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Considerations on the myth of Cybele in Sallustius and Julian

Abstract

This paper aims to present the interpretation of the myth of the Mother of the Gods in the works of Sallustius the Neoplatonist and Emperor Julian (the Apostate). I introduce the topic by giving a short summary of the interpretation of myths in the Platonic tradition, before explaining the myth itself and its importance. In the end I point out the main differences and similarities between the two philosophers' interpretations.

Keywords: Julian, Sallustius (Sallust), Neoplatonism, Mother of the Gods, Cybele, Attis

The interpretation of myths in the Neoplatonic tradition

Before we enter into the discussion of Julian's and Sallustius'¹ interpretation we need to take a brief overview of the history of myths in the Platonic tradition. To summarize the Platonic position on myths, I follow Robert Lamberton's line of presentation.² First, I discuss the roles of myth interpretation in Plato's *Republic*, and then I will focus on the changes in these interpretations in the Neoplatonic tradition. In the *Republic*, myths are negatively represented. The question of myths comes up in the second book when the education of guards is discussed. The guards should learn music, poetry and acquire physical training. Their education should start with poetry in childhood. Poetry is already just a false story, an imitation of reality, which makes it less valuable but if used correctly, poetry can teach virtues to children. Many stories that the children hear, however, are immoral and must be thrown out, such as the stories of Homer and Hesiod. They portray gods and heroes in a bad light (*Rep* 2.377a-d). For example, the myth of Uranos and Chronos can encourage the young to commit atrocious acts against their fathers (*Rep* 2.378b). According to Plato, when creating myths, certain principles must be followed, such as representing the gods as they are (*Rep*. 2.379a). The correct form of poetry can teach the youth to honour the gods, their parents and their friends. It can also teach them to be courageous in a battle and not to fear death (*Rep*. 3.386ab). This is contrary to what Homer tells us; therefore the problematic passages ought to be removed (*Rep* 3.386a-387b). The criticism goes as far as Socrates concludes that such false poets should be banished from the city (*Rep* 3.398ab).

The reconciliation between Platonism and Homer goes back at least to the grammarian Telephus of Pergamon³ and Numenius⁴ in the 2nd century AD. Platonists wished to place Homer alongside Plato in the canon of authors who might provide a

¹ In my sources I have met many different spellings of Sallustius' name (Salustius, Sallust, Sallustius), for clarity, I will only use the form "Sallustius".

² See: Lamberton. (1989). *Homer the Theologian*.

³ See: Buffiere. (1973). *Les mythes d'Homère*, p. 442-44

⁴ See: Dillon. (1977). *Middle Platonists*, p. 364

glimpse of the Truth. The tendency to emphasize the spiritual and cosmological authority of Homer becomes a growing trend in Platonism in one part, because of a need to offer an authoritative text able to bear comparison with the texts of the increasingly challenging Christian tradition (Lamberton, 1989, p.15-16).

Many Neoplatonist philosophers such as Porphyry, Julian, Sallustius and Proclus continue the tradition of defending Homeric poems and myths in general. As a side note, we can mention that the so-called founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus, does not mention Homer by name and he is not much concerned with the interpretation of myths. He shows, however, a tendency to see the myths of the early poets as texts concealing complex structures of meaning (Lamberton, 1989, p.83).

Before we go further, we can ask whether these Homeric myths in general had any philosophical meaning. Lamberton argues that they did. Human ignorance and divine wisdom are often contrasted in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. The interpretation of myths in the Neoplatonic tradition went much further, it departed from the most obvious meaning, and the poems were transformed into revelations about the universe and the fate of souls (Lamberton, 1989, p.21).

Not only the Homeric poems were transformed but the stories of the mysteries as well. In Pausanias' version⁵ of the myth of Cybele, Attis not just ended up as a eunuch but a corpse as well. In the Platonist worldview, the death of a god was unthinkable. Julian reinterprets this myth in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy (Smith, 1995, p.160). Before I explore the interpretation of the myth of the Mother of the Gods, I will discuss the role of myths in general in Sallustius and Julian.

