for we are forced to assume that the ideas expressed in the second book of *De abstinencia* are similar to those in the *Letter to Anebo*³.

¹ Iamblique, *Réponse à Porphyre (De mysteriis)*, ed. by H.D. Saffrey, P. Segonds, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2013, pp. 149-179. I will use the title *Ad Porphyrium* and the abbreviation *Ad Porph.* introduced by D.P. Taormina in her studies. The title *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum* was given by Marsilio Ficino to his translation of the text. This section about sacrifice corresponds to the fifth book of *De mysteriis* in the division made by Nicola Scutelli in 1556. See Saffrey-Segonds, *Introduction*, pp. IX-XXI.

² The standard edition is *De l'abstinence*, ed. by J. Bouffartigue, M. Patillon, A.P. Segonds, 3 vols., Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1979-1995.

³ On Porphyry see G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Critica del sacrificio cruento in Grecia: da Pitagora a Porfirio, II. Il De abstinencia porfiriano*, in F. Vattioni (ed.), *Sangue e*

Although Iamblichus shows a clear intention to attack the views of his predecessor, I believe that the differences between the two are not as great as they may seem at first: they both accept blood sacrifices as well as bloodless ones, even though they assign them different roles⁴. They both have a strong link with the pagan religious tradition and they both present themselves as traditional and conservative thinkers. In what follows, I will argue that it is especially the destination of the text and the historical context which induces them to espouse contrasting positions with regard to the different types of sacrifices.

Before dealing in detail with the two philosophers' conceptions, I will start by making a preliminary observation: for both Porphyry and Iamblichus the primary goal of sacrificial rites is the Platonic assimilation to the divine⁵. They repeat this fundamental idea across different sections of their works⁶ and consider the ritual act as a practice ensuring spiritual elevation.

In the second book of Porphyry's *De abstinentia* it is clearly affirmed that blood sacrifice is not suitable for the philosopher, but only for the multitude and cities⁷. In the first book of the same treatise Porphyry presents vegetarianism as functional towards ascesis, while in the second he examines the consequences of the refusal to eat meat on the part of a philosopher who must live within the society.

In all his works Porphyry reveals a strictly aristocratic view of life. According to his conception of mankind there are two categories of people: philosophers, who seek to establish a relationship with the gods only through noetic worship and possibly bloodless

antropologia nella teologia, Atti della VI settimana di Studi, Roma 23-28 novembre 1987, Sanguis Editrice, Roma 1989, pp. 461-505; A. Camplani, M. Zambon, *Il sacrificio come problema in alcune correnti filosofiche di età imperiale*, «Annali di storia dell'esegesi» 19/1 (2002), pp. 59-99. On both authors see T. Krulak, "THYSIA" and *Theurgy: Sacrificial Theory in Fourth and Fifth-century Platonism*, in «Classical Quarterly» 64/1 (2014), pp. 353-358.

⁴ Many scholars still tend to draw a sharp distinction between the 'rationalist' approach of Porphyry and the 'irrational' ritualism of Iamblichus: see for example E. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge University Press 1965; G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton University Press 1986, pp. 127-131; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, University Park PA 1995, pp. 11-15, pp. 231-238; E.C. Clarke in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. by E.C. Clarke, J.M. Dillon, J.P. Hershbell, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2003, pp. 4-18, pp. 119-121. Instead A. Smith has recently offered a more balanced view of Iamblichean theurgy: see his volume *Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. Philosophy and Religion in Neoplatonism*, Ashgate, Farnham 2011; in this volume Smith gathers all his articles on this theme. The same idea is supported also by C. Addey in her recent book *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism. Oracles of Gods*, Ashgate, Farnham 2014.

⁵ *Theaet.* 176 b.

⁶ Porphyry, *De abst.* II 34, 3; II 43, 3; II 49, 3. Iamblichus, *Ad Porph.* p. 177 ll. 24 ss. (= *De myst.* V 26 p. 239 ll. 12 ss.).

⁷ *De abst.* II 43, 1.

sacrifices, and all other people, whom Porphyry does not address in his essay. Thus, in *De abstinentia* the hierarchy of sacrifice is shown to be naturally linked to the human one. Porphyry says that blood sacrifice may be offered by ordinary men, whom he calls *hoi polloí* (the many) and by the cities for which material profit is really important⁸.

