

RIDERS IN THE SKY: CAVALIER GODS AND THEURGIC SALVATION IN THE SECOND CENTURY A.D.

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I. INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT magical texts provide many examples of epiphanies by gods, demons, and angels. The form in which an entity chooses to appear can sometimes be explained by reference to what we know of Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and other Mediterranean religions. Such analyses of epiphanies, in turn, often clarify the intents of the spells in general, and the systems of beliefs that lay behind them.

In this article, I will examine one particular magical epiphany in order to shed light on theurgy, a religious movement that arose during the latter half of the second century A.D. and significantly affected subsequent Neoplatonic philosophy and mysticism. In theurgy, techniques such as those we encounter in the magical papyri were wed to the cosmological and metaphysical tenets of Platonic philosophy. The theurgist, for example, understood the universe to be divided into the same material and noetic realms that are familiar from the writings of many Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists. His highest goal, correspondingly, was similar to that of Philo, Plotinus, Porphyry, and some other Platonists of the time: he sought to experience ἀναγωγή—to cause his soul to ascend out of the material world and into the noetic realm where it could enjoy ἔνωσις with the Νοῦς πατρικός (theurgy's transcendent, supreme god). The means by which the theurgist could achieve ἔνωσις, however, went beyond the contemplation and asceticism advocated by other Platonists; theurgists manipulated sacred stones, spoke secret words, and engaged in special breathing techniques both to prepare for ἀναγωγή and to aid themselves in other endeavors. The theurgist's sacred texts were the Chaldaean Oracles, transcriptions of dactylic hexameter verses allegedly spoken by the gods either during direct epiphanies or through the mouths of entranced mediums and animated statues. In these Oracles, the gods both described the nature of the cosmos and gave the theurgist practical instructions regarding the magical rituals he was to perform. We still possess substantial fragments of the Oracles, gleaned from the writings of Neoplatonists such as Proclus and Damascius, who quoted them in support of their own interpretations of Platonic doctrines.¹

1. The sketch that I have given here of theurgical doctrines and their relationship to other forms of magical praxis and/or Platonism can be filled out by reference to S. I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A study*

Although there is general agreement regarding the broad outlines of theurgic praxis and theory, relatively little has been done to clarify the finer points of either. One reason is that research has been deterred by a scholarly assumption that, although theurgy may have borrowed bits and pieces from contemporaneous religious and philosophical systems, as a whole it was abstruse and disconnected from those systems. Two discouraging corollaries of this assumption are: 1) that second-century *comparanda* can shed little light upon theurgy's interpretative problems and 2) that even if it were to be elucidated, theurgy would have little to offer towards the clarification of other religious, mystical, or magical systems of the second century.²

An analysis of one theurgic epiphany will help to show that neither corollary holds true. By examining the iconography of the epiphany in the context of second-century religious iconography at large, we will not only be able to elucidate the significance of the theurgic image itself, but will also enrich our understanding of how religious ideas spread throughout the Empire. The general assumption will begin to fall as well: once the epiphany is understood properly, we will find that theurgic iconography is neither abstruse nor disconnected from its religious milieu.

The epiphany in question is that of a divinity who will manifest himself to the theurgist as a child on a horse, according to Chaldaean Oracle frag. 146.³

of Hekate's roles in the Chaldean Oracles and related literature, American Classical Studies 21 (Atlanta, 1990); R. D. Majercik, ed., trans., and comm., *The Chaldean Oracles*, Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 5 (Leiden, 1989), introduction, esp. pp. 30–46; G. Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," in *Religion, Science and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V. M. Flescher (New York and Oxford, 1989), pp. 185–228; G. Shaw, "Theurgy and Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 1–28; E. des Places, ed., trans., and comm., *Oracles Chaldaïques* (Paris, 1971); O. Geudtner, *Die Seelenlehre der chaldäischen Orakel*, Beitr. z. Klass. Philol. 35 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1971); F. W. Cremer, *Die chaldäischen Orakel und Jamblich de Mystériis*, Beitr. z. Klass. Philol. 26 (Meisenheim am Glan, 1969); E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *JRS* 37 (1947): 55–69, reprinted as "Theurgy" in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 283–311; H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (1956; revised, reprint ed., Paris, 1978); W. Theiler, *Die chaldäischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesios*, Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft 18.1 (Halle, 1942; reprinted in W. Theiler, *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus* [Berlin, 1966], pp. 252–301); W. Kroll, *De Oraculis Chaldaicis*, Breslauer Philol. Abhand. 7.1 (1894; reprint ed., Breslau, 1962). The notes in Johnston and Majercik give references to works on specific questions.

2. E.g., Dodds, *Greeks*, p. 284 and implicitly throughout his discussion. He takes a somewhat different view in the first paragraph of his "New Light on the 'Chaldaean Oracles,'" *HTHR* 54 (1961): 263–73 (reprinted in the second edition of Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. 693–701), where he says that the Oracles are of "serious concern to historians of religion, as the last important Sacred Book of pagan antiquity. . . ." See also R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1986), pp. 196–98, who seems to suggest it was the very obscurity of the Oracles that made them attractive to later Platonists; Fox calls them a "jousting ground for the hyperintelligent." Luck, "Theurgy," p. 185, suggests that the "enigmatic style . . . and exuberant imagery would have made [the Oracles] difficult to use even [in antiquity] without the help of a spiritual guide or mentor." Recently, some scholars have again begun to treat theurgy and the Oracles as being capable of explanation and as having some potential to shed light on related systems of thought or worship; in addition to the recent works on theurgy itself that are listed in n. 1, see R. Turcan, *Les Cultes Orientaux dans le Monde Romain* (Paris, 1989), pp. 277–88, and G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge, 1986).

3. I cite Chaldaean Oracle fragments according to the numbers assigned in des Places, *Oracles*. Throughout this article, I will also cite parenthetically or in notes the corresponding page numbers of the first collection of the fragments in Kroll, *Oraculis*, and the ancient sources of the fragments: frag. 146 = Kroll, p. 57 = Procl., *In Rem.* 1.111.3–11.

It is one of a series of epiphanies described in Oracle frags. 146, 147, and 148,⁴ all of which, scholars generally agree, are excerpts from a single, longer Oracle spoken by Hekate, probably through an entranced medium.⁵ Most scholars have held back from offering any interpretation of the young cavalier at all. Lewy suggested that he represented an ἄωρος or βαιοθάνατος soul—one of the restless and therefore potentially malicious demons that accompanied Hekate during her nocturnal wanderings, according to traditional belief. This suggestion is unsatisfactory for several reasons, most notably because we know of no reason why the theurgist would have wanted to invoke a chthonic entity—indeed, the theurgist was supposed to avoid contact with such creatures. Moreover, theurgical sources never describe ἄωροι, βαιοθάνατοι, or any other chthonic entities as being “fiery” (ἔμπυρος), as the cavalier of frag. 146 is described. In fact, “fiery” entities in the theurgic system are always understood to come from the celestial, noetic realm. Finally, in theurgy, Hekate never exhibits the darker side of her traditional nature; for the theurgist, she is a σώτειρα, not the mistress of dead, unhappy souls.⁶

After an initial discussion of frag. 146, the second section of this article analyzes the iconography and symbolism of other Mediterranean cavalier gods in the first few centuries A.D. In the third section, I discuss the meaning of the bow and arrows that the theurgic cavalier may carry and the symbolism of the ways in which he may appear—χρυσῷ πεπυκασμένος and γυμνός. Finally, I use the conclusions of the first three sections to make some brief comments on the nature of theurgy and suggest ways in which its further study might be approached.

