religions

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Theurgy, Paredroi, and Embodied Power in Neoplatonism and Late Antique Celestial Hierarchies

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Abstract: This article will place the rituals of the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) for the acquisition of a supernatural assistant (paredros) into conversation with broader late antique debates surrounding the place of daimones within the celestial hierarchy. In considering the writings of Plotinus, Plutarch, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, it will survey points of contention surrounding questions of appropriate and inappropriate displays of ritual power, as facilitated by intermediary spirits who act as intercessors between humanity and the divine. Through analyzing the metaphysical underpinnings of the nature of the paredros, as variously articulated within the rituals for their conjuration within the Greek Magical Papyri, it will contextualize the aims of the ritualist against the backdrop of Iamblichus' theurgy in pursuit of mastery of—and intimate, transcendent communion with—the fundamental numinous nature of the world. In doing so, this article argues that Iamblichus' theurgy and the paredros rituals of the PGM ultimately grasp towards similar soteriological goals using different ritual methodologies; both seeking to elevate the incarnated body of the ritualist into a higher level of spiritual attainment through direct confrontation with the powers of nature.

Keywords: Greek Magical Papyri; Neoplatonism; paredros; theurgy; magic

Citation: Pejovic, Katarina. 2024. Theurgy, Paredroi, and Embodied Power in Neoplatonism and Late Antique Celestial Hierarchies. *Religions* 15: 300. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030300

Academic Editor: Stan Rosenberg

Received: 2 February 2024
Revised: 19 February 2024
Accepted: 26 February 2024
Published: 28 February 2024

1. Introduction

This article will place the rituals of the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM) for the acquisition of a supernatural assistant (or paredros) into conversation with broader late antique debates surrounding the place of daimones within the celestial hierarchy. It argues that the controversy over the status of daimones vis a vis the ineffable God cannot be divorced from broader Platonist concerns over the state of individual descended intellects within the scope of the broader world soul of creation.

Through the use of the content analysis method, it will consider the writings of Plotinus, Plutarch, Porphyry, and Iamblichus to survey points of contention surrounding questions of appropriate and inappropriate displays of ritual power as facilitated by intermediary spirits who act as intercessors between humanity and the divine. In qualifying the broader Neoplatonic soteriological project, as articulated in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, it will liken the conceptual tension between a supreme, immutable God and the mutable, semi-divine daimon spirits with that between the world soul and the many individual souls which inhabit it. In this way, it will argue that the controversy over the place of daimones within the late antique monotheistic hierarchies of Neoplatonism ultimately strikes to the heart of the human condition within incarnate reality.

As part of this presentation of primary sources, it will also survey a selection of the rituals within the PGM that are principally concerned with the conjuration of a paredros to assist the ritualist in their theurgic and sorcerous goals alike. It will then move to put these sources into the conversation, developing an analytical methodology by which the metaphysical underpinnings of the nature of the paredros are evaluated in light of this late antique debate over the place of daimons in the celestial hierarchy. In doing so, this article will contextualize the soteriological aims of the ritualist who engages with these

papyri against the backdrop of Iamblichus' theurgy in pursuit of mastery of—and intimate, transcendent communion with—the fundamental numinous nature of the world. Through this comparison between philosophical and ritualistic primary texts, this article argues that Neoplatonic theurgy and the paredros rituals of the PGM ultimately grasp towards similar soteriological goals using different ritual methodologies; both seeking to elevate the incarnated body of the ritualist into a higher level of spiritual attainment through direct confrontation with the powers of nature.

2. The Controversy of Daimons

In analyzing constructions of the notoriously ephemeral categories of magic and religion in the late antique Mediterranean world, it is essential to note from the outset that the enduring debates surrounding socially permissible and impermissible ritual actions were not introduced to the ancient world through the advent of Christianity. Rather, concerns about which kinds of ritual actions were to be considered inappropriate—and thereby labeled as explicitly magical, sorcerous, necromantic, and so on—emerged within pagan circles themselves, especially during the times of late antique Neoplatonic thinkers. As Kyle Fraser (2009, p. 131) observes, these discussions arose from attempts to define the spheres of legitimate ritual actions that would align with their increasingly monotheistic theological project. In order to construct the boundaries of which actions were to be sanctioned as contributing to the evolving dynamics of late pagan monotheism, Neoplatonic thinkers required a foil: an opposing, illicit sphere of sorcery and impious ritual conduct. The implications of these debates not only challenged the landscape of the late Greek pagan religious world, but extended to inform the structures of future Christian discussions of which actions would be counted as belonging to religion, and which were condemned as diabolical sorcery.

