

# Praying and Thinking: Religious and Philosophical Interactions in the Representations of the Abstract Deified Concept of Aion in Magical Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall examine the religious representations and identifications of the abstract deified concept of Aion as presented in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, *PGM*, from Roman Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the paper is first to identify the different religious influences represented mainly from Greek, Egyptian and Jewish religions; and then to analyse the logic of these religious assimilations and syncretistic attitudes, looking at the philosophical approaches of their contemporary Neoplatonists on the notion of the one and many. Questions addressed are: Do the religious assimilations reflect tensions towards monotheism? To what extent could these assimilations and the notion of “many-formedness” of Aion be paralleled with the tensions of their contemporary Neoplatonist philosophy?

## AION/GOD OF THE AIONS/AION OF AIONS

Among the other abstract deities addressed in the *PGM*, such as Tyche, Nature, Time, Graces and Moirai,<sup>2</sup> I shall focus on Aion’s religious and philosophical assimilations with various deities, with the god-creator and with philosophical conceptions. The spells to be analyzed are: “Divine assistance from three Homeric verses” (IV.2145–2240, A.D. IV); “GOD/GODS; A sacred book called ‘Unique’ or ‘Eighth book of Moses’ about the holy name”

1. The editions for the *PGM* spells used in this paper are K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs *Papyri Graecae Magicae Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, Vols. I–II (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–74); I also refer to Betz’s translation, H.D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). The *PGM* references are given in Roman numerals followed by Arabic numerals.

2. See n.34 below.

(XIII.1–734: part A.1–343, A.D. IV); “A little ring” (XII.201–269, A.D. IV); the “Stele” (IV.1167–1226, A.D. IV); and the spell V.459–489 (A.D. IV). Other spells I shall refer to are: XIII.734–1077 (A.D. IV), VII.579–590 and VII.505–528 (A.D. III/IV), III.187–262 (A.D. IV) and I.195–222 (A.D. IV/V).

(a) “Divine assistance from three Homeric verses” (IV.2145–2240). In the formula of consecration of a plague included in this spell, the divine assistant is addressed as “the master of all things (ὁ τῶν ὅλων δεσπότης), “Aion of Aions” and identified with “the ruler of the cosmos, Ra, Pan (Πᾶν)” (IV.2196–2199).<sup>3</sup> Noteworthy here is the implicit etymological connection of “τῶν ὅλων” with “Πᾶν” and their association to Aion.<sup>4</sup> Similarly in XIII.734–1077, which contains a collection of various spells, the author refers to the title “Ἐν καὶ τὸ Πᾶν” of the fifth book of the Ptolemaica, relating it etymologically to the address of “ὁ πάντα κτίσας” (“the one who created all things”) and “θεὸς μόνος” (“the only god”) (XIII.978–983). The verb “κτίζω” is used extensively in the sense of “create” in the *Septuagint* version of the *Old Testament*.<sup>5</sup> The monotheistic suggestion here is significant, especially when this universal creator of all and the only god is assimilated to “the lord of Aion,” or “the great, great Aion” (ὁ μέγας, μέγας Αἰών), or “god, lord Aion” (XIII.982, 996–997).<sup>6</sup> The doubling of the positive for emphatic reasons also occurs in Hebrew and is reflected in the Greek of the *Septuagint* and of the *New Testament*.<sup>7</sup>

3. In another spell also related to the concept of πάρεδρος (I.42–195) the divine assistant is addressed in the invocation spell as “god of gods,” “Aion” (I.163).

4. On the association of the god Πᾶν and “τὸ πᾶν” see Pl.*Cra.*408b–c; also *H.Hymn to Pan* 19.47; Plu.*Mor.*419c.

5. E.g., Os.XIII.4.1–2, “ἐγὼ δὲ κύριος ὁ θεὸς σου στερεῶν οὐρανὸν καὶ κτίζων γῆν, οὐ αἱ χεῖρες ἔκτισαν πᾶσαν τὴν στρατιὰν οὐρανοῦ”; Am.IV.13.1, “κτίζων πνεῦμα”; Is.XLV.7.2, “κτίζων κακὰ”; Is.LV.16.1–3, “ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἔκτισά σε, οὐχ ὡς χαλκεὺς φυσῶν ἀνθρακας καὶ ἐκφέρων σκεῦος εἰς ἔργον· ἐγὼ δὲ ἔκτισά σε οὐκ εἰς ἀπώλειαν φθεῖραι.”

