

WEAVING ELEMENTAL GARMENTS: PROCLUS ON CIRCE (COMMENTARY ON THE CRATYLUS §53, 22.8–9)*

ABSTRACT

In the Commentary on the Cratylus, Proclus puts forward an original but largely ignored interpretation of Circe as weaving life in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ. This paper argues that τὸ τετραστοίχον refers not to the four genera but to the four elements. Thus what the enchantress weaves are the elemental garments that weigh the soul down to the earthly realm of mortals.

Keywords: Proclus; Circe; allegoresis; τὸ τετραστοίχον; the four elements; *Commentary on the Cratylus*; *Commentary on the Timaeus*; *Commentary on the Alcibiades*

In his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus allegorically interprets (§53, 22.8–9) Circe as ‘weaving all of life in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ’.¹ LSJ translates τὸ τετραστοίχον as ‘four classes of ζῶα’ and this rendition is very frequently followed. Suffice it to mention here the most recent translations of Proclus’ commentary by Brian Duvick² or Michele Abbate.³ Some scholars, however, have questioned the validity of this rendition. For example, Sibylle Tochtermann has asserted that the LSJ translation makes no sense:

Die Übersetzung des Hapaxlegomenon τῷ τετραστοίχῳ bei Liddell-Scott als ‘vier Klassen der Lebewesen’ leuchtet nicht ein. Eher scheint in diesem Zusammenhang das Leben, d.h. der Bereich des Irdischen, gemeint zu sein, der sich aus den vier Elementen zusammensetzt.⁴

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¹ The text is that of G. Pasquali, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Cratylum commentaria* (Leipzig, 1908) and the translation (at times modified) is that of B. Duvick, *Proclus: On Plato Cratylus* (London, 2007).

² Duvick (n. 1), 30: ‘four classes’.

³ M. Abbate, *Proclo: Commento al Cratilo di Platone* (Milan, 2017), 315: ‘quattro classi <di esseri viventi>’. Abbate explains further (at 587 n. 225): ‘Il riferimento è, con ogni probabilità, alla distinzione di matrice aristotelica delle quattro classi di esseri viventi sulla base del loro modo di locomozione: animali che camminano, che volano, che nuotano, che strisciano.’

⁴ S. Tochtermann, *Der allegorisch gedeutete Kirke-Mythos: Studien zur Entwicklungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), 85 n. 32. To the best of my knowledge, only F. Buffière, *Les mythes d’Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956), 557 mentions briefly the allegoresis of Circe that Proclus offers in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Other studies make at best merely passing references to it: e.g. P. Courcelle, ‘Témoins nouveaux de la “région de dissemblance” (Platon, *Politique* 273 d)’, *BEC* 118 (1960), 20–36, at 28 n. 3 or E. Kaiser, ‘Odyssee-Szenen als Topoi’, *MH* 21 (1964), 109–36 and 197–224, at 207. With the exception of Tochtermann, none of these works broaches the issue of τὸ τετραστοίχον. Proclus’ account of the sorceress is ignored by J. Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana and Chicago, 1994), who concludes her survey of Platonic interpretations of Circe with Porphyry (at 76–7), apparently unaware of Tochtermann’s important work.

Although this paper argues that Tochtermann is right to impugn the accuracy of the LSJ rendition, her characterization of τὸ τετράστοιχον as a *hapax legomenon* needs qualification, since the term is used by Proclus twice more in the *Commentary on the Timaeus* (2.268.6–7 and 2.268.9).⁵ Unsurprisingly, here again scholars are divided about the appropriate translation. Thomas Taylor renders it as ‘the four elements’.⁶ André-Jean Festugière, on the other hand, suggests, on the basis of *In Cra.* §53, 22.9, ‘les quatre classes de vivants’.⁷ Finally, Dirk Baltzly, in the most recent translation, makes a strong case for ‘the four elements’.⁸ In what follows, it will be proposed that the same applies to the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, since Proclus’ allegoresis of Circe sits much better with the four-elements interpretation than with the four-genera reading. Let us first provide the context.