The core of the controversy is one shared by Christian and pagan monotheists alike, namely, the question of divine manipulation: is the ineffable God vulnerable to coercion? Can he be persuaded to change the present and future state of existence? In the theological positions articulated by the successors of Plato, the highest principle—God, the One, the Good, etc.—is entirely beyond such negotiation, being ontologically removed from the spheres of ritual actions and representations. Naturally, this view conflicted with the precedents of classical polytheism and its cults, leaving a troubling conceptual gap between the supreme God of Neoplatonism and the traditional gods who accepted sacrifices, interceded on behalf of petitions, and played more overt roles in the social lives of their worshippers. One answer to this puzzle, shared especially by the likes of Iamblichus (and present to varying extents in the very dialogues of Plato, especially the *Apology* and *Symposium*) was the category of daimones. The true recipients of traditional, polytheistic forms of pious devotion, from petitionary prayers to supplicatory sacrifices, were the intermediary divinities who, in their in-between state, could both benefit from the efforts of human supplication while at the same time respond to them in kind (Fraser 2009, p. 131). By postulating daimones as the actual beneficiaries of these deeds, and identifying them with the gods of polytheistic cults, late pagan monotheist thinkers could reconcile traditional practices with a transcendent deity.

This proposal, naturally, gave birth to its own immediately pressing concerns. For if the daimones did not share in the properties of the supreme God, being distinct from him and simultaneously lower on the spirit-to-matter hierarchy, they, therefore, must equally share a moral distance, being similarly (though not to the same degree) imperfect as humans are. This posed a significant problem for the ritualist. If not every daimon was equally moral, then how could he know whether the one he was propitiating was fundamentally good-natured (Fraser 2009, p. 132)? What if the daimon he made offerings to was lying to him for its own selfish ends—to ply more sacrifices from his purse, and to garner greater renown for its own veneration? How could the moral character of a daimon be ascertained, such that the ritualist did not fall prey to the whims of a being who only pretended to be good such that it might benefit from human ritual actions, but was not genuinely so?

While some thinkers disparaged the whole enterprise of ritualism (and all interactions with daimones thereby), most pagan religious thinkers, Fraser (2009, p. 132) notes, hoped to salvage the cherished status of the traditional cults while also upholding their new monotheistic theological commitments. In working to carve out a space for the former within the confines of the latter, they devised new categorizations of ritual actions to match the divide between the supreme and ineffable God and the lower, secondary divinities of the daimones. In this way, not all ritual actions were illegitimate; those that fell within the acceptable monotheistic worldview may very well not only be acceptable, but potentially pious, contributing to a social economy of action that was understood as beneficial and proper. However, the very practices and behaviors that were redefined as existing beyond these delineations were disparaged as dangerous, "[exposing] the ritualist to daimonic manipulation" and the influence of wicked spirits (Fraser 2009, p. 132). It was these practices that came to be understood as pernicious and sorcerous—acts of "magic" contrasted against notions of proper "religion"—a division which Fraser (2009, p. 135) asserts was not imposed upon pagan traditions by Christianity, but rather adopted and further developed from it.

3. Philosophical Underpinnings

The question of the place of daimones within the celestial hierarchy of the Platonic tradition is not solely concerned with proper ritual action and the redemptive possibility of magic. Rather, the very structure of the hierarchy itself speaks to the heart of the entire Platonic soteriological project. Plotinus' *Ennead* IV. 8, *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*, grapples with the question of how it is that humans—whose true identities are fundamentally those of incorporeal intellects eternally cognizing the Forms—have come to be embodied in the first place (Plotinus 2017, IV. 8.1.1–10). For the human soul, which is produced by Nous, the universal Intellect, embodiment entails distress and suffering. Although "nobody does wrong willingly" as Plato claims—for all created beings fundamentally desire the Good—what the Good really is and how one should achieve it become occluded for souls living in the sensible world (Plato 1997a, 358c; Plotinus 2017, IV 8.1.1–5). Plotinus asserts that since the Good is not grudging, it produces all that is possible, not wishing to withhold anything (Plato 1997b, 29e–30b; Plotinus 2017, IV 8.3.26–30). As the sensible world itself is formed from this limitless creativity, so too are individual souls, encompassed within the greater Intellect, being unified by their underlying essence while differentiated as the many loci of intellection (IV 8.3.7–11).