The role of myths in Julians' works

Julian references Homer even in his early works like his oration *The Heroic Deeds of the Emperor Constantius*, a praise of the Emperor Constantius.⁶

“When I reflect on this, my beloved Emperor, and behold you displaying in all that you do the result of your study of Homer, and see you so eager to benefit every citizen in the community in every way, and devising for me individually such honours and privileges one after another, then I think that you desire to be nobler than the king of the Greeks”⁷ (Julian, *Or II 50c*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright⁸)

⁵ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 7.17.9-13

⁶ For Julian's Homer quotations see: Bouffartigue. (1992). *L'empereur Julien et la culture de son temps*

⁷ Ταῦτα κατ' ἑμαυτὸν ἐννοῶν, ᾧ φίλε βασιλεῦ, καὶ σὲ μὲν ὄρων ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων τὴν Ὀμηρικὴν παιδείαν ἐπιδεικνύμενον καὶ ἐθέλοντα πάντως κοινῇ μὲν ἅπαντας ἀγαθόν τι δρᾶν, ἡμῖν δὲ ἰδίᾳ τιμὰς καὶ γέρα ἄλλα ἐπ' ἄλλοις παρασκευάζοντα, τοσοῦτω δὲ οἶμαι κρείττονα τοῦ τῶν Ἑλλήνων βασιλέως εἶναι ἐθέλοντα

⁸ I use Wilmer C. Wright's Julian translations and when referring to Julian's works by numbers I use Wright's numbering

Other examples could be cited from many of his works. His clearest defence of myths can be found in his oration *To the Cynic Heracleios*.⁹ In this work, Julian heavily criticizes the Cynic for misusing myths in a lecture delivered in front of Julian, already the Emperor. He accuses the Cynics of blasphemy (*Her.* 204d-205a).

Julian with this work intends to teach a lesson to Heracleios about myths (*Her.* 205b). Julian then presents a short history of the development of myths. He first assumes that it is probably the invention of men of pastoral pursuits, mainly used for their entertainment. He argues that people are naturally inclined to learn, and myths were also used to teach children things that they cannot directly understand (*Her.* 205c-206d). Myths were further developed in Greece where they were used to teach moral codes. They are no longer fables used for teaching children but guides of virtuous behaviour. They need concealing to not alienate their listeners (*Her.* 207a). This is not what Cynics do nowadays, Julian claims. They dishonour the gods, human wisdom and the laws (*Her.* 209b-c). He defends the original Cynics such as Diogenes. Julian claims Diogenes followed the Delphic maxim “know thyself” (γνῶθι σεαυτόν). He taught us that knowing ourselves is not something based on the opinion of others but something that we must find within. Diogenes also obeyed the Gods contrary to the modern Cynics (*Her.* 211c-d). One instance of this is when the Gods ordered him to go to Corinth even though he desired to dwell in Athens; confident in their ability to care for him, he complied (*Her.* 212d-213a).

Following his criticism, Julian proceeds to outline the traditional divisions and subdivisions of philosophy to determine which branch should be concerned with myths. These three branches are logic, practical philosophy, and natural philosophy. Natural philosophy deals with theology, mathematics and study of the world of generation and decay. Practical philosophy deals with ethics, politics and economics. And lastly logic has three divisions: demonstrative, polemic and eristic (*Her.* 215c-216a). From these branches only theology should use myths, when dealing with initiations and mysteries, and ethics. Myths are used in theology to make it easier to understand divine truths for people who cannot directly receive this divine knowledge (*Her.* 216c-d).

There were philosophers who used myths correctly such as Plato and Xenophanes: they used these stories mainly to teach ethics. When we tell myths, we should follow their example (*Her.* 217a). The appeal to Plato as an exemplary myth maker also occurs in Julian’s other work, the *Caesars*:

“I shall listen with great pleasure, for I too am not one to despise myths, and I am far from rejecting those that have the right tendency; indeed I am of the same opinion as you and your admired, or rather the universally admired, Plato. He also often conveyed a serious lesson in his myths.”¹⁰ (Julian, *Caesars.* 306c)

⁹ Abbreviated as “Her.”

¹⁰ Λέγοις ἂν καὶ μάλα ἀσμένῳ, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἀτιμάζω τοὺς μύθους οὐδὲ παντάπασιν ἐξελαύνω τοὺς ὀρθῶς ἔχοντας, ἀκόλουθά σοί τε καὶ φίλῳ τῷ σῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ τῷ κοινῷ, Πλάτωνι διανοοῦμενος, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτῷ πολλὰ ἐν μύθοις ἐσπούδασται.

Julian treats the more paradoxical or portentous myths differently than Plato. He states:

“I mean that the more paradoxical and prodigious the riddle is the more it seems to warn us not to believe simply the bare words but rather to study diligently the hidden truth...”¹¹ (*Her.* 217c.)

Then Julian gives his principle of myth-telling. The language of the myths should be beautiful, sober and appropriate to the Gods (*Or VII.* 218d). But then he says incongruous elements are to be allowed in myths to inspire people to search for hidden meanings (*Her.* 219a).

The role of myths in Sallustius

Sallustius is the author of *On the Gods and The World*, a short guide of Neoplatonic philosophy. His identity, however, cannot be unambiguously verified. He could be identified with Flavius Sallustius but also with Saturninius Secundus Salutius, both of whom served under Julian (Desnier, 1983, p.57).

