

The Chaldaean Oracles

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Entry tags: Greek Religions, Ancient Greek text, Text, Babylonian Religions, Greek Philosophical Traditions, Greek Mystery Cults, Religious Group, Hellenistic Religions, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism

The “Chaldaean Oracles” comprise a body of fragments, survived through quotes and commentary by Neoplatonic writers, of a lost text from Graeco-Roman antiquity. The text is supposed to consist of utterances coming directly from the gods themselves, as well as from the soul of Plato. Originally composed in Greek language, the text uses the poetic form of dactylic hexameters, which was the traditional metre that was used both for divine oracles and for epic poetry. The authorship of the “Oracles” is a controversial issue. They are usually attributed to a father and son by the names of Julian the Chaldaean and Julian the Theurgist, who are believed to have lived during the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE), or perhaps that of Trajan (98-117 CE). The place of origin of the “Oracles” remains unknown. The fact that the text is written in Greek makes it likely that it originates from the eastern part of the Roman Empire. The term “Chaldean” attributed to the text goes back to antiquity: philosophers in the Platonic tradition venerated Chaldea –a name that Greeks of the 4th century BCE and later used for Babylon– as a source of religious enlightenment. The region had a wider reputation in Graeco-Roman antiquity as the home of astrology and other esoteric doctrines and practices, while it is possible, by the time of the composition of the text, that the term “Chaldean” designated “magician” or “practitioner of mysterious arts”. The content of the “Chaldean Oracles” is abstruse, mystical and not necessarily self-consistent. It makes metaphysical claims about the structure of reality and refers to techniques of practical ritual magic. The “Oracles” embrace the basic Platonic division between a higher spiritual realm (Intelligible World) and an inferior material realm (Sublunar World). Presiding over the Cosmos is a divine trinity: Father, Mind and Power. Beneath these divinities are to be found a variety of lesser spiritual beings. The “Oracles” affirm that the divine realm is accessible to human beings. Through the use of meditation and magical ritual practices, the soul of the worshiper can ascend upwards from the world of matter to the world of spirit and can achieve communion with the divine. Neoplatonic philosophers, from Porphyry (c. 234–c. 305) to Damascius (480–c. 550), considered the “Oracles” as authoritative revelatory literature, equal in importance only to the “Timaeus” of Plato. Other ancient Neoplatonists who used the “Oracles” in their writings include Plotinus, the Emperor Julian, Syrianus, Hermias, Hierocles, Simplicius, and Olympiodorus. The Byzantine monk and scholar Michael Psellus (1018-1078) made the “Chaldean Oracles” a pillar of his philosophy. He wrote commentaries on the “Oracles”, for the composition of which he drew from Proclus. Psellus’s commentaries profoundly shaped the way in which other Byzantine writers engaged with the “Oracles”, including Michael Italicus (d. before 1157), Nicephorus Gregoras (c. 1292–c. 1360), Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) and George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355–c. 1450). The “Chaldaean Oracles” entered Western European culture at the Renaissance and influenced Italian philosophers, such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. The first printed edition of the “Chaldean Oracles” went on sale in Paris, in 1538, published by Ludovicus Tiletanus (Jean Loys de Thielt), and it was based on the work of Plethon. The esoteric use of the Oracles began to gather steam in the late eighteenth century. It has been suggested that they might have influenced Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute” (1791), while they formed part of the work of Thomas Taylor (1758–1835), the Platonic philosopher who was one of the first people in modern British history to embrace revived paganism as a philosophical and religious system.



Date Range: 100 CE - 199 CE

Region: Chaldea

Region tags: Asia, Western Asia, Middle East, Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Eastern Mediterranean, Chaldea

Chaldea is a term that the Greeks of the 4th century BCE and later used for Babylon. This is how they transliterated the Assyrian name "Kaldū", an area southeast of Babylon towards the coast of the Persian Gulf.