As Proclus discusses the deities who weave ‘the order of life’ (τὸν διάκοσμον τῆς ζωῆς), he explains (*In Cra.* §53, 22.3–15) that this weaving

μετεχομένην δὲ ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ θεῶν (καὶ γὰρ ὁ εἷς δημιουργὸς τοῖς νέοις δημιουργοῖς προσυφαίνειν τῷ ἀθανάτῳ παρακελεύεται τὸ θνητὸν εἶδος τῆς ζωῆς), περατομένην δ’ εἰς τοὺς τῆς γενέσεως προστάτας θεοὺς, ὧν ἔστιν καὶ ἡ παρ’ Ὀμήρῳ Κίρκη πάσαν ὑφαίνουσα τὴν ἐν τῷ τετραστοίχῳ ζωὴν καὶ ἅμα ταῖς φῶδαις ἐναρμόνιον ποιούσα τὸν ὑπὸ σελήνην τόπον. ἐν ταύταις οὖν ταῖς ὑφαντικαῖς καὶ ἡ Κίρκη ὑπὸ τῶν θεολόγων παραλαμβάνεται, χρυσῆ μέντοι, καθάπερ φασίν, ἐνδεικνύμενοι τὴν νοεράν αὐτῆς καὶ ἄχραντον οὐσίαν καὶ ἄλλοι καὶ ἀμιγῆ πρὸς τὴν γένεσιν, καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῆς διακρίνειν τὰ ἐστῶτα τῶν κινουμένων καὶ χωρίζειν κατὰ τὴν ἑτερότητα τὴν θείαν.

is participated in by all the gods in the cosmos (for the one Demiurge bids the young demiurges to interweave the mortal form of life with the immortal), and is completed among the gods presiding over generation, amidst whom there is Homer’s Circe, who weaves all of life in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ and at the same time makes the region under the moon harmonious with [her magic] songs.⁹ Among these weavers, then, also Circe is included by the theologians, indeed, the golden [one], as they say, thus indicating her intellectual and immaculate essence, both immaterial and unmingled with generation, as well as her task [which is] to discriminate the things at rest from those in motion, and to separate [them] according to divine difference.

⁵ The text is that of E. Diehl, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1903–6) and the translations (at times modified) are those of H. Tarrant, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, Volume 1: Book 1. Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis* (Cambridge, 2007); D. Baltzly, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, Volume 4: Book 3. Part 2. Proclus on the World Soul* (Cambridge, 2009); and H. Tarrant, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, Volume 6: Book 5. Proclus on the Gods of Generation and the Creation of Humans* (Cambridge, 2017). For recent discussions of Proclus’ monumental commentary, see M. Martijn, *Proclus on Nature: Philosophy of Nature and its Methods in Proclus’ Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* (Leiden and Boston, 2010); and E. Kutash, *Ten Gifts of the Demiurge: Proclus on Plato’s Timaeus* (London and New York, 2011).

⁶ T. Taylor, *The Commentaries of Proclus on the Timaeus of Plato in Five Books; Containing a Treasury of Pythagoric and Platonic Physiology*, 2 vols. (London, 1820), 135. The first instance is translated as ‘the four elements’, whereas the second as ‘the quadruple order of the elements’.

⁷ A.-J. Festugière, *Proclus: Commentaire sur le Timée*, vol. 3: *Livre 3* (Paris, 1967), 312 with n. 1. Again though, the former instance is rendered as ‘les quatre classes de vivants’, whereas the latter as ‘l’ordre quadruple des vivants’.

⁸ Baltzly (n. 5), 257 n. 552: ‘If the four genera of living creatures are at issue, how is the size of the sublunary area relative to the whole cosmos relevant? Moreover, one genus of the four is found throughout the cosmos—the visible heavenly gods.’ The scholar compellingly argues that τὸ τετράστοιχον refers to the four elements, as Proclus seeks to dispel a Peripatetic’s doubts.

⁹ It is probable, as Abbate (n. 3), 587 n. 224 points out, that here the general term φῶδῆ has the same meaning as ἐπιφῶδῆς.