For the philosopher it is rather different. He is supposed to perform sacrifices as well, but not of animals. For this kind of man three kinds of sacrifice are possible. First there is the sacrifice to the highest God: the author affirms that it is forbidden to offer him anything corporeal, so the philosophers must only make an offering of pure silence and pure thoughts⁹.

The second kind of sacrifice is described by Porphyry as follows: «For his offspring, the intelligible gods, hymn-singing in words should be added. For sacrifice is an offering to each god from what he has given, with which he sustains us and maintains our essence in being. So, as a farmer offers corn-ears and fruits, so we offer them fine thoughts about them [...]»¹⁰. It is important here to stress that Porphyry clearly underlines the need to offer the gods what every god has given to the mankind. Porphyry proposes an intellectual form of sacrifice that is constituted by prayer¹¹: in other words, hymn-singing is the correct sacrifice for these intelligible gods.

Finally, there is a third type of sacrifice: «To the other gods, the world and the fixed and wondering stars [...] we should return thanks as has been described, by sacrifices of inanimate things»¹². And this is the bloodless sacrifice which has to be offered to the visible gods. It is precisely the possibility of this kind of sacrifice which allows Porphyry to strike an agreement between his own personal inclination towards asceticism, which necessarily rules out blood sacrifice, and the established religious tradition.

This, in nutshell, is Porphyry's idea of sacrifice. The fundamental bond between Porphyry's conception and Iamblichus' is the *correspondence principle*. In Porphyry we have this double correspondence: between the offerer and the gift and between the god who receives the gift and the gift itself. This chain – offerer-gift-

⁸ *De abst.* II 43, 2.

⁹ *De abst.* II 43, 2.

¹⁰ *De abst.* II 34, 4-5. The translations come from: Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, G. Clark trans., Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2000.

¹¹ On the prayer's role see A. Timotin *À la recherche d'une religion platonicienne. La polémique entre Porphyre et Jamblique sur la prière*, in H. Seng, L. Soares Santoprete, C. Tommasi Moreschini (eds.), *Il lato oscuro della Tarda Antichità. Controversie, identità, ortodossie ed eresie*, Verlag, Heidelberg 2015, pp. 59-76; *Porphyry on prayer. Platonic Tradition and religious trends in the third century*, in J. Dillon, A. Timotin (eds.), *Platonic Theories of Prayer*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2015.

¹² *De abst.* II 37, 3.

god who receives the gift – reflects the principle that «like likes like». In Iamblichus this principle becomes a real and explicit law, as in the following passage: «Similarly, each person performs his cult according to the nature that he has, not that which he does not have; one should not, therefore, overstep the measure proper to the sacrificing agent»¹³. Here Iamblichus is simply expressing the necessary correspondence between offerer and gift. On the other hand, in a previous passage we have the correspondence between the class of gods and the gifts offered:

The best way of all to begin is to show that the law of sacrifices is dependent upon the order of the gods themselves. Let us, therefore, posit once again that, among the gods, some are material, others immaterial. Those are material that embrace matter within themselves and impose order upon it, while immaterial are those that are exempt from matter and rise above it [...]. If, then, one wishes to worship such gods with theurgic rites, it is in accordance with their nature and with the sphere of authority which they have been allotted that one should render them worship, that is to say, material worship, even as they are material.¹⁴

Therefore, «the best way» to sacrifice is that which links the appropriate ritual acts to the appropriate class of gods. And in the same paragraph we have an explanation of this law. There are two main classes of gods: material and immaterial. If someone wants to worship his gods in a theurgic fashion he must offer material and corporeal worship to material gods and pure and immaterial worship to immaterial gods. Material and corporeal worship consists, in the case of sacrifice, in the blood sacrifice. This kind of sacrifice is strictly necessary in order to worship material gods:

[...] and so, in sacrifices, dead bodies deprived of life, the slaughter of animals and the consumption of their bodies and every sort of change and destruction, and in general process of dissolution are suitable to those gods who preside over matter – not to them in themselves, but because of the matter over which they rule.¹⁵

The sacrifice must inevitably be corporeal, namely bloody, because we live both in a body and in a material world:

Then, indeed, we do not deal with the body on an intellectual and incorporeal plane, for the body does not naturally relate to such modes of treatment; it is, rather, through participating in what is akin to itself, through

¹³ *Ad Porph.* p. 164 ll. 9-12 (= *De myst.* V 15 p. 220 ll. 6-9). The translations come from: Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. cit.