Fragment 146 reads as follows:

... ταῦτ' ἐπιφωνήσας ἡ παιδί κατόψῃ
 πῦρ ἵκελον σκιρτηδὸν ἐπ' ἡέρος οἶδμα τιταίνον·
 ἡ καὶ πῦρ ἀτύπωτον, ὅθεν φωνὴν προθέουσιν·
 ἡ φῶς πλούσιον ἀμφὶ γύην ροιζαῖον ἐλιχθέν·
 ἀλλὰ καὶ ἵππον ἰδεῖν φωτὸς πλέον ἀστράπτοντα
 ἡ καὶ παῖδα θεοῖς νώτοις ἐποχούμενον ἵππου

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4. The text of Oracle frag. 146 is given below in the body of this article. Oracle fragment 147 = Kroll, pp. 57–58 = Psellus, *PG* 122 1133B5–8: Πολλάκις ἦν λέξις μοι, ἀθρήσεις πάντ' ἀχλύοντα. / Οὔτε γὰρ οὐράνιος κυρτὸς τότε φαίνεται ὄγκος, / ἀστέρες οὐ λάμπουσι, τὸ μήνης φῶς κεκάλυπται, / χθὼν οὐχ ἔστηκεν. βλέπεται δέ [τε] πάντα κεραυνοῖς. (I adopt Lobeck's emendation πάντ' ἀχλύοντα for the text's πάντα λέοντα in line 1; see Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 112–14 for discussion.) Oracle fragment 148 = Kroll, pp. 57–58 = Psellus *PG* 122 1136B11–C1: Ἦνικά [δὲ] βλέψης μορφῆς ἄτερ εὐτερον πῦρ / λαμπόμενον σκιρτηδὸν ὅλου κατὰ βένθεα κόσμου, / κλυθὶ πυρὸς φωνήν.

5. That the fragments come from a single oracle was first suggested by Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. 243–44. For the evidence that Hekate is the speaker, see most recently, Johnston, *Hekate*, p. 112 and n. 3. Luck, “Theurgy,” pp. 196–97, in contrast to other scholars, has suggested that frags. 146–48 were “utterances of one or several mediums in trance, recorded over a period of time” and only later assembled. Des Places' arrangement of these fragments (which follows Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. 240–45), is almost certainly incorrect: frag. 147 probably preceded frag. 146, and frag. 148 followed both; see Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 114–19.

6. Lewy, *Chaldaean*, p. 242; cited, apparently in agreement, by Majercik, *Chaldaean*, pp. 195–96. Lewy's interpretation is criticized more fully at Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 119–24; see also the final portion of this article. On avoidance of chthonic demons, see Johnston, *Hekate*, chap. 9. On the fiery nature of celestial or noetic deities in theurgy, see n. 61 below. Hekate's darker traits, as we know them from the magical papyri and literary sources such as Soph. *TGrF* frag. 492 and Eur. *Hel.* 569–70, were cast off by the theurgists onto the goddess Physis (Johnston, *Hekate*, chap. 9).

ἔμπυρον ἢ χρυσῷ πεπυκασμένον ἢ πάλι γυμνόν,
ἢ καὶ τοξεύοντα καὶ ἑστηῶτ' ἐπὶ νώτοις.

Having spoken these things, you will behold
either a fire leaping skittishly like a child over the aery waves;
or an unformed fire from which a voice emerges;
or a rich light that whirs around the field in a spiral.
But [it is also possible] that you will see a horse flashing more
brightly than light,
either also a fiery child mounted on the swift back of the horse,
covered with gold or naked;
or even a child shooting arrows, upright upon the horse's back.

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Hekate says that, after the theurgist has spoken certain magical words or phrases (which may have been included in a missing portion of the Oracle), he will see a divinity or divinities make their epiphanies. Scholars agree, based on analysis of ancient exegeses of this fragment and fragments 147 and 148, that the formless fire described in line 3 is a manifestation of Hekate herself.⁷ The disjointed syntax and diction of the fragment—which, as Dodds remarks, bears strong similarities to the broken utterances of modern spiritualists and mediums⁸—have made any further interpretation of the fragment difficult. To begin with, it is hard to determine how many mutually exclusive epiphanies or combinations of epiphanies Hekate is describing, as comparison of previous scholars' translations and remarks shows. Lewy, for example, assumed that the fragment described the epiphany of Hekate as accompanied by a troop of lesser entities;⁹ Luck, however, understood the fragment to describe nine separate apparitions that would manifest themselves exclusively of one another.

I suggest that frag. 146 describes the possible ways in which *two* separate entities may choose to make their epiphanies. The first four lines describe the appearances or behaviors of the first entity, Hekate, who will manifest herself to the theurgist as a formless fire or light. This Hekatean fire may: 1) leap as skittishly as a child over the aery waves; 2) speak to the theurgist; and/or 3) whirl around the field. The second four lines describe three traits or behaviors that may be manifested by the second entity. A horse will appear, flashing more brightly than light, and carrying on its back a fiery child. This child will be either 1) covered with gold or 2) naked. The child may also 3) be shooting a bow and arrow as it rides upon the horse. The ἀλλὰ καὶ of line 5 suggests that it is possible that the fire and the cavalier, in any of their various forms, may appear to the theurgist together. It does not, however, exclude the possibility that they may appear separately from one another, as well. As this issue cannot be resolved, I suggest that it is initially best to identify and interpret the icon

7. The formless fire, alias Hekate, also is mentioned in frag. 148.1. The most recent discussion of the ancient evidence for identifying the fire as Hekate is at Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 112–15.

8. Dodds, *Greeks*, p. 284.

9. Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. 240–44. I originally adopted Lewy's interpretation myself: Johnston, *Hekate*, chap. 8, especially p. 112.

of the cavalier independently of any connection he may or may not have with the Hekatean fire.

II. DIVINE HORSEMEN IN MYTH, CULT, AND MYSTICISM

Generally speaking, the image of a god on a horse bespeaks swift and powerful aid against all types of trouble. The Dioscuri, who frequently appear in art and literature on horseback,¹⁰ are portrayed as early as *Homeric Hymn* 33 as mounted saviors to those in dangerous seas.¹¹ Elsewhere, they are imagined to bring aid to troops or individuals on the battlefield,¹² a role that undoubtedly reflects the close connection between the Dioscuri and young men entering the period of life concerned with warfare.¹³ Yet the patronage of these cavaliers is by no means restricted to sailors and soldiers. They also bring aid during illness,¹⁴ and the epithet σωτήρ is applied to them in a wide variety of other situations in both literature and cult.¹⁵ Similarly, Heron, the "Thracian Rider God,"¹⁶ whose cult flourished not only in Thrace itself but also in distant areas such as Rome, Pannonian Intercisa, Egypt, and southern Russia during the Roman period, and undoubtedly long before,¹⁷ seems to have been a god on whom one relied for salvation in a variety of situations. Epithets that clearly indicate this role include Θεὸς σώζων, Ἐπήκοος, and Σωτήρ; also suggestive are Θαυματοργός, Πανθοποιός, Ἀγαθαποιός, Κατοικαδίου, and Προπύλαιος.¹⁸ Heron often is found in the company of

10. My comments on the Dioscuri are based mainly on those of W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. by J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 212–13; M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*³ (Munich, 1967), 1:406–11; and Bethe, "Dioskuren," *RE* 5.1 (1903): 1087–1123. See also S. Eitrem, *Die göttliche Zwillinge bei den Griechen* (Oslo, 1902); and L. R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (Oxford, 1921), pp. 175–228. On the boys appearing on horseback, see specifically M. P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Berlin, 1906), pp. 418–22 and Nilsson, *GGR*³, 1:409–11 and pl. 29.5.

11. Further on aid at sea: Pl. *Euthyd.* 293A, *Eur. Hel.* 1662–66, *Theoc. Id.* 22.8, *Catull.* 68.65; further examples at Bethe, "Dioskuren," col. 1096.

12. Aid on the battlefield: *Diod. Sic.* 8.32, *Strab.* 6.261, *Cic. Nat. D.* 2.6 and 3.11, *CIL*² 1:322; further examples at Bethe, "Dioskuren," col. 1095.

13. Cf. Burkert, *Religion*, p. 212.

14. Theopomp. ap. the *Suda*, s.v. Φορπύιον; the scholiast on Persius 2.56 says "cum Romani pestilentia laborarent, Castor et Pollux in somniis populum monuerunt, quibus remediis curarentur." Further at Bethe, "Dioskuren," col. 1097.

15. E.g., *Hymn. Hom.* 33.6, *Theoc. Id.* 22.6, *Eur. Hel.* 1500 and 1642. Further at Bethe, "Dioskuren," coll. 1094–98 and 1107.

