Nicola Spanu: Proclus and the *Chaldean Oracles*: A Study on Proclean Exegesis, with a Translation and Commentary of Proclus' *Treatise on Chaldean Philosophy*. London/New York: Routledge 2021 (Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies). VIII, 199 p. £ 96.00. ISBN: 978-0-367-47314-3.

It goes without saying that the Chaldean Oracles have been the subject of intrigue and much ink across multiple disciplines for at least the last fifty years – if not the last millennium. The Oracles were a collection of Greek dactylic hexameter poems and testimonia, held to be divinely revealed by the gods (particularly Hecate) and attributed to Julian the Theurgist, roughly contemporary with Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD).[1] All that survives of the Oracles are a series of fragments and testimonia preserved through the Neoplatonists – particularly Porphyry, Proclus, and Damascius. Despite the fact that their transmission depends on their Platonist bearers and their exegesis of them, much scholarship on the Oracles has tended to separate the oracular fragments from their context and to study them in isolation from their Platonist transmitters. Although this is certainly a worthwhile endeavor, without bringing in the exegeses of late antique, near-contemporary readers of the Oracles would seem to make the endeavor all the more like flying in the dark – rather like the tendency of modern Plato and Aristotle studies, at least until recently, to ignore late antique commentators of their corpora. In turn, Platonist scholars – such as this reviewer, admittedly – have tended to treat the Oracles simply as proof-texts for their respective Platonists, without considering the Oracles' own framework in itself – however much that framework more or less influenced certain Platonists over others.

Nicola Spanu's book is aimed at filling this lacuna by providing the first systematic study of the Chaldean Oracles expressly in comparison with Proclus' exegesis of the different fragments – while it also provides the first full translation and commentary on the extant text of Proclus' *On Chaldean Philosophy*. Spanu takes as his point of departure the call made by Pierre Hadot from a

1 Some evidence for this seems to be in Iul. epist. 12 (Bidez), ll. 13–14, and Procl. in Crat. 122 ll. 3–5 (Pasquali), although the references seem murky (special thanks to Stephen Menn for pointing these references out). See also J. F. Finamore/S. I. Johnston: The *Chaldean Oracles*. In: L. P. Gerson (ed.): The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity. Vol 1. Cambridge 2010, pp. 161–173 for further background on the text.

1971 paper[2] that the Chaldean Oracles "must now be placed back inside their context: one must study how the Neo-Platonists have conceived of and commented on the Oracles."[3] In this, Hadot and Spanu move against a line of thought in Oracular scholarship that the Neoplatonic exegesis of the Oracles is "more a hindrance than an opportunity to obtain precious information on the fragments' original meaning" (p. 8). Just as seems to be happening in more recent Plato and Aristotle work, Spanu's book contributes to a hopefully similar change in scholarship on the Chaldean Oracles, as he sets out for his objective in the book's Introduction: an attempt to integrate the interpretations of Neoplatonists – mainly Proclus, in this case – into a reading of the Oracles in themselves, and therewith to assess the fragments of the Oracles in light of Proclus' exegesis (p. 9).

The first half of the book's Introduction (pp. 1–16) goes over the textual history of the Oracles and Proclus' metaphysical framework (pp. 1–6), while the second half discusses the state of secondary literature on the Oracles and Spanu's methodology in analyzing the Oracles (pp. 6–13). Spanu opts to see the Oracles as a collective work, agreeing with Édouard des Places in understanding the work more as an anonymous text, with some contribution from both Julian the Theurgist and his father, Julian the Chaldean. This would suggest that the Oracles are to be understood as a revelatory text, where the author's presence in the text (whoever he/she or they may have been) is deemphasized in relation to the text as a medium for the gods (p. 2). As Spanu next notes, Proclus discovered the Oracles through his master, Syrianus, albeit only their basic 'elements', while Proclus spent five years studying the Oracles together with the commentaries of Porphyry and Iamblichus, to receive a better insight into them. From Spanu's presentation, it seems clear that the Oracles were a significant divine source for Proclus, perhaps even to a higher degree than other revelatory sources (like the Orphic sayings and *Hermetica*) – although Spanu does not specify in what way. Though Proclus' main point of reference for his metaphysics is Plato, one may indeed wonder

2 See P. Hadot: Bilan et perspectives sur les *Oracles Chaldaïques*. In: H. Lewy (ed.): Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy. Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire. Troisième édition par M. Tardieu, avec un supplément "Les Oracles chaldaïques 1891–2011". Paris 2011 (Collection des Études augustiniennes. Série Antiquité 77), pp. 703–720.

3 Hadot (n. 2) p. 715; translation from the French by Spanu.

how much the Oracles play a distinct, if even equal, role in influencing Proclus' framework. At the same time, one difficulty is that Proclus' quotations of the Oracles are usually brief (except for some exceptions – including the surviving excerpts of the *On Chaldean Philosophy*), often treated in the manner of proof-texts to confirm Plato's words and Proclus' framework (p. 3). One can then see Spanu's justification (following Hadot, Helmut Seng, and others: see p. 11) to include the extra textual context in which the differing Oracular fragments appear in Proclus' texts.