The question of myths is discussed in the third chapter of Sallustius’ work. He is first concerned with the question of why the ancients used myths instead of λόγοι (*Sallustius, De Diis et Mundo*, III¹²).

The myths are used to not leave our minds idle. They are also used by divinely inspired poets, the best philosophers, mysteries and oracles. These myths should be worthy of the gods because the gods rejoice in what is like them and reject what is unlike them. The existence of myths makes clear to all that gods exist, but their true essence (οὐσία) and activities (ἐνέργειαι) can only be understood by the wise who sees through the hidden meanings.

Sallustius, just like Julian, addresses the controversial elements in myths.

“But why have they put in the myths stories of adultery, robbery, father-binding, and all the other absurdity? Is not that perhaps a thing worthy of admiration, done so that by means of the visible absurdity the soul may immediately feel that the words are veils and believe the truth to be a mystery?”¹³ (*DM*, III trans. Gilbert Murray)

In the fourth chapter, he lists the five types of myths.

1. Theological myths (θεολογικοὶ μῦθοι) deal with the essence of gods. The myth of Kronos swallowing his children could be given a theological interpretation, according to which this god is intellectual and every intellect returns to itself.

¹¹ ὅσῳ γὰρ μᾶλλον παράδοξόν ἐστι καὶ τερατῶδες τὸ αἰνίγμα, τοσούτῳ μᾶλλον ἔοικε διαμαρτύρεσθαι, μὴ τοῖς αὐτόθεν λεγομένοις πιστεύειν.

¹² Henceforth, I refer to this work as “DM”

¹³ ἀλλὰ διὰ τί μοιχείας καὶ κλοπὰς καὶ πατέρων δεομοῦς καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀτοπίαν ἐν τοῖς μύθοις εἰρήκασιν; ἢ καὶ τοῦτο ἄξιον θαύματος ἵνα διὰ τῆς φαινομένης ἀτοπίας εὐθὺς ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦς μὲν λόγους ἠγήσεται προκαλύμματα τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς ἀπόρρητον εἶναι νομίση;

2. Physical myths (φυσικοὶ μῦθοι) express the Gods' activities in the physical world. Kronos for example can symbolize time whereas his sons symbolize the division of time.
3. Psychic myths (ψυχικοὶ μῦθοι) deal with the activities of the soul. We are given here another explanation of the Kronos myth: "...the soul's acts of thought, though they pass on to other objects, nevertheless remain inside their begetters".¹⁴ (*DM*, IV trans. Gilbert Murray)
4. Material myths (ὕλικοι μῦθοι) are, in Sallustius' view, the aberration of the Egyptians. They believed according to Sallustius that material objects are Gods. They called earth Isis and moisture Osiris. What could be the reason for rejecting Egyptian myths which both Julian and Iamblichus defended?¹⁵ Van den Berg's research refers to Arthur Darby Nock's commentary who is suggesting that Sallustius was only concerned with defending the Greek religion against Christian polemical attacks. He couldn't defend the Egyptian myths which were vulnerable to Christian polemics. Van den Berg elaborates by claiming that this rejection lies in the Stoic and Platonist polemic. Stoics interpreted both Greek and Egyptian myths as being about the material cosmos. These can remind us of Porphyry's physical interpretation of myths.¹⁶ The core difference between the Stoic and the Platonist physical interpretation, however, is that the latter hints at invisible divine powers. The strictly materialistic interpretations could be seen as atheistic (van den Berg, 2022, p.186-189).
5. Mixed myths (μικτοὶ μῦθοι) combine elements of the first, the second and the third type of myths. Among the examples named by Sallustius is the story of Paris, where in a banquet of gods Discord threw down a golden apple, for which the goddesses contended. They were sent by Zeus to Paris to be judged. Paris found Aphrodite the most beautiful and gave her the apple. The banquet signifies the hypercosmic powers of the gods, which is why they are all together. The apple signifies the world, which is formed out of opposites (said to be caused by Discord). The contention for the apple means that different gods bestow different gifts upon the world. And the soul which is blinded by sense (Paris) doesn't see other powers in the world, only beauty and declares that the apple belongs to Aphrodite (*DM*, IV).

Sallustius then states that theological myths suit the philosophers, the physical and psychic the poets and the mixed variation suits the religious initiations since their aim is to unite us with the world and gods (*DM*, IV)

¹⁴ ὅτι καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν αἰ νοήσεις, κἄν εἰς τοὺς ἄλλους προέλθωσιν, ἀλλὰ οὖν ἐν τοῖς γεννήσασιν μένουσιν.