6. The spell also VII.579–590 includes instructions for the preparations of a phylactery, according to which “the name of the great god” (ὄνομα τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ) should be written on it, in order to assure the protection of the body and the soul of the person who wears it. The great god with the protective powers is identified among other magical names with Aion, the Jewish Iao and the Egyptian Chphyris (χφυρίς), which stands, as Smith notes, for Khepri, the Egyptian primordial god in the form of a scarab (VII.583–584). See Betz (1986), 134, n.102.

7. E.g., LXX Is.6.3, *NT.Mat.*25.11, *Luk.*8.24, *Mat.*23.7, *Jn.*19.6 etc.; see also IV.3270, “ὁ μέγας μέγας Τυφῶν”; F. Blass and Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), sect.493.1. This grammatical phenomenon called epanadiplosis is commonly used in the *PGM* in the magical formula “ἦδη, ἦδη, τάχυ τάχυ,” often repeated at the end of spells.

(b) “GOD/GODS; A sacred book called ‘Unique’ or ‘Eighth book of Moses’ about the holy name” (XIII.1–734: part A.1–343). The spell of the sacred stele (XIII.61–89), included in XIII.1–343, invokes “the one who created all things” (τὸν πάντα κτίσαντα), “the self-begotten” (XIII.62–63), who is actually, as the title implies—“GOD/GODS”<sup>8</sup>—superior to the other gods, as the magician states, “to you all things have been subjected, whose real form none of the gods can see” (XIII.69–70). This god-creator of all is identified with “Aion of Aion,” “who is transformed into all (gods)” (ὁ μεταμορφούμενος εἰς πάντας), although at the same time he is described as “invisible” (XIII.70–71). Morton Smith translates “ὁ μεταμορφούμενος εἰς πάντας” as “who changes into all forms,” but “πάντας” is masculine and must refer to “the gods.”<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere another god, Eros, is also described as “having assumed the likeness (παρομοιωθεῖς) of a god (or a goddess)” (XII.83) and “having assumed the likeness (ὁμοιωθεῖς) of a god, or daimon she worships” (IV.1858–1859). Thus the various gods of the polytheistic systems are here just “transformations” of the monotheistic god. The creator of all/Aion of Aion is assimilated to Helios *Echebykrom*, Abrasax, the Jewish “Σαβαώθ· Ἀρβαθιάω· Ζαγουρη” and Adonaios and Iao (XIII.78–80, 84 and 75). In the “Hermetic (spell)” (XIII.138–161) included in XIII.1–343, Helios *Achebykrom*<sup>10</sup> is also defined as “the one who creates (κτίζων) the cosmos in divine light” (XIII.144–145) and identified with Abrasax (XIII.156). Abrasax is a solar deity often invoked in the PGM.<sup>11</sup> The Jewish angels “Σαβαώθ· Ἀρβαθιάω· Ζαγουρη” are also mentioned in this spell, described as “the first appeared angels,”<sup>12</sup> and followed by “Ἀραθ· Ἀδωναῖε· Βασημμ· ἰάω” (XIII.146–147). This reference to the Jewish “angels” emphasises the influences of the Jewish concept of the god-creator.<sup>13</sup>

8. See also Betz (1986), 172, n.1.

9. Betz (1986), 174; notice also that in the second version XIII.343–646 the lines XIII.70–71 are repeated (XIII.578–581).

10. On “Ἡλιος, Ἀχεβυκρωμ see also XIII.292, 333 and 446.

11. See C. Colpe “Geister (Dämonen): Die wichtigsten Gestalten: a. Abrasax,” *RAC* 9 (1976): 618–619; Betz (1986), 331; R. Markelbach and M. Totti, *Abrasax: Ausgewählte Papyri Religiösen und Magischen Inhalts. Band 1–2*. Papyrologica Coloniensia 17.1–2 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990–91); A. Dieterich, *Abrasax: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätem Altertums* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1891); the representation of Abrasax in the magical amulets as an armoured cock-headed deity with serpent legs implies an amalgam of Greek, Egyptian and Persian influences; C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Greco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 123–39 and plates VIII–IX.