This ingenious allegoresis of Circe enables Proclus not only to buttress his interpretation of Plato's dialogue with the authority of Homer but also to illustrate an important assumption of Neoplatonic metaphysics with the poet's beautiful and suggestive image of the enchantress. Circe is, then, deciphered as an encosmic deity who rules over the realm of coming to be and passing away, distributes life there and arranges the sublunary sphere into a harmonious whole. The sorceress is referred to as 'golden',¹⁰ because her nature remains undefiled by the contact with the material world even as she braids the eternal with the perishable.

While Proclus skilfully adapts the figure of Circe to the framework of his theology, her inclusion might have been prompted by the example in the lemma on which he comments: at *Cra.* 389b1–7 Socrates examines the problem of the intelligible Forms of artefacts, which he illustrates with the case of a 'shuttle' (κερκίς).¹¹ Given that the etymological connection between κερκίς and Circe appears (s.v. Κίρκη) in the *Suda*, the *Etymologicum Gudianum* and the *Etymologicum Magnum*, the association must have been quite natural for Proclus.¹² This helps explain why he refers to a deity absent from the Platonic dialogue that he investigates.¹³ Before we address the difficult question 'in what Circe weaves all of life', we have to briefly touch upon the thorny issue of the originality of Proclus' account of the enchantress.

By far the most popular Circe episode with ancient allegorists is the transformation of Odysseus' companions and the hero's miraculous resistance (*Od.* 10.233–335).¹⁴ Proclus himself adduces this episode in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*.¹⁵

¹⁰ Proclus might have posited some etymological connection between Κίρκη and χρύσεος (see Abbate [n. 3], 587 n. 226 but also n. 12 below).

¹¹ Most generally, Proclus argues (*In Cra.* §53, 21.10–11) that all 'artificial objects' (τεχνητά) are 'without essence' (ἀνούσια), since they can be altered freely. On this, see R.M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context: Ancient Theories of Language and Naming* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 148–51; and P. d'Hoine, 'Proclus and Syrianus on ideas of artefacts: a test case for Neoplatonic hermeneutics', in M. Perkams and R.M. Piccione (edd.), *Proklos: Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 279–302 (especially 292–301).

¹² See Tochtermann (n. 4), 84 n. 29. Duvick (n. 1), 127 n. 125, on the other hand, points to κερκίζειν, which, naturally, also appears frequently in the *Cratylus* (e.g. 387e1, 388a4, 389a8).

¹³ The *Commentary on the Cratylus* is different from Proclus' other commentaries in that it has come down to us in the form of 'useful extracts' (ἐκλογαὶ χρήσιμοι) from Proclus' 'scholia' (σχόλια) on Plato's *Cratylus* (see the manuscripts' title). While the commentary is thus a series of excerpts taken from the notes on Proclus' lecture, the identity of the student/compiler remains unknown (see e.g. Pasquali [n. 1], vi; Duvick [n. 1], 3; van den Berg [n. 11], 94; Abbate [n. 3], 50; and also M. Domaradzki, 'The lotus and the boat: Plutarch and Iamblichus on Egyptian symbols', *TAPhA* 151 [2021], 363–94, at 384 n. 66).

¹⁴ This topos has received substantial scholarly treatment. To the aforementioned studies (i.e. Buffière [n. 4]; Kaiser [n. 4]; Tochtermann [n. 4]; Yarnall [n. 4]), one could add R. Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1986), especially 41–2, 106–7, 115–19; and M. Domaradzki, 'Marrying Stoicism with Platonism? Pseudo-Plutarch's use of the Circe episode', *AJPh* 141 (2020), 211–39. Proclus' allegoresis of the weaving Circe, on the other hand, has been less fortunate (see n. 4 above). This may be due to the fact that many scholars examining Proclus' allegoresis have focussed primarily on his *Commentary on the Republic*: see e.g. the seminal studies by A.J. Friedl, *Die Homer-Interpretation des Neuplatonikers Proklos* (Würzburg, 1936); J.A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden, 1976); A.D.R. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen, 1980); Lambertson (n. 14); and R. Pichler, *Allegorese und Ethik bei Proklos: Untersuchungen zum Kommentar zu Platons Politeia* (Berlin, 2006).

¹⁵ The text is that of L.G. Westerink, *Proclus Diadochus: Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato* (Amsterdam, 1954) and the translation (at times modified) is that of W. O'Neill, *Proclus: Alcibiades I. A Translation and Commentary* (The Hague, 1971).