Status of Readership:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists

Sources and Corpora

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Ruth Majercik, "The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary", Leiden: Brill, 1989
- Source 2: Édouard Des Places, "Oracles chaldaïques", Revised and corrected by A. Segonds, Paris 1996

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chaldean-Oracles>
- Source 1 Description: Chaldean Oracles, Britannica
- Source 2 URL: <http://n1.intelibility.com/ime/lyceum/?p=lemma&id=866&lang=2>
- Source 2 Description: Plato and the Chaldean Oracles, Encyclopedia of Plato
- Source 3 URL: <https://www.saturniatellus.com/2017/11/travel-toward-neoplatonic-mysticism-philosophical-itinerary-ix/>
- Source 3 Description: A Travel Toward Neoplatonic Mysticism: The Chaldean Oracles.

Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

- Source 1 URL: http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts/0150_chaldean_orac/02_chaldean_oracles.htm
- Source 1 Description: The Chaldean Oracles
- Source 2 URL: https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/proclus_chaldaic_oracles.htm
- Source 2 Description: Fragments from Proclus' Commentary on the Chaldean Oracles

General Variables

Materiality

Methods of Composition

– Written



Inked

– with Ink

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

– Papyrus

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

– Physical preparation

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

– Physical preparation

Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

– No

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

– No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

– No

Production & Intended Audience

Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

– No

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

– Yes

↳ Is there a culture of oral recitation?

– No

↳ Is there a story associated with the origins of scripture?

– Yes

Notes: The "Oracles" have perhaps been received via mediumistic trance. Julian the Theurgist (the son) functioned as a medium through whom Julian the Chaldean (the father) extracted oracles from Plato's soul.

↳ Revealed by a high god?

– No

↳ Revealed by other supernatural being?

– Yes

↳ Inspired by high god?

– Yes

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings?

– No

↳ Originated from non-divine human being?

– No

↳ Are the scriptures alterable?

– Yes

↳ Do the practitioners generally consider the scripture open to alteration?

– No

Notes: The "Oracles" were not open to alteration as such, but their interpretation depended on each philosopher/theurgist who used them, so their ritual significance could be altered, in some way.

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting scriptures?

– No

Notes: Not as such. The "Oracles" were largely interpreted by neoplatonic philosophers at the neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria. The only formality therefore of these institutions was the teaching of philosophy, not the interpretation of the "Oracles".

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures?

– Yes

Notes: In fact, only the initiates of the Oracles could operate the rituals and the incantations. These initiates were few and, in the case of neoplatonism, such an initiation presupposed an intellectual purification, which could be achieved through contemplation.

↳ Is the select group of people defined by any specific gender designation?

– No

↳ Is the select group of people defined by any age designation?

– No

↳ Is the select group of people defined by any form of linguistic designation?

– No

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures?

– No

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

– No

Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– No

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– No

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– Yes

↳ Is it orally recited?

– Yes

↳ Is there any particular affect of the oral recitation of the text?

– Yes

↳ Is there any particular affect on the audience of the recitation?

– Yes

↳ Does the affect involve unlocking hidden knowledge?

– Yes

↳ On the reciter?

– Yes

Notes: One of the theurgic techniques involved in the "Oracles" is the "Conjuration". This is a rite that involved the conjuring-up of a specific deity who could then prophecy to the theurgist. There are two ways to achieve this: through the animation of statues and through binding and loosing of a god. The animation of statues involved the placing of certain stones, herbs or small animals (these were symbols) within the cavity of a statue of a god, in order to achieve a sympathetic relation with the god. The principle behind this procedure is that of sympathēia, a notion which assumes a direct correspondence between a deity and his/hers symbolic representatives in the animal, mineral and vegetable worlds. The second technique involved the binding of a god in human medium and the loosing the god when the rite was completed. Both techniques were used in order to receive predictions for the future or any sort of answer from the divine realm.

↳ Does the affect involve unlocking hidden knowledge?

– Yes

↳ Is it read?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Describe the nature of the ritual practice?

– Specify: Recitation of the "Oracles" was involved in the soteriological theurgic techniques. These are: 1) Conjunction, 2) Conjunction and 3) Anagoge (ascension)

↳ Is the text employed in large scale rituals?

– Yes

↳ On average, how many participants are present?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is the text employed in small scale rituals?

– Yes

↳ On average, how many participants are present?

– Field doesn't know

↳ How often do the rituals take place?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks?