12. This phrase is placed between the first three names and the remaining four of the seven.

13. For the Hellenistic background to “angels” and their role in the Chaldaean system of divine entities as “ministering angels” see H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 157–164; on the Jewish angelology see E. Langton, *The Ministries of the Angelic Powers According to the Old Testament and Later Jewish Literature* (London, 1936) and R. Elior, “Mysticism, Magic and

Similarly, in the other spells included in the XIII.1–343, as for example in the spell “opening by the name” (XIII.327–333), Helios is identified with Aion of Aions,<sup>14</sup> and in the spell “to quench fire” (XIII.297–303) the magician identifies himself with Aion (XIII.332–333 and 299).<sup>15</sup>

In XIII.61–89 there are issues for further discussion. First, the creator of all/Aion is assimilated to Helios, Abrasax and the Jewish angels. In XIII.138–61 also, the creator of all/Helios is identified with Abrasax and the Jewish angels. Smith also points out that these two invocations are an allusion to an old Egyptian hymn to the sun god/creator of the world.<sup>16</sup> Thus there is a multiplicity of religious influences from Greek, Egyptian and Jewish religious systems, denoting the interreligious character of the spell.

Second, the variety of transformations of Aion is a major characteristic of gods and goddesses in the *PGM*, who assume various forms and names. Helios, for example, elsewhere is identified with various “forms” (μορφάς) of animals (III.500).<sup>17</sup> These transformations may reveal Egyptian influences, since the depiction of the gods in various animal forms, or in human forms with animal heads, was a major characteristic of the Egyptian religious personification of the divine, according to which not only humans but also animals and plants can be associated with the divine power, and considered to be, as Morenz points out, “God *in potentia*.”<sup>18</sup>

Angelology—The Persertion of Angels in Hekhalot Literature,” *JSQ* 1 (1993): 3–53; and for the angels in the Christian tradition see J.M. Hall, *Hellenistic Magic and Synoptic Tradition* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), 87–96.

14. In the *Hymn “To Helios”* (III.198–229), included in the untitled spell for revelation (III.187–262), Helios is described as “the flaming angel (ἄγγελον) of Zeus” and identified with Iao, Raphael, Abrasax, Michael, Sabaoth and Adonai (III.211–214 and 219–220). Also in the *Hymn “To the gods of all”* (I.297–314, 342–345), included in the “Apollonian invocation” (I.262–347), Apollo is addressed as “the first angel (ἄγγελε) of the god, the great Zeus” (I.300) and identified with Abrasax, the Jewish Iao, Adonai, the archangels Michael and Gabriel, and the abstract Nature. The interesting point here is that both Helios and Apollo, described as the angel of Zeus, are compared with Jewish deities and angels and with the solar deity Abrasax. In addition, this peculiar amalgam of Apollo/Abrasax/Iao/Adonai/Michael/Gabriel is equated to “the aeonian god and Aion of all” (θεὸν αἰώνιον Αἰώνά τε πάντων) (I.309). The deity adjured is also described as “father of the cosmos” (πάτερ κόσ[σ]μοιο) (I.304). (Note here the appropriately archaising genitive ending –οιο of “κόσ[σ]μοιο”; also in I.307, “ὀρκίζω χέρα δεξιτερῆν, ἦν κόσμω ἐπέσχεσ”).

15. Similarly, in V.156 the magician identifies himself with “the Grace (ἡ Χάρις) of Aion.”

16. Betz (1986), 174, n.16.

17. E.g., note also that Apollo/Helios is described as “many-named” (πολυώνυμε) (II.107–108); Hermes is addressed as “many-named” (VIII.14); also the goddesses Selene/Hecate/Artemis are described as “many-named” and “many-formed” (IV.2798, 2830, VII.870); also Isis (VII.503).

