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Daniele Tripaldi
Lots, Cups, and Ecstasy:
Towards a Reconstruction of the ‘Thiasoi’ of Marcus, Disciple of Valentinus

Before the comprehensive work of Niclas Förster came out, Marcus, disciple of Valentinus, whom Irenaeus labeled ‘the magician’, had been living a shadowy existence at the margins of scholarly debates on Christian origins, being devoted just a few, sketchy remarks within the broader framework of histories and surveys of ‘Gnosticism’ in general, and of ‘Valentinianism’, in particular¹. Following as he does in the footsteps of C. Marksches and W.A. Löhr, Förster must be given credit for having made the first – and so far, to my knowledge, still the only – attempt to gain a fresh and deep-ranging critical look into Marcus’ historical figure and activity *on their own*: he placed under scrutiny the evidence at our disposal and discussed its reliability; he provided Irenaeus’ report (*Haer.* I, 13, 1-16, 2), our oldest source, with an extensive commentary, at the same time integrating ‘Hippolytus’ complementary information (*Ref.* VI, 39, 1-54, 2) into his analysis, at least as far as the latter can be shown not to depend on, and even to deliberately ignore the former². Conclusions were then drawn, and results collected, in order to profile Marcus’ theology as well as to bring to the fore the «innersten „Antriebskräfte“ der Markosierreligiosität [...] und derjenigen Christlichkeit, die sie für sich beanspruchte», within the context of 2nd-3rd century CE ‘Gnostic syncretism’³: here the limits of his work appear in all their evidence, from here new researches can set out⁴.

Moving from Förster’s monograph, in the first part of the article, I shall briefly sketch where we stand now in studying Marcus and the movement he founded and took the lead of; in the second

¹ See the introduction in N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 1-5. For a critical evaluation of Förster’s work, see J.-D. DUBOIS, « Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Apocrypha* 12 (2001), p. 286-287, and A. MAGRIS, « Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Adamantius* 7 (2001), p. 343-347. E. THOMASSEN, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the «Valentinians»*, Leiden-Boston, MA, 2006, p. 498-500; J.-D. DUBOIS, « Gnose et manichéisme. I. Recherches sur le gnostique valentinien Marc le Mage. II. Le manichéens dans l’oasis de Kellis. III. Conférences d’introduction: figures gnostiques de Jésus », *Annuaire EPHE, Sciences Religieuses* 115 (2006-2007), p. 209-215, here 209-211 ; B.A. PEARSON, *Ancient Gnosticism. Traditions and Literature*, Minneapolis, MN, 2007, p. 168-173; I. DUNDERBERG, « The School of Valentinus », in A. MARJANEN – P. LUOMANEN (eds.), *A Companion to Second Century Christian “Heretics”*, Leiden, 2008, p. 64-99, here 82-83, quote and discuss his monograph as well, Thomassen even collecting some more piece of disputed evidence on Marcus which was neglected by Förster (see THOMASSEN, *ibid.*, p. 498 n. 28). N. FÖRSTER, « Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis », in A.D. DECONICK – G. SHAW – J.D. TURNER (eds.), *Practicing Gnosis. Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, Leiden, 2013, p. 433-448, just summarizes and re-asserts the results of his earlier analysis.

² I’m summing up the plan of chapters 1 through 5. Cp. N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 1 (and n.1!).5, and the judgment of J.-D. DUBOIS, « Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Apocrypha* 12 (2001), p. 286.

³ N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. v.

⁴ See J.-D. DUBOIS, « Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Apocrypha* 12 (2001), p. 286-287. A useful criticism of the implications of the concept of ‘syncretism’ presupposed by Förster can be found in A. MAGRIS, « Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Adamantius* 7 (2001), p. 346.

part, I shall make the attempt to give my own contribution to enriching our understanding of their ritual meals and practices, through and despite of Irenaeus' lenses.

Back to the 'historical Marcus'.

In order to free Marcus' historical figure from the heresiological accretions and deformations it has been attracting, it seems appropriate to begin by focusing on the epithets his name was associated with from the start, so as to question the definitions traditionally imposed on him by Irenaeus and his followers as well as by modern scholars⁵.

We find ourselves in the privileged position to still have some of Marcus' own self-definitions to read: before turning into a 'magician' and a 'gnostic', teacher of further 'gnostics', in the eyes of others, Marcus «boasted» to be τοῦ διδασκάλου διορθωτής («corrector of his teacher») the «teacher» being most probably Valentinus (Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 13, 1)⁶. Furthermore, on a deeper level, he regarded himself as the μονογενής, the one and only «womb and vessel of Σιγή»: he was invested with such a new identity and special status in the due course of a visionary experience that he had and that he then wrote down to sanction the transformation he had undergone. The autobiographical account relating such experience in the form of a lengthy treatise meant to expound and legitimize his teachings eventually came into Irenaeus' hands who excerpted some passages from it, and summed others up (Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 14, 1)⁷. By identifying and analyzing the sources and traditions his revelation builds upon, it turns out that Marcus' teachings and the rituals embodying and actualizing them, his personal «problematic relationship» with Valentinus⁸, must all be understood against the background of 2nd-3rd century CE Christian 'propheticism' in Asia Minor: the most prominent feature at least of Marcus' vision and prophetic activity, elements of philosophical education helped him not only shaping his revelatory experience but also recalling and putting its contents into writing⁹.

Subsequent accusations of practicing sorcery and being a 'magician' originated probably as a result of such a search for contact and union with the divine, a search indeed that Marcus and his

⁵ If a critical point needs to be made here, Förster doesn't show much of a critical consciousness in dealing with heresiological texts and representations – at least not as much as C. MARKSCHIES, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, Tübingen, 1992, p. 388-407, and W.A. LÖHR, *Basilides und seine Schule. Eine Studie zur Theologie- und Kirchengeschichte des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen, 1996, p. 324-337, his models, did contesting older images of Valentinus and Basilides, respectively.