16. My comments here are based largely on three works by G. I. Kazarow: "Thrake (Religion)," *RE* 11.2 (1922): 477–88; "Heros (thrakischer)," *RE* supp. 3 (1918): 1132–48; and *Die Denkmäler des thrakischen Reitergottes in Bulgarien* (Budapest, 1938), 2 vols. These works now are being superseded by a multi-volumed study in the *EPRO* series that will document the sculptural representations within separate geographical areas: *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii (CCET)*, (Leiden, 1979 [vols. 1 and 4], 1981 [vol. 2.1], 1984 [vol. 2.2], 1982 [vol. 5]). A final volume is planned, in which the sculptures will be discussed and the cult interpreted. The four published volumes include no in-depth analyses; vol. 1 includes a brief essay on the Rider's nature by I. Venedikov (pp. 1–6). Tudor frequently comments on the Thracian Rider during his discussion of the Danubian Rider (see n. 46 below).

17. Cf. Kazarow, *Denkmäler*, 1:11; Venedikov, *CCET*, 1:1. Venedikov notes that the Thracian Rider began to receive large numbers of inscribed and sculpted reliefs only after the Roman occupation—our oldest inscriptions date only to the first century B.C. and our oldest reliefs to the first century A.D.—but that the figure appears in other artistic mediums much earlier, including a gold ring dated to the fifth century B.C. (*CCET* 1:3–4).

18. Full lists of epithets are included in Kazarow, "Thrake" and Kazarow, "Heros." Updated lists are found in indices of each volume of *CCET*; these lists, however, give only those epithets and names found within the geographical area with which the volume is concerned.

Asclepius and occasionally in the company of Asclepius' "children," Hygieia/Salus and Telesphoros, suggesting that his aid was particularly expected in matters of sickness and childbirth. We also have evidence that he was regarded as a guardian of agriculture and the herd.¹⁹ Just as in the case of the Dioscuri, however, we suspect that his soteriological powers went beyond any and all of these specific areas, for the *benedictio latina* that he sometimes displays is a "bénédictio de caractère très général, à laquelle on pouvait attribuer tous les bienfaits. . . ." ²⁰

The long-standing association between the icon of the cavalier and a god who brings aid makes sense, not only because the horse provided a swiftness and stamina unavailable to the man on foot, but also because the horse was almost exclusively the mount of the wealthy and noble; to ride a horse, in other words, indicated a superiority of class or station as well as of speed and endurance. During the decades immediately preceding or coinciding with the composition of the Oracles, this icon of the divine cavalier as savior took on new life in various parts of the Roman Empire, as can be illustrated through five examples. This renewed popularity, I will argue, led to its adoption by the theurgists.

1) *Horus/Harpocrates*: As Françoise Dunand has noted, the image of a mounted god is not at all an Egyptian motif.²¹ During the second century, however, terracottas of Harpocrates began to represent him frequently as a mounted warrior; the famous bas-relief in the Louvre (E 4850), of approximately the same era, shows Horus as a cavalier, victorious over the Sethian crocodile that he regularly defeats elsewhere on foot.²²

This image of Horus/Harpocrates on horseback overcoming evil appears as early as the first century; Plutarch relates a myth in which Horus chooses the horse as the animal that will aid him against Typhon as he seeks vengeance for Osiris' death.²³ Perdrizet, in his study of artistic representations of rider-gods in Egypt, suggests that the god's career as a cavalier began in the first century B.C., when Thracians in Egypt began to identify Horus with Heron.²⁴ The subsequent, substantial rise in popularity of Harpocrates/Horus as cavalier during the second century A.D. may have been motivated initially by an increased population of soldiers in the area at that time, Dunand suggests.²⁵ To some extent, then, cavalier rep-

19. Kazarow, "Thrake," coll. 478, 483-84.

20. Seyrig, *Bull. hell.* 51 (1938): 211. Some scholars (but not Seyrig) have suggested that the Thracian Rider borrowed the *benedictio latina* (a hand-sign like that which the Pope uses in blessings) from the Thracio-Phrygian god Sabazios; for a review of the arguments see Kazarow, "Thrake," coll. 485-86. The Danubian Rider (below, pp. 312-13) occasionally displays the *benedictio latina*, too. On the Thracian Rider as a general bringer of aid, see also Kazarow, *Denkmäler*, 1:11-12. Venedikov, *CCET*, 1:2-5, concludes that the Thracian Rider's sphere of benign influence was so wide that he might be called an *All-Gott*.

21. *Religion Populaire en Égypte Romaine* (Leiden, 1979), p. 81.

22. For the extensive bibliography on this relief see J. Gwyn Griffiths, ed., trans., and comm., *Plutarch's "De Iside et Osiride"* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 346, n. 4. P. D. Scott-Moncrieff, *Paganism and Christianity in Egypt* (Cambridge, 1913), pp. 136-40, is still helpful, too.

23. *De Is. et Os.* 19.358B-C. Comments at Griffiths, "Iside," pp. 344-45.

24. P. Perdrizet, *Negotium perambulans in tenebris: Études de démonologie gréco-orientale* (Paris, 1922). Dunand, *Religion*, p. 81 and n. 168, is in agreement.

25. Dunand, *Religion*, p. 82.

representations of Harpocrates/Horus at about the time of the Oracles may say as much about his worshippers as about the god himself.

Yet we cannot discount the value of the symbol as an expression of this god's salvational or protective aspects during the second century, not only because those aspects are suggested by his pre-second-century portrayal as mounted victor over Sethian evil, but also because the use of the image subsequent to the second-century surge in popularity continues strongly to express salvation and protection, as shown most notably by the Coptic cavalier saint. This saint, who, scholars agree, owes his iconography to cavalier Horus, is portrayed as early as the third century on magical amulets and elsewhere as wounding a demonic enemy who lies on the ground beneath his horse.²⁶ Sometimes this demon is represented as a female who is identical or similar to the child-stealing witch more familiar from Byzantine sources; sometimes the demonic enemy takes on a reptilian form more similar to the scorpions and crocodiles that Horus/Harpocrates traditionally fought; many amulets connect the demon to illnesses.²⁷

In sum: it is likely that the representation of Horus/Harpocrates σωτήρ as a cavalier began in the first century B.C., was established as part of the myth of his battle against the forces of Typhonic evil at least by the late first century A.D., and took on a popularity during the second century that significantly influenced not only subsequent images of Horus/Harpocrates but also those of Coptic saints.²⁸ It is notable that these cavalier representations of the god were assimilated to other representations of Harpocrates as a child or youth, sometimes with his finger in his mouth. In one example, indeed, the mounted god is a chubby infant, naked except for a cape.²⁹ Here, then, may well be one of the specific models to which the composers of frag. 146 looked when describing their own παῖς θεοῖς νότοις ἐποχούμενος ἵππου.

26. I follow the dating of C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor, 1950), p. 211.

27. Perdrizet, *Negotium*; S. Lewis, "Coptic Horsemen," *JARCE* 10 (1973): 27–63; Griffiths, "Iside," p. 346 and notes (wherein also are given further references to works on Coptic art's debts to Egyptian iconography). See also Bonner, *Amulets*, p. 208–11; A. A. Barb, "Antaura the Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother," *Journ. Warb. Court. Instit.* 29 (1966): 1–23. The basic Byzantine story of the cavalier saints' victory over the child-stealing witch is found most accessibly in J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (1909; reprint ed., Cambridge, 1964), pp. 173–84. F. Cumont, "St. George and Mithra 'The Cattle Thief,'" *JRS* 27 (1937): 63–71, suggests influence of cavalier Mithras on St. George. See now also W. M. Brashear, "Horus," *RAC*, in press, who discusses Horus as cavalier, particularly with respect to healing (I thank Dr. Brashear for sending me page proofs of his article, which arrived while the present article was in press).