18. S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (London: Methuen, 1973), 19–21; E. Hornung (trans. J. Baines), *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Third, these transformations of Aion “into all gods” seem parallel to Plotinus’ doctrine of the “generically” and “manifold” “one” (έν), which is “at the same time also many” (άμα καί πολλά) (*Enn.*VI.2.2.2ff).<sup>19</sup> Iamblichus also in *De Mysteriis* refers to the “manifold powers,” “forms” and “transformations” of the “one god” (τόν ένα θεόν) Helios.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Proclus’ *On Hieratic Art* refers to the various attributes of Helios in different entities, such as angels, demons, souls, animals, plants and stones, which all participate in his nature.<sup>21</sup> The notion of one god with many names and variable ritual customs among different nations also occurs in Latin Literature. In Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* Book XI, for example, the goddess Isis identifies herself as a divinity worshiped worldwide “in diverse manners, in variable customs and by many names” (*multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiiugo*) different for various nations, such as the Phrygians, Athenians, Cyprians, Cretans, Sicilians and Eleusinians; and only the Ethiopians and the Egyptians call her by her true name (*vero nomine*) (*Met.*XI.4).

(c) “A little ring” (XII.201–269). The magician addresses “the forefather (τόν προπάτορα) of gods, overseer and lord of all” (XII.237–238). Similarly, in the spell I.195–222, the first-begotten (πρωτοφυής) and first-born (πρωτογενής) god-creator is addressed as “[προπ]άτωρ” (I.200).<sup>22</sup> Helios also is described as “αύτοφυής” in the *Orphic Hymn to Helios*.<sup>23</sup> The concept of “ό θεός ό προπάτωρ” is also found in the parallel religious and philosophical texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Neoplatonist philosophers.<sup>24</sup> We are probably dealing here with some form of Orphic cosmogony,<sup>25</sup> combined with Pre-Socratic thinking about fire and the sun. The forefather of gods is

19. Plot.*Enn.*VI.2.2.2–3: “ή έν άμα καί πολλά λέγομεν, καί τι ποικίλον έν τά πολλά εις έν έχον. ανάγκη τοίνυν τούτο τό ούτως έν ή τω γένει έν ειναί, είδη δ’ αυτού τά όντα, οίς πολλά καί έν, ή πλείω ένός γένη, ύφ’ έν δε τά πάντα, ή πλείω μέν γένη, μηδεν δε άλλο ύπ’ άλλο, άλλ’ έκαστον περιεκτικόν τών ύπ’ αυτό...”

20. Iamb.*Myst.*VII.3.12–16: “διά τού πλήθους τών δοθέντων τόν ένα θεόν έμφάινειν, καί δια τών πολυτρόπων δυνάμεων τήν μίαν αυτού παριστάναί δύνανμιν· διό καί φησιν αυτόν ένα ειναί καί τόν αυτόν, τας δε διαμείψεις τής μορφής καί τούς μετασχηματισμούς έν τοις δεχομένοις ύποτίθεται.”

21. Procl.*Hier.Ar.*150.23–24: “ίδοις άν ουν τας συνεπειραμένας ιδιότητας έν ήλίω μεριζομένης έν τοις μετεχουσιν άγγέλαις, δαίμοσι, ψυχάις, ζώοις, φυτοίς, λίθοις.”

22. Helios is also characterised as “forefather” in III.442 and IV.457, 948 and 1987 and as “self-engendered” and “first-appearing” in IV.943–944; for the association of “self-engendered” (IV.943) with the Egyptian Kephri see Grese’s note in Betz (1986), 57, n.134; Helios is also described as “forefather” and “self-engendered” in I.341–342 and IV.1988; Eros also is described as “first-appearing” in IV.1794.

23. *Orph.H.*VIII.3, “To Helios.”

24. *Corp.Herm.Fr.*23.10.4–5; see also Iamb.*Myst.*VIII.4.22ff; also for Ouranos in Procl. in *Tim.*III.99.17–18.