On pp. 3–6 Spanu lays out a brief comparison of the Chaldean Oracles' and Proclus' respective metaphysical frameworks, which we see elaborated in the later chapters. As may be already familiar to readers, Proclus' first principle for his framework is the One, which is equated with the Good (as from Plato's *Republic* VI) beyond all being, followed by what Proclus calls the 'henads' (i.e. the gods as they exist in themselves), which mirror the One's nature as purely 'one', and are directly participated intermediaries of unity for beings; below the One are the three main principles of Being, Life, and Intellect, followed by the World Soul (and also Soul-itself)[4] and all individual souls. Similarly in the Chaldean system, one finds the first, primary triad over all things composed of the principles of Father, Power, and Intellect – roughly analogous to Proclus' triad of principles, Being, Life, and Intellect – with the Father characterized as the first principle for the Oracles' framework. It is on the basis of the Chaldean principle (made clear in the Father-Power-Intellect triad), "in every world there shines a triad over which a monad rules" (fr. 27, des Places; cf. p. 24), that Proclus subdivides the three main principles into respective triads: hence Being implies its own triad, i.e. intelligible Being, intelligible-intellective Being, and intellective Being; similarly Life, with intelligible/intelligible-intellective/intellective Life; and so on also for Intellect.[5] At the top of the chain are the two principles, Limit and

4 Though not specified by Spanu, it seems that the World Soul, insofar as it is directly participated, would be distinct from the unparticipated monad, Soul-itself, or primary soul (ἡ πρώτη ψυχή): cf. Procl. inst. theol. Propositions 21 (esp. p. 24 ll. 25–27 in Dodds) and 23.

5 Discussed on p. 5. Radek Chlup gives a more detailed, helpful elaboration of this breakdown between the main Being-Life-Intellect triad and the sub-triads found on in each principle of the main triad; see R. Chlup: Proclus. An Introduction. Cambridge 2012, pp. 92–99.

Unlimited, which compose the third term (Being-itself) of the first intelligible triad, for Proclus.

As Spanu notes, there is still widespread disagreement in the scholarship on where to place the henads in relation to the pair, Limit-Unlimited – or as he puts it, whether they are "above or below Being, since Proclus seems to defend both positions and place the henads both above and below Being" (p. 5). This is, however, somewhat misleading, both from the texts in question and the literature:[6] Spanu likely has in mind the controverted issue of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, Proposition 159, which claims that "every order of gods is derived from the first principles of Limit and Unlimited" (πᾶσα τάξις θεῶν ἐκ τῶν πρώτων ἐστὶν ἀρχῶν, πέρατος καὶ ἀπειρίας). The issue, as his cited sources put it,[7] and as I would claim, is whether the henads are above (i.e. dis-coordinated with) the Limit and Unlimited, or if the henads are "composed" from the Limit and Unlimited, like the intelligibles in the realm of Being – in this sense, either "above" or on the level of Being.[8] Otherwise this is a minor issue compared to larger, more open questions that Spanu briefly discusses on pp. 6–8 and tackles in depth in chapter 1: how, for instance, to characterize the "Father" as both first principle and the first term of the intelligible triad in the Oracles, and whether Proclus' own interpretation adequately describes the Chaldean "Father" in this case.

In his methodological discussion on pp. 8–13, Spanu lays out a four-fold division of the Chaldean fragments, with Proclus' discussion of the texts,

6 And even from Proclus' own claim in inst. theol. Proposition 115, that "every god is above being, life, and intellect" – i.e. to the degree each god is a self-complete henad (p. 100 ll. 29–31 Dodds).

7 As in chapter 1, p. 42, n. 18 he discusses particularly D. G. MacIsaac: The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus. In: M. Treschow/W. Otten/W. Hannam (eds.): Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought. Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse. Leiden/Boston 2007 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 151), pp. 141–172; T. Lankila: Henadology in the Two Theologies of Proclus. In: Dionysius 28, 2010, pp. 63–76, and G. Van Riel: Les hénades de Proclus sont-elles composées de limite et d'illimité? In: RSPh 85, 2001, pp. 417–432.

8 The reviewer may also humbly add that he recently had an article published on the henads' relation to the Limit, Unlimited, and Being, as Spanu's book was going to press: see J. Greig: Proclus on the Two Causal Models for the One's Production of Being. Reconciling the Relation of the Henads and the Limit/Unlimited. In: The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition 14, 2020, pp. 23–48.

with which he will carry out the rest of the book, according to (chapter 1) the Chaldean/primary triad; (chapter 2) the single divine "hypostases", or principles generally speaking – for instance, from the goddess Hecate, to the Intellectual Fire, Chronus, Rhea, and so on; (chapter 3) the world's intellectual archetype, and the creation of the material dimension; and (chapter 4) man and his final destiny (with the final chapter, 5, on Proclus' *On Chaldean Philosophy* treatise). Spanu argues for this division as a working hypothesis for the original text, based on both the general, thematic structure of Proclus' exegesis of the fragments, and the fact that other texts in the same genre of revelatory writing (like the Hermetic *Poimandres*, the *Apocryphon* of John, and so on) follow a similar structure. I would perhaps be more tentative on the claim that the original text would have been like this, but Spanu at least posits plausibly the general *idea* of the Oracles' texts as following this structure.