As he clarifies that embodiment is by no means natural to souls (256.10–257.9), Proclus quotes *Od.* 10.326 to illustrate that souls ‘clothed’ (ἡμπεριεσμέναι) in bodies which nevertheless strive to live an immaterial life in the world of generation ‘have drunk this potion but not been charmed’.¹⁶ Subsequently, Proclus puts forward an allegorical interpretation which presents (257.10–258.3) Circe as responsible for the realm of the earthly and for the transmigration of the souls.¹⁷ What is the relation between this account of the enchantress and the account Proclus offers in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*?

Scholars have variously answered this difficult question. Félix Buffière emphasizes the affinity between the two accounts.¹⁸ So does Erich Kaiser.¹⁹ But Sibylle Tochtermann stresses that the ‘Tenor’ between the two interpretations is quite different.²⁰ Undeniably, there is a correspondence between the two accounts, since in both cases Proclus assigns to Circe the realm of the earthly, that is, the world of becoming (*In Alc.* 257.13–14, *In Cra.* §53, 22.7–8). Thus in both commentaries the implication is that the soul’s descent into generation and its imprisonment in the body are as abominable as the transformation of Odysseus’ men into animals. Yet in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* the sorceress is not so much in charge of the cycle of metempsychosis but rather in charge of the cosmic weaving. Thus Proclus alludes here specifically to *Od.* 10.220–3, where Odysseus’ comrades arrive at Circe’s palace, hear the enchantress’ beautiful singing and see her great ‘imperishable’ (ἄμβροτος) web, which they immediately recognize as the work of a goddess. Tochtermann rightly observes that the moral dimension of Proclus’ allegoresis is not that conspicuous in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. At the same time, however, she overemphasizes the difference between the two accounts. If we seek to ascertain *in what* Circe weaves all of life, it is more fruitful to treat the two accounts as complementary and to read them in light of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the only other work by Proclus where τὸ τετράστοιχον appears.

¹⁶ Proclus quotes (*In Alc.* 257.9) Homer faithfully but with πῶς instead of ὡς. In his allegoresis, he equates (257.10) Circe’s drugs with ‘oblivion’ (λήθη), ‘error’ (πλάνη) and ‘ignorance’ (ἄγνοια), on which see further P. Lévêque, *Aurea Catena Homeri: une étude sur l’allégorie grecque* (Paris, 1959), 37 n. 1; Courcelle (n. 4), 29; and Tochtermann (n. 4), 82.

¹⁷ Proclus also combines the topic of the metamorphoses caused by the sorceress with a reference to the Platonic notion of ‘dissimilarity’ (ὀνομοιότης). However, Proclus speaks here (*In Alc.* 257.11) of the ‘region of unlikeness’ (ὀνομοιότητος τόπος), whereas what Plato has (*Plt.* 273d6–e1) is rather the ‘ocean of unlikeness’ (ὀνομοιότητος πόντος). While, curiously enough, the latter phrase also appears earlier in the *Commentary on the Alcibiades* (34.6), a useful discussion of this issue is given by e.g. Courcelle (n. 4), 27–9. The idea that Plato’s πόντος is to be interpreted in conjunction with the *Odyssey* can already be found in Numenius (fr. 33 des Places), on which see M. Domaradzki, ‘Of nymphs and sea: Numenius on souls and matter in Homer’s *Odyssey*’, *G&R* 67 (2020), 139–50, at 149.

¹⁸ Buffière (n. 4), 557. The scholar does not refer specifically to the *Commentary on the Alcibiades*, but suggests that Proclus’ interpretation of Circe as ‘une des divinités qui président à la génération’ is consistent with the Pythagorean-Platonic account where she ‘diriger la ronde des renaissances’ (discussed by him extensively at 500–20).

¹⁹ Kaiser (n. 4), 207: ‘im Prinzip ebenso, aber von einem anderen Ausgangspunkt herkommend’.

