

СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

NEOPLATONIC EXEGESIS OF HERMAIC CHAIN: SOME REFLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT. In his exposition of the philosophical history of Neoplatonist School in Athens, Damascius attempts to prove that Isidore's soul was part of the Hermaic chain to which Proclus also belonged. According to Marinus (*V. Procl.* 28), Proclus had the revelation of this very fact and had learned from a dream that he possessed the soul of the Pythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa. In the 4th and 6th centuries the expression “pattern of Hermes Logios” is transmitted through the various links of the Neoplatonic chain, Julian (*Or.* 7.237c), Proclus (*in Parm.* I.618), Damascius (*V. Isid.* Fr. 16) and Olympiodorus (*in Gorg.* 41.10.16–22; *in Alc.* 190.14–191.2). The formula that Aelius Aristides (*Or.* III.663) dedicates to the praise of Demosthenes, the best of Greek orators, arises in the context of an opposition between rhetoric and philosophy, and appears transferred and transmuted in the texts of the Neoplatonic schools to a philosophical context that defends an exegetical mode of teaching. Demosthenes, through his admirer Aristides, exerts an influence on Neoplatonism, introducing Hermes as the key piece that strengthens the chain of reason and eloquence. Hermes, the “eloquent” god or “friend of discourses”, transmits divine authority through the word of the exegete: an exceptional philosopher, a model of virtue to strive to rise to.

KEYWORDS: Hermes, Julian emperor, Proclus, Damascius, Olympiodorus.

The Neoplatonic teacher transmits to his students, through exegesis,¹ an anagogical excellence: the commentaries on Aristotle's treatises (*Categories* and *On In-*

¹ According to the exegetical method established by Proclus: the text is divided into *lemmata* which, for example, in the case of the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, are quoted in full. The exegesis of the text is based on the distinction between general explanation (*θεωρία*) and detailed explanation (*λέξις*) – more flexible and swaying in Proclus and more rigid and strict in the Alexandrian commentators, especially in Olympiodorus. On the exegetical method, see Festugière 1963 (= 1971), and Hoffmann 2006. According to the

terpretation) or Plato's dialogues elevate the souls of the students, guided by the teacher-philosopher, towards Hermes and the other gods “guardians of discourses”.² In his discourse *On the Golden Chain*, Michael Psellos conveys to us the Neoplatonic belief that Plato's soul itself was a god who lived in the company of Apollo and Hermes, that is, that he belonged to the “chain” of these gods.³ Hermes is the “eloquent” god or “friend of discourses” (λόγιος). In *Cratylus* (407e-408b), Plato shows the multiple affinities that Hermes maintains with the *logos*. The command of discourse characterises Hermes Logios, the master of discourse. The epithet “Logios” designates the functions attributed to the god as messenger, herald and ambassador. For this reason, Hermes is the patron of eloquence and orators, since he leads with the word.⁴ This conception, whose origin is ancient, expands in the Greek Neoplatonic schools of late antiquity. Hermes presides, together with Heracles, over the life of the gymnasiums, which for the philosophers corresponds to intellectual and rational life.

Hermes, god of the *logos*, connects rhetoric with philosophy, in line with the concerns of the Neoplatonic approach, through the expression of Aelius Aristides: “pattern of Hermes Logios”, taken from a work devoted entirely to Plato's exegesis, the discourse *In Defence of the Four against Plato*, where Demosthenes is in fact characterised with exactly these words.⁵ The term λόγιος comes from λόγος, “word” or “reason”. Thus, the meaning assigned to λόγιος depends on the context in which it is placed: it may refer to eloquence, understood in its technical sense, to the literary in general, or to the rational, alluding to intellectual qualities in general. Likewise, in the Neoplatonic schools the term “pattern” (τύπος) is a key

scheme θεωρία and λέξις, the *Commentary on the first Alcibiades* faithfully reflects the oral course; the *Commentary on the Timaeus* and the *Commentary on the Parmenides* would be more independent of oral exposition – being Plato's “supreme” dialogues, only the most advanced students attend the courses, without needing additional explanations of a textual nature.

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² Simplicius, *In Aristotelis categorias commentarium* 438.34 Kalbfleisch. Cf. Hoffmann 1997.

³ Michael Psellos, *Opusculum* 46.48–49 Duffy: καὶ ὅτι γεννηθέντα τοῖς θεοῖς πᾶσι συνέστησε καὶ τῇ Πλάτωνος ψυχῇ Ἀπόλλωνι συνδιαγούση καὶ τῷ Ἑρμῇ. Cf. Lévêque 1959, 52, and 77–81.

⁴ On the epithet “Logios” applied to Hermes, cf. Pernot 2002, 191–207, and 2006, 129–175.

⁵ Aelius Aristides, *Or.* III.663 Behr and Lenz 1976-1980, fasc. 3, 51; *Or.* 46.398.1–3 Dindorf: καὶ τολμῶσι καὶ περὶ Δημοσθένους, ὃν ἐγὼ φαίην ἂν Ἑρμοῦ τινος λογίου τύπον εἰς ἀνθρώπους κατελεθεῖν. This same expression appears in Choricus of Gaza, *Or.* III.5 and XIII.15, and Eunapius of Sardis, *Vitae Sophistarum* 490 Goulet.

element, since it expresses metaphorically the participation of sensitive things in a higher universal principle from which they come.

The formula Ἑρμοῦ Λογίου τύπος passes from Demosthenes, the prince of public speaking (4th century B.C.), to Olympiodorus, the professor of philosophy at Alexandria (6th century), at the same time as the epithet λόγιος takes on a religious sense, as it is adapted to the Neoplatonic courses. Hermes is no longer only the god who inspires the works of eloquence. He is now, and above all, the guardian of reasoning of thought. He is no longer, therefore, exclusively a god of argumentation, ultimately he is a god of reasoning.