28. It is also notable that Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus were portrayed on Alexandrian coins not only as equestrians, but sometimes as warriors spearing enemies who lie prostrate on the ground beneath their horses—poses, as Bonner, *Amulets*, p. 210, notes, that are identical to that of Horus spearing the Sethian crocodile and Solomon/Sisinnius spearing demonic females. Coinage usually borrows images whose symbolism is simple and widely-enough known to promulgate a message: the coinage, then, suggests that the icon was a popular one in second-century Egypt. For examples of the coins, see R. S. Poole, *Catalogue of the Coins of Alexandria and the Nomes* (Bologne, 1964), p. lxxxix, no. 1430; J. G. Milne, *Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins* (London, 1933), no. 2531; G. Dattari, *Monete Imperiali Greche* (Cairo, 1901), nos. 2444, 2445, 3421; J. Vogt, *Die alexandrinischen Münzen* (Stuttgart, 1924), pls. 3, 10. See also Poole, no. 1380, a coin of Lucius Verus, which shows Nike on horseback carrying a wreath and trophy; beneath her horse are two Parthian or Armenian soldiers in attitudes of supplication; and Milne, no. 4407, which shows Aurelianus thrusting a spear at a man in foreign garb, who lies beneath the horse.

29. Dunand, *Religion*, pl. 91, no. 242.

2) *Mithras*: In the second and third centuries, Mithras was portrayed on horseback in Germany and in the eastern regions of the Roman Empire. Four late second- or early third-century reliefs from Germany show him thus, as do frescoes from Dura-Europus that date to the first half of the third century. A third-century relief from Hama, in Syria, also seems to show Mithras as cavalier, although the identification is not certain.³⁰ The appearance of Mithras as cavalier can be pushed back to the late first or early second century in Pontine Trapezus, where coins minted from the reign of Trajan to that of Philippus Arabus (between about 98 and 249) show him thus.

Cumont³¹ has suggested that these eastern portrayals of Mithras on horseback were influenced by those of several indigenous cavalier gods who, like Mithras, were associated with the sun.³² The dedicators of these monuments would also have exerted iconographic influence, Cumont notes: as in the case of Horus, they were largely Roman soldiers or soldiers of tribes serving the Roman army, such as the Palmyrenes.³³ The development of Mithras as cavalier in Germany may have been favored by similar circumstances—Merkelbach describes the German Mithras as the god of the *Männerbund*, of Roman soldiers who rode horses in order to fight and to hunt.³⁴ It is probable that two factors, in short, encouraged Mithras' appearance as a cavalier in the second and third centuries—his popularity among men who used the horse themselves and his similarities to some foreign gods who already were cavaliers.³⁵ But more generally, the image must have seemed a natural one to attach to Mithras, who was the soul's guide through the planetary spheres, the mediating link between heaven and earth and, on a more mundane level, the god to whom one prayed for good health and successful return from the next battle—the

30. On the cavalier portrayals of Mithras, see R. Merkelbach, *Weihegrade und Seelenlehre der Mithrasmysterien*, Akad. Wiss. Rhein.-Westfäl., Vortr. G257 (Düsseldorf, 1982), pp. 7–8; R. Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein, 1984), pp. 44, 258; M. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Une Statuette Équestre de Mithra," in *Études Mithriaque* 4 (1978): 201–6 and pls. 13–15; F. Cumont, "The Dura Mithraeum," in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1971), 1:151–214, see esp. pp. 186–92. On Mithras in Dura-Europus, see additionally E. Francis, "Mithraic Graffiti from Dura-Europos," in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. J. R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1971), 2:424–45 and pl. 24. Relevant figures in M. J. Vermaseren's *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (The Hague, 1956 and 1960), are 1137, 1247, 1289, and 1292.

31. Cumont, "Dura," pp. 90–92.

32. On one of the more prominent of these, see H. Seyrig and J. Starcky, "Genneas," *Syria* 26 (1949): 230–47 (reprinted in H. Seyrig, *Antiquités Syriennes* [Paris, 1953], 4:45–71) and F. Cumont, "Gennaïos," *RE* 7.1 (1910): 1174. On a cavalier god defeating an anguiped on a bas-relief from the first-century temple of Bel at Palmyra, see Seyrig, "Antiquités Syriennes," *Syria* 15 (1934): 165.

33. Cumont suggests that it is such army influences, again, that encouraged the promulgation of another attribute of eastern Mithras that is of some interest here: his occasional appearance as an archer, either on the horse or off it ("Dura," pp. 187–89; note particularly his observation that the combination of archer and horseman is comparatively late; in the *Avesta*, Mithras is an archer but rides in a chariot). Cf. Merkelbach, *Mithras*, see index under "Bogen."

34. Merkelbach, *Weihegrade*, p. 7; cf. Cumont, "Dura," p. 161.

35. Before the frescoes from Dura-Europus were discovered, when it was believed that Mithras was portrayed as cavalier only in the Germanic regions, Behn suggested that it was the iconography of Wotan that had led to Mithras' adoption of these traits. The influence of Wotan's appearance still deserves some consideration as a factor (F. Behn, *Mithrasheiligtum zu Dieburg* [Berlin, 1928], pp. 8–10; but see the objections of various scholars as cited by Cumont, "Dura," p. 188 and n. 202).

bringer of aid both now and later.³⁶ The god's character fell into line with those of established, familiar rider-gods such as the Dioscuri and Heron.

3) *The Jewish Logos figure/Messiah*: It has long been recognized that Jewish elements influenced Graeco-Roman magic and mysticism.³⁷ In particular, the Judaic tradition of apocalyptic visions and their interpretation was prominent not only in the Roman church throughout the second century,³⁸ but also in such pagan mystic systems as Gnosticism and Hermeticism.³⁹ More specifically, we know that the Book of Revelation, written in the late first century somewhere in the region of Ephesus,⁴⁰ became widely known throughout the Mediterranean at least by the mid-second century.⁴¹ Revelation (or individual images taken from it that may have circulated independently) surely would have captured the attention of the theurgists, whose own system depended upon divine revelations and symbol-laden apocalypses.

Celestial cavaliers occur twice in Revelation, at 6:2–16 and 19:11–16. In the latter passage, St. John sees a white horse, ridden by the Logos of God, who is crowned and followed by an army of celestial horsemen clothed in white and mounted on white steeds; out of his mouth comes a sword to smite the nations that he shall rule with a rod of iron, inflicting the wrath of God. Modern exegesis is split as to whether this horseman is to be identified with one of the four horsemen of the earlier passage (6:2) who rides a white horse, carries a bow, wears a crown, and goes forth "conquering and to conquer."⁴² Objections to such an identification have focused on the alleged inappropriateness of a messiah leading forth the other three horsemen, who have been understood to represent war, famine, and death. It is likely, however, that the ancient reader would not have hesitated to equate them, first, because whiteness and a crown unequivocally symbolized goodness and celestuality in almost all Mediterranean cultures, and second, because it would not be thought unusual for a messiah to begin his reign by obliterating the flawed, defective elements of the world. As Rowland says, the horsemen and the disasters they bring are *messianic* woes, reassuring to those of the chosen sect.⁴³

36. Most of the inscriptions that we find in mithraea are votive in character. W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 15–16.

37. Of the many works that discuss this topic, two by A. D. Nock are still among the best: "Greek Magical Papyri," *JEA* 15 (1929): 219–35 and "The Milieu of Gnosticism," *Gnosis* 12 (1936): 605–12. (Both reprinted in *Essays on the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart [Oxford, 1972], 1:176–94 and 1:444–51.)

38. C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London, 1982), p. 392.

39. Nock, "Gnosticism," 1:445.

40. Overviews of arguments concerning the exact date and place of composition can be found at Rowland, *Heaven*, pp. 403–13; and R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1920), 1:xxix–l and xci–ciii.

41. Survey and analysis of evidence at Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xcviii–ciii.

42. Here I cannot discuss the various controversies that surrounded and still surround interpretation of these horsemen. See Charles, *Revelation*, ad loc., for thorough discussions of this and related questions. Rowland, *Heaven*, pp. 413–23, is better than Charles regarding the question of what the ancient interpretations would have been.