⁶ N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 55-57, reasonably speculates that Irenaeus is depending here on an older Valentinian tradition, most probably going back to Marcus himself. The use of καυχάομαι ('to boast') as introduction to Marcus' own claim is obviously Irenaeus' choice, due to the negative connotations of the verb (FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 57 and n. 15).

⁷ FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 165.

⁸ C. MARKSCHIES, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, Tübingen, 1992, p. 392, so qualifies the complex interplay of continuity and discontinuity, which can be ascertained between Valentinus' thought as echoed in his authentic fragments, and its further developments by his disciples (see *ibid.*, p. 392-402).

⁹ For a brief survey on the sources of Marcus' thought, see N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 391-399, recapitulating his previous analysis. Further insightful remarks in E. THOMASSEN, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the «Valentinians»*, Leiden-Boston, MA, 2006, p. 499-500. As far as the penetration of philosophical thinking and language into contemporary 'prophetic' and oracular practices is concerned, R. LANE-FOX, *Pagani e cristiani*, Roma-Bari, 2006 (orig.: *Pagans and Christians*, London 1986), p. 174-208 and 254-263, has collected much of the available evidence and commented on it. Parallels with activity and rites of oracular centers, as well as with ancient theories of ritual action, are hinted at already in FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 80-81.113-115.130-131. Cf. A. MAGRIS, «Review of N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999 », *Adamantius* 7 (2001), p. 346. V.-E. HIRSCHMANN, *Horrenda Secta. Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Montanismus und seinen Verbindungen zur paganen Religion Phrygiens*, Stuttgart, 2005, p. 86-92 and 98-123, instead, limits herself to focusing on the relationship between Christian 'propheticism' and ancient mantic as exemplified in the case of the New Prophecy.

disciples pursued within a context of marginality and heightened conflict with other groups of Jesus' followers in the area; accusations were further 'ascertained' and corroborated on the basis of the confessions of women who had formerly belonged to Marcus' following, had by then repented and charged Marcus with leading them astray from the family and the *ekklesia* by virtue of strange, 'magical' potions and rituals (Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 13, 5-7)¹⁰. After all, if practicing philosophy was intended as ἐξετάζειν περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (Justin, *Dial.* 1, 3; cf. Plutarch, *Is.Os.* 351a-352c) and actively engaging in the *communio loquendi cum deis immortalibus* (Apuleius, *Ap.* 25-27.54-55), whatever form it may have taken, it follows that «any abnormal interest» in the numinous sphere leading to 'abnormal' or competitive ritual practices in the eye of the beholder might theoretically bring the practitioner to incur the suspicion of indulging in 'magic' or at least make her case suitable for such an accusation¹¹. It goes without saying that in Marcus' case 'ab-normal' and competitive means nothing more than deviating from and challenging the very norm which Irenaeus and his informants accept as authoritative and binding, identifying it with the 'apostolic' and ecclesiastical tradition he himself follows (see *Haer.* I, 13, 4-6). Perhaps drawing on the penitents' confessions, a presbyter of Asia Minor began composing iambs against the newborn 'magician' (*Haer.* I, 15, 6): a first front opposing Marcus emerged, as well as a first trajectory of rumors, uncontrolled gossips, and accusations.

The history of Marcus and his followers can still be glimpsed at through this chain of tradents and information: between 160-180 CE, according to Förster¹², groups of Marcus' followers developed as prophetic movement, at first wandering from town to town and spreading throughout Asia Minor, within or in close proximity to the *ekklesiai* Irenaeus acknowledges as 'orthodox'. Marcus' disciples would enter homes in search for hospitality and gain material and economical support from well-off hosts, both men and women (*Haer.* I, 13, 1); then, *thiasoi* would start flourishing (*ibid.* I, 13, 3-6)¹³.

A few years later, by the last quarter of 2nd century CE, we find Marcus' followers having already made their way into the Rhone valley, once again wedging themselves in the everyday life of the local *ekklesiai*. As he now gets more and more directly involved, not only does Irenaeus collect personal accounts of 'conversion' and repentance, 'apostasy' and hesitation on the fringe (*ibid.* I, 13, 4-5.7), he also recalls and reports the iambs of the aforementioned Asian presbyter mocking and rebuking Marcus (*ibid.* I, 13, 3 and 15, 6). Working on this 'evidence', he then draws the line between two different communities, thereby rhetorically creating them¹⁴. One is left to wonder

¹⁰ On such a self-defense strategy enacted by women under charge or process for abnormal, often illicit sexual behavior, cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Hist.* XXVIII, 1, 48-50, and Jerome, *Vit. Hilar.* 12.

¹¹ I follow F. GRAF, *La magia nel mondo antico*, Roma-Bari, 1995 (orig.: *La magie dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine. Idéologie et pratique*, Parigi, 1994), p. 85, who paraphrases M. Mauss and refers to the case of Boetius, accused of *sacrilegium* and *maleficium* according to *De cons. phil.* I, 4, 134-148 (n. 65). Cf. the portraits of Jesus 'the magician' sketched by Celsus in Origen, *CC* I, 6.28.38; Arnobius, *Adv. nat.* 43, 1; bSanhedrin 43a. D.E. AUNE, « Magic in Early Christianity », *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II/26.2 (1980), p. 1507-1557; M. MEYER – P. MIRECKI (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, Leiden-New York, NY-Köln, 1995; P. MIRECKI – M. MEYER (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Leiden-Boston, MA-Köln, 2002; P. BUSCH, *Magie in neutestamentlicher Zeit*, Göttingen, 2006, offer a more comprehensive perspective on modern study of ancient 'magic'.