1

In the *Life of Isidore* (Fr. 368 Zintzen; Fr. 152 Athanassiadi), Damascius alludes to the Hermaic chain, explaining that the “pure chorus” (ἀκήρατος χορός), referring to Proclus, had the clear vision that his soul belonged to the chain of Hermes. Proclus told this vision to Isidore, who in turn passed it on to Damascius, who wrote it down in his biography.⁶

According to what Marinus tells us, Proclus had received the revelation that he belonged to the “chain” of Hermes and had dreamt that his soul was that of the reincarnated Pythagorean Nicomachus of Gerasa:

And in addition to what I have said, he clearly beheld that he was of the Hermaic chain (τῆς Ἑρμαϊκῆς εἴη σειρᾶς) and believed because of a dream (ὄναρ) that he had the soul of Nichomachus the Pythagorean (τὴν Νικομάχου τοῦ Πυθαγορείου ψυχὴν).⁷

From this testimony of Marinus, Dillon (1969, 274–275 = 1990, XV) places the death of Nicomachus in 196, based on the following deduction: if Proclus (born in 412) believed to be the reincarnation of Nicomachus and if the period between two reincarnations, according to *The Theology of Arithmetic* of Pseudo-Iamblichus (52.5–16 De Falco) is 216 years, Nicomachus was born in 196.⁸ Tarán (1974, 113) is

⁶ According to Saffrey, Segonds and Luna (2001, 159, n. 5), Fr. 368 Zintzen (= Fr 152 Athanassiadi) of Damascius, placed at the end of the *Life of Isidore*, does not seem to allude to the chain of Hermes, but to the series of Platonic dialogues.

⁷ Marinus, *Vita Procli* 28.34–36 Saffrey, Segonds and Luna 2001, 34; trans. Edwards 2000, 102. On the expression “chain of Hermes” (Ἑρμαϊκὴ σειρᾶ), cf. Eunapius, *V. Soph.* IV (Porphyry), 1. 1.8.15–17; Proclus, *in Tim.* II.294.31 Diehl; *in Crat.* XXV.9. 24–25 Pasquali; Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 20.8 Westerink.

⁸ On Nichomachus of Gerasa, cf. Tarán 1974; Dillon 1977, 85; Dörrie and Baltes 1993, 87.6–10, and commentary, 269–272; O’Meara 1997, 14–23; Radicke and Jacoby 1999, n° 1063, 112–131; Centrone and Freudenthal 2005; Ferrari 2018.

opposed to this dating, because there is nothing to indicate that Proclus gave special relevance to the number 216, since he does not cite it in his commentary on the *Timaeus*. Criddle (1998, 324–327), on the basis of a longer reincarnation period than Dillon, fixed at 270 years, considers the date of Nicomachus' death to be 142, considering the chronological proposal suggested by Dillon to be too late. Saffrey, Segonds and Luna (2001, 159–160, n. 6) judge that the arguments of Dillon and Criddle are not very convincing, considering them too speculative, since it is difficult to admit that Proclus knew the exact date of Nicomachus' death.

2

The ex-Christian Roman emperor Julian (reigned 361–363) devotes his discourse *Against the Cynic Heraclius* (*Oration 7*) to refute the Cynic theses, focusing specifically on religious questions. At the end of the text, the emperor makes a list of philosophers who, unlike the Cynics, have respected the gods. In the early spring of 362, Julian was invited to hear a lecture delivered in a hall in Constantinople by a cynic by the name of Heraclius. The discourse is clearly divided into three parts: After an introduction (1.204a1–205a7), he announces the tripartite plan (205a7–c3): (1) it is more convenient for the “dogs”, or Cynic philosophers, to compose discourses than myths (2–29, 205c4–215a5); (2) the composition of myths must satisfy certain rules and what they are (10–23, 215a6–235c1); and (3) with the gods the greatest respect is required (24–25, 236c2–239c5). In this third and last part, to illustrate the respect due to the gods, Julian makes use of the argument from authority, showing to what extent Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle have honoured the names of the gods (236d2–4). When he refers to Aristotle, he alludes to a passage in *Topics* (I.105a5–7) that connects with the image of Hermes Logios:

But now will you allow me to cite next that all-wise Siren (τὴν πάνσοφον ὑπαγορεύσω σειρήνα), the pattern of Hermes the god of eloquence (τὸν τοῦ λογίου τύπον Ἑρμοῦ), the man dear to Apollo and the Muses (<τὸν τῶ> Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ ταῖς Μούσαις φίλον)? Well, he declares that all who raise the question or seek to enquire at all whether gods exist ought not to be answered as though they were men but to be chastised as wild beasts (ὡς τὰ θηρία κολάσεως).⁹

Julian makes reference to Aristotle, specifically to a passage from *Topics* (I.105a) in which he states that every problem should not give rise to a philosophical argument and that in certain cases it is not worth arguing about. According to the Stagirite, he who wonders whether or not to honour the gods, whether or not to

⁹ Julian, *Ad Heracl.* 24.30–35 Rochefort [= *Or.* 7.237c Nesselrath]; trans. Wright 1913, vol. 2, 157, slightly modified.

love one's parents, does not deserve a reasoned answer, but only a good punishment.¹⁰ Likewise, he who asks whether the snow is white or not deserves to be referred to the testimony of his senses.

This quote, as Saffrey (1968, 75) suggests, will become commonplace.¹¹ But Julian probably knew the text because, in his time, it had already become commonplace.¹² The emperor, who quotes second-hand, wields this quotation as a weapon against atheism. Therefore, in order to make his quotation more effective, he refers to Aristotle with the following laudatory adjectives: “omniscient Siren” (τὴν πάνσοφον ὑπαγορεύσω σειρήνα), “the pattern of Hermes Logios” (τὸν τοῦ λογίου τύπον Ἑρμοῦ) and “the man dear to Apollo and the Muses” (<τὸν τῶ> Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ ταῖς Μούσαις φίλον). The expression “pattern of Hermes Logios” plays the role of an authoritative argument: by comparing Aristotle with Hermes, the emperor emphasises that the Stagirite is close to the gods, and this proximity lends greater weight to his argument in favour of Hellenic religion. In the face of the Cynics, the Aristotelian expression – taken from Aristides – is integrated into Julian's rhetorical strategy, with a religious projection. To refute Heraclius, Julian relies on a testimony of Aristotle, which he quotes through Aristides. The discourse peremptorily retorts to the Cynics' ignorance of the *rhetorike technē* of Hermes, and, therefore, their ignorance of the *paideia* in general.