– No

Notes: Not as such. It was crucial however for the participants to be initiated in theurgy and theurgic practices.

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks?

– No

Notes: Not as such, but it was crucial for the theurgist to be initiated and to have been purified before the execution of the ritual.

↳ Are there synchronic practices?

– No

↳ Are there intoxicants used during the ritual?

– No

- ↳ Are there other substances (such as food or drink, for example) that are consumed during rituals?
- Field doesn't know

Is there material significance to the text?

- No
- No

Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

- No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

- No

Notes: However, although there are no different versions of the "Oracles", the commentators preserve several information, at times different the one from the other, and aspects of the text, which allow the original, now lost, text to be reconstructed.

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

- No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

- No

Notes: Not exactly. The "Oracles" is a product of Hellenistic civilization, with affinities with Persian-Babylonian ("Chaldean"), Israelite and Egyptian cultures with their mysterious and enthusiastic cults and wisdom-traditions, as well as with Gnosticism and Hermeticism. In this sense, the literary tradition in which the "Oracles" belong to can be regarded as a part or as an evolution of the most ancient wisdom traditions.

Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary? (Select all that apply)

- Other [specify]: The "Oracles" involve a complex ascent ritual including purifications, trance, phantasmagoria, sacred objects, magical instruments and formulas, prayers, hymns, as well as "nomina barbara" or "voces mystiquae", which consist a list of sounds that are actually patterns with magical properties.

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– No

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The anthropology of the "Oracles" follows a platonic dualism which stresses the body/soul distinction. The soul (i.e. the spiritual part) is depicted as descending into matter to serve the body. This descend is actually twofold: the soul first serves but later becomes enslaved. This submersion into matter is referred as a kind of intoxication. The soul becomes drunk on material distractions and needs to be sober again.

↳ Spirit-Mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other parts?

– Yes

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body?

– Yes

↳ Other spirit-body relationship?

– Yes

Notes: For some of the Neoplatonist, the main advocates of the "Oracles" the body is considered as the tomb of the soul/spirit.

↳ Within conceptions of the mind: are there distinct notions of psychological states or aggregates?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Do practitioners engage in debates about mind-body dualism?

– Yes

Notes: Neoplatonic philosophers do engage in mind-body dualism debates in their philosophical writings, supporting the supremacy of the spirit over the body. In fact, in some cases, such as in the middle Platonism, this separation was sharp and led to extreme

derogation of material existence and an explicit dualistic understanding of the human nature.

↳ Are debates framed in other ways?

– Yes

Notes: Through philosophical treatises.

↳ Do practitioners distinguish between a corporeal body and an incorporeal soul or spirit?

– Yes

↳ Are there other sides or features of the debate?

– I don't know

↳ What are historical mainstream and minority positions?

– Field doesn't know

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Notes: However, Neoplatonists who readily made use of the "Oracles" and their rituals advocated in favor of a soul migration. Furthermore, the "Oracles" suggest that unpurified souls should spend some time in Hades, in order to undergo some sort of retribution, until they will be ready to return back to Earth (and consequently to corporal life).

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dicated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– Yes

Notes: According to the "Oracles" the purification of the lower soul is of particular importance. In order to achieve purification the "Oracles" mention a ritual, a central Chaldean sacrament that included a ritual burning of the body, the purpose of which was to mimic death for the separation and hence the purification of the soul. This ritual was a symbolic burial of the body.

↳ Do these practices take place at tombs/burial sites?

– No

↳ Do these practices take place for the veneration OR worship of the dead?

– No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: A complex chain of lesser beings fills the space between the Primordial Triad and the material world. These are: the Iynges; the Connectors and the Teletarchs. All of the above are considered as aspects of the world of the Platonic Ideas. This filling-up of divine space is important feature of the Chaldean theology, as the Highest God must remain separated from the contamination of material existence.