Originally, the individual souls too remain with the universal Soul in the intelligible world, yet the picture does not remain like this for long. They come to withdraw into themselves. Plotinus here uses the metaphors of flight and withdrawal to underscore the individual soul's coming into isolation. Lost, being that they are no longer oriented in their trajectory towards the One, and are instead focused on their own affairs, they continue their fleeing descent, entering a new dimension (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.4.10–17). Through continually focusing only on itself, it finds the sensible realm of bodies and locates its own manifestation, entering it. This descent can be understood in terms of a kind of decrease in living conditions for the soul, being that its life was, as Plotinus says, "in every way better for it before, when it was [ascending]" (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.4.25). In its new state, all the impediments sense-perception bestow chain it, forcing it to be confused about its identity and ignorant of much of its former knowledge.

However, embodied souls are never entirely cut off from their intellects, as they are direct instantiations of them in the sensible world. As a result, they walk in two worlds, the quality and character of their lives being determined by which world they make the object of their focus (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.4.33–36). Plotinus emphasizes that there is no contradiction in saying that the descent of the soul into the body can be characterized as both voluntary and involuntary. Since all things desire the Good, anything that turns away from it and towards itself does so involuntarily, following an "eternal law of nature", being that its incarnation is possible and, therefore, necessary, and thus it must realize its

embodied existence (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.5.5–10). At the same time, it descends voluntarily, being, therefore, responsible for the crimes it commits while embodied.

Despite the rather dreary outlook the soul seems to have in its embodied state, Plotinus assures us that while it would certainly be better for the soul to exist solely in the intelligible world, all is not lost. There is yet salvation in embodiment, for within incarnation, the soul "occupies a middle rank" in which it straddles the outer limits of intelligibility and sensibility, existing in a uniquely liminal state owing to its divine endowment (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.7.1–10). It is because its origin is the intelligible world that the soul can relearn what it is like to exist in it, deriving its understanding through making comparisons with what it experiences in the sensible world (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.7.11–15). The soul of the universe is never involved with any degradation or evil, as it only "reflects contemplatively" on that which is below it while being eternally dependent on the above, receiving from the latter and providing for the former (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.7.26–31). Individual souls, on the other hand, only come to know evil by directly experiencing it through incarnation, and in doing so, they can come to remember what the Good truly is (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.7.15–20).

There is a crucial parallel to be drawn here between the state of the soul of the universe and the supreme God, and that of individual souls incarnated in the sensible world with daimones. The true God, as we have noted, is not susceptible to negotiation; he can neither be swayed into action nor persuaded to change the state of the world through sacrifices and prayer, being fundamentally immutable and without passion. Instead, it is the intermediaries of the daimones who participate in the activities of these ritual supplications, possessing aerial bodies that experience pleasures and pains, and thereby enjoy burnt offerings (Fraser 2009, p. 137). Much in the same way, the world soul encompasses the lesser, plural intellects, being more "complete" and "powerful" than the individual souls within it that ultimately descend into matter (Plotinus 2017, IV 8.3.13–18). Just as there are intellectual activities, such as philosophy, which serve to realign the individual, incarnated soul with its true purpose and orientation towards God, so too are there activities that would do the opposite. Are ritual actions that propitiate daimones an example of the latter? Is it possible to participate in ritual actions that, rather than tempt the soul away from God through the machinations of unreliable spirits, might instead elevate the ritualist towards the divine through the assistance of heavenly intermediaries?

These were the philosophical underpinnings at play in the discussions surrounding the place of daimones in late antique ritual practices. Fraser gives an exceptionally well-detailed account of some of the key interlocutors of these debates. Plutarch, for example, follows the Platonic distinction between the immutable God and mutable daimones closely, affirming that the gods are not present in ritual ceremonies and do not partake of offerings; instead, the daimones are the ones who oversee and administer the mysteries of their rituals (Plutarch 1936, 417b). It is precisely that they are able to feel desire that renders them susceptible to vice. In order to further separate the two from each other, Plutarch writes that shocking stories about carnal rituals to the gods—including those involving human sacrifice, the consumption of raw flesh, and so on—are not actually dedicated to proper deities, but rather the daimones (Plutarch 1936, 417c–d).

While for Plutarch, not all rituals are quite so obscene, and indeed there is much room for beneficial and pious ritual action towards the *correct* daimones, Porphyry's stance is entirely anti-ritual. On his account, all those who would engage in the ritual supplication of daimones are sorcerers, rousing evil spirits to satisfy worldly lusts (Porphyry 2000, II.45.1). In contrast, the pious man abstains from such impurities and cultivates a connection with the divine through inner, intellectual contemplation (Porphyry 2000, II.45.4). He discourages sacrifices as they can help evil daimones (who can pretend to be good so that they may obtain them) grow in power, and similarly argues that all ritual offerings are easily susceptible to such perversion (Porphyry 2000, II.45.3). In his project to both promote vegetarianism and discourage animal sacrifice, Porphyry is well aware that he is combatting a traditional custom well engrained in the society in which he lives. Therefore, he repositions the recipients of such practices to evil daimones—and not the

gods who would normally receive the burnt meat (which would later be consumed by the worshippers)—to mark the entire spectacle as deeply vulnerable to corruption and impurity. While Porphyry's position was a remarkable divergence from the perspectives of other Neoplatonists, Travis Proctor (2014, p. 420) makes the convincing case that this break owed much to the similar hierarchies of Origen of Alexandria.