25. For the main lines of which see G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21–33.

addressed as “the god ruler of all” (ὁ παντοκράτωρ θεός) (XII.238)<sup>26</sup> and again as “lord, holy ruler of all and master of all” (κύριε, παντοκράτωρ ἄγιε καὶ δέσποτα πάντων) (XII.250) in the *Hymn “To the creator of all”* (XII.244–252)<sup>27</sup> included in XII.201–269. The cosmic body of the god ruler of all/forefather of gods is described thus: “heaven (is) (the) head, ether (the) body, earth (the) feet and what is around you (the) water, ocean, Good (Agathos) Daimon (τὸ δὲ περὶ σε ὕδωρ, ὠκεανός, Ἄγαθος Δαίμων)” (XII.243).<sup>28</sup>

This forefather/god ruler of all, in the *Hymn “To the creator of all”* (XII.244–252), is assimilated to “the king of Aions and lord,” or to “Aion nourishing Aion rules Aions” (Αἰὼν Αἰ<ω>να τρέφων Αἰῶσιν ἀνάσει), and addressed as “one god immortal (εἷς θεὸς ἀθάνατος); the begetter of all” (XII.246–247), implying a monotheistic notion of the god-creator of all.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the existence of “elements” (στοιχεῖα) and the birth of all in air, earth, water and “steam of fire” (πυρὸς ἀτμῶ) are related to his power (XII.250–252). In relation to the reference to the four elements it is worth mentioning that in the “Mithras Liturgy” (IV.475–829) the magician addresses “fire” among the four elements (*pneuma*, fire, water, earth substance), defining it as “the one given by god to my mixture of the mixtures in me” (τὸ εἷς ἐμὴν κράσιν τῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ κράσεων θεοδώρητον) (IV.490–491).<sup>30</sup> That reference probably alludes to Stoic Philosophy on the “σύγκρασις” of the four elements.<sup>31</sup> Another noteworthy point is the reference to the element of fire as “πυρὸς ἀτμῶ.” A similar expression is found in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.<sup>32</sup>

26. Helios is described as “κοσμοκράτωρ” in IV.1599; also in the *Orphic Hymn to Helios*, *Orph.H.VIII.11* and 16; also as “θαλασσοκράτωρ” in IV.1601–1602 and 1696–1697.

27. Reconstructed *Hymn 1 “To the creator of all”* (XII 244–252); Preisendanz (1974), vol. II, 237.

28. Smith translates “τὸ δὲ περὶ σε ὕδωρ, ὠκεανός, Ἄγαθος Δαίμων” as “and the water around you, ocean, [O] Agathos Daimon” (so does Preisendanz, translating it as “das Wasser um dich, der Ozean, der Gute Dämon”; Preisendanz [1974], vol.II, 74); Grese follows this translation in XXI.5–7 (Betz [1986], 259), although in XIII.770–773 he translates “τὸ δὲ περὶ σ<ε> ὄν ὕδωρ ὁ Ἄγαθος Δαίμων. σὺ εἶ ὁ ὠκεανός” as “and the environment water, the Agathos Daimon. You are the ocean” (Betz [1986], 162 and n.77). But the latter translation of “τὸ δὲ περὶ σε ὕδωρ” seems better and according to the previous “οὐρανός μὲν κεφαλή, αἰθήρ δὲ σῶμα, γῆ πόδες,” in which οὐρανός, αἰθήρ and γῆ are the subjects and κεφαλή, σῶμα and πόδες their equivalent complements.

29. See also “one Zeus Sarapis” (εἷς Ζεὺς Σάραπις) (IV.1715).

30. On “The Mithras Liturgy” see M.W. Meyer, *The Mithras Liturgy* (Missoula, MO: Scholars Press for Biblical Literature, 1976); also H.D. Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 107–108.

31. On the “σύγκρασις” of the four elements see Chrysip.Stoic.Fr.Log. et Phys.555.5; also on “τὴν τοῦ περιέχοντος κράσιν” see Posidon.Fr.13.59ff; also Fr.169.35ff, 290a.367ff, 291.61ff, 307.2, 309a.4.

32. A.Eu.138, “τῶ ἀτμῶ ... νηδύος πυρί”; see also in another context the association of ἀτμός with the sun, Arist.Pr.862a4.