¹⁵ More on this later

¹⁶ see: Porphyry, *On the Cave of the Nymphs* (Lamberton, Berryhill, Station Hill Press, 1983)

According to Robbert van den Berg, the five types of myths could be reduced to three. Sallustius already rejected the fourth one and we can group the physical and psychic together since they both discuss questions about the cosmos. We can associate myth-users with these three types. Theological myth-users are, for example, Plato. A mixed myth-user could be Julian. And as an example of the physical-psychic combination, we can name Porphyry (van den Berg, 2022, p.190). Porphyry's use of myths might require some explanation. The best example of his use of myths is perhaps his work *On the Cave of the Nymphs* work.

“...On the Cave of the Nymphs, an allegorical interpretation of a passage from Homer's *Odyssey* (XIII 102–112). The first half of the treatise (§§ 5–31) interprets the cave itself as a symbolical representation of the material cosmos. In the second half of the treatise (§§31–35), Porphyry focuses on Odysseus as an allegorical representation of the human soul which tries to flee this material cosmos. Hence, the Homeric passage combines elements from physical myth and as a psychic one.” (van den Berg, 2022, p. 190)

We can see that Sallustius gives a much more in-depth explanation of the types of myths than Julian. Julian mostly emphasizes the initiation aspect of theological myths while for Sallustius the theological and mixed myths, which deal with initiations, are two separate categories. Sallustius also expands on psychic and physical myths, while Julian emphasizes ethics. It must be noted, however, that Julian's work is a quick response to Herculios. His detailed account might be different. We could also see that Julian and Sallustius are more open to accepting controversial elements in myths that Plato originally rejected. We will see in the next chapter that it is not just controversial *myths* that need to be defended but also controversial *acts* that are part of the cult of Cybele.

The role of myths in Neoplatonic theurgy

Theurgy became an important part of Neoplatonism thanks to the influence of the *Chaldean Oracles* and Iamblichus. It must be noted that not every Neoplatonist embraced theurgic elements. Porphyry criticized it and ascribed limited usefulness to it (Smith, 1995, p. 93, p. 104–105). Iamblichus defends theurgy in his famous work *De mysteriis*, where he takes the role of an Egyptian priest answering the questions and criticism of Porphyry.

According to Gregory Shaw, Platonism under the leadership of Plotinus and Porphyry became more elitist and alienated from the common people. Due to economic and social changes in the third and fourth centuries, people were drawn away from old Hellenistic cults and started adopting Christianity. It would be incorrect to assume that Iamblichus' doctrines were deliberate attempts to revitalize Neoplatonism against these changes. Iamblichus doesn't mention the Christians. But theurgy offered a more direct and simplified way to connect to the One, which could be attractive for intellectuals and for the common people as well (Shaw, 1994, p.

237-238). The aim of theurgy was the liberation and salvation of souls (Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, X.7)

Iamblichus had a great influence on Julian. Julian even states in his oration *Hymn to the Sun* that Iamblichus was as great as Plato. “Now I am aware that the great philosopher Plato, and after him a man who, though he is later in time, is by no means inferior to him in genius — I mean Iamblichus of Chalcis...” (*In Sol.* 146a).¹⁷ In the same oration Julian advises Sallustius to read Iamblichus if he wishes to learn more about the subject. “But if you wish to meet with a more complete and more mystical treatment of the same theme, then read the writings of the inspired Iamblichus on this subject, and you will find there the most consummate wisdom which man can” (*In Sol.* 157c-d).¹⁸

Iamblichus’ influence on Sallustius might have had a lesser extent. We already saw that Sallustius didn’t defend Egyptian religion as Iamblichus did. In Julian’s works, we could also see more syncretic views similar to Iamblichus. In his *Hymn to the Sun*, he tries to merge other gods with the Sun: not just the Greek gods like Zeus and Hades but Egyptian Gods such as Serapis, and even local Syrian Gods like Monimos and Azizos (*In Sol.* 135d-136a, 150c-d). Strictly speaking, Julian does not identify the other gods with the Sun, but with parts of him which could be his powers, functions, or a portion of his essence (Smith, 1995, p. 158-159).

Using Egypt as an ideal culture wasn’t new to Platonism. For example, we can think of the beginning of *Timaeus*, where Critias tells the story of Solon meeting the Egyptian priest from whom he learns ancient wisdom (*Tim.* 20e-25e).