Porphyry's push towards anti-ritualism was a powerful force in the debate over the place of daimones in ritual acts. Its dominant rival philosophy was articulated by the fourth-century Syrian Neoplatonist, Iamblichus. Known by the honorific title "divine" by his successors, Iamblichus famously introduced Chaldean and Egyptian rites to Neoplatonism (Shaw 1985, p. 1). While the terms for "magic" and related ritual acts of power varied, by the time of late Neoplatonism, many had become fixed in their connotations: *goeteia*, for example, had come to mean the evil sorcery that involved the malicious daimones; and *mageia*, while sometimes defended as a sacred Persian art (especially by Apuleius), had also slowly blackened in its reputation (Fraser 2009, 138n19). Iamblichus' move was to use a far less loaded term, *theourgia* (theurgy) for the sacred rituals he championed, characterizing them as divine actions which, while physically performed by men, were fulfilled directly by the divinities who oversaw them (Shaw 1985, p. 1). While for Plotinus and Porphyry, philosophy was the act that most distinguished and dignified man in his search to realign his soul with the divine, for Iamblichus, it was theurgy that had the capacity to elevate it into the celestial sphere. Where philosophy ruled education and intellectual discourse, theurgy ruled the highest levels of spiritual initiation (Shaw 1985, p. 2).

Iamblichus rejected Porphyry's claim that daimones were nourished by the smoke of sacrificed offerings, and by extension that they were dependent on human actions and could be coerced by them. Instead, he launched a counterargument that Porphyry had failed to understand the divine hierarchy in which they play a necessary role (Fraser 2009, p. 145). Daimones govern matter and, as such, cannot be subject to it or reside within it. At the same time, they reside below God, inferior and subordinate, because they are inclined towards generation and rule over the administration of bodies (Fraser 2009, p. 146). In this way, theurgic rituals do not attempt to anchor daimones into matter with offerings and statues, rather they seek to elevate the soul of the ritualist to remember and take its rightful place in the very same hierarchy. Iamblichus still agreed with his predecessors that not all ritual actions were equally useful or even moral: for him, any rites whose intentions were to manipulate daimones were but mere sorcery; delusions and artificial phantasms conjured by charlatans who likewise misunderstood the divine hierarchy by assuming that daimones were susceptible to coercion (Fraser 2009, p. 146).

Yet even for him, the picture was not so simple. For within the very sacred traditions and religious rituals of the Chaldeans and Egyptians that he draws on, there exist myriad coercive rites that threaten to humiliate the gods if their wishes are not granted. In order to rationalize the existence of these spells, Iamblichus ultimately grants that there does exist, at the lowest tier of the hierarchy of daimones, an irrational class of spirit unable to divine truth, fully capable of being threatened into repugnant actions (Fraser 2009, pp. 146–47). The theurgist is able to manipulate these spirits not because of the offerings or ritual actions themselves, but rather because of his elevated station; the divine authority he has cultivated by virtue of his greater identification with the gods. Therefore, while there may well exist irrational daimones that can be used for sorcery, the majority of daimones—and of course, the gods themselves—remain completely immune to compulsion.

This move, despite his admonishments towards *goeteia*, actually opens up the possibility for practical sorcery for the achievement of worldly ends in Iamblichus' framework. If by virtue of his theurgic work, the theurgist reaches an elevated state in which his own place in the hierarchy is such that he can control these lower, irrational daimones, then it seems that at least some sorcery may well be a natural (and potentially divinely sanctioned) consequence of the theurgic project. Similarly, an additional problem that is reopened for Iamblichus, as Fraser (2009, p. 147) points out, is that of evil daimones—for while Iamblichus claims that sorcerers who blaspheme against sacred protocols and refuse

theurgy become vulnerable to the influence of malicious spirits who can pretend to be holy, this concession to Porphyry opens him to the charge that one may never know if a daimon is good or evil. Ultimately, in order to salvage daimones from the same charge of being impossible to distinguish in character (in light of the evil spirits' ability to pretend to be otherwise), he argues that the true theurgist is protected from such manipulation in light of his purity, whereas the irresponsible sorcerer, because of his blasphemy, remains vulnerable (Fraser 2009, p. 147). It is relevant to note that just as the pagan-Christian theological distinctions blurred in the cases of religion and magic, so too does it with theurgy in the case of Dionysius the Areopagite's interpretation of the liturgy (Shaw 1999, p. 582).