For the emperor Julian, referred to as the Apostate, trying to reconcile philosophy and religion became a political challenge. On the one hand, deeply linked to the Greek *paideia* and religion, shaped by Homer and Hesiod, Julian tries to recover the myths related to the traditional Hellenic gods; on the other hand, both Christians and certain pagan intellectuals focus their criticism on Julian's works because of their content, which is incompatible with their beliefs. A little later, in the discourse *Against the Cynic Heraclius*, Julian attributes his salvation to Zeus, setting out in an allegorical way his own biography, which begins by recounting the cruel events that marked his childhood. According to the emperor, Zeus, seeing the impiety and disorder that reigned in the empire since Constantine, entrusts his son Helios with the task of caring for the child – little Julian – and curing him of the disease he suffers from – Christianity.¹³ In the story, Zeus, “father of all the gods” (230d), gives these same orders to Athena and Hermes. Then, in a face-to-face vision with Helios, the young Julian is given the mission to rid the empire of the filth of Christianity. In this account, Zeus occupies the top position

¹⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* I.105a5–7 Ross: οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀποροῦντες “πότερον δεῖ τοὺς θεοὺς τιμᾶν καὶ τοὺς γονεῖς ἀγαπᾶν ἢ οὐ” κολάσεως δέονται, οἱ δὲ “πότερον ἢ χιῶν λευκῇ ἢ οὐ” αἰσθήσεως.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Elias, *in Cat.* 122.22.24 Busse.

¹² Cf. Bouffartigue 1992, 250.

¹³ Cf. Julian, *Ad Heracl.* 229c.

in the levels of the divine hierarchy, emphasising his supremacy, and transmits his orders to Athena and Hermes.¹⁴ The emperor gives constant signs of his devotion, directing his honours to Zeus – father and common king of all things, who occupies the highest rank –, to Helios, Athena and Hermes.¹⁵

3

Proclus clearly acknowledges his debt to Syrianus with regard to the exegesis of the *Parmenides*, as is evident from the two magnificent eulogies he dedicates to his master, with which he begins the *Commentary on the Parmenides* (I.618.1–13) and the *Platonic Theology* (I.1.7.1–8), which show the great importance he places on Syrianus. In the first of these prefaces, the *diadochus* turns to the opening prayer of the oration *On the Crown* by Demosthenes (*in Parm.* I.617.1)¹⁶. Although he does not cite the name of Hermes, Proclus replaces the expression Ἑρμῆς Λόγιος, which he takes from Aristides' *In Defense of the Four against Plato* (*Or.* III.663 Behr and Lenz), by φιλοσοφία:

Of him I [Syrianus] would say that he came to men as the exact pattern of philosophy for the benefit of souls here below (φιλοσοφίας τύπον εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐλθεῖν ἐπ' εὐεργεσίᾳ τῶν τῆδε ψυχῶν), in recompense for the statues, the temples, and the whole ritual of worship, and as the chief author of salvation (σωτηρίας ἀρχηγὸν) for men who now live and for those to come hereafter.¹⁷

¹⁴ In the treatise *Against the Galileans* (115E), Athena administers the nations that are belligerent with intelligence, and Hermes, those that are more prudent than audacious. On Emperor Julian, see Turcan 1975, 105–128; Bouffartigue 1992; Bregman 1999.

¹⁵ Cf. Julian, *Ad Heracl.* 230b–231a, 232d, 233d. Cf. van den Berg 2019, 435–436. In the *Hymn to King Helios* (132a), Julian invokes Hermes Logios, connecting him with Apollo and the Muses.

Porphyry, the third link in the chain, is one of Julian's favourite philosophers and influences him directly or indirectly (Bouffartigue 1992, 90). In the *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* (3.161c), Julian admits: “I learn that Porphyry has left philosophical reflections on the subject (Πορφυρίῳ τινὰ πεφιλοσοφήσθαι περὶ αὐτῶν). I have chosen to treat [...]. I don't know, not having read them, if it goes in the same direction as my discourse (εἰ καὶ συνενεχθῆναί που συμβαίη τῷ λόγῳ)”. Although the text has not been preserved, Julian's purpose focuses on the philosophical interpretation of myths (or rites) and, more specifically, on the meaning of the religion of Cybele and Attis.

¹⁶ Cf. Demosthenes, *De corona* 1 Butcher.

¹⁷ Proclus, *in Parm.* I.618 Luna and Segonds; trans. Morrow and Dillon 1987, 20, slightly modified.

Syrianus, a divine man (θεῖος ἀνὴρ), descended among the incarnated souls, occupies the place left by Demosthenes. Philosophy, likewise, replaces Hermes Logios. At the beginning of the general prologue to his *Commentary on the Parmenides* (I.617.1–659.22) rhetoric serves as an introduction to philosophical hermeneutics. From Proclus onwards, the Neoplatonic philosophical discourse is constructed in confrontation with what we could call “real” Christianity, as a social and political reality. In this passage, the reference to Syrianus replacing statues, shrines, and even sacred worship altogether, must be interpreted in a context of controversy directed against Christians, whom he accuses of ignorance, in contrast to the superiority of the theological science of the pagans. Christians are unjust souls, in the sense of Plato's *Republic*,¹⁸ that is, souls trapped in internal dissonance (στάσις), whose state of ignorance is inseparable from the structural disagreement of their parts, so that the reproach of ignorance in theology connects closely with other reasons of a moral nature.¹⁹

The expression Proclus uses, “chief author of salvation” (σωτηρίας ἀρχηγόν), refers back to the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (2.10), where Paul applies the same terms to Jesus: “It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in

¹⁸ For Proclus, evaluated from the criteria of Plato's *Republic*, the proper constitution of the Christians is unjust, because the souls of its citizens are unjust and ignorant, dominated by the irrational, and are located in the sublunar region of the cosmos, in the generation or even in Tartarus itself, in “the darkest and most disordered realm of the universe (τὸ ἀφεγγέστατον τοῦ παντός καὶ ἀτακτότατον).” (Proclus, in *Crat.* 125.7–8 Pasquali). Also, these men are strangers to the Hellenic world, since they do not recognise the divinity of the sun or the moon or other celestial gods (cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 397d1–2; Proclus, in *Crat.* 125.1–3), “which are our saviours (σωτήρας) and lords (προστάτας), who bring about the elevation (ἀναγωγούς) of immortal souls, but are also creators and maintainers of mortal creatures (δημιουργούς δὲ καὶ ὑποστάτας τῶν θνητῶν).” (Proclus, in *Crat.* 125.3–5; trans. Duvick 2007, 71).

On the contrary, the man who possesses the higher virtues chooses to lead a life similar to that of the gods (cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* I 2 [19] 7.21 Henry and Schwyzer; Porphyrius, *Sent.* 32.7–9.82 Lamberz). He can, however, know the lower virtues and act in accordance with them, but only when circumstances require it. Yet this man is free from generation, and his age, for the present times impose no law on him, dominated by ignorance, and therefore remote from the realm of Intelligence, to which he must submit.