Julian was initiated into many mysteries that had theurgic elements. There is much evidence in his works about his membership in these mysteries. When he starts talking about the mysteries in his *To the Cynic Heracleios*, he says he sets an ox on his tongue (τὸν βοῦν δὲ ἐπιτίθημι τῇ γλώττῃ) before he reveals something too sacred (*Her.* 217d-218a). In *Caesars*, he claims that he was granted knowledge of Mithras by Hermes (*Caes.* 336c). In the very beginning of his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, he is considering whether he should say anything about the mysteries of the Mother of the Gods (*In Matr.* 160a). At the end of the same oration, he asks the gods to make him perfect in theurgy (*In Matr.* 180c).

It is not clear whether the author of *On the Gods and the World* was initiated in any mysteries but he mentioned the importance of initiations and the importance of the union with the Gods. Sallustius claims that arts, sciences, curses, prayers, sacrifices and initiations all came into existence for the sake of preventing souls from sinning. From prayers and sacrifices we do not appease or change the Gods, we just simply heal our sins and enjoy the goodness of the gods again. Gods gain nothing from prayers and sacrifices, what could they gain? It is us who gain communion with

¹⁷ οἶδα μὲν οὖν καὶ Πλάτωνα τὸν μέγαν καὶ μετὰ τοῦτον ἄνδρα τοῖς χρόνοις, οὗτι μὴν τῇ φύσει καταδεέστερον τὸν Χαλκιδέα φημί, τὸν Ἰάμβλιχον.

¹⁸ {τελειότεροις δ’ εἰ βούλει περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν καὶ μυστικωτέροις λόγοις ἐπιστῆσαι, ἐντυχὼν τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ γενομένοις Ἰαμβλίχου περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων συγγράμμασι τὸ τέλος ἐκέισε τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης εὐρήσεις σοφίας.

them. There is great importance attributed to sacrifices. Sallustius states that prayers without sacrifices are mere words only. Prayers with sacrifices are living words, words give meaning to life and life animates the word (*DM* XII, XIV, XV, XIV).

Sacrifices were also important to Julian. In his satirical piece, he expresses his dissatisfaction that there was just a goose to offer at the shrine at Daphne (*Misopogon*, 362ab).

The myth of the Mother of the Gods

Sallustius and Julian alike wrote about the myth of the Mother of the Gods also known as the myth of Cybele.¹⁹ Following van den Berg's research we can say that Julian wrote his *On the Mother of the Gods* oration in 362 for the festival of the Mother of the Gods, and Sallustius used the abridged version of it in his work shortly after. Along with the myth of Paris, Sallustius categorizes this as a mixed myth (van den Berg, 2022, p. 189, 191).

Sallustius' recounting of the story is the following. The Mother of the Gods saw Attis lying by the river Gallus, and fell in love with him. She then crowned him with the cap of stars and dwelled with him. But Attis fell in love with a nymph and left the Mother to live with her. The Mother drove Attis mad who in turn mutilated himself and then returned to the Mother (*DM*, IV). There have been many other versions of this myth. Wolf Liebeschuetz mentions Pausanias'²⁰ version in which Attis ends up dying (Liebeschuetz, 2015, p. 335). This version wouldn't work for the Platonists, as we pointed out earlier the death of a god was unthinkable in the Platoinst worldview.

Sallustius' interpretation is that the Mother of the Gods is the principle that generates life. Attis is the creator of all things which are born and die. The primary gods perfect the secondary, which is what their love signifies. The starry cap, which the Mother gives to Attis, signifies the celestial powers. The nymphs preside over generation. The process of generation must be stopped somewhere before it creates something worse. That is why Attis casts away his generative powers and is joined with the gods once again. The mutilation and his return symbolise that (*DM*, IV).

At the end of this chapter, he also mentions the rituals which are usually performed in the festival of Cybele. Just as Attis in the story, we are fallen from heaven and need to purify ourselves to be able to rejoin the gods. There are many purification rituals associated with this act. First, the participants abstain from corn and all rich and unclean food that are hostile to the soul. Then they cut a pine tree which signifies the cutting off the further process of generation. Lastly, the participants feed on milk which signifies a sort of rebirth and return to the Gods.

¹⁹ See: Bremmer. (2020). Kubaba, Kybele and Mater Magna: The Long March of Two Anatolian Goddesses to Rome.

²⁰ See: Pausanias, Description of Greece, 7.17.9-13

These are done during the Vernal equinox when the fruits of the earth are not produced, and when the day is becoming longer than the night, which is the perfect period for ascending our souls (*DM*,. IV).

To get a clear picture of the philosophical interpretation of this myth, we have to look at Julian's interpretation as well. At the beginning of Julian's account, he talks about the arrival of the worship of the Mother of the Gods in Rome. Its worship originally comes from the Phrygians, and it first arrived at the Athenians who didn't understand it. Guided by their ignorance the Greeks insulted the newly arrived cult, for which the Mother of the Gods punished them. As a means to ask for forgiveness, they built the Metroum. After the Greeks, the Romans also adopted this cult. Julian tells a mythical account of how a divine statue of Cybele helped them to defeat the Carthaginians (*In Matr.* 159a-161a).