¹⁴ *Ad Porph.* p. 162 ll. 3-20 (= *De myst.* V 14 p. 217 l. 3 – p. 218 l. 2).

¹⁵ *Ad Porph.* p. 162 l. 22 – p. 163 l. 3 (= *De myst.* V 14 p. 218 ll. 4-10).

bodies, in fact, that a body is nourished and purified. The procedure of sacrifices for such a purpose will be, then, necessarily corporeal [...].¹⁶

In many passages, as we shall see, Iamblichus restates the fundamental idea of the completeness of the ritual: blood sacrifice has a legitimate role to play within his ritual system precisely in accordance with this need for completeness.

Iamblichus carefully explains the idea that everybody must sacrifice in conformity to who they are. In addition, he divides mankind into three groups, as opposed to Porphyry's bipartition between the multitude and the philosophers. Yet, that of sacrifice is not the only context in which Iamblichus opposes his own division to Porphyry's. Indeed, tripartition is fundamental for Iamblichus' revaluation of the middle level, since the idea of mediation is absolutely crucial to his very ontology and cosmology.

According to Iamblichus, therefore, humanity is divided into the three following groups¹⁷. The majority of the human «herd» is ruled solely by nature and destiny. On the opposite side there are the *holígoi*, «the few», who have released themselves from the flux of becoming. In the middle there are the so-called *mésoi*, who share some peculiarities with the first group, while aspiring to the complete freedom typical of the *holígoi*. Each group is associated with a specific form of cult. The multitude must focus on matter and the body in worship generally, and in the particular in the case of sacrifice, which is usually considered the form of worship *par excellence*. Conversely, the *holígoi* practice a totally intellectual cult. Finally, the form of worship of the *mésoi*, being a mixed one, is characterized both by ritual completeness and by a holy tendency to spiritual elevation:

Those median between these pursue their work in accordance with the differences manifested within the median area and the different ways of worship proper to that, either participating in both modes of worship, or withdrawing themselves from the former type, or accepting them as a basis for proceeding towards the more noble type (for without these the superior type could not be attained to) or employing the sacred rites in some other such suitable ways.¹⁸

Both philosophers, then, link the hierarchy of sacrifice both to a human and a divine hierarchy. And yet, what is the reason for their disagreement over the issue of sacrifice? I will discuss these differences from three different points of view: a philosophical perspective, a historical/political perspective, and finally a literary

¹⁶ *Ad Porph.* p. 165 ll. 3-8 (= *De myst.* V 16 p. 221 ll. 9-14).

¹⁷ *Ad Porph.* p. 166 l.18 – p. 168 l. 3 (= *De myst.* V 18 p. 223 ll. 10 – p. 225 l. 11).

¹⁸ *Ad Porph.* p. 167 l. 24 – p. 168 l. 3 (= *De myst.* V 18 p. 225 ll. 4-11).

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The philosophical perspective is linked to the revaluation of the corporeal reality which is typical of Iamblichus and which we may connect to his conception of the soul as a bridge-builder. In his *Ad Porphyrium* he frequently asserts that even matter is divine and that the gods extend throughout the material world²⁰. For example, in order to lend authoritativeness to his position, in the first book the philosopher quotes Thales' famous assertion that «all things are full of gods»²¹.

In the section about sacrifice I have found four different kinds of tripartition by means of which Iamblichus seems to attribute a certain importance to the ideas of bridge-building and of continuity: these are different applications of the notion of metaphysical *horror vacui* which is typical of Late Neoplatonism.