¹² For his part, J. REILING, « Marcus Gnosticus and the New Testament: Eucharist and Prophecy », in T. BAARDA – A.F.J. KLIJN – W.C. VAN UNNIK (eds.), *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* I, Leiden, 1978, p. 161-179, here 162, dates Marcus' *floruit* «at approximately 160-170 AD».

¹³ See A. FAIVRE – C. FAIVRE, « La place des femmes dans le rituel eucharistique des Marcosiens: déviance ou archaïsme? », *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 71/3 (1997), p. 310-328; N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 58.84-85.122-124.136-137; I. DUNDERBERG, « The School of Valentinus », in A. MARJANEN – P. LUOMANEN (eds.), *A Companion to Second Century Christian "Heretics"*, Leiden, 2008, p. 83. However, Irenaeus' almost obsessive insistence on Marcus' success among and fascination on women should be better accounted for as heresiological *topos* exaggerating and distorting Marcus' actual intellectual appeal on his hosts (see once and for all FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, 58.124-126.137-138).

¹⁴ On Irenaeus' knowledge of the Marcosians, cf. succinctly M.J. JONCAS, « Eucharist Among the Marcosians: A Study of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* I, 13:2 », *Questions Liturgiques* 71 (1990), p. 99-111, here 101-102.

whether such a line presupposes an actual process of parting already on its way or embodies just an attempt to impose difference from the outside on a still fluid reality – and porous boundary¹⁵.

Be that as it may, at the beginnings of the 3rd century CE, ‘Hippolytus’ had the chance to get in touch with Roman followers of Marcus’ who had evidently read Irenaeus’ report and were contesting its reliability. ‘Hippolytus’ informants bear witness to one or more groups of Marcus’ followers where new ‘converts’ were baptized at the outcome of a preliminary catechetical and preparatory phase, and a second immersion, perhaps for internal cohesion’s sake, was possibly practiced. Such (a) group(s) was (were) hierarchically structured: ἐπίσκοποι – whatever the term may here imply – were appointed at the top of the hierarchy in order to grant continuity through time in ritual praxis and transmit esoteric teachings, as exemplified in ‘Hippolytus’ account on the ἀπολύτρωσις (*Ref.* VI, 42, 1 and 41, 2-5)¹⁶. As a matter of fact, therefore, any attempt to come to terms with the discrepancies between Irenaeus’ and ‘Hippolytus’ notices on the formula to be recited during the ἀπολύτρωσις should not exclude the possibility of local variants and/ or historical developments of one and the same religious practice and of the verbal formulas accompanying it¹⁷.

The question of the relationship of our two main sources on Marcus here just hinted at brings me directly to the second part of my contribution.

The historical Marcus and his followers: banquets and ritual(s) of ecstasy.

As far as concrete ritual praxis among Marcus’ followers is concerned, Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 13, 2-4, and ‘Hippolytus’, *Ref.* VI, 39, 2 – 40, still provide the fundamental information for any historical reconstruction: both texts lie at the end of the long, complex and multi-phase process of transmission I have attempted to outline, and thus need to be put under scrutiny anew.

‘Hippolytus’ himself openly confesses he has read Irenaeus (cf. *Ref.* VI, 42, 1), but at the same time admits he has made autonomous research in Rome on a few points of Irenaeus’ refutation which Marcus’ followers contested (*ibid.*). I will then briefly add a few comments on the distinctive tendencies of the two reports, their convergences and their differences¹⁸.

Most strikingly, Irenaeus seems to have deliberately moved the formula to be spoken on the mix of wine and water from the description of the rite (I, 13, 2) and replaced it with a caricatured dialogue between the ‘magician’ and his female victim (I, 13, 3). The latter was evidently staged to target Marcus with charges of circumvention and sexual abuses, as well as to expose the successful propagation of the prophetic activity he promotes as a mix of astute trickery on his side and overexcitability on his female disciples¹⁹. For his part, ‘Hippolytus’ omits both the formula and the dialogue, and has only one rite to report. I wonder then whether *Haer.* I, 13, 2 and I, 13, 3 might actually reflect not two separate rituals, but rather two complementary stages of one single ritual, consisting of the ‘transcoloration’ and the multiplication of wine – I shall turn to demonstrating such hypothesis in a while²⁰. Furthermore: what are we to make of the πολλάκις in ‘Hippolytus’, *Ref.* VI,

¹⁵ N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 132-133.138.159.402-404, counts with a two phase historical development from Gnostic “Zirkel” within already existing Christian *ekklesiai*, as Irenaeus relates, to a separated Gnostic “Gemeinde”, as documented by ‘Hippolytus’. Interesting as it is, his thesis needs further investigation and probably even revision, since it rests too much on Irenaeus’ own categories and polemical *topoi*, such as the opposition Gnostic-Christian and the theme of the supposed ‘double life’ (402: «Doppelexistenz») of the elitist ‘heretics’.

¹⁶ E. THOMASSEN, *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the «Valentinians»*, Leiden-Boston, MA, 2006, p. 500 n. 35, advises caution with respect to Förster’s suggestion of growing hierarchisation among Marcosians.

¹⁷ N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 153-158, reduces the analysis of the two parallels to an a-historical and a-geographical literary model (dependence; contradictoriness; preference accorded to one source against the other).

¹⁸ For a thorough investigation, see FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 26-31.

¹⁹ FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 72-73 and 116-117.