¹⁹ Since Proclus, the Neoplatonic philosophers of Athens have considered themselves the last representatives of Greek philosophy, threatened by the irruption of Christianity as the official religion. For this reason, they take a pessimistic view of the present times in which they live, precisely because they are aware of a progressive and inescapable departure from a golden age. Cf. Ramos Jurado 1974; Saffrey 1992 (= 2000); Gavray 2015; Hoffmann 2012; Zamora Calvo 2020.

bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας) perfect through sufferings (διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι).” Thus, in a context of refutation before the Christians, integrated within the encomium to Syrianus, this reference places his master as the successor of Hermes who displaces the figure of Christ. Christians are forgetful souls, who live in the world of generation, far from intelligible and transcendent causes, ignoring the order reality: the distinction between being and becoming, between the intelligible world and the sensible world. In this way, by confusing the orders of reality, they destroy the hierarchy, since, being installed exclusively in the “sublunar” sphere, they only know the sensible becoming. Theological ignorance leads them in politics to the closing of temples, the destruction of sanctuaries and the prohibition of the rites proper to the traditional religion. In his praise of Syrianus, for Proclus, the science taught by Plato and projected on the whole of the philosophical and religious tradition responds to impious ignorance.

According to Marinus, Proclus had had the revelation that he belonged to the chain of Hermes.²⁰ For Proclus, Hermes is one of the twelve hypercosmic-cosmic gods, who constitute a class “separate from the world, supra-celestial, immaculate, elevating and perfect” (*Theol. Plat.* VI.15.74.17–75.2). Hermes forms, together with Aphrodite and Apollo, “the elevating triad” (ἡ ἀναγωγὸς τριάς). Hermes “is the purveyor of philosophy and, by philosophy, raises souls, and, by the dialectical powers, leads souls, both universal and particular, towards the Good itself” (*Theol. Plat.* VI.22.98.14–17).²¹

The hypercosmic-cosmic gods, also called “separated from the world” (ἀπόλυτοι), immediately follow the hypercosmic gods, and are characterised by the following attributes: “in contact, not in contact”. Given that these attributes appear for the first time in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (148d5–149d7) and are not denied of the One in the first hypostasis, Proclus does not address the hypercosmic-encosmic gods in the commentary on the first hypothesis (*in Parm.* VII.1201.25–1202.14). Hypercosmic (or assimilative) gods are analysed in *Platonic Theology*.²²

²⁰ Cf. Marinus, *V. Procl.* 8.34–35. Cf. Saffrey, Segonds and Luna 2001, 34, and 159, n. 5.

²¹ A stature of Hermes (Inv. S 1054) was discovered, together with a head of Nemesis (Inv. S 1055) and a statuette of a seated philosopher (Inv. S 1053), in a well of House B, a place of learning akin to the so-called “House of Proclus”, situated at the foot of the Acropolis. Cf. Hoffmann 1989, 549–550. Shear (1969, 236, 238 [fig. 36], 240 and 241 [fig. 40]) dates this statue of Hermes to the Augustan period.

²² Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* VI.1–14, especially in chap. 14. On the conception of the hypercosmic gods, cf. Saffrey and Westerink 1968–1997, vol. 6, IX–XXXIII.

Iamblichus uses the opposition between pericosmic gods and hypercosmic gods to designate the transcendence of the first gods. Saffrey and Westerink (1968-1997, vol. 6, XI–XII) attribute to Iamblichus the invention of the pericosmic-hypercosmic (περικόσμιος-ὑπερκόσμιος) pair that will soon become, in his successors, the pair: encosmic-hypercosmic (ἐγκόσμιος-ὑπερκόσμιος).²³ In *Platonic Theology* (VI.3), Proclus demonstrates the intermediary function of the hypercosmic gods, which consists in establishing the similarity between the images and their models. The function of the demiurge is to act as a cause, and that of the hypercosmic gods, as assimilation. The assimilative gods (or hypercosmic: like, unlike) are followed by the gods separate from the world (hypercosmic-cosmic: in contact, not in contact) and the cosmic gods (equal, unequal). In this way, the assimilative gods, who come after the intellectual gods, make the gods who follow them similar to the intellectual gods (*In Parm.* VII.1191.13–21).²⁴

In *Platonic Theology* (III.18) we discover a new direct link between Hermes and Truth, where Proclus establishes a correspondence between the three monads in the *Philebus* (65a2) – Truth, Beauty, Proportion – and three human types – the philosopher, the lover, the musician –,²⁵ which correspond to the three gods of the “elevating” triad.²⁶

²³ In his treatise *De mysteriis* (VIII.8.271.10–13), Iamblichus makes constant use of the adjective ὑπερκόσμιος. Quoting himself, he points out that in his treatise *On the Gods*, he distinguishes the gods into pericosmic and hypercosmic, and that the pericosmic gods are those who liberate souls.

²⁴ Proclus discusses the gods separate from the world (ἀπόλυτοι), or hypercosmic-encosmic, in the *Platonic Theology* (VI.15–24), particularly chapter 24 (the last chapter of the *Platonic Theology*) is devoted to the teaching of the *Parmenides* and concludes (114.19–22) by referring to *Commentary on Parmenides* (1202.8–11), where he interprets the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (148d5–149d7).

The theologians to whom Proclus attributes the appellation “gods separate from the world” are probably, as Saffrey and Westerink (1968-1997, vol. 6, 164-165) suggests the authors of a commentary on the *Chaldean Oracles*, since the term ἀπόλυτος does not properly occur in the *Chaldean Oracles*. Hermias (*in Phaedr.* 145.24–28 Lucarini and Moreschini), who is influenced by the teaching of Syrianus, mentions the gods separate from the world. As in Proclus, for Damascius, in the commentary on the *Parmenides*, the gods separated from the world correspond to *Parmenides* (in contact, not in contact). Cf. Luna and Segonds, 2007-2021, vol. 7, 390.

²⁵ Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* III.18.63.16–21. Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 248d3–4; Plotinus, *Enn.* I 3 [20] 1.8–10.

²⁶ Cf. Combès 1987 (= 1996); van den Berg 2001, 61–62.

Damascius, the last *diadochus* of the Platonic “Academy” of Athens, composed the *Life of Isidore*, where, in parallel to the biography dedicated to his master, Isidore of Alexandria, he produced a panoramic exposition of the philosophical paganism of the 5th century. The *Life of Isidore* is preserved in fragmentary form in the *Codex 242* of the *Bibliotheca* of Photius and in a series of *lemmata* of the Byzantine biography of the *Suda* lexicon. In the beginning of this work, Damascius discovers Isidore's square face as “a sacred pattern of Hermes Logios”.