Given this, I found a couple issues in Spanu's discussion for methodology. For one, it was not clear to me why the study focuses only on Proclus in contrast to other Neoplatonists, such as Damascius, much less comparatively across multiple Neoplatonists. In Damascius' case, for instance, one also finds a prolific use of the Oracles throughout his works (especially the *De Principiis*), similar to Proclus, and it seems a similar kind of book could be written on the Oracles and Damascius' own unique reading of them.[9] Of course enough can be said just about Proclus (and similarly Damascius) to merit its own book, justifiably so in this case, yet it would only help Spanu's discussion further why he begins with Proclus rather than a more general survey of the Oracles amidst all other Platonist texts.

Another issue is Spanu's choice of critical editions, especially for Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* (where he uses the older Victor Cousin [1864] and, for the Latin edition, Raymond Klibansky and Lotte Labowski [1953], rather than Carlos Steel [2007–2009] or Alain Philippe Segonds and Concetta Luna [2007–2017]) and Damascius' *De Principiis* (where he uses the older Charles Émile Ruelle [1889], rather than Leendert G. Westerink and Joseph Combès

9 Although on p. 14, n. 38, Spanu says he intends to write a follow-up monograph study focusing on Damascius' reading and citation of the Oracles. And to be fair, Spanu says that he uses Damascius to augment Proclus' exegesis, where Proclus says little (e.g. in the case of fr. 4 from des Places' edition) (pp. 3–4).

[2002]).[10] Spanu does not provide a reason why he does not use these editions, or whether some of the relevant passages may have differences from the newer editions, if at all. This unfortunately means that one must constantly check a newer critical edition for certain texts (like Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary*) and treat the Greek (and subsequent translation/commentary) in these relevant cases in the book rather tentatively.[11]

In chapter 1 (pp. 17–52), on the Chaldean triad, Spanu devotes the majority of the chapter to the three main terms of Father, Power, and Intellect (section 1.1, pp. 17–33), with an analysis of the "First Transcendent Fire" (τὸ πῦρ ἐπέκεινα τὸ πρῶτον) (section 1.2, pp. 33–38), or the second, demiurgic Intellect deriving from the first Intellect of the triad. For this reviewer, this was the most interesting chapter in the book, and hence the one I spend the most time on for this review. Spanu's analysis in section 1.1 is oriented around fr. 4 in des Places, i.e. Proclus' *In Alcibiadem* p. 83 l. 17–p. 84 l. 17, which quotes the Oracles' well-known declaration, "for Power is with Him [i.e. the Father] but Intellect proceeds from Him". Spanu spends the next few pages discussing Proclus' implicit references to the Chaldean "Father" in other contexts: for instance, the "paternal order" of gods in *Elements of Theology*, Proposition 151, or Proclus' discussion of Porphyry's position on the Father of the triad linked to the One (which Proclus, of course, disagrees with), and so on. Spanu does a good job discussing Proclus' exegesis of the "Father" in relation to his own metaphysics, while also discussing Porphyry's, Iamblichus', and Damascius' positions in juxtaposition. Among several details discussed, the more interesting, significant issue is the placement of the "Father" in relation to the Neoplatonic One and the first term of the intelligible triad. In Proclus' exegesis, as Spanu points out (pp. 20–21), the term, "Father", is a

10 As he mentions on p. 11, he takes his Greek texts from the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae's database, which regrettably still does not have updated versions of Proclus' *Parmenides Commentary* and Damascius' *De Principiis* (among other texts). Though a more minor critique, this is unfortunately one pitfall of relying solely on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, rather than using it for its word search capabilities or its text analytical functions, where relevant.

11 Another, perhaps smaller issue throughout the book is that Spanu unfortunately does not provide the full corresponding Greek for his full passage translations of the fragments in the ensuing chapters. This may come down to the limitations of the publisher and/or series, which is certainly fine, but it would greatly help the reader of these texts, and especially when Spanu comments on certain aspects of the Greek from some of the passages.

relative term: it can only pertain to the first term of the intelligible triad, and *not* to the One, which is entirely unrelated (ἄσχετον). Hence, while the henads can each be called "Father" with respect to their particular intelligible order – while they are all also "one" like the One-itself – this is so only because they are participated; by contrast, Proclus denies the term, "Father", to the One, since it is unparticipated in itself – here following Plato's *Parmenides*' first hypothesis, where the One "transcends both every juxtapositioning and coordinating with all things" (ἐξῄρηται πάσης πρὸς πάντα καὶ ἀντιδιαιρέσεως καὶ συντάξεως), and thus participation.[12]

Yet, as Spanu shows from other fragments, there is an implicit conflict in Proclus' interpretation, or at least an incomplete picture. Fr. 4, quoted by Proclus, simply says that the Father is the first term in relation to its two other correlated principles, Power and Intellect. But then fr. 27 from Damascius' *De Principiis* (volume II, p. 2 l. 19, Westerink/Combès) claims that, "For in every world shines a triad, ruled by a monad" (παντὶ γὰρ ἐν κόσμῳ λάμπει τριάς, ἧς μονὰς ἄρχει), which suggests that the Father is identified *both* with the first term of the Chaldean/intelligible triad, and with a monad *before* the triad, as Damascius claims just before the quote.[13] On the one hand, Proclus tacitly concedes in other passages certain senses in which the One can be indicated as "Father" – for instance, when the paternal order of gods is named such

12 My translation, slightly differing from Spanu's choice of "contrast and relationship" (p. 20) for ἀντιδιαιρέσεως καὶ συντάξεως.