²⁰ W. BOUSSET, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, Göttingen, 1907, p. 315-317, supposed that words and liturgical sections preserved in *Haer.* I, 13, 2 and I, 13, 3 might have actually belonged to the one single celebration of the sacrament of the bridal chamber. See also M.J. JONCAS, «Eucharist Among the Marcosians: A Study of Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses*

39, 2, qualifying the single ritual he relates as recurrent, against Irenaeus' notice depicting it as an unrepeatable rite, once and for all valid for any single individual who had undergone it, that is, as a rite of initiation²¹? Are we supposed to regard 'Hippolytus' assumption of recursiveness in the ritual's performance and recursiveness as such as a later development, which was *a posteriori* dated back to the master's lifetime in order to invent a 'tradition' and authoritatively found a 'new' widespread practice²²?

I shall leave these two last questions unanswered until my hypothesis is demonstrated and conclusions are drawn on that basis. I wish now to focus first on the socio-religious form the group and its gatherings assumed.

Irenaeus' definitions of the former as *thiasos* and of the latter as *deipna* (I, 13, 4) make sure that Marcus' followers indulged in an intense cult-oriented symposial activity, or were perceived to do so (cf. 'Hippolytus', *Ref.* VI, 40.4 and 41, 1)²³. So far they do not considerably differ from other early Christian groups²⁴. The use of lots to determine who is going to prophesy belongs to such socio-cultural scenario as well: on the one hand, it reminds of the practice of extracting lots in order to choose who was going to drink first at and lead a banquet (see, e.g., Ovid, *Ars* I, 581-583); on the other hand, it was probably intended to impose some order onto chaotic and uncontrolled bursts of 'pneumatic gifts', manifesting themselves as those already addressed by Paul one century earlier (*I Cor* 14, 26-33)²⁵.

Turning now to the ritual itself, I still find convincing Förster's impressive demonstration that «das erste Tranksakrament mit dem Farbumwandlung aus Adv. haer. I 13, 2 und die in Adv. haer. I 13, 3 überlieferte Kultformel zusammengehören» and that Irenaeus «die Beschreibung der Zeremonie von der dazugehörigen Anrufung der Charis getrennt tradiert hat»²⁶. However, a more careful synoptic reading of those two paragraphs has in the meantime led me to the conviction that the comparative analysis could be brought even further and would shed new light on the ritual action as it actually took place: *Haer.* I, 13, 2 and I, 13, 3 appear to run parallel, if not specular, to each other with respect to themes and structure far beyond Förster's first findings, such as to almost integrate and fill up one another's omissions, blanks, and brief hints.

I hope the following synopsis will immediately highlight my point:

I, 13:2 », *Questions Liturgiques* 71 (1990), p. 109-111, who advanced the hypothesis of a single Eucharistic rite consisting of a first invocatory section prayed by Marcus (*Haer.* I, 13, 2), and a second, separate thanksgiving prayed by Marcus' female followers (*Haer.* I, 13, 3). Contesting Bousset, J. REILING, « Marcus Gnosticus and the New Testament: Eucharist and Prophecy », in T. BAARDA – A.F.J. KLIJN – W.C. VAN UNNIK (eds.), *Miscellanea Neotestamentica* I, Leiden, 1978, p. 171, envisaged instead two different ritual actions. He saw nonetheless a connection between them in the fact that «the first Charis-communication is intended for the whole community of πνευματικοί, and the second only for those who will be initiated in prophecy, the πνευματικώτατοι». FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 84-85, has no doubts assuming two distinct rituals either. H. SCHMID, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus. Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3)*, Leiden-Boston, MA, 2007, p. 394-405, here 397, maintains that we are dealing with two versions of the Eucharist.

²¹ I present the alternative as FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 66-69, understands and puts it. Its radicalism has already been questioned by SCHMID, *ibid.*, p. 404-405.

²² Cf., e.g., *I Cor* 11, 23-26 and *Lk* 22, 14-20 with *Mk* 14, 22-25 and *Mt* 26, 26-30.

²³ Irenaeus' use of the term *thiasos* has undoubtedly polemical undertones, reflecting as it does the image of a seductive and appealing leader attracting exclusively female followers. Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* IV, 79; Euripides, *Bacch.* 136; Theocritus, *Id.* 26, 2; Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 291a; Aelius Aristides, *Dion.* 30, 17 Jebb; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* I, 2, 2, 7.

²⁴ See H.-J. KLAUCK, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum ersten Korintherbrief*, Münster, 1982; P. LAMPE, « Das Korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer *Theologia Crucis* (1Kor 1, 17-34) », *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1991), p. 183-213; D.E. SMITH, *From Symposium to Eucharist. The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis, MN, 2003.

²⁵ N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 131, pleads for the influence of ancient oracular practices for the choice of the divining priest or priestess as attested, for example, in Didyma and Delphi.

²⁶ FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 64-126, here 72. See also *ibid.*, p. 400-401.

I, 13, 2, 1-9

Ποτήριον οἶνω κεκραμένον προσποιούμενος εὐχαριστεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ πλέον ἐκτείνων τὸν λόγον τῆς ἐπικλήσεως πορφύρεα καὶ ἐρυθρὰ ἀναφαίνεσθαι ποιεῖ, ὡς δοκεῖν τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὅλα Χάριν τὸ αἶμα τὸ ἑαυτῆς στάζειν ἐν τῷ ἐκείνου ποτηρίῳ διὰ τῆς ἐπικλήσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑπεριμείρεσθαι τοὺς παρόντας ἐξ ἐκείνου γεύσασθαι τοῦ πόματος, ἵνα καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐπομβρήση ἢ διὰ τοῦ μάγου τούτου κληζομένη Χάρις.