Isidore's appearance was that of a sensible, elderly man, dignified and resolute. His face was almost square (τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον ὀλίγου τετράγωνον ἦν), his sacred pattern being that of Logios Hermes (Ἑρμοῦ λογίου τύπος ἱερός). As for his eyes, how can I describe the true charm of Aphrodite herself that resided in them, how can I express the very wisdom of Athena that was contained in them?²⁷

For the description of his master's face, Isidore borrows from Aelius Aristides the expression he applied to Demosthenes: “The pattern of Hermes Logios descended among men” (*Or.* III.663). The square shape of Isidore's face is a “sign” (σύνημα), that is, a divine mark inscribed in the sensible reality, which guarantees the integrity of the last “link” of the chain that Hermes orders. By means of this sign, Damascius incorporates the Pythagorean physiognomy into the Neoplatonic theurgy. He who is able to recognise this “sign” can return to the source from which it comes, to the previous link in the chain.

In Neoplatonic teaching, as Damascius shows, “professional” veneration possesses anagogical excellence (*Life of Isidore*, Fr. 191 Zintzen; Fr. 84E Athanassiadi). This disposition of the soul provokes an “assimilation” of the “professionals” towards the gods who preside over their art, and converts them towards them. The mode of citation Damascius employs is similar to that employed above in the passages of Julian and Proclus. The last dialogue transfers the expression “pattern of Hermes *Logios*”, taken from Aristides, applying it to a Neoplatonic philosopher, in this case his teacher Isidore, with the aim of praising him, highlighting his link with the divine.²⁸

Damascius' concise expression connects physiognomy with philosophy. Isidore's face reflects the natural ideal philosopher according to the conception of

²⁷ Damascius, *V. Isid.* Fr. 16 Zintzen (= Photius, *Bibliotheca* 242.336a4–10 Henry); Fr. 13 Athanassiadi; trans. Athanassiadi 1999, 89 slightly modified.

²⁸ The onomastic power leads to god: the name acquires the function of Hermes. Symbols operate what they mean. By means of his physiognomic observation, Damascius places Isidore in the chain of Hermes. Cf. Pernot 2006, 167–171.

the Neoplatonic schools, i.e. the quadrangular shape of his face shows the mastery of discourse (*logos*) and the proximity to Hermes. In two passages, *Epitoma Photiana* 80 (Fr. 59A Athanassiadi) and Fr. 248 Zintzen, Damascius points out that Proclus and Isidore admired each other's faces, because they recognised in them the pattern – or mark – of the divine and of philosophy. In the quoted text, Damascius alludes to a continuity in the divinisation of the philosopher: Isidore's eyes show the proximity to Aphrodite and Athena; beyond the metonymy, the proximity between the goddesses strengthens the process of divinisation of his master. Damascius inserts the adjective “sacred” (ἱερός) in the expression “pattern of Hermes Logios”, thus emphasising the sacred character of his teacher. According to the biography, Isidore represents a “luminous apparition”, a “divine epiphany”, typical of the chain of Hermes.

The term τετράγωνος, applied to the form of Isidore's face, takes on a signification of “perfect”, in a sense very close to “good” (ἀγαθός). Damascius connects the “pattern of Hermes” with the quadrangular figure of Isidore's face: in this way, mathematics is linked to astronomy, in an exegetical context inherited from the Neopythagorean tradition: 4 represents harmony and perfection.²⁹ As Johnston and Mulroy (2004) suggest, Simonides (Fr. 37 Page) employs the adjective τετράγωνος in the sense of “perfect”, referring to Hermes. In this well-known fragment preserved in the *Protagoras* (339b1–3) of Plato, Simonides uses the term “square” (τετράγωνος) as a figurative way of describing a “truly good man”.³⁰

5

Olympiodorus writes his *Commentary on Gorgias* probably around 525³¹ and the *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* around 560.³² In both commentaries, one of the main purposes of Olympiodorus focuses on responding to the *Platonic Dis-*

²⁹ Cf. Asmus 1911, 144–145; Athanassiadi 1999, 89, n. 32; Johnston and Mulroy 2004.

³⁰ Plato, *Prot.* 339b1–3: ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι χαλεπὸν, χερσὶν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόῳ τετράγωνον, ἀνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον. For Simonides texts, cf. Campbell 1991, 434–437. This image, which in the academic tradition is connected with Pythagorean philosophy, is cited once by Plato (*Prot.* 339a–b) and twice by Aristotle (*EN* 1100b21; *Rhet.* 1411b27). There is a scholarly tradition that connects the image with Pythagorean philosophy. In our opinion, such an association is not likely to have occurred to Simonides or to the public. It is more likely that Simonides drew the image from archaic sculpture, specifically from Hermes depicted with preferably rectilinear lines, which allows us to explore a connection that allows us to interpret the meaning of the poem. Cf. Kahn 1974, 162; Johnston and Mulroy 2004, 2–3.

³¹ Cf. Festugière 1963, 77–80 (= 1971, 551–554).

³² Cf. Segonds 1985–1986, vol. 1, LXX; Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 15.

courses of Aelius Aristides and, specifically, to the *In Defense of the Four against Plato* (Or III.663).³³

We must also cite the nice remark made by one of the philosophers (ἔφη τις φιλόσοφος), that Aristides does not realize that he is contradicting himself. For if Aristides himself says that Demosthenes was the pattern of Hermes (Ἐρμοῦ τύπον), and Demosthenes praises Plato, then all the more divine is Plato (πολλῶ πλεόν Πλάτων θεῖος). Hence the story that Demosthenes was listening to Plato and praising his style, when one of his companions cuffed him for not attending to the substance of the lessons.³⁴

In this passage, taken from the commentary on the *Gorgias*, after examining the consequences of Demosthenes being a disciple of Plato, Olympiodorus introduces the expression “pattern of Hermes” (Ἐρμοῦ τύπος), with the aim of putting Aristides in contradiction with himself. On the one hand, Aristides attacks Plato, but on the other hand, he praises Demosthenes, applying to him the expression “pattern of Hermes”. Now, according to the author from whom Olympiodorus draws his inspiration, Demosthenes praises Plato (in *Letter V.3*). Aristides has therefore praised an advocate of Plato. Therefore, in believing he criticised the philosopher, Aristides has in reality only built him up. Olympiodorus' intention is to defend Plato, so he replies to Aristides.³⁵ This refutation of Olympiodorus has antecedents, like the philosopher he quotes: “one of the philosophers (τις φιλόσοφος)” (in *Gorg.* 41.10.16) or the interpreter alluded to in another passage: “And certainly one of the commentators well observed (ἀμέλει καλῶς εἶπέ τις

³³ Olympiodorus, in *Gorg.* 41.10.3–6 Westerink: “There existed the celebrated orators (γεγόνασι ῥήτορες θαυμαστοί) Isocrates and Demosthenes and Lycurgus. But Isocrates was [Plato's] contemporary, whereas Demosthenes and Lycurgus were his students (μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ)”. (Trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 268). Cf. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 22, 70, n. 7, and 255, n. 752; Grimaldi 2004.

