Porphyry of Tyre on the *Daimon*, Birth and the Stars

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**Introduction**

The works of Porphyry of Tyre—polymath, philosopher and astrologer—have enjoyed an upsurge in scholarly interest particularly in the last twenty years. This attention has forced a reassessment of earlier verdicts on Porphyry’s thought. From formerly having been accused of being ‘gâté par trop de souplesse’ and ‘no consistent or creative thinker’, his reputation has been rehabilitated: ‘a very erudite intellectual with an amazing knowledge of the history of philosophy, an interest in religion, rhetoric, and the culture of his time’; ‘It is not inappropriate to compare Porphyry with Plutarch, who shared many of the same interests …’. Recent works featuring Porphyry have concentrated on religious issues (in some cases Christian, and the topic of salvation), identity and ethnography; and ritual, oracles and divination. Some have touched on the topic of Porphyry’s interest in astrology (mostly tangentially) as well as his conception of the *daimōn*. However, aside from my own

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1 For evidence supporting this designation, see my recent book, Greenbaum (2016), 236, 251, 266–273; also Addey (2014a), 104–106, 117–124; also below, ‘Porphyry on Astrology’, esp. n. 22.
2 Bidez (1913), 132.
3 Dodds (1951), 286–287.
5 Smith (2007), 12.
6 Simmons (2015); Proctor (2014).
7 Johnson (2013).
8 Addey (2014a).
9 E.g., Johnson (2013); astrology is more central to his topic in Johnson (2015), 186–201.
10 Timotin (2012), 208–215; Alt (2005), 79–80; Nance (2002): however, Nance’s point of view is somewhat blinkered as to Porphyry’s other wide-ranging interests and how these might affect how he writes about *daimōnes*. See also Luc Brisson’s and Nilufer Ackay’s articles in this volume.
work, no one has, as yet, considered how astrology has been integrated into Porphyry’s ideas about birth and the daimōn, to say nothing of the relationship of the soul’s attachment to the body at birth. This article aims to remedy that lack.

The focus of my investigation will be the way in which Porphyry combines the functions and interactions of the daimōn, humans and souls with his interest in astrology, particularly the astrological moment of birth. The primary texts I shall be looking at are On What is Up to Us, To Gaurus on How Embryos are Ensouled and parts of Porphyry’s understudied astrological treatise, Introduction to the Tetrabiblos, which integrates with the other two texts. A close reading of these texts in regard to the daimōn, astrology and when the soul comes into the body will demonstrate a coherent philosophical and astrological line followed by Porphyry in these treatises.

In looking at Porphyry’s astrological knowledge, this essay will also discuss astrological terms that relate etymologically to terms used by Porphyry in philosophical contexts, even if Porphyry does not make a specific connection between them. The point of giving these examples is not to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Porphyry equated, or even explicitly connected, such terms and doctrines. It is to show, in demonstrating the astrological knowledge base that would have been available to Porphyry as an astrologer, underlying similarities between the use of terms in astrological and philosophical contexts.

Porphyry on Daimones, Astrology and the Myth of Er

Porphyry on Daimones

Porphyry’s abiding interest in daimones is revealed in a number of his works: On Abstinence from Killing Animals, Philosophy from Oracles, Life of Plotinus, Letter to Anebo, On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey, Commentary on Plato’s

12 The ascription of this text to Porphyry has mostly been agreed upon by scholarship, pace Barnes (2011), 109 n. 22, who calls it, in relation to Porphyry’s authorship, ‘doubtful’. But to my mind James Wilberding’s argument for authenticity, expanding on Kalbfleisch’s, is persuasive: Wilberding (2011), 7–10, esp. 9–10.
13 For the argument for Porphyry’s authorship of this treatise (which has been accepted by most scholarship on the topic), see Greenbaum (2016), 266–270.
14 This discussion follows a holistic approach in line with recent scholarship (e.g. Johnson [2013], 13–14), in contrast to, e.g. Bidez’s approach (1913), dating Porphyry’s works by their so-called intellectual development.