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"In Angelic Space:" *Chaldaean Oracles* Fr. 138 and Iamblichus

It is well known that Neoplatonists adopted the *Chaldaean Oracles* as a sacred text, in complete harmony with Plato's teachings. The Middle-Platonic doctrines of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, however, often presented problems for Neoplatonic interpreters. In this paper I will explore how Iamblichus re-interpreted Fr. 138 so as to bring it into line with his own philosophy. In Fragment 138 of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, we are presented with three Greek words: *ANGELIKOI ENI CHORO* ("in angelic space"). Thanks to the work of Lewy, des Places, Hadot, Cremer, and Majercik, we know a good deal about the meaning of this Oracle. It concerns the abode of purified human souls after death; these souls, after living an exceptionally pure life on earth, are rewarded by living "in angelic space;" but the souls must eventually leave this abode and as angels descend to earth in order to help struggling human beings. These angels play a significant role in helping human souls re-ascend to the intelligible realm.

Iamblichus in his *De Mysteriis* assigns this same theurgic role to the angels. Iamblichus, however, firmly distinguishes the different ranks of soul, including angelic from human and thus cannot adopt the Chaldaean doctrine that human souls become angels. For Iamblichus, the purified human soul unites with the gods but remains separate according to its own essence.

It is in light of this kind of union that Iamblichus re-interprets Fr. 138. In *De Mysteriis* 2.2, Iamblichus paraphrases the Oracle, saying that the human soul can "ascend to a greater, angelic order." But Iamblichus immediately re-interprets this statement, saying that the human soul merely shares the realm of the angels (69.16-19) and thereby forms the kind of union that Iamblichus requires. In his *De Anima* Iamblichus clarifies his position concerning the kind of union that human souls form with gods and the extent to which human souls can be "in angelic space."

Iamblichus thus preserves the soul's rank and essence. Weaving together Chaldaean and Neoplatonic doctrines, he affirms the truth of the Oracle and of his own philosophy. Iamblichus' re-interpretation becomes standard Neoplatonic doctrine: souls abide with the angels but do not become them.