I, 13, 3, 24-40

Εἰκὸς δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ δαίμονά τινα πάρεδρον ἔχειν, δι' οὗ αὐτὸς τε προφητεῦειν δοκεῖ καὶ ὅσας ἀξίας ἠγεῖται γενέσθαι μετόχους τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ προφητεῦειν ποιεῖ. Μάλιστα γὰρ περὶ γυναῖκας ἀσχολεῖται καὶ τούτων τὰς εὐπαρύφους καὶ περιπορφύρους καὶ πλουσιωτάτας, ἃς πολλάκις ὑπάγεσθαι πειρώμενος, κολακεύων φησὶν αὐταῖς μεταδοῦναι σοι θέλω τῆς ἐμῆς Χάριτος, ἐπειδὴ ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων τὸν ἄγγελόν σου διὰ παντὸς βλέπει πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ. Ὁ δὲ τόπος τοῦ Μεγέθους ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστὶ δεῖ ἡμᾶς εἰς τὸ ἐν καταστήναι. Λάμβανε πρῶτον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ καὶ δι' ἐμοῦ τὴν Χάριν. εὐτρέπισον σεαυτὴν ὡς νύμφη ἐκδεχομένη τὸν νυμφίον ἑαυτῆς, ἵνα ἔσῃ ὁ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ ὁ σύ. Καθίδρυσον ἐν τῷ νυμφῶνί σου τὸ σπέρμα τοῦ φωτός. Λάβε παρ' ἐμοῦ τὸν νυμφίον καὶ χώρησον αὐτὸν καὶ χωρήθητι ἐν αὐτῷ. Ἰδοὺ, ἢ Χάρις κατήλθεν ἐπὶ σέ· ἀνοιξὸν τὸ στόμα σου καὶ προφήτευσον.

In 13, 2, 1-9 we hear of an invocation to *Charis* and in 13, 3, 30-40 we do find one. Both are pronounced in order to bestow *Charis* (cp. ἵνα καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐπομβρήση ἢ διὰ τοῦ μάγου τούτου κληζομένη Χάρις with ὅσας ἀξίας ἠγεῖται γενέσθαι μετόχους τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ, followed by a γάρ sentence introducing the formula). I assume with Förster that the two *epicleseis* are actually one and the same speech act and that 13, 3, 24-40 is the very text missing in 13, 2, 1-9: Irenaeus transmits the supposed description of the action apart from the words of the invocation accompanying it in order both to set the stage for a fake 'Eucharist' rite (13, 2, 1-19) and to mimic the exchange between the magician and his victim (13, 3, 24-44)²⁷. Action and words however originally belonged together as components of a single coherent phase of the rite. The use of the verb *lambano* and of the prepositions *dia* and *apo* in the text of the invocation seems indeed to presuppose some act of reaching and taking as well as the existence of something to be reached and taken respectively, which we could now quite safely identify with the mixed cup of wine and water mentioned in 13, 2, 1-2. In 13, 2, 9 women appear next on stage as Marcus commands them to *eucharistein*: such a command evidently reflects and condenses the last two open injunctions addressed to a bystanding woman in 13, 3, 39-40 (ἀνοιξὸν τὸ στόμα σου καὶ προφήτευσον) and reiterated in 13, 3, 43-44²⁸.

²⁷ Despite the objections raised by H. SCHMID, *Die Eucharistie ist Jesus. Anfänge einer Theorie des Sakraments im koptischen Philippusevangelium (NHC II 3)*, Leiden-Boston, MA, 2007, p. 401-405, I still find FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 66-69.74-75, persuasive in basically arguing that the Marcosian rite is not to simply equate with a Eucharistic meal, at least as Irenaeus or later 'orthodox' authors understood it. See also J.-D. DUBOIS, « Gnose et manichéisme. I. Recherches sur le gnostique valentinien Marc le Mage. II. Le manichéens dans l'oasis de Kellis. III. Conférences d'introduction: figures gnostiques de Jésus », *Annuaire EPHE, Sciences Religieuses* 115 (2006-2007), p. 210. M.J. JONCAS, « Eucharist Among the Marcosians: A Study of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* I, 13:2 », *Questions Liturgiques* 71 (1990), p. 104-111, and SCHMID, *ibid.*, p. 405, plead for assuming a special form of Eucharist being practiced by Marcus and his followers, the former even suggesting that Marcus and his followers are preserving an alternative, possibly older Eucharistic tradition (JONCAS, *ibid.*, p. 105 and 109-111; similarly also A. FAIVRE – C. FAIVRE, « La place des femmes dans le rituel eucharistique des Marcosiens: déviance ou archaïsme? », *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 71/3 (1997), p. 326 and 328). It is not out of interest here to note that Schmid actually speaks of Marcus shaping his «Trankrituale» on the Eucharistic tradition of the majority Christians (*ibid.*, p. 405), and thus seems to perceive that no perfect correspondence is to be detected – or should be expected – between the two.

²⁸ On *eucharistia* as 'pneumatic' prayer and prophetic utterance, see 1 Cor 14, 14-18 and *Did.* 10, 7. Marcus and his followers probably attached such a meaning, if any, to the term (cf. the concluding remarks by JONCAS, *ibid.*, p. 110-111, and FAIVRE – FAIVRE, *ibid.*, p. 323-325), but Irenaeus quite naturally interpreted it in the light of his own use, his own world-view and the practice which was by then asserting itself among Jesus' followers of his front. However, his composite formulation in *Haer.* I, 13, 4 ἐγκελεύεσθαι τὸ προφητεῦειν, at the same time echoing and mixing εὐχαριστεῖν ἐγκελεύεται (I, 13, 2) and προφητεῦειν ποιεῖ (I, 13, 3), still probably betrays the original use of εὐχαριστέω as synonym with προφητεύω. Following P. LAMPE, « Das Korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenis-tisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1Kor 1, 17-34) », *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82