4. The Paredroi of the Greek Magical Papyri

One of the most significant examples of an allied daimon that assists a theurgist in his ventures is that of the paredros in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM). Of course, to even specify the paredros as a unified subclass of daimon is too hasty, for the term is not used in the exact same sense across the ten texts in the PGM which feature it. Additionally, the spirits are never described only as paredroi; rather, they bear additional names, qualifications, and descriptions to further narrow and specify their natures (Ciraolo 2001, p. 279).

The Greek word paredros is an adjective meaning "sitting beside or near", most frequently used in classical times to describe a variety of different military and governmental officials (Ciraolo 2001, p. 279). While frequently referring to the assistants and assessors of magistrates, the term has also been commonly employed within the context of theatre and oratory to indicate physical presence near another person: literally "sitting beside" (Kapparis 1998, pp. 383–84). In the PGM, the word is most deployed to refer to a supernatural assistant—some kind of daimon or divine power—who directly serves the ritualist's will and acts as an aide in his operations (Ciraolo 2001, p. 279). In his breakdown of the intended outcomes of the rituals in the PGM, Stephen Skinner (2014, p. 388) observes that rites to obtain a paredros (which he also refers to as a "familiar spirit" more broadly) make up 1.1% of all the fragments; being more frequent than spells for exorcism, invisibility, and oracles, on par with those for the creation of magic statues, rituals for initiation, and herbal knowledge, and less frequent than those for the invocation of gods, the creation of amulets, the preservation of health, and the procurement of love and sex.

As Leda Jean Ciraolo (2001, p. 280) notes, paredroi are identified with the divine in all but three of the texts that concern them, sometimes directly with another deity, or at other times as a god in their own right. In PGM IV.1716–1870 and XII.14–95, they are addressed as the god Eros; in both cases being summoned through the fashioning and enchanting of a wooden figurine representing him (Scibilia 2002, p. 77). Not every allusion to deities is so direct; sometimes the paredros is referred to by an epithet or title that is more commonly associated with another deity, such as "Aion" in PGM I.164–65, or "Good Farmer" in PGM I.26—the latter being similar to one commonly given to Anubis (Ciraolo 2001, p. 281). The means by which the spirit is most precisely and powerfully conjured and bound into subservience, however, is by use of its true individual name: not as "Eros" or an assistant of the god, but by its own secret title (Ciraolo 2001, p. 281). The significance of the true name of the paredros is especially touted in PGM I.36, I.89–91, I.160–163, and I.182–183, in which the ritualist is assured that the spirit will come and obey simply through calling its name alone. Intriguingly, when the true name is given in the text, it is never repeated. While in PGM IV.1716–1870 and XII.14–95, the paredros (and the actual deity Eros) are most frequently referred to as "Eros" or "the Eros", in texts such as I.42–195 where the genuine name is revealed, it is called either paredros or *theos* (Ciraolo 2001, p. 282).

The paredroi the ritualist acquires are not always so clearly defined. In PGM VII.862–918, the assistant is deployed by the goddess Selene, who is its true master: it obeys her commands and is given to the practitioner by her decree. However, the ritualist cannot be certain which paredros he will gain; twelve names for each of the hours are given, but it is not clear if the spirit who arrives is the one in whose hour the rite is being performed,

or another being entirely (Betz 1986, PGM VII.895–910). In addition to this vagueness in identity, the assistant of Selene is not described in any terms relating to will or personality. Other than being loyal to the goddess, it has no other defining attributes; even the twelve names of the hours are not distinguished in any way apart from their temporal rulership (Pachoumi 2011, pp. 160–61).

This is a far cry from the robust and vigorous paredros of PGM I.42–195. In addition to being described as a "god of gods" and "mighty angel", it is explicitly stated that "the gods will agree with him on all matters, for apart from him there is nothing" (Betz 1986, I.I64, I.173, I.130–131). The spell by which the paredros is acquired is addressed to the gods Helios and Selene, but, as Ciraolo (2001, p. 283) observes, the text gives no pretensions that the assistant serves them directly or is in any way subject to their control; rather, it is directly bonded with the ritualist. Additionally, its abilities appear limitless, being capable of procuring wealth and love, granting invisibility, changing the weather, lighting and extinguishing lamps, telling the future, and even inducing earthquakes (Betz 1986, PGM I.98–129).