³⁴ Olympiodorus, in *Gorg.* 41.10.16–22 Westerink; trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 268 slightly modified.

³⁵ Cf. Olympiodorus, in *Gorg.* 1.13; 32.2; 38.2; 41.3; 41.18; 42.1; 42.2; in *Alc.* 2.97; 135.8. Olympiodorus replies to Aelius Aristides, who composed four treatise-discourses against Plato's attack on rhetoric and in praise of oratory: Two *On Rhetoric, against Plato*, which are a reply to Plato's criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*; one *In Defence of the Four against Plato*, which is a defence of Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles' political career (cf. Shephard 2021, 195), and *Against Capito*, in which he answers to the objections raised by the theses exposed in the other three discourses.

τῶν ἐξηγητῶν)" (*in Gorg.* 32.2.8–9).³⁶ In his refutation, Olympiodorus would defeat Aristides by employing his own weapons, using the same formula by which he believed he won. In this way, he leads into contradiction with himself the second century deuterosophist and professor of rhetoric, considered the greatest expert in the art of refutation.³⁷ Therefore, as Pernot (2006, 160–163) suggests, if it is a question of replying to Aristides, it is not so much a question of criticising Demosthenes, but only of relativising the hyperbolic formula to which the Neosophist of Smyrna resorts in this passage to praise Demosthenes. Olympiodorus agrees that Demosthenes should occupy a principal place on the podium, as long as Plato occupies a higher place than he does. Thus, he does not object to calling Demosthenes "pattern of Hermes", as Aristides proposes, as long as Plato is placed above him in the hierarchical scale, occupying the rank of the gods, since if an orator can be divine, as the best of orators, the Orator par excellence, the philosopher, must be much more so.

The controversy against Aristides that appears in the *Commentary on the Gorgias* of Olympiodorus could come, at least in eight passages, from a treatise of Porphyry, divided into seven books, entitled *Against Aristides* (Πρὸς Ἀριστείδην ζ').³⁸ In this work Porphyry replicates the *Platonic Discourses* of Aristides.³⁹ But Smith (1993, 487) has suggested that this Aristides to whom the treatise points is probably Aristides Quintilianus, and not Aelius Aristides, on the grounds that Porphyry (413T) may have been inspired by a passage in the treatise *On Music* (II.17).

Heath (2003, 144) is sceptical of Smith's suggested identification. While acknowledging that Porphyry is interested in music theory, it is clearly demonstrat-

³⁶ Lenz (1946, 120) assumes that this is a commentator on Aristides, and Behr (1968) that it is Porphyry in the *Against Aristides*, but it could also be an uncommon reference to earlier *Commentary on the Gorgias*. Cf. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 97, n. 598.

³⁷ Cf. Olympiodorus, *in Gorg.* 38.2.23–24: "But Aristides, that controversialist and specialist in lengthy quibbles (ὁ δὲ ἀντιλογικὸς καὶ μακρὸς φλὴναφος)". (Trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 247). Aristides is described as a man expert in debate, in the art (τέχνη) of disputation, skilful debater or argumentator (ἀντιλογικός). Lenz (1946, 111–112) regards this passage as a proper quotation from Olympiodorus and maintains that Aristides's words have disappeared.

³⁸ *Suda*, Π, 2098. Cf. Lenz 1946; Behr 1968. The English translators of this commentary, Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant (1998, 22, 240), prefer to admit a first-hand knowledge of Aristides on the part of Olympiodorus, without the necessary mediation of Porphyry's treatise. On this work by Porphyrius, cf. Goulet 2012, 1303–1304.

³⁹ In the edition of *Suidae Lexicon* V, s. u. Ἀριστείδης, Adler (1938, 136) argues that the title of Porphyry's treatment Πρὸς Ἀριστείδην refers to Aelius Aristides. On this same identification, cf. also Heath 2003, 144.

ed from Behr (1968, 186–199) that the work is probably a rejoinder to Aristides' criticisms of Plato on rhetoric, traces of which may be discernible in the Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias*. The treatise *Against Aristides*, therefore, is related to rhetoric, but its nature is not technical, but refutational: the preposition πρὸς in the title indicates that it is a “reply”. Therefore, the *skopos* of *Against Aristides* focuses on giving a response to the *Platonic Discourses* of Aelius Aristides.

It is, in fact, Aelius Aristides, and not Aritides Quintilianus, as Smith (1993, 487) considers.⁴⁰ A proponent of this identification, Pernot (2006, 307–309) provides the following four good reasons that dismantle Smith's proposal: (1) In the *Suda*, the treatise *Against Aristides* is cited among the literary and rhetorical writings. (2) A parallel of this treatise can be found in Porphyry's refutation of the apology of Alcibiades,⁴¹ composed by the rhetor Diophanes, which, according to his biography, made Plotinus enjoy it.⁴² (3) Porphyry was a pupil of Longinus, the most renowned philologist and literary critic of his time, admirer of Aelius Aristides.⁴³ (4) Aelius Aristides was better known than Aristides Quintilianus, as is proved by the fact that the former is cited ten times in the *Suda*, and the latter not once.⁴⁴

In a passage of his *Commentary on the first Alcibiades of Plato*,⁴⁵ Olympiodorus claims the link with Hermes. If Demosthenes is a Hermes, then Socrates must be one too, and even more and better. The purpose of self-knowledge connects closely with the first place that the dialogue occupied in the curriculum of reading Plato's dialogues, as established by Iamblichus, and that will be adopted in the Neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Aristides also <remarks> about the orator Demosthenes that ‘He was the very pattern of an eloquent Hermes, come among men (Ἑρμοῦ λογίου τύπος ἦν εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐλθὼν)’; but I would say that this [saying] is better suited to Socrates, since he was first assimilated to Hermes (for he is called ‘Herm’s son’), and just as Hermes used to produce sleep and wakefulness ‘with one strike of his rod –’

[*He charms to sleep*]

*whom he wishes, and he wakes again the sleepers*⁴⁶

⁴⁰ In the sixth book of the treatise *Against Aristides* (= P59) Smith on his apparatus (413T) comments: “Aristides Quintilianus?”.