I, 13, 2, 9-19

πάλιν δὲ γυναιξὶν ἐπιδοῦς ἐκπόματα κεκραμένα αὐτὰς εὐχαριστεῖν ἐγκελεύεται παρεστῶτος αὐτοῦ. καὶ τούτου γενομένου, αὐτὸς ἄλλο ποτήριον πολλῶ μείζον ἐκείνου, οὗ ἢ ἐξηπατημένη ἠὲ χαρίστησε, προσενεγκῶν καὶ μετακενώσας ἀπὸ τοῦ μικροτέρου τοῦ ὑπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς ἠὲ χαριστιμένου εἰς τὸ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κεκομισμένον ἐπιλέγων ἅμα οὕτως ἢ πρὸ τῶν ὄλων, ἢ ἀνευνόητος καὶ ἄρρητος Χάρις πληρώσαι σου τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον καὶ πληθύναι ἐν σοὶ τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτῆς, ἐγκατασπείρουσα τὸν κόκκον τοῦ σινάπεως εἰς τὴν ἀγαθὴν γῆν.

Pάλιν in 13, 2, 9 has its immediate counterpart in ἐκ δευτέρου in 13, 3, 42, both alluding to and introducing a second phase in the ritual. Conversely the brief allusion to some more invocations – I assume, to *Charis* once again as it was before – is this time fully exploited by the quotation of the very words of a second epiclesis to *Charis* following ἐπιλέγων in 13, 2, 15. The description in 13, 3 is then most probably to be regarded as expanding on this second part of the liturgy, revolving around the women's invocation, after the color is transformed and cups are placed in their hands. Given its unmistakable character of artful reduplication for mockery's sake, the anecdotal dialogue related in 13, 3, 41-44 has obviously very few chances to be historical²⁹.

I, 13, 2, 19-23

καὶ τοιαῦτά τινα εἰπὼν καὶ ἐξοιστρήσας τὴν ταλαίπωρον θαυματοποιὸς ἀνεφάνη, τοῦ μεγάλου πληρωθέντος ἐκ τοῦ μικροῦ ποτηρίου, ὥστε καὶ ὑπερεκχεῖσθαι ἐξ αὐτοῦ.

ἢ δὲ χαννωθεῖσα καὶ κεφρωθεῖσα ὑπὸ τῶν προειρημένων, διαθερμανθεῖσα τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὸ τῆς προσδοκίας τοῦ μέλλειν αὐτὴν προφητεῦειν, τῆς καρδίας πλέον τοῦ δέοντος παλλούσης, ἀποτολμᾷ λαλεῖν ληρώδη καὶ τὰ τυχόντα, πάντα κενῶς καὶ τολμηρῶς, ἅτε ὑπὸ κενοῦ τεθερμαμμένη πνεύματος (καθὼς ὁ κρείσσων ἡμῶν ἔφη περὶ τῶν τοιούτων προφητῶν, ὅτι τολμηρὸν καὶ ἀναιδὲς ψυχὴ κενῶ ἀέρι θερμαινομένη) καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου λοιπὸν προφήτιδα ἑαυτὴν ὑπολαμβάνει καὶ εὐχαριστεῖ Μάρκῳ τῷ ἐπιδιδόντι τῆς ἰδίας χάριτος αὐτῆ.

I, 13, 3, 40-44

ἢ δὲ χαννωθεῖσα καὶ κεφρωθεῖσα ὑπὸ τῶν προειρημένων, διαθερμανθεῖσα τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπὸ τῆς προσδοκίας τοῦ μέλλειν αὐτὴν προφητεῦειν, τῆς καρδίας πλέον τοῦ δέοντος παλλούσης, ἀποτολμᾷ λαλεῖν ληρώδη καὶ τὰ τυχόντα, πάντα κενῶς καὶ τολμηρῶς, ἅτε ὑπὸ κενοῦ τεθερμαμμένη πνεύματος (καθὼς ὁ κρείσσων ἡμῶν ἔφη περὶ τῶν τοιούτων προφητῶν, ὅτι τολμηρὸν καὶ ἀναιδὲς ψυχὴ κενῶ ἀέρι θερμαινομένη) καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου λοιπὸν προφήτιδα ἑαυτὴν ὑπολαμβάνει καὶ εὐχαριστεῖ Μάρκῳ τῷ ἐπιδιδόντι τῆς ἰδίας χάριτος αὐτῆ.

I, 13, 3, 44-54

The *oistros* just hinted at in 13, 2, 19 as climax of the ritual finds its full description in 13, 3 44-49: moving beyond Irenaeus' misrepresentations and comparing single words and motifs occurring in his report with other ancient literary sources, the description surfaces of symptoms topically associated with ἐξοιστῶν, as Marcus' followers were probably experiencing and then conventionally voicing it³⁰. The still perceptible biblical flavor of some of such details, survived to Irenaeus'

(1991), p. 186-191, SCHMID, *ibid.*, p. 403-404 n. 108, rightly stresses the analogies between Marcus' ritual and the χαρίσματα manifesting themselves during meals in Corinth.

²⁹ FAIVRE –FAIVRE, *ibid.*, p. 321-323, have shown how radically discourses on true and false prophecy shape Irenaeus' presentation of the exchange between Marcus and the woman as well as his explanation of the symptomatology of the following *oistros*.