²⁰ Tochtermann (n. 4), 86 n. 37: ‘Hatte Proklos das Kirke-Abenteuer im *Alcibiades*-Kommentar in Verbindung mit der neuplatonischen Seelenwanderungslehre und den damit verbundenen moralischen Aspekten ausgelegt, so erklärt er im *Kratylos*-Kommentar die Gestalt der Zauberin—und nicht den ganzen Mythos bzw. die für diesen charakteristische Verwandlungsszene—auf dem Hintergrund neuplatonischer Theologie. Der so oft mit der Allegorese des Kirke-Mythos einhergehende moralisierende Unterton fehlt in diesem Kontext.’

Earlier scholars characterized Proclus' metaphysics as a convoluted and arbitrary development of Plotinus' thought.²¹ Laudably, the recent trend in research on the Lycian philosopher has been to seek to do justice to the originality and depth of his thought, as scholars have painstakingly reconstructed Proclus' rich and complex system of divinities.²² However, Circe's place in the hierarchy has so far received no scholarly attention. Given that the enchantress presides over the realm of γένεσις (*In Cra.* §53, 22.7–8, *In Alc.* 257.13–14), her weaving must be of the lower kind. Indeed, in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* Proclus counts Circe among the deities who *complete* the weaving in the world of becoming (§53, 22.7–8). She is, however, preceded by several other weaving deities: the young demiurges (22.4–6), Kore (22.1–3) and Athena (21.21–22.1). This suggests that Circe is a goddess in the series of Athena, whose power passes through the σείρά of Kore before it eventually reaches the sorceress.²³ A detailed investigation of all these weaving deities would take us deep into the maze of Proclus' polytheistic theology. Fascinating as this journey in itself might be, it would distract us from our modest purpose, which is to establish *in what* Circe weaves all of life. Accordingly, the ensuing discussion will be confined to the young gods, whose weaving is particularly relevant for the question of this paper.²⁴

When Proclus says (*In Cra.* §53, 22.4–6) that the one Demiurge orders the young demiurges to weave together the mortal and the immortal, he is referring to Plato, who introduces these νέοι θεοί at *Ti.* 42d6 to explain the genesis of mortal bodies: the Demiurge hands down the second creation to the young gods because, if he himself had produced the living creatures, they would be immortal (41c2–3). Yet before he passes the task of ζῶων δημιουργία over to his servants (41c4–5), the Demiurge clarifies (41c6–d2) that he had 'sown' (σπείρας) and 'instituted' (ὑπαρξάμενος) the divine part of the ζῶα, which he now delivers to the young gods so that they could weave onto it the mortal and thus generate the ζῶα proper. In his commentary on the dialogue, Proclus explains (*In Ti.* 3.233.13–234.5) that what the Demiurge 'sows' is the 'soul' (ψυχή), that is, a 'rational principle from rational principles' (λόγος ἐκ λόγων), which he 'institutes' by producing the 'vehicle' (ὄχημα) of the soul and the 'life' (ζωή) contained within it. Most generally, then, the one Demiurge engenders two eternal components of the ζῶα: the rational soul and the first vehicle. Onto

²¹ In his otherwise very helpful and in many aspects pioneering discussion of Proclus' allegoresis, Friedl (n. 14), 71, for example, passes the following judgement: 'Das in seiner klaren Konstruktion zu einer übersichtlichen Einheit verbundene Gedankengebäude Plotins ist bei Proklos zum Tummelplatz scholastizistischer Distinktionen und Teilungskünste geworden, für die auch das Prinzip der Entwicklung keine innere Begründung mehr geben konnte.'

²² See e.g. L.J. Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus: The Final Phase of Ancient Thought* (New York, 1949), especially 131–8, 151–6, 165–73; J. Opsomer, 'Proclus on demiurgy and procession: a Neoplatonic reading of the *Timaeus*', in M.R. Wright (ed.), *Reason and Necessity: Essays on Plato's Timaeus* (London, 2000), 113–43; R.M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden / Boston / Cologne, 2001), 35–43; J. Opsomer, 'La démiurgie des jeunes dieux selon Proclus', *LEC* 71 (2003), 5–49; and R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), 112–36. L. Brisson, *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe*, vol. 1: *Sauver les mythes* (Paris, 1996), 121–45 shows how Proclus integrates the gods of Homer and Hesiod with those of the Orphic and Chaldean theologies. See also L. Brisson, 'Proclus' theology', in P. d'Hoine and M. Martijn (edd.), *All From One: A Guide to Proclus* (Oxford, 2017), 207–22 with further references.