(d) The “Stele” (IV.1167–1226). In the prayer for deliverance, the magician assimilates “the one and blessed (τὸν ἕνα καὶ μάκαρα) of the Aions and father of the cosmos” with “Helios, father of the cosmos” (IV.1169–1170, 1181–1182). The god of Aions/Helios is addressed as “creator of the world” (κόσμου κτίστα), “creator of all (things)” and “god of gods” (IV.1200). He is also identified with “the one who created (ὁ κτίσας) gods and archangels and decans” (IV.1202–1203). Similarly, in the spell/prayer for deliverance (I.195–222), the “first-begotten and first-born god” addressed as “eternal” (I.196–200) is identified with the one “who has created mighty decans and archangels” (I.207–208). The reference to “the one god” and the identification of Helios/the god of Aions with the god-creator of gods, archangels and decans reveals Jewish influences related to the concept of a god-creator.<sup>33</sup> These characteristics in regard to the assimilation of the god-creator of all with Helios are attributed in most cases to Aion, or the god of Aions.

Another significant point of this spell is the identification of Aion with Wisdom, when the magician states, “and the lord witnessed to your Wisdom, which is Aion” (IV.1205–1206).<sup>34</sup> But this is not “a unique instance in the *PGM*,” as claimed by Grese,<sup>35</sup> since in the spell I.195–222 of similar content, in which some phrases are repeated,<sup>36</sup> the above sentence recurs as, “and the lord has witnessed to your wisdom” (I.209–210).

Wisdom was personified in Jewish, Gnostic and Christian texts. In *First Corinthians*, for example, the abstract Wisdom is personified and characterized as God’s Wisdom distinguished from the wisdom “of this aion” (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) or “of the rulers of this aion” (τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου).<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in the recently discovered “Gospel of Judas” Wisdom

33. See also IV.1190–1192, “συ εἶ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἅγιον κα[ι] τὸ ἰσχυρόν, τὸ καθηγιασμένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων πάντων” and IV.1203–1205, “αἱ μυριάδες τῶν ἀγγέλων παρεστῆκασι [σοι] καὶ ὑψωσαν τὸν οὐρανόν.”

34. On the abstract deified concepts invoked in the *PGM* see spells e.g., in the “Connection with your own daimon” (VII.505–528): various abstract deities or deified concepts are greeted, such as Tyche, the daimon of this place, the present hour and day, or even “the encompassing,” and Helios is addressed as “the father of the reborn Aion *Zarachthō*,” or “the father of the terrible Nature *Thorchophano*” (VII.510–511). (For the names *Zarachthō* and the Coptic *Thorchophano* see Betz (1986), 132, 79, and 80). Similarly in the “Hidden Stele” (IV.1115–1166) various abstract concepts are greeted, such as “the whole system (σύστημα) of the aerial spirit,” or “the spirit” itself (IV.1115–1117), or even “the incomprehensible form (σχήμα) of the cosmos” (IV.1138–1139), and addressed as “the god of gods” (IV.1146–1147) and identified with “the god of Aions,” the “great” and “master of all” (IV.1163–1164).

35. Betz (1986), 61, n.164.

36. E.g., I.205–207 and IV.1189–1191; I.207–209 and IV.1201–1204; I.211–212 and IV.1208–1209.

37. *NT.1Cor.2.6.1*; *NT.Luc.11.49*; *Apoc.13.18.1*; also in the *Septuagint*, *Pr.III.28.3*; *Reg. XIV.20.4*; *Esd.I.VIII.23.1*; also in *Corp.Herm.Fr.23.29.2*.

is personified and deified.<sup>38</sup>

(e) Spell V.459–489. In our last spell to examine, the magician invokes the one “who created (τὸν κτίσαντα) earth and bones and all flesh and all spirit” (V.459–461), identified with “the great Mind/Intelligence who administrates all lawfully,” “ὁ μέγας Νοῦς, ἔν[νο]μος τὸ πᾶν διοικῶν” (V.464–465). This god “creator”/“the great Mind” (ὁ μέγας Νοῦς) is also assimilated to Aion, Zeus and the Jewish Adonai, Iao and Sabaoth and Sarapis (V.464–485). What is interesting here is the identification with the Jewish creator-god and with various forms of Yaweh, with Zeus and Sarapis and the abstract Aion and Nous.