13 Dam. princ. vol. II, p. 2 ll. 17–18 (Westerink/Combès): "And if [one posits] Father, Power, and Intellect, there will be what is before these, the one Father who is before the triad." (εἴτε πατήρ ἐστιν καὶ δύναμις καὶ νοῦς, εἴη ἂν τὸ πρὸ τούτων, ὁ εἷς πατὴρ ὁ πρὸ τῆς τρίαδος.) Spanu on p. 24 argues that, for Damascius, the Unified (as the third term after the One-All and All-One) is the Father, rather than the pure One; however on checking the passage in context (in Westerink/Combès, Dam. princ. vol. III, p. 154 l. 19–p. 155 l. 1), I see no ground for Spanu's claim: after his quoted line at p. 154 ll. 19–20, Damascius goes on to say, "[...] so that the Father is before being and generator of being" (ὅτι πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ γεννητὴς τοῦ ὄντος) (p. 154 l. 20), while beforehand he argues that, "if the One is simply existence (ἁπλῶς ὕπαρξις), the Unified is indeed simply subsistence [or 'being'] (ἁπλῶς οὐσία)" (p. 154 ll. 8–9). In this context Damascius seems to be clear: the Father is always the cause of being, hence it must be identified with the principle responsible for "being", i.e. the One-All implicitly, over the Unified as ἁπλῶς οὐσία. Perhaps Spanu has another passage in mind, but here I could not see his claim.

in analogy to the One,[14] or even as a "symbolic" term of the One.[15] However, neither of these allows a straightforward identification of the One with the term, "Father", since to do so would imply that the One is attached to the intelligible triad, a status which would threaten the One's absolute transcendence. In this, the One for Proclus follows the priority he gives to the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis, negating any direct relation or attachment to the different terms of Being – all of which would correspond to the Oracles' intelligible triad. Spanu seems to read this as Proclus' 'interpretation' of the Oracles, but I think it may be more accurate to say that this is more Proclus prioritizing one textual framework over the other. In discussing the term, "Father", in reference to the One, Proclus seems to prioritize the *Parmenides*' framework, with the first hypothesis' purely negative attributes, over that of the Oracles, which implies a fluidity between negative and positive attributes: one and the same "Father" is unqualifiedly described as the monad detached from the triad (implying negative attributes), and it is also becomes the first term *attached* to the triad (implying positive attributes). By contrast to Proclus, one seems to find the inverse view in Damascius, as Spanu describes his position (p. 24): Damascius appears willing to prioritize the Oracles' framework over that of the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis when he identifies the One unqualifiedly with the "Father" across different passages (e.g. Dam. princ. vol. III, p. 154 ll. 19–20, where the One is said to be the Father of the triad) – at the same time that he also identifies the One, just like the Oracles' Father, with the principle before the triad (e.g. Dam. princ. vol. II, p. 1 ll. 5–7, where Damascius approvingly cites Iamblichus' position, implicitly with the One before the triad). Damascius' willingness to identify one and the same first principle both "before" and "with" the triad is certainly a sharp contrast to Proclus, who is careful to distinguish the Chaldean Father from the One, which remains strictly separate from the triad.

It is somewhat unfortunate that Spanu does not go further into the different positions on the One between Proclus and Damascius – much less between Porphyry and Iamblichus, let alone Plotinus – since that seems to be a significant factor in the different placements of the "Father" in relation to the

14 Cf. e.g. Procl. inst. theol. Proposition 151, p. 132 ll. 29–31 (Dodds).

15 Cf. Procl. theol. Plat. vol. II, p. 56 ll. 20–21 (Westerink/Saffrey).

One. For instance, Iamblichus' description of two "Ones" – i.e. a transcendent, ineffable "One" and a "One" which implies the triad within itself[16] – parallels the two senses of the "Father" from fr. 4 (as the triad's first term) and fr. 27 (as before the triad). Although Spanu mentions Damascius' distinction between the Ineffable and the One, following Iamblichus, Damascius' position on the One by itself is worth paying more attention to. In particular, as I argued in my recent monograph, Damascius maintains a two-fold understanding of the One, apart from the Ineffable: either as (a) undetermined, when seen in its true nature apart from any relation, including the intelligible triad; or as (b) "determined", through analogical terms (what he calls predication κατὰ ἀναλογίαν: see e.g. Dam. princ. vol. I, p. 129 ll. 1–16), when seen as the cause of the intelligible world.[17] It is in this latter capacity (b) that Damascius calls the One the "One-All", or the analogous principle of "remaining" (τὸ μένον), implying its two other correlated principles of "procession" (τὸ προϊόν) and "reversion" (τὸ ἐπιστρεφόμενον). One can see a direct parallel to the two-fold descriptions of the Oracles' Father as both separate from the triad (à la fr. 27) and as the first term of the triad (à la fr. 4): for Damascius this two-fold relation reflects the dynamic two-fold nature of causation, where causes, insofar as they produce their effects, establish a direct relation to the things they produce; when viewed in themselves, 'before' they produce their effects, no relation to the effects obtains.[18] In this respect, Damascius' causal framework, alongside his two-fold description of the One, seems to be not only a return to Iamblichus, but more so an

16 Beyond Damascius' testimonia in Dam. princ. vol. II, p. 1 ll. 5–7, see e.g. Iambl. de myst. 8,2 (p. 261 l. 7–p. 262 l. 7 in des Places) and *On Ethical and Theological Arithmetic*, ll. 70–80, in D. J. O'Meara: Pythagoras Revived. Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity. Oxford/New York 1989, pp. 226–227. Cf. my discussion of Iamblichus' position in J. Greig: The First Principle in Late Neoplatonism. A Study of the One's Causality in Proclus and Damascius. Leiden/Boston 2021 (Philosophia antiqua 156), pp. 54–69.