²³ A good overview of the particular 'chaînes divines chez Proclus' is offered by Lévêque (n. 16), 61–75.

²⁴ For a general discussion of these 'jeunes dieux', see Opsomer (n. 22 [2003]), 27–38. For an analysis of their δημιουργία in the specific context of *In Cra.*, see van den Berg (n. 11), 152–4.

these, the young gods weave the mortal, which comprises the irrational soul and the second vehicle. More specifically, though, the Demiurge creates the ‘highest pinnacles’ (ἀκρότητες) of the irrational life and their vehicle (both of which are eternal), whereas the young gods fashion the mortal extension of this irrational life and its perishable vehicle, which connects the immortal vehicle to the individual’s material body (3.236.31–237.14). Thus the first vehicle brings about the mortal irrational life in the second vehicle, which then gives rise to the various irrational faculties in the earthly body.²⁵

Hence if Plato has the Demiurge put every soul into one ὄχημα (*Ti.* 41e1–2), Proclus differentiates three distinct vehicles of the soul: (1) the first is ‘congenital’ (συμφυρές),²⁶ lasts forever and makes the soul encosmic; (2) the second is ‘pneumatic’ (πνευματικόν),²⁷ makes the soul a ‘citizen of generation’ (γενέσεως πολίτης), precedes and survives the body but is eventually jettisoned; and (3) the third is ‘shell-like’ (ὄστρεωδης),²⁸ makes the soul chthonic and endures only for the time of an individual life upon earth, since it changes with each rebirth.²⁹ Only the first indissoluble vehicle is engendered by the one Demiurge, whereas the two perishable ones are woven onto the first one by the young gods. Now, in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* Proclus specifies (§53, 22.7–8) that the weaving performed by the young demiurges is brought to an end by Circe and other deities in charge of generation. How could the enchantress’ weaving in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ be related to that of the young gods?

According to Plato (*Ti.* 42c4–d2), release from the cycle of reincarnation is only possible when reason triumphs over the ‘troublesome mass’ (πολὺς ὄχλος) which (1) has adhered to the soul ‘of fire, water, air and earth’ (ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος καὶ ἀέρος καὶ γῆς), and which (2) is further characterized as ‘turbulent’ (θορυβώδης) as well as ‘irrational’ (ἄλογος). When commenting on this difficult lemma, Proclus explains (*In Ti.* 3.297.21–3) that ‘souls descending to earth take on from the elements one type of garments after another: airy, watery, earthy’ (εἰς γῆν κατιούσαι γὰρ αἱ ψυχαὶ προσλαμβάνουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων ἄλλους καὶ ἄλλους χιτῶνας, ἀερίους ἐνυδρίους χθονίους).³⁰ Proclus thus equates Plato’s troublesome mass of the four elements with ‘the second vehicle (δεύτερον ὄχημα) and the life (ζωή) within it’.³¹ While this pneumatic vehicle forms around the soul during its descent through the celestial spheres, it weathers through the round of rebirths until the soul cleanses itself

²⁵ A detailed survey of these ‘irrationale Vermögen’ is provided by J. Opsomer, ‘Was sind irrationale Seelen?’, in M. Perkams and R.M. Piccione (edd.), *Proklos: Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 136–66, at 140–7.

²⁶ Alternatively referred to as αἰθέριον (e.g. *In Ti.* 1.5.15), ἀύγοιδέες (e.g. *In Ti.* 2.81.21) or ἀστροειδέες (e.g. *In Ti.* 3.195.5).

²⁷ For the term, see e.g. *In Ti.* 3.234.11, 3.237.25, 3.238.20, 3.331.7.

²⁸ This designation builds on *Phdr.* 250c6, where Plato says that we are imprisoned in our body in the manner of an ‘oyster’ (ὄστρεον). While another term for this vehicle is ὄστρεῖνον (e.g. *In Ti.* 3.285.5), Opsomer (n. 25), 148 n. 55 compares *Phlb.* 21c8, where the irrational life is portrayed precisely in terms of ‘shell-like’ (ὄστρεῖνον) bodies.