↳ A supreme high-god is present

– Yes

Notes: According to the Chaldean theology, apart from the Highest God, which is completely transcendent, there is: (a) a Second God (or Demiurgic Intellect). His function is to fashion the intelligible world on the model of the Platonic Ideas. It is conceived as dyadic in nature, as he is turned towards both the intelligible and the sensible realm. He exists as the beginner of the process of division that leads to creation and generation. The second Intellect projects the Platonic Ideas onto primal (uninformed) matter. (b) A third God, which is conceived as a female generative entity. It is described as "Power" or is conflated with Hecate as the World Soul. Is located either as a median figure between the first and the second Gods; either on the borders between the intelligible and the sensible realm. The third God (Power) reveals the necessity of a feminine element for the process of generation, either at the highest or the lowest levels. In general, the Power and the Demiurgic Intellect are regarded as faculties of the Highest God (the Father). This divine scheme is regarded triadically, as a triadic monad/three-in-one deity.

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic or described in anthropomorphic terms

– No

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity

– No

- ↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld)
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god)
 - No
- ↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good
 - Yes
 - Notes: The Highest God is described positively in the "Oracles" as Father, First, Paternal Intellect, Monad, Source, One.
- ↳ Other features of the supreme high god
 - Specify: The sole function of the Chaldean supreme God is to "think" or "contemplate" the Platonic world of Ideas. He exists as an indivisible unity.
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world
 - No
 - Notes: Chaldean theology stresses the transcendence of the Highest God. This transcendence is very close to a via negativa, where the Highest God is described as "snatched away" and existing outside of his products.
- ↳ Has deliberate causal efficacy in the world
 - No
- ↳ Indirect causal efficacy in the world
 - Yes
- ↳ Exhibits positive emotion
 - Yes

- ↳ Exhibits negative emotion
 - No
- ↳ Possesses Hunger?
 - No
- ↳ Can be hurt?
 - No
- ↳ Can be tricked?
 - No
- ↳ Can be imprisoned?
 - No
- ↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural being other than the high god?
 - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature
 - Specify: The supreme High God exists as an indivisible unity.
- ↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living
 - No
- ↳ Does the text make communication with supreme high-god possible?
 - No

Previously human spirits are present

– No

Non-human supernatural beings are present

– Yes

Notes: The chain of lesser beings in Chaldean theology includes: (a) the *lynges*. The term comes from Plato and signifies the binding force between Man and the Gods. In the "Oracles" the *lynges* are found as thoughts (Ideas) of the Father (Supreme God); couriers between the Father and matter; they are connected with certain cosmic entities (Intellectual Supports); they are equated with the magic wheels used in theurgic rites. The *lynges* operate as mediating or binding entities between the intelligible and the sensible world and play both a cosmic and a theurgic role. (b) The Connectors. Their

main purpose is to harmonize and protect the various parts of the Universe. They are referred as invisible powers which hold the Universe together. (c) Teletarchs, Beneath the Iynges and the Connectors are the Teletarchs, divine entities assimilated with the rulers of the three worlds of Chaldean cosmology. They are also associated with the Chaldean virtues of Faith, Truth and Love. Faith is connected with the material Teletarch. Truth is connected with the Ethereal Teletarch and Love with the Empyrean Teletarch. These virtues are not to be understood as spiritual qualities (as in Christianity for example), but as Cosmic entities involved in the creation and maintenance of the Universe. Furthermore, Faith, Truth and Love can be understood as well as theurgic agents that unite the theurgist with God. Finally, they are said to be responsible for purifying the ascending soul and guiding its journey upwards.

↳ Supernatural beings can be seen

– No

↳ Supernatural beings can be physically felt

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world

– Yes

↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs

– No

↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region

– No

↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region

– Yes

↳ Knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region

– Yes

↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)

– Field doesn't know

↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)

– Field doesn't know

↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)

- Field doesn't know
- ↳ Know basic character (personal essence)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Have other knowledge of this world
 - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world
 - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings communicate with the living according to the text?
 - Yes
 - ↳ In waking, everyday life?
 - No
 - ↳ In dreams?
 - No
 - ↳ In trance possession?
 - Yes
 - ↳ Through divination practices?
 - Yes
 - ↳ Only through religious specialists?
 - Yes
 - ↳ Only through monarch?
 - No
 - ↳ Other?

–Specify: Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion

– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion

– Field doesn't know

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger

– No

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature

–Specify: Field doesn't know

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically?

– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?

– Yes

↳ Other organization of pantheon?