17 See Greig (n. 16) pp. 257–265.

18 This goes in line with Damascius' overarching causal framework for other, lower principles beyond just the One: see S. Gertz: Knowledge, Intellect and Being in Damascius' *Doubts and Solutions Concerning First Principles*. In: AncPhil 36 (2), 2016, 479–494, and Greig (n. 16) pp. 118–153.

attempt to return back to the Oracles, shifting away from the fixed, 'static' framework one finds in Proclus.[19]

Though much more could be said, one more observation to add is that Spanu on p. 25 insightfully points out a passage in the earlier (likely Porphyrian-era) *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* (fr. IX, p. 92r ll. 1–20 in Hadot), which describes "Power" and "Intellect" as "co-unified" with an unnamed principle – which Spanu, following Hadot, infers to be the Father – before they become distinct. The anonymous commentator ascribes this view to an unnamed party which claims to have had this "revealed by the gods" (suggesting the Oracles), and yet, as the commentator notes, these descriptions are like giving the right logical definitions of colors to someone who is blind. This would also fit with the *Anonymous Commentary*'s description of attributes like "being" and "activity" obtaining for the One, just as they also obtain for the One-Being, or Being-itself.[20] For the commentator, the latter implies definition and distinction, the former implies indeterminacy: hence "being" and "activity" have indefinite meanings when they apply to the One, rather than the definite meanings they obtain in the One-Being – much like fr. IX's description of technically correct definitions of colors spoken by a blind person who has no direct apprehension of the colors in themselves. This context helps to show how the commentator, like Proclus and Damascius, embeds the Oracles' framework within his own. That being said, the anonymous commentator's position seems to come rather close to what one finds in Damascius and Iamblichus, though with certain caveats. In any case this is another scenario where a discussion of the anonymous commentator's framework for the One and One-Being would help provide better context to understand the kind of exegesis we see in fr. IX.

In the remainder of section 1.1, Spanu goes over the remaining terms, Power (pp. 29–30) and Intellect (pp. 31–33), while in section 1.2 Spanu covers the Chaldeans' terms of the "First Transcendent Fire" (τὸ πῦρ ἐπέκεινα τὸ πρῶτον),

19 Effectively one main thesis of Stephen Menn in an article in progress on Neoplatonic metaphysics.

20 In Prm. fr. XII, ll. 22–35 (Hadot). On the distinction between One and Being in the *Anonymous*, see R. Chiaradonna: Logica e teologia nel primo neoplatonismo. A proposito di Anon., *In Parm*., XI, 5–19 e Iambl., *Risposta a Porfirio* [*De Mysteriis*], I, 4. In: Studia graeco-arabica 5, 2015, pp. 1–11 (esp. p. 5) and Greig (n. 16) pp. 47–54.

the first intellect, and the second, demiurgic intellect from fr. 5.[21] In the latter schema, Spanu points out (pp. 34–37) that the "First Transcendent Fire" indicates the first principle's (i.e. the Father's) transcendence, implicitly pointing back to the Stoic and Heraclitean heritage of the notion of fire as the lightest element, transcending bodies, and thus as pre-existing the material cosmos as its source and cause. In turn, Spanu notes that the two-fold distinction between the first and second, demiurgic intellect points to a loose connection with Numenius' own first and second intellects, indicating the Middle Platonist milieu of the Oracles overall – although, as Spanu concedes (p. 38), differences such as the Oracles' placing a monad above the triad of the Father and his Intellect, as well as the second, demiurgic intellect, suggest only a loose connection.

One final observation is worth making. In discussing the second term, "Power", Spanu notes Proclus' identification of the term with the principle of the Unlimited (τὸ ἄπειρον), taken from Plato's *Philebus*. Proclus' identification of "Power" with the Unlimited, alongside the "Father" with the Limit, leads him to characterize the former as inferior and lower in relation to the latter. Though Spanu seems to pass this over without comment, one may wonder whether this is an apt description from the Oracles' own vantage point: on the one hand, while fr's. 4 and 5 describe Power as "belonging" to the Father, or as the Father's "own"; on the other hand, it is not clear whether this relative positioning necessitates inferiority. Indeed in the *Philebus*' schema of the Limit and Unlimited itself, the Limit acts on the Unlimited – implying the Unlimited's lower status, even though it remains a principle. However in the case of the Oracles' schema, it is not clear where the Father and Power should be conceived in exactly this sense. In the case of Proclus, we find a characterization of the Unlimited as a depreciated form of unity, while the Limit is superior insofar as it more closely matches the One's unity (e.g. Procl. theol. Plat. vol. III, p. 32 ll. 19–28, Westerink-Saffrey). By contrast, if we look at Damascius' construal of the "All-One" (the correlate to the Unlimited for Proclus) in Dam. princ. vol. II, p. 33 ll. 2–6, we find by contrast that the All-One is defined as "plurality conceived without unity"

21 Quoting the relevant section of fr. 5: "As the Oracles say: 'For the First Transcendent Fire does not enclose its own Power in matter through works, but by availing [Himself] of Intellect. For Intellect derived from Intellect is the Craftsman of the fiery world'" (translated by Spanu).