43. Rowland, *Heaven*, p. 416.

The Jewish image of the divine cavalier as we see it in Revelation 6 is thought to look back specifically to the sixth-century book of Zechariah, where angels descend upon white, red, black, and yellow horses (1:8–11, cf. 6:1–8), but both this passage and that of Revelation 19 also reflect, more generally, the same wide popularity of the icon of the cavalier throughout the Middle Eastern region that was mentioned above with reference to Mithras.⁴⁴ The Eastern rider's horse is often white or even "flashing with light," as is the horse in Chaldaean Oracle frag. 146. Frequently, the rider is also clad in fiery white or brightly flashing clothes to indicate his divine origins and beneficence.⁴⁵ These cavaliers, then, generally express the same ideas as the other cavaliers that we have examined: the arrival of divine aid. Often, the Eastern cavalier wears the gear of a warrior, which indicates again, perhaps, the interests of his worshippers, but also symbolizes the cavalier's staunch defense against enemies. This latter connotation is the primary one in the case of the Logos-figure of 19:12, who leads his army against the godless nations.

In the late first century, then, Jewish mysticism made a new promise. Previously, it had encouraged the expectation that angelic messengers might arrive on horseback, but the newest information (said to have been given to a holy man by the messiah) suggested that the horse would be the vehicle of the savior himself, as well.

4) *The Danubian Rider*: The Danubian Rider appears on small, engraved gems and stones and on somewhat larger stone plaques (the largest being 14.7 × 13 inches) that were created between the early second and the later fourth centuries A.D. These representations are found primarily in Roman provinces north of the Danube (especially Dacia, Pannonia, and Moesia), although a few examples have been found south of the Danube and one was found in London. In the earliest examples, only one rider appears; in later examples, two riders are shown, facing one another.⁴⁶

Several scholars have argued that this deity was originally worshipped aniconically by local Daco-Getan tribes, and later found pictorial expres-

44. Discussions in Rowland, *Heaven*, p. 408; E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York, 1953–65), 1:97; cf. n. 32 above.

45. On white or flashing cavaliers in Judaism and throughout the ancient East, see Goodenough, *Symbols*, 10:164 and 172–205. For comments on whiteness and brightness in Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic literature in general, see also Rowland, *Heaven*, p. 367; Goodenough, *Symbols*, 9:167. Bright whiteness or fieriness are common attributes of heavenly visions in the Old and New Testaments and related apocryphal literature, and are frequently expressed by cognates of the word ἀστράπτω (Matt. 28:3, Luke 9:29, Dan. 10:6, Ezek. 1:4, 1:7, and 1:13, Acts 9:3, 22:6, and 26:12, 1 Enoch 14:20). The word ἀστράπτω and its cognates are not used to describe divine epiphanies in traditional Graeco-Roman literature, to my knowledge, other than at frag. 146.5 and Iambl. *Myst.* 2.4; 77.10—a passage thought to reflect frag. 146. It is generally argued that the theurgic portrayal of the gods and their emanations as "fiery" reflects eastern influence; I would suggest further that the use of ἀστράπτουσα at frag. 146.5 specifically may indicate theurgic familiarity with biblical epiphanic and apocalyptic literature. On the fiery brightness of epiphanies in *PGM* and early Christian literature, see also S. Eitrem, "Die σύστασις und der Lichtzauber in der Magie," *SO* 8 (1929): 49–51.

46. I rely here and in the remarks that follow on the invaluable work of D. Tudor, *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Equitum Danuviorum* (= *CMRED*) (Leiden, 1969 and 1976), 2 vols. The first volume is a catalogue of previously unpublished examples of the Danubian Rider monuments (with plates); the second volume includes an extensive review and critique by Tudor of previous work on the topic, as well as discussions of chronology, geographical distribution, and artistic development of the motif as well as of possible religious practices associated with the cult.

sion at the hands of Greek or Roman craftsmen, perhaps as the Roman army moved into the area.⁴⁷ Thus, it is probable that some of the other cavalier gods mentioned in this section, with whom the Greeks and Romans were acquainted, contributed details to the artistic representation of the Danubian icon, such as the “Phrygian” cap that the Danubian Rider usually wears. The doubling of the god, which began in the early third century, may have been influenced by artistic representations of the Dioscuri and Cabiroi.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, convincing iconographical arguments have been brought against the assumption that the Danubian Rider was nothing more than a local variation of the Thracian Rider, Mithras, and the Dioscuri or the Cabiroi, for instance. Most notably, the Danubian Rider virtually always tramples a prostrate human figure beneath the feet of his horse, whereas these other cavaliers rarely do so.⁴⁹

Scholars are agreed that the figure of the Danubian Rider trampling the prostrate enemy symbolizes the triumph of “Good” over “Evil,” or the arrival of divine aid against some demonic enemy.⁵⁰ The variety of help that this Rider was expected to bring is suggested by two further observations. First, the use of his icon on small amulets and magical gems that could be worn suggests that this god was expected to bring help in everyday situations—e.g., he may have averted disease-demons.⁵¹ Second, the apparent connection of this Rider with mysteries that were similar—at least iconographically—to those of Mithras and Cybele suggests that he had soteriological powers that extended beyond this world.⁵² Together, these two observations argue for a Rider-god of very broad salvific powers indeed, who represented “the certainty of the triumph over Evil in this life and in the life beyond death.”⁵³

5) *The Gallic “Jupiter”*: Beginning in about the mid-second century, and continuing into the third century, unusual columns were erected in Roman Gaul. They were crowned by a bearded, mature god atop a horse,

47. Tudor, *CMRED*, 2:26, 82–83, and 159, with accompanying notes.

48. On the Dioscuri, see Tudor, *CMRED*, 2:161–70. Tudor generally argues for the Thracian Rider and Mithras as being the most important influences on the iconographic details of the Danubian Rider (*passim*, but see especially the discussion at 2:153–72). Note also that the Danubian Rider probably influenced the Thracian Rider iconographically (2:156).

49. On the Danubian Rider's similarities to and differences from other cavaliers, see Tudor, *CMRED*, *passim*, but especially his review of other scholars' work at 2:23–49 and 58–59.

50. Mentioned frequently during Tudor's résumé of previous scholars' work (*CMRED* 2:23–49); see also *CMRED* 2:118–22, 142. Generally, this assumption underlies Tudor's analyses throughout. Tudor himself seeks to downplay the demonic nature of the Rider's enemy at 2:121, arguing that his human—rather than bestial or barbaric—appearance suggests that he is another god or hero. I find this distinction unconvincing, however, because a demon need not be represented as a beast or barbarian. Furthermore, it seems of little theoretical importance: how much difference is there between a god who brings evil and a demon?

51. We need a full study of these magical gemstones and amulets, some of which are decorated not only with the image of the Rider and his enemy but also with a variety of symbols or deities known from other sources (e.g., Hekate and Nemesis appear with the Rider, *inter alios*, on a gem numbered 194 in Tudor, *CMRED* 2:110–11).

52. On the assumed mysteries of the Danubian Rider, see Tudor, *CMRED* 2: part 6 and pp. 284–88. He is probably correct that there were mysteries of the Danubian Rider (as well as public worship), and is probably also correct that they had eschatological ramifications. However, in my opinion, he goes too far in his recreation of the mysteries' rites and doctrine from the pictorial evidence.

53. Tudor, *CMRED*, 2:122.

often with a thunderbolt in hand. The forefeet of the horse rest upon the back or the upheld hands of a bearded anguipede. A. B. Cook notes that in the extant examples, the horse seems not so much to be trampling the anguipede as to be politely supported by it.⁵⁴ Yet, this is almost certainly a sculptural development of an artistic *topos* in which the cavalier god did, indeed, tread upon the anguipede in order to vanquish it. Pobé and Roubier describe this icon as typifying the "victory of the heavenly powers over the powers of the Underworld. . . ."⁵⁵ In Gaul, then, at about the time of the Oracles' composition, we again find that god as a savior is represented as a cavalier.