³⁰ Frenzy: cf. *Haer.* I, 13, 2, 19 with Euripides, *Bacch.* 32-33 (τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ὄιστρησ' ἐγὼ/μανίας, ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν).117-119 (θηλυγενῆς ὄχλος/ἄφ' ἰστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων τ'οἰστρηθεὶς Διονύσωι); *Or. Sib.* 11, 324-325 (οἴστρον ἀπωσάμενος καὶ ἐτήτυμον ἔνθεον ὀμφὴν/καὶ μανίην φοβερὰν); Philo, *Ebr.* 147 (φιλεῖ γὰρ τοῖς θεοφορήτοις οὐχ ἢ ψυχὴ μόνον ἐγείρεσθαι καὶ ὥσπερ ἐξοιστῶν); not knowing what is being said: cf. *Haer.* I, 13, 3, 48-49 with *Or. Sib.* 2, 4-5 (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδα/ὅτι λέγω, κέλεται δὲ θεὸς τὰ ἕκαστ' ἀγορεύειν); abnormal heart beat and breathing: cf. *Haer.* I, 13, 3, 44-51, with *Or. Sib.* 3, 4 (ἀλλὰ τί μοι κραδίη πάλι πάλλεται) and Dio Chrysostomus, *Reg.* I, 56 (ἀσθμαίνουσα). On the connection between erotic and mantic 'enthusiasm' see already J. REILING, « Marcus Gnosticus and the New Testament: Eucharist and Prophecy », in T. BAARDA – A.F.J. KLIJN – W.C. VAN UNNIK (eds.), *Miscellanea Neotestamentica I*, Leiden, 1978, p. 177-178.

massive redactional interventions, and therefore not ascribable to him (cp. *Haer.* I, 13, 3, 49-51 with Jer 20, 9 and 23, 9 [God's words burning up, breaking and shaking the prophet's heart and bones, as the latter speaks]), leads me to the educated guess that Irenaeus is here probably working on and distorting 'confessions' of disciples of Marcus' on *Charis*' agency upon their own bodies as divine source of their altered state of consciousness³¹.

The comparison of *Haer.* I, 13, 2 and I, 13, 3 should have by now shown that the two paragraphs are probably best interpreted as literary doublets, which reflect and relate one and the same event from two different perspectives: the first paragraph describes the drinking ritual as a fake Eucharist, the second returns to it to expose its character and meaning of magical séance just mimicking true prophecy (cp. *Haer.* I, 13, 4, 74: *μαντεύεσθαι*), but actually involving a *paredros* demon as a means to practice divination, gain material income and obtain sexual favors (cp. *Haer.* I, 13, 3, 24-30.54-58 and 13, 5, with *PGM* I, 1-3.43-45.96-105.327-331, and IV, 2081-2086).

Having thus cleared up the textual basis for my reconstruction, I now finally turn to put all the scattered pieces back together.

Towards reconstructing an ancient rite: goals, actions, and speech acts.

In my view, as I attempted to demonstrate, a single coherent ritual action underlies Irenaeus' polemical doubling. The rite was intended and performed to produce ecstasy, or, as Marcus' followers themselves put it, to enable them to «drink up (*καταπεποκέναι*) the knowledge of the unspeakable Power in all its greatness» (Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 13, 6). The Greek verb used here, *καταπίνω* ('drink up, swallow up'), undoubtedly sounds like a reference to the drinking ritual; therefore, it seems to imply that those very mixed cups of wine and water being filled, reached and emptied out channeled such an exceeding acquaintance with the divine³².

With regard to the actual performance and staging of the ritual, the lexical and structural analysis I undertook in the second part of the article leaves space for the following hypothesis to be formulated: at the outset, Marcus would recite the invocation to *Charis* preserved in *Haer.* I, 13, 3 on a cup full of wine mixed with water, and then reach it to a follower of his standing next to him. He would utter the last words of the invocation after she had drunk: «See, now *Charis* has descended upon you: open your mouth and prophecy!». The *eucharistia* of the disciple would follow, closing the first stage of the ritual as well as opening the second one. Marcus would now fill a bigger cup out of the smaller one, on which the follower had just «given thanks», and pray *Charis* once again to increase, overflow and fill his disciple with knowledge. Not only do action and verbal utterance occur simultaneously, they are also intrinsically bound to each other: Marcus verbally 'creates' the overflowing as he performs the filling of the cup; conversely, performing the filling of the cup enacts on the human level the superhuman process that words describe and actualize as the hoped for aim of the ritual. In some sense, one is tempted to say, actions here work as 'signifiers', verbal utterances as 'signified': in the due course of the properly performed ritual, the overflowing

³¹ Cp. also Philo, *Ebr.* 147, explaining the hot flush over the body experienced by θεοφόρητοι upon being filled with intoxicating *Charis* (146!). N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 118-121, speaks of hyperventilation and slight hypnosis. In 2013, he confirmed his previous conclusions, writing: «because of Irenaeus' polemic, it is difficult to establish what exactly induced the prophetic words and utterances. However, one can assume, that the prophecy was induced by a self-induced state of over-breathing. [...] The "feverish" soul mentioned by Irenaeus may allude to the observation that intentionally increased breathing often causes sweating. The prophecy consisted of associations and spontaneous ideas induced by hyperventilation» (N. FÖRSTER, «Marcosian Rituals for Prophecy and Apolytrosis», in A.D. DECONICK – G. SHAW – J.D. TURNER [eds.], *Practicing Gnosis. Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature. Essays in Honor of Birger A. Pearson*, Leiden, 2013, p. 438).