⁴¹ Cf. Plato, *Symp.* 212d–22c.

⁴² Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 15.14.

⁴³ Cf. Longinus, Fr. 50.5.12; 52; 54 Patillon and Brisson.

⁴⁴ Cf. Adler 1938, 136.

⁴⁵ Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Alcibiades* can be dated to about 560 (a century after Proclus').

⁴⁶ Cf. Homer, *Il.* XXIV.344; *Od.* V.48, XXIV.4.

–so too Socrates uses one rod, namely dialectic (μῖξ ῥάβδω, τῆ διαλεκτικῆ), both to overthrow those who speak proudly, and to rouse again those who have fallen and call them back up.⁴⁷

Olympiodorus replies to Aelius Aristides, one of the main representatives of the literary and social movement of the Second Sophistic,⁴⁸ who composed four treatise-discourses against Plato's attack on rhetoric and in praise of public speaking: Two *On Rhetoric, against Plato*, which are a reply to Plato's criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*; one *In Defense of the Four against Plato*, which is a defense of four of the great Athenian *rhetors* (“public orators”) – Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles – , and *Against Capito*, in which he answers the objections raised by the theses put forward in the other three discourses.

Although the tone is controversial, Aristides does not criticise the whole of Plato's philosophy, and devotes himself to demonstrating that several dialogues, among them the *Gorgias* admit the existence of a “good” rhetoric, represented by its homonym, the *rhetor* Aristides, son of Lysimachus.⁴⁹ Thus, reconstructed by rhetoric, Plato can be considered the “father and master of orators” (II.465); and dialectic, a part of rhetoric (II.450; III.509).⁵⁰

In the passage quoted above, Olympiodorus' argument rests on two pillars: (1) one, biographical, Socrates is said to be the son of a hermoglyph; (2) the other, symbolic, the caduceus – the rod (ῥάβδος) – of Hermes symbolises the Socratic dialectic.⁵¹ By means of dialectics, Socrates has the quasi-magical power to make spirits sleep or wake up, just as Hermes, thanks to the caduceus, can provoke wakefulness or sleep. The quotation from Homer alludes to Hermes psychopompos (*Od.* XXIV.4). In exercising this function, Hermes can be seen as a model of the philosopher, and connects with the Platonic theme of philosophy as preparation for death: to learn to philosophise is to learn to die.⁵²

Likewise, in his argument Olympiodorus provides (3) an additional piece of information by comparing Socrates with Hermes, resorting, in this case, to the So-

⁴⁷ Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 190.14–191.2 Westerink; trans. Griffin 2016, 117.

⁴⁸ Aelius Aristides (117–c. 180) belongs to the so-called Second Sophistic, which designates, according to Philostratus, a reborn rhetoric “which should not be called new, since it is ancient, but rather second” (Philostratus, *V. Soph.* 481.64 Wright). The sophist is considered as a teacher of rhetoric expert in oratory and the rhetor as a teacher or professional declaimer or an ambassador of the cities to the Roman emperor. Cf. Dittadi 2016, 59–73.

⁴⁹ Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 526b; *Lach.* 179a; *Th.* 151a.

⁵⁰ Cf. López Eire 1992, 32.

⁵¹ Cf. Siebert 1996.

⁵² Cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 63b–69e; Olympiodorus, *in Phaed.* 3.11.7–8. Cf. Gertz 2011, 27–30.

cratic exercise of maieutics: just as Hermes is the son of Maia, Socrates is the son of a midwife (μαῖα). The final context is projected onto the political theory and practice raised in the *skopos* of the dialogue under commentary, which focuses the conversation between Socrates and Alcibiades: Olympiodorus claims that Socrates knows how to guide men and that he is a better politician than Demosthenes. Thus, the comparison of the *Commentary on the first Alcibiades* agrees with the *Commentary on the Gorgias*.

Olympiodorus vindicates philosophy, embodied in Socrates, against rhetoric, embodied in Demosthenes. Philosophy implies a closer relationship with divinity than that offered by rhetoric; thus the *dialektike technē* of Socrates surpasses the *rhetorike technē* of Demosthenes. In his argumentation, Aristides resorts to Demosthenes against Plato; in his reply, using the same weapons, applying dialectics against oratory, Olympiodorus resorts to Socrates and Plato against Demosthenes.

Proclus shows that *Alcibiades* introduces the whole of Plato's philosophy and all the sciences. Although, as it seems, there may have been relevant differences in the exegesis that Proclus and Damascius devote to this dialogue and, in particular, about its central purpose (*skopos*).⁵³ Although Damascius' commentary has not come down to us, we can try to trace these differences in the commentary of Olympiodorus, which he wrote a century after that of Proclus, around 560.⁵⁴ Indeed, Olympiodorus successively exposes the divergent positions of Proclus⁵⁵ and Damascius⁵⁶ on the central purpose of *Alcibiades I*. For Damascius, the *skopos* of dialogue consists of self-knowledge from a political perspective:⁵⁷ “knowing oneself as a civic person (περὶ τοῦ πολιτικῶς γινῶναι ἑαυτόν)” (Olymp. *In Alc.* 4.16–17). As opposed to the exegesis of Proclus, Olympiodorus considers the interpretation of Damascius to be preferable.⁵⁸ However, in his approach he seeks to find a coherence between the two hermeneutical proposals defended by the two dialogues of the school of Athens.⁵⁹ Olympiodorus, professor in the school of Alexandria, beyond the internal disputes in the school of Athens between Proclus and

⁵³ Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the first Alcibiades of Plato* has aroused great interest in the last two decades, cf. esp. Renaud and Tarrant 2015, 190–244; Renaud 2009; 2012; 2014; and Tarrant 2007.

⁵⁴ Cf. *supra*, n. 32.

⁵⁵ Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 3.3–4.14.

⁵⁶ Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 4.15–5.16.

⁵⁷ Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 4.15–5.1. Cf. Segonds 1985–1986, vol. 1, LVI–LVII and LIII–LXIX; O'Meara 2003, 64.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hoffmann 1994, 580.

⁵⁹ Cf. Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* 5.17–9.19.

Damascius, maintains the claim of *Alcibiades I* as the introductory dialogue to the totality of Plato's philosophy and, with it, to all sciences.