(τὸ [...] ἄνευ τοῦ ἑνὸς πλῆθος ἐπινοούμενον)[22] – an impossibility for Proclus – while it is "one" only by its proximate order next to the One-All. In other words, the One-All and All-One in Damascius – standing in for the Father and Power, respectively – are defined by their relative opposition to each other, yet one is not inferior to the other in the way it is for Proclus. This extra conceptual difference between Proclus and Damascius yet again brings back the question of exegesis when looking at the Oracles with the Father and Power, particularly how to conceive the relation between the two.

In chapter 2 ("The structure of the divine dimension", pp. 53–95), Spanu goes through the long list of divine "hypostases" (as he coins them: see p. 53, n. 1) beyond the Chaldean triad – including terms that, to my mind, seem more like general descriptors of a class of principles,[23] alongside specific gods or goddesses, like Hecate.[24] As he does throughout, Spanu is mainly focused on Proclus' (and Damascius') exegesis in each of these sections, in comparison especially with Ruth Majercik and other commentators on the Oracles' fragments. Various of the terms I could not help but wonder why they were not considered in the previous chapter on the Chaldean Triad, such as the "paternal monad" (πατρικὴ μονάς: fr. 11) (section 2.1.1, pp. 53–54), which seems directly connected to the discussion of the Father. In any case, this is quite an exhaustive chapter, so I will only list the sub-chapter headings, and then make some general comments.

After the "paternal monad", Spanu next discusses: the "first principle as 'unutterable' (ἄφθεγκτος)" (fr. 191) (section 2.1.2; pp. 54–55); the "hidden world" (κρύφιος [διάκοσμος]: fr. 198), which surrounds the Intelligible (section 2.1.3; p. 55); the "primal Power of the sacred *Logos*" (δύναμις πρώτη ἱεροῦ λόγου) (fr. 175) (section 2.1.4; pp. 55–57); the "single-" and "double-beyond" (ἅπαξ ἐπέκεινα, δὶς ἐπέκεινα: fr. 169),[25] with the former pertaining to Chronos (section 2.1.5; pp. 57–58); the "intellectual Fire" (πῦρ νοερόν: fr. 81) (section 2.1.6;

22 Cf. Greig (n. 16) p. 274, n. 144.

23 Like the "hidden world" (κρύφιος [διάκοσμος]) from fr. 198 in section 2.1.3 (p. 55).

24 Section 2.1.8 (pp. 61–66).

25 Spanu, apparently following Brian Duvick's translation from Proclus' *Cratylus Commentary*, translates ἅπαξ as "unitarily", but etymologically this seems hard to reconcile with the term, ἕν, for "One" or "unity". In the context of Procl. in Crat. 109, ll. 1–8 (Pasquali), the next best approximation that stays faithful to the term's etymology, I would say, is "single" or "singly".

pp. 58–60); the inter-dependency between intellect and the intelligible (section 2.1.7; pp. 60–61); the goddess, Hecate (section 2.1.8; pp. 61–66); the demiurgic intellect, or dyad (section 2.1.9; pp. 66–68); the divine artisan (ἐργοτεχνίτης: fr. 33) (section 2.1.10; pp. 68–69); the gods, Chronos and Rhea[26] (section 2.1.11; pp. pp. 69–70); Aiôn and Time (section 2.1.12; pp. 70–73); Eros (section 2.1.13; pp. 73–74); the "hypercosmic paternal Abyss" (ὁ ὑπέρκοσμος πατρικὸς βυθὸς: fr. 18) (section 2.1.14; pp. 74–76); the Demiurge and the Iynges (section 2.1.15; pp. 76–77); the "Connectors" (συνοχεῦσιν) (section 2.1.16; pp. 77–79); the Teletarchs (section 2.1.17; pp. 79–81); the World Soul (section 2.1.18; pp. 81–82); and finally, *Azonoi* and the hypercosmic gods (section 2.1.19; pp. 82–83).

In between Spanu's discussion of these terms, one general question is the degree to which each of these terms should be seen as distinct, existent principles. For example, as Ruth Majercik notes,[27] the only explicitly-named divinity in the Oracles appears to be Hecate, despite other potential references like Proclus' attribution of one Oracular line in fr. 56 (in Crat. 143, p. 81 ll. 1–10, Pasquali) to Chronos. While the Oracles refer to Hecate's mediating position between the "single-" and "double-beyond" (ἅπαξ/δὶς ἐπέκεινα) – or in other words, between the Father and the Demiurge (fr. 38; in Spanu, pp. 65–66) – contemporary commentators have tended to treat these three terms as a trinity of divine principles, or persons.[28] This would also be similar to a common reading of the earlier Chaldean Triad as a trinity of divine principles, between Father, Power, and Intellect, as Spanu sometimes seems to assume. Yet it is not clear if we should understand the Oracles in this way – certainly it is not clear if Proclus himself also treats the Oracles' principles this way. If Hecate is the only named deity in the Oracles, it is unclear if we should consider the "single-" and "double-beyond" as deities or divine principles in the same sense as Hecate. In addition, as certain scholars have noted, Proclus elsewhere seems to treat the triad of Limit, Unlimited, and Being (as the Mixed) not as distinct principles, but rather classifications of

26 Or at least apparently: see next paragraph.

27 Cf. R. Majercik: Chaldean Triads in Neoplatonic Exegesis. Some Reconsiderations. In: CQ 51, 2001, pp. 265–296, esp. p. 294.

