

Divine power and social authority in late antiquity: the Iamblichan model

The paper explores the ways in which Iamblichus responded to the material and moral crisis of his time by articulating a new soteriological discourse in dialogue with analogous programmes both within and outside the Platonic tradition. The exclusive milieu of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, with which he seems to have come into contact in Apamea, and the figure of the theurgist operating within its framework, provided Iamblichus with the inspiration for constructing a whole new discipline – theurgy. Complete with a theoretical aspect which rested on the elaboration of the theology of the *Oracles*, and a new sociological type –the ἐπιστήμων θεουργός- who as an agent of salvation responded to the most urgent needs of the troubled world of the 3rd century, the science of theurgy is about the diffusion and wielding of divine power and the construction of spiritual authority in “an age of anxiety”. In response to Christian eschatological doctrines which place salvation after death, and to the Plotinian discourse which makes it strictly dependent on individual effort, Iamblichus advanced a theory according to which divine grace saves *on this very earth* even those who are unaware of the gifts that the gods shower down on humanity, through the agency of the theurgist as the recipient and manager of their *dynamis*.

The large-scale application of the Iamblichan model came about for a brief moment with the Emperor Julian’s organization of a professional clerical body. However, in the 5th century and on the margins of the official religious ideology, Proclus still incarnated the Iamblichan ideal as “the hierophant of the entire world”, who through the adroit channeling of divine *dynamis* saved both individuals and communities from incurable evils and taught others how to do so.

Polymnia Athanassiadi