I have summed up these tripartitions as follows:

- 1) COSMOLOGICAL LEVEL: Nature-daemons-first causes. *Ad Porph.* p. 157 l. 12 – p. 158 l. 7 (= *De myst.* V 10 p. 210 l. 15 – p. 211 l. 10).
- 2) ONTOLOGICAL LEVEL: Intellect-soul-nature. *Ad Porph.* p. 160 ll. 19-23 (= *De myst.* V 10 p. 213 l. 18 – p. 214 l. 3).
- 3) RITUAL LEVEL: Gods-gifts-offerer. *Ad Porph.* p. 162 ll. 18-23 (= *De myst.* V 14 p. 218 ll. 1-4).
- 4) HUMAN LEVEL: multitude-*mésou*-*holígoi*. *Ad Porph.* p. 166 l. 17 – p. 167 l. 6 (= *De myst.* V 18 p. 223 l. 10 – p. 224 l. 6).
- 5) TYPES OF WORSHIP: Material worship-mixed worship-intellectual worship. *Ad Porph.* p. 167 l. 6 – p. 168 l. 3 (= *De myst.* V 18 p. 224 l. 7 – p. 225 l. 11).

Daemons, the soul, gifts, the so-called *mésou*, and a mixed mode of worship which encompasses both material worship – mainly blood sacrifice – and immaterial: these all accomplish a *mediation between opposites*. It should be noted that the sacrificial rite is shown as a form of mediation because of its function of assimilation to the divine, both in Porphyry and in Iamblichus.

I believe that the *mésou* are the theurgists who find themselves midway along the path of assimilation to the divine. The *holígoi* are a very small group and, as we will soon see, they are not Iamblichus' addressees. They too are theurgists, but have reached the end of

¹⁹ On *Ad Porphyrium*'s literary genre see C. Addey, *op. cit.*, pp. 128 ss.

²⁰ For example, *Ad Porph.* p. 174 ll. 9-11 (= *De myst.* V 23 p. 232 ll. 14-17).

²¹ *Ad Porph.* p. 22 ll. 22-23 (= *De myst.* I 9 p. 30 ll. 2-3).

their journey; they are perfect theurgists because they have released themselves from the flux of becoming and achieved union with the divine²²:

However, when one makes contact in a hypercosmic mode with the gods of theurgy (which is an exceedingly rare occurrence), such an individual will be one who has transcended the bounds of bodies and matter in the service of the gods, and who is united to the gods through hypercosmic power. One should not therefore take a feature that manifests itself in the case of a particular individual, as the result of great effort and long preparation, at the consummation of the hieratic art, and present it as something common to all men, but not even as something immediately available to those beginning theurgy, nor yet those who have reached a middling degree of proficiency in it; for even these latter endow their performance of cult with some degree of corporeal influence.²³

So the *holígoi* are finally united to the gods and make contact with the gods in a hypercosmic way. They are superior to matter and the body and so they do not need material worship. When it comes to sacrifice, they are the only ones who do not need blood sacrifice. But this condition is an extraordinarily uncommon one. Instead, all the theurgists who are at the beginning or in the middle of the theurgic path need corporeal worship. We have already seen that the *mésoui* are men who participate «in both modes of worship» and Iamblichus repeatedly asserts the absolute need for a complete ritual:

This fact also, I imagine, will be recognised by all those who love to contemplate theurgic truth, that one should not connect the gods up with the cult pertaining to them in any partial or incomplete way. [...] anyone who fails to allot to all their due and welcome each of them with suitable honour will end up unsatisfied and deprived of any share in communication with the gods, whereas he, on the other hand, who has propitiated all, and rendered to each the gifts that

²² The key concept is that theurgy is constituted by different levels. This idea is supported by G. Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-228; C. van Liefferinge, *La théurgie des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus*, Supplément a «Kernos» 9, Liège 1999, p. 38, pp. 104-110; E.M. Clarke, *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous*, Ashgate, Farnham 2001, p. 46: Clarke introduces the formula «theurgist in training». Finamore and Dillon, in their edition of Iamblichus' *De anima* (Iamblichus, *De anima*, eds. J. Finamore, J.M. Dillon, Leiden-Boston-Köln, Brill 2002, pp. 159-163), draw a correspondence between this tripartition and the three groups of souls in *De anima* VI 29 p. 56, ll. 18-24 Finamore-Dillon. The same idea is supported by D.P. Taormina in *Giamblico. I frammenti dalle epistole*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2010, p. 183, pp. 169-180, pp. 266 ff. According to these scholars there is a triple correspondence between these two texts: herd-souls that descend for punishment and judgement, *mésoui*-souls that descend for correction and exercise, *holígoi*-souls that descend for purification and perfection of this world. I will not discuss in detail the exactness of this correspondence. Even if the *holígoi* are, in theory, at the top of Iamblichus' anthropology they are a real rarity and are not the main addressee of this text. They have already achieved their final goal, as they have freed themselves from the flux of becoming.