Perhaps the most impressive ability within this remarkable résumé is that the assistant can also wrap his master's body "as befits a god" and "carry [his spirit] into the air with him" (Betz 1986, PGM I.174–179). The implications of this practice weigh heavily on the afterlife of the magician, as the text proclaims: "For no aerial spirit which is joined with a mighty assistant will go into Hades, for to him all things are subject" (Betz 1986, PGM I.180–181). The wrapping of the body is evocative of the mummification of Egyptian pharaohs for the purposes of immortality in the afterlife, and indeed Egyptian motifs are littered throughout the text, both in some of the epithets given to the daimon as well as in the dietary restrictions associated with him—while he may grant whatever the practitioners wish in the way of foods, he will never bring pork or fish, the two significant Egyptian taboos (Betz 1986, PGM I.105–106). While the paredros does not grant the ritualist political, worldly kingship as a pharaoh would have, he does seem to imbue him with a kind of spiritual kingship and authority, both in the sense that the practitioner receives an alternative, nobler afterlife destination as well as in his recognition by the gods as someone special and worthy of recognition. As the assistant ensures that the gods will agree to every request made of him, so too is the ritualist elevated into a new space in the hierarchy of beings; no longer a dabbler of sorcery, but a "blessed initiate of the sacred magic" (Betz 1986, PGM I.128).

Another similar text is PGM I.1–42. The paredros of this text is also given a proper, individual name on line 36, and is attributed powers of a similar scope to that of PGM I.42–195, causing: "the currents of the Nile to roll down upon and mingle with the sea, [transforming them with life] as it does man's seed in sexual intercourse, [establishing] the world on an indestructible. . . [foundation]" (Betz 1986, PGM I.29–33). These two texts, which are the most complex paredros rituals of the collection, are from the same papyrus and are identified with celestial phenomena, linked to either Orion or an unnamed star (Ciraolo 2001, p. 285). Ciraolo (2001, p. 291) posits that their physical proximity makes their "structural parallels more noticeable and suggests that they too may have a common origin or be variants of one another". While other paredroi in the PGM are often direct servants of other deities or have powers that are specifically designated by their station, these two complex rituals invest both significant, far-reaching abilities as well as spiritual implications for their master's soul (Ciraolo 2001, p. 286). In the case of PGM I.42–195, it seems that the magician, through the assistant, has even entered the marketplace of the gods. As part of the ritual, he has shared food and drink with the paredros, having sat at the metaphorical table of divinity, and thereby, become able to participate in the decisions of the gods both in heaven and on earth (Betz 1986, PGM I.85–90). Since the paredros can both kill and heal, the ritualist is given power over life and death by extension. Similarly, his station in the afterlife is guaranteed to be among the select and coveted few who share in the initiatory mysteries, as the text itself says: "Share this great mystery with no one [else], but conceal it, by Helios, since you have been deemed worthy by the lord [god]" (Betz 1986, PGM I.130–132).

The acquisition of such an assistant and its association with both spiritual and worldly prestige is not unique to this papyrus within the Graeco-Egyptian world. Skinner (2014, p. 72) points out that in the 1st or 2nd century *Testament of Solomon*, King Solomon is unable to bind the other 59 spirits of the text prior to first taming the spirit Ornias. Afterward, Ornias "acts as a magical assistant and introduces him to" the rest of the spirits of the text (Skinner 2014, p. 72). Within the PGM itself, the paredroi are not always procured through divine or entirely benevolent means. In the two skull rituals of PGM IV.1928–2005 and IV.2006–2125—being similarly spatially connected as PGM I.1–42 and PGM I.42–195 are—the identities of the assistants are either that of the soul of a dead man who had died violently or a chthonic daimon, respectively. These origins, like those of the demon Ornias, are associated less with the higher, elevated nobility of the paredroi granted directly by the gods and more with the disreputable natures of the daimones whose moralities lie along a spectrum of ambiguity, bound into servitude by the mechanics of the ritual as the others are though without their associated prestige.

From this brief survey we can see that, just as the term paredros could apply to a multitude of civic stations chiefly defined by their relationship with a higher magistrate or officer, so too does it apply in magical texts to a variety of different kinds of spiritual beings. The paredroi are not a class or species of spirit in the sense that "gods" and "daimones" (however vaguely and imprecisely conceived) are, rather they are a role or station that a daimon may occupy in so far as they serve another deity or are compelled to serve a ritualist (Scibilia 2002, p. 79). In this way, just as it would be inappropriate to assume that all civic assistants to political officials, regardless of rank, share the same duties or are awarded the same level of prestige, so too would it be inappropriate to paint all the paredroi of the PGM with the same broad strokes. For there is indeed something peculiar and special about the assistants in PGM I.1–42 and PGM I.42–195; apart from their far-reaching powers, they confer a special kind of ritual authority to the magician, especially in the case of PGM I.42–195. The spirits, humans, animals, and forces of nature, which are compelled by the assistant to obey the ritualist, kneel *because* of his special relationship with the gods; and indeed, his ownership of the paredros is the very emblematic proof of that connection.