My five examples suggest that in diverse parts of the Mediterranean in the first three centuries A.D., the figure of the cavalier took on new popularity as a way of representing heroes/gods who brought aid or salvation, often against a demonic or chthonic enemy. It is probable that the composers of the Chaldaean Oracles were familiar with most or all of the manifestations of the motif that we have examined. The legendary promulgators of the Oracles—Julian the Chaldaean and Julian the Theurgist—were said to have flourished during the reigns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Whether we believe in these Juliani or not, it is agreed that attribution of the Oracles to the mid- to late second century is correct—a time when emperors regularly campaigned in the eastern, Gallic, and Germanic regions. Indeed, as was noted above, the presence of Roman armies or their allies in some of these areas may have led to the production of the first pictorial representations of some of these gods (the Danubian Rider) or encouraged the attachment of cavalier iconography to familiar gods (Mithras, Horus). Legend reported that the younger Julian actually travelled with Marcus Aurelius on his campaigns; if not true in the absolute sense, this story reflects the probability that some religious advisor to the emperor did so; he is likely to have encountered in person some of the cavalier-gods just described.⁵⁶ The Book of Revelation was in circulation in Rome and its provinces at least by the time of the Oracles' composition, as noted above. All things considered, it should not surprise us to meet with a divine cavalier within theurgy's sacred literature. A prophet is

54. A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (1914; reprint ed., New York, 1959), 2:74–86. More recently, M. Pobé and J. Roubier, *The Art of Roman Gaul* (Toronto, 1961), p. 70 and figs. 184 (from Portieux [Vosges]) and 185 (from Neschers [Puy de Dôme]); O. Brogan, *Roman Gaul* (London, 1953), pp. 174 and 189–90.

55. Pobé and Roubier, *Art*, p. 70.

56. In one case, later tradition said that Julian used theurgy to create a thunder-throwing mask that helped Marcus Aurelius defeat the Dacians. It was precisely in Dacia, Tudor argues, that the Danubian Rider first was represented pictorially, in the early second century (*CMRED* 2:53). In another case, Julian allegedly saved the Roman army from drought during its campaign against the Quadi by bringing rain from the skies. The Quadi dwelt in the region just east of modern Vienna, where several representations of the Danubian Rider have been found. On the date of the Juliani and the sources for the stories about them, see Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 2–3 and notes; Fox, *Pagans*, p. 715 and n. 93; Dodds, *Greeks*, pp. 283–85 and notes. It is difficult to say whether these stories are products of the second century or only later (on the arguments, see the secondary literature cited in Johnston). H.-D. Saffrey, "Les Néoplatoniciens et les Oracles Chaldaïques," *REA* 36 (1981): 225; J. Bidez, *La Vie de l'Empereur Julien* (Paris, 1930), p. 75; and F. Cumont, *La Théologie Solaire du Paganisme Romain* (Paris, 1909), p. 476, argue that both Juliani may actually have been of Eastern origin.

predisposed to see and hear what experience has taught him to see and hear—the symbolic language of his divine informants agrees with that of the myths and cultic iconography of his time and place.⁵⁷

Based on what we have concluded about other cavaliers of the period, it is logical to assume that the one described in frag. 146 represents a figure of soteriological importance in the theurgical system.⁵⁸ Further than this, we cannot go with confidence. The childlikeness of the theurgic cavalier may remind us of Horus, and the arrows he sometimes carries may remind us of other cavaliers, including Mithras, but frag. 146 does not provide enough description of the theurgic cavalier for him to be identified securely with any other known cavalier god. Nor do we find mention of these or other known divine cavaliers elsewhere in theurgic literature.⁵⁹ It is quite possible, in fact, that the theurgic cavalier of frag. 146 is some god who is not represented on horseback anywhere else, but whose soteriological importance to the theurgists justified this iconographic innovation.⁶⁰ It is also possible that even the theurgist himself would not have been able to put a specific name to this god.

The assumption that the cavalier is a savior of some kind fits well with the general nature of the epiphanies described in frag. 146 and in accompanying frags. 147 and 148. All of the epiphanies described in these fragments are fiery or brilliant, qualities that are always associated with celestial, noetic entities in Chaldaean lore;⁶¹ all of them seem to appear in

57. Cf. the remarks of A. D. Nock, "A Vision of Mandulis Aion," *HThR* 27 (1934): 53–104 (reprinted in the collection cited above, n. 37, pp. 357–400). Alternatively, if one assumes, as Fox does, that the Oracles were "influential frauds" perpetrated by two expert con-men, then one may regard the presence of a cavalier in frag. 146 as a calculated attempt at verisimilitude (Fox, *Pagans*, p. 197, but cf. his somewhat different attitude on p. 198; see also Dodds, *Greeks*, p. 284, and P. Merlan, "Religion and Philosophy from Plato's *Phaedo* to the *Chaldaean Oracles*," *JHPH* 1.2 [1963]: 174).

58. Some mention should be made of the Graeco-Roman use of the horse, especially during the Imperial period, as a symbol for the ascent of a blessed or divinized soul after death. See F. Cumont, "Pégase et l'apothéose," *BSRAA* 20 [1924]: 193–95 (cf. Goodenough, *Symbols*, 8:146–48).

59. Despite a tendency in popular belief of the time to connect theurgy with Egypt (see Fowden, *Hermes*, pp. 126–41, esp. 135), there is no actual mention of Egyptian deities in the Chaldaean Oracles. Mithras never appears in theurgical literature, and although Mithraism and theurgy share the worship of Hekate and Aion, these gods appear to play different roles in the two systems. Zeus is mentioned three times in fragments that may come from the Oracles, but not in a soteriological role (*fragmenta dubia* 215.3–4, 218.5). There are a few traces in the Oracles of Jewish ideas (e.g., the use of the word παρὰ-δεῖσος to describe the heavenly place of rewards in frags. 107.10, 165), but no more than in similar Graeco-Roman mystical/magical systems of the time.

60. One deity worthy of consideration here is Eros, who is represented frequently in art and literature of the Imperial Age as a child with bow and arrows (C. Schlam, *Cupid and Psyche: Apuleius and the Monuments* [University Park, Pa., 1976]) and who is described in the magical papyri as a childlike archer (*PGM* 4.1780 and 85, *PGM* 12.17–20 and 79; cf. Orph. *Hymn* 58). The soteriological importance of eros in many Middle Platonic or Neoplatonic systems (e.g., those of Philo, Plutarch, Plotinus, and Iamblichus) and its cosmological and soteriological importance in the theurgic system (Ch. Or. frags. 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46) give this suggestion further appeal; it would not have been odd for theurgy to personify the metaphysical principle ("eros") and represent it in its traditional mythological guise ("Eros")—cf. their treatment of Hekate/Cosmic Soul. This is a hypothesis, however, that requires more detailed analysis than I can offer here.

61. On the fiery nature of Chaldaean gods and the celestial/noetic connotations of fire and light in the theurgic system, see Luck, "Theurgy," pp. 186 and 190; Dodds, *Greeks*, pp. 291, 298–99, and 301, n. 18; Lewy, *Chaldaean*, *passim*, but esp. chap. 5 and pp. 171–74; Kroll, *Oraculis*, pp. 53–55. The term φωτ-αγωγία is used by Iamblichus to describe the theurgic invocation of gods: *Myst.* 3.14; 132.11, and 133.12. Note that Proclus describes the δόχηματα of the hypercosmic entities, too, as being either αἰθέριοι or ἐμπύριοι (*In Ti.* 2.144.27–30).

the air above the theurgist, as if they have descended from the noetic realm that lies above the material world in which the theurgist dwells. All of the entities who appear, in other words, are potentially helpful to the theurgist. Hekate, who manifests herself in frags. 146–48 as the unformed fire, is a divinity who has particularly important soteriological roles in the theurgic system. We might hypothesize that the words or phrases that the theurgist was instructed to speak in order to bring about one or more of the epiphanies described in these fragments made up some general request for σύστασις with a helpful god or gods, but that the theurgist would not know which god(s) would arrive until the epiphany actually had occurred. Alternatively, it is possible that although the words requesting help remained the same regardless of who was being invoked, the *symbola* employed in the accompanying ritual varied according to which divinity was sought (i.e., if the theurgist wanted to invoke Hekate, he might burn incense of one kind while reciting the words; if he sought the divine horseman, he might burn another while reciting them).⁶² Such instructions may have been included in lost portions of the Oracle.

In the next section, the accoutrement of the theurgic cavalier and his weaponry will be discussed in order to offer a more detailed interpretation of his soteriological function.