The “Nous (or Phrenes)” is elsewhere in the *PGM* associated with heart as the place of intelligence and wits and identified with Hermes (XIII.172–175). Similarly, in the spell XIII.343–646, Nous (and Phrenes) is identified with Hermes who, as stated, “is in the phrenes, by whom the whole is managed (ἔστιν δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν φρενῶν, δι’ οὗ οἰκονομήθη τὸ πᾶν)” (XIII.486–490).<sup>39</sup>

The divine conceptualisation of Nous seems to be an influence from the doctrine of nous of the Pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras.<sup>40</sup> The idea of administration, or management, associated with Nous represented in both spells alludes to the notion of διοίκησις of the whole world by a principle, or by the god’s power as described in Philo.<sup>41</sup>

In the *Corpus Hermeticum* Book I, called *Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistus*, there is also a reference to “the Intelligence/Mind (Nous) of the sovereignty” (ὁ τῆς ἀυθεντίας νοῦς), described as “the first god,” or “the archetypal form,” which the protagonist of this dialogue has perceived “in his mind” (ἐν τῷ νῷ).<sup>42</sup> This first nous “being bisexual” gave birth to the “other nous creator” (ἕτερον νοῦν δημιουργόν), who created in his turn the

38. *Gosp.Jud.44*, “Jesus said, “It is impossible to sow seed on [rock] and harvest its fruit. [This] is also the way [...] the [defiled] generation [...] and corruptible Sophia [...] the hand that has created mortal people, so that their souls go up to the eternal realms above” (*The Gospel of Judas from Codex Tchacos*, trans. R. Kasser, M. Meyer, and G. Wurst [Washington: The National Geographic Society, 2006], 30).

39. Plutarch in *De Iside et Osiride* connects *Nous* and reason with Osiris (one of Sarapis’ constituent gods); *Plu.De Is. et Os.371A*.

40. On *Nous* in Anaxagoras see *Fragm.B11* (*Simp.in Phys.164.22*), *B12* (*Simp.in Phys.164.24; 156.13*), *B13* (*Simp.in Phys.300.27*), *B14* (*Simp.in Phys.157.5*) and discussion in P. Curd, *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae: Fragments and Testimonia. A Text and Translation with Notes and Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 22–25 and 192ff. See also Betz (1986), 109–110, n.61–62.

41. *Ph.De Opif.Mundi 3–4*: “ἡ δ’ ἀρχή, ..., καθ’ ἣν καὶ ὁ σύμπας κόσμος διοικεῖται”; *Ph.De Spec. Leg.IV.187*, “τὸ γὰρ ἔπεσθαι θεῶν τοῦτ’ ἐστίν, ἐπεὶ κακείνω δύναμις μὲν ἐστι δρᾶν ἐκάτερα, βούλεται δὲ μόνα τὰγαθά. Μημίει δὲ ἡ τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις τε καὶ διοίκησις.”

42. *Corp.Herm.1.3*, 6, 7.



seven “administrators” (διοικήτ<ορ>ας), whose administration (διοίκησις) is called destiny (εἰμαρμένη).<sup>43</sup>

In our spell (V.459–489), the great *Nous* is described as “daimon of daimons, god of gods” and assimilated to Aion Iao (V.465–468). In addition, this god-creator/*Nous*/Aion is addressed as “the master of gods,” which nicely anticipates the characterization “sovereign” (τύρωννε) Zeus, with whom he is identified (V.470–472). This god-creator/*Nous*/god of gods/Aion Iao/Zeus is equated to the Jewish Adonai and Iao (V.477–479).