28 Although this is a position Majercik has pushed back against: see Majercik (cf. n. 27) pp. 286–296.

the different aspects of the henads in their nature and/or activity.[29] One might legitimately wonder if the same dynamic is at work with the Oracles' "single-" and "double-beyond" in relation to Hecate. Among the scholars Spanu cites in passing on Hecate's role in section 2.1.8, one of Spanu's references, Edward Butler, puts forward such a reading, where the "single-beyond" indicates Hecate's and the other gods' transcendent nature, while the "twice-beyond" indicates the fully manifested intellectual realm produced by Hecate and the other gods.[30] This brings up a larger question of how to consider terms like the "first principle", or the three terms of "Father", "Power", and "Intellect" in the Chaldean Triad, not as indicating discrete, separate principles, but rather categories of the gods' activity, much in the same way that one may understand Proclus' Limit and Unlimited. It is unfortunate that Spanu, though citing Butler's piece, does not discuss this reading, which seems to be a crucial factor to understanding Hecate and the "once-/twice-beyond". This deficit does not detract from Spanu's overall commentary, but the broader issue, especially when considering Proclus' exegesis of the Oracles, is an important angle to consider.

In chapter 3, "The world's intellectual archetype and the creation of the material dimension" (pp. 96–115), Spanu covers the other fragments either directly or indirectly related to the intellectual archetype for the cosmos. In sum, Spanu goes through the procession of the Ideas from the domain of the Father (section 3.1; pp. 96–98); the division of all things into triads (section 3.2; pp. 98–99); the cosmic triad of Faith, Truth, and Eros (section 3.3; pp. 99–101); the paternal Intellect's "channels of implacable fire" (section 3.4; pp. 101–103); *symbola* and *synthemata*, as signatures of the paternal Intellect within the material cosmos (section 3.5; pp. 103–104); matter (section 3.6; pp. 104–106); the four elements and the creation of the material world (section 3.7; pp. 106–107); the sun and the encosmic gods (section 3.8; pp. 107–111); the sky, as a "copy of Intellect" (section 3.9; pp. 111–112); and the movement of the fixed stars and planetary revolutions (section 3.10; p. 112).

29 See E. Butler: The Intelligible Gods in the Platonic Theology of Proclus. In: Méthexis 21, 2008, pp. 131–143, esp. p. 135, and Van Riel (n. 7) pp. 428–429; I discuss Butler and Van Riel's positions in Greig (n. 8) pp. 35–43.

30 See Spanu's citation of Butler in p. 65 (n. 71).

In his discussion of fr. 37 in section 3.1, I was confused by Spanu's claim and the corresponding translation he gives: in the final paragraph (p. 97), Spanu claims that, "The penultimate line of the Oracle attributes to the Father, not to the paternal Intellect, the emanation of the Ideas"; but then Spanu's translation of the line reads: "This primary and perfect source of the Father (scil. the Father's Intellect)" (p. 96). The "scil." clarification seems to contradict his claim – perhaps this was a typo in the translation(?) – though he concedes that the Father "uses" his Intellect to disseminate the Ideas, which seems like a fair reading. Furthermore, in his discussion of fr. 34, on Proclus' attribution of matter, for the Chaldeans, coming from the "source of sources" (πηγὴ πηγῶν), Spanu claims that Michael Psellos perhaps has a closer interpretation, attributing the "source of sources" to the Chaldean Father, rather than Proclus' and Damascius' attribution to the Living Being from Plato's *Timaeus*. Yet, on the other hand, the Living Being is also equated with the term, "Father", as the third member of the third intelligible triad (cf. in Spanu, p. 32): could not Proclus and Damascius be referring to the "Father" by proxy? Nuances and questions like this I sometimes found missing, although they are fairly minor.

In chapter 4 (pp. 116–146), Spanu discusses the fragments covering the creation and destiny of man, as well as different aspects of the material world for the Oracles. In sum, he goes through man's creation by the Father (section 4.1; pp. 116–117); the vehicle of the soul (section 4.2; pp. 117–118); the material body (section 4.3; pp. 118–119); the liberation of souls from their material constraints (section 4.4; pp. 119–120); the soul's transmigration into different bodies (section 4.5; pp. 120–121); the soul's faculty of perception (section 4.6; p. 121); instructions, or declarations, from the "gods" generically (section 4.7; pp. 121–128); the love (ἔρως) of the initiate for the gods (section 4.8; pp. 128–129); Hecate's apparitions to the initiate (section 4.9; pp. 129–133); the methods that the Oracles prescribe to reach the divine world (section 4.10; pp. 133–139); and man and his relation to angels and daemons (section 4.11; pp. 139–141).