In his consideration of the Delphic Maxim "Know Yourself" in the PGM, editor and translator Hans Dieter Betz draws a winding line from the self-knowledge of one's soul necessary in the Platonic soteriological scheme of the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and other such dialogues with their reinterpretation in the papyri by magicians. His claim is that, within the frame of reference of the magicians, to "consult with one's personal daimon" in the manner of Socrates or even Cicero—with "personal daimon" referring to the divine part of the soul—referred not to philosophical self-examination, but rather the conjuration of an assistant daimon who appears, answers questions, and performs duties (Betz 1981, pp. 159–60). While the "personal daimon" is not always described as an assistant or paredros, Betz (1981, p. 163) argues that the semantics are less relevant than the ideas and intended practices the spirits represent. For just as the all-powerful assistant of PGM I.42–195 can elevate the soul of his master to reside in the realm of the gods, providing answers to all manner of questions, so too can the personal daimon of PGM VII.478–490 reveal the answers to all queries in dreams. Betz (1981, p. 163) also notes that the isolation required by the latter ritual may carry a deeper connotation for the philosophically minded: to "turn in with yourself" might be to "return into yourself" in the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Delphic maxim. That the answers are received in dreams is also significant, for in sleep the sense perceptions of the body are at rest, and the soul can fully separate and return "to its eternal and divine state of being" (Betz 1981, p. 163).

Another connection between self-knowledge, self-control, and the worldly powers of the paredroi can be found in the fragmented PGM III.612–632. Egyptian in origin, the spell promises that the magician will "gain control over [his] own shadow so that it will serve [him]" (Betz 1986, PGM III.614–615). The shadow is adjured to serve the practitioner because he has uttered its sacred names, signs, and symbols, which it must obey (Betz 1986, PGM III.625). While the shadow has been identified with the soul in what Betz (1981, p. 164)

calls the "popular religion" of Greece and Egypt, in this instance, control over the shadow is conjoined with not only self-mastery and elevation but also the acquisition of the shadow itself as an assistant or paredros.

5. Conclusions

The rituals in the PGM that subjugate a personal or assistant daimon work as a kind of permanent solution for the question of ritual union (*sustasis*) with the divine (Fraser 2009, p. 148). This elevation of the ritualist's soul into the realm of the divine is the goal of Iamblichus' theurgy; his own rituals aiming to immortalize the soul in a new state of divine existence as achieved both through ritual and spiritual initiation. In the PGM, certain rites for the acquisition of a paredros—in addition to conferring upon the magician a great deal of worldly power as emblematic proof of his new station—thrust him into the same vertical source of divine hierarchical authority.

This ability of the paredros to perform the same contemplative or theurgic function as the meditations and philosophical training of Porphyry and the god-working rituals of Iamblichus still does not evade the earlier puzzle at the heart of their debate. While some paredroi in the papyri (especially PGM IV.1928–2005 and IV.2006–2125) may be more susceptible to charges of evil origins or lower stations in the divine hierarchy as daimones, even the almighty assistant of PGM I.42–195 might still be vulnerable to similar critiques. We could easily imagine followers of Porphyry disparaging such rituals as little more than indulgent *goeteia*: the trappings of power-hungry sorcerers who sought to gain riches, lovers, and command over the elements of nature and the very forces of life and death, allying with malicious spirits who masqueraded as the noble attendants of gods, deluded by their promises of gain into accepting their Faustian bargain. After all, with a spirit so powerful (if indeed its powers are real and not the result of trickery and illusion), how would one ever know if it were telling the truth about its nature—if it were truly going to elevate the soul of the ritualist to the plane of the gods, rather than plunge it into Hades by the shackles of their contractual bond?

While Iamblichus was still careful to distinguish between theurgy and other forms of lesser ritual, upholding the former as the true sacred art, it is possible that he too would be nervous about such prospects presented by paredros rituals. After all, the claim of a spell to reveal the "sacred magic" could also be a trick intended to delude the weak-willed sorcerer (Betz 1986, PGM I.128). Similarly, the paredros of PGM I.42–195 does indeed eat and drink with the magician, and for Iamblichus, only the lowest level of daimon is subject to such coercion (Iamblichus 2003, VI.6.247. 3–4). On his account, all true gods and daimones transcend the need for physical sustenance and cannot be manipulated by men, and the paredros clearly appears to be subject to both.