²⁹ The above characterization is based on *In Ti.* 3.298.27–299.4. For Proclus’ three vehicles, see e.g. Rosán (n. 22), 194–8; J. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris, 1982), 220–1; L. Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh, 1996), 131–3; Opsomer (n. 25), 147–52; Chlup (n. 22), 104–5; I. Ramelli, ‘Proclus and apokatastasis’, in D.D. Butorac and D.A. Layne (edd.), *Proclus and his Legacy* (Berlin and Boston, 2017), 95–122, at 113–17.

³⁰ See also *In Ti.* 1.112.21–2, where Proclus, in a similar vein, says that ‘descending souls clothe themselves in many garments: airy or watery, but also fiery’ (πολλοὺς γὰρ αἱ ψυχαὶ κατιούσαι περιβάλλονται χιτῶνας, ἀερίους ἢ ἐνυδρίους, αἱ δὲ καὶ ἐμπυρίους).

³¹ He states this explicitly at *In Ti.* 3.320.20–2, but see also the entire discussion at 3.297.21–300.20.

of its irrationality. Yet although the second vehicle precedes and survives the body, its formation overlaps with that of the third vehicle.³²

Most importantly, however, the *Commentary on the Timaeus* makes it clear (3.320.14–15) that both the body and the pneumatic vehicle are made of the four elements. Indeed, Proclus states in no uncertain terms (3.320.18–26) that the two perishable vehicles differ primarily in the variety of their garments, for the organic body is not ‘merely a complex of simple (ἐκ τῶν ἀπλῶν) elements but also of homoiomerous (ἐκ τῶν ὁμοιομερῶν) ones’.³³ Proclus makes interesting use of the Anaxagorean notion of homoiomerics³⁴ to show that, while the second and the third vehicles are obviously not identical, they are nevertheless both aggregates of the four elements. The crucial difference is that the shell-like vehicle forms through the accretion of additional elemental vestures.

The above account of incarnation could be corroborated by many passages of Proclus, but suffice it to cite here the *Elements of Theology*.³⁵ In this work, the soul’s vehicle is also said (§209, 182.16–17) to descend ‘by the addition of garments increasingly material’ (προσθέσει χιτῶνων ἐνυλοτέρων) and the descent itself is likewise presented (182.19–20) as being due to the soul’s ‘acquisition of irrational lives’ (ἀλόγους προσλαβοῦσα ζωάς). This is consistent with what Proclus says in the *Commentary on the Timaeus*. As a matter of fact, in his groundbreaking edition, E.R. Dodds points precisely to *In Ti.* 3.298.1, where the soul’s second vehicle is ἐκ παντοδαπῶν χιτῶνων συγκείμενον, which means—as the scholar acutely observes—that ‘it consists of successive layers of the four elements, which are successively attached to the immortal vehicle in the course of the soul’s descent’.³⁶ Hence the

³² As Opsomer (n. 25), 151 points out: ‘Weder das pneumatische Fahrzeug noch der irdische Körper noch die mit ihnen verbundenen Lebensfunktionen bilden sich spontan. Im *Timaios* überschneiden sich hier zwei Beschreibungstypen: Einerseits erwerben die Seelen selbst ihre Körper und niederen Lebensfunktionen und gestalten diese selbst; bei ihrem Abstieg beispielsweise kleiden sie sich in übereinander gelagerte Schichten der vier Elemente—die so genannten Hüllen (χιτῶνες), die materieller werden, je tiefer die Seelen absinken. Andererseits sind es die jungen Götter, die sich um die Schöpfung des Sterblichen kümmern und die den Körper und die irrationale Seelengestalt anfertigen.’

³³ Proclus makes the same point at *In Ti.* 3.321.1–7, where he clarifies that the young gods create the vehicles for the irrational souls (i.e. Plato’s troublesome mass) by taking ‘the simple’ (τὰ ἀπλά) elements, which they then ‘glue together’ (κολλῶντες) to thus generate ‘the homoiomerics’ (τὰ ὁμοιομερῆ), whose composition is therefore also ‘from the four elements’ (ἐκ τῶν τεττάρων στοιχείων).