³² As we have already seen before (nn. 19-21 and 26-27), N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 72-73 and 121, too maintains that the formulas reported in I, 13, 3 and the ritual described in I, 13, 2 are somehow interrelated, but speaks of two distinct «sacraments», the transcoloration of wine supposedly being a unique initiation ritual, its multiplication instead a recursive practice.

wine, upon which the name *Charis* had been pronounced and *Charis* herself has therefore actually descended, turns into that very divine force invoked by Marcus and swallowed up by his followers. Hereby, assuming the form of mixed wine, *Charis* is believed and expected to overabundantly permeate the latter. I regard as possible but far from certain that the ritual closed with a second, last drink, after the filling of the bigger cup was completed: at least that's what 'Hippolytus' expressly reports (*Ref.* VI, 40, 4).

The performative aspect of verbal utterances is pivotal to the staging and 'success' of the rite as a whole³³, investing metaphors and echoes of some Jesus' words³⁴ as well as material substances, in this case wine and water, as we have seen. More specifically, elaborating metaphors and reciting Jesus' words were surely meant to transfer new properties and ritual power into the liquids and activate them. For their part, the two liquids got absorbed and assimilated into the body of whoever drank them, thereby physically imbuing her with *Charis* and knowledge³⁵. Marcus seems to have shared himself cultural theories which accorded active, 'creative' force to words, names, and verbal acts (cf. Pliny the Older, *Nat. Hist.* XXVII, 131; Apuleius, *Ap.* 34; Origen, *Cels.* I, 6.24)³⁶: carefully read between the lines, the beginning of his theogony (Irenaeus, *Haer.* I, 14, 1) clearly presuppose the concept that the very acts of opening the mouth, and then articulating and emitting sounds *de facto* coincide with transforming (γίγνομαι), and giving form to (μορφώω) and 'pro-ducing' (προίημι), that is, bringing to light, something³⁷.

Last but not least, I return to the two questions which I left unanswered earlier. As far as I can see from Irenaeus' notice, the drinking ritual was routinely repeated during Marcus' and his followers' *deipna*, εἰώθασιν [...] ἀλλήλοις ἐγκελεύεσθαι τὸ προφητεύειν in *Haer.* I, 13, 4 (cp. εὐχαριστεῖν ἐγκελεύεται in 13, 2 and προφητεύειν ποιεῖ in 13,3!) clearly matching with 'Hippolytus' πολλάκις in *Ref.* VI, 39, 2: former drinkers would undergo it at every new meal they were participating in and from time to time they would take the role of the ritual specialist leading the rite (I, 13, 4: εἰ οὖν Μάρκος μὲν κελεύει ἢ ἄλλος τις). Against such a new social role can and must the transformative potential of the rite itself be measured and evaluated: every follower turns into a vessel of the *Charis*, endowed with power and authority to take the lead, reenact the ritual and transmit *Charis* to others – just what Irenaeus represents as (false) prophetic consciousness contagiously propagating among Marcus' followers from one individual to another (*Haer.* I, 13, 3-4).

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³³ Developed by J.L. AUSTIN, *Come fare cose con le parole*, Genova-Milano, 2005⁷, (orig.: *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford-New York, NY, 1962, 1975²), and applied to ritual analysis by S.J. TAMBIAH, *Rituali e cultura*, Bologna, 1995 (orig.: *Culture, Thought, and Social Action. An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 41-191, the theory of performative verbal acts has already been usefully integrated as heuristic tool into the study of ancient 'magic' (see F. GRAF, *La magia nel mondo antico*, Roma-Bari, 1995 [orig.: *La magie dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine. Idéologie et pratique*, Parigi, 1994], p. 15-16 and 200-207). FÖRSTER, *ibid.*, p. 72.78-79.84, seems to depend too much on Frazerian concepts (e.g., sympathy and substitution) as well as on theological categories (e.g., sacrament), which in the end prevent him from understanding and explaining correctly the ritual process he is focusing on. See GRAF, *ibid.*, p. 8-19; 29-34; 199-203; 220-221, for a consistent critique of still operating Frazerian views on ancient 'magic'.

³⁴ Cp. the exorcisms using ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τῆς ἀπαγγελίας τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἱστοριῶν as documented by Origen, *Cels.* I, 6, who's correcting the supposed Christian use of δαιμόνων τινῶν ὀνόματα καὶ κατακλήσεις mentioned by Celsus. G. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Origene e la magia: teoria e prassi*, in L. PERRONE (ed.), *Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition*. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27-31 August 2001, Leuven, 2003, p. 733-756, here 738-741, offers an accurate commentary on the passage.

³⁵ See S.J. TAMBIAH, *Rituali e cultura*, Bologna, 1995 (orig.: *Culture, Thought, and Social Action. An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 67-86 and 104-109 for terminology and examples. On verbal acts investing things to be swallowed with ritual power and ingestion as means of 'incorporating' it into individuals as well as on digestion as a 'practical' way to knowledge, cp. D. TRIPALDI, *Gesù di Nazareth nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni. Spirito, profetia e memoria*, Brescia, 2010, p. 79-89, with further literature.

³⁶ More material and discussion in F. GRAF, *La magia nel mondo antico*, Roma-Bari, 1995 (orig.: *La magie dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine. Idéologie et pratique*, Parigi, 1994), p. 200-207.

³⁷ As N. FÖRSTER, *Marcus Magus. Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe. Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1999, p. 181-192, correctly notes.

Abstract

The article puts under exam Irenaeus' report on the cultic gatherings organized by a supposed disciple of Valentinus', Marcus the 'magician', in the early second half of the 2nd century CE. After identifying Irenaeus' sources and highlighting his rhetorical and polemical strategies, the attempt is made to outline what actually took place in such occasions, encompassing as much as meals as ecstatic practices, which were – or so it seems – openly characterized as 'prophetic'. Thanks to first-hand accounts collected by Irenaeus himself, it is possible to offer an accurate description of the symptoms of ecstasy, as they were experienced, related and then transmitted in the course of such meetings.