²³ *Ad Porphy.* p. 169 l. 26 – p. 170 l. 11 (= *De myst.* V 20 p. 228 ll. 1-14).

are pleasing and to the greatest extent possible conformable to them, remains always safe and free from mishap, having nobly performed, in perfection and integrity, the reception of the whole divine choir.²⁴

He argues that anyone who loves the truth in a theurgic manner must practice a cult which is both material and immaterial; hence, the theurgic method coincides with the *mésos*'s "mixed cult". He says that he who does not worship different deities in the appropriate manner remains *atelés* (imperfect, incomplete), while he who worships the gods by following the aforementioned law of correspondence does not run any risk, since this man is ensuring his *hupodoché* of the gods, i.e. his possibility of «receiving» them. We may infer that this is a man who fills the empty space which exists between opposites.

Then, Iamblichus goes on to say that, if what is invoked and moved during a sacrifice were simple, then the sacrifice too would be simple. Yet this is not the case. He thus establishes a strict correspondence between the complexity of the divine system and the complexity of the cult, which is meant to reproduce that system:

Well, if that which is evoked and set in motion in sacred rites were simple and of one order of being, then necessarily the mode of sacrifice would be simple also. But if, in fact, the multitude of powers stirred up in the process of the arousal and descent of the gods is such as no one else can comprehend, but only the theurgists know these things exactly through having made trial of them in practice, then only these can know what is the proper method of performing the hieratic art, and they realize that any elements omitted, even minor ones, can subvert the whole performance of cult, even as in the playing of a musical scale the breaking of a single string destroys the harmony and symmetry of the whole.²⁵

Therefore, it is clear that the theurgists are here identified with the *mésos*, as this passage shows that only theurgists can practice an integral piety, which compasses both material and immaterial worship and, being mixed, belongs precisely to the *mésos*. Only the theurgists are able to practice a form of worship which imitates not only the complexity of the divine system, but also that of the universe. Accordingly, the theurgist himself, i.e. the offerer, is to be regarded as a bridge-builder who has the holy duty not merely of preserving but of accomplishing cosmic harmony by means of his religious acts. Consequently, blood sacrifice too is necessary to establish and maintain this order.

The offerer, the thing offered and the act of offering itself may thus be seen to coincide: each is like the middle term of a

²⁴ *Ad Porph.* p. 170 l. 11 – p. 171 l. 1 (= *De myst.* V 21 p. 228 l. 16 – p. 229 l. 13).

²⁵ *Ad Porph.* p. 170 ll. 1-18 (= *De myst.* V 21 p. 229 l. 13 – p. 230 l. 6).

proportion. Likewise, for Iamblichus blood sacrifice is absolutely necessary, for it reflects the hierarchical level associated with material gods. Neglecting this fundamental ritual entails some serious risks: the theurgist is the only man who can completely fulfil his religious duties, as he stands in the middle, a position he re-establishes again and again, along with his role of bridge-builder, through the regular performance of rituals.

We have seen how blood sacrifice plays an essential role in Iamblichus' philosophy of religion, insofar as he assigns a divine status to matter, and how – given the *law of correspondence* – the theurgist must practice a material cult, namely blood sacrifice. This is what I have called the *philosophical reason* for the disagreement between Iamblichus and Porphyry. I will now suggest two other reasons, before trying to link them with each other and with the philosophical one.

I believe that the difference between the readership of Porphyry's *De abstinentia* and that of Iamblichus' *Ad Porphyrium* is clearly linked to politics. At the beginning of the first book of *De abstinentia*²⁶, Porphyry states his intentions: he will not address men of action, but only philosophers, for it is not fair to give the same advices to the common man, who is happily asleep, and to the man who is seeking awakening, namely the philosopher:

For myself, I am not trying to destroy the customs which prevail among each people: the state is not my present subject. But the laws by which we are governed allow the divine power to be honoured even by very simple and inanimate things, so by choosing the simplest we shall sacrifice in accordance with the law of the city, and will ourselves strive to offer a fitting sacrifice, pure in all respects when we approach the gods.²⁷

Thus Porphyry announces that he does not have a political goal, and that he is speaking neither to the cities nor to the common men. He does not wish to cast himself in the role of a legislator²⁸. The philosopher must strike the right compromise between intellectual cult and religious tradition: and the bloodless sacrifice offers him precisely such possibility. Porphyry is not interested in changing the laws, and blood sacrifice is still useful to the common

²⁶ *De abst.* I 27, 1-2.