III. “COVERED WITH GOLD OR NAKED”

The Chaldaean Oracles look back to Plato for their cosmological and metaphysical tenets and to traditional magic and religion for their practical ideas, but they follow the archaizing trend of the times by looking back to Homer for the means to express them. Not only do the Oracles, like most prophetic proclamations, use the dactylic hexameter of epic, they also prefer Ionic variations of words to Attic (e.g., ἥερος, frag. 146.2), and borrow specific words or phrases from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁶³ When we cannot completely clarify the meaning of an Oracle fragment by looking to Plato or the contemporaneous religions of the Mediterranean, we do well to consider Homer next.

My earlier translation of lines 6–7 did not reflect signs of Homeric influence: “you will see a child mounted on the swift back of a horse, a fiery⁶⁴ child, either covered with gold, or naked (ἢ καὶ παῖδα θοοῖς νότοις ἐποχούμενον ἵππου, ἔμπυρον ἢ χρυσοῦ πεπυκασμένον ἢ πάλι γυμνόν). But a different translation of line 7 echoes Iliadic vocabulary: “You will see a child . . . either armored in gold or without armor” (παῖδα . . . ἢ χρυσοῦ

62. F. Graf has discussed an analogous phenomenon: “Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual,” in *Magika Hiera*, ed. C. Faraone and D. Obbink (Oxford, 1991), p. 196, with regard to *PGM* 4.2785–890. The magician is instructed to recite the same prayer to Selene whether he wants to work good or harm; in the former case, however, he is to burn a fruit pit and spices while reciting it and in the latter case to burn the “magical material” of a dog, a goat, and a dead virgin.

63. E.g., frag. 111 draws on *Il.* 23.430. See further “Homeric expressions” in the index to Lewy, *Chaldaean*.

64. I will not discuss the description of the cavalier as ἔμπυρος, as the fiery nature of Chaldaean deities in general is well established (see n. 61, above). Generally, ἔμπυρος implies, as does the word ἀστράπτοντα describing the horse, that the entity is of celestial/noetic origin.

πεπυκασμένον ἢ πάλι γυμνόν). Πυκάζω frequently connotes a protective covering in the *Iliad* and elsewhere. Of its nine appearances in the *Iliad*, four carry this connotation. More specifically, one of them describes a helmet and another the metal covering a chariot: the boars'-tusk helmet that protects Odysseus' head at *Iliad* 10.271 is said to πυκάζειν it; Diomedes' chariot at *Iliad* 23.503 is χρυσῷ πεπυκασμένα κασσιτέρῳ τε, a phrase that our fragment echoes closely.⁶⁵ (The likelihood that Chaldaean Oracle frag. 146.7 is echoing *Iliad* 23.503 in particular is strengthened by the fact that the words χρυσῷ πεπυκασμένα appear in the same position in the hexametric line.) Γυμνός and its cognates, on the other hand, all but once refer, in the *Iliad*, to a person who is unprotected by armor or a corpse stripped of armor. The remaining use refers to a wall stripped of its defenses (*Il.* 12.399).

The picture of the cavalier now has military tones. He may appear to the theurgist in armor or without; perhaps he also will use a bow and arrows, according to line 8. This military tone accords nicely with the cavalier gods that were examined earlier in the article: all but the Jewish messiah are sometimes shown in armor or wearing a soldier's cuirass; all are portrayed frequently as bearing weaponry. But this tone also accords with a theurgical doctrine that can be glimpsed in frag. 2. Spoken by Hekate, it describes how the theurgist must prepare himself to attempt ἀναγωγή (= Kroll, p. 51 = Dam. *Pr.* 1.155, 11–14):

Ἑσάμενον πάντευχον ἀκμὴν φωτὸς κελάδοντος,
ἀλκῇ τριγλώχινι νόον ψυχὴν θ' ὀπλίσαντα,
πᾶν τριάδος σύνθημα βαλεῖν φρενὶ μὴδ' ἐπιφοιτᾶν
ἐμπυρίοις σποράδην ὀχετοῖς, ἀλλὰ στιβαρηδόν.

Being dressed in the full-armored force of the resounding light,
and equipping the soul and the intellect with three-barbed strength,
you must cast into your mind the complete password of the Triad and wander
amongst the fiery rays not in a scattered manner but with concentration.

Before all else, the theurgist must dress himself in some sort of armor, and must equip his soul and intellect with weaponry. Here, in the use of the uncommon adjective τριγλώχινι to describe the weaponry, we again have an Iliadic echo; in the *Iliad*, τριγλώχης is used twice, both times to describe arrows (5.393 and 11.507).

In *Hekate Soteira*, I suggested through analysis of this and other fragments that the “weapons and armor” that Hekate tells the theurgist to bear in frag. 2 represent the tools of his trade—the magical accoutrements and knowledge with which he must ritually gird himself for an attempt at ἀναγωγή.⁶⁶ The metaphor is an appropriate one, for theurgic ἀναγωγή was understood to be a difficult endeavor, requiring protection and even active combat by means of phylacteries and/or magical words against the

65. The other two Iliadic uses connoting a protective covering are 2.777 and 24.581. The remaining five uses are *Il.* 8.124, 8.314, 14.289, 17.81, and 17.551.

66. Pp. 127–30.

harmful demons whom the theurgist would meet along the way.⁶⁷ Analogous statements are made in the magical papyri concerning συστάσεις with potentially harmful demons. In one spell, for example, the magician is told to protect himself carefully against the demon whom he has invoked, because the demon himself will arrive ἐνοπλος and will try to force the magician to release a trapped beetle that serves as a phylactery. In another spell, the magician is told not to be afraid when he receives the first sign that σύστασις with an invoked demon is about to occur, because, the text tells him, μαγικὴν ψυχὴν ἔχων ὀπλισθεῖς.⁶⁸ Many other spells include instructions for the making of a phylactery, intended to guard the magician during his encounters with divine and demonic powers whose good will cannot be counted on.

In a theurgical context, then, “weaponry and armor” can represent useful knowledge, tools or phylacteries (physical or psychic) that the practitioner can use to aid or protect himself during attempted ἀναγωγή and probably during other encounters with gods and demons as well. Is this the proper interpretation of the cavalier’s armor and weaponry, too? We can begin to evaluate this possibility by reviewing the iconography of the other cavalier gods who were examined in the first section of this article. They often brandish weapons against prey or enemies who lie on the ground or run beneath their horses’ feet. In the cases of Mithras and the Thracian Heron, the “enemies” are sometimes merely the animals that members of *Männerbünde* would hunt. But in most cases—Horus, the Coptic saints, the Danubian Rider, and many eastern cavaliers—the enemy is demonic in nature, and the attack of the god is *on behalf of* his worshippers. The giant against whom the Gallic Jupiter fights is of a similar significance. The Jewish Logos-figure, who brandishes a bow and arrow at Revelation 6:2 and a sword at Revelation 19:6, rides out against a “godless” and thus demonic enemy, too.⁶⁹

It is logical to assume, by analogy, that the arrows that the cavalier shoots in frag. 146 are intended to help avert the demonic onslaught against which the theurgist is told to protect himself in other passages. Hekate, as well, sometimes wears armor and carries weaponry when she makes an epiphany to the theurgist, according to frag. 72 (= Kroll, p. 36 = Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 324.8): Καὶ γὰρ δὴ πάντευχος ἐνόπλιος ἦκα θεεῖη, “For I have come, a goddess in full armor and with weapons.” As she is

67. On the many difficulties caused for the theurgist by demons, including hindrance during ascension, see discussion at Johnston, *Hekate*, chap. 9; Majercik, *Oracles*, pp. 13–14, 25–26, and her comments on frag. 2 at p. 141; Lewy, *Chaldaean*, chap. 5.

68. *PGM* 4.70–72, *PGM* 4.210. Doing battle with the demonic, with either magical or real weaponry, goes back as far as *Od.* 11.48.