Julian characterises Attis as the cause which descends unto matter and as the god of generative powers (*In Matr.* 161c). The nymph is the dampness of matter, she is not the matter itself but the lowest immaterial cause which subsists prior to matter (*In Matr.* 165d). The Mother of the Gods is the source of intellectual and creative gods, who guide the visible gods. She is the mother and the spouse of Zeus and she came into being with the great creator. She brings perfection to all things, and with the Father's aid, she creates all things that are (*In Matr.* 166a).

Smith's interpretation is that both in this work and in his *Hymn to the Sun* he uses a three-hypostasis system. The supreme principle is the One or the Good which is in his fourth oration the noetic form of the Sun. The noetic Sun is the cause of beauty, being, perfection and oneness (*In Sol.* 133b). The second in the hierarchy is the intelligible world (ruled by the noetic form of the Sun). The third one is the visible world governed by the Sun, the physical form of the Sun. The second and the third forms of the Sun cause blessings for the noetic and visible gods which they respectively govern (Smith, 1995,p.148). This interpretation is, however, largely debated today. The contemporary view is that Julian only talks about one Sun and who is an intelligible god who has a main intermediary role between the intelligible and the material world.²¹

The Sun played an important part in Julian's philosophy.²² At the beginning of the *Hymn to the Sun*, he emphasises his personal relation to the Sun. "For I am a follower of King Helios²³. And of this fact I possess within me, known to myself alone, proofs more certain that I can give. But this at least I am permitted to say without sacrilege, that from my childhood an extraordinary longing for the rays of

²¹ See: Opsomer, (2008). Weshalb nach Julian die mosaisch-christliche Schöpfungslehre der platonischen Demiurgie unterlegen ist. & Buzási, (2011). Julianus császár és naphimnusa és a karácsony eredete

²²See:Gábor Buzási, Solar Theology in Neoplatonism: A Commentary on the Emperor Julian's Hymn to the Sun King (diss. K.U. Leuven, 2008)&Michael Schramm (ed.), (2022). Sonne, Kosmos, Rom

²³ Wright doesn't translate the word "Helios"

the god penetrated deep into my soul”²⁴ (*In Sol.* 130c). His *Hymn to the Sun* oration also focuses on the centrality of the noeric Sun. He is not just the middle in relation to other noeric gods but also in relation to his noetic and visible counterparts. He is the “middle among the middle” according to Julian (*In Sol.* 132d). The noeric Sun also can be seen as an intermediary between God and man. From this, it is not a great step to use him as a saviour through whom men can hope to escape from the world of generation (Smith, 1995, p. 149). “But his more divine gifts, and all that he bestows on our souls when he frees them from the body and then lifts them up on high to the region of those substances that are akin to the god; and the fineness and vigour of his divine rays, which are assigned as a sort of vehicle for the safe descent of our souls into this world of generation”²⁵ (*In Sol.* 152b.). Attis also serves a similar role in Julian’s fifth oration. Attis is the mediator between the Mother and the material world (Smith, 1995, p. 160).

Smith argues that the origin of his system could be traced back to Iamblichus’ reading of the Chaldaean Oracles (Smith, 1995, p. 151). Liebescheutz takes the same position. According to him, Iamblichus’ reading of the Oracles provides a link between the world of philosophy and the world of religion. This makes it possible to introduce traditional gods into the abstract world of philosophers. These oracles seem to describe the nature of the universe, and show how the divine principle and the human soul are related to the universe as a whole (Liebescheutz, 2015, p. 328). Just like Julian’s system, the system of the Oracles is divided into three kosmoi. The first principle is the intelligible (noetic) world, and it is subdivided into two kosmoi: the noetic and the noeric. The second world consists of the spheres of the fixed stars and the seven planets. The third world is the sub-lunar regions and the earth. The second and the third world are the same as the visible world in Julian’s system. Although we can see the intermediate noeric world is not part of the system of the Oracles. According to Smith, the difference is easily explained. Julian doesn’t follow the Oracles themselves but Iamblichus’ commentary on them. This led him to interpret the tripartite universe of the Oracles according to Neoplatonist metaphysics. Just like in Julian’s system the Chaldaean thought also attributed different rulers to their kosmoi. The first ruler is Aion (father-begotten light emanating from the first transcendent fire), the second is the Sun, and the third is probably the Moon. The Chaldaean Sun is also called middle in relation to the other two rulers. The centrality of the Chaldaean Sun is also important. The fire which is his essential quality has an origin in Aion which channelled through the third ruler warms the earth. As a ruler of the planets, he is called seven-rayed. In Smith's view, there is also an intimate