The allusions to Christianity that appear in the preserved work of Olympiodorus, which corresponds to the lecture notes taken by his students, show a pagan philosopher, an Alexandrian professor, who, like Proclus and Damascius in Athens, marks his distancing from Christian society.⁶⁰ From the beginning of the 6th century, the school of Alexandria had taken over from Athens to become the great cultural centre of the Greek world (starting with Hermias, a disciple of Syrianus and companion of Proclus in Athens).⁶¹

6. Conclusion

The orators, rhetors and sophists are under the invocation of Hermes who, according to Protagoras and later Aelius Aristides, brought to men by order of Zeus the imponderable gift of the *logos*.⁶² Aelius Aristides considers himself a “sophist” in the good sense of this term, that is to say, an expert in education in general (παιδεία), as a friend of beauty (φιλοκαλία), who cultivates the search for beauty and who is continually engaged in exercising himself in discourses (διατριβή περι λόγους).⁶³

In Aristides' paraphrase of Protagoras' myth in his discourse *On Rhetoric* (II.63–75 Dindorf), Hermes does not give humans “respect” (αἰδώς) and “justice”

⁶⁰ Olympiodorus, *in Gorg.* 47.1.9-14: “Why does he say ‘perfectly fine (μάλα καλοῦ)’? We say that it is with a view to distinguishing it from the myths of the poets. For they are merely fine, but not perfectly [fine], for they are not fine on the surface too (οὐ γὰρ καὶ τὸ φαινόμενον ἔχουσι καλόν) but only beneath the surface (ἀλλὰ μόνον τὸ βάθος). Philosophical myths, on the other hand, which are also fine on the surface, are ‘perfectly fine’”. (Trans. Jackson, Lycos and Tarrant 1998, 296).

In lecture 47 of *Commentary of the Gorgias* (523a1-b1) Olympiodorus is striving to defend Platonist theological beliefs because their use of myth and associated theology is liable to render them open to suspicion in Christian eyes. The poets of ancient times did not know that a corrupt society would arrive that looks only at appearance and does not look absolutely for what is hidden in the depths of myth (that is, theology). Cf. Tarrant 2021, 205–207, 217.

⁶¹ Cf. Westerik 1962, X-XXV.

⁶² He calls the rhetors “those around Hermes” (Libanius, *Ep.* 245.8 Foerster). The vindication of Greek rhetoric in late antiquity pays attention to the tradition of rhetorical genres and recognises the relevance of the *ethos* of the orator in any deliberative manifestation.

⁶³ Cf. Arist. II.407 Dindorf.

(δίκη) by order of Zeus, but simply “rhetoric”.⁶⁴ Therefore, rhetoric was the invaluable gift of the gods that preserves and keeps healthy and saves the human race by putting an end to the endless conflicts between men, giving them the ability to form communities, build cities and make laws.⁶⁵

Neoplatonic schools from Apamea to Athens show a fervent devotion to Hermes, the first link of the chain (σειρά) on which the souls of great philosophers depend. At the beginning of the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus alludes to Hermes: “Hermes, the god who presides over rational discourse (Θεὸς ὁ τῶν λόγων ἡγεμῶν, Ἑρμῆς)”.⁶⁶ Proclus, according to his biographer and disciple Marinus, had had the revelation of belonging to the chain of Hermes.⁶⁷ In the *Life of Isidore* Damascius discovers Isidore's square face as “a sacred pattern of Hermes Logios”.⁶⁸ By means of this physiognomic observation, Damascius places Isidore in the Hermaic chain.

The expression “pattern of Hermes Logios”, originally applied to Demosthenes, appears transferred to the Neoplatonic philosophers, schoolmasters, in an encomiastic introduction before beginning the commentary on a dialogue of Plato, dedicated to his master, or on a treatise of Aristotle. In the prayer with which concludes the *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* Simplicius first addresses the gods “guardians of discourse” (οἱ τῶν λόγων ἔφοροι), probably identified with Hermes and Athena, to ask them to grant him “a more precise understanding” (ἀκριβεστέρα κατανόησις) of the theory of the categories, in which he has followed Iamblichus, and, since the categories are the fundamental terms of the assertive statement (λόγος ἀποφαντικός), namely, the first element of all demonstrative knowledge, to grant him the grace of this precise understanding of the categories as a “viaticum on the way to the highest contemplations”,⁶⁹ and specifically in

⁶⁴ Aelius Aristides, *Or.* II.396 Behr and Lenz. Cf. Cassin 1995, 215–236; Saïd 2008, 65–66. For Aelius Aristides, rhetoric, more than an art (τέχνη), is a divine gift (Aristid. II.10 Dindorf), and the orator, like the poet of earlier times, speaks by inspiration of the Muses and gods.

⁶⁵ Cf. Plato, *Prot.* 322b–c; *Pol.* 268d–274d.

⁶⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* I.1.1; trans. Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell 2003, 5. Cf. Saffrey, *Seconds*, Lecerc 2013, 1.6 ff., n. 2–6, and 224–225.

⁶⁷ Marinus, *V. Procl.* 28.34–35. Cf. Saffrey, *Seconds* and Luna 2001, 34 and 159, n. 5.

⁶⁸ Damascius, *V. Isid.* Fr. 16 Zintzen = (Fr. 13 Athanassiadi).

⁶⁹ Simplicius, *in Cat.* 438.33–36: Ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ μέχρι τοῦδε καὶ ὁ θεὸς προήλθεν Ἰάμβλιχος, καὶ ἐγὼ καταπαύω τὸν λόγον, εὐχόμενος τοῖς τῶν λόγων ἐφόροις τούτων τε ἀκριβεστέραν ἐνδοῦναι κατανόησιν καὶ ταύτην ἐφόδιόν μοι πρὸς τὰς ὑψηλοτέρας θεωρίας χαρίσασθαι καὶ σχολὴν παρασχεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ περιελκόντων. For the use of a similar expression, cf. Marinus, *V. Procli* 10.7–12; Saffrey, *Seconds* and Luna 2001, 12, n. 7–8, and 93–94.

view of the further studies that pertain to the properly “theoretical” part of philosophy.

The Neoplatonic commentaries, as is evident from a reading of his final prayers, undertake a religious and anagogical approach in keeping with the ascending order of the works of the Neoplatonic syllabus. These prayers are addressed to the gods who are situated in precise ranks within the hierarchy of Neoplatonic theological science: first of all, Hermes and the gods *logoi* and then, on a higher level, Zeus.

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