Both Porphyry and Iamblichus are engaging with a project of reinterpreting traditional Greek cultic traditions of worship, piety, providence, and self-knowledge. Where, for Porphyry, the solution to the moral ambiguity of the daimones was to condemn them all together, emphasizing philosophical, intellectual, and contemplative knowledge over ritual, Iamblichus attempted to reintroduce notions of sacred mysteries and direct engagement with the divine through ritual practice into the Platonic tradition, returning a sense of grace and prestige to the daimones by restoring their divine station as the emissaries—and indeed, assistants—of the gods. Yet the paredroi of the PGM, even at their most elevated, do not cleanly fit into Iamblichus' theurgy, even if they purport to share some of the general goals. To disparage them as mere sorcery (*goeteia*), or the wicked practices of power-hungry dabblers, would not only play into the rhetorical apparatuses of anti-magic (and potentially, anti-ritual) voices, but it would also paint the entirety of the paredroi rituals with the same stroke. We have already seen that even among the few paredroi texts there exists a remarkable variety of objectives, origins, and methodologies. So how might we interpret the presence of PGM I.1–42 and PGM I.42–195 and their aims towards initiation, elevation, and the attainment of sacred knowledge and higher mysteries?

I am inclined to agree with Betz that such papyri involve a reinterpretation of the Platonic project of contemplative self-knowledge. For as the discordant texts of the PGM themselves reveal, ritualists had myriad tools at their disposal for the attainment of the same ends; even the acquisition of an assistant spirit could be conducted in various ways in accordance with the goals and desires of the practitioner. While there are other texts specifically for the purposes of initiation, soul elevation, and encounters with deities (Skinner counts them at 1.1% and 0.8% of the total PGM rites, respectively), certain spells, especially PGM I.42–195, reveal a divergent approach to a remarkably similar theurgic goal to Iamblichus (Skinner 2014, p. 388). Though Iamblichus might see the feast that is shared between the magician and the spirit as proof of the latter's corrupted nature, in the ritual it is the very emblem of the former's acceptance into a new station in the divine hierarchy. The new "blessed initiate of magic", fully privy to arcane secrets because of his assistant, is given mastery over worldly, physical matters precisely because of his soul's new ranking. He is given an entirely separate afterlife destination from most people, joining with the gods in the sky, and is granted both a literal seat at their table in the case of the banquet as well as a metaphorical one: being able to directly influence the events of both heaven and earth. The paredros, who will not fail to hear his requests, not only knows the decisions of the gods and can inform the magician of them (so that he may live in harmony with them), but can also issue out his vote in the same matters, granting him a voice among the divine. That the ritualist is now a friend of the gods is the very same goal of Iamblichus' theurgy, and his ability to command the lesser spirits is likewise proof of having undergone the fruits of theurgic practice. After all, the theurgist is able to manipulate the irrational daimones because of the divine authority invested in him by virtue of his greater identification with the gods (Fraser 2009, p. 146). The magician has on the account of the papyri, acquired the same, only through the acquisition of the assistant.

Intriguingly, the most powerful of the paredroi are those who are not the direct servants of specific deities like Eros. Instead, they are the sole attendants to the magician along his vertical journey through the celestial hierarchy. If we are to see them not as loaned assistants from deities temporarily reassigned to a human, but as divinely ordained spirits serving magicians directly, then claims of the papyrus that the presence of the paredros is what is emblematic of the practitioner's elevated station are made more cogent. In this way, it is the magician, through the assistant, who has become a daimon-like intermediary between gods and men, able to perform all the miracles traditionally associated with powerful spirits. Where the theurgist seeks to become this through a greater identification with the gods, further strengthening his relationship with them through ritual, the magician ascends through raw authority, mimicking the gods by owning his own celestial servant.

Ultimately, the methods by which the followers of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and the users of the spells in the PGM alike attain their divine stations, reveal to themselves the hidden knowledge of their souls, and grapple with questions concerning immortality, knowledge, and spiritual authority all exist within their own contexts. Yet while the paredroi rituals of the PGM may not come equipped with their own theological defenses, to allow them to be explained by their polemical opponents would be to make the same errors that Fraser (2009, pp. 135–36) observes many scholars of pagan-Christian debates participating in when they suggest that only Christianity conceived of a difference between notions of proper religion and improper magic. In the landscape of the debates pertaining to the nature, character, and place of daimons on the celestial hierarchy—as holy servants and mediators of the divine or as false demons eager to deceive mankind—the PGM rites to acquire paredroi add a complex and intriguing conception, further lending daimones an ambiguity that stretches in both vertical directions: both muddying them as potential deceptive agents as well as elevating them as divine custodians of the hidden powers of the natural world.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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