²⁴ καὶ γὰρ εἶμι τοῦ βασιλέως ὀπαδὸς Ἡλίου. τούτου δὲ ἔχω μὲν οἴκοι παρ’ ἐμαντῶ τὰς πίστεις ἀκριβεστέρας· ὁ δὲ μοι θέμις εἰπεῖν καὶ ἀνεμέσητον, ἐντέτηκέ μοι δεινὸς ἐκ παίδων τῶν ἀγῶν τοῦ θεοῦ πόθος,

²⁵ τὰ μὲν οὖν θεϊότερα καὶ ὅσα ταῖς ψυχαῖς δίδωσιν ἀπολύων αὐτὰς τοῦ σώματος, εἴτα ἐπανάγων ἐπὶ τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ συγγενεῖς οὐσίας καὶ τὸ λεπτόν καὶ εὐτονὸν τῆς θείας ἀγῆς οἶον ὄχημα τῆς εἰς τὴν γένεσιν ἀσφαλοῦς διδόμενον καθόδου ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμνεῖσθω τε ἄλλοις ἀξίως καὶ ὑφ’ ἡμῶν πιστευέσθω μᾶλλον ἢ δεικνύσθω

connection between Cybele and the supreme noetic principle in the association of Hecate and the Paternal Nous in the Chaldean Oracles. Lastly, we can also find Chaldaean neologisms in his fifth oration. He uses the word σκύβαλον²⁶ for matter for example (Smith, 1995, p. 151-153). Julian also briefly mentions the Oracles in the same oration: “And if I should also touch on the secret teaching of the Mysteries in which the Chaldean, divinely frenzied, celebrated the God of the Seven Rays, that god through whom he lifts up the souls of men, I should be saying what is unintelligible, yea wholly unintelligible to the common herd, but familiar to the happy theurgists. And so I will for the present be silent on that subject”²⁷ (*In Matr.* 172d-173a.)

Julian also presents his own innovations to us. In his *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, he claims he hasn't read Porphyry's treatise on the same subject so he doesn't know how much he agrees with it. Nevertheless, he presents his identification of Attis with the substance of generative and creative Intellect as his own interpretation (*In Matr.* 161c).

The importance of the Sun is also emphasised in his *Hymn to the Mother of Gods*.²⁸ The Sun, who sees everything, observed the love of Attis and the nymph, and sent the Lion to inform the Mother of her lover's unfaithfulness. The flame-coloured Lion doesn't appear in Pausanias' version. But it is possible that the Lion had a place in the version of the myth told at the sanctuary at Pessinus. There are many images representing Cybele in a chariot drawn by lions, or on a throne which lions are guarding (Liebeschuetz, 2015, p. 335-336).

Attis' importance is also emphasised. He is the leader of all sublunary divine beings. Julian argues that Attis is wholly a god. The myth only calls him a demigod, indicating a difference between him and the unchanging gods. He is attended by Corybants who are assigned to him by the Mother. Attis is also the ruler of the lions, and he encircles the heaven like a tiara and from there he sets out as though to descend to earth (*In Matr.* 168bc).

Sallustius doesn't refer to the Sun the same way as Julian. He states that gods take care of the world without any will or effort. They produce their effects just by merely existing just like the Sun gives heat and light by merely existing (*DM.* IX). When talking about the different activities of gods, there is no emphasis on the importance of centrality. There is an allusion to the Sun in this chapter when he attributes the sphere of the Sun to Apollo (*DM.* VI). It is different from Julian's account because he states that Apollo abides with the Sun (*In Sol.* 144a).

Julian also gives us a more detailed account of the rituals conducted during the festival of the Mother (*In Matr.* 168d-169d). Both Julian and Sallustius emphasise

²⁶ Or. V. 170d, 179cd

²⁷ εἰ δὲ καὶ τῆς ἀρρήτου μυσταγωγίας ἀψαίμην, ἣν ὁ Χαλδαῖος περὶ τὸν ἐπτάκτινα θεὸν ἐβάκχευσεν, ἀνάγων δι' αὐτοῦ τὰς ψυχάς, ἄγνωστα ἐρῶ, καὶ μάλα γε ἄγνωστα τῷ συρφετῷ, θεουργοῖς δὲ τοῖς μακαρίοις γνώριμα· διόπερ αὐτὰ σιωπήσω τανῦν

²⁸ Or. V. 167bd

that the myths are just allegorical. When summarizing the myth of Cybele, Sallustius states that “these things never happened, but always are” (*DM*, IV):