–Specify: Chaldean cosmology is informed by a heliocentric concept, according to which the sun functions as the heart or the center of the Universe. Accordingly, each world can be seen as a circle which is equated with one of the three Teletarchs.

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– No

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– Yes

Notes: One of the techniques involved in the rite of the "Conjuration" is the binding and loosing of a god. This technique involved the binding of a god in a human medium and then loosing her/him when the rite was completed. The actual presence of the god during the rite was manifest in various ways: divine possession verified by certain physical reactions such as levitation, bodily/facial movements, changes in voice etc. Furthermore, luminous apparitions often appeared, sometimes seen as entering or leaving the body of the human medium. Such apparitions are distinguished to those who are seen by the "caller", those viewed by the "receiver" and those witnessed by the spectators. Also, the deities invoked appear sometimes in luminous shapes, such as dazzling horse, formless fire etc., while other fragments of the "Oracles" refer that the gods appear initially without form, but take on various shapes so that they become visible to human sight.

↳ Is the aspect of the supernatural being/high god visible to anyone in the text?

– No

↳ Is the aspect of the supernatural being/high god hidden from anyone in the text?

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

– Other [specify]: Angels and demons.

Notes: Both of these play a role in the theurgic elevation of the soul. There are three classes of angels: those who remain in the presence of the Highest God; those who are separated from the Highest God and those who praise Him with hymns. Additionally, the demons inhabit all aspects of the sublunar (material) world and they are responsible for the passionate element of in humans, as well as for sickness and disease. Their types are: terrestrial, atmospheric, water and lunar.

Does the text guide divination practices?

– Yes

↳ Divination by examination of the extra (animal remains)

– No

↳ Divination through human communication?

– Yes

↳ Human being the vehicle for the oracle?

– Yes

Notes: "Conjuration" was a Chaldean rite that involved the conjuring-up of a specific deity who would then prophecy to the theurgist. One of the ways to achieve it was binding and loosing of a god in a human medium and then loosing the god when the

rite was completed.

↳ Human being the interpreter of the oracle?

– No

Notes: The invoked gods during the rites were the ones to have the ultimate control over the rite, not the theurgist/interpreter.

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of specified sex/gender?

– No

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of specified ethnicity?

– No

↳ Are the oracle interpreters of specified class?

– Yes

Notes: The interpreters should be initiated to the "Oracles".

↳ Is sex-deprivation required?

– No

↳ Are intoxicants required?

– No

↳ Is physical ordeal required?

– No

↳ Divination through animal-behavior?

– No

↳ Divination through non-living material?

–Other [specify]: Statues.

Notes: "Conjuration" was a Chaldean rite that involved the conjuring-up of a specific deity who would then prophecy to the theurgist. One of the ways to achieve it was the animation of statues. This rite involved the placing of certain stones, herbs and small animals in the cavity of a statue to achieve a sympathetic relation with the god. The principle behind this procedure is that of sympathia, a notion which assumes a direct correspondence between a deity and his/hers symbolic representative in the animal, mineral and vegetable worlds.

↳ Other form of divination:

– Specify: Magical instruments and various invocations.

Notes: Theurgist used several magical instruments. These include the magic wheel (connected with the lynges) which was a golden sphere embedded with a sapphire and swung around by a leather strap. On the surface of the wheel were engraved magical characters. By swinging the wheel, the theurgist would imitate the motion of the heavenly spheres and thus he would attract sympathetically the lynges, who in their turn would operate as messengers between the theurgist and the gods. Furthermore, several brass instruments were also used in Chaldean rites, perhaps as apotropaic means of warding off evil demons. These include pots and pans. There were also amulets, sacred stones etc. Furthermore, the theurgic technique of "Conjunction" that refers to the communication (or contact) of the theurgist with a particular god/spirit should be mentioned. The means of achieving this contact was through the use of various invocations, but it could also be achieved via material means (burial of certain material substances to conjoin with the corresponding spirit).

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– Field doesn't know

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– No

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– No

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– Yes

Notes: The basic Chaldean virtues of Faith, Truth and Love in the theurgic context are agents that unite the theurgist with God.