³⁴ See e.g. DK 59 A 43, 45, 46.

³⁵ The text along with translation (at times modified) is that of E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology. A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1963).

³⁶ Dodds (n. 35), 307. J.F. Finamore and E. Kutash, ‘Proclus on the *psychê*: world soul and the individual soul’, in P. d’Hoine and M. Martijn (edd.), *All From One: A Guide to Proclus* (Oxford, 2017), 122–38 have criticized Dodds’s statement as misleading on the grounds that the pneumatic vehicle ‘is made from the ethereal envelopes of the planetary bodies (which are, of course ethereal, not material)’ (138 n. 40). However, *In Ti.* 3.320.14–321.7 (discussed above) Proclus specifies that both the body and the second vehicle are established ἐκ τῶν στοιχείων. Furthermore, as Ramelli (n. 29), 116 n. 71 notes, Proclus often uses the term ἄυλος in a relative sense, that is, ‘not meaning without matter or body in an absolute sense, but as compared with heavy earthly bodies’. Given its intermediary status between the first immaterial vehicle and the third material one, the pneumatic vehicle should be seen as a transitional stage between the two extremes. For a classic discussion of the semi-corporeal (i.e. ‘on the borderline between spirit and matter’) πνεῦμα/ὄχημα in Porphyry and the later Neoplatonists, see A. Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague, 1974), 152–8. On the different modalities or gradations of the four elements in general, see Siorvanes (n. 29), 232–5; and D. Baltzly, ‘What goes up: Proclus against Aristotle on the fifth element’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80 (2002), 261–87, at 273–5.

Elements of Theology also account for the formation of the soul's vehicles in terms of the elemental vestures.

If we now turn to Circe's weaving in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ, we shall see that it is challenging to determine whether Proclus conceived of the sorceress as involved in the weaving of the second or of the third vehicle, since what he says in his *Commentary on the Alcibiades* can be interpreted in either way. A strong case can be made for the fleshly garments.³⁷ Given that souls are explicitly characterized (257.3–4) as 'clothed in bodies' (ἡμπεσμένα ... σώματα), it is probable that Proclus had precisely these corporeal tunics in mind when he spoke of Circe weaving all of life in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ. On the other hand, the pneumatic vehicle along with the mortal manifestation of irrationality cannot be ruled out, since the accounts of the formation of the second and of the third vehicles intersect.³⁸ Thus when Proclus diagnoses (257.14–258.1) that many embodied souls are ensnared by Circe's draught because of their 'immoderate desire' (ἄμετρος ἐπιθυμία), we may construe this as implying that the enchantress participates in the weaving of the second vehicle and its life. Since the soul must vanquish the troublesome mass through reason, it is no surprise that Proclus gives (258.1–3) Hermes,³⁹ who symbolizes 'reason' (λόγος) and 'knowledge' (ἐπιστήμη), as the antidote to the sorceress' potion and charm.⁴⁰

Be that as it may, the crucial point is that both the pneumatic vehicle and the shell-like one are composed of τῶν τετάρων στοιχείων. The two differ primarily in the character of their χιτώνων, since the second vehicle is made of simple elements, whereas the organic body consists of homoiomerous ones. This strongly suggests that, when Proclus has Circe weave all of life in τῷ τετραστοίχῳ, what is meant are not the four genera but the four elements. It is these elemental vestures that weigh the soul down to the realm of generation.

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³⁷ Although he only briefly mentions Circe's 'tissage' and does not discuss Proclus' allegoresis of the enchantress in depth, Buffière (n. 4), 557 is inclined to this view: 'Or, qu'est-ce que naître, pour une âme, sinon voir se tisser autour d'elle, tel le cocon autour du ver à soie, les réseaux de nerfs, de veines, d'artères, et toute la trame de chair qui formera son corps?'

³⁸ See n. 32 above.

³⁹ To be more precise, Proclus speaks here (*In Alc.* 258.2) of those who 'in their nature are followers of Hermes' (Ἑρμαϊκοὶ τὴν φύσιν εἰσίν).

⁴⁰ This interpretation of Hermes was a commonplace in the allegorical tradition, on which see Domaradzki (n. 14), especially 220–2, 228–30.