69. I should also mention another well-known archer god connected with practical soteriology—although, to the best of my knowledge, he never appears on a horse: Apollo. Apollo’s arrows are frequently presented as warding off illnesses or killing monsters in literary sources; more importantly, however, statues of Apollo the archer were erected to protect Thracian and Anatolian towns from the plague in A.D. 166. See H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London, 1985), pp. 150–59; M. L. West, “Oracles of Apollo Kareios: A Revised Text,” *ZPE* 1 (1967): 184–85; O. Weinreich, “Heros Propylaios und Apollo Propylaios,” *MDAI(A)* 38 (1913): 62–72; K. Buresch, *Klaros: Untersuchungen zum Orakelwesen des späteren Altertums* (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 81–86.

the Chaldaean deity most concerned with the welfare of the individual theurgist, we could guess that her appearance in armor and weaponry carries the same significance as that of the cavalier—she will ward off threatening demons from the theurgist. The fact that this fragment uses πάντευχος, as does frag. 2, and also ἐνόπλιος, a cognate of ὀπλίσαντα in frag. 2, tempts us to wonder whether the two fragments are portions of the same Oracle; perhaps Hekate herself initially protects the theurgist after she has arrived (frag. 72), but then begins to teach him how to protect himself (frag. 2).⁷⁰

Other fragments of the Oracles and comments by their exegetes indicate that the better part of this demonic onslaught sought to work from *within* the individual theurgist. Like some other Platonists, the theurgist believed that the passions against which he had to fight in order to purify his soul for the performance of sacred acts and the eventual experience of ἀναγωγή and ἔνωσις, were actually demons who dwelt in his body and continually tempted him towards “passionate” and corporeally indulgent behavior.⁷¹ Iamblichus, in his discussion of the ways in which impassioning demons could obstruct theurgic endeavors, says that when the theurgist is experiencing σύστασις with true gods, these demons must leave him alone (*Myst.* 3.31; 176.7–9):

[When the true gods are present and impart their light], that which is evil and demonical vanishes from the presence of these more excellent entities in the same manner as darkness vanishes when light is present. The demons then are unable to disturb theurgists in the smallest degree, because the theurgists have received from this divine light every virtue, have become good and perfect and well-ordered in their actions, have been liberated from passions and disorderly behavior, and have been purified of every atheistic and unholy sort of conduct.

As is the case throughout the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus does not offer specific details: we are not told exactly who these gods are or by what techniques, precisely, they avert impassioning demons from the theurgist. But the passage does indicate that it was on the gods’ direct aid as well as on his own skills that the theurgist relied for protection against the demonic.

Before leaving discussion of lines 7 and 8 of frag. 146, we should note again the possibilities that the cavalier may appear without armor—γυμνός—or without using his bow and arrows. As scholars, we should probably regard this uncertainty about the details of the theurgic cavalier’s

70. This analysis differs slightly from that which I offered in *Hekate Soteira*, where I suggested that Hekate’s appearance in armor and with weaponry similar to that which the theurgist is told to bear in frag. 2 indicates that Hekate bestows the knowledge and tools that the armor and weaponry represent (Johnston, *Hekate*, pp. 127–30).

71. Discussions of this point at Gerdtnr, *Seelenlehre*, pp. 56–63; Cremer, *Jamblich*, pp. 78–85; Lewy, *Chaldaean*, chap. 5; Johnston, *Hekate*, chap. 9. The theurgist also believed, like traditional magicians, that he had to protect himself against demons who attacked him from outside of his body. On the existence of these demons and some of the means of averting them, see, e.g., Ch. Or. frag. 149; Psellus, *CMAG* 6:61.22; Psellus ap. J. Bidez, “Proclus: περὶ τῆς ἱερατικῆς τέχνης,” in *Mélanges Cumont* (Bruxelles, 1936), 98.6; and discussion at Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. 288–93. It is probably incorrect to divide these two types of demons strictly—both types were denizens of the hylic world, servants of Physis, and thus, were liable to thwart the theurgist’s attempts at σύστασις, ἀναγωγή, ἔνωσις, and other magical endeavors in any of various ways, if they were not controlled or averted.

appearance as reflecting the variety of ways in which other Mediterranean cavalier-gods were depicted. If, as I remarked already in Section 2, a prophet sees and hears what experience has taught him to see and hear, then the cavalier that Hekate described to the theurgist would understandably have been of somewhat indeterminate appearance, because the models for that cavalier—the other cavaliers to whom the theurgist had been exposed—varied from a naked, infantile Harpocrates to a Mithras wearing a cuirass and shooting a bow. The theurgist himself probably would have interpreted the alternatives described by Hekate as signifying that the cavalier descended for different reasons or under different circumstances at different times. Sometimes, perhaps, it was necessary for him to avert threatening demons vigorously, with all the means at his disposal; at other times, his simple presence offered protection enough.

To sum up our conclusions about the divine cavalier of frag. 146: 1) he was a savior god whose epiphany on horseback reflects an iconographical trend common throughout the Mediterranean basin during the late second century A.D.; 2) his weaponry and armor draw not only on the iconography of these other divine cavaliers, who protect their worshippers against demons and other evils, but also on a common image of the magician doing battle, sometimes with the aid of the gods, against the demonic forces that oppose him during his endeavors. In both these respects, the cavalier accords with the other divinity whose epiphany is described in frags. 146–48: the gods that manifest themselves to the theurgist are celestial, beneficent, and potentially helpful.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The significance of the theurgic cavalier is now clearer. Moreover, I have shown that this theurgic image can be interpreted from the vantage point of popular Mediterranean religious iconography of the time, which suggests that it would be possible to clarify other, allegedly abstruse theurgic images or doctrines by reexamining them in the larger context of contemporaneous religions.

Lewy did, in fact, try to bring his knowledge of contemporaneous religion to bear on the imagery of frag. 146, when he argued that any entity who accompanies Hekate must align with what he assumed to be her traditional nature—i.e., must be one of the ἄωροι or βαιοθάνατοι who were believed to accompany Hekate on her nocturnal wanderings.⁷² I criticized Lewy's interpretation in the introductory section of this article for several specific reasons; more generally, Lewy's failure to interpret frag. 146 correctly by means of contemporary religion was due to his failure to expect coherence within the theurgical system.⁷³ For example, although Lewy

72. Lewy, *Chaldaean*, p. 242.

73. It must be noted, in fairness, that Lewy died before his work saw publication, and that he produced it under trying conditions in the first place (for details, see M. Tardieu's remarks in the second edition of Lewy, *Chaldaean*, pp. xi–xii and 515–19, and Dodds, "New Light," pp. 693–94). That Lewy was a scholar of great ability is indisputable; it is probable that many inconsistencies or errors within his book would have been repaired, had he lived to revise it.

himself had noted correctly that theurgy consistently portrayed the demonic as chthonic and dark, and that fieriness consistently connoted celestialty,⁷⁴ when confronted with confusing images that were *bright*, he fell back upon chthonic, demonic interpretations that implicitly suggested the tenets of Chaldaean theurgy were incoherent. This is the second misconception that I have begun to lay to rest by showing that, when studied in the context of contemporaneous religious iconography, theurgy's divine cavalier suggests a function that aligns with the usual connotation of a fiery or bright appearance in theurgical sources, and also aligns with the regular functions of theurgic Hekate, who also manifests herself in frags. 146–48.

As I remarked in the introduction to this article, the mistaken impression that theurgy was abstruse, incoherent, and largely disconnected from contemporaneous religions has discouraged its study not only because scholars have assumed that second-century *comparanda* could shed little light upon its interpretative problems, but also because they have assumed that, even if it were to be elucidated, theurgy would have little to offer towards the interpretation of other religious, mystical, or magical systems. This is not the place to embark on a comprehensive discussion of how further analysis of theurgical iconography and praxis could enrich our understanding of Graeco-Roman religions of the Imperial Age, but I will note in closing that the conclusions regarding the theurgical cavalier can contribute to studies of at least two topics familiar to historians of religion: 1) the migration of religious symbols and iconography, particularly as influenced by military movements during the Imperial Age; and 2) the synthetic and adaptive style of many of the elite magico/mystical systems that emerged during the Imperial Age or later antiquity (cf. Hermeticism, Gnosticism).⁷⁵

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74. Lewy, *Chaldaean*, esp. chap. 5, pp. 171–74 and *passim*.

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