↳ Honesty/trustworthiness/integrity

– No

↳ Courage (in battle)

– No

↳ Courage (generic)

– No

↳ Compassion/empathy/kindness/benevolence

– No

↳ Mercy/forgiveness/tolerance

– No

↳ Generosity/charity

– No

↳ Selflessness/selfless giving

– No

↳ Righteousness/moral rectitude

– Yes

↳ Ritual purity/ritual adherence/abstention from sources of impurity

– Yes

↳ Respectfulness/courtesy

– Yes

- ↳ Familial obedience/filial piety
 - No
- ↳ Fidelity/loyalty
 - Yes
- ↳ Cooperation
 - No
- ↳ Independence/creativity/freedom
 - No
- ↳ Moderation/frugality
 - Yes
- ↳ Forbearance/fortitude/patience
 - No
- ↳ Diligence/self-discipline/excellence
 - Yes
- ↳ Assertiveness/decisiveness/confidence/initiative
 - No
- ↳ Strength (physical)
 - No
- ↳ Power/status/nobility
 - No
- ↳ Humility/modesty
 - No
- ↳ Contentment/serenity/equanimity
 - No

↳ Joyfulness/enthusiasm/cheerfulness

– No

↳ Optimism/hope

– No

↳ Gratitude/thankfulness

– No

↳ Reverence/awe/wonder

– Yes

↳ Faith/belief/trust/devotion

– Yes

↳ Wisdom/understanding

– Yes

↳ Discernment/intelligence

– Yes

↳ Beauty/attractiveness

– No

↳ Cleanliness (physical)/orderliness

– No

↳ Other important virtues

– Yes

Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

Notes: However, some philosophical texts, like Porphyry's "On abstinence from animal food" are connected to the purposes of the "Oracles", which is the purification of the soul.

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Notes: Perhaps indirectly. Since the scope of the "Oracles" is to purify the soul, it follows that a code of moral conduct should be followed. This happens in association with the moral notions that Neoplatonism developed and implemented to its students/agents.

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– Field doesn't know

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– Field doesn't know

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– No

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– Yes



Are sacrifices specified by the text?

– No



↳ Are there self-sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there material offerings present?

– Yes

Notes: In certain rituals, such as the animation of statues, offerings are mandatory. These include stones, herbs and small animals, which are symbolic representatives of the mineral, vegetable and animal world.

↳ Are they mandatory?

– Yes

↳ Are they composed of valuable objects?

– No

↳ Are they composed of daily-life objects?

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches)?

– Yes

↳ Are there particular smells associated with material offerings?

– Yes

↳ Are there particular visual stimuli (colors, symbols) associated with the offerings? (I.e. 'must be bright' 'must include red')

– No

↳ Other?

–Specify: Small animals like birds, lizards and the like.

↳ Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory?

– Yes

↳ By the community?

– No

↳ By specific individuals?

– Yes

↳ Is the maintenance of the place regulated by the text?

– Field doesn't know

Institutions & Production Environment of Text

Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– Other

Notes: Philosophical schools and esoteric groups.

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– Other

Notes: Mostly the philosophical schools of Late Antiquity, particular the neoplatonic one. However, the text was not reproduced, but it was largely commented on by philosophers and savants. It is of particular importance to note that the Oracles played a prominent part in the formation of a type of middle Platonism which had affinities with Gnosticism and Hermeticism and led to elaborate and at times exasperating metaphysical concepts; extreme derogation of the material existence; a dualistic understanding of the human nature; promoted a method of salvation/enlightenment that involved a spiritual/ritual ascent of the soul and promoted a mythologizing tendency that hypostasized abstractions into quasi-mythical beings.

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

– Other

Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– No

Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– No

Notes: The text was not meant to be taught, in the strict sense of the word. It presupposes a process of initiation, which could have taken place in any of the Neoplatonic schools of antiquity (as well as elsewhere) without, however, having a formal character.

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Notes: The text was propagated mainly through neoplatonism. Therefore, although there is no clear reference, studying and deeply understanding the philosophy of Plato was in some way a prerequisite for understanding the text. In fact, in some cases, philosophy and theurgy -the theurgic rites and rituals mentioned in the "Oracles"- were considered interconnected and complementary.

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– No

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

– No

Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– No

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