This god-creator is even identified with the Hellenistic Sarapis (V.486). Also noteworthy is the description of the god-creator/*Nous*/Aion/Iao/Adonai/Sarapis as “seeing with eternal eyes” (αἰωνόφθα[λ]μος) (V.465–466) and later as “αἰωνόβιε,” “immortal” (V.482), a title used for the Egyptian kings and found elsewhere in the *PGM*. For example, in the spell written in the form of a letter (IV.154–285), Nephotes greets Psammetichos, addressing him as “immortal king of Egypt” (βασιλεῖ Αἰγύπτου αἰωνοβίω) (IV.154–156).<sup>44</sup> The magician also identifies himself with a series of magical names, some of which are the Jewish Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai and Eloai Abraam (V.475ff).<sup>45</sup> This technique alludes to the religious practice of the Egyptian practitioners of adjuring the gods on equal terms.<sup>46</sup> The magician also states that he invokes this great god in Syrian and Hebrew, reciting magical words for each case (V.472–475). In the *PGM* there are similar expressions reflecting the cultural and religious translatability of the spells and their intercultural or interreligious character.<sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have examined the religious and philosophical assimilations of the abstract deified concept of Aion, or the god of Aions, in a series of *PGM* spells. The abstract character of Aion is defined by his various assimilations

43. *Corp.Herm.*1.9.

44. See also *OGI* 90.4 in the Rosetta stone (II B.C.).

45. Aune points out that the words in Greek of the magical names correspond to a “Jewish blessing” prayer, but he questions the level of the magician’s understanding of their actual meaning (Betz [1986], 110, n.63).

46. *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, spell I; R.O. Faulkner, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 1998), plate 5; see also J. Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100–300 CE)* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 154–155.

47. E.g. XIII.139 and 147–160: “ὁ δὲ πρῶτος ἄγγελος φωνεῖ ὀρνεογλυφιστί ... ὁ δὲ Ἥλιος ὕμνεῖ σε ἱερογλυφιστί ... ἀβραῖστί δὲ διὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὀνόματος ... τὸ δὲ φυσικὸν σου ὄνομα αἰγυπτιστί ... ὁ δὲ ἐννεάμορφος ἀσπάζεται σε ἱερατιστί”; also XIII.79–86 and XII.263–267: “ἐπικαλοῦμαι σε κατὰ μὲν Αἰγυπτίους ... κατὰ δ’ Ἰουδαίους ... κατὰ Ἕλληνας ... κατὰ δὲ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς ... κατὰ δὲ Πάρθους.”

with gods and deities mainly from the Greek and the Egyptian polytheistic systems or from the Jewish monotheistic system with its range of angels and archangels, or even with philosophical abstract concepts. The assimilation of Aion with the god-creator of all and with Jewish deities reveals Jewish influences. Aion's identification also with other abstract concepts, such as Wisdom (or Tyche, the encompassing, the system, the spirit, or the form of the world) emphasizes his abstract quality, at the same time appropriating gods from various religious traditions to a single concept of Eternity.

This identification process also implies his ability to accumulate the features of these gods or concepts into a single monotheistic concept of Aion/"Eternity."

The "many-forms" and transformations of Aion become explicit in the assimilation of the god-creator of all with "Aion of Aion," "who is transformed into all (gods)." This "many-formedness" is an important vehicle in the assimilation of gods from different religious systems. It also facilitates the tendency towards monotheism.

There are other attempts to create a sense of order within a formally polytheistic framework which fall short of *monotheism*, for example, *henotheistic* notions, or what might be described as a *megatheistic* concept, in the emphasis on Aion as being "great, great," or the search for a "forefather," or some similar first principle as the "first-begotten," "first-born," or the "self-engendered," apparently sometimes derived from Orphic cosmogonies.

The philosophical influences on the particular *PGM* spells and especially the influences from the Neoplatonists are used in active ways, for example, to underwrite unifying abstractions such as Intelligence or Mind, or to reconcile the notion of apparent plurality with "one-ness." The notion of "one-ness" as transcending apparent plurality is expressed in the *Hymn "To the creator of all"* (XII.244–252), in which the creator of all/king of Aions is addressed as "one god immortal; the begetter of all" (XII.246–247). The reading of the spells should be inclusive of the various religious and philosophical currents and not exclusive. The various assimilations of Aion within a religious system, or between different systems and the various names and transformations, which, as examined, reveal a religious tendency towards monotheism, may also at the same time reflect influences from the Neoplatonist philosophers related to the notion of the "one (which) is at the same time many," or "that manifold one having the many in one." On the whole, therefore, their function is to support fundamentally monotheistic conceptions.