“And never did this happen save in the manner that it happens now; but forever is Attis the servant and charioteer of the Mother; forever he yearns passionately towards generation; and forever he cuts short his unlimited course through the cause whose limits are fixed, even the cause of the forms. In like manner the myth says that he is led upwards as though from our earth, and again resumes his ancient sceptre and dominion: not that he ever lost it, or ever loses it now, but the myth says that he lost it on account of his union with that which is subject to passion and change.”²⁹ (*In Matr.* 171cd)

It also could be asked why Sallustius and Julian chose this myth in particular. It might be clearer in Sallustius’ case because his account of the myth of the Mother of the Gods might be an abridged version of Julian’s interpretation but why did Julian choose it? Smith touches on this subject while investigating the question of why Julian wrote about the cult of the Mother instead of Mithraism.³⁰ Metroac or Isiac cult has been integrated into the network of public worship, unlike Mithraism which was seen as too weird and inward-looking. The mysteries of the Mother had a more broad social appeal. Non-initiates could attend their festivals. Women could also participate freely which wasn’t the case in Mithraism. The geographic spread was also broader in the case of the cult of the Mother. Outside Italy, Mithraism only flourished in military frontier provinces. The worship of the Mother had taken hold in Asia Minor, Gaul, Africa and of course in Italy itself. Julian’s mention of the story of how Cybele helped win the war against Carthage can also show the worship of the Mother is part of Roman well-being and identity. It was thus better to popularize this cult (Smith, 1995, p.167,171). Despite this, there were negative connotations associated with the cult. In the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial period the practice of eunuchism, performed by the Galli who used it as a means to completely dedicate themselves to Cybele, met with resistance in the Greek and Roman world. Julian also distinguishes the ceremonies which follow secret laws and rites that were known to everybody.³¹ It is assumed that during the hidden ceremonies were the ones where rites of mutilation were practiced (Sfameni Gasparro, 1985, p. 76). Julian also touches on this when he tells us that he is grateful to the Mother for not disregarding him when he was wandering in the darkness, and for that she bade him not to cut off any of his body parts (*In Matr.* 174c). In a letter to a priest, Julian writes that the Hellenic religion doesn’t prosper in the way he wanted to. He encourages the priests

²⁹ καὶ οὐδέποτε γέγονεν, ὅτε μὴ ταῦτα τοῦτον εἶχε τὸν τρόπον, ὄνπερ νῦν ἔχει, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ μὲν Ἄττις ἐστὶν ὑπουργὸς τῆ Μητρὶ καὶ ἠνίοχος, αἰεὶ δὲ ὄργῃ εἰς τὴν γένεσιν, αἰεὶ δὲ ἀποτέμνεται τὴν ἀπειρίαν διὰ τῆς ὀρισμένης τῶν εἰδῶν αἰτίας. ἐπαναγόμενος δὲ ὥσπερ ἐκ γῆς τῶν ἀρχαίων αὐθις λέγεται δυναστεύειν σκῆπτρων, ἐκπεσῶν μὲν αὐτῶν οὐδαμῶς οὐδὲ ἐκπίπτων, ἐκπεσεῖν δὲ αὐτῶν λεγόμενος διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ παθητὸν σύμμιξιν.

³⁰ Smith spends a great deal of his work arguing against the exaggeration of Mithraic influences in Julian’s works. See: Smith, (1995). *Julian’s Gods*, pp. 114-179

³¹ Or. V. 169a

to act piously and to be charitable. At the end of the letter, he shows his plans to assist Pessinus in hope that the whole community will become suppliants of the Mother of the Gods (*Letter 22*)³².

Julian ends his oration about the Mother of the Gods by wishing happiness to all men, the highest happiness being the knowledge of the gods. For himself, to be perfect in theurgy. In the affairs of the state and the army, he wishes for virtue and good fortune (*In Matr.* 180bc)

Conclusion

The use of myths became an important part of the Neoplatonic tradition. Both Sallustius and Julian are part of this tendency which tried to reinterpret myths in accordance with Neoplatonic philosophy. Both of them used the myth of the Mother of the Gods which in Sallustius' case could be an abridged version of Julian's account. They used these myths to make their doctrine more understandable to the common people and to intellectuals as well. This could have been useful in a time when people were drawn from Hellenism to the mysteries of Christ. There was no universal agreement about who should be using myths and what kind of myths should be used. We could also see this difference between Sallustius and Julian who presented us with different categorizations of myths. The Sun was also an integral part of Julian's belief while Sallustius doesn't emphasise it the way Julian does. Lastly, both philosophers show similarities when it comes to the importance of the union with Gods.

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³² I use Wright's numbering.

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