Various fragments in this chapter stand out for their parallels to Plato, such as fr's. 25 and 94, which both speak of the Father giving the soul to a mortal (fr. 25) and placing "intellect in soul", and hence placing us in bodies, as souls, in bodies (fr. 94) – which, of course, parallels the Demiurge's placement of "intellect in soul, and soul in body", as Proclus also notes, in the *Timaeus* (30b). Proclus interprets the "Father" in the fragments to be the

Demiurge, below the Chaldean Triad (and presumably as the third member of the first intellective triad), although as Spanu observes, one could ask why the "Father" in this case could not also be the "Father" of the Chaldean Triad, for the Oracles. Unfortunately he does not seem to elaborate here, but one wonders if perhaps this could be another case where the Oracles hold a dynamic notion for one and the same term: the "Father" as both removed and separate from the process of production (especially in his capacity as the "monad" prior to the Triad), and as directly involved in the production process, equivalent of the Demiurge. In addition, just as the Oracles are implicitly influenced by Plato's *Timaeus* in fr's. 25 and 94, one also finds the language of the "vehicle" (ὄχημα) of the soul in fr's. 193 and 201 (section 4.2) potentially suggesting an earlier Platonist origin, insofar as other Neoplatonists, like Plotinus and Porphyry, use the term freely without a distinct reference to the Oracles. As Spanu rightly observes (p. 118), this is a case where it is uncertain whether Proclus' (let alone earlier Neoplatonists') language comes from the Oracles or an earlier, if perhaps common, Platonist source. Cases like this otherwise suggest (if not show) how the Oracles weave earlier Platonist material into a revelatory genre, where philosophical concepts and language are employed in delivering revelatory messages.

Finally in chapter 5 (pp. 147–169), Spanu quotes Proclus' *On Chaldean Philosophy*, both Greek and translation (sections 5.2–5.3; pp. 148–156), and gives a commentary on the different sections of the treatise (section 5.4; pp. 156–163). Here, while it is very helpful that Spanu provides the Greek – excerpted from Michael Psellos' own extracts from Proclus' original treatise – it is somewhat puzzling that he did not provide the Greek for the fragments he quoted in translation in the earlier chapters: consistency in this respect would have been appreciated. (It would have also helped if the Greek were presented in parallel, side-by-side, next to the translation, rather than in separate pages – however this is not a major issue.) In the introduction, Spanu interestingly notes that the treatise's format is unique, insofar as it is not like a standard commentary where Proclus gives the original quotation and then his comments, but instead it is a free-standing treatise with quotes from the Oracles interwoven – perhaps reflecting a student's notes from a lecture, not unlike Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Despite this, Spanu in general provides a good discussion of the different extracts of the treatise, especially his discussion of the fourth extract (pp. 160–162) in linking the quasi-faculties

of the "flower of the intellect" and "flower of the soul" to the notion of causality by likeness in Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (e.g. Proposition 32).

In the first line of Extract 3 (p. 153), Proclus notably says that the "body is the root of evil" (ῥίζα τῆς κακίας τὸ σῶμα) – which is striking coming from Proclus' *De malorum subsistentia*, where Proclus seems to attack this very idea, namely that matter is the source of evil in the way formulated by Plotinus and other Platonists;[31] instead for Proclus, evil results from the entity in question failing to aim for its proximately higher good (e.g. nature in the case of body, or reason in the case of irrational souls, and so on). Spanu unfortunately does not address this somewhat troubling conflict in his commentary (pp. 158–159), where the formulation seems to be something directly out of Plotinus – as if Proclus seems to be contradicting himself. On the one hand, perhaps this was an 'early' phase for Proclus, assuming the phrasing was meant in the sense of Plotinus' doctrine. On the other hand, perhaps the line could be saved and understood in the sense above, where body is the "root" only insofar as something at the level of body fails to ascend and stays at that level – or also much the same with soul, if it chooses what is "worse" or lower (i.e. body) instead of what is "better" or higher (i.e. reason, for irrational soul, or intellect, for rational soul). More could be said about this passage and its relation to Proclus' other discussions on evil; despite Spanu's brief commentary, hopefully his full translation and initial discussion will open up more opportunities to discuss this intriguing passage alongside the *De malorum subsistentia.*

To conclude, I found Spanu's work a dense but good fulfillment of his aim to read and discuss the Chaldean Oracles in context with Proclus' exegesis and commentary on them, especially in light of Proclus' broader metaphysical framework. Spanu provides thorough references to recent secondary literature on the Oracles, while mainly discussing Majercik's translation and commentaries on the Oracles. While I found Spanu's translation and analysis to be quite good, one general deficit is the lack of a discussion of Proclus' methodology for reading revelatory texts in general, not just the Oracles – accounting for other texts like the Orphic poems, the *Hermetica*, as well as "divinely inspired" poets like Hesiod, Homer, and so on. A comparison of Proclus' method of exegesis between the Oracles and these other, similarly

31 Among other passages, see e.g. Procl. de malo. 35 ll. 25–27; 46 ll. 1–18 (in Strobel's retroversion).

"revelatory" texts (to the degree they can be classified such) would have greatly helped Spanu's analysis, and in general would help us better understand how Proclus reads the Oracles. Another difficulty throughout the book is that it is plagued with multiple typos and an intricate writing style that could have been simplified in many places – important especially for discussing dense material from Proclus and the Oracles. Despite these shortcomings, Spanu's book is a solid start for hopefully more work in the field on the Neoplatonists' reading of the Oracles, where there has been little systematic work. Such research would help bring anew the question of how Platonists understood revelatory texts from a philosophical vantage point, and how such texts, in turn, influenced as they are by various strands of earlier Platonism, communicate philosophical content wrapped within a revelatory genre. To his credit, Spanu helps to open a new door to this interesting and very important question for late antique philosophy and theology.

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