²⁷ *De abst.* II 33, 1.

²⁸ See Bouffartigue-Patillon (*Introduction in De l'abstinence*, v. I, p. LXII): the editors consider vegetarianism as a total or partial negation of the differences that exist between men and gods. But the social order is based on these differences: the refusal to eat meat, and the resulting refusal of blood sacrifice, is therefore linked to a strong criticism of this order and it is also linked to a problematic relationship with the external world (see M. Detienne, *Dionysos mis à mort*, Gallimard, Paris 1977, pp. 161-217).

people, but not to the philosophers, who have a sort of *status extra legem*.

Iamblichus' purpose is quite different. At the beginning of section about sacrifice of *Ad Porphyrium*²⁹ he affirms that the problem of sacrifice does not concern just a small circle of elite philosophers, for each person who is interested in *paideiā* – i.e. in 'education' or, better, 'culture' – is involved in this matter. In other words, Iamblichus attributes a political role to sacrifices. Sacrifices are closely linked to Hellenic pagan culture – a culture which is currently at risk of extinction because of the spread of Christianity. In one passage Iamblichus seems to be directly answering Porphyry, intentionally acknowledging his disagreement with his supposed teacher: «But the purpose of the present discourse is not to prescribe precepts for such a man (for he is superior to all legislation), but to provide a set of rules for those who need regulation»³⁰. Those who are superior to all legislation are the *holígoi*, men who have finally made it out of the flux of becoming. It sounds like an answer to Porphyry's declarations. It worth bearing in mind that Iamblichus claims to be a high priest explaining proper ritual duties to his disciple Anebo, who would be none other than Porphyry. So while at first sight Iamblichus' treatise seems to be a philosophical-religious text for a very select audience, this last passage shows that it actually has a different addressee: for here Iamblichus presents himself as a sort of legislator in matters of sacrifice. Accordingly, I believe that by claiming the title of high priest for himself Iamblichus is seeking to ensure he has the authority to address not only another philosopher, such as Porphyry, but also the cities which need blood sacrifice. This literary device serves a political purpose, which leads us back to the idea of correspondence: the divine and the cosmic hierarchy requires a ritual hierarchy, which is in turn related to a hierarchical conception of society³¹.

If sacrifices do not conform to this social hierarchy, if there is something lacking in the worship, or if the priest neglects blood sacrifice, this constitutes a real danger not only for the priest himself but also for the community. The *law of correspondence* is the holiest of laws: no aspect of reality can be ignored and, obviously, the middle level is the ideal condition from which to take care of the whole of reality.

And yet, ultimately, there is an important question we need to address: how can we link the philosophical perspective to the literary and the political? Can we really affirm that behind Iamblichus' revaluation of corporeal and material reality there lie

²⁹ *Ad Porph.* p. 149 ll. 5-8 (= *De myst.* V 1 p. 199 ll. 6-10).

³⁰ *Ad Porph.* p. 172 ll. 7-10 (= *De myst.* V 22 p. 231 ll. 2-5).

³¹ *Ad Porph.* p. 162 ll. 10-14 (= *De myst.* V 22 p. 231 ll. 5-9).

both the political goal of ordering society and the cultural goal of saving pagan culture? Perhaps it is so: Iamblichus' world, a world in which pagan religion was dying – one must bear in mind the momentous step represented by the Edict of Milan – was quite different from the world of his teacher Porphyry. The fear of losing an ancient heritage was certainly a problem for both philosophers; it is my contention that this fear is precisely linked to the reevaluation of corporeal and material reality, although it would not be correct to see such philosophical conception as the direct outcome of political and social circumstances. It goes without saying that Platonism cannot be described in monolithic terms. There were different tendencies, especially in Late Antiquity: not just one, but many different 'Platonisms'. And it was precisely the historical moment in which Iamblichus was living that led him to adopt a less dualistic and elitist form of Platonism: a form of Platonism which could save not only the material world in general but also, more specifically, the pagan world of the philosopher and his cultural heritage.

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